

# Adding environmental sustainability to the management of event tourism

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to identify the management principles of environmental sustainability for event tourism.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The paper takes a meta-synthesis approach to review and to analyze collected papers in this subject.*

**Findings** – *To manage environmental sustainability in the context of event tourism is to minimize the negative impacts on critical natural capital. The environmental sustainability consists of these three interconnected components: the event organization, a place to host the event and the host community, and event-goers. One should follow three management principles in attempting to add environmental sustainability to the management. First, sustainable event management requires careful planning prior to events. Second, taking responsibility in event management is crucial in achieving sustainability. Third, offering information and education to raise the awareness of event goers is the key to putting sustainability into practice.*

**Originality/value** – *A limited number of papers specifically address the importance of environmental sustainability in the management of event tourism and what their management principles should be. This paper brings together, integrates and synthesizes the different studies. Event organizers and practitioners can have a better understanding of environmental management in the context of event tourism and follow the three managerial principles to build a truly sustainable event.*

**Keywords** *Tourism management, Forward planning, Responsibilities, Event tourism, Environmental sustainability, Event management*

**Paper type** *Conceptual paper*

## Introduction

The growing number of planned events is a global phenomenon (Goldblatt, 2000; Weber and Ladkin, 2003). The same is true for event tourism (Getz, 2008). Environment is one of the central concerns for organizing an event. Events not only serve as tourist attractions, catalyst for development, and renewal of destinations (Getz, 2008), but also induce massive environment impacts (Chernushenko, 1994; Puczkó and Rätz, 2002). The damage of environmental assets that tourism ultimately depend upon will lead to serious negative economic impacts (Cater, 1995; Mathieson and Wall, 1992). Policymakers and event organizers driven by profit concerns and societal pressures are increasingly interested in knowing how to add environmental sustainability to the management of event tourism to reduce environmental impacts.

The environmental impacts brought by hallmark and mega-events are too substantial to slip by host communities (Jones, 2001; Collins *et al.*, 2007). The organization and delivery of events produce a variety of unwanted byproducts, possibly modifying and affecting the quality of the environment. For example, Chernushenko (1994) in his book *Greening Our Games*, used Montreal's 1976 Summer Olympic Games and 1992 Winter Olympic Games to exemplify inappropriate and negative impact caused by those flamboyant events with little

thought given to post-event legacies by event organizers. Those impacts included the creation of hazards for residents, increased air pollution and waste, ecosystem destruction, and land erosion. Many smaller events have been just as neglectful of environmental quality and ecological sustainability as mega-events. Therefore, one should carefully manages environmental sustainability of event tourism, and addresses their environmental impacts.

Environmental sustainability of event tourism generally addresses the reduction and monitor of environmental impacts of event organization and delivery, the impacts of events on community, and the behaviors of event goers (Getz, 2005; Ritchie, 1984; Smith-Christensen, 2009). It is a multi-dimensional concept containing natural capital, biodiversity, and the value of natural objects at all levels including international, national, regional, and community (Dobson, 2003). Therefore, the question to be addressed is: How can these complex dimensions of environmental sustainability be incorporated within an event tourism management framework for minimizing the impacts of planned events?

This paper is structured as follows. The next section delineates the characteristics of event tourism and explains the concept of environmental sustainability. A review of the negative environmental impacts possibly caused by events was provided. The third section explains the translation of this concept into management principles and how to add each principle into the operation of event tourism.

### Event tourism

Events were defined by (Getz, 1998; 2005) from a management and planning perspective. The concept involves three major aspects:

1. *Destinations*: the systematic planning, development, and marketing of events as tourist attractions, catalysts for other development, image builders, and animators of attractions and destination areas.
2. *Organizers and Sponsors*: event tourism strategies should also cover the management of news and negative events.
3. *Event-goers*: a market segment consisting of those people who travel to and attend events.

Event tourism is at the nexus of tourism and planned event. Thus, it has joined characteristics from both fields. Planned events are purposeful human creations and generally characterized for their “non-routine” and “uniqueness” (Shone and Parry, 2004). Event tourism is often defined as “major one-time or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination in the short or long term” (Ritchie, 1984, p. 2). Clearly, event tourism serves as an instrument in facilitating community-building, fostering urban renewal, and spurring tourism development to provide a better quality of life and environment.

Environmental resources provide basic ingredients for the construction of the infrastructure and production of the tourist product for the host community and the event goers. Event goers act like tourists, participate in events, and gain experience that differs from “normal day of living” (Goldblatt, 2008, p. 2); they pursue leisure, social, or cultural purposes (Getz, 1998) with high expectations on the quality of environment. In other words, the quality of environment is the key to provide satisfaction of tourists’ needs and wants; the economic success is dependent upon it. As Mieczkowski (1995, p. 114) comments: “The very existence of tourism is unthinkable without a healthy and pleasant environment, with well preserved landscapes and harmony between people and nature.” Government bodies often used Event tourism as a national and regional development tool to allocate more budget in constructing infrastructures, and to promote the destination for attracting more tourists. Stressing environment as the essential cornerstone in tourism, Cater (1995) stated “unless the environment is safe-guarded, tourism is in danger of being a self-destructive process, destroying the very resources upon which it is based” (Cater, 1995, p. 22). Maintaining the quality of environment is essential in sustaining the attractiveness and capability of a destination to host future events.

## Environmental sustainability

The concept of sustainability gained its recognition at the 1980 World Conservation Strategy (WCED, 1987; Keating, 1993) to address the conservation and degradation of environment caused by growth-driven value. Later, Brundtland Report's "Our Common Future" introduced the term "sustainable development" and defined sustainability as living within the finite limits of the earth "to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future." Sustainability is about making decision and choice to mitigate the negative consequences and impacts of human actions, and then taking actions toward using limited resources wisely in a just and equitable manner for both present and future generation.

In 1992, the Earth Summit held in Rio expanded the scope of environmental issues from concerning conservation to incorporate protection of wildlife habitat and environmental quality, and to renew, recycle and reuse energy and resources. Sustainable development describes a situation when "all human activities are practiced so that the society and its members are able to meet their needs and wants, while preserving environmental and socio-cultural systems indefinitely" (Higham, 2007, p. 35). Sustaining such a state is a dynamic process (Smith-Christensen, 2009) and cannot be achieved through the economic growth.

The event tourism and economy could not possibly keep growing with limited resources and carry capacity on the Earth. Scottish National Heritage (1993, p. 9) explained the difference between "growth" and "development": "To grow means to increase in size by the assimilation or accretion of materials. To develop means to expand or realize the potentialities of: to bring a fuller, greater, or better state. When something grows, it gets quantitatively bigger; when it develops, it gets qualitatively better, or at least different." It implies wise use of environmental resources and rejecting blind pursuit of unqualified growth; the latter is the driving force behind most environmental destruction (Capra, 1991). In other words, unless the environment is safeguarded, event tourism puts itself in a destructive process. Such definition reflects a realization that the viability of event tourism lies on the quality of natural resources. Therefore, the most important question for environmental sustainability is: "what is to be sustained?"

The answers become apparent from the ever-expanding literature on examining environmental sustainability of event management (Ritchie, 1984; Chernushenko, 1994; Raj and Musgrave, 2009). We need to sustain the critical natural capital (Dobson, 2003). Critical natural capital is also called ecological capital; it is directly related to the raw materials that become food, fuels, metals, timber, etc. Those materials have four functions: the provision of resources for production; the absorption of wastes from production; the provision of basic context and condition for supporting life; and the aesthetic quality of those materials (Ekins *et al.*, 2003). Activities involved in event tourism can certainly affect the critical natural capital and the functions produced by it.

## The environmental impacts of event tourism

One can view environmental sustainability in event management through the concerns related to environmental impacts, and category environmental impacts on three criteria: resources, residual, and consumption/production at different temporal and spatial scale (Briassoulis, 2000). This mainly reflects three types of concern:

1. resource usage;
2. waste and pollution; and
3. behavioral considerations (see Table I).

The concerns of resource usage imply resource impacts. The resources impacts concern depletion and competition for natural resources between other forms of development and human activity. The forms of natural resource include physical materials, space, energy/power, and water, as well as any living life forms. For example, Japanese highly prize bluefin tuna is for making sushi. Those are also major fishing stocks for many countries.

| <b>Table I</b> Classification of negative environmental impacts of event tourism by the type of concerns |                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Type of concerns</i>                                                                                  | <i>Impacts</i>                                                                                                          |
| Resource usage                                                                                           | Resources depletion and competition of physical materials and space, energy/power, and water                            |
| Waste, and pollution                                                                                     | Ecosystem destruction, air quality, noise, aesthetic, water pollution, flora and fauna, waste                           |
| Behavioral consideration                                                                                 | Purchase and procurement: food/meals, accommodation, transport that human activities produce litter, waste and emission |

Tung Kang, a small village located in southern Taiwan, hosts the Bluefish Culture & Tourism Festival (BCTF) annually to celebrate the fishing culture. Local government uses this event as marketing strategy to attract more visitors in the hope of securing villagers' incomes to support their lives. However, overfishing and poor international regulation has led to the addition of Bluefin tuna to the seafood red list of Greenpeace International in 2010 (Black, 2010). Thus, the decreasing amount of harvest of bluefin confront villagers of Tung Kang. The public also criticized the villagers on whether they should keep hosting the BCTF.

Space is also a type of resource and often ignored by the rush to build even-required facilities within limited time. For example, the uncontrolled overcrowding of facilities (Ritchie, 1984) might have a negative effect on the aesthetic quality of urban environment. Another example is the legacy of the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway. The Winter Game built a lot more infrastructure than originally planned (Chernushenko, 1994). Kearins and Pavlovich pointed out the nature of hallmark events, such as Olympic Games, are inherently unsustainable because the duration of event is short but the event has long lasting impact (Kearins and Pavlovich, 2002). Many hallmark events share a common legacy of huge debt and a good deal of underutilized infrastructure (Toohey and Veal, 2000).

The use of natural resources subsequently leads to the transformation of ecological habitats, loss of flora and fauna, and ecosystem destruction. These type of impacts referred as residual impacts are related to pollution and environmental degradation of resources and receptors. A range of different types of pollution can result from event tourism. These can impact on different spatial scales from local to global, including water, air (Gössling, 2000), aesthetic, and noise (Dunstan, 1986). A number of recent publications (Gössling, 2000; Gössling *et al.*, 2002) specifically pointed out that transport (particularly air traffic) is responsible for the majority of the environmental impacts associated with long-distance tourism due to the greenhouse gas emission (Gössling, 2000). Other examples of the pollution are sewage and emission. Sewage discharges into sea or river from hotel development may lead to the contamination of fish stocks. Extra air and car traffic at airports could lead to increased emissions of greenhouse gas and toxic particles.

### Green operation: adding environmental sustainability in event management

Management is the act of getting people together to accomplish desired goals and objectives efficiently and effectively. Such acts involve planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. For an event to be managed in tourism context, acts must involve people to accomplish predetermined goals and objectives in a place (Raj and Musgrave, 2009). As illustrated in Figure 1, the management of event tourism consists of three interconnected components: the event organization; a place to host the event and host community; and event-goers (Smith-Christensen, 2009). Smith-Christensen further emphasized that to fully incorporate environmental sustainability, every member involved in an event has to take his/her share of responsibility. As any other form of management, it is a goal-driven process and the capability of controlling people and place. Hence, one can refer the management of environmental sustainability in event management as the capacity to act for long-term maintenance of wellbeing in a responsible manner. It requires all acts of stakeholders and

**Figure 1** Sustainable events



members of host communities to organize and plan events collaboratively in order to accomplish sustainable development and efficiently and effectively reduce the event's negative impact on the environment (Smith-Christensen, 2009).

Given the definition of environmental sustainability and the characteristics of event tourism management, several key principles emerge to guide the incorporation of environmental sustainability in event management.

***Sustainable event management is complex and a managerial challenge that requires carefully planning prior to the events***

Event management is a multi-layer process involving interactions of various stakeholders who have different motivations, interests, and perspectives in the process. Given the dynamics and complexity of event tourism, and to be successful in incorporating sustainability into its management, one should take a multi-stage approach. Marquardt *et al.* (2007) identified four stages involved in the process of planning and managing an event:

1. concept phase;
2. implementation phase;
3. during the event; and
4. post event.

Though it is crucial to integrate environmental sustainability into all stages of events, we should not ignore the importance of concept phase. This phase encompasses establishing a feasible commitment, identifying stakeholders, assessing environmental issues, and determining the scope of event. Also, organizers build all the guiding principles and operation strategies during this phase. This phase is the credo of sustainability for setting goals and operational guidelines (de Bruyn, 2003). However, most events are often speedy through the concept phase due to the limitation and pressure of time (Hall, 1987). Hence, environmental impact often receives little consideration. As a result, this common practice heightens the risk of detrimental environmental impacts. For example, International Olympic Committee (IOC) acknowledges the environment as its third pillar of Olympism. Yet Demetres Karavvellas, the Chief Executive Officer of WWF-Greece, reported that Athens Olympic Games caused irreversible environmental damage (Nantsou, 2004). His report revealed that without a well thought-out environmental plan and management strategy, the results of the Athens Games failed to meet the Bid Book's promise of being sensitive to the environment in all stages of development and operation. Seeing from those examples, one

can easily see that managers and organizers are the key personnel to initiate the planning process and they must be proactive to put environmental sustainability as the priority of event management.

***Responsible stakeholders in event management is crucial in achieving environmental sustainability***

The maintenance of a qualitatively better event calls for collaboration of every member living in the very same environmental-social system. Clearly, it is impossible to fulfill all the environmental guiding principles without full support of all stakeholders and community members. However, the management of event tourism is goal-driven and value-based (Getz, 2005). Stakeholders involved have diverse values, interests, and needs that likely lead them to have different aims and concerns (Kearins and Pavlovich, 2002). Stakeholders with different values and attitudes may prioritize the economic gain while having no concern for the environment; this can lead to a range of negative consequences. In addition, some of the stakeholders may hold selfish attitudes and jeopardize the achievement of event goals.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) means that organizations take responsibility to produce an event with concern for the consequences of events, including environmental issues (Smith-Christensen, 2009). One can never achieve the promise of the environmental sustainability goals unless corporate bodies take responsibility to society in general, as well as to their shareholders (Kalisch, 2002). Not surprisingly, researchers pointed out that CSR is a key factor in determining the success of achieving a sustainable event (Kearins and Pavlovich, 2002; Raj and Musgrave, 2009). Stakeholder involvement is critical to the process of incorporating sustainability into the management of event tourism. The divergent voices and interests existing among stakeholders require considerable time for negotiation and learning. The goal is to properly incorporate the principles of ecological sustainable concept and environmental guidelines into operation, design and construction. The effort of getting people to be involved should start as early as possible.

***Offering information and education to raise the awareness of event goers is the key to putting the sustainability into practice***

Although people report that they care about the environment and are willing to purchase green products, they have minimal knowledge about what real green products are and how they should behave in accordance with the environmental sustainability principles. The involvement and devotion of all event-goers also affect the success or failure of sustainable event management efforts. There is a need for event managers to provide information to visitors, local residents, and stakeholders about the planning and conservation of the destination resources. In addition, organizers should provide education information about appropriate behavior when attending an event.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1994), quality tourism requires delivering good value for money, protecting tourism resources, and attracting “the kinds of tourists who will respect the local environment and society” (p. 8). Not only event organizations need to behave ethically, event-goers need to recognize their duties towards the environment, host communities, and each other. An event is an information channel to promote and spread the message of environmental sustainability. Organizers should take two actions during the delivery of an event. One is engaging visitors and the wider public; the other is to promote the initiatives (Marquardt *et al.*, 2007).

First, during an event delivery, the event organizers need to make sure that all necessary signage and information is properly designed and placed on site (Laing and Frost, 2010). Organizers must inform officials, volunteers, and visitors about the initiatives, their roles, and their expected contributions to the initiatives. Second, organizers should continue communication of the various environmental sustainability activities during the event. That way all spectators, including international visitors, come to understand, accept, and embrace the individual initiatives. This is essential to ensure maximum public support and take-up, for example in use of the public transport systems made available (Marquardt *et al.*, 2007).

## Conclusion

The growing awareness of the importance of delivering and hosting environmentally sustainable events is becoming the standard in event planning worldwide. This paper reviews the concept of environmental sustainability and explains generic principles for adding environmental sustainability to event management. However, event tourism is the sum of phenomena and the web of relationships of various industries ranging from transportation to hospitalities and attractions. Diverse voices and interests exist. Organizers cannot simply assume that the needs, interests, and environmental knowledge of stakeholders and members of the host community, as well as tourists, are homogeneous. Efforts of incorporating environmental sustainability principles must start early and weave into each stage of event planning process. Organizers should build strategies and take actions to initiate the collaboration among stakeholders. In addition, organizers should offer educational information and activities to further secure the goals of an event and make the event more influential in promoting the concept of environmental sustainability.

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