

# The notting hill carnival



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The aim of this case study is to use theoretical perspectives to analyse an arts or events activity that clearly integrates diverse concepts of the arts or events activities such as tradition, identity, authenticity, invention, boosterism and imperialism. The event selected here has the features of both an art and event activity, the Notting hill carnival can be described as an event and an art activity in the sense that it is an organised event that celebrates the arts of music, dance, costumes and heritage.

The Notting hill carnival is the second largest arts festival in Europe and it is held in central London, with Ladbroke Grove being the centre of the carnival, dating back to 1966 the Notting hill carnival has become a huge multi cultural arts festival attracting over 2million people and also becoming a major tourist attraction in London.

The Notting hill carnival originated from the arrival of Trinidadians in great Britain, they were inspired by the carnivals organised in Trinidad which motivated them to create something similar to what they experienced back home resulting to a small number of people carrying steel drums and costume parades in the streets of Ladbroke grove and Notting hill in central London, these activities afterwards advanced into a calendar event known as the Notting hill carnival.

The carnival is held every last weekend in August, there are two major carnival days of Sunday and Monday, Sundays are devoted to children and families, all bands taking part on this day are under the age of 21, the themed children's carnival day intends for children to learn about the culture and traditions of the event, while the bank holiday Monday is when the

carnival truly comes alive, activities on this day includes live performances, street dancers , costume parades, arts and crafts from the afro Caribbean community exhibited and sold.

According to the official Notting hill carnival website online, the aim of the carnival is stated as the “ Carnival aims to celebrate the cultural heritage of its founders and at the same time be open enough to take on board evolving contemporary culture with its multiracial, multicultural trends” ( mynottinghill. co. uk 2006).

The multiracial and multicultural trends mentioned here illustrates the audience for the carnival, although the Trinidadians came up with the idea for the carnival, the carnivals growth has been based on the audience diversity with people from various multicultural backgrounds such as Africa, the Caribbean , Asia and the English participating in the event.

Audiences for the Notting hill carnival has been boosted by the multiracial and multicultural diversity of the participants, the lack of discrimination enables various people from various backgrounds to attend the carnival allowing interaction between the various culture. The audience figures has risen to millions in recent years , which shows the appeal of the carnival and success. Audiences for the Notting hill carnival includes local residents, local tourist, foreign tourist and the media.

The type of tourists attracted to the Notting hill carnival are mostly tourist from around that seek live culture, Dicks ( 2003, p. 44) explained “ Rather than dead culture in the form of stone monuments and empty palaces, tourists today are seeking live culture , in the form of people and their

<https://assignbuster.com/the-notting-hill-carnival/>

colourful customs”. An event of the Notting hill carnivals nature allows the tourist and other audiences to be part of the whole experience and also learn in the process as this is an advantage of live culture tourism.

Although there is a children’s day for the carnival, there is no age and sex restrictions to attending the carnival on both carnival days, giving the carnival a very broad audience. The historical context of the carnival revolves around the Trinidadians who were west Indian immigrants from the Caribbean’s settling in great Britain, the Trinidadians were in an environment that was not similar to their own culture back home, which made them believe they had no identity, Gold and Gold ( 2005, p. 0) explained that ” among other things, culture supplies a frame in which individuals make sense of the world around them and forge their identity” the Trinidadians immigrants in great Britain decided to create something from their culture back home, this was the carnivals they experienced while in their own country, by creating a carnival within their own community in great Britain they created an identity for them selves. Rutherford (1990, p. 24) stated this when he said ” only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised”.

The carnival enabled them to exhibit their own art forms and culture, enabling them to be recognised in a society that was ill mannered towards their arrival in great Britain, as this period involved extensive racial attacks caused by race relations. The race relations can be traced back to the imperialism period which involved the extension of power of a state through acquisition of other territories and imposed rules, the British in particular colonised most afro Caribbean countries and this perhaps was responsible

for most Brits believing the afro Caribbean's were beneath them resulting to the racial attacks during the 1960's.

Ironically , the idea of the carnival came from imperialism , during the slave trade period the traditional European carnival was imported to Trinidad by the Europeans who colonised the Trinidadians, however during this period the slaves where not allowed to participate , it was after slavery was abolished that the slaves created a carnival to impersonate what they had seen their masters do , the costumes paraded in the carnival developed from the slaves dressing like their masters in order to express their freedom.

The historical background of the carnival makes the Notting hill carnival an invented tradition , in the sense that it is a tradition that has been invented to commemorate the past , Hobsbawm ( 1983, p. 1) was referring to this stating " in fact , where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" . Notting hill carnival has become a yearly event meaning it has a continuity with an appropriate historic past which is celebrated through commemoration of the Trinidadian past.

The consequence with most invented traditions is that they neglect the old tradition, this could slightly relate to the Notting hill carnival as the costumes are no longer imitates of the slave masters but now flamboyant costumes. This could be a sign of modernity as people believe in progress, however the flamboyant costumes does not totally erase the authenticity of the carnival history, what it does is try to get beyond imperialism and race hates by celebrating the past with an ethical message rather than create bitterness.

The new costumes has left behind the slave masters impersonation, participants in the costume parades now wear costumes that reflects on the afro Caribbean culture , Owusu and Ross ( 1987, p. 15) stated " clothes are sign posts of cultural identity and desire" . The carnival being a form of identity meant it would have to be interpreted in a way that people without the awareness of what the afro Caribbean culture is about would be informed by attending the carnival.

The interpretation techniques used by the Notting hill carnival organisers include human interpretations and activities . Human interpretation techniques vary in different art genres, as most museums and galleries use this method, which is normally referred to as live interpretation. Hems and Blockley ( 2006, p. 2) defines live interpretation as " any presentation using people , usually costumed, whether in an historical environment or not , which aims to place artefacts , places or events in context against the background of the human environment of the past" most people would generally think about live interpretation as re- enactments of battles from the past , this is right , however the Notting hill carnival human interpretation which involves people in costumes , steel drums and dances interprets the culture of the afro Caribbean community from the past.

The purpose of a live interpretation in general would be to educate, and the organisers achieve this through the dancers and costume parades as it educates uninformed people about the afro Caribbean identity culture. The carnivals design involves a range of people working together , the Notting hill carnival limited, the government , carnival review groups and others are associated with designing a successful carnival. The governments

involvement includes controlling the health and public safety issues by providing police on both carnival days to direct and keep people protected.

The Notting hill carnival design has shown post modernism features in its design, by using modern technology , there are various websites with computer graphic image of the carnival route to make it easier for participants to get around, also CCTV is used to monitor crowd movement and interactions. The design for the carnival itself is not a complicated one, the costume dancers are followed by a band of instrumentalist , while some dancers are showcased in the back of a moving truck, the general public are kept away from the performers by barricades watched by the police.

The carnivals designs also provides various cultural background with their own sets, popular sets includes the Nigerian stands and the Jamaican stands. An event such as the Notting hill carnival educates people about other peoples culture and heritage, therefore it is important for such an event to have authenticity as a major feature, because this makes the event distinctive.

The authenticity of the Notting hill carnival relates to the culture and identity of the carnivals history, all this comes from the authentic Caribbean food , music, costumes and dance put on show. Another important feature is the location of the carnival, the Notting hill carnival would loose its authenticity if the carnival was to be relocated to another area, this would taint the theme of the carnival which is the afro Caribbean freedom legacy in great Britain during the race attacks in Notting hill in the 1960's.

This is why there was major objection from the carnival organisers when the mayor of London , ken Livingstone suggested the route of the carnival should change from Notting hill to Hyde park because of overcrowding , however the organisers did not agree to this , Chris Mullard, chairman of Notting hill carnival limited said “ What no one wants is for carnival to be ripped out of its home and placed in an environment that does not reflect its history” ( Evening Standard 2006).

The quote here illustrates what authenticity means to the organisers as they know the carnivals history heavily relies on the location that gave birth to the carnival in the first place which gives the carnival its own identity. From a personal perspective after participating in this years Notting hill carnival it was clear to see why mayor ken Livingstone might have been interested in changing the location of the carnival, there were millions of people at the carnival, although no sign of overcrowding was visible on this visit, which would make one think maybe there is another motive to the mayors suggestions “ Boosterism” .

The Notting hill carnival attracts millions of people and is also a major tourist attraction in London, thousands of tourist from around the world and local tourist come to the event, the carnival has boosted the image of the Notting hill area of central London and also close surroundings.

According to the official website for the mayor of London , in 2002 the Notting hill carnival generated i?? 93 million to the UK economy, the carnival attracts tourist and London at the moment is facing competition from other world cities for tourists, moving the Notting hill carnival to Hyde park could



help in the city's boosterism as Hyde park is a major landmark in the centre of London.

The Notting hill carnival was invented as a commemoration event to celebrate a culture of the past, however the carnival since then has become a global phenomenon which attracts millions of people both locally and abroad, the success of the carnival has been based on the involvement of organisers ranging from the government to committees and the people who attend, this year saw millions of people attend the carnival which shows the carnival has not lost its popularity.

The carnival does not only celebrate freedom and culture, it also promotes peace between all multiracial and multicultural backgrounds, all this features has earned the carnival Europe's biggest arts festival as it is a place to be entertained and also educated. As long as the organisers and the government keep working together and put their dispute over the carnival location to rest, the carnival will continue its success and also contribute to London and Europe's arts festival and culture future, educating more people about culture and bringing different multiracial backgrounds together.