

RITUAL PLATFORMS FOR INSTIGATING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PROJECT MARKETING

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Introduction

It is usually advocated that project-based companies have to develop networks of relations in order to anticipate and shape forthcoming projects in their key target industries (Cova et al., 2002). This is due to the high degree of discontinuity existing in the economic relationship between the buyer and seller (Hadjikhani, 1996; Mandjak and Veres, 1998). For example, the buyer of a power station may only need to develop such a facility every five or ten years. Thus, the main marketing strategy adopted by project-based companies (Artto and Wikström, 2005) when faced with particularly irregular purchasing patterns among their clients is to try to overcome the effects of economic discontinuity by developing strong social and relational bonds (Björkman and Kock, 1995).

Consequently, one of the major issues faced by project based companies is to join meeting platforms which, through their ritual nature, put company's members in contact with different stakeholders who might play a part in forthcoming projects (Cova and Salle, 2000). This paper seeks to contribute to solve this issue by going beyond the canonical example of Bechtel's Bohemian Grove (McCartney 1991) to elaborate the basic rules of construction of such ritual platforms (Cova and Salle, 2000). It is focused on the case of a platform allowing local companies and stakeholders to meet: the scale is the one of a region and not a nation or a continent.

We will first summarize the key characteristics of project business and marketing and detail how project based companies instigate personal relations. Second, we will develop the ritual approach to extrabusiness relations in project business. This will lead us to our core question: how does a ritual platform function in project business? Third, in order to answer this question, we will study the case of a sporting even: the Open 13 international tennis tournament in Marseilles (France). Fourth, we will detail and interpret what is at play in this type of ritual platform in term of macro-rituals. Fifth, we will detail and interpret what is at play in term of micro-rituals.

Project business and marketing

Firms in industries such as aerospace, construction, shipyards, engineering, etc. are firms that do not conceive, produce, and sell either products or services, but projects. These firms thus operate in project business (Artto and Wikström, 2005), which is very closely related to solution business (Tuli et al., 2007), which is all the rage today. “A *project is a long-lasting, negotiated and interactive process*” (Cova and Holstius, 1993, p. 108), that includes numerous phases and interventions from numerous actors from a variety of origins (e.g., from and around the supplier firm, from and around the customer firm). All these actors together form a project network (Dubois and Gadde, 2000). Throughout the process, the different actors interact in one way or another to shape a project. As these projects are very often both unique and complex, prior definition of the entire project is impossible. These projects therefore give rise to a long process of co-creation in which the different actors participate to a greater or lesser extent. Project marketing theory (Cova and Salle, 2007; Skaates and Tikkanen, 2003) results in researchers not only focusing their attention on the offering strategy and project management but rather more on the specificities of the stakeholders in this type of transaction (i.e., the actors in a project network). Researchers stipulate (Bansard et al., 1993) that a double fragmentation of the buying center and selling center distinguishes a project activity from other BtoB activities. This fragmentation leads to a multitude of possible interactions between the actors of these two fragmented centers. Such interactions show (Cova et al., 1996) that the fragmentation leads to an awareness of these actors’ importance in the buying process. The latter is true for business actors and non-business actors alike. In one way or another, these actors participate in the process and by making the same decisions (e.g., initiating or kicking off a project, defining a project, setting up a purchasing procedure, determining specifications, selecting suppliers, etc.). Consequently, researchers have introduced concepts to develop awareness of this type of network that evolves over time – they refer to the milieu (Cova et al., 1996) or a project horizon (Tikkanen, 1998). The milieu is attached to an activity in a clearly defined territory. The milieu gathers all business and non business actors concerned by the activity on this territory. The milieu has clear geographical borders, but its actors may have relationships with several actors outside these borders.

Given the low transaction frequency of projects, project marketing approaches are mainly interpretable (Hadjikhani, 1996) as a means of limiting the supplier–customer relationship discontinuity inside a dedicated milieu. Consequently, the supplier’s principle lever is reliance on anticipated actions. The aim is to detect projects well upstream of the consultation phase by relying on contacts within the entire group of actors who are directly or indirectly in contact with customers who have projects. Research into the project marketing (Günter and Bonnacorsi, 1996; Cova and Salle, 2007) of the two last decades has demonstrated that in terms of responding to invitations to bid, project marketing extends well beyond the tactical considerations associated with competitive bidding. In this respect, project marketing encompasses an activity that one can illustrate in terms of the strategic options available to a supplier at three key stages of project development (Cova et al., 2002):

- *Outside any project opportunities*: when the client establishment of a specific requirement has yet to occur, thus requiring the supplier to anticipate and/or create the competitive arena in conjunction with other potential participants. At this stage, the supplier tries to develop a relational position in the milieu. Such a position is made up of relations between business and non business actors, who are potential stakeholders in pending projects;

- *Upstream of the project*: when the supplier aims to anticipate and/or build a project's expected value in conjunction with the customer and other influential actors. At this stage, the supplier tries to secure its relational position in the network of actors around the pending project;
- *Inside the project*: when the supplier accepts the established value or seeks to have this re-built in order to compete on more favorable terms. At this stage, the supplier tries to mobilize all its relations in the network of actors inside and around the buyer.

Thus, to take the high level of uncertainty relating with low transaction frequency into account, project marketing toys with anticipation by relying on relationship elements, and especially on personal contacts and social episodes. Companies which sell solutions (Tuli et al., 2007) and projects-to-order (Cova et al., 2002) operate inside very complex and fast moving international networks where it is of paramount importance to develop relationships with possible clients and stakeholders before any business would take place (Jansson, 1989; Owusu et al., 2007), i.e. during the phase '*Outside any project opportunities*'. In this area, beyond economic and technological interdependencies between companies, business relationships are especially made up of social interactions (Björkman and Kock, 1995). This social dimension often escapes the attention of marketing theorists although it is of major importance in the management of business relationships. The role of social interactions is suggested as a central means for managing the discontinuity of project business relationships (Hadjikhani, 1996). Mainela and Ulkuniemi (2009) have recently demonstrated that a project based company is able to be close to its customers and be present when needed both during and between projects only through individuals representing it. Building on Hallen's (1992) pioneering work, Halinen and Salmi (2001) conclude on the fact that "*management of personal contacts is complicated. Existing personal contacts, relationship sediments, are past-oriented – some common history is needed for usable contacts to exist. However, in using or managing contacts, orientation is towards the future. Therefore, the intentions and perceptions of the individuals involved and their willingness and ability to use personal relations for company purposes become crucial issues. By definition, it is difficult to manage the informal side of business interaction that personal contacts typically reflect. This concerns especially the basic roles of personal relations as enablers of business relationships*" (Halinen and Salmi, 2001).

An approach through rituals

On the basis of an investigation into project businesses, (Cova and Salle, 2000) have developed a ritual approach for analyzing the practices at play during extrabusiness episodes of business relationships, i.e. social episodes taking place outside any business opportunity. This ritual approach has been adopted by several others authors in order to understand the role of exhibitions and trade shows (Borghini et al., 2006) or the importance of networks beyond projects (Manning, 2008). All in all, these works confirm that extrabusiness relationships are nurtured through rituals.

A ritual is an ordered sequence of behaviour which is more rigid and predictable than in ordinary action. It is a meaningful but scarcely conscious procedure of dramatised roles, of values and finalities, of real and symbolic means, of communication through coded systems (Bell, 1992). It is to be noted that the functioning of macro-rituals is based on some principles (Rivière, 1995, p.71):

- Meeting (every ritual implies a situation in which the actors are in each other's presence);
- Delegation (all the members are not necessarily present; it is enough for some to perform the ritual behaviour as representatives, who are delegates of the community);

- Shared emotion which solidifies the link.

But the way rituals work is never clearly expressed and expressible: *“ritual procedures are certainly significant but often actors are not aware of the ritual nature of these procedures”* (Rivière, 1995, p.70).

In considering that ritual is the basic social act, Cova and Salle (2000) propose a ritualization framework aiming at providing a structure for organizing actions taking place in the context of extrabusiness relationships. They consider two types of rituals:

- rituals of integration or macro-rituals, which are elaborate procedures (ceremonies) for consolidation of the “we-ness” feeling such as trade shows;
- rituals of interaction or micro-rituals, which are simple procedures for facilitating everyday contacts and negotiating personal identity such as exchanging business cards.

In their exploratory work, Cova and Salle (2000) focus on macro-rituals because their main function of social integration seems capable of *“providing a framework adapted to the needs of boosting confidence, of maintaining interdependence and socio-economic integration between the company and different stakeholders”* (Cova and Salle, 2000, p. 676). They coined the term ‘ritual platform’ to define these macro-rituals which facilitate social encounters: *“The final aim is to provide a ritual platform able to support the construction, the development and the maintenance of interpersonal contacts not to organise them”* (Cova and Salle, 2000, p. 677). Let’s remember here that in anthropology and ethnology, the notion of ‘ritual platform’ is traditionally used to depict the sacred physical support (a stone, a grave, etc.) of the ritual act. By extension, this notion is used today to describe any tangible or intangible support of the ritual act (Raj and Harman, 2006) such as the Bohemian encampment.

In the wake of this ritual approach, the aim of this paper is to investigate how does such a ritual platform function? In order to answer this question we chose to study the case of a sporting even: the Open 13 international tennis tournament in Marseilles (France). The objective was to understand how for over 15 years a network of partners comprising mainly local institutions (Region, Urban Community, City, etc.) and companies selling projects (Bombardier, Onet, Sodexo, Veolia, etc.) has built itself up around this event.

Our data collection involved two types of qualitative research methods: 1) active interviews (Holtsein and Gulbrium, 1995); 2) participant observation (Visconti, 2010). We interviewed 22 people, on the organizing side or on the client side. We conducted several days of participant observation at each tournament. One of the authors played the role of participant-observer in the tennis tournament and provided critical access to companies and organizing teams. The other author played a peripheral role as outside observer spending time in the tournament, attending meetings with companies, and observing business interactions from the sidelines. These observations were recorded as field notes and integrated in our corpus of data. We paid specific attention to one site within the Marseilles Open 13 tennis tournament: what the organizing team calls the “village”. The analysis of our data followed the logic of the extended case method in business to business settings (Dubois and Gibbert, 2010).

Presentation of the case study: The Open13

The organization we studied is an international tennis tournament, the Open 13, which since 1993 takes place each year at the beginning of the month of February at the Palais des Sports in Marseilles (France). The Open 13 is part of the Association of Tennis Professionals circuit of professional tournaments; the ATP World Tour.

In 1993 Jean-François Caujolle, ex-professional tennis player in the 70's and 80's from Marseilles, created this event in collaboration with the IMG McCormack group, specialists in the management of athletes, events, media rights and sports marketing. In 1999, the IMG McCormack group decided to take over another major American tournament as its owner and co-organizer withdrew from the Marseilles tournament. At that particular moment, Jean-François Caujolle created a family structure, surrounding himself with close relatives and friends in order to become the sole owner of the tournament and to give it new, more entrepreneurial dynamics. Thus, by drawing on a core group of public and faithful private partners, this sporting event has become one of the first in France, alongside the "Grand Prix de Tennis de Lyon", to have considerably developed its offer in terms of public relations for companies. This evolution is symbolized by the creation and development of the Public Relations village offered to partners, devised as a work/living space for a week, where each firm or local authority disposes of a unique support where he can invite his colleagues, clients and business prospects for lunch or dinner, thus mixing professional meetings and sporting entertainment with the top level sports event. Consequently the Open13 distinguishes itself in two key ways which have now become part of the identity of the event:

- The quality of the sports' line-up and the director's capacity to let the general public discover the future big stars of the Association of Tennis Professionals' circuit (Becker, Noah, Kafelnikov, Federer, Nadal, Djokovic, Murray, Tsonga...);
- The quality of the public relations' services and the proximity that exists between the organizers and the partner clients which allows a personalization quasi unique in partnership proposals (visibility, communication, public relations...).

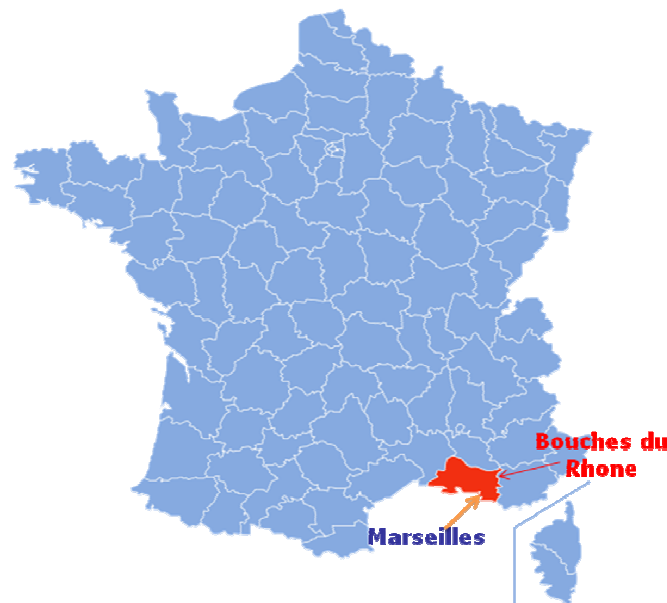


Figure 1: Marseilles and the Bouches du Rhône in France

One of the particularities about this sporting event is its partnership with the local council authority the Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône (a part of Provence known as N°13 in France), which has made the Open 13 its major event and involves itself not only financially but also involves itself in the actual organization of the tournament. The political and economic actors therefore form a solid social network around this event. An event such as the Open13 develops and evolves according to its partnerships, which are at the origin of 75 % of its turnover. The structure put into place by Jean-François Caujolle and his team is pyramid-shaped as follows:

- Major partner: Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône (council of the Bouches du Rhône area) ;
- Public official partners: Marseille Provence Métropole (Urban Community grouping together the city of Marseille and its suburbs); Ville de Marseille (city of Marseille);
- Private official partners : Bombardier (rail vehicles); Onet (cleaning multiservices, extreme environment technologies, security, safety); Sodexo (catering services, facilities management); Véolia (water and waste management services); Peugeot (cars and vans); BNP-Paribas (bank and finance). It is to be noted that apart from BNP-Paribas and Peugeot, all these companies operate mainly in project business. Therefore, they are in the search for developing relations with local public partners in order to anticipate and prepare future tenders. Jean-François Caujolle and his team have a deliberate policy concerning private partners: to exclude the attendance of potential competitors for each company.

The active role of the researcher inside this sporting event enabled us to analyze this case study in such a way as to characterize the types of development of macro and micro rituals within a network of public and private partners. We will therefore present this case study firstly from the point of view of the construction of a macro-ritual of an event and then we will analyze the creation and animation practices of micro-rituals.

The Open 13, a macro-ritual and a liminoid zone

This case study confirms that each public or private partner has, over several years, invested in the Open 13 with clearly defined objectives for the management of business relationships through extrabusiness episodes:

- The public institution partners of the Open 13 seek to increase the awareness of, inform and interact with certain political and social-economic decision-makers. « *In one week I was able to meet and talk with the main local political and economic deciders, I was able to explain and make these key people aware of what we do, something which would have taken me up to 6 months in normal conditions* » (President of the Marseille Provence Métropole). Indeed, the interest of Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône, Marseille Provence Métropole and Ville de Marseille mainly lies in the possibility to communicate their social actions (concerning the environment, the teenagers, etc.) to targeted audiences;
- A large number of private companies get involved in the Open 13 as part of their national business relationships' strategy. « *The number of political decision makers and future clients whom I met during the 2 days totally justifies Véolia's partnership with the Open 13 Tournament* » (Managing Director of Véolia);
- A more limited number of private companies make use of the Open 13 to demonstrate their know-how by acting as both suppliers and partners at the same time. Sodexo for catering projects is a good example: « *One of the reasons we get so involved in the Open 13 is to demonstrate our know-how to the principal local actors, by serving more than 35 000 meals during the week , whilst totally interacting with the organizers,*” (Events Director Sodexo).

Each of the partners is represented by several delegates who remain the whole week on the site. In certain cases, a partner can outsource its presence to public relation company, but this comes against what the Tournament Director expects from the partners.

According to the managers their participation in the Open 13 is inseparable from the concept of the Village: originally this space was designed as a VIP restaurant where each company could invite their clients, suppliers, employees and future prospects to their own personal space, giving them access to their private lodge to watch the high-level tennis matches between meals. The particularity of this Village, specially designed for the main partners, is that it is built for a period of only 10 days and has a different theme each year (Morocco, China, Egypt, New-York, Cuba...). As a result the Open 13 combines classic sponsoring, ticketing and public relations' services with the very specific service of an ephemeral space, the partners' Village.

For certain partners, the period of the year (beginning of February) and the Open 13 Village have become a key moment and place not to be missed. *"It reminds me of summer holiday camps or sports' training courses when we were impatient to meet up again with our friends"* Sponsorship Manager Sodexo). *"This Village is a bit like our home"* explained the Regional Manager for Peugeot: each of the principal partners participates in the development of the plans, the choice of furniture and the decor. The Communications Manager for the Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône therefore feels each year *"like I'm decorating my own home"*. This collective involvement in the creation of the Village, supported by the organizers of the Tournament, makes this place unique, creating a community atmosphere in harmony with the partners: *"At the Open 13 we are all part of a family, everybody knows each other and we spend a week together with the organizers, the players, the umpires, the other partners, without even noticing that we are working in the Palais des Sports in Marseilles..."* (Sponsorship Manager BNP Paribas). *"Here I don't have to get out my business card like I would do at a trade fair or at an official meeting; if I need to meet someone, the organizers know everyone and know how to introduce us discreetly, even to the politicians and economic decision-makers"* (Communications Manager Marseille Provence Métropole). On the name badges, people's first names take precedence over their surname or their job title. The specificity of this event thus lies in its double identity, both sporting and family/community, which makes the activity of networking more informal and leaves room for improvisation. *"By going to the Open 13 I know that during the week of the Tournament I will make unexpected and expected meetings, but all in a relaxed atmosphere"* (Commercial Manager Bombardier). Consequently, the Open 13 Village is considered by the managers to be a meeting place without constraints or obligations. At other events, the companies explain that they have a list of personalities to meet with and a reverse schedule to follow. *"Here at the Open 13, there is some improvisation which is part of our identity, but at the end of the day the objectives are always met. Our partners live the event with us; when I get a player like Andy Murray who this year withdrew at the last minute, many are even more disappointed than I am!"* (Tournament Director).

According to the partners, one event is particularly important in creating the atmosphere of community and equality in the Village: the election of the Village Mayor among all the principal partners' representatives on the first day of the Open 13. This election is made by the group of partners without intrusion of the organizers (Photo 1). It is followed by an exchange of gifts between partners (Photo 2). At the beginning of each day, the Mayor accompanied by the organizers, gathers together all the partners in order to discuss with them their activities for that day. This informal exchange allows information about the personalities present that day to be shared whereas the organizers, who are at the heart of the logistics (transport, welcome, etc.), have already received this information. The exchange of gifts between partners happens at the beginning and the end of the Tournament. These presents are customized with the colors of each organization and marked with the Open 13 logo. It is to be noted that the value of the exchanged items is limited; it mainly concerns objects used for promotional actions such as pens, umbrellas, t-shirts, etc. As for the organizers, they give the partners official Tournament clothes, limited edition products, worn by the tennis players and those in charge of the Tournament's organization. On this last point, we have noticed that when the decision makers and operating partners are present at other events (Roland Garros, Tour de France, other tournaments), they often wear the personalized Open 13 outfits that they have been given.



Photo 1: Election of the “Village Mayor”



Photo 2: Exchange of gifts between partners

This Mayor, in association with the organizers, participates in directing the themes and needs of the different actors. Amongst each partners' managers participating in this election, some have more of a go-between role and will not have any decision making power, others will be directly involved in the business relationships with their interlocutors. The Village Mayor therefore plays the role of defending the interests of each partner, all the while trying to maintain, in collaboration with the organizers, the exceptionality of the way meetings and interaction happens, hence making this place conducive to extrabusiness relationships.

According to the managers, the Open 13 thus confirms its role of a meeting platform and at the same time its ritual dimension. It is a calendar macro-ritual, that is to say, it comes around each year at the same period (February), just like summer holiday camps. In this sense, it structures the lives of the actors present who look forward to it and prepare for it each year. It allows each one of its members to feel the "we-ness" through its community, even family, atmosphere. Consequently, the Open 13 and its Village therefore correspond to the idea of macro-rituals introduced by Cova and Salle (2000). This said the case of the Open 13 and its Village enables us to go even further in the definition of what can be considered as being a macro-ritual aimed at promoting the development of extrabusiness relationships. As highlighted by Evers and Knight (2008) for trade shows, the Open 13 produces a change in relationships: it is no longer a commercial or business zone where individuals confront each other and are in competition in the name of their companies, it is a « *neutral territory* » (Evers and Knight, 2008, p.553) wherein the barriers and defenses are lowered and where individuals socialize around mutual passions. The primary effect of this is to facilitate meetings.

By pushing a bit further the ritual metaphor introduced by Cova and Salle (2000), we can even

describe the Village space at the Open 13 as a liminoid zone as defined by Turner (1974) and resumed by Getz (2007) to define a special type of events' place: a special place where time is out of time and where/when people experiences the feeling of *communitas*. The creation of such a type of liminoid zone (Borghini et al., 2006) can clearly be linked to the ritual process. For Turner (1969), a ritual exemplifies the transition of an individual from one state to another – a rite of passage. Turner identifies a three phased process of ritual: 1) the preliminary stage - a change is accomplished by separating the participants from their usual social setting; 2) the liminal stage - a period during which one is “betwixt and between”, neither here nor there; 3) the final stage - a period during which one's new social status is confirmed, and reincorporation occurs. The liminal stage starts (Turner, 1969) with the communication of *sacra*, where secret symbols are communicated to the ritual subjects in the form of exhibitions of sacred articles, actions and instructions. During the liminal stage of a ritual, normally accepted differences between the participants, such as social class, are often de-emphasized or ignored. A social structure of *communitas* forms: one based on common humanity and equality rather than recognized hierarchy. For example, during a pilgrimage, members of an upper class and members of a lower class might mix and talk as equals, when in normal life they would likely never talk at all or their conversation might be limited to giving orders. Turner (1974) coins the term liminoid to refer to contemporary rituals that have characteristics of liminal stages but are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis such as traditional rites of passage.

In this vein, Sherry, Kozinets and Borghini (2007) show how today consumption rituals create a separate space, away from the mundane, which can be called a liminoid zone. The Open 13 operates like these liminoid zones. The members of the partner companies leave their status behind at the doors of the Village. In the Village these statuses are ignored or diminished: everyone is a member of an ephemeral community that has nominated a leader, the Mayor of the Village. This greatly facilitates relationships like the example of the Compostela Pilgrimage. The Open 13, is therefore not only a neutral zone, it is above all a liminoid zone which momentarily transforms the individuals, and it is this in particular that seems to facilitate the extrabusiness episodes.

However, one could wonder how do the managers involved in The Open 13 justify spending a week of their time on such a liminal activity? What criteria managers being invited to the Open 13 use to determine whether or not the financial cost of attending can be justified? Even if they argue that they make lots of useful contacts, it is really difficult to understand how they can measure them. Indeed, they try to justify what seems unjustifiable. Many of them declare to use conventional public relations' measures such as media impact (press, television, radio, etc.) of their brands during and after the event. It is clearly not what they are searching for in The Open 13, but it is the best way they have found to justify their participation in the eyes of their top management and shareholders. This kind of *ex post* rationalization is common in this type of activities as noted by Borghini et al. (2006, p. 1156): “*The search for information of not immediate usefulness may thus be the ex post rationalization of a behaviour whose roots are in the neo-tribal need of periodically meeting and interacting with similar others belonging to different organizations*”.

The Open 13, micro-ritual attempts and successes

An analysis of extrabusiness episodes that promote meetings shows that they are concentrated around ritual-related activities which are facilitated by the liminoid zone that has been created; they are micro-ritual episodes. At the outset, these activities were put forward by the management of the Open 13 and decided upon by the community of the Tournament's partners. Some of them are strongly targeted towards a precise inter partner action but often have a second objective, networking with the other partners present in the Village. These public relations' activities by theme have developed over a 10 year period, certain receiving positive feedback from the actors and so continue to be organized each year during the tournament week, others being abandoned or repositioned. Here we have chosen to focus on 3 activities which were successes and have thus become perpetual in the form of micro-rituals within a macro-ritual that is the Open 13, and 3 activities that did not have the anticipated results in terms of extrabusiness relationships. The set of examples has allowed us to identify certain characteristics of micro-ritual activities intended to encourage extrabusiness relationships.

The most established activity organized by the management of the Open 13 is the official end of Tournament party (organized on the Saturday evening before the final). This official party was originally organized for the principal partner the Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône, in the presence of its President. It takes place in the heart of the village where the decor is dismantled to create a zone where all the partners meet up outside of their personal space. There is a meal with entertainment linked to a particular event such as the 10th or 15th anniversary of the Tournament, the retirement of one of the directors amongst the partners.... This party is also the opportunity to invite local, national and international decision makers and politicians for a collective celebration of the end of another edition and at the same time to evoke a special event. The Tournament Director is particularly involved in the invitation and placing of each guest, creating specific connections, all in a warm atmosphere. Each of the organization's managers is also included in the party. It is to be noted that on the Saturday of the Tournament the matches (semi-finals) only take place during the day, and the Palais des Sports de Marseille stays open just for the party. Certain partners make precise requests to the Tournament director, for example to have the opportunity to be introduced to a new managing director in the community or quite simply for a new arrival to be officially introduced to all the other public and private partners. The commercial impact for the partners is often difficult to quantify as it is the informal exchange prevails. The main advantages of this party as recounted by the Tournament partners are its intimacy, its selectiveness, along with its ceremonial character.

Another of the activities that takes place within the Village, which has been organized since the creation of the event, involves the professional tennis players participating in the final draw of the Tournament. These actions, extremely common at major sporting events, consist of inviting a player into the partners' zones after his match or during his day off. To do this, the Tournament's press agent is in contact with the Association of Tennis Professionals and each day organizes for a tennis man to visit the partners. The player visits the partner's space, signs autographs, has his photo taken with the partners' guests and sometimes even has a chat with them (the conversation being in English however, the language barrier is often a problem). The impact of this activity remains limited for the partners and is not a great stimulus for business relationships. The high level sportsmen are above all on show, in fact it is only the rarity of being able to meet or chat with one of the personalities of the moment that attracts the partners. In addition to this, these meetings take place behind closed doors within each partners' personal zone, which excludes the possibility of relationships with other outside decision makers.

Along the same lines as the activity of meeting the tennis players, one of the partners organizes a party on the Monday night with the local football team, the Olympique de Marseille. This football team receives major media coverage impossible to ignore in France. In the Village this party is considered to be the launching event of the Tournament. In actual fact this partner, who is also a partner of the Olympique de Marseille, invites the players and the club's staff to his personal zone and invites the other companies and decision makers present in the Village of the Open 13. The special aim of this party is to initiate a reunion between sportsmen and decision makers during a cocktail buffet. The media are most interested in this type of meeting as well and take advantage of the event to carry out interviews on the premises. This activity has established itself over the years and the feedback from the Tournament's partners on the success and commercial impact of this party in terms of episodes is positive. This special event enables them to make appointments for the rest of the week and to ensure the meeting with target figures over a short period.

For several years now, once again through the contact of another partner, a further activity has been organized. This is the creation of a bar and bowling (*pétanque*) area dedicated to the Village's partners. The partner in question, the Pernod-Ricard group, is the pioneer in terms of the production of spirits and aperitif drinks. The game of bowling, strongly linked to the aniseed aperitif called Pastis, is one of Marseilles' traditions. The idea behind this was to integrate the tradition into the Open 13 Village so as to create a new meeting place based on this local tradition. However this new meeting place, originally designed to stimulate meetings and exchanges between decision makers did not have the expected results. The different actors, partners and organizers very quickly gave the same feedback. This activity attracted many people, including the players who have lunch and also dinner in the Village in their own personalized space, but it did not attract the key decision makers: it tended to attract people wishing to entertain themselves with no interest in exchanging or making contacts. For the Village's partners this activity would thus appear to be unsuitable in the context of activating a business network, as it has become an area and moment of purely entertainment.

Each year, with a view to creating an intellectual exchange, several partners in connection with the organizers, organize conference-debates within the Village on diverse and varied subjects linked to the event; health, sports business, corporate social responsibility... This conference activity takes place in a new neutral zone, dedicated to this activity that is positioned at the entrance to the Village. These conferences take place early evening and are followed by a cocktail buffet. The partner or partners involved choose their own guests and also open their conference to the members of the Village. The subjects, often in line with current affairs are discussed for an hour to an hour and a half and introduce speakers who are renowned for their savoir-faire and experiences. The objective here is to bring together decision makers around a theme that concerns them, where a co-apprenticeship will be set up and continued in the area devoted to this activity and in the Village of the Open 13. At the beginning the discussions concern the theme of the debate and then continue, informally, throughout the evening. What is quite remarkable about this activity is to see certain decision makers pass by the conference space as they enter the Village and stop quite spontaneously to listen and even attend and join in the conference if the subject concerns their professional activity. The creation of an open space, whilst targeting a conference type event within a place of entertainment, had a strong impact and provoked unexpected exchanges and sharing of experiences. This series of conferences have gradually established themselves and the themes and speakers are communicated simply by word-of-mouth to the partners.

In parallel to this conference activity, the organizers, in collaboration with the partners have developed an activity of exchanges and debates about the tennis matches in each of the partners personal zones in the Village. This action introduces a recognized sports journalist who invites the sporting actors of the Tournament, that is to say the players, the coaches or experts and personalities. Operationally speaking, this activity functions like a live TV program where the partner's guest attends an exclusive sports' debate. This gathering had a limited effect on interpersonal exchanges. The people present in each space commented negatively on the impact of this activity which they found of interest principally because of the content, but which was not the source of any business exchanges. In this situation the passivity of the decision makers at the sports' debate was the principal observation made by the partners involved, who considered this activity to be solely entertaining and did not encourage interpersonal relationships.

From this selection of positive and negative episodes we can identify the following precepts for the creation of micro-rituals:

- The Master of Ceremonies (Rivière, 1995) – in this case the organizer - plays a major role: he acts as a “marrier” making the connections run smoothly during the episodes. His charisma and his network are essential elements for the success of extrabusiness episodes;
- The notion of the small liminoid zone within the large liminoid zone, which is the sporting event, is a key element for success. It has for effect to increase the feeling of *communitas*, (Turner, 1969) experienced by the participants;
- In fact, inside the macro-ritual which is the specific sporting event, the episodes which work best are those that do not outshine the sporting purpose of the event, but create a new “niche”. In the case of the Open 13 Tennis Tournament, it is episodes linked to football or current affairs such as health, the sports business, corporate social responsibility. All the episodes directly linked to the Tournament's activity seemed to have failed in their mission of relationship development (the meeting with the players, debates about the matches). However this “niche” must not be too significant – too out of context – as subsequently it is not pertinent for the major actors of the macro-ritual and their targets. In the case of the Open 13, this is true of the activities that are solely entertaining such as the bar and the bowling (*pétanque*) which easily attract non-targeted persons.

It is important to note that all the successful episodes are ritualized, which means that they are institutionalized and recur each year from the moment that they are assessed as being positive. They become micro-rituals.

Overall, our analysis of this specific case of the Open 13 as a platform for the creation and development of extrabusiness relationships highlights the following sequential functioning for the management of business relationships through extrabusiness episodes:

- The event has imposed itself as an inconvertible macro-ritual for a group of actors who look forward to it and prepare for it;
- This macro-ritual opens firstly with a micro-ritual (in this case the election of the Mayor of the Village) which allows its participants to enter into a liminal phase and transforms the area of the event into a liminoid zone, a favorable ground for extrabusiness meetings ;
- Within this liminoid zone created thus, and during the entire sporting event, micro-rituals play the role of extrabusiness meetings' accelerators. In order to function correctly and to establish themselves, these micro-rituals must themselves recreate a small liminoid zone within the event. Without outshining the sporting objective of the event, they must create a “niche” through the different themes, at the same time remaining relatively central to the specific interests of the partners without being too amusing.

Consequently, our results contribute to a better understanding of the functioning of these ritual platforms in project business by clarifying certain micro-ritual practices.

Conclusion

The research is dedicated to the study of extrabusiness relationships in project business and to their ritual type management (Cova and Salle, 2000). It advances on Cova and Salle's paper (2000) by specifically highlighting the different approaches to creating, maintaining and managing a ritual platform, so as to understand how these informal business meetings can be made easier.

The action research method enabled us to incorporate the operational dimension of the implementation and development of a ritual platform. The event that we studied, the Open 13 tournament, is used by project based companies to develop relationships with key actors in the local milieu. One of the keys to success that was highlighted for the activation and maintenance of extrabusiness relationships is the construction of a macro ritual event; a liminoid zone, as defined by Turner (1974), in which micro-ritual practices, whose characteristics are extremely specific as we have highlighted in this study, make contacts and business meetings easier.

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