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EVENTS AND SUSTAINABILITY: WHY AND HOW TO ORGANIZE GREEN EVENTS?

Abstract

This paper aims to identify the importance of organizing green events from the perspective of different stakeholders, as well as possible solutions that event organizers can use to make their events greener. The large number of people who gather, the short duration, and the significant impact they have on the environment in which they are held, have led to the fact that events are often considered the “antithesis of sustainability”. This paper seeks to review the literature to determine the relationship between events and sustainability, and then, on the example of the Belgrade Beer Fest, to identify ways that, even events that are not primarily organized for this reason, can contribute to improving the sustainability of the destination.

Keywords: *tourism events, green events, green festivals, sustainability*

JEL classification: *Z32, Q51*

ДОГАЂАЈИ И ОДРЖИВОСТ: ЗАШТО И КАКО ОРГАНИЗОВАТИ ЗЕЛЕНЕ ДОГАЂАЈЕ?

Апстракт

Овај рад има за циљ да идентификује значај организовања зелених догађаја из перспективе различитих стејхолдера, као и могућа решења која организатори догађаја могу искористити да своје догађаје учине „зеленијим”. Велики број људи који окупљају, кратко трајање и значајан утицај који имају на окружење у коме се одржавају, довели су до тога да се догађаји често сматрају „антитезом одрживости”. Овај рад настоји да прегледом литературе утврди везу између догађаја и одрживости, а затим да на примеру Београдског Beer Fest-а, укаже на начине на које, чак и догађаји који нису примарно организовани из овог разлога, могу допринети побољшању одрживости дестинације.

Кључне речи: *туристички догађаји, зелени догађаји, зелени фестивали, одрживост*

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Introduction

Almost two decades ago Ottman (1993) noticed that being “green” could bring a competitive advantage to the organization. Smith-Christensen (2009) notes that this trend is especially used in event promotion. Events take place in a specific economic, political, social and environmental context, producing both positive and negative effects. The prevalence of negative effects can lead to the event creating negative publicity, but also losing the support of the local community. While the economic effects of events are mostly positive, social effects combined, and environmental effects are mostly identified as negative. For an event to be sustainable in the long run, negative effects must not outweigh positive ones in any aspect (Holmes et al., 2015). Therefore, events increasingly strive to proactively contribute to sustainable development and are promoted as “green”, “sustainable”, or “carbon-neutral”, thus emphasizing their environmental awareness (Smith-Christensen, 2009). An event that “has a sustainability policy or incorporates sustainable practices into its management and operations”, Laing and Frost (2010, p. 262) consider a green event. Although the original idea of the concept of green events was to minimize negative impacts on the environment, it has expanded over time to include economic and social impacts as well (Holmes et al., 2015).

By organizing green events companies strive to gain a competitive advantage and fulfil their social responsibility (Wong et al., 2015). Ottman (1993) identifies that a sense of social and environmental responsibility is also present among green event attendees. Wong et al. (2015) found that participants, who are actively involved in the green initiatives implemented by the event, tend to develop a sense of social and environmental responsibility, but also a sense of loyalty to the event that provides them with this opportunity (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021). In this way, events are considered “catalysts of positive social development” (Armbrecht, 2021, p. 169).

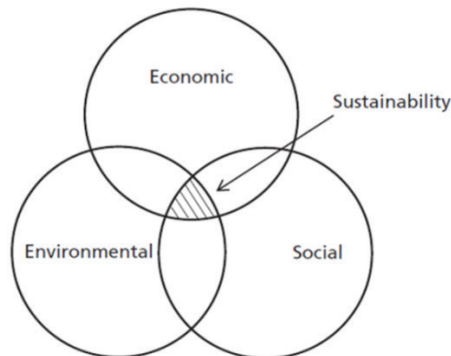
The purpose of this paper is to identify the importance of organizing green events from the perspectives of various stakeholders, as well as possible solutions that event organizers can implement to make their events greener. In order to achieve this objective, the paper was arranged into three connected parts. The first part will analyse the concept of sustainability in order to provide an understanding of the principles of sustainability that need to be incorporated when organizing green events. The second part will address the link between tourism events and sustainability, while the third part will identify ways of organizing green events and present an example of good practice.

1. Sustainability

The term “sustainability” was coined in 1712 by German forester Hans Carl von Carlowitz, who used this term to point out the importance of long-term forest management. However, it was not until the 1980s that the term became more widely used (Scoones, 2007). After the United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development’s Report (well known as the Brundtland Report) defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43), the term received full

affirmation. In other words, sustainability suggests “an equilibrium or condition of stability in which consumption and renewal of resources are in a balance that maintains conditions for human survival that can continue forever” (Holmes et al., 2015, p. 3). To achieve this, Farrell (1999) emphasizes the “trinity of sustainability”, that is, the integration and creation of a balance between the economy, society, and the environment (Dimitrovski, 2018), as “the three main elements underpinning human society” (Holmes et al., 2015, p. 3). This is usually illustrated in the form of three intersecting circles (representing the economy, environment, and society), with sustainability being placed at the intersection, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Representation of the sustainability concept



Source: Holmes et al. (2015, p. 3)

Three interconnected “pillars” (Basiago, 1998), “dimensions” (Carter & Moir, 2012), or “stool legs” (Dawe & Ryan, 2003), employed to describe sustainability, imply that sustainability must be understood as a holistic concept (Holmes et al., 2015). That is, in order to achieve sustainability, the following concurrent achievements are necessary (Hall et al., 2015; Holmes et al., 2015):

- *Economic sustainability* – in the form of creating prosperity at different levels of society, through the long-term sustainability of enterprises and related economic activities;
- *Social sustainability* – implies an equitable distribution of benefits, respecting human rights and different cultures, as well as maintaining and strengthening local communities;
- *Environmental sustainability* – refers to the conservation and responsible management of natural resources (primarily non-renewable and vital for the maintenance of life, such as air, water, and land) by minimizing pollution and protecting the environment.

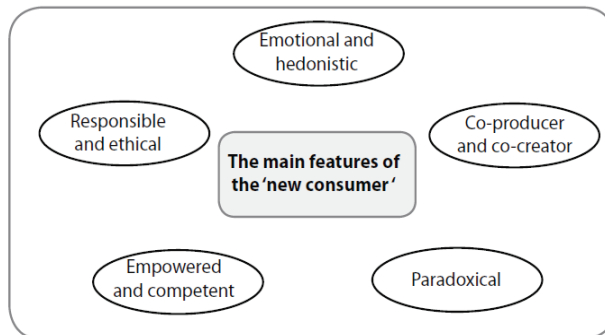
The basic ideas and principles of sustainability have permeated all aspects of society (Zdravković & Peković, 2020; Srebro et al., 2021), and have been applied to tourism (Saarinen, 2006). According to Elmo et al. (2020), “tourism activities are sustainable when they are economically efficient without compromising social well-being and the environment” (p. 2).

2. Tourism events and sustainability

Each planned event, due to its nature, produces numerous positive and negative influences. These impacts, depending on the size and type of event, affect the local community but can have impacts on a much wider scale (Holmes et al., 2015). According to Schlenker et al. (2010), the impact of events is primarily measured from an economic perspective. Negruşa et al. (2016) also note that there is a strong focus in the literature on economic benefits. Holmes et al. (2015) tried to explain this by the fact that the success of an event is measured primarily by its economic contribution to stakeholders and the local community. However, events and festivals also produce socio-cultural and environmental impacts that are very often at the other end of the impact spectrum and require greater consideration.

Based on a literature review, Frochot and Batat (2013) discovered the characteristics of the postmodern consumer, or “new consumer” as they named it (Figure 2). Quan and Wang (2004) point out that the tourist is actually a consumer, whose consumption is realized through the tourism activities he/she undertakes, which allows the consumer behaviour identified by Frochot and Batat (2013) to be placed in the context of tourism. Based on the previous, the postmodern tourist can be described as empowered and competent, responsible and ethical, emotional and hedonistically oriented, paradoxical, and eager to get involved in tourism activities, i.e., ready to co-create or co-produce his/her experience.

Figure 2. Characteristics of the “new consumer”



Source: Frochot & Batat (2013, p. 10)

Zifkos (2015) argues that events and festivals provide an excellent opportunity for “cooperation with the natural order” (p. 6). Raworth (2017) consider festivals as an ideal opportunity for building “norms, rules and relations that enable us to cooperate with and depend on one another”, thus helping us “meet our fundamental human needs such as for participation, leisure, protection and belonging” (p. 76). The study by Choi et al. (2012) showed that the pro-environmental beliefs of tourists affect their motivation to attend the event. As Ryan (2002) explained, the interpretation of experience is extremely subjective, and therefore beliefs will play an extremely important role in interpreting circumstances, forming opinions, and finally, in deciding to take action, that is visiting the event. Additionally, Gratton et al. (2011) believe that events can also provide an opportunity to reaffirm the environmental beliefs of participants.

According to Goldblatt (2012) creating a sense of community among visitors is of great importance as well. As Mair and Jago (2010) point out, it is not enough just to encourage sustainable behaviour towards the natural environment, but it is also necessary to consider social conditions as well. Jones (2017) therefore points out that event organizers have the responsibility to provide conditions that will minimize environmental impact and encourage the creation of social ties.

Mair and Laing (2012) conducted a survey among event organizers to determine their reasons for implementing sustainable practices. The study found that in addition to visitor satisfaction, marketing benefits, image enhancement, desire to educate visitors and economic benefits are the main reasons for organizing green events. According to a literature review conducted by Seočanac (2018), tourists for whom sustainability and responsibility are the way of life, such as LOHAS tourists, are characterized by greater purchasing power, but also a willingness to spend more money to buy products, or visit destinations or events that are in line with their lifestyle. Holmes et al. (2015) noted that “event organisers and managers, as well as event goers, have become more aware of the wider impacts of events and the need to ensure negative impacts is minimized while any benefits are maximized across social, economic and environmental issues” (p. 5). As Getz (2010) points out, the festival experience cannot be fully staged, but it can be suggested and facilitated. Getz and Andersson (2010) believe that if festival managers recognize the existence of a link between environmental beliefs and social interaction, they will be able to design a much better offer for their target market segments.

The unique and unforgettable experiences that events can provide to visitors can have a positive impact on their quality of life, happiness and well-being (Armbrecht & Andersson, 2019; Fredman & Margaryan, 2020; Armbrecht, 2021). Therefore, temporary *communitas* and the events of the experience offer can be a great opportunity to strengthen the individual and group identity of visitors (Richards & Palmer, 2010), as well as to educate and inspire people to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle (Mair & Smith, 2021). Zifkos (2015) suggest that events can act as “incubators of change” (p. 10). White and White (2004) also found that tourism can serve as a “rite of passage”, that is, tourism can encourage tourists to move from the old to the new way of life. Mair and Smith (2021) believe that events represent an environment that can initiate changes in the behaviour of tourists, at least temporarily, since their impact on permanent changes in behaviour has not yet been determined. At the event, people can get new ideas or good practices, which they can incorporate into their daily lives. Smith (2012) for example discovered that temporary experiences of using public transportation during events can impact the future behaviour of car users.

According to Mair and Laing (2012), sustainable event practices should stimulate guest participation in waste management, reduce power consumption and promote the use of public transportation. These authors suggest that even events that are not organized for that purpose can encourage the sustainable behaviour of visitors. Mair and Smith (2021) consider that events need to be integrated “within wider public policy initiatives, rather than regarded as standalone interventions” (p. 6). Only in this way, they believe, the desired outcomes of the event can be achieved.

3. The Belgrade Beer Fest Case Study

One of the most visited festivals in the Republic of Serbia and Southeast Europe as well, the Belgrade Beer Fest, was founded in 2003 and is the most important project of the Belgrade Cultural Network. Until 2008, the location of the festival was in the Lower Town, inside the Belgrade Fortress, after which it was moved to Ušće (*Beogradski Beer Fest*, n.d.). Belgrade Beer Fest gathers people of different nationalities and cultures in one place, who primarily come to the festival because of the atmosphere and opportunity for socialization (*Belgrade Beer Fest 2016*, n.d.). The festival is held every year in August, and on that occasion, about 500,000 people gather during the five days of the festival. In addition to a wide range of domestic and foreign beer brands and over 400 different beer flavours, the festival is characterized by a very rich and diverse music program. Adding to this the free entrance to the festival, this concept attracts visitors from all over the country, the region, and the world.

The event implements several activities aimed at reducing the impact on the environment. In order to raise environmental awareness among festival visitors and reduce the amount of waste, Ekostar Pak (National Packaging Waste Management System Operator) and Pet Eko Recycling (operator for collecting PET and other packaging waste in Belgrade), together with Heineken Serbia, organized an action for proper packaging waste disposal at Belgrade Beer Fest. Cardboard boxes and containers for packaging waste were placed at the festival, and Ecostar Pak volunteers took care of how the waste was disposed of and gave information to festival visitors about proper waste disposal. Every morning, during the Belgrade Beer Fest, waste is picked up from the festival site and taken for sorting and later for recycling. According to data for 2013, at the festival and during its preparation, about 400 kilograms of paper and cardboard, about 250 kilograms of cans, and about 160 kilograms of plastic were collected (Ekostar Pak, 2013). Activities aimed at environmental sustainability are also carried out by the Apatin Brewery. Through the campaign “Recycle and you!”, it strived to raise the awareness of Belgrade Beer Fest visitors in an interesting way about the importance of preserving the environment by properly recycling waste. For that purpose, a football table for recycling was presented, an adapted version of a popular game that uses empty cans instead of tokens. Also, the XO Magic Box, a modernized version of the popular XO game, that uses empty cans for the game, preparing them for recycling, was created.

Through social campaigns such as “Don’t drink and drive” and “Who’s driving home”, the organizers of the Belgrade Beer Fest, in cooperation with sponsors, encourage responsible behaviour and strive to ensure the sustainability of the local community. In cooperation with Apatin Brewery, within the campaign “Don’t drink and drive”, consumers are explained in interesting ways how alcohol affects motor skills and encourage not to drive if they have consumed alcohol, but to get home in alternative ways – to call a taxi or a friend, take a walk or wait for transportation. As part of the “Who’s driving home” campaign, Heineken Serbia, in cooperation with the City Transport Company and the Traffic Safety Agency, organizes transportation from different parts of the city to the Belgrade Beer Fest, as well as a safe return from the festival.

Actions aimed at supporting vulnerable social groups were also organized at the festival. An example is an action “One packet, a lot of love”, which was carried out in cooperation with the Red Cross in 2007 at the Belgrade Beer Fest and aimed to raise

funds for New Year's gifts to children from Kosovo (*Belgrade Beer Fest 2007*, 2007). Another example is the environmental-humanitarian action that was organized for the first time at the Belgrade Beer Fest held in 2018. As a result, 1,500,000 dinars were raised for the "We Live Together" association of people with disabilities. The Recan Foundation, Ball Beverage Packaging Belgrade, and Belgrade Beer Fest participated in the action, with the support of the City of Belgrade ("Limenke u Službi Humanosti," 2018).

4. Discussion and conclusion

As Smith (2009) observed, "at first glance, events appear to be the antithesis of sustainability – they are short-lived, involve the mass movement of thousands of people, and can disrupt existing plans for an area" (p. 32). However, a review of the literature revealed that even events that are not organized with the goal of improving sustainability can encourage sustainable behaviour among visitors, and the Belgrade Beer Fest is an example. Selective waste collection, recycling, and encouraging the use of public transport are some of the examples of activities that the festival conducts in order to reduce the impact on the environment and also to encourage visitors to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. By involving visitors in various activities during the festival and enabling them to co-create their own experiences, the event encourages the creation of cohesion among visitors as well.

Based on the Belgrade Beer Fest case study, several conclusions can be drawn. Implementing social and environmental actions, creating innovative and unique offers, promoting positive energy and socializing, and cooperating with public and private organizations are activities that encourage positive impacts on the destination and the country, strengthen the image of the country, and consequently contribute to tourism and other sectors. The example of the Belgrade Beer Fest can serve as a guide for other countries to successfully organize events that seek to achieve long-term tangible and intangible benefits for the country, region, or city.

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