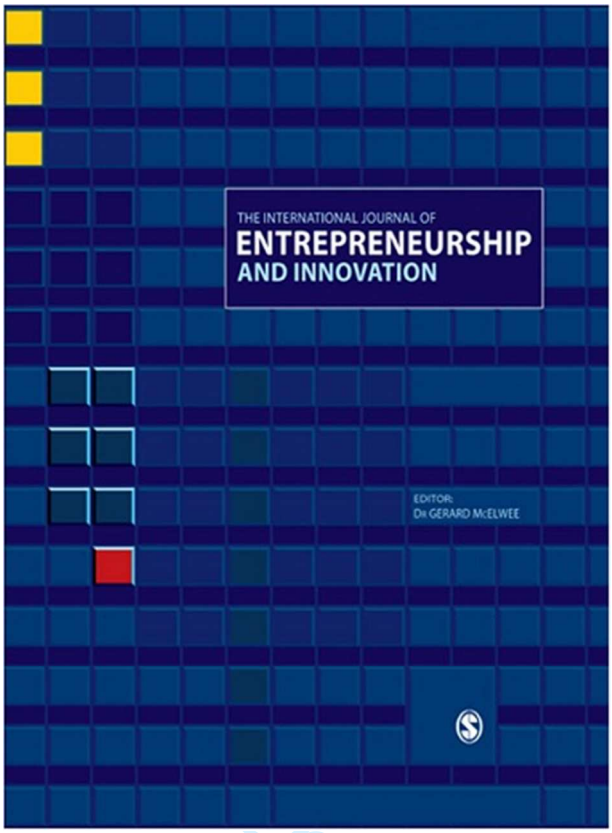
At work and play: business events as entrepreneurial spaces

Crowther, P., Orefice, C. and Beard, C.



At work and play; business events as entrepreneurial spaces

Journal:	*The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*
Manuscript ID	IEI-17-0064.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Business Events, Play, Space, Enterepreneurial, Event Design
Abstract:	There is inadequate literature examining, and illustrating, the integration of play and business events and how this facilitates entrepreneurial opportunities. Business events are distinct from the patters of ordinary life and increasingly offer participants an "invitation to play", encouraging socialisation and trust. This paper examines the role of play in the design of business events and how this can enable entrepreneurial outcomes. Through examination of diverse, but related, literature and three contrasting, empirically based, case studies this paper illustrates how event creators take an increasingly entrepreneurial approach. These cases range from a charity event with participants sleeping with the homeless on a city's streets, a major flooring manufacturer designing events to outsource

	innovation, and an imaginative event activity termed 'coffee and papers'. Designing events that fuse, rather than polarize, play and work enables business event settings, and activities, which trigger entrepreneurial outcomes. This paper adds to the embryonic literature and concludes by identifying four principles which underlie the effectual facilitation of play in a business event setting.

At Work and Play;
Business events as entrepreneurial spaces

Introduction

Cities are both containers for many thousands of events each year and also the canvas upon which these events are designed and experienced (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Outcomes are far reaching, and their legacies prolific in shaping the physical and social landscape and also influencing the economic prosperity of organisations and people (Foley et al., 2014; Richards, 2013). The extent, to which these event experiences engage and inspire participants, and specifically facilitate future innovation and entrepreneurial opportunity, impinges, to a large extent, upon the nature of their design.

Planned events are bound together by key traits of which designed experience is foremost (Berridge, 2012), they also include; purposefulness (Crowther, 2014), transience, uniqueness, programme, and congregation (Getz, 2012; Goldblatt, 2005). Business events are distinct from other event types, with the participation of attendees usually determined by their status as employees or business owners, and not private individuals. Although there is no agreed definition of business events (Rogers, 2013) conventional terminology categorises them as meetings, incentive travel, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), while others refer more generally to 'business tourism' (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001). Their design is evolving with the adoption of more free-thinking and experiential formats aligned with the delivery of specific objectives (Berridge, 2012; Crowther, 2014). Henceforth the term business event is increasingly inclusive of other much more experiential formats, such as festivals, competitions, and brands creating their own

product visitor attractions (Wood, 2009). These more progressive approaches are partly a response to the challenge of attention scarcity cited by Richards (2013) and the imperative to create moment of focussed mutual energy among select groupings of people.

Business events are conceived as an intentional disruption to time and space and distinct from the patters of ordinary life (Patterson and Getz, 2013; Turner, 1969), offering opportunities for knowledge exchange, problem solving, understanding customers, markets and competitors (Maskell et al., 2006; Schuldt and Bathelt, 2011). Each of these can be considered as a precursor to innovation and entrepreneurial strategy (Drucker, 2007) as they contribute to opportunity recognition, an important topic of debate in entrepreneurship literature (Hansen et al., 2016). This paper offers a novel perspective on the process of opportunity recognition, arguing that by 'blurring' work and play (Hechavarria and Welter, 2015) through adept and inventive event design, it is possible to harness the potential of business events as a space where entrepreneurial opportunities are created or discovered. Starting from the premise that events are designed to induce settings and contexts which heighten attention, and create social space for bonding and elicit certain moods and behaviours, it demonstrates that the tradition of passive audiences and didactic delivery is outdated (Nelson, 2009). There is increased acceptance of the virtue of much more engaging formats offering participants an "invitation to play" (Foley et al., 2014: p60). The intense and instantaneous fusion of playing while working blurs boundaries, challenging the archetypal dichotomy of play and work, or sacred and profane (Belk et al., 1989). Such paradoxical design is advantageous in creating freer and more agreeable settings through which business people can coalesce and mutually prosper (Crowther, 2010).

There is inadequate literature examining, and illustrating, the integration of play and business events (Jonson et al., 2015) and no research was found connecting this to the facilitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. Therefore to address these gaps in the literature, and contribute to theory development, the paper focuses on three research questions.

1. What is the role of play in the creation of entrepreneurial outcomes during business events
2. What are the characteristics of a playful event environment
3. How does the physical space influence playfulness in an event context

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Firstly the literature relating to events design and playfulness is analysed to understand how it contributes to the development of entrepreneurial and innovation opportunities. Then the research methods are described and the three case studies are introduced; ranging from a charity event with participants sleeping with the homeless on a city's streets, a major flooring manufacturer designing events to outsource innovation, and a playful event activity which has been successfully implemented in events across the world stimulating collaborative and creative dialogue. The findings section provides an analysis of the case studies, emerging from which are four principles, outlined in the conclusion. Finally, there is a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications, limitations of the study, and identifying areas for future research.

Literature

Events as opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship

To fully understand the utility of play as an event design tactic that facilitates entrepreneurship and innovation opportunities it is necessary to explore the underlying intent, and future oriented consequence, of business events for individuals and organisations. Business events are characterised by networks of social relations that shape their actors' present and future activities (Foley et al., 2014) thus intensifying relations with employees, clients, and wider stakeholders. The relationship with entrepreneurship is established with events providing "a rich arena for processes of knowledge exchange and acquisition where small observations or hints may lead firms into new lines of thinking and change their scope for creating novel and profitable combinations of existing ideas and capabilities" (Maskell et al., 2006: p1001). Business events can thus be conceived as temporary sophisticated knowledge ecosystems where creative competitive advantages are augmented through problem solving and idea generation (Bathelt and Cohendet, 2014; Schuldt and Bathelt, 2011).

Freire-Gibb and Lorentzen (2011) provide a useful illustration of this through the example of a lighting festival in a Danish small city which has become a platform for local entrepreneurs. Born as a cultural event in an effort to diversify the local struggling industrially-based economy, the event morphed into a business event that created a knowledge network of local lighting companies, the local technical college, other businesses such as banks and local service providers, taking advantage of their geographical proximity but also reaching some international exposure. The festival included a lighting design camp for students and an international conference, and offered opportunities to test and

showcase prototypes of new products, to promote local services and, most importantly, to extend the network of lighting firms at national and international level.

This case study demonstrates how business events can offer the space, time, activities and socialisation for both opportunity discovery and creation. Entrepreneurship opportunities are characterised as the result of a single moment of insight or the result of a creative process (Hansen et al., 2016). They may be discovered intentionally or serendipitously (Dew, 2009; Fiet, 2007) and the underlying debate of whether entrepreneurial opportunities are out there to be discovered or are instead emerging through interaction with the environment has characterised the entrepreneurship literature for a long time with some authors claiming that the two perspectives are in fact complementary (Hechavarria and Welter, 2015). Hansen et al. (2016) developed a framework to organise and synthesise the component parts of entrepreneurial opportunity, identifying moderators as key contextual (or environmental) factors such as resources, technologies or ideas which entrepreneurs find themselves exposed to. Events are occasions which assimilate many and varied moderators - and therein instigate outcomes such as a new business idea, a new product or business opportunity, or a step along a development process. Event designers can deliberately affect this environment and can take advantage of the short term proximity to provide spaces and activities for both finding existing opportunities and forming new ones (Hechavarria and Welter, 2015)

Geographical location and physical distance of a firm's partners are analysed by Fitjar et al. (2013) to explore how they affect innovation opportunities. They emphasise how the innovation process is characterised by social complex interactions of knowledge sharing across individuals and organisations, and the entrepreneurial activity is the capacity to seize

these opportunities and navigating threats. Geographical proximity and the physical spaces where events take place are important in facilitating these knowledge ecosystems as they provide the setting for socialisation, (Fjelstul et al., 2009) engender the required trust and therefore coalesces collaborators. In this context the expedient role of playful settings encourages a more casual and creative environment within which the desired relationships can be built (Foley et al., 2014).

Designing opportunities for social bonding

Socialisation and trust, and the creation of a shared social reality, underpin the potential for entrepreneurial outcomes through events (Foley at al., 2014). In this inherently sociable space people, have the potential to be, detached from their own personal and social constraints, finding themselves in an artificial environment of temporary equality which enables a freedom to experiment and engage in creativity (Simmel, 1964). It is argued that purposeful event design is crucial to facilitate this and significant time and spaces, within the event schedule, to allow participants to establish their shared meanings, or 'we-feeling', based on a commonly shared social reality that breaks away power structures and allows the sharing of individual values and perspectives (Wolf and Troxler, 2008).

The integral role of design in shaping the event experience is palpable. Berridge's (2012) view is that event experiences should be created using an integrated design-based process, defining event design as a purposeful activity aimed at solving a problem. Importantly it goes beyond the customary tangible aspects of setting, theme, décor, atmospherics, and servicescape and into 'the realm where a planned and deliberate process is undertaken to reach specific outcomes' (Berridge, 2012: p276). Hence interwoven design principles, such as 'play', are established, such as in the case of the Marketing Bureau in the city of

Copenhagen. With the aim of promoting the city as a backdrop for effective events, they introduced the 'meetovation' concept, a meeting design approach underpinned by notions of creative setup (akin to play), active involvement, responsible thinking, and local inspiration (Visit Denmark, 2016). These principles are all encompassing and permeate each aspect of their event design process, demonstrating how play extends beyond singular activities within an event and could become an underlying philosophy central to the achievement of desired outcomes such as entrepreneurial and innovation opportunities.

In achieving such outcomes Brown (2005) stresses the influence of the emotional and psychological responses of participants which, stimulated by design, allows 'meaning making' in events. It is within this context that the significance of a more playful approach can be perceived, particularly when reviewing the analysis of Proyer (2012) who establishes the relationship between playfulness and positive emotions and also intrinsic motivation (Amabile et al., 1994). Constructively engagement in play allows participants to express, regain, or reconstruct a sense of self (Kim and Jamal, 2007), and also allows moderating factors to be captured and absorbed, as in Hansen et al.'s (2016) framework. Henceforth play is positioned as an innovative stratagem for event creators in the context of facilitating entrepreneurial outcomes.

Play as an innovative event design tool

Jonson et al (2015) and Getz (2012) discuss the commonality between events and play, specifically pinpointing 'out of the ordinary' as shared characteristic of both. Similarly Veal et al. (2012: p19) reflect upon how play involves removal from the "literal, mundane, everyday-life world". The integration of playful settings and activities provides stark contrast to the more serious connotation of work (Yu et al., 2007), yet the facilitation of these

engenders productive responses such as; activity, humour, spontaneity, unpredictability, impulse, cheer, energy, and sociability (Barnett, 2007). This has similarities with Csikszentmihalyi (1975) theory of flow which also includes the idea that play should provide a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment occurring as the result of a balance between a challenging environment and the individual skills that are being used to overcome the challenge. Such responses, and associated behaviours, underpin the interrelationship between play and events, heightening the potential of the event to prompt the entrepreneurial and innovation opportunities where partnerships are formed (Hjorth, 2004).

The embedding of play in events provides a safe environment for experimentation and the thus generation of creative ideas, promoting the formation of social groups that have no ulterior motive for taking part other than having fun (Jonson et al., 2015). Fontijn and Hoonhout (2007), building on the work of Malone and Lepper's (1987), discuss how fun (as a by-product of play) is an intrinsic motivation for learning, corresponding to three core sources; accomplishment, discovery and bonding. The first two being personalised outcomes, derive from curiosity and a drive to gain knowledge by exploring new things, whilst the third, bonding, relates to interpersonal intrinsic motivations (Malone and Lepper, 1987). Bonding requires a balancing of competition and cooperation aligned with some sort of recognition.

An illustration of how fun is integrated as an enhancement factor in events is presented by Raftopoulos and Waltz (2013) where an entertaining crowd sourcing exercise was introduced as part of a 'game design festival' to demonstrate how problem solving exercises can be engaging and encourage collaborative ideation. Interestingly, one finding of the

exercise was that participants engaged with the activity primarily because of its entertaining characteristics rather than the problem solving challenge. So, in this instance, the fun component became more relevant to participants than the actual contribution to the achievement of the event objectives; of course the objectives were inadvertently achieved.

Playfulness and physical spaces

Fontijn and Hoonhout (2007) discuss the importance of fun enhancement factors which they identify as fantasy, aesthetics and physicality. Two key elements of the Meetovation concept introduced earlier (Visit Denmark, 2016) are creative setup and local inspiration, which explicitly rely on the use of aesthetic and physical elements such as existing facilities and outdoor spaces to immerse participants in more authentic and conducive experiences that enhance learning and socialisation. Their annual MIND Conference is an example of how the city can be used as a playful space with, for example, event participants communicating through silent breakout sessions in public parks, adventuring through the streets of the city on rickshaws, relaxing and dining in the home of local residents, and cycling to preserve the electricity while they learn about sustainability. Such design contributes to the achievement of event outcomes by deliberately constructing the relationship not only between participant and participant, but also between participants and the environment.

Hence physicality, aesthetics, and also the insertion of fantasy are designed with clear intent as is evidenced through wider studies, such as Beard and Wilson (2013), who examined the advantageous use of simulation for organisational and individual learning and development, and also Bateson's (1972) development of the 'play frame'. However, the purposeful crafting of event settings and activities by those designing the event, must be matched by

endeavour and skill from active (not passive) participants in learning the norms and understanding the goals of the activity. Once this is achieved the social groups that are formed tend to persist once the playful activity is over (Mainemelis et al, 2010; Jonson et al, 2015).

Summary of key literature themes

The literature discussed, reveals a clear rationale for an integration of play both as a principle guiding the design of business events and more tangibly in the physical layout, aesthetics, activities and so forth. Furthermore the role of playful events, and their many dimensions, as moderators precipitating entrepreneurial discovery is noteworthy particularly, but not limited to, social bonding, and forums for ideas generation. The three case studies introduced in the methodology section, and discussed in the results, provide a rich illustration of the integration of play within event design.

Methods

Plummer (2010) discusses the spatial and contextual (in addition to temporal) complexity of entrepreneurship research, with Zahra (2007) suggesting that the specific context requires suitable methods. Exploratory case studies are thus favourable, enabling the development of new theories and providing an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). To explore these cases an ethnographic approach is adopted; reflecting the subjectivist views of the authors and the belief that research should be designed to reveal a richer and more holistic picture (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). The three case study events are examined in the Findings and Discussion section below and in each of the cases one of the authors of this paper, who is also a consultant, was embedded within

the setting; in the case of *Interface* in the dual role of participant and facilitator, *NHS* as facilitator, in the final case of *CAP* co-researching the event with one of the events participants.

The approach, to examining these cases, is consistent with the view that a hunt for knowledge is best achieved through highly participative and inductive research methods (Gill and Johnson, 2010: 233). Henceforth an ethnographic approach is utilised involving observation and the keeping of a field diary, or research log, as a way of recording the events and experiences before, during, and after. The researcher was immersed in the events settings, interacting, observing, and also questioning (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), and undertaking the role of "observer as participant" (Saunders, 2003). Analysis of the varied records of the event (field diary, pictures, and participant feedback) enabled what Geertz (1973) calls a 'thick description'.

Purposive sample, criteria based and non probabilistic, was selected to provide information-rich cases, which enable learning about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990); namely entrepreneurship and play. Given the authors role implanted within the events, Spradley's (1980) four key dimensions (for ethnographic research) were achieved; simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, and permissibleness. Content analysis from the field diary, and associated notes, was undertaken to manage and classify the qualitative data. Particularly the reflections of the researcher were given emphasis in the analysis process to enrich the more superficial information and therefore reveal meaning (Berg, 1997). This is important given Zahra's (2007: 445) critique of some entrepreneurship research that '...readers have no sense of what the researchers have

observed, felt or thought', and also the need to access the more experiential dimension of events, given the studies focus (Holloway et al., 2010).

Inherent within the approach is acceptance of the assumption that researchers collect data, analyse it, and also actively influence the research process (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Piekkari et al., 2009). Careful analysis of the emergent data and artefacts enhances reliability, ensuring the interpretations make sense and are of use (Gummesson, 2000; Yin, 2014). In the case of this study the participation of the other two authors in the analysis of the experiences and reflections of the involved author is notable in moderating partiality (Morgan and Smircich 1980), and also mitigating risk of retrospective sense making (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Therein data was coded leading to the development of descriptive and analytical themes which were co-developed through examination of the data and artefacts. Ultimately this process underpinning the development of the four principles detailed in the conclusion.

Key principles of anonymity and confidentiality, as identified by Holloway et al (2010), have been adhered to in the information revealed. Gatekeepers, within each organisation, are aware of the intention to use the cases for publication and appropriate permissions are in place.

Each case is initially introduced below and examined and analysed in the below section.

Interface – Between 2009 and 2011 Interface, a global floor textile company, outsourced innovation by using a network of contacts to bring together a selective group of people from across Europe who had a reputation of being very creative, and committed to environmental sustainability. The entrepreneurs took part in, and helped shape, a

succession of playful events in unique and enticing spaces to support their immersion in an intense co-creative process that resulted in the design of a range of new products.

NHS – In 2012 a group of senior managers working for the National Health Service in the UK were concerned by workplace design and its adverse influence upon organisational culture. Their shared interest led to a series of development events with a view to investigating this further and designing recommendations and solutions for new work spaces. An innovative, and indulgent, 'coffee and papers' format was adopted.

Cathedral Archer Project (CAP) – In 2014 the *CAP,* a Sheffield UK based charity for the homeless, designed an atypical event in order to inspire the achievement of objectives relating to awareness, benefactors, and fundraising. The Sleep Out event involved staff from their partner organisation, HSBC, 'playing' the role of a homeless person and spending a night on the streets chaperoned by a homeless buddy.

Findings and Discussion

This section has been structured to reflect, and respond to, the research questions posed in the introduction.

Role of play in the creation of entrepreneurial outcomes

Interface quite literally dispatched invitations to play' through their network of contacts. More than twenty recognized thinkers from Europe, including both natural and social scientists, all passionate about innovation and the environment, were invited to engage in expenses paid, and play inspired events - by recommendation. Each received personalised invitations to join the European Innovation Team (EIT) and participate in the co-design of future groundbreaking product solutions. Therein *Interface* successfully produced an

outsourced knowledge ecosystem (Schuldt and Bathelt, 2011) and live action moderator (Hansen et al., 2016), as a stimulus for entrepreneurial ideas. Over forty significant ideas were generated and developed to varying degrees. The ideas ranged from resin-based floors poured onto objects such as sweats or pebbles, carpets that light up when walked on, breathable carpets, and educational flooring with symbols and numbers embedded within floor tiles.

Interface's proposition to participants was intriguing, as was CAP's who offered a highly experiential, and somewhat unnerving and exigent, night on the streets. This event targeted objectives such as; stimulating PR and social media buzz, increasing fundraising / benefactors, and also cultivating their collaboration with HSBCs. Through a significant disruption to the patterns of ordinary life, the attendees gain new knowledge and changed attitudes, becoming vigorous advocates for the charity and collaborators in identifying future opportunities for the charity.

Jonson et al.'s (2015) notion of how play inspires experimentation, and thus generation of creative ideas and intent, is palpable in the *Interface* and *NHS* cases. For the hard pressed executives from the *NHS* the invitation to play was a significant departure from the norms of both everyday working life and previous event attendance (Turner, 1969). Colleagues engagement was instantaneously heightened when they were surreally invited to find a personal space to relax, quite literally 'put their feet up', and be steadily inspired by carefully selected reading material. Their reaction to such uncharacteristic setting and activity was stark, encapsulated by one chief executive who, sat in her stocking feet surrounded by strawberries coated in chocolate, said: *'I am in heaven. I never have the time to read any more. I have lost the power to think or read with any depth these days...I am*

enjoying this experience so much!'. This playful activity bestowed a dreamlike, yet industrious, environment within which to be - a symbolic place that signified time for concentration, and emphasised the importance of such edification as a justifiable extension of everyday work (Yu et al., 2007). Similarly Veal et al. (2012: p19) reflect upon how play involves removal from the "literal, mundane, everyday-life world".

Both *Interface* and the *NHS* gained significant innovations as a result of the events, indeed NHS executive were inspired to incorporate in their future investments sensory spaces where staff could escape and be immersed in their clinical reading and also launched an internal campaign to endorse and encourage protected time and space for clinical reading, thinking and sharing. The fleeting nature of the playful paradox was evident in sparking creativity and enhancing relationships and entrepreneurship opportunities (Hansen et al., 2016; Fitjar et al., 2013).

Characteristics of a playful event environment

The participants' awareness of the transient nature of the event experience is a conspicuous characteristic of playful environments and their capacity to facilitate knowledge sharing and creation activities (Maskell et al., 2006). The role of the event designer is to take advantage of this short term proximity to orchestrate as many of these opportunities as possible so that innovative ideas are discovered or created (Hechavarria and Welter, 2015). In the NHS case participants were invited to find a personal space to relax, and their experience was carefully managed through the provision of specific foods, drinks, and props so as to enhance the essential sensory and emotional experiential dynamic (Nelson, 2009).

Immersing participants in the event experience and engaging several core human dimensions, through play, is a powerful tool for event designers. As well as the participant sense of being and belonging, discussed above; sensorial, affective, cognitive, and conative aspects are involved (Beard, 2014). In *CAP*, the act of physically going with the homeless person to get bedding from the commercial dustbins that contain large sheets of cardboard known as 'cardboard city', is a significant ritualistic component of the experience that immersed participants senses as well as affectively. Perhaps the depth of realism of this experience is best captured in this reflection from a participant; 'Here was this laddy, all dishevelled and everything, put his arms around me and gave me a big hug and said "I bloody love you I do" and I said come on then I'll buy you a cup of tea. What amazed me was that here was me in my business outfit and my suit and all the rest of it heading to meetings, posh briefcase and here was this laddy with his mangy dog giving me a hug in the middle of the street'.

In all three cases the events were designed to create conditions for specific orchestrated activities to combine with serendipitous discoveries as discussed by Dew (2009). These irregular activities, distinct from the patterns of ordinary life (Turner, 1969) were unexpectedly calming, stimulating high levels of engagement at the same time. In NHS, for instance, the solo experience of reading the paper was followed by collaborative conversational, facilitated in a similarly playful manner, to generate ideas. In the Interface case brainstorming, on an ambitious scale, was orchestrated by facilitators through playful collaborative sketching, imagining, dreaming, talking, reading, presenting, and also walking. All linked to focus on enjoyment and inspiring imagination (Jonson et al., 2015) about possible sustainable futures. As a result there was a strong sense of trust and belonging

within the group leading to the development of an extensive range of innovative commercial ideas.

Physical space and playfulness

The discussion above shows that in all cases the purposeful creation of playful circumstances was conducive to the cultivation of a social space (Fjestul et al., 2009), as participants experienced a sense of belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and became absorbed in mutual commitment to the cause. This in turn generated further ideas and contributions towards the creation of new products (Interface), new work spaces (NHS), and charitable initiatives that took place after the event (CAP).

The purposeful creation of playful physical activities and spaces facilitates the creation of temporary communities of individuals propelling them into a freer and safer environment which encourages risk-taking and exploration (Wearing, 1998); for example Interface utilised unusual spaces like circular room in the turret of a tower, and talking journeys around outdoor grounds known as Socratic Walks. CAP arranged that the homeless person take the group to the area known as 'cardboard city', to get their bedding for the night from the skips at the back of city stores. Thanks to the physical proximity in unusual settings, participants got to know each other in a different context or social role and created a shared social space that was distinct from their usual daily experience and provided opportunities for bonding and value sharing (Veal et al., 2012; Wolf and Troxler, 2008).

Fantasy, aesthetics and physicality (Fontijn and Hoonhout, 2007) were prominent in the integrated design features of all three cases, with an emphasis upon out of ordinary and enticing spaces. *Interface* demonstrated a consistent approach to unlikely settings, whether

these are city or countryside, futuristic or intensely green, and with bizarre furniture, including for example straw bales as the environmental theme resonated, combined with the intent to create a stimulating environment. Equally, for the NHS executives, the atmosphere was enhanced by indulgent and stimulating smells and tastes; on one occasion the smell of fresh coffee and croissants, faint background piano music and a log fire was utilised to enhance the essential sensory and emotional experiential dynamic (Nelson, 2009). The influence of the designer in shaping the physicality and ambience of the event is conspicuous in influencing mood, creating an affective state known as 'relaxed alertness', the psychological flow state (reference) as a precondition to creative and collaborative thinking. The city spatial dynamics and the theatrical experience are also a significant element in CAP, highlighting how spaces define the memories associated with the experience. The soup kitchens, cathedral, doorways, and sheltered places were some of the significant places referred to in the participant data. The authentic city at night; dark and sometimes very noisy with revellers emptying out of nightclubs, cold floors in the doorway of a department store, is a simultaneously beautiful and scary place. Experiencing a city, that participants know so well, but from a perverse perspective was disturbing and humbling for them as indicated by this quote; '….and it just sort of makes you realise how fine the line is between you know, what most of us have and what some others don't.'

Conclusion

As indicated throughout the above, noteworthy connections exist between business events, which are ubiquitous in cities, and play. This paper has exemplified many instances of distinct playful settings and activities in the design of events; however it has, more pervasively, specified the value of a playful philosophy underlying the design of business

events and therefore impinging upon their many and varied design aspects. It has illustrated the interrelationships between playful design and trust and sociality, and henceforth how these features are recognised as precursors for entrepreneurial outcomes. The case examples demonstrate this multifaceted relationship and how the cultivation of a playful tenor is a catalyst for opportunity recognition and the creation or discovery of entrepreneurial outcomes.

The extent to which playful experiences within a business event context are socially (with other people), emotionally (feelings), environmentally (space/place/more-than-human world) constructed is significant and all three case studies demonstrate notable aspects of each. They each highlight how playfulness has meaningful application to business events and provide additional insights into what makes play such an effective tool for successful event creation (Malone and Lepper, 1987; Proyer, 2012). Realising the possibilities of play in business events enable learning (Mainemelis, et al., 2010; Maskell et al., 2006) and relationships (Foley et al., 2014; Wearing, 1998), motivation and positivity (Glynn and Webster, 1993; Yuet al., 2007), which each trigger innovation and creativity (Barnett, 2007; Glynn and Webster, 1992). Clearly the shaping of playful event settings which awaken the individual's inner self and therein promote experimentation (Jonson et al., 2015) are worthy.

Integral within the above is a destabilising of the notion that event creators should be active and imaginative whereas attendees are passive recipients. This outdated tenet has been superseded by a healthy recognition of the important of co-creation and experience facilitation; indeed the marked role is design conditions where participants engage and share knowledge, values and experiences (Getz, 2012). Henceforth playfulness is fostered

by a fusion of attendees' individual qualifications and preparations and the properties of the design (Strandvad and Pedersen, 2014).

In conclusion to this study, and research questions 1-3, four emergent event design principles are identified. This contribution also responds to Jonson et al.'s (2015), and Proyer's (2012), appeal for research on the conditions that allow and also hinder playfulness.

The first principle is to craft 'challenging but safe environments' which will extend participants in ways which are oriented towards the events purposes, but in contexts that are, in the view of Huizinga (1980), real and not real, pretend and not pretend, at the same time. So, within the boundaries provided by the event creator, participant's individualities can surface and active contributions can be facilitated, which may lead to the discovery or creation of innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities.

This underpins the second principle, which is to facilitate a 'shared social reality for participants'. When participants enter a temporary state of affective bonding, they inadvertently realise the latent socialisation possibilities, which act as a pre-requisite for meaningful knowledge sharing and creation. Once this shared reality is achieved, participants can also be encouraged to evolve their own parameters for playful activities with the event creator progressively conceding control, but maintaining an overarching sense of purpose.

The third principle is the 'imaginative use of space', whether formal or informal, and indeed indoor or outdoor. As illustrated by all the three case studies, space, layout and facilities do not only provide the backdrop of the event experience but are integral influencers in the

creation of immersive playfulness that is conducive to a state of bonding and the resultant identification of entrepreneurial opportunities.

The final consideration relates to the 'challenging boundaries' and the integral role of the event creators and facilitators in setting the modus operandi. This includes the temporal, spatial, and procedural parameters for the playful activities balancing direction with the gift of freedom to experiment, explore, and play that allow for entrepreneurial and innovation opportunities to emerge (Dew, 2009; Fiet, 2007).

A blurring of the play / work dichotomy thus emerges as an integral consideration for event creators seeking to realise entrepreneurial outcomes through events. Unadventurously conceding to the premise that that business events are work, with connotations of seriousness, results in customary and staid approaches that can be underwhelming for attendees and similarly for investors. Creators of business events can conversely embrace a fusion of play and work, rather than polarizing them, and in so doing facilitate playful contexts which trigger entrepreneurial outcomes.

Implications

The backdrop to this study is a notable shift in business event research, pedagogy, and practice towards a sociocultural context which increasingly fixates on human experience, as opposed to the more conventional preoccupation with operational efficacy. This study further endorses this direction of travel indicating how a more progressive, and adventurous approach to design facilitates success. In the three cases examined play was pervasive in the design mindset and not a token activity within a wider, and more conventional, event. This paper therefore has implication for event practitioners and academics alike in how they

approach and discuss the topic. Playfulness emerges as a noteworthy approach to business event creation that requires wider, and more varied, research among peers, particularly when considered as a comprehensive design strategy rather than a simple design tool.

The study has also revealed the role of playful event settings as a multifaceted moderator for entrepreneurial activities. Considering business events as temporary knowledge ecosystems that facilitate problem solving and idea generation, allows an analysis of their role as social and physical spaces for opportunity identification and/or creation. This provides a contribution to the ongoing discussion in entrepreneurship literature on the moderating factors affecting opportunity recognition. As demonstrated by the case studies, the contextual and environmental influences leading to opportunity recognition can be captured or recognised through playful activities that require interactions with others. These in turn deliver event outcomes such as a new product or business opportunity (Hansen et al., 2016).

This is the first time that events have been researched for their role in providing the setting for entrepreneurship and innovation so further research is required into the characteristics and activities that generate this type of outcomes. Playfulness is a facilitating factor embedded in event design but the broader contribution that events can offer to organisational innovation and growth from a strategic perspective remains to be explored.

Limitations and Future Research

Whilst this study has answered the three research questions which were established at the outset, it should be considered in light of certain limitations. Firstly, as indicated above, there is scant research looking at business events as opportunity for the creation of

entrepreneurial outcomes, with which to compare the findings. Secondly, while the multi case study approach provides context dependant (as opposed to context independent) knowledge which is of high worth in management research (Flyvbjerg, 2006, in Kale et al., 2010) this does inevitably limited the generalisability of the findings. Therefore while the findings are rich in revealing a depth of insight relating to the specific contexts they require much wider examination in different contexts, and using varied methods.

In advancing discussion about the integration of play within business events, and the implications this has for the use of space, considerable potential exists for further research. More specifically, the role of the city would deserve further exploration. As shown by the Visit Denmark Meetovation concept and by the CAP case study in particular, the city is an essential backdrop of the event experience and provides the setting where the participants co-create their solutions. Further research is needed on how the physical spaces in a city affect the discovery or creation of entrepreneurship opportunities during events.

The notion of playfulness as, not (more simply) an activity or feature of an event, but instead an overarching philosophy underpinning the events creation is a concept that is ripe for exploration both in the outcomes it enables but also its dimension, akin to the principles advanced in this study.

References

Alvesson M and Deetz S (2000) *Doing Critical Management Research*. London: Sage.

Amabile TM, Hill KG, Hennessey BA and Tighe EM (1994) The work preference inventory: assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66(5): 950.

Barnett LA (2007) The nature of playfulness in young adults. *Personality and individual Differences* 43(4): 949-958.

Bateson G (1972) *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bathelt H and Cohendet P (2014) The creation of knowledge: local building, global accessing and economic development — toward an agenda. *Journal of Economic Geography* 14(5): 869-882.

Baumeister RF and Leary MR (1995) The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin* 117(3): 497-525.

Beard C and Wilson J (2013) *Experiential Learning: A handbook for education, training and coaching*. London: Kogan Page.

Beard C (2014) Designing and Mapping the Event Experience. In: Sharples E, Crowther P, Orefice C and May D (eds) *Strategic Event Creation*. Oxford: Goodfellows, pp. 123-140.

Belk R, Sherry J and Wallendorf M (1989) The sacred and the profane in consumer behaviour: theodicy on the odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Research* 16 (June): 1-38.

Berg BL (1997) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Cambirdge: Pearson

Berridge G (2012) Designing Event Experiences. In: Page SJ and Connell J (Eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Events*. Oxon: Taylor Francis Group, pp. 273-288.

Brown S (2005) Event design—an Australian perspective. In: 2nd International Event Management Body of Knowledge Global Alignment Summit, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Crowther P (2010) Marketing space: a conceptual framework for marketing events. *The Marketing Review* 10(4): 369-383.

Crowther P (2014) Strategic Event Creation. In: Sharples E, Crowther P, Orefice C and May D (eds) *Strategic Event Creation*. Oxford: Goodfellows, pp. 3-20.

Csikszentmihalyi M (1975) *Beyond boredom and anxiety: The experience of play in work and leisure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dew N (2009) Serendipity and Entrepreneurship. *Organization Studies* 30(7): 735-753.

Drucker PF (2007) *Innovation and entrepreneurship: practice and principles*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Easterby-Smith M and Malina D (1999) Cross-cultural collaborative research: Toward reflexivity. *Academy of Management Journal* 42(1): 76–86.

Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532–550.

Eisenhardt KM and Graebner ME (2007) Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 25–32.

Fiet JO (2007) A prescriptive analysis of search and discovery. *Journal of Management Studies* 44(4): 592-611.

Fitjar RD, Gjelsvik M and Rodríguez-Pose A (2013) The combined impact of managerial and relational capabilities on innovation in firms. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 25 (5-6): 500-520.

Fjelstul J, Severt K and Breiter D (2009) An analysis of the motivators and inhibitors affecting association meeting attendance for Generation X and Baby Boomers. *Event Management* 13(1): 31-41.

Foley C, Edwards D and Schlenker K (2014) Business events and friendship: Leveraging the sociable legacies. *Event Management* 18(1): 53-64.

Fontijn W and Hoonhout J (2007) Functional fun with tangible user interfaces. In: *DIGITEL'07. The First IEEE International Workshop on Digital Game and Intelligent Toy Enhanced Learning*, Jhongli City, Taiwan, 26-28 March 2007

Freire-Gibb LC and Lorentzen A (2011) A platform for local entrepreneurship: The case of the lighting festival of Frederikshavn. *Local Economy* 26(3): 157-169.

Geertz C (1973) *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Getz D (2012) Event Studies: Discourses and Future Directions. *Event Management* 16: 171-187.

Gill J and Johnson P (2010) *Research Methods for Managers: 4th Edition*. London: Sage.

Glynn MA and Webster J (1992) The adult playfulness scale: An initial assessment. *Psychological reports* 71(1): 83-103.

Glynn MA and Webster J (1993) Refining the nomological net of the Adult Playfulness Scale: Personality, motivational, and attitudinal correlates for highly intelligent adults. *Psychological reports* 72(3): 1023-1026.

Goldblatt J (2005) *Special Events: Global Event Management in the 21st Century: 4th ed*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Gummesson E (2000) *Qualitative Methods in Management Research.* London: Sage.

Hammersley M and Atkinson P (2007) *Ethnography Principles in Practice*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Hansen DJ, Monllor J and Shrader RC (2016) Identifying elements of entrepreneurial opportunity constructs: Recognizing what scholars are really examining. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 17(4): 240-255.

Hechavarria DM and Welter C (2015) Opportunity types, social entrepreneurship and innovation: Evidence from the panel study of entrepreneurial dynamics. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 16(4): 237-251.

Hjorth D (2004) Creating space for play/invention – concepts of space and organizational entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 16(5): 413-432

Holloway I, Brown L and Shipway R (2010) Meaning not measurement: Using ethnography to bring a deeper understanding to the participant experience of festivals and events. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 1(1): 74-85.

Huizinga J (1980) *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. London: Routledge.

Jonson PT, Small J, Foley C and Schlenker K (2015) "All Shook Up" at the Parkes Elvis Festival: The Role of Play in Events. *Event Management* 19(4): 479-493.

Kale SH, Pentecost RD and Zlatevska N (2010) Designing and Delivering Compelling Experiences; Insights from the 2008 Democratic National Convention. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 1(2): 148-159.

Kim H and Jamal T (2007) Touristic quest for existential authenticity. *Annals of Tourism Research* 34(1): 181-201.

Mainemelis C, Altman Y, Kolb AY and Kolb DA (2010) Learning to play, playing to learn: A case study of a ludic learning space. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 23(1): 26-50.

Malone TW and Lepper MR (1987) Making learning fun: A taxonomy of intrinsic motivations for learning. In: Snow R and Farr MJ (eds) *Aptitude, learning, and instruction Volume 3: Conative and Affective Process Analysis*. NJ: Hillsdale, pp 223-253.

Maskell P, Bathelt H and Malmberg A (2006) Building global knowledge pipelines: the role of temporary clusters. *European planning studies* 14(8): 997-1013.

Morgan G and Smircich L (1980) The Case for Qualitative Research. *The Academy of Marketing Review* 5(4): 491-500.

Nelson KB (2009) Enhancing the attendee's experience through creative design of the event environment: applying Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism* 10 (2): 120-133

Patterson I and Getz D (2013) At the nexus of leisure and event studies. *Event Management* 17(3): 227-240.

Patton MQ (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods:2nd ed*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Piekkari R, Welch C and Paavilainen E (2009) The case study as disciplinary convention: Evidence from international business journals. *Organizational Research Methods* 12(3): 567–589.

Plummer LA (2010) Spatial dependence in entrepreneurship research: Challenges and methods. *Organizational Research Methods* 13(1): 146–175.

Proyer RT (2012) Examining playfulness in adults: Testing its correlates with personality, positive psychological functioning, goal aspirations, and multi-methodically assessed ingenuity. Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling 54(2): 103.

Raftopoulos M and Walz S (2013) Designing events as gameful and playful experiences. In: Designing Gamification: Creating Gameful and Playful Experiences Workshop at Chi 2013, Paris, France, 28 April 2013, pp 1-5

Richards GW (2013) Events and the means of attention. Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research 2(2) doi:10.4172/2324-8807.1000118

Richards G and Palmer R (2010) Eventful cities. London: Routledge.

Rogers T (2013) Conferences and Conventions: A Global Industry: 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

Saunders MN (2003) Research methods for business students:5th ed. India: Pearson.

Schuldt N and Bathelt H (2011) International trade fairs and global buzz. Part II: Practices of global buzz. *European Planning Studies* 19(1): 1-22.

Simmel G (1964) Sociability. In: Simmel G and Wolff KW (eds) *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: New York Free Press, pp. 40-47.

Spradley JP (1980) *Participant Observation*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Janovich.

Strandvad SM and Pedersen KM (2014) Co-Producing a festival experience: a socio material understanding of experience design. In: Benz PE (eds) *Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp105-113.

Swarbrooke J and Horner S (2001) *Business travel and tourism*. London: Routledge.

Turner V (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

Veal A J, Darcy S, and Lynch R (2012) *Australian leisure*. Australia: Pearson Higher Education.

Visit Denmark (2016) Meetovation = Meeting Designs. Available at: http://www.visitdenmark.com/denmark/meetovation-meeting-designs (accessed 15 May 2017).

Wearing B (1998) *Leisure and feminist theory*: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolf P and Troxler P (2008) The Proof of the Pudding is in the eating—But what was the Pudding in the First Place? A proven unconferencing approach in search of its theoretical foundations. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9(2)

Wood EH (2009) Evaluating event marketing: experience or outcome? *Journal of Promotion Management* 15(1-2): 247-268.

Yin RK (2014) *Case Study Research Design and Methods*: 5th ed. London: Sage.

Yu P, Wu JJ, Chen IH and Lin YT (2007) Is playfulness a benefit to work? Empirical evidence of professionals in Taiwan. *International Journal of Technology Management* 39(3-4): 412-429.

Zahra SA (2007) Contextualizing theory building in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing* 22(3): 443–452.