

**Article on bachelor thesis project
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During my practical placement in 2008 at event organising agency EQ International, I worked for the equine event Zwolle International. In 2009 I was stable manager at the same event. During these editions I could observe the event's set up and program. When I got to know Zwolle International, it was still a stallion show. A year later it was turned into an international sports event. A lot of people I met had an opinion on this change. At this point I first started to wonder how a program of an event is designed. What makes a program interesting for visitors and how do you find sponsors who are willing to invest? When EQ International suggested I could do my thesis on innovation of Zwolle International, I was very eager to research this and come up with well-reasoned suggestions! In this article I will explain my research and the findings to people unfamiliar with the research topic.

The municipality Zwolle is one of the largest sponsors of the event, and announced in a letter that they think the program is not innovative enough. The aim for the research was mainly to find the best way to remain subsidy of the municipality for 2011 by innovation. The municipality Zwolle will re-evaluate the subsidy system in 2010. Equine sport event Zwolle International is at risk not to be considered for subsidy in 2011. My effort was to bring several information-sources together and investigate the opinion of visitors and people close to the event. My goal was to come up with recommendations about changing the program to the benefit of Zwolle International.

In the process, my external supervisor Mariska Honingh provided me with information about Zwolle International, and kept me on track by pointing on the desired outcomes of the research, namely to maintain the subsidy. My internal supervisor supported me by helping with the scientific part and the report writing. Koen Janssen supported me with the data analyses of the questionnaire. The planning, setting up, reporting and carrying out the research was for my account.

The research consist of three ways to collect information. First, a literature study was done with sources such as innovation-literature, documents of Zwolle International, the policy documents of municipality Zwolle and web-information about the equine sector. Second, interviews are held among people close to the event. The 7 interviewees were all very busy during the event and it took some persistence to speak to them. The interviews provided valuable information about the situation of the event and gave indications on innovation of the program. The visitors got the chance to give their opinion on the event in a visitors-questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and adapted by the external supervisor of the project and the project manager of Zwolle International. The questionnaire was spread during the edition of Zwolle International 2010 by the researcher, with help from an intern at EQ International. 303 visitors returned the questionnaires.

The outcome of the three sources gives an interesting view on the problem of subsidy and innovation. In short, outcomes of the interviews mainly stated that most interviewees would like to improve the sportive level in stars appointed by the international equestrian federation. They feel the event is in need of more variation and more spectacle. Almost 34% of the visitors support this, as they would like to see more shows in the future. The visitors score the event a 7,7 out of 10. The literature search yielded additional insights. The municipality and the event have mutual interests or Zwolle International can provide in establishing some of the municipality's goals. Examples to satisfy

the municipality are to have a more original and innovative program, to organise events on basic sports with clinics and workshops and to organise congresses for entrepreneurs of Zwolle. This last part might also stimulate the sponsor income, due to the direct contact between the organisation of the event and entrepreneurs in the region. From the policy of the municipality appears, that there are possibilities for more subsidy for the event, up to 10 times as much as the sum which is obtained now. Literature on innovation clarified that Zwolle International searches for basic-level innovation, instead of transformational organisational change. Sources on the equine sector illustrate opportunities in the market on innovation about sport performance, welfare of the horse and innovative products.

In conclusion of this, Zwolle International could add more variation and show elements to the program. Furthermore educational workshops and clinics on welfare and innovation of sports performance can be added. Zwolle International could start a Dutch innovation fair, organize business network events, congresses and involve basic level riders. These recommendations are included in the report, which Zwolle International can use in practice to improve the program. The total performance can be improved by offering a attractive program to the public. More public will attract more press and more sponsors. With sponsor-money the event can be improve and so on!

In literature it appears how important it is to build in innovative processes for improving business performance. This research brings innovation under attention of entrepreneurs in the equine sector. To quote C. Freeman: *'Not to innovate is to die!'* Furthermore, companies in the equine event sector in different countries can learn from this research to scan the policies of subsidy-suppliers thoroughly. It might give indications on how to gain more subsidy.