
**THE ROLE OF THE EVENT IN CREATING THE DESTINATION IMAGE, THE CASE
STUDY OF STRUMICA CARNIVAL**

Maja Novak Cerepnalkovska

ECPD (European Center for Peace and Development), Belgrade majanovak@yahoo.com

Abstract: Event industry is a new concept established in the second half of the last century. It is said that it is unity between tourism and research community. They are also important motivator for tourism development of many countries. Events have arisen not only from economic reasons, but also from scientific and professional, social and cultural needs and experience exchange. Destinations are highly competitive in finding their place at the world map of different event contents. Congresses and seminars, conventions, festivals and carnivals, trade fairs, sport events and exhibitions belong to the wide group of event possibilities and belong to the wide spectrum of development possibilities as well. Events need a broad cooperation among the main stake holders, such as organizers, participants, audience, hotel industry, sponsors, media, volunteers, local community. Carnivals belong to cultural events and occur the essential element in the tourism development of many destinations. Although carnivals existed from the ancient times, today they have compound elements of destination economy, social and cultural life. The biggest carnival destinations in the world, such as Rio de Janeiro carnival, Venice, or Mardi Gras in New Orleans, have traditions for centuries and have become the brand event product of their countries. Strumica carnival is the oldest and the most important carnival in Republic of Macedonia, a member of FECC, International Carnival Association. The purpose of this paper is to research in which way the carnival contributes to the city image and to evaluate the image of the Strumica Carnival among participants. The core of the quantitative data is the total of 330 foreign participants in February 2017th originating from Holland (Holland Antilles), Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Albania. The qualitative research method is also incorporated in the research, discussing the satisfaction of participants adopting the cultural and social benefits of the event and the city through structured and semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. The respondents' answers were given in a 5-point Likert-type scale. Although questionnaires' with 40 question is realized, only 4 answers are analyzed in the paper considering subject of improvement of the event, the image of Strumica in the sense of recommendation to friend or relative, friendliness of the hotel staff and language comprehension problems. At the same time an interview with the organizer of the carnival is performed with structured and semi structured questions. Results have shown the strong artistic and cultural value of the event, stable number of participants, necessity of strengthening position and image of event destination, improvement of hotel facilities and infrastructure, training of hotel and service staff, as well as the partnership between the main stakeholders.

Keywords: destination, event, image, participant, Strumica Carnival.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many authors have discussed and tried to give definition of "events". The word "event" has its explanation in the primary meaning given in some English dictionaries, such as: gathering or social activity, something that is happening at a given place and time, competition, adventure, occasion. Accordingly Laurence Carter (2007) described it as "any gathering of people for a specific purpose"¹⁵⁵, while the second one is given by Donald Getz (2011) as "event: an occurrence at a given place and time"¹⁵⁶. Goldblatt (1990) define it as "an unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs"¹⁵⁷. Events are an important motivator of tourism and are of increasing importance for destination competitiveness. Event tourism is a new concept established in tourism industry. It was only a few decades ago that "event tourism" became established in both the tourism industry and in the research community. Equally, "event management" is a fast growing professional field in which tourists constitute a potential market for planned events and the tourism industry has become a vital stakeholder in their success and attractiveness (Getz D. 2007)¹⁵⁸. An article by Getz (1989) in *Tourism Management* ("special Events: Defining the Product") developed a framework for planning "event tourism"¹⁵⁹. The touristic potential of events is

¹⁵⁵ Carter L., *Event Planning*, Author House, Indiana, (2007)

¹⁵⁶ Getz, D., *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy Planned Events*, Oxford: Elsevier, (2007)

¹⁵⁷ Goldblatt, J., *Special Events: The Art and Science of Celebration*, Wiley, New Jersey, (1990)

¹⁵⁸ Getz, D., *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy Planned Events*, Oxford: Elsevier, (2007)

¹⁵⁹ Getz, D., *Special Events: Defining the Product*, *Tourism Management*, 10(2), p.135-137, (1989)

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

reflected in many of the current studies as they are “increasingly being viewed as an integral part of tourism development and marketing planning, even though the majority of events have probably arisen for non-touristic reasons, such as competition, cultural celebrations or need to raise funds for charity” (Tassiopoulos, 2009)¹⁶⁰. To this reasons some other should be added, such as scientific and professional, as well as the trade experience exchange. It means that this valuation includes assessment of value of the event, but also includes the positive destination image and place marketing in general. From the side of supply destinations develop, facilitate and promote events of all kinds in order to achieve particular goals, as to attract tourists, to foster the positive destination image and contribute to general place marketing. Almost every destination on Earth gets the image it deserves (Anholt, 2007, p.35)¹⁶¹. According to Getz typology of planed events (1997, p.17) carnivals belong to cultural events and occur the essential element in the tourism development of destination¹⁶². In Ancient Greece and Italy, long before the emergency of Christianity, people whom we call pagans today had wild celebrations centered around the winter and spring solstices, and spring and fall equinoxes, celebrations that the people did not want to give up, even after they became Christians. Today carnivals are part of the economy of many countries and are active promoters of the country image. Image of the Rio de Janeiro Carnival is the worldwide standard for huge festivals. With over two million people in attendance each year, it is the world’s biggest carnival and has been running annually since 1723. Though the revelers are allowed to move freely around the carnival, the floats themselves are quite organized – they are staffed exclusively with samba school, or groups of neighbors that want to perform together. The Carnival of Venice, which takes place just before lent and ends on the Holy day, is all about the decorative masks native to the city itself. Though nobody is sure exactly how this carnival began, it is said to date all the way back to 1162, but it become extremely famous during the 18th century. One of the biggest and the most famous festivals in United States, and perhaps in the entire world is Mardi Gras, held in New Orleans and created in the mid-1700s. It is well known for over-the-top floats and costumes and drunken revelry.¹⁶³ One of the oldest and the most important carnivals in Republic of Macedonia is the Strumica Carnival. The key components or the main stakeholders of the carnival are organizers, sponsors, hotels, participants and the audience. The main objective of the research is to see in which way the carnival contributes to the city image and to evaluate the image of the Strumica Carnival among participants. The core of the quantitative data is the total of 330 foreign participants in February 2017th originating from Holland (Holland Antilles), Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Albania. The qualitative research method is also incorporated in the research, discussing the satisfaction of participants adopting the cultural and social benefits of the event and the city through structured and semi-structured questionnaires and interviews.

2. GENERAL ISSUE

Situated at the southeastern part of the Republic of Macedonia, Strumica Municipality has 54.636 citizens according to the last census in 2002^{n164d}. First settlement at the same spot is mentioned in Latin documents in 181st as Astaion. It has the natural and manmade tourist attractions situated at the nearby mountain Belasica (Kolasino and Smolari waterfalls) and the monasteries of Vodoca and Veljusa. The Strumica Carnival is one of the most remarkable customs and traditions of its kind in Macedonia, held during so-called Trimer Days, marking the start of the Lenten Fast, which always begins on Sunday Eve of Forgiveness (Procka) lasts until Wednesday. Tuesday is the tradicional carnival night, when masked groups stroll through town to the homes of engaged girls until early in the morning. Trimeri is the Christian tradition, while the carnival is a remnant from a pagan cult. The Strumica Carnival has a very long tradition, mentioned by chronicler Evlija Celebija as early as 1670th. Passing through Strumica, he wrote: “I came to a town situated in the foothill of a high hill and I saw that masked people ran from one house to another, in laughter, whistle, and song...”¹⁶⁵ clearly indicating that it happened during the Trimer Carnival in Strumica.

¹⁶⁰ Tassiopoulos D., *Event Management A Professional and Developmental Approach*, 2nd edition, Juta Accademic (2009)

¹⁶¹ Anholt, S., *Competitive Identity, The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities, Regions*, Palgrave McMilan, p.35 (2007)

¹⁶² Getz, D., *Event Management and Event Tourism*, New York CCC, p.17 (1997)

¹⁶³ Festival Statistics, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, www.unesco.org/culture/documents

¹⁶⁴ www.stat.gov.mk

¹⁶⁵ www.carnivalstrum.org

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE
 25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

The present day carnival has assumed many of modern dimensions of the most popular world carnivals, but the traditional customs and gowns of going to engaged girls' houses remains.

According to the ethnologist Ilija Suvaniev¹⁶⁶, through its multicolored appearance, figures and masks with different motives and topics, it aims to demonstrate the infinite struggle, dualism and antagonism between good and evil, realism and sarcasm, irony, satire and tradition. The whole town lives with and for the carnival a weeks before. In the last twenty years Strumica Carnival is a member of international carnival association FCEE which has the strict criteria for originality of group masks. It became a member of FECC in 1997th in Aruba, Holland Antilles.

3. IMAGE OF THE CARNIVAL AND DESTINATION AMONG PARTICIPANTS

The research is conducted during the carnival in the period 23rd till 25th February 1997th among a sample of 330 foreign participants from Holland, Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania and Montenegro.

Age-wise the participants were divided into five distinct classes: (1) less than 25 years; (2) between 26-34 years; (3) between 35-44 years; (4) between 45-60 years and (5) more than 60 years. The participant answers were not divided according to the country of origin. The research was done in different hotels of their accommodation during the carnival.

AGE	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Under 25	214	65
26-34	43	13
35-44	46	14
45-60	26	8
More than 60	-	-

Considering the participation before, 24 of respondents (7%) were at the Strumica Carnival for the first time, while 306 (93%) have taken participation the previous years.

Event image:

The respondents were asked what they would improve by the event. The answers were given in a 5-point Likert-type scale: (1) infrastructure of the hotel; (2) organization; (3) excursion and free time offer; (4) accompanying persons program and (5) nothing at all.

Table 1: The event image

ANSWERS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Infrastructure of the hotel	66	20
Carnival organization	178	51
Excursions and free time offer	26	8
Accompanying persons program	-	-
Nothing at all	76	21

Ask if the carnival has fulfilled their expectation, 234 participants (71%) answered positively, while 96 (29%) answered with negative reply.

Destination image:

The second objective of this study is to check the image of the destination. The survey was conducted also considering the questions about Strumica, the local citizens, the hotel staff and the language comprehension issues.

The answers were given in a 5-point Likert-type scale:

Table 2: Strumica image

The question considers if Strumica would be recommended to friends as holiday destination

ANSWERS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
No, not interesting	23	7
Maybe	11	11
Great destination, but not the same hotel	228	69
Yes, it is an excellent choice	40	12
I don't know	3	1

The most of the respondents would like to recommend Strumica as the holiday destination, but the main complaint issue is the hotel accommodation. The most of the participants were accommodated in the low budget hotels.

¹⁶⁶ www.carnivalstrum.org

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE
 25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

Table 3: Hotel staff, helpful and friendly

ANSWERS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Not at all	36	11
A little	53	16
Moderate	76	24
Very much	86	26
Extremely	79	23

As the participants were accommodated in the 7 different hotels, the answers were almost equal in percentage.

Table 4: Language comprehension problems with the local citizens

ANSWERS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Not at all	182	55
A little	59	18
Moderate	69	21
Very much	20	6
Extremely	-	-

The majority of participants arrived from the neighboring countries, as Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria, originating from the same group of languages. The local citizens and the organizers are familiar with the English language, which made the communication with Albanian, Dutch and Russian group much easier.

On the simple question if the participants liked Strumica, 307 respondents (93%) answered affirmative, while 25 of them answered negative (7%).

4. CONCLUSION

As a member of the International Association of carnivals FECC for twenty years, Strumica Carnival has regional and worldwide reputation as the cultural and art event, adopting the high standards of the association in content performance. Although research is done by structured and semi structured questionnaires' with 40 questions in total, only four key issues are given in this paper. The core quantitative data for the carnival event and destination are the number of 330 foreign participants of Strumica Carnival. Qualitative research is the impact of carnival and destination on participants' satisfaction and their perception.

Valuating the carnival, 178 respondents (54%) would improve the organization of the event. 66 of them (20%) would improve the infrastructure of hotels. Simultaneously, the interview with the organizer of the carnival with forty questions is performed, where the cross examination discovered the lack of finances for the event in 2017th. The carnival is financed by sponsors, mainly from the Municipality of Strumica, banks, insurance companies and a few commercial companies. The main motive for organizing the event is tradition and community pride. Majority of respondents, 229 (69%) would like to come to Strumica again and recommend it to the relatives and friends, but wouldn't stay in the same hotel. Hotel staff from 7 different hotels is valued helpful and friendly almost in equal percentages of the Likert-type scale. Majority of participants have no language problems.

The research findings indicate the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Long tradition and fulfilled standards of FECC Association considering content of the event;
- Strong artistic and cultural value;
- Community pride;
- Stable number of participants from the region and wider;
- Necessity of strengthening the position and image of event and destination;
- Improvement of hotel facilities and infrastructure;
- Training of hotel and service staff;
- Strengthening motivation of participation;
- Partnership between the main stakeholders is essential for sustainability of carnival (host organization, hotels, sponsors, participants, volunteers, media, local citizens).

REFERENCES

- [1] Allen et al, *Festival and Special Event Management*, Wiley and Son, Ontario,(2009)
- [2] Allen at al, *Event Planning*, Wiley and Son, Ontario, (2009)

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

- [3] Andrews, H., Leopold, T., *Events and the Social Sciences*, Routledge, (2013)
 - [4] Anholt, S., *Competitive Identity, The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities, Regions*, Palgrave McMillan, p.35 (2007)
 - [5] Carter L., *Event Planning*, Author House, Indiana, (2007)
 - [6] Getz, D., *Event Management and Event Tourism*, New York CCC, p.17 (1997)
 - [7] Getz, D., *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy Planned Events*, Oxford: Elsevier, (2007)
 - [8] Getz, D., *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy Planned Events*, Oxford: Elsevier, (2007)
 - [9] Getz, D., *Special Events: Defining the Product*, *Tourism Management*, 10(2), p.135-137, (1989)
 - [10] Goeldner R., B. Ritche, *Tourism, Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, Wiley and Sons, (2009)
 - [11] Goldblatt, J., *Special Events: The Art and Science of Celebration*, Wiley, New Jersey, (1990)
 - [12] Goldblatt, J., *Special Events, The roots Wings of Celebration* and, 5 edit, John Wiley and Son, (2008)
 - [13] Harril R., *Fundamentals of Destination and Marketing*, American Hotel and Education Institute, (2005)
 - [14] Hoyle, H.L., *Event Marketing*, John Wiley and Son, (2002)
 - [15] McKercher, B., Mei, W., *Are Short Duration Festivals Tourist Attraction ?* *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(1), (2006)
 - [16] Tassiopoulos D., *Event Management A Professional and Developmental Approach*, 2nd edition, Juta Academic (2009)
 - [17] Zaric et al, *Event Planning: Principles and Practices*, Hisperia, Belgrade (2013)
- Internet sources:
- [1] www.stat.gov.mk
 - [2] www.carnivalstrum.org
 - [3] www.unesco.org/culture/documents
 - [4] ¹ www.stat.gov.mk