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## Tomorrow's Champions Of Sustainability: How Everyday Leaders Can Harness Grass Roots Momentum to Advance Adoption of Ecologically Sound Practices in Sport and Event Management

Dorene Ciletti

*Duquesne University*, [ciletti@duq.edu](mailto:ciletti@duq.edu)

John M. Lanasa

*Duquesne University*, [Lanasa@duq.edu](mailto:Lanasa@duq.edu)

Diane P. Ramos

*Duquesne University*, [ramos@duq.edu](mailto:ramos@duq.edu)

Richard E. Mathisen

*Kennesaw State University*, [rmathise@kennesaw.edu](mailto:rmathise@kennesaw.edu)

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## Tomorrow's Champions Of Sustainability: How Everyday Leaders Can Harness Grass Roots Momentum to Advance Adoption of Ecologically Sound Practices in Sport and Event Management

Dorene Ciletti, John Lanasa, Diane Ramos and Richard E. Mathisen

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### AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dorene Ciletti  
Duquesne University  
[ciletti@duq.edu](mailto:ciletti@duq.edu)

John Lanasa  
Duquesne University  
[lanasa@duq.edu](mailto:lanasa@duq.edu)

Diane Ramos  
Duquesne University  
[ramos@duq.edu](mailto:ramos@duq.edu)

Richard E. Mathisen  
Kennesaw State University  
[rmathise@kennesaw.edu](mailto:rmathise@kennesaw.edu)

### ABSTRACT

For more than a decade, we have appealed to corporations to consider sustainability. Leading companies have enjoyed positive media attention, improved bottom line profits and enhanced competitiveness through environmental management and social initiatives. Sustainability in the broader sense has become everyone's job, and the momentum crosses age groups and economic strata. This paper focuses on the event organizer as ordinary leader, inspiring an engaged, accessible audience toward sustainability, and offers rationale for promoting socially and environmentally responsible event management. With a captive audience, ordinary leaders have an opportunity to model socially and environmentally responsible practices through effective education, communication, metrics and follow-up.

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### INTRODUCTION

Who is responsible for reducing carbon footprints? For preserving non-renewable resources? For curbing global warming? For addressing working and living conditions among the world's less fortunate? A quick review of Fortune 100 company web sites would suggest that large corporations are eager to take credit for their contributions; nearly 90% posted information about the greenness of their products or services or practices in 2008. Governments, universities and not-for profit organizations are also publishing sustainability reports that tout eco-friendly practices and facilities. At the grass roots level, public sentiment for environmental conservation has shifted from liberals and elitists to every age group and socio-economic level (Bockman, Razzouk, & Sirotnik, 2009). Sustainability -- meeting today's needs without compromising resources for tomorrow -- has become everyone's job. From the *Wall Street Journal* to *Vanity Fair* to *Facebook*, the message is loud and clear: "Going green" is the right thing to do.

The challenges are significant, including pollution and toxic waste; scarcity of resources and equality of access; global warming and climate change; safety of our food and water supplies. How can we harness a groundswell of momentum towards sustainability, especially in times of economic hardship? Although the facilities' manager who replaces thousands of incandescent light bulbs in a multi-plant manufacturing complex has more impact than the homemaker who transports groceries

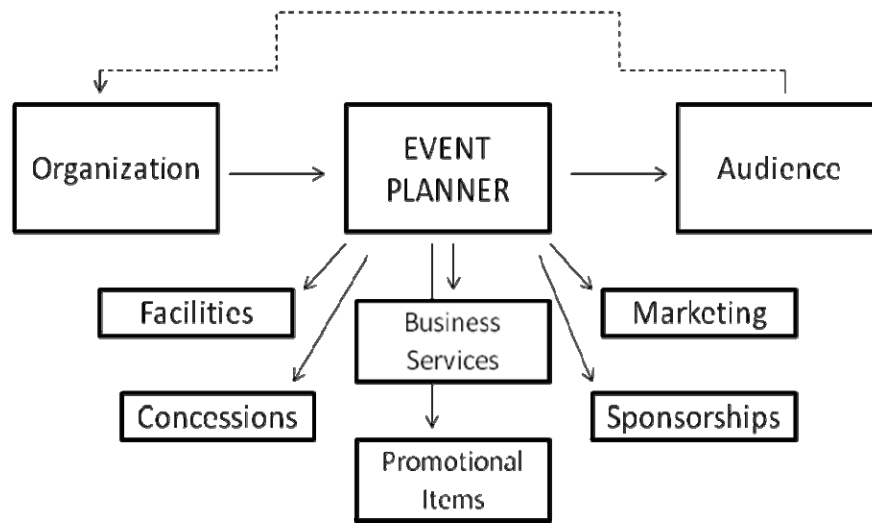
in canvas totes, both are doing their part to promote eco-responsibility. Is there an intermediary – some link between corporate leader and individual – who can orchestrate broader efforts for faster adoption and greater impact? This paper focuses on the role of the ordinary event/activity organizer, both paid and unpaid, in leading positive change. Those ordinary organizers include corporate meeting planners; high school or community athletic directors; professional sports team owners; concert and theater venue managers; reunion, PTA and booster club committees; wedding, block party and family reunion planners, just about anyone who gathers a group of people in one place for a few hours or more. All of these ordinary event organizers have the potential to be powerful opinion leaders and catalysts for behavior change. This article offers practical frameworks for motivating participants to improve the impact of going green at any event.

In his 1993 bestseller, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*, Paul Hawken asserted that business was in dire need of a full-blown redesign to sustain life tomorrow (Hawken, 1993). Stuart Hart, Ph.D., the Samuel C. Johnson Chair in Sustainable Global Enterprise at Cornell who helped launch the corporate sustainability movement in the late nineties, maintains that large businesses are best equipped to use their clout and resources to address the world's most pressing social and ecological challenges (Hart, 2005). Daniel Esty, a member of Obama's transition team and professor at Yale Law School, contends that every industry should be addressing environmental concerns as part of their core business strategies for creating value and spurring innovation (Esty and Winston, 2006). McDonough, an architect and green building pioneer, and Braungart, a chemist, propose that any manufacturer could become eco-efficient and by mimicking nature's cycles and turning waste into food (McDonough and Braungart, 2002). Elkington, chairman of one of the world's largest consultancies, describes sustainability as the "#1 issue for business" and the triple bottom line as a universally accepted definition of sustainable development (Elkington, 2001). Harvard's competitiveness guru, Michael Porter, views environmental and social responsibility as cornerstones of competitive advantage (Porter, 2008). However, it is the work of Peter Senge et. al, who call for "unleashing the power of organizations and networks of all sorts to create the changes needed in the coming years..." (Senge, Laur, Smith, Schley and Kruschwitz, 2008) that prompted us to think about opportunities for empowering everyday event organizers and community leaders to hasten widespread adoption of sustainable practices.

This paper builds on Senge's challenge and focuses on leaders from "all sorts of networks" – especially sports managers and marketers, event planners and community organizers. Ordinary leaders have both the opportunity and ability to make an impact because they reach an already-engaged audience of like-minded individuals – already engaged because audience comes together for a common purpose and like-minded because they have some common interest in attending the event, whether as spectators at a sporting event, a concert, a convention, a community event, a local children's sports tournament or participants at a corporate or charitable function.

Figure 1

### Event Planning Value Chain



As the Event Planning Value Chain shows (Figure 1), event planners and organizers are the conduit that connects organizations with an audience, and they are thus uniquely poised to *create awareness* of sustainability, educating, engaging, and communicating with audiences from all walks of life. Thus organizers are uniquely positioned to *model* sustainability as well as *influence behavior* toward sustainability for not only their audience but also for the wider community.

We begin with an overview of sustainability, noting key conceptions and theorists, criticisms, and benefits. We then focus on the application of strategic sustainability to sports and events. Finally, we present a framework for organizers to include sustainability in the planning of such events.

### A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY

When society views business behavior as questionable and current economic, environmental and societal trends as unsustainable, as Laszlo argued in 2001, a fundamental shift is needed (Laszlo, 2001). Garten (2003, p. 55) suggests business leaders “will need a heightened sense of their roles in society.” A 2006 McKinsey survey, “CEOs as public leaders” found that nearly half of the US executives surveyed believed they should play a leadership role regarding sociopolitical issues, and 84% agreed that a corporation’s societal role involved more than just shareholder obligations. A challenge, according to Hart (1997), “is to develop a sustainable global economy: an economy that the planet is capable of supporting indefinitely.”

Sustainability has emerged as an influential corporate strategy that generates positive press (Frederick, 2006). In fact, *Business Week* noted that sustainability was at the “top of the agenda” for today’s CEOs in a January 28, 2008, cover story. Tyler Elm, vice president and senior director of corporate strategy and business sustainability for Wal-Mart, explained that “sustainability isn’t something you’re doing in addition to your job. It is a new way of approaching your job” (Plambeck, 2007, p. 20). Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, and Schley (2008) went so far as to describe sustainability as a “necessary revolution” (p. 52). Hart (1997) argues that “we are poised at the threshold of a historic moment in which many of the world’s industries may be transformed” as we learn more about the challenges of sustainability (p. 2).

While there is no one widely accepted definition of sustainability, many authors trace its emergence from environmentalism and social responsibility perspectives. While this basic conception of sustainability as used today dates back to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, and then more specifically the U.N. World Conference on Environment and Development (WCED)'s Bruntland Commission Report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987, which identified sustainable development as that which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", one could argue that concern for the environment and society is as old as civilization itself (Daly and Cobb, 1994). Both Elkington (2004) and Kilbourne (2004) note that the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 brought public attention to environmental issues, bridging the connection between both economic activity and human impact on the natural environment. In 1971, Erlich and Holdren developed a model with an ecological focus, and posited that the impact of behavior on the environment was a function of population, affluence, and technology.

The 1987 WCED definition serves to provide a base of common understanding without providing a precise and limiting conception of sustainability. Acknowledging that economic growth brings effects on the ecosystem and social justice concerns, it noted that persuasion to participate in sustainable growth requires education, institutional development, and law enforcement, as interdependence and common interest themselves are not always effective.

Additionally, this report suggests that growth itself must fundamentally change, such that it results in equitable impact and requires fewer material and energy resources, as "economic and social development can and should be mutually reinforcing," further reinforcing that sustainability is not simply rooted in economics, as it "requires views of human needs and well-being that incorporate such non-economic variables as education and health enjoyed for their own sake, clean air and water, and the protection of natural beauty," as well as serving to "remove disabilities from disadvantaged groups" (WCED, 1987, p. xvi).

But sustainability is more than just "going green". While the environmental component is important, sustainability is informed by the integration and balance of economic, natural and social capital as well as an ability to meet the needs of stakeholders both current and future, with the awareness that one's actions impact others, both individually and collectively, consistent with Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line approach, as numerous authors note (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002; Collins, Steg and Koning, 2007; Savitz and Weber, 2007).

Sustainability is not about denying one's own needs, but rather considering those needs in the context of the community. Savitz and Weber (2007) caution that "sustainability is not about philanthropy" because "the sustainable company conducts its business so that benefits flow naturally to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, business partners, the communities in which it operates, and, of course, shareholders" (p. 17). The WCED (1987) recognized the interdependence of the individual and the community, noting that "meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life" (p. 10) would strengthen a sense of community. Savitz and Weber (2007) posit that sustainable companies don't deprive the communities, but rather enrich it, finding "areas of mutual interest...thus avoiding the implied conflict between society and shareholders," and further recommend that companies move toward a vision of an organization "that renews society as it enriches its shareholders" (p. 17).

Klessig and Hagenhuber (1999) point out that "[h]uman communities and societies have a social web of life that holds them together as cohesive functioning units...Sustainability is the roof that provides a common shelter to nurture the future community and society" and further "sustainability and sustainable development have become the touchstones for local, national, and international policymakers" (p. 35). Euston and Gibson (1995) interpret sustainability as a "condition in which

natural systems and social systems survive and thrive together indefinitely” (p. 5). Further, they argue that sustainability is a moral value and thus a human responsibility, a public call to ethical responsibility, concurring with Pearce et al.’s (1989) view of sustainability as a decision to provide future generations with the same options that current generations have available. Esty and Winston (2006) consider the ROI of sustainability, viewing it as an opportunity to improve both business outcomes and profits.

Jones et. al (2007) suggest that organizations are interested in sustainability for a number of reasons, including the need to comply with regulations, recognition of the perishability of non-renewable resources, growing media coverage, increased awareness of sustainability by stakeholders, and changes in social attitudes and values. While the hard case for sustainability, according to Savitz and Weber (2007), relates to costs and economic benefits, the soft case includes the values derived from an enhanced reputation, satisfied employees, customer goodwill, and industry leadership. While some organizations view sustainability as defensive in nature (i.e., to avoid bad publicity or litigation), sustainability can provide strategic advantages when managed in an integrated, responsive framework. A challenge, according to Hart (1997), “is to develop a sustainable global economy: an economy that the planet is capable of supporting indefinitely” (p. 67).

Sustainability is not without challenges. Savitz and Weber (2007) note that it “requires commitment, resources, and a change of direction, which entail costs and risk”, as “sustainability is not a guarantee of financial success” (p. 23). Critics contend that sustainability is vague and thus has little real meaning. It is usurped unscrupulously by those looking to exploit the popularity of the term, and it does not sufficiently direct attention to a fundamental need for change, especially as economic growth rates are unsustainable (Robinson, 2004).

Is sustainability becoming a mere buzzword? Are we seeing so much of it that we’re cynical (greenwashing), played out, or growing bored with so many self-proclaimed experts? Perhaps the often quoted comment by Rutherford Rogers, former Yale librarian, applies to modern day advocates for sustainability: “We’re drowning in information and starving for knowledge.”

Three recent studies (ABC News/Washington Post/Stanford University, 2007; Bockman, Razzouk, and Sirotnik, 2009; Krosnick and Bannon, 2007) found increasing support for environmental issues among Americans across age, education, and socioeconomic levels. The Cone Consumer Environmental Survey (2007) found that environmental sustainability impacts the (American) public perception of an organization, as 93% believe that environmental preservation is the responsibility of an organization, and 91% responded that they view environmentally responsible organizations more positively.

If stakeholders are motivated by sustainability, organizers can target that audience and tailor sustainability communication strategies to further enhance relationships. According to Doorley and Garcia (2007), “companies with better reputations gain essentially free press coverage that is worth as much if not more than advertising” (p. 55). Organizers who communicate sustainability values for an event “can increase the value of its image and its brand while making its services more attractive,” and reap a “distinct competitive advantage” (Ioakimidis, 2007, p. 4).

Additionally, economics can serve as a motivator. Hart (1997) notes that “more and more companies are ‘going green’ as they realize that they can reduce pollution and increase profits simultaneously” (p. 70). In fact, the Chamber of Commerce Center for Corporate Citizenship found that 82% of the business executives from across a broad range of industries and company sizes said that good citizenship makes a tangible contribution to the bottom line (Chamber of Commerce, 2006). To further increase profits, operating costs may be reduced through sustainable behavior. For example, consideration of environmental factors, such as waste reduction and productivity improvement can lead to cost reductions (Roberts, 2004). By ignoring sustainability, organizers may be negatively

impacting both the environment and profitability.

## **SPORT AND EVENT MARKETING**

The strategic planning process includes the areas of planning, organizing, controlling, and motivating. When applying this definition to the marketing discipline, it becomes the planning, controlling and implementing of marketing activities. The field of sport event management and marketing includes the organization, marketing, implementation and evaluation of any type of event related to sports (Graham et.al, 2001).

Examples of types of events include but are not limited to:

- Not-for profit charities,
- Collegiate or secondary sports programs,
- Corporate sporting events,
- National or international organizations,
- Major or minor sport organizations,
- Hallmark events (Olympics),
- Non-sport events in sporting venues,
- Sport trade shows, and
- Sporting events ranging from acrobatics, auto racing to yachting (Fullerton, 2010).

In any and all of these above mentioned venues, the motivation is to raise the level of awareness, generate revenues and for participants or spectators to have a positive experience that exceeds expectations.

The planning of the events centers typically around marketing, sales, operations, legal considerations and financial controls. Figure 2, the Events Activity Wheel (EAW), provides a more in depth example of the types of activities required in the planning of events.

Figure 2



As presented in the EAW, marketing activities include advertising, media relations, public relations and hospitality. Sales or revenue generation involves ticketing, licensing (merchandise), and mailers. Legal involves general counsel, contracts, licenses, and insurance while financial is budgeting, accounts receivable/ payables, investments and traditional accounting functions. The area of focus for this discussion is the operational area of the EAW. The operational area includes grounds, buildings, utilities and venue communications.

### Strategic Sustainability and Sport/Event Planning

Planning and implementing sustainability initiatives, including social and environmental stewardship, can address these issues offensively, providing strategic advantages that minimize the need for defensive posturing. As Hart (1997) noted, “A vision of sustainability for an industry or a company is like a road map to the future,” but “without a framework to give direction to those activities, their impact will dissipate” (p. 66-77).

Figure 3

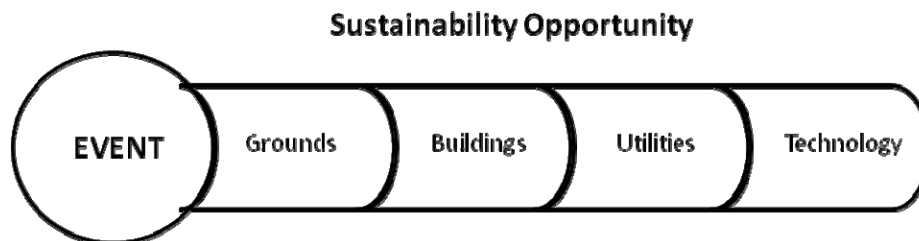




Figure 3 expands the area of operations which is an area of opportunity for sustainability. This area is the area of benefit. The exploded view provides the best of opportunities for pursuing optimization strategy. It is not uncommon for organizations to be environmentally conscious regarding events. In the marketing literature this is defined as green marketing (Fullerton, 2010, p. 280). The primary caveat is 'if you promote green then be green'. As noted above, the areas that provide significant opportunity is the operational area including grounds, building, utilities and venue communications. Major consideration such as environmental impact, energy usage, water usage, pollution and emissions control, waste removal and control and recycling all come under the general area of operations.

When you bring a crowd of people together in a finite space, you cannot prevent them from exhaling carbon dioxide with every breath, but you can offset the impact of those human emissions by planting trees or trading carbon credits or helping those who are less fortunate. How many people could be nourished if 50 million people at an event donated one canned good? Consider the impact of attendees at the Super Bowl or World Cup, for example. Organizers of recreational events can encourage all who participate to give something back to nature or the community.

Corporations, not-for-profit organizations, and even professional sports teams have begun to recognize the value of sustainability initiatives. Many organizations are making strides, though some sustainability initiatives thus far have been more tactical than strategic. Ordinary leaders who take a macro approach can integrate sustainability strategically into the event plan, identifying and addressing social, environmental, and economic goals and objectives relative to the event. To present a framework for this type of integration, we consider the perspective of local, national, and global sporting events.

From a strategic perspective, the International Olympic Committee is moving sustainability into the business model. In 1994, it established Sport for Sustainable Development as a program for action using sport to advance sustainable development, modeled after the United Nations Agenda 21 ([www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/environment/agenda\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/environment/agenda_uk.asp)). Its key objectives include improving socio-economic conditions in host communities, games-based practices on environmental conservation, and strengthening the inclusion of women, youth, and indigenous peoples in the games. Further, participants of the 2007 World Conference on Sport and the Environment, including over 80 National Olympic Committees, 20 International Sports Federations, and United Nations entities, adopted a series of resolutions in October 2007 which included, in part, an appeal for sports communities to "maximise lasting legacies for the wider community" and "ensure sustainable and ecologically responsible sports events and activities" (Final Declaration of 7<sup>th</sup> World Conference, 2007).

Considering events from the social perspective, Healy and Cote (2001) assert that the ability to work together to advance the collective good is rooted in social interaction perpetuated by the local community. In terms of impact, the value of sports teams belies merely its economic significance. A sports team "provides significant public consumption benefits," because, while revenue is derived from consumers who attend games, broadcast rights, and merchandising, it is its cultural importance and externality that makes the economic impact of sports teams difficult to quantify (Noll and Zimbalist, 1997, p. 56). Its impact should take social capital into consideration, particularly as market-oriented social connections are generated by sport (Dyreson, 2001).

Kott (2005) noted the increased use of sports events by host cities to address social issues. Additionally, sports events and teams create awareness of a community and impact its image reciprocally, as a team's image, especially when well-known, affects the perception of community by members and non-members, and vice versa. For example, the National Football League's focus on community addresses sustainability from a social perspective. Thirty-one of the 32 NFL teams include a "Community" tab on its website home page, and are involved in a variety of community

initiatives, from education to philanthropy, and many teams address these issues during events. Examples include scoreboard announcements, proclamations or reminders announced live during events, information presented in event programs, and on-field recognition related to such initiatives.

From an environmental perspective, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) developed a Sport and Environment Strategy that will utilize the influence of sport organizations to communicate the core objectives of the strategy. The three main objectives, according to Toepfer, are to promote the integration of environmental considerations in sports, to use the popularity of sport to promote environmental awareness and to promote the development of environmentally friendly sports facilities and the manufacture of the environmentally friendly sports goods (Toepfer, 2003). He further notes mutual dependence of sport and the environment, citing the amount of waste generated at a sporting event, and the impact of global warming on skiing as examples. Additionally, new venues are focusing on sustainable design, and existing venues are being updated with sustainability in mind. "What's good for the environment is good for the bottom line," notes Jack Groh, environment program director for the National Football League, one of the many companies converting from "the world of sport to a school of thought that incorporates environmental responsibility into the business model" (Falt, 2006, p. 1). Environmental concerns, including waste generation, energy use, and carbon emissions can be addressed strategically through venue design, energy use policies, reclamation and recycling programs, and carbon mitigation initiatives.

From an economic perspective, the sports industry, as with many industries, is not immune to business cycles. Futterman (2008) notes that the "crisis in financial markets is sending a chill through the sports industry.... as the upheaval in global markets, mounting job losses in the U.S. and other signs of a worsening economy continue to undermine consumer confidence" (p. B1). By ignoring sustainability, sports organizations may be negatively impacting both the environment and profitability. Thus there is not an inherent cost increase associated with sustainability. Event organizers can strategically plan for the integration of sustainability into the bottom line by considering both the costs associated with sustainability initiatives as well as the savings that will be generated.

As merchandising plays a significant role in the marketing of professional sports organizations, particularly its availability and sale during events, consideration of retail sustainability communication can provide guidance. Lamb (2008) suggests that, for retail market offerings, labeling and other related messaging that communications issues related to sustainability within a retail environment could serve to benefit consumers as they make purchase decisions. She further notes that identification of minimum standards would reduce sustainability confusion and simplify messaging, as well as allow organizations to publicly announce its values.

### **Sustainability Considerations for Event Planners**

Those who plan and organize events – whether for 100 or 100,000 – have a responsibility to manage the environmental impact of that event. However, taking steps to reduce waste or offset carbon emissions is not enough. Organizers have an opportunity to institutionalize ongoing behavior change by informing, educating and inspiring attendees.

When it comes to the "how" of sustainability, many focus on tactical tips, and the resulting piecemeal approach limits impact. If one person changes a light bulb, the impact is negligible. However, an orchestrated campaign can have a huge collective impact. For example, Alcoa Technical Center distributed a single light bulb to every employee for the Rachel Carson Legacy Challenge, as reported on the Rachel Carson Homestead web site ([www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org/RachelCarsonsLegacy/LegacyChallengeCommitments/tabid/105/Default.aspx](http://www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org/RachelCarsonsLegacy/LegacyChallengeCommitments/tabid/105/Default.aspx)). They estimate savings of 449.5 mwh of electricity per year and a 449.5 ton reduction in carbon dioxide production, the equivalent of taking 66 cars off the road per year, if the bulbs were lit

an average of four hours per day. At a Net Impact meeting at Duquesne University in 2007, a documentary film on energy conservations was shown, and every participant was encouraged to replace five incandescent light bulbs with energy efficient fluorescent bulbs and report the change in their electric bill. One participant, who changed bulbs for lights that her family rarely turns off, reported sustained savings of \$30 per month on the household electric bill.

This format could thus be utilized at events, i.e., preliminary information in the form of sustainability communication could be provided (as with Duquesne’s screening of a documentary, perhaps printed material included with a program, or even something as simple as an announcement made publicly during the event), followed by a call to action, which could include an explanation of how to take action, recommendations for action, or a specific motivation for action. Referencing the energy usage example above, imagine the impact if, for example, attendees were provided with a four-pack of energy-efficient bulbs, subsidized perhaps by a sponsor’s contribution, in addition to communication, explanation, and recommendations regarding this sustainability initiative.

According to Savitz and Weber (2006), pursuing sustainability through optimization (“being more good”) is more powerful than minimization (“being less bad”), although both approaches offer economic benefits. Minimization efforts tend to have quick impact, while optimization initiatives may require investment for long-term competitive advantages that will be difficult to duplicate. Table 1 provides additional detail.

Table 1  
Sustainability - Minimization vs. Optimization

Minimization strategies	Optimization strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure</li> <li>• Conserve</li> <li>• Recycle</li> <li>• Reuse</li> <li>• Offset</li> <li>• Streamline</li> <li>• Automate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convert waste to raw materials</li> <li>• Retrofit facilities to LEED specifications</li> <li>• Develop healthier and safer procedures</li> <li>• Design systems/rewards/consequences to encourage desired behaviors</li> </ul>

Research has found that sustainability impacts a wide variety of people, cutting across demographic and geographic lines (Bockman, Razzouk and Sirotnik, 2009). As organizers model sustainability, they must also communicate it. Sustainability communication is an evolving concept that refers to communications about sustainability issues (Franz-Balsen and Heinrichs, 2007; Signitzer and Prexl, 2008), and Signitzer and Prexl (2008) suggest that sustainability communication emerged as an “outgrowth and advancement of the corporate social reports and environmental communication programs of the 1970s and 1980s.”

Research on communication for sustainable development has privileged dialogic communication that engages and empowers (Mefalopulos, n.d.). Franz-Balsen and Heinrichs (2007) agree, suggesting that “dialogue and participation play a central role” in sustainability communication, as a dialogic approach to sustainability communication is supported by a model of human beings as competent citizens. This is counter to the Bernays perspective of the public “as a malleable mass of protoplasm, plastic raw material that – in the hands of a skilled manipulator – could be manufactured at will” (Ewen, 1996). We concur, and recommend that sustainability communication be responsive to and respectful of the audience.

Signitzer and Prexl (2008) recommend internal audiences as the first recipients of sustainability communication to develop and enhance awareness, suggesting the emergence of a bottom-up process with top-down support, which could create an environment conducive to narrative collaboration, as it additionally results in internal consideration of the needs and aspirations of the public. When sustainability is integrated into an organization's culture and accepted by employees, it can enhance employee pride and loyalty, providing what Jones et.al (2007) term "a valuable 'sales asset' when communicating with customers." This furthers the 'sustainability sweet spot' (Savitz and Weber, 2007), the common ground shared by business and public, as the organization both lives its values, and shares its values. A lack of authentic integration can, however, lead to 'convenient sustainability', as initiatives may be forgone if objectives that supersede sustainability are known by employees to be the true measure of performance.

Both Signitzer and Prexel (2008) and Lamb (2008) suggest public relations as an integral element of sustainability communications. While consumers may view pronouncements by CEO's and company-sponsored advertising warily, media stories, and particularly consistent messages accessed through multiple sources, can provide reinforcement and serve to validate sustainability claims (Lamb, 2008). Public relations efforts regarding sustainability communication can assist in establishing and enhancing consumer trust, particularly its educational and reflective aspects both internally and externally, as it concerns itself with the relationship between an organization and the public, bringing the potential for dialogue into a public sphere (Signitzer and Prexel, 2008).

Ipsos MORI, the first research agency to be accredited in meeting the ISO 20252 research standards, found that consumers want more information about sustainability relative to their purchase decisions, noting that coherent sustainability messages can serve to build trust both within and outside of the organization, and consumers desire sustainability information, but often invest little time in obtaining it (Lamb, 2008). Such communication should be accurate and credible, avoiding rhetoric or bias (Belz, 2006; Gill, Dickson, and Scharl, 2008; Kolk et. al, 2001), as well as easy to access and comprehend. Shelton Group's national Eco Pulse study (Ebenkamp, 2008) asserted that "[p]eople are interested in being green, but they don't necessarily know what to do specifically and when people are confused, they do nothing" (p. 1).

An element of education should be involved, as well as development of messages that are consistent and repetitious (Vaccaro, 2008). Companies should be wary of inviting cynicism, as Schultz (2005) notes, by "making promises about the brand that the organization can't or won't support in the actual brand experience" (p. 11). Known as greenwashing, misrepresentation should be avoided to prevent a backlash from skeptical consumers (Greer and Bruno, 1996; Vaccaro, 2008; Lamb, 2008).

Event sustainability is not without challenges. Initial sustainable efforts can raise costs associated with change, particularly in the short term, but these costs should be considered with a view of the long term future of both the firm and its stakeholders. An additional obstacle results from the challenge to change the personal habits and lifestyles of attendees, partners, participants, and varied stakeholders. It is up to the organizers to identify a catalyst to build and enhance relationships with event stakeholders.

We piloted one such catalyst. To both engage participants as well as create awareness of the impact of spectator sports on the environment and generate table conversation about the prospects for sustainability initiatives in sports marketing, we conducted a brief survey (Figure 4) at the closing luncheon of the Sports Marketing Association's (SMA) annual conference when it was hosted by Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in November 2007. This international organization fosters interaction between sports marketing professionals and academicians. The survey was prepared and distributed by MBA students who were part of Duquesne's Net Impact

Club, a global network of leaders who are changing the world through business (<http://netimpact.org>).

Figure 4  
Survey Questions and Results

**RESULTS: The "Net Impact" of Spectators at Sports Survey**

\* indicates correct answer

Question 1	Responses:	Frequency:	Percent:
<i>To offset carbon emissions from Super Bowl XL, how many trees did the NFL plant in Detroit, Michigan?</i>	450 Trees	5	5%
	750 Trees	15	15%
	1,500 Trees	43	42%
	<b>2,500 Trees *</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39%</b>
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>
Question 2		Frequency:	Percent:
<i>The 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, produced 500,000 tons of carbon dioxide in just two weeks. What size of city emits that much CO<sub>2</sub> in the same time period?</i>	1,000 Pop.	5	5%
	10,000 Pop.	16	16%
	100,000 Pop.	37	36%
	<b>1,000,000 Pop. *</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>44%</b>
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>
Question 3		Frequency:	Percent:
<i>How many cubic meters of drinking water were saved by using water-free urinals at the 2006 World Cup in Frankfurt, Germany?</i>	1,000 m <sup>3</sup>	2	2%
	5,000 m <sup>3</sup>	24	23%
	<b>10,000 m<sup>3</sup> *</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33%</b>
	15,000 m <sup>3</sup>	43	42%
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>
Question 4		Frequency:	Percent:
<i>The 2006 World Cup used 3 million kilowatt-hours of energy and produced 5-10 tons of trash during each:</i>	Day	30	29%
	Hour	16	16%
	<b>Soccer Match *</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46%</b>
	Week	10	10%
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>
Question 5		Frequency:	Percent:
<i>The most intensive nonagricultural use of pesticides is for:</i>	Baseball Field	3	3%
	<b>Golf Course *</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>84%</b>
	Football Field	5	5%
	Soccer Field	8	8%
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in Figure 4, more than half of the 103 survey respondents, the majority of whom were sports marketing professionals, underestimated the impact on three of the four questions that related to estimating emissions, energy use and quantities of trash (questions 1, 2 and 4). Based on table conversations and post-conference comments, few present had considered the environmental consequences, and many were surprised at the enormity of the numbers that were offered as answer choices.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Considering Senge’s challenge, we believe that opportunities exist for empowering everyday event organizers and community leaders to hasten widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Considerations include viewing sustainability strategically such that it is implemented into the event plan itself, modeling sustainability for not only their audience but also for the wider community, and utilizing sustainability communication for educating, engaging, and communicating with receptive audiences. The following table provides additional detail.

Table 2  
 Strategic Sustainability Opportunities for Event Organizers

<b>Buy Responsibly</b>	<b>Act Responsibly</b>	<b>Educate, Inform, Inspire</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for reputable third party certifications</li> <li>• Choose recyclable products with high recycled content</li> <li>• Buy locally to reduce transportation</li> <li>• Buy in bulk to save on packaging</li> <li>• Buy fair traded products</li> <li>• Shun Styrofoam, plastic, coated paper to prevent toxic waste</li> <li>• Patronize LEED-certified facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email invitations/information</li> <li>• Print on recycled paper -- double sided</li> <li>• Compost all food waste</li> <li>• Donate un-served food to shelter or soup kitchen</li> <li>• Send flower arrangements to nursing home or hospital after event</li> <li>• Provide recycling bins and signs</li> <li>• Use washable dishes and flatware (or compostable products)</li> <li>• Offset carbon impact by planting trees, purchasing credits, making charitable donations</li> <li>• Use renewable forms of energy</li> <li>• Don’t change towels and linens daily if possible</li> <li>• Encourage carpooling, bicycling or walking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote greenness of event in pre-event invitations and publicity</li> <li>• Measure and share impact</li> <li>• Model responsibility</li> <li>• Teach but don’t preach - trust that informed guests will choose responsibly</li> <li>• Invite media to cover newsworthy aspects of sustainability initiatives</li> <li>• Follow-up to encourage ongoing green habits from participants</li> </ul>

The unique nature of events, including an engaged, like-minded audience, economic impact, societal role, and environmental impact uniquely position organizers to communicate the value of sustainability to large numbers of people, both through service provided and the relationship with customers. As sustainability becomes integrated not only into organizations, but into the fabric of society, event organizers who embrace sustainability may find the common ground, with sustainability as a bridge through which ethical, responsive relationships with an audience and other stakeholders are built, and, in this ongoing, volatile market, sustained.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Dorene Ciletti, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Marketing and Sports Marketing at Duquesne University.

John Lanasa, PhD, is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Marketing, Sports Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Supply Chain, and Global Business divisions at Duquesne University.

Diane Ramos, MBA, is Assistant Director of the MBA-Sustainability program and an adjunct faculty member at Duquesne University.

Richard E. Mathisen, PhD, is a Professor of Marketing at Coles College of Business, Kennesaw State University.