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Can a Personal Passion for the Environment Create a Shift in the Event Industry?

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Can a Personal Passion for the Environment Create a Shift in the Event Industry?

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Advisor Signature Approval Page

Abstract

Global warming and its detrimental effects are evident in all aspects of life. Event companies, a serious offender in this, have begun implementing sustainable practices into their events.

Previous literature has extensively studied the effects of events on the environment, as well as potential mitigations and ways to lessen said effects. While past scholarship focused on the events, there has been minimal research done on the event managers. There is reason to believe that some event planners, who have an innate desire to be sustainable, can help the event industry become more environmentally-focused. The purpose of this study is to examine how event organizers with a personal passion for the environment can create a shift in the event industry towards sustainability. To conduct this study, primary research was completed through structured interviews. These interviews were used to gain information from those working in the field. Three themes surfaced as a result of these interviews: defining moments, clear values, and positive changes. The participants' responses focused on what caused them to dedicate their work to sustainability, as well as the basis for the values of their companies. They all also mentioned a change in the industry as a whole occurring, which was something not discussed in previous literature. Findings of this study suggest that event organizers understand the issues that events cause the environment, have taken it upon themselves to fully support the change through dedicated efforts, and notice the shift that is beginning to take place because of companies like their own and people like themselves.

Keywords: events, environment, sustainability, manager, passion

Table of Contents

Advisor Signature Approval Page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Environmental Issues and Mitigations.....	5
Participants' Views on Event Sustainability.....	8
Event Manager Focus.....	9
Methodology.....	11
Design & Procedure.....	11
Sample Participants.....	12
Materials.....	13
Results.....	14
Defining Moments.....	14
Clear Values.....	16
Positive Changes.....	18
Discussion.....	22
Conclusion.....	25
References.....	27
Appendix A. Sample Structured Interview Questions.....	29
Appendix B. Structured Interview Responses.....	30

Introduction

The effects of global warming are more prominent now than ever before. As a result, companies have begun to include more eco-friendly aspects at their events. Many events now have some element of recycling, composting, reusing, or other components. Some event companies are taking this one step further, directly focusing on the sustainable aspects of their events, and providing clients with environmental alternatives. These types of event companies are growing and becoming more prominent in the field. This study will specifically look into event companies that focus on sustainability, whether they help other companies improve their events or if they are in charge of executing the events themselves.

Based on a review of previously published literature, many event companies are more aware of their effects on the environment. Some events include aspects of sustainability just to gain respect or popularity from attendees. Being environmentally friendly is more of a trend right now. For example, some festivals make attendees bring their own reusable water bottles, a museum exists that is decorated from sustainable and recycled materials, and other events are going paperless. The social aspects of people paying more attention to climate change, as well as wanting to attend events that promote sustainability, are important for this study. The scientific facts about climate change concerning events and sustainability are also very important. For example, there have been studies done on how much waste is produced, and how the ecosystem suffers from different types of pollution at events. As the concern for climate change increases, event organizers need to focus on minimizing the negative effects that their events have on the environment. However, a lot of the previous literature is older and outdated, and the practices and recommendations mentioned for a more sustainable event are already in place. Furthermore, those in charge of events have surpassed this recommended level of involvement; their ideas are

even more innovative and beneficial. There are even companies now whose entire focus is these sustainable aspects. These companies, which will be discussed in this study, are calling for change in the event industry. There is a personal want for the event industry to become more sustainable along with their own companies. In response to this, the following research question is posed: How are event organizers with a personal passion for the environment able to impact the event industry as a whole in regards to sustainability? The goal of this study is to find out if these managers are helping the event industry become more focused on the environment, and are encouraging those who might not consider the environmental aspects in their planning process as more important.

Literature Review

The following research considers how event organizers with a personal passion for the environment can create a shift in the event industry towards sustainability. The literature reviewed includes negative impacts of event planning on the environment and past suggestions on how to mitigate, participants' reasons for attending and their perception of eco-friendly initiatives at events, and event managers' focuses during events. The following research examines the practices already in use by event organizers in regards to environmental sustainability when possible, their attendees' views on these initiatives, and the role of managers at these events. The study that will be conducted stresses that as the importance of climate change and event sustainability grows, more passionate event organizers will have a global impact on the practices put forward.

Environmental Issues and Mitigations

In the past decade or so, there has been more of a focus on the environment when it comes to event planning. Large-scale or mega-events put sustainable practices into their planning

phases, and small events are also implementing changes. There has been significant research on how to mitigate the detrimental effects events have on the environment at different stages. Researchers have focused on recycling, composting, reusing, and other forms of environmentally-focused practices for their events.

One environmental impact that has been studied is the carbon footprint, defined as the total set of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused directly or indirectly by an individual, organization, event, or product (Heck, 2019). Events create tons of GHGs, specifically carbon dioxide, through transportation. GHGs are contributing to climate change at an alarming rate. Promoting alternative forms of transportation has been a frequently used suggestion to lower the carbon footprint of events. Public transit and bicycle facilities are two common ways to reduce environmental impacts from attendee travel (Daley, 2018). According to a study done on eco-friendly events, not only do modes of transportation such as public transit and carpooling reduce the carbon footprint, but they are also able to improve mobility to event destinations and align with the sustainable theme of the event (Ye et al., 2020). Providing and promoting alternative modes of transportation can have positive effects on the attendance and reputation of an event, as well as on the environment and climate change.

Waste, litter, and garbage are seemingly interchangeable words to use when describing the most visible effects of events on the environment. This can come in the forms of food wasted, attendee items left behind, excessive packaging used, and more. To prevent waste such as this, and move towards the goal of a zero-waste event, event organizers can use less paper, rent products rather than buy, eliminate unnecessary items like giveaways, and use reusable food and beverage items (Almadani, 2012). A zero-waste event is defined as one that “aims to reduce event waste holistically, including purchasing, usage, and disposal of resources before, during

and after an event” (Pennsylvania Resource Council, 2020). Eliminating unnecessary waste can make events much more environmentally sustainable.

Waste minimization plans are also increasingly significant to event planners. Events with waste minimization plans have initiatives including providing sufficient recycling and having vendors provide sustainable products or minimize their waste (Daley, 2018). Vendors at events should be most concerned with their packaging, including that used to prepare food, as well as given to customers, for example, takeout boxes and plastic utensils. Packaging used at events is almost always just thrown away because there is no financial value or emotional ties to it (Lockerbie, 2014). Working with vendors is extremely important when planning an event because organizers want to be on the same page with vendors on their sustainable practices. A study from Daley (2018) suggests organizers look for third-party certification, for example, USDA Organic or Energy Star, to ensure that materials used by vendors are sustainable.

Another suggestion to combat waste at events is through incentive programs, for example returning paper cups after use for a certain amount of change (Lockerbie, 2014). This example allows event attendees to also be involved in the sustainable practices of an event. However, event organizers need solutions according to their attendee size; controlling and providing enough opportunities for certain sustainable measures can become more difficult the larger the number of attendees (Lockerbie, 2014). Due to their size, not all events can provide the same sustainable opportunities or initiatives. However, prior research also shows that these incentives are very successful in terms of sustainable initiatives (Lockerbie, 2014). If an event can control this type of initiative, it could have a very positive response from event attendees. With more of a focus on event sustainability and “eco-friendliness”, attendees of events have also been studied.

Participants' Views on Event Sustainability

The public has become more aware of climate change and environmental issues. There is more media coverage, the topic is more mainstream, and there has been more research done on the effects of environmental changes. A previous study supports the fact that events adopting sustainable behaviors can be crucial for eco-friendly event attendees (Ye et al., 2020). Event organizers must take advantage of this awareness, by promoting their own event sustainability and implementing their own changes. Past literature has studied reasons why participants attend environmentally-friendly events, so event organizers may further promote their events to a larger group of people with similar values.

Environmentalism and sustainability in regards to consumer awareness have been increasing topics of research in the event industry (Ye et al., 2020). Research from Ye et al.'s study shows that event novelty, socialization, family togetherness, and relaxation are common factors when internal decisions are made by attendees. These internal decisions are also called push factors, which help guests make choices about if they should attend an event and why. Prominent pull factors, or external motivators for attending an event, are programs, location, and accessibility (2020). These results are important for event organizers who need to promote their events. It is valuable to know what motivates guests to attend an event, especially when including sustainable aspects. Previous literature found that accessible, easy-to-reach locations are also important when attracting people to sustainable events (Ye et al., 2020). A study completed on event participants also found that the longer the distance that needed to be traveled to reach the destination, the more likely attendees were to use public transportation (Brennan et al., 2019). As noted in Ye et al.'s study (2020), public transportation is much better for the environment, specifically in carbon dioxide levels and pollution, than private transportation.

There has also been research done on attendees' perception of these events. Brennan et al.'s studies have shown that attendees may view certain events as "vacation" or "holiday", and may behave differently than they would at home. This could lead to either a better response, in that they may take care of the event location better than their home, or, they may become laxer in their behaviors (2019). In this way, event organizers must be prepared to implement strict guidelines for environmental expectations at their events. The study also found who attendees thought should be responsible for ensuring an event is environmentally sustainable, which brings up an interesting point: Most of the respondents in the study completed by Brennan et al. (2019) viewed that the event organizers should be the most responsible for event sustainability, while another large portion of the respondents thought that individuals attending the event were also responsible for their own actions. The responsibility must be placed on both the attendee and organizer to focus on sustainable behavior. Changes solely on the management side of event structure nor behavioral promotions towards audiences would create a large impact, but both must work together to create substantial change (Brennan et al., 2019). Event attendees have been studied, but there has also been some research done on the event organizers in regards to their role.

Event Manager Focus

There was a study done that mentioned that event managers are too busy with all the other aspects of event planning and execution to focus on event sustainability. The role of sustainability managers is important, especially now, so that all aspects are covered while planning and executing. An extremely important part of any event is the financial component, and unfortunately, this may be more important than sustainability because event organizers are focused on money, not the environment. There are also minimal standards in place for event

organizers to utilize when implementing sustainable practices (Brennan et al., 2019). In this way, no two events' environmental practices will be the same or even similar. Since there are no current standards, event organizers are left to decide what they think are sufficient environmental practices.

One study done had also mentioned that people with a passion for sustainability and the environment are at operational or middle management levels, rather than board levels with the power to fully influence (Li & Wu, 2020). There has not been research done on those individuals, which this study plans to find. Li and Wu's (2020) research identified that only a few large events, like the Olympics, have dedicated sustainability managers, who focus all their effort and energy on the environmental factors of event planning. However, this designated position is not logistically or financially possible for all events. If an event manager wants to include sustainable practices, they most likely have to include them in the planning stage themselves, along with everything else they must handle.

While event organizers themselves may be too busy to focus on event sustainability, there are more and more companies that are specifically geared towards waste management and environmental practices. Waste management is more of an important aspect of events now, and there are companies specifically catering to that. Physical engagement creates more attention than just signage and suggestions at events, so having attendees interact with employees and volunteers can have a more prominent effect than just placed items and signs (Zelenika, Moreau, and Zhao, 2018). This research also noted that including zero waste principles in the process of event planning allows event organizers to control what types of waste are generated and makes sure most of it is diverted from landfills (2018).

Overall, previous research has focused on the effects events have on the environment, which has pushed managers to focus more on sustainability. The sources provided valuable information on how events affect the environment, as well as suggestions that have been used in the past and what can be implemented now to lessen these negative effects. Past literature also provided research on how event attendees interact and make decisions when going to events, specifically those with a focus on environmental sustainability. Previous studies also included current event managers' priorities, as well as the rise of more sustainable companies. However, there have not been studies done on the managers of these companies, who may have more personal, intrinsic motivation to implement sustainable practices. There has not been substantial research done on event managers in regards to sustainable events and their views. Research has not been done on the intrinsic motivation that some managers have to promote environmentally friendly practices. There has also not been enough research done on zero-waste companies or those promoting sustainability, which arguably is crucial to event planning today. This study will attempt to discover if event organizers from these companies have a personal commitment to providing sustainable initiatives and if they think their passion could help create a shift in the event industry to focus more on sustainability as a whole.

Methodology

Design and Procedure

This study focused on qualitative research through structured interviews with individuals in the event planning field. Interviews were chosen for the study based on the expectations of it being more beneficial than conducting surveys. These structured interviews were short but allowed the study to gain a substantial amount of information regarding the questions. It was also more beneficial to conduct interviews rather than online research because topics and questions

asked could be expanded on. By speaking to someone, more questions could be asked, and clarification could occur if necessary. A key point of the research, passion, could only come through words and emotions.

To conduct interviews ethically, an IRB certification was completed before finding subjects. All interview subjects were required to fill out a consent form before their interview and could stop questioning at any time. All interviewees were kept anonymous, and any identifiable characteristics were omitted from the study.

Sample Participants

The participants of this study all worked in the event industry, specifically focusing on sustainable events. Every participant was the founder and owner of their own company. The companies' descriptions were as follows:

Participant 1: event planning, design, and coordination company that focused on sustainable practices

Participant 2: company that provided pre-event consultations, onsite management through recycling and composting, and post-event reports for clients

Participant 3: vegan event company that worked with nonprofits

Participant 4: sustainable event consultation company that also spoke to event professionals about implementing sustainable practices

The participants all worked in varying locations across the country; New Jersey, Ohio, Los Angeles, and Indiana. All companies were under 10 years old.

Materials

Participants were found through Google searches and contacted through email. The study utilized structured interviews, and, due to COVID-19 restrictions, all of the interviews were conducted remotely. This helped rather than hurt the study because contact was able to be made with people much farther away than if face-to-face interviews were able to be conducted.

Interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded through an app called Google Voice.

The app recorded and stored the calls, which were later transcribed into a document. During the interviews, participants answered six questions, as well as follow-up questions when applicable.

The main questions asked during the structured interviews were as follows:

Sample Structured Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe the company you work for and your position in it.
2. Why did you want to work for this type of company?
3. How do you understand the relationship between your work and its effects on the environment?
4. Do you think there has been a bigger focus on climate change/the environment/sustainability recently? If so, how or why?
5. How has this shift impacted your organization and/or the individuals/groups with which you work?
6. Do you think your personal views on the environment in regards to events are significant to this shift?

Once the interviews had been conducted, each recording was played through and notes were taken on each interview. All pertinent information was written down for each, and any conversations that diverted from the direct questions were left out if not necessary for the study. After taking notes on all of the interviews, each answer was coded through a series of phases. First, comments were made where there seemed a need for a summary in the conversation. This included looking for certain thoughts, emotions, and tones. Next, similarities were made between the different codes to develop themes, which were grouped as follows: “defining moments”, “clear values”, and “positive changes”. There was at least one example of each theme in all interviews. These themes would provide insight into the study which built upon previous literature.

Results

Defining Moments

The event organizers that were interviewed all had some sort of defining moment in their life where they knew they had to work with sustainable events. Each had already been involved with environmental practices in their everyday lives. Participants 1 and 4 had grown up deeply involved in practices such as recycling and composting because of their parents, and both had special care and love for the environment from a young age. Participant 2 had always been an active outdoors person and enjoyed extreme outdoor sports as well as outdoor music festivals.

When answering the second question of the interview, “Why did you want to work for this type of company?”, each respondent provided some sort of defining moment where they felt the need to work with events in a sustainable manner. Participant 4 had been working with a company that put on themed events for clients and realized that the wasteful way in which they

were producing these events did not align with the environmentally-conscious way in which they lived their life. Participants 1, 2, and 3 had all worked with event companies while they were in college, and their varying experiences ultimately led to their decision in forming their own companies. Participant 1 specifically mentioned that they remembered being “devastated and crushed” by the amount of uneaten food and other types of waste that piled up at events they worked at. Participant 2 worked with a zero-waste program to help eliminate waste at local events. Participant 3 worked with organizations that focused on saving animals and veganism. Participant 4 understood that the company they worked for was small, meaning: “this problem probably wasn’t isolated to this one company, which meant there might be a bigger need for someone to help demonstrate a better way”. Each understood that events create unimaginable amounts of waste, and their reactions were that something had to change, and they would be the one to do it. Participant 1 explained the reasoning behind their decision:

As I moved through my career path, I realized that if I was going to stay in the event space, I wanted more control, more accountability for what I was doing and how it was happening. I wanted to ensure that the events I was working on created positive change.

This reasoning was reflected in the other participants’ responses as well. Participants 2 and 3 realized that working with events in an environmentally conscious way would allow them to combine two passions. For Participant 2, that was their love for music festivals and being outdoors with making an impact through waste management. For Participant 3, that was their passion for animal rights and event planning.

These turning points created a basis for each participant’s company values and goals. These were not event companies being created to put on events and make money; these were created to change the world.

Clear Values

Each company focused on a set of values pertaining to community and development through events while taking care of the environment. This was evident in their answers to question three, “How do you understand the relationship between your work and its effects on the environment?”. The companies wanted to think critically about waste, and took specific measures to combat that, while still putting on enjoyable events. It is important to note that each company studied used different sustainable practices, and focused on different aspects of sustainability. There are endless options on how to lessen the detrimental effects events have on the environment.

Participant 1 explained the reasoning behind the company’s goals:

When I founded the company, it was built on the idea that you can still do beautiful, incredible, impactful events while reducing your carbon footprint, and thinking critically about any sort of waste. From the beginning, it was “how can we take these pieces and make sure we are also empowering the community?” It has been really important to me, really critical pieces to me. I turn down clients if they don’t fall in line with those ideals and values. They’re super important to me, I want to make sure that as the event industry changes from Covid, how do we make sure it’s positive change?

These views were echoed in the other responses as well. There is reason behind the creation of these events, and the event managers of these companies work hard to make sure all of the work they do goes back to that reasoning. Participant 2 explained that “celebration is a key part of the human experience”, and that people will always want to attend festivals and events, but need to know that these temporary structures have a large impact on the environment in which they are

hosted. To continue this love and need for celebration, systems must be put in place to lessen the impact events have. Participant 2's company emphasized diverting waste from landfills at their events and provided all necessary actions to remove as much waste as possible. Participant 3 was dedicated to vegan events, another facet of being environmentally conscious. In addition to providing sustainable alternatives to all aspects of events, Participant 3's company worked with only vegan food and materials when possible, to lessen the carbon footprint as well as the suffering of animals. Participant 4's company was the only in its area, dedicated to helping meeting and event planners make their events more sustainable, with onsite waste diversion and consultation services. Each participant's choices on how to provide environmentally-friendly initiatives circled back to their backgrounds, and the foundations for which they wanted to start the companies in the first place.

Another common value was bringing awareness to their communities. All respondents spoke about using the companies to bring about change locally and teach others about the impact they have on the environment. Participant 1 said that a lot of their work was about "educating clients". They gave examples of ways in which they would provide assistance to clients, such as using a digital RSVP or invite rather than a paper one or reusing flowers. As no event is the same, Participant 1 explained that it was important to think about what the individual pieces are that they could cater to each client. Participant 4 held similar values, being the only sustainable event planning company in the area. Their company provides not only hands-on event services, like recycling and composting, to the local businesses, but also provides consulting to events outside the general area, as well as presentations and training regarding different types of sustainable practices. Some of the topics offered include: "Six Steps to a Zero Waste Event", "The Ultimate Guide to Reducing Event Waste", and now, "Can Events Be Sustainable in a

Post-Pandemic World?”. Participant 2 used their company as a way to “give back to the community that has meant so much to me over the years”. They described the feeling of being recognized at events locally now. Their company had grown to be expected at certain local events annually, providing them with a feeling of being needed and welcomed. Participant 3 explained that although they did fully vegan events, their goal was to “infiltrate the non-vegan event space”, and to overall provide eco-friendly and sustainable practices to all. They mentioned going to event conferences where they just taught other event companies the importance of sustainable initiatives.

This sense of community and learning, not just practicing these initiatives in their own events, shows that these event organizers want overall change. They wish for positive change in the event industry as a whole, and beyond, having people act sustainably in their daily lives.

Positive Changes

There was an overwhelming theme of optimism, positivity, and hope. All of the participants answered the interview questions, specifically Questions 4 through 6, with a sense of hope for the future of the event industry, and their place in it. Each respondent answered yes to question four, “Do you think there has been a bigger focus on climate change/the environment/sustainability recently? If so, how or why?”, and expanded on their opinions for this. There was some sort of encouraging outlook in each person’s response. There was an optimistic view of change that can be made, even within their own companies.

Participant 1 mentioned that people are “finally understanding that they have to make larger changes”. In regards to question five, “How has this shift impacted your organization and/or the individuals/groups with which you work?”, Participant 1 described a shift in how

people viewed their company when they first started to now: “When we first started the business... people were like, ‘you do what? I don’t understand. Why is that different than event planning? Do people want that?’ Whereas now... we have become a resource for a lot of local vendors around town”. They expressed that there has been a “massive shift in the past couple years”.

Participant 2 also described a shift from when their company first began. At first, there had not been a need for waste management in the sense of diverting it from landfills; the company was more so used to help clean up waste for them, and the diversion efforts were a “bonus”. However, Participant 2 explained, they have noticed that diversion efforts are “more and more at the forefront” and are “held in as high esteem as general cleanup is as well”. Their views focused on being in the “right place at the right time”, meaning that their company has been one of the first to step up to these initiatives, and now that people are taking notice, they are benefiting from it.

Participant 3 mentioned that “getting everyone on board” to implement sustainable and vegan practices is getting easier. There has been a shift to being more open-minded. They gave the example that when they first started the company and were working with vendors, they would ask the chefs to provide all vegan food, but the chefs would have never cooked vegan food in their lives. Now, Participant 3 explained, there has been a change, where the chef might have “just gone to a vegan food conference in Italy”. These ideas, to Participant 3, are up and coming, and are growing. They expressed that while veganism is the goal, being more sustainable and eco-friendly will come first, and then people will slowly work in fewer animal products. Participant 3 also mentioned that they hope everyone will get on board with these practices, something they have noticed more. They explained that companies that do not

necessarily focus on sustainability or the environment are at least starting to offer packages that focus on that.

Participant 4 specifically mentioned that they have noticed more awareness, in both the general public as well as the event industry, something which the other participants did not differentiate between. They described that the change was coming in more “piecemeal” ways, not something that was occurring all at once in all aspects. They gave the example that IMEX, a giant in the global event exhibition community, focused their conference theme on nature and sustainability this year, meaning over 10,000 people would be learning more about being environmentally conscious when planning events. For their company, Participant 4 explained that the growing awareness of climate change has at the very least made people more understanding of what their services provide and why. They said that before they started their company, no one was focusing on sustainability in the local market. Since Participant 4 is still the only one providing these types of services, they equate some of this awareness and change to just becoming more well known in the area but does believe that sustainability being more of a topic in everyday life has given people a general understanding of what they should be doing.

The sixth and final question of the interview, “Do you think your personal views on the environment in regards to events is significant to this shift?”, also provided the study with more of this theme of hope and change. Participant 1 described that there is “such a growing change in event space towards aspects of sustainability... I see a lot of the new and emerging businesses have a more integral focus in it”. They said that they believe their business has been at the forefront, but that with Covid specifically, they have been rethinking what their place in the event space is. Participant 1 posed the question, “Where can we make the greatest impact and change?”, which was a recurring theme during the interviews overall.

Participants 1, 2, and 3 all expressed that while they hope they are making a difference within their own company, they believe that it is up to the industry as a whole and that everyone is working towards the same goal. Participants 1 and 2 both mentioned that they are not the only ones putting in the work; there are “so many businesses out there doing great things and making great change”, as Participant 1 put it. With that being said, the interviewees all believed that their work could make and is making a difference, at the very least in their own communities.

Participant 4 explained that getting connected with the people involved with the major events in the local city allowed those people to “do something tangible at their events, instead of bringing someone in from the outside”. They expressed their presence in the market:

I think that I have perhaps moved some organizations from kind of thinking about [sustainable practices] but not knowing how to do so, to having someone they can call, and have a place to start, which has been huge. I hope I can continue providing that for my market.

Participant 2 expressed their hopes that the zero waste efforts that they work towards will become a “norm across the board and a staple of the events community”.

Participant 3 finished their thoughts up with something that resonates with this study in particular, and the question in which it asks: “One person can really make a big difference”. The responses from all of the event managers interviewed proved this statement to be true, with all of the dedication that they have put into their work and the environment. See Appendix for interview findings by question per interviewee.

Discussion

The conducted research addressed how event organizers can create a shift in the event industry through their personal passions for sustainability. The study found that there are significant moments in event managers' lives that cause them to start their own company revolving around environmentally-conscious practices. These event organizers have strong foundations for their companies and believe in values that rule not only their everyday lives but how they work with their communities. There is an overall sense of progress and possibilities from the creation of these businesses towards a more sustainable event space. The relationship that was developed between previous scholarship and practice is that the participants moved forward with practices mentioned in the field's research. Previous research related to participant responses, while other information discussed during the interviews brought forth new ideas on the topic. Event organizers understand the issues that events cause the environment, and they have taken it upon themselves to fully support the change through dedicated efforts, and notice the shift that is beginning to take place because of companies like their own and people like themselves.

As previous literature mentioned, event organizers are aware of the negative effects of events on the environment. All respondents described the amount of waste that accumulates at events of all sizes. Their frustration was apparent when answering questions. All expressed the need to make a change and decided to start their own companies to help combat the detrimental effects events have on the environment. The respondents also mentioned reducing carbon footprint as a goal for their companies and their clients, something that has been studied significantly previously. Participant 2's company specifically handles waste reduction at events, diverting as much waste from landfills as possible. This practice of waste reduction or diversion

is also handled through Participant 4's company. This practice has been studied previously and proves that it is important to improve the sustainability of events.

One result that challenged previous literature was the idea that large events could not necessarily practice sustainability to the effect that a smaller, more controlled event could. The answers from participants proved this to be false. The companies all work with varying sizes and types of events, including statewide conferences and multi-day festivals. In this way, it is not impossible for larger events to, at the very least, begin to implement sustainable practices. If the event manager has the dedication and belief in the event and the outcomes of providing sustainable initiatives, then there is no doubt that even mega-events could become more sustainable, and maybe even fully zero-waste.

As mentioned in previous literature, people are looking more towards events that include environmentally-friendly components and themes. Participant 2 added to this argument, saying that there is a lot of competition in the events industry, and adding sustainable practices to the event could give organizers a competitive advantage. The target audience of festivals and events tends to be towards younger crowds since they tend to have more time to spend on those events, rather than on families or children, as older consumers might not. The younger demographic is also much more involved in sustainability initiatives and the environment, as one of the participants mentioned, and so targeting this demographic is incredibly important. Two participants mentioned that the younger generation is more readily accepting of these changes. If big-name companies want to keep the younger demographic, they will need to target them through implementing environmental practices into their events.

Another part of previous literature that has been challenged is the idea that event managers are too busy focusing on all other parts of the process that they do not have time or

resources to focus on the environment in regards to their events. The participants' responses challenge this theory, as all of these event organizers have been successful. All of the companies are also relatively small, only working with a handful of team members, and can pull off very detailed, thought-out components of their events in regards to sustainability. The participants mentioned separating all materials into different waste groups, composting, recycling, organizing fully vegan events, being completely paperless offices, and more. When the manager is already dedicated to helping the environment in their daily lives, it is easy for them to then incorporate those ideas into their work. Their passions have been transferred into their work, in which they can take the skills and knowledge they already have and implement them into events.

While much was learned by way of this work, limitations did exist. This study was only able to interview four participants, all of which had to be interviewed over the phone due to Covid-19. More people could have been interviewed if there was more time to devote to finding interviewees, as well as getting more responses from companies. Different questions related to this topic could also have been asked. All of the participants studied were relatively young, and their companies were newer as well. This could provide questions such as if their age, generation, and upbringing might have anything to do with their passion for the environment and change. Since this study was expecting to find a shift, a bias is present in the findings, specifically regarding the way questions were worded. If this study was done through a survey, there is reason to believe that the responses would not necessarily have been the same, or at least as detailed as through the interviews.

Conclusion

The key findings of this research focus on the defining moments in event managers' lives that caused them to create event companies dedicated to sustainability, their clear values present in their personal lives as well as their companies, and the positive changes that they believe are shifting the event industry. Previous scholarship focused on examples of problems events have in regards to the environment, and included ways in which event organizers have lessened these problems in the past, but this research advances past information on this topic by proving the extent to which managers of these types of event companies are working. It gives specific reasoning on why they have made these decisions, as well as providing new information that there is a positive shift occurring in the event industry. While past literature argued that organizers were too busy handling all other aspects of events to focus on sustainability or the environment, this research goes beyond that, showing that these event organizers have sustainability at the front of their minds; that it is the basis of all of their events. These findings are significant in that they give an optimistic outlook on the future of the event industry. The rise of this type of event company implies the need for further research on their benefits. Event organizers today are constantly improving their efforts towards sustainable events, and are dedicated to finding new ways to do so, even involving attendees and vendors. These changes are taking place in locations across the country, and around the world. There are more and more companies being created that focus on several sustainable efforts, whether that be waste management, reusable materials, or vegan practices. Each has its own impact on the surrounding community. The dedication that event managers bring to their jobs in regards to sustainability is strong enough to create an industry-wide shift. The bar has been set, and now event companies must catch up. Including sustainable practices in event planning will soon become the standard

for events. As more and more companies start to implement changes and sustainable practices, there will be a push for new regulations, expectations, and norms within events. It is interesting to see just how much of a shift this will create, and how the event industry will change as a result of that.

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Appendix A

Sample Structured Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe the company you work for and your position in it.
2. Why did you want to work for this type of company?
3. How do you understand the relationship between your work and its effects on the environment?
4. Do you think there has been a bigger focus on climate change/the environment/sustainability recently? If so, how or why?
5. How has this shift impacted your organization and/or the individuals/groups with which you work?
6. Do you think your personal views on the environment in regards to events are significant to this shift?

Appendix B

Structured Interview Responses

Questions	Participants			
	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
#1	-event planning, design, and coordination company that focused on sustainable practices	-company that provided pre-event consultations, onsite management through recycling and composting, and post-event reports for clients	-vegan event company that worked with nonprofits	-sustainable event consultation company that also spoke to event professionals about implementing sustainable practices
#2	-worked with event company in college -remembered being “devastated and crushed” by the amount of uneaten food and other types of waste that piled up at events they worked at -wanted more control and more accountability -needed to form own company	-worked with event company in college -worked with a zero-waste program to help eliminate waste at local events -needed to form own company -could combine two passions	-worked with event company in college -worked with organizations that focused on saving animals and veganism -needed to form own company -could combine two passions	-worked with event company in college -realized the wasteful events produced at company did not align with the eco-friendly way in which they lived their life -needed to form own company
#3	-you can still do beautiful, incredible, impactful events while reducing your carbon footprint, and thinking critically about any sort of waste.	-“celebration is a key part of the human experience” -To continue this love and need for celebration, systems must be put in place to lessen the impact events have	-dedicated to vegan events, only vegan food and materials when possible, to lessen the carbon footprint as well as the suffering of animals -provide	-dedicated to helping meeting and event planners make their events more sustainable, with onsite waste diversion and consultation services -only company in

	-“how can we take these pieces and make sure we are also empowering the community?” -educated clients	-company emphasized diverting waste from landfills at their events and provided all necessary actions to remove as much waste as possible -wanted to give back to community	vegan/sustainable events for all	the area
#4	-answered yes -people are “finally understanding that they have to make larger changes”	-answered yes -diversion efforts are “more and more at the forefront” and are “held in as high esteem as general cleanup is as well”	-answered yes -getting everyone on board is easier -people are more open-minded	-answered yes -noticed shift in industry and general public
#5	-“massive shift in the past couple years”	-in the right place at the right time	-veganism is the goal, but other aspects can come first	-growing interest in climate change increased awareness
#6	-believe their business has been at the forefront -where can they make the greatest impact? -up to industry as a whole -not the only one putting in work -can make a difference within their community	-up to industry as a whole -not the only one putting in work -can make a difference within their community -hopes their work becomes the norm across events	-up to industry as a whole -can make a difference within their community -“one person can really make a big difference”	-up to industry as a whole -can make a difference within their community -they are the go-to resource for the area, and hope to continue to provide that