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## **Editorial**

### *Special Issue on Equality & Diversity in the Professional Planned Events Industry*

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This special issue is not intended to be a stand-alone, one time only, acknowledgement of the issues of equality and diversity in the planned events sector. Indeed, we might argue to rename this a 'call to arms' rather than just a 'special issue'. Events management education is often driven by the needs of industry, and we contend that this can hamstring the research that is often supported in our departments. Although bridging the principles and practices of events management is mainly considered the goal of research into planned events, we argue that this sells the subject short. Along with simply responding to industry trends and developments, we argue there is a need to further develop robust empirical research and debate which is underpinned by engagement with critical theory. Long-lasting and meaningful impact and positive change does not happen without this. Structural inequalities need more than tokenism or short term interventions, as these can do more to disguise a problem that erase it all together (Ahmed, 2012 and also Fletcher and Hylton in this issue).

Critical events research has been a developing field for over two decades, and many scholars have framed political, social, and economic studies around planned events and their impacts on communities and places. More and more cities and countries around the globe are employing planned events to address socio-economic issues. Convergences of gender, sexuality, and intersectional analyses and events, sport, leisure, and tourism studies have begun to drive new critical understanding of the impacts of events on diverse communities and places in cities, countries, and worldwide. However, there is still a huge gap in this area of critical events research, and the work to date mainly addresses gender on its own, so intersectional debates still need to happen more often and more effectively. We would argue that in leisure studies, this work has already been taking place (Henderson and Gibson, 2013; Mansfield et al, 2017; Watson and Scraton, 2013) and events scholar are slow to embrace this, perhaps even disregarding leisure as an outdated discipline. This, we argue, would be a mistake, as much of current critical events understanding has emerged from a leisure studies past and still has a lot to learn from its ongoing theoretical engagement.

To galvanise critical events researchers who might be looking into the area of gender diversity specifically, we hosted a free symposium in September 2017 and were disappointed with the low attendance and engagement. We wondered what might be the reason for this. Was it just 'a bad time' of year (but when is is 'a good time')? Or, was it that event scholars are just not engaging in this area of research? Perhaps it viewed as niche or

for specific groups to focus upon only. Or, perhaps it is seen as controversial, not aligned with REF or institutional agendas, and, thus, more difficult to be supported and get published in high ranking journals. We acknowledge the challenges of getting such work recognised, published, and taken seriously – challenges events research has at the best of times, let alone when adopting feminist and intersectional approaches.

Whilst we cannot know for certain why people were not attracted to this event we ask: is it not time that we, as a community of researchers, talked about this collectively and with more urgency? We shared the concerns about the lack of women and ethnic minority voices in events management research, policies, and practices following the recent contemporary policy debate paper written by Thomas (2017) in this journal. Whilst pointing out positive changes and initiatives, it remains that white men dominate the sector, visually at least, at high profile events and in industry publications. It is also becoming increasingly evident via social media platforms that there is discomfort around the prominence of all male panels and conferences whether academic or corporate. This is occurring despite the case that the majority of students in events management education identify as women. In order to instigate social change in this regard, there needs to be more diversity in role models, mentorship, and, yes, authorship for the research informing their studies. Indeed, are we as event educators thinking about how white and male our reading lists are? However, this does not begin and end with issues of gender. There also has been a clear lack of consideration of policy-making within the examination of the professional events sector on diversity beyond gender with questions of ethnicity, disability, and sexuality receiving limited attention. There have been strides made in these areas in relation to sport policy, which is related to the events sector but little more specific work (a special issue of this journal edited by Hylton and Chakrabarty examined race in 2011 with one paper of this issue examining festival tourism: Adams, 2011). In practice, lip-service is often paid by event planners to these issues with acknowledgement that it is of concern, but we are seeing little shift in terms of actual implementation into policy or practice.

It is imperative that policy-makers and organisations in the planned events sector consider how gender, equality, and diversity are managed as a legal and moral imperative. We, as social scientists, have a responsibility to inform such thinking and contribute to positive social change. There is an expectation that tourism, leisure, and events organisations, management professionals, and public bodies have a responsibility not only to support equality endeavours, but also to promote diversity within their own organisations as well as appeal to diverse audiences and communities. A question also remains whether our events education programmes represent diversity in their student bodies and academic staff, as well as in what we deliver in the curriculum. Along with analyses of mega-event contexts there is also scope to focus more locally and examine how policies related to gender, equality, and diversity processes are affecting the events landscape. New research emerging from post-graduate and early career researchers in critical events topics have begun to address some of these gaps, and there is scope for a body of work to be developed along these lines utilising innovative approaches. This needs to be supported and built upon in order for the discipline to progress and break out of the rut of studies promoting instrumental outcomes or measuring motivations. Critical event studies employing intersectional approaches can contribute to knowledge in understanding the ways in which events-related gender, equality, and diversity policies have an impact on people and places. It also has the potential to

further discourses related to power relations, sites of challenge and resistance, and models of best practice.

### **An overview of this special issue**

This special issue informs many of the main debates regarding equality and diversity in the professional planned events sector utilising a range of methodological approaches to explore organisational, governance, and participant perspectives as well as representations in the media. Although the majority of the papers included in this special issue focus on gender in the planned events sector, there is still much more that needs to be done in this area; also, it highlights the need for more work on issues related to ethnicity, whiteness, and intersectional approaches. One of the main goals of this special issue has been to raise these issues to the forefront of critical events research not only by shining a spotlight on the important studies already being conducted, but also by highlighting the gaps to recognise the studies that still need to be done.

The special issue begins by highlighting on the equality and diversity issues of two popular types of events: conferences and festivals. Research by Walters examines gender (in)equality at tourism, hospitality, leisure, and event studies academic conferences and critically analyses the implications of such gender inequality on both women academics and knowledge production in these fields. Jarman's paper uses survey-based social network analysis to study a volunteer run arts festival in Scotland, specifically investigating the inherent diversity of its organising team and social structures, as well as 'hunting for homophily'.

Concentrating on more organisational and structural contexts, Dashper builds on her earlier work (2013) and reports on research conducted on a formal events industry-wide mentoring programme for women that aims to pair female professionals with leading events industry figures. Conducted over the course of a year and drawing on data from 37 interviews with mentees on the programme, the paper considers the potential for mentorship to empower women in the events industry and advance their careers in the field. Findings suggest that mentoring alone will not redress gender inequality in the events industry; however, it provides a valuable and effective mechanism for individual career development and empowerment.

The role of the media in the events sector is often as complicated as it is symbiotic. Domeneghetti examines through textual analysis how the British Popular Press articulated notions of femininity during the 2016 Wimbledon Championships. In particular, he focuses on the media image of white women players and white women partners of men players, and found representations constructed in accordance with traditional subordinate, passive, and sexualised roles. At the same time, black female tennis players were cast in the role of extraordinary 'superwomen', a representation which had the result of 'othering' them.

This special issue ends with a powerful piece by Fletcher and Hylton concerning issues of 'race', ethnicity, and Whiteness in the governance of the professional planned events industry. They argue that while the notion of social justice has been receiving greater scrutiny in critical events studies, ideas of 'race', ethnicity and their intersections, and Whiteness are neither currently addressed nor fully understood. Explicitly identifying

Whiteness and making it visible, they argue, is the first step in combating the privileges afforded by whiteness and their effects related to hegemony and supremacy. If not addressed, the disproportionate number of leadership positions in events organisations will continue to perpetuate the deep-rooted cultural relations of power that sustain racially exclusive practices.

We realise this is a modest sample of research in this area, and there are obvious gaps, such as work related to disabilities, both hidden and visible. Indeed, Darcy's work (2012) addressing disability in the events industry had been one of the scant few publications on this topic relating specifically to planned events until only recently joined by McGillivray, Misener, McPherson, and Legg with their research concerning parasport events (see Misener et al., 2015; McGillivray et al., 2017). However, it is our aspiration and anticipation that these studies can act as a catalyst for further academic conversations, networks, and outputs, and we call on the critical events scholar communities to develop and advance work in these important areas related to equality and diversity.

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