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Evaluating the impacts of event communication

The purpose of the chapter is to explain how to manage communication both as a tool to help demonstrate the value of events and to provide the reader with theoretical models and practical tools to use in measuring communication effectiveness and learning how to apply the tools, using an holistic approach.

At the end of the chapter readers should:

- Know the main evaluation methods of event communication in the context of a holistic approach.
- Understand how to design a communication assessment.
- Know the main monitoring and analysis methods and techniques.
- Understand how to use the results of the event evaluation and experience how to apply monitoring and analysis techniques.

Approaches from a holistic perspective

This chapter is dedicated to understanding how event management should be evaluated. It is not possible to explore this aspect without first framing the processes in question within a broader and more articulated monitoring and evaluation system that concerns all aspects of the event. Each of them influences the others, and to understand, for example, the success achieved by communication actions intended for stakeholders or users, it is therefore also necessary to examine socio-economic factors, the effectiveness of the activities carried out by entire networks, and the role that more or less intense relationships have in the construction of an event's offer. Therefore, the holistic approach proposed here explains how a good evaluation of communication can be formed through an integrated evaluation of all the aspects that characterize an event. According to this conception, the various aspects of communication can be measured and interpreted only when there is an organic vision of the whole process.

How can you verify that you have obtained the results foreseen in the planning stage of an event and determine whether the processes have been effective and efficient? How can you acquire the information necessary to establish any changes to event communication to improve and optimize the role of that communication? How long do memories last, and how much loyalty do they produce at the end of the event? How do you demonstrate to institutions, investors, sponsors, and citizens the perceived value that an event or portfolio has produced?

Stakeholders pose these questions to organizers daily, and their willingness to support events depends on the answers. More structured events already include monitoring and evaluation plans as an essential part of event management. However, although the measurement of results is a very important issue, systematic – and comparable – methods are not always used. This happens because events

are very different from each other in terms of objectives, breadth, scope, and the situations and environments in which they take place. Each is often so specific that it leads to the use of measurement techniques and methods consistent with its own peculiarities and purposes and with the requests of its stakeholders. For this reason, from a scientific point of view, it is very difficult to carry out comparative studies in this sector. In some cases, the evaluations that organizers form are sporadic, episodic, and instrumental and, therefore, are concentrated only on some economic, social, or environmental aspects that meet the specific needs of a specific edition of the event. In this case, a historical analysis of the evolution of a single event is missing. However, such an analysis would be useful to better plan subsequent editions.

More generally, the advantage of greater standardization is to allow better exploitation of data for multiple purposes by the various actors involved: institutions, organizers, investors, sponsoring companies, social planners and designers, the media (for the selection of events to cover), and attendees (with respect to their participation and consumption choices).

In this regard, it may be useful to add a reflection on the importance of the replicability and comparability of a holistic approach. To ensure their full implementation, the support of analysis and evaluation structures would be appropriate, hopefully operating in close collaboration with universities and research centers. Event organizers should be responsible for collecting information and producing subsequent targeted reports for their stakeholders. Research institutions should be entrusted with analytic tasks to provide precise measurements of the value created by each event and portfolio in the territory to those directly involved and to local administrations. The goal is to be able to support, in a precise and efficient way, the formulation of development and support policies governing events, territories, and interterritorial initiatives at the local, national, and international levels. This research network could enhance the activities of consortia and commissions, participation in interregional events in support of local development, and international participation in large and mega-events that are distributed across several areas to balance out the overall management costs. Finally, the knowledge guaranteed by a good evaluation allows organizers to increase an event's credibility and reputation to encourage investments, especially when they contribute to innovation and sustainability. These elements are now the cornerstones of the event sector's development.

Getz, in collaboration with various scholars, has addressed this issue on several occasions in over 20 years of work, to the point of reporting and systematizing evaluation theories and methods in a 2018 volume (Carlsen et al., 2000; Carlsen, 2004; Getz, 2008; Brown et al., 2015; Getz, 2018). He explained that evaluating means placing a value on something and judging its quality and effectiveness, while estimating an event's impact involves testing the policy-making, decision-making, and planning processes that determine the outcomes that need to be examined. This process requires the adoption of a holistic and ecosystemic approach. It considers the value of all the activities involved in planning and implementing an event from pre- to post-event and the repercussions that the event generates for all the actors involved and for the host territories in the short, medium, and long terms (Figure 8.1). This approach considers valuation a useful tool for discounting