

Management and Evaluation of Leisure Services and Products

La gestion et revaluation des services et produits de loisirs

The Role of Municipalities in Developing Festivals and Special Events in Ontario

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INTRODUCTION

The number of community-based festivals and special events are growing rapidly in Canada and they are an increasingly important part of the leisure service delivery system in both large and small communities (Wilson and Udall, 1982; Chick, 1983; Getz and Frisby, 1988). There has been growing interest in festivals and special events from a number of perspectives including: the sociological perspective (e.g. Van Esterik, 1982; Manning, 1983; Tomlinson, 1986), the social psychological perspective (e.g. MacCannell, 1976; Pearce, 1982), the community development perspective (e.g. Getz, 1984), and the tourism perspective (e.g. Richie, 1984; Mitchell and Wall, 1986). However, little research has been done on festivals and special events from a management perspective. Most of this literature in this area provides useful practical information but is not research-based (e.g. Wilson and Udall, 1982; Tourism Canada, undated; Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, undated).

The development of a research-based management approach could address, among other issues, strategies for ensuring the long term survival of these events so that they can maximize their various contributions. Getz and Frisby (1988) and Frisby and Getz (1989) have looked at related questions such as assessing the managerial effectiveness of volunteer-based festivals and determining how the transition toward managerial sophistication or professionalism is related to the stage of organizational growth.

A particularly interesting feature of festival and special event management which warrants further investigation, is the role that municipalities, and in particular parks and recreation departments, play in the development of these events. The goals of festivals and special events are often multifaceted and may include: to generate revenue for participating community groups and the community at large; to increase tourism in the host community; to foster an appreciation of the arts, heritage, and multiculturalism; to create leisure opportunities for visitors; to create a positive community image; and to encourage local leadership and community development. These goals often compliment

the mandates of various municipal departments. However, based on discussions with festivals organizers at the 1989 Canadian Association of Festivals and Events Annual Conference, festivals and special events are often run independently or receive very limited support from municipal governments.

Because festival and special event organizers face a number of problems such as generating sufficient resources, recruiting and retaining volunteers, and obtaining suitable facilities, many events have difficulty surviving from year to year (Getz and Frisby, 1988; Frisby and Getz, 1989). Therefore, municipalities are increasingly being called upon to provide support to festivals and special events so that their mutual goals may be realized. However, careful consideration has not been given to a number of ensuing issues. For example, how does involvement in festivals and special events contribute to the mandates of parks and recreation and other municipal departments, what types of festivals and special events should be supported, what types of support should be provided, where will this support come from, how should municipal involvement in festivals and special events be evaluated, and at what point should organizers be encouraged to become self sufficient?

The purpose of this study was to examine the above questions by surveying municipalities to determine the role that they are currently playing in the development and management of festivals and special events in the province of Ontario.

METHOD

For the purpose of this study, festivals were defined as annually recurring public celebrations of limited duration (e.g. multicultural festivals, music festivals, heritage festivals, seasonal festivals) while special events were defined as major one-time events or programmes involving activities, entertainment, or culture (e.g. Canada Day, Special Olympics, major sports tournaments).

The survey was developed with financial assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation through the Wintario Development Programme. It was sent to Parks/Recreation and Economic Development officials in all Ontario municipalities listed in the 1989 Municipal Directory (n = 975) with instructions that it was to be filled out by the person(s) most involved with festivals and special events.

Respondents were asked generally about festivals and special events in their communities and about the specific ones in which their municipality is involved. Information was solicited regarding types of involvement, policies, staffing, budgeting, promotion, benefits sought, and problem areas. The survey had been previously circulated to Ministry of Tourism and Recreation officials, members of Festivals Ontario, and members of the Canadian Association of Festivals and Events for feedback on the survey design and contents.

The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics provided by the SPSS-X computer programme. In addition, crosstabulations were done to determine if there was a difference in response depending on the size of the municipality.

RESULTS

Of the surveys sent to Ontario municipalities, 350 were returned (35.9% response rate). A follow-up telephone survey revealed that many of those who did not respond were from small communities which are not currently involved in festivals and special events. This is a good response rate considering the fact that counties and regions were covered

as well as local municipalities.

The results revealed that there is little consistency across the province regarding the roles that municipalities are playing in the development and management of festivals and special events. Of those municipalities which are involved, there is a wide variety in: the types of municipal departments involved, the positions and background of staff responsible, the types of duties they perform, and the types of support provided.

When asked to indicate the most important reasons for assisting festivals and special events, the most frequent responses by the municipalities were that these events: contribute to community pride, increase tourism and economic growth, create favourable public relations, bring people together, provide recreation and entertainment, and provide a service to public organizations.

However, over 90% of the respondents indicated that their municipality provide less than \$10,000 in grant money to festivals and special events, and the majority (58%) do not operate any of these events on their own. Furthermore, most of the municipalities (81.5%) did not have policies related to festival and special event involvement which makes it difficult for them to decide which events to sponsor.

When asked to identify the most serious problems that limit their involvement in the development of festivals and events, respondents listed the following areas: limited resources, a lack of volunteers, difficulties in coordinating large numbers of community groups, unpredictable weather, and competition from other events. As might be expected given the lack of policies, few municipalities have established procedures for evaluating the success of festivals and special events that they do support.

The most common methods of support provided were: facilities (81.5%), finances (75.6%), staff (66.3%), clean-up (60.8%), equipment (56.6%), and promotions (55.6%). Respondents indicated that they need more financial support, more staff, more volunteers, and more training in order to assist festival and special event organizers more effectively.

There was a fairly close split regarding the question of whether or not all festivals and special events should become self-sufficient. The majority of the respondents (51.4%) felt that self-sufficiency should occur in order to reduce the tax burden. However, 42.9% of the respondents felt that this is not a realistic goal because the events are too expensive for community groups to develop, consistency is needed through municipal involvement, and the events benefit the entire community.

DISCUSSION

While municipal respondents indicated that there are a number of important reasons why municipalities should be involved in the development of festivals

and special events, very few are currently providing support. To help ensure the long term survival of these events and to maximize their various contributions, municipalities need to give careful consideration as to how the goals of festivals and special events match their mandates. Support can then be provided in a number of ways such as: creating departments or units to deal specifically with festivals and special events; providing trained staff to act as facilitators; designing fair policies regarding how support will be allocated; budgeting sufficient fiscal support; including these events in promotional strategies, and supplying assistance in the areas of facilities, space, equipment, crowd control, and clean up.

As the number of festivals and special events are continuing to grow to meet the demand for this type of activity, municipalities must critically examine their role in development of these events.

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