18 Sustainable Festivals and Events

In this chapter you will cover:

- Sustainability framework
- Sustainable events management
- Sustainable events with ISO 20121
- Sustainable development goals (SDGs)
- The impact of sustainability on events and festivals
- Impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on event industry
- Strategies to make community events sustainable

This chapter will analyse and discuss sustainability within the event industry and emphasise the fundamental principles of social, economic and environmental requirements for sustainable festivals and events. Over the last few decades sustainability has become a prominent issue and this chapter highlights the importance of adopting sustainability as an integral part of the event industry. It will evaluate a sustainable festivals and events management framework for organisations to adopt, so that events can continue to prosper by creating a working environment with local communities, local governments, businesses and safeguarding the environment.

Sustainability framework

Sustainability is a key concept that needs to be developed by events and festivals organisers. The major problem had been the scarcity of reliable information available to festivals and events managers and organisers. Therefore, there had been a lack of interest among individual workers and policymaking executives in developing sustainable planning models and professional standards. Over the last few years, state governments have attempted to adopt a sustainable policy at every stage of an event industry.

Sustainability is now a vital part of the festivals and events industry and has increased across the board acceptance among the policymakers, environmental strategists and event organisers. Over the years there have been a number of barriers that have been faced by the organisers to implement the principles of sustainability policy within festivals and events industry. Musgrave and Raj (2009, p.1) states that:

Sustainable event managers must be cognisant of the concept of sustainability and implement the principles within the organisation and delivery of the event.

Sustainable management for festivals and events is an enduring process that has been increasing and continues to flourish while working with different partners and keeping local communities on board and helping the local environment and local economy to benefit from the sustainable development. Adopting a sustainability framework within festivals and events helps to develop long term tools for organisers to maintain and enhance accepted principles of the sustainable strategy. Hall (2016, p.1) stated that:

The likelihood of the required policy learning to occur for this approach to be adopted is small given the role of political and corporate interests in promoting large scale events as a solution to problems of place competitiveness rather than as a symptom of the problems of contemporary neoliberal thinking with respect to development and sustainability.

In the political world, sustainability is referred to as 'sustainable development' which has been adopted by the countries to support economic, social and environmental equivalence. Some leaders in events management have accepted sustainability in very loose terms, to meet the social parity to support the sustainable events terminology (Musgrave and Raj, 2009, Dickson and Arcodia, 2010, Collins and Cooper, 2016).

It is important for the events industry to adopt and implement sustainability within the given (ISO) 20121 framework. Large scale mega-events can have a significant positive impact on the host communities, environment and social surroundings, because society has, overall, become more environmentally friendly and looks to festival and event organisers to organise sustainable events, regardless of the size. The Events Industry Council (EIC) states that sustainability is the process and tool to make changes to protect nature and adopt eco-friendly policies when planning the events and festivals.

Sustainability for events means taking action towards preserving our natural environment; promoting a healthy, inclusive society; and supporting a thriving economy.

The Events Industry Council Sustainable Event Standards has replaced APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Meeting Standards. These standards have been developed by leading practitioners to improve the sustainable practices across the event industry and make events more environmentally friendly in the future.

Sustainable event management

Sustainable event management is a process that helps festival and event organisers to use procedures and tools that are more environmentally friendly and make festivals and events greener by reducing CO2 emissions, food serving packages and reducing the waste at event sites. McKinley (2019) stated that the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 20121 clearly outlines the framework that event organisers need to follow.

Sustainable event management is the process of integrating environmental and social responsibility issues into event planning. Sustainable event management requires you consider the needs and values of different stakeholders that are impacted by your event. On the one hand, you take steps to reduce significant negative impacts, or harm, such as solid waste. While on the other hand you also seek out opportunities for events to leave positive legacies that benefit communities, including philanthropic and volunteer projects.

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Prominently, it is important for festivals and events organisers to create a significant framework of sustainable events management tools that helps the organisation to develop professional capacity in addressing practice within the industry with clear guidance, and highlighting the importance of events in modern society. Musgrave and Raj (2009, p.6) analysed the impacts of sustainable events.

Clearly sustainable event management has evolved over a number of years, rather than a concept born out of government strategies or academic posturing. The recent proposition to develop past and existing frameworks into a recognised standard is a natural progression. A conceptual framework that has developed and emerged out of the planning and management of events over the past decade is a necessity for a responsible events profession operating within the 21st Century.

Therefore, it is very crucial for the events industry to develop a sustainable policy and plan that provides a long-term solution for every key stakeholder to appreciate the reputation of sustainability being addressed in mega-events. Local governments may have to impose the requirement of the key guidelines that have been developed under the sustainable events development.

Events organisers need to start adopting sustainable development at the planning stage to set guidelines for visitors attending the event. Therefore, organisers should start consultations with suppliers and local management teams to make sure their event is in alignment with sustainable development principles and implement sustainable logistics for the event organisation. Event organisers, managers and volunteers should set targets by creating innovative practices and new technologies for the materials and resources that are used for event tickets, delegation packs and signage. Also, they should use modern food and beverage facilities which are environmentally friendly, and adopt reusable and recycled approaches.

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Sustainable events with ISO 20121

ISO 20121 provides event industry key stakeholder guidelines worldwide to adopt during the planning stage of the event. The standards were developed by the industry representatives and academics internationally. The underpinning of ISO 20121 should be done at the planning stage as the basis for the successful implementation and evaluation of any sustainable development plan. Sustainable principles must be implemented by the events industry, regardless of time constraints, contractual concerns and the overriding need to deliver events that meet the attendees' expectations and achieve inimitable experiences for visitors.

ISO 20121 offers a number of benefits to key stakeholders within the events industry at all stages as stated in Figure 18.1.
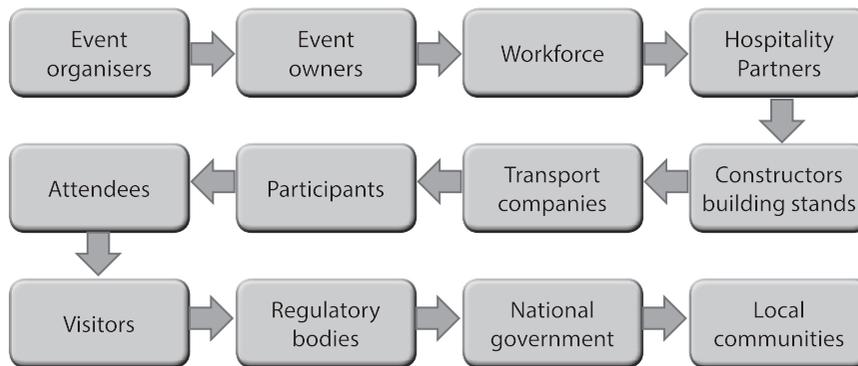

Figure 18.1: Benefits to key stakeholders

Implementing ISO 20121, an internationally recognised framework, helps the event organisation to improve their reputation and demonstrate to the local and international community that events are being planned according to sustainability guidelines. There are many other practical guidelines and policies beside ISO 20121 that have been published to reduce the environmental impact on local areas, reduce carbon emissions, and improve the wellbeing of attendees and visitors at the live event.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in June 2018, launched the report under "The World in 2050 (TWI2050) initiative" highlighting the following six key transformations that world needs to meet.

☐ Sustainable development is a societal rather than an environmental challenge. Substantial advances in **human capacity** are needed through improvements of education and healthcare – resulting, among others, in higher income and better environmental decisions.

☐ Responsible **consumption and production** cut across several of the other transitions, allowing us to do more with fewer resources – we need to adopt a circular economy approach and reduce demand.