

## EQUIPMENT FOR EVENTS IN BONITO/MS AND THE ROLE OF THE CONVENTION BUREAU

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### ABSTRACT

In a strategic attempt whose main goal is to increase the number of tourists during the low season, the Convention Bureau, in partnership with the public authorities, play a fundamental role in the development of activities that support securing and realizing events that induce tourist flow. The present work had the objective of identifying the structure of the tourist offer for events in the municipality of Bonito. As methodological procedures, we used bibliographical research, field research and interviews. As a result, it was noticed that among the main local events, with a great public reach are the Bonito / MS Winter Festival and the Guavira fruit Festival, besides the technical scientific events that take place in the city. It was also verified that the city of Bonito / MS possesses a solid structure of lodging, with capacity to welcome the visitors and at the same time to serve as infrastructure of events, and that the Convention Center and Convention Bureau plays a fundamental role in the Promotion of the city as a tourist destination not only of nature, but of events as well.

**Keywords:** Convention Bureau; Event Venues, Convention Center.

## INTRODUCTION

Event tourism is a growing exponential activity in Brazil. From 2001 to 2013, the sector increased in a 14% average per year, which corresponded, in 2013, to 4.3% of the national GDP (ABEOC; SEBRAE, 2014). The potential multiplicative effect of economic benefit makes the tourism a structured activity which moves and improves the economic development of the places where it happens. In this scenery, the city of Bonito/MS state counts on a very consolidated touristic activity since mid-1990, whose events are stimulated as structured operations focusing on the increase of touristic flow during low seasons and on the enhancement of this city's image.

Bonito is a touristic destination already consolidated in the nature segment and is often presented as a success case in relation to the management of touristic destinations. Its unique voucher system provides a systemic structure which includes touristic trade, public power and local community (Grechi et. al, 2010). The study on the events segment in the city, also systemically structured, is relevant for verifying the strict relation among the events with tourism itself, as well as for focusing on how the touristic locations can benefit themselves from this activity.

The present study is a result of an interdisciplinary academic activity that sought to perceive how the infrastructures influences the events that enables the tourist flow in the city of Bonito. The overall aim was to identify the organizational structure and both the official and alternative locations for events in Bonito. As specific goals the study attempted: to raise the infrastructure of events in the main local hotels; to identify – through a field research – the alternative places used for touristic events; to make the Bonito's Convention Center known as the main space for events in the region; and to enhance the importance of the Convention Bureau to promote the touristic destination of Bodoquena Sierrain Bonito.

The methodological procedures that aimed to reach the proposals of this research were divided into three steps: 1) activities pre- field research, with theoretical approaches

focusing on a) the importance and economic scaling of the event tourism, b) the information about the local places for events, as well as c) the creation of the research instrument to be used on the next steps; 2) field research, with in loco identification of the alternative places for events and of the Bonito's Convention Center, through semi-structured interview with BC&VB representative; and 3) activities post-field, which consisted of the creation and presentation of a report with the research's main results and critical analysis.

## EVENTS AND THE TOURISTIC OFFERS

All the happenings, both the resulted from natural phenomena or the anthropic ones, may be named as events. As a social activity, events are defined as “any kind of happening in which people gather in order to exchange ideas of professional, cultural, political, celebratory etc. interest”(Gonçalves, 1998, p. 20), whose first aim is to bring people together around it.

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This characteristic enables the structured events to be also used as a marketing tool, whose aims are the company, the brand or the product. Under this perspective, this definition finds support in Meirelles, who defines events as:

An institutional and promotional tool, used in communication campaigning, aiming to create concepts and to establish the image of the organizations, products, services, ideas and people, through a previously planned happening, which will take place in a single time by gathering participants, either physically or through technological resources (Meirelles, 1999, page 21).

However, the importance of the events while economic activities goes beyond this gathering of people or commercial promotion of institutions and products. The displacement of people who participate the structured events, as well as the extensive network of products and services necessary to their execution, results in an economic flow on several levels, by multiplying their effects.

This characteristic of several services and people displacement enables a strict bond between activities of events and tourism. Thus, the event is considered an important branch

of touristic activity, once it mobilizes the economic agents from a determined region, bonded to touristic activity, like hotels of reception agencies, local businesses or service providers like bars, restaurants, transportation services etc.

According to Canton (2009, page 197):

The sector contributed to the economy and for the local development, enabling opportunities for businesses, services and also revenue increases. Besides these contributions, events are important tools for the combat of touristic seasonality, both for their occasionality as for guaranteeing the presence of greater number of people.

The events, as activities that facilitate the touristic flow increase, occur for three main reasons, according to Coutinho&Coutinho (2007):

- they are the main driving force of local touristic flow: normally bonded to business, the events on touristic cities are the main reason for tourists arrivals;
- they increase the already existant local flow, even during high season, like events made for tourists' fidelization, or even for increasing the concurrency among activities during high season, like shows on already crowded beaches or during special holidays.
- they by-pass the seasonality of an existant tourism, by creating a flow during low season: in such cases, the events are usually turned to technical, scientific, cultural or sportive meetings able to increase the touristic flow and minimize the impact of the idleness of the touristic structure during low season periods.

During the beginning of the touristic activities in Bonito, there were lots of cultural activities like shows aiming to overcome the competitiveness for the choice of locations during high season. Afterwards, understanding the events as structured activities able to multiply the positive economic impacts in the touristic destination of Bonito - already consolidated for high season - the city organized itself to host events which would minimize the seasonality. In this process, the Convention Bureau played a very important role for the development of the touristic activity.

## CONVENTIONS BUREAU AND THE SEARCH FOR EVENTS IN HOST CITIES

The idea of the Conventions Bureau sprang up in the US, when a group of entrepreneurs and business teams gathered through the Detroit Convention and Businessmen League to promote the cities as ideal destinations for business conventions and events. In Europe, this movement started around 1905; in Brazil, the first Convention Bureau only opened in 1983, in Sao Paulo, although the boom of the creation and development of the bureaux sprang in Brazil only in 2000 (Confederação Brasileira de Conventions& Visitors Bureau, 2016).

The Conventions & Visitors Bureau are non-profit agencies belonging to the third sector, whose main aim is to search for events in their locations in order to contribute to their development. Their members can be mostly from the touristic sector, though there are more often companies from other sectors, which are indirectly benefited from the events and, consequently, from the local development.

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Convention bureaux usually set up in touristic cities, or in the ones with potential to host events, collaborate with local government, civil society and with the touristic companies themselves, such as hotels, transportation, restaurants, inter allia  
(Confederação Brasileira de Conventions Bureau, 2016).

The search for events demands a certain level of professionalization and engagement from the envolved institutions. Specifically in technical scientific events, there is a series of requirements that the interested locations must meet in order to host them.

This is a coveted kind of event that attracts to host locations people with higher average expenses. However, this characteristic demands from the promoter, besides an impeccable organization, the ability of awakening in participants the desire of being in the event.

Besides the natural wonders that increase the desire of visiting the location, Bonito counts on a good infrastructure to host visitors, which bestows to the city good conditions to host different kinds of events. Moreover, a professional organization and very elaborated marketing plan is crucial for the success of the task (Pires e Associados, 2017).

Thus, the role of Convention Bureau in Bonito is to contribute and structure the private sector in order to enhance both city and region, enabling businesses and development through the search of events.

## **INFRASTRUTURE FOR EVENTS IN THE CITY OF BONITO/MS**

The field activities for this research happened in October on the 28th and 29th, 2016, in Bonito city. On the first day, a technical meeting took place in Bonito's Convention Center, followed by a speech performed by the representative of the local Convention Bureau, who explained the activity of events in the city and the work of BC&VB.

During the speech, the most part of the questions from the directed semi structured interview were responded to. The remaining questions were resolved at a later time after the speech.

On the second day, a field observation took place in the public places where the events happen. Data collection is shown below.

## **BONITO'S CONVENTION CENTER**

Bonito's Convention Center is a private enterprise, founded in 2005. Its infrastructure differs from most of the Convention Centers, since it was built in an indigenous village format, with a straw-based roof. Its horizontal building, like a village – both in view of the structural element and decoration – grants itself an environment of green appearance bonded to local scenery (Figure 01), in view of the concerns on decreasing the visual impact that such a big building would cause.

Figure 1: Aerial view of the Convention Center



Source: Bonito's Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2016.

The space counts on a 1000-seat central auditorium, with an excellent internal acoustic, stage, dressing room and simultaneous interpretation booths. A multi use room to host small events and meetings, also adapted to turn into bigger spaces, according to the needs. Two other 300-seat auditoria - which is comprised of a multimedia projector, stage and retractable screen - that can turn into a single place, doubling the crowd's capacity.

The Convention Center also has two open areas for stands exhibitions, which can be used for secretaries of events etc and for extra tables settings during specific events. There is also a place which can be used as an eating area, with mezzanine floor attached to an industrial kitchen, able to host 500 guests (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Multi use space with industrial kitchen



Source: Bonito's Convention&Visitors Bureau, 2016.

It's noteworthy to mention that all spaces - named after local indigenous ethnicities – are acclimatized, however, services like security, buffet, sound, lighting etc. must be hired separately by the event's organizer. The secretary of this touristic complex offers to clients a list of local suppliers names for such additional services, if necessary.

This is a private touristic complex. Despite its legal structure working independently, it is managed by the same group that manages the Bonito's Convention Center.

### **BONITO'S CENTRAL SQUARE**

In Bonito's downtown there is a space named Liberty Square whose main monument honors the Piraputanga fish (Figure 3), a locally known icon, due to their abundance along the region's rivers. The importance of this square for the events collection in this research is due to it being a place for almost all the local cultural and public events.

Figure 3: Picture of the Piraputangas' Monument in Liberty Square.



Source: Authors' files, 2016.

In relation to the Square's structure, there are some house-shaped kiosks all over the place hosting snack bars during evening time, with a varied menu. However, there are no restrooms for daily used. When there is an event, chemical toilets are provided.



The space also counts on benches all around it and a continuous lighting service, thus, no schedule is required from people to visit it, since there are no walls or gates. For information purposes, there is a information board, with the name of the Square and a brief summary of the city's history.

Most part of the Square's floor is covered with Portuguese stones. In some places, such stones are not perfectly fitted, causing vibrations as crowds walk on them, since they are not levelled. There are neither marking systems nor tactile floors, which prevent blind users moving autonomously in comfort and security.

The Square also hosts the largest public events, especially during low season, aiming to re-warm the tourists presence. The two most famous public events that take place at Liberty Square are the Bonito's Winter Festival and the Guavira fruit Festival.

## **OTHER PLACES FOR EVENTS IN BONITO**

Besides the Convention Center and Liberty Square, other big events can take place in alternative spaces like studios, schools, as well as tents, set all over the city for meetings, speeches, art or cultural workshops ect. Such spaces are chosen sporadically and rotationally when these important events are happening at the same time.

In this city, hotels are also used for events, especially for the convenience of offering simultaneously space and accommodation services. At least seven hotels and hostels are appropriate to host events since they are structurally able to. They are: Zagaia Eco Resort, Wetiga Hotel, PiráMiúna Hotel, Marruá Hotel, Arizona Hostel, Água Azul Hostel and Águas de Bonito Hostel.

Such spaces accomodate a varied group of people, mainly for technical, scientific and corporative events. Moreover, they can host social meetings through structures including auditoria, small halls and multiuse rooms.

## EVENTS CAPTURE AND TOURISTIC FLOW GENERATION

### BONITO'S CONVENTION&VISITORS BUREAU

Based on the information of the Bonito's Convention&Visitors Bureau (BC&VB) managers, it is noticeable that this institution promotes the marketing of Bonito city and region. It is about an autonomous and private initiative structure, whose aim is to facilitate businesses through securing events. Thus, it is based on services of public relations, marketing, organization and support to events applications.

Bonito's Convention&Visitors Bureau arose in 2005 and is a non-profit association, supported by private initiative, which works by focusing on the sustainable development at local and regional levels, by fomenting event tourism and marketing actions of the destination. BC&VB's actions seek to contribute to the increase of touristic flow during low season, strengthening economy and resulting in new jobs and income generation for local community.

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The main practices of BC&VB's actions aim:

- To support the acquisition and the execution of events that may induce turistic flow during low season;
- Marketing and disclosure activities related to the destination city;
- To collect, organize and disclose data about tourism in Bonito;
- To support events' promoters and organizers in Bonito, by informing and articulating local partnerships for promotional materials and technical visits, which will leave a legacy for the local community;
- To increase the number of visitors and the duration of their stay in Bonito during low season;
- To strengthen a favorable image of Bonito as a destination for events by showing the city's infrastructures and events' logistics;
- To foment the businesses' generation for their members;

- To support or take actions for tourism professional training for both regional and local members;

The organization is kept mainly by its members from the region of Mato Grosso Sul state like the cities of Bonito, Jardim and Bodoquena. The members are required to pay monthly taxes that varies from R\$50,00 to R\$ 200,00, depending on the number of personnel their companies have.

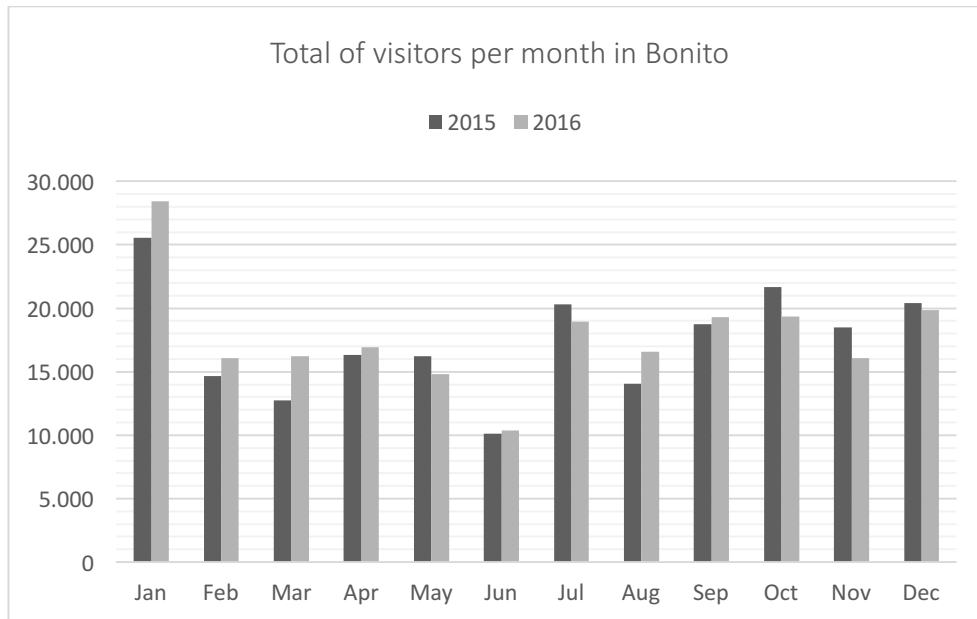
Besides the managements strictly belonging to touristic activities, such as hotels, agencies inter alia, other diverse companies are also associated with the Convention Bureau, such as gas stations and retailing markets.

Among the main advantages for members is support to attain events; the inclusion of members into the main disclosure media by the Bureau; the disclosure of company's promotional material during the events supported by Bonito's C&VB in both national and international tourism fairs; the participation of a network formed by the business community, public authorities and regional companies, increasing the contact among members, enabling partnerships; and the access to the training program furnished by Bonito's C&VB.

BC&VB headquarters is situated in Bonito, but it counts on an office in Campo Grande (capital of Mato Grosso do Sul state) due to a more strategic location that enables contacts and events capture. In total, there is a 5-personnel team responsible for BC&VB's activities. BC&VB has already supported and hosted more than 150 events, including international ones during 11 years of activities. According to its managers, their main aim is to increase this number over the next years, although they do not have specific goals for it. Furthermore, the financial investment in marketing focusing on the destination aims to uphold Bonito's image for visitors not to be seen only as a nature tourism option, but also as structured place planned to host big events.

Data shows that in 2016, Bonito hosted 213.000 tourists (Figure 4). BC&VB estimated that 25% from this total were driven by the events and 10% came specifically for participating in the events promoted by the Convention Center.

Figure 4: Total of visitors per month in Bonito-MS state.



Source : Bonito's Tourism and Events Observatory, 2017

Data show that the peak of visitors happened in January, July, October and December. Despite the slight drop during these months in relation to 2015, both are the months with the highest numbers of tourists. Besides the periods of vacations and long-drawn holidays, these peaks happen with the period of big events, which meets the idea that they are extremely important for regional growth, for enabling the positive impact on the economy, as they attract tourists.

## TRADITIONAL EVENTS THAT ENABLES TOURITIC FLOW

From the several events that annually take place in Bonito, two stand out for being traditional. They are cultural events, structured by public administration aiming the use of non-fomal spaces for events. They are: Bonito's Winter Festival and Guavira fruit Festival.

### BONITO'S WINTER FESTIVAL

The Winter Festival begun in 2000 as a tool for attracting tourists during low season, as well as to promote art and cultural activities in Mato Grosso do Sul countryside. After 17 occurrences, always in July, this Festival is currently fixed as the busiest event in town.

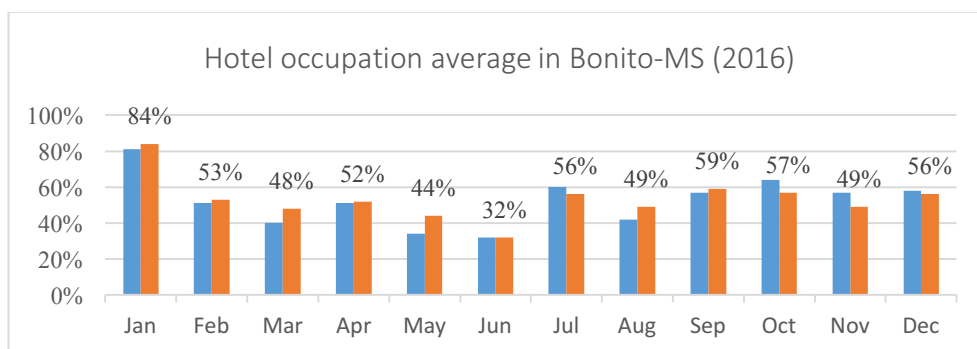
Besides disclosing statal art and culture, this Festival gathers a big crowd for national attractions in shows, theater plays and other cultural activities that take place in Liberty Square. The program includes several parallel activities in alternative spaces like speeches, workshops, exhibitions and fairs.

### GUAVIRA FRUIT FESTIVAL

This is about an annual event that takes place also in Liberty Square in Bonito. The attractions include shows, exhibitions and gastronomic meetings. The name of the Festival also stands for a regional typical fruit from Brazilian Cerrado, the guavira, which is found natively throughout the city and region during crop period, in December.

The festival do not have specific data on numbers of visitors. The organizers estimate that around 25.000 tourists come to Bonito during the event. However, data from Tourism Observatory and from Convention Bureau, only 19.000 are registered in local hostels and hotels in July, which is a number very close to the ones registered by hosting media during Guavira festival in 2017 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Hotel occupation average in Bonito-MS.



Source : Bonito's Tourism and Events Observatory, 2017

Data show, by the percentage of hotel occupation in Bonito throughout the year, that both Guavira fruit Festival (December) and Winter Festival (July) keep the hotel occupation average around 60%. It's worth mentioning that during low season there is an effort to attain other events aiming the disclosure of destinations and the positive economic impact.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research showed the importance of the events' capturing, which attracts more tourists to the region during low flow periods. Bonito counts on a very good infrastructure for hosting technical, scientific and corporative events.

The creation of Bonito's Convention Bureau contributed to place the city at a new level as a touristic destination, adding value to the already established traditional nature tourism. The events in Bonito improved in quality over the last years, which reflects on the visitors' profile improvement and the increase in flow during low season.

According to BC&VB representatives, it is still not possible to identify the exact reach of both BC&VB itself and the Convention Center. It is known that around 25% of tourists are currently stimulated by the events, although it is not known so far how much they interfered with the touristic flow over the past years. Based on Convention Center representatives, it is expected that the consolidation and systematization of Tourism Observatory will enable this estimation.

With respect to future perspectives in tourism in Bonito, Convention Center's data show that the city does not have a long-term planning, nor aims or planned goals. The Convention Center itself only has a short-term planning, with no specific goals in relation to the number of events they intend to capture. Thus, a vision of the future or even a more tangible perspective – with defined goals for tourism – is not predictable.

Even so, the region known as Bonito – Bodoquena Sierra - which is focused mainly on nature tourism with attractions mostly linked to aquatic, adventure or ecological activities – pictures the events as a driving force to help the development of the local economy, once they add value to the region, disseminating a positive image that will encourage the development of touristic activities in Mato Grosso do Sul state even more.

The idea that the events contribute to touristic flow locally, may also be seen in Bonito. It is expected that this research will reinforce the effort on events capture, as well as on maintenance of the already consolidated structure, not only of the companies involved, but also the ones that are included in the touristic trade that happens in Bonito and neighboring cities that compose the sector of tourism, which is directly bonded to quality, innovation and in keeping with an attractive destination, which demands a huge commitment and effort from all the involved parts.

We suggest, for future researches related to the current impact and future perspectives on tourism in Bonito, a parallel study between Convention Bureau and municipal public power in order to assess and compare, under all the aspects, the expectations, impacts and projections of event tourism in Bonito and surrounding area.

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