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Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia
a Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából
International Scientific Conference
on the Occasion of the Hungarian Science Festival

Sopron, 2025. november 6.
6 November 2025, Sopron

FEJLŐDÉSI PÁLYÁK ÉS ÚJ TÖRÉSVONALAK A FENNTARTHATÓSÁGI ÁTMENET IDŐSZAKÁBAN

DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORIES AND NEW DIVIDES IN TIMES OF SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

Szerkesztők / Editors:
RESPERGER Richárd, SZÉLES Zsuzsanna, TÓTH Balázs István

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Essential Steps in Sustainable Corporate Event Management

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Abstract:
Sustainable corporate events require strategic resource optimization, vital not only for environmental protection but also for economic and reputational outcomes. Key practices include deliberate planning, engaging local suppliers, adopting digital solutions, and optimizing waste management. Corporate events are not solely designed for entertainment; they carry an ethical imperative for the hosting entity to utilize resources responsibly, avoiding abusive consumption and rather embracing opportunities that foster positive social and environmental impact. A skilled professional is essential, who understands organizational processes, negotiates effectively and oversees compliance, budgeting and execution. This role centralizes efforts toward environmental stewardship and stakeholder education. The modern event organizer is not just a coordinator but a credible representative of the company's environmental mission. This study examines material and energy usage throughout event execution, from procurement to waste processing. Drawing on current literature, it outlines strategic considerations for planning environmentally conscious events and highlights best practices in sustainable event management. As a result, the role of the event organizer transcends conventional logistical coordination, encompassing functions as educator, strategic collaborator, and executor of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

Keywords: sustainability, green event management, circular economy, environmental protection
JEL Codes: Q01, Q53, Q56, O13, P41

1. Introduction

After careful consideration of the numerous definitions of "event", I consider the following the best matching one from the perspective of the research: "an occasional, large-scale gathering, a periodic assembly organized in a prearranged format" (Arany, 2002). According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2009), a "green event" is one that is designed, organized, and implemented in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts and leaves a positive legacy for the audience. The fundamental principle of sustainability dictates that consumption should be limited to levels that do not adversely affect future resource availability.

Wang (2017) offers a more pragmatic interpretation, suggesting that the term "green event" refers to an event that adheres to sustainable principles or incorporates green strategies into its planning, management, and operation. Furthermore, sustainability encompasses not only environmental concerns but also the dimensions of social, cultural, and economic sustainable development.

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Corporate events can cause considerable environmental pressure if not properly planned. This study focuses on external events organized for partners and clients (e.g., conferences, exhibitions), as well as internal events (e.g., family days, factory open days) intended for employee engagement. The event organizer plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the materials, energy, and services utilized during the event are employed in an optimal and environmentally conscious manner. The objective of this study is to explore the possibilities for optimizing these resources in the context of sustainable event planning, with particular emphasis on the responsibilities of the event organizer.

The early 2000s saw the emergence of the first recognized guidelines concerning sustainable events. However, in the past five years, research papers in this domain have predominantly focused on the environmental aspects of festivals and sport events. Numerous agencies have published informational and promotional materials offering a wealth of practical advice to companies on implementing green events, thereby fostering environmental awareness and encouraging the development of sustainable consumer behavior.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of sustainable event management have been examined by numerous scholars. According to Jones (2018), the implementation of green events is not merely a technical issue but a strategic decision that reflects the core values of the organization. The 2025 study by the Business Council for Sustainable Development in Hungary (BCSDH) emphasizes that the greatest challenge in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions lies in technological and financial constraints.

The application of the 5R model (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle) in event planning offers a practical framework for minimizing material consumption (HighVibes, 2024). Employing professionals who are familiar with environmental regulations and the ISO 20121 standard facilitates proper execution (Jones, 2018). However, due to the high costs associated with certification, only a handful of companies in Hungary currently possess this accreditation. It is essential that employee communication also encompasses the company's sustainability initiatives. For instance, a family day presents an excellent opportunity to demonstrate recycling practices, while exhibitions allow the company to build trust through environmentally conscious branding. Szeberényi's (2023) research highlights that Generation Z is particularly receptive to sustainable solutions, underscoring the importance of educational efforts in green event contexts targeted at this demographic.

Companies with high levels of production-related pollution must emphasize their compensatory measures, sustainability commitments, and tangible environmental actions during networking events (Jones, 2018). The event organizer bears significant responsibility for ensuring that the event concept is genuinely infused with environmentally friendly solutions. Sustainability should not remain theoretical but must be translated into tangible practices. The use of renewable energy sources, optimization of water and thermal energy, and strategic procurement can reduce operational expenditures (Bognár, 2016).

An excellent sustainability and communications expert possesses a comprehensive understanding of the company's goals and the implementation process. Ideally, such expertise can influence participant attitudes and provide knowledge applicable in their personal lives (Bodnár, 2016).

The limitations of natural resources pose a significant risk to both the economy and everyday life. Biological elements are extracted from nature, utilized, and within the framework of a circular economy returned to the environment as biological components of waste. Sustainability efforts should begin at the early stages of planning by optimizing procurement sources. If participant numbers are accurately captured through registration, food portions and the associated waste can be effectively reduced.

2.1. Planning Phase

The focus of this research is on corporate events, whose objectives must consistently align with the company's strategic goals and messaging (Dér, 2013). Once a company has defined the purpose of an event, it becomes clear to what extent environmental considerations can be integrated. As *Figure 1* illustrates it, the initial step involves formulating a Vision, which articulates the overarching goal, what the organization aims to achieve. The Mission then outlines the pathway toward that goal. Values establish the foundational principles that support environmentally conscious actions. Policies provide specific guidance on permissible actions and practices to be avoided. Targets quantify the intended outcomes, enabling assessment of goal attainment. The Action Plan is a critical component of implementation, detailing the steps required to achieve the objectives. Closely related is the Strategy, which defines the tools and methods necessary for execution, including documentation systems and reporting formats (Jones, 2018).

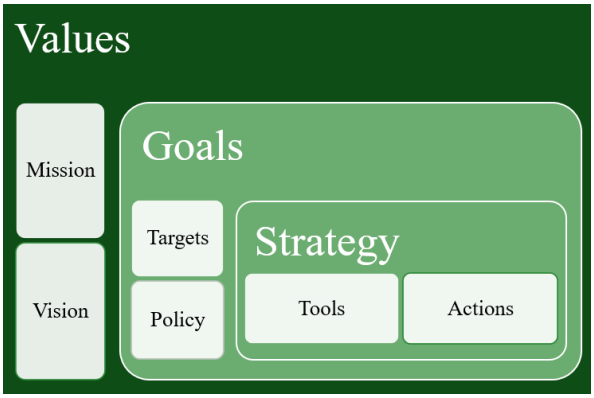

Figure 1: Foundation principles
Source: Own illustration

The event planner is responsible for designing the event in accordance with the defined goals, mission, and values. Collaborating with experienced agencies and suppliers increases the likelihood of offering diverse programs, incorporating environmental innovations, and minimizing errors (Kitchin et al. 2021). In Hungary, only a few agencies specialize in this field, although many are familiar with the fundamentals of sustainable solutions.

2.2. Venue

Conferences are typically held across multiple large halls and are often accompanied by exhibition spaces. At venue selection accessibility, energy efficiency, and the site's sustainability credentials must be considered. Environmentally friendly venue choices should prioritize proximity to public transportation and the availability of charging stations for electric vehicles and scooters (Jones, 2018). It is essential to evaluate water and energy consumption measures and waste management processes. Although window ventilation is often restricted, natural airflow significantly reduces energy usage. Rooms with natural lighting help lower electricity costs associated with artificial illumination. Given that most venues operate with built-in heating and cooling systems, it is crucial to ensure that temperature settings can be optimized on demand without requiring excessive energy surges (Jones, 2018). Natural light and ventilation contribute to reduced energy consumption.

The company and the agency must jointly review the necessary steps to reduce energy and water usage and prevent unnecessary environmental burdens. An increasing number of event venues possess environmental certifications. A conscientious organizer will only contract suppliers who can demonstrate measurable results, a robust knowledge base, auditing systems, and effective implementation (Bodnár, 2016).

Attention must also be given to the work of support staff. Cleaners, hostesses, and technicians may not be in the spotlight, but their attitude reflects on the company, making their role significant (Varga, 2017). Training hostesses is essential; moreover, involving a few employees in promoting the mission and visibly supporting the event's success can yield more impactful results (Jones, 2018).

2.3. Travel

Identifying a venue that aligns with the event's objectives can be a significant challenge, particularly when the location is far from the company's headquarters. In such cases, organizing transportation becomes equally complex. Traveling to international conferences leaves a substantial carbon footprint. According to ClimateTrade (2023), travel accounts for approximately 70–90% of the total carbon emissions associated with event organization. It is therefore reasonable to aim for attendee transportation via vehicles with minimal pollutant emissions. The use of organized shuttle buses and electric car-sharing systems can significantly improve sustainability outcomes.

Carbon footprint calculations require meticulous attention. For instance, replacing gasoline-powered vehicles with electric cars may reduce emissions, but the origin of the electricity used for charging must also be assessed. Moreover, the issue of battery waste management remains unresolved (Pogátsa, 2023).

Resources for calculating carbon emissions are available on the website of the Hungarian Association for Sustainable Economies (Követ) and in the European Green Office Handbook. The onboard:earth application also assists in measuring CO_2 emissions. Globally, an increasing number of systems are emerging to help companies calculate carbon footprints across various operational domains.

While the experiential value of in-person events cannot be compared to webinars, research from the University of Sopron reveals that physical attendance significantly increases environmental impact due to travel. Their study found that a one-day in-person event would require 281 oak trees over 20 years to offset its CO_2 emissions, whereas an online event would require only one (Polgár & Elekné, 2023).

During registration, it is advisable to inquire about attendees' travel methods. Promoting organized buses or car-sharing services can substantially reduce the event's carbon footprint. If the company communicates the importance of sustainable travel across multiple channels, it can expect greater cooperation from participants, who may prioritize public transportation.

A sustainable event can only be realized through an excellent communication strategy. After each event, a feedback questionnaire should be distributed to attendees to collect both positive and negative experiences. This provides a valuable foundation for improving the planning and execution of future events (Jones, 2018).

2.4. Catering

Today's event themes offer numerous opportunities to create memorable experiences. The quality of food served is a critical determinant of an event's success. Péter Varga's book, *Rendezvényatlasz (Event Atlas)*, provides excellent ideas in this regard. Whether it involves a popcorn bar, a mixer show, or edible flowers, all serve the purpose of leaving attendees with positive impressions (Varga, 2020).

In internal corporate events, lunch often plays a central role. The timing and venue characteristics primarily determine the type of catering, although some events place gastronomic experiences at the forefront. As with other aspects, the event's objective dictates the format. A sports event, conference, or Christmas party must meet vastly different needs. Active events call for small bites, while formal gatherings expect seated dinners. Congresses typically offer

pastries and buffet-style lunches. Although this phase tends to be the most cost-intensive, it also provides the greatest opportunity to showcase sustainability efforts.

Porcelain tableware and metal cutlery are ideal for seated meals. While these elevate costs, they represent one of the most environmentally responsible choices alongside elegance. Conferences often feature buffet-style lunches with reusable plates. However, in many other cases, disposable paper or plastic cups and plates are used, an irresponsible choice that generates substantial waste. This is particularly harmful in Hungary, where most plastic waste cannot be recycled. Event planning must consider every step from procurement to waste disposal through the lens of sustainability (Jones, 2018).

Using seasonal, locally sourced ingredients and offering meat-free options can yield significant environmental savings. Responsible companies assess the energy consumption of catering facilities both during idle periods and throughout the event, including preparation time (Wilberforce, 2011). Venues unable to provide accurate data should be reconsidered. Carbon footprint calculations also extend to food procurement, including meat content and transportation distances.

Catering providers have multiple avenues to support sustainability goals. Their practices should be grounded in alternative energy use and energy efficiency. Moreover, collaboration with local suppliers significantly reduces transportation time and cost, thereby lowering emissions. For example, instead of serving fruit salads with mango and banana in winter, domestic peach compote is a more sustainable alternative. Engaging local vendors shortens delivery times and fosters sustainable social processes (HighVibes, 2024).

Meat production is one of the most harmful contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, which many seek to mitigate through vegetarian diets. While this is often valid, lifecycle assessments of plant-based products sometimes reveal that locally sourced chicken may have a lower carbon footprint than imported smoked tofu.

2.5. Technological Solutions

Beyond the careless procurement of food, numerous other environmentally unfriendly practices persist. At external events, networking often involves the exchange of business cards, gifts, flyers, brochures, and other printed materials. These should be digitalized wherever possible. Registration can be conducted online, contact details exchanged via email, websites accessed through QR codes, and coupon codes used as substitutes for physical items (Dominus et al., 2022). Given that nearly everyone carries a smartphone, even a family day event can be rendered entirely paperless.

Organizers must not overlook the team-building potential of shared activities. Attendees can generate electricity using bicycles, participate in collective litter-picking, or collect refundable bottles for charitable organizations. These types of CSR activities serve as an authentic representation of the company's environmental mission.

At internal events, printed promotional materials are generally unnecessary. However, directional signage and program booklets remain more cost-effective than placing tablets or monitor-sized digital displays at every corner. These displays are often provided by the venue and can be reused multiple times, making them a worthwhile investment (Jones, 2018). Moreover, their energy consumption typically results in a lower carbon footprint compared to the production and disposal of paper.

2.6. Waste Management

Since the 1950s, waste generation has increased dramatically, prompting the emergence of the 3R concept: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. For companies aiming to operate sustainably within a circular economy, the 5R framework (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle) should be seriously considered. The HighVibes agency has developed a valuable presentation offering

practical recommendations for implementing green events from this perspective (HighVibes, 2024).

A major challenge of the 21st century is ensuring that materials used in events are inherently compostable. Items such as cups and plates made from PLA (polylactic acid), a plant-based bioplastic derived from corn starch, are marketed as biodegradable. However, effective composting of these materials requires industrial conditions and approximately 12 weeks to decompose (HighVibes, 2024). The carbon footprint of this process remains a subject of ongoing debate.

Procurement must also account for the quantity and packaging of goods, whether food, gifts, or furniture, as excessive packaging often becomes waste shortly after delivery. It is essential to reassess the necessity, avoidability, and potential for reuse of such materials.

Waste collection is frequently neglected due to the high costs associated with sorting, transportation, and processing. If the venue does not offer these services, only highly committed companies are willing to bear the expense of hiring external partners for waste management.

In cases where specialty foods, often expensive, remain unconsumed, it is advisable to offer them to staff members after the event. During the debriefing session, this gesture can serve as a form of appreciation and contribute to a more positive atmosphere for subsequent programs. This practice also effectively reduces food waste.

The Hungarian Food Bank Association accepts surplus cooked meals in hygienic packaging and distributes them to those in need. Although well-organized events typically generate minimal leftover portions, this initiative presents an excellent CSR opportunity for restaurants to support individuals who may not otherwise have access to quality meals. However, few establishments are able to meet the strict requirements set by the Food Bank (Jones, 2018).

2.7. Stakeholder education

The development of a stakeholder map is a foundational analytical tool for identifying and categorizing individuals and groups based on their roles, influence, and responsibilities within the organizational ecosystem. This mapping facilitates targeted communication strategies and ensures that each stakeholder's expectations and contributions are aligned with the overarching objectives of the initiative (Khaw-ngern et al., 2021).

At the executive level, it is imperative to articulate a clear and compelling mission statement that emphasizes the organization's commitment to environmental sustainability. This strategic directive should be embedded within the corporate vision and serve as a guiding principle for decision-making and resource allocation.

Effective internal communication is critical to disseminating core environmental values across all levels of the organization. It ensures that employees and external participants possess a coherent understanding of the sustainability goals and the behavioral or operational changes required to achieve them. This process should leverage both formal channels (e.g., policy documents, training sessions) and informal mechanisms (e.g., peer discussions, visual cues) to reinforce the message.

In the context of corporate events, the event manager assumes a pivotal role as the conduct for organizational messaging. Their responsibilities extend beyond logistical coordination to include the strategic deployment of communication tools, such as signage, digital media, and interactive experiences, to embed sustainability themes throughout the event lifecycle (Jones, 2018).

Pre-event communication should encompass a comprehensive environmental strategy, outlining specific targets, implementation pathways, and anticipated outcomes. This phase is essential for cultivating a shared mental model among stakeholders, thereby enhancing collective commitment and facilitating smoother execution of sustainability measures.

3. Conclusions

The purpose of an event extends beyond entertainment; it is the company's responsibility to ensure that its resources are not exploited selfishly, but rather utilized in ways that create a positive impact on society and the environment. Every event requires a competent professional who understands the organizational process, negotiates effectively, monitors regulations, tasks, budgets, and implementation, and translates executive objectives into actionable plans for suppliers while prioritizing successful execution. This individual also oversees performance measurement and evaluation, and is responsible for collecting feedback to inform future improvements. The event organizer plays a central role in all activities aimed at environmental protection and participant education.

In the implementation of sustainable corporate events, resource optimization is not only an environmental imperative but also a key factor in economic efficiency and corporate reputation. The role of the event organizer extends beyond logistical coordination, they serve as educator, strategic partner, and CSR facilitator. Conscious planning, engagement of local suppliers, adoption of digital solutions, and optimization of waste management all contribute to achieving sustainability goals. Their responsibilities include stakeholder education, resource optimization, supplier negotiation, and the integration of circular economy principles into procurement, catering, transportation, and waste management systems.

These competencies collectively empower the green event manager to serve as a strategic facilitator of sustainability, ensuring that corporate events are not only operationally successful but also environmentally responsible and socially impactful. The event organizer of the future is not merely responsible for executing programs, but also serves as an authentic representative of the company's environmental mission.

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