

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND SPORTS EVENTS UPON THE GROWTH OF A REGION

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Abstract

In this article, it is presented how cultural and sports events are benefic for the development of a region. Events that are promoted and organized in a proficient way can be regarded as real engines for the growth of a region, in terms of tourisms, services, and infrastructure and so on. The study will focus especially on cultural and sports events deployed in Romania, in different regions and the degree in which these events have influenced a region.

In the first part of the paper, there are presented some important and drive efficient events, cultural and sports, that succeeded over the years in attracting bigger and bigger audiences, both from the region and from the country or district. The second part of the paper offers the results of a research conducted to see the perception of the inhabitants of such a region that flourishes due to the deployment of events and the degree of awareness of the benefits of hosting this kind of the events. And thirdly, we have drawn up some strategies that communities should follow in order to increase the popularity of their region.

Key words: *cultural events, sport events, developing region*

JEL Classification: *M3 Marketing and advertising, M30 General*

I. INTRODUCTION

Events can play a key role in the development of a village, city, region and even countries if we take into consideration mega events or hallmark events. Events have an important economic, social and cultural impact as well. Events can be used also as a policy tool for achieving different marketing objectives for the region where they are held, as generators of jobs and small and medium enterprises due to the increase in the demand of the spectators that are not locals.

The event industry (Kose and Argan and Argan, 2011) is one of the world's largest employers and contributes to a major positive economic impact. The term event is used for describing different activities like: sport, art, tourism or social activities; designed for different purposes. Public or private, commercial or charitable, celebratory or commemorative-events bring people together to share an experience and produce a measurable outcome. Events are leisure activities for the spectators and at the same time work possibilities for people.

II. CULTURAL EVENTS

Not only sports events can attract a very large number of visitors, but also cultural events can do the same, an example is the European Capital of Culture. It was created by the former actress Melina Mercouri (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/ecoc_25years_en.pdf, 2009), then Greece's Minister of Culture, that came up with the idea of launching a series of yearly events that would put the spotlight on cities around Europe and their role in the development of European cultures. Twenty-five years later the European Capitals of Culture are Europe's most ambitious collaborative cultural projects both in scope and scale, with budgets far exceeding those of any other cultural event. Among other things, their aim is to make Europeans aware of what they have in common. The event has acquired considerable prestige among Europe's citizens.

Since 1985, every year, the EU commission selects few cities from different countries, which have the chance to host cultural events for one year. During this time (Santinelli, 2015), the chosen city can show its cultural life and its cultural development on the European and international scene. In this way, the Capitals of Culture have a unique chance to transform their cultural infrastructures, boosting the local economy and attracting more tourists. So far, more than 50 cities from Europe have been selected to be The European Capitals of Culture, not matter if the cities, which hosted the cultural events, were capitals or non-EU members as, in 2010, Istanbul (Turkey) was selected. Another program was launched in 1990, the Ministers of Culture launched

the "European Cultural Month" (<http://www.uneec.org/htmls/history1.html>, 2007). This event is similar to the European City of Culture, but goes on for a shorter period of a month and is addressed to Central and Eastern European countries in particular. The European Commission granted a subsidy for the European Cultural Month each year, but, unfortunately, in 2003, it was suspended because of the high investments but little revenue and impact.

The main benefits of winning the Cultural Capital competition can be considered at three levels (Vasilescu, 2014):

- Marketing for the city, like regeneration of public spaces, renewal of cultural spaces as well as sustainable promotion of local products and facilities;
- Tourism development in long term as the city is included in the specialized guides and can become an international destination for the tourists from worldwide;
- Social cohesion - strengthening of social and institutional issues by increasing the feeling of confidence and local pride.

Nowadays, the event of the European Cultural Capital (Cosma and Negrusa and Popovici, 2009) has certainly developed beyond its mainly cultural origins becoming a part of urban economic and cultural reconstruction alternatives for cities in Europe. The year of 2007 has a historical signification for Romanian tourism: Sibiu, a Transylvanian city, becomes the first East- Central-European Capital of Culture, sharing its title with the city of Luxembourg. One of the main benefits of Sibiu after 2007 is certainly enhancing its brand image. The city has become in a very short time, maybe, the most famous city in Romania after the capital of the country. In general, one of the main objectives of the European Cultural Capital is the rehabilitation and development of cultural infrastructure.

The Romanian tourism image in the international market (Negrusa and Cosma and Gica, 2009) is starting to be identifiable and is related to the elements of cultural, eco and rural tourism. Visitors will find here authentic cultural experiences as they are treated with respect, educated, and invited to participate in local traditions and lifestyles.

Cultural tourism has turned into an important trend at international level. In 2006, WTTC (Cosma and Negrusa, 2008) recommended cultural, heritage tourism and spa wellness tourism as important parts of tourism products for Romania, especially concerning foreign tourists. The attraction points are numerous, various and interesting. Tourism stakeholders can create independent and complex products in order to promote Romania as a cultural tourist destination.

The global economic crisis (Dulău and Coroş, 2009) was a huge opportunity for Romania's tourism development, because foreigners still perceive it as a relatively cheap destination. Authorities need to work on the national branding strategy, while local destinations' representatives must understand that they need to promote these ones for a better exploitation of their tourism assets and cultural heritage. Although valuable cultural and historic sites (Dulău and Coroş, 2009) seem to be well preserved and hidden from the eyes of the potential visitors mainly by not being signalized and promoted. Foreign visitor's access is still limited due to the lack of education regarding international well-known foreign languages like: French, German and even English regarding the employees of museums, transportation companies, public institutions and so on. Meanwhile, hospitality investors must also contribute to the development of the quality of the services delivered to both domestic and foreign tourists, as word of mouth and, especially, the not-so-good experiences, through which the tourists might receive, will only drive away their friends, relatives, acquaintances and peers as they will give a bad feedback regarding their experience.

III. SPORTS EVENTS

Sports events played an important role in the development of the society starting with the Olympic Games organized firstly by the ancient Greeks, which had not only economic, cultural and social impact upon the participants' countries but also a political one, as during the Games (Kyle, 2015), wars were suspended and armies were allowed to pass with their weapons through Elis during the seven days before and after the Games. At the same time, trials were postponed as well as the penalties of death to be carried out. Violators of the Truce (Swaddling, 1999), that were established during the Games, were heavily fined, and indeed, on one occasion, even Alexander the Great himself had to recompense an Athenian who had been robbed by some of his mercenaries whilst travelling to Olympia.

Nowadays, also major sporting events (Burgan and Mules, 1992) have their main economic impact via the direct expenditure of tourists associated with the event. On the other hand, a mega-sport event (Fourie and Santana-Gallego, 2011) is scheduled at least once every year somewhere in the world, these events are rare occurrences for the host cities and countries. The benefits of such events seem lucrative, not in the short or medium term, but in long term, and the very fact that many countries bid to host these events suggests that the benefits – be they tangible, like the construction of new buildings and locations for the sport competition to be held and also the infrastructure that always can be improved in order to permit a very large number of spectators

to be present at the event; or intangible, like improving the brand image and awareness of both the cities and countries – more often than not outweigh the costs. Communities and some administrative personnel are reluctant of such investments mainly the "white elephants" buildings. They are defined as (www.oxforddictionaries.com) a possession that is useless or troublesome, especially one that is expensive to maintain or difficult to dispose of, like most of the buildings constructed for the deployment of events, or even the hotels, or Olympic parks. Such an example is the Olympics Winter Games from Sochi that from the very beginning were not so strategically thought over as the climate of Sochi is a subtropical one and even more, for example, \$6 billion initial investment (Masterova, 2013) had to cover the construction of most of all the sports facilities from zero, there were few roads, too much traffic and inadequate public transportation and also not enough hotel rooms. Although the strategy and the first intention was that the games will have a positive impact on the region, as new hotels, business centers, concert halls and many other major facilities will be left to be used after the games and also a new state-of-the-art airport terminal. As even the president of Russia (Lally, 2013) stated that he wanted to turn Sochi, a threadbare resort at the Black Sea, into a "polished Russian jewel", an up-to-the-minute, year-round snow-and-sun resort drawing tourists long after the Olympics Games finished. The final costs exceeded £31 billion which was called (Miller, 2014) "the shining showpiece Winter Olympics Extravaganza", and unfortunately, today the resort of Sochi resembles little more than a ghost town with deserted buildings, empty streets and a few stray dogs. This might be also the result of the foreign policy of the following events in Crimea and Ukraine that have already overshadowed any feel-good effect from the games.

But this problem did not just appear because of the climate and the government of the country, as, in Greece, the post-Olympic era (Kissoudi, 2010) was characterized by missed opportunities that were mainly concerned with the utilization of the Olympic venues, which, hampered by bureaucracy and lack of long-term planning, remained unexploited, having been abandoned after the games.

In Romania, different kinds of sport competitions took place. One remarkable is the European Youth Olympic Winter Festival which was held in Brasov in 2013. The Minister of Youth and Sports (<http://mts.ro/>, 2013) from that time stated that it was the biggest competition organized by Romania after 1981. The mayor of Brasov (<http://www.romanalibera.ro/>, 2013) decided to send intention letters to the International Olympic Committee with the intention to host the Youth Winter Olympic Games in 2020, regarding that they have already the experience of organizing the Festival. The conditions are even more, and very restrictive. Besides, Brasov - Poiana Brasov, also cities like Rasnov, Predeal and very likely Prahova Valey will be in the project.

IV. RESEARCH

A research was conducted among 437 respondents with age between 18 up to 25 years old, living in urban or rural area, to see how the locals perceive the organization of events, especially sport and cultural events and if they had some or any: economic, social and cultural impact upon them and their families. There were questioned only those that were living there during the entire deployment of the event: pre-event, during and post-event in the city, or village where it took place in order to see how it was perceived by them. In the sample were taken into consideration also direct and indirect audience of the events. Most of them attended only sport events 81.92%, while 40.3% only at art events and only 27.45% both sport and arts events, which is explicable why young people tend to practise and to be more attracted to sports competitions or why the frequency and the number of cultural events are not so predominant as it is for sports.

The scope of the research was to discover if organizing events contributes to the increase of quality of life from the point of view of economic and socio-cultural of the respondents. Most events were deployed in existing buildings or sites, and in the best case, they were renovated as painted, refurbished or some important elements changed like the stage with a new and improved one - 27.68%, and only 8.46% took part in events in new buildings that were built from scratch especially for the event.

Regarding the infrastructure developing, including improved public transportation, transport infrastructure, town rehabilitation and even ecological projects started like planting trees, selective recycling at the site of the event which were perceived by 22.19%. Just for major events, especially sport events, the number of businesses increased as well as job opportunities that were noticed by 10.75%. It can be also included the city brand awareness and image here.

Events seem to have a greater social impact when it comes to strengthening consensus, cohesion, an opportunity to spend more time with friends, sharing the experience, being more loyal to the site, good way to meet new people and combating social exclusion were perceived by 85.12%.

Cultural impact is increased if the play or the concerts have also known locals as actors or singers even if they sing in the opening of the concert this, giving them a feeling of ownership, or a way of expressing their own culture by raising civic pride and celebrating at the same time, the residents' customs and traditions, 36.38%.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Events have positive effects upon the region where they are deployed, like increasing the awareness and brand image of the country, region, city, village, place and together with offer for urban regeneration (Mathesona, 2010) legacies, primarily physical and economic renewal for local businesses and more exactly for the hospitality sector where are included hotels, restaurants and even spas.

Besides the positives legacies that sports and cultural events offer to the communities where they are organized and deployed, there will always be negative legacies (Mangan, 2008) such as debts from construction, high opportunity costs, infrastructure that is not needed after the event, temporary crowding, as well as the loss of potential tourists that would have liked to visit the host region during the event.

Bearing in mind that the construction of buildings is authorized by the authorities, it would be their main duty to plan in the long term how those buildings can attract events and with them spectators and tourists, or in the worst case scenario to think of alternative plans that would change their initial destination to use those buildings so that they would not become "white elephants" for the community, becoming a burden, instead of something that they should be proud of.

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