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A Broader Perspective in Lampedusa

February 13, 2018



By involving local communities you can create a concrete legacy for host destinations. Whether it be business events or association congresses, strategic results can be achieved for everyone, the organiser, the attendees and local stakeholders.

The impact meetings have on host destinations and local communities is much wider than people imagine. Things like knowledge or skills transfer, sharing of scientific and healthcare advancements with local professionals, empowering young people or women in developing countries, and involving future political leaders, are all important legacies far beyond economic and touristic values. It is about how events change the real lives in a community.

Nowadays the meeting industry's broader value is becoming more and more understood. The most important industry associations are engaged in promoting this value, and professional congress organisers and associations are definitely on the frontline of this process. But, why should they deploy resources on a legacy programme?

Strategic approach

Planning an event with a broader vision for positive legacies on a local destination is not only a good practice for CSR and for moral reasons but it can produce significant outcomes for associations. It helps them attract and retain members, build brand reputation and promote accountability of the meetings industry to society. It also helps create a meaningful bond between delegates, boost team spirit and make conferences more engaging.

To realise the right legacy projects with the most concrete and useful impacts, it is important to have a strategic approach, identify clear objectives and plan the actions well in advance. Choosing initiatives tailored to the core activities and topics of the conference can foster the

engagement of participants and sponsors, while it's advisable to interact with local people and stakeholders in order to understand the local social issues.

With those premises, the possible actions are numerous.

You can, for example, involve participants in construction/renovation projects, as happened at a national conference of real estate agents, where the attendees had the chance to participate in a volunteer program of building three new homes for families in need. Or at a national congress of respiratory and pulmonary medicine, where, due to the relationship between respiratory health and air quality, it was decided to plant all the trees used for the decoration in a park. This was a concrete contribution of these specialists to the city's air quality. Also, during an international conference dedicated to Alzheimer disease, a sensory garden was built by local patients and after the event it was relocated as a community garden in a derelict area.

Of course the contribution of a conference is related to knowledge-sharing with the local community. For example, at a European congress of paediatric physicians local parents had the opportunity to discuss child-health issues with world-class specialists, during an open conference.

Another type of legacy is the economic support to local social projects by corporate donations or fundraising among delegates (e.g. gala dinner auctions or a fun run). In this case, it's important to carefully handle the choice of the recipient, and preferably working in close partnership with the destination stakeholders who know local needs and non-profit organisations.

A deep dive into reality

A good example of what can be done in terms of legacy is the SIAARTI Academy 2017, the innovative and efficient training event for the young members of the Italian Society for Anaesthesia, Analgesia, Resuscitation and Intensive Care – recently awarded at Bea World Award and IAPCO Collaboration Awards.

Together with PCO AIM Group, SIAARTI decided the small island of Lampedusa, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, was the most appropriate venue for the Academy. Once known as an ideal holiday destination, Lampedusa has become famous as the backdrop for migrant boat landings and major socio-sanitary challenges. The island is well acquainted with human suffering and known for its ability to handle emergencies.

Organising an event on such an island enabled some local facilities and companies – such as the airport, hotels, restaurants and transfer companies – to be revaluated and to successfully adapt to the needs of the meeting industry. AIM Group hoped to prove that Lampedusa was capable of hosting business events and educational activities, creating an important legacy in terms of the destination's reputation. Furthermore, the event was held just before the opening of the tourist season, providing an additional economic profit to local operators.

In fact, the island welcomed 100 medical residents from 38 postgraduate schools to attend plenary sessions, lectures for smaller groups and hands-on sessions with experts and stations with up-to-date simulators. A remarkable highlight of the congress was a maxi simulation.

Organised in collaboration with the Coast Guard and the Military Corps of the Italian Red Cross, the sinking of a boat was simulated and field hospitals were situated on the beach.

The specialists had to play different roles, such as the wounded (with realistic make-up), rescuers (doctors and nurses) and observers, in order to test their ability to put into practice what they had learned and to move from abstract clinical practice to empathy of a real-life situation. The new format mixing team building, hands-on and theoretical sessions, and the legacy in the destination was the perfect solution to effectively involve young doctors and to get the island's operators ready to welcome new events.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Patrizia Semprebene Buongiorno, Vice President, AIM Group International. IAPCO represents today 118 companies comprised of over 5,000 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 41 countries. info@iapco.org / www.iapco.org

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