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Sustainability and sustainable event management

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Abstract

Sustainability is a macro-level policy issue. It involves living and working in ways that do not negatively affect future generations. To operate sustainably, events organisers need to maximise positive – and mitigate negative – economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts and legacies. This case provides students with the opportunity to (a) identify the impacts and legacies of a music festival, (b) identify examples of good practice in sustainable events management and evaluate the extent to which they are impactful, (c) strategically plan how they will enhance the sustainability of a festival, and (d) how they will evaluate the success of their proposed initiatives.

Subjects: Strategic event creation; sustainable events management; contemporary issues and trends; event evaluation

Introduction

Global warming is an emergency (United Nations, 2021). As events contribute to global warming through the carbon emissions associated with transport, waste, energy, and the supply chain (Jones, 2018), it is crucial that efforts continue to enhance the environmental sustainability of events.

The not-for-profit association A Greener Festival (AGF) was established in 2007 to help festivals become more sustainable by assessing their environmental impacts and practices (Berridge et al., 2018). AGF has since widened its remit to events, arenas, and tours. The most sustainable event/arena/tour and those that are to be commended, in both the UK and overseas, are announced at the International AGF Awards. This provides events/arenas/tours with an added incentive to participate as the accolades can be used to appeal to today's conscious consumers.

Events/arenas/tours that register to be assessed, complete a Self-Assessment Form outlining how they impact the community and environment, and submit this to AGF along with supporting documents. Assessors from AGF review the

paperwork before conducting an on-site evaluation where they compare the information provided with their observations front- and back-of-house and speak to relevant stakeholders (e.g., traders, caterers, and organisers). Post-event, further evidence in the form of data (e.g., % of waste; carbon footprint from travel; and the kW of power used) is sent to the assessors by the event organisers. The assessors use the evidence collated to grade the event/venue against the assessment criteria (e.g., social impacts, water, and energy) to generate the festival/arena/tour's sustainability rating. Crucially, a report is produced to highlight the event/arena/tour's good practice in sustainable events management and areas for improvement.

To become an Assessor for AGF, individuals must have an undergraduate degree or level 6 equivalent qualification or three years of relevant experience (Falmouth University, n.d.). After completing Stage 1 of the training to learn about industry best practice, Assessors can continue their training by assessing a participating event/arena/tour under the guidance of a Senior Assessor (Berridge, Moore, & Ali-Knight, 2018).

Assessors are chosen for each event based on their proximity to the site/venue and the proposed mode and cost of their travel, thus ensuring sustainability within the selection process.

This chapter presents a case study of the evaluation of a hypothetical festival called Transformation by fictional AGF Assessor Dominique and fictional Senior Assessor Alex.

Dominique and Alex's pre-festival evaluation of transformation's AGF application

As an Events Management graduate, Dominique trains to become an Assessor for AGF to gain greater understanding of sustainable events management in practice, and to have the opportunity to attend more events.

Having completed the training, passed the test, and received her certificate verifying that she is now a Stage 1 Assessor, she is accepted onto Stage 2 of the training which involves conducting an evaluation with a Senior Assessor acting as a mentor. She receives a spreadsheet with a list of events that need to be evaluated. She notices that Transformation – which is staged not far from where she lives – is on the list, so she sends in her estimated travel costs and is asked to evaluate the festival. Prior to attending, she reviews the festival's application and supporting documents (e.g., Ecological Report; Site Drainage Plan; Noise Management Plan) under the guidance of her mentor, Alex. The knowledge and understanding they gain about Transformation's practices is outlined below:

Social impacts

- ◆ Community consultation is undertaken, and actions are taken to mitigate the negative impacts of the festival on the community. For example, litter is picked up off site, and free tickets and a complaints hotline are provided for locals. The festival also raises money for community projects.
- ◆ A noise management plan is in place to minimise noise pollution.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

- ◆ The line-up is gender and ethnically diverse.

Water

- ◆ The festival has a mains water supply and water is provided via standpipes. Two water tankers are on standby in case there are any disruptions to the mains supply. The festival plumbers check the system regularly for leaks.
- ◆ Soakaways are used for the drainage of grey water.
- ◆ Social media and signage are used to educate festivalgoers on the importance of using the toilets provided.

Sustainable supply chain management

- ◆ The festival's sustainability policy was produced from contributions from each department and has been approved by the board of directors.
- ◆ A sustainable procurement policy is in place and applies to crew, caterers, and traders. Non-recyclable and single-use items are banned. Sustainability requirements are integrated within the tender for caterers and the most sustainable caterers are selected. Readiness to open checks are performed and non-compliant traders are not permitted to open.
- ◆ Local preferred suppliers deliver goods to traders who need them to reduce vehicle movement.

Ecology

- ◆ The Ecological Report identifies sensitive areas containing flora and fauna. As a result, an area of the site is fenced off and the festival works with a conservation charity to contribute to the conservation of the habitat of the grey partridge.
- ◆ Spill kits are kept on site for small fuel and hydraulic spillages. A gully tanker is used to suck up any sewage spillages and if required, the ground is jet cleaned.

Travel

- ◆ As audience travel can account for around half of a festival's total carbon emissions from transport (Vision 2025, Powerful Thinking and Julie's Bicycle, 2020), efforts are being made to try to mitigate the travel carbon footprint of the festival. Festivalgoers are encouraged to travel to the festival via public transport and shuttle buses are provided from the local train station to try to prevent festivalgoers from taking taxis. To discourage festivalgoers from driving to the festival, a parking fee is charged. The money raised from this is used to subsidise return coach travel from a variety of locations to make it cheaper for festivalgoers and encourage uptake. Public transport, coach travel, and travelling in a car at full capacity are incentivised by providing festivalgoers with the opportunity to arrive on site on Friday night to have first choice of where to camp. Car sharing is incentivised with the opportunity to win free tickets to next year's festival.
- ◆ Local artists are used where possible. Touring artists are booked and shared with other promoters. Artists are asked to use sustainable modes of trans-