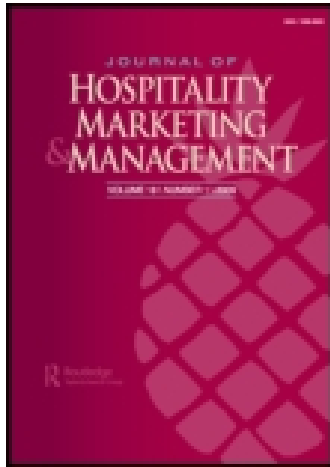


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Building a Preliminary Model of Event Management for Rural Communities

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This article considers a network-based stakeholder approach for marketing and managing community-run events and festivals with a focus on the implications for regional development. A qualitative case study method was adopted in order to explore selected social networks and stakeholders' power relationships. The case study was based on a series of local events in rural communities between the Orta and Maggiore Lakes in Italy. The empirical findings emphasize the importance of event organizers' skills and abilities in working with stakeholders. The commitment and trust of key players in the local hospitality and leisure industry were critical for success and depended on having shared goals. From the research a model for the event industry is proposed in which networking processes with stakeholders help explain organizers' problem-solving activities. The theoretical framework applied facilitates the analysis of key aspects related to event management such as strategic marketing planning, product innovation, and socioeconomic impact.

KEYWORDS *Event management, community-run events, stakeholders, social network, collaboration*

A preliminary version of this article was presented at the International Conference, "Cultural and Event Tourism: Issues & Debates," in November 2008, and was awarded the best paper in Event Tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of festivals and events for promoting rural areas has been widely recognized in the tourism and event literature (Getz, 2005, 2007). When rooted in community and cultural development strategies, events can also strengthen feelings of belonging, create a sense of place, and encourage tolerance and diversity (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2006). Thus, cultural events can be transformed into celebrations for the host community, especially through the contribution of representatives of local cultures and nonprofit organizations (Jafari, 2008). Although rural festivals need little financial support from the public sector (Janiskee & Drews, 1998), they may have low demand and low value (Getz, 2008, p. 407) and their economic impact can be uncertain (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002).

Given the importance of achieving socioeconomic aims in rural tourism and regional development planning, this article analyzes the impacts of event organizers' networking processes in marketing and managing community-run events and festivals. Informed by tourism and event literature, a case study was carried based on the rural region between the Orta and Maggiore Lakes in Italy. Through the analysis of the empirical findings a management model is proposed. This model is based on four propositions related to event organizers' skills and abilities in building relationships with stakeholders. In coherence with a network-based stakeholder approach (Gummeson, 2008), this contribution is particularly important since other studies have concerned specific issues related to event organization such as funding (Tomljenovic & Weber, 2004), innovation and product development (Mackellar, 2006), and knowledge sharing (Getz, 1998; Stokes, 2004).

The article structures as follows: first we review the literature on stakeholders and networking processes in accordance with the implications on event organization; the next section presents the research design followed by information regarding the case study and empirical findings, followed by the conclusion.

STAKEHOLDERS, NETWORKING PROCESSES, AND EVENT ORGANIZATION

The management literature has focused on the concept of *stakeholder*, even if the term remains vague (Jones & Wicks, 1999). Freeman (1984, p. 46) defined a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations' objectives." Clarkson (1994) instead, associated the concept to a condition of bearing a risky position, representing a narrower definition (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Donaldson and Preston (1995) proposed a broader nature of the "stake,"

considering it in connection with various groups' moral interests. Rowley (1997) employed a social network concept and proposed a stakeholder theory based on the presence of multiple and interdependent interactions in the stakeholder environment, whilst Mitchell et al. (1997) described the stakeholder identification in accordance with three attributes (power, legitimacy, and urgency).

In coherence with the described framework and through a cross-comparison case study, Getz, Andersson, and Larson (2007) developed the idea that festival organizations result from a set of managed stakeholders' relationships. They proposed typologies of stakeholders to help the analysis of the complex web of relationships related to event marketing and management. The relevant categories for the current study are: (a) facilitators provided cash grants, sponsorships, and in-kind support; (b) co-producers such as performers and associations involved through voluntary activities in creating the event experience; (c) suppliers acting as services providers inside the festival value chain; (d) the audience; and (e) the impacted including the local community and special interest groups.

In the light of the likely aims of community-run events and festivals, a network-based stakeholder approach can be applied, as in the event industry there is a constant need to moving from a "customer centricity" to a "balanced centricity" (Gummesson, 2008). In fact, the involvement of all stakeholder groups is a key element for a sustainable tourism development in rural communities (Bramwell, 1998; Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Additionally, in presence of public financial resources, a more holistic approach is needed to assess the overall costs and benefits (Dwyer, 2008).

In order to ensure economic efficiencies and to maximize success, event management is based on resource interdependencies between partners (Long, 2000, p. 58). Networks in regional communities are fundamental not only to explore new opportunities for marketing local industry (Mackellar, 2006), but also to create the prerequisites for regional product innovation (McCarthy, Moscardo, Murphy, & Pearce, 2007).

The event managers' skills and capabilities in building personal networks are a key element for event sustainability in the long run (Arcodia & Whitford, 2005). Person-to-person communication emerges as important in maintaining strong stakeholder relationships and limiting latent conflicts (Merrilees, Getz, & O'Brien, 2005). Some festival organizations work with stakeholders through informal personal relationships or with natural allies in the professional community (Getz et al., 2007). Andersson and Getz (2007) identified the importance of divergent strategies in dealing with both powerful and weak stakeholders. Furthermore, strategies for media and public relations should be coherent with the local authorities' orientation in terms of image and brand management (Mossberg & Getz, 2006). In particular, Getz and Fairley (2004) demonstrated the critical stakeholder interrelationship in events as being particularly important for effective media management.

In rural communities, collaborative processes can be created through round-tables and other participatory mechanisms (Stokes, 2008). Although interactions between actors are collaborative, there is frequently a need to reconcile partners' strategic objectives (Long, 2000). Additionally, in the tourism industry the benefits from cooperation among local actors can be limited by a low presence of the private sector (Araujo & Bramwell, 2002), and by stakeholders' position in terms of resource allocation and profit orientation (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Bramwell, 2006).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The case study was developed in coherence with grounded theory (Eisenhardt, 1989), allowing exploration of an observed phenomenon to produce possible explanations. Findings from case studies play "an important role in creating new knowledge, generating hypotheses or propositions and testing new existing theories" (Getz, 2007, p. 368).

A single case study was carried out in the rural communities between Orta and Maggiore Lakes located in the Province of Novara, Italy. The geographical context was selected in accordance with the aims of the study directed at gaining insights into event organizers' networking processes with local stakeholders. In fact, artists and writers living in the area and local associations represent the social capital, as they are actively involved in promoting the territory through events. A further feature is represented by the local institutions' commitment in marketing the rural communities with cultural initiatives and by means of a co-shared project branded under the name "*Un Cuore Verde tra i due Laghi*" ("A Green Heart Between the Two Lakes"). A more detailed description of the socioeconomic context is presented next.

In the first stage of the study, a dataset related to the relevant programs of events was established. As there was no existing comprehensive list available, both soft and hard copies of promotional materials were consulted. The materials were from a range of sources such as local tourist information offices and nonprofit associations. A total of 15 planned cultural events was identified, according to the typology of event forms proposed by Getz (2007). For the current study, 13 events organized by local actors (professional and volunteer associations, local public institutions) were selected. This decision was coherent with the purposes of study directed at assessing local actors' involvement and commitment in regional development. Thus, two events organized by the Province of Novara in the area were not considered.

The format and content of the selected events were analyzed for a period from June 2007 to September 2008. Thus, each event was evaluated in terms of its evolution and status (i.e., the first, second, or third time it

had run). This was considered to be a key element in understanding the dynamics of event organizers' relationships (Halinen & Törnroos, 2005).

In the second stage, 24 interviews directed at various levels of decision-makers were carried out. Firstly, the interviews were targeted at seven event coordinators with a focus on the history of the organization and the features of the event such as its objectives, actors involved, programmed activities, and participant profiles. This enabled effective collection and collation of information on present and former relationships with stakeholders. Contextually, a purposeful sampling technique identified representatives of powerful stakeholder groups active in the geographical context (Patton, 1990). Representatives of stakeholder groups were identified by a "reputation approach" and the researchers contacted nominees suggested by knowledgeable informants. The latter were selected for their knowledge of tourism policy and planning in the region. These informants helped generate a list of potential interviewees known to be active in the region. These actors were mainly 10 hotel managers in the area, two banking foundations, two private sponsors of events, two public administrators, and the local retailers' association. Interviews ascertained stakeholders' involvement and commitment in event organization and local development.

In the third stage a triangulation process was adopted (Woodside & Wilson, 2003, p. 506), including participant observation of events and evaluation of written documents supplied by event organizations and tourist information offices. Additionally, the researchers also took part in three workshops organized by local municipalities, in order to analyze emerging issues in these communities and discuss the validity of the preliminary findings.

In keeping with the theoretical framework the identified convergence of themes and patterns helped guide data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In particular, following a content analysis research method (Kaplan, 1943; Holbrook, 1977; Kassarian, 1977; Kepplinger, 1989; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991) critical and recurrent issues were identified and considered in evaluating empirical results. In accordance with these findings, four research propositions were formulated on which the proposed conceptual model is based.

THE CASE STUDY

The Socioeconomic Context

The rural communities between the two lakes (Figure 1) suffer from a significant depopulation related to traditional dependence on established sectors, particularly farm and craft industries. The strong natural distinctiveness of the region is associated with the presence of a unique woodland area with ancient trails connecting the communities between the two lakes.

The area is characterized by important architectural heritage related to the history of the territory and the dominance of the Catholic Church, but

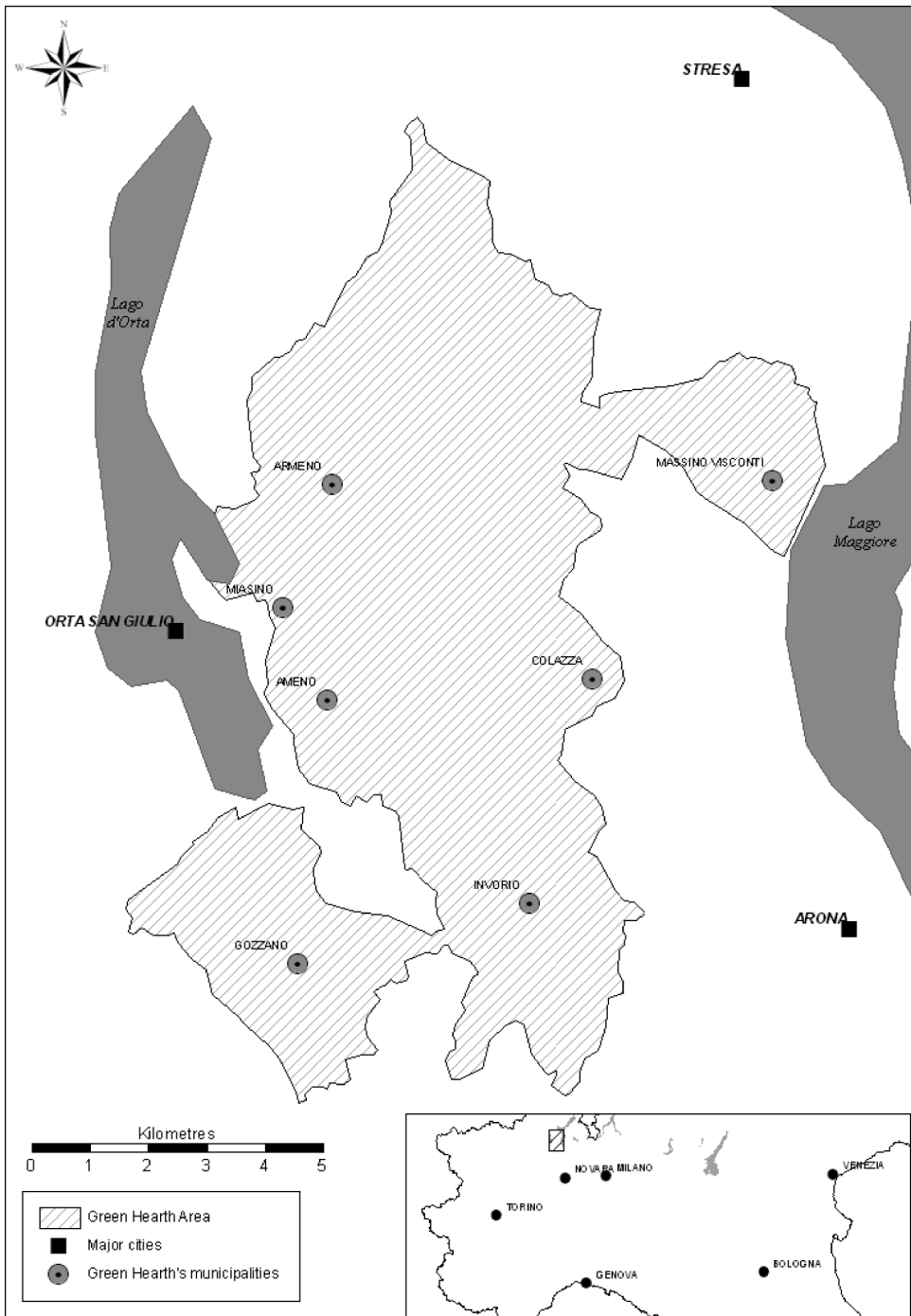


FIGURE 1 The geographical context.

maintenance and restoration operations have not yet been sustainable. The presence of artists and writers who have chosen to reside in the hills of the Orta Lake has helped trigger several cultural initiatives.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, private country residences were constructed by European noblemen and an entrepreneurial middle class from the Lombardy or Piedmont. Some of them, such as Palazzo Torielli in Ameno and Villa Nigra in Miasino, are now selected as locations for local events.

After the Second World War the manufacturing industry developed with significant damage to vegetation in and around the Orta Lake. Yet, given the crises in the local manufacturing sector, the current tourism strategy is oriented to a relaunch of the Orta Lake.

In the studied geographical context, local institutions identified an opportunity to develop a shared project linking to local markets for leisure and tourism activities. The project also aims to co-ordinate the initiatives of locally active professional and voluntary bodies in promotional and management work. In January 2008, a partnership was established involving local municipalities, schools, religious bodies, and associations. Since then the geographical area represented by these municipalities was identified under the name “Cuore Verde fra i due Laghi”, and now has the potential to promote itself through the “Green Heart” brand.

Event Organizers and Activities

The events aim to help market the area as a cultural district with support from local stakeholders. This is achieved through measures directed at embedding interest in conservation of natural and historical resources with potential benefits for the local economy. Seven associations were identified with 13 events occurring between June 2007 and September 2008 (Table 1).

There is a formal group, the Association *Asilo Bianco*, which actively promotes the area. It is located in Ameno and aims to promote contemporary arts through cultural initiatives (Events 1–6). The objectives of the association are to develop interest in arts through the discovery of local heritage (Event 3). A key aspect has been the creation of an international social network between artists and writers by means of the financial support of banking foundations. This collaboration has helped generate an events program and repopulate the area. In fact, workshops organized by artists and writers are oriented to establish relationships between residents and tourists (Event 4).

The *Ecomuseo* of the Orta Lake and Mottarone is an association of local museums, entities, and sites around the Orta Lake with a focus on folk culture, arts and nature. Supporting the aims as described increased the awareness of local heritage by visitors and residents (Event 7).

TABLE 1 Description of Events

Organizer	Event	Edition	Format and content
Asilo Bianco	1. Papers/Leaves and Writing	1st	Promotion of a tourist guide realized by international artists and writers hosted in the area.
Asilo Bianco	2. Contemporary Art Exhibition	1st	Promotion of the local heritage through contemporary art.
Asilo Bianco	3. Breakfast on the Grass	1st	Planned openings of local churches and historical houses with marketing actions for local productions.
Asilo Bianco	4. Mediterranean Frost—A Review of Swedish Literature	1st	Cultural exchanges in the area through Swedish literature
Asilo Bianco	5. Targeted Landscapes	1st	Exhibition of photographic proposals directed to redesign the Green Heart's municipalities.
Asilo Bianco	6. Opening Artists' Studios	4th	Explanation of artists' works and actions to enhance the value of local cuisine and farm productions.
The Ecomuseo of Orta Lake and Mottarone	7. Girolago	3rd	Cultural walks around the Orta Lake and directed at discovering local heritage.
La Finestra sul Lago	8. A Town with Six Strings	3rd	Musical and dancing performances.
La Finestra sul Lago	9. The Heavy Course	4th	Gastronomic events combining music and theatrical performances.
Ameno Blues	10. Ameno Blues Festival	4th	Music performances in local municipalities.
Proloco of Miasino	11. Miasino Classic Jazz Festival	8th	Music performances in Villa Nigra (Miasino).
Teatro delle Selve	12. Moving Theatre	8th	Open-air theatrical performances in local municipalities.
Poetry on the Lake	13. Poetry on the Lake Event	7th	Poetry readings, workshops, discussions, and competitions.

Note. Our data collection.

La Finestra sul Lago is an association promoting cultural events with different expressions of arts related to theatre, music, and gastronomy (Events 8 and 9). *Ameno Blues* is a nonprofit organization promoting interest in blues music through marketing and managing festivals. Since July 2005, the Blues Festival organized in Ameno and sponsored by the Novara Province has attracted around 400 people each year. Performances by several international artists from the United States and the association's semiexclusive rights have combined to progressively increase the reputation of the event among fans (Event 10). Similarly, to promote a local town, the *Proloco of Miasino* is a local volunteer association with 200 supporters that has organized an annual jazz festival since 2000. This event is attended by about 350 people and with a peak of 500 (Event 11).

The *Teatro delle Selve* was formed in 2001 to promote the theatre. A distinctive feature of the events is the selection of open-air theater locations in 10 towns around the Orta Lake. The initiatives aim to create a symbiotic relationship between people, nature, and culture (Event 12).

The Poetry on the Lake association is focused on developing interest in literature. Since 2001, they have organized an annual event supported by the British Council and UNESCO. This annual event is attended by around 100 participants from different countries (Event 13).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Empirical Findings and Research Propositions

In the studied area the cross-comparison of event formats and contents indicate that event managers' aims are to market the region by combining the natural distinctness of the place with arts expressions. In relation to this objective, the assessment of activities reveals four critical issues based on actions related to funding, marketing and production, innovation, and socioeconomic impact.

EVENT FUNDING

For the analyzed events, dependence on public funding sources generated strong ties to public institutions. Some initiatives drew on local politicians' interests, and strengthened relationships with facilitators (Event 6, 10, and 11). One event organizer explained: "The first Blues Festival was organized in June 2005, given local administrators' passion for music. They perceived it as a way to reduce the anonymity of territory and animate the area" (organizer of Event 10). Private sponsorship from local firms only occurred in two cases (Events 5 and 13). It was also associated with event marketing activity through a co-branding action. One interviewee indicated: "Attracting tourists in the area is not our mission. Our sponsorship is associated with the nature and purposes of an event" (private sponsor). The public sector also acts as a facilitator in terms of supplying the venue, as indicated by one organizer: "In Miasino Villa Nigra belongs to the local municipality. And it is the most used location in accordance with planned actions directed at marketing this historical asset" (Event 11).

According to local associations, the potential for free entrance supported by public actors was counterproductive. It seems the event organizers are not able to effectively communicate the event quality and product position, as described by one event organizer: "The free entrance policy reduces the value of events and is a penalty for the hard work developed in managing events. And it is also risky given the presence of several initiatives with a divergent cultural level" (Events 8 and 9). Given the economical constraints,

some artists take part for free, as described by one interviewee: “There is a crisis of financial supports. Except for some contributions from. . . the events results from poetries’ volunteer activities” (organizer of Event 12). However, all local associations had developed expertise in applying for resources offered by grant-aiding sources such as banking foundations.

The aforementioned empirical findings lead us to posit Proposition 1 as follows:

Proposition 1: Financing of events is based on the involvement of facilitators and co-producers through informal relationships, and this social network leverages on the presence of common interests and achievement of co-shared aims with the mentioned stakeholders.

EVENT MARKETING AND PRODUCTION

Some of the events, for example Events 3 and 7, put significant investment into producing brochures and leaflets. Yet, since the importance of mainstream distribution channels tends to be undervalued, main tourist information offices in key locations such as Stresa or Orta did not stock these promotional materials. A private stakeholder explained: “Each tourism office offers only own materials related to its territory. This is not the way to promote tourism! With so many initiatives from different institutions that cost and do not produce measurable and real effects.” This aspect is accentuated by fact that in the case study area there are several events that are not specifically related to the destination image. Moreover, the Green Heart brand is still weak and relatively unknown by the potential audience. Additionally, as one event organizer emphasized: “If you compare the promotional materials, each association has well designed brochures and leaflets. But there is a lack of a unique communication policy for the Green Heart area.”

It also seemed that links to the media were ineffective; this was reflected in local newspapers with some positive and/or negative articles on the initiatives. Additionally, few event organizers cultivated relationships with key journalists. One event organizer stressed: “A significant promotional tool is the collaboration with two journalists specialized in music and gastronomy. They disseminate information related to our events through focused articles in specialized magazines” (Event 8 and 9).

Analysis indicates that marketing activity is mainly through collaborations with a selected group of suppliers, word-of-mouth advertising, and networking in local communities, as described by one event organizer: “Fundamental instruments to promote the event program are leaflets and brochures which are distributed by local retailers and hoteliers” (Event 11).

The study found that the associations’ personal networks were considered central to their promotional strategies, and helped recruit event

co-producers, as indicated by an interviewee: “The most important poets are selected through my personal links and word of the mouth adverting. I have very good connections in UK” (Event 13). Another interviewee said: “The initiatives were generated through a specific co-operation program involving the Swedish Minister of Culture and Embassy in Rome, and inviting international artists from Sweden, previously hosted by the Association” (Events 1, 2, and 4).

Our empirical findings lead us to suggest Proposition 2:

Proposition 2: Event marketing and production are based on a co-operation with suppliers and host communities, and are strengthened on event organizers’ personal networks with co-producers.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

The comparison of events organized by individual associations and the annual sequence of particular events reveal that innovation processes and product development were supported by complex webs of weak ties created by event organizers. In the case of Event 3, the working group was directed at involving local suppliers and provided new opportunities to identify and combine key attractors in the area.

Personal networks are also important to recruit new artists, and the co-producers contributed to event program innovation in the area. According to one organizer: “The performers are selected in accordance with our previous contacts and a part of them is new each year” (Event 10).

There were positive attempts to relate leisure events to the existing economy. As the Novara Province has been promoting local farm production, there was a specific focus on marketing gastronomy during the events program. For Event 6, this activity was based on the involvement of local producers and adopted as a tool to reinforce the products’ image. An interviewee described:

The idea is to combine arts’ expressions with territory, building a productive dialogue. An artistic packaging is a value added component for local foods, often sold in an industrial and anonymous manner. They are three products for the area between the two Lakes. We have created a link with local small producers which are characterized by high level of quality, but a limited market (Event 6).

In the described perspective, the local industry acts as a supplier for the event activity and contributes to product development and event value chain creation.

The previous discussion allows us to formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Product development and event innovation are related to the event organizer's abilities and skills in networking processes with co-producers and suppliers, and stakeholders' involvement in rejuvenating the events program.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

Visitor surveys were not undertaken, though the event managers were able to identify participant profiles associated with the initiatives. There were higher levels of attendance for musical events, as the associations and their events are well known among fans. Relationship-based marketing strategies were developed to network with the audience and attract specific market segments (for example children and amateurs). In the case of Event 6, local artists opened their studios and explained their works to visitors. One organizer described:

It is important to networking with the audience, in order to favor the understanding of contemporary arts. Beyond the aesthetical dimension, Leonardo's painting is difficult to understand too. What is instead really important is the artist's interest of talking about their activities and experiences. (Event 6)

Following a bottom-up approach in tourism development planning, Event 5 involved the audience in assessing and discussing photographic works related to development proposals. These proposals were collected from contestants among designers and architects, and were directed at redesigning the image of local towns in the area. The event organizer described the initiative:

It is an invitation addressed to local institutions, operators, and citizens to think about the richness of local landscape in several communities, but also the expression of the need to regenerate the area through methods, tools, and plans. Microprojects for public spaces are presented by means of postcards. The best ones will be printed, distributed to the local population and presented through a local exhibition. (Event 5)

Social issues were considered important by event organizers. In order to achieve social inclusion objectives and enhance quality of life in the rural communities, they developed specific actions. In particular, the building of community ownership of events was important to avoid the creation of niche products, which might be marketed only to specific interested visitors. Emulation between local communities was also a key motivator for the entertainment-organizing group in each municipality, as described by one event organizer:

The basic principle of our event is the idea of a “slow walk” with the aims of rediscovering the life in rural communities. An additional purpose is to favor the recover of ancient ways and landscapes through a tangible contribution of local communities. The existence of the initiative is due to the cooperation between municipalities, local associations, and residents. They contribute to initiatives through work, financial resources, ideas, and voluntary activities. (Event 7)

In the case of Events 2 and 6, organizers considered provocative artistic displays in key locations in local towns as a strategic tool to involve the host community in the regeneration processes. However, some residents still find it difficult to understand the artists’ behavior, as described by an event organizer:

A part of the local population belongs to the first migration (the 1950s) and finds it difficult to understand our initiatives. One day two artists, who are hosted by our association, decided to show the ancient process to produce soap. They started boiling water and grease in the town’s place. Some were surprised, but others seeing smoke called firemen! (Events 2 and 6)

With Events 1 and 6, the program also included didactic laboratories organized in collaboration with schools. An interviewee explained: “In collaboration with a retailer and schools, an interesting educational program on environment will be developed in order to combine the different theatrical expressions with the discovery of local landscapes” (Event 12).

In tourism and leisure development, the potential economic impacts are often considered important by planners and funding bodies. Yet in terms of assessing the economic impacts, the event organizers tended to have developed only weak, sporadic, and sometimes selective dyadic relationships with private sector. For some well-known events (e.g., Events 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13), organizers noted collaborations with the local hospitality industry. However, a representative of the hotel industry indicated: “The calendar of events is focused on the summertime with a mainly local visitor catchment area.” And another hotelier highlighted: “I believe that the current provision is limited to attract tourism that exists thanks to natural landscape around the Maggiore Lake.”

Although suppliers in event marketing and management are important, the involvement of small operators was a problem, as described in the case of Event 3:

The better results were obtained from operators who developed an aggressive marketing policy in their local stores. Yet, one operator refused the adherence but after the clientele’ pressure on the initiative,

he called back saying as an excuse that he did not receive enough details about the relevance of the program.

Moreover, the importance of co-shared project is a key aspect, as one stakeholder indicated: "It is an initiative that damages bars, restaurants, agri-tourism, and all of them who work actively in the tourism industry. A project which is not co-shared with operators" (Event 3). On the other hand, a representative of a public stakeholder noted: "The potential operators such as local restaurants, hotels, retailers find it difficult to follow our initiative. The medium average of productive firms is low." Thus, it seems that conflicts and turbulence were a limit on contributions to regional growth, whilst trust and commitment of local suppliers should be instead a key element for generating local development.

Additionally, given a relatively lower participation level of audiences, local events and festivals had less adverse environmental impact and so achieved the aims of conserving natural resources. Yet, in terms of expanding the audience, the maintenance of quality standards and the venue capacity for the events program are constraints, as described: "The amount of audience is linked to the selected location. This is often a historical courtyard, a churchyard or an unusual location where is not possible and wished a crowded place."

The empirical findings suggest Proposition 4:

Proposition 4: Achieving socioeconomic objectives through events is based on building community ownership of event through the involvement of host communities, on generating trust and commitment among local suppliers, and on developing marketing relationship strategies with audience.

Towards a Preliminary Model

In accordance with the four research propositions based on our findings, networking processes with stakeholders are a critical factor in understanding the event managers' problem-solving activities. In Figure 2, a model is proposed to summarize these assumptions, equating the position of event organizer to that of a focal organization. This theoretical framework is based on the stakeholders' categories proposed by Getz et al. (2007) and was previously presented in the literature review. However, the stakeholder "host community" is introduced, instead of considering a more ample category called "the impacted." Additionally, the position of suppliers is focused on the role played by the local industry in creating the event value chain and generating economic impact through cultural initiatives.

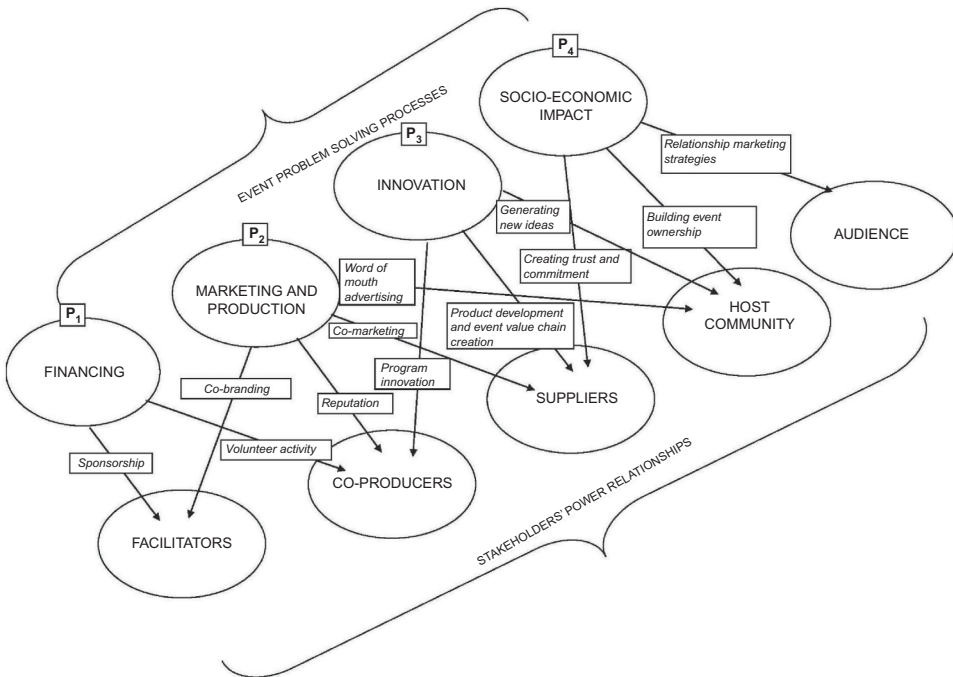


FIGURE 2 A preliminary conceptual model.

This decision relates to the need of observing and analyzing event organizers' abilities in involving host communities and their implications on regional development.

In accordance with our four research propositions, the described linkages are related to the following critical issues: event funding, event marketing and production, product innovation and development, and socioeconomic impact.

As indicated in Figure 2, the aims of networking processes depend on the nature of stakeholder. In particular, beyond the importance of the artists' reputation and the implications for promotion, event marketing and production benefit from a collaborative approach with facilitators and suppliers.

The model stresses the importance of building a sense of belonging and event ownership in host communities. In fact, the event organizers' social networks support their activities in presence of shared interests among local actors. Building trust and commitment in rural communities implies social cohesion, but stakeholders' power relations might be a constraint. In fact, divergent objectives and competition in terms of resource allocation generate tensions and conflicts, and increase the complexity of event organizers' problem-solving processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Although community-run events and festivals are often low demand, they have potential to achieve socioeconomic aims. Yet, in the analyzed area, the event experience is frequently built through the volunteer input of local stakeholders. With this concern in mind, the case study is focused on event organizers' networking processes to identify new strategies for attracting human and financial resources. There is a parallel with business marketing networks and innovation diffusion (Woodside & Biemans, 2005) and this indicates that event managers and associations are proactive in supporting regional development. However, protecting local heritage and promoting culture are not always a priority for the private sector, as business considerations tend to dominate over social and cultural aims. Thus, reflecting the theoretical framework of relationship marketing (Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993; Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), the findings underline the importance of co-sharing a project among stakeholders.

The four propositions emphasize event managers' skills directed at leveraging through complex webs of informal relationships. This finding is significant, as destination development planners tend to consider events as priorities in their agendas. Thus, in the described context a prerequisite for any event policy is evaluating the event organizers' orientation and propensity towards networking processes and partnership mechanisms.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the model proposed benefits from a co-joint application of network and stakeholder theories and clarifies the roles of local actors in the event sector, focusing on the nature of relationships established in the leisure industry. It facilitates analysis of key aspects related to event management such as strategic marketing planning, product innovation, and socioeconomic impact. In addition, it is a complementary tool to formulate destination management and development policy, as it is directed towards understanding networking processes and stakeholders' power relationships with specific critical issues. This contribution is significant because current tourism policies tend to prescribe a collaborative orientation without assessing relationships among key players. The model reflects a sustainable development approach, but whilst minimizing adverse environmental impacts, the low levels of audience participation also limit socioeconomic benefits.

As with Wilson and Woodside (1999) and Yin (2003), our study was constrained by empirical findings being from a cross-comparison of events in a single context. Additionally, this preliminary model is not intended to represent the complex web of relationships inside the local communities.

Thus, further investigation is needed to make the model more robust. Additionally, this research was formulated in relation to an emerging destination and with a program of leisure and tourism events. Future studies will investigate the role of social networks in other geographical contexts. In

particular, as the current priority of destination planners and marketers is to foster regional identity, it may be interesting to assess stakeholders' power relationships and interactions with traditional values of rural communities.

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