

Cultural Tourism: the Business of Sustaining the Performing Arts

Abstract

It is regarded as self-evident today that no city can claim to be world class without a first class cultural centre. Many cultural activities are risky and have an uncertain financial return. For that reason, in London, several West End theatres are part of larger groups so that a mix of successes and failures average out in most years. But performing arts organisations, such as opera companies do not exist solely for the purpose of satisfying consumer demand, but also to further their cultural medium. In this the performing arts have an ‘intrinsic value’, which is value independent of that expressed by the consumer. As museums may be regarded as the guardians of heritage, so opera companies take their share of guarding the cultural resources of society. The techniques used to evaluate the public worth of cultural projects are reviewed, but the main focus, in the light of the current ‘credit crunch’ is opera organisations themselves. The broad goals of the professional opera companies are to maximise attendance, while presenting a repertoire that meets their quality standards; yet the traditions and conventions in the repertoire lead to high costs and prices in today’s market, implying varying amounts of government funding to enable the art form to continue. Given that the latter is ‘at arm’s length’ and subject to tightening public sector budgetary conditions, the essence of the discussion here is one of self-help to survive.

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