

Participatory Cultural Events and Place Attachment: A New Path towards Place Branding?

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Abstract

This chapter examines whether place marketing, which has been traditionally associated to managerial processes, top-to-down cultural approaches and copy-cut models, allows for the consideration of non-institutional, grassroots, audience-led cultural initiatives for place branding. Looking closely at participatory art festivals that actively engage local audiences and visitors in the production, promotion and consumption of cultural experiences, the research investigates the processes through which audience involvement in arts-based events create human-place bonds. Through the conceptual lens of place attachment, we examine the relationship between participatory cultural events and place marketing discussing the greater impact of artistic audience participation on the image and the attractiveness of the place in which these events are embedded. To examine the role that participatory art events may play on place branding, attention is focused on a troubled context - Athens during the crisis years. In the last decade, Athens has evidenced the emergence of many small self-managed arts festivals, which enable people to participate in a range of artistic projects, creative programmes and self-expressive events. The present work wishes to examine what happens when participatory forms of artistic events are brought into our everyday urban spaces in an organic way. What happens when citizens occupy public spaces and transform them into cultural arenas where locals and visitors can co-create and co-consume the cultural content, the experiences and events on site?

Keywords: participatory art events, place attachment, Athens, place event marketing, place branding

1. Introduction

In the last thirty years academics, policy makers, and city planners have explored extensively the role of art in urban development, urban revitalization, and city planning (Bassett 1993; Müller 2018). Placing the emphasis on culture, urban studies researchers have elaborated on the positive effects of art on urban place making (Redaelli 2018; Richards and Duif 2018). Scholars working in the field of events and festival studies have also discussed the relationship between cultural events and place identity, festivals and place branding, artistic public celebrations and place image-making (Cudny 2016). Additionally, marketing scholarship has offered valuable insights in relation to the impact of aesthetic, artistic, and cultural experiences on place marketing and branding strategies (Bain and Landau 2017). In other words, interdisciplinary academic work and real-life cases suggest that art has a significant role to play in our spatial experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. As a result, the employment of art has been crucial for the development, promotion, inhabitation, consumption and sustainability of contemporary urban space.

However, the literature on arts and place is often focused on institutionally-led, publicly-funded, or market-based creative strategies applied for the planning, development, and promotion of nations, regions, or metropolitan centers for external audiences, such as investors, tourists and visitors (Comunian and Mould 2014). As a result, existing research has not fully examined the relationship between non-institutional, audience-led, and crowd-sourced cultural events and place marketing. Furthermore, the role of participation in the production, dissemination, and consumption of grassroots arts events has not been fully explored yet. This is especially true in relation to how internal audiences, such as local communities, may perceive, feel, and experience their cities. Third, existing studies concentrate on the implications, effects, and outcomes of hallmark cultural programmes, major festivals, and large-scale art events. However, they overlook smaller artistic happenings, everyday creative practices, and informal cultural activities.

In response to this research gap, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the affordances of everyday creativity in relation to the

development of human-place bonds between internal audiences and urban public spaces investigating the role that pocket-sized participatory cultural events may play in place branding endeavors. For this research, we define participatory art events those space-bound, informal, and grassroots cultural happenings that are initiated, produced, implemented, and consumed by audiences, local communities, and everyday creative people. Participatory cultural events, in our context, are non-institutional, audience-led, and spontaneous cultural expressions of non-expert creatives, emerging and professional artists.

Our work brings together theoretical contributions and literature from diverse disciplines with the aim to address the following overarching research question: How do participatory art events affect the perceptions, sentiments, and attitudes towards a place? The findings of our multi-sited ethnographic research help us conceptualize what happens when creative citizens use their imagination, storytelling capability, and artistic self-expressive faculties to co-create, share, and co-consume the cultural content of their urban public space. This enables us to critically examine whether place marketing theory could also engage with non-institutional, grassroots, audience-led cultural initiatives. Do existing institutional marketing approaches contribute to the promotion of the original character of a place? Or, should we turn our attention to alternative organic initiatives of citizen participation in the arts that can help us extend our place branding theorizations and practices?

2. Place Attachment and Creativity in Place Branding

Our work bridges two diverse sets of academic arguments, which might in many ways seem disconnected, but will be key in the development of our conceptual framework. On one side, we aim to review the academic knowledge in relation to place attachment. On the other end, we aim to consider how culture and creativity become instrumental tools for place marketing and branding strategies. Finally, we question the current lack of research on bottom-up participatory arts events. Hence, we highlight the need for further research that investigates how participatory art events connect with place attachment and place branding.

2.1 Understanding place attachment

The study of affective relationships that people develop towards their environments is a subject that has received considerable scholarly attention

across various disciplines. Our work concentrates on the theory of *place attachment*, which is used as the conceptual foundation that enables us to explore the emotion-laden human-place bonds stimulated, developed, and sustained through participatory art events. Using place attachment as a broad theoretical framework, we discuss how individuals - locals and visitors - experience, form, interpret, negotiate and assign meanings to their urban environments through participatory art experiences.

To explore the role that participatory art events may play in place attachment, we draw on the work of the British psychologist John Bowlby, who was the first to conceive the basic tenets of *attachment theory* (Bowlby 1951; Bowlby 1969). Bowlby studied the bonds that are developed between a baby and a mother introducing *attachment* as the emotional parent-infant relationship. Later, Bowlby (1982) looks at potential negative effects that may arise in case of disruption of this relationship due to events of deprivation, separation, or bereavement. Today, attachment theory has moved beyond the parent-infant relationship to include studies, which explore attachment to communities (Manzo and Perkins 2006), social environments (Milligan 1998), neighbourhoods (Manzo 2005), brands (Thomson et al 2005) and places (Kyle et al 2004). In other words, attachment theory currently covers a wide domain in terms of research and application, embracing bonds to persons, objects, and places. The key characteristic of the concept of attachment, which is common across all different research areas, disciplines, and practical manifestations, is the desire of the attached individual to maintain closeness to the object of attachment (Bowlby 1969).

To delve deeper into the human-place relationships that can be developed through participatory cultural events, we focus on the notion of *place attachment* (Manzo and Devine-Wright 2013). Place attachment refers to the long lasting affective, cognitive, social, cultural, symbolic and physical ties that are developed between a person and a particular setting through processes of human-place bonding (Low and Altman 1992). The theory of place attachment builds on research initially conducted by Fried (1963), who demonstrates that people suffer from grief when they have to be removed from a place that they feel attached to. As Relph (1976) reveals, in our everyday life situations, we are not aware of the strong bonds and commitments that exist between our lives, our places, and ourselves. The significance of our places “(...) become(s) apparent only in time of loss and hardship” (Relph 1976, 40).

Spaces become places through experience, symbolisms, and sentiment (Tuan, 1974). In this sense, people experience, form, and transform urban space through their daily routines, their everyday practices, their senses (Duffy et al 2011) and their mundane meaning-making processes. Steele (1981) also supports that places do not exist independent from us. Humans create their own places, which are defined by the physical attributes of the space and the meanings we bring to them. This human-place bond, conceptualised as place attachment, “is based on an accumulation of physical, social, historical, and cultural meanings that become associated with the place through time and experience” (Debenedetti et al 2013, 905).

Flourishing in the fields of different scientific disciplines, the theory of place attachment holds the same premise as attachment theory: the desire and tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to a particular place (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). It is because peoples’ identity and values are shaped within and by places they consider significant that strong human-place bonds are developed. In a similar vein, place identity is not only a component of self-identity, but also an aspect of social identity (Stedman 2002). Physical sites become arenas for social interaction, which form individuals, communities, society, politics, and cultural life. Social sites define and are defined by collectively constructed processes, local group meanings, and largest cultural and socio-political contexts (Milligan 1998). In other words, our physical environments can be viewed as an essential part of one’s self and a defining part of our shared identity regardless, or in addition to, the physical qualities of the space.

Although place attachment has been explored in many contexts, there is limited work that theorises how human-place bonds are developed in the contemporary market-driven urban space and what circumstances might facilitate this. For example, there are a few studies, which look at the processes in which mundane or commercial places can arouse strong emotions for their visitors (Debenedetti, Oppewal and Arsel 2013). There is also literature suggesting that art events, public celebrations, and festivals through collectively shared symbolic processes can ascribe meaning to publicly accessed spaces (Kozinets 2002; Visconti et al 2010; Patsiaouras, Veneti and Green 2018). However, these papers do not examine the role of smaller-scale symbolic, cultural, and aesthetic experiences in the development of human-place bonds within urban everyday contexts.

We propose that an analysis of the practices, experiences, and manifested outcomes linked to city attachment through participatory art events will help us articulate better the relationship between everyday

creativity, human-place bonding, and place branding. According to Johnston and Conroy (2008, 381), “The reasons why people become attached to different locations extend well beyond the location’s physical characteristics, the types of products it sells and/or the level of service it provides”. Hence, our research explores how informal participatory arts events may trigger, develop, and sustain human-place bonds discussing the implications of place attachment for place branding.

2.2 The role of arts, culture, and creativity in urban regeneration, place making, and place branding

In this brief review, we explore firstly how art has recently found a new role in local, city and regional development interventions. Secondly, we focus more closely on the role that festivals have played in this broader landscape as artistic event-based intervention. Finally, we review the limited attention given in the literature to participatory art events.

Art, culture, and creativity have been in the last three decades key in the regeneration processing of many cities around the world (Evans 2005). They have been used - alongside physical regeneration and urban renewal - for a range of instrumental objectives. These objectives can be summarised under three main headings: (1) economic; (2) image/rebranding; (3) social interaction. They have been used as an opportunity to re-think local economic development and specifically focus on new sectors of the economy – such as the creative industries (Mould and Comunian 2015). However, while investments in cultural events, arts, and creativity can have potentially positive impact in developing local creative production, many authors highlight that this is not necessarily an easy strategy for many cities competing for talent (Jayne 2005; Comunian 2009; Comunian and Jewell 2018). Second, García (2004) underlines how cultural activities can maximize the impact of city branding supporting the view of Tibbot (2002), who argues that “cultural projects give emotional ‘fuel’ for successful destination brands. And cultural brands can be adopted by commercial regeneration projects” (Tibbot 2002 quoted García 2004, 316). Part of this is due to the increasing competition among cities in order to attract capital and investments. In a sort of competitive place marketing, the cultural assets and attributes of a city have been acquiring a central position (Griffiths et al 2003). Miles (2005), however, questions this because it promotes a standardized understanding of culture. This is the culture

associated to big flagship projects and event-led advertising campaigns developed by public authorities. Rebranding old urban spaces to attract new residents, tourists, and investors is often at the expenses of local communities. Furthermore, as Pratt (2000) suggests “the question of whose representation of the city is used to promote and advertise it is about which set of values, which aspects of the city are invested with legitimacy, which part are visible and which are not” (Pratt, 2000, p.45). Nonetheless, a third objective often put forward for using arts and culture in regeneration is its role in engaging communities and fostering new interactions amongst old and new residents (Miles 2005).

Festivals play an important role in the arguments illustrated above as a sub-field within event studies. They are an important component of cities’ cultural strategies for regeneration and attraction of investment and people. Refocusing our previous arguments for the value of cultural intervention in relation to (1) economic impact, (2) image/branding, (3) social interaction, we can reflect on how festivals can become instrumental on all three levels. In respect to social engagement and interaction, festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity, and continuity (De Bres and Davis 2001). For example, Derrett (2003) argues that community-based festivals in New South Wales, Australia contribute to a sense of community. In this sense, festivals shape experiences, meanings, spatial patterns, and processes. They inspire creativity and generate emotional responses. However, they can also attract large (external) attention and crowds. The latter is of specific interest for the economic and image/place branding value of culture. In relation to image and branding, festivals are being employed as tools in destination image-making, branding, and re-positioning strategies. Harcup (2000) examined how a festival was developed to deliberately help change the image of Leeds. Jago et al. (2003) in Australia studied how to build events into destination branding. Boo and Busser (2006) examined how a festival could improve a destination’s image. With this branding and image potential, festivals are strategically used to create economic impact and jobs, which constitutes our third theme (Crompton and McKay 1994). This is also celebrated by local policy makers as a great tool for job creation. However, as previous research suggests, most career opportunities created tend to be in the service sector and often lead to low-level paid jobs (O’Sullivan and Jackson 2002). Ultimately, while festivals have been considered useful instruments for destination branding and economic development, their multiplication has also a negative impact on the level of quality and authenticity that a city can present and promote.

Despite the richness of the existing studies on the relationship between art festivals and place marketing, as previously mentioned, the role of grassroots, audience-led, bottom-up cultural events in spatial consumption has not been fully examined yet (Sasaki 2010). Limited previous work in marketing and consumer research has suggested that participatory aesthetic practices can contribute to the collective consumption of urban public space (Visconti et al 2010), a sense of community (Kozinets 2002) and social cohesion (Patsiaouras, Veneti and Green 2018) for dwellers, local communities, and citizens. However, there is not adequate research conducted that investigates the role of smaller, informal, and more spontaneous participatory cultural happenings in the city.

3. Case study, Methodology and Research Framework

3.1 Athens Fringe Festival

Athens Fringe Festival (AFF) is a multifaceted arts festival organised annually since 2008, in the city of Athens in Greece. AFF is one of the first contemporary participatory art initiatives in the city. Its participatory character is manifested by its intention to invite every form of art, a range of creative practices, methods, and mediums, and diverse publics to learn, prepare, develop, present, and promote artistic work during the festive period. The key characteristic of the festival is its unique capacity to invite any member of the society to showcase their creative talents; everyday creative people, craftsmen, makers, amateur, emerging, and professional artists, local community members, designers, activists, students, academics, marginalised groups, immigrants, media professionals, local authority representatives, tourists and city visitors are welcome to participate with their own creative ideas and self-expressive works.

The festival usually takes place for a month every June/July hosting some hundreds of people presenting their art and attending others' events. Ranging from visual and fine arts, music, theatre and dance, poetry, installations and screenings, crafts, fashion and cooking to learning, community and children programmes, workshops, seminars, and public discussions. The artistic activity of the festival is formed by the proposals received from the audience through a series of open calls. All proposals are accepted for realization by the organizing team since the objective of the festival is to support every form of everyday creative self-expression. In this

sense, it could be argued that no clear preference of an artform, medium, practice, or cultural producer is privileged. The “curation” of the programme is more a practice of scheduling.

The organising team consists of local community members and volunteers, who collaborate to put together the festival schedule, to establish partnerships with local businesses and venues, and to spread the word about the events. AFF is an independent platform that operates as a network for the creative individuals of the city and operates as a registered charity. Any income generated from the events is reinvested in the organisation of next year’s festival.

The aim of the festival is to operate as an open platform for everyday creative people, who wish to engage with artistic self-expressive practices and aspire to produce, organise, and showcase their cultural work. Usually, the participants of the festival set up arts events to try new self-expressive activities, take part in collaborative projects, meet with the public, cooperate with other creative individuals, artistic collectives, and activist communities. They get involved in processes of reciprocal learning and public discussion and contribute in the organising of social activism through the arts. In other words, AFF’s ultimate objective is to trigger an active interaction between the city, its citizens, and its visitors through the arts.

The events of the festival take place in numerous public spaces, such as streets, gardens, squares, public transport vehicles, parks, beaches and neighbourhoods. Some events also take place in a variety of indoor spaces more or less commercial in nature, such as cafes, restaurants, bars, cinemas and theatres. These urban settings operate as exhibition spaces, performance venues, screening areas, meeting places, arts schools and platforms for dialogue. During the festival period, many different events take place in multiple sites around the city simultaneously. The participants can attend all the events for free and the spectators, who do not actively participate in the art-making process, can enjoy others’ creative output issuing a daily pass that gives them access to all festival spaces (public and commercial) with a cost of 5-10 euros/day.

The space-bound, informal, and audience-led character of AFF makes it an appropriate context to explore arts-stimulated interactional processes, participatory practices, and human-place dynamics, relations, and bonds in urban settings. We limit our research only to spaces that are publicly owned and accessed, such as streets, parks, plazas, public transport vehicles, and beaches in the city.

3.2 Methodology & Research Questions

To research the relationship between participatory art events, place attachment, and place branding, we conducted a multi-sited ethnography in Athens, Greece (Marcus, 1995; Falzon, 2016). The stories found in this chapter are generated through active participation in a variety of art events initiated, developed, and produced by everyday creative people, who occupy, use, and experience a number of public spaces across the city with the aim to create, develop, and present their artistic work. Our data collection and analysis methods are not applied across all festival sites and events, as this would not be feasible. AFF takes place in multiple public and privately-owned locations simultaneously for many days every year. This means that an intensive and sustained immersion in all different events of each site would not be a realistically achievable plan. One of the researchers participated in some of the events in more than 10 public sites (streets, parks, means of public transportation, beaches) during a five-year period, between 2011 and 2016, collecting empirical data comprised of field notes, observations, photographs, videos and interviews with festival participants.

During the first two years, the researcher witnessed and experienced the artistic events taking place across the city as an active participant, jotting field notes, taking photographs, and getting immersed in the creative events. In the next three years, the researcher tried to engage in participatory art activities, such as observing the physical context of the participatory art events, keeping notes about the physical activity of festival participants, and interacting with them about their embodied, emotional, and mental engagement with the space through informal discussions. Throughout this period, the researcher conducted 10 interviews with festival participants, who ranged from first-time festival attenders to returning festival goers and from creative people who take part in the festival showcasing their work to organisers and volunteers. The focus of the research was placed specifically on participants' spatial experiences during the festival period. Based on the above, we examine the relationship between grassroots participatory art events and place attachment towards urban public spaces. We then discuss what happens when participatory forms of art are brought into our urban everyday sites.

More specifically, the research has been focused on responding to the four following questions:

- How do grassroots participatory arts events emerge?

- How does audience involvement in the creation, preparation, and implementation of cultural events affect human-place bonds?
- How does audience participation in cultural events influence spatial experiences, perceptions, and sentiments?
- In what ways can art-stimulated participatory events contribute to place making, marketing and branding endeavours for our cities?

Responding to these questions enables us to develop our theoretical understanding on the relationship between participatory art events and place branding. For our data analysis, we have decided not to describe, evaluate, and delve into every aesthetic experience, artistic project, and creative event recorded, lived, and interpreted through our fieldwork, as this would be neither feasible nor productive. We, therefore, do not follow a chronological or event-focused narration but we develop emic-to-ethic themes that respond to our initial research questions. Reflecting on the theoretical perspectives and the literature discussed previously, we focus our attention on those stories that can shed some more light on the role that participatory art events may play in place attachment, marketing and branding efforts.

4. Findings

4.1 The origin and meaning of the AFF: How participatory arts events emerge in our cities

AFF started in a serendipitous way as a non-planned demand by many citizens of Athens to create an open artistic platform. Such a platform allowed them to creatively, discursively, and aesthetically interact, share, and exchange their dreams and fears, passions and loves, emotions and hopes through art. As one of the festival organisers has publicly stated:

We keep falling into each other. Our paths cross at the tube entrance. We drive next to each other on Kifissias avenue, we look at each other from the trolley windows. We are seeking reasons to talk to each other and we are happy when we find one, even if this reason is to yell at each other. We live in the same city. We are the first generation that feels that we own it. We love it. Athens belongs to us and it's

the extension of our living rooms. Reality is nice, it can even be magical. Fringe is the Festival of Athens.

The philosophy behind the festival is revealed through its slogan: *Athens Belongs to Us*. The founding team of the festival consists of a group of everyday creative people, who were struggling for years to find a cultural institution, organisation, or venue to accept their creative work in Athens. So, interestingly, while significant investment in urban arts tends to concentrate on building new cultural infrastructure and iconic cultural landmarks, these same institutions, often, promote an institutional perspective on culture, which does not facilitate everyday creativity (Comunian and Mould 2014). Before the launch of AFF, creative Athenians, who were not professional artists, were not feeling welcome to present their work in arts-dedicated venues, art festivals, or cultural institutions for decades. They were not recognised as legitimate cultural producers and they were not encouraged to artistically express themselves in urban public contexts. This is the main reason why AFF was established. Everyday citizens, who felt the need to interact with others in creative ways, tried to find non-arts, public or privately-owned spaces that would allow them to share their stories through art and would enable them to aesthetically communicate with others. Inspired by the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, they came up with the idea of AFF and launched this festival as an act of resistance to the mainstream art offerings in the city. As one of the core organising team members of the Festival recalls:

We were begging the well-established art festivals [...] to become more open, to accept the work of more people. There was an intense need to express ourselves, but there was no platform willing to host us. We have sent countless letters to artistic directors and cultural programmers asking them to allow more people to participate in the Greek artistic scene. Everything was rejected. We were not “professional” enough. They were looking for “quality”. They have been claiming that the Greek artistic scene “should progress”, so they have been trying to focus on developing partnerships with international artistic companies. In 2008 AFF was born out of this need for participation in the cultural production of the city. AFF, in this sense, is a political action. An action of participation in the cultural commons.

In response to our first research question, we can see that far beyond being launched as an urban top-down strategy, participatory events often seem to appear as a response to the stifling of art and creativity in institutional frameworks. This highlights a general discontent of people in being treated just as consumers in the broader creative economy and the importance of social interaction and everyday creativity (Wilson 2010). Further, recent academic work highlights the importance of the ‘creative citizen’ (Hargreaves and Hartley 2016) and the need to take seriously the role they play not simply as audiences but as cultural producers. As our interviewees argue, the value of non-professional creative self-expression is not always recognised within institutions and professional settings (Comunian 2011). This structural inadequacy creates the need for organic participatory and collaborative art events and inspires their emergence in cities (Comunian 2017).

4.2 Participatory Cultural Practices and Place Attachment

The second area of enquiry relates to how participatory cultural events inspire place attachment. Our informants’ stories reveal that participatory creative activities are undertaken through practices of physical familiarization, spatial *experimentation, interaction, and control*. The arts-based multisensory, experimental, relational, and authoring practices make citizens come closer to the physical context of the city. They offer a protected environment in which people can creatively experiment, express themselves, and share ideas, emotions and experiences with others. Participants’ stories articulate how human-place bonds develop through such participatory creative practices.

Physical Familiarisation

Our data indicate that audience participation in the making, experience, and consumption of cultural events contributes to spatial familiarisation, risk-taking, and sensory exploration. Many respondents highlighted how their involvement with events in the AFF provided an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the city. This was the case for individuals who lived there for decades as well as new comers.

I participate almost every year in AFF. Although I have been living in this city for more than four decades, I had never felt that I know my city much. Through the festival, I have come

to know little corners, underground areas, and hidden places of the city that I had never noticed before. The discovery of these places happens in a unique way. Passing by a new building or walking on the same street everyday is not enough; it takes many creative ways to discover your city with all of your senses.

Participatory art events request the active involvement of the audience in creative productive processes; it is not simply about attending an event but about being physically, mentally, and psychologically immersed in the creative happening. As a result, the type of familiarisation that takes place through participatory art events involves multi-sensorial experiences and a deep level of engagement that brings an embodied understanding of the city (Duffy, et al 2011).

During the festival, we spend so much time listening to the sounds of the city and producing our own sounds or acting and dancing in central spots. Yesterday, I had to lie down on the most central commercial street of Athens because of an improvisational act we were presenting. I had never smelled, touched or felt the temperature of Ermou street before. I don't know why but I feel closer to it now. It's not just a street any more. You know ... it's a street that I know ... a street that I can recognise with all my senses. I don't know why but I think that I love it more. It means more to me now. I shared a part of my life and myself on that street with all my honesty and emotion ... in front of friends, strangers and family members... How could it be the same again?



Figure 4.1. AFF, 2011. Dancing on Syntagma Square.
Source: Authors.

Experimentation

Participatory art events also encourage artistic self-expression, experimentation, and risk-taking practices. Creative participatory practices give audiences the opportunity to try new things, to be brave and open themselves to the public, and to explore new forms of public interaction. This is what two returning festival participants stated when commenting about their city experiences during AFF.

[During the AFF], the city is transformed into this friendly place, where you can just experiment. If I start singing alone in the middle of the street in any given moment, people would probably think that I am crazy, but during the Festival, such acts of self-expression are acceptable and welcome.

You identify the most unsuspected space, you try to familiarize yourself with it for a minute or two, and then off you go. Anything that comes to your mind becomes possible.

These place-embedded practices of self-experimentation support the inclusivity of diverse, often conflicting, creative voices in the city, the broadening of representation in the Athenian urban landscape, and the

pluralism of public expression (Wilson, Gross and Bull 2017; Mason and Scollen 2018).

Interaction

Another significant practice that contributes to the development of human-place bonding is the interaction and dialogue needed in order to create grassroots participatory cultural events. Space-bound participatory cultural events facilitate meaningful verbal and non-verbal exchanges with others. This is an important dimension of participatory art because it builds on our knowledge of how culture can bring people together (Amin 2008). It also highlights the role of festivals in creating spaces for artistic self-expression (Kozinets 2002), dialogue (Wilks 2011), and collaboration (Comunian 2017).

In a time where all forms of participation in the public dialogue - except the national and municipal elections - have been taken away from us, that citizens cannot decide on the matters of their everyday lives [...] we have found a way to take part in the public debate and to intervene. We do this through art, the most genuine form of human self-expression. We turn our city into an arena of interaction. We use sounds and rhythms, our bodies and our moves, our stories and our poems, to share our experiences, our dreams, our troubles. Athens becomes a domain of creative self-expression, exchange, and dialogue.

The above statement comes from an older local amateur participant referring to the problematic social effects of the economic crisis in Greece. The respondent is arguing that art and creativity offer an alternative avenue towards public debate.

Control

The last significant characteristic of participatory art events identified through our research concerns the practices of control that are encouraged. Participatory cultural opportunities empower the consumer's role in the attached space, but also enable participants to gain control over the space. Participatory artistic practices relate to the ability of individuals to creatively contribute to the context in which they express themselves but also to feel empowered to act, shape, and control their physical

environments. The following statement comes from a younger emerging artist that has taken part in the festival repeatedly.

For 360 days every year, Athens is a place where things happen, and I have to adjust. I have to drive faster, I have to walk faster, [...] I have to be quiet, I have to divert because of the demonstrations, I have to wait, I have to move again, I have to ask permission to enter into particular buildings. But there are a couple of days during the year [...], when I can just experience my city in the way that I want to. There is not a better feeling than knowing that for some days, you can take back control. You can live on your own terms. You produce your own work on the spot and in the moment and it feels like the city is just there for you, waiting to be crafted according to your wishes, inspirations, and ideas. The city becomes yours again, even if it's just for a few fleeting moments.

Here, it becomes clear how participatory art events can relate to issues of cultural democracy (Wilson et al 2017). Participatory art events can be powerful ways to redefine collective identities (Miles 2005) as well as group experiences, perceptions, and sentiment towards the city. In other words, participatory art events enable ordinary people to creatively shape, form, and define their urban context and content (Strydom et al 2018).

4.3 From Place Attachment to Place Image

The aforementioned narratives suggest that participatory art events encourage consumer practices that contribute to the development of human-place bonds. But how do these experiences of spatial familiarisation, experimentation, interaction, and control are manifested? How are human-place bonds translated in terms of audiences' spatial associations and evaluations? First, festival participants in the study stated that participatory art events contribute to a sense of authenticity for Athens. Second, participants expressed a sense of safety, security, and protection experienced in the context of their city. Third, place attachment was manifested through post-event nostalgia. Last, festival participants expressed perceptions and sentiments of closeness, ownership, and collective possession.

Authenticity

Many authors highlight how using art as a tool to improve the city image for tourism has become a common urban strategy. While this kind of investment might lead to local economic development, this tends to be very short-term (García 2005), leaving often empty buildings and displacing the local community in the long-term analysis (Gaffney 2010). On the other hand of the spectrum, recent research has engaged with the concept of authenticity in cultural and tourism experiences (Jive' n and Larkham 2003; Knudsen and Waade 2010). This is very close to our findings in Athens, where participants reported the importance of spontaneity, informality, and authenticity in how the AFF events took place and involved real people. The following opinion comes from a local audience member that visits the festival for the first time.

Events like this are genuine. Here, we find real stories, from real people for real people. Everything is real. It's real art. There is nothing curated, nothing refined, nothing is created with the aim to be sold. There is no formal stage, no props, no designed settings. All the events happen in real time, in real settings, in impulsive and spontaneous ways. It's a sincere act of communication.

Usually, art events are delivered by professional organisers with the risk of losing the authentic local, community, and participatory character of the festive activities (Edensor and Sumartojo, 2018; Rota and Salone, 2014). Professionally staged events run the risk of offering standardised, impeccable, and, often, uninspiring experiences to audiences. Grassroots participatory art events offer a rare opportunity to audiences to show the city's own idiosyncratic merit, anarchic creativity, and beauty without constructing stages, auditoriums, and luxury holiday packages for tourists. This creates a unique, valuable, and distinctive character for Athens, which might have greater potential for communicating a more authentic, original, and organic place identity.

Safety

As highlighted in the literature, place attachment depends and connects with our primal need for safety and security (Fried 2000). It also contrasts with much of the contemporary fears which are developed and experienced in our cities (Low 1997). Furthermore, from a city marketing and tourism perspective, it connects with one of the key issues that cities aim to address

to attract visitors (Dolnicar 2005). The following statement comes from a younger participant that takes part in the festival for the first time.

The city feels ~~more safe and open~~ safer and more open. There is this homey feeling everywhere... you feel like you are in your shower, you know. Singing for yourself... but people are actually there ... present ... and they care. They stop, they listen... they try to understand... they sometimes ask questions. For a few days, Athens becomes cosier and less threatening.

Human-place ties developed through participatory creative practices have the potential to make our urban spaces feel safer, less threatening, and friendlier. They create a sense of homeyness, coziness, and intimacy (Debenedetti et al 2013).

Post-Event Nostalgia

Art-stimulated place attachment also creates a strong post-event nostalgia. This reflects the arguments of Bowlby (1982), Fried (1963) and Relf (1976) about grief in case of place loss and separation. A young participant who travelled to Athens from abroad to present her work in the festival discusses about the positive associations, dear memories, and treasured recollections developed during the festival period.

It doesn't feel the same ... you know. It's the same place, the same city ... and at the same time, it isn't. Because it becomes impersonal, in a sense, again. But the memories are still so warm and vivid. We keep talking about our memories when we performed and had our rehearsals here. And every single time that I pass by, I remember these intense feelings ... There was fairy dust ... there was heartbeat ... you know... there was anxiety and excitement. It was just magical! Now, we just have to wait for next year's events.

As this participant argues, the memories of the events create an idealised image of the city; Athens is felt and remembered like a magical, charming, innovative, and alive place. Participatory creative practices stimulate strong associations for individuals with the experience of excitement for the moment. Participants' experiences, sentiments, and shared moments give meaning to the city, their lives, and their spatial-based interactions (Tuan 1974; Steele 1981).

Collective Possession

Participatory art practices also stimulate a sense of ownership and collective spatial possession. The stories from the field allow us to imagine how a city through extra-governmental participatory aesthetic practices can be experienced as collectively possessed by the citizens.

When other big events take place in particular parts of Athens, we know that we can't have access to those parts of the city if we don't aim to attend the event. You know ... big concerts, parades, marathons. They just close the streets down. So, if it's not your type of thing to attend as a spectator, you can't be there, you are excluded. When AFF takes place, we come together to create, collaborate, and change our city. Access is free ... We all get the opportunity to express ourselves in our common shared space. Everyone can use the city to tell their own stories. In this sense, the city becomes yours. But at the same time, you know that it belongs to others and you are there to hear their stories as well. And, in this way, you feel that you belong in something bigger, in something collective.

In this sense, it could be argued that AFF acts as a political arena of non-institutionalised participatory aesthetic experiences that has the potential to shift the shape, the outlook, and the experience of the city encouraging a more collective sense of spatial possession (Visconti et al 2010).



Figure 4.2. AFF, 2011. Athens Fringe Bus, Interventions in the City.
Source: Authors.

4.4 From Place Image to Place Branding

As discussed above, participatory cultural events, such as AFF, have the potential to arouse individually experienced attachment towards urban space. This happens through participatory art practices undertaken by diverse creative citizens. However, such human-place bonds may also lead to further macro-level implications; participatory art events foster a new playful, creative, polysensory identity for the attached place for both citizens and external visitors of the festival. As one of our local informants explains, these events make inhabitants feel closer to their city and enhance their desire to also remain close to it – something that reflects the existing literature on place attachment (Bowlby 1969, 1982; Shumaker and Taylor 1983).

I would never change this city for anything in this world – where else can you find this burst of creativity? This artistic excitement in every corner? I have travelled all around the world and there is no other place right now that offers this feeling of creative anarchy. Although Athens is not an easy city, actually, it's one of the hardest cities to live in, it offers you something that no other place can. It's this feeling of creative resistance ... you know ... this sense of whatever may happen to us, we still have power, and this is our creative spirit, we still have ways to respond to the problems of modernity and this is our creative urge. This is what keeps me in this city... and it will keep me forever. Athens is a place irreplaceable. I wouldn't change it for any other city in the world.

Participatory art events here clearly contribute to a sense of connection to and pride of the city, its vivid character, and creative flair. This results in commitment, loyalty, and fidelity from the side of the citizens. Our participants demonstrated advocacy and loyalty towards the city of Athens because of this participatory artistic activity. This is another manifestation of place attachment, which is related to place branding (Faullant et al 2008). While loyalty seems to connect with external visitors, their affiliation, and return patterns to places, in this case, we find that loyalty - and in some respect, pride of a place (Bailey et al 2004) - is experienced by local citizens, who are not willing to leave, replace their cherished place, or associate their lives with another city (Fried 1963; Relph 1976). This is

richly expressed by a young professional, who lives in Athens, and has participated in the festival several times.

The atmosphere is so lively and vivid. When the events take place, Athens is a colorful city! Full of art, paintings, music, balloons, songs, plays, dances, poems. There are stories everywhere. [...] You never get bored, there are unique happenings everywhere in the city. There are people who create in every corner. They create because they hope in something better, because they want to express their disappointment and disagreement, because they want to change their society and they want to be changed. They long to communicate. And when the words we have are not enough, we resort to whatever form of communication is left – and this is art. I love this sense of surprise and unpredictability in a city. I love this artistic flair.

This is an image of the city, which is not created and shaped by policy makers or place managers but it emerges among the networks of participants, citizens, and visitors that engage in the grassroots creative activity in the city. Participatory art events can create a long-term enhancement of the appreciation for the city's offerings, its creative profile, and its surprising gifts. Through stories that are reproduced by international media (Sooke 2017) and by the festival's own channels and social media, the mosaic of the city image is enriched. However, this enhanced perception of Athens because of its grassroots creative events is not only evident in internal audiences' stories. Our discussions with local business owners and tourists revealed that:

This creative vibe brings so many people downtown. Athens has many disadvantages but this artistic activity going on brings in people, commerce, positive reputation, and more artists from around the world. It brings excitement to Athenians and visitors.

This is why I wanted to travel to Athens! I had heard so many stories and I kept reading that it's a city where crowd-sourced art is evidenced in any unimaginable and unexpected place. And I wanted to experience that. It's true. Athens is like an adult playground. There is a sense of

freedom, creativity, and playfulness everywhere. It's a place full of sounds, images, smells, and tastes.

Because of these grassroots lived aesthetics experienced across the city, Athens now embodies the meaning of underground creativity and uncompromised artistic self-expression. It is broadly recognized because of this unexpected, anarchic, and surprising artistic disposition that its citizens present. Athens, as a place brand, through its crowd-sourced art events, manages to organically connect ideals of resistance, self-expression, and genuine creativity changing how people think, feel, and act (Jones 2017). We believe that this last impression provided below coming from a tourist we met during the festival summarizes brilliantly our findings.

We all have the same perceptions about Greece... a place of debt, lazy people, and poverty. So, as a foreigner, you are a bit sceptical about travelling there. We hear many negative stories. And, obviously, these are not completely fake. But if you find a glimpse of spontaneous and genuine craziness in the sea of commercialisation that we all have to swim in, you forget all the rest and you dive in ...

5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Our stories from the field suggest that participatory art events in urban public spaces contribute to the development of human-place ties that extend, enrich, and deepen usual spatial experiences in the city. Through participatory art practices, people get the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the city, experiment and interact with others in its context, and ephemerally control the space around them. Our findings indicate that participatory art practices stimulate place attachment, which has an impact on participants' spatial experiences, perceptions, and sentiments towards the city manifested through a sense of authenticity, security, possession, and post-event nostalgia. This results in an overall enhancement of the city image for internal and external audiences, an appreciation of its offerings, and loyalty towards the place.

Reflecting on the stories from the field, we develop a framework (Figure. 4.3.) to conceptualise how the participation of citizens and visitors in informal arts events in the city can (1) foster human-place bonds, (2)

affect spatial experiences, perceptions, and sentiments, and (3) impact macro-level implications in the overall place brand. In our analysis, we identified four key stages that connect the possibility for participatory cultural events to stimulate place attachment and, consequently, enhance the place brand.

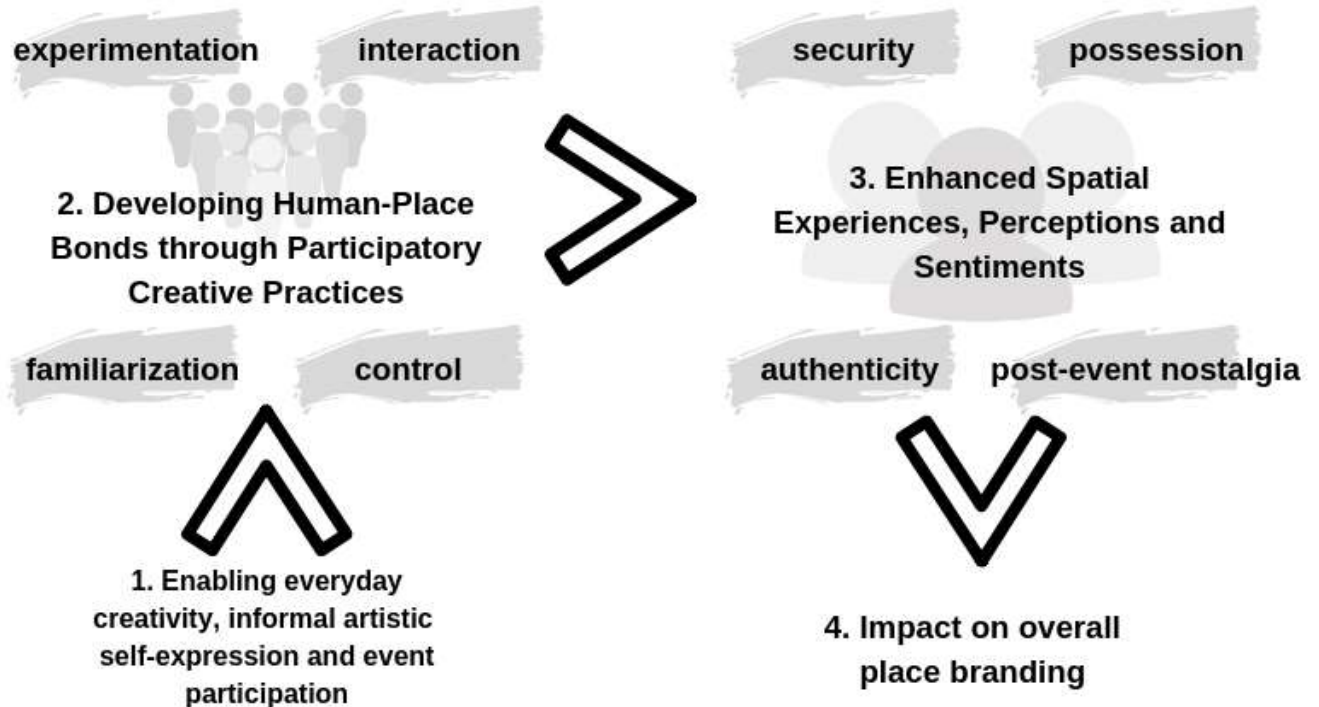


Figure 4.3. Relationship between participatory cultural events, place attachment, place branding.

Source: Authors.

Our concluding remarks highlight some conceptual propositions, some remaining open questions, and some venues for further research, which, hopefully, colleagues will be interested in exploring with us. Our findings suggest that against a copycat strategy of culture-led regeneration (Evans 2003) and the boosting of marketing-led festivals (Quinn 2005), grassroots participatory cultural events will become more important in supporting and sustaining an authentic identity for places (Kagan et al 2018). In a similar vein to Mould’s (2015) readings of subversive creativity, we propose that participatory festivals have the potential to question existing urban politics, unleash radical urban creativity, and offer opportunities for self-experimentation, social interaction, and spatial

reconfiguration. In the case of AFF, we have demonstrated how the participatory, spontaneous, and audience-led nature of the artistic events has created a new dialogical platform for the city and an alternative place brand, which has affected the spatial experiences, perceptions, and sentiments of locals and visitors towards the city (Richards 2017). However, to understand whether this change in place image can affect and, transform broader socio-cultural spatial dynamics, perceptions, and sentiments in the long-term, we would require further research.

Another crucial issue is whether participatory cultural events can be encouraged, supported, and/or developed through institutional channels. We would argue that participatory art events stimulate place attachment and contribute to the development of human-place bonds exactly because of their spontaneous, organic, fluid, bottom-up, and independent character. It is the emergence and experience of this resisting counterculture that creates this sense of authentic, non-compromised, and autonomous identity that makes places distinctive, original, and creative. While the encouragement of institutions would go a long way in ensuring the festival keeps on growing and embracing more places and people in the city, policy interventions - through funding or others means - might stifle the event's freshness, genuineness, and impulsiveness, changing the nature of the festival itself (Comunian 2011). Therefore, the question remains open for place policy makers, managers, and marketers on how to connect and sustain the authenticity of independently initiated, developed, and delivered grassroots participatory cultural events to city branding endeavours (de Brito and Richards 2017).

Finally, although beyond the scope of this book, we hope this study can also contribute to a better understanding of the role of participatory cultural events and everyday creativity in academic discussions, policy endeavours, and managerial aspirations around cultural democracy (Richards, 2007; Wilson et al 2017), as well as in a more creative development, positive experience, and democratic living of our cities.

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