

# Guide to Croatian cultural and sports events evaluation

## Projects and activities of the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb

Cultural, entertainment and sport events have long been the back bone of tourism development strategies, especially in urban settings where they are used to create the atmosphere, sense of place or being attractions in themselves. Destinations suffering seasonality of demand also use events to create a number of mini-seasons, while smaller community events in rural areas are used as an image creator and repeat visit generators. In addition, in many of the newly formed nation states that appeared in Europe with the fall of the Berlin wall cultural events have become one of the vehicles of (re)creation of national identity. These forces, to a large extent, shape the landscape of cultural and sporting events in Europe. Therefore, it is of a little surprise that the events have grown exponentially. Such is also the case in Croatia, where there is a growing competition between events for mostly scarce public funding, reluctant private sector sponsors and increasingly demanding audience. To be competitive, evolve and survive these events need stable funding, professional event team with a range of skills and destination wide actions to grow events into tourism attractions. For this they require, among other things, key marketing data to guide their programming and marketing strategies and to create synergies of actions with major stakeholders. Yet, the cost of the tailor made market research can not be easily met by most small and mid-size events.

To overcome this barrier, a group of Australian scholars headed by Leo Jago, in early 1990s, started to develop a methodology for evaluating events that can be easily used by the organizers. It evolved into the „Encore Festival and Event Evaluation Kit". It is based a tailor-made software with a great amount of flexibility in questionnaire development and data reporting. The questionnaire consists of the demographic, economic, marketing and additional questions modules that gather data from attendees, exhibitors and participants.

While the additional questions module enables organizers to add specific questions and customize the evaluation to their own needs, the economic module enables assessment of direct in-scope expenditure that an event has attracted to the region, requiring also that the organizers data (income and expenditure) be entered into a special part of the Kit. Data entry can be done directly into the Encore file or imported from Excel. Various reports can then be generated automatically. While the extent of its use is not known, a number of funding agencies ask organizers to attach the event evaluation report using the Encore Kit to their funding application. However, while the kit is based on a well thought out methodology built on a sound theory, it serves best in the context where the culture of festival evaluation is already developed and events are already embedded into cultural and economic strategies. Where this is not the case, some simpler methods need to be devised to build the culture of event evaluation.

Inspired by the Australian approach, we have developed a "Guide to cultural and sport events evaluation" adjusting the scope and methods of evaluation to the social, cultural and economic context of the Croatian event scene. In this process, a number of decisions had to be made in relation to the event organizers readiness to accept the idea of an objective event evaluation, the level of organizers' skills in coordinating research, their abilities in data handling/interpretation and the optimal level of information needed by the majority of stakeholders. Taking these issues into consideration we have decided to: a) build this guide on Microsoft Office basic products (Excel and Word); b) focus the evaluation to only a couple of most important dimensions and c) simplify the reporting procedure. The decision to build it on the Microsoft Office was based on the fact that it is widely available and most computer users are familiar with this software and

have it installed on their computer stations. With this approach we have reduced the investment needed for software development, enabling us to provide this guide free of charge and, therefore, maximize the likelihood of its use.

In terms of the scope of evaluation, we have focused on socio-demographic characteristics of visitors, their motivation, satisfaction with the event organization and its program. This information, apart from enabling organizers to improve events and devise more targeted promotional messages, is also appreciated by sponsors and public sector agencies in assessing or justifying their investment. In terms of estimating the impact of events, we have focused on estimating the proportion of purposeful non-residential event visitors, as this is the most debatable issue in Croatia. While event organizers routinely expect funding from the tourism organizations, tourism organizations are at the same time very skeptical of the tourism benefits of these events, yet neither side can base their arguments on any objective criteria. Thus, we considered this aspect to be the most important one to estimate.

When it comes to estimating economic impact, we have decided to simplify this for two reasons. Firstly, collecting expenditure data is difficult, especially in the noisy and atmosphere laden event environment with often not very experienced interviewers. At the same time, the stakeholders are not yet attaching high importance to this information. Instead, we have opted for gaining insight into the structure of visitor expenditure, i.e. if they have spent money on food, souvenirs and additional activities. We have also added a question asking visitors to indicate if the event attendance has prompted them to visit any other attraction while in the region to roughly gauge if the benefits of the event visitation have spread regionally. Finally, if visitors are staying overnight, we ask for a number of nights spent and type of accommodation used.

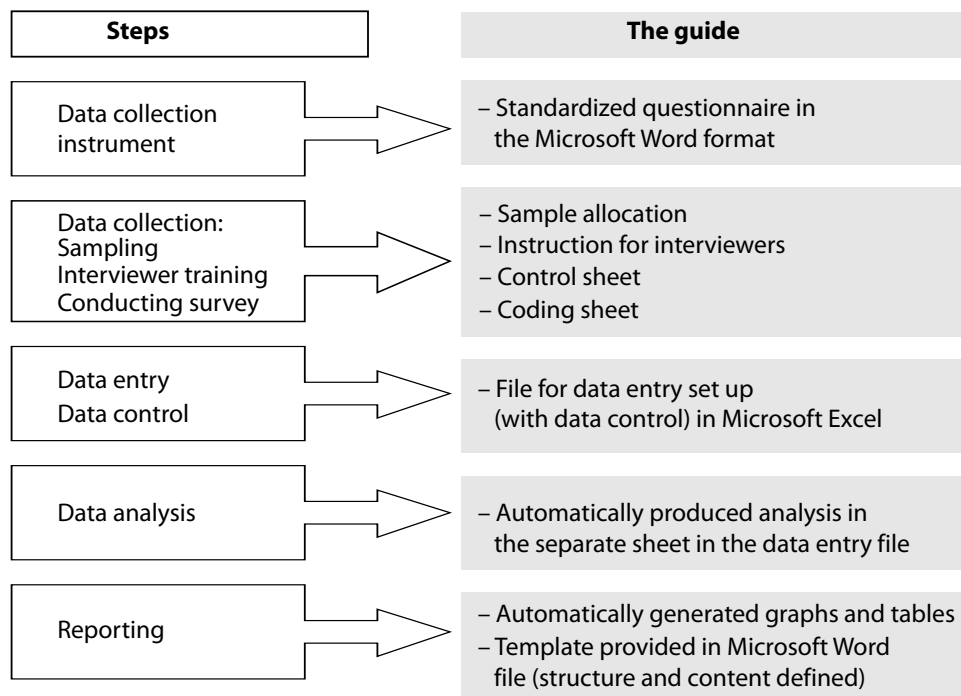
The questionnaire is formatted in Microsoft Word format and can be modified in the part concerning event program and attendance to the various event activities. Similar to the Encore Kit, we have included

in the Guide a chapter dedicated to the methods of data collection in more depth given that the users are likely to have none or only minimal research skills. Therefore, this chapter guides users through sampling, data collection and organization of field survey. To minimize the burden on organizers, we have provided ready for print instructions for interviewers, sampling plan (when, where and how many interviewers) and a control sheet for monitoring non-response.

Data are entered into the preprogrammed Excel sheet where particular attention was given to the automatic control of the accuracy of data entry (both typographic and logical control). Finally, the guide was set up to provide two types of report. In its simplest version, the Excel was set up to generate graphs and tables. The report also produces comparison based on the geographic origin of visitors (local, regional, national, international) and visitor loyalty (first time visitors, repeat visitors) in terms of the motivation, satisfaction and interest for similar events. In case a more detailed report is needed (i.e. for corporate sponsors), a template was provided to minimize the misinterpretation of results, as it is safe to assume that most users are not particularly skilled in interpreting and presenting research results. The process of visitor survey and the way the Guide has been set up in relation to it is illustrated in Figure 1.

The Guide was developed in cooperation with the local tourism board, with every aspect of the Guide's implementation being pilot tested and experiences thus gathered were built into the final product. The Tourism Board of Karlovac was a key industry partner. The Board has taken keen interest in the project, provided seed funding and actively participated in the Guide development. Karlovac is a mid-size town an hour's drive south of the capital Zagreb, known for the star-shaped Renaissance fortress, four rivers running through the town and a brewery. As mostly relying on the regional visitors, they need events to augment their attraction base. However, short of human and financial resources, they opted for supporting and growing community events, rather than on importing events or organizing new ones by themselves.

Figure 1  
**STEPS IN SURVEY RESEARCH IN RELATION TO THE GUIDE**



In this, they asked how they can make a sound decision as to what events are worth investing in and in what way, apart from offering financial support, can they assist the event organizers. Also, they were aware that these events need to innovate to keep visitor interest and have looked for the continuous monitoring of the events' performance. Thus, the Tourism Board of Karlovac has been a highly motivated and active partner in this project.

The project evolved slowly. Firstly, we have developed and pilot tested methodology on their medieval fair event. We have developed the questionnaire, survey plan, trained the interviewers and conducted data entry and analysis to test the suitability of Excel. For the second and third pilot studies – small scale community events – the Tourism Board of Karlovac has taken on a greater role by modifying the questionnaire, developing a research plan, training the interviewers and entering data. We have taken only an advisory role and

helped in the reporting phase. The fourth pilot was their hallmark event – Karlovac Beer Festival which is entering slowly into stagnation phase and attracting some controversy regarding the public expenditure versus resulting benefits. By this time, the Board's staff was able to organize the visitor survey and was also keen to obtain some indicators on vendors' satisfaction. This proved to be very difficult against vendors' suspicions and reluctance to participate in the survey. In the light of this experience, we have decided to keep the Guide focused on the visitor survey only and restricted to the small and medium scale cultural and sport events. We would like to build a culture of evaluating events and using the evaluation data to further the quality of events and their marketing. Once a critical mass is achieved, the plan is to move into the more sophisticated phase of the comprehensive event evaluation.

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