

Chapter 8

The Impact of Events: To Which Extent Are They Sustainable for Tourist Destinations? Some Evidences From Expo Milano 2015

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues about some of the main effects generated by cultural events on the host territory with the aim at verifying under which conditions an event creates value for all stakeholders and is sustainable. Sustainability is not a static condition but an ever-changing process, which should lead to enhanced life conditions from an economic, social and environmental point of view. This requires that all stakeholders not only participate but also deeply share values as well as local resources, take part in common projects and act to achieve mutual goals. In this regard, Expo Milano 2015 is analyzed as a significant example, because not only it promotes a virtuous theme but also it represents the product of intents and values shared by different organizations. However, despite the undisputed value generated by the event, the aim is to call into question its degree of sustainability, in relation to the policies implemented for promoting the event, the firms' strategy, as well as the social and economic effects in Milan and in Italy.

INTRODUCTION

Coherently to the book's theme, this chapter aims at presenting some critical issues about sustainable development in case of events performing. The goal is to analyze the effects of an event in the host territory and evaluate if the value generated is sustainable for *all* stakeholders from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

The Expo Milano 2015 is a significant example of event and definitely suitable for our aim at least for two reasons. First of all, it is an exceptional event able to *attract* people from all over the world, so it has presumably a deep impact over the host territory. Secondly, it promotes a particular *theme* that is «Feeding the Planet. Energy for Life». Sustainability is addressed to food sector development, in terms

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of providing sufficient and healthy food for all the world inhabitants, finding sustainable solutions for production and consumption and sharing best practices and guidelines for the future. It is clear that this theme makes the event very interesting for many organizations, which operate in different sectors but share the urgency to face the problem of how to “feed the planet” and prevent hunger, especially in consideration of the rapid depletion of agricultural resources.

In these terms, the exposition becomes, on one side, a *social meeting place* for people directly involved in the fair and, on the other side, one among the most powerful *cultural attractions* for tourists in Milan. This double feature enhances the destination’s value from both a social and tourist point of view and increases the destination attractiveness.

However, more attractiveness does not necessary imply sustainable development. Certainly, cultural events make destinations more attractive but we cannot take for granted that sustainability is improved because the tourist flow increases. In fact, the tourism incoming can alter the equilibrium of local communities as well as the activities promoted to perform the event can damage other local businesses. In the article published by The Guardian in May 12th 2015, Oliver Wainwright, one of the most famous art critic in the world, not only criticizes the event, but also calls into question the effectiveness of all universal exhibitions, because of high costs, incongruity between intentions and actions and controversial effects in the territories.

The role of governance is certainly crucial to develop initiatives aimed at improving sustainability. Governance should involve organizations from both public and private sectors as well as civil society, working all together within a set of values and principles. This requires trust between stakeholders, who share knowledge, rules and responsibilities, including co-funding. In other words, it means to act as a *network*, which implies not only *participation* but also *profound sharing*.

This is stated in the main document of UNWTO Algarve Forum, held in Portugal in 2011, according to which we should consider new ways to ensure innovation and sustainable development by means of governance through *networking*, which can foster cooperation among a large range of stakeholders, in order to transform collective intelligence into decisions and actions.

All these issues direct our attention to the need of verifying the degree of sustainability of the event. This means to assure that Expo would be able to create sustainable value not only in the short but also in the medium and long term for Milan as well as the whole country, from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

BACKGROUND

Organizing cultural events with high tourist potential requires a noteworthy effort to the host territory, local institutions, firms and citizens in terms of resources consumption, local investments and coordination of all activities, aimed at both planning and implementing the event. However, in considering the advantages that these events can carry along, a number of cities have followed a strategy of hosting mega-events in order to boost their reputation and economies (Roche, 1994; Burbank, Andranovick & Heying, 2001).

Events can be seen as “tourist products”, arising from creativity (individual and collective) and able to generate cultural innovation and enhance the destination attractiveness. Several scholars of *event management* focus on the event development to increase destination competitiveness. Getz (2008) claims that territories should plan and develop events like firms invest for their new products, because they

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