

# Potential Factors That Influence Event Sustainability: A Case of Special Event

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## Abstract

*This conceptual paper intends to identify the potential factors that influence event sustainability. Previous literature related to Triple Bottom Line concept in tourism development and three potential factors that might influence event sustainability are reviewed and discussed. These factors are strategic and cultural fit, community support and the quality of event. The findings from the literatures resulted in establishing three inquiries pertaining to the study for further investigation. Both theoretical and conceptual framework could provide valuable information and insight on the event sustainability, thus strengthening the current literature.*

**Keywords:** event sustainability, strategic and cultural fit, community support, event quality

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, hosting a special event such as sport events, expositions, festivals, has been acknowledged as an important strategy not only for a short-term rise in tourist volumes and positive economic benefits, but also for improving a destination's image and building a destination's brand for sustainable development (Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, and Shameem, 2003). Zabkar and Dmitrovic (2010) stated that in the recent decades, the waves of globalization have swept every corner of the world, which gives rise to the increasing competition between different cities in order to survive or stand out in such big climate.

Thus, the ideas of city marketing and urban regeneration have emerged as a main concern for the policy makers. Hence, organizing a special event and festival can boost up the destination image and may give a positive impact on tourism industry as indicated by Ingram and Grieve (2013). Furthermore, Jun and Lee (2008) confirmed that festivals and events are an important part of city life. They have a function of providing a good vehicle to toughen a

city in competition. Despite this function, more and more cities hold festivals and events with the aim of improving the cities' images, attracting visitors and investment as well as stimulating urban development and boosting local economy as a whole. (Zabkar & Dmitrovic, 2010).

In Malaysia, there are various events and festivals held annually. These events and festivals mostly organized by city council in every state. Recently, events and festivals become one of the marketing strategies in branding a destination and enhance destination image. According to Putrajaya Annual Report 2013, Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival, is the hallmark event of Putrajaya and 2013 being 6<sup>th</sup> edition with a record of 865,971 visitors generating revenue of about RM2 million in sales. Involved in this annual festival are various government sectors, multi-million dollar corporations, landscape architects, florists, growers, associations, artists, traders, students of all levels – from primary to tertiary, and our local communities and nature lovers. Flower and Garden Festival, Putrajaya 2013 serves to bring to realization the Government's aspirations in making Putrajaya a garden city and a pioneer green city in all aspects of planning, management and development. There are many special events held in Putrajaya namely International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta, Redbull Air Race, Magic of The Night, Fireworks Competition, Magic Fest, International Islamic Arts and Culture Festival, Light and Motion, and Flower and Garden Festival.

Denoting to all the special events held in this city, only Flower and Garden Festival meet the goals in realizing Putrajaya as a Garden City. Thus a study should be carried out on how to sustain this event as it is a pioneer in developing a garden city. Due to overwhelming agenda of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in green conservation, this is the right time for promoting sustainability (Jun & Lee, 2008). Thus, the Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival can play a distinctive and essential role in this perspective. Therefore, this festival must be properly designed in term of structure and cultural fit, enhancing community support, and improving the quality of event, envisioned and managed for sustainability.

Additionally, many festival organizers are already making terrific strides in this direction, and there is a lot to be learnt from their experiences and perspectives around sustainable event management (Meadows, 2008). So, it is essential to know the difficulties and also the successes of Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival organizers face in strategizing their festivals for sustainability.

The growing importance of special events and their competitive nature in tourism industry, this study would extend the research paradigm in sustainable event tourism and their impact on destination image. The unique of this study is that, it gathers culture and event at the middle of activities of various stakeholders to a key piece of the puzzle by offering an insight on how an event can be used in a sustainable way to enhance destination image. Hence, Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival organizers also may provide a distinctive strategy in system intervention where small actions can create big changes. Therefore, by identifying strategies that will specifically help event organizers engage and improve sustainable event management, this festival will move forward to a sustainable event and provide a positive impact to portray Putrajaya as a city in-a-garden image.

However, by organizing an event, the possible effect of ecosystems are being despoiled and driven nearer to collapse, and the global climate is quickly shifting into unprecedented variance (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Furthermore, cultures

far and wide are being homogenized in the wake of modernization, and local knowledge is being lost under strip malls, parking lots and suburban sprawl. Consequently, without any essential precautions, these conditions of un-sustainability will transform the destination into uninhabitable place for human civilization and weaken societies so that they are unable to handle the critical challenges of this time. (Jun & Lee, 2008).

## **2. Scope and Limitation**

This conceptual paper focuses on strategic and cultural fit, community support, and quality of event as the variables under this study. The sustainability of the special event is limited to Flower and Garden Festival, Putrajaya, Malaysia as the subject in the study. The theoretical framework adopts the triple bottom line (TBL) theories to explain and understand the concept of event sustainability. Therefore, related literature depends on previous researchers' reports and availability of the literature topics in the selected database within a limited time.

## **3. Analysis and Discussion of the Literature**

This section will explore the background of event sustainability and related theories and concepts adopt in the study. The key factors that influence event sustainability are explored and discussed. The method for data collection for future research is presented in the proceeding sections.

### **3.1 Event Sustainability**

Sustainable event management refers to the convergence of sustainability with the project planning process of event management (Katzel, 2007). A sustainably managed event is one in which sustainability responsiveness; plan and making decision are fully integrated into its management logistics, operations, and production. Event coordinators increasingly try to improve the sustainability credentials of events, and sustainable event discussion has become popular amongst the media and public (Laing & Frost, 2009). Sustainability practices have begun which to take hold in all kinds of events including conferences and meetings, expositions and trade shows, mega-events, sporting events, festivals, religious or cultural celebrations, and community and civic events (Sustainable Event Alliance, 2011). Though sustainable event management continues to grow in popularity, it is not yet common practice. There are very few forces or mechanisms driving the extensive adoption and expansion of sustainable event management to become regular practice throughout the Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival. Therefore a need exists to identify strategies that will help event organizers engage and improve sustainable event management of the festivals.

### **3.2 Theoretical Underpinning**

According to Tyrell, Cody and Biaett Jr (2012), the "Triple Bottom Line (TBL)" concept of sustainable development has been used consistently since 1980s as reported in World Commission on the Environment and Development publication in 1987. Furthermore, Elkington (2004), who originally coined the *triple bottom line*, suggests that "developing this comprehensive approach to sustainable development and environmental protection will be a

central governance challenge—and, even more critically, a market challenge—in the 21st century” (p. 16).

However, there are difficulties has been noted in the application of the TBL in tourism settings. For Instance, Dwyer (2005) notes that social and environmental costs and benefits are usually measured using qualitative techniques, and the market values of environmental and social impacts cannot be used to identify individuals’ preferences for these values. Dwyer’s list of challenges for the TBL includes “identifying and selecting appropriate indicators, adopting an appropriate framework for TBL accounting and monitory purposes, and confronting TBL implementation costs” (p. 84). Another challenge in the application of the TBL is to avoid allowing entities to use TBL to legitimize their activities by reporting only positive aspects of their performance (Faux, 2005).

According to Elkington (1994) the TBL was developed as a framework for measuring and reporting corporate performance beyond the traditional, single “Bottom Line” focused on economic profitability. The TBL adds socio-cultural and environmental bottom lines in order to put these dimensions on a more equal footing with the traditional economic benchmark .The TBL is meant to be more than just a method of accounting and reporting (Vanclay 2004), as it is hoped that the execution of the framework would lead to the embracement of the ideals of sustainable development (Elkington 1997; Faux 2005).

While the TBL has been widely adopted, Vanclay (2004) argues that many of the agencies and businesses have lost sight of the wider vision and philosophy of the TBL, instead focusing too much on responding to reporting requirements. A survey conducted by Vandenberg (2002) in 32 organizations that use the TBL framework in Victoria, Australia, found that there was considerable confusion among the organizations about the philosophy and definition of TBL. In addition, several challenges have been noted for integrating the TBL into business and organization operations. Vanclay (2004) suggests that much of the literature on and many of the applications of the TBL have ignored the field of impact assessment, implying that “the naïve adoption of a TBL framework will be a regressive step” (p. 271).

Coffman and Umemoto’s (2010) review how the TBL concept was used at the policy and planning level and led to a process that polarized economic and environmental interests during the development of the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Plan. They argued that “adopting popular notions of sustainability [TBL], without critical examination of how the respective policy frames diverge or interrelate, can lead to ‘tautological traps’” (p. 597). Tourism industry provides a unique opportunity for the promotion and development of the TBL, as it is made up of many commercial enterprises and forms of tourism that seek to generate gains in conservation, community quality of life, and for multiple stakeholders, simultaneously (Buckley, 2003). Tourism sector can provide leadership toward the adoption of the sustainable development philosophy, which reflects the ideals of the societies in which tourism entities operate through active engagement with the TBL (Faux & Dwyer, 2009).

Jago et al (2003) dimension for measuring sustainability is chosen in this study because it is appropriate and more associated to this research as compared to Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model. TBL attributes is quantified in dollar values (Hacking & Guthrie, 2008), where it is measure in the sense of factual money values. Therefore, to analyze and measure non-monetary attributes such as personal behavior, perceive value, community support etc is

inappropriate. Therefore, the researcher implemented the dimension as proposed by Jago et al. (2003) as the forte in this study because it fit and meet the current situation of the subject Flower and Garden Festival in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The need to assess Infrastructure and cultural fit, the support by community and the quality of event may be vital and encouraging the sustainable of a particular event. Thus, the finding of this study may be an important point not only for academic scholar but also to Putrajaya Corporation (Perbadanan Putrajaya) in reviewing the Flora and Garden Festival as the core event in sustaining and realizing Putrajaya as a Garden City in the future.

### **3.3 Research Inquiries**

In view of the related literature discussed in the previous section, there are three research questions related to the study are established.

#### **3.3.1 Does the strategic structure and cultural fit influence event sustainability?**

This is the first research question established for the study based on the findings from the previous literature. This finding provides foundation on identifying factors relating to how structure and cultural fit influence event sustainability.

Strategic and cultural fit are refers to the fitting of the special event to the destination. Organizing any special event in a destination involves the coordination and promotion of event and destination image (Yu, Wang & Seo, 2012). To be consistent with Jago et al. (2003), strategic and cultural fit are defined as a main latent variable in this study which could be measured by this few manifest variables which include event capacity, infrastructure and media. Event capacity reflects the core values of Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival in terms of benefits of hosting the festival itself. Infrastructure mainly includes the transportation and hospitality facilities to accommodate potential tourists. For media, it was included in this construct since it is a major indicator of the fit between a special event and the host city (Ritchie, J.R.B., Shipway, R. and Chien, P.M, 2010).

The host destination has its own brand values that have to be clearly communicated through the hosting of the special event. On the other hand, the special event, particularly the world mega event, has its own brand that needs to be protected and enhanced (Roche, 1998). Infrastructure, mean those tools which are fairly transparent for most people we know about, wide in both temporal and spatial scope, embedded in familiar structures like power grids, water, the Internet, airlines (Yates & Maanen, 2001). Accessibility may be defined as the easy-to-reach desired destinations by means of a specific transport system. Accessibility is of great importance both from the point of view of regional development and that of social welfare. It depends to a great extent on the building of transport infrastructures and in turn influences land capacity and mobility (Yu et al., 2012).

Based on Institute of Landscape, Architects Malaysia (ILAM, 2013) report, Putrajaya are planned to be equipped with the latest technologies and facilities to allow expansion in the effectiveness of the government's mechanism and productivity as well providing amenities that will greatly contribute towards a quality urban living and working environment. Flower and Garden Putrajaya 2013 serves to bring to realization the Government's aspirations in making Putrajaya a garden city and a pioneer green city in all aspects of planning, management and development. Therefore, to what extent that this

strategic and cultural fit (media, infrastructure, and cultural fit) of this event would influence sustainability is the first inquiry for the study.

### **3.3.2 Does host community and residents' support contribute to event sustainability?**

This is the second research question established for the study based on the findings from the previous literature. This finding provides foundation on identifying factors relating to how host community and residents' support towards event sustainability.

Host community or also known as local residents' behaviour has been identified as an important element for destination branding (Olin, 2008). This community support is the second main factor identified in Jago et al. (2003) conceptual model. Therefore, community support measured by three manifest variables which includes local residents' attitude, community participation as well as local hospitality. The local residents' support and participation in the particular event will indirectly affect the success of event operations; local residents' attitude towards the hosting of the event and tourists will leave an impression on the tourists itself. Accordingly, residents may have more positive views toward tourism if they perceive that their tourism exchanges bring individual benefits, but will have negative perceptions of tourism if they perceive these benefits to be outweighed by costs. In other words, expressed support for tourism is considered as a willingness to enter into an exchange (Jurowski et al., 1997). Therefore, host communities seeking to capitalize on events for attaining beneficial outcomes need to understand and leverage the patterns of relationships that facilitate collaboration.

According to Putrajaya Annual Report 2013, Putrajaya Flower and Garden Festival, is the hallmark event of Putrajaya and 2013 being 6<sup>th</sup> edition with a record of 865,971 visitors generating revenue of about RM 2 million in sales. Many stakeholders involved in this annual festival namely various government sectors, multi-million dollar corporations, landscape architects, florists, growers, associations, artists, and traders, students of all levels – from primary to tertiary, and our local communities and nature lovers. Karlsen and Brandstrom (2008) asserted that festivals have a very unique ability to assemble community, support a community's sense of place and identity, and stimulate authentic values and experiences for host communities. Hence, the second inquiry is to explore whether community and residents' (Local Residents' Attitude, Community Participation, and Local Hospitality Service) contribute to event sustainability.

### **3.3.3 Does the event quality affect event sustainability?**

This is the third research question established for the study based on the findings from the previous literature. This finding provides foundation on identifying factors relating to how event quality affects event sustainability.

The quality of an event was identified as having impacts on destination branding to some extent (Jago et al., 2003). This third latent variable for this study is therefore defined as the quality of event, measured by tourist experience (s), psychology comfort and perceived benefits by tourist. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) also agreed that a complete evaluation of a destination brand should also to include the quality of tourists' experience. Positive experiences with a quality event will leave tourists with various memories and generate good word of mouth publicity for the event itself as well as to the host destination. Service product

itself is intangible and cannot be tested before it is produced. In addition, several researchers such as Parasuraman, P.A., Zeithaml, V.A. & Berry, L.L. (1988), argued that understanding intangible service is very important. Thus, Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) suggested the six dimensions of service quality namely Reliability, Responsiveness, Security, Credibility, Communication, and Assurance.

However, Moon, Yong, Daniel, Jeoung, and Lee (2011) mentioned that tangibility refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, communications material, and other customers in the service facility. The tangible aspect of event quality can include the physical environment variables such as ambience (e.g. temperature, air quality, noise, and music), space (e.g. layout, equipment, and furnishings), and signage (e.g. style, de'cor, size). In view of the above reviews on event quality perspective, the third inquiry is to explore whether quality of event (Tourist Experience (s), Psychology Comfort, and Perceived Benefits (by Tourist) contribute to event sustainability.

### **Method for Collecting and Analysing Data**

This study is mainly use the quantitative research design which is descriptive analysis with a structured questionnaire as the tool for collecting data. Questionnaire will be developed based on the variables stipulated in the proposed study framework. The questionnaire divided into five main sections. The first section (A) to assess the fit between festival and the host city, section (B) will assess tourist perceptions of local support, section (C) will measure event quality perceived by tourist, section (D) will assess tourist perception of event and destination image, and section (E) will be the demographic of the respondent. The items in section A, B, C, D and E will be replicated and modified from Jago et al. (2003). From the study done by Jago et al. (2003), all indicator loadings exceeded the 0.7 level. The composite reliabilities of the constructs were all above 0.8 ranging from 0.81 to 0.88. Therefore, measurement scales for this study met the three criteria for convergent validity of the scales. The modification in term of wording will be made to suit with the present study.

### **Conclusion**

Since Putrajaya is renowned as a 'Garden City', the Flower and Garden Festival which serves to bring to realization the Government's aspirations in making Putrajaya a garden city. Hence, this study may indicate the festival's aims to cultivate the love and care for the environment and spread this knowledge to general public. In addition, the findings from this study should also provide theoretical implications with a provision of valuable information and insight on the sustainability of the special event.

From practical implication, the outcome of this study would provides essential perspective to the event organizer designing this special event for a better structure and cultural fit, enhancing community support, and improvising the quality of event, envisioned and managed for sustainability. . Effectively justifying the negative impacts and enlightening the positive impacts of this festival is not easy task (Buhalis, 2000). In addition, many festivals organizers are already making terrific strides in this direction, and there is a lot to be learned from their experiences and perspectives around sustainable event management (Meadows, 2008).

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