

9 Event Portfolios and Cultural Exhibitions in Canberra and Melbourne

Valentina Gorchakova

The sustainable development of an event portfolio requires a synergy between the different types of events included in it. The pool of events that are commonly used by city event planners and destination marketers usually revolve around major sport events, cultural festivals and celebrations, and world trade expositions. Some cities, however, also attract and stage international touring exhibitions that bring together a collection of rare art works, significant cultural objects, or memorabilia to tour a limited number of destinations.

In this chapter, major events such as international touring exhibitions will be explored as key components of portfolios of events in Canberra and Melbourne. The chapter discusses the different ways event and tourism planners in Canberra and Melbourne have been approaching major touring exhibitions, and the specific roles these events can play in delivering a balanced and successful portfolio. It will be demonstrated that the decision making around events and event portfolio composition needs to be considered within a wider context, in the light of the city's geography and demographics, as well as political, social and cultural factors.

An exploratory qualitative research was conducted in Canberra and Melbourne, Australia. The primary data was collected from 12 semi-structured interviews with managers and executives in tourism and major events planning in both cities, as well as managers and curators of the cultural institutions that had hosted major touring exhibitions. The secondary data included a range of documents pertinent to the cities' tourism and major events policy and strategy, existing research about touring exhibitions, and websites and articles in the mass media. In the chapter, examples of past major exhibitions are given.

Major touring international exhibitions

Major touring exhibitions, often referred to as ‘major international exhibitions’ or ‘blockbuster exhibitions’, represent collections of art works and objects that are brought together under a specific topic or theme to travel outside of their place of permanent exhibition. These exhibitions have been hosted by many cultural institutions around the world but have not often been discussed in the events literature. The nature of major international exhibitions, however, is one of a special event (Gorchakova, 2017) – they are hosted for a limited period of time, attract tourists, raise awareness of the host city, offer a social experience and are out of the ordinary occurrences (Jago & Shaw, 1998). These events can play an important role in tourism both in the short- and long-term perspectives. As a ‘must-see’ attraction, they draw significant number of visitors over a relatively short period of time and can contribute to the host city’s image and profile, and enhance the events portfolio of a city.

A portfolio of events can help in the achievement of synergy between otherwise unrelated events and in leveraging their benefits (Costa & Ziakas, 2011). It can also foster collaboration within a network of stakeholders and sustain the outcomes of events that singly may be short-term or ephemeral (Ziakas, 2014). Event portfolios cannot be considered outside of the wider socio-economic, political and geographical contexts of the cities where they are being developed. In fact, these considerations play an important role in the decision-making of destination marketers and major events planners, and eventually affect the composition of portfolios of major events – as will be shown in the next section: An overview of the city contexts.

There are, however, other effects on the major events portfolio in a city. These effects, which include variety, orientation, seasonality and uniqueness, are discussed further in the chapter, with examples drawn from Canberra and Melbourne where major touring exhibitions have been hosted over a number of years as part of those cities’ event portfolios.

An overview of the city contexts

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is located within the state of New South Wales, and is a self-governing internal territory in Australia. Canberra is located in this territory and is its urban centre. Canberra has been the capital city of Australia since 1913. The Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly acts as both a city council and territory government. The choice of a place for the capital was defined by a dispute over this role between Melbourne (the capital of the Victoria state) and Sydney (the capital of the New South Wales state). A consensus was reached, and the capital was built in New South Wales, 170 miles (280 km) away from Sydney, and 410 miles (660 km) away from Melbourne.

Canberra is close to Sydney, and relatively close to Melbourne – the two largest Australian cities – and these are the sources for Canberra’s domestic tourism. A tourism study (Tourism Research Australia, 2017a) found that more than a half of all domestic overnight visitors to Canberra come from NSW and the state of Victoria. There are more than 15 flights daily from Melbourne to Canberra and more than 20 from Sydney, with a flight time of 55 minutes from Sydney and 1 hour 5 minutes from Melbourne. The flight connections make travelling to Canberra from the states of New South Wales and Victoria a relatively easy task, which is a favourable attribute of the geographical context. Overall, 4.7 million domestic tourists, both those staying overnight and coming on a day trip, and 249,000 international overnight visitors, visited Canberra in the year ending June 2018 (Visit Canberra, 2018).

The estimated resident population of ACT as of June 3, 2018 was over 420,902 people, which is the second strongest growth in estimated resident population of all jurisdictions in Australia (ACT Government, 2018). The average salary in the ACT is A\$94,224, while the full-time earnings in Australia average A\$82,436 a year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). According to the AMP.NATSEM report (Cassells Duncan, Abello, D’Souza, & Nepal, 2012), ACT residents are highly educated – 78% of 25-43 year olds and 80% of those aged between 35-44 hold a higher education qualification, with 25% holding a bachelor’s degree, above the national average of 17%; they also are twice as likely to hold a post-graduate qualification – about 9% of the total surveyed population, as opposed to the rest of Australia at 4.5%. The Australian National University in Canberra ranks second in the country and is in the top 50 in the world (Times Higher Education, n.d.) and counts six Nobel Laureates among staff and alumni – more than any other Australian university.

Many cultural and political institutions are located in Canberra, such as the Parliament, the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Library, the National Archives, the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and the National Zoo and Aquarium. As a result, there is a strong sense of the national capital role the city is destined to play. The idea of ‘being of service’ for the country and its residents stands out in most of the communications – both in person and in the city’s strategic documents. Canberra is called ‘the Home of the Australian story’ (Visit Canberra, n.d.-a), and the variety of institutions of national significance makes the city rather unique.

Melbourne is the fastest-growing city in Australia due to both internal and overseas migration (Royall, 2015). It is more than ten times bigger than Canberra – in 2018 the population hit 5 million people (Population Australia, n.d.) and the city may become the largest in the country by 2028 (Longbottom & Knight, 2018). In the year ending December 2017, Melbourne welcomed 2.7 million international visitors and 9.3 million domestic overnight visitors (Destination Melbourne, 2018).