2 Mixed event strategies and multilevel communication

In event management, a central dimension concerns the role that events have in sharing meanings at international, national, and local community levels. This chapter highlights the main characteristics that differentiate the role of communication based on the scope of events. This aspect is very important because one cannot think of following a single management and communication model, but above all, it recognizes the diverse objectives that motivate the organization of the event, and the ways in which they must be presented.

At the end of the chapter readers should be able to understand:

- How communication develops a solid identity image consistent with the shared objectives in the organizational network

- How to organize communication based on the local, national, and international scope of the event

- How to create a link with users, starting from the shared identity of the event.

Multilevel integrated communication

The previous chapter highlighted the importance of adopting an integrated communication model in event management. This chapter explores the crucial issue of building a distinctive identity that represents the foundation for communicating with stakeholders and participants. The construction of an identity is most conspicuously the task of corporate communication, but it serves all communication activities in an integrated manner.

Sharing an identity allows interlocutors to identify points of contact and immediately recognize the meaning and value of an event. The construction of an identity is, therefore, essential to sharing the specificity of the event's themes, the coherence of its objectives with the themes, and the uniqueness of its structure. These three aspects are essential requirements for creating value around an event. Uniqueness guarantees non-repeatability with respect to other events and to other iterations of the event itself. Despite possessing a structure that repeats itself over time, so that it is recognizable, the themes and the articulation of the offer of services and collateral events must guarantee the event's non-routine nature. This unprecedented nature makes the event attractive and capable of arousing expectations among observers. As Getz nicely summarizes (2008, p. 404), "*Uniqueness is an opportunity as a large part of the charm of events is that they are never the same and one must 'be there' to fully experience the unique experience; if you miss it, it's a missed opportunity*". The author underlines how even repeatable events (in the sense that they reiterate themselves over time according to a defined pattern) will not be the same on the various occasions since the themes, timing, participants, and experiences will always be different.

Therefore, the more unique the event, the more it manages to guarantee its continuity over time and the effectiveness of its results.

To guarantee these requirements, it is essential that the content of communication expresses the event's profound and unitary meaning, which must be consistent with the objectives of the organizational network (and not only of the organizers) and respond to the expectations of the target participants in and observers of the event.

For this reason, building a unitary representation of identity means creating a set of coherent meanings that are easily understandable and shareable by all. During the realization of the event, the conformity of these meanings with goals and expectations feeds the sense of credibility and trust, which increases the identity's value and generates a sense of belonging to and appreciation for the event (Figure 2.1).
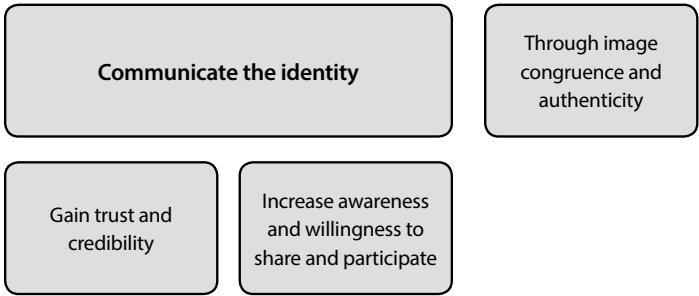

Figure 2.1: Communicating the identity of the event. Author's elaboration

The communication of an event is designed to share the relevant thematic choices, first among the stakeholders and then in public discussions. The goal of this sharing is to raise awareness and create a desire for participation. As modeling theory says (Bandura, 1972), sharing encourages the convergence of the behaviors of the parties involved. According to this theory, the communication of shared decisions acts as a reinforcing factor for both stakeholders and participants. In the same way, and more recently, Richardson (2018) highlighted the importance of avoiding contradictory communications because they produce confusion and intolerance, generating reactions contrary to intentions. The author raises this issue because such confusion has often been one of the unintended consequences when the communication of an event does not clearly express its identity. Indeed, when communication is not adequately organized, it produces a negative gap between the predispositions and considerations of the event, which undermines the trust, reputation, and credibility of the event. Given the large number of actors involved and the objectives, interests, and expectations that must converge around the goals of an event, this is a very real danger. For this reason, the work of communication is very delicate and important.

To avoid the risk of eroding trust, we can use the theory of trust transfer formulated by Strub and Priest (1976) and recently revived by Min-Seong and Stepchenkova (2020). This theory holds that individuals who have limited knowledge of an issue, or some aspect of it, seek credible and trusted sources that provide them with guidance and direction. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) adds that people tend to give up on an event if they find the information unclear or if it