

Inclusive Events and People with Disabilities (PWDs)

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ABSTRACT: Events are important in tourism as they can enhance the attraction of tourist destinations and enrich the experiences of tourists. Additionally, hosting events such as cultural celebrations and arts festivals can generate a positive impact, revitalise traditions and culture; enhance national pride; and develop a sense of belonging. In the context of tourism field, much research has shown there are some efforts to include people with disabilities (PWDs) into the society by encouraging social tourism and accessible tourism. However, in event management, there are limited studies which focus on the topics of inclusive events and PWDs especially in the context of Malaysia. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to explore on event managers perspective pertaining inclusive events and PWDs. This paper will emphasis at the possibilities for event managers to organise inclusive events. It will also focus on event managers' awareness towards PWDs as their potential attendees. Apart from that, it is also aimed at assessing the impending barriers for the event managers in their intention to manage an inclusive event.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Events, People with Disabilities, Social Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Social inclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs) has been an important issues in recent years (Polu, Mong, & Nelson, 2015). It is an issue that has been made as forefront agendas for most countries around the world. After the adoption of social model of disability, many action have been taken especially in education field whereby many special education school for the disabled had been abolished in the effort to move towards encouraging inclusive education (Boer, 2012). It is believed that special education led to a segregation of students with special education needs, which indicates a violation of students' right to be educated with typically developing peers (Fisher, Roach, & Frey, 2002). In the context of tourism field, much research has shown there are some efforts to include PWDs into the society by encouraging social tourism (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015; Medarić, 2016; Minnaert, Maitland, & Miller, 2011) and accessible tourism (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy, 2010; Darcy &

Pegg, 2011). In the area of event management, there is a call for research on inclusive practices in the industry and therefore this study is to explore on inclusive events and event managers perspective pertaining to PWDs. The main aim is to look at the possibilities for event managers to organise an inclusive event. It will also be focusing on event managers' awareness towards people with disabilities as their potential market segment. Apart from that, it is also aimed at assessing the impending barriers for the event managers in their intention to manage an inclusive event.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Festival and the event industry are growing and have been a potential market for the host destination. Events are seen as an important motivator of tourism especially to draw people to regions that traditionally have a seasonal tourist appeal (Janeczko, Mules, & Ritchie, 2002), and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2008a). This is valid as the

demand for events have increased and has become an important “boosterism” (where events are used to “boost” visitor numbers and appeal) for many countries that searching for competitive advantage (Getz, 2008a). At present, many destinations use events as one of their major tourism attractions and it has become one of the fastest growing segments of the travel market (Getz, 2008b; Getz & Page, 2016).

As for Malaysia, our event industry has become a phenomenon of importance and has grown rapidly since the mid-nineties (Bouchon, Kashif Hussain, & Konar, 2015). Malaysia state government, public and private sectors, non-governmental bodies and local community group plays an important role in organizing events, in order to enhance local and tourists experiences (Ayob, 2003). According to Mahdzar, Othman & Hanafiah (2010), Malaysian government is looking at the event industry as an impetus to upgrade tourism development in the country. The success of Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) program which was first introduced in 1990 has put Malaysia in the eye of the world. Since then, Malaysia has been constantly organizing various events in conjunction with the VMY programs. For instance, in 2007 which was Malaysia’s 50th Independence Anniversary, all 13 states of Malaysia participated VMY program in the same year where over 200 events were organized with 50 major events showcasing Malaysia’s tourism products (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2014). In addition, Malaysia is also seeking the same opportunity and our government has continuously provided support to promote events. This is apparent as Malaysia was hosting Southeast Asian Games in 2017 and showing interest to host Commonwealth Games in 2022.

However, as the number of events being organized are increasing, so as the number of disabled people that need special attention and social assistance (Darcy, 2012; Misener & Darcy, 2014). In the past years, issues about PWDs and their rights to be included in the society has been increasing tremendously (Darcy, 2012; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). In fact over the past century, in different countries,

people from differing minority groups (e.g. people with disabilities, people from different ethnic backgrounds) have been treated in different ways, regrettably in troubling and abusive manners (Kinetics, 2010). Sadly, PWDs are being marginalized from the society and benefits from any activities that the events brings (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005; Misener & Darcy, 2014). A study by Kadir, Jamaludin, & Rahim (2012) also indicated that some of the major social factors that contributes to the exclusion of PWDs from social and economic mainstream are inaccessible environment. Hence, it is a critical issue for any country as PWDs are also is part us in the community.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN MALAYSIA

People with disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia can be considered as one of the most vulnerable of the minority group in the Malaysian population (Kamaruddin, 2007). Based on Islam (2015) the disabled people in Malaysia are excluded from the main stream development and their socio-economic conditions are poor. The population of the disabled people is growing tremendously all over the world. In fact, according to World Health Organisations (WHO, 2015), about 15% of the global population or over 1 billion of people live with disabilities. Due to the huge numbers of PWDs in the world, this emerging groups has drawn the attention of many countries as a potential labour resources that can contribute to the countries productivity. This means that approximately one billion persons around the world are already, or will become, persons with disabilities. Additionally, the World Report on Disability also estimates that 3.8% of the world's population, around 195 million persons, have significant disabilities and the number is increasing every year. This is supported by Islam (2015) where his study implied that the number of PWDs is expected to increase due to population ageing, rapid increase of chronic diseases and improvements in methodologies used to measure disability.

Meanwhile, according to the Statistic of Malaysian Demographic 2017 by Department of Information (Jabatan Penerangan Negara), the

estimate population of Malaysia in 2017 recorded a total number of 32,049,700 people. Among the huge number of population, only 420,201 (as at 31 March 2017) are registered as PWD at Malaysia Social Welfare Department (Malaysia Statistic Department, 2017). Hence, if 15% of the population live with disabilities, it means that there should be approximately 4.8 million of disabled people in Malaysia at present. As the registration is voluntary, it is not reflective of the real numbers of the PWD in the country. The number of registered PWD could be bigger because the registration is on voluntary basis. As compare to the population of Malaysia, it shows that many of the PWDs are not yet register to the Welfare Department. There are various forms of open discussion on the equal rights and the quality lifestyle of the people with disabilities in Malaysia (Islam, 2015). Their opinions are often excluded from the decisions that affect their welfare and livelihood. Most important thing is that a large number of disabled people are socially excluded in Malaysia and they are now out of the main development stream.

Inclusive events which is also be referred as accessible or barrier-free events are events that lower the environmental barriers to participation (Saito, 2006). This was based on the social constructions model of disability. Where the concept of accessible design or barrier-free design focusing more on buildings and architecture, inclusive events aiming at lowering barriers at events so that the events are accessible for all disregards their physical condition. However, there are limited studies on inclusive events (Darcy, 2012), where until recently, most studies on events were focusing more on the characteristics and event types (Getz, 2007, 2008a; Getz, Svensson, & Gunnervall, 2012), the impacts of events (Carlsen, Robertson, & Ali-Knight, 2007; Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012; Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Janeczko et al., 2002; Teigland, 1996; Wood, 2005), motivation and behaviour (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kong, 2015; Pegg & Patterson, 2010; Yang, Gu, & Cen, 2011), and last but not least, the area of event marketing

(A.-M. Hede & Kellett, 2011; A. Hede, 2011; Jayswal, 2008; Trošt, Klarić, & Ružić, 2012).

As for Malaysia there are studies being conducted on PWDs but mostly on the area of transport and building accessibility (Abdul Rahim & Abd. Samad, 2010; Anuar, Wan Nawawi, Khalid, & Musa, 2015; Kadir & Jamaludin, 2012; Kadir et al., 2012), job employment (Salehuddin et al., 2010; Yeo, 2010) and inclusive education (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001; Jelas, 2010; Khoo et al., 2009). Based on previous study, PWDs in Malaysia can be considered as one of the most vulnerable of the minority group in the Malaysian population (Jayasooria, 1999; Jayasooria, Krishnan, & Ooi, 1997; Kamaruddin, 2007). Being vulnerable and minority, and increasing in number, the Malaysian government has put the issues of disability and social inclusion as one of the agenda since the 9th Malaysian Plan until now.

The inclusion of PWDs in the community activities can be the first step to include them into the society. In Malaysia, as mentioned in previous discussion, we have been organising many events, from local to international events. This will be a good platform to include PWDs to be included and be able to attend the events. In this scenario, the person who are responsible in planning and hosting these events would be the event managers. By organising inclusive events, it will provide as a platform to encourage PWDs to participate and hence increase their sense of belonging into the society.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As mentioned, social inclusion of PWDs are seen as crucial for most countries. The inclusion of PWDs in the society has been important issues in recent years (Davis, 2013; Parasuram, 2006; Shields, Synott, & Barr, 2012; van Pletzen, Booyens, & Lorenzo, 2014; Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, & Curfs, 2009; Wilken, 1992). Social inclusion means ensuring that people with disabilities have full and fair access to activities, social roles and relationships directly alongside non-disabled citizens (Bates & Davis, 2004). According to Diekmann & McCabe (2011) based on the

European Commission report, others have to assist PWDs in order to make them be accepted, integrated and socially included in society. Since events offers a decent social benefits such as fostering the social interactions among communities which helped towards community wellbeing, strengthening a sense of community and belonging (Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2011), it will be a huge contributions from the industry to the society especially to people with disabilities if the event they conducted are inclusive events. Social inclusion might be an outcome of festival involvement and attendance, but as yet, little research has been conducted to explore how this might occur through the efforts of festival organizers (Laing & Mair, 2015). Although there is a deficiency in the industry on how they can support the government and help the community through organising inclusive event, as concurred by Darcy (2012), the challenge is to work in collaboration between academics and the industry to document, understand, and develop theoretical approaches to place the event industry at the forefront of inclusive practices. A study conducted by Clarke and Jepson (2011), identified the importance of understanding how event organizers themselves frame community, as this framing tends to be influential in terms of the accrual of benefits from the event, thus encouraging social inclusion. Therefore, the insights of event managers pertaining to inclusive events are important in the effort to promote events as a tool for social inclusion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above discussion, there are some questions that need to be answered pertaining to inclusive events. For instance, what is an inclusive event? The other important element that the study need to look at is from the perspective of the event managers as the organizer of the event. How do event managers perceive inclusive events? Do event managers responsive towards PWDs when they intend to organize an event? If yes, to what extend they are trying to lower the access barrier of their events? What factors that encourage and

discourage event managers to adopt inclusive events practices in managing events?

CONCLUSION

A study on inclusive events and PWDs need to be conducted in Malaysia especially as we are moving towards developing country. If real progress is to be made in achieving social inclusion and better lives for the PWDs, both perception of PWDs and the policy must change. Event managers as one of the main stakeholder will be able to make changes concerning PWDs and social inclusion. It is important to acknowledge that everyone has the rights to be included and be part of the community and organizing inclusive events will assist to kick start in the direction to improve community bonding and sense of belonging.

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