Evaluative Event Frameworks: A Learning Destination Perspective

Dr Debbie Sadd, Bournemouth University

Prof Alan Fyall Rosen College, Florida

Kenneth Wardrop

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of the “learning destination” as a solution to historical challenges of event evaluation. The paper evaluates its relevance and role in the development of an inclusive and strategic approach to event planning and identifies the process (and context) of the development of a strategic evaluative event framework. Using a case-study methodology, evidence is provided from a major visitor-dependent destination to support the development of a strategic Framework for the Assessment of Major Events (FAME) with recommendations advanced for its application and generalizability across other destinations.

KEYWORDS
Learning destination, event planning, tourism, destination management, destination marketing

INTRODUCTION

Consistent with the “composite” nature of destinations, for those planning and organising events there exists the need for effective stakeholder collaboration at the destination level and the ability to develop the marketing of events as valuable attractors for tourists (Araujo and Bramwell, 2000). This in turn necessitates event strategies that are well defined and self-sustaining in highly competitive, and frequently resource-constrained, destination environments (Mills and Rosentraub, 2013; Stokes, 2008). The self-sustaining aspect of tourist and “place-making” investments by the public sector is of particular resonance in the more frugal economic landscape that many destinations now find themselves with the need for economic optimization now beginning to override previous more expansive ambitions where economic returns were not always of such high priority (Della Lucia, 2013).

Given the economic priority of tourism generally, it comes as no surprise that to date there has been an over concentration on the evaluation of the economic benefits of events in tourism (O’Sullivan, Pickernell and Senyard, 2009). That being said, Getz (2008) justifiably argues that event tourism must be viewed as an open system with the social and cultural outcomes of an event portfolio also needing to be addressed, preferably within a pre-event evaluation, to counter the predominance of economic drivers. Carlsen, Getz and Soutar (2001), Sherwood, Jago and Deery (2004), Sherwood (2007) and Andersson and Lundberg (2013), meanwhile, all advocate a “triple bottom-line” approach to event sustainability and a more strategic approach to the development of events for the broader benefit of tourism in destinations.

Lacking in both the professional sector and academia, however, are more rounded, holistic and multidimensional frameworks that, rather than measuring and monitoring impact, actually facilitate decision making as to what events should take place in a destination, when, where and with what overriding purpose (Wood, 2009). As such, this study does not seek to measure impact but to identify a suitably robust and inclusive process to facilitate decision making at the destination level and so avoid the “unchecked growth” omnipresent in so many destinations whereby events are developed with ‘insufficient planning, strategy and forethought’ (Wood, 2009, p.3). The complexity of destinations adds to the degree of difficulty in achieving such an ideal with isolation of decision making and the often limited sharing of information and resources hindering the collaborative sharing of knowledge upon which to base real decision making. Frustratingly, the information tends to be in existence. However, the information is frequently disparate in its whereabouts with it having been collected for a variety of different, and often conflicting, purposes. Such a situation is not unique to destinations, however, with Wood (2009, p.3) highlighting that many ‘so-called event departments operate in relative isolation with their own budgets and limited use of shared resources such as organization-wide information systems’. This latter point represents the essence of this study in that there is an increasing recognition of the need for a more strategic and inclusive means by which destinations plan events and incorporate them into wider destination strategies. One of the challenges for those managing destinations is the ability to introduce more open and responsive “learning” forms of strategy development into a traditionally conservative arena and provide a knowledge-informed decision making environment which facilitates both emergent and adaptive approaches (Jamal and Getz, 1996) with collaboration being the key to successful strategy development at the destination level (Stokes, 2008).

In light of the above discussion, the aim of this paper is to introduce the concept of the “learning destination” as a potential solution to historical challenges of event evaluation. In turn, the paper evaluates its relevance and role in the development of an inclusive and strategic approach to event planning, and identifies the process and context of the development of a framework for the evaluation of events against a wider set of destination-related objectives. Followed by an overview of the "learning destination" and evaluative event frameworks, this paper then outlines the case study methodology adopted which underpins the development of a strategic Framework for the Assessment of Major Events (FAME) for use across destinations. The results of the qualitative research process are then discussed and frameworks presented followed by a discussion and presentation of the study's limitations. The paper concludes with a critique of the contribution to theory and practice of the "learning destination" in the specific context of the development and implementation of event evaluation frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The learning destination

One notable approach gaining credence in the literature to provide a decision making environment which facilitates both emergent and adaptive approaches is that of the "learning organization". Defined by Senge (1990, p.3) as an organization where 'people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together', the learning organization sits within the wider, and expanding "knowledge" ecosystem. Of more relevance to this study, and the "composite" tourist destination, is the sharing of knowledge in the context of geographic or industrial clusters (Boschma and Lambooy, 2002; Malmberg and Power, 2005; Maskell, 2001) with the proximity of a number of stakeholders working together to achieve a collaborative outcome. As such, Gibson (2006) argues that "learning destinations" are when people from different contexts, with different perspectives and knowledge come together to develop ways forward for destinations. In other words what is needed for them to co-exist and what processes are needed in order to facilitate this to be beneficial for all parties involved to the benefit of the wider destination"? Consistent with the views of Gibson (2006), Schianetz et al. (2007) advocate a life-long learning approach for learning destinations to succeed underpinned by collaboration across all its component parts and an infrastructure to collect, disseminate and apply knowledge. Stakeholder collaboration and continuous learning at both organizational and destination levels are therefore crucial, with collaboration necessitating the inclusion of all salient stakeholders.

Despite the seemingly obvious appeal of the concept of the “learning destination”, Cooper and Sheldon (2010, p.215) argue that whilst the tourism business is ‘a natural user of information’ it has been a late adopter of knowledge management. This is a viewpoint shared by Long and Morpeth (2012) with them arguing that destination managers must explore knowledge needs due to the rapidly changing landscape of the destination product. With significant reductions in public funding for many destinations, the need to consider the pooling of resources and to form working relationships at both local and national levels has become more pressing. Cooper and Sheldon (2010) stress their initial point further by arguing that through the adoption of some form of knowledge management in a destination, there is potential for the destination to develop competitive advantage and sustainability. A “soft” infrastructure is thus required in order for destinations to become learning entities through knowledge, creativity and suitable networks for collaboration to take place. In this regard, in order to become a true “learning destination” Campbell (2009) suggests that a network of stakeholders, both formal and informal, is needed to engage collectively with Hudson (2013) arguing that academia should make a significant contributor to the process in the form of a “bridge builder” due to its historical neutrality in the context of destination management. Despite the exponential growth in tourism academia in many countries around the world it is surprising that Hudson notes that such “bridge building” remains rare with academics not fully leveraging their knowledge and skill set to the benefit of destinations. Although Tribe (1997) acknowledged the impasse between the lexicon and presentation of academic and practitioner research, as well as the sometimes tribal nature of the contrasting “communities of practice”, the neutrality of academics remains firm with their potential to facilitate the transfer of knowledge in the context of destinations a priority for the development of policy frameworks in the context of a knowledge-based economy (Beesley, 2004; Cooper, 2006). Defined for the purpose of this study as an “inclusive, holistic and collaborative stakeholder entity that joins together in continuously shaping the future direction of destinations through the collective sharing of perspectives and knowledge for the greater good of the destination”, the learning destination thus sits at the core of this paper. It represents an effective vehicle for strategic event planning at the destination level with collaboration among the various tourism sectors providing a suitable infrastructure to collect, disseminate and apply knowledge and deliver adaptive approaches to the marketing and management of destinations.

Evaluative “event” frameworks

Although events can serve as a cost effective way of boosting the overall prosperity of a destination, event design and organization can be high risk concerns and as such a suitable methodology is required to assist destination professionals in making informed decisions about the development, planning and hosting of events. The use of evaluative frameworks is widely regarded as an effective means to allow efficient planning through a systematic process that evaluates potential events against an agreed set of pre-determined objectives. Traditionally, event evaluation has focussed on post-event feedback mechanisms which are wide ranging in their choice and scope (Getz, 2008). Attention has tended to address the choice mechanisms adopted by the event attended with much attention given to the design of events and their ability to attract the desired audiences (Bowdin *et al.,* 2012). More recently, however, the use of significant funds from the public sector to support special events without having a robust ability to justify the support given has come under political scrutiny, most notably in those economies impacted by the financial crisis of the mid-to-late 2000s (Andersson and Lundberg, 2013). Pre-event forms of evaluation are thus of increasing interest and importance. For the most part, decisions often hinge on the perceived “public” benefits of the event offset against its costs (Collins *et al.,* 2009). Special events, however, are argued as having particular attributes unlike other events and as such warrant special consideration (Jago *et al.,* 1998). That being said, tools of analysis are required to help evaluate which events are to be supported and perhaps more importantly, which events are not to be supported.

In their comprehensive study at the turn of the millennium, Carlsen et al. (2001) identified eight pre-event evaluation criteria to help evaluate the worth and return of events in touristic places. The eight criteria were: potential risk exposure for the tourism destination authorities; probability of success; compatibility with existing venues; event manager’s capability; potential community benefits; potential environmental impacts; forecast number of tourists; and, fit with destination image/brand. In a related study, Cherubini and Iasevoli (2006) proposed the development of a measurement instrument that can be used to evaluate special event impacts on local communities and all other stakeholders with their Stakeholders Event Evaluation (SEE) framework a welcome development from the historical predominance of economic impact models (Della Lucia, 2013). The challenge of this and other derivative frameworks are common in that identifying and implementing a universal instrument of evaluation is somewhat of an utopian ideal with stakeholders frequently at odds as to what represent the ideal “critical success factors”.

It is interesting to note that before the launch of the SEE, public authorities were already active with Tourism New South Wales, Australia, the first public authority to commission an evaluative event framework in 1998. This inaugural framework did, however, focus entirely on the economic impacts of events with the many non-economic factors critical to the success of events side-lined. More recently, the City of Calgary Sports Tourism Authority now has a clear set of assessment guidelines for funding support (see more consistent with the pre-event evaluation criteria first advocated by Carlsen *et al.* (2001) and the SEE proposed by Cherubini and Iasevoli (2006) while New Zealand and their focus on major events is often cited as a good case study for robust assessment and prioritisation (see [www.med.govt.nz/majorevents 2014](http://www.med.govt.nz/majorevents)).

In the UK, Edinburgh's increasing profile as a host of major events has resulted in a growing need for an evaluation tool for destination leaders as none of the additional expenditure required for new events could be justified without some form of evaluative tool. A framework was thus needed to facilitate the measurement of the direct and indirect impacts of the event portfolio, this especially so after the publication of "Thundering Hooves", a report from the Scottish Arts Council (AEA, 2006). The rationale for the commissioning of the study was the realisation that Edinburgh as 'the World's Festival City' and a mature destination brand and market leader needed to guard against complacency in a dynamic market environment characterised by an increasing number of well-resourced and innovative new entrants. While competition from the UK came in the form of Manchester with its Bi-Annual International Festival and Liverpool through its status as European City of Culture in 2008, international competition came from established destinations such as Melbourne, Adelaide, Montreal, and Dubai. The intensity of competition collectively triggered a change in focus from the historic organic, local-organiser based, bottom-up approach adopted for the development of the festivals and events portfolio to a more strategic, destination-centric collaborative partnership approach with recognition of the benefits to be achieved from greater awareness and realisation of the mutuality and inter-dependence between the festivals and value from the sharing of skills, expertise and resources for innovation, marketing and networking; characteristics consistent with the "learning destination".

Although recognising some of the benefits of a bottom-up approach, the desire for a more holistic, strategic approach was clear with a need for a far more robust tool of evaluation and measurement than had previously been available. The latter was in fact considered critical to secure and maintain Edinburgh's competitive position in a highly competitive domestic and global market. Furthermore the sheer growth of festivals in Edinburgh necessitated a huge undertaking on behalf of all partners in the destination with there being a need for greater levels of professionalism to cope with the festivals and their respective stakeholders (Jarman and Theodoraki, 2011). The Thundering Hooves report was the catalyst for the creation of the Festivals Edinburgh Partnership, a highly effective collaboration between the 12 Major Festivals and key strategic stakeholders.

Again in the UK, Event Scotland in its 'grant support scheme for national and local events utilises rigorous assessment process' (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.3.2.8). The National Event Strategy for Scotland "Scotland: The Perfect Stage" (Event Scotland, 2014) provides an overarching strategic framework for Scotland's events focus. In England, meanwhile, Tourism South East (TSE) produced an alternative framework albeit one with a focus on impacts rather than the more holistic strategic planning of events. The TSE model and toolkit 'finds ways in which events can minimise their negative impacts and maximise their positive impacts by measuring the economic, environmental, social and cultural factors involved in running a tourism event' (Sustrip, 2012). One particular disadvantage of this model is that it represents a "one size fits all" and fails to take into account the particular requirements and nuances of different destinations.

The opportunity to collaborate destination-wide in order to facilitate learning in destinations is, thus, key to developing a holistic strategy event approach. In this instance it is to build an event portfolio to enhance and encourage tourism. The following methodology explains how this was facilitated.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, longitudinal, single case-study methodology was deemed the most appropriate vehicle by which to gather a suitably in-depth understanding of the learning destination in action with an emphasis on both the process and outcome of its deliberations. Defined by Yin (1994, p.13) as an 'investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and that relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion', the case study approach is one that, although not immune from criticism, has gained credibility in recent years in the field of tourism (Beeton, 2005). More specifically Dredge (2006, p.271) argues that it serves as an 'ideal approach for exploring the dynamics, role and influence of destination networks'. This is also a stance adopted by Wood (2009, p.7) in her acceptance that 'research in the "real" social world needs to be flexible and inventive and, in order to have any validity, needs to be triangulated and supported through techniques that are at times composite, iterative, or longitudinal in nature'. That being said, although Wood (2009, p.8) proposes a 'standardized framework for developing, administering, and using impact evaluation' this study moves beyond "impact" to real decision making in the context of events at tourist destinations.

As with all case study research, there is an emphasis on an open and transparent display of multiple sources of evidence with the detailed documentation of extensive research notes and policy and strategy documents throughout the duration of the study undertaken from February to September 2012. Extensive documentation of attendance at meetings and focus group sessions was undertaken at the case destination as was evidence detailed of all feedback provided be it face-to-face or electronic. Although the budget allocated did not facilitate one-to-one interviews, the extensive cooperation provided by the local municipality and destination stakeholders was such that sufficient primary data was gathered upon which to build converging lines of inquiry. Fourteen destination stakeholders were involved in the research process with all sectors of the local tourism industry included at each stage of the research process. For the purpose of anonymity, no formal name identification is provided in the findings with initials and job role specified instead.

The specific case context for this study is Bournemouth in the south of England, one of the largest coastal resort destinations in the UK. According to Butler (1980) all tourism destinations have an evolutionary six stage cycle and it could be argued that Bournemouth, whilst only recently celebrating its bi- centenary, was in danger of stagnation and ultimate decline as seen in other coastal resorts in the UK. This was particularly the case back in the 1980s when it was identified as a town with a lack of sense of belonging as a result of the restructuring of UK cities (MRG, 2008). In response, the municipal authority at the time looked towards events as a means to foster a sense of community pride in the town and to transform it into a place of entertainment, to enhance the tourism offer and to boost tourism receipts with minimum financial investment from the municipal authority. In response, the Bournemouth Tourism Management Board (BTMB), the towns Destination Management Organization (DMO), set out to establish a major event to attract tourists to the area and to serve as a catalyst for further patterns of visitation. Based on the individual experience of the incumbent Director of Tourism (and member of the BTMB), it was decided to consider an air festival. Further to evaluation visits by board members to the locations of other air festivals across the country, the BTMB concluded that an air show in Bournemouth would serve as a major spectacle to attract tourist numbers as ‘military and civil air shows in the UK remain second only to football in terms of spectator numbers’ (MRG, 2008). In addition, the natural topography of Poole Bay, incorporating Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, was the perfect setting for maximum viewing of aircraft flying along the edge of the 10 km stretch of the bay against the scenic backdrop of the English Channel. Over 1.3 million visitors attended the Air Show in 2009 with numbers increasing each successive year.

FINDINGS

Although representative of the varying sectors contributing to the destination, and consistent with the views of Hudson (2013), the BTMB sought the assistance of the local university and an outside consultant in its attempt to create a more collaborative and learning culture within which to build the events portfolio and provide a suitable bridge between the two communities of practice. After much deliberation and searching for internal and external funds to support the initiative, funding was eventually secured through a successful bid to the UK’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). Funding was awarded on a range of criteria with the close working relations between education institutions, government agencies and businesses and members of the BTMB noted as a particular strength (BTMB EG, 2012a). The bid was also viewed as innovative with its mix of knowledge creation and dissemination activities contributing to the development of a knowledge-based economy as recommended by Cooper and Sheldon (2010). Funding awarded through the HEIF fund allowed work to commence in early 2012 with the particular objectives of FAME to develop, and then market, a robust and innovative evaluation framework to underpin decision making in destinations and inform the development and testing of new event proposals. The project was expected to take 24 months to complete, with 12 months in which to undertake research, develop iterations of the framework, working alongside stakeholders and then marketing it as a commercial project after appropriate testing.

An external consultant was employed to facilitate the meetings with representation from the following sectors within the destination including: the local university and other educational establishments; the municipal tourism and events team; local government councillors with tourism portfolio responsibilities; two major venue managers; major dance company manager; members of BTMB; representative from local musical/cultural organization; hoteliers; attraction owners; town centre management board (retail); and the organization responsible for council-owned events venues. Four meetings took place (February 16, May 11, July 11 and October 15) whereby the external consultant facilitated discussion with the two representatives from the local university. Each meeting was held in a very cordial, constructive and professional manner with all participants committed to the future development of the destination, some acutely aware of previous attempts that for whatever reason had failed.

Meeting 1

The primary objective of the first meeting held on Thursday, February 16, 2012 was to 'gather the perspectives of the key stakeholders on this new process for developing major events, and to achieve agreement to the utilisation of the proposed model and its future application' (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.2.2.3). As evident below a variety of views were expressed in the early part of the meeting:

> *'A vision for Bournemouth and clarity on marketing approach, consider events within the context of the Marketing Mix/ how events fit with the vision for the destination/ can assist in realising the potential of the destination/ engender civic pride/ distinction between ticketed and free events/ and verification in events offer' (AD, Town Centre Management Board)*

> *'Looking at medium/large-scale events, rationale for getting events, need to ensure events are the right thing for the destination, events often committed to for the wrong reasons. Events can be run for the right reason, should work on the basis that everyone must go through FAME framework, events to draw people to the destination, air festival creating scenario of being a 'victim' of our own success' (JE, Attraction Venue Owner)*

> *'Should be looking to create a quality and richer (and not throw away) experience – also a framework for measuring impact for visitors and locals that can easily be shared' (JT, Conference Centre Manager)*

> *'Framework to ensure resources used to best possible outcome – the best return and benefit' (AM, Hotelier)*

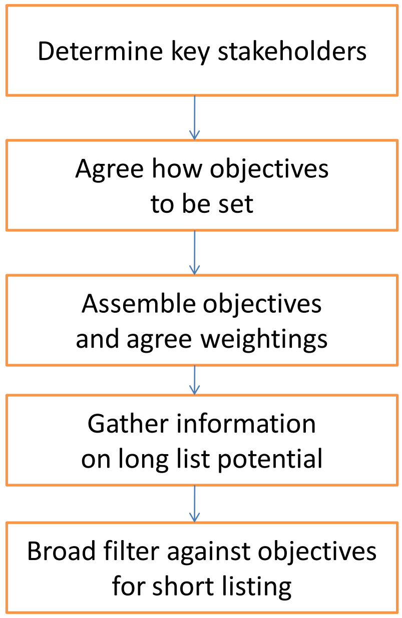
‘Understanding outcomes tourism versus social outcomes. It is often the secondary drivers that deliver the primary outcomes. Need a process that is systematic to encourage wider idea – scoping all sizes of events but does not preclude people from putting forward ideas/FAME should be a self-help checklist for event organisers to help them in their decision making’ (JW, Director of Events)

‘Everyone will have different events in mind, is it possible to get an agreement when all have different interests? Get a model that works for tourism but can have value for other stakeholders too and also useful for other destinations. Inevitably there will be the need for compromise, but hope can achieve consensus. Hoping it will be possible to realise the dream scenario for the destination’ (MS, Senior Destination Manager)

(BTMB EG, 2012a, pp.3-4.3.1).

The desired outcome from the first meeting was to validate the framework as a systematic, objective yet rigorous process (see Figure 1), to build a strategic festivals and events programme for the destination based on a ‘robust scoring matrix, and a performance measurement framework of a set of commonly identified outcomes’ (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.1.1). Furthermore, agreement was to be sought on how the objectives would be set; how to assemble and weight these objectives, how to gather information on a long list of potential events, how to then broad filter these potential events against objectives into a short list, to then run detailed assessments using the FAME model, and finally how to post evaluate against the original objectives. Ultimately, the development of ‘the assessment criteria will be aided through reference to existing strategic plans (vision and objectives), cross referencing of target markets and audiences, a consideration of the aspirations of key stakeholders (stakeholder mapping), and scanning the external competitor environment’ (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.5.4.9).

Figure 1: The Initial FAME Process



Source: Authors.

Underpinning such a framework was an understanding that the programme was to include events that have ‘as their primary driver stimulation of the visitor (or tourism) economy (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.1.2). Hence, although there was collective recognition that the framework could easily and justifiably be adapted to assess a range of other community, civic, cultural, educational and sporting agendas the sole focus for this particular framework was tourism. In order to ensure a common understanding among stakeholders, and to facilitate an evidence-based process, it was deemed critical to disseminate all relevant strategy, marketing and promotion documents to all stakeholders before the next meeting. Thereafter the framework would serve both strategic and competitive market positioning agendas. For the second meeting it was agreed that the key agenda item would be the identification and agreement of the criteria for assessment and to establish the type of events ‘that would best fit with the destination’s strategic product and market positioning objectives’ (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.2.1.6).

Meeting 2

Prior to the identification and agreement of the criteria for assessment to be included in the model, there was an introductory discussion at the second meeting on Wednesday 11 May, 2012 whereby all those present were in agreement as to the need for momentum to be built from the successful Air Festival and for it to serve as a catalyst for visitation to the resort other than the destination's primary asset of the beach. It was also agreed that "buy-in" from all stakeholders was critical with any outcome of FAME to be consistent with the ambitions of the wider destination strategy.

Thereafter, a "snow carding" exercise to brain storm the strategic objectives of the destination's festival and event offer took place. The technique allows all participants in the review or consultation process an equal voice, "parity of esteem", as each respondent records their own response by writing their points or ideas on a small card or "post-it" note before sharing these by posting these like falling snow on a surface for sorting and grouping by the participants in the exercise. Following this it was necessary to then decide the key criteria needed to assess the events. Each heading then had the individual ideas or components listed under the separate criteria, and these were the basis for the first iteration of the framework, namely: economic impact; market positioning; diversity of offer; capacity; financing; reputation; legacy and longevity; residents; visitor experience; sustainability. Many of these criteria could be valued numerically but others were more subjective and this is where additional research was conducted to review and synthesise additional documentation as a "sense check" as to what had been initially agreed upon. This included the sourcing of much documentation from the local municipality and researching other event venues to gain a subjective weighting mechanism for each separate category based on the needs of the principle stakeholders. In order to facilitate this, the town's Tourism Strategy 2011- 2020 was dissected with a key finding identified in that no obvious events strategy was included within.

At the close of the second meeting further actions included 'agreeing the draft festivals and events plan, endorsement of the draft plan by the BTMB and other relevant stakeholders (including the municipality), implementation programme of the plan (champions and owners), agree the review and evaluation framework and scorecard – the "success factors" going forward, and identify the process of the iterative review and refinement of the model (BTMB EG, 2012a, p.6.5.3).

Meeting 3

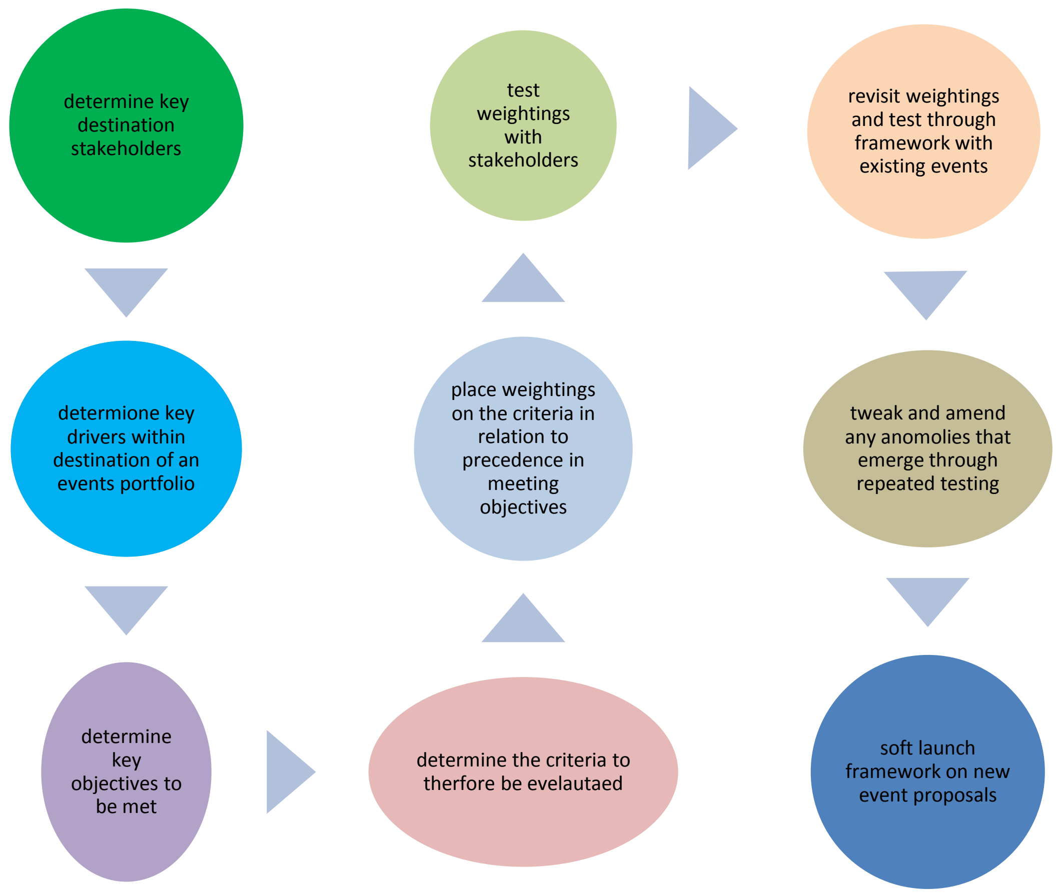
The third meeting was held on Wednesday, July 11, 2012 to agree the prioritisation of headings and weightings of the assessment criteria with the original stakeholders and seek confirmation of their commitment to the adoption of a strategic approach to the forward planning and creation of an event portfolio for the destination for a 3-5 year period and in turn, plotting out the process for drafting a strategic festivals and events programme 2014 to 2017 for the tourism department (BTMB EG, 2012b). Interestingly despite the promises of commitment to engage and take an active part in the exchange of knowledge consistent with the concept of the learning destination, no input (feedback) had been received since the second meeting to inform the agenda for this third meeting, this despite an obvious desire to commit to the ‘adoption of a strategic approach to the forward planning and creation of a portfolio of events for the next three to five year period’ (BTMB EG, 2012c, p.1.1). Although there was no resistance to what was being developed there was in existence a surprising reluctance to deeply engage with the process between meetings; this in turn limiting the true extent to which “learning” was taking place. Preoccupation with the “day job”. That said, the meeting served as an ideal opportunity to demonstrate the model with calibration of weightings possible with the agreement of the group. In response to the demonstration, further amendments were proposed with particular feedback at the meeting relating to cost recovery and the need to be sufficiently inclusive to accommodate aspirational events.

It was also clarified that the ambition was for the model to be applied in different destinations albeit under the understanding that ‘each destination will have a unique set of priorities based on their individual strategic objectives’ (BTMB EG, 2012c, p.2.1.4). There then followed an open discussion as to the future ownership (custodian) of the model. Although recognising the collaborative development of FAME, there was an acceptance that ultimately the ownership, or custodianship, of the model would need to be located somewhere. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was agreed that the most likely scenario would be ‘a process of formal approval of the Model’s use to be agreed by Council Committee, and at the same time identification of Bournemouth Tourism as acting as the custodian providing the stewardship role and also sign off of an agreed portfolio / programme of events’ (BTMB EG, 2012c, p.3.2.1). Although in many ways an obvious outcome, concerns were raised as to the pressure on the existing event team with resources universally accepted as “stretched”. In turn, although there was a high degree of trust with the role of Bournemouth Tourism as “custodian”, if events were truly to be of strategic significance to the development of the destination then resources of a commensurate level ought to be allocated accordingly. Comments were also raised as to the true nature of a learning destination if the local authority were to remain in its traditional “ownership” role while although integral to the development of the FAME process, there was agreement as to a future more proactive and weighty contribution from the BTMB Events Group.

Meeting 4

Although not planned at the outset, a fourth meeting took place on October 15th 2012 where the second iteration of the FAME model was demonstrated. One of the key outcomes was the request to classify many of the original criteria into one heading of deliverables but also asking the potential event organiser to sum up their event on the very first page of the application form to get a feel for their passion, knowledge and experience. After the meeting, the framework was then “tested” on a number of events where data existed of a compatible format to for the running of the model. This allowed for the testing of any anomalies or inconsistencies within the matrix of scoring. The framework needed a robust scoring matrix yet there was no “magic score” to pass, just areas that could be “red flagged” as concerns or areas that may need focusing on to meet council criteria. This also allowed for adjustments to the weightings and other variables. After the internal testing the model was presented directly to the local municipality and a smaller group of stakeholders, chosen for their involvement with the tourism marketing board who then suggested a few further minor amendments including simply asking what will be the visitor experience from this event. Subsequently, several smaller meetings then took place with the council events team to fine tune the final model as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Revised FAME Model.



Source: Authors

Upon completion of the final model, agreement was reached by all parties vis-à-vis "sign off" ready for application and implementation with Bournemouth Tourism with the BTMB Events Group confirmed as the custodians of the model followed by an agreement to formulate a 'communication and engagement strategy in relation to the new strategic approach and FAME model with stakeholders' (BTMB EG, 2012c, 6.5.1).

DISCUSSION

Although collaboration is very much the norm in the context of the management and marketing of tourist destinations, the ability and willingness to share knowledge appears less collaborative in nature with Cooper and Sheldon (2010, p.215) acknowledging tourism as being a late adopter of knowledge management. That being said, defined as an "inclusive, holistic and collaborative stakeholder entity that joins together in continuously shaping the future direction of destinations through the collective sharing of perspectives and knowledge for the greater good of the destination", the learning destination evidenced in this study is somewhat inconclusive, however, in relation to the actual extent to which all stakeholders truly are able and willing to adopt such a "learning" culture and move beyond the functionality of regular meetings and engagements into deeper, more sustained "learning" interactions other than the tourism council officials.

In the early stages of the study, there is strong supportive evidence of stakeholders recognizing the increasing impact of events in destinations and their acceptance that, and desire for, the need for the destination to "step up a gear" in taking the agenda forward, supporting Cooper and Sheldon (2010). That said, there remains a perceived, and possibly real, weakness with regard to the clarity of understanding of the destination's current and desired market positioning and the resources actually at the destination's disposal to fully meet the strategic events agenda. The question of resource "appropriateness" was aired regularly with the belief that even if a suitable framework was developed, resources would be insufficient to implement it fully. That being said, the overall participation and engagement with stakeholders throughout the process has been viewed in a positive light. If the concept of the "learning destination" is to become a reality, however, sustained engagement is critical (Gibson, 2006).

For the initial adoption and support of the project by the external stakeholders it was crucial to involve the external consultant to gain credibility for the project as suggested by Fincham (1999). His presence also prevented the project being dominated by the local municipality, which for some stakeholders was a concern, and deemed necessary to ensure impartial management of the framework; in turn ensuring that Healey's (2003) warning of power relationships being ignored did not occur here. Furthermore, the power relationships as considered by French and Raven (1959), whereby the local municipality events team had both the expert power as the event organisers/liaison team but also coercive power as they have the final say in those events that take place, became ever more noticeable as the process developed with them increasingly dominating much of the discussion. It was therefore necessary that all voices around the table, with their complex and sometimes conflicting requirements were considered in the spirit of a "learning destination". On occasions, this resulted in uncomfortable situations where the re-iteration of the rationale for the framework's construction was required.

Interestingly, a number of issues were raised that although not overly critical of the process conducted did in fact raise some valid points. The first relates to the potentially overly formal nature of the FAME model, a process that if too rigidly applied is likely to alienate some smaller and more innovative ideas for events. There was also a view expressed that the key to event success is often down to a ‘committed, driven and passionate individual’ with events ‘by committee rarely having the same success of longevity (BTMB EG, 2012b, p.3.2.1). As was clarified at the beginning of the first meeting, the framework will not, and was never intended to, give a definitive yes or no answer with no benchmark score to be reached in support of a decision. Rather, it provides a very useful indicator as to how best the proposed event meets with the ambitions for the destination as at the same time having the capability to highlight those areas in need of further attention. In this regard it will also satisfy the stakeholders as there are clear criteria set that have to be considered in order to meet their collective requirements and not just those of the local municipality. This is an important aspect of the framework to clarify as some of the stakeholders initially suggested a yes or no definitive answer.

Interestingly, many of the stakeholders involved in the first meeting disagreed with the view that there were no direct representatives of any local residents’ groups involved within the process of event planning. When this omission was mentioned it was a group decision that this was too complex an area to try and resolve because it was not clear which residents groups to refer to when the scope of an events portfolio covers every area of the town. It was thus decided that despite collaborative planning being one of the remits of the framework design, the very nature of it being for major events, it would be more suitable for local consultation once it had been designed and was ready to launch alongside the strategic events vision for the town; this would be the stage for public consultation. Maginn (2007) cautions this approach in his study of collaborative planning and suggests there are three underlying reasons as to why this community participation is resisted; namely issues pertaining to time, money and local politics. The latter was particularly noteworthy in this case as the perception was that conflict with residents in the early stages may delay the design phase. Since the framework is now ready, however, it is at this stage that collaboration will be possible as there is a tangible outcome to demonstrate. In the spirit of a learning destination, the views of local residents need to be considered in some form vis-à-vis the on-going discussions to afford true collaborative planning of the future events strategy for the destination.

Finally, where there was consensus was in all stakeholders agreeing that the rules of engagement of FAME need to show Bournemouth as a “yes” destination in terms of ‘being identified as a proactive and supportive destination for the staging and hosting of events’ (BTMB EG, 2012c, p.5.3.3), as proposed by Getz (2008), rather than one that is slow, conservative and reactive. In turn, it is critical to ensure that in whatever outcome is agreed upon there is consistency with the brand values and essence of the destination, and that they ‘amplify the tone of voice of the destination brand to project the proposition to key target markets and audiences’ (BTMB EG, 2012c, p.5.3.4).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper sought to introduce the concept of the “learning destination” as a vehicle to develop an inclusive and strategic approach to event planning that facilitates organizational learning and more effective decision making at the destination level. In the case context of Bournemouth in the UK, the strategic Framework for the Assessment of Major Events (FAME) was the outcome of a sustained period of destination “learning”. Defined for the purpose of this study as an “inclusive, holistic and collaborative stakeholder entity that joins together in continuously shaping the future direction of destinations through the collective sharing of perspectives and knowledge for the greater good of the destination”, the learning destination is in evidence in Bournemouth although one could, based on the findings presented, question the extent to which true collaboration, dissemination and application of knowledge have taken place.

Underpinning the extent to which a destination can realistically be claimed to be a “learning destination”, however, is the degree to which stakeholders with different perspectives and knowledge truly come together and collaboratively form a strategy. This co-existence of stakeholders is evident in the case context of Bournemouth with the long-standing social capital established over many years contributing to the willingness to come together and collaborate. The absence of residents as a salient stakeholder group also indicates a degree of “mistrust” as to what their actual involvement may produce. The need for an evidence-based process was clear although the lack of communication and feedback between meetings indicates a somewhat fragmented and superficial approach to “learning” in the case of Bournemouth with far deeper, sustained and committed engagement required throughout the learning process to be truly considered a learning destination. The fact that Bournemouth was bold enough to initiate such a process is evidence in itself in that it already is, or is seeking to be, a “proactive destination” in the context espoused by Campbell (2009) in that it has committed resources to develop knowledge for the purpose of competitive advantage through events. Sustaining such resources to fully implement the outcomes of “learning” is another matter, however, with large question marks hanging over the ability, and willingness, to fully fund the outcomes of FAME. This particular study also validates the role to be played by a neutral academic “bridge builder” consistent with the views of Hudson (2013). As mentioned in the studies conducted by Beesley (2004) and Cooper (2006), the neutrality of academics remains firm with their potential to facilitate the transfer of knowledge in the context of destinations a priority for the development of policy frameworks in the context of a knowledge-based economy.With regard to limitations of the study, there is clear need for future studies to move beyond a single destination case study and explore a range of comparative destination contexts, be they determined by scale, type or location. In addition, with this study focusing on the process of implementation of event evaluation frameworks, future studies are advised to cast a critical lens on the evaluation of the outcomes of the framework itself. It is also advised to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with all salient stakeholders as well as quantitative studies that examine the identification and measurement of the variables of “learning”. It is hoped that such studies would contribute to the development of a continuum of learning destinations and gauge their overall level of success as compared to non-learning destinations.

To conclude, the definition of a learning destination used in this study is highly laudable and, if administered properly, will serve as an effective vehicle to shape the future direction of destinations through the collective sharing of perspectives and knowledge for the greater good of the destination. That being said, as evident in the case of Bournemouth, to be truly beneficial and to be a true “learning” destination, evaluation frameworks such as FAME need to be implemented in a truly inclusive, integrated and collaborative manner for objective strategic decision making to be effective and for destination-wide interaction and engagement to exist; and more importantly to be sustained.

REFERENCES

AEA Consulting. 2006. *Thundering Hooves - Maintaining the Global Competitive Edge of Edinburgh’s Festivals.* AEA consulting: Edinburgh Scotland.

Andersson TD, Lundberg E. 2013. Commensurability and sustainability: triple impact assessments of a tourism event. *Tourism Management* **37**: 99-109.

Araujo L, Bramwell B. 2000. Stakeholder assessment and collaborative tourism planning. In Bramwell B, Lane B. (Eds), *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships: Politics, Practice and Sustainability* (No. 2). Channel View Publications: Clevedon, UK.

Beesley L. 2004. Multi-level complexity in the management of collaborative tourism research settings. In Cooper C, Arcodia C, Solnet D, Whitford M. (Eds), *Creating Tourism Knowledge: A Selection of Papers from CAUTHE 2004* (pp.20-36). Common Ground Publishing: Victoria, Australia.

Beeton S. 2005. The case study in tourism research: A multi-method case study approach. In Ritchie BW, Burns P, Palmer C. (Eds), *Tourism Research Methods: Integrating Theory with Practice* (pp.37-48). Oxford: CABI Publishing.

Boschma RA, Lambooy JG. 2002. Knowledge, market structure and economic coordination: dynamics of industrial districts. *Growth and Change* **33**(3): 291-311.

Bowdin G, Allen J, Harris R, McDonnell I, O'Toole W. 2012. *Events Management*. Oxon, UK, Routledge.

BTMB EG. 2012a. Meeting notes, Thursday 16 February 2012. Bournemouth Tourism Management Board Events Group, Bournemouth, UK.

BTMB EG. 2012b. Meeting notes, Wednesday 2 May 2012. Bournemouth Tourism Management Board Events Group, Bournemouth, UK.

BTMB EG. 2012c. Meeting Notes, Wednesday 11 July 2012. Bournemouth Tourism Management Board Events Group, Bournemouth, UK.

Butler R. 1980. The concept of a tourism area cycle of evolution: implications for management of resources. *Canadian Geographer* **24**(18): 5-12.

Campbell T. 2009. Learning cities: knowledge, capacity and competitiveness. *Habitat International* **33**(2): 195-201.

Carlsen J, Getz D, Soutar G. 2001. Event evaluation research. *Event Management* **6**(4): 247-257.

Cherubini S, Iasevoli G. 2006. Stakeholders event evaluation: Notte Bianca Case Study. Universita Ca' Foscari, Venezia, 20-21 Gennaio.

Collins A, Jones C, Munday M. 2009. Assessing the environmental impacts of mega sporting events: two options? *Tourism Management* **30**(6): 828-837.

Cooper C. 2006. Knowledge management and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* **33**(1): 47-64.

Cooper C, Sheldon P. 2010. Knowledge management in tourism: from databases to learning destinations. In Pearce D, Butler R. (Eds), *Tourism Research: A 20:20 Vision.* Goodfellow Publishers Limited: Oxford, UK, pp. 215-227.

Della Lucia M. 2013. Economic performance measurement systems for event planning and investment decision making. *Tourism Management* **34**: 91-100.

Dredge D. 2006. Policy networks and the local organization of tourism. *Tourism Management* **27**: 269-280.

Event Scotland 2014. http://www.eventscotland.org/scotland-the-perfect-stage/the-national-events-strategy/ (accessed, May 2014).

Fincham R. 1999. The consultant-client relationship: Critical perspectives on the management of organizational change. *Journal of Management Studies* **36**(3): 335-351.

French JRP, Raven B. 1959. The bases of social power. In Cartwright D, Zander A. (Eds), Group dynamics. New York: Harper and Row.

Getz D. 2008. Event tourism: definition, evolution and research. *Tourism Management* **29**: 403-428.

Gibson L. 2006*. Learning destinations: the complexity of tourism development.* Unpublished dissertation Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden.

Healey P. 2003. Collaborative planning in perspective. *Planning Theory* 2(2): 101-122.

Hudson S. 2013. Knowledge exchange: A destination perspective. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management* 2: 129-131.

https://www.med.govt.nz/majorevents (2014). https://www.med.govt.nz/majorevents/pdf-library/nz-major-events/strategy-documents/ME-strategy.pdf (accessed June 2014).

Jamal TB, Getz D. 1996. Does strategy planning pay? lessons for destinations from corporate planning experience. *Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research* **2**(1): 59-78.

Jago L, Shaw K, Robin N. 1998. Special events: a conceptual and definitional framework. *Festival Management and Event Tourism* **5**(1-2): 21-32.

Jarman D, Theodoraki E. 2011. Strategic Analysis of the Edinburgh FCTT: A Framework for Research. *Economia della Cultura 4*, dicembre, pp. 441-454.

Long PE, Morpeth N. 2012. Critiquing creativity in tourism. In Smith M, Richards G. (Eds), *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Tourism*, London: Routledge.

Maginn P. 2007. Towards more effective community participation in urban regeneration: the potential of collaborative planning and applied ethnography. *Qualitative Research* **7**(1): 24-43.

Malmberg A, Power D. 2005. (How) do (firms in) clusters create knowledge? *Industry and Innovation* **12**(4): 409-431.

Maskell P. 2001. Knowledge creation and diffusion in geographic clusters. *International Journal of Innovation Management* **5**(2): 213-237.

Mills BM, Rosentraub MS. 2013. Hosting mega-events: a guide to the evaluation of development effects in integrated metropolitan regions. *Tourism Management* **34**: 238-246.

MRG. 2008. Town Centre Master Vision, evaluation of the effect of an evening event in the town on business levels and customer perceptions. Bournemouth University, Bournemouth UK.

O'Sullivan D, Pickernell D, Senyard J. 2009. Public sector evaluation of festivals and special events. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* **1**(1): 19-36.

Schianetz K, Kavanagh L, Lockington D. 2007. The learning tourism destination: the potential of a learning organization approach for improving the sustainability of tourism destinations. *Tourism Management* **28**: 1485-1496.

Senge PM. 1990. *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization.* New York: Currency Doubleday.

Sherwood P. 2007. A *triple bottom line evaluation of the impact of special events: the development of indicators.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Victoria University, Melbourne.

Sherwood P, Jago L, Deery M. 2004. Sustainability reporting: an application for the evaluation of special events. In Cooper C, Arcodia C, Solnet D, Whitford, M. (Eds). paper presented to Annual Council of Australian Tourism and Hospitality Educators' Conference, Brisbane.

Stokes R. 2008. Tourism strategy making: insights to the events tourism domain. *Tourism Management* **29**: 252-262.

Sustrip (2012), "Event Impacts Model".

http://www.sustainabletourismresearch.eu/documents/sustainable-tourism/events-impact-model/ [accessed October 14th, 2013].

Tribe J. 1997. The indiscipline of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* **24**(3), 638-657.

Wood E. 2009. An impact evaluation framework: local government community festivals. *Event Management* **12**: 1-17.

Yin RK. 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Second Edition)*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.