



Chapter 14

The Impact of an International Literary Festival in a Tourist Destination

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ABSTRACT

Cultural events create a variety of impacts on the local economy and communities of hosting places. The impacts generated can be of short- or long-term, positive or negative. Literature distinguishes the term ‘impact’ from ‘legacy’. While impacts are focused on the economy effects in the short-term, legacy is referred to benefits that remains longer than the event itself. If residents and local stakeholders perceive benefits from an event, thus they will be supportive of hosting in the future. This chapter investigates the issue of literary festivals as tourism opportunity for a destination. It highlights the important role that festivals play within the local communities of the hosting place, including the facilitation of social cohesion and place image. It is based on the perceptions expressed by the different categories of local stakeholders involved in an international literary festival. The study reveals that evaluating and understanding the legacy effects of hosting a cultural event can provide managerial insights for planning, over time, events in a tourism destination.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism represents a substantial contributor to the development of different places. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were received by destinations around the world in 2019, with a growth of 4% compared to the previous year

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(World Tourism Organization, 2020a). However, the situation dramatically changed due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, since tourism has been one of the most affected of all the main economic sectors. According to available tourism data, in the first quarter of 2020, international tourist arrivals registered a double-digit decrease of 22%, with arrivals in March down by 57%. This represents a loss of 67 million international arrivals compared to the same period of last year (World Tourism Organization, 2020b). Although tourism is now showing positive signs of change, the scenario presents a high level of uncertainty. Naturally, the hope is to return to some sort of normality but the COVID-19 crisis has posed complex challenges for tourist businesses (Jones & Comfort, 2020). With these thoughts in mind, this chapter focuses on cultural events as entrepreneurial opportunities for tourism and hospitality for a hosting place.

Over the last decade, an ever-increasing number of destinations worldwide have invested in cultural events, such as literary festivals, given the remarkable growth of the cultural tourism phenomenon and the tendency of tourists to seek new and unique cultural experiences. Arts festivals and cultural events have always been associated with urban life and form a vibrant ingredient of cultural policies. Hosting cultural events and festivals has become a strategic element in the tourism development of destinations to attract visitors and encourage investment, improve the image and boost the local economy. Events may be a form of tourism offer of a destination in which the content of the events is associated with the resources of the place where it is held. They contain a number of activities, and are planned and organized by different public institutions and private organizations (Getz, 1997).

In more recent years, there has been a proliferation of literary festivals all over the world. As Weber (2018) highlights, literary festivals are events that incorporate literary culture into their constitution; they celebrate literary culture and integrate it into their organization. Within national contexts, different experiences emerge. In Italy, according to the Tourism National Agency, literary and book festivals represent a well-tested and innovative formula approved by publishing houses, book lovers and the public in general. The Italian scenario of these types of events varies in terms of theme, style, location and buying and selling opportunities. They offer the opportunity for an author to engage in direct contact with the public and are diverse in their histories and origins. Many festivals are hosted in small villages as well as in suggestive locations; as such, they mark out the places where they are hosted. This is the case of *Taobuk-Taormina Book Festival*, an international literary festival hosted in the city of Taormina, one of the most famous tourist destinations in Sicily, the biggest island in the Mediterranean Sea and the largest region of Italy.

Festivals and cultural events are considered an important motivator of tourism, as well as representing a key element in the development and marketing plans of many destinations. They can generate impacts on the host population and stakeholders in a number of ways. These factors are concerned with social and cultural, physical and environmental, political and economic impacts, and can be both positive and negative (Raj, 2003). Many studies underline the importance of their effects on the economic activities of the host territory. However, the attempt to measure the economic benefits provides some difficulties, most significantly because of the problems of isolating the impacts of one event within a complex economy. While there is a general consensus regarding the social and economic benefits that tourism development potentially provides, it is recognized that these benefits can be realized only if tourism is managed in order to maximise positive impacts, while negative impacts are kept to a minimum. The issue of impacts, therefore, remains at the forefront of the sector and arises on different occasions, as in the case of the effects generated by a cultural event attracting a large number of participants, spectators and sponsorships to a destination.

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