

The Hong Kong Arts Festival and Cultural Activity Choices

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Festivals are a growing phenomenon in modern economies (Prentice & Andersen 2003). It has been noted that cultural festivals are now a significant mainstay on the cultural calendar of modern society (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007). This paper explores the role of arts festivals on local cultural activity consumptions, seeking in particular to gain a full understanding of attendees' experiences with traditional versus globalised culture. Using data from over 1100 surveys of attendees at the 2009 Hong Kong Arts Festival the findings show that there were significant differences between attendance patterns of local residents and visitors. Local residents were attracted more to international performances while visitors were also strongly attracted to Chinese performances (both contemporary and traditional). This result highlights the dual role of major festivals of both bringing the best of international art to local residents while also showcasing the traditional and contemporary culture of the region.

1. Introduction

Festivals are a major component of modern societies and their economies (Prentice & Andersen 2003). Since the Second World war there has been an exponential increase in arts, cultural and other popular activities condensed into short periods of concentrated effort for maximum impact. In fact as noted by Fjell (2007) festivals in Europe have increased in the last 60 years from around 400 to over 30,000. As such they are significant contributors to the cultural life of many cities (Arcodia & Whitford 2006) and therefore have attracted significant interest from researchers and practioners as well as governments at all levels.

It has been noted that cultural festivals are now a significant mainstay on the cultural calendar of modern society (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007). These events take on a variety of roles extending from mechanisms to sustain cultural groups, to mechanisms for assuring the acceptance of a particular cultural discourse to a means of generating local pride, identity and income (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007). However a number of authors suggest that the cultural content of such festivals is limited and there is a fear that the more traditional culture of these societies is being replaced by a globalised, popular culture (Crespi- Vallbona & Richards 2007).

A number of studies have looked at the economic impact of festivals but in more recent years it has become apparent that this limited perspective of the value of festivals does not adequately acknowledge the cultural and social benefits that festivals may bring to a community (Carlsen, Ali-Knight and Robertson 2007; Quinn

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2005). There have been numerous studies that have looked at the impact of festivals on destinations and locations from a number of different perspectives. Many studies have looked at attendance at festivals from a tourism perspective (eg Getz 2008; Hughes & Allen 2005; Kim, Cheng & O'Leary 2007; Prentice & Andersen 2003), while others have looked at the relationship between festivals and local residents (eg Arcodia & Richards 2007; Van Zyl & Botha 2004). However there is limited research on the differences between these two groups of local residents and tourists. One study (Lee, Lee & Wicks 2004) examined the differences of motivation on attendance by nationality while another study by Lee (2000) explored the differences of Caucasian versus Asian visitors to a cultural expo. However an understanding of the social and cultural implications of the attendance preferences of these two groups remains limited.

This research aims to help address this gap by exploring the role of arts festivals in local cultural attendance, seeking in particular to gain a full understanding of different groups of attendees' preferences re traditional versus globalised culture. This paper makes use of primary data obtained from 1169 attendees to the 2009 Hong Kong Arts Festival.

The paper provides an understanding of arts festivals and their role in modern society. In particular the relationship between the presentations of local cultural product, distinctive to the location of the festival, versus global cultural product is explored. The methodology section contains demographic data of the 1169 respondents to surveys conducted during the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 2009. A series of ANOVA are then undertaken looking at differences in desire to attend local cultural productions (both traditional and contemporary) and international cultural productions, based on different demographics including residency status. The final sections discuss the implications of these findings for the development of local cultural product and the potential role a major international festival can play in this.

2. Festivals and Local Cultural Activity

The term Festival can mean many things but in the case of the arts we can look to find a more specific interpretation. For example, The Oxford Dictionary of Music describes festivals as "gatherings in which one or more of the arts is celebrated" (Kennedy 1989, p. 247). Kennedy goes to explain how arts festivals have been aligned more and more with tourism since the Second World War and that many cities have sought to develop arts festivals as a means to attracting visitors to their location (1989, p. 247). These festivals can be devoted to one artist or one type of artform or merely be a "random collection of artistic events" (Kennedy 1989, p. 247)

Getz provides us with a more simple definition of festivals being "themed, public events" (Getz 2009, p. 31). Getz also points out that many so-called festivals are much more commercially focussed than others and often lose the interpretation of the meaning of the event in the process and that true festivals can tell much about the social and cultural identity of the society (Getz 2009, p. 32).

However, it has been noted that many festivals are not "...constructed around distinctively "local" and/or "ethnic" sign patterns. Generic and socially decontextualized –"placeless"-festival forms are increasingly being invented..." (Robinson, Picard & Long 2004, p. 187). Here the authors bring to notice that

festivals need not necessarily be related to the city in which they are held but in fact may be more generic or global in their cultural content and focus. They go on to state that "...it becomes critical not only to understand the cultural festival as a *particular* and located event, but also as a *dislocated* event capable of reproduction..." (Robinson, Picard & Long 2004, p. 188).

Art festivals are regarded as a time for celebration, marked by special observances, focusing on a cultural event consisting of a series of performances of works of fine arts (Quinn 2005). A variety of benefits have been found to be gained from major international arts festivals. Of particular interest to this research is their benefit to local cultural consumption. McKercher et al. (2006) state that a key benefit of arts festivals is that they satisfy the sustainability criterion for tourism practices by providing opportunity to showcase the destination's ethnic background and cultural art heritage. Therefore these can be seen as integral to traditional cultural vibrancy. This is supported by Prentice and Andersen (2003, p.8) in their statement of art festivals as a unique selling point of creativity as well as local heritage. Festivals can be seen as a type of cultural tourism but in contradiction they are also seen as selling and promoting globalised culture. Crespi-Vallbona and Richards (2007) point out that this divided view on festivals has been examined in a number of cases. However, it appears most of these evaluations have taken place in the non-Asian context. This study adds to our understanding of festival attendance in an Asian context by looking at an international arts festival based in a major Asian destination.

The Hong Kong Arts Festival (HKAF) is a major festival destination event in Asia, impacting considerably on the cultural life of Hong Kong (McCartney 2010, p. 379). First staged in 1973 it is now considered a major international arts festival as well as the premier arts event in Hong Kong. The programme of events offers a balance of both international and local artists and companies in a variety of art forms including music, theatre, dance, popular entertainment, film and visual arts exhibitions. According to the HKAF, its "mission is to present an annual international festival of the highest standard for the enrichment of cultural life in Hong Kong. The Festival also serves as a catalyst to arouse wider public interest in the arts and to encourage artistic dialogue and cultural exchange" (<http://www.hk.artsfestival.org/en/about/>). The Festival mounts over 100 performances in the space of 3 to 4 weeks and attracts in the vicinity of 100,000 ticket sales annually (McCartney 2010, p. 376).

The research question being asked here then is what types of cultural activities are experienced by local residents and international visitors during the Festival's staging of international and local arts productions?

3. Methodology

This study seeks to explore the potential influence of the 2009 Hong Kong Arts Festival on the cultural experiences gained by attendees. The research framework captures the intentions of and activities undertaken by attendees to festival events and looks at preferences of two major segments, visitors and local residents to three core clusters of events (international performances, contemporary Chinese and traditional Chinese).

This paper uses data collected by the Hong Kong Arts Festival from a survey conducted during the 2009 festival among the local and international festival participants. People attending 41 different performances were surveyed with an average of 28 surveys being completed at each event. Events were chosen to represent a broad range of performance types including different art forms, matinee and evening performances, and both weekday and weekend performances. Individual audience members were selected randomly to complete the survey. The survey was conducted in two versions, one for local residents and one for tourists attending the festival. Surveys were administered in both English and Chinese. Participants were asked to volunteer to complete a questionnaire during the performance and to return it in the same evening. A total of 1169 useable surveys were returned including both residents and visitors. For analysis, Forty-one shows are categorised into three broad categories based on their content. These are: Best International Performances, Traditional Chinese shows and Contemporary Chinese shows.

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Survey participants were predominantly residents of Hong Kong rather than visitors from other countries. Approximately 89 per cent (88.9 per cent) of the survey participants indicated that they live permanently in Hong Kong. Only 11.1 per cent of participants were international visitor who were attending the Arts Festival (please refer to Table 1). Table 1 also shows the gender of those surveyed and it can be seen that the majority of respondents were female (64 per cent for residents and 56 per cent for visitors). The majority of visitors were aged over 18 years with a reasonably even mix of respondents aged 18 to 34 years (36 per cent), 35 to 54 years (32 per cent) and over 55 years (30 per cent). Like visitors the largest age groups represented for residents were the 18 to 34 year group (36 per cent) and 35 to 54 year age group (29 per cent). However, the age profile for residents was different in that a significant number of respondents were under 18 years of age (22 per cent).

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Category		Residents	Visitors
Residency status as percentage of total responses		89	11
Gender (%):	Male	36	44
	Female	64	56
Age (%):	<18	22	3
	18-34	36	36
	35-54	29	32
	55+	13	30
Education (%):	School	34	11
	Tertiary	43	52
	Higher Degree	23	36

The majority of visitors attending the festival had a post-secondary education at a diploma or higher level. In fact 43 per cent of respondents had at least a Bachelor degree with a further 36 per cent having a Master's degree or higher. The education

profile of residents is slightly different possibly reflecting the higher proportion of children attending performances. Two thirds of local respondents (66 per cent) indicated they had a post-secondary education at a diploma level or higher. Overall 36 per cent of respondents had at least a Bachelor degree with a further 23 per cent having a Master's degree or higher. About 30 per cent of residents indicated that the highest education level undertaken was secondary schooling. Further analysis of the descriptive statistics show that overall it would appear that the data set is a reasonable distribution across gender, age and education which appears not to be skewed. Residency status is skewed towards local residents but this is to be expected given the audience base of the festival being predominantly local residents (see Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Residency	1163	1.00	2.00	1.1109	.31417	2.481	.072	4.163	.143
Gender	1159	1.00	2.00	1.6316	.48258	-.546	.072	-1.705	.144
Age	1157	1.00	4.00	2.4045	.96240	.132	.072	-.934	.144
Education	1134	1.00	5.00	2.6367	1.24150	-.059	.073	-1.123	.145

Residency: 1 = resident, 2 = visitor

Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female

Age: 1 = under 18, 2 = 18- 35 years, 3 = 35-54 years, 4 = over 55 years

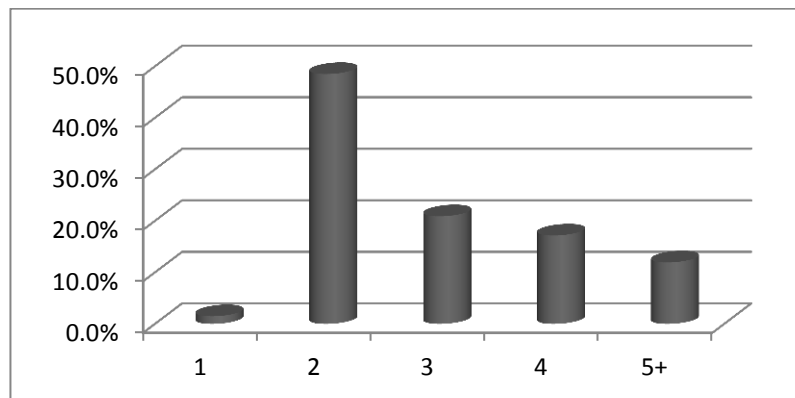
Education: 1 = high school certificate, 2 = diploma, 3 = bachelor, 4 = masters, 5 = PhD

Overall the demographics show that attendees to the Festival are more likely to be female, aged between 18 and 54 and have a tertiary education. This fits well with other studies of arts attendance patterns and would indicate a reasonable representation of arts audiences internationally (see for example Seaman 2006). Of the demographic variables commonly used in studies of performing arts audiences, five have been identified repeatedly as important: education, age, income, occupation, and gender (Stafford and Tripp, 2000, p. 32). Stafford and Tripp defined performing arts audiences as being middle-aged with higher education and more likely to be female (2000, p. 32). The statistics observed here are in line with this description, albeit slightly younger than middle aged.

In particular, in this study local resident statistics show a higher level of attendees aged less than 18 years along with a corresponding higher level of only High School level education. These statistics may indicate a significant level of local school students attending the Festival in addition to the more traditional arts attendee described above. If this is the case, it would appear that the Festival is successful in attracting both traditional arts attendees as well as young people to experience a variety of cultural activities associated with this event.

Figure 1 below shows the percentage breakdown of repeat attendance at the festival for respondents aged less than 18 years of age. Almost half of the respondents (48.5%) aged under 18 years had attended the Festival twice before, with the remaining 50% indicating they had attended at least three previous festivals. This supports the idea that the festival is successful in not only attracting new audiences but are developing them into potential long term attenders.

Figure 1: Number of Previous Festival Visits for Respondents aged < 18 yrs.



4. The Findings

To explore further the types of events that attracted individuals to the Festival, respondents were asked what their main interest in attending the festival was. Responses were categorised into 3 main themes, namely to experience *Traditional Chinese Performances*, *Contemporary Chinese Performances* and *The Best of International Performances*. A series of One Way Analysis of Variance between groups was undertaken to see if there were any significant differences between interest in the festival based on residency status, gender, and age and education levels.

Analysis of variance based on residency was significant at the 5 per cent level. Results in Table 3 show all three categories being significant to varying degrees. Although *Traditional Chinese Performances* is not supported at 5 per cent level of significance, it is supported at 10 per cent level of significance. Results from this analysis indicate that the main interest in attending the shows differs significantly based on their place of origin (residency status).

Table 3: Summary of the residency status based ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Trad_Chinese	Between Groups	1.633	1	1.633	3.143	.077
	Within Groups	603.364	1161	.520		
	Total	604.997	1162			
Cont_Chinese	Between Groups	15.515	1	15.515	16.386	.000
	Within Groups	1099.276	1161	.947		
	Total	1114.791	1162			
Best_Intnl	Between Groups	18.540	1	18.540	4.161	.042
	Within Groups	5173.405	1161	4.456		
	Total	5191.945	1162			

Gender as a factor in explaining variance in attendance was not supported at 5 per cent level of significance. ANOVA results (please refer to Table 4) indicated that *Traditional* and *Contemporary Chinese Performances* watched by the festival attendees did not vary significantly based on their gender. Only *The Best of International Performances* watched by the attendees differed significantly based on their gender. Since two out of three categories are not supported by the data, there is lack of sufficient evidence to conclude that interest in the different types of performances of the festival attendees differed significantly based on their gender.

Table 4: Summary of gender based ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Trad_Chinese	Between Groups	.099	1	.099	.193	.660
	Within Groups	591.306	1157	.511		
	Total	591.405	1158			
Cont_Chinese	Between Groups	.138	1	.138	.144	.705
	Within Groups	1112.231	1157	.961		
	Total	1112.369	1158			
Best_Intnl	Between Groups	74.880	1	74.880	16.954	.000
	Within Groups	5110.112	1157	4.417		
	Total	5184.992	1158			

Age however does appear to be a significant factor at the 5 per cent level of significance (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Summary of the age category based ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Trad_Chinese	Between Groups	27.562	3	9.187	18.453	.000
	Within Groups	574.068	1153	.498		
	Total	601.630	1156			
Cont_Chinese	Between Groups	16.318	3	5.439	5.723	.001
	Within Groups	1095.839	1153	.950		
	Total	1112.157	1156			
Best_Intnl	Between Groups	78.659	3	26.220	5.917	.001
	Within Groups	5109.328	1153	4.431		
	Total	5187.986	1156			

All three categories are supported at 5 per cent level of significance which strongly indicates that interest in *Traditional Chinese*, *Contemporary Chinese* and *Best International Performances* by the festival attendees varied significantly based on festival attendees age category. This will be explored further in the next section.

Finally education level also appears to be a significant factor in explaining attendance patterns as reported in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Summary of the level of education based ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Trad_Chinese	Between Groups	2.900	4	.725	1.415	.227
	Within Groups	578.314	1129	.512		
	Total	581.214	1133			
Cont_Chinese	Between Groups	8.644	4	2.161	2.259	.061
	Within Groups	1080.157	1129	.957		
	Total	1088.802	1133			
Best_Intnl	Between Groups	198.198	4	49.549	11.602	.000
	Within Groups	4821.714	1129	4.271		
	Total	5019.912	1133			

While there is no significance in regard to interest in *Traditional Chinese Performances* by the festival attendees based on their level of education, the number of *Contemporary Chinese* and *Best International Performances* interest by the festival attendees did differ significantly based on their level of education (please refer to Table 6). Since two out of three factors are supported by the ANOVA results, it can be concluded that the type of different types of shows watched by the

festival participants differs significantly based on their level of education.

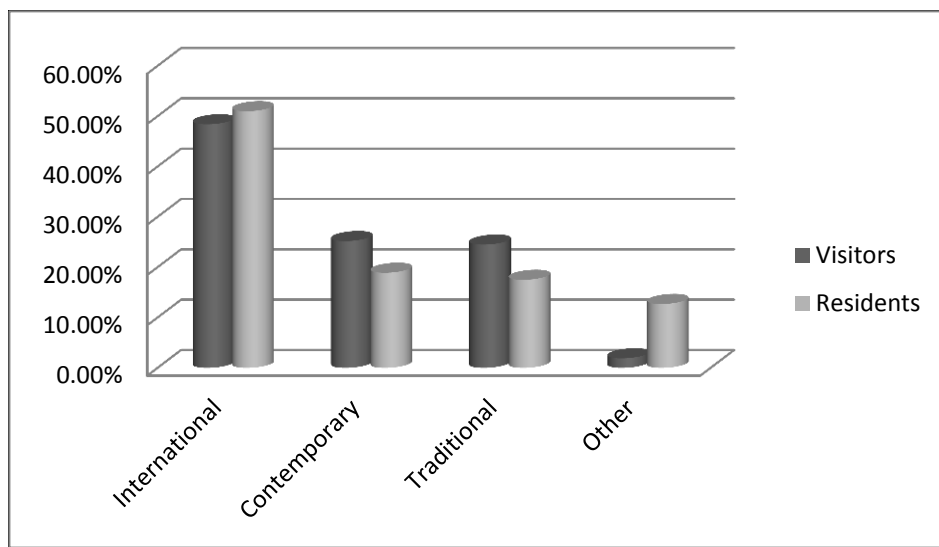
The interpretation and implications for the above results will be discussed in the next section.

5. Discussion

The above analyses show that the main rationale for attending the festival does differ depending on age, education and whether the attendee was a local or visitor. Of particular interest to this paper however, is the difference between local residents and visitors to Hong Kong. Figure 2 below displays the overall level of interest in the main reason for attending the festival by respondents based on residency status.

While the majority of both residents and local audiences went to the Festival to see the best of international performances, this result was slightly higher for residents (51 per cent) than for visitors (48 per cent).

Figure 2: Main Interest in Attending the Festival



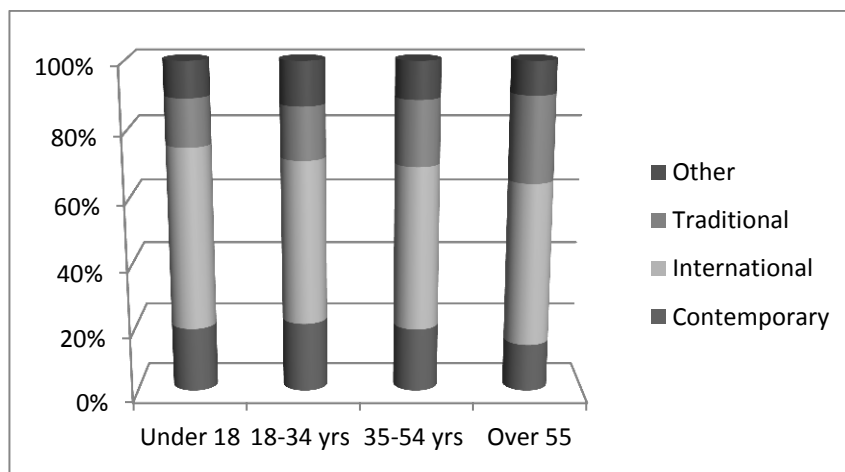
Visitors however indicated a higher interest in both contemporary and traditional Asian performances than did residents. This result perhaps indicates the desire for visitors to the region to experience a wide variety of Asian cultural activities. It would also indicate that local residents see the Festival more as an opportunity to experience the best of the world's performances that come to Hong Kong for the Festival.

It can be seen from the above analyses that the Festival plays an important dual role within the cultural context of Hong Kong. On the one hand the majority of the audience is made up of local residents so it must fulfil the needs of this constituency. However there is also a significant proportion of visitors to Hong Kong that also attend the Festival (around 10 per cent of respondents) which also demonstrates the global focus expected of a major international arts festival.

There is no doubt that the festival attracts a traditional arts audience to many of its performances but there is a significant component of the local resident population in particular which comprises school students and those under 18 year of age. This demonstrates the ability of the Festival to attract and potentially develop new audiences to cultural performances across a variety of genres, which is an important component of cultural development. Local residents were also asked about their frequency of attendance to past festivals and 20 per cent of respondents indicated this was the first time they had attended a Hong Kong Arts Festival event. Again this figure supports the notion that the festival is creating new consumers of cultural product.

Figure 3 displays the statistics for each of the three clusters of interest aggregated by age. As noted above the ANOVA indicated that age was a significant factor in determining attendance desires. It can be seen below that around 50 per cent of all age groups consistently saw the best of international performances being a key reason for attending the festival. Around 20 per cent of those under 54 wished to attend based on contemporary Asian performances, dropping to 15 per cent for those over 55. Finally, the younger a person's age the less likely they are to see performances based on traditional Asian work, with the highest level of attraction being those over 55 years of age (26 per cent).

Figure 3: Interest in Attending Festival based on Age



This notion of a dominance of international work is supported when looking at the clusters in regard to residency status as just over half of local residents attending (51 per cent) were inspired to attend the Festival to see the best of international performances. This would appear to be in line with a key component of a major arts festival's mission, to bring the best the world has to offer to the residents of the city or state. This would also seem to concur with the thesis that festivals contribute to a notion of globalising culture. However this global culture is not seen as a totally dominant factor as the remaining half of respondents indicated that they were interested in local Chinese culture, both traditional and contemporary. This was particularly true for international visitors and residents aged over 55 years. This would indicate that the Festival is not necessarily stifling the local cultural scene but in fact it could be argued that it is supporting this in a significant way through showcasing local Asian performing arts companies alongside major international companies.

Interestingly when looking at programming of the three themed categories in the Festival, 60 per cent of performance events were classified as international companies and artists. The remaining 40 per cent were Chinese companies and artists with about 28 per cent being contemporary and 12 per cent traditional performances. This demonstrates a slight bias toward international artists which would appear to be in line with the desires of local residents who are interested in seeing these types of performances. However the strong presence of Chinese artists and companies on the Festival program indicates the level of support given by the Festival to local cultural production.

When looking at international visitors to Hong Kong the attendance patterns also support the notion that local culture in a variety of forms is being strengthened through the activities of the Festival. For example, visitors were more likely to attend performances by both traditional and contemporary Chinese companies and artists than local residents. This indicates that there is keen interest from visitors to experience local culture in a festival setting.

In addition, while in Hong Kong many visitors also took advantage of other cultural activities outside the Festival. Over two thirds of all international visitors also attended local museums and almost half of respondents visited local heritage sites, demonstrating a wider cultural impact. Of those surveyed the majority of visitors were from other Asian countries and Europe. These two geographic areas accounted for over 75 per cent of respondents (37 per cent and 39 per cent respectively). Around 65 per cent of Asian visitors and 75 per cent of European visitors also visited or intended to visit a museum while in Hong Kong. This was the largest single additional activity listed by visitors. Interestingly 67 per cent of European visitors also intended to visit heritage sites, however only 37 per cent of those from Asian countries intended to do so.

However whether this interaction with other cultural activities can be attributed in any way to the Festival would rely on some indication of why visitors had come to Hong Kong in the first place. Of those audience members who were identified as visiting Hong Kong approximately one third (33 per cent) came to Hong Kong specifically to attend the Festival. Of those visitors surveyed that indicated they did not come to Hong Kong specifically to attend the Festival, a further 30 per cent stated that they did change their travel plans to accommodate the festival. Therefore almost half of visitors surveyed indicated that they either came to Hong Kong because of the Festival or changed their trip to accommodate attending the Festival. This indicates that the festival is an important driver in developing visitor interest in local culture on a number of levels. Through activities directly related to the Festival and by visiting other cultural venues and sites, tourists are experiencing a wide variety of cultural activities from artistic performances, through to museums and heritage, through to Hong Kong shopping and cuisine experiences.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the Hong Kong Arts Festival shows that there were significant differences between attendance patterns of local residents and visitors. Local residents were attracted more to international performances while visitors were attracted to more Chinese performances (both contemporary and traditional).

Findings also indicated that there is an indirect positive effect of the Festival on local culture activities occurring during the event but not specific to it.

This result highlights that arts festivals fulfil a dual role of bringing the best of international art to local residents while also showcasing the traditional and contemporary culture of a region. Findings from the Hong Kong Arts Festival point the consumption of culture to derive from two influential factors. The first is the core cluster of international culture performances which indicates that the region of Hong Kong serves as a catalyst for globalised culture.

However, the findings also point to a demand for a balance of events in the festival setting through the other two clusters of traditional and contemporary interpretations of local culture. In particular international visitors to Hong Kong cited attending Chinese performances as a key driver in their decision to attend the festival.

This result shows that there is a balance between demand for consumption of both globalised culture and local culture. This provides a unique opportunity for cultural policy makers to explore how international festivals can use the promotion of a globalised culture to create a space for the introduction of a more contemporary interpretation of local culture. The challenge, however, for policy makers is to provide the structure for festivals such as this to take on and maintain this key role in cultural development as well as preserve the real meaning of festivals as being a place of rich social local cultural reproduction.

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Boyle, Joham & Abdullah

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