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Analysis of the Love Parade Disaster 2010 in the context of risk management in events

Abstract: This article aims to analyse the Love Parade Disaster 2010 in the context of risk management in events. Whilst taking into consideration the infrastructure, legislation and human error during the event the article will identify and discuss which has been the most prominent in causing the disaster whilst analysing each component individually. It will also analyse what implications the disaster had on the events industry.

Key Words: risk, risk management, disaster, mass events

Introduction

A risk can be defined as “something that might happen in the future that will result in an adverse effect” (Tum et al., 2006, p. 149). It is a possibility of something happening, both good or bad and the exposure to the arising possibility of loss, damage or injury that is imposed by an uncertainty (Silvers, 2008, p. 4). Risk Management is “the art of being aware of all the things that could go wrong and contingencies to prevent this, not to remedy the situation, as best as possible if things go wrong” (Tum et al., 2006, p. 149). In other words, risk management assesses potential risks and takes action that will lessen the effects of potential losses and threats.

As Julia Silvers mentions “event risk management is a comprehensive process that must be fully integrated and embedded into all the event plans and throughout the event management process” (2008, p. xvii) to ensure the health and safety of all event goers. To make this happen Silver highlights the importance of all people involved in event planning – organisers, producers, managers, suppliers and even the government, to participate in the risk management process (Silvers, 2008).

This article is about The Love Parade electronic music festival that happened on July 24th, 2010. It was the first time the festival (that was created in 1989) took place in Duisburg. The festival site is said to be the reason why the event had disastrous consequences. The main entrance to the area, where the event was being staged, led through a tunnel that was 400 metres in length and only 18 metres in width, which has consequently led to a crowd disaster that killed 21 people and left more than 650 injured (Grunau, 2020). This event is relevant to examine in connection with risk management because even though the event managers considered the site to be rightfully set up and prepared for the festival, they did not take into consideration factors such as the infrastructure of the site, the weather or number of attendees (Tum et al., 2006).

The article argues that there was no one main cause of the disaster and thus it could not have been avoided or foreseen. Another argument that will be raised is the issue of the lack of communication between the organisers internally as well as externally – with the policy and local government which has, in the end, delayed the response and increased the number of casualties and people that were injured.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the key issues associated with the event, why those issues arose, how the management responded as well as what were the outcomes of the disaster. The main questions asked are what factors had led to the tragedy happening? Why have they not have been foreseen? And did the event have long-lasting consequences on the events management industry? The research method used to answer those questions is source analysis.

The Crucial Points of the Incident

One of the most crucial points for the safety of mass events is that they should be organised in a way that is robust against many kinds of disturbances (such as weather conditions, human errors, maximum capacity of the event site etc.) (Silvers, 2008, p. 4). In the case of the Love Parade 2010, one main reason as to why the festival ended in disaster can be outlined – the general festival area and its capacity. However, other factors for instance the sunny weather (which attracted a larger number of attendees) or organisers' lack of foresight (no working loudspeakers, not enough police officers and crowd management staff) also had an impact.

It is worth mentioning that the location of the festival has been moved several times after 2003 and it has even been cancelled a few times due to funding problems. For example, coordinated opposition of political parties or even issues such as the waste that was left on site as the aftermath of the festival a year beforehand (Helbing et al., 2012). In 2007 it was even cancelled due to the fact the Senate of Berlin did not issue the necessary permits on time. This almost happened in 2010, as the festival managers got the last of the permits around 8AM, the day of the festival (Helbing et al., 2012).

The area on which the festival took place in 2010 was a confined space (a former freight station) that had a maximum capacity of 250,000 people (Helbing et al., 2012). Taking into consideration the average turnout of the previous years, the event was expected to host a number of attendees close to one million. In total, up to 1.4 million people are said to have attended the festival this year (SkyNews, 2010).

The festival area in Duisburg was approximately 100,000 square metres large and was contravened by a freeway on the West and railway tracks on the East (Helbing et al., 2012). To overcome the security issues which have been noticed by the regulatory authorities during routine inspections, the organisers of the festival decided to fence the whole area up. However, the festival area could only be entered via a tunnel which was also the only exit. In the middle of the tunnel there was a main ramp that led to the festival area. The tunnel and the ramp determined an inverse T-shape of inflows and outflows. The smallest overall diameter of the tunnel in the East and in the West was about 20 metres. The ramp itself was 26 metres wide and 130 metres long (Helbing et al., 2012). Not only was the tunnel too narrow to enable a natural flow of the crowd, the length of it was also a factor in causing the attendees to panic during the most hazardous moments.

Another occurrence that has obstructed the entrance/exit flow was the postponement of admissions to the festival. They were initially supposed to begin at 11 a.m. but due to delayed construction work they commenced at around noon (Schraven, 2013). As a consequence, there was an inconsistent entrance flow right from the beginning. The police worried that the event would be overcrowded even as soon as 13h30 (Helbing et al., 2012). However, even with instructions to the new arrivals to turn back and wait, people were pushing into the confined space (bbc.com, 2010). At 16h30 pm, a fence at the West side of the tunnel (which was unused by the public) was opened to permit an emergency vehicle to enter, ac-

cidentally allowing hundreds of attendees to make use of it, increasing the number of people that were already inside the festival site. There were also problems with the communication. The crowd management seemingly did not have a working loudspeaker, mobile phones did not work due to an overload of the network from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm which caused issues in communication between the event managers and police as well as the communication with the outside world (Helbing et al., 2012).

Management Response

It is difficult to assess the response of the management team after the incident as the misunderstandings started even before the festival has had commenced. As mentioned before, to obtain the permit to conduct the festival on the area in Duisburg, the city gave the organisers a condition to restrict the number of attendees to 250,000. Even though, the organisers could not have had predicted that the good weather would summon more people than usual, they could have had taken into consideration the number of attendees of the previous editions of the festival and expect the number to be close to a million people in 2010 (Helbing et al., 2012). Another issue that had emerged that year, is that the police got an email about the approval of the festival at 8 o'clock that morning, this has delayed the preparedness of the force right from the beginning of the festival and has influenced the time of the opening of the festival site therefore instituting a dangerous crowd of attendees.

As much fewer attendees were expected to attend the festival, there were only around 3,200 police officers on-site that were responsible for crowd control (Grunau, 2020). This calculated to 1 police officer having control over about 500 people. There were also around 1,400 additional helpers and 59 emergency doctors (Grunau, 2020). The police officers instructed new arrivals to turn away via loudspeaker, however the crowd management staff did not even have a working loudspeaker which is a legal requirement. Even though the breakage of the cell network that occurred due to the overload of the network around 3:30 pm and lasted to around 6:00 pm could not have been predicted by the organisers, the lack of loudspeakers or in fact any type of emergency communication is a part of risk management that should have been foreseen by them (Silvers, 2008).

As a matter of fact, there is not much to be discussed when it comes to management response during the most critical minutes of the tragedy be-

cause there was practically none. At 4:47 pm, there was an interview with one of the organisers who did not seem to be aware of what was going on (Helbing et al., 2012). What is more, at 5:15 pm the operation room of the city of Duisburg was also not aware of the situation and called the Love Parade a big success (Helbing et al., 2012). These two examples show that the management team did not realise how critique the situation has gotten, additionally, even the police officers that were navigating the flow of people near the tunnel were not aware of what was going on inside of it.

The biggest success of the management was not ending the festival when the tragedy occurred. The fact that they allowed the party to keep going, thus preventing further panic as well as more people being stuck in the tunnel, has saved many lives.

The Impact of the Event

The most crucial impact on event attendees is the fact that 21 people died and at least 625 were injured. There are many testimonies of the survivors who were psychically injured and could not work for years. Thousands of people suffered psychological trauma and so called ‘survivors’ guilt’. Even ten years later, while testifying for court people broke down while recalling the event. Many of the attendees that helped the emergency services during the tragedy were honoured by then-president of Germany Christian Wulff for their help (Grunau, 2018).

The list of the critique of the management team as well as the city council is long. The trial that took place after the disaster lasted for 10 years. During the trial, six city officials and four representatives of the festival’s organiser *LopaVent* were charged with negligent manslaughter and causing bodily harm. Seven of them have taken a deal in 2019 to pay fees in exchange for the charges to be dropped, but the other three wanted to be acquitted in court (Grunau, 2020).

It is thus difficult to assess the blame to the management, as even when the trial ended in May 2020, it ended without a verdict, with a 44-page document issued by the court, that explained that it was impossible to prove the criminal responsibility for any of the individual defenders. The prosecutor, Uwe Muhlhoff stated that the organisers knew the risks but still gave the event a go ahead and they all held “ethical responsibility” for the deaths. He stated that many people were involved in the planning

and called it an “organised irresponsibility” as, in the end, it was totally unclear who was responsible for what (Grunau, 2020).

The event itself was cancelled indefinitely a day after the tragedy. The organisers said that in respect for the deceased they would not continue with the tradition of The Love Parade (berlinloveparade.com). It could not have been an easy decision as the festival dates back to 1989, when the Berlin Wall was still standing, and apart from great tradition it was an extremely economically (both for the organisers and the city where it took place) valuable event (Helbing et al., 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the Love Parade disaster has written itself into the German and European pop culture. There has been a number of documentaries that were made about it. Both using real footage from the day, as well as footage of the survivors and even from the trial. There were at least 2 songs made by German artists about it, a German television drama and a feature film.

Future Implications

Arguably, the biggest issue with the 2010 Love Parade Festival was the festival site – which was too small to accommodate the large amount of people that were in attendance, as well as the failure of flow control. If the organisers issued tickets for the event, that would have been up for sale beforehand, they would be able to control the number of people participating in the event thus the number of people they needed to accommodate on the festival site. Since 2010, this has definitely become something used much more frequently – nowadays it is almost impossible to find an event of that scale that does not sell tickets beforehand. Also, the delay in opening of the event had a huge impact on the amount of people that were waiting to come in. This has made it difficult to control the inflow of attendees. The mass event was not capable of making it up for that delay. Nowadays, it would be easy to put up a notice on the social media of the event or its website, which was not available in 2010. People today would be able to see that information before going to the festival site and that would also decrease the overcrowding.

A huge lesson learnt from this event, that has had an impact on the whole event industry is the importance of infrastructure outside of the festival site. During the 2010 Love Parade there was a lack of food, drinks and toilets outside the area and people were impatient and wanted to get

inside as fast as possible. Since the event happened, this area of events management has greatly improved.

The communication between the event management and the attendees is also a recommended subject for improvement. Even though the mobile phones network was overloaded and did not work, the management should have had loudspeakers at the tunnel and ramp. Also, one of the biggest issues was the communication between the management and the police. The former tried to get support from the latter between 14h30 and 15h00, because they had a shortage of security staff as they were busy with controlling the outflow or guiding the VIPs. It had taken a considerable amount of time to request the police support. It is also worth mentioning that there was a change in the police shift around 15h00 just when the situation started to deteriorate. If the communication had had been better, more people could have been on site earlier and could work together to manage the situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Love Parade disaster is an example of causal interdependencies of many contributing factors. Lack of communication, bad organisation, wrong festival site, lack of informed organisers who were not aware of how critical the situation was, have caused the festival to be a great example of how important it is to look at every aspect of event planning in a point of view that risk management highlights. It seemed as if a singular factor would not cause such a disaster, however, after putting many small, contributing things that went sufficiently wrong together, a tragedy that has contributed to the death of 21 people occurred.

The event had long-lasting consequences on the industry. It raised the question of the importance of the correct use of technology during the event itself in order to secure the appropriate level of communication inside the management team as well as highlighting the significance of preselling tickets to estimate the number of attendees before the event happens. It also probed the discussion about the significance of the use of adequate festival site and infrastructure.

The article does confirm that the tragedy could not have been foreseen due to the lack of one immediate cause of it but at the same time it does recognised all of the casual interdependencies that stood behind it. It also highlights the reasons of the lack of overall communication of the festival organisers' such as technological issues and planning shortcomings.

A recommendation that could be useful for the whole events industry is the fact that the organisers should have had an overview of the attendees coming into and going out of the event. There were no cameras inside the tunnel, the police could not see what was happening. It would have been extremely useful to have a view from cameras inside of it that could be seen in some sort of control room. These types of technologies, including drones have become significantly more popular during the last decade and has enabled the events industry to develop in the context of risk management.

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Analiza tragedii podczas Love Parade w 2010 roku w kontekście zarządzania ryzykiem podczas wydarzeń masowych

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu analizę tragedii, która odbyła się podczas Love Parade w 2010 roku w kontekście zarządzania ryzykiem w eventach. Biorąc pod uwagę infrastrukturę, ustawodawstwo i błędy ludzkie podczas wydarzenia, artykuł określi i omówi, który z nich był najbardziej znaczący w spowodowaniu katastrofy, analizując każdy element z osobna. Zostanie również przeanalizowane, jakie konsekwencje miała ta katastrofa dla całej branży eventowej.

Słowa kluczowe: ryzyko, zarządzanie ryzykiem, katastrofa, imprezy masowe

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