

Chapter 35

Obstacles and Adaptations of Mega-Events in São Paulo in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to identify how mega-events that had been established in the official calendar of SPTuris (São Paulo Tourism Company) in 2020, of the Municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, have adapted to the coronavirus pandemic. The study verified the impacts and obstacles caused in the event industry as well as the mitigation of such difficulties. A presentation was made on concepts, classifications of events, their history, and position in the market, including a description of actions by organizers not to stop all activities; the authors also included an interview with a representative of two companies in the event industry. The study conclusion was that most events opted for the internet and social media, in addition to drive-thru and delivery activities in the case of gastronomy; and that there have been gains in health safety and in the role of hybrid events in the future.

INTRODUCTION

In general, events account for a significant portion of the Brazilian economy. According to the latest survey conducted by ABEOC (Brazilian Association of Companies and Events), in 2013, the sector generated R\$ 209.2 billion and accounted for 4.3% of the Brazilian Gross Domestic Product. Regarding mega-events, a very strong sector in São Paulo - Brazil, it is “a short-term event, with permanent results in the hosting cities and/or countries and is associated to the creation of infrastructure and facilities for the event” (Roche, 1994 as cited in Da Silva, Cabral and Romano 2016, p. 638). In addition, a mega-event has a large audience, stands out for having a defined target audience and causes political, economic, social

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and broad media impacts (Hall, 2006 as cited in Da Silva; Braga; Romano 2016, p. 638). According to the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Economic Performance Bulletin (2017) shows that the area of events had an increase of 6% in 2016, while in 2017 this percentage rose to 13%. However, in the year 2020, COVID-19¹ arrived in Brazil, strongly impacting the events market. A survey conducted by Sebrae (Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service) in April 2020 shows that the pandemic affected 98% of the sector financially, causing events to be canceled or rescheduled. As preventive measures against the disease, the Brazilian Ministry of Health (2020) recommended that the population practice social distancing (avoiding crowds and being at least one meter away from each other), compliance with the respiratory etiquette (use of masks and, when coughing, covering mouth and nose), as well as hand hygiene and disinfection of environments.

Due the pandemic scenario, most of the population has stayed home and the events undergo adaptations and adjustments, a fact that is confirmed in the abovementioned Sebrae survey (2020), where almost half of the 2702 entrepreneurs who participated in the survey are trying to adjust their business model to keep operating. It is therefore important to understand how companies confronted the challenges of the pandemic and what opportunities event organizers found to survive in the market. However, the objective of this chapter is to understand how the mega-events area was affected and whether it remained on the market. To identify how companies survived the challenges and the opportunities they had in the pandemic, it will be reported mega-events that take place in the Municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, according to the official calendar of SPTuris (São Paulo Tourism Company), which is the official municipal tourism and events company. In each event, an online search was made on search pages to collect information about events and companies that produce them, which made it possible to report what actions were taken to adapt the event to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Such research mode is mentioned by Veal (2011, p.29) when stating that “much of the descriptive research in the area (leisure and tourism) can be considered *exploratory*: it seeks to discover, describe or map patterns of behavior in areas or activities that have not been previously studied”. Also, this chapter proposes as methodology a literature review, a procedure called “expository review” by Silveira (1992) in the perspective that exposes a theme from the analysis and synthesis of several studies. Through this method, one can collect news, interviews with experts and research conducted at the time of the pandemic. Thus, it is necessary to gather such data and identify, using the data presented, what actions were taken by event companies. In addition, the bibliographic review helps to build the theoretical framework of the “events” theme. Furthermore, through the expository review procedure, it will be described how the event market evolved starting from six years before the pandemic, considering that the market was constantly growing and had great expectations, even before that, in the preparations for the 2014 World Cup (Mendonça and Perozin, 2014).

In addition, to analyze the particularities of a company in the events industry, an interview was conducted with a representative working at VMO Turismo and DKS Eventos. At the end of the chapter, a comparative analysis of the actions was conducted, pointing out that most events were adapted to the online format and that a smaller part of event organizers decided to postpone and reschedule events for another date. It was then found that the sector has not stopped all activities and has adjusted to the calamity scenario caused by the pandemic, and that new possibilities have been figured out for the future, such as hybrid, face-to-face and virtual events, in addition to advances in health security.

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