

# 2 Sustainability in the Context of Event Management

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## Learning outcomes

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

- Discuss the concept of sustainability in the context of event management
- Understand the key sustainability indicators and criteria for event management
- Appreciate the ISO approach to event management
- Compare the ISO approach with other models in later chapters

## Introduction

Enormous numbers of different type of events are taking place all around the world, impacting the environment and consuming a wider range of resources. For most businesses and organisations, the impact their activities have on the environment and sustainability is becoming a key factor input when planning and organizing events of all kinds.

Festivals and events, in general, are important components of the tourism industry. With worldwide growth of festivals and events and global tourism set to reach 1.6 billion arrivals by in the near future, it is important to develop planning tools to facilitate the roll out of sustainably managed events. Festivals and events create significant impacts both positive and negative on the environment, society, and the economy. Therefore, sustainable event management is gaining attraction and is, in many cases, demanded as it provides an opportunity to manage these impacts while improving the quality of events.

This chapter starts with an introduction to the principles of sustainability; describing sustainable management issues and practical considerations that managers need to apply, in the context of the sustainable event and its contribution to competitive advantage. The following sections define the sustainable event and consider different positions that might be adopted by private and public sector organisations when addressing the triple bottom line (TBL) of sustainable development. The chapter also provides a discussion about the key tools that allow managers successful planning and organisation of sustainable events.

## Sustainability for event management

Huge number of events and meeting happen globally in each industry, business sector, as well as in governments and international organisations. Meetings and other events are standard business practice, often seen as a time-efficient and effective way of communication, identifying solutions and reaching agreement. However, meetings and events can cause negative effects, reflected in high environmental footprints. Events can create high energy and water consumption and waste creation; pollute the air and water; and contribute to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions. All these negative effects could be overcome by applying the principles of sustainable development to event management. The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as:

*“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

Sustainable development refers to the consideration of the TBL of sustainability that comprises the *economic*, *social* and *environmental* pillars. A more recent view on sustainability added a fourth dimension that is *culture*. The 3Ps – People, Planet and Profit – offer an alternative perspective. Both perspectives are quite congruent. For example, environment vs planet, social vs people and economic vs profit. It might be argued that the three pillars of the TBL, economic, environment, social, provide a more comprehensive perspective. For example, the scope of the economic dimension is much wider than profit. The same applies to the environment, which is more concise compared to planet; and similarly the social and cultural dimensions provide a more defined scope than the broader term, people.

The economic pillar of sustainability addresses long-term economic efficiency rather than the short-term and limited scope of profits. Sustainable economic efficiency considers the cost-benefit and value creation perspectives that should eventually result in sustained healthy profit margins through effective benefit realization management.

The benefits of incorporating sustainability considerations into event planning can be manifold, as they lead to environmental improvements, financial advantages, creating a positive image for the event planners, and yielding social benefits for the local community. Moreover, incorporating the principles of sustainable development in the planning and organisation of events, can undoubtedly trigger innovation in the marketplace, thus enhancing and encouraging the development of new products, as well as inspiring change and yielding long-term benefits for the broader community. Organisations, whether the event management or the client organisation, should establish sustainable business models that are based on value creation as perceived by the target audience. For more detailed discussion on sustainable business model and innovation management see Chapter 9.

## Defining the sustainable event

A sustainable event can be defined as one that embraces the principles of sustainability with emphasis on the triple bottom line that integrates the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural responsibilities (Kapera, 2018).

Sustainability in events is quite a new concept that attracted the attention of some scholars (Buckley, 2012; Kay et al., 2016; Liyin, 2016). Research in this field has been developed to capture the policies of various countries to prevent the natural environment from pollution. The goal of the sustainable event is to maintain the balance between the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions (Smith-Cristensen, 2009). To produce great benefits for societies, event organizers and policy makers should adopt a holistic approach to maximize economic impacts, optimize socio-cultural effects, and minimize environmental impacts.

The term 'sustainable' is not the only one used when concerns are raised over the abuse of our surroundings in the pursuit of, normally, commercial activity. Terms such as 'responsible', 'greening', 'environmentally friendly', 'corporate social responsibility', and 'eco-friendly' are interchangeably mixed with 'sustainable'. In considering the 'green' event, Laing and Frost (2010) note the different interpretations and the vagueness of the application of such themes in events. For example, an event may claim it for its use of locally sourced food and drink, even though this represents only a part of the overall event activity. Whilst activists in sustainability may claim this as progress, others may consider the level of progress as inadequate to meet sustainable development needs and seek more dramatic change.

The event management industry should take a wider view of its sustainable development involving both the 'product' and 'process' aspects, i.e. to organise an event that meets sustainable standards when being enjoyed by