

EVENT AND BUSINESS TOURISM IN BALNEÁRIO CAMBORIÚ-BRAZIL: EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS THE IMPLANTATION OF AN EVENTS CENTER IN THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in the town of Balneário Camboriú - state of Santa Catarina (SC), Brazil - is still focused mainly on its beaches. However, the business and event industry has been proving to be strategic especially due to its capacity of minimizing seasonality effects and not depending on natural or cultural attractions. In this scenario, this study investigated the perspectives that representatives from the tourism industry, civil construction area and real estate business have towards the expansion and consolidation of this segment in Balneário Camboriú, given the construction of an Events Center in the town. An exploratory-descriptive research with a qualitative approach was carried out, and data was collected through a questionnaire with closed-ended questions distributed into four interview rounds conducted in October/2015. Results showed that the undertaking may inject new dynamics into the town, with the construction of one of the most modern and well-equipped venues for hosting major events in Brazil.

Keywords: Event and business tourism. Civil construction. Real estate business. Balneário Camboriú Events Center.

INTRODUCTION

For the past years, tourism has been proving to be a very important activity for the development of countries and regions, corresponding to practically 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating over 276 million jobs, including direct, indirect and inducted activities with which the industry is involved (Wtte, 2015). In Brazil, tourism is responsible for 9,6% of the national GDP, generating a total contribution of 8,8 million jobs (Wtte, 2015b).

In the state of Santa Catarina, this industry has been growing over recent years, namely during summer seasons. According to data published by Abrasel SC (2016), there was an increase in the number of tourists in Santa Catarina during the summer of 2016 in comparison to the same period in 2015. Because of the dollar appreciation, the number of foreign tourists that visit the state has increased - mostly Argentinians, whose economy is currently more stable, but also Brazilians who have chosen to go on national trips instead of international ones.

Balneário Camboriú is in seventh place among the Brazilian destinations most visited by foreign tourists (Mtur, 2014). Located on the north coast of Santa Catarina, the town has a fixed population of 128,155 inhabitants and is 46,23km² large. Moreover, Balneário Camboriú has one of the highest per capita income measures in the country, and its economy's main sectors are tourism and civil construction (Ibge, 2015).

With the implantation of a new Events Center in the town, in addition to the beach-oriented tourism influx that takes place chiefly during summer season, a significant growth in the business and event areas is expected. This segment is able to generate both economic and social benefits for entrepreneurs, promoters, local businesses, restaurants, hotels, among other professionals directly or indirectly involved. With an annual growth of approximately 12%, this market outperforms the tourism industry as a whole (Coutinho & Coutinho, 2007).

The venue will comprise an urbanized area of 33,582,54m², including a parking lot, besides the central building with conference rooms, food court and access to the Santur Zoo Park. The architecture project includes a structure for twenty-eight modular rooms with capacity for up to three thousand people. It was developed based on sustainability principles, intending to utilize natural light, use equipment that reduce energy consumption and maximize natural ventilation (Sinduscon, 2015).

Within this context, the research investigates the perspectives that representatives from the tourism industry, civil construction area and real estate business have towards the expansion and consolidation of the event and business segment in the town, exploring the existing tourism potential. Not only is this segment able to minimize seasonality effects (Donaire et al., 2009), it also handles billions of reals in Brazil (Mtur, 2010).

EVENT AND BUSINESS TOURISM

Business tourism is represented by a group of tourism activities derived from meetings with institutional, associative or professional interests, and such meetings might be commercial, promotional, technical, scientific or social (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2002; Canton, 2009). As stated by Beni (2001), events create tourism influx, since they are essentially tourism attractions as well. Urbanized cities are the most sought-after destinations for this kind of tourism due to the wide array of venues and attractions that they offer, which meet the business tourist's expectations (Hunt & Crompton, 2008).

The business tourism market involves many actors in the supply/demand relation and its intermediaries. The demand sphere includes individual clients, companies, associations and other entities such as the public or private sector. Intermediaries are actually represented by specialized intermediaries such as business travel agents, companies organizing congresses, companies organizing fairs/exhibits,

companies promoting events, incentive travel reward agencies, convention and visitors' bureaus and destination management companies. The supply area comprises transportation companies, venues for hosting business events, accommodation establishments, food and drink companies, services specialized in audiovisual resources and communication/information technology, as well as entertainment and tourism attractions that involve structured products and/or tourism resources (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Event tourism, in turn, is considered a tourism segment that leads to many benefits to local tourism as a whole, because it encourages investment and improvement, besides generating jobs and currency (Dias, 2003). One of its positive aspects is that it does not depend on seasonality, since events can result in huge economic transformation due to the tourism activity that it generates (Coutinho & Coutinho, 2007). Event tourism is an activity that benefits many areas both economically and socially, such as entrepreneurs, promoters, local commerce, restaurants, hotels and many professionals involved with this market both directly and indirectly (Batista & Pinto, 2007). It is considered a tourism segment responsible for several kinds of events such as congresses, fairs, exhibits, symposiums, workshops, concerts, among others (Brito & Fontes, 2002).

This activity is now the most feasible alternative for diversifying the hotels' revenue sources, thus decreasing the damaging effects of tourism seasonality and strengthening the operational and strategic relationship with the hospitality business (Donaire et al., 2009; Batista & Pinto, 2007; Martin, 2003; Ignarra, 1999). In this context, events are considered tourism instruments with great attraction potential, capable of optimizing the use of tourism structures and stimulating environmental, political, sociocultural and economic aspects in a given region. This happens based on actions that are interconnected to the host country/cities, which makes destinations competitive and sustainability-oriented, since it activates the whole chain of activities related to tourism (Getz, 1997; Hoeller, 2002; Batista &

Pinto, 2007; Cooper et al., 2008; Page, 2009; Allen et al., 2010; Cook et al., 2010; Crosdales & Tomazzoni, 2010).

With proper planning for hosting events, cities may enhance their own image and receive a heavier influx of tourists (Tyler et al., 2001). Events may bolster economic returns for several segments of the community (de Luca Filho, 2004).

According to Ubrafe – in research carried out by Fipe (2013) – Institute for Economic Research –, the actors/agents involved with even tourism are the promoters, assembly and infrastructure companies, venues, exhibitors, visitors and other suppliers (de Luca Filho, 2014).

The search for events is done by the town's Convention & Visitors Bureau. In case the Bureau is associated with the ICCA, that data can be easily found. Afterward, the Bureau gets in touch with the association representative (city, state or country) in order to know if the regional office is interested (de Luca Filho, p. 146, 2014) (loosely translated).

With the world-wide expansion and development of event tourism, it is now known that large-scale events require a political decision. This happens due to the need for substantial investment in the construction and upgrade of airports and convention centers, as well as financial aid for the private sector (Britto & Fontes, 2002; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Magalhães et al., 2015). According to Oliveira (2002), public and private administrators must come together in favor of tourism development.

The choice of a location for hosting an event is influenced by a number of factors such as: venues for hosting the event, basic infrastructure - safety, political issues related to class entities promoting the events, government support, sanitation, access to and through the destination, visual signaling - prices, region image, features of the region's industry agglomeration, services offered in the destination – taxi drivers, public transportation, accommodation, food services, entertainment,

leisure, tourism attractions, cost, potential sponsorship, among others (de Luca Filho, 2014).

The construction of the Events Center in Balneário Camboriú should stimulate activity across the entire state. Thanks to a number of factors, Santa Catarina, as well as its entrepreneurs and workers in general, is most likely to keep standing out in the events scene - especially when it comes to small and medium-sized events in Brazil. Such factors include: public and private investment in highways, airports, event venues, professional training and new hotels; the existing synergy in tourism and event trade; qualification in event venues management and in service delivery; fundraising and qualification in attracting events to the town (de Luca Filho, p.09-10, 2014) (loosely translated).

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Balneário Camboriú is considered one of the greatest tourism hubs in southern Brazil and has recently ranked seventh place among the Brazilian destinations that foreign tourists most seek after according to the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism - Mtur/Fipe (2014). The town is also known as the state capital of tourism and is fondly referred to as "The Atlantic Wonder" for having a great number of attractions, leisure and shopping options, plus well-established gastronomy and hotels.

Its coast is composed of nine beaches. The central beach hosts a number of events, such as New Year's Eve and Christmas Lights Night ("Brilhos de Natal"), as well as artistic and sports presentations. Moreover, Balneário Camboriú has attractions such as the Christ Light monument ("Cristo Luz"), the Unipraias Park, shopping malls, ecotourism activities, extreme sports, etc. At the time of this research, there were a hundred and fifteen hotels in the town, which corresponds to about six thousand, eight hundred housing units.

As reported by Ibge (2015) - Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics -, the town has a fixed population of 128,155 inhabitants within mere 46,23km². It holds one of the highest per capita income measures in the country - R\$14,441 - and its economy's main sectors are tourism and civil construction. Balneário Camboriú has around two thousand high rises and is considered as a reference point in the national civil construction area thanks to its high quality finishing and design standards.

The real estate market in Balneário Camboriú draws people who intend to have better life quality. Therefore, the town aims at meeting the expectations of those who are searching for a good place to live and invest in. New projects, such as the construction of the Events Center, indicate that Balneário Camboriú will grow significantly in the years to come.

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The new tourism venue is already being built near the BR-101 freeway, on a land lot owned by Santur - Santa Catarina Tourism Company. The first construction stage will be carried out by construction company Salver Constructor and Incorporator. It encompasses the construction of the ground and upper floors, plus urbanization area and parking lot, which totals a 33,582,54m² built-up area. Besides the central building with conference rooms, food court and access to the Santur Zoo Park, the architecture project includes a structure for twenty-eight modular rooms with capacity for up to three thousand people (Sinduscon, 2015). Figure 1 presents the architecture project for the Events Center.

Figure 01 – Events Center architecture project.



Source: Prefeitura Municipal de Balneário Camboriú, 2015.

The undertaking is already causing reactions from both public and private sectors, which influences the construction chain directly, as well as the expansion of existing factories and the implantation of new ones, construction of shopping malls, reconstruction and expansion of health centers, public transportation (accessibility), among others.

The project was developed based on sustainability principles, intending to get maximum utilization of natural light, use equipment that reduce energy consumption, solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and devices that reduce water consumption and maximize natural ventilation.

METHOD

This research was carried out in Balneário Camboriú and utilized a qualitative approach. It may be classified as an exploratory-descriptive research (Dencker, 2003), since the objective was to investigate the perspectives that representatives from the tourism industry, civil construction industry and real estate business have

towards the expansion and consolidation of the event and business segment in the town. Later on, the research described their answers after using a questionnaire with closed-ended questions distributed into four interview rounds conducted in October/2015.

The main representatives from the sectors involved were invited for the interviews: the then president of Sinduscon - Balneário Camboriú Civil Construction Labor Union; the then director of the Balneário Camboriú Convention & Visitors Bureau; an employee from the Planning Department of the Tourism Secretariat; and a former deputy from the 11th Region CRECI - Regional Council of Real Estate Brokers, representing local real estate agents (real estate sector).

A research based on documental and bibliographic data was also conducted, which allowed structural analyses of the following central themes in this study: town tourism and event tourism at a regional level; the real estate business in Balneário Camboriú; and factors associated with the civil construction industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This stage presents the points of view of the main representatives from the tourism industry, civil construction and real estate business as to the implantation of the Events Center in Balneário Camboriú. At the end of this paper there is a general discussion concerning the highlighted points. Table 1 shows a summary on the main results of the interviews.

Table 01 – Interview results.

Research Questionnaire	Respondents			
	Civil Construction	Real Estate	Event and Business Tourism	Tourism Sector
1. What do you hope will improve with the construction of the Events Center in Balneário Camboriú regarding your work sector?	Greater demand from potential clients willing to purchase property in Balneário Camboriú	Hopes the hospitality business will increase the number of beds and improve service	Better service and seasonality break	Intensified influx of tourists during low season
2. Are there any negative aspects that might affect the local real estate market?	Does not believe so	Does not believe so	Does not Believe so	Does not believe so
3. As to urban infrastructure, which sectors do you think should be invested in initially?	Accessibility and safety	Accessibility, transportation and hospitality	Accessibility and safety	Accessibility and safety
4. With fast-paced civil construction work, do you believe that there will be property appreciation in the Events Center's surrounding areas?	Considers real estate speculation as a natural reflex	Property appreciation in the surrounding areas and neighborhoods will take place naturally	There will probably be real estate market appreciation	It will support the development of the town's outskirts
5. What are the advantages of investing in event tourism in Balneário Camboriú?	Bolstering tourism and intensifying potential demand	Seasonality break and greater demand from potential property buyers	Seasonality break	Larger expenditure on the event tourist's part in comparison to the leisure tourist, resulting in economic benefits and less seasonality
6. Event tourism generates direct and indirect jobs. How do you perceive this economic matrix for the town of Balneário Camboriú?	Does not see it as a new economic matrix, but as a propelling agent to the already existing tourism activity	It is an attraction that will result in great development and new opportunities for the town	Extremely positive, making the town much more competitive for attracting major events	Very positive and in alignment with the objectives from the National Plan for Tourism

Source: Research data, 2015

Tourism Sector

According to the interview conducted with the representative from the Planning and Research Department of the Balneário Camboriú Tourism Secretariat, the tourism sector believes that the construction of the new Events Center might increase the influx of tourists in the low season, thus intensifying hotel occupancy and maintaining existing jobs in the town. The sector also considers that there will not be any negative impacts on the local real estate market. On the contrary, the town will only benefit from this venture.

As to the urban infrastructure, the representative considers that investment priorities should be the transportation and accessibility sectors, followed by the health sector, commerce in general, hospitality, and lastly bars, restaurants and the like.

On the subject of property appreciation in the Events Center's surrounding areas, the tourism sector hopes that the Comprehensive Plan legislation is respected, as well as the environmental legislation, which would reduce the possibility of bigger problems in the future.

The representative from the Planning and Research Department of the Balneário Camboriú Tourism Secretariat also emphasizes that one of the most significant advantages of constructing the Events Center is the investment in event tourism, since the event tourist presents a higher average expenditure than the leisure tourist, which benefits the town economically. Another important factor mentioned is the possibility of events being held in the low season, which would reduce seasonality effects and support the development of the town's outskirts.

Event and Business Tourism Sector

The representative from the Balneário Camboriú Convention & Visitors Bureau states that the whole state of Santa Catarina will benefit from the new Events Center. According to her, "Our town is the next big thing. Because we didn't have this venue, we didn't have the chance to host big events, so many of them were hosted by other cities or even states. But now we can see new market opportunities".

The representative from the event and business tourism sector also affirms that the construction of the Events Center will break seasonality in the town. In addition, she foresees improvement in the quality of the existing services, since the town will probably receive more demanding tourists.

During her interview, no negative impacts on the local real estate business were mentioned, since this market is actually likely to be favored by the Events Center.

As to urban infrastructure, the representative considers that the investment priority must be initially accessibility and transportation, followed by the health sector. She does not consider the investment in the hospitality business or bars/restaurants sector relevant, since private companies could meet those needs. The representative also emphasizes that Balneário Camboriú has one of the highest numbers of beds available in the country and an expansive amount of restaurants and commercial establishments in comparison to other cities.

For the Convention Bureau representative, property appreciation in the Event Center's surrounding areas will probably occur and could be compared to what happened in the Itajaí Port's surrounding areas, since the consolidation or implantation of any new economic matrix affects its entire region.

As stated previously, she also claims that one of the main advantages of investing in event tourism is breaking seasonality. According to her, "A beach destination,

which is extremely seasonal, becomes even stronger if it's inserted into the events market", since this is a market that is active essentially from March through to November, Mondays to Thursdays.

For the event and business tourism sector, this new economic matrix is extremely positive, since a single event may activate up to 52 types of service providers. With its existing hospitality and gastronomic potential, Balneário Camboriú is likely to become competitive in the events market, thus generating direct and indirect jobs.

Civil Construction Industry Sector

The representative from Sinduscon - Balneário Camboriú Civil Construction Labor Union - stated that tourism has always been the town's main propelling agent. The other sectors of the economic chain depend on both tourism and civil construction, with 76% of the town's properties being sold to tourists. For the representative from the civil construction sector, there are no negative aspects that might impact the local real estate market, because as the tourism activity develops and qualifies, the civil construction sector will be more demanded, and properties will be more appreciated. The respondent also points out that the Events Center will interfere with property appreciation indirectly rather than directly, because as more tourists are drawn to the town, they will lead to a higher number of property sales.

For the civil construction sector, the appreciation of the Events Center's surrounding areas will occur as an expected consequence, since any undertaking of this sort increases real estate speculation naturally.

The representative from this sector also declares that, even though the town has several small events centers, it lacked an appropriate location for hosting major events. He mentions the importance of investing in event tourism so that other sectors can develop too. According to him, event and business tourism is now

virtually nonexistent in the town, so the Events Center will bring nothing but positive impacts.

The analysis of the current situation shows that the private sector needs to invest in new tourism attractions, since the last time Balneário Camboriú was granted a new one was 10 years ago, with Marina Tedesco .

The civil construction sector does not perceive the construction of the new Events Center as a new economic matrix, but as a propelling agent for the main matrix, which is tourism.

On the subject of infrastructure, the representative believes that the government should invest initially in accessibility and safety. Later on, the private sector will invest in other areas as a consequence.

It is necessary to create private investment opportunities in order to stimulate the tourism activity and consequentially draw investors into the town. Nevertheless, in order for companies to be interested in the town, there is a huge impasse concerning the government: the lack of financial incentive.

The respondent gave "accessibility" the highest grade, followed by "safety", as the primary areas to be invested in by the government.

Real Estate Business Sector

The representative from the real estate business sector also states that tourism is the main propelling agent in the town's economy. He talks about the importance of constructing the Events Center in Balneário Camboriú, yet he is quite concerned about the development of hotel chains so that the town can accommodate event participants.

This sector believes that attracting major events will increase the demand, and the hospitality structure will have to keep up with that growth. The representative also highlights that the town is able to meet the current demand for leisure tourism and

small events; nonetheless, when the Events Center starts hosting big events, the town must be ready to serve a new tourist profile besides the current one.

In the representative's opinion, there are no negative aspects that might impact the local real estate market, with the exception of the town's Comprehensive Plan situation. The legislation has not been altered for the past three years, which has led to a slight decline in this sector's economy. In spite of that, the respondent pointed out that, as the construction work develops, the market will regain its usual stability.

When questioned about which sectors should be invested in initially, he placed accessibility and transportation in first place, followed by hospitality and accommodation, health and commerce in general. On the other hand, the current infrastructure for bars, restaurants and akin was considered well-prepared to meet the potential demand. Concerning the civil construction area, the representative stated that as property appreciation in the Events Center's surrounding areas rises naturally, construction work will speed up. He expressed that, in order for that to happen in an organized, sustainable fashion, the town must prepare in all primary aspects related to sanitation, water supply and waste management.

For this sector, the greatest benefit from the construction of the Events Center is the decrease in tourism seasonality, since event participants will add value to the local economy during low season, increasing expenditure on accommodation, food and commerce in general.

The representative from the real estate business also mentions that the Events Center will be the town economy's "ace in the hole", that is, an extremely important attraction for generating direct and indirect jobs and providing new opportunities for the development of Balneário Camboriú.

General Discussion

Analyzing the interviews in general, it was observed that all participants consider the Events Center as an opportunity for stimulating the existing tourism activity in Balneário Camboriú, thus diminishing seasonality effects during low season.

However, the respondents diverge when it comes to determining which sectors from the local economy should be invested in and improved upon first, such as hospitality. For local real estate brokers, the local hospitality business is not prepared to meet the impending demand. On the other hand, the representative from the Balneário Camboriú Convention & Visitors Bureau does not consider this to be a relevant item, since she believes that the private sector will invest in that area. As for the transportation and accessibility aspect, all respondents share a common opinion, reporting that the town's infrastructure is one of the main points to be improved.

Concerning the emergence of a new economic matrix in the town, the representative from the Balneário Camboriú Civil Construction Labor Union diverges from the other participants by saying that the undertaking is not about a new economic matrix, but about bolstering the already existing tourism matrix, whereas the other respondents stated that the Events Center will indeed be a new economy matrix for the town.

In addition, all participants expressed positive perspectives regarding the implantation of the Events Center, which will generate direct and indirect jobs, intensify the demand from potential real estate buyers and encourage investment from the private sector even more.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The interviews with representatives from the tourism industry, civil construction area and real estate business as to the implantation of the Events Center in Balneário Camboriú indicate that the town's ability to prepare and organize the sectors involved with event and business tourism will complement the already existing demand for beach tourism. The proposal is to provide the venue with the necessary infrastructure so that it is able to host major events, but also include other attractions focused on entertainment, shopping, food, among others.

In this regard, market awareness, as well as awareness from the current politicians and administrators themselves, is of the utmost importance in order to generate innovation and planning, with the objective of keeping the influx of events going, maintaining quality in the facilities and good infrastructure not only in the neighboring areas, but in the town as a whole.

Among the results, it was possible to identify that investment in the real estate business is growing as a reflex of the construction of the Events Center, which many consider to be a new economic matrix. It was also clear that the transportation and accessibility sectors will call for more investment from the government in order to mitigate current deficiencies, which will require even further attention due to the heavier influx of tourists.

In short, it is possible to affirm that Balneário Camboriú is already a well-established, competitive tourism destination; however, the implantation of the Events Center may enhance its image and competitive edge even further, thus providing tourists with one more reason to visit the town at times of the year other than summer. Dwellers, in turn, may get the opportunity of improving their life quality with more job and income possibilities throughout the entire year.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this new tourism facility may also help the state of Santa Catarina itself and draw even more attention to the tourism activity in the town of Balneário Camboriú, placing it as one of the most well-prepared destinations for hosting major national and international events in the country.

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