CultureCase

The views of venue managers in a live music destination undergoing change

This research was conducted by **Nicholas Carah** and **five others** at the **University of Queensland** and **three other institutions, Australia**

Summary

This research examined live music venues in Fortitude Valley, an inner-city neighbourhood in Brisbane, Australia. The neighbourhood has undergone rapid change, from a diverse mix of venues and live music experiences, to a more commercialised generic offer of a venue-club-bar experience based around excessive or premium alcohol consumption. This attracts more people and revenue but also harmful behaviours which (along with measures like security and crowd control) have changed the character of the area. Ultimately, artists and musicians have provided ‘the cultural alibi’ for increasing commercialisation. Policies designed to protect the live music scene have in effect led to it becoming embedded in a wider commercialised experience of a precinct with venues dealing with high demand and high costs, rather than shielding live music from these forces.

The research was based on 11 interviews with current and former venue owners and managers

Some interviewees describe their role in cultivating a music scene, supporting local bands and providing a live music experience for audiences with moderated levels of alcohol consumption. This perspective was more common among long-standing venue owners. By contrast, others tended not to ‘imagine their venue as a live music space, but rather as a nightlife business of which live music was a part’ in a profitable mix of entertainment.

Policymakers and venue owners/managers are responding to changing habits of people who do not understand the commercial realities of the experiences they enjoy

‘Venue owners felt that they invested in live music, but patrons did not pay it back to the venue by drinking there’. Visitors to the precinct increasingly flowed between venues and live music and clubbing. In general, there was a lack of understanding about how venues stay financially viable. Audiences wanted to support artists but tended to only focus their attention on venues when they became obviously under threat.

Keywords

live **Australia** **music** **nightlife** **venues**

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