

---

# 10 A Chronicle of Event Postponement and Reorganization: Coming Back Stronger

*Danai Varveri and Vassilios Ziakas*

## Introduction

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global event industry has been deeply affected. In Greece, the scale of the coronavirus crisis brings back memories of the 2008 financial crisis; both are crises that reshaped society in lasting ways. The 2008 financial crisis showed that the event industry in Greece can survive adverse conditions. In the following years, although Greece has been under strict austerity measures and economic hardship, the Greek calendar continued to feature a range of cultural festivals and events, especially during the summer months of the peak tourism season. Music and dance festivals are a mainstay of the creative event industry in Greece, because they not only enhance local development and tourism but also contribute to artistic expression and the utilization of cultural capital.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has put at risk most events around the globe. According to chaos theory, the principle of ‘butterfly effect’ explains how small incidents may cause large effects to broader systems; in this manner alike the COVID-19 outbreak has plunged the global into a serious pandemic crisis. In the event industry, strict social distancing and restrictions to minimize the spread of coronavirus have set new norms in socializing and celebrating. Concerns about safety in gatherings have led to cancelling or reshaping events. The Greek government imposed consecutive lockdowns that paralyzed the already dismal social and business environment from a 10-year economic depression. Local or national lockdowns limit the range of managerial responses in event planning and make it more difficult for any level of crisis preparedness to be achieved. Thus, major uncertainties have arisen about the future and survival of events in Greece. How are event organizers responding to the crisis and adapting to the new conditions? What

decision-making processes do they employ to deal with the consequences of the crisis? The purpose of this chapter is to throw light on the empirical decision-making of event managers to re-organize the National Ballet Competition of Greece as a virtual event. This experience is discussed alongside pertinent literature to highlight major issues and responses.

## **Organizational context and case study approach**

A crisis can be understood as a major situation with harmful effects to both internal and external stakeholders. For events, a crisis may lead to their cancellation. Once an event is cancelled, there is always a risk that it will never take place; but also event-failure can be caused by financial deficiencies, lack of crisis management and detrimental external forces. Nevertheless, facing challenges can also bring opportunities, to which managers need to respond quickly in order to implement innovative policies for problem-solving and recovery (Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). Swift responses to crises often mirror ad-hoc reactive decision-making by event organizers to particular issues. They might also represent creative ideas and innovative approaches that need to be recorded and examined. This chapter provides a case study that chronicles event organizers' decision-making in response to COVID-19 crisis.

### **To cancel vs. to postpone the National Ballet Competition**

In Greece, Spring marks the beginning of the ballet competition season. In March of 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak led to a sudden national lockdown which lasted for three months. The organizers of the National Ballet Competition had to face the consequences of COVID-19 outbreak and manage effectively the crisis ridden event. The National Ballet Competition is a one-off, annual event, giving emphasis on celebrating 'the love for ballet', and promoting youth artistic development. It is a point of convergence for dancers, choreographers and ballet-school owners across Greece and Cyprus. This event is strongly related to art and culture and celebrates elements significant in the life of the ballet community, consolidating it. In addition, the National Ballet Competition has become a prestigious event by offering numerous scholarships and awards to young artists. More than 800 dancers perform their choreography, in front of a 12-member Judging Committee, in Solo, Duet or Group divisions.

The event is organized by the Hellenic Classical & Contemporary Dance Association, which is a non-profit organization established in 2015. The board of directors is composed of four members (i.e., President/Managing Director, Vice-President/Artistic Director, Secretary/Membership Coordinator, and Treasurer) and is elected every three years by stakeholders' vote at the annual

meeting. According to Ingram (2015), the leadership of a social sector organization needs to fulfill its mission and advance the public good so that it can play a vital role in society. In order to accomplish that, the governing body meets at regular intervals to set policies for corporate management by adopting ethical and legal governance and overseeing the organization's activities. While the governance of the organization, strategy, oversight, and accountability are accomplished by the board of directors, the day-to-day operations are run by the management team, which is composed by four individuals. The management team is responsible for the implementation of the organizational mission and strategies. Two members from the board of directors have dual-capacity also in managing the team, which helps the mission of the organization and how it operates. These members have experience in overseeing business affairs, background in sport management and dance specialization, which all align with the organization's identity. The roles and responsibilities of the management team are described below:

- ◆ *Event Coordinator*: responsible for event planning and production within time limits, for choosing the venue, hiring guest dancers and coordinating volunteers. Part of the role is organizing transportation, accommodation, special equipment in the facilities and catering.
- ◆ *Communication Manager*: responsible for media and public relations and to ensure that the brand remains top of mind. Web and social media material, creation, editing and promotion, are part of this role's duties. This person also handles all complaints and press releases during crises.
- ◆ *Fundraising/Sponsor Manager*: responsible for overseeing communication with sponsors and developing a fundraising strategy aligning the organization's mission statement. This role looks for opportunities to reach and attract potential supporters, high-value donors, companies and governing bodies.
- ◆ *Virtual Event Technologist*: provides and manages the technical support to ensure a successful virtual event; responsible for monitoring each dance performance, chat, video stream, virtual meeting rooms and sponsors' exhibition booths, and addressing potential problems.

The first author of this chapter was a founding member and had a dual-capacity role as President and Managing Director, thus having first-hand access to the event and its management. In line with action research logics (Kemmis & Carr, 1986), the methodological approach in this chapter pursued a self-reflective enquiry of the event organizers' decision-making to deal with critical dilemmas and issues. This aimed to capture reflective practice where the practitioner is an insider action-researcher, actively involved in the cause for which the research is conducted (Coghlan, 2001). Self-reflection observations and interpretations were debated, contrasted and triangulated with the second author who acted as a detached observer. This enabled the production