Hosting Events as a Tool for Restoring Destination Image

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ABSTRACT

Restoration of destination image has become a necessity in the global world when negative perception can be a barrier in attracting tourism. One strategy applied by destination marketers to improve the image of places experiencing an immediate or prolonged crisis is hosting spotlight events. The goal of this article is to expand our knowledge of this strategy and to ask what kind of events, place marketers host to reverse a negative destination image and what the advantages or by-products of hosting such events are. The analysis concerns seven kinds of events' hosting: (1) mega sports events; (2) sports events; (3) cultural events; (4) events that brand a destination contrary to the stereotype; (5) events with opinion leaders and celebrities; (6) conferences and conventions; (7) events that convert negative characteristics into positive.

KEY WORDS

INTRODUCTION

Many destinations around the world labour under a negative image that proves a barrier to attracting tourism, businesses and investments. Several authors have explored various strategies used by marketers to restore a positive image to their destination (Beirman, 2003, 2002; Baker, 2007; Tilson & Stacks, 1997; Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Ketter & Avraham, 2012). Prominent among the many strategies these authors identified was a tendency of destination marketers to host various kinds of events. The strategy of "hosting spotlight events" is used to attract various visitors in the hope that this will lead to an improvement in the destination's public image. In addition to attracting audiences and opinion leaders, spotlight events focus the media's attention on a particular location for a short, concentrated period, allowing the host destination to promote certain chosen images that can serve to improve a negative image, create positive news, and shift international media attention from a negative to a positive portrayal of the destination (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

The goal of this article is to expand knowledge of the strategy of "hosting spotlight events" and to ask what kind of events are hosted by place marketers to reverse a negative destination image, and analyse the advantages or byproducts of hosting such events are. While most previous studies are actually individual case studies on the effect of hosting one event on specific destination image (Dimanche, 1996; Lee et al., 2005; Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Teigland, 1999;

McCartney, 2005; Erfurt & Johnsen, 2003; Chi & Qu, 2008; Carlsen & Taylor, 2003), there is a shortage of broad-based studies that analyse numerous case studies. By using a large number of case studies, this study aims to reach general conclusions and insights.

DESTINATION IMAGE AND MARKETING

International tourism is a highly competitive, dynamic and trend-leading market. To cultivate a positive destination image, maintain market share and attract tourism, places must allocate resources for various marketing tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion and social media (McCartney, 2005; Godfrey & Clarke, 2000; Lahav et al., 2013). According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is "a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers". Effective marketing efforts are a key factor for the destination's success, while ineffective marketing carries negative consequences to the place's ability to attract tourists, visitors and investors. In tourism, marketing is used to shape the market's demand and affect the behaviour, motivations and decision-making process of potential visitors (Middleton et al., 2009). By delivering well planned marketing messages, local and national decision makers can create a positive, rich and favourable image and enhance their competitive position (Baker, 2007).

Destination marketers strive to promote a positive image of their tourism destination region. However, destination promotion can be undermined because places encounter difficulties and crises due to external factors including, natural disaster, war, terror attack, crime waves, and political tensions. Such occurrences keep potential visitors from the destination (Richie, 2009; Beirman, 2003). In the global era a negative or problematic image is a major obstacle to attracting tourists, high-quality residents and investors so places need to restore their image (Baker, 2007; Beirman, 2003; Ritchie, 2009; Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). In the fields of crisis communication and image restoration two types of negative destination images are customarily distinguished. The first is an acute negative image caused by an unexpected crisis such as a terror attack, natural disaster or a sudden epidemic. The second is a prolonged negative image generated by chronic problems such as economic hardship, high crime rates, continuous warfare or political instability (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). As may be expected, either kind of crisis calls for the use of different strategies.

MARKETING DURING CRISIS AND IMAGE RESTORATION

Since the perceptual image of a destination is presumed to be highly stable, changing a negative image into a positive one is a long process (Erfurt & Johnsen, 2003). Destinations, burdened with a negative image are challenge for marketers. When a destination is perceived as "dangerous," "unsafe" or "boring" marketers have no use for "regular" slogans or visuals which describe its unique characteristics such as sea, sun or cultural events. It is quite unrealistic to expect an ad campaign or other promotional tools to cause any target audience to discount a place's longstanding negative images and stereotypes, and visit it (Anholt, 2006).

The media strategies chosen by marketers to restore their company, organization or product after a crisis receives considerable research attention (see list of models and theories in Coombs and Holladay, 2010). Conversely, a relatively small amount of research has dealt with image restoration of destinations after crisis (Beirman, 2003; Richie, 2009). After careful analysis of the strategies employed to alter destinations' prolonged negative images, and integrating theories

from crisis communication, image restoration and destination marketing, Avraham and Ketter (2013) introduced a new theoretical models based on a continuum of two groups of media strategies to improve prolonged negative images: the strategic approach and the cosmetic approach. Strategies that follow the cosmetic approach focus on retouch of the negative image, without changing the reality that spoiled it in the first place. The strategic approach, by contrast, is to take comprehensive action, basing the new campaign on substantial changes in the destination's reality, among other factors (e.g. developing and improving tourism attractions and infrastructure in destinations perceived as boring). One of the strategies involves hosting events.

HOSTING SPOTLIGHT EVENTS AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

Events are considered to exert an important impact on destination image. Erfurt and Johnsen (2003) compiled a list of examples which provides insights into the extent of destinations' image change after an event. Hosting an event does not necessarily tackle the roots of the image problem, but does help in making some changes, broadening the destination's image and creating local and international identity (Waitt, 2001). The hosting spotlight events strategy is simple and popular; destinations host major events to attract opinion leaders and journalists to improve the destination's image. They are considered a good opportunity to draw outsiders to a destination they might never consider visiting. Many destinations host or produce festivals and cultural events as platforms for generating positive media coverage (Beriatos and Gospodini, 2004). As we know, a central role in "spreading rumours" around an event can be played by the media. Its attention is focused on a particular location for a short, concentrated period, allowing the host destination to promote certain chosen images that can be used to repair a negative image, create positive news and shift media attention from a negative to a positive portrayal of the destination (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

While sports are the ultimate example of a spotlight event, smaller locations employ a similar method by hosting festivals and athletic meets. Though sporting events are common, many destinations try to capitalize on local products, natural phenomena, local history or cultural traditions, often holding festivals to celebrate what makes them unique (Avraham & Daugherty, 2009; Avraham & Ketter, 2013). One of the most famous examples of a spotlight event exploited to improve a place's image was the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin, intended to project a positive image for the Nazi regime (Nielsen, 2001). Since 1936, many places have used the Summer and Winter Olympics, the World Expo, the title of Cultural Capital of Europe, or the Eurovision Song Contest as platforms for massive PR-driven image campaigns; in the US, the Republican and Democratic national conventions likewise fulfil this role (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004; Erfurt & Johnsen, 2003).

Events, in summary, entail several significant advantages for the host destination: (1) the place attracts large numbers of guests and visitors who not would travel there were it not for the event; they can then serve as the place's advocates; (2) spotlight events attract opinion leaders such as celebrities, academics and journalists, who will later write columns that can improve the place's image; (3) spotlight events encourage local residents to take pride at their place and reinforce their commitment to its image; (4) events are viewed as a driver for social cohesion, economic mobility, new attractions, sports and cultural facilities; (5) an event contributes to the future success of the destination by creating awareness and attracting tourism business developers for future inbound travel. Attendees at the event consume the services the place

offers, thereby supporting the local economy in general, and businesses such as tourist attractions, restaurants, cafes and hotels in particular (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou et. al., 2013; Carlsen & Taylor, 2003; Tarlow, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to summarize knowledge accumulated around the strategy of "hosting an event" used by marketers to restore destination image. Accordingly, data were collected from a variety of media and means such as places' websites, newspaper websites (such as *New York times* and *Ha'artez*), tourism news websites (eTurbo news - eTN), international tourism journals and academic articles. At first glance, the variety of the types of data may indicate a lack of focus; however, the idea is to analyse the principal tools used by countries' marketers and officials to restore their destinations' image to host an event.

This study utilizes qualitative analysis, based on a semiotic interpretation of texts. The qualitative approach is especially useful for studies attempting to explain social interaction in general, and it applies inductive reasoning, generalizing from the social reality to a more comprehensive theory (Tuchman, 1991). This method is based on a thorough understanding of the analysed units and examines the common signifying process. Researchers using this method believe that texts reveal general discourse patterns (Pauly, 1991) through the appearance of motifs, labels, definitions, logos, symbols, visuals, slogans and generalizations presented in the ads as exclusively characterizing a specific place or destination (First & Avraham, 2009). The qualitative content analysis is a very popular method, as attested in place marketing and branding studies (Morgan & Pritchard, 2001; de Jager, 2010).

To expand our knowledge of the strategy of hosting events as a tool for image improvement, the following research questions need to be answered:

RQ1   What kind of events do marketers host to repair a negative destination image?
RQ2   What goals do destinations marketers hope to achieve by hosting events?
RQ3   What kind of image crisis is manageable by use of this strategy?

The cases covered by this study are primarily events hosted in places that experienced an immediate or prolonged image crisis. Events hosted by a "regular" destination without an image problem were not included.

FINDINGS

The findings distinguish seven kinds of events aimed to correct a destination's negative image by hosting events: (1) mega sporting events, (2) sporting events, (3) cultural events, (4) events that brand a destination contrary to the stereotype, (5) events for opinion leaders and celebrities, (6) conferences and conventions, (7) events that convert negative characteristics into positive.

1.   Mega Sporting Events

The most sought-after occasions a destination can host are international sporting events: the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth/Asian Games or the World Cup; each is held every four years. These mega events are cited as major catalysts for extensive infrastructure developments

in the host destination (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Carlsen & Taylor, 2003). The ancient Olympic Games were held in Greece from 776 BC to 393 AD. The competition revived in 1896 and took place in Athens, ushering in the modern era of the Olympic Games. The Olympics is one of the most popular sporting events in the world. Since the time of the above-mentioned 1936 Games in Berlin many places have battled to host the contest as a means to draw positive media attention and gain many other advantages.

Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, in 1990 Beijing hosted the Asian Games and made use of the media attention to improve its image and present a more favourable portrait of the country (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996). Subsequently, Beijing hosted the 2008 Olympic Games. During the last two decades China suffered from some negative images resulting from issues related to human rights and freedom of speech. Long before the 2008 games the local decision makers perceived the occasion as an opportunity for image improvement, and hoped that "the games will provide a window to the world" (Barnet, 2001) ; and indeed research shows a positive effect on China's image after the games (Lee, 2010). South Africa also treated hosting the 2010 World Cup as an opportunity to improve the country's image. Early preparation for the event was quickly branded by the South African government as an investment in "nation building" (Kaplanidou et al., 2013).

Mass media exposure created by hosting the Olympics, in an incentive for prospective host governments to invest enormous sums of money in their contest to be the venue of future games. In 2005 some of the most popular tourist destinations competed to host the 2012 Olympic Games: New York, Paris, London, Moscow and Madrid. Although none of these cities was beset by any serious image crisis, each believed that hosting the games would contribute greatly to its future development and its image. At least two of these cities aspired to gain some benefits related to crises they had undergone: New York hoped that hosting the games would help the city recover from 9/11, and Paris hoped to reshape the city by means of the new infrastructures needed for the games. Eventually, as we know, the International Olympic Committee chose London. In any event, the struggle over hosting the games exemplifies well how many decision makers believe that hosting the games can serve as leverage for image improvement even for cities deemed to be strong brands (Kaplanidou et al., 2013).

The bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games is similar to that for the 2008 games. In summer 2013 three cities were shortlisted: Istanbul, Tokyo and Madrid. Leaders of these cities believe that hosting the games will help to improve their city's' and their country's image, after the damage all three experienced: Tokyo and Japan following the 2011 tsunami, Istanbul and Turkey following the incident in Taksim Square and the war in Syria, and Madrid and Spain following the economic crisis, which has not yet ended (*Ha'aretz*, 14 July 2013). Ultimately Tokyo's bid succeeded.

2.   Sporting Events

Other sporting events than the Olympics can also draw journalists, big crowds and international attention, and may result in image improvement. Sporting events can be part of a set of destination attractions for new and loyal sports consumer markets and offer many more other advantages (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). One place which tried to attract a medium-size sporting event is the Republic of Guyana, a tropical country on the northern coast of South America. According to the president of Guyana's Tourism and Hospitality Association (THA), one of the

biggest problems the country faces is lack of foreign awareness: "Most of the international travelling public does not know where Guyana is and what our tourism products are" (Avraham & Ketter, 2008: 146). One way to change this was to host the 2007 ICC Cricket World Cup, a spotlight sporting event that drew many visitors and increased media attention (Guyana News and Information, 2007).

Another place which decided to use a sporting event as a major marketing tool is the city of Lexington, Kentucky. Known as the "Horse capital of the world," the city's marketers decided to focus their efforts on its horses. In recent years these animals have been the main attraction of the city, centring on Kentucky Horse Park, the city's racetrack, and tours of private stables that are offered. As its spotlight event, Lexington hosted the 2010 FEI World Equestrian Games. This was also the first time the games were hosted by a city outside Europe. Although the event was scheduled for 2010, the city's website started advertising the games as early as 2005, to advance the city's branding process (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

The resource used by Ethiopia to boost tourism is its people's natural talent for long-distance running. Trying to project a rich and favourable image, Ethiopia now hosts annually "The Great Ethiopian Run." The race, begun in 2001, attracted over 26,000 participants in 2013 and has some international sponsors (*New York Times*, 27 February, 2013). According to local spokespersons, the event serves as a great opportunity for the Ethiopian people to attract international and positive attention by means of their inborn talent (Media Ethiopia, 2007). By hosting "The Great Ethiopian Run" the country can associate itself with positive values linked to running such as health, fitness and lifestyle. In this way the country can replace negative media images of poverty with positive images of a world-class sports event.

Sporting events can also be hosted in such a way as to project a certain destination's values such as safety, family, fun, tradition, sustainability or other. For example, the head of the Jordanian Olympic Committee -the driving force behind the country's hosting five world sporting events - sought to promote Jordan's "safety" perception. He said: "…It is critical for the promotion of Jordan…. It gives us an opportunity to showcase Jordan as a safe and secure leisure destination…. We want to show that it's a very safe and secure environment for athletes and hopefully not what you see on the television about the Middle East…. It's not just a question of hosting events here but bringing world-class athletes here and world interest in Jordan…to show how rich it is in culture and history…" (eTN, 29 March 2009). The conclusion is that sometimes events are specially organized to combat a problematic image. A similar case, where a destination hosts an event to project safety and message of "business as usual," was Bahrain, which annually hosts a Formula One Grand Prix. Internal ethnic tensions with demonstrations and riots in early 2011 caused the cancellation of the event that year. In the following years the Bahraini government acted vigorously to renew the race in order to disseminate the message that normality was restored in the small country.

3.   Cultural Events

Hosting cultural events can serve to attract visitors or improve a general image, although some places employ such events as a deliberate means to overcome problematic image. One such place is the city of Baltimore, Maryland, seeking to shed its reputation as a place with a high crime rate. The strategy chosen by the city was to expand and develop its cultural attractions to

draw visitors. These included museums, a science centre, a zoo and the nationally famous aquarium. Those efforts proved successful, when Frommer's *Travel Guide* crowned Baltimore one of its top ten travel destinations for summer 2005 (Visit Baltimore, 2005).

The city of Reno, Nevada, has a hard time competing with its bigger and classier sister, Las Vegas. Following a continuous decline in the number of visitors to Reno in the early 1990s, a group of local businesses initiated a plan to "use the arts to improve the city's self-image and give locals a reason to play downtown again" (Reno is Artown, 2013). Starting from summer 1996, Reno, branding itself as "Artown," has invited tourists, visitors and residents to enjoy "a month-long celebration of cultural diversity and artistic innovation." The Artown project, marketed under the slogan "Thirty-one days – one spectacular event," offers a month-long summer festival with more than 500 events (as expected for the 2013 festival) in the fields of visual, performing and human arts.

A scourge of terror attacks might be fatal for the image of cities and countries as destinations in the Middle East (Beirman, 2003; Avraham, 2013). One way to replace the problematic image with a positive one is to attempt to host cultural events, demonstrating that the place is safe and friendly. For example, Egypt tried to shift international attention from a series of terror attacks by hosting some special international events and promoting visits to its ancient archaeological sites (Wahab, 1996). Northern Ireland tried to reverse its negative image created by past violent conflict by promoting local music, dance, literature and theatre festivals (*Ha'aretz*, 30 June 1998). Another place that attempted to repair its damaged image is the city of Bilbao in northern Spain. During the 1990s the city suffered at the hands of Basque terror groups and experienced high levels of unemployment. The Guggenheim Museum opened in 1997 as a major attraction, and a set of supporting cultural events turned things around (*Ha'aretz*, 12 May 2002).

Another example is Yemen, which in 2010 hosted an international soccer tournament featuring teams from eight Gulf States. This effort by Yemen's government was to change the country's image as an insurgent battleground and a wellspring of global terrorism (*NYT*, 5 December 2010). Similarly, to bring back tourists, especially from Arab countries, the Egyptian tourism ministry launched the "Fawanees Ramadan 2011" festival in August that year, under the slogan "Egypt's spirit of Ramadan" (eTN, 31 July 2011). Morocco, for its part, initiated the "Gnawa Music Festival" to attract a Western audience (Gnawa Music Festival, 2011; Avraham, 2013).

4.   Events that Brand a Destination Contrary to the Stereotype

Numerous destinations are associated with negative stereotypes that they would be happy to shed. Many of these took shape in the aftermath of a war, a terror attack, the industrial era, or other past events, all long gone. Whatever the cause of the negative stereotype, past experience indicates that changing it is a long and complex task (Erfurt & Johnsen, 2003). One possible strategy is branding contrary to the stereotype by constructing an opposite image. The place tries to change its image (and usually its reality) dramatically and to acquire a new image that is opposite to the existing one. As we have seen, hosting specific events can help the marketers to re-brand a destination.

A destination that endured a post-war image crisis is the German city of Nuremberg, one of the principal symbols of the Nazi regime, its name ever linked to the post-war trials of Nazi leaders.

To counter its old image, Nuremberg in recent decades steadily positioned itself as a centre of "Peace and human rights." The positioning succeeded, as Nuremberg won international recognition by UNESCO. The chosen position was the direct opposite of the negative image imprinted on the city by its Nazi past: instead of war, racism, destruction and nationalism, Nuremberg now stands for justice, freedom, peace and equality. This change in the positioning was accomplished by the creation and promotion of museums, monuments, art exhibits, cultural events and conferences dedicated to human rights and social justice (*Ha'aretz*, 5 December 2003).

To change Macao's gaming image and widen tourism market segments, the local government set out to position the city as a "city of events." This was primarily accomplished through sporting activities: golf, volleyball and of course the famous Macao Grand Prix. This event was promoted as "not only a prestigious international sporting event, but also an effective way to promote Macao's reputation as an international travel destination around the world" (McCartney, 2005: 47).

5.   Events with Opinion Leaders and Celebrities

Decision makers at many places are surprised to discover that while the physical crisis may pass in a short period of time, the resulting stereotypes tend to stick. One marketing approach to delivering the message that the place is safe and welcoming again is to host opinion leaders. Journalists, stakeholders, tour operators, community and religious leaders and other opinion leaders are invited to the place to see the change with their own eyes. This tactic exerts an immediate and a long-term effect on destination image. In the course of the visit the marketers arrange events such as press conferences, lectures, tours, meetings with state leaders, and special meetings with cultural or religious groups, all of which usually get international media coverage. After these opinion leaders have returned home, they are expected to spread the news to their audience, fans, communities and students, thereby helping the destination to overcome its image crisis.

Many destinations which choose to employ this tactic organize familiarization trips for different opinion leaders in the hope that they will report that the situation in the destination is "business as usual": tourist attractions and information booths are open, cultural events continue and tourist services are available. Leading examples of places that used this strategy are these: Germany after World War II, hosting many public opinion leaders worldwide to show them the "new Germany"; India during an epidemic in the 1990s; London during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak; Nepal after the political unrest (1996-2006) which threatened to put a halt to the flow of tourists ; Miami following crime wave against tourists in the early 1990s; and Hong Kong it was declared as free of SARS in 2003 (Hopper, 2002; Frisby, 2002; Baral et al., 2004; Beirman, 2002; Tilson & Stacks, 1997). Cities in north of England, in their quest to overcome negative perceptions held by financial investors and public opinion leaders concerning the area, also set up visits for public opinion leaders in the hope that these would help promote a favourable image that would be passed on to other people with whom the opinion leaders associated (Burgess, 1982).

An excellent example of the way this technique is planned and implemented emerges from an interview with the World Tourism Organization Secretary General, Francesco Frangialli, advising how to promote the image of Iran. According to Frangialli, "Iran has mainly depended on regional

tourism from neighbouring countries. That's good, but in addition it is important to have tourists from Western Europe." Accordingly, the UNWTO initiated two projects to promote Iran's tourism industry: "One is to organize press trips to Iran to make the international press familiar with Iranian tourism. The other is a conference which links tourism with handicraft production," said Frangialli. Both projects aimed to draw journalists and decision makers in the tourism industry to win some positive media coverage for the country (Payvand, 2005). Following the same method suggested by the UNWTO, the Caribbean Islands offer striking evidence of the growing tendency to host opinion leaders as a strategy to improve the place's image. Shortly after Hurricane George in 1998, the Caribbean Tourism Organization executed a crisis management plan to limit the fallout of the crisis. A large number of journalists and travel agents were invited almost immediately after the hurricane, indicating the importance attached to opinion leaders as shapers of public attitudes (UNISDR).

Another technique adopted by destinations is using celebrities and opinion leaders who are willing to deliver the message that a place is safe to visit from their own experience. Here the goal is to contradict the place's negative and unsafe depiction propagated by the media coverage. On the main page of Israel's tourism ministry website (2005) there was a video clip of Madonna's visit to Israel, filmed at a press conference with the world-famous pop star. The headline stated, "I feel very safe and very welcome." In the clip Madonna tells the audience that the time she felt the most unsafe during her entire visit to Israel was when she encountered some "very naughty paparazzi" outside her hotel (Israel Tourism website). In this instance Israeli officials made use of Madonna to counteract the country's habitual association with violent conflict. The use of a celebrity seems able to help get the opposite message across through reliance on this person's credibility. In addition, Israel hosts at least 2,000 public opinion leaders yearly, such as academics, clergy, journalists, politicians and community leaders, to show them that the country - its sights and people - are very different from those that appear in its media coverage (Avraham, 2009). Israel's neighbour, Jordan, also invited selected travel writers and journalists from the US and Canada to participate in a press trip during the recent Arab Spring events in the Middle East (Avraham, 2013).

6.   Conferences and Conventions

One of the most common techniques for attracting opinion leaders is to hold a conference or convention. It has been widely used in many places, including the Caribbean subsequent to incidents of crime, and Southeast Asia after the tsunami. For example, the positive image of the Caribbean island of Aruba was threatened by a tragic case of a missing American woman tourist. An international tourism security conference was rapidly arranged on the island in June 2006, aimed to attract tourism professionals there (Tarlow, 2005). The conference directly tackled issues concerning the safety of tourists, the role of tourist police and the effects of crime on a place's image. The conference organizers thereby achieved two goals: first, the decision makers who attended the conference learned of the major efforts being taken to keep visitors safe and secure, and tourism professionals learned to associate the island of Aruba with tourism safety. Second, all the professionals and journalists who attended the conference got the feeling that Aruba was safe, and that they were expected to deliver this message in their home countries. A similar idea was adopted by Florida marketers after a crime wave in Miami in the early 1990s and the number of tourists plummeted as a result. In September 1994 the first South Florida

Conference on tourism safety and security was held in Miami (Tilson and Stacks, 1997), in the hope of get the same results as in the Aruba case.

A similar example can be found in Indonesia, which suffered a severe twofold image crisis due to terror attacks against tourists, principally in Bali, and the 2004 tsunami. To restore the country's image, Indonesia held a conference on tourism communications in May 2005. Participating tourism journalists were called upon to provide a "balanced report" on the situation in the country. According to the World Tourism Organization, the event attracted decision makers in international tourism communications and a large group of journalists (World Tourism Organization, 2005), all serving as opinion leaders who could bring tourism back to Bali. Support for this tactic can be found in an interview given by a senior executive of the Israeli Hotel Association, hosting an international convention for Microsoft (with Bill Gates present): "International conventions are a great opportunity to promote both the hotel and the State of Israel. Every event of this kind attracts foreign journalists and photographers, who contrary to the common belief are more than happy to present a different image of Israel" (*Ha'aretz*, 9 November 2005).

7.   Events that Convert Negative Characteristics into Positive

Another strategy employed by DMOs dealing with negative perceptions and stereotypes linked to a destination is to admit the existence of a negative characteristic, and convert it into a positive one. For example, Minnesota winters are known to be extremely cold, a fact that in the past damaged the state's image and drove people away. Today, however, these winters are marketed as unique, and have become a tourist attraction. A variety of winter cultural events, companions and festivals cater to many (Kotler et al., 1993). A similar case is the English city of Bradford, which for decades suffered from a negative image due to the many foreign immigrants who had settled in it and the ethnic and racial clashes that ensued. Over the 20 years, the city has been trying to turn this characteristic into an advantage by marketing itself as a multicultural oasis (with the slogan: "Flavors of Asia"), where different social groups and races coexist in harmony and a spirit of cooperation (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). The city hosts events such as ethnic music festivals, ethnic food festivals and the like, which emphasize its cultural diversity.

Two Texas towns, Sweetwater and Wichita Falls, provide us with additional examples of this technique. Sweetwater hosts an annual Rattlesnake Roundup, where visitors come to celebrate and confront an animal that would normally be considered a deadly local pest. Participants hunt for rattlesnakes after paying a registration fee for the privilege, while visitors come to eat snake meat and see the venomous serpents up close. One might assume that an association with poisonous snakes would deter visitors, but Sweetwater has managed to turn this negative aspect into a tourist attraction. Wichita Falls, meanwhile, has managed to get visitors to come specifically to experience its deadly summer temperatures. It hosts a cycling event called the Hotter 'n Hell One Hundred, or HHH. According to its website, the HHH arose from the community's desire to uniquely celebrate its centennial in 1982. It was proposed that cyclists would ride 100 miles in 100 degree (Fahrenheit) heat to celebrate 100 years. The event is dangerous enough that organizers set a cut-off point (called Hell's Gate) approximately two thirds through the course to keep the slowest riders from over-exposing themselves to the intense heat. Now in its third decade, this Wichita Falls tradition claims to be the nation's (and possibly world's) largest single-day cycling event, drawing 12,000 riders and 25,000 visitors to brave the

lethal temperatures. Both Sweetwater and Wichita Falls have successfully spun negative local characteristics – indeed, even obstacles – to attracting tourists into assets, creating reasons for thousands of tourists to visit them (Avraham and Daugherty, 2009).

SUMMARY

This article has considered which events destinations hosts to restore their image. The findings indicate that hosting events is a popular strategy among marketers of places that suffer from an immediate or a prolonged image crisis. These marketers can choose from seven types of events that can help them in their difficult mission to market a place which suffer from stereotypes, generalizations and negative labeling. Kaplanidou et al. (2013) distinguish "hard" structures with an event-hosting impact from "soft" structures. The hard structures include sports and culture infrastructure-related projects, performance halls, construction of roads, bridges, parking spots and many more developments. The soft structures are mainly intangible benefits such as governance reforms, positive media coverage, attracting opinion leaders and self-image improvement. Without doubt, we can add to the list of "soft" structures the repair of the negative image of places that experienced an immediate or prolonged image crisis.

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Should every place with a negative image host an event? In principle, an event can apparently help to improve a destination's negative image, but it cannot serve as a magic potion. Local decisions makers should remember that an event can also carry negative consequences for the destination's inhabitants such as crowding, traffic and parking problems, and crime. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that the decision to host an event depends on the values that marketers want the destination to evoke, and also depends on how the event is managed. The "strategic approach" (Avraham & Ketter, 2013) seems suitable also for a decision on the feasibility of hosting an event and how to run it. As mentioned, hosting an event is recommended only if it promotes the values that the marketers wish the destination to inspire; otherwise it is a waste of effort and resources (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007).

At the same time, the conduct of the event must be highly professional; otherwise the place's image may be damaged further. For example, Tanzania recently hosted US President Barack Obama. The visit got intense international media coverage and certainly ameliorated the image of Tanzania, which during the last years witnessed a revival of its tourism. However, a few days after the visit the media reported that garbage and filth were back to the streets and beaches of the capital, Dar-es-Salaam, which had been cleaned for the visit. Such news may well hamper the country's image restoration following the visit (eTN, 12 July, 2013). The conclusion is that destination marketers wishing to host an event must do so in the best way possible, and also make sure the events will promote the true deep-rooted values of the place, not just surface glitter; otherwise, an event may improve the destination's image for a short while, but this might not last long.

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