

A survey of sustainable development in the events industry

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<p>In today's world, sustainable development is a megatrend that has started to become a necessity for businesses across all industries, and not simply a competitive advantage. To achieve full potential of sustainable development, it should be integrated into the planning and measurement systems of businesses.</p> <p>This thesis is a research-based study that examines sustainable development in the Finnish events industry. The goal of the thesis is to provide an overview of how Finnish companies and organizations have adopted and implemented sustainable practices, what is the level of commitment to sustainable development, and to find out what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current situation.</p> <p>The theoretical framework describes the features of the fragmented and diverse events industry and the process of event planning and management. The concepts of sustainable development and sustainability are explained and some of the most famous sustainability initiatives that are essential for the study are presented. These topics are brought together by describing how sustainable development can be approached in the context of event management.</p> <p>Primary data collection was carried out in the form of an online questionnaire. Mixed research strategy that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen. Quantitative research allows generalization from the results to a wider group of event companies, and qualitative features bring depth to the survey and help understand the phenomenon in a more profound manner. In spring 2021, 236 companies that operate in the events industry were contacted by email request to fill the online questionnaire. 73 company representatives filled the questionnaire and decent response rate of 31% was acquired.</p> <p>The results of the survey revealed that the level of the investment and measures used in sustainable development varied quite a lot between the companies. Only a few respondents announced that sustainability is not considered at all in the operations of the company, most companies described that they had adopted some sustainability measures, some respondents described that their company is considering sustainability throughout all the operations. Though most actors understand the importance of sustainable development and are willing to invest in it, some responses also revealed that more awareness and knowledge about sustainable development is needed.</p> <p>As most of the actors seem to be open-minded for sustainable development and are willing to learn more about it and invest in it, this information should be utilized in the events industry by actively bringing different actors together to exchange ideas, network and to create common approaches to sustainable development that could address the issues of sustainability more effectively than just individual actions.</p>	
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1 Introduction

The author has studied event management as a part of specialisation studies of the degree programme of Bachelor of Business Administration. The idea for the thesis arose from a personal interest in events industry and sustainable development. Sustainability is a pressing concern globally and it receives a lot of attention in most parts of our society. All actors in the society need to get involved in order to create sustainable future for ourselves and coming generations. It is increasingly common that companies are making some efforts towards sustainable development, and it is also expected by society that businesses act responsibly and make positive impacts on the environment in which they operate. Sustainability has started to become a necessity, and not simply a competitive advantage. Thus, future professionals can also be expected to have knowledge and commitment to the principles of sustainable development.

Many Finnish municipalities already have agendas of becoming carbon neutral in upcoming years and they are encouraging festivals, congresses, and other events to take part in achieving this goal. There is also a growing demand from public that expects the events should be organized in a sustainable manner. Despite the increase in awareness about sustainability within the events industry, and progress in implementing sustainable development practices, there's still room for improvement. Françoise Grumberg, Vice President of Global Responsible Business and Diversity & Inclusion, CWT, states that, "The fact that we now talk about climate crisis instead of climate change, underlines the urgency for all stakeholders to address sustainability very seriously." (CWT Meetings and Events 2020, 82).

1.1 Thesis objectives, target group and research questions

The goal of this thesis is to provide an overview of how Finnish companies, that operate in events industry, have adopted and implemented sustainable practices and to find out how important sustainable development is considered as part of the operations of a company. Individual actors may inform something about their sustainability practices for example on their website, but the author of this thesis was not able to find proper research on the subject. There are some other theses that approach sustainable development in the field of events, but perspectives are different compared to this thesis. It is important to understand the current situation and its strengths and weaknesses so that future development can address the right issues and that successful implementations can be shared and utilized by other companies.

Research objectives:

- Find out how committed are the Finnish companies in the events industry to sustainable development
- Clarify what are the chosen measures to achieve sustainability
- Understand what are the factors that influence how much is invested in sustainability
- Find out how aware and commitment the companies are to sustainability initiatives

The target group of this thesis are Finnish companies and organizations that operate in the events industry. The research approach is a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The aim is to obtain a broad sample of the target group that would allow generalization of the results to widely to the industry but at the same time bring more depth to the study by adding some qualitative features that would help understand the phenomenon in a more profound level.

Research questions:

- How important is sustainable development for Finnish companies that operate in the events industry?
- What are the measures taken to address sustainable development?
- What are the barriers towards achieving sustainability and what are the motivators?
- Does the type or size of the company affect how much the company invests in sustainable development?

1.2 Introduction to research methods

For data collection both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. For the secondary research, the resources were selected from popular literature as well as articles and research found on the Internet. Due to the restriction of COVID-19 pandemic, primary data collection was chosen to be carried out in a form of an online questionnaire that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. 236 companies that operate in Finnish events industry were chosen from public member register of umbrella organizations in events industry. These 236 companies were contacted by email requesting to fill the questionnaire. There were 73 company representants that filled the questionnaire and an analysis made of the results of 73 companies that answered. Research methods are presented in more detail later in the thesis.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. After the introduction, there will be three chapters focusing on theory, which provides the basis of the survey. The second chapter describes events industry from both global and Finnish perspective. It gives an overview of the size, characteristics and significance of the events industry. This chapter also describes the

main phases and responsibilities in event planning and management. The third chapter focuses on explaining sustainable development and sustainability as concepts and describes important sustainability initiatives that are relevant to this study. The fourth chapter combines the concepts from the previous two chapters and explains the main features of sustainable event management.

The fifth chapter will define terminology and concepts of the quantitative and qualitative research methods and describes the methods chosen for this thesis. The sixth chapter presents the results of the survey and highlights the most important findings. Reliability and validity of the study are considered at the end of this chapter. The seventh chapter is the final chapter that provides conclusions of the thesis and description of the personal learning process. The questionnaire used in the research is attached in appendices.

2 Events industry

The second chapter of the thesis gives a definition of an event and describes the events industry both in a global and Finnish context. The events industry has significant economic impact, but it has been severely affected by COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter explains typical characteristics of events industry as well as the main functions of event planning and management. Event manager has a crucial role in executing an event and has various responsibilities that are described at the end of the chapter. Event managers also play a key role in creating and implementing sustainable events.

2.1 Definition of an event

The APEX (Accepted Practices Exchange) Industry Glossary of Terms defines an event as ‘an organised occasion such as a meeting, convention, exhibition, special event, gala dinner, etc. An event is often composed of several different yet related functions. (Events Industry Council a.) Events can be categorized by their size, scope and scale and by their type or sector, such as conferences and exhibitions, arts and entertainment, sports events, and charitable events (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 3). Not all events have an appointed event organizer and local traditions may for example be a reason for unorganised or spontaneous events. Diversity of events makes it difficult to provide one single definition of event. (Pielichaty, Els, Reed & Mawer 2017, 2.)

2.2 Significance of the events industry

In 2018, the Events Industry Council released the results of a study, conducted by Oxford Economics, that demonstrated the significance of the economic impact of the global events industry. According to this study, on a total GDP basis, the global events industry is the 13th largest global economy. Global business events support 26 million jobs, generate 1.5 trillion in GDP, and reaches 1.5 billion events participants in 180 countries. (Events Industry Council b. 2018, 5.)

In 2019 there were around 3,200 companies operating in the events industry in Finland. There was estimated to be 20 000 permanent employees and around 120 000 - 175 000 temporary employees. (Wirén, Westerholm & Liikamaa 2020a 5-7.) Although the events industry in Finland has a significant employment effect, employees rarely end up to work in the industry through clear, event-oriented educational pathways. The expertise in the field comes mostly through practical work experience and people involved have come to work in the industry through a variety of paths. (Wirén, Westerholm & Liikamaa 2020b, 7.)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Finnish events industry was growing steadily in terms of companies operating in the industry, total turnover and profitability. Turnover of the events industry had almost doubled over the years of 2012-2019. A total value of the industry was estimated to be EUR 2.35 billion in 2019. However, since March 2020, business activities of events industry have been severely restricted or banned continuously due to pandemic. According to studies and surveys commissioned by the event industry, the turnover of companies in the sector has fallen by 80-95% during this period. The industry-wide losses for 2020 are estimated at as much as € 1.5 billion. Due to the pandemic, almost 10,000 employees have been laid off in the event industry, and in 2020, almost 140,000 temporary employees remained unemployed. The events industry also has significant indirect economic effects to other sectors such as accommodation, catering, transportation, and retail sectors. (Wirén & al. 2020a, 5-7,13.)

The COVID-19 crisis has had a profound and disastrous impact on the global meetings and has led to an increase of online meetings and remote work. Bigwood prompts that for the global meetings and events industry to recover, flourish and thrive in a future world, the temptation of adopting COVID-19 recovery strategies based on a wish to return to the 'normal' of the past should be resisted. Instead, the pandemic should be used as a possibility rethink, reimagine and redesign a new restorative, resilient, inclusive and zero carbon growth model. The sustainability agenda shouldn't be left to the bottom of the list as the current state of the world makes the business case for immediate action more relevant than ever. (Bigwood 2020, 8-9.)

2.3 Industry classification and its characteristics

Currently the official industry classification does not recognize the event industry as its own industry in Finland. There are actors in the field from numerous industries such as administration and support services, communication industries, arts, entertainment and recreation. Unlike many other industries, the events industry has been so far approached through its contents and formats, outlining events for example to sports and entertainment or festivals and concerts. According to Tapahtumateollisuus ry, the events industry can also be approached from business and trade perspective like other industries. This perspective is relevant if the Finnish events industry wants to be recognised as its own industry. For this reason, Tapahtumateollisuus ry has created the third perspective that is an industry classification based on business perspective. (Wirén, & al. 2020b, 5.) The triad of content, format and business perspective is illustrated in the figure below.

Content	Formats	Business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art, culture, entertainment • Sports • Business • Science, education • Political, national, municipal • Religious and spiritual • Cultural celebrations • Recreational • Private events • Unorganized events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals, amusement parks, carnival • Concerts, theatre, performance • Congresses, conferences • Lectures, workshops • Seminars, meetings, symposiums • Celebrations, galas • Competitions, tournaments • Fairs, exhibitions • Openings, launches • Demonstrations, parades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event organizing • Venue rental • Performer- and program services • Event technology, services • Event construction services • Ticket services • Ancillary services • Digital event services • Planning and consulting • Other event-related business

Figure 1. Events industry classification perspectives (adapted from Wirén, & al.2020b, 5)

Event management companies can be responsible for entire events or the design of their individual components and implementation. Event production is different from majority of a product or service production in that sense that the event rarely is feasible by a single party. Events are created from complex subcontracting networks and their form varies depending on content and formats. It is also characteristic of the events industry that different actors take many roles simultaneously. Events can be organized as a business, as part of the organizer's other business activities, or on a voluntary basis. In all these cases, the implementation of the event is rarely possible without subcontracting network. Event implementations can be ordered by companies, other communities, and individuals. (Wirén, & al. 2020b, 6-7.)

2.4 Event planning and management

According to Lee and Goldblatt (2020, 12-14), event planning is a profession that through planned events, requires public assembly for the purpose of celebration, education, marketing and reunion. Besides this four-field approach to event planning, the profession encompasses many specialized fields. Public assembly on the other hand refers to events that are managed by professionals who typically bring people together for a purpose. The size and the type of event will determine the level of skills required by a professional event manager.

In large events, there can be many different event organizers at the same time, each corresponding to their own area of responsibility. Their cooperation and the overall implementation of the event is coordinated by the event organizer in charge of the whole event. Event organizing typically requires the ability to coordinate and manage several different functions. (Wirén, & al. 2020b, 6.) The event manager also needs to identify all the internal and external stakeholders. They are people or organizations that have somehow invested in an event like government officials, the municipal staff, media, vendors, and guests. They are interested in outcomes of the event and the event manager needs to be able to communicate properly with them. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 22.)

According to Lee and Goldblatt there are three major leadership styles of event management that are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Autocratic style of leadership means that there is only one person in charge of all, whereas the laissez-faire refers to leading style where a leader allows group members total freedom and do not participate in the decision-making process, and rarely offer opinions. Democratic style of leadership, which is recommendable for an event manager, refers to leadership style which balances decision-making responsibility between the group and the leader. Besides considering the leadership style, an event manager should possess some critical leadership characteristics that include integrity, confidence, communication, vision and social, environmental, and fiscal responsibility. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 113.)

Lee & Goldblatt suggest that all successful events have five critical stages that ensure their consistent effectiveness. These five phases are research, design, planning, coordination, and evaluation. Understanding the business value of sustainability and to have current knowledge of event technology is very critical to event managers. Therefore, these aspects should be integrated into the five stages. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 44.) This expanded event planning five-phase process is illustrated in the figure below. In addition to this, Lee & Goldblatt suggest that the principles of social responsibility with its economic and social impact to event communities should be supported by each of the stages (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 44).

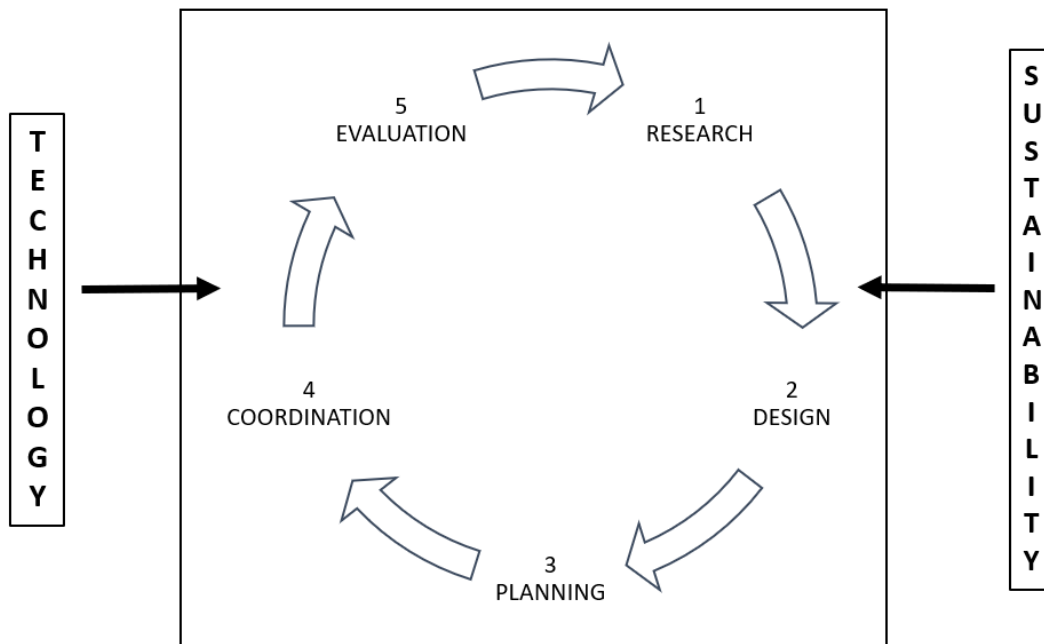


Figure 2. Expanded event planning five-phase process (adapted from Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 44)

The research conducted prior to the event reduces future risks and the planned outcomes are more likely achieved. Research can be used to find out the needs, wants, desires and expectations of prospective customers. Matching the research type to the event is important and the type is determined by the goals of the research, timeframe, and the funds available. Goals and objectives of an event should be considered already in this stage which is very critical in professional event management. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 44-45.)

Qualitative and quantitative research methods can be useful in the initial phase. One recommended analysis tool for the research phase by Lee and Goldblatt is a SWOT analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the event. The analysis assists in identifying the internal and external variables that may prevent the event from being successful. This analysis should be completed prior to designing the event in order to gain comprehensive understanding of all variables that could affect the outcomes. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 49-50.)

The next phase is design process that requires creativeness and the best event designers are continuously looking for new ideas. The event philosophy will determine the financial, cultural, social, and other important aspects of the event. Creative ideas need to be matched with the goals and objectives of the event which can be accomplished through needs assessment and analysis, which is a survey that determines if the creative solu-

tions chosen will satisfy the needs of stakeholders. Before the actual planning phase, feasibility of the event should also be considered. Feasibility means that there are enough resources to conduct the event plan. The three basic resources needed are financial, human, and political. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 52-53, 55.)

Once the event has gone through the approval process, which can be an acceptance by the client or more complex and require dozens of signatures from various actors, the actual planning phase can begin. In the planning stage, research and designs are turned into concrete plan for managing with its specific tasks. Brainstorming and mind mapping may improve the planning and using a project management system will help establish a systematic approach to all events. Lee and Goldblatt recommend learning about international sustainable event standards and measurements that can provide guidance in implementing events. The project management provides an objective process for reviewing the event development which help to use systematic and logical approaches instead of emotional decisions. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 56.)

The planning period is typically the longest period in the event planning process. If the research and design process is conducted carefully, it will make the planning phase simpler and briefer. After the design and planning phase comes the coordination phase and the event manager should ensure that there is an obvious relationship between the design, the plan, and the final version of the event. In the coordination stage, the plan is executed in the actual event environment. The event manager needs good coordination skills to execute the event plan successfully. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 57, 61, 169.)

The final stage is evaluation that feeds information back into research for a future event. Areas of success and areas for improvement are evaluated. The most common way to evaluate the event is a survey that is conducted immediately after the event. However, the evaluation process should already begin during the event, not after. To gather data during the event, participant observation research or survey methods are recommended. (Goldblatt 2012, 51.) When evaluating the event, the cultural, environmental impacts should be analysed alongside the profitability. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 62-63.)

This basic process for event planning can be used as base for sustainable events as well (Goldblatt 2012, 38).

2.5 Responsibilities of an event manager

The event manager identifies the most appropriate resources for the event. Event resources usually include people, time, finances, technology, and physical assets. The event manager should be able to manage resources efficiently and these include the ability administrate, coordinate, market and manage the risk for the event. By linking these four competencies together throughout the event process, a successful event can be produced. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 67,169.)

Event leaders need to take fiscal responsibility and ensure ethical and sustainable budgeting and cash flow. Event manager should focus on key responsibilities and delegate tasks to others. Employees should be offered all the resource needed to accomplish tasks. It is also an important skill to be able to empower and motivate the employees so that they can excel in their tasks. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 120.)

Event managers should take care of the careful development of policies, procedures and practices that reflect the culture of the event organization. Internal stakeholders benefit from this by having a clear process through which to make decisions. The external stakeholders also benefit from using a toll to help them understand the organization and the decision-making process of the event team. Legal, ethical and risk-management issues should be considered through every decision that is made. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 129.)

Knowledge of social and environmental impacts of events and taking responsibility is very critical part of event leadership in today's world. Event leaders should identify opportunities to create a real positive change in the community and environment where the event is occurring. To communicate to others about the core values of the company corporate social responsibility (CSR) statements and outcomes can be used in corporate reports or in tenders that are offered. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 68,119.)

There is a clear growth in formal education for event leaders and the percentage of event professionals with qualifications has continually increased. As the profession requires specific skills to ensure that high-quality performance is achieved consistently over time, it is essential to have a certificate, a degree, or a professional certification for employment in planned events. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 324.)

3 Sustainable development and sustainability

This chapter will define terminology around sustainable development and sustainability and describes its meaning in business. The chapter introduces some of the most famous global and national initiatives related to sustainable development. These initiatives presented are also essentially related to the survey that was conducted.

3.1 Definition of sustainability and sustainable development

Sustainability is usually defined in loose terms to enable acceptance within varying scenarios and is often referred to as 'sustainable development' (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 2). Sustainability is often thought of as a long-term goal, while sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it (UNESCO). The most common definition for sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This appeared first in the World Commission on Environment and Development's report, *Our Common Future*. (UN's World Commission for Environment and Development 1987, 16.) The concept of conserving resources for future generations is one of the major features that distinguishes sustainable development policy from traditional environmental policy. The overall goal of sustainable development is the long-term stability of the economy and environment, which is achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process. (Emas 2015.)

The definitions of sustainable development are usually concerned with multilevel, worldwide issues, but they are also influenced by local and national initiatives. Sustainability refers to the link with ecological impacts: the consumption of natural resources and the deliberation of pollution and energy use, concerns about social inclusion and distribution of wealth, combined with the economic issues of growth and longevity. Within a business context, these three impacts are known as the 'triple bottom line'. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 3.)

So far literature and research has lacked an agreement as for the definition and notion of sustainability. Also defining sustainability in the business setting is considered complex and it has been difficult to ensure a standardized definition for one organization to understand all its facets in detail. Another challenging fact is that the concept of sustainability constantly evolves and changes its meaning. (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast & Ardell Broadbent 2013, 1-2.)

3.2 Sustainable development in business

One of the reasons why consumers expect so much from business today, is because it has been so successful and gained vast economic power. There is a broadening of the values of many business people and hence, a broadening of the values of capitalism. Therefore, the very purpose of business has moved from making money to creating sustainable value for all stakeholders. The phenomenon does not extend to all businesses, but a growing number of business people want to make a difference. They are willing to take responsibility not only for their own actions, but also for some problems in the society. Many management scholars are championing this kind of vision of companies, that is based on the belief that doing well and doing good are not opposites. (Williams 2014, 93-94.)

The operations of organizations are also monitored more closely than ever before, and they are being held to account for their actions. Organisations should have transparent processes, and transparency in performance outcomes so that stakeholders can be confident that the organisation is acting ethically. Transparency is important aspect of ethical organisational governance, and it is also a foundation of sustainability. (Jones 2014, 13.)

According to the survey Sustainability in Finland 2019, conducted by FIBS, 87% of the corporate executives and experts that responded to the survey stated that climate change would be an important or very important focus area of responsibility for their organisation in the next 12 months. Climate change was considered more important than ethics (79%) or circular economy (71%). The majority of respondents (55%) thought that global challenges should be solved primarily through legislation and international treaties instead of voluntary actions. The survey is Finland's most extensive sustainability survey, and includes perspectives from CEOs, directors and managers from Finland's Top 1000 companies. (FIBS 2019.)

3.3 Different types of initiatives

Scholars have suggested that corporate responsibility initiatives can be divided into four categories: principle-based initiatives, certification initiatives, reporting initiatives and process-based initiatives. Principle-based initiatives are a set of ideals that members of an organization are expected to follow. These norms are general in nature and have no explicit enforcement mechanism whereas certification initiatives have auditing and verification procedures. Reporting initiatives outline comparable performance indicators that cor-

porations can report on. According to Williams, following the principles have a high likelihood of enhancing reputation capital, brand building, enabling a company to attract and retain valuable employees and developing trust. (Williams 2014, 79, 81.)

There are critics who consider that the only answer is a worldwide legal framework (hard law) rather than a set of voluntary principles (soft law). Hard law is understood as binding and enforceable while soft law is legally non-binding. Usually, soft law appears in forms of guidelines, resolutions and principles. Once there is a firm consensus on the soft law required for the global business community, occurs a possibility of evolving it into hard law if desired. Whether hard law is better than soft law is a matter of great debate. (Williams 2014, 88.)

3.3.1 The 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 that is focused around achieving 17 goals within 15 years. These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. States have the primary responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but attaining the goals requires wide participation from local government, private sector, civil society, and citizens. The goals are addressing the global challenges including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice, as seen in the figure below. (United Nations a).



Figure 3. Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations b)

In Finland, there have been several initiatives during the last years to raise general awareness about the Agenda 2030 in cooperation between the governmental actors, civil society and the private sector. According to a recent poll, almost half of Finns (47%) know about the 2030 Agenda. Finland has been at the forefront of many international sustainability comparisons and studies. Reaching many of the SDGs related to social and economic sustainability has been very close. However, COVID-19 pandemic has caused setbacks around the world and can cause further challenges for the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. In Finland, the pandemic has led to many urgent changes and measures to Government's short-term economic, healthcare, education, security and mobility policies, among others. However, the sustainable development goals are intended to keep as the basis of sustainable well-being in Finland and the aim of the current Government is to transform Finland into a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society by 2030. (Prime Minister's Office 2020, 7-9.)

3.3.2 UN Global Compact

The UN Global Compact (UNGC) is the world's largest voluntary corporate sustainability initiative. It's ten principles focus on human rights, labour rights, environment and anti-corruption. (Jones 2014, 10; UN Global Compact.) The ten principles are illustrated in the figure below.

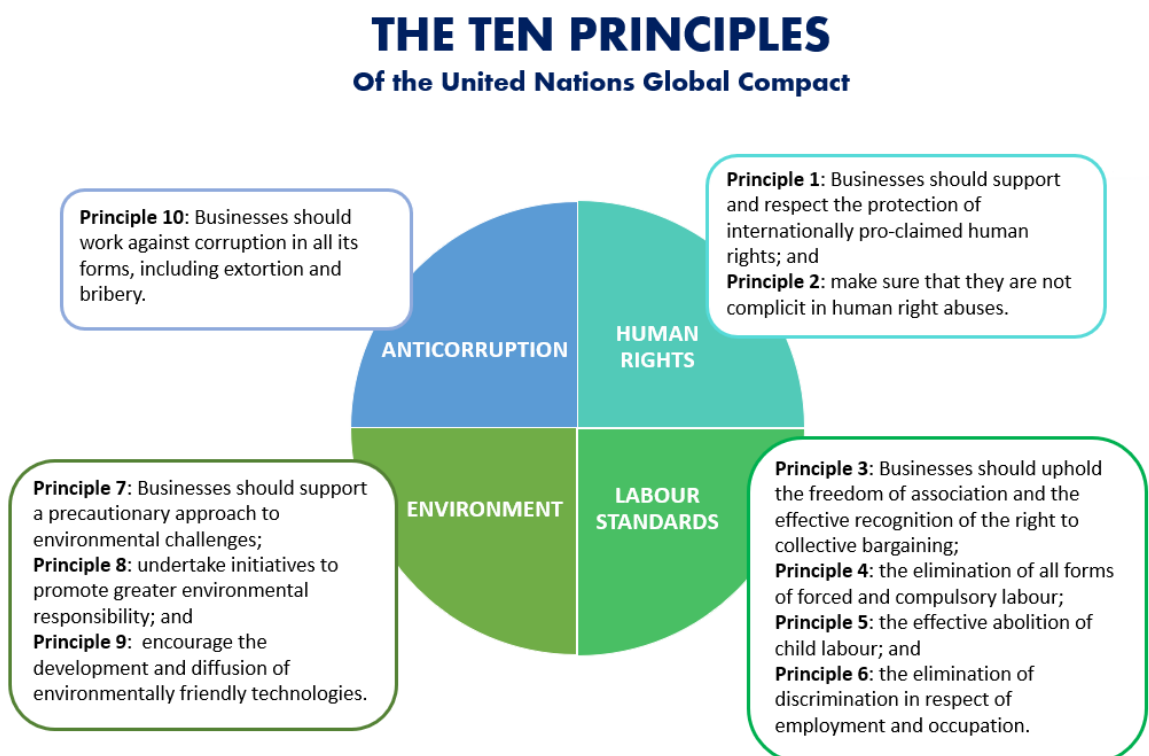


Figure 4. The ten principles of the Global Compact (adapted from UN Global Compact)

The purpose of the Global Compact network is to support companies on their journey towards more sustainable and responsible business. A company can become a member, even if the sustainability work is at the very beginning. The mission of the Global Compact is to provide support, guidance, training, tools and enthusiasm to support sustainability work. Therefore, membership is also suitable for small and medium-sized enterprises as well. (Global Compact Network Finland.)

While the scale of the global goals is unprecedented, the fundamental ways that business can contribute remain unchanged. Therefore, UN Global Compact asks companies to first do business responsibly and then pursue opportunities to solve societal challenges through business innovation and collaboration. (UN Global Compact.)

The Global Compact is considered as soft law but like with most of the soft laws, there are penalties for joining the UNGC and then not complying. A company subscribing to the principles is expected to make a clear statement of support and must include some references in its annual report or other public documents on the progress it is making on internalizing the principles within its operations. This Communication on Progress (COP) is published on the Global Compact website. If company does not submit a COP within two years of becoming a signatory to the compact, it will be delisted. (Williams 2014, 79, 88.)

3.3.3 ISO 26000 Social Responsibility

Released in 2010 by the International Standards Organization, ISO 26000 Social Responsibility provides guidelines on social responsibility for organisations (Jones 2014, 16). The standard provides guidance for all types and sizes of organizations worldwide. When applying the standard, organizations are expected to consider societal, environmental, legal, cultural, political and organizational diversity as well as differences in economic conditions, while being consistent with international norms of behaviour. ISO 26000 is not a management system standard, and it does not contain requirements and cannot be used for certification. ISO 26000 addresses seven core subjects of social responsibility that are organizational governance, human rights, labour practises, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues and community involvement and development. (International Organization for Standardization 2018, 6-9.)

3.3.1 Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

The EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is a voluntary environmental scheme for all companies and organizations by the European Commission. It spans all economic and service sectors and is applicable worldwide. It is an environmental management tool that enables organisations to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance. Organisations can identify the indirect and direct environmental impacts of its operations, products and services and to act in a planned manner to reduce various emissions and wastes and energy and resource consumption. As a result of targeted operations, the environmental impacts and costs of operations are reduced. EMAS is based on the EU Regulation (EC) No 1221/2009 and the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System requirements are an integral part of it. There are only a few steps from an ISO 14001 to EMAS, that takes into account additional elements to support organisations that continuously improve their environmental performance. (Ympäristöhallinnon yhteinen verkkopalvelu 2019; European Commission a.)

EMAS has also elaborated several provisions to meet the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to facilitate their meeting the requirements of the scheme. For example, EMAS full verification can be carried out every four years, instead of every three years and the time period for internal audit can be extended from one year to two. Fees are also designed to be proportionate to the size of the organisation. There is also possibility for SMEs to register for EMAS using the EMAS Easy method that takes into account the size, financial performance and organizational culture of small businesses. (European Commission b.)

3.3.2 EcoCompass

EcoCompass (Ekokompassi in Finnish) is an industry-independent environmental management system (EMS), based on the international ISO 14001 standard. With tools developed for the needs of SMEs, EcoCompass promotes environmental management commonplace for more and more people. EcoCompass already helps almost 300 Finnish organizations in managing environmental issues. With the support of EcoCompass experts, the company builds an environmental program with its goals and measures. The environmental program is tailored to the organization's own needs and supports the continuous development of operations. The environmental program is audited externally, and the company is awarded an environmental certificate. (Ekokompassi a.) The EcoCompass certificate demonstrates commitment to continuously improving and complying with the following principles:

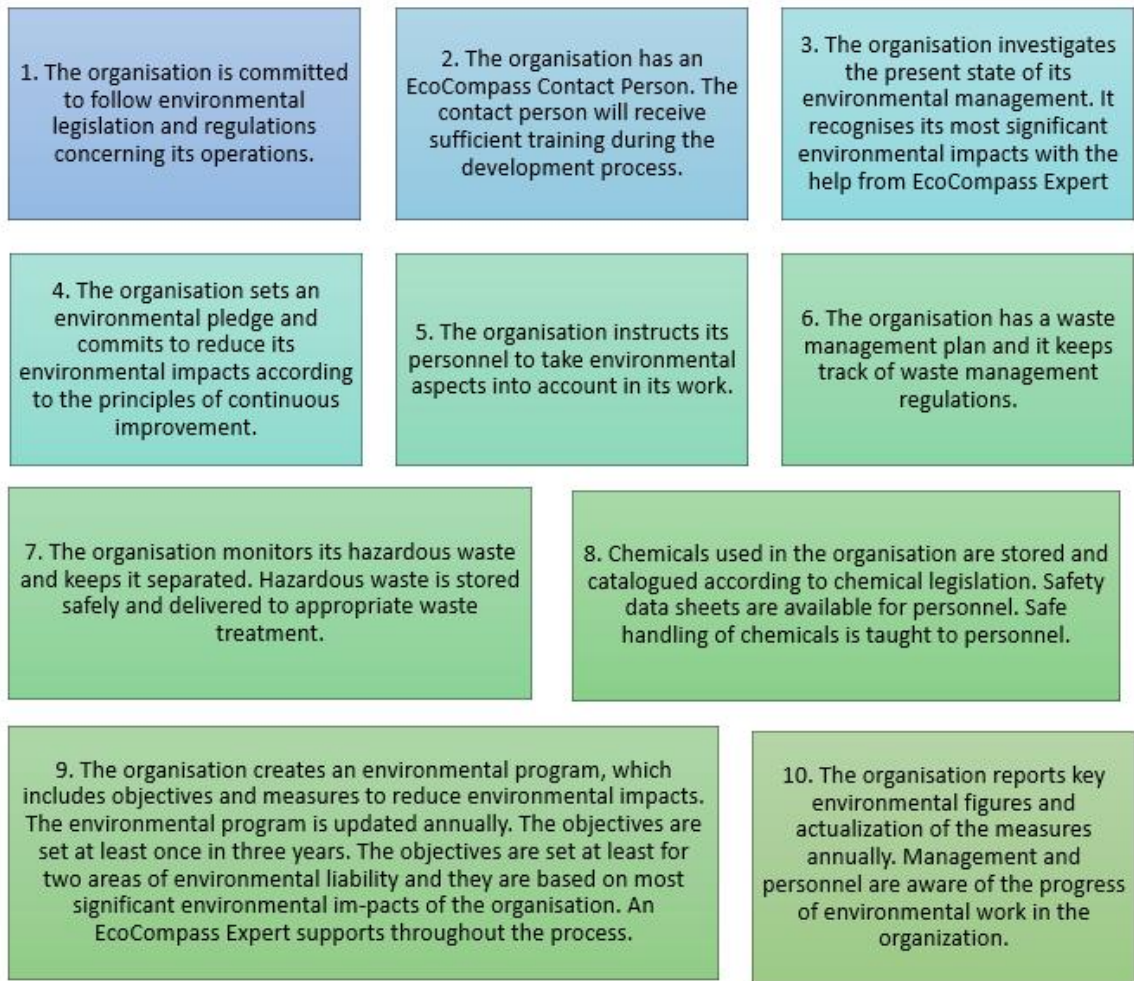


Figure 5. The ten principles of EcoCompass (adapted from Ekokompassi b.)

4 Sustainable development in the events industry

This chapter describes some popular views of how sustainability can be approached in the context of events industry. There has been a clear shift in attitudes and willingness to plan and implement sustainable events in recent years. Event managers play a crucial role for implementing sustainable practices and some main aspects of sustainability management are described in this chapter.

4.1 Defining sustainability for events

In 2018, the Events Industry Council (EIC) hosted the first Global Sustainable Event Standards Forum at IMEX Frankfurt, where leaders in the sustainability community discussed event standards and criteria and how could these practices be adopted globally. According to the definition that the eighteen representatives drafted, sustainability for events means taking action towards preserving our natural environment; promoting a healthy, inclusive society; and supporting a thriving economy. Four guiding principles were created that should support any sustainable event standards and address all 17 of the United Nations SDGs as can be seen from the figure below. (Events Industry Council c.)



Figure 6. Principles for Sustainable Events by EIC (Events Industry Council d)

4.2 A shift towards sustainability in the events industry

In recent years client demand for sustainable practices has grown steadily and sustainability in event planning has become a strong trend (Blomster 2020; Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020, 2). According to the 2020 IMEX Natureworks Research Survey, 90% of tourism and events industry professionals consider sustainability “important” or “extremely important”. 79% these respondents reported of increasing their focus on sustainability in the past year. (Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020, 2.) According to the survey of 2021 Global Meetings & Events Forecast, 58% to 67% of event professionals are very likely or completely likely to address sustainability in their meeting plans for 2021 (American Express Meetings and Events 2020, 36).

Especially mega-events are leading the charge and leveraging a sustainable legacy for their host cities. Local government has a role to play in supporting or incentivising local events to operate sustainably. There are still sectors of the industry or regions of the world that have not yet taken up the responsibility which events have towards society to be sustainably operated and to leave lasting positive legacies. (Jones 2014, 4.)

4.3 Sustainable event planning and management

Applying holistic thinking to event planning means understanding the connection between the elements that make the event happen and how this relates to broader context in which the event is taking place. Interdependencies and interactions between the various aspects of the event needs to be understood and to recognise that these aspects may change over time. (Holmes, Hughes, Mair & Carlsen 2015, 122.)

It is not enough that an event organiser alone is keen to implement sustainable practices, but also all the stakeholders should share the same goal. It is important to communicate with stakeholders to have a shared vision and understanding of expected sustainable practices. (Holmes & al. 2015, 6). As events are fragmented and made up of many stages, suppliers, performance indicators and clients, should it be integral to introduce a sustainable policy to all elements of the event. The elements of an event refer to pre-, live and post-event, and the life cycle and entirety of event management must be considered. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 2.)

Assembling a diverse team of staff and stakeholders is a good start for the research phase. Individuals who are creative or passionate about environmental, social, political, and ethical issues can likely offer valuable contribution to the brainstorming and implementing process. Progressive event managers will educate their guest and colleagues on sustainability as part of continual quest for improvement. It is also important that possible sustainable initiatives used should be practical, so that various level of staff can understand and implement them in the event environment (Goldblatt 2012, 10, 38, 49). Incentivized strategies for event participants, staff and the organization is also one way to provide immediate results and a more enthusiastic compliance towards the sustainable paradigm (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 7).

Jones suggest that sustainability management for an event can be broken down into issues, impacts and outcomes. Issues are the specific actions that require management such as communicating with local resident, recycling operations and use of energy-efficient equipment. Impacts are the measurable outputs of those issues which can be negative if not managed and positive if managed well. A negative impact could be for example producing more greenhouse gases than necessary. Outcomes are the final remains of the issues being managed and the impacts being reduced or enhanced. For example, the event can enhance community cohesion or resources can be conserved. (Jones 2014, 5.)

All existing and new activity must consider the source of materials and their life cycle. If materials are needed, they should be reusable, recycled or recyclable. Supply chain management and procurement negotiations are key elements of aligning sustainability principles and the logistics of event organization. Sustainable event management should set improved goals, implement innovative practices, and utilize new technologies. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 6.)

Innovative design approaches and communication must become standard in the industry. The basic principle is awareness of the requirements for the ecological and social systems in which the event operates. It is also necessary to analyse the resources used, their sourcing and supply to ensure that the requirements are met. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 6-7.)

The event manager should consider if the event could be conducted virtually and achieve the same outcomes as a live event. Often the largest single contribution to the carbon footprint for many events and meetings is air travel and therefore one of the easiest way to reduce carbon footprint is to reduce the amount of travel that is needed for the event. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 299.)

The best way to set and track strategic sustainability goals is by creating key performance indicators (KPIs), or specific, measurable outcomes that the strategies chosen will affect. KPIs should follow criteria of SMART— specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Social KPIs might describe participant experience or employee satisfaction and could be assessed through qualitative research such as interviews. For environmental KPIs, quantitative data is most often used to track environmental impacts such as carbon emissions or water usage. Financial KPIs rely on quantitative data. They show accounting figures and for example the amount spent on carbon offset. (Goldblatt 2012, 60-61.)

One of the most important parts of the event management process is risk management that can be defined as the process of carefully planning to avoid any dangerous or harmful incidents during the event. Responsible event managers take into account sustainability perspective in their risk management. Even after careful risk assessment, problems may arise at any event. Ethical problem solving requires considering different options and choosing the solution that best supports the sustainability of the event. This is a way to show to clients and attendees that operations are run with diligence and integrity. (Goldblatt 2012, 46-47, 51.)

Responsible event leaders will aim for sustainability in their long-term plans business plans. All events impact the culture of their locations and sustainable events should be locally oriented to maintain meaningful and beneficial relationship with local culture. The pursuit of long-term sustainable development is essential as the rise of environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices can be considered as a long-term industry movement, not a trend. (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 11, 315-316.)

As planning sustainable events will become even more important in the future, it requires event leaders to possess extensive and professional training of key factors influencing sustainable event planning (Lee & Goldblatt 2020, 327).

4.4 Sustainability frameworks

In recent years the global trend of sustainable development has led to emergence of numerous guides, standards and certification programmes to assist in sustainable event development. Usually, they include all three aspects of environmental, economic and social impacts. Some guides are designed for events of any type and size, and others have a specific focus. Some of these are developed by not-for-profit organisations, some are government-led, and some are industry driven. (Holmes, & al. 2015, 6).

There have been many benefits to creating a number of published frameworks for sustainable event management. It has not only given a sense of professionalism in the light of contemporary concerns, but also highlighted best practice within the industry, advice and guidance, practical solutions, and an inward sense of the importance of events in modern society. Sustainable event management has evolved over several years, and it hasn't been a concept born out of government strategies. The recent proposal to develop past and existing frameworks into a recognized standard is a natural step forward. A conceptual framework that has evolved and emerged from event planning and management over the past decade is essential for a responsible event professional operating in the 21st century. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 4.)

4.5 Sustainability policy and reporting

A sustainability management policy is a document that indicates the commitment to sustainable development and describes the pathways to sustainability. This document can be provided to new contractors or staff, and it is a good document to have to spread out publicly. It can either be a broad mission statement or a detailed action plan. For an organization for which event management is not at the centre of its business, there will likely be an overarching policy that covers all of the event organisation's activities. In this situation, the event department may find that it wants to develop the policy to include event-specific content. (Jones 2014, 18.)

A sustainability report is a report published by a company or organisation about the non-financial aspects of company's activities including an assessment of its wider economic, environmental and social impacts. It also presents the organisation's values and governance model and demonstrates the link between its strategy and its commitment to a sustainable global economy. (Global Reporting Initiative; Nitti 2020.) Non-financial reporting tools have a variety of synonymous terms such as sustainability reporting, triple bottom line reporting and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting. Non-financial reporting tools allow stakeholders to get a much wider picture of organizations than from the traditional financial reports. (Nitti 2020.)

Sustainability reporting is the practice of measuring, disclosing and being accountable to internal and external stakeholders for organizational performance towards the goal of sustainable development. A sustainability report should be truthful and reasonable representation of the sustainability performance of a reporting organization that include both positive and negative contributions. (Global Reporting Initiative 2000-2012, 12-17.)

According to Nitti (2020), sustainability reporting, in its most broad and profound meaning, is about investigating, analyzing, understanding, and perhaps, rethinking an organization's functioning, management, strategy and vision, identifying, and taking into account its broad impacts on stakeholders and on the environment, and the intended and unintended changes it generates. This is equally important for private companies, non-profit, third sector and public organizations.

Sustainability reporting standards can support reporting practices not only in terms of increased comparability, but also in reducing selective disclosure and the risk of misleading information. Standards also help to create a common, shared knowledge base about organizations, their operations, and their system of relationships. Standards help organizations by guiding them in the reporting practice, even though, ultimately, social and environmental reporting is organization specific. (Nitti 2020.)

The world's most widely used, and widely trusted sustainability reporting framework is provided by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The GRI is an independent international organisation that helps businesses and governments by providing guidelines (GRI Standards) for reporting on a variety of economic, environmental and social issues. These commonly accepted reporting standards help companies benchmark their performance against each other, which can encourage them implement even more sustainability initiatives. (Global Reporting Initiative 2000-2012.)

The Global Reporting Initiative's Event Organizers' Sector Supplement (GRI EOSS) has established its own framework for the systematic treatment of sustainability issues for events with the launch of the international standard ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems (Jones 2014, 4 & Holmes, & al. 2015, 6). This supplement provides reporting guidance that is suitable for all types and sizes of event, which includes business events, sports events, and cultural events. The reporting guidance covers the complete project life cycle of an event from pre-event planning, execution and, post-event and the reporting can happen before or after the event has taken place. A comprehensive prediction of the event impacts, and reporting before the event occurs, can provide useful data to influence decision making and ensure optimal event legacy. (Global Reporting Initiative 2000-2012.)

Downside of the ISO certification is that it can be complex, costly and time consuming. Many events may not have enough resources to adopt such practices, particularly smaller and community-based events or one-off events. (Holmes & al. 2015, 120).

According to The Sustainable Event Alliance (The SEA), there are many varied specific sustainability challenges related to the events industry and while the sustainability impacts for the sector may be known, reporting on these impacts is in the early stages. (Sustainable Event Alliance.) Smaller companies have adopted sustainability reporting more slowly, possibly with the impression that only large companies should report on sustainability. However, every company, regardless of size, has an impact on its clients, employees and the surrounding environment and leaves an environmental footprint. Although the business scale of SMEs may be smaller than that of larger companies, the cumulative impact of small striving to achieve sustainable goals can have a huge impact that may exceed that of a few large companies. (Summertown 2019.)

4.6 Sustainability certification

An eco- or sustainability certification measures the integration of sustainable practice and performance against a set of predetermined environmental, social and economic criteria. Sustainability certifications are usually aligned with specific industry trade groups or international organizations to identify base performance levels and enable comparisons across regions and products. (Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020.)

A good sustainability certification legitimizes organization's sustainability strategy by verifying claims and providing external validation on issues such as responsible supply chain management and environmental and social risks management practices and procedures. The sustainability certification should drive improvement in sustainability strategy and performance. The number of clients who require certification as part of their own sustainability program is clearly growing. (Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020.)

Certification validation can be divided in three levels. In the first party validation, the organisation declares itself as compliant with the certification criteria "self-assessed" or "self-declared". In the second party validation, the organisation validates a supplier (or other stakeholder) as compliant with the criteria of a certification. In the third-party validation, the organisation is audited by an independent professional organisation who is officially trained in the certification criteria. A successful audit results in a third-party certification of an audit. (Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020.)

Sustainability certifications are a significant investment in time and money, but their potential to drive responsible business practices, enhance brand reputation, and support clients

in their purchasing choices is significant. According to the 2020 IMEX Natureworks Research Survey, 70% of the responding event planners and suppliers, hold some type of eco-certification, and this number is increasing. (Global Destination Sustainability Movement 2020.)

4.7 Benefits of sustainable event management

Sustainability is about a holistic way of doing business that creates positive and meaningful change. Research shows that engaging in sustainability contributes positively to shareholder value in the long term, as well as building reputation, avoiding risks, finding new opportunities for growth, and even cost savings. Meetings and events can have a very strong influence and social impact on a destination and local communities. Responsible business practices and corporate culture are ever more important when employees and consumers want to be associated with a brand that reflects their values. (CWT Meetings and Events 2020, 82-83.)

Most companies understand that transparency improves their recognition and reputation, but the benefits can extend far beyond reputation. Sustainability disclosure can also help companies perform better in the marketplace through improved customer relationships and efficiency in its operations. (Mohin 2019.)

Often the local community is benefitting from events, in terms of increased job opportunities and money in the local economy as well as increasing community pride. Events often attract tourists who bring both direct and indirect economic impact. If they enjoy their visit, they are likely to spread positive message about the destination and likely to return again in the future. Events can provide opportunities for local people to gain skills and experience, either as paid staff or volunteers. Even if participants do not receive specific training or qualifications, volunteering is recognized as an important part of building social capital in a community. Events can provide an opportunity for culturally and ethnically diverse communities to showcase their traditions and encourage tolerance of the diversity that exists within most communities. (Holmes & al. 2015, 122-123.)

A legacy is the long-term outcomes or impacts associated to events. Positive legacies can include physical changes to the destination such as improved infrastructure or economic changes due to inward investment attracted by the event; and psychological changes such as increased sense of community and belonging. (Holmes & al. 2015, 163).

Accepting responsibility for the impacts that events cause can create a new generation of event managers. Responsible events management will represent a holistic understanding of all core and support activities of planned events, raise awareness of the impacts of these activities and foster a strategic intent to reduce impacts, increase the effectiveness of actions taken and create a culture that continuously measures and evaluates these changes. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 11.)

Goldblatt (2012, 10) suggests that sustainable strategies do not just improve the planet, they actually produce superior event experiences. Event managers should keep in mind that sustainability is not a destination, but a journey of continually searching for new, innovative ways to improve on sustainable strategies and superior experiences.

4.8 Challenges for sustainable event management

One of the biggest concerns of implementing sustainable events is the belief that they cost more. This is a major obstacle to incorporating sustainable practices as according to 2018 State of Sustainability Survey conducted by Events Industry Council (EIC), the event organisers require sustainability to either be cost-neutral or cost-saving. EIC points out that while some aspects of sustainable events may increase the budget, overall, the cost can be reduced by leveraging the efficiency that is at the heart of sustainable events. (Events Industry Council e. 2018.)

As sustainability has become a worldwide trend, there have been some companies who have called themselves “green” without first assessing what that truly means for them. The term “greenwash” means using the language of sustainability without undertaking any actual practices or misleading marketing that falsely gives an image of a meeting or event more sustainable than it is. Companies who are being accused of greenwash can damage their public image. Marketing claims should be rooted to real sustainable actions that have been measured and reported. (Goldblatt 2012, 252-253.) The lack of use of planning and performance standards will only heighten the necessity for long-term government policies and create imposed policies that will standardize and characterize operations in the events sector. (Raj & Musgrave 2009, 10.)

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have more limited resources which can be seen as a strong barrier to the development of a sustainability strategy. However, it is likely easier and faster to embed sustainability into SMEs than into large ones. SMEs have simpler structures (regarding space, staff, or relationship with stakeholders) and change can be implemented more quickly. The guidelines can help establish a structured

idea on where to start and what to do, even if in the beginning an organization don't produce a report. (Gonçalves 2020.)

Developing a sustainability strategy may be a challenge for many SMEs when considered that the guidelines, together with many certifications are expensive and complex for the scale SMEs. Despite the initial high costs of integrating and reporting sustainability, the benefits might be more than offset by cost savings. SMEs that successfully introduce sustainability issues into their business development strategy can have multiple benefits. From reduced risks to innovation opportunities, higher operational efficiency, lower costs or a positive brand association a well-implemented corporate social responsibility strategy can be of great value to SMEs. (Gonçalves 2020.)

5 Research methods and data collection

This chapter describes the basic terminology of the used research methods such as primary and secondary research and quantitative and qualitative research methods. The process of data collection for this thesis is explained as well as reflection on how the ethics of the research have been ensured.

5.1 Primary and secondary research

Secondary research refers to the whole or part of the study where information is retrieved and presented logically but not formally analysed. Primary research on the other hand refers to research that involves the statistical or other analysis of data for the first time. (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati & Brackstone 2014, 23.) The primary data for this thesis was collected in a form of an online questionnaire. This data collection method was chosen as it seemed the easiest and most convenient way to collect information during the time of restrictions caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The secondary data was collected from literature and online research and articles and is presented in the theory framework of the thesis. Information on regulations and government documents were searched from Internet to ensure currency and accuracy of the information.

5.2 Quantitative research

Quantitative research deals with numbers and relationships between them. In quantitative research, concepts are defined in such a way that they can be measured. To be able to carry out quantitative research calculations, the object of the calculation needs to be clear and the knowledge on the phenomenon is needed. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 178.) When properly applied quantitative research can produce reliable results from a representative sample of participants that can be generalized to a wider population (Kananen 2011, 39).

Quantitative research is based on variables. The variable is the name of a concept/factor/subject which can have one or several attributes and this is the object of interest in the research. Various kinds of variables like age, occupation or opinion on a matter, with attributes describing them can be assigned to the cases. Variables are converted into questions to be answered and attributes are assigned values, which can be measured. (Kananen 2011, 75-77, 79.)

A questionnaire is a typical data collection method in quantitative research. The target group is often so large that it is not reasonable to include all individuals in the study. A

representative sample gives enough reliable research results as the whole population. (Kananen 2011, 72-73.)

The target group of this research are companies that operate in the events industry in Finland. As it is impossible to involve and contact all the Finnish event companies, the sample group was selected. The original idea was to collaborate with an umbrella event organization such Tapahumateollisuus ry or Congress Network Finland ry and use their distribution channel to share the survey. As this cooperation didn't succeed, there was still an opportunity to use their public membership information. A list of 236 companies was created based on this information. The online survey was conducted by using a survey and reporting tool called Webropol. The sample of 236 companies were contacted with an email request to answer the online survey.

In order to make a successful questionnaire survey, questions should be formed in a way that the respondent understands the question in a right way and the respondent should know enough of the subject that the questions are about. The respondent should also be prepared to provide requested information. (Kananen 2011, 92)

5.3 Qualitative research

To establish and define the phenomenon, qualitative research is needed. This helps to understand the phenomenon and what is it all about. After the phenomenon is being understood, quantitative research can be applied and numbers and their interdependencies can be used to measure the phenomenon. (Kananen 2011, 37.) The theory part of the thesis presents existing knowledge and research around the theme. This helps to see what kind of measures have been used and what kind of conclusions have already been drawn. The principle is that new research is built on the basis of existing science (Kananen 2011, 21).

Qualitative research uses non-numerical data and is usually in the form of words. Where quantitative method is designed to provide a general view of the phenomenon, qualitative method aims to describe, understand or obtain meaning. The data is less objective but can be more detailed and profound and therefore provide depth to a study. (Fox & al. 2014, 24)

For this thesis, mixed research strategy that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen. Besides wanting to make generalization from the results to wider group of event professionals, there was also a need to find more detailed information about the attitudes of the respondents. Adding qualitative features to the research helps to gain a

deeper understanding of the phenomenon as well. Qualitative features have been added to the questionnaire by adding open ended questions that allow the respondents to answer the questions in their own words and therefore more profound data can be collected.

5.4 Research ethics

Research ethics were taken into consideration when creating the online questionnaire. The participants were contacted by blind carbon copy email so that their email addresses were hidden from each other. Email shortly described the background of the thesis and informed that filling the questionnaire would happen anonymously and that the results of the study it would be used only for the thesis purposes.

6 Results

236 company representatives were contacted by email with a request to fill the online questionnaire. According to Buckingham & Saunders (2004, 70), the response rate is the proportion of people in the sample who successfully complete a questionnaire. In this survey, 73 representatives that were contacted completed the survey and the response rate was 31%. The questionnaire was created with Webropol survey and reporting tool that is the most widely used Nordic online survey tool. Webropol survey tools are based on what is known as OLAP (Online Analytical Processing) technology. This technology enables to manage and analyse data quickly and efficiently and in addition it allows multidimensional viewing of results (Webropol).

6.1 Background information on respondents

As pointed out in the theoretical part, the classification of different actors in the events industry into categories is challenging due to the fragmentation of the events industry and diversity of actors. Tapahtumateollisuus ry is an umbrella organisation for events industry and they have created industry classification with business perspective which was presented in the second chapter. This classification was used as a base for categorizing the respondents of this survey, though it was a little bit modified. As the theory parts suggest, many companies in the events industry offer a wide range of services, and it can be difficult to classify them under one clear category. Therefore, the respondents had an opportunity to choose multiple categories on type of company represented and the 73 respondents selected 127 categories all together. Many respondents answered that their business type fits to several of the given options and chose 2-3 variables. This result reinforces the notion that it is very difficult to categorize actors in the event industry with exact categories. The distribution of responses can be seen in the chart below.

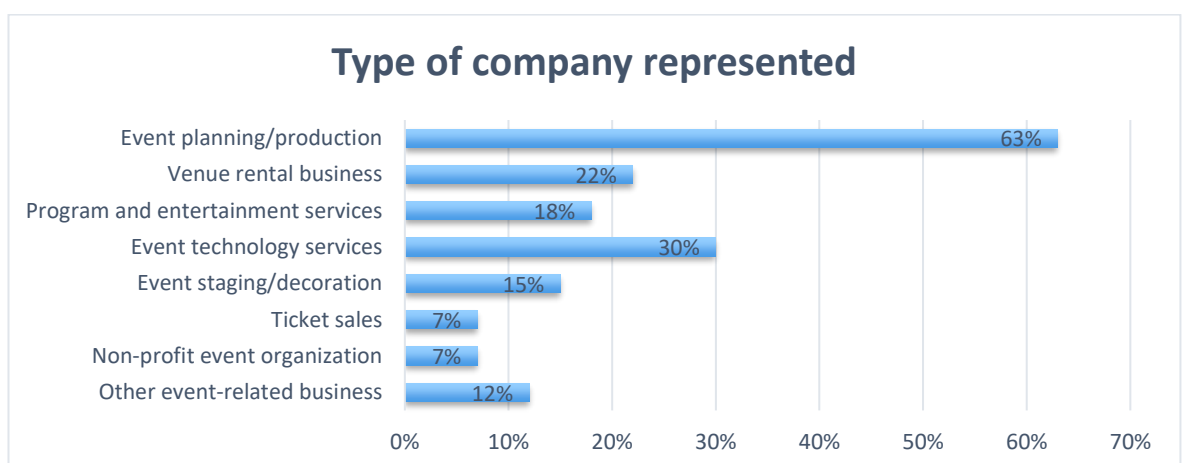


Figure 7. Percent distribution by type of company represented

There were nine respondents who answered that they represent other event-related business category. Following types of businesses were described in the open text field:

- professional congress organizer (PCO)
- exhibition stand designer
- theatre agency
- streaming production and platform
- fairs
- furniture rental
- maintenance of Live-club
- consulting, training, sparring
- event marketing

Besides wanting to find out the company type of the respondents; the company size was under the investigation in order to find out whether the size of a company affects how much is invested in sustainable development. The results revealed that the majority of respondents represent either a micro company (70%) or small company (26%). There were only three respondents who represented a medium size company and zero respondent for large companies. These results can be seen as frequency and percent distribution from the table below. The comparison of whether the size of the company affects how much is invested in sustainable development will be observed later in this chapter.

Table 1. Frequency and percent distribution by company size

Company size	Number of employees	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Micro	1–9	51	70%
Small	10–49	19	26%
Medium	50–249	3	4%
Large	250≤	0	0 %

6.2 Importance of sustainable development for companies

The theoretical framework suggests that the importance of sustainable development in the events industry in a global context has grown significantly in recent years. One purpose of this research is to find out how important it is perceived by Finnish actors in the field. The respondents were asked, how important is sustainable development as part of the operations of their company currently. The answers were given with a rating scale between values of 0-10, when 0 is being irrelevant and 10 is being very important. The mean tells the average value of all the cases in the sample and the median tells the middle value in the range of values in the sample (Buckingham & Saunders 2004, 108). The mean average of the answers is 7 and the median is 8. This result reinforces the theory that sustainable development is perceived as an important factor for the most actors in the events industry.

Although the concept of sustainable development has been around for a few decades, in recent years it has gained visibility and importance in a whole new way due to climate change. For this reason, it was interesting to discover how long Finnish companies have been investing in sustainable development. There was no prior enquiry into how long the companies had been in operation, so it is possible some of the respondents represent newly established companies. In that case, it is natural that those companies have not been able to invest in sustainable development for as long as those companies that have been in operation for several years and this must be taken into account in the results. Distribution of the answers was quite even, and two thirds of the respondents had taken sustainable development into account for at least one year or even longer than 10 years.

There were 11 respondents (15%) who replied that their company does not take sustainable development into account at all. The questionnaire was programmed to skip the following questions for those respondents as the next questions dived deeper into the theme of sustainable development.

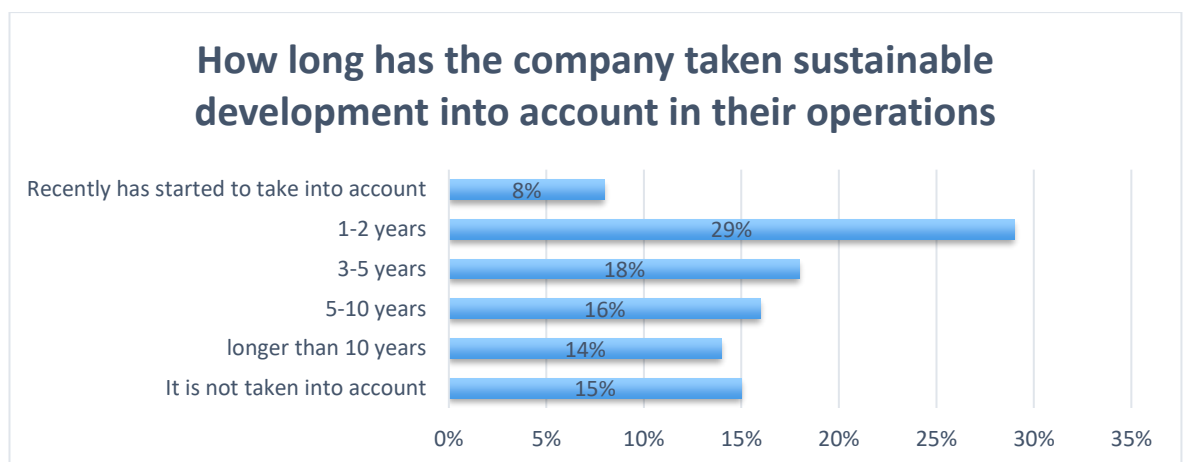


Figure 8. Percentage distribution of years invested by companies in sustainable development

6.3 Sustainability strategy and reporting

In the theoretical part, it was pointed out that advanced event organizers have a sustainability strategy, and they report on the sustainability practices. These matters were under the investigation in the questionnaire and a little less than half (47%) of the 62 respondents answered “Yes” to the next question about whether the company that they are representing has a strategy for sustainable development. Over half (60%) of the 62 respondents indicated that their company has appointed a person in charge of sustainable development.

The respondents were also asked whether their company reports on sustainable development. Only one fifth (21%) of the 62 respondents replied in affirmative and the rest of them (79%) replied that their company is not reporting. For the one fifth of the respondents who gave an affirmative answer, there was a follow-up question, that requested to clarify what type of reporting their company is conducting. The answer format was an open text field. Eight respondents out of thirteen described that their company is conducting both internal and external reporting. Some of these respondents described more precisely that the reporting was done to either for clients, employees, partners, auditing, or certification purposes. Four respondents told that their company is reporting only externally either to partners, auditors, to obtain Eco Compass certification or to report of energy consumption. One respondent told that the company he/she is representing is conducting a report for internal purposes.

6.4 Awareness and commitment to sustainability initiatives and standards

All the respondents were asked with a multiple-choice question, if they are familiar with some popular sustainability initiatives, standards and certification that have been introduced in the theoretical framework of this thesis. A little less than half (46%) of the 70 respondents announced that they had not heard of any of the options that were given. The most well-known was a Finnish EcoCompass (Ekokompassi) certification, which was familiar to 28 (40%) of the respondents. Only 17% of the respondents were familiar with UN Agenda 2030 and 6% with UN Global Compact. This is a somewhat surprising finding as the literature especially highlighted global famousness of UN initiatives. Also, according to the Finnish survey that was mentioned earlier in the chapter 3, it is estimated that almost half of Finns (47%) know about the UN 2030 Agenda. The percentage distribution as a whole can be seen in the figure below.



Figure 9. Percentage distribution of the awareness of different initiatives

The respondents were then asked whether they are committed to any of the options given. This question was excluded from the 11 respondents who previously stated that their company does not take sustainable development into account. Out of 59 respondents four fifths (80%) answered that they are not committed to any sustainability initiative or standard. EcoCompass received the most mentions (14%). Other certifications that were mentioned once were Sustainable Travel Finland and Green Key Finland. Sustainable Travel Finland is a programme that is designed for tourism companies and destinations in Finland and the Green Key is a leading international eco-label awarded to accommodations and other hospitality facilities.

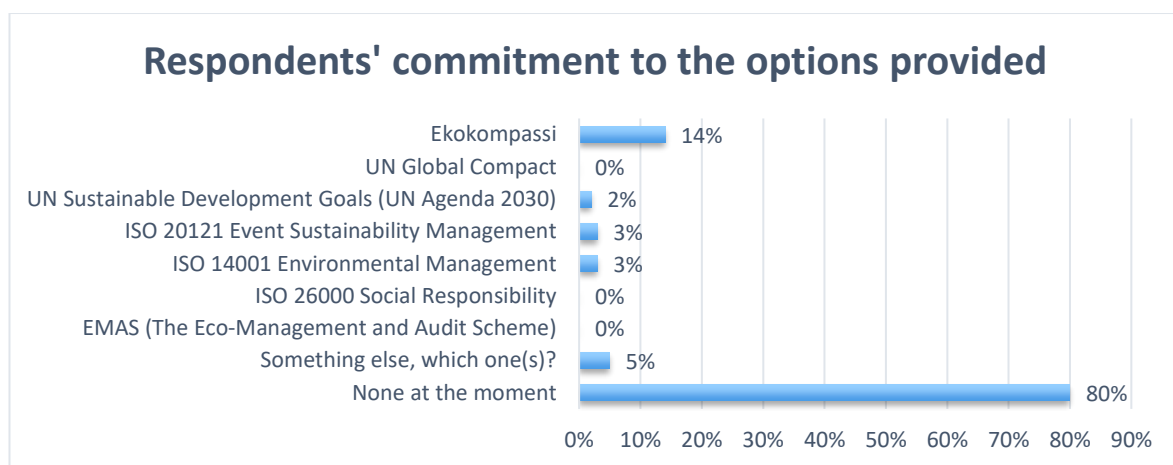


Figure 10. Percentage distribution of the commitment to different initiatives

6.5 Barriers and motivators to achieving sustainability

The most important part of the research was to find out what are the barriers and motivators for achieving sustainability. Knowing these reasons is essential in order to make a change in the behaviour and attitudes of different actors in the industry. All 73 respondents who started the questionnaire were asked about these reasons, and 66 of them gave an answer. The question format was a multiple choice. Half (50%) of the respondents thought that limited budget is a barrier for achieving sustainability and almost half (48%) thought it is time-consuming (48%) and just over a third (38%) thought that lack of knowledge is a barrier. A few of the respondents (11%) answered that lack of interest is a barrier for them. Some other barriers were mentioned by twelve (18%) respondents in the open text field. Three respondents wrote that the COVID-19 pandemic had disturbed the operations of the company and therefore, affected sustainability goals. Two respondents answered that for the company that they are representing, there are no barriers to achieving sustainability as it is such an important value for them. Also, one respondent described that they have already invested a lot in sustainable development, and it is difficult to invest

more at the moment. Three respondents mentioned that they always recommend their customers to follow sustainability principles, but it is ultimately client's decision, if they decide to follow them. Two of the respondents answered that sustainable development either is not effective in their business, or it is difficult to implement to their branch.

Only those respondents who answered that they are taking sustainable development into account in their operations were programmed to answer the next question about the motivators for achieving sustainability. Majority of the 61 respondents (84%) named that the motivator for sustainable development is the desire to create better and more sustainable future. The majority thought also that company image (70%) and customer expectations (70%) are important motivators. Other things mentioned in the open text field were personal values, nature, sustainability as a key element of the business, government bans and importance of customer goals.

6.6 Sustainable development practices

Despite the fact whether Finnish actors in the events industry are following some sustainability initiatives, have some certification or conduct reporting, the most relevant thing is if they are taking some sustainability measures altogether. This in mind, the respondents were asked to describe how sustainable development shows in practise in their company. This is the qualitative part of the study where the respondents were asked to give answers in the form of the open text field, and they could write in a free manner about the subject.

Qualitative research often generates a lot of material which needs to be converted into a more compact form to be able to analyse it (Kananen 2011, 136). There were fewer respondents to this question (33) compared to the previous questions, but there was still plenty of material to be analysed. Since it is not possible to present all the findings in the scope of this thesis, only the most important findings are presented. The figure below summarizes the main findings. The size of the bubbles indicates how often each subject was mentioned in the responses.



Figure 11. Sustainable development practices of the companies

The measures taken to achieve sustainability can be diverse which is seen from the results as well. Environmental aspects of sustainability was mentioned most often in the answers.

6.7 Sustainable practices in the future

Finally, all the respondents were asked if they see their company making more effort on implementing sustainable practices in the next 5 years. Around two thirds (69%) out of 71 respondents answered 'yes', one third (30%) answered 'I don't know' and one (1%) respondent answered 'no'. The respondents who answered 'yes' were asked to describe what type of changes they are expecting, and 26 answers were given in open text field. The main findings and thoughts of the respondents are collected in the figure below. The size of bubbles gives some indication of the number of answers about each subject.



Figure 12. Expectations of the companies about their sustainable practices in the future

6.8 Comparison in terms of company type and size

As none of the respondents represented a large size company and there were only three respondents who represented a medium size company, a proper comparison cannot be made of the investment to sustainable development based on the company size. The results did not suggest that sustainable development would be less important for smaller companies. There were no clear differences between the company types either.

6.9 Reliability and validity of the results

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research results. However, reliability is not necessarily guaranteed by a new measurement as the phenomenon may change over time. (Kananen 2011, 66.)

Finnish or global events industry does not have its own database for research which made it more challenging to find reliable research to use for the theoretical framework. However, to improve reliability, attention has been paid to finding good quality sources and by selecting recent studies and literature on the subject and by favouring well-known authors in

the field. Also, number of sources used can be considered decent, given the scope of the thesis. Reliability of the thesis is improved by a moderate number of respondents and decent response rate of 31%.

Validity on the other hand refers to whether the research answers the questions it is intended to answer. External validity means that the findings can be generalised to the population and that the research results are valid in similar situations. (Kananen 2011, 67.) Internal validity on the other hand refers to how well a study is conducted. The evaluation of how well the criteria of internal validity is met is very difficult, but can be improved by careful documentation of the research project and by defining the concepts that are used appropriately and preferably based on theory. (Kananen 2011, 125-128.)

Internal validity has sub-concepts that are content validity, theoretical validity and criterion validity. Content validity is fulfilled when the measuring used measures what it is supposed to measure. Content validity reflects the accuracy of the measure, and it can be difficult to prove that the criteria of the content validity are met. It is also important to justify and document the measures that have been used. Theoretical validity means that the concepts of the study are derived from existing theories. Criterion validity is based on the use of other previous research results to support the new results. (Kananen 2011, 127-128.)

As pointed out in the previous chapter, in order to make a successful questionnaire survey, questions should be formed in a way that the respondent understands the question in a right way and the respondent should know enough of the subject that the questions are about. The online questionnaire did not define the concept of sustainable development or sustainability for the respondents, but it was assumed that the respondents know the basic idea of it. In retrospect, more time should have been spent for setting the research questions and it would have been wise to determine the level of knowledge of the respondents about sustainability as the concept is very broad and complex. This is probably the biggest weakness of the study, as lack of knowledge can be reflected in the results. For example, environmental aspects of sustainable development are well represented in the answers, but the social and financial aspects of sustainable development are mentioned only by a few respondents. It remains unclear whether these aspects are ignored in the sustainability practices or is there a lack of knowledge about the concept.

The decision to use public memberships lists of event organizations which included a colorful array of different actors in the industry, contributed to the fact that the research could not be limited to any specific set of actors in the industry. Probably the results would have

been easier to analyse and utilize if the target group had been more carefully delimited. Also, the survey did not collect information about the position of the respondent in the company. Although the questionnaire was sent directly to the companies and was intended to be answered by only representative, due to the anonymity of the survey, there is no certainty to whether several company representatives were able to reply to the survey and thus, change the results.

Another challenge of the study was that the online questionnaire was written in English, but the respondents were most likely Finnish speakers. In general Finnish people have good level of English skills but it is hard to estimate whether the language chosen affected the results. Most of the respondents gave clear answers but there were also a few responses that remained somewhat unclear. Some of the respondents wrote their answers in the open text field in Finnish. It is possible that for some respondents the concepts might have been more familiar in Finnish. This may affect the accuracy and nature of the answers. There was also some inconsistency in some of the answers. For example, there was one answer to the question 'how important is sustainable development as part of the operations of your company', where a respondent gave the value 8 on a scale from 0-10, but then answered in the next question that sustainable development is not taken into account at the moment.

7 Conclusions and learning process

This chapter describes the main conclusion of the research and considers how the results can be utilized now and in the future. The author's own learning process is described at the end of the chapter.

7.1 Main conclusions

The level of the investment in sustainable development varied according to the responses from a few respondents who described that sustainable development is not considered at all, to respondents who described that their company has adopted a few sustainability measures and to those respondents who described that their company is considering sustainability throughout all the operations. Most actors in the events industry clearly understand the importance of sustainable development and are willing to invest in it. However, the results revealed that more awareness, knowledge and guidance about sustainable development is needed.

As the events industry is fragmented and diverse, the challenge is to create common approaches that would address the issues of sustainability more effectively than just individual actions. Organizations like Tapahtumateollisuus ry, MPI Finland (Meeting Professionals International) and Congress Network Finland are doing an important work to bring together actors in the field and may have the opportunity to influence common practices in the field as well. In order to contribute comprehensively on an industry-wide scale, different actors need to have the opportunity to gather together, network and exchange ideas so that common ways of influencing can be created. This is certainly a major challenge for the event industry at the moment, as well as figuring out how it will recover from the pandemic.

As Kananen points out, society changes and develops and thus the phenomenon can change. Theories need to be tested continually in order to ascertain whether they continue to be valid. (Kananen 2011, 39.) The concept of sustainable development evolves continually and as its importance is increasing year by year, so should it be studied continually as well. The time period of COVID-19 pandemic has been unusual in the history of the events industry and has caused unexpected changes in the industry and it is very difficult to estimate how this affects the results of the study. How does the pandemic shape the industry in the future and does it affect sustainability practices remains to be seen and need to be studied in the future as well.

7.2 Personal learning process

The author of this thesis had not ever conducted this broad survey before so there were many learning curves during the process. The process has given a deeper understanding of features of a high-quality study as well as deepened the understanding of the events industry as well as the concept of sustainable development. The thesis process has taught to organise and manage a larger project as well as challenged language skills as English is not the mother tongue of the author.

COVID-19 pandemic caused some challenges for conducting the thesis. Restrictions in the society affected to chosen research methods and availability of library services. However, the most challenging thing was the lack of peer support by other students as all the studies have been conducted remotely since March 2020. This has forced students to work in a very independent manner and to take care of the schedules and the progression of the studies without the normal social presence of the university environment. This has had its pros and cons. I learned that I could work on such a large project quite independently, but on the other hand, I felt very strongly that some of the study motivation and enthusiasm disappeared once the students were forced to study remotely. The whole process provided a good learning experience as well as a reminder of the author's own strengths and weaknesses.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey questions

Sustainability in Events Industry

The survey is anonymous and the responses will be used only for thesis purposes. Filling the survey takes approximately 3 minutes. You may answer open questions in English or Finnish.

1. What type of company do you represent?

- Event planning/production
- Venue rental business
- Program and entertainment services
- Event technology services
- Event staging
- Ticket sales
- Non-profit event organization
- Other event-related business, what?

2. What is your company size by number of employees?

- 1-9
- 10-49
- 50-249
- 250≤

3. How important is sustainable development as part of the operations of your company currently?



4. For how long has your company taken sustainable development into account in your operations?

- Recently has started to take into account
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- longer than 10 years
- It is not taken into account

5. Does your company have a strategy for sustainable development?

- Yes
- No

6. Is there someone in charge of sustainable development?

- Yes
- No

7. Does your company report on sustainable development?

- Yes
- No

8. What type of reporting? Internal or external (for stakeholders, auditors)?

9. Which of the following initiatives/standards/certificates are you familiar with?

- Ekokompassi
- UN Global Compact
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN Agenda 2030)
- ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management
- ISO 14001 Environmental Management
- ISO 26000 Social Responsibility
- EMAS (The Eco-Management and Audit Scheme)
- I have not heard of any of them

10. Is your company committed to any of the following initiatives or received a certification related to sustainable development? Which one(s)?

- Ekokompassi
- UN Global Compact
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN Agenda 2030)
- ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management
- ISO 14001 Environmental Management
- ISO 26000 Social Responsibility
- EMAS (The Eco-Management and Audit Scheme)
- Something else, which one(s)?
- None at the moment

11. What are the barriers towards achieving sustainability?

- It is time-consuming
- Lack of knowledge
- Limited budget
- Lack of interest
- Something else, what?

12. What are the motivators for achieving sustainability?

- Company image
- Creating better and more sustainable future
- Customer expectations
- Pressure from the society
- Something else, what?

13. How sustainable development shows in practice in your company?

14. In next 5 years do you see your company making more effort on implementing sustainable practices?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know.

15. What type of changes are you expecting?
