

# Sustainable Event Management

A Practical Guide

Meegan Jones



publishing for a sustainable future

London • Sterling, VA

# Contents

Preface	vii
Who Should Read this Book?	x
Acknowledgements	xi
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	xiii
Chapter 1 Sustainability and Events	3
Chapter 2 Marketing and Communications	37
Chapter 3 Energy and Emissions	77
Chapter 4 Transport	141
Chapter 5 Water	183
Chapter 6 Purchasing and Resource Use	231
Chapter 7 Waste	305
Appendix	385
Index	409

# Preface

Across the world each year millions of events of every shape and size are held: community fairs, business functions, religious and cultural celebrations, local sporting competitions and school fairs, through to the world's largest festivals, stadium concerts, conferences, expos and sporting events. These public parties use up resources, send out emissions and generate mountain ranges of waste. They also cause a lot of smiles, community cohesion, celebration, give voice to issues and everyone has a wonderful time.

The idea of creating a temporary city for a massive event, with power, toilets, waste, water, transport, is inherently unsustainable, consuming unnecessary resources, producing masses of waste. It could be said the most environmentally friendly event is no event at all, but that's no fun. Public parties always have and always will be a part of the human story. Those who stage these events have a social and environmental responsibility to reduce their impacts. If all event organizers, from the largest commercial shows to small community fairs, kept sustainability at the core of their planning, the cumulative outcome would be impressive.

But what does running an event sustainably actually mean? Is recycling enough? What about biodegradable waste? What to do with that? Does being sustainable mean counting up all the emissions and then offsetting them? And if you offset, what projects do you support and how do you know they're effective? If you use biodegradable plates and cups to serve your food and drink on, do you buy those made from genetically modified corn grown in your country or plates that have travelled half way across the world but are made from fallen palm leaves and whose production helps support the sustainable development of India's rural poor? What of the biofuel debate? You want to get away from relying on fossil fuels to power your event, but how can you justify using biodiesel that has been grown from crops which should really have been food? And what to do with all the sewage and waste water? Surely there's a better way to go than full-flush loos with stinky toilet 'blue'?

This book will open up some of these questions and either gives you the outright answers or supplies enough ammunition to go out and ask the right questions of your contractors and suppliers, production staff and venue owners. Hopefully it will also shed light on areas previously left unconsidered.

As we progress through each chapter of the book, we go on a journey towards sustainability with tips, production logistics, projects to undertake and practical solutions to common challenges. You'll hear from the coalface with real-life examples from event organizers who have tackled challenges and successfully reduced the impacts of their events. There are examples from all around the world, the bulk coming from Australia, the UK, the US and Europe. However the solutions offered can be applied in just about any country and an interpretation of the suggestions can usually be applied to any set of circumstances.

## **The Science of Sustainability**

Scientists, environmental experts, activists and specialists in every field of sustainability, greening, environment, ecology, biodiversity and global warming, have published volumes of books, papers, reports and documents on these subjects. There are thousands of websites, action groups, causes and campaigns online. This book doesn't attempt to recreate or duplicate this work or to teach environmental science. It's written assuming the reader has basic knowledge of the concepts of sustainability and environmental conservation, or at a minimum has the Earth's interest at heart.

When you break it down the base function of sustainable event management is communications, management, marketing and making the right choices. You don't need to be a technical expert. The experts are there to become part of your toolbox of solutions. They are there to bounce your ideas off to ensure you're making the best choices for your event. However these technical experts in environmental science, carbon accounting and the like are not events professionals. It's your role to ensure a healthy marriage between these important functions of sustainability and environmental management with your intimate knowledge of your event, your audience and other particular circumstances surrounding them both.

We are event organizers and our skills are firmly set in this area. We don't need to know the technical details of how to build a reed bed system to recycle water, or the science inside a composting toilet, or how your printing company can clean a printing plate without solvents. All we need to know is what can be done. Learn all you can so you can make informed choices, but don't be afraid to bring in specialists and technical experts when the need arises. In fact ensure you do.

## **Lead by Example and Create Change**

Apart from the obvious improvement environmentally, an attractive by-product of every sustainably produced event is the potential to inspire and motivate others. This includes the supply chain, the media and of course your audience or participants.

Use your event to demonstrate how a sustainable community could work, to show sustainability in action. Every litre of fuel, every flick of the switch, every degree on a thermostat and every bottle or can thrown instead of recycled is directly responsible for using up precious resources, creating waste and inevitably sending up a plume of greenhouse gases adding to climate change. Show how it's possible to do things a better way.

People come in their millions upon millions to our shows and we have the enviable position of a captive and receptive audience. We are in a position to champion causes, highlight issues and inspire changing behaviour. It's a fine line though, as you don't want to hammer people at every turn with

your message for a green future. But you could also risk alienating them if you don't consider the environment and take some green steps at your event.

The events industry worldwide – be it the live music scene, outdoor festivals, worldwide sporting competitions, local leagues, community events, agricultural shows or conferences and expos – together make for a huge influencing group. The power of our collective chequebooks has the potential to effect change in the industry and offer a forum for innovators to develop sustainable solutions. There is a need for the events industry to change our production and purchasing habits now.

I hope this book inspires you to adjust the way you produce your event and to use your event in turn to inspire others.