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# 6 Redesigning Events in the Post COVID-19 Crisis: A Design Thinking Approach

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## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 12 March 2020. Since then, COVID-19 has significantly influenced the global economic, political, and socio-cultural systems (Sigala, 2020). This pandemic is arguably one of the most substantial challenges facing businesses in the past 100 years (Hall et al., 2020). Although the tourism industry has been generally resilient in recovery from a variety of crises (e.g. terrorism, earthquakes, and outbreaks such as SARS), tourism is one of many industries in which COVID-19 has caused severe adverse effects (UNWTO, 2020b) and has given rise to profound and long-term changes (Sigala, 2020). Moreover, it is not yet clear if, or when, businesses will return to normal (Cankurtaran & Beverland, 2020).

As COVID-19 has continued to spread across the world, travel restrictions and border shutdowns have been enforced in many countries to curb its spread (Qiu et al., 2020). Flights have been canceled (Haywood, 2020), forcing millions of travelers to postpone their travel plans (Rwigema, 2020). People all over the world have experienced quarantine or isolation, whilst businesses have been closed in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Kabadayi et al., 2020) which has caused supply chain disruptions.

Whilst the events sector is considered as a vital part of the tourism industry (Mohanty et al., 2020; Rwigema, 2020), it has been disrupted the most (Gajjar & Parmar, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020) due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 (Congrex Switzerland, 2020; Margolis et al., 2020; Min Ho & Ming Sia, 2020; Mohanty et al., 2020; Ranasinghe et al., 2020) which lead to social distancing (Rwigema, 2020; Sigala, 2020), the avoidance of crowd gatherings (Hao et al., 2020), travel restrictions, border controls, and involuntary quarantine (Disimulacion, 2020).

Consequently, all kinds of events with large groups of participants have been restricted, including events ranging from concerts, meetings, conferences,

sports, to large family gatherings (e.g., weddings) (Gössling et al., 2020). Hundreds and thousands of events all over the world have been postponed or canceled (Congrex Switzerland, 2020), which has negatively affected stakeholders such as sponsors and suppliers (Min Ho & Ming Sia, 2020). Key events that have been affected by COVID-19 include the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, Facebook's Annual F8 Conference (Min Ho & Ming Sia, 2020), and major sports leagues across Europe, North America, and other regions. The total economic impact is not yet known but will be in the hundreds of billions of US dollars (Gössling et al., 2020).

When compared with other sectors of the tourism industry, the events sector will require a significantly longer period of time to recover as a number of events have already been postponed or cancelled and the marketing and travel budgets of companies are limited due to COVID-19 (Suau-Sanchez et al., 2020). In turn, this has resulted in significant losses to the events sector (Mohanty et al., 2020). Therefore, it is a challenge for the events sector to launch and manage events with minimal disruption (Disimulacion, 2020).

Regardless of such challenges, the implications of COVID-19 on the events sector have been largely understudied (Mohanty et al., 2020). Further studies on COVID-19 and the events sector are needed to accurately identify the key factors that contribute to the success of events in the future (Min Ho & Ming Sia, 2020). Moreover, the current situation requires study on how the events sector could be prepared to mitigate risks in the post-COVID-19 period (Mohanty et al., 2020).

Given the likelihood of a reoccurrence of the pandemic, design thinking is one of many problem-solving methods which can be used to cope with such challenges (Cankurtarana & Beverlandb, 2020; Thakur et al., 2020). Moreover, a number of authors (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Sigala, 2020) have pointed out that COVID-19 tourism research, including events, should generate de-thinking, re-thinking and un-thinking of pre-assumptions and mindsets. Therefore, this chapter aims to discuss the role of design thinking during the COVID-19 pandemic to generate innovative solutions to address unique challenges in the events sector. By using design thinking as a framework, this chapter will discuss various solutions which address these challenges. Finally, recommendations for future studies will be provided.

## Literature review

### Crisis management in tourism and events

There is a growing number of crises that have affected the tourism industry, including the events sector, ranging from natural to human influenced incidents (Faulkner, 2001) including the '9/11' terrorist attacks on the USA in

2001, the tsunami in the Indian Ocean region in 2004, the swine flu crisis in 2009, and the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Reddy et al., 2020) and COVID-19 in 2020 (Gössling et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2020; Ranasinghe et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020).

The tourism industry, especially international tourism demand, is vulnerable to crises due to many external factors, including political instability, economic conditions, the environment and the weather (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Tourism crises have affected the willingness of tourists to travel (Jin et al., 2019) as such crises create negative destination images and consequently reduce the number of tourist arrivals (Rittichainuwat et al., 2020). As a result, crises have impacts on both event organizers when selecting event destinations, as well as event participants when deciding whether to attend events.

To understand crisis management in the tourism and event contexts, it is crucial to examine multiple stages or crises (Lai & Wong, 2020). While opinion varies greatly in regard to the most suitable stages of crisis management, a number of authors have agreed that tourism crisis management involves the following stages: 1. The identification or discovery of threats, 2. Crisis management planning, 3. Crisis response, 4. Crisis recovery, and 5. Learning from the crisis (Campiranon & Scott, 2014). Another approach is to categorize crises into three stages: before, during and after a crisis (Sigala, 2020). The pre-disaster stage is the period of time that precedes the event, and research can determine the state of preparedness. Research in the post-disaster phase aims to examine the lessons learned and recommend crisis management responses for future incidents. However, in the during-crisis stage, the aim of research is different as it involves the development of a crisis management plan (Lai & Wong, 2020).

As there are no specific models or frameworks for event crisis management, this chapter has relied on literature and models from the general tourism field. Whilst a number of authors have proposed a crisis management framework in the tourism industry, Faulkner (2001)'s model remains one of the most cited crisis and disaster management frameworks. Faulkner's Tourism Disaster Management Framework discusses the following stages of disaster management (Table 6.1).

A number of authors (e.g. Muskat et al., 2014; Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2003; Ritchie, 2008) simplified the stages of tourism crisis management into four stages: reduction, readiness (pre disaster), response (disaster), and recovery. Following the review of 142 papers published between 1960 and 2018 on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management, Ritchie and Jiang (2019) identified the following three broad management stages of disasters and crises: 1. Preparedness and planning 2. Response and recovery 3. Resolution and reflection (Table 6.2).