

1 Event Management: A sustainable project management perspective

Mohamed Salama and Yulia Raffaelli

Learning outcomes

By completing this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Appreciate the importance of applying sustainable principles to event management.
- Discuss how to apply the principles of sustainable project management to events.
- Discuss how the Sustainable Project Management Model (SPMM) in the context of event management.
- Appreciate the need for a Sustainable Event Management Model (SEMM).

Introduction

The Events Management sector has been a new fast-growing trend that links tourism, business, and leisure together (Getz, 1997). Traditionally, all events were mainly focused on financial benefits. However, the recent trend reflects a broader vision based on sustainable (social, cultural, environmental and economic) issues. The term 'Green Events' became a new trend in events; usually sponsored and organized by local authorities that try to educate visitors and the local community towards more sustainable behaviours through the integration of sustainable tools during the planning, organisation, and management processes to reduce potential adverse effects resulting from the limited focus on the financial objectives.

Nowadays, traditional management tools and methods applied to the events are not sufficient. Furthermore, some gaps have been identified and should be studied more in-depth. Examples include the social, cultural and economic legacy i.e., the impact of the event to promote the knowledge diffusion, new trends leading to innovation, the education outcome of sustainable practices and networking relationship (Clark & Kearns, 2015; Thomson et al., 2018).

Undoubtedly, events are attracting general visitors and contribute to domestic economic growth (Getz & Page, 2005). However, there is a gap in terms of the outcomes and tourism strategy during event organisation (Getz & Page, 2016; Stokes, 2008). Today, sustainability is a comprehensive and holistic approach to tackling the complex, real-world issues of this era (Katzel, 2007). Getz has noted that the events literature is missing a sustainable development perspective.

Introduction to event management from a sustainable project management perspective

Researchers have acknowledged that events can be regarded as a special category of projects, thus the same tools and management practices can be applied to events (O'Toole, 2000). However, existing literature review on project management, strategic project management and the development of the practices and methodologies associated with these areas of knowledge relating to traditional tools and techniques had explicitly highlighted the sense of urgency to apply the sustainability principles for the management of projects (Salama, 2018). The Sustainable Project Management Model (SPMM) includes six main dimensions: Sustainability, Adaptive Leadership, Life Cycle Assessment, Adopting Advanced Technologies, Managing Innovation, and Assurances and Controls. The model provides the dimensions which could be applied to design and implement a sustainable project, in the generic context. Indeed, SPMM can guide the move towards more efficient and sustainable event management. This model will be discussed in some depth later in this chapter. However, a general background in the event industry is an essential pre-requisite to prepare the reader for the detailed project management focused discussion.

Events industry background

Events are instrumental for the comprehension of the human history or 'artefacts of human culture' (Kennedy-Eden, 2014). Getz (2008) stated that events are 'state of the art' and can be present in different shapes and forms.

Examples include simple religious ceremonies and memorials, wedding and parties as part of the community celebration, or even firm announcements of a new product introduction. Events are providing experience and impact on individual and collective levels.

Event research has been mainly focused on the economic impact and its benefits: transformation of the country in terms of the infrastructure, building environment, facilities enhancement (Clark, Kearns & Cleland, 2016), growth of air transport infrastructure, destination image, and competitive positioning. Other studies paid attention to the social impact of the events in terms of the employment generated through the infrastructure of the mega-events for the host country; the economic impact due to tourists' expenditures that contributes to the local wages and salaries and the support and development of small enterprises. The economic benefits, however, come at a cost; the required initial investments, the environmental and social impacts, the negative image of the host county that may be associated with corruption and poverty (Puente-Díaz, 2018) as well as negative media coverage of the event (Fairley et al., 2016).

The business strategy theory suggests that it is imperative that the event management firm would conduct strategic analyses at the macro and micro levels, seeking a well-informed decision based on a comprehensive assessment using tool such as PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal dimensions) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and both can help generate the Strategic Advantage Profile (SAP). However, this traditional approach does not capture the dynamic and long-term benefits of the more integrated approach based on the Business Model perspective, let alone the more recent concept of Sustainable Business Model (SBM) which will be discussed in Chapter 10.

A word of caution is required, here, about the unit of analysis. There should be a clear understanding of the difference between managing the event and managing the event management organisation. While both can be interrelated, there are significant differences that need to be highlighted:

- 1 The appreciation of the event as a temporary endeavor thus the concept of temporary organisation.
- 2 The event is the vehicle through which the firm/organisation delivers its strategic objectives.
- 3 From strategic management perspective, events are at the operational level of the firm's strategic hierarchy.
- 4 The event strategy and objectives should be aligned with the firm's strategy, but they are not the same.