

Full Length Research Paper

Are responsible tourism indicators in the event sector applicable? The case study of Gauteng Province, South Africa

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Tourism policies and guidelines have been created by public sector and industry organisations around the world. In South Africa the government has indicated that sustainable and responsible tourism is the key to the future development of the industry. The tourism industry is multi-sectoral and the event sector is a new and popular research field. Sustainable tourism indicators have been used by numerous researchers and applied to various sectors of the industry but, little application can be found in events on the African continent. This paper analyses the use of tourism indicators in the event sector using Gauteng province as a case study, and found that this sector actively supports responsible tourism and that tourism indicators can be used to monitor the event sector.

Key words: Responsible tourism, tourism indicators, event sector, tourism guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism allows people to explore the world, open up business opportunities and build global networks. This multi-sectoral industry is considered by some to be the world's largest (Middleton and Clarke, 2001), contributing significantly to the economies of developed and developing countries including South Africa.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predict that tourism will, by 2021, contribute 9.6% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and employ over 120 million people (WTTC, 2011a). It predicts that in South Africa tourism will contribute 11.5% of GDP and employ over 1.7 million people by 2021 (WTTC, 2011b). Although, the industry provides economic benefits, it also faces global challenges, including environmental concerns with long-term impacts (Hall, 2008). To deal with the effects of tourism, responsible management of the industry becomes imperative.

The concept of sustainable tourism has its roots in the

founding theme of sustainable development first discussed in detail in the Brundtland report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 (Hall, 2008). Hall (2008) also describes the evolution of sustainable tourism theory from the paradigm of sustainable development and the intrinsic links between the ecological, economic and social environments. In practice, sustainable and responsible tourism have several similarities (Keyser, 2002; Hall, 2008), but responsible tourism has more immediate focus in the short-term on environmental, economic and socio-cultural protection and upliftment (often called the three pillars of responsible and sustainable tourism), which should ideally result in longer-term sustainability (SA, 2002a; Myburgh and Saayman, 2002). The government of South Africa in its white paper on the promotion and development of tourism (Tourism white paper) (SA, 1996) has committed itself to the principles of sustainable tourism as the basis of tourism development in the country. Researchers in the field have provided numerous constructive guidelines and indicators for promoting sustainable tourism in order to stimulate the success of the industry in to the future.

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Another current research topic relates to the expansion of the event sector, one of the fastest growing areas of the tourism industry (Uysal and Xiangping, 2008; Dwyer, 2008). Getz (2007) and Dwyer et al. (2007) point to events as important motivators of tourism forming part of the marketing plans of most destinations.

The academic literature identifies significant developments in research focusing on responsible tourism and sustainable tourism, as well as developments in the event industry. However the literature does not bring these two current research topics together. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to answer the following questions:

1. Are responsible tourism indicators applicable to the event sector?
2. Are these tourism indicators able to contribute meaningfully to the event sector?
3. Are these indicators measurable when applied to the event sector?

Background to the study

There is a growing trend for businesses in all sectors, including tourism, to go “green”, or to become increasingly environmentally friendly (Frey and George, 2008). This is a result of global pressures, primarily those concerning global warming (Bramwell and Lane, 2008). However, other global issues, including social and economic inequalities, also need to be addressed and to which, according to Bramwell and Lane (2008), research should give priority to.

Responsible tourism management strives to provide progressive tourist experiences for both tourists and service providers. It achieves success through increased socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management, according to the South African Department of Tourism (previously the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism up to 2009) (SA, 2002a). This emphasis should, simultaneously, benefit local communities, and allow them to enjoy a better quality of life, as indicated in the tourism white paper (SA, 1996).

For George (2007) the main features of responsible tourism are that it aims at developing a competitive advantage; assesses, monitors and discloses the impacts of tourism developments; involves local communities for them to achieve socio-economic benefits and forms meaningful economic linkages; encourages natural, economic, social and cultural diversity; promotes the sustainable use of natural resources.

Both responsible and sustainable tourism have become “hot” research topics in recent years, and the concepts of sustainable tourism have been adapted to various fields of management. Hall (2008) and Neto (2003) focus on the development of sustainable tourism; Gilmore et al. (2007) describe sustainable marketing implications of

tourism; while others have argued for the application of sustainable tourism within the attractions sector (Ioannidis, 1995; Landorf, 2009).

Sustainable tourism is also discussed in other specialist sectors of the industry. These studies (Clifton and Benson, 2006; Ballantyre et al., 2009; Plummer and Fennel, 2009) for example, have analysed the application of sustainability within the ecotourism sector, and the principles of sustainability have even been applied to the backpacker sector (Murphy and Brymer, 2010).

There is relatively little research on the application of sustainability to events. The available literature is often focused on just one or two of the three pillars of sustainability. These studies (Morgan and Condliffe, 2006; Kruger et al., 2010; Henderson, 2010; Arcodia and Novais, 2010) focus primarily on the economic impacts of sustainability on events. Others, such as Kennel and Sitz (2010), assess the environmental impact of events. There is also inadequate assessment of the implementation of sustainable tourism indicators such as management guidelines, policies and strategies within the event sector.

In South Africa, in order to promote sustainable tourism, public sector organisations and government have developed responsible and sustainable tourism policies, white papers and guidelines. At national level the DAT has developed strategies for tourism development and management in, for example the tourism white paper (SA, 1996) and the national events strategy (SA, 2002b). The national government has also developed the responsible tourism manual for South Africa (SA, 2002a), which contains indicators in the form of descriptions and guidelines relating to responsible tourism with the aim of generating opportunities for improving business performance. The province of Gauteng and local governments such as the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality have created numerous tourism strategies specific to their areas of government.

To assess the applicability of sustainable tourism indicators in the events sector, our case study is discussed, focusing on South Africa’s province of Gauteng, which plays a crucial economic role in the country and on the African continent.

METHODOLOGY

The study discussed here, formed part of a broader research project on responsible event practices at geological heritage sites in Gauteng. Various indicators of responsible event management were selected and tested in terms of their use at event venues located at geological heritage sites in the province.

The target population included the people involved in the management of event venues located at research sites; these had to meet three basic requirements. They had to be (1) directly involved in the hosting of events, (2) geographically restricted to Gauteng and (3) located at a geological heritage feature.

Preferred respondents to the survey included those people who were directly responsible for the management of events at the particular sites, such as events managers and general managers.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents.

Parameter		Frequency (n)	Percent*
Category of operations	Private	28	76
	Public	2	5
	Both	7	19
Sector of activities	Accommodation	29	37
	Tour operations	1	1
	Conference and events	26	33
	Destination / site management	7	9
	Attraction	2	3
	Museum	5	6
	Wildlife park/game park	8	10
Size of business by employee count	Fewer than 5	8	22
	6–10	7	19
	11–50	14	38
	51–100	3	8
	More than 100	5	14

*All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

A relatively small population size numbering 70 organisations was determined in the research area. A saturation sample was used; all venues identified were approached to participate in the study, and each had an equal opportunity to respond to the questionnaire forwarded to them. In this manner, the technique of simple random sampling was employed.

Most of the respondents were in the private sector. They offered accommodation and conference and event venues, and comprised predominantly small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), each employing fewer than 50 employees (Table 1).

Questionnaire design, implementation and analysis

The 15 indicators that were tested were obtained from the responsible tourism manual (SA, 2002a). Five indicators for each of the three pillars of responsible tourism were identified. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions, and focused on a two-pronged approach so as to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. In the range of these questions, response sets encompassing scales of measurement were used to test the levels of importance. These scales included ranking scales and Likert scales.

The questionnaires were first administered in a pilot study to ensure that the categories provided for questions were valid and reliable measures; that the terms were understandable and that the question order flowed and to determine how long the questionnaire would take to be completed. The pilot study also tested the suitability of the measures of analysis. It had the added advantage of enabling the researcher to inspect the events venues that were visited.

A computer-aided self-administered survey using QuestionPro (<http://www.questionpro.com>) was the primary means of data collection. Each organisation was contacted individually to ensure that the correspondence was correctly administered and sent to the person dealing with events. To increase the response rate, follow-up telephonic interviews were conducted at some of the sites and

questionnaires were completed in personal interviews.

The data collection took place over six weeks, during May and June 2009. Thirty-seven out of 70 organisations participated, resulting in a 53% response rate. Several of the findings have been compared through various t-tests (t) and Chi square tests and comparative analysis were also completed.

RESULTS

The 15 responsible tourism indicators were identified and tested. Respondents were asked to rate 15 indicators on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very unimportant; 2 = unimportant; 3 = neutral; 4 = important and 5 = highly important. Table 2 shows the results of this investigation. The table depicts the mean scores of each responsible tourism indicator on the scale of 1 to 5 as well as their standard deviation (SD).

The first indicator to be tested was the importance of new product development and product diversification for the organisation. The response to this indicator can be justified as commonly neutral, supported by the relatively even distribution of responses and 42% of respondents grading this indicator as neutral or 3.

Most respondents strongly supported the use of local products and services, although a few respondents rated this indicator as unimportant. The predominant response indicates a general positive stance towards the utilisation of local products and services, supported by the mean response of 3.86. When the relevant respondents were asked why they did not find this indicator important, the most common answer revealed a lack of awareness of local suppliers of goods and services and, in some

Table 2. Summary of responsible tourism practice scores.

	Responsible tourism practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
1	New product development	3.25	1.38
2	Using local products and services	3.86	1.23
3	Links and partnerships with SMMEs	3.20	1.26
4	The creation of local employment	4.46	0.77
5	The promotion of infrastructural development	3.51	1.45
6	Host community engagement	4.08	0.86
7	Community development	3.74	1.04
8	Support for local handcraft	3.05	1.41
9	Seasonality of employment	3.22	1.36
10	Capacity building	3.73	0.96
11	Landscape management and the use of indigenous fauna and flora	3.97	1.28
12	Management of noise	4.03	1.21
13	Recycling, use of poisons and cleaning material	3.89	1.06
14	Energy-saving initiatives	3.84	1.041
15	Environmental education of staff and visitors	3.84	1.093

geographic areas, there was a lack of supply.

The main response relating to the importance of building links and partnerships with local SMMEs was neutral; 46% of respondents chose to rank this indicator as 3. No respondents rated this indicator as 'unimportant'. There is also no clear scale in terms of high and low importance by respondents, as 17% rated this indicator 'very important' as well as 17% rating it as 'very unimportant'. Therefore, the general response in terms of SMME importance is neutral. Broadly, the respondents who viewed this option 'very unimportant' did so because they were not aware of local SMMEs, or, in the worst cases, did not know what an SMME was.

A significant relationship was found between linkage and partnership with SMMEs and the size of the organisation ($Pr=0.042$). Micro-businesses with fewer than five employees gave the least support to linkages and partnerships with SMMEs, with more than two thirds rating this indicator as 'very unimportant'. We found that the larger the size of the organisation, the more it supported these partnerships. The reasons for this tendency is not certain, although, it could be that smaller businesses are more competitive and view other small businesses as competition, and that partnerships or integration with larger companies hold greater security. Another possibility is that larger organisations have to align with government economic policy, which specifically promotes SMME development.

The majority of respondents viewed employing local people and job creation of very high importance. No respondents ranked this criterion as either 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant'. This indicator achieved the highest mean of the 15 that were rated. This may not advocate the theory that the events sector is chiefly responsible for the creation of temporary employment.

The response towards the indicator, importance of infrastructural development, such as the support for the building of roads and telecommunications, was diverse. The majority of respondents (38%) viewed this indicator as 'very important' while 16.22% of respondents did not support the development of infrastructure. This may be because infrastructural developments as essential to the survival of businesses but some businesses find trouble in implementing its development either financially or other means. Smaller companies find it difficult to invest significant amounts of money in infrastructural development and encounter difficulties when confronted by authorities to do so. This was determined during interviews and visits to venues.

A significant number, of respondents, indicated that contact and engagement with the host community was 'highly important'. No respondent viewed this indicator as either 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant'. All responses received rated this indicator above neutral. This signifies that no respondents rejected the importance of host communities and all found it significant.

Respondents indicated that supporting community development was 'important' with 35% supporting option 4. Only 3% viewed this indicator as unimportant'. Although, most responses indicated a support for community engagement, not as many actively support community development. Responses to the latter are more spread out over the options although, the response is generally positive.

A brief comparison between establishing contact with the host community and community development provides the subsequent finding. All respondents identified the importance of establishing contact with the host community in order to make them (the host community) aware of their activities. Although a large number of

respondents found community development of importance, fewer supported community contact. Respondents did not provide an indication of why they did not engage more in community development, other than lack of capacity or financial constraints, or that establishing contact with the host community was a means of expanding their consumer base in the market. It was also determined that event venues regarded visitors that are closer situated geographically as more important than those visitors located further away.

In terms of supporting their local handcraft industry, responses were generally neutral. This indicator achieved the poorest overall positive response, as this mean was the lowest of the 15 indicators that were rated. The respondents who viewed this indicator as 'unimportant' and 'very unimportant' did so for the following reasons; most respondents indicated that there was a lack of awareness of local suppliers of handcrafts and those local handcrafts were not part of their marketing focus. This can be supported by an additional finding that foreign markets were of least importance to these events organisers, as they predominantly received visitors that are situated closer to the venues geographically. Respondents indicated that because they did not cater intensively for foreign clients, local handcraft was not that important. Local visitors were seen as less inclined to purchase curios and gifts such as local handcraft.

Another responsible tourism guideline tested was the managing of seasonality of employment. The less seasonal the employment, the more responsible the operations should be. With regard to the management of employment during high and low seasons, 'neutral' was the most chosen option with exactly one third supporting option 3. The respondents who rated this indicator poorly (22% rated this indicator below neutral), specified that they did not see events as being needed to manage seasonality, as they often redeployed their staff to do other jobs during low seasons or were not affected by seasonality. These venues might also not be highly dependent on volunteers and temporary staff often associated with the events sector.

Capacity building, training and skills development is considered 'important' to the tourism industry and its sustainability. Most respondents indicated clear support for capacity building, training and skills development of staff. 'Neutral', 'important' and 'very important' were the most popular responses received. The 5% of respondents who indicated that capacity building, training and skills development was 'unimportant' and 'very unimportant' considered themselves small companies and did not see the need to do staff training, while others provided in-house staff training and did not send their staff on any formal training programmes.

Slightly under half (49%) of all respondents rated landscape management and the use of indigenous fauna and flora as 'very important'. Respondents who viewed

this indicator as 'important' and 'very important' together achieved a combined sum of 70% of responses.

Most respondents indicated their support for the management of noise generated by their events as 'very important', with 49% selecting this option. The least chosen option was 'very unimportant', generating only 5%. These respondents may have done so because of their location; as some were located in protected areas such as game reserves or where high levels of noise would be detrimental to the overall ambience of the venue.

Most respondents indicated support for responsible waste management and recycling initiatives. A total of 38% of respondents specified this indicator as 'very important'. The respondents collectively support the need for recycling of waste and waste removal with the responsible use of poisons and cleaning material. Respondents who were visited and those contacted telephonically indicated that, as was the case with the management of noise, they were located in environmentally sensitive areas. As such, waste was dealt with through municipal services or recycling and the respondents were aware of the fact that chemicals such as poisons and cleaning material could cause damage to the environment if not dealt with appropriately.

To build on the earlier discussed finding a comparison was undertaken between recycling and waste management and the category of operations in the form of a cross-tabulation analysis, which where statistical significance was tested. A significant relationship was found to exist ($Pr=0.001$).

Although, 5% of respondents considered energy saving as 'very unimportant' to their organisations, the predominant trend in the responses was positive. During direct correspondence with respondents it was determined that a major contributor to the positive result was the financial implications for the organisations when conserving energy. However, the major obstacle in this regard is finances themselves, such as the costs of new light bulbs and solar panels.

With regard to the importance of environmental education of staff and visitors, 35.14% of responses were 'neutral'. The generally positive stance towards environmental education may be because of the protected areas and environmentally sensitive areas where respondents are located.

Event organisations in Gauteng may be viewed as positive contributors to responsible event management through guidelines developed for the tourism industry. Our study has shown that the organisations which took part implement these guidelines on an informal basis and were often unaware of the actions. Although, most of the respondents were oblivious to the existence of tourism guidelines, they were implementing them none the less.

This study focused only on a small segment of the event sector in Gauteng, but we believe that these

findings hold the possibility of providing a general view into the active workings of responsible management within the sector. Responsible tourism guidelines have proven effective in other sectors of the tourism industry and their effective implementation in the event sector probably makes them workable for other tourism sectors as well. Although, tourism guidelines such as the responsible tourism manual are generated for the entire tourism industry and its contents have not been widely disseminated to all sectors.

The event sector lacks suitable recognition systems and communication platforms for creating further awareness of responsible management. A means for giving credit to responsible event organisations may hold marketing advantages for them. Tourism planners, industry organisation and companies would need to be approached by policy makers more appropriately to ensure effective dissemination of information so that these policies and guidelines have a greater chance of implementation.

Conclusion

This study provided a platform for testing responsible tourism indicators in the event sector. We found that numerous researchers and government departments have developed tourism guidelines in order to promote responsible development and management in the industry. As the tourism industry is large and multi-sectoral, researchers have applied the principles of sustainable tourism successfully to various tourism sectors, except thus far to events.

As one of the fastest growing sectors of the industry, sustainable management of events is crucial. Benefactors of events research such as governments, destination management organisations, private companies and researchers have access to various general tourism indicators for responsible tourism such as strategies and policies. This research shows clearly that the indicators developed for responsible tourism in Gauteng as a whole, and in the context of South Africa are applicable to the event sector. Event planners and managers can use existing indicators as their guide and thereby save themselves the time and expense of creating new event-specific lists. To improve the use of these tourism indicators by the event sector they may need to be adapted to a given situation; tourism indicators should be adaptable to all sectors of the industry.

In addition, our study has shown these indicators to be measurable performance can be assessed by using scales of measurement such as Likert scales. In the case of Gauteng the tourism guidelines were positively viewed by event organisations. This finding will benefit those organizations involved with the monitoring of the sector

and the developers of tourism policy. Tourism policies according to our study are suitable indicators of event performance. They should not fragment the industry but should rather approach the industry as consolidated and multi-sectoral. Tourism planners should be aware of the sectoral nature of the industry and create policies that apply each sector individually as part of a broader industry.

The benefits of these findings for event stakeholders may be appreciated more widely if similar studies are conducted in other provinces, countries or regions. Changing global environments and continued developments affecting the tourism industry are likely in future to require adaptations in sustainable tourism indicators from developing global issues such as peak-oil and increased research and development in the event sector.

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