

Exhibitions Related Social Events

Cocktail Hours, Banquets, Social Dinners

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Abstract : The international business exhibitions in Italy has risen to an estimated level of 1 billion euros. Associated with this rise is a similar increase in exhibition related services. Business exhibitions create high revenues for hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities. Exhibitors in trade shows spend huge amounts of money to entertain attendee/clients at hospitality suites, elaborate dinners and receptions. Although exhibition halls are equipped with food in bars and restaurants, special attendees are invited to additional banquets and special dinners. At these dinners, the highest quality of Italian certified food is typically served. An excellent example of the intersection of high quality Italian food and strong business tourism occurs in Bologna. Although Bologna isn't a big city, it boasts the 5th largest conference centre in Europe and hosts a variety of international symposia, meetings, conferences, congresses. Bologna's example of integration of fine food and social events into business exhibitions creates a more relaxed and interactive business environment that is mutually beneficial to both business and the food industry.

Key words: Exhibition, Conferences, Meetings, Italian typical products, Business Tourism, Bologna.

Introduction

In this work the author would discuss food consumption related to business tourism in Bologna, Italy; in particular the communal occasions related to lectures, exhibitions and meetings. Due to the fact that exhibitors in trade shows spend huge amounts of money to entertain attendee/clients in hospitality suites, and through elaborate dinners and receptions (Fenich and Hashimoto (2004: 71), I will focus on banquets set up in exhibition centers.

Usually at these exhibition facilities the convention/ meeting organizers pay for banquets, receptions, coffee breaks and more.

Although most businessmen do not attend exhibitions for the culinary experience alone, the promise of good food does make business travel more attractive. In addition, at an exhibition more interest and foot traffic is often generated by attractive food display.

The social value of food

Good food is appreciated for its satisfying taste, its stimulation of social interaction and most importantly for promoting good health. Good quality food, made in traditional wholesome fashion, influences health in two impor-

tant ways. First, quality food aids in the prevention of illness and enables the body to work most efficiently. In addition, the aesthetic value of well-presented food cannot be under-estimated. Indeed, decorative foods are often appreciated more for their presentation than their nutritional value. Wine too has obviously changed from being a basic element in the daily diet to a voluptuous product which is not strictly indispensable and which is increasingly becoming a luxury good, often with hedonistic connotations (Gasparini (2004: 2). Feeding is an art, just as art is nourishment (Barbero 2004); feeding nowadays isn't only a necessity, but more than that: it is symbol of economic power while in the past it was symbol of political power. Montanari's research asserts that, today, it is not so important to consume more food than others, but to have more food at one's disposal, if only to offer it (2004: 92). In this sense, food is used as a tool to engage someone in sentimental or business affairs; to attract people towards certain goals.

According to Roland Barthes (1970), in this society of abundance, food's nutritional worth has weakened, and instead it emphasizes other meanings. In such a way, culinary language has developed an ostentatious, flowery, and theatrical content.

So luxurious food is related to business: it is well known that business tourism involves high expenses for hotels, restaurants, and banquets (Clark 2004: 7).

Business tourism

Evidence shows that conventions and meetings are but two components of a vast tourism/entertainment sector that has helped to revitalize local economies in recent decades, due to the fact that in recent years, conventions, meetings and business travel have been essential for local economic vitality and the revitalization of downtowns" (Laslo and Judd, 2004: 82, 83).

This is because of the large amount of money that drives business travel and events. In this sense "over the last several decades, small and medium-sized cities have been participants in an economic development gold rush to build convention centers" (McNeill and Evans, 2004: 39).

McNeill and Evans are reminding us that over the last 30 years, meetings and conventions growth in the United States has been nothing less than spectacular (cited: 24).

Carlsen too describes conventions as the seams of gold that run through tourism, but he regrets that there is limited academic literature specific to the development of convention and exhibition centers (2004: 47). It is recognized

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by Carlsen (2004: 59) that conventions and business tourism are vital tools for education, marketing, networking, and corporate communication, and therefore they play an important role in the economy. Furthermore, the increased specialization that has occurred in almost every profession has caused specialists to unit with other people of similar interests across the world, when the number of "niche" specialists at any given location is generally very small (Shure 1996, a).

New technologies have likewise increased the efficiency and the economic productivity of meetings (Shure 1996, b). According to Laslo and Judd "the new infrastructures and amenities of tourism and entertainment offer far more benefit to cities than the attraction of out-of-town visitors" (2004: 85). Las Vegas executives too believe that business is now more important than recreational travel than ever before (Berns 2000: 1). Las Vegas isn't alone, "the strategy of targeting conventions' business as a significant tourism market has been adopted by several cities around the world seeking to achieve international recognition by hosting major international conventions" (Carlsen 2004: 51).

Trade fairs, which are held all year round and offer particular products and services, are popular throughout the world. They draw a large attendance since they are the main information source for traders and vendors. They facilitate the building of relationships and provide an opportunity to learn the market's news; they offer a chance for attendees to find jobs or to speak with specialized sector experts.

Due to the frequency of these events and their many locations, it is necessary for potential attendees to make a choice as to which to attend. People typically prefer the trade fairs characterized by a strong presence of trade professionals, while the primary aim of trade fairs exhibitors is promoting and selling the products offered.

In order to promote and sell their products, the exhibitors try to involve the visitors increasing their attendance by making the experience more entertaining and more attractive.

The Italian case study

Laslo and Judd affirm that the new "lean and mean" and flexible corporate structures based on horizontal rather than vertical organization, relies heavily on meetings (2004: 85).

This is the case in Italy, where especially small or medium industries need exhibition facilities, as they are very strictly connected to local economies. In addition, even small and medium industries are globally interlinked

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today. The small dimension of enterprises is a peculiarity of Italy, especially of the Emilia Romagna region, whose model of familiar enterprises has been studied and imitated around the world.

Product exhibitions started in the Middle Ages, but today, instead of decreasing, the phenomenon is increasing: "the meeting industry, which includes exhibitions, trade shows, consumer shows, associations and corporate meetings, has been expanding rapidly in recent years, and it is likely to continue to do so" (Laslo and Judd, 2004: 85). This expansion occurs in spite of web connections, because people enjoy and need personal communication; Internet connections can be helpful in a later time, facilitating further relationships and trade exchanges.

The Bocconi University estimates the value of the international exhibitions business in Italy at around 1 billion euros. With 200 international events held annually, and with the national, regional and local fairs, Italy is ranking second in the international arena with the prospect of generating even more profits (QN, January 2005: 2).

According to AEFI (Fair System in Italy), 200,000 enterprises attend every year the fair (fiera) events with 20 million national and international operators involved, generating 60 million euros worth of deals (Ferrari, 2005: 9).

Statistics show that fifty per cent of export sales originate from fair organizations. Thus, approximately, 75 percent of entrepreneurs believe that fairs are a fundamental tool for development (Ferrari 2005: 16).

The increase of services in the show facilities

To be leaders in the fair world market, it is necessary to be internationally renown, and a very important role is played by the innovation process, offering new competing services involving all the regional organization of an area.

Enlarging the area capacity no longer produces sufficient results; in this field the winning strategy is innovation, which should be brought on through sector services and organizing advertising campaigns, promotional initiatives, events, and exhibits.

One requirement to fully optimize international attraction is that convention cities provide the full range of auxiliary goods and services required by delegates and accompanying people, as world class facilities, infrastructures, and amenities.

In many cases, organizers are able to plan informal meeting occasions that can be more productive than the official event itself (Bonini and Dall'Ara 1993: 14).

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Professionals offering holiday packages should involve visitors with short performances (such as theatre etc.) or offer them particular gifts. Conventions on trade topics, workshops with international experts, further initiatives aimed at contextualizing the product, as well as lunch and dinner events, attract businessmen (Todisco 2002).

Exhibitors all have to promote their products or activity to specific consumers, often characterized by cultural needs, attracted by showy innovation and aesthetic values. Generally products shown in conjunction with objects of extraneous value attract more visitors who may, in turn, pay multiple visits, in fact, non-market unrelated incentives are present for the purpose of entertainment.

Clark reports that the ratio of meeting space to exhibit space has gone from 4 to 1; to 3 to 1 over the past 10 years (2004: 18). Effectively 20 years ago the Bologna Fiera had a ratio of 10 to 1, while today the ratio is 2 to 1, including all services (Mastrobuono 2004: 7).

According to an Italian operator, services are the core of the exhibition world (Prioni 2004: 14). In this sense, business and scientific meetings are more and more enriched by social events as parties and banquets, according to the exigencies of business targets.

What distinguishes Milan, from other European cities is what the Fiera Milano's organizers define as "the capacity to create an event into the event": visitors are attracted by accompanying initiatives that add glamour to the exhibitions. For example in one of the last shows, in December 2004, around 70 events were organized, such as workshops, forums, art and museums visits..." (Ferrari 2005: 5). The last Futur-Show in Milan, in addition to the exhibition facilities, involved 60 locations in the city, and the contents included a campaign for the UN "Millennium Goal" Program.

Meetings

The variation of meeting habits between people of different nationalities and localities presents particular concern for geographers.

It is well known that official dinners and receptions are widespread around the world, but their modalities differ significantly from one country to another and from one continent to another.

It seems that every country follows schematized patterns. Obviously, conventions must offer excellent services, but that excellence is contingent upon the available funds. Funds available to the conventions are in turn reliant upon both private and public allowances. Private funds depend on the economic solidity of the sponsor or on its advertisement's allocations. The variation in the allocation of funds affects the ability to provide free lunches, dinners, or refreshments.

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Another basic difference should be recognized in the free or paid fees of lunches, dinners, or parties. Many paid events are of lower quality as they are included in the conference package. In contrast, the free events are staged in a more luxurious setting, in order to provide the consumers with an extra incentive.

Food services in fairs

While services requested by international business tourists are diverse, one of the most important is F&B provision. Food in fairs is not only a practical necessity, but a nice corollary to reunions and meetings. One can meet food requirements in bars, restaurants, or in fast food establishments, but for businessmen and special attendees, banquets and reserved invitations to dinners are also offered. Services are generally provided by third-party firms and designed caterers, but food supplies are very profitable for fair operators too, due to the fact that many centers require a 10% rebate from caterers. In and nearby the Fiera Milano there are eighty restaurants or similar services; inside the Bologna Fiera there are 22 restaurants. The designated caterer for Bologna Fiera, the CAMST company, which has been providing services there since the Fiera opening, has become the third largest food provider in Italy (Zamagni 2002). Recently, the Bologna Fiera has decreased its external assistance reliance on food providers creating a new internal catering company, "Convivia", a joint venture between the institution running the Bologna exhibition center and the caterer quoted above.

Convivia is now providing for all catering needs on the fair premises. This newly formed, highly professional outfit ensures reliability and top cuisine service standards across the whole range of catering options.

Culinary tourism

The Italian Tourist Office (ENIT) is aiming to promote culinary tourism, because it is confirmed that this is among the major sources of Italian attractions, as it has been demonstrated by many researches realized by 26 Italian Tourist offices around the world (Todisco 2002).

Trips are often aimed at culinary specialties, both directly, when one takes a trip in order to know typical products of an area or of a famous cook, and indirectly, when one takes a trip for another reason and knowledge of local production is acquired.

Exhibitions are also related to food in direct and indirect ways.

First trade exhibitions can be aimed at presenting food or food related

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products. Secondly, trade exhibitions may be aimed at presenting other products, but on these occasions visitors can enjoy banqueting services through which they are offered food by exhibitors as a way of entertainment.

Italy is a good venue to observe culinary events and food presentation related to exhibitions and business. Specifically, some food shows are famous around the world, such as: Vinitaly, the international wine show in Verona, replicated in several places abroad, such as Russia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, and China which have begun to offer similar shows. In Verona, Enolitech is tied to wine technologies; Sol is related to olive oil advertisement, and the most comprehensive, Agrifood, is also held in Verona. In Milan, the Fiera Food System is an important event, with parallel events in Turin with La Fiera del Gusto.

In Bologna, food is addressed as a health matter in an event called SANA, and food packaging is the focus of the Pack Show.

Italian production

Italy produces one-fifth of the over 500 European certified typical products and one-fifth of these Italian products are concentrated in Emilia-Romagna, the Italian region with the highest number of such products.

With 39 million tourists per year, Italy welcomes six percent of the world's tourist arrivals, positioning itself third in Europe, after Spain and France. Furthermore, Italy ranks second, after France for P.D.O. and P.G.I. products; among them we find some food specialties, renowned all over Italy and worldwide, such as the Parma Ham, the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, and 300 Italian labeled wines. In addition to the mild climate, there are more than 100 art cities with more or less well-known monuments which attract visitors; but culinary traditions are often the combination of folk culture, ancient customs, authentic lifestyles, and handicraft. Some wines, cheeses, salami etc. have the taste of the past, their roots deriving from the Roman, the Greek, or even from the Etruscan age, such as the famous "Bologna" the beef and pork salami, whose name derives from the city of production and which originates from a Roman recipe.

In the Middle Ages, the markets of Bologna and Milan were famous because of the great availability of "local foods", and for their capacity to define themselves like inter-territorial, inter-regional or inter-national places of exchange.

The city of Bologna

Bologna is the capital of the Emilia-Romagna region, in northern-central Italy. It is an ancient city, very rich in monuments, because it was one of the most important provinces in the Vatican State until the reunification of Italy in 1861. Its Science Foundation has been, for centuries, a hinge of multidisciplinary research and discoveries, as is the University, the most ancient in the world, with nine centuries of high scientific performances. Today, this University is leading the European knowledge and educational innovation process, named "The Bologna Process". Another point of strength in this area is the railway and highway connection, as Bologna is located on the Via Emilia, the ancient roman road between Rome and Milan. In addition to that, it is the central hub of the tourist line, Rome-Florence-Venice, and at the crossroad of the east- west line connecting the two Italian seas, the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic sea, therefore connecting Rimini or Ravenna, from one coast, to Genova on the other coast, and it hosts an international, and, for a few months now, an intercontinental airport.

Its highest revenue per person in Italy, its ancient historical buildings, and its University are fostering Bologna's cultural life as much as the new facilities connected to the high level of industrialization.

The rationale for this focus is that this location is one of the most important trade communities in Italy's history of convention activities. It is the second in Italy, the fourth in Europe, the fifteenth in the world (Ferriani 2004). Certainly it is not a big city, but it is a special place for symposia, meetings, lectures, conferences. Usually, every day offers an opportunity to celebrate some meetings and conferences, thanks to the vital activity of the University, the renowned hospital, and the large number of enterprises. In this sense, Emilia-Romagna is one of the richest European regions with little and medium enterprises spread throughout; in short, it is a world celebrated model of self entrepreneurs, especially in mechanics and ceramics industries.

Even though it is a hub, Bologna is not at all a tourist city, because of its high prices, but, for all the reasons quoted above, it is a business and cultural city. In fact, it was declared by the EU, "European Cultural City" in the year 2000. This recognition has been an occasion for enhancing and promoting a number of cultural and innovating events. Bologna has been celebrated since the first centuries of the first millennium, as a capital of outstanding food, culture, and architecture, the evidence is to be found in the fact that it was named the "grassa, dotta, turrita" (fat, learned, towered). Fat, because some typical foods are connected to the rich traditions of the Etruscan and Roman culture, mixed with some elements of the Long bard or German habits. Learned,

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because it houses the oldest university in the world. Towered, because rich families have inhabited the city since the medieval ages, as vassals of the Church's political power and have built towers as symbols of their richness.

The highest revenues per person in Italy, the ancient historical buildings, and the University are fostering Bologna's cultural life as much as the new facilities connected to the high level of industrialization.

Bologna Convention Center Area

Trade events in Bologna began in the fifties in an open urban space, on an artificial hill which today serves as a weekly market, adapted as a showroom for a large range of products. In the sixties, according to the city plan, new exhibition facilities were created in a northern area, on the intersection of all major modes of transportation and near the highway's entrance.

The famous architect Benevolo was committed to draw the exhibition buildings in this dedicated space. He created edifices shaped as the Paris Pompidou centre. These have been later expanded by structures ideated by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, who also planned the city's main highway intersection and a new business focal point, all in the same area, where a building drawn by Le Corbusier already existed.

Meeting and show planners generally prefer centers located close to hotels and restaurants (Clark 2004: 12). In Bologna, the exhibition's core is relatively distant from downtown, but the small city dimensions offer an easy way back and forth, from the meeting place to the city, for the trade fair centre has been constructed in an area planned for further development. Nevertheless, the planned residential expansion in this area has not happened. It was supposed to be located at the rear of the railway station which splits the city into two parts: centre and suburbs. Suburbs are preferred for large business settlements, not for residences. Fortunately, the convention center's area is easily reachable and it is equipped with commercial offices and banks, a city theatre, a modern art gallery, parking facilities and hotels.

The railway terminals, as well as the bus terminals nearby, generate a sort of interface between the city and the closest suburbs, where the Fiera is located; in fact, one railway line arrives directly into the exhibition space. The same railway line departing from the Fiera, permits the exhibitors to join the tourist sea resort of Rimini, where not only another big exhibition feature is located, but where a large availability of hotels is offered, especially during off peak seasons. Rimini is a famous tourist resort and, in the low season, hotel prices are cheaper than in Bologna. Even though Rimini is located 75 miles away,

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it is a good option because Bologna lacks hotel rooms to fully reach its business potential: hotels are insufficient to accommodate the large demand, so Rimini is needed in peak fair times . The sea resort also offers skilled workers to fulfill the Bologna Fiera services demand. Nevertheless, workers are also available among the large number of Bologna University students, who find the employment suitable for the weekends.

The dimensions of "Bologna Fiera"

Since the 50's, Bologna has become one of the top convention destinations in Europe, ranking second in Italy for the number of exhibitors and visitors.

The Bologna Fiera dimensions	
Total Surface Area	340,000 m ²
Indoor Exhibition space	175,000 m ²
Outdoor Exhibition space	80,000
Services	35,000 m ²
Exhibition Halls	20
Entrances	4
Parking Availability	10,000
Theatre-seats	1,350

Source : Annual Report of 2004 Bologna Fiera

That is quite remarkable, since the city of Bologna counts only four hundred thousand inhabitants. Its strong points are mainly the number and the relevance of the thousands of enterprises around, and the fact that small or medium size industries need these facilities to advertise and market themselves, more so than the big companies.

Other reasons of Bologna Convention Centre success are its management efficiency, the city infrastructures, transportation facilities, and connections.

Nowadays, the total area of the exhibition centre measures more than 3,659,729 square feet; the indoor exhibition space covers 1,883,684 square feet and the outdoor exhibition space covers 861,112 square feet. These facilities are continuously expanding through new indoor spaces and open areas to host new events.

Twenty eight events are held throughout the year, except during the summer and public holidays. In 2004, an average of 20,000 exhibitors (of which 3,500

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were foreign) were officially present, and almost 2,500,000 have been the annual visitors, for a total of 125 active days.

One of the most successful events, attracting more than one million visitors, is the "Motor-show" presenting numerous racings, cars and motors competitions, patronized by famous sportsmen.

The Motor-show was in its origin especially related to Ferrari cars - which are produced near Bologna, in the city of Modena, only thirty kilometers away - as a way to celebrate their success. Modena is also the site where the luxurious Maserati cars are produced.

In the surrounding areas of Bologna the flamboyant Lamborghini, and other famous motorbikes, such as Ducati or Benelli are produced.

The Bologna's convention centre is a sign of the high technology level of its regional enterprises, reflected by the success of the specialized regional exports: machinery, tiles and food. In fact the world renown nicknames of the Bologna region are: "packaging valley", "ceramics valley", & "food valley". Almost all types of packaging machineries all over the world derive from this area; seventy percent of the world tiles is produced between Bologna, Modena, and Reggio Emilia.

The "food valley" offers 22 regional products with European labels; precisely this region is the kingdom of fresh pasta, homeland of tagliatelle and lasagne, often enriched with Bolognese meat sauce, the specialized point for cappelletti and tortellini filled with raw ham and Parmesan.

One should not forget the numerous kinds of sweets and cakes, such as the rice cake, the pampolato, which derives its origins from the Renaissance royal scenery, and typical wines such as Lambrusco or the more rare "sand wines". It would be too much to count all the products, simply deriving from agriculture & from longstanding traditional crafts or long lasting conservation methods, such as the balsamic vinegar, obtained after 25 years of preservation in wood barrels.

Culinary traditions, new source for the Bologna tourism

Culinary traditions can be a motivation for tourism, as people move to taste precious recipes or typical fruits or vegetables. Business and food richness are strictly related in Bologna and in its region; together they have created reasons for business and cultural tourism. In a special way, here, good food is the pivot of trade tourism. As quoted earlier, Bologna is not mainly visited for its monuments, even if they are noticeable, but it is very assiduously frequented for lectures, conventions, seminars, summits, courses and especially for exhibitions, and in almost all these events gastronomy is on stage. This occurs likely because hospitality has a long tradition going back to the classical ages, and likely be-

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cause food is the icon of this region. Exhibitors, businessmen, and managers sell their manufactured products in exhibitions offering local products as business gifts, which are, in most cases, edible promotional goods.

Sometimes, food caterers make compromises, according to the paradigm of "glocalisation", melding different culinary traditions as a synthesis of the choices of the "world's best", eventually adapting world renowned food to local tastes.

In this way, typical good recipes become the reward for the attention paid by trade visitors or conference attendees. Conferences or conventions are usually accompanied all around the world by social dinners, elegant buffets, smart cocktails hours, but this habit is not so widespread as in the Emilia-Romagna region, where buffets are distinguished by their wide variety and particular richness, and also the generous offering, even in the smallest and most informal meetings.

Generally, most part of the events are strictly reserved to people involved, in one way or the other, to the event; in Bologna exhibitions facilities not only are the buyers generously served with food, but also the visitors or the curious, likely with the usual 3-course meal offered in Italy.

Even in Milan, the first business city in Italy, gadgets are given as promotional merchandise instead of food; in Bologna, food is the preferred offering. Surely some samples of each are offered in meetings and press conferences, and sometime both: gadgets and cakes. However the main promotional means in this "food valley" is considered food and beverage and the most spectacular place where all this setting up is performed is the exhibition centre in Bologna. All this is a kind of generosity demonstrated by the local entrepreneurs, even among different events. Certainly the gratuity of the offer is attractive and may help organizers to sell their products; in other words, banquets are an advertisement tool. In fact, good and free food encourage people to spend more time at show stands, observing the stand's products with more interest. The strong competition among exhibitors and the large number of trade fairs around the world impose pull factors and visitors require a variety of entertainment. At this end, nice resorts are chosen to host cultural and business events, as aesthetics have a primary role, encompassing more and more the aspects of taste.

Finally, experts affirm that businessmen are going to trade fairs for technical, economic, and cultural reasons, but they attend events with more pleasure when trade is enriched by various proposals and offers, influencing the psychological aspects of individuals.

Parallel events

In Bologna, events and also shows are connected to food in a direct or indi-

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rect way, especially in the exhibition arena. The direct connection happens when the exhibition's theme is the food or food related production. Several exhibitions are related to food, such as food packaging tools or machines, food conservation technologies, or food export-import business. But usually all events offer food items in order to entertain the clients longer and more pleasantly. Champagne or sweets accompany discussions, new product presentations and technical demonstrations play on consumers' psychology. What occurs in the Bologna Fiera is not at all similar to what occurs in other cities or countries; in England, the food offered during lectures or public events is very limited (in some countries just some peanuts); in Italy, food is always accompanied by good wines and "spumante" (Italian champagne) or "prosecco" (dry white wine). The special treatment of the Italian organizers is the "open offer"; this means that everyone passing through is allowed to help himself at the open buffets; in some countries, buffets are very closed with different kinds of controls and restraints. This specific behavior is the spontaneous effect of ancestral hospitality, and it gradually increases moving from the north to the south of Italy, as hospitality was a very respected habit in the ancient Greek culture, which established itself in the southern part of Italy.

The quality and quantity of banquets are very different from one exhibition stall to another, even in the same event. Generally booths offer some cakes and ales. Some are furnished inside their spaces with nice bars and sometime restaurants, even if the rental of spaces is very expensive; some of the incorporated restaurants are not always open to the public, but only to the clients or highest caliber buyers. Candies or chocolates however are offered to all trade show goers, in spaces facing the external side of the stall, towards the passage, whereas incorporated restaurants and bars are visually separated from the public. Some stands offer beverages or little sweets, characterized by the firm brand, even if the firm is not a food producer. The less expensive choice for exhibitors is to offer visitors cheap gifts as key holders with the advertised logo. Little samples are continually offered during the entire exhibition time, usually presented by attractive hostesses, whereas meals are set up during lunch hours.

At the end of trade events, it may occur that some enterprises celebrate the conclusion of a good deal with cocktail hours, enriched by champagne. The last curiosity I would like to recall regards an enterprise offering gifts for visitors during an exposition of building materials. Gifts consisted of free jars of honey labeled with an icon of a carpenter's glue; the advertisement explained that the new material was as strong as glue, but also as sweet and supple as honey. The only difficulty was that visitors did not understand if it was edible or not, so they did not take them away, even though they looked at them with curiosity.

Typical products

The most important point about food in trade shows is that generally food products of local origin are offered to the delegates or clients, even if the firms on stage are foreign. According to this, Italian and foreign exhibitors offer Italian specialties and, particularly, the regional ones, so this food ends up characterizing the typical image of the hosting area. This is supposed to attract local clients, so exhibitors adapt themselves to the local habits. Exceptions to this statement occur at the extremely specialized exhibitions, which attract people from all over the world. In this case, exhibitors offer the products of their region or the most world famous products, so that people who are curious about different tastes have the opportunity to try them.

"The multiplication of products of terroir is a manifestation of the resurgence of local identity, tied to places, giving a sense of authenticity according to traditions, in the context of globalization of the agri-food business. It also demonstrates new ties to nature, considered as a heritage, but also as entertainment, show, and even as consumption of biodiversity" (Cornier Salem 2004: 12, my translation from French).

The entertainment innovations

Very often commercial exhibitions are connected to the life of the city in which they are located and in such a way that visitors may attend related events which are offered both in the exhibition space and the city centre. The extension towards outside spaces is realized in a large variety of forms.

In many cases, exhibitors utilize space downtown or in the city as a whole, embracing several opportunities for presenting evening events as dinners, concerts, theatre performances, distribution of business awards, art or photograph exhibitions, or celebrating successful business deals at the City Hall. On the other side, the city businessmen often grasp the opportunities offered by the trade fair's scenery, together with all its economic deals, to enhance hotels, pubs, taxis, and restaurant revenues, perhaps creating new job opportunities.

In Bologna, one theatre is located in the fair area, it is used as a conference hall during the exhibition periods and for other entertainments outside the exhibition periods as well.

Several conferences are organized simultaneously with exhibitions in the high quality and central hotels, where dinners or fashion shows are also presented.

Diversification is the last brainstorming process in this business world. It originates from the increasing expenses of exhibition organization and the costs of spaces, in addition to the increasing competition among exhibitors. As a consequence, new promotions are performed in different spaces, times and

modalities.

One of the most impressive activities has been the fashion show of hair couture, followed by a reception in high style, carried out in an old factory, which is already considered an industrial archeological sample, near the "Fiera" official area. The space is so large that it enabled exhibitors to organize a fashion show, with top model instruction, dinner setting, dinner service, and, in addition, an after dinner party with dancing and music, all in the same building.

Another new idea - in our opinion a little bit expensive - has been the project finalized to rent some spaces in the city centre, in order to expand both the area and the image of some enterprises present at the trade shows.

All this can be better explained through three examples. The idea has been originated during the ceramic tile exhibition, one of the most important among Bologna trade fairs.

The first example is of an enterprise which invited their clients to a central restaurant from 8 to 10 p.m. This time schedule was chosen in order to satisfy two necessities: first, offer a dinner to the fair visitors, and secondly to let the restaurant be free for usual clients (in Italy, it is considered trendy for VIPs to go to restaurants and pubs very late at night, after 10 p.m. for example). The firm's clients were not only offered dinner and beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, but in addition to that, they had the opportunity to enjoy some wellness and entertainment proposals (such as shiatsu massages, tattoo, music, video commercials and so on) in order to relax after a business day.

The second enterprise rented a famous pub for days and nights where tiles were exposed together with video conferences. The atmosphere was in Japanese style and Japanese food was offered, because a line of oriental ceramics was on stage. The most expensive aspect of this arrangement was organizing transport to the venue: the exhibitors offered a free shuttle service for executives from the fair zone to the city and vice versa (the Fiera is two miles away from the city centre). This event was held during the trade fair working hours which made it useful to organize a shuttle service for the fair's attendees.

Meanwhile the company quoted above did not organize shuttle services because the time of the event occurred after the exhibition hours.

The third experiment was carried out in the dismissed facilities of the National Railways Company and produced very good results; because this space has been considered a duplication of the Fiera, due to the short distance from its premises, just three blocks away. These spaces will likely be used again, because they meet several standards: they are free, they are retired buildings - cheap and big at the same time - and they are located both near the city and the Fiera, precisely in between. They have the advantage of being very large, surrounded by gardens, terraces and courts, which is helpful because large areas are required

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for furniture, marbles or wood product shows. On these occasions, music orchestra performances, dancing, free buffets have been organized, and wonderful product displays, in arrangements designed by artists or architects, have been presented.

Finally, it should be remembered that some exhibition stalls are set up by artists very able in highlighting the best aspect of the products and impressing visitors both with the colorful images and logos of the manufactured items and the most representative images of the enterprise itself.

Conclusions

This work tries to demonstrate that different aspects of tourism exist; one of them is culinary tourism, but this enacts itself in several ways, the richest of which is represented by banquets, conference buffets, and official dinners. According to this development, business and culinary tourism are merging into one another, and together they can be considered expressions of cultural tourism. Only in this way will tourism promote visits to the city of Bologna, which is not, as of now, characterized by mass tourism, even if it is rich in monuments and located among the most important cultural cities in Italy.

Bologna's perception is shaped both by culture and market, which gives rise to business fluxes, but together they can offer opportunities for community, which can be considered one face of culture, in the sense that it provides socialization and getting to know each others.

Food is, as ever, a tool of connecting people, according to the popular expression: "where there is food, people come", but classic healthy food is, in a certain sense, a rediscovery of traditions and consumer values, and it represents today a new connotation of business and cultural relationships.

Banquets are organized after and during conferences or trade fairs; they are particularly amusing and could become an attracting argument for commercial advertisements too.

Even if businessmen usually do not attend meetings and symposia for the purpose of conviviality and taste, no one can deny that the moments of eating together are the most delightful moments, able to take part in leisure and relaxation in business concerns.

Exhibition centers offer many opportunities to several cities to promote tourist attractions, as parallel events to attract more visitors to the city's area.

Bologna offers an effective example of interlocked events, eventually related to the convention centre, but it should even more highlight and relate its famous culinary traditions in all the events in order to effectively entice visitors.

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Notes :

- ¹ Also a new helicopter platform and a toy train inside the village, connecting different parts along the fair space, shouldn't be forgotten.
- ² The city of Bologna has only 84 hotels with 9.039 beds. Its province offers 342 hotels with 22,765 beds.
- ³ 1,300.00 in 2003
- ⁴ The leather exhibition has involved in 2004, exhibitors from 120 countries.
- ⁵ Wellness activities entertainment were offered because the enterprise is producing facilities for spas.

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