

# The evolution of the "Guide for cultural and sport event evaluation" from the perspective of the Tourism Board of Karlovac



With the strategic orientation to build its tourism demand on existing events, the Tourism Board of Karlovac needed a more systematic approach to the event evaluation, especially of those events that, in terms of their promotion or number of visitors, exceed local boundaries. For that, the Board has asked the Institute for Tourism for assistance. The first activities related to the evaluation of Karlovac's events started in 2008, with the survey of visitors to the Medieval Fair, held on the ground of the hillside fortress in one of the Karlovac's suburbs. The specific goals of this research were: a) to determine the share of the Fair's induced non-local visitors as an indicator of its tourism attractiveness; b) visitors profile and c) visitor satisfaction with the Medieval Fair program. The Tourism Board plan was to use these results in its event portfolio building, development of the event funding program, identification of the areas where

Tourism Board can be of greater assistance with its expertise (in contrast to the current practice where it mostly provides funding) and, finally, to encourage other public sector stakeholders to take a more active role in organization of the Fair.

The team of the Institute for Tourism has developed and implemented the visitor survey, while the Tourism Board was in charge of selection of interviewers. As the Tourism Board has planned to evaluate all of the Karlovac's events, we wanted to create a pool of trained interviewers from the very beginning. Thus, in cooperation with the Polytechnic of Karlovac, we have recruited ten students based on their academic results and communication skills, while the team of the Institute has conducted the training. Tourism Board staff also participated in the training in order to become familiar with the research process and to be able to undertake the training of the interviewers and supervise the field work in the future. In that way we applied, in fact, the "train the trainer" approach. The Institute's team put an emphasis on the importance of the random selection of respondents and the consequences that the systematic sampling or completion of the questionnaires by the interviewers could have on the research validity. Institute for Tourism prepared the sample allocation plan containing dates and time of surveying, number of interviewers required and number of surveys to be completed, making sure that all of the days and periods of the day were represented. The Tourism Board appointed a research manager in charge of coordinating field work.

During the Medieval Fair's visitors survey we gathered knowledge necessary for further event visitor research. We formed a survey team headed by research manager, and had enough confidence to conduct the visitor surveys for other town's events.

The following events were especially important for the Tourism Board: Karlovac Beer Festival (traditional 10 days event that attracts 200.000 visitors), the St. John Bonfire (a rather short evening event), and the newest Ethno Jazz festival. With that kind of ambition but very small budget, the idea of developing a questionnaire that we could use, with a slight adjustment, for all our events was born. The Institute's team has, therefore, developed a generic questionnaire in Microsoft Word, where only those parts relating to the event's program need to be changed with every event. We thought that this kind of approach would not only give us a chance to compare our events, but also would allow us to evaluate their growth and development through years. With this, we have embarked on an independent even evaluation program.

To make us self-sufficient in visitor survey research, the Institute's team has trained us to do data entry and analysis. For doing that, a decision was made to use Microsoft Excel. This program is used by all our employees and students as opposed to the specialized statistical programs. Therefore, the Institute for Tourism prepared us an Excel file ready for data entry with all necessary input controls, which minimized the possibility of incorrect data input (logical and typographic control). Excel file was programmed in such a way that enabled instant presentation of results through tables and graphs. In that way, we had a ready report soon after we finished the input of data. Along with the basic report that is automatically generated in Excel, the team of the Institute has also made a template for a more detailed research report that can be, just like the questionnaire, easily completed. In addition, the Institute of Tourism prepared us a short printed guide with instructions.

Having in mind a number of events we planned to include evaluation, and the fact that we wanted to conduct evaluation every year, we needed a large base of trained interviewers. For that reason we combined this project with one of our existing project called "We want you to grow" which was created for students in Polytechnics of Karlovac who have their internship in the Karlovac Tourism Board.

In accordance with the goals of this project we made an education programme in which we integrated our event visitor survey. In this part of internship the research manager, also trained by the team of Institute for Tourism, introduced students to event survey evaluation, starting from the research goals, sampling methods, field work, data entry and evaluation. The goal of this part of internship was to train a sufficient number of students which will be able to survey visitors and whose competencies gained through the internship will make a positive contribution to the quality of research. In this way, we can employ students to work as interviewers during their internships and employ them after their internships through part time student jobs. With this approach, we made a pool of quality trained interviewers for all our future research of Karlovac events' visitors.

After the Medieval Fair where we mainly leaned on the support of the Institute for Tourism team, we conducted the St. John Bonfire visitor survey mostly independently. This is relatively short event held in late night hours. The Bonfire was an opportunity to learn how to adapt our research plan, especially sampling, to all those events that are concentrated in the few hours period and where visitors have to be surveyed in the short time right after the programme. After that, we conducted research at the Etno Jazz festival and, finally, at the biggest town event - Karlovac Beer Festival. The Institute for Tourism team checked questionnaires which we have modified according to the event's program and the survey plan for each event. We entered the data by ourselves in the programmed Excel file and produced reports based on the given report template that the team has provided us with. The reports and database were sent to the Institute's team for verification.

Although the research was initiated by the Tourism Board and not the event organizers, from the very beginning we were aware of the importance of organizer's involvement and support. Due to the fact that the event evaluation is not a common practice, we had to announce the research idea to the organizers very carefully. From the very beginning we emphasized that the goal of evaluation is not to criticize

the work of organizers or the event, even though the results may be different from the expectations. Because of that, we were emphasizing that this research is conducted in order to work together on development and improvement of events. We also emphasized that the research gives us a chance to eliminate problems and aspects that cannot be directly controlled by organizers such as traffic control and signalization. As the time passed, the resistance of organizers to visitor survey weakened, although it is still present.

No matter what event, the application of standardized methodology enabled us to compare outcomes of Karlovac's events. The results showed that, in spite of the organizers' arguments that these events are tourist attractions and, therefore, need to be financially supported by the Tourism Board, the share of event induced non-local visitors to the Karlovac's events is, on average, a modest 4%. At the same time, vast majority of visitors to town's events were satisfied with the programme and the service given at the event, what means that the organizers are performing excellently in the part which they have under their direct control. However, at almost every event visitors were complaining on the organization of arrival (traffic signalization, parking organization) and the level of information available before the event. The relatively low share of event induced non-local visitors might be partly due to the lack of information prior to the event and this aspect could be improved through better partnership with the Tourism Board.

With these indicators, we are able to modify our approach to event funding. In the past, we would simply decided if we would fund the event and to what amount. They would then give us report on the number of visitors (mainly based on the rough assessment of the organizers), program and media coverage. In that way, we were not having any influence on the event organization and were not able to detect areas in which organizer needed more assistance. In

other words, we were passive stakeholders, distanced from the event organization. With the survey results available, we are now able to adjust our event funding approach in a way that we now allocate our funds to those parts of events with which the visitors were not pleased but that can be improved with more generous funding. Also, we allocate our funds to those program elements that were most interesting to our visitors. We are also able to support organizers by mediating between them and other institutions that are needed for solving problems such as traffic and parking which is sometimes out of the organizers' control.

Aside from developing more tailor made event funding program based on these results, Tourist Board also uses these results when preparing applications for donations, sponsorships and EU funding. The results are also used when we evaluate the work of the Tourism Board and its event funding program performance. The results of the research are also very important when communicating with media and other members of the Tourist Board. In this way, our work and the work of all organizers are becoming more transparent and the events are gaining better affirmation and reputation.

Finally, as we were guided in the development of the event evaluation program by the Institute for Tourism, its final product - "Guide to cultural and sport events evaluation" - is completely tested and proven methodology adapted to those with minimal survey research knowledge or experience. For that reason, we have decided to give this Guide for free to everyone who wishes to evaluate their events, be they organizers or sponsors, under one condition only - to forward the results to the Institute for Tourism in order to facilitate event benchmarking on the national level. In that way, we will all be able to define more efficient approach to development and improvement of the event tourism in our country.

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