

10 Evaluating Visitors and Experiences

Learning objectives

- Know the various 'audiences' of events.
- Be able to make accurate attendance counts or reliable estimates.
- Be able to profile attendees according to: motivation and benefits desired; origins and trip type; activities and spending.
- Understand how to evaluate the cognitive, affective, behavioural, interpersonal and sensory components of event experiences – and the meanings of these terms.
- Be able to combine quantitative measures (the event experience scale) with qualitative (participant observation, ethnography, experience mapping).
- Learn how technological developments are providing new approaches and measures of event and tourism experiences.

10.1 Introduction

Understanding the visitors and their experiences is central to event studies, and the focus of considerable research effort. Evaluation contributes to theory development, but the focus here is on several important questions: is marketing effective? are we delivering the experiences and quality services we designed? how do our visitors evaluate us?

Here is the logic of the ensuing discussion. First, to know your visitors/audience requires data on attendance and a visitor description, plus information on motivation and benefits desired. How does this profile fit with marketing plans and target marketing? Second, how can the quality of visitor experiences be measured?

10.2 The audience

There are multiple audiences, stakeholders or constituencies for most events. Mackellar (2014) in the book *Event Audiences and Expectations* classified the audiences as:

- ◆ *Mass audience*: large crowds attending big events, often for hedonistic reasons; could include pilgrimage
- ◆ *Special interest*: the involved, attracted by event-specific benefits
- ◆ *Community*: events called ‘community festivals’ and the like, aiming to bring together members of specific places; could include fund raisers
- ◆ *Incidentals*: otherwise known as ‘casual tourists’, they attend because of general interest in the destination or someone takes them to the event
- ◆ *Media*: a mediated experience; social media now a dominant factor in experience co-creation

This typology can be related to the generic/targeted benefits dichotomy – discussed in the books *Event Studies* (Getz & Page, 2016), and *Event Tourism* (Getz, 2013) – which suggests that most event attendees are seeking generic leisure and social experiences, while those with special interests have different needs and expectations. Mackellar uses the term ‘serious participation’, based on Stebbins’ theory on ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 2006), and the sociological construct of ‘social worlds’ (Unruh, 1980). These theories sparked interest in examining the ‘event tourist career trajectory’ (Getz and McConnell, 2011) which has been applied to sport-event participants, food and wine tourists.

10.2.1 Attendance

Figure 10.1 lists some key evaluation questions, suggested KPIs and the data sources and methods available to evaluators. Note that for attendance the KPIs actually describe the measures needed for a comprehensive examination of attendance, and these data also contribute to other evaluation questions such as financial audits and economic impact assessment. The biggest challenge is always going to be the open-access event where crowd estimation is needed, and of course these can be exaggerated for political reasons. For a review of methods see Tyrrell & Ismail (2005) and Biaett and Hultsman (2015).

10.2.2 Profiling the visitor

Some events are not particularly concerned about target marketing and do not do segmentation studies, but for most events it is important to design experiences and services for the intended audience. Visitor profiles are therefore essential, and so is trend analysis to see if changes are as planned, or the event needs to adapt. Visitor surveys are the main source, but might have to be complemented by market area surveys. Observation can be used to gain a better understanding of the audience and their behaviour, but in some cases might be the only way to profile visitors. For an example see the research article by Katsoni and Vrontdou (2017) that profiles sport event tourists.

Figure 10.1: The Evaluator's Toolbox: Attendance evaluation

Attendance: evaluation questions	Key performance indicators	Data sources / methods
<p>Q-Are we reaching OR did we reach our targets (for total attendance; venue or programme attendance; ticket sales)?</p> <p>Q-Do we have a firm attendance count or a reliable estimate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Total event attendance and at sub-events ■ Total number of guests, participants, or customers ■ Total number of visitations and ave. Visits per person/group ■ Turnover rate (# of new and departing visitors per hour) ■ Peak attendance ■ Ticket sales (combined with revenue per ticket this KPI can be more important than attendance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sales and revenue data ■ Turnstile counts (bodies through the gate) ■ Vehicle counts (also needed: ave. Persons per vehicle) ■ Crowd estimates (e.g., from police, photos, observation) ■ Market area surveys (usually by telephone) ■ Registration (often there are discrepancies between advance registration and actual attendance)

Figure 10.2: The Evaluator's Toolbox: Visitor profiles

Visitor profile: Evaluation questions	KPIs	Data sources & methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Was our target marketing effective? (i.e., we attracted the anticipated segments) ■ Were there conflicts among visitor groups? ■ What are the trends in visitor types, and the implications? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Profile of each visitor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Age in years ■ Male or female ■ Employment status ■ Educational level ■ Income level ■ Party type: family only; family and friends; friends only; alone; team or tour group ■ Size of party (number of visitors travelling together) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Visitor survey ■ Market area survey ■ Direct observation
<p><i>Market area and trip type</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Where did we draw visitors from? was this expected? what are the implications? ■ Travel data are needed for tourism impact assessments and carbon / ecological footprint analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Home address: country, state, city or town ■ Origin of trip on day of survey; distance travelled ■ Stops on the trip ■ Number and percent that are classified as tourists ■ Type of trip: accommodation used ■ Number of nights away from home and in the destination ■ Travel mode(s) (type of vehicle) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Visitor survey ■ Interviews with visitors ■ Visitor log books ■ Observation of vehicle origins ■ Traffic counts