

RESEARCH NOTE

DIFFERENT HEARTH, DIFFERENT WORTH: SUSTAINING AN EMERGING FESTIVAL IN THE NEW CULTURAL CITY OF SINGAPORE

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This study examines some challenges and draws lessons for a new cultural city promoting an emerging festival. This was done by considering the valuation of the festival and its determinants by foreign tourists, domestic tourists, and potential attendees (a group often ignored in the literature). For a young festival, it was encouraging to find that the festival's social value to tourists, local attendees, and potential attendees exceeded the entry fee. Overall, the Biennale was more popular with younger people, and local attendees appreciated the educational dimension of the event. This augurs well for the future of this festival. However, for the festival's sustainability, it is important to strike a balance between catering to preferences of international and local attendees as well as avoid trying to achieve multiple objectives that may lead to a dilution in the focus and identity of the new festival.

Key words: Contingent valuation (CV); Willingness to pay (WTP); Biennale; Festival tourism

Introduction

Cultural tourism's rapid growth makes it a major driving force of the urban tourism system (Ark & Richards, 2006). In particular, highly urbanized cities face greater competition from other cities that have caught onto festivalization to develop and broaden the scope of their appeal to tourists (Whyte, Hood, & White, 2012). Hence, it is relevant to consider the challenges that a new cultural

city faces in trying to sustain an emerging festival. Festival sustainability depends on visitor numbers and the entry fee, among other factors. Thus, this study uses contingent valuation (CV) to focus on the willingness to pay (WTP), as well as the attitudes and preferences, of tourists, local attendees, and potential attendees—that is, local residents who have not been to the festival. These are all critical parties whose patronage keeps festivals running. It is particularly important to understand the

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preferences and motivations of local nonattenders because they are potential customers providing much-needed support for a new festival.

Herrero, Sanz, Bedate, and Barrio (2012) compared the WTP of local residents and tourists attending a music festival in Spain, whereas Andersson, Armbrrecht, and Lundberg (2012) did likewise for a Gothenburg music festival. However, earlier WTP valuation studies on arts festivals—such as Snowball (2005); Thompson, Berger, Blomquist, and Allen (2002); and Thompson (1998)—did not distinguish between tourists and local attenders. Singapore Biennale, a visual arts festival, is a pertinent case study because although Biennales have become a global institution showing unprecedented growth in the last 30 years, few empirical studies on Biennials have been done (Morgner, 2014). Moreover, Singapore is an interesting city due to its deliberate strategy to transform itself into a cultural city after having enjoyed stellar industrial success (Ooi, 2010). Popularizing its festivals is highly challenging for any emerging cultural city. Specifically, the Biennale was only established in 2006 as Singapore's preeminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art, covering films, video, paintings, drawings, new media, photography, sculpture, and furniture. Chronologically, as the 11th Biennale to be established in Asia (Artnet News, 2014), it has little early mover advantage. The cities that had started their Biennales earlier have longer histories as cultural places and much larger domestic population bases.

Survey and Methodology

The survey on the Singapore Biennale, which was sponsored by the Singapore National Arts Council, was carried out from September to November 2008. A total of 896 local residents (constituting domestic tourists), 158 foreign tourists, and 515 nonattenders were interviewed using a systematic 1 in 10 random sampling method. Table 1 presents information from the survey data. In the CV component, respondents were presented with the scenario of the Biennale being discontinued due to a lack of funding and sponsorship support. They were then asked to choose from a range of WTP intervals (see Table 1) indicating the amount they would be willing to pay/donate to continue having the festival.

Contingent valuation, originally developed to measure the value of environmental resources and its services, is eminently suited to estimate the value of cultural goods and services (Noonan, 2004). Because WTP was collected using intervals in the survey, interval regression (see Long & Freese, 2006) analysis was used. The dependent variable WTP is given by y_i^* for individual i , and it is observed in the following interval:

$$M_i \geq y_i^* \geq m_i \quad (1)$$

$$\text{The model } y_i' = X_i' \beta + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where X' denotes a vector of the factors affecting WTP with the parameter vector, β , estimated using maximum likelihood in the STATA econometric package.

Results and Analysis

The WTP is computed using the estimated coefficients and means of the explanatory variables for three different groups of people. The tourists' WTP of S\$16.85 (Singapore dollars) is higher than local attenders' WTP of S\$14.57, similar to the findings of Herrero et al. (2012) and Andersson et al. (2012). However, local attenders' WTP is significantly higher than local nonattenders' WTP of S\$11.63. This differs from Tuan and Navrud (2008), who found no significant difference between the WTP of local visitors and local nonvisitors for a cultural heritage site in Vietnam. The WTP of all three groups of people is, however, higher than the entry charge of S\$10, providing evidence of a nascent demand for this emerging festival among Singaporeans and cultural tourists to Singapore.

From the regression analysis (see Table 2), it can be seen that the Biennale appeals more to younger people, possibly because as a relatively young festival, the Biennale has not yet built up a following among the older generation. Also, the festival focuses on contemporary art whose more experimental and avant-garde nature often has greater resonance with younger audiences. Contrary to the belief that women display deeper affinity for arts and culture (Lampi & Orth, 2009), there was no gender-biased relationship except among those who did not attend the Biennale. Among the local residents, the better educated had a deeper appreciation. This was

Table 1
Summary Statistics

Variable	Percentage of Total Sample		
	Tourists (<i>n</i> = 158)	Local Attenders (<i>n</i> = 896)	Local Nonattenders (<i>n</i> = 515)
Age			
15–19 years old	2.53	16.52	9.51
20–29 years old	31.01	44.20	17.86
30–39 years old	33.54	20.42	21.55
40–49 years old	17.09	9.82	18.83
50 years and older	15.82	7.58	32.23
Gender			
Male	65.19	48.10	47.77
Female	34.81	51.90	52.23
Education			
Primary (6 years of schooling)	0.65	2.24	15.92
Secondary (10 years of schooling)	2.61	10.41	34.37
Postsecondary	9.80	32.14	26.02
Tertiary	86.93	55.21	23.69
Personal monthly income (in Singapore dollars)			
Up to S\$1,000	13.91	24.19	10.49
S\$1,001–S\$3,000	29.57	26.13	53.50
S\$3,001–S\$5,000	28.70	30.97	23.78
S\$5,001–S\$10,000	20.00	12.10	10.49
>S\$10,000	7.83	6.61	1.75
Bid intervals (in Singapore dollars)			
S\$0	1.91	1.79	10.31
S\$1–S\$10	37.97	42.30	63.00
S\$11–S\$20	36.08	37.61	13.23
S\$21–S\$30	12.66	12.83	6.28
S\$31–S\$40	5.70	2.79	2.47
S\$41–S\$50	5.69	2.68	4.71
Previous visit			
No	82.91	62.61	89.73
Yes	17.09	37.39	8.22
Time spent at event			
<30 min	12.03	12.32	–
30 min–1 hr	22.78	30.12	–
1–2 hr	35.44	37.44	–
2–3 hr	22.78	16.59	–
>3 hr	6.96	3.54	–
Visit motivation			
Interest in visual arts	77.22	58.78	–
Networking and socializing	16.46	27.68	–
Relaxation	12.66	17.80	–
Learning and enrichment	24.05	34.15	–
Recommendation (media/others)	17.09	20.73	–
Prefer visual arts over other genres	–	–	31.26
Attended some visual arts exhibition in the past year	–	–	13.98
Perception of Biennale (7-point Likert scale) [<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)]			
Quality of art works	5.57 (1.05)	5.57 (1.01)	–
Variety of art works	5.27 (1.22)	5.35 (1.17)	–
Accessibility of venues	5.20 (1.51)	5.09 (1.39)	–
Information on art works	5.57 (1.11)	5.40 (1.15)	–
Attitudes (5-point Likert scale) [<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)]			
Agree that event:			
Enhances respondent's quality of life	4.42 (0.96)	4.31 (0.99)	3.58 (1.27)
Broadens respondent's mind and enhances creativity	4.62 (0.72)	4.60 (0.72)	3.83 (1.15)
Contributes to Singapore economy	4.19 (1.04)	3.86 (1.12)	3.66 (1.19)
Is an iconic arts event in Singapore's cultural landscape	4.46 (0.88)	4.55 (0.92)	3.77 (1.14)
Enhances Singapore's reputation as arts and cultural hub	4.54 (0.74)	4.64 (0.68)	3.88 (1.11)
Promotes community bonding and benefits	4.32 (1.03)	4.11 (1.12)	3.84 (1.14)

Note. A dash indicates unavailable data from the survey.

Table 2
Regression Analysis on Factors Affecting Willingness to Pay

Variable	Tourists		Local Attenders		Local Nonattenders	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Constant	0.971**	0.482	0.567*	0.338	1.074***	0.353
Age	-0.115*	0.064	-0.069***	0.025	-0.090***	0.033
Female	0.060	0.146	-0.008	0.054	0.178*	0.104
Education	-0.104	0.054	0.065***	0.022	0.064*	0.035
Income	0.092*	0.040	0.028*	0.016	0.011	0.032
Previous visit to Biennale	0.026	0.177	0.115**	0.054	-	-
Prefer visual arts	-	-	-	-	0.246**	0.119
Attended visual arts exhibition before	-	-	-	-	0.333***	0.151
Time spent	0.195***	0.074	0.019	0.029	-	-
Perception of Biennale						
Quality of art works	0.102	0.088	0.048	0.036	-	-
Variety of art works	-0.173**	0.073	-0.026	0.031	-	-
Access to venues	0.002	0.048	0.057***	0.022	-	-
Information on art works	0.033	0.071	-0.013	0.030	-	-
Visit motivation						
Interest in visual arts	-0.045	0.182	0.066	0.056	-	-
Socializing	-0.032	0.186	0.039	0.058	-	-
Relaxation	-0.066	0.235	0.035	0.070	-	-
Learning	-0.269	0.168	0.139**	0.056	-	-
Recommendation	0.503***	0.172	-0.022	0.066	-	-
Attitudes						
Enhance quality of life	-0.220*	0.116	-0.003	0.036	0.035	0.050
Enhance creativity	0.241	0.156	0.071	0.047	0.023	0.064
Contributes to economy	0.042	0.072	0.015	0.029	-0.046	0.049
Iconic arts event	0.203*	0.118	0.076**	0.034	0.068	0.054
Enhances reputation as cultural hub	0.138	0.150	0.087*	0.046	-0.004	0.054
Promotes community bonding and benefits	0.033	0.088	-0.002	0.031	0.036	0.051
Model statistics						
Log-likelihood	-136.80		-875.86		-399.49	
Chi-square	60.07***		96.05***		54.41***	

Note. A dash indicates unavailable data from the survey.

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

not evident among the tourists because they were mainly tertiary-educated (see Table 1).

Contemporary art challenges traditional notions of beauty and design and, besides being entertaining, can be thought-provoking, puzzling, or perverse (Minissale, 2013). Biennale exhibits require time for thought and comprehension. Hence, tourists who spent more time at the Biennale developed a better appreciation for the event. However, the perceived diversity of art works did not enhance appreciation. Artworks for this Biennale were located at eight different sites. Although the sites were within walking distance, the lack of effective integration of these sites may have led tourists to feel that the artworks were too varied and the festival fragmented, negatively affecting their WTP. Curators must thus clearly identify a strong

unifying focus or theme for the festival and communicate this effectively to attenders.

Of concern is the evidence that information on art works had no impact on attenders. Event organizers and curators must thus improve this interpretive aspect, providing succinct information that help attenders relate and understand the displays better. Tourists take recommendations seriously because they want to optimize their visit by seeing the city's best attractions. Modern advertising platforms such as social media and digital previews of art works on dedicated portals should be leveraged to globally publicize the event in advance.

Although tourists were not troubled by the location of the venues (because going to different areas provides opportunities to see the city), the accessibility of the various venues was a key factor for

the locals. This reiterates the need for Biennale organizers to consider their choice of exhibition sites because what makes cultural, artistic, or urban regeneration sense may not resonate with those who are attending; moreover, what may appeal to the subgroup of regular arts events attendees may not work with first-time visitors or nonlocals. If artistic and urban showcasing considerations mean that new exhibition sites within the city are chosen for different editions of the Biennale, then complementary resources such as distinctive and clear signage, easy-to-use maps and mobile applications, and knowledgeable docents should be invested in, especially if tourists are a key customer segment.

Lastly, unlike nonattendees, local attendees felt that the Biennale enhanced Singapore's reputation as an arts and cultural hub; both local and foreign attendees regarded it as an iconic arts event that should be continued. However, nobody thought that the Biennale contributed significantly to the economy, possibly because noncommercial arts events are rarely profit-making. This suggests that cities may find it difficult to justify the continuance of such events based on the "economic impact" argument alone. A more effective justification must incorporate the event's social and other nonmarket impacts.

Biennales are now perceived to be important sources of cultural pride, international recognition, and tourism for cities. However, from the experience of the UK, meaningful incorporation of elements of the local community to give the event a "local flavor" and cater to the local community is critical (Rolfe, 1992). Smith (2009) concurred that festivals should essentially function as platform for revitalizing local traditions, communities, or physical landscapes. Although the Singapore Biennale does not appear to fall clearly into any of these functional categories, there is evidence that this young Biennale provides value to foreign and potential domestic tourists. Hence, organizers must think about what the identity of the Biennale is and what its unique proposition is to tourists who can go to any of the more well-known regional offerings.

Conclusion

With increasing competition among cultural cities and cultural events around the world, this article contributes to the understanding of sustaining an

emerging festival in a new cultural city through considering the valuation of the consumer segments of local attendees, tourists, and local nonattendees. There are useful lessons for cities embarking on similar transformative pathways to promote festival tourism.

Event managers may be tempted to present a wide array of art works to capture different visitor segments. Evidence suggests that this will not resonate with tourists without clear communication of a strong unifying theme, or physical distinctiveness and integration of the exhibition venues. A direct implication of this for small cities such as Singapore is to use a Biennale exhibition format that concentrates all artworks within a dedicated festival venue.

Given the infancy of the festival, advanced digital and mobile marketing technologies present new opportunities to publicize the event abroad. However, to attract local residents, planning a convenient location for the venues is likely to pay off. In addition, the curators and organizers need to reinforce the educational aspects of the Biennale's works and market these to the locals. This highlights the importance of customized advertising and outreach efforts to different customer segments.

In an increasingly crowded global arts festival calendar, emerging festivals should not solely cater to international tourists' tastes and neglect strategies to attract domestic attendees. Striking the appropriate balance between these groups is crucial for the festival's sustainability. Future research should delve further into the opportunities, cost, and risks of a new festival and its contribution to a broader tourism strategy. It will also be useful to see whether deliberate shifts in the festival's program/content over time appeal to international tourists and local visitors.

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