



FAIRS, FESTIVALS  
AND EVENTS  
MULTI-COVERAGE  
SOCIAL INTERACTION  
PLATFORMS

By Fabian Obregon

In today's world, the event industry has become a giant platform that reaches and involves many areas of human activity; business, tourism, religion, government, commerce, politics, sports, education, research, entertainment, and more.

In all fields, as human needs grow and become more complex, humanity itself seeks to find solutions, however, nowadays, these solutions require more effort, creativity and innovation on the basis of two factors; the large number of options generated by the entities that make up the current market and the continuous change of the conditions under which the needs are generated. The events industry in the world is no stranger to these circumstances.

Since the beginning of mankind, man by nature, has gathered around his fellows, however, undeniably the primary cluster unit was family and from it similar groups were generated based on needs and interests, which various rituals began to be held, and this is where we find the first group holiday celebrations.

Similarly, many years ago, the need to exchange products and goods generated the conditions for creating temporary markets in certain villages that facilitated the meeting of different communities, so that we start from bartering to more elaborate and complex commercial transactions involving currency and loans. At the same time, markets are beginning to offer a service that we now call entertainment, and it was nothing but samples of cultural expressions of communities and people gathered there.

The same need for entertainment that I mention in the old markets, evolved and refined into what we now have around us, Fairs, Festivals and Events (FFE) that integrate expressions of cultural, economic and trade fields, among others, that seek to meet the needs of specific market segments. FFEs have become multi-coverage social interaction platforms.

They are multi-platform coverage due to the engagement of different segments of human interest and as they are based on linking people with behaviors and expressions created by the same human

being individually and collectively, they generate group interaction as a society.

Today marketing has played a very important role in understanding market segmentation and the conditions in which the individuals who make this market segment behave. FFE organizers should, in primary form, fully understand and identify the market segments to which they target, as well as behavior and habits to design appropriate solutions to the needs that have been previously identified.

By achieving this, the organizers of FFEs minimize investment risk involved in making any event and thus seek to maximize their results, which are usually measured in monetary units. However, if the success of the FFEs is measured only in terms of the impact and economic development generated, then the FFEs will be away from being a multi-coverage social interaction platforms.

The great challenge for the FFEs is encouraging the creation of social development as well as economic development within the groups of people with whom they interact, beginning with members of the organizing committee of the FFEs, to all people and companies that provide products or services to the FFEs, such as artistic groups, equipment suppliers, vendors, contractors, etc. up to the attendees, whether local, foreign as well as members of the community in which FFEs take place and that are not necessarily attendees.

According to the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP), "the development of a country can not be understood from the unique perspective of economic growth. The ultimate purpose of development is found in every one of its inhabitants and the possibilities they have to choose a life in which they can fully realize their potential as human beings.

Human development is the freedom enjoyed by individuals to choose between different options and ways of life. The key factors that allow people to be free in that sense, is the possibility of achieving a long and healthy life, to acquire valuable knowledge individually and socially, and have the opportunity to obtain the necessary resources to enjoy a decent standard of living.

At the core of the concept of human development, are the people and their opportunities, not wealth, income earned, or the goods and services they consume."

Not all FFEs' results are equally successful in generation of economic development, however, for many of them its strength may lie in the large impact on human development.

Generally speaking, the FFEs that have higher brand awareness and positioning among people (Top of Mind), are those which in their evolution have become a tourism product of high impact, whether regional, national or international (tourism traditionally is measured with indicators of economic development), examples of these are the music festivals like Lollapalooza, Coachella, Rock in Rio, Pinkpop Festival as well as traditional festivals like Oktoberfest, San Fermin, Mardi Gras and Holifestival. The FFEs of high tourism impact are often very attractive to some people because they involve high exposure and media coverage.

However, there are other FFEs that are not designed as touristic attractions, but which originate and are sustained in social (community) and human (individuals) development, which strengthen the fabric of society, promote tolerance, acceptance of different expressions and social behavior, improving the level of education and knowledge of community members as well as promoting the value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), define the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), which is also known as "living heritage" as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage."

The ICH is manifested particularly in the following areas:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship.

These type of FFEs usually do not have much "glamour" and thus fail to capture the massive public and/or media attention, they are commonly focused on a very particular and identified target audience and present growth trends much lower than the touristic ones.

When the FFEs really work as Multi-coverage Social Interaction Platforms, they are great tools to help strengthen human development, which is why the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA) defines its vision and mission as:

*"A united Global Industry, touching lives in a positive way through the celebration."*

*"To inspire and enable all those in our industry to realize their dreams, build communities and have sustained success through celebration."*

It is very important to highlight "sustained success through celebration" as like any other service in modern markets, FFEs involve professional work and careful planning and execution to get the right resources, both monetary and non-monetary, to sustain the event in the long term. In other words, not just for being FFEs that promote human development should be unlinked to the business areas that can enable them to obtain and generate resources to ensure its permanence and sustainability.

To the extent that the FFEs are economically sustainable, to that extent they can continue to generate human and social development, as otherwise its lifetime will be dependent on the existing seasonal interest in organizations, whether public or private.

There are some international institutions that promote the FFEs as a fundamental part of human development, here I highlight only two of them:

### **International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF)**

An instance that is focused since 1970 on strengthening human development through the preservation and promotion of the ICH through dance, music, songs, games, rituals, ceremonies, customs, traditional crafts, costumes and food.

This Council is an international non-governmental organization (NGO), which at the last meeting of UNESCO in Paris, was officially accredited by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Every four years the flagship event of CIOFF takes place, CIOFF World Folkloriada® is a global festival which aims to bring together people and cultures from all over the world, promoting understanding and appreciation of each other's

cultures, strengthening friendship and solidarity between people and celebrating national cultural heritage of each participating Nation. The latest edition of this event was held in October 2012 in the city of South Korea Anseong and during its World Congress, it was announced that next Folkloriada®, will take place in Zacatecas, Mexico in July 2016. For more information on CIOFF: [www.cioff.org](http://www.cioff.org)

### **International Exhibition Bureau (BIE)**

An entity best known for its events rather than by its name and has one of the most important roles in international events. It is headquartered in Paris, France and was created by an International Convention held in 1928 in the same city. The BIE is the intergovernmental organization in charge of overseeing the calendar, the bidding, the selection, and the organization of World and International Expos.

The Paris Convention of 1928 sets out the rights and responsibilities of organizers and participants at World and International Expos and the BIE's role is to oversee and ensure that these are met, therefore it provides a regulatory framework for countries, international organizations, civil society groups, corporations and citizens involved.

BIE's mission is to maintain the integrity and quality of Expos so that they may continue to educate the public and promote innovation in the service of human progress. Expos must be able to not only provide a benchmark for the human progress made in a given domain but also propose a roadmap for the way forward – and the BIE works to ensure this.

Article 1 of the 1928 Paris Convention defines Exhibition as: "An exhibition is a display which, whatever its title, has as its principal purpose the education of the public: it may exhibit the means at man's disposal for meeting the needs of civilisation, or demonstrate the progress achieved in one or more branches of human endeavor, or show prospects for the future."

World and International Exhibitions differ primarily in the size of the venue, the event duration and scope of the topic.

The characteristics of these are presented in the following table.

Currently there have been scheduled editions of the World Exhibition 2015 to be held in the city of Milan, Italy and in Dubai, UAE in 2020, while the only International Exhibition scheduled, so far, is in 2017 and it will take place in the city of Astana in Kazakhstan.

International Horticultural Expos are a type of International Exhibitions and they are held under the joint auspices of

the BIE and the AIPH (the International Association of Horticultural Producers).

The Horticultural Expos are recognized by the BIE after the following steps are taken: the project is examined and approved by the AIPH; the government of the country in which the exhibition would be held submits a request for recognition to the BIE, and the BIE General Assembly approves the project's general regulations.

These events can last a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months and can take place every 2 years in different countries, and once a decade in the same country and the size of the site must be over 50 hectares.

For more information on the International Exhibitions Bureau: [www.bie-paris.org](http://www.bie-paris.org)

### **Context of Mexico in FFEs**

The reality of Mexico regarding the FFEs is not unrelated to the global environment, there has recently been an important growth in terms of the number of events, however much work is needed to be done to raise people responsible for the organization of FFEs consciousness about the need to foster knowledge, education, training and developing their skills necessary to have a professional event industry with the best practices worldwide.

Even though there are Mexican events in different areas, such as: business, tourism, religion, government, commerce, politics, sports, education, research, entertainment, made by the private and public sector, there is no national policy to promote and improve the quality with professionalization of this activity. Currently the main organizer of FFEs in Mexico is the public sector (Government).

Opposite to the Meeting Industry which covers the Congresses, Conventions, Expositions and Incentive trips, the FFEs do not have any entity, institution or association that groups the needs and interests related to organizers, there is a lack of a representative body for this sector.

There are, mainly, two federal government agencies that provide support to the FFEs, the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA) and the Mexico Tourism Board (CPTM).

CONACULTA was created to coordinate cultural and artistic policies, organizations, and agencies. Likewise, it is dedicated to promoting, supporting, and sponsoring events that foster culture and the arts. Through its General Cultural Outreach Division website, it makes calls to support cultural and arts festivals. [www.conaculta.gob.mx/convocatorias](http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/convocatorias)

The CPTM mission is to promote, both integrally and competitively, Mexico's

	INTERNATIONAL REGISTERED EXHIBITIONS	INTERNATIONAL RECOGNISED EXHIBITIONS
CATEGORY	World Exhibitions	International Exhibitions
FREQUENCY	Every 5 years	Take place between two world expos
MAXIMUM LENGTH	6 months	3 months
PARTICIPATION	Countries, Intl. Organizations, NGOs, corporations and other institutions.	Countries, Intl. Organizations, NGOs, corporations and other institutions.
THEME	Chosen theme concerns the whole of humanity	Must be specific, specialized.
CONSTRUCTION	Participants build their own pavilions.	Participants customized pavilions that are built by the organizer.
SITIE	Unlimited	Maximum of 25 hectares

products and destinations, in the national and international markets, so those FFEs that meet the profile needed to generate tourism, can get support for promotion. [www.cptm.com.mx](http://www.cptm.com.mx)

Each of the above entities mentioned have their own guidelines and operating rules for granting support while taking care of the fulfillment of the objectives that each has defined for its activity.

State and municipal governments also generate programs that support the FFEs, however the criteria varies depending on location and interests of each place.

In the field of FFEs in Mexico, there are important and recognized examples of Dance, Music, Film, Food and Popular Expressions, and each year more are added to the list, however the rate of consolidation for the new events is not very high.

One of the most renowned art festivals in Mexico is the International Cervantes Festival (FIC), which is held annually in the city of Guanajuato in the month of October and includes a multidisciplinary program of theater, dance, music and other cultural expressions. [www.festival-cervantino.gob.mx](http://www.festival-cervantino.gob.mx)

## Other Important Cultural Festivals in Mexico

### May Cultural Festival

Held annually in Guadalajara, Jalisco for 23 days and covers the fields of music, dance, art exhibitions and street entertainment in different forums of the city. [www.festivaldemayo.org](http://www.festivaldemayo.org)

### International Festival of the Mayan Culture

Takes place in Merida, Yucatan for 18 days from the middle of October. It includes the implementation and development of ongoing activities to promote the study, dissemination and expression of the surviving Mayan culture from various forms of knowledge: visual and performing arts, literature, mu-

sic, cuisine, science, ecology and others. [www.ficmaya.com](http://www.ficmaya.com)

### Cumbre Tajin

A 5-day event in March that aims to disseminate, preserve and enhance the legacy of the Totonac culture, which every year around the spring equinox brings ancient rituals, music, reflection, dance, healing and multiple expressions of artistic creation and ritual. [www.cumbretajin.com](http://www.cumbretajin.com)

Additionally, Fairs are deeply rooted in Mexican customs, so practically a festivity of this kind takes place in every city and town. There are fairs of all sizes and length, some retain very traditional formats and others have evolved to integrate concepts that traditionally only were found in art festivals.

The most recognized Mexican fairs are in the cities of León and Aguascalientes, but cities like Guadalajara, San Luis Potosi, Durango, Puebla and Merida are also highlight for the content offered, the size of the fairgrounds or the number of fairgoers they attract.

### La Feria de Leon

A 26-day event that takes place in the month of January and Aguascalientes Fair, better known as Feria de San Marcos starts in April and ends in May with a duration of 23 days. Both have shows for different targets; nightlife, livestock exhibits, amusement rides, restaurants, shows and more. Both Fairs have achieved a very significant development in their organization which has ensured sustained growth for several years.

### To learn more about the above fairs:

- **Feria de León**  
León, Gto.  
[www.ferialeon.org](http://www.ferialeon.org)
- **Feria de San Marcos**  
Aguascalientes, Ags.  
[www.feriadesanmarcos.gob.mx](http://www.feriadesanmarcos.gob.mx)

- **Fiestas de Octubre**  
Guadalajara, Jal.  
[www.fiestasdeoctubre.com.mx](http://www.fiestasdeoctubre.com.mx)

- **Feria Nacional Potosina**  
San Luis Potosí, SLP  
[www.fenapo.mx](http://www.fenapo.mx)

- **Feria Nacional de Durango**  
Durango, Dgo.  
[www.ferianacionaldurango.gob.mx](http://www.ferianacionaldurango.gob.mx)

- **Fair de Merida**  
Merida, Yuc.  
[www.feriayucatan.gob.mx](http://www.feriayucatan.gob.mx)

- **Feria de Puebla**  
Puebla, Pue.  
[www.feriapuebla.mx](http://www.feriapuebla.mx)

To conclude, I can tell that the Fairs, Festivals and Events in Mexico are going forward as multi-coverage social interaction platforms, however there is still much potential for development of this sector in Mexico and we must not only create new events, but improve the management and professionalization to achieve better quality in the impact of social, human, economic, tourist and cultural development.

**Fabian Obregon** graduated in Business Management and started to actively participate in the organization of events when he coordinated trade missions at Mexican Pavilions at International Trade Fairs and abroad. He was the General Director of Leon Fairgrounds and its State Fair which attracted 5 million attendees during its 26 days. He is currently the cofounder and partner of Luden-e, a company focused on providing consulting and advice to event organizers, as well as the organization of the Specialized Congress for Fairs, Festivals and Events in Mexico.