

Title

A Bourdieusian critique of event professionalisation

Purpose

Traditional models of becoming an events professional have dominated the academic literature on the process of professionalisation. This paper uses Bourdieu's concepts to critique my understanding of the demand for and current position of the event professional. It particularly utilises Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'field' to understand the agents and issues involved in this complex phenomenon. The focus is on the challenges of supporting a professionalisation agenda.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper is based upon a theoretical discussion around the findings of an interpretive phenomenological study of 24 interviews undertaken across leaders from event companies, associations and education providers in the UK. The author is positioned across all three of these areas and uses Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field to explore the relationships and issues of adopting a traditional approach to professionalisation. The methodological approach is an important part of the discussion on the way that professionalisation is viewed and researched. The positivist approach preferred in practice is questioned but also utilized by Bourdieu to bridge the object-subject divide.

Findings

The Professionalisation in Events research identified 4Ps – Policy, People and Professional Practice and that these blended together the 2Es – Experience and Education. The findings in this paper however are more discursive than definitive. The aim is to question but also to inform decisions on policy, practice and research that go beyond traditional and utilitarian approaches. For the first time it puts events and those involved in events into a socially constructed paradigm that explores the individual and organisational concerns of legitimacy, validity, recognition and reward.

Research limitations/implications

This study is part of an action research project that involves the researcher playing an active part in the review of policy and practice of event professionalisation within the event sector in the UK. Given the situated context of events in the UK the findings of this paper may not be directly applicable to other event fields. However, the approach may afford others a different lens through which to explore this and other event-related topics.

Practical implications

The use of Bourdieu's work to critique the findings, to date, of the Professionalisation in Events research project offers a different perspective and alternative issues to discuss with practitioners and academics. It goes beyond the human capital arguments of individual recognition and reward to the organisational and socially constructed questions of a unified profession with clear structures, benchmarks and identity.

Originality/value

Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field offer a means of challenging and exploring the notion of professionalisation in the event sector. It also offers a different approach to researching event phenomena.

Keywords: events, professional, Bourdieu, habitus, capital, field