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## **OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS IN THE GREENING OF SMALL-SCALE EVENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The events sector is a fast-growing industry and has become essential to our lives. The sector is highly resource intensive and, if not appropriately managed, can harm the ecosystem and host communities. Even after introducing various guidelines, frameworks and assessment measures, the industry needs to make more strides towards greening its events. In this study, I have tried to identify the barriers that event management companies face while greening their event and how they can overcome them. This research mainly focuses on small-scale events as they are large in number, are conducted more frequently and are a part of everyone's professional and personal life. A model for greening events was developed after interviewing six event management companies based in India that only conduct small-scale events sustainably. The results show that the greening barriers of small-scale events are budget constraints, involvement of multiple stakeholders, demand by attendees, hidden costs and client aspirations. A catalyst motivated by intrinsic values can overcome these barriers through adaption, collaboration, education and customisation.

## INTRODUCTION

Events and celebrations have been a part of human society since the beginning of civilisation in the form of weddings, festivals, and religious gatherings. In the modern world, we celebrate many events from small scale to large scale in the form of seminars, trade fairs, conferences, exhibitions, weddings, sports gatherings, etcetera. Like every other human activity, events also extract many resources from the planet and leave a negative footprint behind, as the primary business model of the event industry is take-make-waste. Events, by definition, are unsustainable phenomena as they are temporary, short-lived occurrences with massive resource mobilisation and public gatherings (1). A three-day event for up to a thousand people generates an average of 5760 kg of discarded waste and 530 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> (2). They are embedded in the sociocultural economy and have become an essential part of contemporary society; hence are unavoidable (1) The global event industry is expected to reach a whopping \$1552.9 billion by 2028 with a CAGR of 11.2% (3). The negative effect will only multiply at this growth rate when the Earth's planetary boundaries reach their tipping points (4) The main areas of significant impact are (i) Transportation, (ii) Food & Catering, (iii) Marketing, (iv) Water Usage, (v) Energy Consumption, (vi) Waste Management and (vii) Resource Procurement (5–8) A mindless outlook towards these areas can result in pollution, over usage of natural resources and an increase in greenhouse gases which do not only affect the local ecosystem but also the local community (9).

Studies have concluded that climate change will also harm the functioning of the event industry (10,11). Climate variability can impact overall revenue, attendance percentage and visitor satisfaction (12). Hence, the event industry has to gear up to transition towards incorporating sustainability into its functioning.

Many international organisations have developed guidelines, performance measurement tools and certifications to help transition into greener events and avoid greenwashing. ISO20121 is a global organisation developing best practices and offering guidance on managing sustainable events (13). UNEP also rolled out a Green Meeting Guide in 2009 to assist organisers of small and medium-sized events and meetings (14). Apart from this, various industry councils, alliances and forums such as The Event Industry Council (15) and public-private partnerships such as EventImpacts (16) have set up economic, environmental and social sustainability standards to guide the players in the event industry. There are even awards, such as the Banskia Award in Australia, which recognise the efforts of event planners and reward them for being green (9). However, most of the investment made by the event sector in environmentally sustainable practices is for image manipulation and to be seen as green (17). The industry is mainly resorting to greenwashing instead of being green. The events industry is widely misusing the term sustainability and greening by vaguely misinterpreting and applying themes such as “eco-friendly”, “green”, and “responsible” to the overall marketing of the event (18,19). Due to the ubiquitous use of the term, “sustainability” has almost become meaningless for the event attendees (20).

Researchers have tried to study what barriers are hindering this progress. However, most studies have focussed on mega or hallmark events such as large-scale international sports events or music festivals (21–29). Small-scale events, such as corporate seminars, cultural hostings, personal celebrations, social galas, etcetera, have not been studied widely in the literature, especially regarding their environmental impact. Even though small-scale events have a more minor ecological and economic effect than mega-events, they are more in number, are hosted more frequently, and constitute a large part of the event management industry (30). Small-scale

events differ in size, budget, resources, and stakeholders involved; hence it can be assumed that small-scale events' barriers to greening would be different compared to large-scale mega-events. With the change in the type of barriers, the actions needed to overcome these barriers would also be other. Thus I aimed to answer the following research question through this empirical research:

*“How can event management organisations overcome the greening barriers and make small-scale events more environmentally sustainable?”*

As event planners and event management companies are the ones who coordinate the planning, organising and implementation of an event, they can play a critical role in the greening of the event (31–33). Hence, through interviewing six event management companies located in India that conduct small-scale events sustainably, I have explored how the small-scale events industry can overcome the greening obstacles and have created a model to explain the results.

The following section of the literature review explores the evolution of the term sustainability in the events industry, what measures are being taken already and the barriers and drivers that the researchers have discovered in the greening of events. The research methods section details the research design and how the data has been designed and analysed. Lastly, the result section summarises the greening model, and the discussion section concludes my findings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Sustainability In The Event Sector**

When the Brundtland Report coined the term "sustainable development", a sustainable event was primarily regarded as "an event that has a sustainability policy or incorporates sustainable practices into its management and operations" (19). As time passed by and sustainability started becoming mainstream with John Elkington popularising the term "triple bottom line" (34),

researchers began to understand the evolution of green event management in the era of economic, social and environmental sustainability (35–37). A term specific to ecological sustainability, "greening of the event," was coined to define investment in sustainable practices and facilities (17). These definitions were considered quite vague and did not explain the process of greening but defined what a green event should look like (38). Sustainability in the events sector achieved a breakthrough when UNEP rolled out its green meeting guide and described a green event as 'an event which is designed, organised, and implemented in a way that minimises negative environmental impact and leaves a positive legacy for the host community.' (14) The slow movement also inspired researchers to explore slow events that could positively impact the local economy and host environment (39).

There is a collective agreement among the researchers of sustainable tourism and events that several studies are exploring economic sustainability (25,40–42), and quite a few are exploring social sustainability (24,39,43,44). However, very few are examining environmental sustainability (19).

### **Barriers To Event Greening**

One of the study's topmost challenges was the involvement of various stakeholders with diverse and conflicting interests. Event planners must be armed with all the necessary information, including cost and benefit analysis, to garner enough support from everyone (19). There are also operational challenges that relate to the availability of all the needed inputs, such as a green venue, renewable energy, reusable decor, waste management, and green transport, all in one place (19). However, early planning and active communication of the action plan can help select the right service providers and help address their concerns early on (14). The success of

implementing sustainability practices also depends on event attendees; for example, waste management efforts would only be successful if the attendees segregate at the source. Such behavioural factors are out of the control of the event organisers but are essential for the success of greening the event (19,38). Clear communication pre and during the event regarding sustainability measures to the participants can ensure strict adherence (14). There is also the possibility of the potential attendees considering sustainable events as dull or boring (1). They might feel that their hedonic experience is being turned into an awareness drive (1). Hence, it is imperative to consider consumer behaviour while planning a green event. There is also the case of regional and cultural differences between different event venues, which hamper sustainability efforts (14). Availability of adequate infrastructure, sustainable supplies, and systems may vary across other regions, along with people's understanding and experience regarding sustainability. This discrepancy creates new challenges for the event planners with new events and venues.

Mair & Jago were the first to conceptualise greening events and develop a framework to identify barriers and drivers in business events (17). Mair built on her study with Laing, applied the framework to music festivals, and found similarities in the barriers and drivers in greening two very different types of events, namely professional and entertainment (45). This conceptual framework was further developed and applied in an Asian context, which proved that the barriers and drivers for event greening are the same in the East and the West (38). The drivers of event greening are gaining competitive advantage, image enhancement, customer demand and personal stewardship. In contrast, the barriers identified are lack of time, availability of resources, insufficient sustainability knowledge, high costs, involvement of multiple stakeholders and lack of policy support. It is essential to note that there are two leading causes behind the drivers; one is the perception of sustainability as a "hygiene factor", which means that incorporating

sustainability into events does not necessarily reward them but would hurt them if absent (17). Hence, it can be prevalent for the industry to use sustainability as a term to greenwash. The second cause is the personal values and ethos of the event organisers or planners who believe that sustainability is the ethical way of living and find it their responsibility to educate people through the events (45). It is important to note that the financial costs as a barrier are not related to sustainable procurement or management; they are related to acquiring knowledge and investing additional time in making the event sustainable (46). Event planners also need to work around the rigidity of the client's decision-making (47). For instance, they might prefer a specific venue they have used previously, but it might not have waste segregation practices or renewable energy sources. Such inflexibility makes it difficult for the event organisers to implement green practices. However, presenting reports regarding cost saving or ticking the client's consciousness by quantifying the results of the implemented measures can help persuade the client to change their mind (48).

### **Drivers Of Event Greening**

The researchers have a consensus that the main driver of greening in the event management industry is the presence of an eco-champion event planner motivated by his values to make a change (9,17,45). By organising a green event, they want to influence all the stakeholders, including attendees, towards living a more sustainable lifestyle and spreading awareness regarding environmental conservation (5,9,49). They act as a catalyst and enable the shift towards a more green industry, setting a path for others to follow.

Four key stakeholders have emerged through the studies who can help change towards a more sustainable and green event industry. First is the customer, which can pressure the event

organisers and planners to adopt more environmentally responsible practices (17,38,45). Second, the government can create mandatory rules and strict policies for the industry that would leave no choice to the planners but to organise a green event (38). They can also employ positive reinforcement to reward environmentally sustainable behaviour that can act as publicity for the event organiser. Grants and subsidies can also make the green event space more lucrative and affordable (45). Third, professional associations can help educate event planners regarding sustainability and how it can give them an edge via cost saving (17). Currently, the guidelines issued by multiple associations are numerous and need to be clarified. A simple checklist-like guideline could make the process easier for event planners (17,47). They can also ensure compliance by monitoring practices and accreditation (50). They can act as a networking hub to let people interact and expand their knowledge regarding sustainability and best practices (50). Lastly, the media is a catalyst that can shape public opinion and policies (17,38,45).

Green event management also helps the event planning organisation gain a competitive edge by being at the forefront of sustainability in front of a large audience (5). Green event practices such as reduced waste, local sourcing, and energy conservation reduce costs for the organisers in the long run (14). Less material usage leads to less expenditure which ends up reducing the budget. They also avoid hefty fines and penalties imposed by the governing bodies regarding waste management and pollution control (18). Less waste, local sourcing, reduced consumption, and adhering to local traditions lead to social inclusion, positively impacting the local community (1). Hence, an environmentally sustainable event paves the way for a socially and economically sustainable event.

### **Evolution Of Greening In The Events Sector**



While the industry is already making some strides towards implementing positive environmental practices due to the growing consumer demand, more is needed to create a positive environmental impact (1). The event planners are adhering to an Environmental Impact Assessment tool to calculate their ecological footprint and take a few measures such as using solar energy, compostable toilets and carbon credits (9). These measures are a positive step in the right direction, but sustainability needs to be considered a primary criterion in the planning process. While UNEP's green guide defines five critical areas of greening that need to be addressed (14), ISO 20121 guide focuses on optimal planning and monitoring measures that need to be considered (13). Even though these guides give a starting point to the event planners for greening the event, the 27th International Sustainable Development Research Society Conference Panel in 2021 created a more holistic approach. They discussed Circular Economy In The Event Sector. They created an 11x4 matrix, dividing the columns into major event phases, namely planning, setting up, event day and strip down and the rows into the 11 R's of sustainability, namely Refuse, Reservitisation, Reduce, Regenerate, Reuse, Repair, Refurbish, Remanufacture, Re-purpose, Recycle and Recover. The matrix needs to be filled by the event planner based on the practices they are undertaking under each of these heads for environmental aspects of emissions, resource utilisation, biodiversity preservation, waste production, energy management and water use (8). Industry experts believe that growing demand is changing the business model of the events industry. However, the change has been slower than anticipated as the event industry still needs to understand sustainability demonstrating a knowledge gap (46). Hence more research is needed in this sector regarding the barriers and how they can be overcome (49).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This research aimed to develop a grounded theory for overcoming barriers in greening small-scale events; an inductive approach was chosen to understand common patterns between the different cases (51). The research question of this study can best be answered by emphasising the entire sample of cases and not their unique contexts; hence the cross-sectional research design was deemed most appropriate for this research (51). As the area of small-scale events is under-researched, a qualitative approach is best suited to develop new theories (52).

### **Data Collection**

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted online via google meet with six event management companies in India that only organise small-scale events and do so sustainably to collect appropriate data to answer the research question. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and provide a real-world understanding of under-researched topics (53). Participants were selected through purposive sampling via intensive research on the Internet. Two main criteria were used to select the participants: the event planners only organise small-scale events, and they organise them sustainably. The keywords used to find the company were “Sustainable/Eco-friendly/Green Event Management/Planning/Planners/Company India.” Email, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp to contact the companies. The study was exposed to response bias, as only six responded promptly out of ten companies contacted. An overview of the companies interviewed has been provided in Appendix A. Personal interviews with the key personnel give an in-depth understanding of the entire process and are successful in presenting contextual and case background information (51).

Thus, the interviews were conducted with the founders. The founders were able to give insights into the barriers they faced when they started a sustainable event management organisation in the event space and how they have overcome those barriers over time. They also shared the standard practices they have established for greening the events. The initial questions were regarding the barriers faced by their company while organising events sustainably and what measures they have undertaken to overcome them. An interview guide of open-ended questions was developed to keep enough space for new insights to emerge from data to facilitate theory development (54). The questions were aimed at all eight event organisation functions identified in the literature review. The latter questions were asked regarding the barriers of large-scale events and whether they have faced the same. The interview guide is presented in Appendix B. All the interviews were conducted in English to avoid data loss during translation.

### **Data Analysis**

The recorded interviews were transcribed using the Descript software. The data was open-coded in an Excel sheet into various themes to build the model for the greening of events (55). The coding was done by reading the transcripts multiple times and with the help of notes that were taken during the interviews. Two sets of codes were developed, the first to identify various barriers faced by the event management companies in greening small-scale events and the second to identify how to overcome these barriers. The first step was to pick relevant quotes to the research question by reading the transcription. Later similar quotes were arranged together to bring out the first-level descriptive codes. Based on the data pattern in the first-level codes, various themes were identified to build the second-level analytical code to build a model. The coding process, along with quotes, has been presented in Appendix C.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study received ethical approval from Campus Fryslan's Ethics Committee before the data collection process started. Each participant received the informed consent form before the interview, and they duly signed it. It outlined the purpose of the research, the nature of participation and data collection practices (56). The informed consent was also verbally stated before starting each interview. The permission for the audio recording of the interview was also taken before the start of the interview. The data was collected and stored electronically as per the current GDPR Rules. Once the transcription was complete, the audio recordings were deleted to eliminate the chances of any fraud (51).

## **RESULTS**

### **Barriers To Greening Of Small-Scale Events**

The barriers specific to small-scale events were discovered based on interviews with six sustainable event management companies, and it was found that the barriers faced by event management companies in greening small-scale events resonate with the findings of existing studies that have examined the barriers in greening large-scale events. Notably, these barriers did not stop the event management companies from implementing sustainable measures but acted as hurdles they overcame through strategies presented in the section following the barriers. It was also interesting to note that all the founders interviewed were personally motivated to make a change and had deep environmental values. Hence the barriers did not stop them from pursuing their goal of organising sustainable events. Due to this quality, they act as a catalyst in overcoming the barriers and making the events green.

Figure 1 presents the model of greening small-scale events. The five barriers identified during the interview are listed below with illustrative quotes' support.

### ***Budget Constraints***

All six interviewees agreed that sustainability is perceived to be too expensive by their prospective clients. The clients are ready to give the reins to the event management companies to make the event more sustainable as long as they do not need to spend more than their budget.

*"In the same budget, if I can do it sustainably, they will be like, yeah, do it. But if you ask them to spend more, they cannot." (PW).*

The clients understand the need for sustainability in the event and show excitement at the idea of their entire event being green, but they are unwilling to pay for its costs.

*"This has been a major challenge for us. We get a lot of queries and requests, but when it comes to, you know, the commercial aspect of it, people usually take a step back" (GM).*

*"People love this concept of sustainable weddings, but they do not understand that it comes with a cost right now. Because the concept is quite a niche. The affordability is not there." (GM).*

Even though some of these companies have managed to keep the quotes below or at par with the average market prices, people tend to keep the bias that organising a green event will be more expensive than a regular event.

*"This is the problem, people come over and ask, this is a green event will you do it with less budget? And, our budget is always lesser than the other event management companies." (GU).*

*"So people thought sustainable events are either very, very cheap or they are either costly. We try to make them understand that you will spend the same amount that you would have in a normal event." (NT)*

These high costs related to green event planning are associated with low demand for sustainable products as it is a niche market. However, sustainable event management companies hope it will be resolved, with sustainable events becoming the norm instead of an exception. They also argued that the events used to be conducted sustainably until single-use products and other resources became accessible, and easy to ask the event planners need to return to the old ways of doing events. With the resources being reduced, reused and recycled, the costs of planning and executing the event would ultimately decrease.

### ***Involvement of multiple stakeholders***

End-to-end event planning requires communication and coordination with various stakeholders such as caterers, decorators, waste collectors, venue organisers, etcetera. Often the stakeholders involved need more knowledge about sustainability; hence the event planning companies have to educate them and make them aware of the ecological impact.

*"We go through the plans in detail with them, explain the repercussions of it and suggest them alternatives." (GM)*

Each entity involved has different working methods, additional budget and cost allocation, and management styles. The event planners must keep an amicable approach in negotiating with each party and convincing them to do it sustainably.

*"In many cases, the sponsors would not listen, and we would just make sure that whatever merchandise or gifting coming out from their stalls was supplied with segregated bins for the plastic wraps." (EF)*

Most of the time, the event planners could not bring in their vendors who had greener products as the clients wanted the old caterers and decorators with whom they had previously worked on other events to host this event. This created much friction between parties as the regular vendors needed to be made aware of the alternatives for single-use products.

*"They were very adamant about the fact of not replacing the floral foams in bouquet arrangement. They said, no, we do not know any alternatives for this. On the other hand, we proposed many alternatives to them, but they stuck to it and said we would reduce the quantities to half, which they did, but it still ended up being in the landfill." (GM)*

If the events are hosted in five-star properties, they have rules and regulations regarding waste management and catering. Hence, the event planners need more say in these matters, making it is challenging for them to implement certain measures to make these specific functions greener.

*"The policy of all the five properties in India says that all the ways collected have to be taken care of by the five properties themselves. They will let you do segregation, but you cannot remove the waste. So basically, the waste segregation will happen to show that your segregation has been done." (NT)*

The consensus among all the event planning companies was that it is much easier if they bring in their vendors, caterers and decorators, whom they have already associated with, to handle different functions of event organising as it makes it much easier to source eco-friendly materials and coordinate action.

### ***Demand By Attendees***

Since the COVID pandemic, people have become more sensitive to hygiene. They prefer single-use cutlery and packaged water bottles over reusables because they feel more hygienic and safe.

*"Clients only ask for plastic bottles and paper cups as people think it is more hygienic when they use single-use" (GU).*

Many activities, such as waste segregation, need attendees' cooperation. Hence, they need to deploy resources and extra workforce to ensure such activities occur smoothly.

*"People attending music festivals do not care too much about waste segregation. Sometimes they are too drunk to even like, you know, respond" (EF).*

*"We have seen numbers decrease regarding waste segregation if we do not employ a volunteer at the waste station" (SK).*

The consensus by the sustainable event planning companies here is that people need to be more educated regarding the environmental impact of events. The attendees and clients from an aware space are much easier to work with and make the event greener.

### ***Hidden Costs***

Sustainable event planning companies incur many hidden costs that they are not transferring to the clients. With every event, they must understand the local economy, ecosystem and policies, which requires much research and time. When negotiating with several stakeholders, they must keep their best foot forward and share all the possible information relevant to their decision-making. They also spend much time educating the stakeholders regarding sustainability and its importance.



*"It is not easy. I will say the negotiation part is quite time-consuming and energy-consuming."  
(GM)*

They also have to work post-event on making sure that the wet waste is being sent for segregation, food waste is being donated to a food bank, the decorations are kept back for reuse, the dry waste is sent for recycling, etcetera.

*"It is more effort because we have to get everything back, like all the decorations. It is not like if we are using paper pom flowers so that we will throw them. Yeah, we get them, we fold them and keep them back. Making cost is not high, three rupees or something for one paper flower, but we put effort to fold, keep, and reuse them as many times." (GU)*

These activities require workforce, time and resources, but these costs are not quoted when handing the proposition to the client.

### ***Client Aspirations***

People think sustainable events would be too simple and not aesthetically pleasing. They have a very narrow image of a sustainable event, believing that the event would no longer remain fun or appealing to the eyes.

*"The barrier was to make people understand that it can look beautiful. What people think is it will look drab, or it will not look nice design-wise" (NT).*

They also tend to believe that a few things must be part of the celebration as they have become popular. People think there can be no decor without balloons or gifting without wrapping. If the event planning companies give them the option of minimising such wasteful additions, they usually face resistance from the client.

*"At first, they say, no, no, no, my daughter she cannot have a birthday party without balloons. But when we did it, they said no one missed balloons." (GU)*

There is another case when the client has a high budget and wants everything customised to their liking and personalised to their taste. Sustainable event planning companies find creating something new, especially for the event from scratch, quite wasteful hence advise against it. However, they are met with client resistance and must tackle it with a friendly approach.

*"Even the fabric people want to customise, if it is my wedding, I want a Peacock theme, so they will get new cushion covers made with a peacock." (NT)*

Currently, most of the clients that approach sustainable event management companies want to have an eco-friendly event. However, due to limited knowledge about the subject, they need to realise what popular aspects they will have to give up, hence lowering the client's aspirations becomes an additional task for the event organisers.

### **Overcoming The Barriers**

Event management companies employ different methods to organise a sustainable small-scale event while overcoming the barriers and prejudice against sustainability. These have been summarised below, along with quotes from the interviewees.

#### ***Adaption***

Sustainable event management companies begin planning a small-scale event by adapting to the local economy, incorporating the stakeholders' goals and addressing the main issues the events industry faces. They thoroughly examine the materials and services available in the local economy and then choose the ones that can return to the economy, thereby addressing circularity.

*"So our priority was to see the complete life cycle of the product and match it with the local economy availability and then suggest an alternative." (EF)*

Then they work with the stakeholders involved to incorporate these materials into the event while considering their interests. This happens in two phases, first at the ideation stage of the event and second at the planning stage. During the ideation stage, when the vendors and sponsors have yet to be chosen, they create a tailor-made standard operating procedure and share it with prospective parties. Accordingly, the event's sponsors and vendors are selected, making the process hassle-free for the later stages. The companies prefer to work with known vendors as they know how event organisation works and what aspects must be made sustainable.

*"We would suggest beforehand to them that this is what you should mention in your SOP" (EF).*

However, in most cases, the clients already have their vendors and sponsors on board, so the best option is to reach a middle ground with them. At times when complete removal of unsustainable materials is not possible, and the vendor is not ready to opt for the other alternatives, the best way is to minimise the materials.

*"So when working with so many vendors, you must come to a middle ground. Cause there must be some vendors coming from a small setup, like maybe from a rural background, they do not understand the concept of sustainability as such." (GM)*

When working with corporate sponsors, they try to align the event's sustainability with the corporates' sustainability agenda.

*"There were sponsors whom themselves had their sustainability agendas, which most of the corporates do have right now. And they would listen." (EF)*

The companies leverage the PR and marketing in favour of the sponsors putting them in good light, which convinces the sponsors to commit to sustainability in the event.

*"You know, when working on events as your bread and butter, you must use media wisely. You need to take the help of good PR. When people see that, you know, this thing will give them PR, we will put them in a good light; then they will somehow be lured to do it." (GM)*

When working with vendors, event management companies have learned that they already possess many assets that can be reused for different projects, so they build on the existing assets and make them sustainable without incurring any extra expenditure for the vendors.

*"Work starts when we talk to them and understand what they have already and what we have already, and then the designs are made. It is not like we make a design, and we go to them saying make this." (NT)*

In the long run, the vendors also start adapting to the best practices of the event planning companies as they start understanding the nuances of a sustainable event and how to source the right resources.

*"And somehow, I feel many of my florists have started using our way of using no floral foam, stringing their flowers, and doing design, which is more sustainable. Moreover, they look even prettier. Even if they are doing it to save their cost." (NT)*

### **Education**

As event management companies are genuinely committed to sustainability, they leverage events to create awareness amongst people and open their minds towards sustainability. It begins with the clients; they present statistical reports to them pre and post-event to show the impact they

have created by diverting waste from landfill, minimising energy and water usage, and reducing their carbon footprint. This environmental report raises a wave of responsibility and achievement amongst the client, showing them that their efforts have paid off. These are also supplemented with cost-saving reports to convince the clients on the financial front.

*"My way of convincing a client to switch to a sustainable product was to show them in the report. We would weigh the waste and track down where that waste was going." (EF)*

Vendors are often made aware of the consequences of single-use materials and their environmental impact. This way, they try to nudge the consciousness of the vendors by employing a friendly approach instead of an aggressive approach. The vendors consider sustainability something big and scary, so the companies simplify the term for them and break it down in a way that benefits them. The companies also stress that reusables can lead to cost savings in the long run, and they will not have to invest in new assets every time; the old ones can be tweaked through minimal design changes and made to look fresh for the next event. Incorporating sustainability also reduces waste generation, which makes it easier for the venue to handle waste. Adhering to waste management practices also leaves them less exposed to local laws. The vendors can also reach a new market where people want to conduct sustainable events.

*"So if people are coming, we serve food in reusables, making it easy for the organiser as well. Then organisers do not need to source disposables. So we are saving money. Moreover, they do not need to take care of and manage trash later. So once you get eco-friendly, your life is also easy." (GU)*

The companies also try to influence the attendees by marketing the event as sustainable. The invites clearly state that it is a green event and provides specific guidelines to them. For example,

a wedding invite can clearly state that no guest needs to bring any gift to the party, or a marathon run can state that people must bring their water bottles to the event. This information also piques their interest regarding the greening of events. To tap into the inquisitiveness, event management companies try visualising sustainability for them at the event. A prevalent practice is creating a compost pit for wet waste within the venue so the attendees can experience the process first-hand. They also add small nudges throughout the event by putting quotes like "eat what you take and take what you can eat" near food counters, but they are careful to balance it out as they do not want to make their client's event an awareness campaign. They stay very subtle in their approach.

*"A composting pit was put near the venue, and people were coming and checking it out between the events. People were curious to know how this wedding was green and how it was happening." (GM)*

The second way is to organise eco-friendly activities within the event for people to enjoy. Activities such as pottery and tree plantations can be a source of entertainment and education.

People also have a prejudice that the decor in sustainable events is going to make everything look drab, but this is where sustainable event management companies come in and use natural materials to design and do the decor to open people's minds towards sustainability and tell them that events can look beautiful and be made enjoyable without harming the environment.

*"What people think is, it will look drab, it will not look nice, but we make them understand how design can help you understand sustainability much better. We can design an environment for people to celebrate but also keep a low carbon footprint" (NT)*

### **Collaboration**

Sustainable event management companies also try to strengthen the local economy through collaborations. Big catering companies are not so open to reducing buffer food stock and often do not distribute it to needy people. Collaborating with community kitchens or home chefs resolves this problem by reducing food wastage and increasing the income for small businesses at the same time. They are easier to work with, close-knit, and adhere to more sustainable practices.

*"Our home chefs were very clever. If I am giving them a number and the items, they will prepare the quantity likewise." (GU)*

For other aspects, such as decor, local artisans can help create an aesthetic setup by employing indigenous art and craft techniques. This practice not only helps preserve the local art forms but also helps provide income to the artisans.

*"I feel there is a lot that happens in Indian art itself. We want to imbibe and showcase it because it is beautiful, sustainable, and reusable. You can use it in your own houses, garden, or anywhere, and they are not expensive, to be honest." (NT)*

Volunteer groups and NGOs can also help by being present at the event and guiding people regarding waste segregation. Many NGOs also help by collecting leftover food and distributing it to needy people.

*"We have tied with Swabhiman NGO and Robinhood Army. So they take the food, and they will distribute it in the slum area." (GU)*

These unconventional collaborations can help strengthen the local community while maintaining the eco-friendliness of the event.

### ***Customisation***

To overcome the resistance and constraints related to budget and procurement, sustainable event management companies always present multiple options to the clients and vendors, allowing them to choose between various alternatives. For example, if the client is not necessarily keen on keeping cloth napkins, they can opt for the next best option: recycled paper napkins that can be collected and composted later. Companies always try to push for the most sustainable alternative, which is not single-use, but the clients may prefer something else. So they always have their plan B ready with the next best sustainable option.

*"So we try and give them solutions of what they can opt-in depending on the budget that the clients have, we give them options like this A, B, and C, so then they choose accordingly and get that implemented." (NT)*

Each event has a different action plan for sustainability; it depends on the local economy, budget, availability of materials, and types of events. For instance, if there is no composting facility available in the immediate vicinity, but there is a recycling plant nearby, the companies would suggest recyclable plastic alternatives instead of compostable ones as the plastic would be able to go back into the economy, but the biodegradable option would end up in a landfill.

They try to reuse their decor in every event by tweaking the design so that no two events look the same. For example, the fabric used in the previous event can be upcycled through techniques like tie and dye, giving it an entirely new look. Showcasing local art and craft through rentals can provide a unique design aesthetic to the event and put local artisans' work at the forefront.

*"We keep upcycling decor. So, we do not throw away anything. We keep using it. So there are many art forms that you can do, and it will still look different, and you can use it. It may not be*



*on the main stage, but it will be in the elements around where other things are happening in an event." (NT)*

Regarding catering, the companies propose to put the local cuisine, which does not require any transportation of ingredients to the location. They try to incorporate more plant-based and resilient foods such as millet and provide a diverse menu that makes the attendees content with the food options provided at the event.

*"Because some people eat meat, you cannot stop them. However, if you are not serving them, give them many options. I worked with a chef to create a menu that was more wide so that people did not feel like, oh, there is no meat. I push for climate-resilient plants and local produce." (EF)*

Proposing simple swaps do not require extra inputs but help green events. Conducting the event during the day instead of the night helps save energy and reduce the expenditure on diesel, generators and power grids. These swaps also happen for behind the scene activities, like switching to bio enzyme for washing cutlery to reduce water consumption. Procuring materials can be a mix of rentals, reusables and recyclables to keep the costs low while keeping the event green.

*"We try to help our clients to do more day events because then we save the electricity. Especially the lighting used in events take much power." (NT)*

While negotiating, companies need to put their best foot forward, which needs to be backed by thorough research as the stakeholders would try their best to resist. Knowing about local policies and laws helps here. Most local governments have waste management rules regarding waste segregation and the treatment of workers. Sharing this law can convince the venues to segregate waste at source and adopt healthy workplace practices for waste workers. The recent single-use

plastic ban in India has made the negotiation process relatively easier for event planning companies. It has also made non-plastic alternatives accessible in the market, increasing the supply of sustainable materials.

*"I have personally used that law in front of many people who say we cannot do this, then you take this policy out, and you tell them, but you have to." (EF)*

Diversifying and localising different legs of the event contributes to the greening of events and enrichment of the local community without adding any extra expenditure.

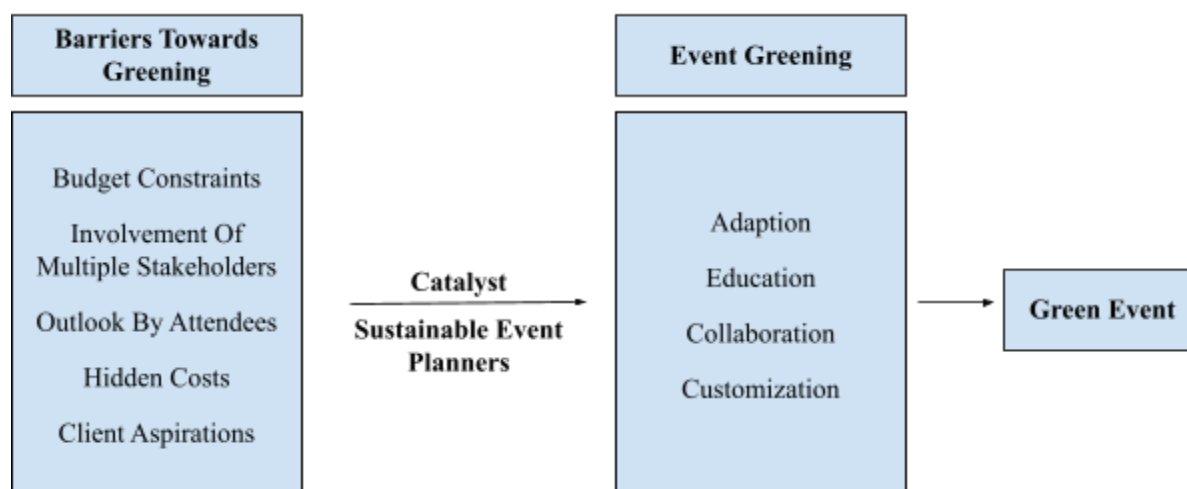


Fig 1. Model Of Small-Scale Event Greening

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the barriers event management companies face in greening small-scale events and to overcome these barriers. Founders of six event management companies that organise small-scale sustainable events were interviewed. It can be concluded that the greening barriers faced by large-scale and small-scale events industries are slightly different.

As the interviewees only organised sustainable events, it showcased the will and commitment of these event organisers towards sustainability. The result corroborates the findings of previous

research that an eco-champion or a steward is required for successful greening efforts (17,45). Their consistent efforts have set an example for their industry peers to follow their path, as they have already set the blueprint by being early adopters (45).

### **Key Findings**

Multiple pieces of research have highlighted the barriers of budget, involvement of multiple stakeholders and demand by attendees. However, hidden costs and client aspirations are two new barriers that have come out in this study.

The barriers regarding limited time and availability of resources did not come into the picture. Event planning companies understand the dynamism of the entire industry; hence they are always ready to tackle sustainability issues in a small time frame as well. Lack of availability of resources also did not surface as they localised the sustainability of each event and considered multiple factors before choosing any particular option for organising the event. It is also exciting to note that all the barriers identified in this study are rooted in the need for more education and awareness regarding sustainability among the various stakeholders. The cooperation from vendors, clients and attendees is lacking because they need to understand sustainability and the implications of not organising a green event. Due to this lack of awareness, disseminating education becomes one of the most critical steps in overcoming the barriers.

The data supports that the cost benefits, in the long run, can help overcome budget constraints (46), as only some interviewees had already done by pricing themselves at par and sometimes below regular commercial events. The rest are also confident to do so soon as sustainable supplies become more accessible with higher demand, which would dissolve the hidden costs barrier.

Though previous research has suggested that event planners undertake environmentally sustainable practices to gain a competitive edge (5), in this research, the main driver is their desire to showcase that a sustainably organised event can be as enjoyable as a commercial event without going over the budget. By leveraging design aesthetics and diversification, the interviewees try to minimise the environmental impact while considering people's hedonic aspirations for organising and attending events. These steps have answered the call for research in previous studies (1), where the researchers want to bridge the gap between inculcating sustainability values amongst people and ensuring people have a leisurely experience. This study also supports the previous work regarding how sustainability-organised events can stimulate pre-environmental behaviour (57). However, the educational efforts are not directed towards attendees but other stakeholders such as vendors and suppliers. Event organisers themselves can enable a shift towards a greener industry through disseminating education.

### **Practical Implications**

The results show that government regulations and policies are crucial in negotiation. Hence, stronger laws favouring green events are needed to make the negotiation and greening hassle-free (38). Stricter laws would compel the stakeholders to adhere to greener practices, reducing the burden on the event planners for coordinating and negotiating the activities.

It is also evident that greening efforts help achieve social sustainability through localisation. Promoting local art and crafts, food, and businesses leaves a lasting impact on the host environment. In previous research, the event industry had called out for a standardised checklist as they need clarification amongst various accreditations and frameworks available for greening (17,47). Standardisation may work for large-scale events, but small-scale events need to be

localised and customised as per the need of the client, location, economy and vendors; hence a checklist may render redundant. Event management companies need to develop different backup plans in case the negotiations fail, so sticking to a checklist might make the entire process very rigid, leaving no room for the event's greening. It is also interesting to note that to make small-scale events greener, the entire business model need not be changed, and various adaptations to existing infrastructure and practices can resolve the issue in the long term (46).

### **Limitations**

Although all the steps were taken to minimise the biases and get reliable and rigorous results, this research has limitations. Due to the university's word-limit requirements and time frame, a diverse but small sample was examined. Even though previous studies have shown similarities regarding the greening barriers and drivers in the event management industry between the Eastern and Western contexts (38), the generalizability of this study might be limited as the sample was only limited to India. The companies interviewed were event management companies that only organise sustainable events; hence the study's results might only partially apply to commercial event management companies.

### **Future Research**

I recommend more empirical research into the explored topic to overcome the limitations. Further research can examine if the small-scale events industry faces the same barriers in other contexts apart from India and if the same framework can be applied to overcome these barriers. Researchers can also examine if this framework can be modified for the large-scale events industry. As we have seen from the results section, many organisers use the events to spread information regarding sustainability, and in-depth research can be done to explore how it affects

the outlook of the attendees and suppliers towards sustainability in the long run. It would also be interesting to delve into the differences and similarities in the greening of different events to examine how the barriers and steps to overcome them vary across professional, social and entertainment events as the motivations and gains behind each event category differ. Another interesting take would be to see the motivations and role of other stakeholders, such as attendees and clients, in the greening of events.

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## APPENDIX A

## Information Regarding Interviewees

<i>Event Management Companies</i>	<i>Events Organised</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Interview Duration</i>
Nose To Tail (NT)	Social	Mumbai, Maharashtra	51:35
GreenMyna (GM)	Professional, Social & Entertainment	Mumbai, Maharashtra	49:07
Green Utsav (GV)	Social	Bengaluru, Karnataka	36:12
Earthling First (EF)	Professional & Entertainment	Delhi	47:49
Skrap (SK)	Professional & Entertainment	Mumbai, Maharashtra	23:52
Panigraha Weddings (PW)	Social	Bengaluru, Karnataka	14:46

Table A1

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide

#### *Icebreaker questions*

Good morning, how are you doing today?

#### *Starting Questions*

How did you begin your entrepreneurial journey and about the business?

#### *Main Questions*

- What main barriers have you faced in this industry when you decided to make the event management space greener?
- How have you overcome these barriers over the years?
- What is the client's outlook regarding your green event management business?
- How do you make food and catering more sustainable?
- How do you manage the waste?
- Is marketing also made sustainable?
- Is water and energy consumption handled by your company? And if yes, how do you ensure minimal usage?
- How do you make procurement sustainable?
- Do you keep sustainability in mind while selecting a venue?
- Do you try to make transport greener as well?
- Has budget ever posed constraints on the greening of the business?
- Has limited time ever posed any issues when making the event more sustainable?

- Do you think the laws and policies are good enough to support sustainable event management practices?
- Do you think you need technical expertise in this stream of sustainable event management?
- What is the outlook of the event attendees towards sustainable event organisation?
- Do you have to educate people involved in the event organisation process regarding sustainability?
- How do you think the small-scale event management industry can be made more sustainable?

***Final questions***

- Can I contact you for a potential follow-up?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## APPENDIX C

Quotes	First Order Codes	Second Order Codes
There were sponsors whom themselves had their sustainability agendas, which most of the corporates do have right now. And they would listen.	Align sustainable event planning options the goals of the client	Adaption
You know, when working on events as your bread and butter, you must use media wisely. You need to take the help of good PR. When people see that, you know, this thing will give them PR, we will put them in a good light; then they will somehow be lured to do it.		
So when working with so many vendors, you must come to a middle ground. Cause there must be some vendors coming from a small setup, like maybe from a rural background, they do not understand the concept of sustainability as such	Check what is currently available with the vendor and plan accordingly	
Work starts when we talk to them and understand what they have already and what we have already, and then the designs are made. It is not like we make a design, and we go to them saying make this.		
So our priority was to see the complete life cycle of the product and match it with the local economy availability and then suggest an alternative.	Do thorough research on the local economy and laws	
I have personally used that law in front of many people who say we cannot do this, then you take this policy out, and you tell them, but you have to.		
In many cases, the sponsors would not listen, and we would just make sure that whatever merchandise or gifting coming out from their stalls was supplied with segregated bins for the plastic wraps	If removal is not possible opt for reduction	
They were very adamant about the fact of not replacing the floral foams in bouquet arrangement. They said, no, we do not know any alternatives for this. On the other hand, we proposed many alternatives to them, but they stuck to it and said we would reduce the quantities to half, which they did,		

<p>So what we usually do is, like, we have tied up with Sahas, like it's a team in Bangalore. They come, they collect the wet waste and they collect the dry waste separately. Out of like whatever wedding, I mean the waste generated out of the wedding, they'll collect it back and they'll give us the report.</p>	<p>Tie up with volunteers and NGOs</p>	
<p>We have tied with Swabhiman NGO and Robinhood Army. So they take the food, and they will distribute it in the slum area.</p>		
<p>we have been promoting small businesses and organic businesses cause they are very, you know, close-knitted and they might lack marketing support sometimes.</p>	<p>Create alliances in the local area to build vendor loyalty and give community based services</p>	<p>Collaboration</p>
<p>I always go source the vendors from that city itself. Develop rapport with them, and make them understand what we're trying to do. Each city I go to, I'm just trying to teach how many other people I can about it.</p>		
<p>We gave food from our home chefs</p>		
<p>For activities also I promote pottery or clay modelling</p>		
<p>We organised tree plantation drive for the child's birthday party, it makes them close to nature as well and inculcates values</p>	<p>Organise eco friendly activities for entertainment to raise awareness</p>	
<p>So if people are coming, we serve food in reusables, making it easy for the organiser as well. Then organisers do not need to source disposables. So we are saving money. Moreover, they do not need to take care of and manage trash later. So once you get eco-friendly, your life is also easy.</p>		
<p>My way of convincing a client to switch to a sustainable product was to show them in the report. We would weigh the waste and track down where that waste was going.</p>	<p>Simplify and visualise sustainability for all the stakeholders involved</p>	<p>Education</p>
<p>A composting pit was put near the venue, and people were coming and checking it out between the events. People were curious to know how this wedding was green and how it was happening</p>		

<p>We keep upcycling decor. So, we do not throw away anything. We keep using it. So there are many art forms that you can do, and it will still look different, and you can use it. It may not be on the main stage, but it will be in the elements around where other things are happening in an event.</p>		
<p>We go through the plans in detail with them, explain the repercussions of it and suggest them alternatives.</p>		
<p>So people thought sustainable events are either very, very cheap or they are either costly. We try to make them understand that you will spend the same amount that you would have in a normal event</p>		
<p>We would suggest beforehand to them that this is what you should mention in your SOP</p>	<p>Customize and tailor made SOP for each event for all the stakeholders</p>	<p>Customization</p>
<p>We ask them to put this in the invitation itself. That either no gifts or if people are getting gifts, they can wrap them in a newspaper or just give the mindful gifts</p>		
<p>I feel there is a lot that happens in Indian art itself. We want to imbibe and showcase it because it is beautiful, sustainable, and reusable. You can use it in your own houses, garden, or anywhere, and they are not expensive, to be honest.</p>	<p>Source cultural, local and ethnic food and decor</p>	
<p>So we try and give them solutions of what they can opt-in depending on the budget that the clients have, we give them options like this A, B, and C, so then they choose accordingly and get that implemented</p>	<p>Provide various options to choose from to all stakeholders</p>	
<p>Because some people eat meat, you cannot stop them. However, if you are not serving them, give them many options. I worked with a chef to create a menu that was more wide so that people did not feel like, oh, there is no meat. I push for climate-resilient plants and local produce.</p>		
<p>I use whatever I have in my own, uh, space. I take along with me like, ok, this is all I have. I will dye, I'll block print over it or do something and I'll use, or</p>	<p>Opt for rentals and reusable to keep the costs low</p>	

reuse it.		
every time it starts with, you know, I, we can't do it sustainably cause it's going to cost so and so, so, uh, you know, that trick there is to push them towards rentals.		

**Table C1**