



Figure 1 Title Page

Whose Diwali is it? The case of the Indian Community and Auckland City Council

Introduction

This paper asserts that there has been a change in Indian performance content and production practices in the Indian cultural festival scene in Auckland. The events in this research demonstrate how processes of festivalisation directly and indirectly influence the nature and construction of the relationship networks that connect producers to essential event resources. The findings I am presenting today are based on the larger ethnographic research that forms part of my PhD findings in my thesis, *Performance Networks: Indian Cultural Production in Aotearoa/New Zealand* recently submitted to the University of Otago.

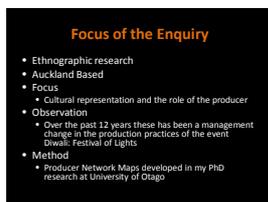


Figure 2 Focus of Enquiry

Over the past 12 years there has been a management change in the production practices of Diwali: Festival of Lights (DFL). This observation is explored by implementing a visual Producer Network Map developed as a method in my thesis. The method is used for the discussion and analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings. Due to time restrictions I will demonstrate only the process visually in the case study central to this talk.



Figure 3 Case Study

Previous research has demonstrated how narrow and exclusive definitions of

culture to which institutional planners may adhere can result in the exclusion of very cultures that a festival is alleged to represent (Clarke & Jepson, 2011; Johnson, 2007, 2010). With this in mind, the central research questions ask: How do relationships to event resources change under the influence of “festivalisation”? How do those changes affect the communities that the resultant events allegedly represent?



Figure 4 Research Questions

The following case study demonstrates how government support has become government control, transforming a community celebration into a “Major Civic Event” that executive management decisions seek to align with larger tourism and economic development strategies. This process is referred to as “festivalisation”. Festivalisation refers to the politics of big events and the political and economic consequences on the host environment (Roth & Frank, 2000, p. 219) ,The term is referred to in the United States as “boosterism”. The term refers to government departments supporting large events to promote the image of a locality and in order to “boost” local economic, social, and environmental settings over both the long and short term.

The findings identify a range of changes in the production practices of DFL a government-sponsored/produced event in Auckland, NZ over the ten-year period of 2002-2012 and especially in the wake of the 2011 Rugby World Cup (RWC).

The Festival Background



Figure 5 Historical Background

In 1997 the New Zealand government recognised the benefits of cultural celebrations, by producing the Festival of Asia, as a way to establish and nurture political and economic relationships across the Asian region. In 1998, the Auckland Indian Association (AIA), established 1938 by early Hindu settlers from mainly Gujarat, started

a public Diwali celebration responding to the rapidly growing Indian community population and needs for collective expression and enjoyment of one of India's most important cultural celebrations.

Government support, beginning in 2002, recognised the potential political and economic benefits of cultural celebrations by launching DFL with the AIA. Over the past decade, Auckland Council had gained increasing control over all aspects of event production practices. By 2012, the local Indian press was reporting voices of dissent concerning Diwali's Bollywood/Panjabi content, noting that the representation of Indian performance culture is now determined by management decisions made by the Council and their selected sponsors.

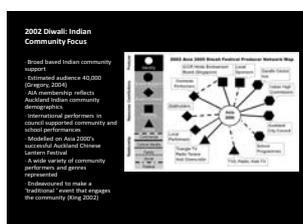


Figure 6 2002 Producer Map Community Focus

The 2002 DFL produced by Jennifer King, cultural manager at Asia: NZ (previously called Asia 2000) was designed to represent the growing Indian communities of Auckland. The event was modelled on the highly successful Lantern Festival, an event created in 2000 with the goal of representing Auckland's Chinese community. Given the extent to which government agencies had previously ignored the Indian community, Diwali began its public career as an event with broad based Indian community support. Local dancers and musicians had opportunities to present their skills to a culturally diverse audience alongside overseas performers funded through government agencies. Several of those who participated continue to teach and perform within the local Indian community.

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The producer had a strong relationship with the Indian Community and at the time, the AIA reflected the Indian community demographics and served as a hub for community events. A wide range of community performers and performance genres were represented. The festival endeavoured to construct a "traditional event that engaged the local community" (King 2002). Auckland's Festival was celebrated at the Mahatma Ghandi Centre, under the Asia 2000 banner, in 2002 and 2003.

Overseas artists and local performances including; fashion shows, bhangra dancers, Bharatanatyam, Bollywood competitions, with rangoli crafts and vegetarian food

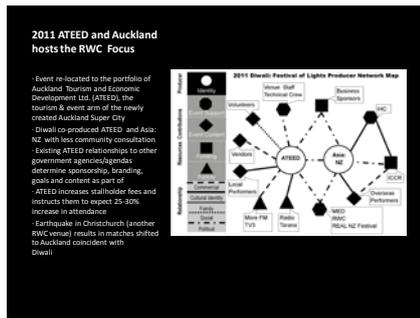


Figure 8 2011 Diwali

By 2011, the Festival management had been moved into the “Major Event” portfolio of the newly formed Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development Ltd, referred to as ATEED, placing economic development and tourism benchmarks as the Festival’s key performance indicators. Political relationships were established between the RWC, Auckland Council, and the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) in Wellington had previously been an exclusive political relationship of Asia: NZ. The RWC was hosted by New Zealand, under the management of MED who liaised directly with the International Rugby Board based in Ireland. Major games, including the finals, were planned in Auckland. ATEED played a major role in promoting the city of Auckland as a major tourist destination for RWC fans. Strategic planning included support for the RWC event itself as well as marketing plans for leisure activities targeted at the expected 85,000 international tourists and their potential revenue contribution. Among those activities planned was Auckland’s DFL, programmed to take place in the major break between the city’s RWC test matches.

These dates were reasonably close to the actual date of Diwali as determined on seasonal and lunar criteria. The production of live events always involves the unexpected. One of the many unexpected events was the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake. The destruction of the stadium and the Christchurch city centre resulted in matches being moved to other cities. The rugby free Diwali weekend turned into rugby central with a weekend of popular RWC pool playoffs at Eden Park.

The attendance at the 2011 Festival was down an estimated 25- 30% from the previous year. This was partially due to major road and transport congestion but also the result of RWC fever and for those not interested stayed home to avoid the crowds. This was a significantly lower attendance outcome than the predicted audience, a year before, by organisers of the Festival. When asked the previous year what impact the RWC would have on Diwali events, the general consensus was that anything planned for Auckland

City would be up 25-30%. In the end, the only businesses that benefited from the extra 85,000 plus visitors were the bars and restaurants at “party central locations” in the Viaduct Basin, Wynyard Quarter, Britomart, the Cloud and the sports stadiums. Needless to say the festival stallholders and sponsors were not happy.

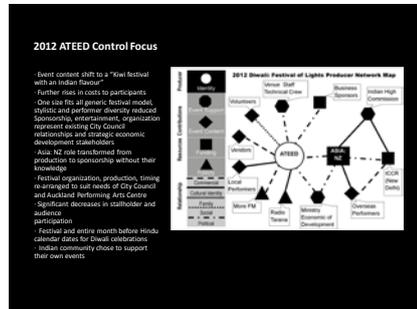


Figure 9 2012 Diwali

By 2012, there had been a surprising change in the Festival management structure as it appears that ATEED has assumed the role of sole producer completing the festivalisation process. The balance of power changed and Asia: NZ has a significantly weaker role in their share of relationships to resource contribution to the event, ATEED has now a strong political relationship with MED post the Rugby World Cup.

The ATEED event team proved unfamiliar at managing cultural festivals and specifically engaging with the Indian community. The Festival has engaged sponsors from RWC relationships replacing Indian businesses and corporate sponsors that had been loyal to the festival over the years. One major corporate business sponsor left their prominently placed marquee empty for the entire weekend and did not return the following year. There was also public confusion over the role of Asia: NZ as members of the ATEED team referred to Asia:NZ as sponsors and not as co-producers or with the respect one would expect. Festival was produced a month before the actual day Diwali was to be celebrated creating opportunities to promote alternative and potentially completing festivities.

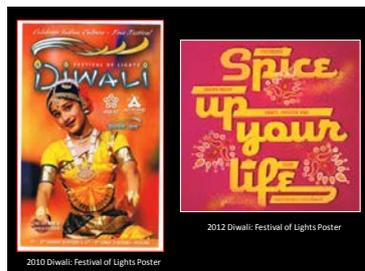


Figure 10 Diwali Poster

The 2012 event was a culturally homogenous festival attracting far fewer expected audience as well as participating stallholders. The event was branded as a “Kiwi festival with an Indian flavour” and reflected this image in the posters and marketing of the event. The number of stallholders had dropped perhaps 50% from the previous year. The further decrease in audience attending can be partially blamed on the weather that proved to be very unpleasant for most of the weekend. Vendors who have supported the Festival over the past decade have expressed their frustration as to how the event is run and the way “India” has been removed from the equation. Many participants from the Indian community did not return in 2013.

The change in Auckland Council structure has meant serious changes in event support and production practices not only at the DFL but also in the community produced Diwali celebrations. In 2012 the Indian community dissent was reflected in highly publicised alternative Diwali celebrations, held a month later when Diwali is traditionally celebrated.

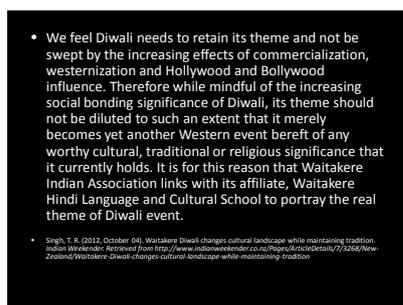


Figure 11. Singh 2012

In a 2012 newspaper article in the Indian Weekender it was stated that Diwali should best be left to the people who know and appreciate it’s religious, mythological, traditional and now growing social significance and associated sensitivities.

We feel Diwali needs to retain its theme and not be swept by the increasing effects of commercialization, westernization and Hollywood and Bollywood influence. Therefore while mindful of the increasing social bonding significance of Diwali, its theme should not be diluted to such an extent that it merely becomes yet another Western event bereft of any worthy cultural, traditional or religious significance that it currently holds. It is for this reason that Waitakere Indian Association links with its affiliate, Waitakere Hindi Language and Cultural School to portray the real theme of Diwali event. (Singh, 2012) .

This statement can be interpreted as a reaction to the Auckland Council’s control of the management of DFL and the impact festivalisation process has had on the Indian communities’ cultural representation and feeling of inclusion. The WIA feels their

autonomy from the control of the Council is essential in the delivery of an authentic event that presents the traditions of the annual celebration. The Manukau Indian Association and other community groups have followed suit competing for sponsors, local performers and audience.



Figure 12 Outcomes

Conclusion

The case studies shed some light on the Indian communities’ reaction to government intervention in the management cultural events and issues of cultural representation. During the festivalisation process there has been a significant rise in stallholder fees resulting in a significant decrease of stallholder participation. Asia: NZ has been marginalised to the role of “sponsor” without their knowledge. The festival is an entire month before the Hindu calendar date for the Diwali celebrations. The shift has resulted in the Indian communities choosing to produce and support their own events. The Indian community have created smaller “boutique” celebrations reflecting the diverse regional differences from within the Indian communities. This has resulted in a significant drop in audience numbers. The Festival cannot continue in its present form without Asia: NZ’s relationship to overseas performers and Indian cultural diplomat resources or the Indian community participation.

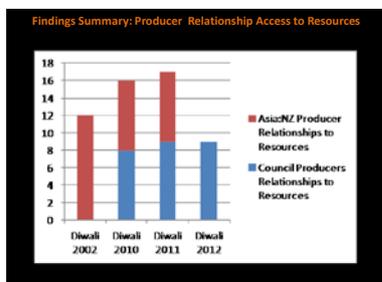


Figure 13 Findings

Event management studies have shown that successful community festivals must ensure that the community is central to all cultural production processes and that the

communities' cultures are evident throughout festival. As festivals have the power to directly and indirectly influence the construction of production networks, when narrow and exclusive definitions of culture are implemented within the planning process, the organisers fail to produce an inclusive community festival (Clarke & Jepson, 2011; Getz, 2002). DFL may not continue in its current form as its success is now determined by ATEED benchmarks, producers and stakeholders who sit outside of the Indian communities.