

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ORGANIZING AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study on the organization of an international event. The researchers used the indicators in the international event management system model of Ferdinand & Kitchin (2012) to reflect on the organization of the event: globalization, global forces affecting the event, local forces affecting the event and stakeholders, resource availability and competition. The researchers concluded that an international event can be successful and sustained through planning, creating committees, conducting regular meetings, using a Gantt chart, intensifying promotions and factoring in logistical considerations. Furthermore, the support from the government and foreign embassies are also needed to strengthen the foundations of the event.

Keywords: International Event Management, Events Best Practices

Introduction

Event management is the creation, development, implementation and evaluation of an event. In the Philippines, event management is a required course offering in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality. This study is focused on reflecting on the lessons learned from organizing an international event given that international event management requires a special approach that requires scholarly attention. International events are special because of the global and national considerations that should be factored into their organisation. To quote, "International events management or an international approach to events management requires an engagement with international activities, cultural differences, and global issues (Ferdinand & Kitchin, Events Management, an International approach p. 23:2013).

This study examined the 7th Asia Euro Conference in Tourism, Hospitality, and Gastronomy 2018 hosted by Far Eastern University (FEU) Manila, Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (ITHM) from the organizers' perspectives as basis for the improvement of future events of the same kind and scale. FEU Manila is strategically located

at the heart of Manila's University Belt where most of the big universities and colleges in the Philippines are found. ITHM offers hospitality and tourism degree programs which aim to produce globally competent graduates and future leaders of the industry. The Institute hosted the conference from November 14-17, 2018 with the theme, "Nurturing the Future of Tourism Today: Maximizing Research Resource Consumption and Utilization through Sustainable Urban and Community Planning".

In the past, this biennial conference has been hosted in other countries such as India and Malaysia. This is the first time that the Philippines hosted the conference in partnership with Taylor's University of Malaysia and Toulouse University of France. In organizing the event, two undergraduate classes were used to provide the logistical, manpower, sponsorship and program support. A committee was formed involving the different offices in the university and with a counterpart from Taylor's University Malaysia.

The International events management model

The framework used to analyse this study is the international events environment model by Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012) as shown in the figure below:

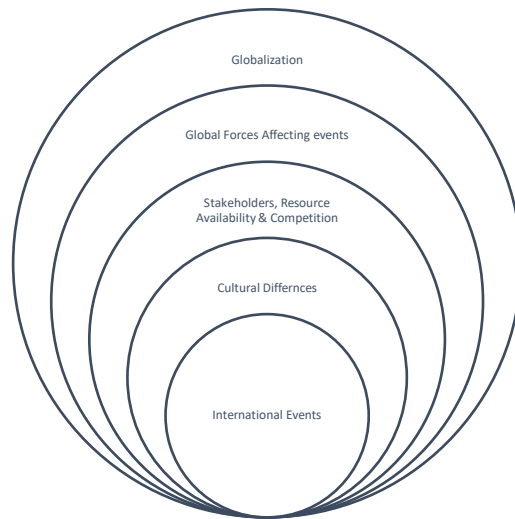


Figure 1. The international events environment

The above framework was adopted from Getz’ 2005 event management system with the addition of global and local forces affecting

events and cultural differences (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2012:26-27).

Results and Discussions

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF FEU’S EVENT USING THE INTERNATIONAL EVENTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM MODEL

International Event Management Particulars	FEU-ITHM’s International Event Management Experience
<p>2.1 Globalization - internationalization of events based on the global standards with the participation and support of the global community</p>	<p>Conference Attendees The conference attracted delegates from ten countries namely Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, France, Indonesia, Mexico, Taiwan, Algeria, Japan and the Philippines through representatives from the different sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry.</p> <p>Panel Discussions Research and panel discussions were aligned to the events’ theme. The conference became a platform to present 82 research presentations about global issues and current trends in the field of tourism and hospitality.</p>
<p>2.2 Global Forces Affecting the Event - forces from outside the host country like immigration laws, currency exchange, global time zones, etc.</p>	<p>Payment of Conference Fees One of the challenges that the organizers faced was the preferred mode of payment of the international delegates registration fees (currency, bank transfers and/or e-money transfers).</p> <p>Logistics In terms of land transfers, the logistics experienced some difficulties because of the different flight schedules and hotel accommodations of the VIP guests.</p>

2.3 Local Forces Affecting the Event

- forces within the host country like the support from the national and local government agencies, public and private institutions, etc.

Government Agencies

The event was highly recognized by different government agencies. Hon. Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat of the Department of Tourism graced the event as one of the keynote speakers. The Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) also supported the event through sponsorships. Other agencies like the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Office of the President gave their support through endorsements and recommendations.

Planning

The bidding for the conference happened in November 2017. The event proposal was approved by the university in January 2018. Planning started via Skype meeting with Taylor's University during February 2018. FEU-ITHM created committees on the same month. Regular meetings, skype conferencing, and email correspondences were also conducted in preparation for the event.

FEU Administration and Community

FEU's administration and different Institutes also supported the event from the initial planning until the end showcasing synchronicity and camaraderie of the entire organization. For instance, the annual Christmas lighting ceremony of the university was held during the event's gala dinner.

FEU-ITHM

ITHM's academic managers, faculty members, staff and students jointly conceptualized and organized the event. Widespread support came from the local and international academic institutions.

Immigration Requirement

In compliance to immigration requirements for visa of some international delegates, FEU-ITHM issued official letters specific to this request.

2.4 Stakeholders, Resource Availability & Competition

2.4.1 Stakeholders

- those who will affect or be affected by the event like the organizers, delegates, government agencies, suppliers, public and private institutions, etc.

2.4.2 Resources

- the materials, funds, facilities, properties and other assets that will contribute to the success of the event

2.4.3 Competition

- similar events that are happening simultaneously that directly competed with the 7th Asia Euro event

Stakeholders

The conference was attended by delegates from 10 different countries. The student organizers came from two Events Management classes of ITHM. The event was fully supported by FEU administration and community and also gained support from the national and local government, and sponsors.

Resources

The facilities and resources of the university were used such as the conference and seminar rooms, audio/visual facilities, etc. The financial gain from the event was not a factor on its success since Asia Euro is a non-profit event.

Competition

In terms of competition, the event coincided with similar events such as THE-ICE Conference held in Thailand and the Philippine Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference held in Baguio City. Through these competing events, the importance of extensive marketing was highly established.

2.5 Cultural Differences

- forces from outside the host country like cultural differences, language, hierarchy of societal and organizational power, food, religion, etc.

The event organizers were conscious and sensitive about the stakeholders' cultural differences which promoted inclusivity. For instance, since the conference was attended by nationalities with different cultural backgrounds, the organizers identified the attendees' food preferences (e.g., *halal* and *non-halal*). Language barrier was also considered.

2.6 International Events

- event that convenes local and international participants for a particular purpose or goal

The event was organized by three prominent universities; Far Eastern University-Manila, Taylor's University of Malaysia and Toulouse University of France. The conference promoted globalized events through an international collaboration aiming for the enrichment of research in tourism, hospitality and gastronomy. This collaboration extended the radius of planning, marketing and execution of the event.

Reflection and Conclusions

To succeed in organizing an international event there should be enough lead time for planning and preparation. In this case, there was extensive planning through the creation of event committees, regular meetings, and devising a comprehensive Gantt Chart to track the event's progress. The event gained support from different tourism government agencies and there were concerted efforts from the different stakeholders to ensure its success. In addition, sensitivity to cultural differences was taken into account in terms of the delegates nationality and language. The protocols of each organizing university was also factored into the planning of the conference to ensure that due respect and recognition was made to the different cultural and administrative norms of each university.

Despite the overall success of the conference some lessons were learned about organizing an international event such as strengthening the marketing and promotions strategy and improving the coordination of logistics. Promotional strategies may be employed to address competition in the context of similar

events that coincided with the international conference which caters to the same market. In terms of logistics coordination, a transfer desk can be placed in the registration to ensure that the transfers of the delegates are arranged.

Lastly, essential to the continued success of organizing international events, especially research programs which is a cornerstone of the academe is the government's support at all levels through sustainable policies and programs for the event sector.

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