

ARTICLE

Are we Moving Closer Towards a More Unified Definition of Sustainable Events?

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This study was conducted to determine if practitioners of events around the world agree on how they understand the definition of a sustainable event. The study consisted of a 15-question, online survey sent out to more than 100 event practitioners around the world. There were 80 responses, but when stratified 72 were found to be usable. It was determined that there is not a unified definition of sustainable events among practitioners, but there are some common elements that practitioners have identified as being a part of sustainable events.

Why is the definition of a sustainable event important?

There are many words used today to describe events. Some of these words, may even have the same meaning, or are understood to be the same thing when in fact, they are very different. The opposite may also be true: when we have a variety of words that some may think are different, but, have the same definition, is also causing confusion. While we may not always be concerned with what the exact definition of these events are, it is important that when an event practitioner does decide to participate in a special event program, earn a certification or recognition, that we are recognizing them for the work they are doing, and that the work is understood across the industry. This is also important as when someone says they have put together a “sustainable event” that they

have considered the full spectrum of sustainability and not just a partial concept. It should be clear to event practitioners as to what each event type is and what differentiates it from another type of event. According to Pernecky and Luck, 2013 p.155, “The relatively late adoption of sustainability within the events sector means that there is, as yet, little in the way of published research.” Later, in 2015, Raj and Musgraves published a book title, *Event Management and Sustainability*, in which they proposed for definitions for sustainable events and suggested that the current trends and terminology have left a lot of confusion as to what a “sustainable event” is. They suggested that for sustainable events to have meaning in the future, the industry will need to come to a common understanding of what a “sustainable event” is and is not.

Two definitions are commonly cited in the literature that define events: 1) "Something that helps us celebrate and commemorate personal and public landmark occasions, they bring communities together and they provide opportunities for entertainment. Events take place in specific political, economic, environmental and social contexts and all events create impacts," (Holmes et.al., 2015, p.16). 2) "Planned events are spatial-temporal phenomenon, and each is unique because of interactions among the setting, people, and management systems—including design elements and the program," (Getz, 2008). Events are an important part of how humans interact, and are often used as business transactions, marketing tactics and as ways to demonstrate a commitment to a topic or campaign to constituents. "Events are about excitement, creativity and enthusiasm, and the generation of experiences and memories," (Preston & Hoyle, 2012, p. 2). One thing that many groups, companies, and businesses have been using to attract customers over the last decade increasingly is the idea that their company, event, or person being promoted, has a sense of responsibility and as a result is environmentally friendly or sustainable. This can be a slippery slope for all involved however, as one of the main quandaries in sustainability is "Who defines what sustainability is?" So first, we must establish that "sustainability is a word that is defined, interpreted, and imagined differently between individuals, organizations, and social groups," (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). This is part of

the reason defining a "sustainable event" is so difficult. That said, as an industry using "sustainable events" as a part of the industry, meeting and event planners should be able to come to a general understanding of what exactly a sustainable event is if it is to be used as an industry term and is agreed upon as something necessary by many practitioners.

"Consequently, for the 'sustainable' concept to be meaningful and promote informed decision making within the events sector, it needs to be used in consistence with broader and already established definitions. If not, the term will lend itself to misuse – risking 'sustainability' becoming a passing fad rather than a changing trend,"

-Raj and Musgraves, 2009, p.29.

To understand what sustainability is in a general context, it is helpful to reference the current literature on sustainability and how scholars have defined it within the context of other industries and how scholars are positioning it within the context of events. There have been various definitions of sustainability since the 1950's, but the concept has been around since as early as 1798, when Thomas Malthus published *Limits to Growth*. (Holmes et.al., 2015). While there are numerous definitions that have been proposed over the years, one of the first and most cited definitions of sustainability was created in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission, which defined sustainable development as development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'

(WCED, 1987, Raj & Musgraves, 2009; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Pernecky et.al., 2013). While this definition is one that has been considered to impact tourism for quite some time now, it wasn't until the signing of Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 when events and their inevitable impact on the environment and host cities were considered (Pernecky et. al., 2013).

In 2000, two definitions came out defining sustainable development that are mentioned throughout the literature. These two definitions describe sustainability in two different ways, but show how differently people can interpret the word sustainability differently. Maxwell & Cannell (2000, p.321) define sustainable development as "where 'a balance is struck between the achievement of environmental and social objectives, and the drive for wealth creation and economic competitiveness."

The second definition comes from 'O'Riordan (2000, p.xii), who defines sustainable development as "the bonding of people to the planet in a placenta of care, equity, justice and progress". This definition brings out the moral and ethical force of the concept and emphasizes the right of other people (in the present and future), and organisms, to a decent life within the limits of available resources.

Taking these definitions into account, we will further explore the specifics of special events and how the literature defines them. This section will look at how the history of sustainability has shaped the development of sustainable events.

"The most important thing to establish about sustainability is that it is a word that

is defined, interpreted and imagined differently between individuals, organizations and social groups ...sustainability is considered a contested concept, a concept that is 'socially and politically constructed' and reflects the interests and values of those involved," "Who defines what sustainability is?" (Mowforth & Munt, 2009, p.20).

Traditionally, when the term sustainability has been brought up, it has lent itself towards the furthering of green agenda items. As the years have progressed, the meaning of the word has become more common knowledge, but the implementation still leaves something to be desired as it is still mainly focused on the environment. If implementing the true definition of sustainability, the social and economic impacts also need to be included, and many will argue that should also include measures for poverty reduction. In addition, those who wish to make sustainability something that is more than just a fad, they need to focus on owning the responsibility for reducing semantics and increasing transparency, accountability, and tracking (Raj & Musgraves, 2009, p. 2).

"Sustainability implies a link towards ecological impacts; namely, the consumption of natural resources and the deliberation of pollution and energy use, the concern for social inclusion and distribution of wealth, coupled with the economic themes of growth and longevity. The more affluent a society becomes, the more distant it is from the impacts of its lifestyle. Antithetically, the poor often lack the resources"

For the context of this paper, the term “event” will be used in the broadest sense to include all types of “events” that may occur. This means that events, festivals, meetings, gatherings etc. will be included. The term “sustainability” will refer to the first formal definition, and the most cited throughout literature with the addition that it must include reference to the TBL, or the Triple Bottom Line.

Defining the difference between events and tourism and learning from tourism- Or is there one?

While sustainability within the tourism industry seems to have established a variety of parameters to operate in, sustainability within the events industry is still working on determining what this means to practitioners.

Since 1987 (and before), the tourism industry has been making strides from big impact to big statements. The shift has been due to the increased call on the industry to fulfill constituent responsibility and increased demand from guests for the industry to demonstrate their commitment to the environment and communities that these businesses work within. As more guests have been questioning the practices in the tourism industry, they have also started to inquire as to the practices found within the event industry.

When considering how these two industries can combine the knowledge from the tourism industry and the innovation from the events industry, both are looking towards certifications to strategically demonstrate their commitment to the environment and communities while also

establishing stakeholder partnerships (Raj & Musgraves, 2009).

Literature Review: Definitions Surrounding Sustainable Events

This study was conducted to determine if practitioners of events agree on how they understand the definition of a sustainable event. As such, there are a variety of definitions that were reviewed to determine if the literature agrees on one definition of a sustainable event. While some elements of sustainable events are agreed on, the definitions seemed to vary depending on the group who is defining “sustainable event.” The following six terms are terms that are referenced throughout the literature and published materials that reference a “sustainable event” when they are also utilizing other terms

- Carbon Neutral Events & Meetings
- Eco-Events or Eco-Friendly Events
- Green Event
- Poverty Reduction Events
- Responsible Events
- Sustainable Events

Carbon Neutral Events & Meetings

Carbon neutral events and meetings are some of the trending terms being used by a variety of those in the industry. While many are saying that they are working on their carbon neutrality, there is much confusion as to what exactly this means (Wiedmann & Minx 2007; East, 2008; Finkbeiner, 2009; Peters, 2010; Pandey et.al., 2010). Being considered “carbon neutral” is when a group or company calculates their total carbon emissions generated. They get to carbon neutrality by reducing their emissions when possible and offsetting the

rest through programs such as planting trees or investing in renewable energy among other options (Alexander et.al., 2007; New Oxford American Dictionary, 2006).

While this might seem like a process that is easy enough to follow through with and measure, there are conflicting views in the industry as to how this might be achieved, the feasibility and exactly what steps need to be taken for an event to achieve complete carbon neutrality.

According to David Suzuki (2014), an internationally recognized academic, science broadcaster and environmental advocate: "Virtually all aspects of any event can have a reduced climate impact, including: venue, registration, accreditation, transportation, offices, food and beverage services, procurement, and production. Climate-friendly practices range from waste minimization and energy conservation to using renewable energy and carbon offsets to mitigate emissions that remain after reduction efforts."

On the other hand, groups such as the Sustainable Event Alliance are not so convinced that it is not the term that event practitioners should be using as the term for their focus. In fact, they state on their website that: "A carbon neutral event is not really a possibility. Carbon neutrality infers that a complete carbon footprint has been assessed, and within an event, this is not a practical undertaking."

Eco-Events or Eco-Friendly Events

Increasingly, many have been referring to things as "eco-friendly" or "eco-safe". This can be found in products across the

board from cleaning and packaging to transportation and meetings. (Jones, 2014). However, outside of having an emphasis on the environment and its tone, exactly what "Eco-events" are is not clearly defined in the meeting and event industry. While not clearly defined, many practitioners and publishers have made suggestions towards what an eco-event might take into consideration.

Groups like Go-Green ae from the United Arab Emirates state on their website that "Eco-events are events, no matter the occasion that take steps to be greener and participate in social responsibility." To accomplish this, they suggest a variety of considerations for event planners such as: 1) Picking a location that is accessible, and has access to public transportation or carpooling. 2) Reducing paper products through online registration, invites, and printing on recycled paper when necessary. 3) Serving local food, or organic when possible. 4) Make eco efforts such as recycling at your event easy and clearly labeled.

There are those who have also been able to capitalize on "eco-events" by making these event types their main business model. Nancy Judd, utilizes Eco-Events as a way to combine a variety of categories including art and fashion into educational pieces seen at conferences and embedded in various eco-campaigns. Yet others seek to take any event and make it eco-friendly, like Evelina at Evelina's Eco Events (eee) who is a Certified B Corp that produces sustainable eco-events on a variety of scales. These eco-events promise to deliver conscious designs, unique experiences, zero

waste, inspire social responsibility and demonstrate dedication to sustainability and regenerative practices while also delivering a low-carbon footprint.

Green Events

There are many event venues and planners that claim to host “green events, meetings or festivals.” In 2009, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) published *A Green Meeting Guide*. In this guide, they adapted the ICLEI’s definition developed in 2004 at the *Greening Events Symposium* in Barcelona stating that: “A green meeting is one designed, organised and implemented in a way that minimizes negative environmental impacts and leaves a positive legacy for the host community.”

While this is established to some organizations, and they are expected to follow certain guidelines laid out by groups such as UNEP, another definition was published in 2010 that was more encompassing of events: “An event that has a sustainability policy and/or implements sustainable management practices,” (Laing & Frost 2010).

Poverty Reduction Events and Megaevents

Poverty reduction events have been an increasing trend and utilized often as a tool for sustainable development. (UNWTO, 2010). The term “poverty” here is used to be inclusive of definitions from the World Bank, Poverty-Environment Partnership and from interviews of those who are impoverished themselves to mean not only that there is a lack of income or assets and access to services but also that the people

do not have civil and political rights, and includes the conservation of indigenous cultures (Roe, 2008).

While development through the utilization of events in developing and poverty ridden areas have become popular, the outcomes of these events leave much to be desired after all that was promised. The communities where these events are held are often pitched the event in a way that indicates that those who are impoverished might gain meaningful long-term work if they commit to helping the event be a success. The actual impacts of such events regarding the aspects of poverty reduction are much debated. The most studied group currently in events focused on poverty reduction are found within the production of megaevents in developing countries.

Megaevents have been touted to be the best way to enable regions of poverty out of their own struggles and into a life that has a purpose and hopefully pays a meaningful wage. (Pillay & Bass, 2008). While this might be argued as a good way to ignite development (Humphreys & Prokopowicz, 2007), the sustainability, effectiveness, and actual reduction of poverty in areas where megaevents have occurred lack evidence and longitudinal studies that prove the effectiveness of these being a tool for poverty reduction. (Baade and Matheson; Pillay & Bass, 2008). While the following benefits have been noted:

- Reinforcement of authoritarian regimes
- Infrastructure development and improvement
- Changes in stereotypical images of countries such as South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka

- Temporary job development and creation

(Dimeo & Kay 2004; Pillay & Bass, 2008; Black & Van der Westhuizen 2004)

The following drawbacks have also been noted (Cornelissen 2007; Horne and Manzenreiter 2006; Matheson and Baade 2004; Pillay & Bass, 2008; Whitson and Horne 2006):

- Lack of long-term employment opportunities to locals, particularly after the event ends
- Cost of construction often borne by residents
- Cost of operation often continued to be expected from residents
- Increased infrastructure does not add to local social or economic capital
- A venue locals are often denied access to
- Inequality often increased after hosting a megaevent

Furthermore, there is currently no evidence in the literature that events produced with the intention of poverty reduction will result in “meaningful job creation, a significant contribution to the GDP or infrastructural, service and facilities provision that is appropriate beyond the lifespan of the event,” (Pillay & Bass, 2008). This is because often in areas where events are held, the long-term use of facilities such as soccer stadiums and large hotels are not considered for the long term, that is, what happens after the event finishes and the people return home. Some have made suggestions such as seen in many Brazil

Olympics stadium proposals, where the stadium could be turned into variety of housing to address the housing deficit, while keeping a common soccer field available to residents (Couch, 2014).

This type of event is further tricky to measure the impacts as events are often one-time occurrences and are hard to measure improvements within.

Responsible Events

Responsible events are a relatively new concept to the industry, but some practitioners feel that the use of “sustainability” is overplayed out among their clients and to attract the clients choosing these events for the right reasons that a name change might be in order to clarify what this type of event entails, as most feel that the term “sustainable events” seems to imply too much of an emphasis on solely the environment and ignores the other important aspects of the Triple Bottom Line concept.

Event Research International (2012) defines a responsible event as one that is: *“locality-centric in nature taking proactive measures to contribute to local sustainable development across the triple bottom-line.”*

In their book *Events and Sustainability*, Raj and Musgraves (2009), proposed several definitions to best define a sustainable event. In their third proposal, they propose changing the industry term from “sustainable event” to “responsible event” and define them as: *“events sensitive to the economic, sociocultural and environmental needs within the local host community, and organized in such a way as to optimize the net holistic (positive) output.”*

Sustainable Events

This is the term that many practitioners are utilizing, yet few recognize the entirety of its meaning.

As early as 2004, groups were attempting to define sustainable events for the world. In 2004, the group “ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability” (which originally stood for the “International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives,” but in 2003 the organization dropped the acronym to “reflect a broader focus on sustainability, not just environmental initiatives.”) met in Barcelona to develop principles of Green Events at their Greening Events symposium. They sculpted the following definition:

“A sustainable event is one designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes potential negative impacts and leaves a beneficial legacy for the host community and all involved.”

Later in 2008, Andersson and Getz published a paper with the definition: *“The ability of host cities to accommodate events without spoiling the quality for locals or future generations.”*

In attempt to rectify the situation of the use of the term “sustainable events,” Raj and Musgraves (2009), proposed multiple definitions in attempt to capture the full essence of what a sustainable event should contain. (Note they offered 4 definitions, however, one is of a “responsible event,” presented earlier.)

Proposed Definition 1:

Sustainable events: events managed as an autonomous cyclical process through the

interaction between event management, host community and event-goers.”

Proposed Definition 2:

Sustainable events: events managed as an autonomous cyclical process through the interaction between event management, host community and event-goers, providing human resources, infrastructure and funds.”

Proposed Definition 4:

Sustainable events: events efficiently utilizing available resources (human resources, infrastructure and funds), thereby being self-sustaining without, or, in the case of externalities, with a minimum of, public sector support.”

In 2010, Heitmann and Lóránt likened a sustainable event to: *“A strategic development approach and local management practices within national, regional and local governmental contexts to: minimize negative impacts while enhancing positive impacts; assure economic viability for the event organization or government; safeguard local culture and heritage; protect natural environments and provide residents and visitors with an enjoyable experience.”*

With these definitions, we can see the broad spectrum of what needs to be considered and what the literature suggests that sustainable events could potentially encompass and the confusion that it has brought to the industry.

Interchanged Words

There are many times in literature, articles, and the industry and in day-to-day activities when any mix of these words are used interchangeably. This adds to the

amount of confusion that continues to occur in the industry. Here are some examples of these words being interchanged that are documented through various sources:

- "Carbon neutral and Sustainable Events" (Sorrells, 2015 article *9 steps for hosting a carbon-neutral event*).
- "Carbon neutral events and Green Conferences" by Zero GHG Inc.
- "Carbon neutral and Green Event," "Make your event more sustainable by implementing greening practices..." by David Suzuki in *How to Host a Sustainable, Carbon Neutral Conference or other Event*.
- "Eco-Friendly events and green events" by go-green.ae
- "World's most Eco-Friendly events and World's most Green Events" by Event Academy's Matt Kendall
- "A "green" or sustainable meeting is..." Green Hotelier, *what is a Green Meeting?*

While UNEP offers a definition for a "green event," (This definition is often claimed to be the most commonly cited) they state: "In the international debate, "Green events" include health and social concerns which should also be taken into consideration when aiming for a 'sustainable' event." The main problem with this is like the UNEP "Green Meeting Guide, 2009," they suggest that the "Green Meeting needs to add additional considerations to become a "sustainable meeting". Acknowledging that they are two separate items does not come across unless you read the beginning of the guide in its entirety. Even in the context of these

parameters, the words are used interchangeably and if not reading or listening carefully could be understood as the same thing, when in fact the "Green Meeting" is honed in on the environmental aspects and is somewhat neglecting of the other two elements (social and economic) that would make an event "sustainable" according to their definition.

In fact, in their summary guide, they provide a list titled *Why green your meeting?* The third point is as follows: "Positive reputation – a green meeting is a visible demonstration of your organizations commitment to sustainable principles. Communications around the green meeting will raise its profile and attract participants." If there was truly a commitment to the TBL (or Triple Bottom Line consisting of Environmental, Economic, and Social factors), then should they not have stated a commitment to "environmental principles" instead?

These are just a few examples of the ways that the words are being interchanged. As mentioned here, it is highly likely that elements of each of these events may align with an event type, but shows that the articles and information being published is not clear in differentiating one event type from another.

Examples of Events that have used "Sustainable Event" as a part of their advertising

There are several venues, companies and groups that are claiming to hold "sustainable events" or to offer services that will help a group or planner achieve a sustainable event. For instance, Cavendish

Venues in London (London Sustainable Venue of the Year Award 2009, 2010 and runner up in 2011), and Zero GHG Inc. in Montreal, Quebec offer services in sustainable events through determining the total carbon footprint an event creates. They claim that the utilization of their carbon calculators help determines the overall carbon the event creates and seeks to offset it through determining the carbon cost and neutralizing it with a partner carbon company.

Another company, *Green Meeting Ninjas*, states “We do not plan events but rather, we help those that do, do so in a more sustainable manner,” (Green Meeting Ninjas website).

According to various resources (including David Suzuki’s Green Event List), these are some examples of sustainable events, or events that have achieved recognition as falling into a category of one of the events listed above:

Examples of Carbon Neutral Events, Tours & Conferences

2010 Winter Olympics
The Academy Awards 2007
Turin Winter Olympics 2006
Super Bowl 2006
FIFA World Cup 2006
World Economic Forum
Barenaked Ladies Tour

Examples of Events listed as sustainable

Nasdaq Sustainability Webinar: Companies & Investors Address Water Issues
GSSB Semi-Annual Meeting

BCCC Corporate Citizenship Conference 2017
CSHS Human Capital Forum
ESG3 Summit
Eurovision, 2013
Hope Global Forum/2017 Annual Meeting
Ceres Conference 2017
Findhorn International Forum on Sustainability
WFE Annual General Assembly & Meeting 2017
Ecosummit Stockholm Conference
TBLI Conference Nordic 2017
2017 Net Impact Conference
The Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games (the first Commonwealth Games to secure the ISO 20121 sustainability standard.)
CIBJO Congress
ITB Asia – The Energy Saving Event
Oracle OpenWorld – The Give Something Back Event
The Croissant Neuf Summer Party – The Self-Sufficient Event (Also voted Greenest event)

Translation from definitions to practice: Methods

Since the literature has so many inconsistencies about “sustainable events”, it made sense to interview those who work in events every day to see if they had a more unified understanding.

A survey was developed with the intent to solicit this information from event practitioners. The survey link was sent to known event planners, posted on social media, Linked In and posted in 5 event planner member group discussion boards. The survey period was 2 weeks, or 14 days. 81 responses were initially received. Of

these, 8 were removed due to respondent duplication (One respondent submitted the same response to the survey 9 times within two minutes.) This reduced the number of useable surveys down to 72.

To get a more accurate count of those planners who rely on event planning as the main portion of their income, the data was further reduced. First, those who responded that event planning was less than 50% of their job were removed, bringing the number of surveys down to 54. Second, those who responded that the successful production of events was not their primary source of income were removed, leaving 38 responses. These were both used as elimination factors, as these are those professionals who are most often dealing with events on a full-time basis.

There was one data oversight, in that a location question was omitted due to human error. Should further studies be conducted, it is recommended that this is added as part of future studies.

Findings

The survey received 80 responses, 43 of which were respondents who stated that their income relied on successful event production and they responded that their job responsibilities included at least 50% event planning or production. The majority of respondents had more than 10 years in the industry, and worked full-time. There were a variety of job titles, including administrative workers, planners, coordinators, directors, senior directors, and president/CEOs that responded. Respondents also worked within a wide variety of event types, ranging from

Academic, Benefit, Business, Family, Household, Lifetime, to weddings and professional events and festivals. Most, many respondents had heard of green events (58) and sustainable events (48), previously, while 7 had never heard of any of the six event types listed.: Only one respondent had heard of all 6 event types, and the % of their job they are responsible for event production is 40%. 9 respondents had heard of 5 out of 6 event types, but when reduced to IDE, only 7 had heard of 5 of the 6 event types. 40 respondents stated they had never worked these event types, while 25 claimed to have worked a green event previously. When narrowed down to those who both had 50% of their job duties dependent on events and stated that events were their main source of income, 20 had not heard of any of these event types while 13 had implemented a green event. When asked if respondents felt that there was a difference in the six terms and their understanding of a sustainable event, the majority said yes, or somewhat. This response stayed the same when paired down to 50% with IDE, 17 (yes), 17 (somewhat) and 4 (no). Respondents were close to evenly split when asked if they could define a sustainable event. With the total response rate, there were 25 who felt they were confident they could define it, 26 who were unsure and 21 who said they would not be able to define a sustainable event. When paired down, 13 said yes, 14 said maybe and 11 said they would be unable to define a sustainable event. When it came to defining a sustainable event, a variety of responses were recorded. Of these responses, the definitions could be

narrowed into 35 categories. Of these, the top choices for sustainable events definitions were consistent, with the following results: 19 respondents stating: “good for the environment” or being “environmentally friendly” as the main definition. 15 defined it as relating to economic, social, and environmental concerns, 14 defined it as an event that has little or zero waste, 12 defined it as an event that follows and implements some form of sustainable practices. Tied for 5th with 10 votes each are events that work to reduce its carbon footprint and an event that has a minimum negative environmental impact. Finally, there were 8 who suggested that a sustainable event that is one that utilizes efficiency practices. When reduced to those respondents who do 50% + IDE, the order of these changed, but the top responses did not. The top result was still an event that does good for the environment or that is environmentally friendly with 11 votes, tied for 2nd with 8 votes each is an event that has economic, social, and environmental concerns and leaves little or zero waste while minimum negative impact moved up to 3rd place with 6 votes. Another tie occurred for 4th place with 4 votes each to defining it as an event that follows and implements some form of sustainable practices and one that works to reduce its carbon footprint. The second consistency is found in that efficiency came in at the end of the voting list after the reduction as well, but with only 2 votes.

When given elements and asked to determine which elements most successfully described a sustainable event, 68 respondents said Material use

consciousness, 64 said Recycling bins being present, 58 said Reduced paper printing and increased online materials, 55 said Water usage consciousness, 54 said Local food purchasing and 54 also said Energy consciousness.

With this information, we see that there are many similar elements, but these are still a variety of elements that are not consistent even when compared with respondents own definitions.

Conclusions

Holmes et.al, suggests that delivering a holistically sustainable event means “Applying holistic thinking to planned events means understanding the connection between the elements that make the event happen and how this relates to the broader context in which the event is taking place. It also needs an understanding of the interdependencies, interactions, and feedback loops between the various aspects of the event and a recognition that these may change over time.

While there are several elements that are similar in the responses that were received, the responses also show confusion among the terminology. This shows that while event practitioners can identify elements that go into sustainable events, less than a quarter of respondents were able to identify main elements that the literature identifies as being unique to sustainable events as opposed to other event types.

Recommendations

- Complete further studies and determine if understanding depends on region of the world events are being produced.

- Continue to develop a way to determine the key differences between the event types that are made available to the event planning community.
- Develop a methodology for assessing the sustainability of an event that is low cost and developed with practitioners.

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