



**Positive power: Events as temporary sites of power which
“empower” marginalised groups**

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Positive power: Events as temporary sites of power which “empower” marginalised groups

Abstract

Purpose: The importance of events for marginalised groups has largely been overlooked within tourism, hospitality and event studies. The purpose of this international study is to address this gap, emphasising the positive outcomes of power relationships rather than the negative, which have traditionally been the focus in event studies.

Approach: The study investigated eight events for indigenous and ethnic minority groups, rural women, disabled people and seniors in Australia and New Zealand. Qualitative data was collected via participant observation, reflexive ethnography, semi-structured interviews and in-the-moment conversations. An inductive thematic approach was taken to data analysis.

Findings: Eight themes around notions of power and empowerment were identified during the analysis: providing a platform, giving/taking ownership, gaining confidence, empowering with/through knowledge, respect, pride and affirmation, freedom to ‘be’, and resistance. These were then viewed through the lenses of social-structural and psychological empowerment, enabling a deeper understanding of power at/through events.

Implications: The paper presents a framework for empowerment that enables event organisers to both understand and deliberately plan for the productive use of power, which can reaffirm important event aims, objectives and values. It can also be used by researchers as a framework through which to identify and assess the contributing elements of empowerment at events, and by local government to guide policymaking around events.

Originality/value: This study is the first to highlight best practices for the positive use of power at events that ‘empowers’ marginalised groups. Grounded in empowerment theory, the study offers a new lens to reframe notions of power and provides a theoretical framework that will be of value for both critical event studies researchers, event organisers and policymakers alike.

Keywords: Marginalised groups, critical event studies, social-structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, community participation, social capital, festivals

Introduction

The locus of power is located at the 'centre' and the expression of power therefore determines who lies 'at the margins' (Smith and Pitts, 2007). Groups and communities may be marginalised for several reasons, including race, gender, religion, sexuality, age, refugee/migrant status, socio-economic status or geographic location. This frequently results in their being subject to threats, derision, discrimination and exploitation, and being treated as objects rather than people (Kauff *et al.*, 2017; Smith and Pitts, 2007). The subsequent sense of powerlessness can have significant implications across all areas of life – social, economic, health and wellbeing (both physical and mental) and cultural.

In recent years power has become a much-debated topic in the event studies literature (a seminal work is Jepson and Clarke's (2018) edited book *Power, construction and meaning in festivals* which has contributions from many countries and types of events). All event stakeholder relationships are shaped and influenced by power; power that is based on the level of each stakeholder's interest in the event, their financial resources, resource ownership, and their influence in terms of decision-making (Reid, 2011). These power relationships in turn shape the way events are constructed, planned and delivered, as well as their impact on attendees and other event consumers (Jepson and Clarke, 2014). To date, scholars have focused on the negative outcomes of power relationships (see for example Batty 2016; Clarke and Jepson 2011; Tiew *et al.*, 2015) and have largely overlooked the experiences of marginalised groups. While two recent studies investigating events for ethnic minority migrants have identified the psychological benefits of such events, and noted a feeling of empowerment, they used theories of counterspace and 'psychological sense of community' respectively, rather than power dynamics (Hassanli *et al.*, 2019, 2020).

This international study addresses these gaps, examining positive outcomes of power at eight events in, by and for a wide variety of marginalised groups. It is theoretically grounded in conceptualisations of empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008), community participation (Arnstein, 1969) and social capital (Taylor, 2011). The paper culminates in a framework for empowerment that enables event organisers to both understand *and* deliberately plan for the productive use of power. This can also be used by researchers as a theoretical framework through which to assess empowerment at/through events, and by local government to guide policymaking around events. The paper therefore addresses a contemporary issue, makes a

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3 meaningful contribution to the field of critical event studies, and has applicability for scholars
4 and practitioners alike.
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8 **Conceptual background**

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10 *Traditional conceptualisations of power in events research: a brief overview*

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13 Events research has been dominated by traditional management conceptualisations of power
14 as a resource which can be used to influence, or in extreme cases coerce, other people to achieve
15 a certain goal. Power is used by one actor 'over' another and as one gains more power, another
16 automatically loses their power. Power can also take on different forms: reward power,
17 coercive power, group power, or the types of power sometimes exercised by event organisers
18 such as legitimate power, expert power, or information power (Benfari *et al.*, 1986; Buchanan
19 and Badham, 2020).
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26 This concept of power as a resource to use over others has been applied to events in recent
27 years: Clarke and Jepson (2011), for example, investigated the use of power as a source of
28 discipline and control throughout the decision-making process around a community festival in
29 Derby, UK. Similarly, Batty (2016) identified examples of stakeholders' legitimate power due
30 to their position within community sports event organisations in New Zealand. Positions of
31 power may be perceived differently, however; while event organisers may perceive a certain
32 stakeholder group to have a lot of power, these stakeholders do not necessarily share this view.
33 White and Stadler (2018), for instance, found that the UK's Glastonbury Festival claims to
34 engage and involve the local community through giving back to them (e.g. free tickets). The
35 community, though, feel rather powerless regarding the decisions made about the festival and
36 their involvement in it.
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47 *Conceptualising positive power and empowerment in an events context*

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49 We seek to put forward the alternative notion of 'positive power' for consideration. Instead of
50 regarding power as a resource 'over' somebody, power can also be seen as a capacity to 'do'
51 something (Lukes, 1974; Taylor, 2011). Power can be created through relationships between
52 stakeholders, where each stakeholder is just one actor within this network of relations. In this
53 sense, power produces new things; it cannot be given to one person or one stakeholder, it cannot
54 be regained, but rather it is exercised; it operates at all different levels of the social body, and
55 as such it constantly changes (Foucault, 1982).
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3 Knowledge has been identified as one such source of power. However, more knowledge does
4 not necessarily mean more power, because neither can be possessed (Foucault, 1980). Rather,
5 power/knowledge is embedded within social relationships between people, groups,
6 stakeholders and organisations. The idea of power/knowledge relations has been applied to a
7 festival case study by Stadler (2013), which highlighted the positive use of both power and
8 knowledge between the festival organisers and the community: through engaging the
9 community as equal partners throughout the creative process and by making their voices heard,
10 the community felt empowered. At the same time, festival organisers gained new knowledge –
11 they had to change their ways of thinking and working *with* the community and empowering
12 them, rather than imposing their own ideas upon them.
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21 The power balance between actors can therefore be changed in a positive way. In relation to
22 marginalised communities, the subject of this paper, Walters and Jepson (2019) recently argued
23 that events can help overcome marginalisation through the taking back of power, through
24 reshaping power relations to give communities the capacity to (albeit temporarily) take control
25 of their circumstances, make their voices heard and achieve their own goals. However, the
26 power of the privileged means marginalised communities are often misunderstood,
27 underrepresented or excluded from an event altogether. It is therefore important to
28 acknowledge that event organisers can, whether deliberately or not, use power relationships to
29 adopt either inclusionary or exclusionary approaches to event planning and management, and
30 hence can turn power into a form of resistance on the one hand, or transformation on the other.
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40 *Empowerment*

41 The concept of empowerment has been much debated within organisational and management
42 literature, with two key perspectives emerging: social-structural empowerment and
43 psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008). The first focuses on the contextual conditions
44 in the workplace which enable empowerment for employees, while the second highlights
45 individual employees' psychological experience(s) at work, and both complement and
46 reinforce each other.
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53 Social-structural empowerment includes having the power to make decisions for the
54 organisation where it is relevant to one's job or role, as well as having authority and control
55 over organisational resources (Lawler, 1986). The aim is to share power through the delegation
56 of responsibility across all levels of the organisation. It can be achieved through the
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3 implementation of organisational policies, structures and practices that give all employees
4 access to opportunity, information, support and resources. According to Spreitzer (2008),
5 social-structural empowerment manifests itself in practices such as participative decision-
6 making, skill and/or knowledge-based pay, open flow of information, flat organisational
7 structures, and training. In an event organisation, open flow of information, for example, is
8 important not only from permanent staff members down to volunteers (e.g. clear goals, tasks
9 and expectations), but also the flow of information from volunteers back up (e.g. suggestions
10 for improvement based on their front-line experience) (Stadler, 2021). Equally as important is
11 participative decision-making, which has also been identified as a key organisational practice
12 in events when working with communities and engaging them in the event planning process
13 (Clarke and Jepson, 2011; Rogers and Anastasiadou, 2011; White and Stadler, 2018).
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23 Psychological empowerment is “a set of psychological states that are necessary for individuals
24 to feel a sense of control in relation to their work” (Spreitzer, 2008, p.56). In an organisational
25 context, it is based on how employees perceive and experience their work, their personal beliefs
26 about their role, as well as their sense of self-efficacy (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). In order
27 for employees to truly feel empowered, four psychological states need to be experienced: (1)
28 Meaning: employees get a sense of meaning from their job if it fits with their career goals,
29 personal beliefs and values; (2) Competence: the belief that one is capable of performing the
30 job with skill and knowledge; (3) Sense of self-determination/autonomy: having the freedom,
31 autonomy and independence to make decisions about which tasks to engage in to perform the
32 job; and (4) Impact: the degree to which an employee perceives their decisions to have an
33 impact on administrative, strategic and operational outcomes (Spreitzer, 1997, 2008).
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44 *Community participation and empowerment*

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46 At the community level of empowerment, we further draw on Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of
47 citizen participation (Figure 1): the first two rungs on the ladder result in non-participation,
48 rungs 3-5 correspond to different levels of tokenism, and the top three rungs denote increasing
49 degrees of citizen power.
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54 INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

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56 At a community level and in the context of community participation and community
57 engagement, Cole (2006, p.97) refers to this in her definition of empowerment as,
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3 “the capacity of individuals or groups to determine their own affairs. It is a process to
4 help people to exert control over factors that affect their lives. It represents the top end
5 of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agents of change
6 and they have the ability to find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement
7 actions and evaluate their solutions.”
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12 We argue that events can thus be considered ‘sites of power’ (Westwood, 2002, p.135) and can
13 be the catalyst for this positive change in power to happen through working at the top rungs of
14 the participation ladder.
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18 As with the two dimensions of empowerment discussed above, empowerment through events
19 can also happen at two different levels. Firstly, at the organisational level, in the sense that
20 event organisers and volunteers can be empowered to do their job and make effective decisions.
21 Secondly, at the community level where the purpose of the event is to empower a marginalised
22 community, make their voices heard, and hence for the community to take ownership of the
23 event. These two levels of empowerment need to reinforce each other, in order to create an
24 empowering event overall. For example, empowerment at the organisational level can include
25 creating partnerships with the community and including them in the decision-making process,
26 rather than imposing ideas and exercising power ‘over’ them. This in turn can enhance
27 empowerment at the community level through the community feeling a sense of pride and a
28 sense of ownership of the event (Kay, 2000; Stadler, 2013).
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38 At a community level, Taylor (2011) argues that communities can more specifically be
39 empowered through a *capacity development* approach based on developing the skills, assets
40 and capacities already available within a community. By redressing inequalities and providing
41 opportunities for learning, networking and organising, communities can recognise and mobilise
42 those capacities that are important to them, and in turn achieve a sense of empowerment. The
43 necessary infrastructure and institutional support need to be in place in order to create a
44 platform for communities to develop these capacities, but it is the inclusion of communities’
45 voices that form the basis for empowerment, as the entire process needs to be grounded in the
46 community’s own concerns rather than imposed from outside.
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55 A further important outcome of the process of capacity development is the creation and
56 enhancement of social capital within the community. Arcodia and Whitford (2007) argued that
57 events can enhance social capital through developing community resources, promoting social
58 cohesiveness, developing a common social purpose (giving the community a ‘voice’), and
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3 through celebration. Wilks (2011) on the other hand, found the festivals in her study provided
4 opportunities for bonding social capital to develop through shared values and mutual trust
5 between attendees, but the formation of bridging social capital - new social connections with
6 previously unconnected attendees - was not achieved through festival attendance. A third type
7 of social capital has the potential to be important for marginalised communities: linking social
8 capital, defined as,
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14 “connections with people in positions of power and is characterised by relations
15 between those within a hierarchy where there are differing levels of power (...). It is
16 different from bonding and bridging in that it is concerned with relations between
17 people who are not on an equal footing.” (Taylor, 2011, p.55)
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22 While bridging social capital is commonly argued to be important in terms of developing social
23 cohesion, it is linking social capital that addresses issues of power and empowerment. Through
24 it, communities can become equal partners, empowered producers and co-producers, as well
25 as empowered citizens on a broader scale (Taylor, 2011). Both capacity and social capital
26 development are therefore essential components in the process of empowerment at the
27 community level.
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33 34 **Research context**

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36 Events selected for this research project include those for indigenous and ethnic minority
37 groups, low socio-economic communities, rural women, disabled people and seniors (over 50s)
38 in Australia and New Zealand. These are groups that are commonly marginalised, facing
39 varying levels of explicit and/or implicit discrimination due to their ethnicity, income, ability,
40 age, gender and/or geographic location (Walters and Jepson, 2019). Seven of the events are
41 from across New Zealand and two are from Queensland, Australia (Table 1) and they are
42 introduced below.
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54 *Clutha Market and Trade Expo (formerly Clutha Women in Business Expo)*

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56 The Women in Business Expo is held in the Clutha District of southern New Zealand, a rural
57 region with a population of just under 17,000 people, and approximately 90 minutes south of
58 Dunedin city by car. It is a free annual business event (although stallholders pay a nominal fee)
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3 organised by the Clutha Women in Business Network (formed in early 2017) and was first held
4 in the region's main town of Balclutha in September 2017. The region has experienced
5 population decline of 7 percent since 1991 (Stats NZ, 1996, 2013a), and experiences a number
6 of other challenges common to rural communities such as poor infrastructure (e.g. slow
7 broadband, limited banking facilities), over-reliance on primary industry, an ageing population
8 and rising unemployment (Bock, 2016; Siemens, 2010).
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15 *Leisure Marching Nationals*

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17 Marching is a competitive team sport for girls and young women that originated in New
18 Zealand in the late 1930s and remained popular as an outdoor summer sport until the late 20th
19 century (Macdonald, 2011). Leisure marching, a non-competitive version of the sport, began
20 in 1991 with a group of six women over the age of 50 who decided to form a marching team
21 for the purpose of 'exercise, fun and friendship' rather than competition (Leisure Marching
22 New Zealand, 2017). There is no longer an informal minimum age for participation and in 2017
23 there were over 1000 "mature ladies" marching in 110 teams across New Zealand. The annual
24 Leisure Marching Nationals event is held in locations alternating between the North and South
25 Islands and is organised as a fundraising exercise by one or more teams from that location.
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35 *Pasifika Festival*

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37 The Wellington Pasifika Festival, held in New Zealand's capital city, began in 2006 and now
38 attracts over 15,000 people each year. The free admission one-day festival highlights the arts,
39 culture and food of the city's many distinctively different but tight-knit Pasifika communities,
40 and takes place in a public square in the central city area. In addition to performances by
41 traditional and modern Pasifika artists and music groups, attendees can purchase Pacific food
42 and handicrafts, engage in free activities such as hula sessions and tapa cloth printing, and meet
43 Pasifika representatives from political and other public sector organisations (Wellington City
44 Council, 2019).
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53 *Diwali Festival of Light*

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55 Invercargill is a small regional city of approximately 51,700 people located in the far south of
56 the South Island of New Zealand. The population is largely white and less diverse than the
57 country as a whole, but the Asian population has more than doubled since the 2006 census
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(Stats NZ, 2018). The Indian Community in Southland (ICS) is an incorporated society formed in mid-2018 to provide support and activities for the growing Indian population in Invercargill. In late 2018 it organised the first Diwali Festival of Light in the city, a free event which approximately 3,000 people attended. Diwali (also known as Deepavali) is of special significance to Hindus, but is also celebrated by Indians from other religions, and symbolises the victory of light over darkness, good over evil and the renewal of life (Satyanand, 2007).

InterACT Disability Arts Festival

The InterACT Disability Arts Festival was established in Auckland in 2011 and is a free event that celebrates the achievements of disabled people in the arts. Held in a large warehouse over three days each October, it incorporates live music, theatre performances, wearable arts parades, an art exhibition and creative workshops (InterACTing Theatre Company, 2019). In 2019 the festival attracted approximately 4,000 people from all parts of the city, ranging in age from primary school to retired and a wide range of abilities.

South Dunedin Street Festival

South Dunedin is a marginalised suburb in Dunedin city, with its population of just under 2500 being more culturally diverse, older, less educated, with more disability, higher unemployment and twice the number of single parent families, and lower levels of income, car and home ownership, and access to technology than the city as a whole (Stats NZ, 2013b). The first South Dunedin Street Festival was held in 2011 and regularly attracts over 5,000 attendees. The celebration aims to build a stronger sense of community and showcase the resilience of its residents in the face of local government neglect (Walters, 2019). The main street is closed to traffic, stages are set up for performances and a wide variety of stallholders (including local food vendors, shops, charities and social services) offer food, crafts, goods, services and information to attendees.

Behind the Cane

Behind the Cane was a community cultural development project commissioned and presented by the Queensland Music Festival in 2011. It was organised over a three-year period through collaboration between the festival organisation, the regional council and the South Sea Islander community in Bowen, Queensland, Australia. *Behind the Cane* told the history of thousands of

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3 South Sea Islanders being kidnapped ('blackbirded') and brought to Queensland to work on
4 sugar cane farms between 1863 and 1906. Cast members were all descendants from South Sea
5 Islanders, representing their own family members on stage. The free performance was
6 presented at the Bowen Soundshell over three nights, with approximately 120 cast members
7 and a total audience of about 8,000 (QMF, 2011).
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13 *Drag Queen'sLand*

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16 *Drag Queen'sLand* was another community project commissioned and presented by the
17 Queensland Music Festival in 2011. It was a theatrical work about challenges of being a drag
18 queen in Queensland (a state with a historically hostile relationship with the queer community).
19 The ticketed show was presented at the Judith Wright Centre in Brisbane, and was an 18+ event
20 containing "violence, adult themes, nudity, offensive language and theatrical smoke effects"
21 (QMF brochure, 2011). All seven shows were sold out with a total audience of approximately
22 2,500 (QMF, 2011). The drag community were included in every major decision along the way
23 and contributed not only their stories but also advice and support during the creative
24 development process, but they were represented by three professional actors on stage, rather
25 than performing themselves.
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35 **Methods**

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37 As befits the research aims, a humanist qualitative approach was considered the most
38 appropriate for core data collection and analysis (Fossey *et al.*, 2002). We took a reflexive
39 approach to the project, examining our assumptions about power. We actively reflected on the
40 researcher-participant relationship to co-constitute understanding and represent multiple voices,
41 not just those who were dominant (Alvesson and Skoeldberg, 2000).
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48 *Data collection*

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50 To gain a holistic understanding of the culturally diverse concept of power at events, and as is
51 common with qualitative research (Fossey *et al.*, 2002), multiple methods were used to collect
52 data. Individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with event organisers (Table 1),
53 allowing some flexibility and scope to explore their ideas while still keeping the conversation
54 on track (McGhee, 2012). The interviews, lasting between 43 and 97 minutes, were digitally
55 recorded for later verbatim independent transcription.
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3 We wished to understand the perspective of a variety of event attendees, including volunteers,
4 activity providers, stallholders, exhibitors, participants and audience members. They were
5 approached in a considerate manner, so their experience was not unduly disturbed and, if
6 willing to participate, were engaged in short in-the-moment interviews ranging from 4-10
7 minutes duration (Quinn and Wilks, 2013). In total, over 150 attendees participated in such
8 conversations (Table 1). The only criteria were that participants were over the age of 18 for
9 reasons of university ethics clearance. As noted by Fossey *et al.* (2002, p.726) “no fixed
10 minimum number of participants is necessary to conduct sound qualitative research”, and in
11 this case the number of participants varied by event. This was determined by a combination of
12 factors, the most important of which was the saturation point at which patterns were recurring
13 and no new information was being gathered from the conversations (Fossey *et al.*, 2002). Other
14 less significant factors that influenced the number of participants recruited included the size,
15 duration, physical layout and programming of the event. In order to minimise perceived
16 researcher-participant power imbalance, the conversations were not audio recorded, but
17 extensive notes were taken immediately afterwards to capture what was said.

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Participants were asked about their experiences of the event, including why they decided to
either organise it or attend it, what it means to them, how they feel about it, whether they feel
the event is needed, and whether they believe it has made a difference to those who participate
(and then what that difference might be). No questions explicitly addressed notions of power
or empowerment; rather, we were interested in how these may arise and be referenced or
alluded to during the conversations.

Overt participant observation was utilised at all events with permission from the event
organisers: extensive notes and photographs were taken throughout each event to capture
participant experiences, observations and rich descriptions of settings (Charmaz, 2006).
Information gathered centred around attendee behaviour: what they were doing, where, with
whom, what they were discussing, how they seemed to experience the event and interact (or
not) with others and the event environment, what was happening in terms of event
programming, the physical layout of the event and how attendees navigated it, and the sounds,
smells and sights we (and attendees) were immersed in (Mackellar, 2013). These were later
used as prompts during the semi-structured interviews with event organisers, as and when
appropriate, to further explore our observations from different perspectives. Researcher
reflections on this observational data were also captured at the time, as an early phase of the
analysis process (Mackellar, 2013). Reflexive ethnography was only possible at the two

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3 Queensland Music Festival events, where the researcher was able to fully immerse herself in
4 the event organisation in the months leading up to the events.
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8 *Data analysis*

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10 Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and its ability to generate a rich and nuanced
11 understanding of complex subjective social phenomena such as that under investigation here
12 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach was employed to identify themes across all
13 data sets - interview transcripts, in-the-moment interview notes, and field notes from
14 participant observation and reflexive ethnography.
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19 Thematic analysis is an iterative, nonlinear process involving the researchers going back and
20 forth across the different phases of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the first phase, the
21 material was read to gain familiarity with the data and highlight words and phrases related to
22 the notions of power and empowerment. Next, across repeated readings, initial codes (extracts
23 of data) were identified and then consolidated into a series of basic themes based on their
24 commonalities. Following this, these basic themes were then condensed over more phases of
25 analysis, resulting in the identification of the eight higher-order themes presented in the
26 findings. These eight themes were then checked for coherence and internal homogeneity by
27 reviewing the codes and examples that comprised each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
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36 We worked both independently and collaboratively across the phases of analysis and across
37 the different sets of data, as a form of investigator triangulation (Decrop, 2004). Each author
38 took a reflexive approach in analysing their own collected data, while the other two acted as
39 'critical outsiders' discussing and assessing the insider's interpretation of the data and
40 providing another perspective (Lofland *et al.*, 2006).
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46 **Findings and Discussion**

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48 Eight themes around notions of power and empowerment were identified. Each will be
49 unpacked in what follows, using excerpts from the data to illustrate them (all names have been
50 changed).
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55 *Platform*

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3 For some groups, the events were seen as a platform, allowing them to have their voices heard
4 or to showcase that which was important to them. The event organisers felt it was their job to
5 provide this platform:
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9 But [Auckland have] got the biggest Pacific community in the world ... and Wellington
10 wants to be able to do something like [their festival]. Not on that scale, but for us, I
11 think we need to be able to give them that platform so that we can celebrate our different
12 dynamic communities that we have here and give them a showcase. (Pasifika Festival
13 organiser)
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18 Field notes also captured deliberate decision-making processes that allowed the community's
19 voice to be showcased:
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22 Jenny is joining us now and talks to Elizabeth about a particular scene that they might
23 have to change a bit. Jenny points out that "we don't HAVE to change it, it's up to
24 you, just let me know." Again, I can sense this special relationship between them.
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26 Before making any changes to the script, Jenny and the others always check back with
27 a member of the community. (Behind the Cane field notes)
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32 This theme speaks to empowerment through engagement and participatory decision-making
33 and indicates the potential of events to work at the top rungs of the ladder of citizen
34 participation (Figure 1): delegated power is at work through the willingness and genuine efforts
35 of the event organisers. It also links strongly to social-structural empowerment through the
36 practice of participatory decision-making and the open flow of information between organisers
37 and the communities they are working with (Spreitzer, 2008).
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43 *Giving/taking ownership*

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46 Event organisers recognised the need for the marginalised groups they were working with to
47 feel ownership of the event, and genuinely strived to allow this:
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50 I just think they feel it's their day, it's their chance to show off their area, and it's
51 their...opportunity to participate as part of being a South Dunedin-ite (South Dunedin
52 Street Festival organiser)
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56 If the story is going to happen, the culture has to bubble out of the ground, it's got to
57 be part of the culture here and that's got to inform everything: the story, the people who
58 do it, the way it's told, all kind of has to bubble out of the community here. And for
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3 them to understand that it belongs to them and that we have a partnership. (Behind the
4 Cane creative team)

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7 We did that the whole way, like “what do you think of the script? What do you think of
8 the music? Here is your story... it’s been realised as a poetic piece of music, like a poem
9 and music fusion. And this was a very tragic moment that happened to you, or a really
10 dark thing that happened to you... What do you think of it? Do you want us to scrap
11 it?”; So, there was always this sort of consultation of putting things in front of them and
12 pulling it back. (Drag Queen’sLand organiser)

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18 Again, this theme illustrates the importance of the social-structural dimension of empowerment,
19 and here it contributes to the achievement of citizen control (the top rung on the participation
20 ladder) (Arnstein, 1969; Spreitzer, 2008). Words such as ‘participation’ and ‘consultation’ are
21 used but are more than tokenistic here: they reflect the deep-seated value systems of the event
22 organisers, who seek to provide the support, information and resources needed for the
23 communities to take ownership.

30 31 *Gaining confidence*

32
33 Event participants gained confidence through learning new skills, exhibiting their work, or
34 performing in public:

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36
37 There’s a bunch of soft skills that people do gain confidence and competence in through
38 doing this work... their posture changes, their eye contact changes, their speech may
39 become clearer or more distinct or more particular. They learn to take turns; they learn
40 to be socially appropriate. They learn [their] lines. (InterACT organiser)

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43
44 I like the little dance group that you saw this morning, one of those little boys two
45 months ago was so shy, he couldn’t... And now look! Here they are, playing for the
46 audience, confident... That’s what it’s all about! It’s about offering people a chance to
47 do something that’s beyond what they believe they are capable of and us being at the
48 bottom of the ladder when they fall and give them the strength to climb up again.
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52
53 (Behind the Cane organiser)

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55
56 However, the events also provided inspiration for spectators and attendees to gain confidence
57 to try something new as a result of seeing others succeeding:

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3 They [the seniors aerobics group] come every year... they are always the biggest hit,
4 because, you know, people see them get up and they go, "I'm going to get up. If they
5 can do it, I can do it". (Pasifika Festival organiser)
6
7

8
9 There's a lot of men in business, you know, but when you're a woman at home on the
10 farm in a rural area it's hard. This Expo might give them the kick they need, they might
11 see all these women and think "Wow, I could do that too!" (Clutha Market and Trade
12 Expo business exhibitor attendee)
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16 These extracts illustrate the events' contribution to the psychological empowerment dimension
17 of competence (Spreitzer, 2008) as well as to linking social capital (Taylor, 2011). Having their
18 talents, skills and expertise valued and made visible gave the event participants confidence and
19 gave event attendees a sense that if others could do it then so could they. Seeing others
20 succeeding or trying something new is an important element of role modelling, particularly for
21 marginalised communities, and this echoes other recent research that has identified events as a
22 potential source of empowerment in this regard (Hassanli *et al.*, 2019).
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30 *Empowering with/through knowledge*

31
32 Knowledge, a contributing factor in social-structural empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008; Stadler,
33 2021) was disseminated through all events, and it was the communities themselves who were
34 in control of that knowledge – and in control of the narratives about themselves:
35
36
37

38 My friends and other fellow students had no idea about the history of the South Sea
39 Islanders, but when they saw this production, they now know and understand. The
40 festival has not only touched the South Sea Islander community but also other non-
41 South Sea Islanders (Behind the Cane attendee)
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46 The cultural events in particular had an explicit focus on knowledge dissemination:
47

48 Diwali in Invercargill is a great event, especially for its ability to bring
49 understanding/tolerance and get rid of racism through the next generation – school
50 groups learn and perform Indian dances for the event, so it teaches the white/non-Indian
51 kids about Indian and other cultures, and the adults that Indian culture is more than
52 butter chicken. (Diwali audience attendee)
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3 Some knowledge that was imparted empowered the marginalised groups themselves, as it
4 helped them understand and navigate the world around them, which could lead to better life
5 outcomes:
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8
9 By the time [the children] are about seven, most parents disconnect from disability
10 support groups. But school doesn't actually tell them what to do next when school ends.
11 So, knowing that, the other important thing is about saying, "Well if we can do this how
12 do we tell other people it's possible?" That's really the purpose of the Festival.
13 (InterACT organiser)
14
15
16

17
18 The event is worthwhile not only for recruiting Pasifika pharmacists and raising
19 awareness of [our] organisation, but also for the conversations [we] have been able to
20 have with event attendees about their health issues. So, it's good from a health
21 education perspective as some may now choose to visit their doctor. (Pasifika Festival
22 stallholder attendee)
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27
28 Phipps (2010, p.230) identified similar empowerment through the dissemination of knowledge
29 to "visitors from the outside" at two indigenous culture events in Australia and Hawaii. He
30 noted the power of the learning and unlearning that happened for such attendees, and the
31 transformative effects of this. Likewise, Stadler (2013; 2021) found that events may play an
32 important role in the creation of new knowledge for organisers, participants and the community
33 alike and, in turn, their empowerment.
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38
39 Again, this provides evidence of the potential for events to facilitate higher levels of community
40 participation and therefore empowerment (Figure 1). The importance of linking social capital
41 is also apparent (Taylor, 2011). Event organisers or others with power obtained through the
42 lived experience of marginalisation shared their knowledge and network connections willingly.
43 They recognised that they could empower others to navigate government or other bureaucracy
44 because of their own first-hand experience and through developing their own community
45 capacities.
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51 52 *Respect*

53
54 Respecting event participants and attendees was important to the organisers as a fundamental
55 human right – but one which was not generally accorded to the groups they were working with,
56 in their everyday lives:
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3 And we respect each other, and then we celebrate the people who are more vulnerable
4 among us are seen, who they're seen to be and what they're seen to do and how that's
5 regarded. And if that's only for three days once a year, that's a good top up, that's a
6 really good boost and reminder going forward. It's like filling your emotional bank
7 account up for quite a long time – it takes ages to drain this stuff out again. (InterACT
8 organiser)
9

10
11 ...the other interesting thing about Bowen is, we tried to get this story about the history
12 of the South Sea Island community into Townsville and Mackay. And both of those
13 towns didn't want it. Whereas Bowen not only embraced it, but they actually gave the
14 opening of the Soundshell, which was really big, and symbolic... so for the council to
15 give that over to the South Sea Island community, is a reflection of the standing that
16 the South Sea Island community have here in Bowen. It's special here in Bowen.
17 (Behind the Cane local council representative)
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27 We argue that respect, as demonstrated here, is one of the dimensions of psychological
28 empowerment: it flows from adopting a truly community-focused, participatory and inclusive
29 approach to event organisation that seeks to work in partnership with the community. This
30 display of mutual trust is also evidence of bonding and linking social capital (Taylor, 2011;
31 Wilks, 2011).
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37 *Pride and affirmation*

38
39 Pride was clearly evidenced in participant observation field notes and in the interviews with
40 event participants, attendees and organisers alike:
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43
44 Definite pride and patriotism in the house when Punjabi women danced, the place
45 went nuts! Lots of cheering and clapping. (Diwali field notes)
46

47
48 It lifts you up – if showing your culture makes you feel good, feel proud, it lifts you
49 up inside. (Pasifika Festival activity provider attendee)
50

51
52 These quotes illustrate the presence of bonding social capital – the social cohesion and sense
53 of celebration fostered by these events was manifest in this pride (Arcodia and Whitford, 2007).
54

55
56 At the InterACT Disability Arts Festival in particular, having their work or performance
57 acknowledged was an affirmation of participants' *ability*, which stood in stark contrast with
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3 their everyday lives that were defined by their *disability* and mirrors Taylor's (2011) notion of
4 capacity development:
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8 So, I think it's just the thrill of the affirmation that you are an artist and that you have
9 achieved a piece of artwork that is of an exhibitable quality...Because there's so little
10 affirmation of your achievements when you've got a disability. You're seen mainly for
11 that disability and not seen for your ability and the Festival celebrates people's abilities
12 rather than their disabilities. (InterACT art exhibition organiser)
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17
18 Event participants were therefore seen (by themselves, the event organisers, and us) to
19 experience a strong sense of meaning, competence, sense of autonomy and impact as a result
20 of the event – all psychological states that foster a sense of empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008).
21
22

23 24 *Freedom to 'be'*

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26 For some participants, these events allowed them freedom from judgement, the freedom to be
27 themselves:
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30
31 The Festival means a lot to participants, it's a place they can come and not be judged,
32 they can just be who they are, they are free. (InterACT volunteer attendee)
33
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36 I'm from a small town and I'm a teacher and everyone knows me, you know, but here
37 I can be ME and have a laugh. (Leisure Marching participant attendee)
38

39
40 Importantly, then, these events were temporary sites of power that provided participants and
41 attendees alike with the autonomy to choose which activities to engage in, and to be able to do
42 so with like-minded or like-bodied others.
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45 46 *Resistance*

47
48 The final theme, but by no means the least important, was that of resistance. Almost all events
49 allowed the marginalised groups to resist and to counter hegemonic discourses and stereotypes:
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52
53 Not just the performances but their culture and arts and crafts and their people and their
54 businesses, but also to a wider Wellington audience so that they can see what's actually
55 happening with our Pacific people and to give them some positive stories as well, and
56 share some of their role models that they have in the Pacific community with
57 mainstream. (Pasifika Festival organiser)
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3 It's important that people realise that women can be in business, that we're just as
4 capable – maybe even more capable! That we can paint, that we can wallpaper. (Clutha
5 Market and Trade Expo business exhibitor attendee)
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8
9 The inclusive approach adopted by event organisers meant a wide variety of people were able
10 to participate as an exhibitor or stallholder, thus the events were a more accurate representation
11 of the communities they sought to serve. This provided the communities with an opportunity
12 to challenge hegemonic stereotypes, whether consciously or not, which supports Cole's (2006)
13 and Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy's (2020) claims that events can be facilitators of
14 empowerment through resistance, even if temporary in nature. This stands in contrast to Clarke
15 and Jepson's (2011) work where the event organisers achieved hegemonic control over
16 knowledge and participation, resulting in a lack of opportunity for minority groups to
17 participate in a meaningful way.
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26 **Theoretical framework for empowerment through events**

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28 Bringing together the themes identified during the analysis with the elements of empowerment
29 discussed in the wider literature, we have developed a theoretical framework that illustrates the
30 process of empowerment through events (Figure 2).
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35 INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE
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39 Psychological empowerment can take the form of what Spreitzer (2008, p.67) refers to as
40 "societal outcomes of empowerment." Within this study, these outcomes were identified as:
41 consumption of the knowledge being produced and seeing the respect and pride of marginalised
42 attendees. The positive flow-on aspects were increased understanding of the marginalised
43 communities, which led to overcoming (negative) stereotyping, developing new friendships,
44 and having confidence to speak out on behalf of marginalised communities.
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50 Overall, the framework proposes that the four socio-structural elements of empowerment need
51 to be in place pre-event (through the creation, design and organisation of the event) in order
52 for the five psychological empowerment outcomes for event attendees to be realised, thus
53 suggesting that empowerment is something that can be consciously created through events. We
54 believe this framework will enable event organisers to both understand and deliberately plan
55 for the productive use of power, which can reaffirm values and help them achieve important
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3 event aims and objectives. It also has potential to be a useful tool for researchers to evaluate
4 the elements of empowerment at events.
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9 **Conclusions**

10
11 Events for marginalised groups and communities often have empowerment as an objective,
12 whether implicit or explicit, and it is thus important to understand how this may be achieved.
13 In the past, however, research at the nexus of power and events has focused on the negative
14 (Batty, 2016; Benfari *et al.*, 1986; Clarke and Jepson, 2011). Our paper extends and reframes
15 this understanding of power in an events context, in order to identify the processes that facilitate
16 the empowerment of marginalised groups, and in so doing makes valuable theoretical and
17 practical contributions.
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25 *Theoretical implications*

26
27 Empowerment theory, which has traditionally been the domain of organisational and
28 management studies (Buchanan and Badham, 2020; Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer,
29 2008), is offered here as a new lens to explain how events may be used to empower
30 marginalised groups and communities. This approach allows us to argue that empowerment
31 through events *is* possible but requires an explicit focus on creating both social-structural and
32 psychological dimensions of empowerment. However, the theoretical framework (Figure 2)
33 also suggests that without attention being directed to the social-structural dimensions during
34 the conceptualisation, planning and delivery of the event, it is unlikely that the psychological
35 benefits of empowerment will be as strong (Spreitzer, 2008).
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44 While some of the elements of our framework (e.g. providing a platform, giving ownership,
45 making voices heard) have previously been explored in an events context (Arcodia and
46 Whitford, 2007; Hassanli *et al.*, 2019, 2020; Stadler, 2013; Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy, 2020;
47 Walters, 2019), studies have focused predominantly on attendees, on a single element, and not
48 specifically on empowerment. This paper is the first to provide a holistic understanding of the
49 *process* of empowerment, and to provide evidence that psychological empowerment accrues
50 not only to event attendees from marginalised groups, but also to volunteers, stallholders and
51 organisers. As such, the framework contributes a new and more critical lens to reframe notions
52 of power in event studies.
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Practical implications

This work also has value for event organisers, who can use our framework to both understand *and* deliberately plan for the productive use of power. As mentioned above, empowerment is often a goal of events held in, by or for marginalised groups. However, there may be uncertainty about how to go about planning for these beneficial outcomes, and what designing an ‘empowering event’ might look like in practice. Using the framework to guide event conceptualisation, design, development and delivery will help organisers focus their efforts and decision-making in ways that will maximise the opportunities for beneficial event outcomes for all attendees (participants, volunteers, stallholders, sponsors and others). It is argued that a better understanding of the interrelation between social-structural and psychological elements in the process of empowerment will allow event organisers to deliberately plan for these benefits, rather than simply waiting for them to occur as impacts. In addition, local government policy in many parts of the Western world is increasingly moving towards a discourse of community well-being: the framework may therefore be used to underpin policies and programmes that encourage organisers of public events (those funded and/or hosted by local councils) to create social benefit through events (Mair and Duffy, 2015). In this sense, events can be seen not only as a catalyst for the development of individual empowerment, but participation in events is also an important factor in capacity development and the enhancement of social capital at the organisational and community levels, and hence contributes to societal empowerment on a much broader scale.

Limitations and future research

Events research is not without its difficulties. In-the-moment interviews had to be carried out during gaps in the programming to avoid interrupting event attendees’ experience, but even then, not all attendees were interested in chatting. At some events we encountered language/communication barriers, meaning we were not able to include all voices in the research. We also acknowledge the limitations of semi-structured interviews around the sensitive topic of marginalisation: the many ‘positive’ stories told by participants could have been shaped by the research relationship and by what event organisers deemed appropriate to say/not say. Lastly, the nature of qualitative research means the findings are specific to the groups and events in the study, and we make no claims of generalisability to the wider population.

Moving forward, we encourage other researchers to apply and test the framework at events in other locations and for other groups and communities, and to refine it further. We also call for researchers to investigate the connections between different elements of the framework to provide deeper insight into empowerment at events. It would also be useful to identify examples of best practice for each of the socio-structural elements, which will add value for event organisers and local government event policymakers. To progress the practical contribution of this research, the next step is trialling the framework with event organisers, and modifying it based on their feedback. We also envisage developing the framework into an evaluation tool, with a series of indicators for each of the contributing factors, which will enable event organisers to measure their success in creating an event that empowers its stakeholders. This in turn will provide evidence of social outcomes that funders often require, hence extending the usefulness of the research for event practitioners.

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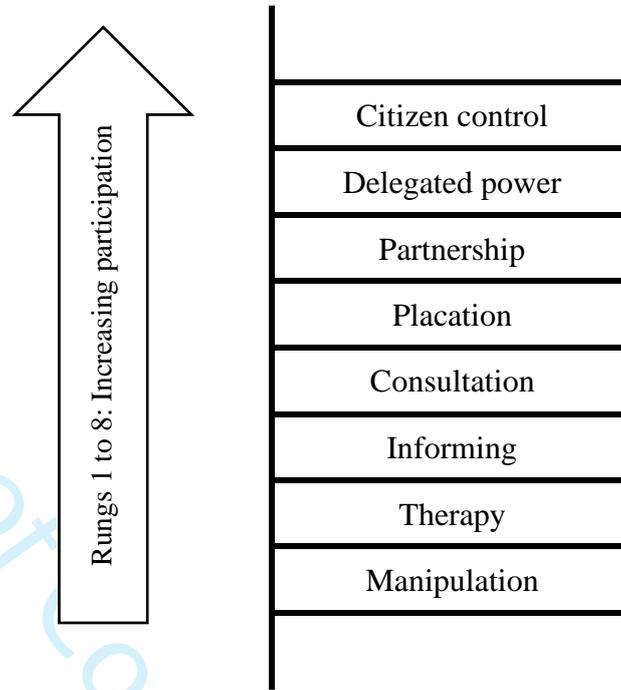


Figure 1: Ladder of citizen participation (Adapted from Arnstein, 1969).

Name of event	Location	Est.	Event organiser	No. event organiser semi-structured interviews	No. event attendee in-the-moment interviews
Clutha Market and Trade Expo	New Zealand	2017	Clutha Women in Business Network	1	12
Leisure Marching Nationals	New Zealand	1991	Individual host teams	1	28
Pasifika Festival	New Zealand	2006	Wellington City Council	1	11
Diwali Festival of Light	New Zealand	2018	Indian Community in Southland	1	18
InterACT Disability Arts Festival	New Zealand	2011	InterACTing Trust	2	17
South Dunedin Street Festival	New Zealand	2011	South D Street Festival Committee	3	12
Behind the Cane	Australia	2011	Queensland Music Festival and Whitsunday Regional Council	7	11
Drag Queen'sLand	Australia	2011	Queensland Music Festival, The Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts and Brisbane City Council	3	6

Table 1: Events selected for inclusion in the study.

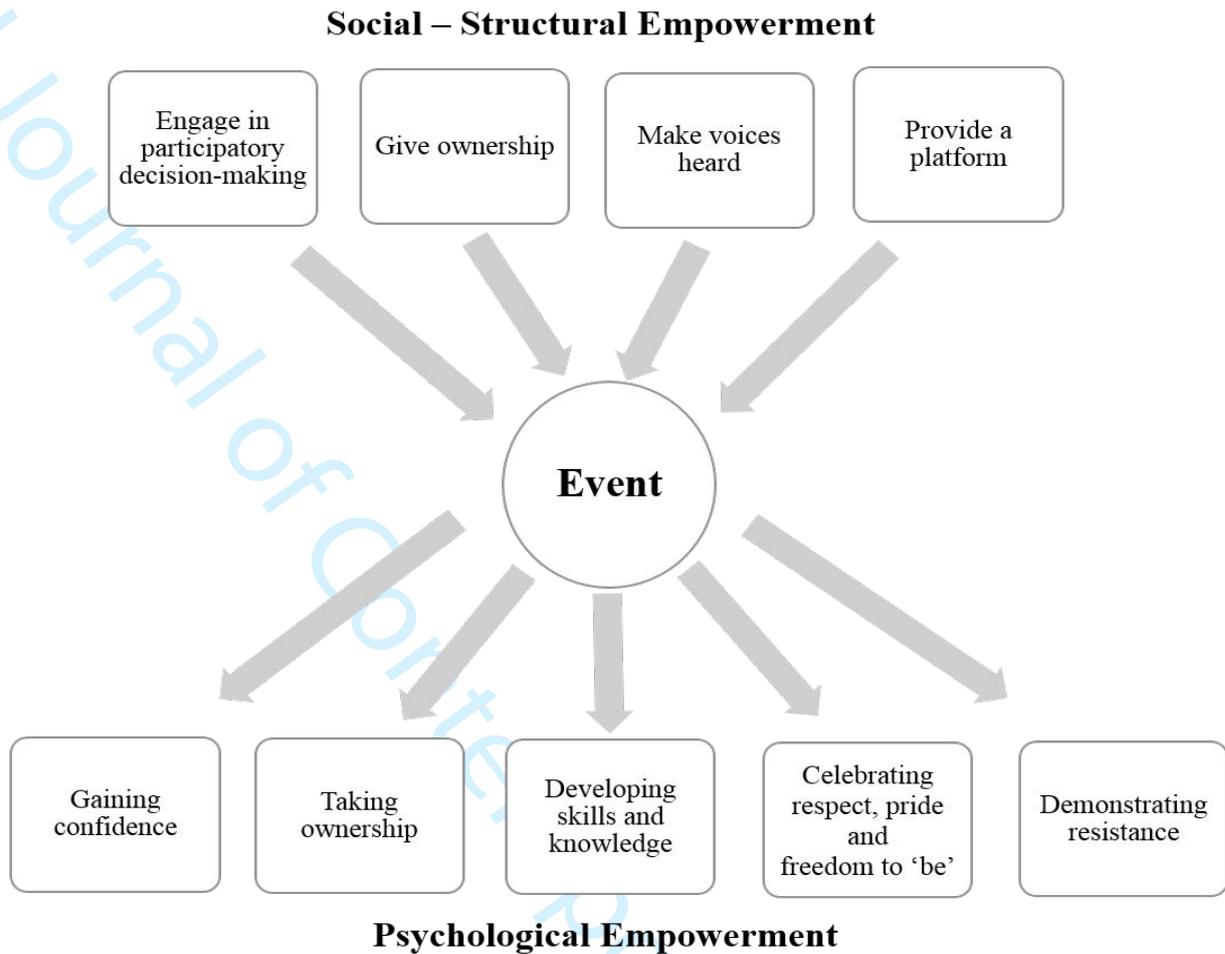


Figure 2: Theoretical framework for empowerment through events.