



## MODULE 10

# Event greening and sustainability



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**Disclaimer:**

These notes are adapted from the University of Cape Town and GetSmarter's course notes for Module 5 of the Events Management elective offered as part of the blended version of the UCT Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Marketing.

**Learning Outcomes:**

**LO1:** Explain sustainability and event greening, and how to achieve these within an event.

**LO2:** Describe the benefits of event greening.

**LO3:** Discuss the environmental impacts of an event.

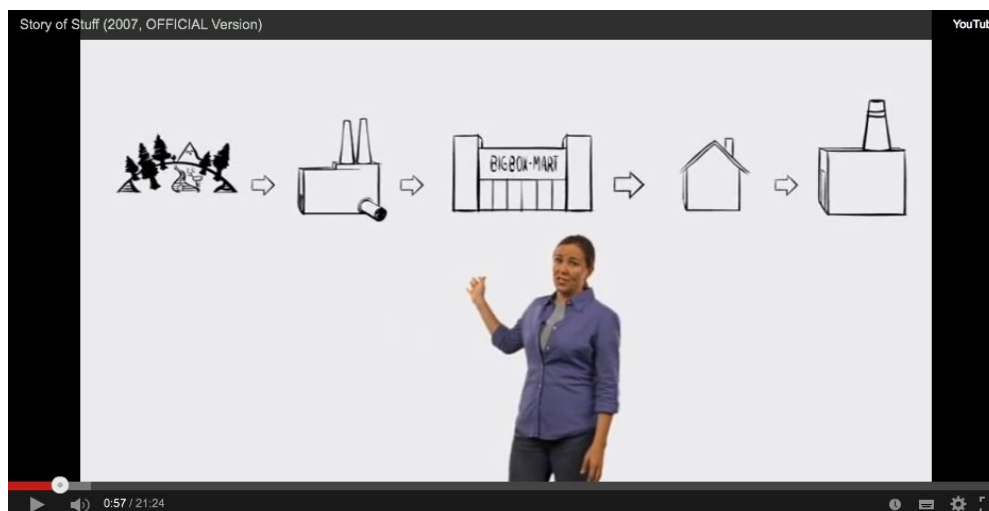
**LO4:** Analyse the event industry's involvement and responsibility.

## 1. Introduction

Take a moment to think about the last plastic product you used. Perhaps you purchased some bottled water on your way home from the gym, or picked up a 500ml soft drink at your local petrol garage. Maybe you picked up some ready-made meals in plastic containers at your local Woolworths, or purchased some Lego or a plastic doll for your son or daughter's birthday. The reality is, we live in a plastic world. Durable, easy to produce, and inexpensive, plastic (along with other non-biodegradable materials) is commonly used to manufacture many of the staple products that consumers purchase on a daily basis, and this has created a "throw-away" culture that doesn't think twice about disposing of containers and products to purchase new ones. The problem is that all that non-biodegradable waste has to end up somewhere, and more often than not, the ocean is its final destination.

Years of accumulated debris has formed what is known today as the Great Pacific garbage patch (or the Pacific trash vortex) – the world's two largest masses of spinning debris, one located near Japan and the other between Hawaii and California (National Geographic Society, 2016). Scientists cannot estimate the exact size of this garbage patch, as the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre is simply too large to trawl, and to complicate matters even further, approximately 70% of ocean debris ends up sinking to the bottom of the ocean, and the majority of plastic breaks down into tiny pieces of microplastics which are invisible to the naked eye. This means that clearing the debris floating on top of the water would merely be scratching the surface of the problem. The pollution has many undesirable consequences and disrupts habitats, injures and kills marine life, and ends up affecting the quality of the seafood that humans consume (National Geographic Society, 2016).

In [this TED Talk](#), Nick Simpson discusses the Great Pacific garbage patch and explains the need for all industries and consumers to start recycling and being more conscious of the products they purchase and the way in which they dispose of those products. But how does this information impact the field of event management?



**Video 1:** This fast-paced 20-minute educational film exposes the dark side of production, consumption, and disposal, and highlights the impact of the modern-day consumer's increasing desire to consume more and more products on the environment and human health. (Source: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>)

The event industry is one of the more wasteful and environmentally-harmful industries on the planet. To put it into perspective, during a typical five-day conference comprising 2,500 attendees, the following resources are consumed:

- 62,500 plates
- 75,000 cups
- 87,500 napkins
- 90,000 cans or bottles

(The Meeting Professional, 2006, cited in The Rezidor Hotel Group, 2010)

The figures are overwhelming and therefore require careful consideration when planning events. In the United States alone, over 1.8 million meetings and events take place on an annual basis, and in the UK over 1.3 million meetings were held in 2011 alone. The South African conference and event industry is also growing rapidly, and based on the continued expansion of the global event industry, now is the time to take action from a greening and environmental perspective before it is too late.

In recent years, the world, and subsequently the events industry, has become aware of the fact that many natural resources are not renewable and that these resources are being used faster than they can be replenished. It has become necessary to use events to drive long-term developmental plans and, in doing so, “event legacies” have been born.

Events should be sustainable and have long-lasting positive effects on the people, destination, and environment, through consciously and consistently planning and designing with green goals in mind.

**Note:**

While it isn't possible for every type of event to be a fully "green" event, event managers can plan events in a number of creative ways to turn conventional (wasteful) event industry practices around. When dealing with multitudes of people attending events on a yearly basis, from the smallest to the largest efforts, every little bit helps.

Some events lend themselves to greening practices more than others - for example, a small-scale wedding on a family farm will most likely leave a much smaller carbon footprint and produce considerably less waste than a F1 motor race. However, one should not only think about applying "greening" practices to large-scale events, but to events of all sizes and scope. Every event manager should try and make every event they manage as environmentally friendly as possible. For examples on how to green different types of events, refer to the [Green Event Guideline: Hosting Green Events in Durban](#) as a resource. (Note that although this resource is from a few years ago, the principles are still relevant today.)

This set of notes focuses on introducing you to the concept of sustainability and event greening, and explores the importance of creating legacies through events and how event organisers can approach designing their events in such a way that a legacy is created.

## 2. What is sustainability and event greening?

### 2.1 Sustainability defined

An event manager needs to understand what sustainability is before they can implement it at an event. One of the most popular definitions of sustainable development first appeared in Our Common Future (otherwise known as the Brundtland Report) in 1987, and stated that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (NGO Committee on Education, 1987). Sustainability has also been defined as an approach that uses "methods, systems and materials that won't deplete resources or harm natural cycles" (Rosenbaum, 1993 quoted in Future Learn, n.d.).

Events, by their very nature, are wasteful. It is only logical that a large event that draws large numbers of visitors to a relatively small area is likely to cause overcrowding, noise, and heavy traffic, which results in large amounts of waste and energy use, as well as disruption of local activities and the disturbance of the natural environment. Large events taking place over a number of days can be particularly wasteful, and music festivals are notorious for gaining bad press regarding their impact on the environment, with their sustainability often being questioned.

As events get bigger and bigger each year, their impact on the environment also grows, and if not managed properly, these events can potentially destroy the area in which they are taking place rather than create a positive event legacy for the area. If you are curious about the statistics surrounding the environmental impact of events, Event Manager Blog, together with MeetGreen, created [this infographic](#) to depict just how large the environmental footprint of



a typical conference can be. In order for the event industry to remain sustainable in the future, it needs to adopt sustainable practices now. Events need to be planned in such a way as to not negatively affect future events, ecosystems, or communities, as in the past, environmental concerns have been largely ignored when planning and designing an event.

## 2.1 Event greening defined

Event greening involves designing and executing an event in an environmentally- and socially-responsible manner, and factoring sustainable development principles and practices into all stages of the decision-making process (City of Cape Town, 2010; Tufts University, 2016). To green an event, factors such as reducing energy and water consumption, minimising waste and recycling where possible, and placing limits on greenhouse gas productions as well as interference with the natural ecosystems and habitats where the event takes place, should be considered (Tufts University, 2016). Greening considerations will start during the conceptualisation and planning stages outlined in Module 4, and should be factored in to all the operational and logistical aspects of an event, as well as the marketing efforts (event marketing will be covered in more detail in Module 10).

### Rocking the Daisies:

“Loads of people ask us what makes Rocking the Daisies such a ‘green’ festival. The truth is - we have lots of measures in place to ensure that our carbon footprint is kept to a minimum. One of the things that we can’t avoid is using heaps of energy during the festival weekend. Luckily, South Africa’s first wind farm is situated just around the corner from Darling, and we all know how windy the festival can be! Fortunately, we have been able to tap into this sustainable resource.” - Craig Bright, Festival Director, Rocking the Daisies (Bright, personal communication n.d.)

### Getting practical – how to “green” an event:

Event greening provides ample opportunity for event managers to be creative and find innovative new ways of doing things. For more information on this topic download the document entitled *Guide to green meetings and events* published by the United States Environmental Protection Agency on the [Event Greening Forum website](#). The guide outlines the four steps for planning “environmentally-aware” events.

### Essential reading: Key areas for event greening and the benefits of greening

The Smart Events Handbook, published by the City of Cape Town, is a comprehensive guide to greening and sustainability practices in the event industry. It provides an overview of the importance of hosting events in a sustainable manner, as well as guidelines for implementing greening solutions in a practical manner.

Read the following sections of the Smart Events Handbook:

- Introduction to event greening: pp. 3-5
- Eco-procurement: pp. 6-8
- Waste minimisation and management: pp. 9-11
- Water conservation: p. 12
- Energy efficiency: pp. 13-14
- Emissions reduction: pp. 15-16
- Biodiversity conservation: p. 17
- Social and economic development: p. 18
- The environmental impact of events and the benefits of greening: pp. 19-22
- Leaving a positive legacy: p. 30

[Download the Smart Events Handbook.](#)

## 3. Leaving a legacy

An event legacy refers to the long-term, post-event impacts of an event and includes the social, environmental, and economic impacts of that event. In general, the larger the event, the more likely it is to have a long-term impact on the environment in which it operates, and event organisers need to ensure that research and planning goes into creating sustainable legacies, and that legacy plans are budgeted for (Carlsen et al., 2015:175; Jones, 2014:377). It is important to remember that legacies are not always positive; an impact can be negative too, such as when communities are uprooted to build infrastructure for mega-events such as the Olympic Games. Event organisers need to do their best to ensure that their event leaves a positive legacy.



There are numerous different types of legacies, such as the following:

- **Sporting legacies:** When venues are built or renovated for large sporting events, these venues can encourage an interest in sport within the local community and be used for local and elite sporting events.
- **Social legacies:** Certain events lend themselves to showcasing the local or national culture of the host community or nation, creating social connections and friendships through volunteer programmes, and building positive relationships between different stakeholders.
- **Environmental legacies:** Certain events, especially mega-events, invest in upgrading and improving the urban landscape, and often governments will invest in resources such as solar energy, other renewable energy sources, or other green initiatives, which will have a positive impact on the community and the environment long after the event.
- **Economic legacies:** Events by their very nature attract people, and for the majority of public events there will be a considerable number of costs involved for attendees, whether this involves purchasing a ticket, food and drinks, souvenirs, booking accommodation, or using public transport services such as taxis, trains, and busses. Large events also result in increased tourism, which means that the economic benefits are not only restricted to event organisers.

(Carlsen et al., 2015:175)

Additionally, legacies can be either “soft” (intangible) or “hard” (tangible). Soft legacies encompass any moral, spiritual, psychological, or affective gains that come from the event. Soft legacies can also include aspects such as encouraging behaviour change (for example encouraging recycling or energy conservation at an event) or knowledge transfer (equipping attendees with new skills and resources) (Carlsen et al., 2015:175; Jones, 2014:377). For example, the 2010 FIFA World Cup instilled a sense of national pride and enthusiasm in the hearts of South Africans, thereby creating a positive psychological and affective legacy. Hard legacies on the other hand refer to material gains such as creating new infrastructure, resources, or technologies to benefit the host community after the event (Carlsen et al., 2015:177). For example, the stadia and venues built for the Olympic Games or world cups can be used by the community, and upgrades in infrastructure such as repairing roads, refurbishing public spaces, and investing in alternative energy sources will leave a hard legacy for the community to benefit from long after the event.

### 3.1 Practical ways to create a legacy

From an event management perspective, events are ideal platforms for encouraging sustainable practices and greening initiatives on a community and individual level, and for educating attendees about the necessity and benefits of sustainable living. Event managers should ask themselves how each event is leaving an impression on attendees and stakeholders. When planned well, events can move beyond simply providing a way for attendees to have a good time and build memories, to actually achieving outcomes that



impact the way all stakeholders involved view life, earth, sustainability, and their individual contribution to the planet (Jones, 2014:377). When well planned and executed, events can encourage lasting behavioural changes for all parties involved, and cause stakeholders to rethink the way they do events.



**Figure 1:** Avoid the creation of waste in the first place by making use of the six Rs of sustainability in your event planning (BBC, 2014).

Jones (2014:379-382) has identified a few practical examples of behavioural change legacies that events can champion to encourage sustainable practices and green consciousness amongst role players and attendees:

- **Sustainable food:** Events can be used as a platform to encourage the sale and consumption of local, organic, seasonal, and chemical-free food. For example, a music festival could partner with local producers and farms to supply all the fresh produce that will be needed to make food for the duration of the event.
- **Waste reduction:** Setting up recycling bins and compost heaps, and setting up initiatives to teach attendees about waste management and recycling practices can help encourage them to do so in their daily lives. Encouraging suppliers and caterers to make use of eco-friendly waste reduction practices can also help set new industry standard norms for waste management.
- **Energy management:** An event can set the example for using energy efficient power sources. It can be designed in such a way that power-free options, natural lighting, LED lights, and alternative energy sources such as solar power and bio-fuel are used during the event build, run, and breakdown.
- **Sustainable transportation:** Events can be designed in such a manner as to encourage the use of sustainable transport options such as cycling, walking, making use of public transport, and carpooling. Attendees can be incentivised to make use of these eco-friendly transport options, and through showcasing how alternative transport methods can be used on a practical level, attendees can be inspired to make use of these options in their day-to-day lives.



- **Water conservation:** Events should encourage responsible water habits (for both suppliers and attendees). This could include encouraging conservative water use during preparation and clean-up activities, protecting any natural bodies of water and waterways on the event site, and educating attendees about the importance of conserving water. Additionally, from an environmental standpoint, events should also discourage the use of bottled water and instead take on initiatives such as providing water refill stations, serving water in jugs and glasses, and providing access to tap water.
- **Sustainable sourcing:** Event managers should endeavour to purchase sustainable materials wherever possible. Eco-labelled, non-toxic, locally-produced products created using Fairtrade and fair labour practices will help contribute to a greener and more sustainable event.
- **Support campaigns:** Events can be used as a platform to promote charities, local campaigns, sustainable development programmes, and any other greening and sustainability initiatives relevant to and in line with the event's objectives.

#### Want to find out more?

If you are interested in consulting more resources about greening different aspects of events, the Event Greening Forum is an excellent place to start. This website offers downloadable guides and information documents relating to green and sustainable catering, tourism, accommodation, hosting green events and meetings in general, recycling, audiovisuals and staging, and greenwashing.

## 4. Conclusion

Climate change, record-high pollution levels, and the degradation of the environment and natural habitats is a reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century life, and industry is one of the biggest contributors to these significant problems. The event industry is no exception, as events often utilise a large amount of resources, can disturb natural habitats, cause water, air, and ground pollution, and contribute to carbon emissions as a result of supplier and attendee travelling. Event managers need to carefully consider whether their events are planned and run in the most sustainable and environmentally-friendly way possible, and should strive to create an awareness amongst attendees and stakeholders of the need for, and benefits of, living in green and sustainable ways. Events are wonderful platforms for creating positive legacies that contribute to economic, social, and environmental upliftment within the host community and beyond. Through careful planning and dedication, events can contribute to a better, more sustainable tomorrow, starting today.



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