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Editorial

The tourism, sport and creative industries have gone through tremendous change in recent years. The last decade has been a period of unprecedented growth for tourism - the world's largest industry. Tourism arrivals are predicted to reach a record 1 billion by the end of 2012 (UNWTO, 2012). At the same time many countries of the world are now in recession due to the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures implemented by their governments have negatively impacted tourism, sport and creative sectors in these economies, whilst technology continues to revolutionize the way the organizations in these industries do business. The articles in this edition of the journal reflect not only the dynamism but also the innovation and incredible resilience of the organizations in the tourism, sport and creative industries.

First off Palumbo highlights the growing popularity of the use virtual reality technology within trade exhibitions, both as an enhancement to brick-and-mortar exhibitions and as a cost-effective replacement with the added advantage of safeguarding intellectual property. Next Ionescu critically examines the role of unusual venues in producing catharsis in event attendees. She argues that event attendees seek out these unusual spaces to satisfy needs that go beyond superficial consumption. She demonstrates that attendees seek out these spaces to experience healing from the anxieties and pressures wrought by post-modern lifestyles. Finally, Alrawadieh and Johnson examine the Middle East's experience with sports tourism. Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Qatar are countries that have enjoyed great success in this area, playing host to numerous home grown and international sporting events within the five years. Indeed abundant financial resources and aggressive marketing along with strong government support and a strategy linked to the region's overall destination marketing have been integral to their achievements. However, the authors also highlight the need for education and training of their sports marketing and management professionals if their current sports tourism strategies are to be sustained.

This edition also marks the end of my term as journal editor for the *London Journal of Tourism, Sport and Creative Industries*. I thoroughly enjoyed my time as editor, having benefitted tremendously from the support of the journal's editorial and advisory boards. I pass the editorship to Ms. Ivna Reic knowing that it will be left in capable hands.

As usual I trust the articles within this edition will inspire and engage readers, contributing to new perspectives and insights.

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Research Paper

Trade Shows and Trade Fairs Meet the Virtual World

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Abstract

There is, as yet, little research in the marketing literature on virtual exhibitions. Virtual reality technology, widely used in a number of business sectors, is beginning to impact the trade show industry in a major way. This paper provides background to the challenges facing traditional venue bound events and opens discussion of the potential for hybrid and virtual events. There is growing evidence that trade events held in cyberspace can serve as an extension of the physical exhibition, reduce marketing costs and minimize the potential for the theft of intellectual property.

Key words: Cyberspace, espionage, event, exhibition, trade show, virtual

Background

Trade shows have played a prominent role in the corporate communications mix for many years. Enterprises use these multifunctional communication platforms to pursue a wide variety of objectives (Kirchgeorg, Springer & Kastner, 2010). Trade Shows and Trade Fairs have traditionally been one of the best ways to enter a market—or find it. In one place you can find products and services to buy, sell products you manufacture or represent, and investigate what the competition is up to.

Trade shows/fairs date back to the time when most trade was centred at markets or fairs. It is possible to trace the origin of trade shows to biblical times, but obviously none of these exhibitions exist today. However, the Frankfurt Book Fair has been held regularly since the thirteenth century. In fact, international trade fairs have been a primary vehicle for reaching potential buyers and introducing products and services since the 16th century. The first real modern "trade event" was the 1851 World's Fair in London. Held for seven months in the temporary Crystal Palace, the Fair showcased the achievements of the British Empire, then at its peak. The purpose of the World's Fair was to stimulate business for British companies in the international market. In the United States, trade events can trace their roots to the completion of the Chicago International Exposition Building in 1872 (Herbig & Palumbo, 2002).

Pitta, Weisgal and Lynagh (2006) reported that in 1995 trade shows accounted for between 16-20 percent of a firm's marketing budget (Chapman, 1995). Another study in 2004 conducted among 700 marketing decision-makers in the automotive, high-tech, financial and health care industries reported that budgets had grown to above the 20 percent level (Barker, 2005). In dollar terms, the figure approximated an incredible $166 billion (Spethmann, 2005). For many small businesses with limited budgets, trade shows and personal selling have been the only affordable promotion mix elements.

Exhibit marketing has been a cost-effective means of reaching customers and prospects. It reduces the buying cycle and allows companies to reach hidden buyers. In 2007, the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) found that the overall exhibition industry growth of 3.2 percent over 2006 levels was led by a 6.8 percent gain in revenue and a 4.9 percent gain in attendees. The report revealed that all but one of the 11 industry sectors — building and construction — grew in 2007, led by the government sector with a 12.6 percent gain for the year. Four sectors improved their growth rates in 2007 compared with 2006: sports, technology, government and consumer goods (Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2008).

Reychav (2009) found that the usefulness of trade shows has been increasingly recognized as a highly cost-effective way of enabling a large number of potential suppliers and customers to meet in a short span of time (Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992; Shoham, 1999). A trade show is an exhibition organized so that companies in a specific industry can showcase and demonstrate their latest products and services, examine the activities of their competitors, and discover recent trends and opportunities. From the exhibitors' (suppliers') standpoint, the major reason for being present at trade shows is to gather information about the competition (Blythe, 2000) as well as to garner general market research information and news about the latest technologies (Rice & Almossawi, 2002). From the customers' perspective, the major motivations for attending trade shows is to collect information about market access, new products, potential suppliers and alternative purchases (Godar & O'Connor, 2001).

One industry pundit called a trade show a four-day bricks and mortar retail store where customers could enter, learn about products and perhaps even buy. Most important, though, is that it can reduce the cost of a sale by as much as 75 percent (Weisgal, 1999; Pitta, Weisgal & Lynagh, 2006). In essence, exhibit marketing is marketing in miniature. Every facet of a business-marketing plan is present in an exhibit marketing programme. The only difference is the scale: the plan is smaller, shorter and takes place within a finite period of time. The key issue is not attracting attendees in general but a niche audience, those with the highest profit potential. Marketers who are familiar with the customer value pyramid literature rank their customers ranging from platinum to lead based on their lifetime value (Zeithaml, Rust & Lemon, 2001).

In a recent survey, trade shows have been shown to be the primary source of purchasing information, beating out traditional elements such as advertisements and articles in trade journals, manufacturer's representatives, catalogues, and even business associates. Industry figures show that, on the average, 70 percent of trade show attendees plan to buy one or more products offered by exhibitors. Moreover, 75 percent actually make a purchase. If these results were not impressive enough, a huge number - 93 percent - said the convention influenced their buying decision. Marketers know that that kind of response is the stuff of which dreams are made. If not dreams, at least the results make hot customer lists (Pitta et al., 2006). However, industry sources reveal an almost unbelievable figure: 83 percent of those prospects were not called on by a company representative within a one year period after a show (Weisgal, 1999). Equally unbelievable is that 80 percent of exhibitors do not follow up on their leads.

Exhibitions, trade shows and conferences are important for many firms' business strategies, whether to increase sales, launch a new product or simply to boost brand awareness and recognition. However, trade shows require a lot of effort and resources from exhibitors - they must dedicate time and financial resources to attend, organize materials and cover for those absent from the office. Exhibitions also demand stamina and perseverance from visitors.

Trade Events Meet Economic Reality

Despite the numerous statistics, reports and organizations that organize, audit and support the exhibition industry worldwide, there is very little written about the risks to a firm's participation in these events. Being a leader in product/service management has a price. In the current global marketing scene, this price is very high and getting higher. Intentionally copying the name, shape, or look of another firm's product/service offering is pirating. Brand or product/service pirating and the loss of intellectual property rights cost American industries an estimated $200 billion in lost sales and is projected to grow at a fast pace (Jacobs, Samli & Jedlik, 2001; Freedman, 1999). Tradeshows are one of the premier opportunities for market intelligence gathering. Highly trained professionals are working the show floor, asking questions, making notes, taking pictures. Every bit of data they gather makes it back to corporate headquarters, to be used to make critical business decisions (Friedman, 2006). The emergence of hybrid and virtual events can dramatically minimize both costs and the exposure to industrial espionage.

Recently, the Exhibit Council released its first best practice report titled "Full Disclosure of Exhibitor Costs". The purpose of this best practice report, as stated in its recommendations, was to increase exhibitor value and improve the effectiveness of event marketing, to advocate for the full disclosure over trade show and event marketing costs, and to guide the industry in making adjustments that will support its financial future and continued presence in the corporate marketing mix (Anonymous, 2010).

Costs of exhibiting at international fairs are high and often take up a sizeable portion of a company's sales budget. During the recent difficult economic climate the mandate is to do more with less. Exhibition and marketing executives have begun to engage online media which affords them efficiencies and broader platforms to market their firm's products and services. Typically, traditional exhibitions are resource-hungry in terms of time and manpower in designing, manufacturing, shipping and the erection of booths and/or stands. There are also associated costs such as insurance premiums and exhibitors' costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence. Common business practice has been to treat the exhibition as an essential component of a company's portfolio of marketing activities (Lee-Kelley, Gilbert & Al-Shehabi, 2004).

The CEIR the research arm of the exhibition industry has reported that the value of exhibitions has increased in importance in business-to-business tactics. But, although interest in face-to-face meetings remains high, a study conducted by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) and The Center for Association Leadership has indicated that the recent economic downturn is threatening those meetings, and as a result associations' bottom lines .

The study, "ASAE and the Center Impact Study—Beliefs, Behaviors and Attitudes in Response to the Current Economy," was conducted between December 2008 and January 2009 and included analysis of membership lists from nearly 100 associations, as well as a survey of 8,500 association members and meeting planners from both the corporate and non-profit sectors. It suggested that association sponsored conventions, one of the main sources of income for associations, will be significantly impacted as the economy worsens; that association members were willing to travel farther for large industry meetings in 2009, but that they may skip smaller, local meetings in order to save money to do so; and that only 58 percent of association members who attended a face-to-face meeting or event in 2009 planned to do so again in 2010.

The events bubble has burst. Most likely, this is due to decades of growth followed by two major U.S. recessions in just 10 years, said Doug Ducate, president-CEO of the CEIR. "During good times, we get into excess. Every year, events tend to get bigger and better than before," he said. "That mentality is what feeds growth during the good times. But this is the most extended period of decline we've ever experienced. Now that we have ratcheted back again - twice in 10 years - how much enthusiasm are exhibitors going to have for going back to old ways? How long is the recovery going to be? And have they found other marketing techniques (i.e. hybrid and virtual marketing tactics) they're using, that they're investing in, that they're happy with?" (Biba, 2010: 16).

According to Ducate, CEIR's data indicate there won't be any growth in the industry until 2012. But that depends on the return of consumer confidence. And while there has been a small amount of growth in consumer shows during the first half of 2010, it has been limited. "While indicators seem to point in that direction, what's happened so far is customers are paying down debt and saving." (Biba, 2010: 16).

Hybrid-virtual Trade Events Emerge

A virtual trade show, often called a virtual trade fair or virtual event is an online environment that goes live and stays live for a period of time. A hybrid event combines the traditional brick-and-mortar experience along with digital media access. This affords attendees the option of visiting the event in person or through an online connection. Several like-minded participants can be available online for brief periods of time, allowing them to connect with one another without travel, via the Internet, no matter where they are located geographically, to exchange information. Lee-Kelley et al. (2004) indicated that the concept of the "virtual exhibition" arose from the excess of demand and availability of traditional (physical) exhibitions. They indicated that this initiative emerged from the Association of Exhibition Organizers (www.aeo.org.uk) and it paved the way for alternative platforms for traditional physical venue-based events. Additional evidence of the "blurring of the boundary between the physical and the virtual" include research conducted by Miles and Snow (1986); Davidow and Malone (1992) and Lee-Kelley (2000).

In 2010 CEIR reported that there has been an increase in the use of digital integration within the traditional brick and mortar event, revealing that "sixty-one percent of respondents to their 2010 Digital and Exhibit Insights study reported use of virtual events to complement live events" (CEIR, 2010). Virtual media, i.e. webinars, webcasts, virtual (on-line) events such as conferences, panel discussions, access to the exhibition hall, etc. were reported to be gaining in both popularity and use. The growth of these hybrid events is confirmed by the Event Marketing Institute in its 8th annual Event View report (Event Marketing Institute & George P. Johnson, 2010). The report indicated that, while budgetary allocations for event marketing remain fairly constant, web-marketing continues to grow with organizers finding new ways to combine and integrate the physical and virtual benefits of the trade event. In addition, the Virtual Marketing Outlook Report indicated that 37% of the 889 participants in its study reported that their firms produce hybrid events. This study was a collaborated effort between the Virtual Edge Institute, the Lattanze Center at Loyola University and George P. Johnson Experience Marketing (Virtual Edge.org & George. P. Johnson 2010). It reflects a growing interest and realization that web-based digital media can both complement and add value to the traditional three-to-five day trade event. Integrating this emerging technology into virtual events dramatically reduces the costs. And, there is the potential to minimize the risk of theft of intellectual property.

Woolard (2009) indicated that "as the economy sags, many events marketers are adding virtual events to their calendar". Marketers interviewed by trade press publication, *B-to-B* reported aggressive virtual events growth, with companies prompted to either step into the virtual arena for the first time or work to increase the performance of their events. Hybrid or virtual platforms give marketers a host of benefits, from cutting costs to increasing reach and even reducing carbon emissions. But at the end of the day, trade shows need to start a dialogue - an area where marketers said virtual events still have room to grow. The format is advancing well beyond the tried-and-true webinar as companies roll out more complex and interactive features (Woolard, 2009).

"The economy has exponentially grown the hybrid and virtual events market," said Brent Arslaner, VP-marketing at Unisfair, a company that specializes in developing web-based events. "Marketers have the same goals, but they have substantially less budget and they have travel freezes. Large companies are cancelling sales meetings and user conferences. But people still have to execute; they still have to do their jobs" (Woolard, 2009: 22).It's a sign of the growing maturity of the digital market that the need for online access now forms a major element of many trade exhibitions. Every business sector, from marketing to manufacturing is focusing on the potential of the Internet. Hybrid and virtual trade shows are expected to add and feature suppliers of digital products and services with thought-provoking seminars.

One of the interesting characteristics of virtual worlds is that they enable interaction between individuals who may be physically far apart from one another (i.e. located in different countries) in a common virtual environment. Those individuals interact as if they were in the same place at the same time, which sometimes referred to as real-time interaction. Whenever, individuals can freely interact in this fashion, one can reasonably expect something to happen. That something is often referred to as a human universal called trade. Trade in virtual worlds is essentially a more sophisticated version of e-commerce, which can be roughly categorized into two main types: business-to-consumer (B2C) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C). There is a growing trend for both B2C and C2C trade to take place on the Web, and many companies have emerged and done well in terms of revenue and profit by providing an infrastructure on which e-commerce can take place. Good examples are Amazon, Craigslist, and eBay (Kock, 2008).

Some trade shows that are held in the virtual world — that is, completely online — are gaining in popularity among groups seeking innovative ways to improve the return on their event marketing dollars. Typically, they are similar to webinars which are usually hour-long web conferences or webcasts focused on one subject. But they can emulate full-blown physical conferences and show activity and can last up to seven hours and even up to three days for big shows. Hybrid and virtual trade shows typically include keynote and breakout sessions presented as web conferences or webcasts. Web pages dedicated to specific exhibitors serve as virtual exhibit booths. All the show participants — speakers, attendees and exhibitors — can communicate with each other in real time through instant messaging (Krantz, 2006).

Virtual Trade Show Technology – How it Works

Virtual reality technology has been applied in many areas to support a more secure and economical presence in the virtual world than in the corresponding real world (Durlach & Mavor, 1995). The use of virtual reality is no longer limited to research in a laboratory but gradually has migrated to practical applications in daily life. To meet the increasing demand for information, emerging virtual exhibitions are more flexible to solve the temporal and spatial

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constraints of traditional exhibitions and allow users to attend the event anytime and anywhere (Su, Yen & Zhang, 1998).

Leading providers of virtual event platforms have seen an immense growth in the demand for their products, software commonly referred to as avatars. This has been attributed in part to the 2008-2009 recession which has driven the need to find cost-cutting ways to do business. According to a Champion Exposition Services study, one in four people plan on using a digital event platform in the association market. The study also found that 70% of respondents are actively producing, considering or interested in pursuing hybrid or virtual events.

There is growing general agreement that the virtual exhibition (VE) has potential - it is conceived to be an appropriate medium to launch "product"; a relevant platform for dealing with pricing issues of the marketing mix; offers the potential to minimize theft of intellectual property; and is acceptable for conducting "promotion" activities. Paradoxically, "place" to conduct business and to support the rest of the marketing-mix activities may not be as strong. There may also be a reluctance to use a VE as a channel due to many companies being unable to automatically integrate Internet purchases with their fulfillment and therefore not being able to take full advantage of the VE (Spiegel, 2000).

Setting up a virtual booth takes as little as an hour. Exhibitors choose from predesigned displays, add their company logos, and upload promotional materials, such as brochures, white papers, and videos. Exhibitors man the booth from their computers, often while doing other work. When a visitor clicks on a company's booth, employees receive an alert. They can talk to the visitor through a chat window or, if both parties have Web cameras, by video. If no one is available to speak, a visitor can leave a message. And, with the growth of social media, blogs, online video, etc., corporate marketers are adopting mobility marketing tactics to efficiently deliver their brand's message. While driven in part by budgetary constraints, hybrid and virtual events engage prospects and customers on their own terms.

Visitors to a hybrid or virtual tradeshow fill out an online registration form and then enter a virtual exhibit hall to visit various virtual booths. The virtual booths often reflect the imagery of a real-world tradeshow booth with visual displays. The visuals also sometimes reflect those seen in real-world convention centers so that users can relate to them easily. A virtual booth typically has several which can trigger different responses upon the click of the mouse. There are icons on which a visitor would click for instant communication with the exhibitor, such as by sending an instant message, or making an instant voice-call. There are icons on which a visitor will be able to click for instantly playing multimedia such as videos and audio messages or other PowerPoint presentations. Users within the environment often create avatars as a visual representation of their person.

Most events don't require an extensive knowledge of virtual environments by visitors. After an attendee registers for an event, his or her contact information is automatically compiled into a profile, which others can view and download when the show goes live. Procuring a booth at a hybrid or virtual trade show isn't always cheap, but it's usually less expensive than renting space in a traditional exhibition hall, which can exceed $US 15,000 before travel costs. Prices vary, because they are set by the organizers of the exposition, industry trade associations and/or the sponsoring trade publications - a virtual booth can cost as little as $US 3,000 to $US 8,000 on average. Those savings have prompted firms to scale back on smaller venue bound regional trade shows in favor of online events (Joyner, 2009).

A major question to answer is if hybrid and virtual events can displace traditional exhibitions. Some managers may believe that there is no substitute for face-to-face transactions (Zott, Amit & Donlevy, 2000). Conversely, a study by Rines (2000) indicated that respondents from the jewelry sector, despite the traditional high involvement and tangible viewing elements in jewelry buying decisions, are interested in seeing an increase of Internet events. This suggests that there is a possibility that the increased use of digital media become a real threat to the physical exhibition - at least for certain industry sectors, such as jewelry. The structure of a typical virtual tradeshow often includes a virtual exhibit hall which users enter with specific permissions and capabilities, to either attend and view virtual trade show displays in the exhibit hall, or build virtual booths to exhibit information related to products or services being offered, just as they would at a show in a convention center. The event may have other components such as a virtual web conference, or a web seminar or a webinar, or other educational presentations. The virtual show thus results in live interaction between all the users on many levels (one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many) and simultaneously. Detailed tracking mechanisms allow organizers to determine the flow of visitors "attending" the virtual tradeshow. Although virtual trade shows are usually conducted in specialized web environments, many have been organized and conducted in tightly controlled text based environments.

Virtual exhibitors use online tools to make content relevant and tailored to appeal to their specific target audiences. Virtual exhibits may be made to look like exhibitors' real-world booths in any in- person trade fair where they may be exhibiting. Hybrid trade shows can be run in conjunction with real-world or in-person tradeshows too. And, sometimes they are stand-alone online only tradeshows. Businesses can employ these tactics as part of their overall marketing promotion mix.

Virtual trade shows are used for a variety of purposes such as international market entry, business match-makers, procurement fairs, and product launches. The experience can also translate well for other applications such as virtual job fairs, virtual benefits fairs, online employee networks, distributor fairs, and venture capital fairs. Virtual tradeshows typically cost much less than traditional trade shows. Since virtual trade shows can be conducted from a person's desk, the cost of travel, lodging, and trade show displays is virtually eliminated.

Keeping Trade Shows Fair

According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, intellectual property theft costs American corporations $250 billion every year. Such theft can hit small and medium-sized firm enterprises (SME) particularly hard because they often lack the resources or the knowledge to combat it. Research conducted in 2005 by the U.S. Patent and trademark Office, a part of the Department of Commerce, reported that 85% of exporting SMEs failed to recognize that their U.S. patents and trademarks did not protect them overseas, thereby jeopardizing ownership of their own products and services in global markets (Wright, 2006, Palumbo 2008).

The emergence of the Internet as a viable marketing tool and medium offers a potential solution to industrial espionage at venue bound trade events, and for cost reduction in marketing expenditures. The recent concept of the "hybrid and virtual exhibition" arose from an excess of demand and availability of traditional (physical) exhibitions. However, hybrid and virtual

exhibitions are emerging that hold value and promise, and could replace for some industries the need for the physical or in-person event.

Common business practice has been to treat the exhibition as an essential component of a company's portfolio of marketing and promotional tactics. The Internet has evolved exponentially over the past decade and has become an integral part of day-to-day business communication. Many companies now view the Internet as a gateway to extending their reach and having the ability to sell globally without having to expand physically into new markets. This realization has prompted major changes in the channels of communication and coordination as well as how firms organize work (Korper & Ellis, 2000).

In the marketing arena the traditional distribution channels are threatened by channel conflict and subsequently, insuring timely developments in the electronic "marketspace" becomes all-important. The new Internet-based economy, with its capacity for boundary-spanning exchanges, has given rise to a host of cyber societies (e.g. virtual communities and virtual organizations) and now presents industry with an exciting new channel in the form of "virtual exhibitions"(Lee-Kelley et al., 2004).The potential for hybrid and virtual exhibitions is that they will be a useful promotional tool although the medium of "physical place" will not be replaced when face-to face contact is required.

Concluding Remarks

Companies must become more aware of their exposure at both traditional and emerging hybrid and virtual trade conferences, fairs and shows. Their competitive advantage will be jeopardized if they do not prepare their staff adequately. Kirchgeorg and Jung (2010) research indicates that "personal contact between decision-makers, companies and customers in an attractive, emotionalized setting will be highly valued in 2020". To insure the continued growth of hybrid and virtual events trade event organizers and participating firms need to create a firm underpinning for robust social media community. Efficient platforms must be maintained so that the interaction between exhibitor and attendee can be productive and useful to both.

In addition, when considering a hybrid or virtual exhibition, participants must be aware of the customer service implications. Relevant communication and timely information throughout the duration of the event will be more and more critical. Visitors at conventional venue bound exhibitions frequently buy the products and services on display and take them away with them; only larger or made-to-order items have to be shipped or delivered. This is not the case with the hybrid or virtual event; all orders will have to be processed and deliveries made separately. This lead-time between order and delivery is an issue not only in terms of the having- to-wait inconvenience factor, but also the possibility of the customer concern about non-delivery, sub-standard products and difficulties returning unfit or unwanted goods (Walsh & Godfrey, 2000).

And, because hybrid and virtual events extend the firm's reach into the marketplace, information must be maintained and kept up-to-date as visitors can "walk" into this web-based exhibition at any time and from anywhere in the world. As the future unfolds, organizers of such events may find their role more and more akin to a broker as they facilitate the exchange of information between buyer and seller. For the company that decides to exhibit in a hybrid or virtual event there are skill and resource implications to consider. Up-to-date information and a constant dialogue with prospects and customers are required. Clearly, additional research to shed light on trends in digital media, effective measurement of hybrid and virtual events,

international shifts in demand and supply, and customer technological sophistication will play a role in whether hybrid or virtual events will gain greater acceptance. As companies are tied less to the need for a specific location or region of the world to operate in, hybrid and virtual events should grow dramatically.

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Case Study

Catharsis, Space and Motivation in Unconventional Event Performance Venues: A Case Study of the Green Hours 22 Club Jazz Cafe

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Abstract

The concept of catharsis, widely exploited in literature, music, drama and psychoanalysis remains still an untouched area in the events industry. Man and space have always defined one another. From the caves to the sky scrapers, humankind's evolution could be detected through its relation to the habitat and the way it has constructed the habitat, but it also defined the way society evolved. By understanding why individuals attend performances in unconventional spaces, our understanding of the events market, the industry, but also the human mind is enhanced. Therefore the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that space generates catharsis. By reviewing literature and undertaking primary research, the author developed a new framework by which motivations to attend events in unconventional spaces could be understood. Findings suggest that individuals prefer the genre of unconventional event venues because it portrays a holistic experience of calmness, serenity, relaxation and freedom of speech.

Key words: unconventional, events, spaces, catharsis, experience, Romania

Introduction

The academic study of individuals' motivations to attend events is focused mainly on marketing. However, the individual's motives for attendance can go far beyond mere consumption. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that event spaces also generate catharsis. "Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area" (Lefebvre, 1991: 1). Lefebvre further suggests that space, later relinquished its empty shell, and became a 'mental thing' or 'mental space' capable of changing behaviour. However, according to Scheff (1979) behaviour is dominated by feeling. It therefore follows that if space is a living organism that can alter behaviour that is ultimately dominated by emotion then it can be suggested that space also generates emotions. Therefore, space is a living organism capable of devising, eliciting and altering emotions.

In the last one hundred years it has been widely accepted that by catharsis Aristotle meant a purgation of emotion or satisfaction. It is suggested that catharsis is a purgation of emotions, a cure for an emotionally pathological condition and that man also needs to reach a level of satisfaction in order to lead a healthy life and free from noxious emotional elements (Rorty, 1992). The concept has been portrayed in literature, music, drama, medicine and psychology and although it takes different shapes, the essence remains the same: it is a physical or psychological release which furthers healing through its cleansing effect. Another vital element that defines the concept of catharsis and its relationship to the human being is space. From the early beginnings Man was defined through his choice of habitat or how he constructed it. Every

society produces its own space that mirrors Man's emotions and desires, therefore a relationship between Man and space, as a living organism emerged. Bearing in mind all the above, it may assumed that space is an expression of emotional release and purification.

The importance of venues has been identified as a central trend in the events industry. According to Berridge (2007), events have an impact upon society at both the micro and macro level. The event venue or location is of primary significance to the overall success or failure of an event.

In the last decade there has been an unprecedented increase in unusual event venues. Events are more and more taking place in churches, unused subway areas, old catacombs, forsaken houses, garages, old warehouses, ruin bars and other types of rooms beneath street level. These venues bring the additional thrill of fear to an event invoking a cinematic sense of emotional estrangement (Jansson & Lagerkvist, 2009). So why do individuals attend performances in unconventional places? And why has this new genre of event venue emerged?

This study seeks to answer these questions by focusing on an unusual venue in Eastern Europe which hosts 'underground' events. Romania, especially Bucharest, is home to many of these spaces that before, during and after the Revolution had an important part to play within the arts industry. Therefore, in order to thoroughly analyse the phenomenon, Green Hours 22 Club Jazz Café was selected as a case study. Green Hours is located in the centre of Bucharest, the capital of Romania. The location is a jazz-bar combined with theatre performances and art exhibitions. Although Green Hours was established in 1994, the location was used before the Revolution (1982) for several art performances. Green Hour's is now associated with unconventional and underground events. Underground events were also popular in Bucharest before the Revolution when artists exhibited or performed for audiences in basements in order to protect themselves from visibility (GDS, 1994).

Environment and its Impact on Human Behaviour

Bitner (1992) observed that human behaviour is influenced by the physical setting in which it occurs. Since the 1960s psychologists started to analyse the effects of physical setting with the aim of predicting and explaining behaviour. One of the most important initiatives was taken with the formation of a research group by William Ittelson and Harold Proshansky at the City University of New York. Their purpose was to study the relationship between architectural design and the behaviour of patients in psychiatric hospitals (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995). They not only introduced the term 'environmental psychology', but also studied the inhabitant's perception of space.

Living organisms relate to their environment through their process of perception and through the exchange of energy between bodies and space. Spaces are characterized, first, through their physical element. The physical world is determined by physical stimuli which affect the sensory organs and bring forth emotion. According to Bitner (1992), perceptions lead to certain emotions, beliefs and physiological sensations which influence behaviour. Thus, behaviours are mediated by a person's internal responses to the place. A very important concept within the realm of environmental psychology is the notion of Gestalt. The Gestalt psychology is grounded in assumptions about how living organisms relate to their environment (Carmer & Rouzer, 1974, cited in Lin, 2010). It was stated that individuals perceive space through a holistic experience,

where all elements within space create a cognitive map able to influence the inhabitant's emotions.

The Event Venue Environment and its Effects

The effect of atmospherics, or physical design and decor elements, on consumers and workers is recognized by managers and mentioned in virtually all marketing, retailing, and organizational behaviour texts (Bitner, 1992). Service businesses such as hotels, restaurants, retail stores have used the ability of the physical environment in order to influence consumer behaviours and to create an image for their organisations (Booms & Bitner, 1982; Kotler, 1973; Shostack, 1977; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985). Furthermore researchers suggest that the physical setting may also influence satisfaction, productivity and motivation (Bitner, 1990; Davis, 1984; Harrell, Hutt & Anderson, 1980; Sundstrom & Altman, 1989). In addition, atmospheric elements communicate to consumers through non-verbal channels (Grayson & McNeill, 2009) such as signs, symbols, artefacts and décor and enhance a certain image or mood. Their role is to create a multisensory experience and to induce satisfaction by communicating the audience's desired emotion. As atmospherics play an important part in the hedonic retail experience, the event environment or venue will employ these channels in order to pull audiences. Despite the emergence of a conceptual link between atmospherics cues/non-verbal channels and the experience economy, research regarding space as a product of experience in event venues is still sparse.

Lugosi (2007 and 2009) considered the link between hospitality, culture and urban regeneration through an examination of Budapest's ruin venues and also analysed the relationship between spaces and queer consumers. According to Scott (2000 as cited in Lugosi, 2010: 12) the ruin venues of Budapest can be said to represent the production of a symbolic form. Scott defines symbolic forms as 'the goods and services that have some emotional or intellectual (i.e. aesthetic or semiotic) content'. Lugosi states that space is produced through a range of social and spatial processes (2009), which means that the attendees lend part of their social DNA to the venue and vice versa. This statement is similar to Lefebvre's notion of the power invested in space and the power exerted on subjects by space, thus emphasizing the exchange of energies and identities between audience and venue. Lugosi describes this type of space as a sanctuary, a private space where consumers shield from surveillance (Lugosi, 2007). Furthermore what happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a design (in both senses of the word). The design serves as a mediator between mental activity, invention and social activity and realization (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore what Lugosi suggests, through Lefebvre's theory, is that space and what happens in space alter and influence the attendees' emotions and behavioural patterns.

Catharsis and Unconventional Event Performance Spaces

The reason for introducing the notion of catharsis and not the trivial satisfaction concept is the hypothesis that catharsis occurs through aggressive behaviour (Scheff, 1979). After the 2nd World War an entire generation was characterized by trauma and neurosis, crime and exile, which was symbolized through a multitude of bunkers dug into the ground; therefore it was most likely for them to find catharsis in a more hidden space. Their emotions evolved from fear, shock, and despair to a sense of alienation. As time unravelled, individuals tended to seek raw experiences

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in spaces that are usually found in strange, unconventional places. Thus, space began to be regarded as a living entity and individuals understood that they could use habitats as a product of healing, freedom of speech and safety; also space as a living organism was no longer just sustaining a performance/ event, but playing a crucial role in delivering catharsis. Therefore, the habitat's reason for existence was to release the audience's inner desires and to purge.

Dada space

On Saturday February 3, 1916 was the inauguration of the Cabaret or 'artist-tavern' Voltaire located at Spiegelgasse 1 in Zürich (Cabaret Voltaire, n.d.). The world will know this location as the womb of the Dada movement revolution. The tavern was situated on a narrow street and the rooms were painted in black with a blue ceiling. Its premises were artists' club, exhibition room, pub, and theatre, all rolled into one. Similar to their choice of venue, all rolled into one, the Dadaists emphasized a multi-sensorial experience. The objective of this experience was to expose the discrepancy between appearance and reality and through their performance to break the boundaries between conscious and subconscious.

In the hands of the Dada artists, the venue appeared like a mental institution and the performances were no less similar. Bearing in mind that a World War was afflicting entire nations, an open air performance could not bring catharsis. Individuals were no longer between nadir and zenith, in fact they were heading towards nadir. Suffering from post-war trauma, neurosis and depression; artists and audiences were looking for a safe area where they could exhibit or voyeur their wants and needs, a place of protection, relieve and recovery; therefore the tendency to look for 'underground' or safe spaces emerged. Selecting a cabaret on a narrow street does not only symbolize the political and social reality of the time, but also the fact that Man is choosing his habitat according to his instinct of what could generate satisfaction.

The alternative exhibition space

In the same manner as Dada, the 70's artists chose to exhibit in what they called a 'raw space'. The raw space was characterized by its antithesis to the white-cube-like galleries that ruled the 70's artistic venues and by its ability to engage a 'raw experience' (Ault, 2002). This type of space became known as an 'alternative space'. Artists were looking for venues that have never been used before like warehouses, personal apartments, garages, hallways etc. These spaces formed a new level of subversion. The main function of the alternative spaces was to allow artists, in a time where freedom of speech was stifled, free expression. Besides the possibility of freedom of speech, these alternative spaces had the power to create a community, to bring together individuals with the same needs and motivations and conceive a social experience. Catharsis for the spaces of post-modernity is linked to healing, freedom of speech and its existence takes a subversive form.

Event Attendee Motivations

In recent years, festival and event tourism, but also leisure tourism have represented the fastest-growing leisure industries and have earned increasing attention from researchers (Getz, 1991; Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004; Janiskee, 1996; as cited in Lee and Beeler, 2009), with particular emphasis being placed on understanding the nature of event attendee motivation. Particularly prevalent frameworks used in understanding event attendee motivations are Maslow's hierarchy

of needs (see Getz, 1991) and Mannell and Iso-Ahola's (1987) escape- seeking dichotomy and the notion of push and pull factors (see Backman, Backman, Uysal & Sunshine, 1995).

Researchers have discovered seven socio-psychological motivational domains that influence an individual in attending an event: socialization, novelty, rest and relaxation, prestige/status, education, value/intellectual enrichment, enhancing kinship and relations/family togetherness, and regression. Using previous research, Gelder and Robinson (2009) also identified six motives to explain why attendees visited music festivals: socializing with friends/family, the music or artist playing, novelty or excitement, general entertainment, to escape everyday life, and for cultural exploration. Additionally, Lee and Beeler (2009) identified in their study that novelty, reminiscence (which involves a desire to engage in behaviour reminiscent of childhood), family togetherness, escaping from boredom and the desire to be with friends characterized the prediction of visitor satisfaction.

Research Questions

Given the key elements that every society produces its own space that mirrors Man's emotions and desires, Man who is characterized through a history of aggressive behaviour, hence the concept of catharsis; but also in relation to the gaps in research identified in prior studies, the underground art/bar environment can be considered as perfectly suited for further exploring the use of space in generating catharsis. The guiding research questions for this study are therefore:

- Why do individuals attend performances in unconventional spaces?

- Why did the new genre emerge?

- How do we experience space?

Methodology

Research was conducted using a self-completed questionnaire, with the data being both quantitative and qualitative in nature. In order to assess the benefits and limitations of the questionnaire design, the researcher conducted a pilot study followed by the main survey. Both surveys included no more than ten questions; nine were quantitative in nature and the last one required a qualitative response. By combining positivism with an interpretive approach, the researcher hoped to identify the attendees' behaviour through quantitative data and gain more insights into an unknown phenomenon through their qualitative responses.

Both surveys started with a socio-demographic section, followed by a list of motivational items. However, although the pilot was focused mainly on the motivation concept, the main survey included quantitative questions that addressed concepts like space, context, emotion and shape and their relationships; concepts that that emerged from the pilot study. Green Hours is a 90m² tunnel that does not have the physical ability to welcome more than 200 individuals. Random sampling therefore was the most logical approach. A total of 60 self-completed questionnaires were collected from respondents, onsite, on the day of a performance at the venue.

Findings and Analysis

The pilot study addressed two important concepts, motivation and emotion as these concepts could reveal how an audience understands and perceives the underground/unconventional event performance space Green Hours. As motives are a precursor of satisfaction and are emotionally driven, it has been assumed that individuals relate to their environment through their process of perception and the exchange of energy between bodies and space. The pilot study revealed that atmosphere and a holistic approach (bar, music and entertainment) were important factors whereas least important was socializing with new people, which suggests that individuals prefer unconventional spaces because of their atmosphere and the activities within, while social motives are of lesser importance. The open-ended question offered important qualitative information that rendered validity to the aspect of space as a product of healing and energy. Respondents in the pilot study deemed the space 'relaxing location where I tend to escape from time to time/ the aspect of Green Hours generates different type of emotions, completely opposite to each other/ I enjoy Green Hours because it implies also the back-library where I always go to buy books/ it's a reminiscence of my adolescence/ a beacon of intellectual exploration/ the perfect ending of a busy day at work/ cool and young'. This suggests the audience perceives the unconventional event performance space as place for relaxation, remembering the past, but also for cultural explorations, which means that space could be regarded as a representation of inner experience.

The pilot study showed that the unconventional space does not only sustain the activities within space, but also help the performance by generating a certain mood through atmosphere and the all-in-one experience. Furthermore besides motive and emotion, new aspects emerged as critical to the venue -the *city*, the *shape* of the location, the permanent emotional *vibe*, *feeling*, and *expression*.

The main study therefore included the aspects city, vibe, shape, feeling, motivation expression and emotion. City and vibe reflect the concept of the context as one of the assumptions is that habitat reflects human nature, but context defines human nature and generates the need for space, therefore context is identified as a catalyst of the science of space. Shape reflects the concept of space. Different shapes inspire emotional distress or pleasure. Feeling completes shape, as it reflects how individuals feel within the architecture of the unconventional event performance venue, Green Hours. Motivational aspects, in keeping with previous event motivational research, included socializing, cultural exploration, music/artist playing, novelty/excitement, theatre, bar, contemporary themes, and atmosphere/physical setting. Expression and emotion, aim to analyse or infer the concept of catharsis.

In Tables 1 and 2 it is shown that from the 60 collected questionnaires 66.7 % are female and 36.7 % represent the main age group of 26-35 year olds. The survey results show that Green Hours attracts a young audience, mainly 26-35 year olds. The significance of age provides some support for the findings of Uysal, Gahan and Martin (1993), who found motivation to be significantly differentiated on the basis of this variable (as cited by Gelder & Robinson, 2009). It is not a surprise that the space attracts a younger clientele, as before and after the revolution, Green Hours was associated with concepts like independence and freedom of speech. Although jazz performances characterize the venue, and attract an older audience, that is connoisseurs of jazz music, still it succeeds in engaging contemporary entertainment forms that pull the young audiences as well.

Table 1 - Gender of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	20	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Female	40	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 – Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-25	20	33.3	33.3	33.3
	26-35	22	36.7	36.7	70.0
	36-45	12	20.0	20.0	90.0
	over 45	6	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The concept of context

In order to define the audience's inner experience, survey respondents were asked how they perceived the city, and also what was their inner mood or vibe. Results showed that 95% deem the city noisy and distressful. However, 50% experience inner calmness and the other 50% stress (see Tables 3 and 4). According to Lefebvre (1991), context generates space and every society produces its own space moulded by the individual's wants and needs. It can be assumed therefore that if Man's inner experience is characterized by negative driven emotions, in this case stress, then the self-preservation behaviour that will emerge will be the seeking of calmness, serenity, safety and positively driven emotions. Thus many respondents to this survey will be engaging is this type of behaviour.

Table 3 City – Respondents Perceptions of the City

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Noisy	57	95.0	95.0	95.0
	Calm	3	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 – Respondents' Inner Moods or Vibes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Calm	30	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Stressed	30	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The concepts of space and perception

From the outputs in Tables 5 and 6 it is shown that 38.3% perceive Green Hours' shape as symmetric and that 16.7% saw it as round; while 18.3% saw it as angular and 26.7% saw it as asymmetric. According to Pittard et al (2007) angularity is a message of energy, conflict, youth, violence, anger, rapidity, dynamics, and movement. Vertical shapes and lines convey strength, masculinity, power, aggression, courage, brutality, dominance, and menacing; symmetry is most valued in collectivist societies, whereas individualistic societies have a tendency to prefer more iconoclastic expressions of creativity (Henderson et al., 2003; Schmitt and Simonson, 1997; as cited in Pittard et al, 2007). Again, it must be kept in mind that the 95% of the survey respondents believe the city to be harmful. By applying the Gestalt psychology framework to these findings we may infer that the way individuals perceive the city is mirrored by the way they perceive the venue's shape. Noise and distress go hand in hand with anger, rapidity, conflict, brutality, menacing and aggression. Although the venue's architecture renders a circular shape of 90 m², the audience' inner emotional world is powerful enough to change perception; they mould and metamorphosis architecture according to their mental activity, therefore circular shapes become angular due to the ill emotional distress caused by context.

Table 5 – Respondents' Perceptions of Shape

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Roundness	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Angularity	11	18.3	18.3	35.0
	Symmetric	23	38.3	38.3	73.3
	Asymmetric	16	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 – Respondents' Feelings in the Space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Safe	53	88.3	88.3	88.3
	Unsafe	7	11.7	11.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The concept of emotion

The above findings suggest that the sample manipulated reality according to their wants and needs. In order to reach catharsis, the same emotion must be engaged in order to be purged. Thus, as stress deems the audience' inner emotional world, they engage the same feeling through the process of perception; the eye compensates for what reality does not render. Asked how they feel in the unconventional space, Green Hours, 88.3% evoked safety. Therefore we may infer that the sample feels positive when engaging the negative moods that must be purged.

The concept of motivation

What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought (Lefebvre, 1991). One of the study's objectives was to assess the motives for attending Green Hours. Table 7 shows 26.7%

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deemed theatre to be the most important motive, 23.3% considered the atmosphere/physical setting, while 20% favoured the all-in-one feature. However, because the main study was conducted before an important theatre performance, perhaps atmosphere and the 'all-in-one' feature of the venue could be considered the most important to the majority of the venue's regular attendees. Thus the respondents' motivations to attend performances in unconventional spaces seem to be because of its ability to generate a plural-form of entertainment and consumption. Every structure, whether it is the bar, atmospherics or entertainment endow meaning that guide and interprets experience. Any experience is a change of place and place moulds experiences through its structure and function. Consequently, the audience motivation for attending is a desire for a holistic experience capable of appealing to all senses at the same time. This experience changes space, while space moulds the experience through its structure and function. Thus, the production of space, based upon the conceived space (atmospherics), the perceived space (how they perceive architecture) and lived space (inner experience), representing structure and function, mould space as a product of experience.

Table 7 – Respondents' Motivations to Visit the Event Space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Socializing	5	8.3	8.3	8.3
	cultural exploration	5	8.3	8.3	16.7
	music/artist playing	4	6.7	6.7	23.3
	novelty/excitement	1	1.7	1.7	25.0
	Theatre	16	26.7	26.7	51.7
	Bar	2	3.3	3.3	55.0
	contemporary themes	1	1.7	1.7	56.7
	atmosphere/physical setting	14	23.3	23.3	80.0
	All-in-one feature	12	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The concepts of expression and emotion

An experience is itself a process which 'presses out' to an 'expression' which completes it (Turner, 1982). Table 8 depicts the answers regarding the concepts of expression and emotion. After experiencing Green Hours, 51.7% felt calm and 40% energized, only 8.3% elicited a negative response. Therefore we may infer that after the negative emotion was consummated through the structure and function of the production of space; space is in the end an expression of serenity and energy. Respondents were also asked to associate an emotion, from a list, with the Green Hours venue - 26.7% chose enthusiasm, 25% surprise and 18.3% calm. Enthusiasm and

surprise can both be considered positive emotions, which together with the expression of energy and calmness deem Green Hours a product of energy and healing.

Table 8 – Respondents' Expressions after the Event Space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Energized	24	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Not energized	5	8.3	8.3	48.3
	Calm	31	51.7	51.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 – Respondents' Emotions associated with the Event Space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Calm	11	18.3	18.3	18.3
	Anxiety	3	5.0	5.0	23.3
	Confusion	3	5.0	5.0	28.3
	Enthusiasm	16	26.7	26.7	55.0
	Panic	2	3.3	3.3	58.3
	Surprise	15	25.0	25.0	83.3
	Melancholy	10	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

The results show that respondents first endowed the space with meaning, in this case with their negative emotions caused by context. Meaning was applied to architecture and through the act of perception individuals moulded space according to their emotions, thus the

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unconventional event performance space may be regarded as a channel that observes their inner reality, then consummates it and transforms into a positive vibe engaging catharsis. Finally, what Man finds in space could be regarded as a life changing experience, because of space's ability to channel negative emotions and send out a healing experience.

The unconventional, throughout history, has been associated with the ideas of healing and freedom of speech. Respondents endowed Green Hours with several meanings, including freedom, originality, reanimation, and relaxation. Green Hours also represented for them, freedom of speech and a place for art experiments – in the words of one respondent '...the underground theatre is an art form that aims to complete the traditional theatre '.

Another respondent perceived the space as '... recapture, coming back to the origins, simple'. This response is indicative of the individual's need for recapturing himself and finding a solution for his desires in an intimate space and to rebel slightly. It implies that the unconventional space can take a ritual form were the rite of passage symbolizes a way for the conscious to reach the subconscious, and that Green Hours is an intimate space and also that the space is slightly rebellious. Therefore, the word unconventional in relation to Green Hours is not trivial buts has resonance and meaning.

According to Turner's theory of liminality, the subject, while entering the ritual, becomes 'nothing' and is put into a state of extreme vulnerability where they are open to change (Schechner, 2006). This however can happen only in a community where the energy is given and taken and in liminality the individual must be a 'tabula rasa', a blank slate on which in inscribed (Tuner, 1969). Thus, in order to come back to the origins, in this case finding the inner Self, one must dig into the unconscious and discover needs and wants that must be purged. But in order to reach the unconscious, individuals must be 'open' and become a blank slate. The Dadaists were trying to achieve the same aim; however, because of their context, they chose a different method, that is shock. For the unconventional event performance space a different method and channel has emerged. Green Hours is a place of ritual and healing because it creates an intimate space and because it renders a plural form of experience that shapes experience through its channel, that is, space.

Conclusion

The responses from event attendees at Green Hours suggest that individuals attend performances in unconventional event performance spaces because they feel the need for unity and because a multi-purpose venue can deliver the holistic experience they are seeking. With atmospherics that shape a multi-sensorial experience, several forms of entertainment and a place for consumption, Green Hours offers a myriad of possibilities that satisfy a large variety of needs and wants. The multiple structures correlate and provide a holistic experience that in the end satisfies the consumer. After visiting the Green Hours experience, the attendees feel calm and energized suggesting that space plays a crucial role in delivering catharsis.

Responses to both the quantitative and qualitative questions of the survey suggested that Green Hours is a place where they escape to, remember their youth or have the chance to experience different emotions at the same time. This supports Mannell's and Iso-Ahola's (1987) escape-seeking dichotomy. The survey also suggests that the respondents are seeking ritualistic, pure expressions which evoke feelings of going back to one's origins.

Attendees contemplate the space as a location for freedom of speech, experiments, relaxation combined with cultural exploration, but most important they enjoy the place because it cradles them together. As the venue is a very small location, individuals enjoyed the fact that because of the small scale, they are forced to come together. Through the event attendees shared desires for holistic forms, non-verbal channels and closeness, the event space and its inhabitants share a close connection, both exchange experiences and their energies, but also contribute to the production of space. The unconventional space is therefore a symbolic form that renders emotional and intellectual context, and more it offers a sanctuary for those in need of unity.

The unconventional event performance space is a place that offers a holistic experience. In contrast to other entertainment forms where attendees are driven by socializing motives, unconventional venues are preferred by attendees because of their ability to evoke calmness, serenity and relaxation. This type of venue emerged because of its association with freedom of speech, raw experiences, art experiments and it continues because it elicits a multi-sensorial experience and brings individuals together, in a community. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that every society produces its own space that mirrors Man's emotions and desires. Additionally, the findings reveal that event attendees possess common needs for unity, immersion and togetherness.

As a venue that serves several functions and meanings, the unconventional event performance space shows itself to be able to satisfy the need for unity, demonstrating that space is an expression of emotional release and purification, that is, catharsis. Audiences seek solace in the form of unity, and the unconventional spaces satisfy this need through a holistic experience. Event attendees find themselves driven to attend unconventional venues, because of their ability to satisfy needs and wants and ultimately deliver satisfaction or catharsis.

However, it should be noted that the findings in this paper are just indicative of the potential unconventional event performance venue to evoke catharsis. To enable generalizations and more definitive conclusions, further research is needed into a wider range of unconventional event performance venues in a variety of contexts.

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Case Study

Building Sports Tourism and Event Portfolios: Key Success Factors in Middle East Sports Tourism

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Abstract

The Middle East has been a key focus and a successful growth area in terms of all types of tourism, in particular sports tourism, as the region seeks to diversify its economy beyond oil. Differences in levels of oil reserves have influenced the urgency with which key regions have moved to diversify. Areas such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar have been more proactive with sports tourism development than Saudi Arabia (Walmsley, 2010). Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar have realised that sports tourism is an important addition to the overall destination product, which is rich in other attractions such as shopping, desert tourism, sand and sea. They have added sports tourism and exploited the synergies with other existing attractions. These destinations have been successful in securing government leadership, which is essential for ensuring that sports tourism is incorporated into the country's development and international cooperation policies and agendas. Furthermore, they have on a local level promoted development through sports tourism. Local development, especially at the community level, benefits from the range of activities put in place. Partnerships have been developed through the full spectrum of stakeholders in the community, including, but not limited to, various sectors of government, sports organisations and agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector. Strategic sports tourism-based partnerships have been created within a common framework, providing a structured environment allowing for coordination, knowledge and expertise sharing as well as cost-effectiveness. This paper aims to share the experiences of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar as top Middle East sports tourism destinations.

Keywords: Middle East, sports tourism, development

Introduction

The sports tourism industry is witnessing significant growth and it has become a powerful player in the global economy (Higham, 2005). The interest in this industry is a result of the new tendencies that occurred in the second half of the last century, which are related to the huge economic contribution made by sports tourism as well as many other influences, such as the impact on community wellbeing and the sense of pride that sports tourism generates (Deery, Jago & Fredline, 2004). In addition, some emerging tourist destinations have found sports activities a significant tool to brand themselves in the international markets, where severe competition exists, especially for sports events that are highly covered by the media and sponsored by the biggest, large-scale businesses around the world (Badulescu, Octavian & Dorin, 2008).

This trend has also been fostered by the changes that the tourism industry witnessed, particularly the new trend of tourists who want to experience places that offer new and diverse products and therefore combine different motivations into a single product. In this sense, the fusion of tourism and sport encouraged game fans to change their traditional destinations by heading toward the nations that are hosting exciting sports events. Moreover, the evolution of the sports tourism industry has helped in reducing the seasonality tourist destinations suffer by attracting new categories of tourists (Higham & Hinch, 2002). Sports tourism is changing the way people view sports activities by merging this concept with the natural needs that human beings have for fitness, recreation and routine breaking. This means a restructuring of the sports concept by viewing it from the attraction perspective, which includes having the activity hosted and sponsored to attract more visitors to the destination (Hinch & Higham, 2001).

Furthermore, the sports tourism industry has increasingly become a model for new forms of business that are in harmony with the supply-demand system and its influences. This implies a continuous process of development that starts from adopting the right strategies and plans for branding the destination appropriately to investing in the infrastructure and superstructure in order to fit the destination to the criteria required for hosting sports tourism events (Getz, 1998). The need for adequate facilities links the hosting of sports events to the financial capacity to spend money on recreation-oriented facilities. Thus, it seems logical that most stadiums and sports centres are built in countries that have disposable income to spend on developing such facilities.

Sports Tourism in the Middle East

According to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) 2020 vision on tourism, international arrivals are expected to reach 1.6 billion tourists in 2020, and the Middle East region is forecasted to record a growth rate of over 6.7% per year, which is higher than the world average (4.1%), while the market share gained by the Middle East is expected to record 4.4% in 2020 compared to only 2.2% in 1995 (UN/WTO, 2020) as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Tourism Forecasts (UN/WTO, 2011)

	Base Year 1995	Forecasts 2010	Forecasts 2020	Market share (%) 1995	Market share (%) 2020	Average annual growth rate (%) 1995-2020
		(Million)	(Million)			
World	565	1006	1561	100	100	4.1
Africa	20	47	77	3.6	5.0	5.5
Americas	110	190	282	19.3	18.1	3.8
East Asia and the Pacific	81	195	397	14.4	25.4	6.5
Europe	336	527	717	59.8	45.9	3.1
Middle East	14	36	69	2.2	4.4	6.7
South Asia	4	11	19	0.7	1.2	6.2

These promising forecasts encouraged the Arab countries to change their economic view by switching to the strategy of diversification of their national income sources in an attempt to reduce their reliance on natural resources, especially those nations that depend on oil as a sole resource. Currently, tourism is regarded in many Middle Eastern countries as one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings and essential for balance of trade purposes. In the Arab Gulf, tourism has started to take its place in the development process since the 1990s, when governments there realised the importance of this sector as a supportive tool for economic growth and prosperity. These countries have invested, using their own public resources, in upgrading infrastructure in order to attract and host different types of tourism.

In Bahrain, tourism offers 17% to 18% of jobs and the country plans to double tourism income to generate 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP) by 2014 by rendering Bahrain the tourist boutique of the Gulf together with other tourist products that the Arab Gulf offers, such as desert safaris, trekking tours and golf courses (Al-hamarneh, 2005). The Formula One race alone generated $400 million in 2006. The aim of the Oman strategy is to deliver $1 billion in tourism revenues by 2020 and to guarantee the involvement of the local community in the tourism industry by obliging tourist establishments such as hotels to recruit 50% of their employees from the local community (Mustafa, 2010). Dubai has also conducted pioneer strategies for all tourism types such as shopping, sport, beach tourism, cultural tourism and business tourism, aiming at delivering more than $108 billion by 2015. In fact, some attributes such as stability, government policy, accessibility, amenities, attractions and promotion represent the clue to success in Dubai (Henderson, 2006). Similarly, in Abu Dhabi, projects are established to increase the number of visitors from 1.35 million in 2006 to 3 million in 2015 (Hazbun, 1997). Qatar invested more than $15 billion in tourist facilities (hotels, museums and theme parks) and based its strategy of diversifying its tourism products on investing in sports tourism, heritage tourism, natural and eco-tourism, family tourism and business tourism (QTA, 2011). In this context, the tourism industry is viewed as one of the new approaches that can be exploited to enhance the economy, thus many strategies have been put in place to encourage foreign and local investors to enter the field and to benefit from various economic incentives.

As one of the fastest growing tourism forms, the sports industry was prioritised in many tourism development strategies in Middle Eastern countries, in particular the Arab Gulf countries such as the United Arab of Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Qatar, as a tool to enhance their reputation in the world, as sport has billions of fans and spectators. A further aim is to increase the number of visiting tourists by analysing the motivational synergies that might encourage people to visit a given destination, which combines collective motives, whether cultural, natural or recreational, with the hosted sports events (Robinson & Gammon, 2004). The evolution that the tourism industry had witnessed in the Middle Eastern countries triggered competition between them to showcase their products around the world by launching creative initiatives that can draw attention.

Qatar is ranked among the top sports tourism destinations in the region, due to its massive investment in developing sports infrastructure and for the prominent international competitions it has hosted during the last few years, with an average of 28 sports events every year. Among these are the 15th Asian Games in 2006, the annual Golf Commercial Bank Qatar Masters Tournament, the Qatar Exxon Mobile Open Tennis Tournament (Men), the Sony Ericsson Championships for Tennis (Women), the Qatar MotoGP (part of Motor Bike Prix Circuit), the Cycling Tour of Qatar, the Qatar Grand Prix Powerboat Event, the Qatar International Road Racing Championship, the Annual World Indoor Championship, the Islamic Triathlon Championship in 2010, the Doha Golf Tournament, the Emir Cup Bowling Championship, the Qatar International Arabian Horse Show, the Pan-Arab Games in 2011, the Asian Cup in 2011, the Qatar Minor Ice Hockey Event, the Qatar International Table Tennis Championship, the

Qatar International Regatta (sailing the Gulf), the Local Hejen Race, the Losail International Circuit, the Snooker Championship, the Qatar International Rally and FIFA 2022 (QTA, 2011; UK Trade & Investment, 2010a). These events have branded Qatar as a distinguished destination that can host sports tourism masses, and this attracts investors to the country to launch their tourist facilities (hotels, restaurants, car rental companies, travel agencies, and so on) there.

UAE is another good example of the synergy between tourism and sport. Both Dubai and Abu Dhabi took the lion's share of the number of tourist arrivals in the country as well as the number of sports tourism events held. Dubai hosted several prominent events, such as the Dubai World Championship (Golf), the FINA World Swimming Championship, the Dubai International Arabia Horse Championship, the Dubai Open Chess Championship, the Dubai International Parachuting Championship, the Dubai Championship for Tennis and the Gulf Cup (DTCM, 2011). Abu Dhabi also hosted many events, such as the Al-Ain Aerobatic Show, the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship, the Abu Dhabi International Triathlon, the Red Bull Air Race, the Formula One in YAS Marina Circuit, the Volvo Ocean Race and the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (part of the FIA Cross-Country Rallies World Cup) in 2011, and it is one of the bidding nations to host the 2013 Under 17 FIFA World Cup and the 2013 Under 20 FIFA World Cup. These events are important for increasing the demand on air and land transportation, accommodation, catering and rental car services, and enhance the tourism movement inside the emirate of Abu Dhabi (ADTA, 2011). Abu Dhabi highlighted priorities in its strategy for sports tourism that include product development and promotion along with building partnerships with other stakeholders in the industry in order to improve the position the destination occupies (ADTA, 2011).

Success Factors in Sports Tourism

Abundance of financial resources

In Qatar, Skiekh Hamad Bin Khalifa and Tamim Bin Hamad patronise most sports tourism events, while Sheikha Moza stands beside her husband, Sheikh Hamad in promoting and encouraging sports tourism for men and women.[1] In this regard, the country spent more than $2.8 billion on the 15th Asian Games Competition in 2006, while it is expected to spend more than $43 billion on infrastructure for hosting the 2022 Football World Cup. Plans have already been made to increase hotel capacity by adding over 70,000 new hotel rooms (UK Trade & Investment, 2010b). According to Ahmad Khalifa (CEO of Dubai's Al Ahli Football Club), the 2022 World Cup will increase the value of football business in the region by 52% to $14 billion by 2022 (Mcgingley, 2011).

Dubai and Abu Dhabi are investing steadily in the sports tourism industry and working hard to offer high-standard facilities that can efficiently handle any international sports event. The investments include direct public involvement in building sports cities, fabulous hotels and tourist villages (e.g. the Dubai Sports City, the Palm Islands, the Burj Al-Arab Hotel ["The Boat"] and Khalifa Tower) and transportation, by rendering Dubai and Abu Dhabi hubs for all passengers travelling between east and west (Braun, Kaynama, Liauleviciute & Rahmouni, 2009). Moreover, the Dubai government directly supports Emirates Airlines, which is based in Dubai, while Abu Dhabi possesses Etihad Airways. These airlines are competing to attract tourists to the respective

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[1]An interesting article about Sheikha Moza Bin Nasser Al-Misned, entitled "A source of pride and inspiration for Qatari women" was published in 2010 in *Sports Magazine*, Vol. 1, p. 6, issued by the Qatar Women Sport Committee.

destinations (Blanke & Mia, n.d.). The acquisition of Manchester Football Club by Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed helped Etihad Airways in sponsoring the British team, while Emirates Airlines has built a partnership with Arsenal Football Club (Jaafari & O'Connor, 2011).

The investment volume in Abu Dhabi in the projects related to tourism is estimated at $272 billion in the period between 2006 and 2015, and this includes rising the available rooms in the emirate to over 25 000 hotel rooms by 2015. Dubai's investments had recorded significant growth with the expansion that Dubai witnessed in the tourism industry, which includes some creative projects conducted to attract tourists from outside, such as the World Project, which yielded around $1.8 billion (O'Connor, 2011). Government support in the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi covers a variety of sports events, although some of them are more likely to be sponsored due to the popularity of those sports. Motorsport, for example, is considered a focus for national and regional pride and is supported by public bodies (O'Connor, 2011).

Government support

Having public support is one of the most crucial success factors in the sports tourism industry in these three destinations. The involvement of key political figures in the sports industry has fostered the evolution of and significantly increased the investments allocated to this sector.

This explains the reasons behind choosing princes and sheikhs to head national sports federations and clubs. Public support can be realised in the following different forms:

- Adopting the appropriate strategies and allocating the necessary resources that are needed to deliver those strategies
- Constructing sports facilities that can host mega-sports events, whether on national, regional or international level
- Recruiting outstanding experts for organising the mega-events
- Playing the role of coordinator between the main stakeholders in the industry, such as the private sector, sports agencies, event agencies and tourism agencies
- Establishing private companies with public funding to help boost the tourism industry in its different forms (the Dubai and Abu Dhabi governments have established such forms of companies to work on tourism in both emirates)

As a matter of fact, government support was determinant in the success of the sports events that took place in these destinations. The form of support was different in the three destinations. In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, public intervention was more regional-oriented, which means that each emirate takes the responsibility for developing its product separate from the other emirates. The case is different in Qatar, where the need to build strategies on local or regional level seems to be less important due to the small size of the country. Thus, public support and intervention here is more national-oriented.

The three governments in fact use the sports events as catalysts for improving their image in the world, which reflects, in turn, on the prestige and reputation of the political leaders in these countries. This is part of the marketing campaigns that are usually conducted before, during and after the hosting of the events.

Qatar, for example, used the Asian Games 2006 to build a positive image and good reputation in this field, and had no expectations for making profits when they started planning for the event. With the selection of Qatar to host the 2022 World Football Cup, the path of excellence looks clearer.

Marketing

Dionysius (2009) states that event marketing is one of the most effective ways of promoting a destination. Globally, sport is watched through various mediums. People attend events, buy merchandise, play sports computer games and are exposed to a wide range of promotional and marketing campaigns using sport or sports stars (Graham, Neirotti & Goldblatt, 2001; Mullen, Hardy & Sutton, 1993 and Shank, 1999).

Sports tourism event marketing requires a high level of skill to ensure successful implementation. According to Shone and Parry (2004), understanding how to market an event will assist in raising awareness, advertising, promoting, improving an image or maintaining the impact of the event in the media, while it is also important to understand what kind of activities customers would enjoy, or what publicity material target markets might respond to.

According to O'Connor (2011), the Middle East markets, on an individual or collective basis, represent a unique challenge to those involved in the study and practice of sports marketing. Currently, sport is benefiting from large investments in the region. While the FIFA World Cup project in Qatar is regarded as the regional flagship in terms of sports marketing, both of the UAE's major airlines, Emirates and Etihad, have exercised a global presence in marketing through sports tourism events for some time. In light of this evolution, and indeed the broader growth of sports marketing in the Middle East, an appreciation of professional sports marketing strategies designed to ensure a return on objectives and/or a return on investment for the stakeholders involved is evident.

O'Conner (2011) suggests that the Middle East region represents a fertile area for the practice of professional sports marketing. O'Conner (2011) indicates that the success of sports tourism event marketing in the Middle East is dependent upon understanding the value of effective sports marketing by regional stakeholders, such as sports governing bodies and the government. In particular, the tourism authorities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar recognise the importance of sports tourism events and the benefits associated with such events being staged in the regions, and they market themselves aggressively. These authorities are committed to economic sustainability of the regions and have strategic frameworks in place that focus on building a brand image for each region. They also have the necessary financial support to engage in aggressive marketing campaigns (Ennis, 2011).

Strategy

According to Bendoni (2011), Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar have established themselves well and truly on the international sports stage, holding many of the world's major sports tourism events, ranging from horse racing and motor racing to golf, tennis, football, rugby, cricket, sailing, powerboat racing and almost every other competitive sport. Bendoni (2011) asserts that 50% of these events are home-grown. He also indicates that the necessary financial backing is available to stage these events. The financial backing is mostly received from government. Sponsorship deals are also generated to support the staging of these events. Expertise is sought from abroad to organise these events, which allows for a flexible approach and staging the events in the correct format. Although these factors attribute to the success of sports tourism events in these regions, each region has a solid tourism development strategy in place to cope with international standards and to strive to provide excellence. These strategies recognise that sport plays an important role in the development of tourism.

The Middle East Experience

Abu Dhabi

The Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA) chairman, Sultan Bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, asserts that tourism and hospitality are two of the most treasured values of the Arab culture (Al Nahyan, 2011). Abu Dhabi's rapid rise to a key tourism destination was represented by a strong presence at the World Travel and Tourism Council's Global Tourism Summit 2011 in Las Vegas. Abu Dhabi is using sports tourism to take its brand to a global audience. ADTA has developed a strategy to utilise high-visibility sports events to globally promote the emirate. It has proved effective internationally, highlighting the emirate's pedigree as a world-class destination of distinction and a major events hub. Investment in sport has been a fundamental strategy to assist in reaching its targets of 2.3 million hotel guests a year by 2012 and 7.9 million staying in 80,000 hotel rooms by 2030.

The key focus of the ADTA strategy is long-term economic sustainability. The key strategic goals focus on building a world-class tourism destination, providing a range of tourism products for the consumer, using aggressive marketing strategies to raise awareness of Abu Dhabi and building organizational and industry capacity and competence to provide total quality (ADTA, 2011). The ADTA strategy is built upon 10 strategic priorities driven by sports tourism to create a global brand. According to the ADTA (2011), the 10 strategic priorities are concentrated on the following:

- **Sector regulation**: Work with the broader industry to enhance overall tourism sector standards
- **Visitor experience**: Improve and ensure consistent visitor experiences founded on their unique culture and character
- **Accessibility**: Improve access to and within Abu Dhabi as a tourism destination
- **Stakeholder collaboration**: Champion the development of the tourism industry with relevant stakeholders
- **Tourism product development**: Foster leisure and business tourism attractions and events, such as sports tourism events
- **Promote Abu Dhabi**: Promote Abu Dhabi as an international destination
- **Job creation**: Increase skilled tourism employment and generate greater levels of Emirati participation
- **Organisation excellence**: Increase the organization's effectiveness by operating with a streamlined structure, using process and adequate technology
- **Workforce development**: Increase the organization's effectiveness and efficiencies by recruiting and retaining skilled employees and empowering them to the highest levels of professionalism
- **Sustainable tourism**: Promote the development of a sustainable tourism sector adding value to the local community

Some top sports tourism events hosted in Abu Dhabi include the FIA World Rally Championship, the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship, the Al Ain Air show and the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, to name but a few. The ADTA works closely with partners such as sports tourism event managers, hotels, airlines, destination management companies and other travel-related organisations in Abu Dhabi to promote the emirate and raise its international profile as an upmarket destination offering top-quality facilities and services (ADTA, 2011). Al Nahyan (2011) posits that ADTA is aware of the vital role and contribution of international colleagues and partners. A key priority is

to maintain and expand these relationships in the future to gain mutually beneficial experiences across destinations and to maintain friendly relations with all.

Dubai

The Dubai Department of Tourism, Commerce and Marketing (DTCM) indicates that in the space of just three decades, Dubai has emerged as the undisputed sports capital of the Middle East. Among the numerous top-class events held in the emirate are the Desert Classic PGA Golf Tournament, the UIM Class One Powerboat World Championships, the ATP Dubai Tennis Open, the Dubai Sevens Rugby Tournament and the Dubai World Cup Horse Race (DTCM, 2011). These sports events have assisted in generating worldwide media exposure for Dubai and increasing international awareness (DTCM, 2011:1). The DTCM (2011) asserts that the success of Dubai as the sports capital of the Middle East can be linked to first-class sports facilities, tourism infrastructure and a good climate, but that the importance of having an effective strategy in place to guide development is critical.

Tourism counts for a high percentage of Dubai's GDP and it is expected to surpass oil exports as an important source of revenue. Dubai is seen as an ideal tourist destination and a thriving commercial centre. The importance of sports tourism events for Dubai has been recognised as part of tourism development. Dubai has been branded by the Dubai Sports Council (DSC) as the "City of Activities and Events" (DSC, 2007). The DSC (2007) states that Dubai has unique tourism features, in that it hosts international sports events as well as events that are linked to other fields. The DSC is focussed on making Dubai a pioneering milestone in the sports sector. Dr Ahmad Al Sharif, chairperson of the DSC, remarked the following in this regard:

> The region, as a whole, with rapid development of sport and leisure infrastructure, is now fast gaining a reputation as a global sport tourism centre in the wake of Dubai becoming a prime destination for the sport and leisure industry, contributing to the 15% annual growth in inbound tourism. (DSC, 2007:2)

Few places in the world have seen such transformation in recent years as Dubai. The Dubai Sports City, as an example, a multi-faceted $4-billion facility, is a sign of the desire to develop tourism and attract top sports events. According to Lorgat (2009:34), the Dubai Sports City is "truly a unique melting pot of sporting talents, and that the value of an integrated sports city adds a new dimension altogether". Government and corporate support has assisted Dubai in gaining a reputation in the sports fraternity (Bendoni, 2011). In order to achieve the DSC's objective, a comprehensive sports strategy was developed to enable the Dubai sports sector and clubs to comply with international standards and to work together with partners that are based in Dubai. The DSC has further added to its branding Dubai's reputation as the sports capital of the Middle East. The DSC and tourism authorities are linked and are in support of sports tourism event development.

Qatar

The Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) chairman, Mr Ahmed Abdullah Al Nuaimi, posits that the role of the QTA is to organise, enable and supervise tourism development in Qatar. In addition, the QTA is responsible for representing and promoting Qatar as a quality tourism destination for leisure, business, education and sport (QTA, 2011). Qatar is keen to establish itself as a global sports destination. As part of its decade-long modernisation programme, the development of sport in Qatar has enjoyed unfettered government support (UK Trade & Investment, 2010a) Since

2004, Qatar has hosted prominent international competitions in a variety of sports, including golf, cycling, tennis, football and marine sports.

The key focus of the Qatar tourism development strategy is to increase visitors to the destination. The staging of events such as the FIFA 2022 World Cup elevates Qatar's profile globally, accelerates infrastructure development and assists in diversifying the economy (UK Trade and Investment, 2010). The strategy of QTA is focused and centred on five pillars for development, namely meetings, culture, education, sports and leisure. In particular, the QTA strategy elevates sport as a key dimension for economic development. Qatar sees sport tourism, such as the hosting of the FIFA 2022 World Cup and other international sports events, as a key to attract visitors to the region. The strategy is supported by government in terms of investment funding to develop infrastructure (UK Trade and Investment, 2010).

Discussion

Sports tourism is considered a major source of foreign exchange and that it is important to the economies of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar for balance-of-trade purposes and the development of infrastructure. Sports tourism is also a crucial generator of employment in these regions and can assist in reducing the dependence on the oil economy. The impacts of sports tourism that are perceived by and affecting residents of these regions can take many forms. The economic impacts of tourism are seen through enhanced income and living standards and the provision of job opportunities. Socio-cultural impacts of sports tourism are characterised by the improvement of quality of life and the contribution to cultural exchange and understanding among different communities.

Although negative impacts are not discussed in this paper, the impacts of sport tourism events suggest the need to have a very carefully managed and planned sports tourism strategy aimed mainly at the economic, social and environmentally sustainability of the regions. The key element of the three regions is to have industry professional development as the key mandate and to raise the level of professionalism within the sports tourism event industry by collaborating with the private sector and encouraging more private sector involvement.

It is evident that adequate funding, top-class facilities and reliable weather combine to make these three regions successful centres for individual and team sports at all levels. All three regions are already top-class destinations for sports tourism and host many international events. Despite the high standards that have already been achieved in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar in sports tourism projects, facilities are continually developed and upgraded.

Sports tourism events have been used for the international promotion of the cities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar. Sports tourism events have benefits that extend beyond the actual events to several aspects impacting on the future of these regions. The benefits of and opportunities from sports tourism events for these regions have been lucrative, and have been unparalleled tools for creating brands and promoting these regions internationally.

The sustainability of sports tourism events in these regions has depended and succeeded on strong leadership, extensive government collaboration and cooperation with relevant sports tourism event communities and stakeholders, built on partnerships, planning and transparency. Leadership has been provided through the respected governments who are interested in maintaining standards and improving sports tourism events. The systematic planning of sports

tourism events in these regions exhibits a clear and accepted vision, specific goals and agreed actions to achieve change for their local communities. Openness and transparency regarding the development and delivery of successful sports tourism events have also been a success factor. Sports tourism event opportunities, particularly those linked to tourism benefits have been maximised in these regions, creating well-established links. Although linkages are in place, further expansion of private sector engagement in the support of and commitment to sports tourism events is encouraged.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Sports tourism events should be treated as a unique and distinctive type of tourist attraction, as they can influence travel patterns, sports and tourism locations, the nature of travel experiences, seasonal visitation patterns and host destinations where the events will take place. An appreciation of these aspects will mean that sports tourism event managers are not passive observers in the sports tourism event process, but managers who can influence the nature and pace of sports tourism event development.

Education and training will therefore be critical to the success of sports tourism events, as this will ensure that sports tourism event managers have the necessary business skills to administer the sports tourism events successfully and to recognise and take advantage of tourism opportunities and business opportunities that accompany the hosting of these events. Broader professional development programmes should also be facilitated to empower nationals of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar to seek employment within the sports tourism sector. To further enhance current best practice, the facilitation of more collaboration with private sector stakeholders on strategies to achieve benchmarks is suggested.

The role of sports tourism event managers should be elevated, as they are catalysts for sports tourism event strategy development, the architects of developing sports tourism events, agents of transformation and drivers of positive socio-economic and environmental impacts in terms of the manner in which they conceptualise, plan and stage events.

Research on sports tourism events should move beyond description to the realms of explanation and prediction, which are facilitated by relevant theory. As the knowledge base regarding sports tourism events grow, it will contribute to advancement in sports tourism event development practices.

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