Events in the public and third sectors

The private sector has been the focus of the majority of event management textbooks, dominating the literature with discussions of profitability and revenue management. In this chapter, we will explore events in the public and third sectors, both of which are increasingly using events in order to achieve their social, political and cultural aims.

11.3 The public sector

The public sector refers to those organisations that are either in the direct control of government at the national, regional or local levels, or receive their core funding from public finances. This sector, despite being encouraged to be more businesslike, is fundamentally different from the private sector when it comes to managing events in one major respect: accountability is to local citizens and the electorate rather than shareholders and/or investors (Wood 2009). The main impacts of this are in terms of how public sector organisations justify their involvement in events management and in how the events themselves are evaluated. Although it is tempting to suggest that public sector events will differ fundamentally from events in other sectors in terms of their content and design, recent moves towards greater private and third sector involvement in what have traditionally been areas of public sector monopoly – such as health, education and welfare – have blurred these distinctions.

CASE STUDY 11.1

The role of governments in the events industry

Event name: Scotland: The Perfect Stage
Event category: various
Venue and location: across Scotland
Date: year round
Website: http://www.eventscotland.org/

Event Scotland is the national events agency for Scotland, set up in 2003 to strengthen and promote the country’s events industry. It promotes and supports an international and national programme of events, and can supply funding to events and event organisations to help them grow and develop. The agency is funded by the Scottish Parliament, and aims to produce an eight-to-one return on investment by 2020.

In 2009, Event Scotland launched ‘Scotland: The Perfect Stage’, a national event strategy for the country. This had a visionary mission statement:

Our 2020 vision for Scotland: Scotland established as the perfect stage for events.

Our mission to deliver this vision: To develop a portfolio for events that delivers impacts and international profile for Scotland.

(Event Scotland 2009: 1)
The fundamental test of whether the public sector should be involved in events, and whether their involvement has been constructive, is based on the ‘public good’ argument (Getz 2007). This asks whether the contribution of government to an event will produce benefits for society as a whole or for targeted groups within it. This argument can be tested in the pre-event and post-event phases by asking the following three questions:

1. Does the event fit into the accepted policy domain of government?
2. Are the public benefits significant and inclusive?
3. Is the event managed sustainably in economic, social and environmental terms?

These relatively simple questions often demand complex responses, and local authorities, government agencies and other public bodies sometimes need to recruit external consultants to answer them. For example, in order to develop an events strategy to promote tourism and inward investment, the city of Birmingham in the English Midlands commissioned an external consultancy – Festival and Events International – to develop a strategic framework for events in the city and partnerships with other regional and local bodies. This took four months and involved a national and international benchmarking exercise to establish the extent to which the city’s plans to get more involved in events were in the best interests of the public (FEI 2011). In some cases, government-supported events can have negative impacts, such as when the economic failure of the World Student Games in Sheffield in 1991 led to an increase in local taxation (Raj et al. 2009).

CASE STUDY 11.2

The relationship of the public sector to the Roskilde Festival

Event name: Roskilde Festival
Event category: cultural
Venue and location: Roskilde, Denmark
Date: every June/July for five days
Attendance: 80,000
Sponsors: Tuborg
Website: http://www.roskilde-festival.dk/uk/

The Roskilde Festival was established in 1971 as an annual festival of rock music on the outskirts of Copenhagen, Denmark. Since then, it has grown into one of the largest annual rock events in Europe. Every year, the festival attracts up to 80,000 visitors, and it is responsible for 20–25 per cent of annual tourism receipts in the Roskilde region.

In 2010, the headline acts were Prince, Gorillaz, Muse and the Prodigy. There are six performance areas in the festival. The smallest, tented space has a capacity of 2000 and the largest, the ‘Orange Stage’, has a capacity of 90,000. There is
an eighty-hectare campsite attached to the festival. A peculiarity of the event is the ‘naked run’ that takes place every year, in which festival-goers run naked around the boundaries of the site, with one male and one female winner receiving tickets to the following year’s event.

The festival is produced by the Roskilde Charitable Foundation, a not-for-profit company with just six full-time employees, but which recruits around 20,000 volunteers to produce the festival each year. Any financial surplus generated by the event is channelled back into cultural and sporting facilities in the region. Since 1992, this has totalled €27 million. Because of the foundation’s charitable status, it is not liable for many state taxes and it does not pay sales tax.

The festival generates its own revenues from ticket sales and sponsorship, but it is involved in a number of partnerships with the public sector in areas such as tourism and economic development. The local authority is responsible for licensing the event and for providing policing and transport services. A local university which has developed a specialism in events management now provides training for event staff in crowd control every year, and the regional tourist board has developed a collaborative ticketing arrangement where festival attendees can receive discounted rates in local accommodation and other regional attractions. In 2001, the Roskilde county and municipal councils awarded a €1.5-million grant for the development of ‘Musicon Valley’, a Silicon Valley-inspired music and technology development, with the aim of building on the success of the festival. This now contains ‘Rock City’, an entertainment, education and cultural tourism destination.

Sources: Bærenholdt and Haldrup 2006; Hjalager 2009; Roskilde Festival 2011

**Study activity**

Read through Case Study 11.2. In what ways does the public sector support the Roskilde Festival? Make a list of the reasons why you think the public sector offers this support. Is such support in the best interests of the public?

### 11.4 Events in the public sector

Governments can use events to gain control of specific agendas in the public eye, build support for policies and programmes, and deliver on specific policy objectives. National governments take responsibility for major international and political events, occasions of state and national celebrations (Allen *et al.* 2008). Local government has responsibility for place-making,
11.4.2.4 Social/community implications of public sector events

Many events are produced or supported by the public sector because of the positive impacts that they may have in such areas as community cohesion, social inclusion, local pride and identity. However, events can also have negative social impacts (as set out in Chapter 14), and these can lead to both financial problems for governments and reputational problems with political implications.

11.4.3 Public sector event financing

Governments around the world are becoming commissioners of services from the private and third sectors, meaning that they increasingly commission specialist event producers to deliver their events. This is in line with the more strategic marketing orientation in local government that was identified by Pugh and Wood (2004) when they looked at local authority events. These developments form part of a changing public sector paradigm in which government is seen as enabling and facilitating, rather than directly delivering the full range of public services.

CASE STUDY 11.3

Private companies delivering public sector events

Event name: NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement Alumni Conference
Event category: public sector event
Venue and location: Excel, London, UK
Audience: 1200 delegates
Website: http://www.worldevents.com/index.shtml

This one-day conference was held in 2006 to celebrate fifty years of management training schemes in the National Health Service, the UK’s publicly funded healthcare system. It had the dual role of bringing together professionals from within the NHS and promoting the NHS to a media and stakeholder audience.

The NHS commissioned a private sector event management company – World Events – to produce and manage this event. World Events provides international events management services, producing hundreds of events each year for both private and public sector clients:

World Events is an international event agency. Founded in 1986, the company has 130 full time staff and a further 100 trained staff who work with us on a part time basis. Offices are located in Europe, USA and Asia with a revenue in excess of €46.7m/£39.8m/$57.7m. World Events is ranked in the top ten event management agencies in Europe and has won numerous industry awards for the work it has conducted for its clients.

(World Events 2011)
11.5 The third sector

Between the private and public sectors, and often bridging the two in practical terms, is the third sector. Known historically as the ‘charitable’ or ‘voluntary’ sector (Shone and Parry 2010), when it comes to events management, contemporary third sector organisations often still contain a strong voluntary and/or charitable component, but they may act in entrepreneurial, businesslike ways that do not conform to older stereotypes of village fête committees and well-meaning volunteer organisations. Many third sector organisations channel public sector funding to the community level, delivering services in communities, and increasing numbers of them engage in forms of social enterprise – generating profitable business for socially sustainable ends. Such businesses have often evolved from charitable and voluntary groups that wished to avoid the constraints imposed by the regulation of charities and sought to develop a more...

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For this event, World Events’ role included:

- event design – developing a theme
- recruiting sponsors and exhibitors to help fund the conference
- marketing the event
- bookings using a bespoke web presence and online booking system
- sourcing keynote speakers and a facilitator
- operations management
- catering.

The event format involved keynote presentations, workshop sessions, debate and discussion. There was a significant use of technology during the event and it was produced to a very high standard in terms of decor and operations management. Delegate feedback was very good, with the following data recorded by World Events:

- 75 per cent got a good impression of the future vision
- 87 per cent more likely to take part in activity post-conference
- 83 per cent would use website to remain informed
- 80 per cent found the event useful and enjoyable.

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Study activity

What are the benefits to the National Health Service of commissioning a private company to produce an event like the one outlined in Case Study 11.3? Do you think the public sector has the capability to produce outstanding events?
A fundraising event for a social enterprise

Event name: A Big Night Out with Jamie
Event category: third sector event
Venue: St Paul’s Cathedral, London
Date: 11 November 2010
Audience: 250-plus
Website: http://www.fifteen.net/abignightoutwithjamie/Pages/default.aspx

The Big Night Out with Jamie is an annual fundraising event for Fifteen – a social enterprise set up by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver:

It exists to inspire disadvantaged young people – homeless, unemployed, overcoming drug or alcohol problems – to believe that they can create for themselves great careers in the restaurant industry.

The Fifteen restaurants serve food of the highest quality made from the best ingredients: their kitchens are where the apprentices learn their trade, and their profits help fund the programme.

(Fifteen Foundation 2011)

The event was structured around a four-course meal designed by Jamie Oliver, but it also incorporated musical entertainment and a charity auction which raised £25,000. The total amount of money raised by this event was £200,000.

Reporting on the event, the Fifteen Foundation make use of testimonials from attendees to demonstrate its success:

What an amazing venue, I never thought in my lifetime I would stand next to Nelson’s tomb with a mojito in my hand. It was great to see the fantastic work done by the Fifteen Foundation. I loved the wheel of fortune game, even if Tash on our table won all the Golden Prizes and walked off with a Plasma TV and an Apple Mac! The Auction prizes were once again exciting and unique. All in all a fabulous night out. Thank you Fifteen!

(Julia Newnham, British Leisure)

You can rely on Jamie’s Big Night to be great fun. The food (as you’d expect) is always delicious and the entertainment is starry. It is a fabulous way for us to thank customers while at the same time raise money for a great cause.

(Tom Weldon, Penguin UK)
A radical political event

Event name: Mutiny
Event type: political event
Venue: Resistance Gallery, London, UK
Audience: 200
Website: http://jointhemutiny.wordpress.com/about/

Mutiny events are radical political gatherings that take place on a bi-monthly basis at the Resistance Gallery in Bethnal Green, London. They have been developed and are produced by a non-hierarchical, loosely affiliated group of individuals and are open at the planning stage to anyone who wants to contribute or become involved in the event to join the group. The aim of the Mutiny events is to create new ways for people to engage with the political situation in the UK and worldwide by bringing together journalists, performers, academics, poets, artists and musicians in events that mix entertainment and debate with very high levels of audience participation. They are examples of a new generation of political events that have emerged across the world as young people, in particular, move away from mainstream forms of political engagement and create forms of political practice that make greater use of creativity, participation and activism in their design.

We want to change the world. We want to see an end to the carbon economy, to the global dominance of the American military complex and sweatshops abroad and call centres in the UK. At the same time we want to spend an evening with friends, enjoying a drink and the spectacle of alternative films and documentaries, performances and poetry, comedy and art installations.

(Mutiny 2011)

The content of each Mutiny event is themed by discussion on topics that have included money, love, the media, fashion and education. The format changes for each event, but will typically involve a panel discussion, individual speakers, musical performances, exhibition of art, and a great deal of audience interaction and debate. In addition, Mutiny events make use of social media, including Twitter and Facebook, to involve people who are unable to attend in person and to collect feedback throughout the night from the audience.