

# A Triple Bottom Line Evaluation of the Impact of Special Events: The Development of Indicators

By

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## **Declaration**

‘I, Peter Mark Sherwood, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ”A Triple Bottom Line Evaluation of the Impact of Special Events: The Development of Indicators” is no more than 100,000 words exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work’.

Signature:

Date:

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## List of Publications from Thesis

### Refereed Conference Papers

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Sherwood, P., Jago, L. & Deery, M. 2005, 'Triple Bottom Line Evaluation of Special Events: Does the Rhetoric Reflect Reporting?' P. Tremblay & A. Boyle (eds), paper presented to *Annual Council of Australian Tourism and Hospitality Educators' Conference*, Alice Springs.

Sherwood, P., Jago, L. & Deery, M. 2005, 'Unlocking the Triple Bottom Line of Special Event Evaluations: What are the Key Impacts?' J. Allen (ed.), paper presented to *Third International Event Management Research Conference*, Sydney.

Jago, L. & Sherwood, P. 2005, 'The Economic Contribution of Special Events: A Framework for Comparison', J. Allen (ed.), paper presented to *Third International Event Management Research Conference*, Sydney.

Sherwood, P., Jago, L. & Deery, M. 2004, 'Sustainability Reporting: An Application for the Evaluation of Special Events', C. Cooper, C. Arcodia, D. Solnet & M. Whitford (eds), paper presented to *Annual Council of Australian Tourism and Hospitality Educators' Conference*, Brisbane.

## **Abstract**

The sustainable development agenda is underpinned by the recognition that there are limits to the capacity of the earth to cope with unimpeded economic growth. Businesses, due to their power and reach, are seen as major users of natural, human and financial capital resources. Granted a societal licence to operate, businesses are under increasing pressure from a diverse range of internal and external stakeholders, who expect a higher level of accountability and transparency in regard to economic, social and environmental performance measurement. In response, businesses have incorporated practices such as eco-efficiency and corporate social responsibility, and an increasing number are now moving towards a more holistic evaluation of their triple bottom line (TBL) performance. In contrast, the special events industry has continued to rely on traditional economic measures of performance.

There has been tremendous growth in the number of special events being staged in tourism destinations. Events have been used strategically to bring ‘new’ money into regions, promote economic development and to showcase destinations to potential visitors. As a result of these economic imperatives, the evaluation of events has predominantly been undertaken from a narrow economic perspective. This approach, however, fails to account for the impact of the event on the host community as well as the impact on the natural environment such as water and energy use and waste generation.

Since the 1980’s, event researchers have called for a broad-based evaluation model that incorporates economic, social and environmental measures. Recently, a number of these researchers have suggested that a TBL approach has merit as a potential framework. What has been lacking, however, is a set of standardised measures that would underpin a broad-based evaluation model. Therefore, the aim of this research is to develop a set of standardised TBL indicators, which would enable a parsimonious TBL evaluation model to be established.

A seven-step indicator development process was used to underpin this research, based on a number of collaborative projects that developed indicators to measure sustainable

development. Within this framework, there were a number of research stages. Initially, a comprehensive analysis of 224 academic event evaluation publications and 85 actual event impact assessments was undertaken. The aim was to understand what impacts have been used in event evaluations from academic and practical perspectives. From these 309 sources, a list of the 20 key impacts was derived. The second stage of the research was a three-round, modified Web-based Delphi survey of event experts. The aim was to use the opinions of the event experts to develop a pool of indicators to measure the key impacts. A total of 24 indicators was proposed by the experts to measure the impacts.

A conceptual model was developed, which detailed the event drivers, the event inputs, the event outcomes, and the TBL indicators. The model also included a TBL evaluation, which included overall measures for the economic, social and environmental impacts. A number of possible models were discussed, which enable a number of TBL indicators to be integrated to allow an overall event 'score' to be achieved.

After a subset of the indicators was selected, the third stage of the study involved the conduct of two special event case studies. The objective of this stage was to operationalise the indicators in order to test their appropriateness for inclusion in a TBL evaluation model. The case studies used intercept surveys of event attendees, competitors and exhibitors to gather economic data, mail-out surveys of local residents to gauge the social impacts and the collection of a range of environmental data from event venues and attendees. Whilst the economic and social data were readily captured via the surveys, not all environmental data were available, mainly due to the regional setting of one of the events, where there was limited capacity for capturing data. Following this, the fourth major stage of the research involved consultations with a small number of project stakeholders in order to obtain feedback on the indicators used and the results of one of the case studies. In general, the stakeholders were supportive of both the direction of the research and the use of the TBL indicators to evaluate the impact of events.

A TBL evaluation will broaden the evaluation criteria for events and bring the events industry in line with the wider business community. There is a growing recognition in the tourism literature that, particularly with transportation, the tourism industry is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, inclusion of environmental measures will provide a clearer picture of the environmental footprint of an event. Moreover, inclusion of the measures of the impact of events on the quality of life of the host community may provide information that assists event organisers to retain the licence to stage an event, which is granted by the event stakeholders.

A further benefit of a TBL evaluation is that it will enable a comparison to be made of a range of different events, which will aid tourism organisations and event stakeholders in the decision-making process about which events merit support. As a result, it will be possible to manage events in a more sustainable manner. Whilst this study contributed to the development of a TBL evaluation, further research is required to integrate the indicators into a framework that can provide an overall 'score' for an event, which can then be compared with other events.

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