

# The meaning of cultural festivals

## Stakeholder perspectives in Catalunya

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*Cultural festivals and events are increasingly becoming arenas of discourse enabling people to express their views on wider cultural, social and political issues. Often the debates polarise into those advocating change and those wishing to preserve "traditional" or "local" culture in the face of modernisation and globalisation. This article analyses the discourse on cultural festivals from the perspective of stakeholders involved in traditional and popular culture events in Catalunya. There is generally a high level of agreement about the aims of cultural events and the cultural content that is appropriate for them. In particular, the importance of cultural events in underpinning Catalan identity is seen as being important. However, stakeholders tend to differ more in the meanings attached to concepts such as identity, with policy makers exhibiting a greater emphasis on economic and political issues, whereas cultural producers are more concerned with social aspects of identity. However, the general consensus on the social role of cultural events between the different stakeholders may be one explanation for the relatively vibrant festival culture in Catalunya.*

### Introduction

Cultural festivals seem to be ubiquitous in modern societies, filling the social calendar and the cultural agenda with a vast array of events, happenings and spectacles. Festivals also increasingly take on a wider range of roles as their significance increases, 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.

The broadening role of traditional and popular cultural events has attracted criticism from those who argue that the cultural content of festivals is being de-valued, and from those who fear that local, "traditional" culture is being replaced by globalised, "popular" culture. Because of the important role of festivals and cultural events as sources of group identity and place identity (de Bres & Davis 2001), processes of commodification have also been blamed for a loss of identity and meaning. In the eyes of many, therefore, the "local" loses its "authenticity" as a result of globalisation and modernisation, while the market economy gains from the tourism spin-off. Such debates underline the idea of festivals as contested fields of meaning (Quinn 2003), in which different groups or "stakeholders" try to utilise the symbolic capital of the event for their own ends.

A further criticism of the use of cultural events as a tool of economic development and image building is their potentially divisive nature. According to Barke and Towner (1996,

p. 369), for example, the proponents of such events “tend to be local or national élites whose lifestyles and, therefore, conceptions of appropriate events are likely to differ substantially from local residents, especially those who are less well off”. This division of interest in the policy communities surrounding large events have been examined in a number of cases, such as the European Cultural Capital event in Glasgow in 1990 (Boyle & Hughes 1994) and Mardi Gras in New Orleans (Waterman 1998).

Such areas of conflict are relatively easy to identify in the discourse surrounding cultural events. Less attention has been paid, however, to those areas where there may be shared meanings or consensus between the actors involved. In the complex field of cultural policy, consensus may co-exist with conflict, actors agreeing to differ on some issues while working together on others. In the field of cultural events this may be quite common, as those involved may agree on the importance of the event being staged, but may differ on the aims or content of the event itself. This suggests that it is useful to look at the positions of different groups involved in the production of cultural events to identify areas of consensus and division, and to identify how far these relate to wider structures and practices in the field of cultural and social policy.

This article examines the field of meaning surrounding cultural events and “traditional” culture in Catalunya, and compares and contrasts the views of policy makers and other stakeholders. The analysis begins with a discussion of the context of cultural policy in Catalunya.

### **The Catalan Context of Cultural Policy**

Catalunya straddles the border between North-eastern Spain (the Spanish Autonomous Community of Catalunya) and South-eastern France (the French département Les Pyrénées-Orientales, or Catalogne in French), with the vast majority of its territory and inhabitants being located on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. Once an independent kingdom, Catalunya is a region with its own language, culture and traditions, which has a high degree of political autonomy within the Spanish national state. This article deals only with the Spanish region of Catalunya.

During the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), Catalan language and culture were heavily repressed in Spain. Since the restoration of democracy in 1979, the cultural agenda in Catalunya has been dominated by the use of culture as an underpinning for Catalan identity. The Catalan Generalitat (the government body for the Autonomous Community of Catalunya) has a firm focus on increasing and consolidating the consumption of culture in Catalunya and on strengthening the international presence of Catalan creative artists and cultural products. During the past few years, Catalan cultural policy has also focused on the need to overcome the lack of cultural investment during the years of the Franco dictatorship, particularly in terms of infrastructure. This has been addressed by developing and constructing a considerable number of major facilities (Dodd & van Hemel 1999). National cultural policy in Catalunya is also under the jurisdiction of the Generalitat which has taken on responsibility for historical and artistic heritage, archives and libraries, museums, traditional culture, drama, dance, music, films and videos, publishing, the arts, the press and language policy (Cubeles & Fina 1998). In 1996, the Catalan Generalitat contributed 33.5% of the total public cultural expenditure. However, in recent years it is the municipalities who have been increasing their cultural spending most rapidly, and their share of total spending rose to 60% by the end of the 1990s. In the period 1999–2003, total public sector cultural expenditure rose by almost 40% (Table 1).

**TABLE 1**

Cultural expenditure by administration in Catalunya 1999–2003 ('000 euros).

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Generalitat	145,439.94	147,983.12	157,495.51	180,483.83	197,113.76
Consells comarcals	—	—	5,203.64	4,939.96	4,649.51
Diputacions	63,872.80	68,453.40	76,289.03	76,757.12	81,160.14
Municipalities	291,036.36	301,967.94	326,337.40	391,347.07	412,495.31
Total	500,349.10	518,404.46	565,325.58	653,527.98	695,418.72

Source: Generalitat de Catalunya (www.idescat.net).

The division of funding between the Generalitat and the municipalities has in the past also reflected a basic division in Catalan politics, between a predominantly nationalist Generalitat and the socialist domination of major municipalities, particularly Barcelona. The Generalitat and the municipalities also often have very different views of cultural policy. In the past, the Generalitat tended to draw its electoral strength from rural Catalunya, and this was reflected in an emphasis on traditional culture and heritage. The Centre for the Promotion of Popular Culture and Catalan Tradition was emblematic of this policy emphasis. In the major cities, more attention was given to contemporary cultural production and different forms of popular culture. This situation changed in late 2003 with the election of a socialist-republican coalition to the Generalitat, which is beginning to place more emphasis on contemporary cultural production throughout the country. One of the significant changes was to establish the Catalan Institute for the Cultural Industries (ICIC), which has responsibility for media, theatre, literature, music and creative industry development.

Because of the particular history of Catalunya, the development of cultural events, and particularly traditional cultural festivals, has been somewhat different than in most other regions of western Europe. Under the Franco regime, many forms of Catalan cultural expression, including the use of the Catalan language in public, were restricted. Following the restoration of democracy, however, there was a resurgence of traditional cultural expression as people reclaimed the streets and began to express their Catalan identity in public. Cultural events played a particularly important role in the recovery and reconstruction of traditional and popular culture. Table 2 shows the growth in the number of cultural events over the past

**TABLE 2**

Development of popular festivals in Catalunya by year of establishment.

Type of event	Festivals analysed	Pre-1970	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	Total
Setmana Santa Processions	44	64%	2%	21%	13%	100%
Carnavals	107	6%	31%	50%	13%	100%
Pessebres vivents	90	4%	15%	32%	49%	100%
Medieval fairs	22			5%	95%	100%
Total	263 <sup>a</sup>					

Source: Crespi (2002). <sup>a</sup>This information was supplied by the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya (2000). Obviously there are far more events celebrated in Catalunya in total; however, the Department of Culture only records data for a small proportion of the total.

30 years. In the Franco period religious festivals such as the Easter (Setmana Santa) processions were promoted, whereas traditional Catalan festivals were repressed. After Franco's death in 1975 traditional festivals began to be "recovered", starting with Carnival and later with *pessebres vivents* (nativity scenes recreated by actors). These developments were supported by a resurgence of participation in cultural associations, but in the 1990s municipalities began to exploit the commercial potential of festivals through the development of medieval fairs, which have little basis in Catalan cultural tradition.

The current "supply" of traditional and popular festivals in Catalunya includes at least 4000 events. The vitality of cultural events in Catalunya can be linked to the high degree of associationism, with over one million people out of a total population of six million involved in almost 6000 cultural associations (Aragay 2005). The basic grass-roots nature of these events, most of which are organised by volunteers from the associations with differing levels of public sector support, means that very few of these events are directly related to tourism, which has often been identified as one of the main conduits of modernisation and commodification for cultural events. The Tourism Office of the Generalitat, for example, publishes the annual *Cultural Tourism Agenda Catalonia* for tourists in different languages. This guide listed some 411 events in 2003 – a small fraction of the total. Even those events that are listed are not necessarily heavily visited by tourists.

Given that it is impracticable to study all those events that might be affected by commodification and tourism development, this study concentrates on a sample of events in Catalunya, ranging from local village festivals to La Mercè in Barcelona, arguably the largest *fiesta* (festival) in Catalunya.

### **Previous Studies of Cultural Events and their Policy Implications**

Many previous studies have been made of cultural events in cities, particularly in recent years. The focus has often been on the replacement of local, traditional cultural by globalised, popular culture, and the transition from "ritual" to "spectacle". This is part of a wider development of "festivalisation", which van Elderen (1997, p. 126) argues represents the "symbolic transformation of public space to a particular form of cultural consumption".

Schuster (2001) argues that studies of festivals to date have been made from two basic perspectives: "arts and urban development" and "liveable cities". The former he regards as "relentlessly instrumental", seeing festivals as a catalyst for urban renewal, attracting tourists and capital investment, enhancing a city's image and creating new jobs. This development is clearly related to the increasing competitiveness of the urban environment as cities strive to attract production and consumption functions, and the resulting imperative for many festivals to become "market orientated" (Pugh & Wood 2005). Gotham (2002, p. 1751) emphasises that "cities and their festivals have become commodities that tourism agencies advertise, market and sell like any other commodity". Similarly, Waterman (1998, p. 69) argues that arts festivals have been driven by declining public subsidy into competing for business sponsorship, as a result of which "the festival becomes a medium for business image making, as well as an arena characterised by less adventurous and less expensive programming". Often the appropriation of such events by tourism and city marketing may meet economic goals, but fail to meet social and cultural goals (Chacko & Schaffer 1993). In such a climate, the desire to use festivals as a means of projecting an "acceptable" image may lead to social exclusion (Atkinson & Laurier 1998) and the appropriation of the event by a particular group (Howie 2000).

The “livable cities” perspective, in contrast, is more community focused, and perhaps as a result less well developed in the literature. For example, Schuster (2001, p. 364) argues that although locally based events are subject to a wide range of influences and pressures, local resistance is much more evident: “Ephemera, particularly signature ephemera, remain a particularly fruitful focus for detecting the distinctively local contribution to the image of a place”. Harcup’s (2000) analysis of the creation of the St Valentine’s Fair in Leeds as a “civic spectacle” is also more optimistic about the outcome of contested time and space. Similarly, de Bres and Davis (2001) conclude that local communities are capable of using commodified events as a basis for positive self-identification, and Derrett (2003) in the case of Australia shows how community festivals can help build local sense of place.

Costa’s (2002) work in Valencia suggests that people have created an alternative reality for themselves through *Las Fallas*, the spectacular fire-based festival held in March, which has “taken over” from some of the organising principles of modernity. However, there are also signs of resistance to the “spectacularisation” of festivals. Carnival has in some places become a new locus of resistance, for example in the case of some samba schools in Rio, Brazil (Tramonte 2003). The outcome of the struggle between participation and spectation will eventually determine the spatial and temporal contours of cultural events. Numerous examples exist of events being transformed for consumption, for example by altering the cultural content to appeal to visitors, by locating the event in more accessible and spectatable spaces or by extending the event in time to increase visitor numbers. Equally there are signs of resistance to these changes, for example when local people try to limit access to the event, where particular days are reserved for particular activities or groups of people or where events are moved to less accessible locations to discourage visitors. However, this apparent conflict masks an internal dichotomy in the groups organising these events, who seek distinction through restricting access to certain parts of the festivals, at the same time needing to attract outsiders to increase the exclusivity (and hence the status) of the organising group (Crespi 2002).

Many of these previous studies have concentrated on the apparent tensions that emerge between different groups involved with staging festivals, such as policy makers, community groups and commercial interests. As McKercher *et al.* (2004, p. 540) remark, “For the most part, [stakeholder] research has been grounded in conflict theory, goal incompatibility and value clash.” In many cases there is also a fairly aggregate approach to the different stakeholders involved, very often pitching the “local community” against public and/or private sector interests. However, the notion of “community” is usually treated in an abstract fashion, which obscures rather than clarifies the role of different stakeholders. Stakeholder theory provides a number of concepts that can be useful in analysing the construction, development and impact of cultural events on the various groups involved in creating them.

Stakeholder theory basically considers the groups and individuals who can affect an organisation or event. A stakeholder is defined by Freeman (1984, p. 46) as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. The various groups of stakeholders in an event such as a festival of course have differing stakes and degrees of influence. Broadly they can be seen as “voluntary” stakeholders who have made some form of investment in the event, or involuntary stakeholders who stand to be affected by the activities or outcomes of the event. Stakeholders will also have differing levels of power in respect to the event, depending on their investment or their importance to the success of the event. In the case of festivals, those funding the event, or providing the cultural content or the audience will have a greater degree of power than other stakeholders.

Stakeholders will often cooperate to stage events, but they may also compete with each other for scarce resources.

According to Mitchell *et al.* (1997), stakeholders vary in terms of their possession of one or more of three relationship attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. Power enables stakeholders to impose their will on a relationship; legitimacy reflects the extent to which stakeholders are seen by others as having a justified claim on power or resources (Larson & Wikström 2001); urgency reflects the extent to which stakeholders can make a claim on immediate attention. Each stakeholder in a given situation will have differing degrees of these three attributes, and the most important will tend to have high levels of all three. In the context of cultural policy, the legitimacy given to organisations in the sphere of “high culture” has tended to increase the importance of these stakeholders. In the realm of cultural festivals, arts festivals dealing with international high culture therefore tend to have high levels of legitimacy, which can in many circumstances be turned into a position of power. In the realm of popular and traditional culture, however, legitimacy and power often have to be gained via other means, such as high levels of civic participation.

Stakeholder theory makes it clear that each group of stakeholders has differing levels of investment, influence and expectations of cultural events. Studying the role of stakeholders is therefore important from the perspective of cultural policy, as the ability of policies to mobilise stakeholders will have a large influence on the success of the event. In the context of cultural events, there are obviously a wide range of stakeholders involved in the development, production and consumption of the event. These range from the cultural associations that are usually responsible for organising the event, to the municipality which usually provides funding and gives permission for the use of public space, to sponsors and the visitors who attend, as well as the local community as a whole.

In applying stakeholder analysis to cultural events in Catalunya, this article analyses the discourse of policy makers, cultural producers, community groups and opinion makers about cultural festivals in Catalunya. We examine the meanings attached to cultural events by different stakeholder groups, and how these meanings are negotiated between them.

## Methods

In order to cover the range of different perspectives on the role of cultural events, interviews were conducted with policy makers and other stakeholders involved in cultural events at local and regional level, including cultural associations, local and regional government and event organisers. Personal interviews were conducted with a total of 37 stakeholders connected with cultural events in Catalunya. The individuals interviewed are listed in Table 3, together with their respective stakeholder positions.

A selection of interviewees was made on the basis of stakeholder type, event type and location. Twenty-three of these interviews were focused on events outside Barcelona, in a range of small towns and rural areas. In order to provide more detailed information on the situation in Barcelona, a specific analysis was also made of La Mercè, the major festival in Barcelona, and the unofficial “*fiesta major*” for Catalunya. A total of 14 interviews covered La Mercè, focusing particularly on the changes that have taken place in the event over the past 25 years. The longitudinal assessment of change was supported by interviews with previous directors of the festival, stretching back to 1977.

The geographic spread of the events covered in the interviews reflects to a large extent the distribution of cultural events in Catalunya. A large number of small events are

**TABLE 3**  
Interviewees

Interviewee	Position	Organisation	Stakeholder type
Maria Anglada	Department of Participation	Municipality of Barcelona	A
Antoni Anguela i Dotres	Department of research and conservation	Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana	O
Victor Blanes	Past Director, Festa de la Mercè (1982 to 1996)		P
Carles Bono i Cabré	President	Cofraria de la Puríssima Sang de Riudoms	P
Maribel Benito	Director of Culture	Districte Nou Barris de Barcelona	A
Jordi Calderó i Sanjuan		Associació Pessebre Vivent de Sudanell	P
Valentí Comes i Quintana		Geganers del Barri de Santa Anna de Vic	P
Xavier Cordoní		Fiestas Department, Municipality of Barcelona	A
Lluïsa Celades i Mediavilla	Coordinator	La Roda d'Espectacles Infants i Juvenils de Barcelona	P
Victor Cucurull	Director	La Fundació Societat i Cultura (FUSIC)	P
Ignasi Deó Valera	Deputy Mayor and Head of Civic Participation, Sports, and Fiestas	Ajuntament de Sitges	A
Felip Elosegui i Navarro	President	Esbart Egarenc de Terrassa	P
Jordi Fabrejas		Centre Artesa Tradicionarius (CAT), Barcelona	P
Josep Farreny Gil	Public Relations	Castellers de Barcelona	P
Josep Fornés		Ethnological Museum Barcelona	O
Josep Francesc Ferrer i Val	President	Germandat de Nostre Pare Jesús de la Passió de Tarragona	P
Francesc Florensa Masip		Geganers i Grallers de Llardecans	P
Jordi Freixas i Codina		Agrupament Escolta Rocaguinarda de Taradell	P
Andreu Garcia i Cartaña	President	Agrupament Esbarts Dansaires de Catalunya	P
Jordi Gratacos		Barcelona Acció Música (BAM)	P
Joan Guillén	Past Creative Director, Festa de la Mercè		P
Joan-Miquel Merino	Communications Officer	Agrupació de Colles de Geganers de Catalunya	P
Pepa Ninou	Manager	Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana	O
Jordi Pablo	Festival researcher	Barcelona	O
Victoria Padreny		Festa al Cel	P



**TABLE 3**  
(continued)

Interviewee	Position	Organisation	Stakeholder type
Salvador Palomar i Abadia		Associació Carrutxa de Reus	P
Jordi Pascual		Diputació de Barcelona (regional network of municipalities)	A
Josep Pascual		Fiestas Department, Municipality of Barcelona	A
Oriol Pasquals		Fiestas Department, Municipality of Barcelona	A
Valerià Pujol		Associació Cultural i Recreativa Carnestoltes de Premià de Dalt	P
Eva Relats i Serra		Esbart Dansaire Sant Genís de Taradell	P
Pau Ricomà	President	Jove Xiquets de Tarragona	P
Peter Rius May		Ball de Diables de Reus	P
Maria Teresa Roca		Associació Institut Promoció Cultura Catalana	P
Marc Sala	Vice President	Castellers de Lleida	P
Marte Tatjer	Past Director, Festa de la Mercè, 1977–81		P
Joan Vidal i Gayolà	President	Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana	O

held in towns and villages all over the country, whereas large-scale festivals are more prevalent in Barcelona. Because tourism has been identified as one of the major forces impacting on the cultural content of festivals, interviews were also conducted with respondents in “resort” towns, such as Sitges, which also stage important cultural events. The interviews also covered different types of stakeholders in order to identify and analyse differences in their positions. The main groups covered were cultural producers and/or participants (because of the important role of cultural associations, it is not always possible to make a clear distinction between the production and participation role of local groups), those involved in public administration and opinion makers in the cultural sector (those involved in studying and analysing festivals, for example in the Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana or museums). These respondents were asked a series of questions relating to the production and organisation of cultural events, the impact of external factors, government policy, relations with the local community and the relationships with other stakeholders. These often included comments on the role of stakeholders not directly involved in the interviews, such as festival sponsors, festival visitors and political parties. The respondents from different stakeholder groups are identified by name as well as a code indicating their stakeholder group: producer/participant (P), public administration (A) or opinion maker (O).

The number of interviews held was determined using the saturation method: interviewing was terminated once it was clear that holding additional interviews was unlikely to yield much new information. The full transcript of each interview was entered into a text file.



An initial analysis of the interviews to identify major themes and items was made using content analysis (the Hamlet programme, see <http://www.apb.cwc.net/homepage.htm>). Subsequent qualitative analysis was made using a matrix analysis of the major items identified from the content analysis. Elements of text were coded according to item and stakeholder type, in order to identify areas of communality and discordance in the responses. The following discussion of results is structured according to these items.

## Results

The analysis of the interviews held with cultural administrators and producers revealed a number of important themes that seemed to be common to the majority of respondents: identity, community and participation, integration, globalisation and localisation, and commercialisation. In broad terms, these issues cover a spectrum of concerns ranging from those related to social cohesion and local community to those related to externalities and structural issues beyond the local community.

### *Identity*

Obviously one of the main aims of cultural festivals is to celebrate the culture and identity of the people staging the event. The theme of identity is therefore a strong central thread in the majority of responses from policy makers and cultural producers, reflecting the long struggle of Catalunya to establish a distinct national identity. This is reflected in the positioning of cultural events, which are seen particularly by the producers and participants as an important element of their own local identity, as well as a link to other areas of Catalunya.

Local identity is very important in the fiesta, and in each event or celebration there are elements of local culture that identify the fiesta and the people who create it. There are also supralocal elements of identity, which are particular to the region as a whole. (Salvador Palomar, P)

The supralocal aspect of identity is also seen by producers as a binding agent for the country as a whole: "Our task is to make the traditional dances and costumes of Catalunya known, particularly in schools. We have to instil a love of things Catalan, of dance and music" (Felip Elosegui, P). The idea of spreading identities through cultural activities was also clear for many cultural producers: "The *esbarts* [dances] of Andorra, Valencia, France and Catalunya Nord and the Balearic Islands, each one with their own peculiarities is what drives the diffusion of Catalan traditional dance" (Andreu Garcia, P).

While both policy makers and cultural producers generally agree on the need to propagate cultural events to support identity, the means of doing this differs. For the local associations, it is the diffusion of a specific art form or cultural manifestation that is important in supporting identity. For the policy makers and opinion makers, all manifestations of popular and traditional culture are seen as important; for them, "culture" almost becomes an abstract "good" to be promoted. The need to do this is linked to a rhetoric of loss, recuperation and diffusion. As Pepa Ninou (O) commented, "globalisation is affecting not only festivals, but culture in general.... We are not just talking about the local cultural associations, but also schools, so that young people see culture close up.... The schools have to teach them to identify with the culture." In the view of the policy makers, traditions that are perceived as being in danger of extinction must be recuperated and "instilled" in the population. In this

way a common identity can be created, which is linked to a specific location. This difference of emphasis can be linked to the differing position of the local cultural associations and the regional and local policy makers. The former are much closer to the process of cultural production, whereas the policy makers have a more instrumental view of cultural processes and products as tools for social and economic ends. This positions the cultural policy makers more often as indirect stakeholders in cultural events.

### *Community and Participation*

The idea of the fiesta as a transforming moment in society is underlined by the extent to which fiestas are seen as a means of developing community spirit and participation. In particular, fiestas play a role in developing social cohesion. One policy maker commented: "the celebration of the fiesta creates cohesion in the community, but it also makes contradictions evident, reaffirms relations between the members of the community and generates a group identity". For the opinion makers the cohesive role of the fiesta is even extended into the more abstract realms of the information society:

The information society is leading to more individual forms of consumption, particularly in the home... video and computer games, the Internet. On the other hand, this is also leading more people to want to get out...because people need to share, to communicate and to open themselves to a process of cultural and social development. Eventually...individualisation gives us interest in collectivity. (Pepa Ninou, O)

For the cultural producers, participation is also important, but more in the sense of being and doing things together. "The association wants to stimulate participation of local people in joint activities...and one of the ways of doing this is to organise a pessebre vivent [religious tableaux]" (Jordi Freixas, P).

Participation can also become a political subject when the number of people attending is seen either as a large potential audience (which is a source of power), or as an indirect endorsement for a particular political view. For example, local politicians are careful to be seen attending the major fiestas in Catalunya, because these provide useful photo opportunities as well as the chance to identify with a popular event or a particular location or community. This is particularly evident at major fiestas such as La Mercè in Barcelona, where the staging of a wide range of events reflecting different cultures can also be seen as an attempt to communicate indirectly with different communities in the city.

The general tone of the respondents' assessment of La Mercè was that the fiesta had become a "metropolitan" event, with a wide scope of events for all the different groups in the city. However, the expansion of the fiesta does not necessarily imply a higher level of spectacle. For example, in the Festa al Cel, which with its aerial acrobatics is probably one of the most spectacular elements of La Mercè, one of the most important activities is actually teaching children how to make their own kites. And while the spectacle of the Festa al Cel was the biggest draw of the 2003 event with 400,000 spectators, the more reflexive and interactive Passeig de les Persones (with seminars, workshops and children's activities) attracted many more participants (300,000) than the closing firework display at the base of Montjuïc (175,000). Size is arguably the main difference between La Mercè and fiestas in other parts of Catalunya. The event has a relatively professional organisation structure, which is located within the Department of Fiestas of the Municipality. In spite of its size and professionalisation, however, the public sector stakeholders maintain that the event still maintains its

cultural roots. According to Maria Anglada (A), "the differences are actually quite small. The main thing is that La Mercè is much bigger than the other fiestas...it is a fiesta for the whole city. But you find the same characteristics, such as music, dance, gegants, diables and castell-ers [giants, devils and human castles]." Oriol Pasquals (A) maintained that La Mercè is essentially a "local" event, in spite of its size: "It is not a festival, because a festival caters for a specific group. A fiesta is for everyone." Cultural producers, on the other hand, argued that the very size of the event inevitably brings change. "Some people say – oh, there are a million participants. No, there are a million spectators. That is very different" (Joan Guillén, P). This implies that the changing scale of the event essentially changes many groups of residents from direct stakeholders (as participants) to indirect stakeholders (as spectators) of the festival. The popularity of the event may therefore be seen as an advantage by those in the public administration who see mass events as a legitimisation not only of their cultural policy, but also their politics, whereas many cultural producers see the "massification" of the audience as a problem.

### *Integration*

The use of festivals as a tool for social integration may in some ways be seen as the obverse of the identity issue. Whereas the use of festivals to shape identity is essentially a process of cultural distinction, the need to create a cohesive community around such identities implies a lessening of social and cultural differences within the local community. In contrast with the tendency of those in the public administration to emphasise the issue of identity, it was the opinion makers and to a lesser extent event organisers who talked about integration.

One of the consequences of globalisation that is seen as particularly problematic for Catalan culture and identity is the growth of immigration. In the 1960s and 1970s the main immigration streams came from other regions of Spain (particularly Andalucia), but since the 1980s increasing numbers of immigrants have arrived from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Whereas the previous generations of Spanish immigrants came from cultural backgrounds reasonably close to those of Catalunya, the latest waves of immigrants have little prior knowledge of Catalan culture or society. Cultural events are therefore seen as one means of integrating these newcomers into the local community and preserving Catalan identity. The public administration and opinion makers in particular emphasised the integrative role of the fiesta in introducing "immigrants" to Catalan culture:

These traditional Catalan cultural activities have served to integrate...geganters, castell-ers... there are plenty of Spanish people who participate as much or more than the Catalans, and basically the people want to enjoy themselves, but eventually they can be integrated into this culture that is different to their original culture. (Antoni Anguela, O)

There was a fairly consistent vision shared by policy makers and the cultural producers and associations of the fiesta as a mechanism for promoting integration and social cohesion and stimulating people to participate in the social and cultural life of the city. The important role taken by public space in the staging of cultural events is partly a reflection of the importance of reclaiming the streets and the public space as a symbol of freedom in the post-Franco era. The early years of democracy saw a dramatic upsurge in the number and extent of public celebrations as the Catalans took full advantage of their new-found freedom to exhibit their cultural identity in public. It is not surprising, therefore, that the idea of bringing

people together in public spaces to share moments of celebration is an important underpinning for the revival of Catalan culture.

However, some respondents doubted the extent to which simply bringing people together during the fiesta actually developed cohesion in wider Catalan society. Some respondents said that the attempts at integration lead to parallel events being organised. Different population groups are attracted to different events, but there is little real mixing. Jordi Pablo (O): "La Mercè is much too big for real contact between people to take place. There is a great mix of people, but no real cohesion." For other respondents this is not necessarily a problem, because they view the fact that people have even visual contact with one another during the major events in La Mercè as positive. People can at least see that Barcelona is a diverse, multicultural city. But the image of a multicultural city is not always attractive for all stakeholders. As Josep Fornes (O) remarked, "politicians are afraid of multiculturality...as a politician it is not good to embrace multiculturality, because it can be dangerous for your position. They would rather pretend that the problem doesn't exist." This may explain the tendency to promote integration of immigrant groups within the traditional structures of Catalan fiestas in most places, rather than experimenting with multicultural forms as Barcelona has sometimes done.

Even in "multicultural" Barcelona, however, tensions sometimes emerge between the desire of politicians to use cultural events to support Catalan nationalism and the more common desire of event organisers to promote community cohesion. In 2004, for example, there was a heated debate between Catalan nationalists and Andalusian immigrant associations about the funding of the Barcelona Feria de Abril, a celebration of Andalusian culture in Catalunya. The Feria de Abril has long been supported financially by the Catalan and Barcelona administrations, arguably as a way of winning political influence among the large Andalusian population in Catalunya (Garcia 1999). In 2004, however, Catalan nationalists began calling for equal treatment for "Catalan" festivals organised in the different districts of Barcelona. This pressure eventually produced a vast increase in funding for two of the main local festivals in 2005 (Sierra & Montaner 2005). Although the cultural associations organising these two events had long called for additional funding, unlike the nationalist politicians they were more reticent in playing on Catalan identity to secure their aims. For them, it was more an issue of funding the local community to produce their own culture, rather than privileging one aspect of identity over another.

### *Globalisation and Localisation*

The increasing scale of festivals such as La Mercè is seen by some commentators as a result of globalisation, which stimulates a tendency towards larger, more spectacular events. The pressure to develop new elements in the programme was mentioned by a number of respondents, particularly those connected with La Mercè. According to Victoria Padreny (P):

[T]he most important thing for us is that there is something new every year. The reinvention and re-creation of the fiesta was particularly important in the early years of La Mercè. This was the period in which the correfoc was invented, as a new version of the correfoc. Cultural elements from the rest of Catalunya (such as castellers from Tarragona) were also introduced to Barcelona. In the beginning they were reluctant to come, because people in Barcelona didn't understand what they were doing. Now the fiesta has created an interest in Castells in Barcelona, and there are many groups of castellers in the city.

In this sense, local culture is consciously being recreated as national culture, and later globalised through the media and events such as the Olympic Games (Hargreaves 2000). Although Catalans seem comfortable with this form of dis-embedding of culture, the globalisation process as a whole is perceived by all stakeholders as a potential threat, which has to be met by the strengthening of local identity. "Globalisation means we have to do more to re-affirm our identity" (Antoni Anguela, O); "we can't allow ourselves to lose our cultural identity, or allow our culture to disappear..." (Andreu Garcia, P). In a globalising world,

Culture has no frontiers, and one thing is clear – we don't want globalisation without defending our own culture, because globalisation threatens minority cultures. The case of Catalan culture is a clear example. There are certain majority cultures that are swallowing minority cultures. (Joan-Miquel Merino, P)

However, the impact of globalisation on the cultural content of the festa was the subject of divided opinions. Some opinion makers saw the transition from a festa to a festival, from a local cultural event to a metropolitan event encompassing global cultures. For example Josep Fornes (O) remarked of La Mercè: "You can find flamenco, salsa and different Moroccan, Peruvian, Dutch and Japanese culture. It is not about Catalan culture, it is about displaying everybody's culture." For some producers, some elements of La Mercè, such as the Festa al Cel, "have nothing to do with Catalan culture" (Victoria Padreny, P). This can also mean a loss of tradition: "the real traditional elements are organised by the residents (in local festivals). La Mercè is more for the tourists" (Jordi Fabregas, P). However, other producers identified a counter-trajectory in La Mercè, which has seemingly become more "traditional" over the years as creative and innovative elements have declined (Victor Cucurull, P). This may be linked to the emergence of "localisation" as a countervailing force to globalisation, but it may also be a measure of the relative ease of reproducing traditional culture compared with innovating new cultural forms. In any case, it is a trend that has been actively supported by the Generalitat over the years as a means of supporting Catalan identity.

There is not such a division between different stakeholders on these issues. Rather, as Oriol Pasquals (A) pointed out, this issue is internalised in the discourse of individual stakeholders: "A tension exists between the local and the global. On one hand la Festa de la Mercè is a festival whose strength is the tradition and the Catalan culture, on the other hand the municipal government of Barcelona wants it to become more known internationally." This is a tension also embedded in the cultural policy of the city, which states that "The city must be capable of valuing the 'intangible elements' of its culture – lifestyles, the use of the streets, festivals, traditions etc. as the best guarantee of expressing singularity within an increasingly global context" (Barcelona Institute of Culture 1998).

### *Commercialisation*

One of the concerns often expressed about the cultural content and integrity of cultural events is the degree to which they come to serve political, economic and social goals in addition to their cultural function. In particular, two areas seem to be of concern. The first is the appropriation of cultural symbols for political ends and the second is the role of tourism as a factor in promoting the instrumental use of fiestas, and particularly in replacing cultural goals with economic ones. For the opinion makers in particular there is a feeling that the festivals need to maintain their "purity", free from the contamination of political

influence and commercial sponsorship, but at the same time they recognise that cultural associations need to draw funding from these sources (Joan Vidal, O).

In Barcelona, many respondents noted the increasing size and budget of La Mercè and that the degree of professionalisation has increased over the years. This is partly because there is more support available from the public sector than in the beginning, but also more recently because of the growth of sponsorship. Sponsors now account for about 50% of the total budget: "this means they have more and more influence. Their advertisements are getting bigger, and they now begin to influence the type of music. They want a particular group" (Oriol Pasquals, A). There was, however, a division of opinion among respondents as to whether commercialisation has an effect on the cultural content of the event.

In some cases, whole events may be organised specifically for economic reasons. In her analysis of Catalan fiestas, Crespi (2002) demonstrates that the growth of local authority sponsored "medieval fairs" and other commercially oriented events is a phenomenon that has grown in recent years. Many of the producers argued that this development is economically driven:

I think the market was started in 1995, when the Municipality decided that Vic should have a market every month. So at Christmastime there was a medieval market for the feast of Saint Nicolas, which is already a shopping period, so it's good business. (Valentí Comes, P)

The economic function of fiestas is strongly linked in the view of many cultural producers to attracting additional consumers to the local area, in other words developing tourism.

The fiestas attract a lot of people from outside, particularly for Carnival and Three Kings. Loads of people come and see us. I think that all the hotels in Salou are full for Easter Week....The popular fiestas, with devils, gegants, castellers, all of this attracts a lot of people. (Salvador Palomar, P)

For the opinion makers, the role of local authorities in stimulating such development is questionable, particularly from the point of view of "authenticity".

I am very critical of the Medieval Fairs because they are badly done. They are poor quality representations with little quality. Everything is a medieval fair these days....[but often] they offer things which are not medieval at all" (Joan Vidal, O)

The view of such events as local development strategies is admitted by the policy makers, although they also argue that they are not necessarily directed at tourists:

Well, I don't think that fiestas are a sufficient motive to attract tourists. They are complementary and temporal.....I don't think it is a principal driving force for tourism. (Ignasi Deó Valera, A)

Such divergent views tend to suggest that the cultural producers see the fiestas as being totally independent of commercialisation and tourism, in spite of the economic and political motives that they attribute to the public administration. The view seems to be, if people from outside want to come and watch, that's fine, but we are not performing for tourists, or doing this for money. This underlines the differing interests of stakeholders. Even though both the associations and the local authorities would probably welcome the injection of more resources into festivals, there is a division of opinion about how to achieve this. Cultural associations tend to see financing festivals as a concern of the public sector, whereas cash-strapped local authorities want to place more emphasis on the income-generating

capacity of the events. However, the increasing emphasis on economic impacts by public sector stakeholders may eventually lead to more funding demands from cultural associations who perceive that their work is generating profits for other stakeholders.

However, even in the case of major events such as La Mercè respondents were almost unanimous in rejecting the idea that commercialisation or tourism have a role in the content or organisation of the fiesta. The general feeling was that tourists are welcome to come, but the fiesta is primarily a local event. If tourists come, there is no specific provision for them, but it is a good way of introducing them to Catalan culture (in Barcelona, the assumption is that "tourists" are foreign, whereas in local fiesta majors the "tourists" are all visitors – "forasters"). However there does appear to be an emerging tension between the idea of a "local fiesta" and the need to profile Barcelona internationally. According to Oriol Pasquals (A), if La Mercè becomes too internationally oriented, it will lose popularity among local people.

Most respondents were of the opinion that La Mercè had become more popular with tourists over the years. The fact that so many people are visiting Barcelona means that there are also many tourists around during the festival. However, fiesta historian Jordi Pardo (O) pointed out that during the Franco era La Mercè was actually more oriented towards tourism than it is now, with programmes printed in several different languages. Even people who notice an increase in tourists do not necessarily find this a problem, as they tend to be proud that "their" fiesta attracts people from outside (Richards 2004).

## **Discussion**

One might argue that the Catalan case is an exceptional one, because of the unique set of historical circumstances that have given rise to the rich festive culture of the country. However, the interesting thing about the Catalan case seems to be that it demonstrates that a particular trajectory of cultural change is by no means inevitable. The apparently inexorable modernisation of festive traditions and the replacement of the "liveable cities" approach by the "arts and urban development" approach to festivals which has been so widely identified elsewhere (e.g. Waterman 1998) appears less marked in Catalunya, or in neighbouring Valencia, as Costa (2002) points out. The shared goal of preserving a culture in the absence of public policy mechanisms kept the culture alive during the Franco era. The newly found freedom of the post-Franco era enabled the pent-up cultural energy to spill out into the streets and into a frenzied period of festival creation and expansion. Most of this activity has remained at grass-roots level because of the inability of public structures to take over the organisation and management of the wealth of grass-roots events. In this situation, legitimacy is gained by most of the stakeholders involved in the festivals. The cultural associations are recognised as the irreplaceable producers of culture, the municipalities are seen to be enabling citizens to participate in culture by funding festivals, and sponsors help to add extra dimensions to the cultural product and support the cultural associations. This balance of legitimacy also helps to maintain the consensus over the role of fiestas in cultural and social terms.

The cultural coherence provided by the high level of civil engagement in Catalunya is probably also responsible for the relative lack of significant divisions of opinion on the directions and content of policy with respect to popular cultural events. One suspects that this may also relate to the high degree of politicisation in Catalunya, which makes the general public more aware of public policy positions and makes politicians more aware of feelings at



grass-roots level. This also means that stakeholders often share a common language, which helps them negotiate questions of power and legitimacy. For example, all of the stakeholders interviewed emphasised the importance of identity as a driving force for sustaining cultural events. However, the use of the term "identity" differed in terms of meaning and emphasis between stakeholder groups. For cultural producers and participants, it is local identity that is important, supporting the cohesion of the community. For policy makers, identity is a source of distinction which can build links between communities and provide a source of regional or national identity. For the opinion makers, cultural identity is a resource that can help Catalunya deal with the challenges of globalisation and immigration. Therefore, the centrality of "identity" in the discourse of different stakeholders is not in doubt, although the meaning attached to the term has important differences among stakeholder groups. For the cultural producers, the emphasis is most often placed on the links between identity, community and sense of place. On the other hand, policy makers are more often engaged in the appropriation of cultural symbols as a means of constructing regional or national identity, which in the longer term may generate economic benefits. The opinion makers tend to see cultural identity as a source of social cohesion in the face of increasing globalisation and loosening of social ties. For each group, the concept of "identity" is therefore a central element of their discourse about cultural events, although the meanings attached to term differ.

These differences in meaning can be related to the claims to power, legitimacy and urgency made by the stakeholders. For the producers, their claim to legitimacy is grounded in their role in reclaiming the streets at the end of the Franco era, and the urgency of their claims is based on flagging cultural participation, which reduces their economic base while also problematising the legitimacy of local associations. For the public administration, the associations are essential partners in the production of cultural events, but the public sector increasingly wants to take the lead in order to maximise economic benefits. "Identity" is therefore a resource to differentiate local culture and attract tourists, as exemplified by the recent Generalitat de Catalunya campaign to develop "identity tourism".

One can also find traces of both "liveable cities" and "arts and urban development" (Schuster 2001) discourse in the discussion of festivals by all stakeholder groups. The differences between stakeholders tend to lie more in emphasis than in diametrically opposed positions. By and large, the public administration stakeholders tend to emphasise development, whereas the cultural producers and participants emphasise community development rather than economic growth. This is reflected in the differential use of language between these two groups, with policy makers tending to emphasise more extrinsic factors such as "globalisation" and "modernisation", whereas local cultural groups tended to be more concerned with "people" and "participation". The opinion makers tend to adopt an intermediate position, lamenting loss of community on the one hand, but recognising the need to generate economic resources to support culture on the other.

In spite of these nuances in emphasis, the overall discourses of the different festival stakeholders tend to have more commonalities than differences. The distinctions between stakeholder groups are found more often in the basis on which legitimacy is claimed or urgency is argued. In the case of the local cultural producers and participants, the claims are largely emotional, relating to the links between community and territory, the importance of tradition, the need for community cohesion. For the public administration, extrinsic arguments carry more weight, as identity becomes a resource that can stimulate the economy of the region for the benefit of all inhabitants. For the opinion makers, excessive

instrumentalisation of festivals for either social or economic goals is seen as threatening the “authenticity” of these events, but at the same time they argue for festivals as a cultural resource that can be used to confront major external challenges for the region, such as globalisation or immigration.

These emotional, extrinsic and intellectual appeals all have some currency in the “political market square” (Larson & Wikström 2001) of Catalan discourse on festivals. Because these appeals all relate to common themes in Catalan society, such as the importance of identity, the threat of globalisation, the need for social cohesion in the face of rapid change, the end result of these negotiated discourses is consensus rather than conflict.

An additional factor which may promote collaborative rather than conflictive relationships between stakeholders is the relative stability of the political and social landscape in Catalunya. As McKercher *et al.* (2004, p. 540) note, “Conflict, or the potential for conflict is most likely to occur when the power balance between stakeholders shifts.” Relative stability, with control of the Generalitat and many municipalities having remained stable over many years, may have helped to avoid conflict. However, this may change in future, with the new ruling coalition in the Generalitat and emerging problems linked to rising immigration and the erosion of social structures.

In contrast to some other areas, there also seems to be relatively little concern that cultural traditions are being lost. Rather, the post-Franco resurgence of Catalan culture seems to have created new and innovative forms of popular culture. The discourse of all stakeholder groups is peppered with terms such as the “recovery” and “reinvention” of culture. There is, however, some concern about the effects of commercialisation and professionalisation on the cultural content and “authenticity” of cultural events. These concerns are most strongly expressed by the cultural producers, who fear that control will be removed from the grass-roots level and placed in the hands of “professionals”. The view of the local cultural associations is that control should be left in the hands of voluntary sector, but that the public sector should provide more generous funding for their efforts. This does seem to be happening in the case of local festivals in Barcelona, where grass-root organisation co-exists with increasingly professionalised management of major events, such as La Mercè.

Because of its size, La Mercè needs to be centrally organised, and opportunities for local groups to have a meaningful input seem to have declined over time. But La Mercè is the exception rather than the rule. Most of the traditional cultural events in Catalunya still retain their grass-roots organisation style and relative lack of commercialisation. In this regard, the role of tourism is also relatively unimportant. Tourists are welcome to attend, and this is a source of pride for most local people (Richards 2004). But there are relatively few conscious efforts to utilise tourism as a means of valorising the cultural content of existing traditional events. The only signs of such developments are to be found in the creation of new events by local authorities, such as the “medieval fairs”, which are clearly aimed to stimulate commercial activity. Generally, cultural producers do not view these new activities as a threat to traditional events, but rather lament their weak cultural content.

The discourse on traditional and popular culture events in Catalunya therefore seems to differ to some extent from the discussion of festivals elsewhere. Concerns about the effects of globalisation and commercialisation seem to be more muted, and the impact of tourism and “festivalisation” seems relatively limited. Most people still experience “fiesta por la fiesta”, and still see the *homo festus* of the voluntary sector as the main engine of growth. This may contrast somewhat with more detached academic explanations that seek causes

of change external to the events themselves. In the case of Catalunya, there seems to be a relatively high level of incipient change, driven by the dynamics of “cultural isostasy” or cultural rebound (Richards 2004) in the aftermath of dictatorship. The relative vitality of Catalan traditional culture is one major reason why there appears to be relatively little discord among stakeholders. The strength of the cultural associations provides a mechanism for most events to function outside the normal frameworks of cultural policy, while the relatively recent re-establishment of pro-active intervention on the part of local authorities means that they have not challenged the status quo. Legitimacy is gained by all stakeholder groups by virtue of the active production and consumption of culture and high levels of civic involvement. The grass-roots development of culture invests the organisers of these popular cultural events with more legitimacy than they might have in the case of more commercial festivals or even “high culture” arts festivals.

What seems to be happening in Catalunya is that a space has been created between state and market in which the voluntary sector is able to act with relative autonomy, supported by the considerable level of social capital present in Catalan society. This situation has been described by Costa (2002) in the case of *Las Fallas* in Valencia, where he argues that we may actually be seeing the development of an “alternative reality” to the inevitable onslaught of modernity, one that uses festive tradition in a positive way to provide new solutions to human problems (and not just an escape from them).

## Conclusions

The analysis of festivals in Catalunya suggests that there is a need to develop a more nuanced view of the relationships between different stakeholders in these events. Our analysis indicates that although stakeholder groups may make their claims for legitimacy on different grounds, the common themes through which these claims are expressed helps to create an atmosphere of consensus rather than confrontation. Elements of both the “liveable cities” and “arts and urban development” approaches to festivals can be found in the discourse of all stakeholder groups, even though cultural producers tend to favour the former model and the public administration the latter.

The common discourse that centres around the role of cultural identity in festivals is important in ensuring broad support for such events. Because in the Catalan context there is little fear of innovating tradition, the discourse does not break down into a confrontation between the need to preserve tradition and the need to modernise culture and society. In addition, the ability to attach new meanings and roles to traditional cultural events extends their cultural, social and political role. These events become not just a celebration of traditional culture, but also a means of social inclusion and adaptation to change. Although the Catalan situation may represent a singular set of circumstances, it does indicate that consensus building around the cultural and social meaning of events can be a successful strategy. When different stakeholders can be persuaded to collaborate, it is possible to challenge some of the supposedly negative impacts of the modernisation process, such as commercialisation and loss of tradition. As Costa (2001, 2002) suggests, there is potential for cultural festivals to create spaces in which alternative forms of modernisation can be experimented with and implemented.

One of the key factors seems to be the high degree of associationism and civic involvement in Catalan society. The strength of the associations and their ability to maintain a central role in cultural events has provided an effective counter-weight to commercial pressures, the growth of tourism and municipal entrepreneurialism. The discourse of the main stakeholders about the role and meaning of cultural events therefore exhibits a high level of convergence, with each group seeming to value the role of the other. This may provide additional arguments for the development of participatory forms of cultural development, although the difficulty of stimulating grass-roots participation in societies where this tradition has declined is obvious.



