FESTIVALS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A case study of Hadoti region, Rajasthan

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Introduction

Festivals work as blood for our culture and heritage. Janiskee (1980, pp. 96–104) clarified that festivals and events can be comprehended as ‘formal periods or projects of pleasurable movements, stimulation or festivals having a festive character and openly commending some idea, event or truth’. However, in the era of digitalization and modernization, the new generation appears to have limited or no interest in engaging in the traditional, local and small festivals, either as participants or audience. This is despite the fact that in a country like India, festivals have their own importance to educate people about our culture, traditions, values and beliefs. Certainly, the festivals of different states have diverse importance. This chapter aims to focus on the festivals and fairs of the Hadoti region of Rajasthan state. The state of Rajasthan is located in the northwestern part of the subcontinent. The state has an area of 132,140 square miles. The Great Indian Desert, also known as Thar Desert, is located in the west of Rajasthan. Hadoti region is located in the southeast of the state. The best season to visit Rajasthan and Hadoti region is from July to December. The Hadoti region is quite rich in culture and heritage tourism. Being on a research project searching for opportunities for tourism in the last two years, I have carried out fieldwork in some of the festivals and fairs with the objective of gathering information and records, such as photographic resources and other information related to the organisation and management of these festivals and fairs. Hence, my fieldwork gave me an opportunity to directly observe these festivals. Through the fieldwork observations, I found that the essence of tourism success and suitability lies in the festivals, fairs and events of this region. The music, songs, dance forms, costumes, jewellery, food and language are unequalled by any other place in the state. The festivals are so overpowering that no matter from where the tourists come, what are their language preferences, etc., the rhythm, sounds and environment will never fail to impress them. However, in spite of immense potential of festival tourism, the region is not benefiting from the potential advantages of and support for showcasing the hidden and unexplored festivals to the community at large. The aim of this research is to investigate in more depth issues related to festivals and tourism in Hadoti region of Rajasthan.
The specific objectives of this study focused upon:

- Whether inevitable festival growth and promotion contribute to community empowerment in the region.
- How to identify challenges faced by local people and festival organizers.

The chapter also aimed to examine the festivals as an important tourism product for economic development.

**Literature review**

Waitt (2003) states that arranging/managing tourism in a way that is suitable to personal satisfaction and values results in socioculturally sustainable tourism. Sustainability in tourism expects hosts to be strongly positive towards improvements, to upgrade the visitors’ involvement and add to the place attraction quality. Schuster (2001) has contended that festivals yield financial advantages by raising the profile of places, their items and establishments and pulling in streams of visitors, capital and internal speculation. For some western urban communities, a key inspiration in creating festivals has been to recover from long-term monetary decay. Festivals and occasions have been only one piece of a more extensive range of new ‘social procedures’ (Fox Gotham 2005a) used to revitalise traditional economies (Zukin 1995) where relaxation, diversion and tourism support an ‘encounter economy’ (Pine & Gilmore 1999).

In terms of financial effects, as Formica (1998) confirms, festival profiles, sponsorship, management and estimating economic drift portrayal are the fundamental subjects. Moscardo (2007) attests that the current tourism research on festivals and occasions is centered on four fundamental themes including financial effects, assessing and improving advertising and administration quality, the administration of festivals with a specific focus on showcasing their potential benefits and evaluating the more extensive festival impacts as experienced by local residents and communities. Concerns about the huge dominating effect of monetary issues have led to a concentration of research on mega-scale festivals (Gibson, Willming & Holdnak 2003). However, local and more parochial festivals can likewise produce positive financial effects. Experimental investigations of assorted local and parochial festivals, for example, the Creoli Christmas Festival, New Orleans (Chacko & Schaffer 1993); the Carbondale Mountain Fair, Arizona (Long & Perdue 1990); the Umbria Jazz celebration, Italy (Formica & Uysal 1996); and the stone music celebration in Loch Lomond, Scotland (Senior & Danson 1998), demonstrate the potential positive impacts.

However, it is good to know that local festivals and events are now being recognized as a tool and source for enhancing and promoting regional identity and development. One of the major reasons behind this acceptance of the local festivals and events is the inadequate income sources in the rural areas in comparison to metro cities (Felsenstein & Fleischer 2003; Jackson, Houghton, Russell & Triandos 2005). In context of the present research, the local festivals can work as a backbone not only for income but also for the development and reimagining of a region. Events can make a positive representation for the local community and give a healthy marketing benefit in the context of alike communities (Allen, O’Toole, McDonnell & Harris 2002). The important part here is to consider that we need ample resources and investments for promoting local festivals. Making huge investments and developing extra facilities are not always necessary to market an event (Bailey 1998 cited in Smith &
Anukrati Sharma

Forest 2006; Law 1993 cited in Smith & Forest 2006). The community involvement, belief in their culture and values itself are sufficient to promote the local festivals and events. The merger of festivals and events with tourism can certainly bring many benefits to the society at large. Numerous regions consider festivals to be extremely significant components of the tourism product (Jackson et al. 2005; McMorland & Mactaggart 2007), and festivals are one of the best tourism products which a region can offer to differentiate it from its competitors.

Research methodology

For the present study, both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, and primary and secondary data have been collected. The reason to adopt longitudinal data in this research is to enhance the authenticity of the study as many researchers are of the opinion that longitudinal data are superior to cross-sectional data for calculating growth (Singer & Willett 2003). The study used mixed methods. The primary data were collected through a questionnaire, key informant interviews and focus groups, and the secondary data were collected through relevant published studies in libraries and search engines.

The questionnaire was designed to include both closed and open-ended questions, and covered topics such as demographics, socioeconomic information, the benefit flow from festivals, challenges faced by local festival organizers and suggestion for improvements. In all, 50 respondents completed the questionnaire. Focus group discussions were held with groups comprising 5–10 respondents. The focus groups were used to collect in-depth information from festival artists, festival organizers and local people. Issues which were discussed included benefits realized from festivals in the area, barriers to accessing benefits from festivals and suggestions to increase benefits from festivals. Interviews were conducted with various festival stakeholders such as festival organizers, festival artists, tourism entrepreneurs and local communities. These stakeholders were considered to be important due to their extensive local knowledge, experience, expertise and their involvement with the festivals in the study area in question. A total of five interviews were carried out. Finally, visits to some festival-related places in the study area were conducted with the intention of observing and interacting with the stakeholders. The visits also enabled the researchers to personally view various socioeconomic activities and also provided better understanding of what happens on the ground in relation to festivals investment and benefits flow.

Background

Festivals of Hadoti

There are many festivals in the Hadoti region, but no complete synopsis of all offered festivals exists, especially of the small local festivals. The region comprises four districts, namely Kota, Bundi, Baran and Jhalawar. The interesting thing about this region is that all the districts have different festivals. The region offers an amalgamation of big and small festivals. Guided and planned tours, exhibitions and shows are also organized during these festivals. These festivals also perform the role of educating and spreading knowledge about the cultural, heritage and religious beliefs in the area.

The best-known festival in Kota, in the Hadoti region, is the Dusshera Festival, which is also known as National Dusshera Festival. The other important and famous festivals and fairs of the region are Kajali Teej of Bundi, also known as the Bundi Utsav Karthik Fair, and the Chandrabhaga Fair. Festivals like the Dol Fair of Baran, Nahan Fair of Sangod (near Kota) and
the Tribal Fair of Sitabari and Ramleela of Patunda (Baran) are of great importance in terms of local community engagement, but they are quite neglected by the tourists as well as by the Government. Results from this study suggest that the local artists who are actually presenting the culture and maintaining the intangible heritage through organizing these festivals and fairs are facing many problems. As a representative of the aforesaid neglected festivals, the Ramleela festival of Patunda village will be used as an example in the chapter.

**Uniqueness of Ramleela at Patunda village**

Dramatic presentations of the epic Ramyana are known as Ramleela. In India, this type of Ramleela, as of Patunda village in Rajasthan, is rare to find (Goel 2017). There are a few other examples of this type of festival in Uttarakhand and Rohtak, Haryana. Patunda is a small village with a population of 2,566 people located on the banks of Kali Sindh River. This village is setting a different way to protect our culture and to pay respect to our epics through the medium of Ramleela. The artists who perform the Ramleela are from every age group, from 10 to 82 years old. The artists of Ramleela are teachers, students and farmers. In total, 30 artists perform the entire drama. The festival treasurer noted, ‘They are not facing major problem related to funds but still they need support for their survival’. The costumes for the artists cost approximately 30,000–40,000 INR (US$463–617). Other than this, they need to expand money in buying the curtains, etc. for creating the scenes for the drama. However, through discussions with the organizer and other artists, it has been demonstrated that small and local festivals are facing a major problem in relation to lack of interest among the public in coming and watching the activities of the occasions/festivals and dramas. One of the respondents even said, ‘Television serials and movies are replacing the charm of local festivals and dramas’.

The Ramleela at this village has been running for the last 150 years. Many unique factors make this festival different from other Ramleela events in the state and outside the state. While all the other Ramleela festivals are celebrated when Lord Ram won over Ravan, this dramatic presentation at Patunda celebrates the birthday of Lord Ram, i.e. Ramnavmi. The artists who perform in the play are the local people – they are not the trained professional actors and singers. In fact, most of them are farmers. Male artists also play the characters of females. This is because females in the village areas are still not free to dance and sing in public places.

The features and origin of this Ramleela are distinct, but the place where it is organized is also unusual. It is not performed on a stage, but rather in an 11th-century old temple of Lord Laxmi Narayan. To make it even more interesting, and according to the epic, three processions are performed. The first is on the opening day of the Ramleela, the second celebrates the marriage procession of Lord Ram and the final one focuses on the death of the evil character Ravan.

**Discussion**

While surveying the impact of the festival as a tourism or pecuniary advancement tool, the standard approach is to create some type of impact assessment. On many occasions, this includes assessing a total measure of earnings and business change owing to the festival. Constantly, the outcomes are often great and are then used to reinforce requests for financial help for the festival. However, by and large, such assessments rely on local multiplier estimates without explaining how this converts into local financial benefits (Gazel & Schwer 1997;
Festivals have an enormous impact on tourism. According to Deco and Balogu (2002), tourism can protect the surroundings and local heritage in a way that would not be possible if mega occasions were not organized. Festivals represent a key that is able to open access; thus, they represent solutions to resolve a variety of broader social issues and support in achieving many hidden benefits. Furthermore, festivals offer an opportunity to empower women – as noted previously, women are relatively limited in terms of what they are allowed to do and how they are allowed to behave in public. Festivals can provide an occasion where social issues can be brought to light and where existing barriers to women’s participation in society can be broken down. It is essential to empower women through festivals in order to unravel these social issues, or in other words, to remove these barriers.

Festivals and economic development

Festivals are becoming a popular destination marketing tool for certain destinations. The reason behind this is probably because the festivals not only create an image of the tourist destination but also develop new avenues of income. According to Getz (1997), the utilization of local festivals has achieved increased impetus in recent decades as a source for tourism development. It could be traditional, cultural or religious festivals, or it could be a new ‘made-up’ festival. Boo and Busser (2006) investigated the contribution of festivals in changing destination image and call for longitudinal research on this inquiry. The purpose behind organizing these festivals is to attract visitors to the destination. Festivals can be easily accepted as a promotional tool as festivals enhance demand for domestic tourism. Festivals that have been well organized are helpful in the reimagining of a place. For a region like Hadoti, where tourism is in the developing stage, a key question is whether potential exists for economic growth, destination marketing and reimagining through festivals? As Pugh and Wood (2004) stress, there is a need to embrace a better way to deal with festivals in order to take full advantage of what is possible for the host economy/group.

Festivals often catch the attention of social organizations, politicians, businesses and tourism stakeholders. The recognition that the festival contributes economically to the destination makes it easier for the organizers to get financial support from the public to conduct activities during the festival. Prevalent celebrations held, for example, in Edinburgh, Salzburg and Glyndebourne are considerably more than just social occasions. Changes in both the delivery and marketing activity for festivals have brought about monetary impacts that frequently overshadow the festivals’ social messages (Frey 1994).

An immensely effective growth indicator of festivals has been their successful outcomes in relation to delivering satisfaction to visitors, economic gains, increased number of tourists and reimagining of place as festival tourist destinations.

Marketing and information technology strategies for promoting festivals

In essence, seeking ways to strengthen discourse and exchange between the local community, place, society, culture and tourist/visitor are core concerns in relation to developing a marketing strategy and using information technology to promote festivals. Falassi (1987) characterizes festivals as an occasion, a social wonder, experienced in practically all human societies. The bright assortment and sensational intensity of their dynamic choreography and stylish perspectives, the indications of profound meaning underlying them, their authentic roots and the contribution of the locals have attracted the attention of casual visitors and have...
Festivals for tourism development

don'ted in explorers and men of letters alike. Government, and the private players who are engaged in organizing festivals, need to develop a strategy to enhance a mutually beneficial plan for local community development and tourist recreation. It is, therefore, important to focus upon 'how can we plan and promote festivals so they efficiently able to attract more visitors/tourist?'

Waitt (2003) notes that good planning and administration as well as personal satisfaction for attendees and equitable results are all fundamental for sustainable tourism. Waitt (2003) identifies a range of ways in which festivals can best promote themselves and contribute to sustainable tourism. These include creating official web pages for all festivals; using content marketing for promotion; maximizing promotion through social networks and sites, including Twitter, Facebook, etc.; providing platforms for local people to discuss and present their ideas for organizing festivals; creating opportunities to solicit feedback and suggestions from visitors at festivals; and developing courses on events and event management in universities and other educational institutions.

During these festivals and fairs, a series of activities are organized, such as guided tours, exhibitions, conferences, shows, theater and workshops. One of the aims of educational and leisure activities is to spread knowledge about the history and cultural heritage of towns and cities. Therefore, there is a willingness to reach a varied audience, spreading knowledge through educational, fun and festive activities. A key element is the set of reenactment activities that provide visitors with the opportunity to relive history. These representations are presented by theater groups and historical reenactment groups. The former stage theatrical representations, while the latter are more educational and base their representations on historical and archaeological research. These strategies needed to be highlighted in the promotion of festivals in the Hadoti region. Many of the existing festivals and fairs, in spite of having immense potential, are not well recognized by the tourism and events industry. The stakeholders of the tourism, events and education industries need to understand the importance of festivals. Merely assuming that festivals are a source of entertainment will not work. Festivals are the milestones that showcase the real heritage and culture of a place. Moreover, educational institutions and universities can promote these festivals by encouraging the students to participate and perform in the festivals at state, national and international levels.

Conclusion

The local festivals of Hadoti region are naturally instrumental in enhancing local tourism and in making a major contribution to the economy. Festivals are a key strategy in promoting those places that have suffered from underinvestment and have been essentially abandoned. Tourism, event and hospitality industry stakeholders and local officials need to view local festivals as crucial activities for providing income and business opportunities, especially for the local people who are suffering from economic scarcity. Festivals are not merely a medium of entertainment in the Hadoti region; they have an important social function and provide economic development resources. This chapter suggests that the local festivals of Hadoti have both social and economic impacts. However, there are some important lessons to be learned. Focused training on marketing and promotion strategies is needed. Additionally, government support is needed in order to allow local festival organisers to conduct well-planned and well-operated festivals. Finally, amenities should be provided to the attendees, visitors and tourists at the place of festival.

Respondents in this study believe strongly that the Ramleela that they perform in their village can play a vital role in enhancing the number of tourists in the region. The event offers
an opportunity to showcase the talents of local people, plus the event itself can become an important tourist attraction as long as they received large-scale support. The respondents felt that as well as creating the identity of their place and strengthening their efforts to bring their culture back, their version of the Ramleela is unique and different. It was felt that not only Patunda village or the Hadoti region could benefit but that the whole state could benefit.

It is important to have a positive outlook towards these types of festivities organized by local people. Government, private companies and other stakeholders should recognize that by supporting these hidden talents, the events like the Ramleela of Patunda can sustain in long run. Respondents felt that if Government can support their efforts, then more tourists would come to see the festival, thus contributing more in the long term. However, youngsters also have to take a step forward to support such events. For that to happen, creating awareness is very much needed. In order to be successful, other stakeholders also have to get involved. For example, other stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry could arrange food stalls with the local recipes to promote food tourism. Information technology, which can spread information about the unique features of these festivals, could also be harnessed to improve marketing efforts. In particular, to promote local festivals, stakeholders may use social media marketing and virtual tours of the festivals. Festivals, especially local festivals in India, are starting to be recognized as significant resources for regional growth. Festivals are important elements of tourism product at the regional level. Surely, the way we develop these festivals will lead to future growth of tourism not only at the regional level but also at the national and international levels. Indeed, study and evaluation of the social, cultural, emotional and economic impacts of these festivals is badly needed. Local festivals in this region have much to offer both locals and visitors, but further work is required to ensure both a satisfactory visitor experience and a positive outcome for host communities.

References

Festivals for tourism development


