INTRODUCTION: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND EVENT MANAGEMENT

The aim of this special issue of *Event Management* is to acknowledge the growing professionalization of the events industry from a number of different perspectives. The articles in this issue present views from multiple stakeholders and offer discussion points within a variety of themes related to event professionalization. These themes include the perspective of industry, education and training, knowledge management, the experiential side of events, the sociable legacies of events, and the role Ambassador Programs play in professionalizing the ad hoc bidding process for international association meetings and events.

The growth of the events industry over the last decade has been widely acknowledged in the events management literature (Getz, 2008; Page & Connell, 2012). As the number of events has grown—whether they be major, sports, community or business oriented—so too has the demand for more professional staff and event experiences increased. Despite the relatively recent recognition of the events sector as an industry in its own right, distinct from its close leisure cousins, tourism, hospitality and sports, very little is known about how its professionalization is impacting upon key stakeholders involved (e.g., staff and event attendees).

Given this background, this special issue presents some of themes relevant to the notion of professionalization of the events industry, including that of a more highly skilled and educated workforce. The articles in this special issue offer a perspective, predominantly from English-speaking countries such as the UK and Australia, where the events industry has advanced significantly. The issue begins with Bladen and Kennell's article on the state of the events education in the UK. Bladen and Kennell acknowledge its maturity and its move away from "parent programs" such as tourism and leisure.

They go on to discuss some of the difficulties and challenges that exist within the events industry and the variance of the scope, breadth, speed of delivery, and diversity of events, compared with other industries. Educators of event management students need to take these factors into consideration when planning and constructing curricula and training packages. Bladen and Kennell see a number of challenges for the future of events education and training and, subsequently, a more professionalized event industry. These include increased foci on design and the creative aspects of events, teaching future event staff to be more reflective in their practice, and more focus on education for job provision.

Along similar lines as Bladen and Kennell, Brown explores the current state of play of event industry professionalization from an Australian professional practitioner perspective. He argues for a single, internationally recognized professional body, as opposed to the current environment of multiple programs, certifications, and industry associations and organizations. His practice-led research and observational study highlights a number of challenges and barriers to be overcome in the quest for a more professionalized industry. He calls for a more collaborative relationship between industry and educational and training bodies, and between industry and the multiple event associations and organizations currently servicing and advocating for the sector. This collaboration has the potential to provide a better experience for event attendees through their engagement with more skilled, qualified and dedicated professionals.

Drawing on several theoretical models of professionalization, Jiang and Schmader's article presents another event industry perspective, examining event professionalism and the role of event management education. Their article examines event

management professionalization from the perspective of the extant literature and a survey with current industry leaders. Their findings and discussion suggest that the events industry still has quite a way to go to be accepted as an established industry. The exploratory online survey they undertook with International Festival and Event Association (IFEA) members points to a number of areas of education and training that need to be addressed. Among these, understanding the limitations of academic event management programs as opposed to industry training courses appears paramount. Both types of courses are important but there needs to be a clearer demarcation as to which skill and knowledge areas both provide in order to ensure graduates are well equipped to work in the industry. Furthermore, Jiang and Schmader, as well as Brown, argue for closer ties between industry and academia to identify commonalities and to design improved event management curricula to meet the needs of the events industry, in the present and for the future.

Stadler, Fullager, and Reid consider effective knowledge management to be fundamental to the professionalization of the events industry. Their case study of knowledge management practices within a large, multievent festival organization in Queensland, Australia considers the roles of staff members involved in the design, production, and management of music festivals. As well, the organizational culture within which these event staff operate is seen as a major contributing factor to an effective and efficient festival organization. Their research aims to identify how festival staff (permanent and seasonal) perceive their roles and responsibilities in the knowledge management process. The ethnographic approach applied by the researchers resulted in an increased understanding of the relational aspects of the festival's organizational structure and culture, and, in particular, the roles of the various people involved in the organization of the festival. Collaborative relationships and knowledge sharing were identified as the most important aspects of a successful festival as well as being contributing factors to successful knowledge management and knowledge transfer for future festivals.

The value of social bonds and friendships resulting from attendance and engagement at business events such as conferences and conventions cannot

be ignored in the discussion of more professionalized events. This is the theme of Foley, Edward, and Schlenker's article on leveraging the sociable legacies of events, and moving beyond the study of economic impacts. Delegates from five Congresses held in Sydney, Australia were the sample for this research and grounded theory was used as the method of analysis. Sociability and friendship were identified as major benefits of attending business events. The authors argue that the social aspects of attending business events contribute to the well-being of delegates, association membership levels, conference attendance, retention of personnel in the profession, successful research and professional collaborations, and creativity and innovation in the sector. To achieve these social and friendship benefits, events need to be designed and managed in such a way that warm and inviting meeting spaces enable and facilitate social interactions. Similar to tourist spaces and working spaces that are designed to encourage interaction and engagement rather than passivity, so too event spaces need to encourage interaction and engagement between business events attendees.

Also focused on business events, strong collaboration between destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and local association leaders was found by Lockstone-Binney, Whitelaw, Robertson, Junek, and Michael to contribute to a professional bidding process for international meetings and events. This process is an exploratory study of destinations' Ambassador Programs, from the perspective of the motives of Ambassadors bidding for international association meetings and events. Ambassador Programs are a relatively recent phenomenon that have sprung up around the world to harness the input of local leaders into the bidding process for international association meetings. Three Ambassador Programs were examined in this study: one in Australia, one in Southeast Asia, and one in the Middle East. The results of an online survey confirmed the important role that Ambassadors play in the DMO's bidding process for these highly sought after, high-yield, globally roaming events.

Event professionalization needs to be looked at from the event attendees' perspective as well as from the education and industry perspectives. This is what Berridge takes in an experiential analysis

of participants in a “gran fondo” cycling event. Through understanding the experiences of event attendees, in this case, cycling participants, it is proposed event managers and organizers can plan and operate events in a more professional way. In using Spradley’s Matrix in an ethnographic study, an initial insight into the experiences of cyclists is provided. This is furthered by an understanding of the elements of experience that organizers need to consider and manage. These elements include space, objects, activity, time, actors, and feelings. Through managing these elements (and Berridge discusses models that could be applied in achieving this) event organizers should be better equipped to provide more professional service to event participants.

Looking to the future, a more professionalized events industry and events workforce can only be beneficial for all stakeholders. More professionally executed events, through improved service, event elements, and experiences, can ensure longevity and the evolution of existing events as well as the birth of new, exciting events as drawcards for destinations. Furthermore, professionalization should go hand in hand with rising academic credibility for

event studies as a dedicated field of research and education, further enhancing professionalization outcomes for the future.

References

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