

Chapter 8

The Role of Partnerships in Staging Tourist Experiences Evidence from a Festival

Marcello M. Mariani

1. Introduction

In today's economy, companies and organizations are more and more interested in staging memorable experiences for their customers rather than merely delivering services (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This trend is even more evident when it comes to the travel and tourism industry (Aho, 2001; Chhetri et al., 2004; Cho et al., 2002; Coghlan et al., 2012; Fairweather and Swaffield, 2001; Han and Back, 2007; Jewell and Crotts, 2001; Kim and Jamal, 2007; McIntyre, 2007; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2013; Ritchie and Hudson, 2009; Snepenger et al., 2004; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; Wang, 1999).

However, despite the growth in the total number of tourism articles published by each major tourism scholarly journal over the last 15 years, no substantial increase in experience-related articles has been found: accordingly “experience-related research remains under-represented in the tourism literature” (Ritchie et al., 2011: 431).

Furthermore, most of the studies conducted so far have tackled how individual companies and organizations can try to stage memorable experiences, almost neglecting how destinations or even aggregations of destinations can themselves stage memorable experiences. More specifically, extant literature has overlooked the role of partnerships between destination management organizations (DMOs) in developing novel tourism products able to trigger compelling tourist experiences.

Building on the Pink Night festival case, this chapter bridges this gap, as we show that partnerships involving different local DMOs can be crucial in order to stage events taking place in a wide geographic area including different administrative

units and empower the absorptive capability of the tourist experience. Last but not least, we innovatively recognize how partnerships between DMOs conjointly staging a tourist experience through an event could modify the comprehensive image held by tourists of the wider tourist area involved in the event itself, thus contributing to rebrand the individual destinations themselves. Unlike the ethnographic study carried out by Giovanardi et al. (2014) on the Pink Night festival, this study sheds light on the importance of the DMOs and their cooperation in order to develop a complex creative tourism product. In order to achieve the aforementioned objective, the chapter is structured as follows. In section 2, we present our twofold theoretical framework drawing on (a) the experience economy framework applied to tourism and (b) the role of destination partnerships. In section 3 we describe the empirical setting and introduce the case of the Pink Night festival. In section 4, we illustrate and discuss our research findings. In section 5 we provide our conclusions and implications, describe the limitations of the analysis and outline a research agenda related to the role of partnerships among DMOs in staging memorable tourist experiences.

2. Theoretical Background

In this section we illustrate our theoretical framework, which builds on two major perspectives: (1) the experience economy framework and its meaning, importance, and application in the current economic environment, in general, and tourism, in particular; (2) the roles played by DMOs, with a focus on destination partnerships and their impact on other roles of a DMO.

Staging Memorable Experiences

Agricultural commodities have been the basis for the economy for millennia and when the United States was founded in 1776, more than 90 percent of the employed population worked in farms. Later companies started turning commodities into useful goods and this radically changed when companies learned to standardize goods and gain economies of scale, with the advent of mass production brought by Henry Ford, starting from 1913. In the 1950s most of the stock exchanges consisted of manufacturing companies: the world's biggest companies at that time were Ford, Standard Oil, General Electric, Philips, and General Motors. Today, according to the latest statistics issued by the UN International Labour Organization, service jobs have eclipsed agricultural ones for the first time in human history.¹

A quick look at the stock exchanges today would reveal an interesting picture of the services sector that has increased dramatically over time (e.g., the increasing importance that media and entertainment companies, such as Time Warner to Disney, Bertelsmann, News Corporation, and more recently Google and Facebook, have acquired over time). The travel and tourism and leisure sectors are additional good examples of industries that have developed significantly over the last 50 years (Baggio et al., 2013; Mariani et al., 2014).

Overall we can empirically observe that the basic economic offering has been shifting over time while the economy was transforming from an agrarian into an industrial and later into a service one. The aforementioned empirical observation is well captured by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, who, in their seminal work on the “experience economy,” maintain that in the current economy, goods and services are no longer enough to foster economic growth, create new jobs, and maintain economic prosperity and that right now the service-based economy is going to be replaced by an experience-based one, where the reference economic offering is an experience that should be “staged” rather than delivered; it should be “personal” rather than “customized” and should be “revealed over a duration” rather than being “delivered on demand” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999).

As the economy evolves from an agrarian-based to a service-based one, the economic offering of companies and businesses tends to change from extracting commodities, to making goods, further to delivering services. The last stage includes staging experiences. As these offerings are more and more differentiated, their value increases as a premium price is paid for offerings able to target specific customers’ need.² This progression is occurring in different fields of the economy and especially in the tourism sector.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1989), experiences can be classified into four realms according to two dimensions: the level of guest participation on the one hand and the kind of connection, or environmental relationship, that unites customers with the event or performance. Guest participation can be passive when customers do not directly affect or influence the performance or active when they affect the performance or event. As far as connection is concerned, there could be absorption—occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind from a distance—or immersion—becoming physically (or virtually) part of the experience itself.

According to the aforementioned distinctions, staging experiences are about engaging customers, not necessarily entertaining them. However, in many cases entertainment is used in the tourism sector as a way to stage memorable experiences.

Currently, more and more tourism companies (such as hotels and airline companies) and destinations are trying to differentiate themselves in order to face fierce global competition. To gain a superior competitive advantage they are increasingly investing in differentiating their products and trying to stage memorable experiences for their customers (i.e., tourists). An increasing body of literature has been developed since the seminal work of Pine and Gilmore on the tourism experiences.

Ritchie and Hudson (2009) identified five major content-based streams of tourism experience research: (1) conceptualization, namely studies that define, conceptualize, and explore the essence of the tourism experience (Aho, 2011; Chhetri et al., 2004; Coghlan et al., 2012; Galloway et al., 2008; Snepenger et al., 2004); (2) experience, behavior, and decision-making models, namely studies that seek to understand the tourist and their experience seeking, decision making, and behavior within the framework of conceptual and theoretical models (Andersson, 2007; Han and Back, 2007; Kim and Tussyadiah, 2013; Schofield and Thompson, 2007); (3) methodologies, namely studies that primarily review, or apply, specific methodological

approaches and procedures in tourism experience research (Arimond and Elfessi, 2001; Fairweather and Swaffield, 2001; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2013); (4) types of experiences, namely studies that explore the nature of specific types of tourism experiences (Ballantine et al., 2011; Curtin, 2006; Galloway et al., 2008; Shipway and Jones, 2007; Tassiopoulos and Haydam, 2008); and (5) managerial concerns, namely studies that focus on the managerial aspects of designing and delivering tourism experiences (Chiou et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2002; Wu, 2007).

Despite the growth in the total number of articles published by each major tourism journal, Ritchie et al. (2011) found no substantial increase in experience-related articles. The findings suggest that, despite its fundamental importance, experience-related research remains underrepresented in the tourism literature.

Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) tested the experience economy's 4Es (i.e., educational, esthetic, entertainment, and escapist experiences) through structural equation modeling and proved that the 4Es are reliable and valid for measuring rural wine tourism. Structural modeling demonstrated the dominance of the esthetic experience in predicting positive memories and destination loyalty in the wine tourism context. Education played a significant but lesser role in creating memories and satisfaction but not in destination loyalty. Although the esthetic experience's preeminence was consistent with other findings, these results contradict Pine and Gilmore's assertion that simultaneous incorporation of the 4Es is necessary.

Generally, literature on tourism experience examined in the context of, or in relation to, destination image, loyalty, and evaluation (Chi and Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2005; Quadri and Fiore, 2013; Weaver et al., 2007) is relatively scant and to our knowledge none of the extant contributions has tackled the relationship between destination partnerships and the staging of tourism experiences. In the next section we elaborate on the concept of destination partnerships.

Roles of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and Partnerships

Companies and destinations in the travel and tourism industry are more and more aware of the fact that they should cooperate in order to strive to gain a competitive advantage in the present fast-changing turbulent economic environment. Globalization and the development of ICTs have not only brought about intensifying competition between actors in the tourism arena, but they have also increased the opportunities for collaboration and networking between both companies and destinations themselves.

Literature on interorganizational relationships has explored the characteristics of strategic alliances, collectives of organizations, and organizational networks (e.g., Astley, 1984; Astley and Fombrun, 1983; Barnett et al., 2000; Bresser, 1988; Contractor and Lorange, 1988; Das and Teng, 2000; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Garcia-Canal et al., 2002; Gulati, 1995; Gulati et al., 2012; Kale and Singh, 2009; Oliver, 1990; Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2009; Powell et al., 1996; Zaheer, 1995; Reur et al., 2002; Reur and Ariño, 2007; Shah and Swaminathan, 2008; Uzzi, 1997).

Often interorganizational relationships involve the government (at different level) and private firms to form private–public partnerships (PPPs) whose major aim is to manage dependencies and increase efficiency (Siemiatycki, 2010; Vining and Boardam, 2008). The worldwide tourism sector (both in hospitality business agglomerations and in regional tourism) has recorded an increased trend to shape PPPs as they generate benefits for private companies aiming to reduce uncertainty, handle the complexity or risks of their environment and meet the skills and resource demands essential for competing in the global market (Cravens et al., 1993), foster tourism innovation by enhancing strong bonds between companies, and bridge intellectual capital between stakeholders (Nordin and Svensson, 2007). However, the aforementioned type of interorganizational relationships are beneficial for the destination as well since several private actors might behave as free-riders, not being interested in destination marketing. Moreover, the development of tourism adds value to the region (Morrison, 2013), the collaboration of public and private sectors creates synergy for the entire region and the industry (von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2001; Palmer, 1996; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003), and the local authority provides vital elements to the tourism destination product, which displays typically a networked nature (Baggio et al., 2013).

In destination management a number of elements are typically involved ranging from leadership and coordination, planning and research, product development, marketing and promotion, partnership and team-building, and community relations (DCG, 2012).

While most of the extant literature has focused on the role of “marketing and promotion,” which has to do with creating the destination positioning and branding, selecting the most appropriate markets, and promoting the destination, in this chapter we focus on the role of “destination partnership,” which refers to “a synergistic relationship between a DMO and other organizations or individuals within or outside a destination” (Morrison, 2013: 191). Typically this is a deliberate cooperative arrangement resulting from pooling of effort and financial and nonfinancial resources, which generates benefits for the DMO and its partners that would not be achieved without working together.

All destination management roles can benefit from partnering. Indeed, while it was first discussed in tourism in the context of marketing and promotion (Palmer and Bejou, 1995), it is crucial also for destination planning (i.e., the process for preparing plans and strategies should be collaborative), leadership and coordination (i.e., partnering is a coordination tool through which DMOs can bring different parties together), and product development (i.e., a number of different partners can pool efforts and resources to design and develop a new tourism product).

More specifically, the impact of partnerships in tourism product development is very important for the aims of this chapter and we will show that partnerships between DMOs aimed at staging memorable experiences *de facto* contribute to product development inside a broader tourism area, which needs to be rebranded or whose lifecycle needs to be modified (Butler, 1980; 2009).

In what follows we will describe how an entertainment initiative—namely a complex creative product (Caves, 2000)—has been developed by a set of DMOs,

which have partnered and involved both public and private stakeholders in order to stage a memorable experience potentially able to impact on the wider tourist area image.

Such cases are not rare or unique: the Silk Road Programme coordinated by the UNWTO is an emblematic example bringing together 28 national tourism organizations from Italy in the West to Japan in the East with the aim of creating an internationally renowned, seamless travel experience.

3. Empirical Setting and Methodology

The Pink Night Festival of the Riviera di Romagna

The empirical setting of our analysis is the Riviera di Romagna, a coastal area of 110 kilometres located in the northern part of the Italian Adriatic coast. It is shared by the neighboring provinces of Rimini, Forlì-Cesena, Ravenna, and Ferrara and includes some 50 municipalities, extending from Comacchio in the North to Cartolica in the South (see Figure 8.1).

It started becoming an internationally renowned tourism destination since the eighteenth century for an aristocratic audience even though mass tourism developed immediately after World War II, especially with the Italian economy boom of the 1960s (Battilani and Fauri, 2009). Since then, the Riviera has remained one of the most popular tourism destinations in Italy, with 5,889,700 arrivals and 32,202,588 overnight guests in 2013, of which 3,147,464 arrivals and 15,504,706 overnight guests are in the Rimini province alone (Unioncamere, 2014).

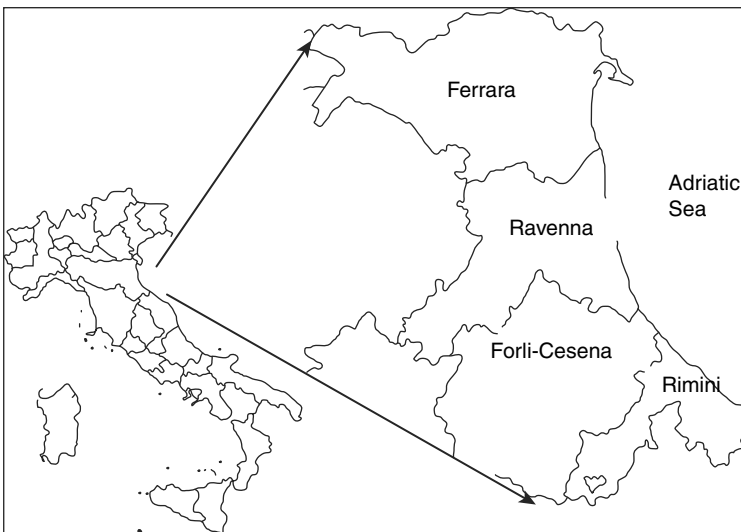


Figure 8.1 The Riviera di Romagna.

As a mature destination, mass tourism in the Riviera di Romagna was undermined during the 1980s with the eutrophication of the Adriatic Sea and the subsequent growth of algae (Becheri, 1991). As a consequence, both local tourism policymakers and entrepreneurs decided to invest on leisure, entertainment activities, and related facilities such as nightclubs and discotheques, turning Rimini in particular into the “trendy disco capital of Italy” (Battilani, 2009: 113). As a consequence, most of the destination branding of the Riviera starting from the 1980s has revolved around the idea of nightlife and transgression.

However, even this new characterization of the destination was not able to counterbalance an overall decline in tourism arrivals, and starting from the mid-2000s the tourism department of the province of Rimini launched a new product: the Pink Night festival (La Notte Rosa). The case has already been portrayed in tourism literature (Giovanardi et al., 2014) with a bottom-up approach in order to describe the role of performance by both hosts and guests in the creation of the tourism place; however, in this chapter we deploy it with a top-down approach to capture how the strategies and actions of relevant policymakers (and their partnerships) have contributed to create a complex creative tourism product (Caves, 2000) and to stage memorable tourism experiences (potentially able to portray the Riviera di Romagna as a leader in the offering of “healthy fun”).

The festival, labeled as the New Year’s Eve of the Summer, is a thematic event that takes place during the first weekend of July. It is a collection of coordinated, synchronized, and intertwined events taking place in a wide geographic area including different administrative units located on the Riviera di Romagna 110 kilometers of coastline. The event leverages the pink color, “the colour of relationships and hospitality” with a “feminine connotation” (promotional brochure, Giovanardi et al., 2014).

By leveraging the culture of hospitality of the Riviera di Romagna, the eighth edition of the festival (taking place in 2013) recorded almost 2 million participants with estimated proceeds of approximately €200 million (APT, 2013). The event offers a unique context in which to study the role of partnerships between DMOs in designing and developing a tourist experience.

Research Techniques

The research approach adopted in this analysis is mainly exploratory and builds on a case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008) with a longitudinal perspective (Pettigrew, 1990). Extensive data were gathered comprehensively by two researchers over four years (from May 2010 to April 2014) in order to shed light on the role of partnerships between DMOs in staging tourism experiences, a phenomenon whose knowledge is scant. A number of research techniques were used, ranging from interviews to analysis of archival data and observation.

Interviews

Twenty-two semistructured interviews were conducted with the key informants involved in the management and organization of the Pink Night, ranging from

representatives of the DMOs involved in planning the event to local politicians in charge of the tourism sector to individual entrepreneurs such as hoteliers and managers of restaurants, nightclubs, and discos. The aforementioned interviews lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours. The interviews covered themes related to the initiation, planning, and execution of all of the eight editions of the Pink Night (from 2006 to 2013). To code the interviews, the NVIVO software application was used. The results stemming from the interviews were discussed with interviewees, who were also invited to read a preliminary draft of this research piece.

Archival Data

We also used archival sources, published information, and sector studies released by the local and regional tourism authorities and tourism associations of the provinces and municipalities under consideration, as well as press releases, leaflets, pamphlets, and reports generated by the regional DMO and municipal DMOs about the Pink Night. Document data offered us detailed, written information and concrete examples on the partnership activities related to the Pink Night (Apt Emilia Romagna, 2006; 2013).

Observation

Three editions of the festival (2011–2013) were the object of nonparticipant observation. It concerned about 20 official and unofficial meetings and events related to the planning and decision making about the development of the event, but also included the observation of the executive part of the event. Our main reason in using the observation method was to complement the top-down perspective of planning by the local DMOs with a bottom-up perspective, which provided a fine-grained insight of meanings and values that the consumers of the Pink Night event link to the event itself (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Giovanardi et al., 2014).

Data Triangulation

We combined interview, archival, and observation data to refine our case history (Jick, 1979). The process was highly iterative as we revisited all our data as new issues and features emerged within the case (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The triangulation resulting from multiple data sources reduces construct validity problems and the risk of retrospectively imposing meaning on historical events based on a certain knowledge of the outcomes (Yin, 1994).

4. Findings

This section is divided into three main subsections: the first one relates to the description of the development and the staging of the Pink Night festival. The second one tackles the experience realms involved in the festival. The third and last one builds on the importance of partnerships in staging memorable tourism experiences.

Developing and Staging the “Pink Night” Tourism Experience and the Riviera di Romagna Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

As mentioned in the empirical setting section, starting from the late 1980s the Riviera di Romagna has experienced eutrophication of the Adriatic Sea and the subsequent growth of algae: this was the main trigger that led both local tourism policymakers and entrepreneurs to invest on leisure, entertainment activities, and related facilities such as nightclubs, discos, turning Rimini into the “trendy disco capital of Italy” (Battilani, 2009: 113). As a consequence, most of the destination branding of the Riviera starting from the 1980s has revolved around the idea of nightlife and transgression.

This new image and identity of the destination became particularly appealing, especially among European youngsters (especially teenagers who had successfully completed their high-school coursework), who flocked to the Riviera in order to have fun and party in the many nightclubs of the area. This trend continued until the first half of 2000 when tourist arrivals started showing a relative decline (especially from the German-speaking area), due also to the emergence of competition from other Mediterranean destinations particularly attractive for nightlife (e.g., the Balearic Islands in Spain rather than Mykonos in Greece or several other islands and coastal destinations in Egypt and Turkey).

At that time the head of the tourism department of the province of Rimini (Interviewee A) started realizing that a strategy of repositioning of the destination was necessary because the Riviera could no more preserve its competitive advantage on the youngsters market but had to fully develop its market potential, also looking at targeting others, such as families.

Drawing partially his inspiration on the traditional format of the White Night or nuit blanche (Jiwa et al., 2009), Interviewee A conceived the “Pink Night” festival as a new opportunity to reposition the Riviera di Romagna. Indeed:

This festival is an event which I decided to set up with the Rimini tourism department in 2005 and was first launched in 2006, with the objective to re-position not only Rimini, but the entire Riviera di Romagna, as relevant destinations. [...] For almost one decade, until the end of the nineties, Rimini has been associated with transgression, alcohol, drugs, and fights in night clubs, youngster dying in car accidents early in the morning after late nights in the discos. (Interviewee A, founder of the Pink Night)

As a matter of fact the event was thought as an opportunity for the municipality of Rimini and the other municipalities along the Riviera di Romagna, to

get rid of the of the stereotype of Rimini as a place for pure transgression, providing a new image of the destination as a place where everyone, not just teenagers, can enjoy and have fun, healthy fun. (Interviewee A, founder of the Pink Night)

The aforementioned words are a clear evidence of the fact that a specific DMO, the one of the municipality of Rimini, in the mid-2000s realized that the destination

needed to reposition itself and build a new destination image. In order to rebrand the destination,

We decided to advertise it [the Pink Night] as the “New Year’s Eve of the Summer,” an event which should involve everyone and should bring a smile for everyone, children, teen-agers, adults, elderly people ... (Interviewee A, founder of the Pink Night)

As is clear from these words, the idea of rebranding the destination was closely intertwined with the idea of staging a different experience for a wider audience of tourists. It was therefore necessary to find a unifying theme (Pine and Gilmore, 1999):

... we chose the pink colour as pink is the colour of genuine human relationships, of women, of children ... (Interviewee A, founder of the Pink Night)

The choice of the color has nothing to do with a gay or lesbian connotation, but is rather referred to the idea of good relationships and feelings (Giovanardi et al., 2014). This way it was possible to offer an appealing thematic experience to everyone: youngsters and adults, solo travelers, groups of friends, and families.

Today the Pink Night is a thematic event, that is, a collection of some 300 coordinated and intertwined events taking place simultaneously on the Riviera di Romagna’s 110 kilometers of coastline. All of them display a common thematic item, which is the pink color. The Riviera is now preparing the 10th edition of the event. But how was it possible to make it happen? In the next subsection we illustrate the major steps that led to the development of this event.

The Importance of DMOs Partnerships and PPPs in Staging Memorable Tourism Experiences

As for any good idea, the inception per se is not sufficient to transform it into a product, service, or experience that can be successfully commercialized. As a complex creative tourism product, the Pink Night displays several major features such as the “motley crew property,” which basically means that for a product to be taken to completion there is a need for intense and constructive collaboration between many professionals and stakeholders.

At the very beginning, the Pink Night Festival was initiated mainly to increase the number of tourists in the province of Rimini and for this reason the initiation and planning activities were carried out by the tourism department of the Province of Rimini (Agenzia Marketing Turistico Riviera di Rimini), which actually set up formal plans and rules that paved the way for the development of the product.

A steering committee (Cabina di Regia, literally a “directing facility”) comprising the most relevant public and private stakeholders of the tourism sector in the Riviera di Romagna was constituted. It includes 14 members: three members of the Union of Product Coast; three members of the regional DMO APT Servizi; and two members each for the provincial DMOs of the municipalities of Rimini, Ferrara, Ravenna, and Forlì-Cesena. The private sector is mainly represented by the Union of Product Coast, including more than 100 companies.

As is clear from the words of Interviewee B, CEO of APT Servizi:

... the objectives of the Steering Committee are to strike a balance between the different interests of the local Destination Management Organizations and professional associations willing to participate in the project. More specifically we have to: 1) determine and communicate the date of the event; 2) approve some general guidelines for all of the provinces involved (such as decorations in pink, 24 hours openings of all private and public companies during the event, pink lighting for all the roads, pink coordinated fireworks across all the municipalities at midnight, regulations related to public safety and alcohol consumption, etc.); 3) determine the budget to invest; 4) allocate competences as far as the program of events is concerned, with a reference to communication, fund-raising, sponsorship, development of tourism packages; 5) institution of the Technical Table. (Interviewee B, former CEO APT Servizi)

The strategic dimension of the cooperation was dealt with by the steering committee while for tactical purposes a coordination facility was created: the Technical Table (i.e., Tavolo Tecnico). The Technical Table is coordinated by a professional identified by the steering committee: Interviewee C, the key organizer of the Pink Night Festival:

I have been dealing with the Pink Night from the very outset when I made it happen with my then colleague [Interviewee A]. So to speak I am together with [Interviewee A] the “history” of this event and I have the control of the Technical Table. However, the planning of a synchronized set of events along a 110 km of coastline require[s] continuous dialogue and now I have understood that the more the event is capillary diffused in the other provinces, the better it is, even if coordination activities increase ... Especially we understood that domestic tourists like to change the location where they enjoy the many events and the midnight fireworks and it is a strength to have them the first year in Rimini, the second year in Ferrara and then to Ravenna and then back to Rimini ... we give them variety. (Interviewee C, Coordinator of Technical Table)

Interviewee C, the coordinator of the Pink Night, has the task of transferring the know-how accumulated by the province of Rimini to the other provinces. Indeed,

The objective is to avoid huge discrepancies in the artistic offers, in the execution of the plans of the Pink Night, with the overall aim to create a holistic image for the Riviera di Romagna.

Most of the activities related to the lifecycle of the event are carried out by the technical table, with the steering committee acting as “Overall director” and local DMOs acting as local directors (see Figure 8.2).

Interestingly, while at the beginning, for the 2006 edition, the Pink Night was staged only the first Saturday of July, later and starting from the third edition, it was celebrated on Friday and this contributed partially to increase the number of overnights. Tourism demand data for the province of Rimini during the Pink Night weekend (Friday–Sunday) seem to point to an increasing trend both in terms of overnights (+19%), and in terms of arrivals (+19%) over the last 2012 and 2013 editions. We could therefore infer that the Pink Night is contributing to increase tourism flows to Rimini (Apt Emilia Romagna, 2013).

The Experience Realms

As already mentioned in the theoretical background section, staging memorable tourism experiences means also being able to strike a good balance between their four realms, the so called 4Es: entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism.

Basically most of the Pink Night Festival is based upon entertainment activities, which can be broken down into three main types: (1) maxi-events; (2) cultural events; and (3) diffusive protagonist events.

Maxi-events are published in the official brochure of the Pink Night and are typically musical or dancing performances staged in the major squares of the municipalities involved. They attract the highest number of attendees and tourists. The coordinated program of the Pink Night, which is designed by the technical table, implies that at least one maxi-event should be staged in each of the largest municipalities involved, with schedules that are highly synchronized thus allowing for the Pink Night to be very capillary on the territory. The Pink Night is therefore

planned over the entire night starting from 8 pm of Day 1 to the morning of Day 2 and later so that people might have a sense of the fact that the “party” is continuous. Therefore fun is distributed all over the Riviera region not only geographically but also temporally. Indeed, for the first part of the night we stage events that can be directed to the widest audience as both adults and children are present. At midnight there are fireworks which are synchronized all over the coastline. After midnight the events are instead targeting the youngsters. (Interviewee C, coordinator of the Technical Table)

Cultural events aggregate all those events that display a higher cultural profile. Typically they are related to visual arts exhibitions, classical or jazz music concert directed to a niche audience. For instance, they include “Assalti al cuore” (“Assaults to the Heart”), which is a parallel festival of Italian literature and music wherein writers, composers, musicians, photographers, and visual artists draw from the theme proposed every year a source of inspiration, de facto staging a kaleidoscope of words, visions, sounds. These events are held normally in places far from the coast such as the historical centres. It is clear that this represents a way to differentiate the offer of entertainment, trying to target audiences who do not like crowded places on the seaside and whose interest is “less pop and more cultural.”

Moreover, these parallel events sometimes extend beyond the Pink Night weekend as they not only entertain but also educate: indeed they contribute to educate the audience by adding to the growth of their cultural capital. These edutainment events are dedicated either to adults (with photography workshops) or to children: for example, the municipality of Bellaria-Igea Marina proposes a number of activities that leverage on drawing or singing workshops allowing for an active participation for children.

Diffusive protagonist events are staged by individual tourism operators (hoteliers, bath resorts, bars, pubs, night clubs, discos, etc.). They are not officially planned by the Technical Table but nonetheless they enlarge the offer by involving directly private companies. They satisfy an audience that is not interested to be involved in a large event, but rather in a self-contained environment to have fun.

Of course, a number of entrepreneurs and hoteliers have created their own diffusive protagonist events while recognizing that the collaboration between the different DMOs was fundamental to effectively develop the Pink Night product:

Our hotel is relatively small and located close to the historical center. We don't provide full board but we want to offer our guests a number of services which remind them of the Pink Night ... we include pink decorations in the lobby, our table cloths turn pink for the Pink Night days and this helps our customers to understand that they are part of the overall experience ...[] ... However we feel that without the heavy investment of the municipality of Rimini we would not be able to set something memorable for our customers. (Interviewee D, hotelier in Rimini)

While the aforementioned diffusive protagonist events are forms of entertainment offered by individual companies (be they hotels, nightclubs, or theme parks), which become for a while a protagonist in staging the Pink Night experience, both maxi-events and cultural events are initiated, planned, executed, and taken to completion by the visible hands of the operational coordinating director (the Technical Table) and the other local directors (the DMOs/tourism departments of the other provinces). Moreover, they are also almost entirely funded by the municipalities: the third last edition of the Pink Night (in 2012) for example was financed by the Rimini municipality with €400,000, while the Martini company provided €100,000 to sponsor the Pink Night.

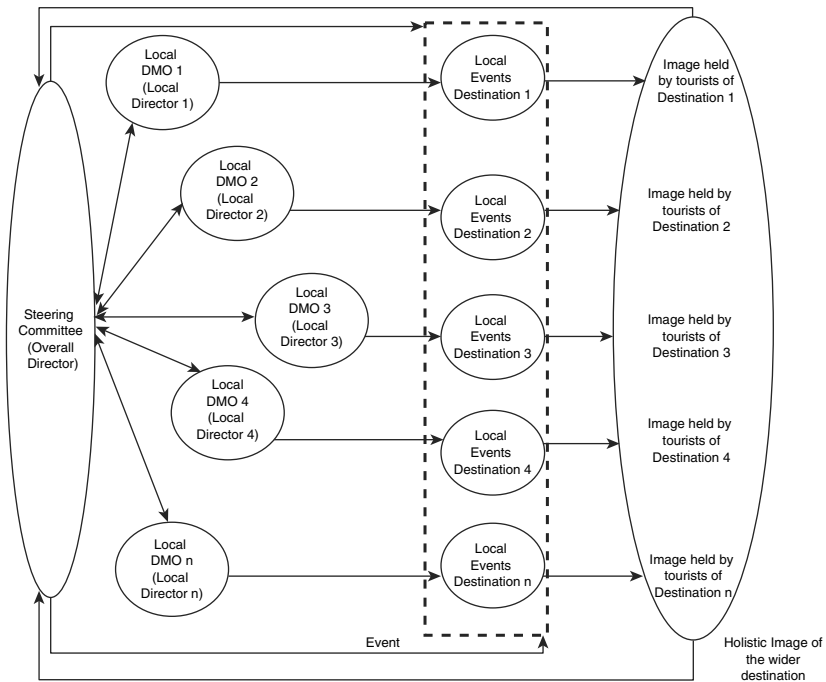


Figure 8.2 Staging a memorable event through the collaboration of competitive DMOs.

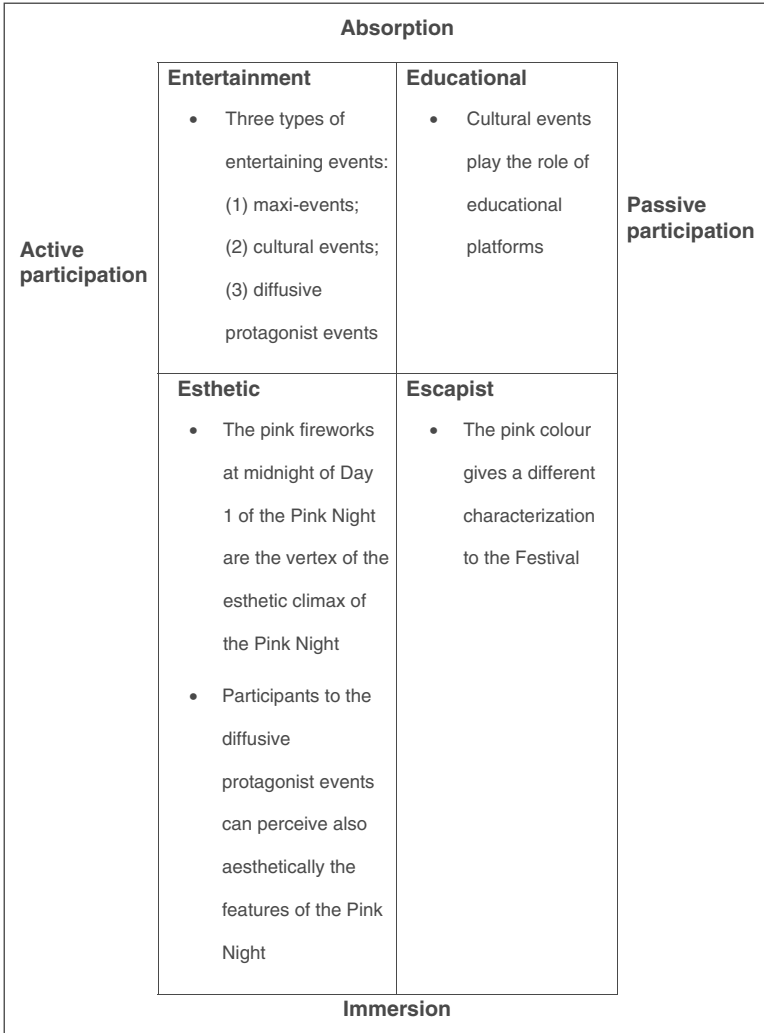


Figure 8.3 The four realms of the tourism experience for the Pink Night festival.

We can epitomize how the four experience realms come into play with the Pink Night Festival in Figure 8.3. While the entertainment realm is by construction at the basis of the tourism product as articulated in its three major components (maxi-events, cultural events, diffusive protagonist events), the educational realm becomes more relevant only for cultural events that typically can span a larger time frame than the duration of the festival itself. The esthetic realm is also very crucial and has to do not only with the pink color itself (which is the unifying feature of the festival) but also with the spectacular pink fireworks that are showcased at midnight of day 1 of the festival. Last but not least the escapist realm is brought into the festival

with the pink light designing, which literally changes the landscape and the objects of the Riviera di Romagna, creating a surreal atmosphere (see also table cloths and eno-gastronomic items in the restaurants).

It appears that partnerships between DMOs can empower the absorptive capability of the tourist experience (indeed the entertainment and educational functions are deliberately planned by the cooperative venture of DMOs), while the immersion in fact is the outcome of the relationship between the set of DMOs delivering the experience and the tourists themselves (see Giovanardi et al., 2014).

5. Conclusions

Recent tourism management literature has acknowledged that the share of scholarly articles dealing with tourist experiences is recording a perplexing decline over time in established international scholarly tourism journals over time (Ritchie et al., 2011). This chapter has contributed to the research stream on tourism experience examined in the context of, or in relation to, destination image, loyalty, and evaluation (Chi and Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2005; Weaver et al., 2007; Quadri and Fiore, 2013). More specifically we have provided innovative insights on the relevance of partnerships between DMOs in staging memorable tourism experiences. By analyzing the event Pink Night (i.e., a collection of coordinated, synchronized, and intertwined events taking place in a wide geographic area including different administrative units in the northern part of the Italian Adriatic coast) we have shown how the development of a brand new tourism product could on the one hand empower the absorptive capability of the tourist experience (thus contributing to reinforce the entertainment and educational realms of the tourist experience itself) and on the other hand be able to unify and corroborate the image of a wider destination to which different DMOs belong.

As far as the empowerment of the absorptive capability of the tourist experience is concerned, we have shown that all the types of events included in the Pink Night festival (maxi-events, cultural events, and diffusive protagonist events) contribute to reinforcing the entertainment realm of the experience with cultural events aimed at strengthening the educational realm. In contrast with recent literature that recognizes that only the esthetic realm is able to generate loyalty toward the destination (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2013) we maintain that the entertainment realm plays a irreplaceable role and is deeply intertwined with the other realms.

As far as the corroboration of the image of the wider destination is concerned, while recent literature has focused on the way the event is performed, experienced, and made sense of by hosts and guests, which contribute to the creation of the tourism place (Giovanardi et al., 2014), here we have adopted a top-down approach able to capture in an overarching framework how the collaborative strategies and actions of relevant policymakers at the destination level (and their partnerships) contribute to create a complex creative product (Caves, 2000) and stage a memorable experience for tourists. In particular, we have stressed how DMOs' partnerships have been able to portray the Riviera di Romagna as a leader in the offering of "healthy fun,"

in contrast to the stereotyped previous image of the Riviera di Romagna as a leader of “nightlife and transgression.”

More specifically, in the framework proposed, the event under consideration is staged by “local directors” (local DMOs of the provinces/municipalities involved) as well as by an “overall director” (the steering committee) and a “general director” (the leading DMO of the province/municipality of Rimini).

The steering committee (overall director) and the municipality of Rimini (general director), had a clear-cut view of the specific stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) of the Riviera di Romagna. Consequently, they agreed on the objectives they wanted to strategically achieve and being at the helm of the event, they also played the role of leaders and coordinators for staging the tourism experience.

The conjoint development of the maxi events within the Pink Night festival contributed to the creation of a unifying brand image for the wider destination of the Riviera di Romagna, which was more than the mere sum of the images of their constituting destinations. This move helped in repositioning the wider destination from a “youngsters-only destination” to a “destination for everyone.”

Strategic partnerships between DMOs and between the public and private sector (PPPs) proved very effective as different destinations could pool effort and financial and nonfinancial resources, which generate benefits for the DMOs and their private partners that would not be achieved without working together (Morrison, 2013).

Our chapter also provides several managerial and policymaking implications. First, it suggests that the objective of co-located tourism destinations should be not just to satisfy tourists’ needs and wants but possibly to generate a positive surprise for the tourist. Second, positive surprises related to successfully staged experiences can be very helpful to rebrand and reposition the destinations themselves and could impact on their rejuvenation and destination loyalty. However, positive surprises do not grow spontaneously and DMOs should be proactive in forming wider destination partnerships locally if they want to successfully face increasing global competition.

Of course, this study displays several limitations. First of all, it includes the analysis of a specific tourism destination: in order to generalize our results, it might be interesting to enlarge the sample of tourism destination under consideration. Second, more light should be shed on the role of multiple DMOs in staging tourism experiences by leveraging such events: accordingly a few more examples to consider might include mega events such as the Olympic Games and the soccer World Cup. Last but not least, while it is clear that partnerships between local DMOs can increase the capability of absorption of the tourist experience, it remains still unclear how they could impact on the immersive dimension of a tourism experience.

Notes

1. “42 percent of worldwide workers find employment in the service sector, 36% percent in agriculture, and only 22 percent in manufacturing” (Pine and Gilmore, 2011: 12).

2. An emblematic example of this progression of value is the offering of coffee, which once extracted in the form of beans might cost up to 2 cents of a dollar per cup but later could be roasted, grinded, and packaged by a manufacturer to reach a value of 25 cents a cup. The manufactured coffee might be brewed in a diner at a dollar a cup or perhaps served at Starbucks at \$2–5 a cup. However, the top of the progression might be to have it included in a guided excursion in Venice and enjoy it in San Marco square as part of a truly memorable experience: the same coffee in this latter case would cost \$12–15 a cup!

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Web sites

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