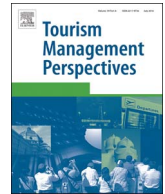




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Event management research: The focus today and in the future

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A B S T R A C T

Event management has burst on the academic and applied fields in the last 30 years as an independent entity, although the event product has existed for approximately as long as mankind has existed. Certainly, from recorded time, events have taken a major role in history as part of celebration, religion, community, and even revolution events that have been focal points of importance to residents, regions, and nations. Therefore, the direction of the present paper is to review what is happening in event management today and suggest the future direction that event management will likely take over the next 30 years. The main conclusion from the paper is that event management is getting stronger as an academic field as well as a major element of tourism development. Which suggests that the future should be bright for both academics and professionals in event management in the years to come.

Event management has burst on the academic and applied fields in the last 30 years as an independent entity, although the event product has existed for approximately as long as mankind has existed (Goldblatt, 2014). Certainly, from recorded time, events have taken a major role in history as part of celebration, religion, community, and even revolution events that have been focal points of importance to residents, regions, and nations (Getz & Page, 2016). Therefore, the direction of the present paper is to review what is happening in event management today and suggest the future direction that event management will likely take over the next 30 years regarding academic research areas and likely these areas will become increasingly important in the actual development and management of events in the future.

We cannot begin to look to the future though without first looking at the event research areas examined most today. So how have we gotten to where we are today as an area of investigation by academics and practitioners? Thirty years ago, there were no academic journals dedicated to events or event management, so why today are there several journals, numerous books, and publishers who have dedicated publication series to the area of events? My assessment is that these things have occurred because society began to take more interest in events, particularly certain types of events – the most obvious being the “mega” events such as the Olympics, the World Cup, the Super Bowl, to name a few. As the world began to shrink in size after World War II, due to technological innovations such as the jet plane, television, and the rise of the “middle class” in most developed nations, the new technology in conjunction with developed nations workers having more discretionary income and increased leisure time resulting in the

explosion of events globally at all levels – local, regional and national. The rise in numbers and frequency of events of all types began to appear (festivals, sports, music, food, culture, etc.) (Getz, 2008). With the increase in the number and types of events, an increase in event research followed. The types of research focused on up to this point will be described in the next section of the paper.

1. Event research to the present

The largest research focus area from the beginning of event research has been on the economic impacts/benefits of individual events. This research was first motivated from a function of the utility of the event management as a way to demonstrate the economic benefits of holding the event to the political powers that control the jurisdiction where the event was held. Other economic studies looked at the benefit for local population, to support the justification for construction of new infrastructure (stadiums), and to take credit for all the employment generated by the development and operation of the events.

In conjunction with the economic studies were the studies that focused on the social impact events had on local populations. These impacts have been identified as both positive and negative. The positive results showing the creation of new employment opportunities to increase livelihoods for residents in a new economic endeavor. In addition to the economic opportunities are the community building and social strengthening that events have done for communities of all sizes and types. Part of the social impacts though has also been found to be negative for local residents. These impacts can range from residential relocation as well as stress to the residents caused by pollution, noise,

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crowding, and crime, to name but a few, suggesting all events are not as successful as they seem on the surface.

The second group of event research elements is found around visitors that attend various types of events. The first type was related to attempt to understand what motivates visitors to attend events. What are the needs and wants of the visitors coming to an event? Looking at these concepts and expectations of visitors to events takes the next research agenda to the assessment of visitor satisfaction, including how their expectations are met, quality of the service provided, the relation of satisfaction to the visitor returning to the event again, event loyalty, and the relationship between value and satisfaction. Other visitor issues that have received attention from researchers were crowding, attachment to event sites, issues concerning various types of visitors or event theme such as related to LGBT, seniors, Millennials, disabled, as well as others.

2. Future areas for event management research

The most obvious topic in the future for event management if you pay any attention to the news today is safety/security at all types of events. This issue is not focused only in North America but is of global concern if past tragedies in England, France and Spain and many other countries are any indication. How then may this type of research evolve to help provide solutions to these problems without making the event experience less enjoyable is just one of the questions for event managers to answer? How do events provide the same level and quality of experiences and still ensure the visitors will be safe and secure? The solution for this is likely going to be quite different for small community events versus mega events in that the parameters that can be imposed at each size of event will have different levels of acceptance by event visitors at each size and type of event.

A second area of event management research that will have to increase is the understanding of what are “event experiences.” Some areas needing research are for instance, the event experiences that visitors are looking for; what makes these event experiences expectations different from previous needs and motives research on events; and does the so-called experience economy mean that visitors will have new measures of satisfaction with their event experience? Will topics for events in the future include such concepts “co-production” of events for them to be successful, or should the events merely provide the visitor with some escape from normal daily life?

Third on the list of future event management research topics is “social media” and “IT”. These components of technology are affecting events today in many ways visitors become aware of the event, to finding out about what is offered by the event, and evaluations and recommendations as to the worth of the event as a personal experience (Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, & McMahon-Beattie, 2015). So what event management approach does an event need to take to best utilize the various types of technology, and particularly, social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and all the others that exist now, as well as all those that will exist in the very near future?

The fourth area for future research should be focusing on the concepts of “green” events versus sustainable events. Are they the same thing or are they only related in some way? Market research has indicated that consumers are very interested in supporting “green” products and this association has transferred to events. Therefore, it will be very important for event managers to understand what role this will have for the recruitment and retention of event visitors to their events, and the distinction needs to be made between events that focus on being sustainable versus the events that focus on being “green” events (Mair, 2014).

Due to the global scope to events now it is destined for the future of event management to become more focused on less developed countries. The role of events in these countries will become even more important to their planning for traditional tourism strategies for them to expand their tourism offerings in order to get visitors to extend their

stay, and or choose that destination over other destinations offering similar tourism products (Getz, 2013). In addition, academics in these countries have begun to identify the opportunities that events offered to local communities and regions within these countries help distribute more benefits from visitors to local residents. Even the most rural and underdeveloped area has the opportunity to begin to develop or promote local events also is a way for those areas to more diversify their economies and improve livelihoods of its residents.

Event management will not only continue to expand in the future with a demand for more and better prepared workers but will be a research area in need of more attention. I see a need for more education and training of the next generation of event managers in the field and event researchers in academia. Due to the fast changing world today, there is a great need for more knowledge and skills for the event industry to be successful in the future, which means academic event programs need to focus on more efficient curriculum that is based on strong research results.

3. Conclusion

The space in this paper does not allow me to cover nearly all the current research being carried on worldwide, nor does it allow for a detailed discussion of future event management research areas but I hope I have provided a look at what should be coming down the road. Overall, the field of event management has not only grown in size but I feel grown in quality of research being conducted and disseminated in the professional journals. Researchers are broadening out into many aspects and concepts not reported in earlier research efforts, such as Richards & Colombo, 2017 and their article on Rethinking the eventful city and the concept of creating cities that have identities tied to events. There is also what appears to be an uneven distribution of research effort in event management, with the majority of event research coming from Europe, Australia and Asia today. This suggests that North American researchers are behind if not in production, likely in depth of knowledge regarding the changing concept of events and understanding their markets. An alternative conclusion may be that North American researchers are more focused on niche areas within events such as weddings (Naehyun, Lee, & Daniels, 2017), sports, and themed events rather than broad concepts and insights into the anatomy of what events are and what they can be. I do see a bright future for the event field everywhere but who will be leading the way has yet to be determined.

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