

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EVENTS ON THE
CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EVENTS ON THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA

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With the ever growing number of planned events around the world and the vast number of attendees, comes the potential to negatively impact the environment. The event industry is perfectly suited to reduce this environmental impact by incorporating sustainable practices into their special events. The purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast of California. This study was conducted through the online survey application Zoomerang.com. The results of this survey indicate that 80% of respondents understand the importance of sustainability and 15% were uncertain if sustainability is an important factor when planning a special event. This may be due to the fact that participants are not well informed on certain aspects of sustainability or that they do not pertain to their particular event. The aspects of sustainability that were considered most important by respondents were recycling and serving food from local farmers. Carbon offsetting was considered the least important aspect of sustainability. The findings indicate that most of the sustainable practices being incorporated by event planners on the Central Coast only meet an acceptable level of importance, which indicates that event planners are not using sustainable practices to their full potential.

Keywords: special events, sustainability, sustainable practices, environment

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Special events take place daily around the world, ranging from a small reception in a local community to mega events like the Olympic Games. Kilkenny (2006) states that, “at any given moment there are thousands of meetings and events going on with millions of attendees traveling to and from different locals throughout the world” (p. 75). The ever growing number of planned events and the vast number of attendees have the potential to negatively impact the environment. The event industry is perfectly suited to reduce this negative impact on the environment by incorporating sustainable practices into special events. Event planners bring together numerous vendors which can all be influenced to incorporate sustainable practices into their services. An environmentally responsible event can replace almost any aspect of a conventional event. Sustainable practices have become a trend in the event planning world. However, there is a difference between having good intentions and actually putting comprehensive sustainable practices into action. Evaluating events on the Central Coast is a starting place in determining whether sustainability is a consideration in this specific locale.

San Luis Obispo County is known for its many community events ranging from local farmers markets to large events such as food and wine festivals. Due to the increasing number of special events held on the Central Coast, it is essential for event planners to address the issue of sustainability when planning and executing an event. The process of setting sustainable practices that take into account environmental concerns

should be a priority within each stage of the planning and execution of an event. Incorporating sustainable practices into an event will not only reflect positively on an organization, but will be beneficial to the local community both economically and environmentally. This study attempted to determine whether sustainable practices are being incorporated into event planning on the Central Coast. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Elite, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, PsycINFO and Proquest. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: sustainable practices and special events.

Sustainable practices. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1987) provides one of the most widely recognized definitions of sustainability: “The term sustainability is used to describe a variety of methods that are implemented in an effort to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (para. 2). According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2011) “the issue of sustainability has emerged as a result of significant concerns about the unintended environmental, social, and economic consequences of rapid population growth, economic growth, and consumption

of our natural resources” (para. 3). Based on this definition, it is imperative that sustainability be a consideration when planning the millions of social gathering around the world. In the area of event planning there is currently a concerted effort to address the subject of sustainability and to establish guidelines for sustainability reporting.

Environmentally the concept of sustainability is based on the simple principle that everything needed for survival depends, either directly or indirectly on the natural environment (EPA, 2011). Improvement in the area of sustainability requires change from the grass roots level to massive global changes. It is important to examine the areas of concern regarding environmental issues related to sustainability. This encourages event planners to change their business models and operational practices to become more sustainable. Specific measurement tools and organizations are currently in place to offer assistance in identifying sustainable practices and offering certification.

The United States Green Building Council (2011), “sets a foundation for building owners and operators by identifying and implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations and maintenance solutions” (para.1). Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) offers certification to help transform the built environment to one that is more sustainable:

LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building, home or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at achieving high performance in key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, education, material selection and indoor environmental quality (para. 3).

In recent years the concept of alternative energy has become increasingly important due to the release of carbon dioxide into the earth's atmosphere. According to the Pros and Cons of Controversial Issues Organization (2012), alternative energy refers to energy sources that do not have undesired consequences. Examples of these sources are; biomass energy, wind energy, solar energy, geothermal energy, and hydroelectric energy (PCCIO). Solar power is the most abundant form of energy and is based on harnessing the sun's energy in two forms; heat and light. These are used to produce solar power through different processes. Wind power is a clean, efficient, low cost form of renewable energy that is being used globally. Biomass energy comes from plants and other biological materials that can be converted into other usable forms of energy like methane gas or transportation fuels. Geothermal energy includes geothermal heat pumps, electricity generation in a power plant, and district heating systems. Hydro-electric energy is one of the cleanest, most reliable, and cost effective forms of renewable energy. This energy comes from the force of falling water to generate hydroelectricity (PCCIO).

Supporting sustainability and being socially responsible requires being mindful of the environment and taking measures to preserve and protect resources. Everyday actions consume energy and produce carbon dioxide emissions. Driving cars, taking flights, heating homes and offices are examples, of these actions. Green Plus (2011) states: "Sustainability certifications are generally a third party assessment of products where the certifying organization evaluates the products against a number of specific agreed upon standards" (para.1). By buying products with these certifications organizations will be able to save money while improving environmental quality. For example, using ENERGY STAR certified computers, printers, break room refrigerators, shredders, and

other office electronics require less energy than those that are not certified products, which reduce company costs overall (Green Plus).

Carbon offsetting is a means of taking action in order to reduce carbon footprint. The Climatelab (2009) explains that, “the voluntary carbon offset market has grown rapidly in recent years, driven by companies that want to project a green image by offsetting emissions, and by consumers who want to offset emissions related to an event, a product, or a lifestyle” (para. 3). Carbon offsetting provides a mechanism to reduce green house emissions in the most cost-effective and economically-efficient manner (Climatelab). According to Elgin (2007), a growing number of organizations, corporations, cities, and individuals are seeking to protect the climate or at least claim bragging rights for protecting the climate. Rather than significantly cutting their own emissions of carbon dioxide, many are paying to have someone else limit air pollution or develop "renewable" energy sources. Human activities contribute to climate change by causing changes in the Earth's atmosphere. Therefore, individuals, businesses, and government organizations can take responsible steps to reduce emissions as much as possible and then offset the remaining unavoidable emissions (Elgin).

The EPA (2011) defines waste diversion as “the prevention and reduction of generated waste through source reduction, recycling, reusing, or composting” (para. 1). Waste diversion is an effort by residents and businesses in a community to reduce the amount of recyclable material being thrown away and ultimately wasted by disposal in a landfill. Many materials have uses or resources that can be recaptured through recycling. The purpose of waste diversion is to reduce the amount of waste created, reuse the waste we create, and recycle the waste we do not reuse. Waste diversion is critical to building a

green economy. This includes avoiding emission of pollutants and greenhouse gases and encouraging the development of innovative, new recycling technologies (EPA, 2011).

The GRACE Communication Foundation (2012) suggests that, “Sustainable agriculture is a way of raising food that is healthy for consumers and animals, does not harm the environment, is humane for workers, respects animals, provides a fair wage to the farmer, and supports and enhances rural communities” (para.1). Not everyone agrees with this definition, but it is nice to know that the federal government has signed a definition for sustainable agriculture into law. Gravitis and Suzuki (1999) cited Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1683, in the Proceedings of the International Conference on Agricultural Engineering as:

An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term, satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole (p. 9).

Hamprecht, Corsten, Noll, and Meier (2005) conclude that for the food industry, the depletion of useable farm land and a growing world population, demand controlling the sustainability of agriculture inputs to the industry. There are many reasons to consider sustainable food products. The concept of sustainability includes eating locally grown food which cuts down the length of time from when the food was harvested and when it is consumed (Hamprecht et al., 2005). In addition animals that are raised sustainably

support natural behaviors that factory farmed animals cannot, because of the inhumane conditions in which they are forced to live. The GRACE Communication Foundation (2012) states that, “On unsustainable farms thousands of animals excrete tons of waste every week. Millions of gallons of this untreated waste are often held in open-air lagoons and pollute the surrounding air, land, and water” (para. 3).

GRACE Communication Foundation (2012) explains that in many cases farmers label their products with terms such as, “cage free” or “natural” when in reality there is no strict set of rules established to measure these criteria. The United States Department of Agriculture is currently working on establishing a set of guidelines that farmers will have to adhere to in order to label their food sustainable (GRACE).

Special events and sustainability. Goldblatt (2005) states that “Every human society celebrates with ceremony and rituals to satisfy specific needs” (p. 6). Whether it is for a festival, reception, meeting, party, or convention, whenever individuals gather they have opportunities to make a positive difference on the environment. Event planners are the central figures in any event; they affect the choices and experiences of a variety of suppliers, facilities, caterers, sponsors, and attendees. Events use resources, send out emissions, and generate mountains of waste, yet are an integral part of life.

Greenprint Denver (2012) states that “greening” is about progress, not perfection when it comes to a special event. Greening is the process of becoming more aware of environmental considerations and making efforts to incorporate them into the event planning process. Considering sustainability in event planning provides the opportunity for continuous improvement (Greenprint Denver). Murphy (2010) states that attaining Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification can attract new

business from clients seeking to hold events at an environmentally friendly facility. Many facilities claim that they are green but have not met all the requirements that would define them as sustainable. LEED certification is one of the best ways to know that the venue has engaged in the process and continue to engage in sustainability practices.

Murphy (2010) also states that, “No venue would be considered green without an extensive recycling program” (p. 31). A venue should offer on-site recycling of paper, cardboard, plastic, glass, and metal. Ideally, a food compost collection program would be an additional plus to a venue. For example, in San Diego, California an organization has implemented a program for food composting. Food waste is put into composting trash cans, and then placed into a compactor which is taken to a compost facility. The facility donates all consumable food to local homeless shelters after their events (Murphy). The recycling process also includes reducing and reusing waste. For example, this may include the use of reusable linens, china, and cutlery, instead of non-renewable resources (Greenprint Denver, 2012). As important as it is to consider recycling, event planners should also make it easy for attendees to recycle by clearly marking recycling, compost, and trash receptacles with large and easy to read signs.

When considering energy conservation at a special event it is important to select venues that practice conservation and energy efficiency. Reducing electricity usage is an important element in creating a green venue. Another important issue in energy usage is heating and air conditioning units. Greenprint Denver (2012) explains that many buildings are being designed with environmental impact in mind and include the use of natural daylight, and efficient heating and cooling systems.

In order to create a sustainable event, one of the LEED requirements for food sustainability calls for purchasing 25% of the food served on site from local or organic sources. In order for food purchasing for events to be considered local, it must be within 100 miles of the venue (Murphy, 2010). Eating locally grown food can also protect the environment against global warming because it eliminates the need for transporting products to venues. Benjamin and Pirog (2003) of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture report: “The average fresh food item on our dinner table travels 1500 miles to get there” (p. 6). Although organic food may increase your food and beverage costs, local food in season may be comparable in price. Even when an organization does not choose the organic food option, small farms are less likely to use chemicals and pesticides which damage the environment (Greenprint Denver, 2012).

In the event planning process it is important to be mindful of water conservation, taking into consideration how well the facility is equipped to conserve water. In order to reduce the amount of water consumed at an event, “Systems can be replaced to make water efficiency a priority such as: low flow toilets in public restrooms, water efficient landscaping, water efficient irrigation systems, and energy efficiency in kitchens” (Greenprint Denver, 2012, p. 32). During an event it is important to minimize single use bottles of water by providing bulk water or refill stations. This will ensure that the number of plastic bottles that are usually sold at large events will be eliminated.

After all conservation methods have been exhausted there will still be carbon dioxide emissions to account for as a result of necessary event-related activities. Event planners should take the opportunity to calculate their carbon footprint ahead of time so they can find ways to cover the cost of carbon off-setting. For example, the Greenprint

Denver (2012) offers a carbon calculator for events. This tool calculates the amount of carbon dioxide emitted as a result of energy usage associated with an event. “It covers all aspects of an event: the energy used at the venue, travel of attendees, organizers and suppliers, the disposal of waste generated, and water consumed” (Greenprint Denver, p.16).

Summary. In every instance society can make changes that have a positive impact on the environment. Small changes by each individual can lead to huge steps in reducing a carbon footprint on the earth. Environmentally sustainable events seem to be growing in popularity as people become more socially responsible and concerned about maintaining a healthy environment. In event planning it’s important to realize that it’s not a simple process in terms of sustainability. There are many considerations when planning a sustainable event. A shared goal as a society should be to contribute sustainable solutions that improve experiences, consider the health and well-being of all participants, while protecting the earth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast of California.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Are companies on the Central Coast of California who are holding events using sustainability as a guide when planning their special events?

2. How important is sustainability when planning a special event?
3. Is the financial impact of implementing sustainability into a special event important?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on sustainability was gathered from event planners organizing special events on the Central Coast of California.
2. Sustainability best practices list including facility choice, purchase responsibility, reduce, reuse, recycle concept, food choice, energy efficiency, water conservation, and transportation were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during the spring of 2012.
4. Information for this study was gathered using an online questionnaire.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. The instrument used in the study was not tested for validity of reliability.
2. The study included a small sample size.
3. The collection of data were altered in order to reach all respondents.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that event planners would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
2. It was assumed that the email sent to each event planner was responded to by the event planner.
3. It was assumed that the respondents understood the concept of sustainability.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Carbon offsetting. “allow individuals and organizations to voluntarily counteract or compensate for their own greenhouse gas emissions by funding projects that reduce green house gas emissions in sectors not required to reduce their emissions” (Climatelab, 2009, para.1).

Geothermal energy. energy derived from the heat in the interior of the earth (Pros and Cons of Controversial Issues, 2012)

Greenhouse gases. “A greenhouse gas (GHG) is a gas that absorbs and releases radiation within our atmosphere” (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2011, para. 2).

Hydroelectric energy. electricity produced by water power

Locally grown. must be within 100 miles of the venue

Solar energy. the radiant energy emitted by the sun.

Special event. something that takes place; an occurrence

Sustainability. “is used to describe a variety of methods that are implemented in an effort to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1987, para. 2).

Sustainable. means using methods, systems and materials that won't deplete resources or harm natural cycles

Waste diversion. the process of diverting waste from landfill

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast of California. This chapter includes the description of subjects, description of instruments, description of procedures, and the method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

The subjects of this study were representatives of companies who are responsible for planning a variety of events held on the Central Coast of California. Subjects were both male and female event planners of various ages that represent events held in the following locations: Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo, Avila Beach, Pismo Beach, Solvang, Cambria, Morro Bay, and Cayucos. The subjects qualified for this study because they were the central figures in the event planning process and responsible for making the decisions involved in planning the various events. The sampling method used was purposive sampling. Thirty-five event planners were selected as respondents based on the calendar of annual events held on the Central Coast of California.

Description of Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a 26-item online questionnaire developed by the researcher and administered through Zoomerang, an online survey generator. This survey included two demographic questions, 24 5-point, Likert-type scale items

developed to assess the level of importance of the various aspects of sustainability (see Appendix A). These aspects included: venue selection and location, food and recycling, water conservation, resource recovery, energy conservation, transportation, financial impact, and using sustainability as a guide when planning a special event. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for subjects to rate the different areas of sustainability (from 1= not at all important to 5= very important).

A field-test was given to four Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration students. These subjects completed the questionnaire as though they were the event planners. Changes to the instrument were made based on feedback and evaluation from the subjects who participated in the field test. An informed consent letter was attached to the email sent out with the online questionnaire (see Appendix B). The letter detailed the amount of time participants would need to complete the questionnaire, their option to refrain from participating in the survey, assurance of anonymity, and contact information if participants wanted to contact the researcher about the survey. The survey was submitted to and approved by the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee before administration to the respondents of the survey.

Description of Procedures

Following approval for the online questionnaire, the researcher entered the survey questions into the online questionnaire database Zoomerang.com. The researcher acquired a list of the major events held on the Central Coast from the Regional Calendar of Events provided by the San Luis Obispo County Visitors and Conference Bureau. The researcher then investigated these events and narrowed the list of subjects to those that

were best suited to take the survey. After the events were selected by the researcher, a link to the online questionnaire was sent to the event planners that were responsible for planning these events. On April 30th, 2012 the researcher distributed the questionnaire through electronic email with the informed consent letter as an attachment. Participants were asked to respond within 2 weeks after receiving the initial email. In the 2nd week a follow-up email was sent to all respondents thanking them for their participation and reminding those who had not completed the questionnaire to do so. Participants confirmed that they read the letter by moving forward to the first question in the questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were collected using an online questionnaire. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to tabulate and analyze the data collected. The questionnaire was designed to answer three research questions: if the company was using sustainability as a guide when planning their events, how important sustainability is when planning their special event, and the financial impact of implementing sustainability into an event. The design of the questionnaire incorporated two initial questions used only to identify the positions of the respondents and the organizations they represented. The remainder of the questions were formulated to use a 5-point Likert type scale to determine the level of importance for specific areas of sustainability. The data collected from the 5-point scale were analyzed using measures of central tendency (i.e., mean and standard deviation). The function of the 5-point Likert-scale was to determine an acceptable level of importance. Mean scores of 3.5 and above indicated an acceptable level of importance.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast of California. The study was conducted through the online survey application Zoomerang.com from April 30, 2012 to May 14, 2012. Of the 35 event planners on the Central Coast who were contacted to participate in the study, 20 event planners completed the survey (response rate= 57%).

Subject Demographics

Demographics measured included the subject's organization and position. The subjects of this study were representatives of companies who are responsible for planning a variety of events held on the Central Coast of California. The top two positions represented were Coordinator (n = 10, 50%), and Director (n = 4, 20%). See Table 1 for the frequency and percentage of all positions.

Table 1
Position According to Frequency and Percentage

Position	<i>f</i>	%
Coordinator	10	50
Director	4	20
Manager	2	10
Professor	2	10
CEO	1	5

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%

Venue Selection and Location

The subjects rated the level of importance of various aspects of sustainability. Levels of importance were analyzed by mean scores on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 indicating not at all important and 5 indicating very important. Participants reported that recycling onsite was the most important item (mean = 4.15, SD = 0.81) and offering carbon offsets was the least important item (mean = 2.45, SD = 1.32). The mean scores and standard deviations for each variable have been included in Table 2.

Table 2
Venue Selection and Location Importance According to Mean Score

Venue Selection and Location	Mean	SD
Reduce and Reuse Waste	4.00	1.12
Recycle Onsite	4.15	0.81
Conserve Water	3.90	1.12
Offer Carbon Offsets	2.45	1.32
Promote Energy Efficiency	3.30	1.34

Food and Recycling

The participants rated their level of importance in regards to food and recycling. Levels of importance were also analyzed used a 5-point importance scale. Participants reported that offering vegan/vegetarian options was the most important item (mean = 4.15, SD = 0.81) and increasing the amount of recycling receptacles onsite was the least important item (mean = 2.45, SD = 1.32). The mean scores and standard deviations for each variable have been included in Table 3.

Table 3
Food and Recycling Importance According to Mean and Standard Deviation

Food and Recycling	Mean	SD
Serve Food from Local Vendors	4.00	1.12
Vegan/Vegetarian Options	4.15	0.81
Condiments in Bulk	3.90	1.12
Increase Recycling Receptacles Onsite	2.45	1.32
Ask Vendors to Reduce Packaging	3.30	1.34

Water Conservation

The importance of water conservation was also analyzed. Participants reported that it was more important to offer bulk water dispensers and pitchers of water with glassware (mean = 3.70, SD = 1.13) than to offer single serving water bottles (mean = 3.35, SD = 1.23).

Resource Recovery

Resource recovery was measured by asking participants to rate their level of importance. Participants reported that reusing signage was the most important item (mean = 3.75, SD = 1.21) and requiring vendors to follow the organizations sustainable guidelines was the least important item (mean = 3.10, SD = 1.45). The mean scores and standard deviations for each variable have been included in Table 4.

Table 4

Resource Recovery Importance According to Mean and Standard Deviation

Resource Recovery	Mean	SD
Partnerships with Waste Haulers	3.55	1.23
Electronic Media for Promotion	3.68	1.16
Reuse, Recycle, Compost Food/Bev	3.40	1.39
Require Vendors to Follow Guidelines	3.10	1.45
Reuse Signage	3.75	1.21

Energy Conservation

Regarding energy conservation, levels of importance were analyzed. The utilization of natural light instead of indoor lighting (mean=3.25, SD=0.97) was rated the most important. Using cleaner burning fuels for any trucks, buses, or generators resulted in a mean score of 2.35, and offering opportunities to calculate and offset carbon was the least important to respondents (mean=2.00, SD=1.08).

Transportation

Participants rated their level of importance regarding transportation. Respondents reported that publicizing bus and shuttle options for attendees had a score of 3.75 (SD=1.37), and encouraging participants to carpool, walk, or bike also had a score of 3.75 (SD=1.29).

Financial Impact of Sustainability

When participants were asked if the financial impact of implementing sustainable practices into an event was an important consideration 14 (70%) said yes, 2 (10%) said

no, and 4 (20%) said they were uncertain. When participants were asked if it was important to use sustainability as a guide when planning a special event 16 (80%) said yes, 1 (5%) said no, and 3 (15%) said they were uncertain.

Summary

The results presented in this chapter indicate that event planners on the Central Coast think that implementing sustainable practices when planning an event is an important consideration. Most of the subjects consider recycling onsite to be the most important sustainable practice and offering opportunities to calculate and offset carbon imprints the least important. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

During the past few decades special events have become increasingly popular. Implementing sustainable practices into event planning is an important consideration when planning and executing a special event. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, recommendations, and future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast of California. With the ever growing number of special events that happen around the world, the event industry has the potential to make a positive impact in the area of sustainability. Due to the frequency of annual events that are held on the Central Coast, it is essential that event planners address the issue of sustainability. The trend of the future is to implement specific measurement tools to offer assistance in identifying and implementing sustainable practices.

This study was conducted utilizing an online survey, which was created on Zoomerang.com. The population included event planners from the Central Coast of California. The data were collected during April and May of 2012 and included responses from 20 subjects.

The findings indicate that the various aspects of sustainability were important to the subjects when planning and executing an event. However, there were certain aspects

of sustainability that participants thought were less important than others. The two aspects of sustainability that were considered most important by respondents were recycling which had a mean score of 4.15 and serving food from local farmers which had a mean score of 4.0. The issue of carbon offsetting which had a mean score of 2.45 was considered the least important aspect of sustainability for event planners on the Central Coast.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the subjects think that sustainability is important. The practices that the event planners think are most important could be considered as “well known” methods of sustainability and relatively easy to achieve. This includes practices such as: water conservation and recycling. The participants rate more complicated aspects of sustainability such as: carbon offsetting and the use of cleaner burning fuels, as less important. This may be due to the fact that the participants are not well informed on these aspects of sustainability or that they do not pertain to their particular event.

The results indicate that the subjects have not taken the issue of sustainability to a very sophisticated level. Large organizations such as Green Print Denver develop programs that implement a large number of sustainable practices into their events. In these cases sustainability is a priority therefore the event planners incorporate sustainable practices into every aspect of the event planning process including the use of vendors who also adhere to sustainable guidelines (Green Print, 2012). Certification programs are being developed to encourage event planners to meet guidelines in order to attain certification as a green venue. An example of an existing program is LEED certification.

LEED certification provides independent, third party verification to help transform the built environment to one that is more sustainable. Obtaining LEED certification indicates that a company has covered all identified areas of sustainability (Murphy, 2010). Events on the Central Coast could move towards implementing more sustainable practices into their events if they used guidelines established for certification.

There are several limitations present in this study. The Central Coast consists of relatively small communities and many of the events are covered by one organization for example; the Pismo Beach Chamber of Commerce. The researcher did not anticipate the number of event planners that are responsible for multiple events therefore it reduced the sample size significantly. In order to include all events on the Central Coast it would have been necessary for a single event planner to take the same survey multiple times. Therefore, the survey was distributed to small event organizers for events such as: winery functions, local farmers markets, and events on the Cal Poly campus. In order to generalize data to the larger population, there needs to be an increase in sample size and random probability sampling.

The findings show that although these event planners on the Central Coast understand the importance of sustainability, they still have a long way to go in achieving sustainability. Based on the results the majority of these event planners indicate that they understand the importance of using sustainability as a guideline when planning an event, however they also indicate that there is concern for the financial impact that may result when implementing sustainable practices. It is necessary to educate event planners about the variety of sustainable practices that can be incorporated into an event without

increasing costs, and how important it is to use sustainability as a guide when building a green foundation.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The subjects think that using sustainability as a guide when planning a special event is an important consideration.
2. Practices rated high in importance when planning a special event were: recycling onsite, serving food from local farmers, reusing signage, and encouraging attendees to carpool, bike, or use public transportation.
3. Event planners indicated that it is important to consider the financial impact that may result when implementing sustainable practices into their events.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The County of San Luis Obispo should clearly establish and enforce guidelines that promote using sustainability as a guide when planning special events.
2. The County of San Luis Obispo should offer educational programs to increase understanding of sustainable event planning and financial considerations.
3. Event planners should consider using a wider range of sustainable practices when planning events.

4. Future research should examine specific sustainable practices that are currently being employed in the event planning process on the Central Coast of California.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Sustainability Questionnaire

Please take a few moments to complete this questionnaire. Your responses are strictly confidential and your participation is voluntary.

What organization do you work for? _____

What is your position? _____

Please indicate your opinion of the importance of each of the following aspects of sustainability at your event, using the rating scale provided.

A. Venue Selection & Location

	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
1. Reduce and reuse waste	1	2	3	4	5
2. Recycle onsite	1	2	3	4	5
3. Conserve water	1	2	3	4	5
4. Offer carbon offsets	1	2	3	4	5
5. Promote energy efficiency	1	2	3	4	5

B. Food and Recycling

	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
1. Serving food from local farmers and producers	1	2	3	4	5
2. Offer vegan/vegetarian options	1	2	3	4	5
3. Condiments, sauces, and spreads served in bulk rather than individual packages	1	2	3	4	5
4. Increase the number of recycling receptacles onsite	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ask vendors to reduce packaging	1	2	3	4	5

C. Water Conservation

	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
1. Offer bulk water dispensers or pitchers of water with glassware	1	2	3	4	5
2. Avoid using water bottles	1	2	3	4	5

D. Resource Recovery

	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
1. Establish partnerships with waste haulers	1	2	3	4	5
2. Use electronic or sustainable media for event promotion and registration	1	2	3	4	5
3. Reuse, recycle, or compost food and beverage products	1	2	3	4	5
4. Require vendors to follow your sustainable guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
5. Reuse signage	1	2	3	4	5

E. Energy Conservation

	Not at all Important 1	Not Very Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Important 4	Very Important 5
1. Offer opportunities to calculate and offset carbon					
2. Use cleaner-burning fuels for any trucks, buses, or generator	1	2	3	4	5
3. Utilize natural light instead of indoor lighting	1	2	3	4	5

F. Transportation

	Not at all Important 1	Not Very Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Important 4	Very Important 5
1. Publicize bus and shuttle options for attendees					
2. Encourage carpooling, biking, and walking	1	2	3	4	5

G. Financial Impact

	Not at all Important 1	Not Very Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Important 4	Very Important 5
1. Is the financial impact of implementing sustainable practices into an event an important consideration when planning an event					

H. Sustainable Guide

	Not at all Important 1	Not Very Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Important 4	Very Important 5
1. Do you think it is important to use sustainability as a guide when planning a special event					

Appendix B
Informed Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN
AN EVALUATION OF SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EVENTS
ON THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA

A research project on sustainability in special events held on the Central Coast is being conducted by Cara Richards in the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo under the direct supervision of Dr. Bill Hendricks. The purpose of the study is to assess the use of sustainable practices by event planners on the Central Coast.

You are being asked to take part in this study by responding to a short survey devised to assess sustainability practices used by event planners on the Central Coast. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. There are no possible risks associated with your participation in this study.

Your anonymity will be maintained. Responses will not be connected to individual respondents. Potential benefits associated with the study include heightened awareness of sustainable practices to event planners on the Central Coast.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Cara Richards at cricha04@calpoly.edu. If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at (805) 756-1508, sopava@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by moving on to the first question in the survey. Please keep one copy of this form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.