

SUSTAINABLE MEGA-EVENTS: BEYOND THE MYTH OF BALANCED APPROACHES TO MEGA-EVENT SUSTAINABILITY

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The concept of sustainability is now integral to the lexicon of tourism and is increasingly becoming part of the discourse of mega-events. Yet despite the success of the concept of sustainable development in being adopted in tourism policy making and research, tourism is less sustainable than ever if environmental measures are adopted. Similarly, substantial questions have been raised as to the sustainability of mega-events. Three frames of sustainability are used with reference to tourism and mega-events: economic sustainability, balanced sustainability, and steady-state sustainability. Each of these has implications for the paradigm under which mega-events are developed and attracted. Only steady-state sustainability is regarded as sufficient to maintain or enhance natural capital. However, the likelihood of the required policy learning to occur for this paradigm to be adopted are slim given the role of political and corporate interests in promoting mega-events as a solution to problems of place competitiveness rather than as a symptom of the problems of contemporary neoliberal thinking with respect to events, places, and sustainability.

Key words: Steady-state tourism; Hallmark events; Political economy; Neoliberalism

Introduction

Business as usual within the events industry can't continue. Our industry can't keep producing mountain ranges of rubbish, or leave clouds of CO₂ in legacy. No matter the type of event, every coming together of people for a purpose can be done so with consideration for sustainability. (Jones, 2011, p. 12)

The concept of sustainability is one of the most successful ideas in tourism and event studies. It is one that has expanded rapidly in tourism studies

since the mid-1980s and, although coming to the study of events a little later, has now become established as an idea that is increasingly incorporated into event management and planning. C. M. Hall (2011), for example, notes that in the tourism literature, the number of articles published on sustainable tourism has grown from two in 1989 to over 60 in 2009. Sustainable tourism now has a dedicated journal, numerous dedicated texts and courses, and is a feature of many academic conferences and meetings. Yet sustainable tourism is not just an

academic concept. It has become widely adopted in policy terminology by government at all scales, industry organizations, individual firms, and non-government organization policies and statements. It has also becoming a part of the lexicon of events, especially with respect to the policy context within which they operate and how events contribute towards sustainability. However, in objective environmental terms, tourism is less sustainable than ever (C. M. Hall, 2011).

This article outlines three different interpretations of sustainability and their implications for the notion of sustainable mega-events. It argues that mega-events focused on economic or balanced sustainability are actually not sustainable at all and continue to run-down environmental capital. Instead, a steady-state approach to sustainability is required that maintains or enhances natural capital. However, before reviewing the three approaches and their implications for hallmark or mega-events, a brief outline is provided of some of the more prominent utilizations of the concept of sustainable development in mega-events.

Sustainable Mega-Events

Sustainable development has become increasingly integrated into the objectives of hosting mega-events. For example, an explicit connection was made between sustainable development and the hosting of the 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa. The FIFA “Football for Hope” program “was created as a unique and global movement that uses the power of football to achieve sustainable social development” (Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA], 2010a). Twenty Football for Hope Centers were planned to be opened in Africa post the 2010 Cup “with each center representing a key contribution to the legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Long after the final whistle is blown, the centers will continue to serve their local communities through sustainable Development Through Football Programs that use the beautiful game to inspire positive social change” (FIFA, 2010b). The World Cup was also part of South Africa’s contribution to meeting the targets of Chapter VIII of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), stating under Target 70: “Support efforts to attain sustainable tourism that

contributes to social, economic and infrastructure development,” that South Africa intended “Utilizing the 2010 Soccer World Cup to be hosted by South Africa to benefit the region” (South Africa, 2008, p. 54). An indication of how far the concept of sustainability has come is also reflected by the Olympic Movement with the Olympic Charter being amended in 1996 to include a paragraph on the role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in the promotion of sustainable development according to the provisions of Agenda 21:

The IOC sees that the Olympic Games are held in conditions which demonstrate a responsible concern for environmental issues and encourages the Olympic Movement to demonstrate a responsible concern for environmental issues, takes measures to reflect such concern in its activities, and educates all those connected with the Olympic Movement as to the importance of sustainable development.

According to the Greek Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works:

The Olympic Movement’s Agenda 21 is an instrument setting out the general actions needed in the fields in which the Olympic Movement can bring an effective contribution to sustainable development. All the members of the Olympic Movement should be urged to integrate sustainable development into their policies and activities based on above Agenda 21; they should also encourage all individuals that are linked to them to behave in such a way as to ensure that their sporting activities and their lifestyles play a part in sustainable development. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development, 2003)

However, it is perhaps relevant to note that sustainable development in this case was primarily defined in terms of the physical environmental legacy of the Olympic Games rather than any social legacy.

Another sign of the adoption of sustainability in the events community is the development of an International Standards Organization (ISO) sustainable event standard in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics. At the time of writing the draft standard is under review. The standard was produced by a new ISO project committee, ISO/PC 250, Sustainability in Event Management. There were 25 participating countries and 10 observer countries

involved as well as several associations. The standard was developed off the back of the BS8901 standard in the UK. The standard (ISO, 2012) takes a management systems approach requiring identification of key sustainability issues including venue selection, operating procedures, supply chain management, procurement, communications, transport, and others (Jones, 2011). According to Fiona Pelham, Committee Chair, “The future ISO standard will make a great difference to the event industry. . . . Just imagine the change in thinking that could follow as the international event industry starts to systematically address their negative social, economic and environmental impacts.” The ISO developments also received support from Elizabeth Henderson, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility at MPI: “As sustainability is becoming increasingly important for the event industry, individuals, companies and countries are setting multiple and differing standards. ISO 20121 will be developed with extensive stakeholder engagement so the industry can have one internationally recognized framework to implement sustainability” (ISO, 2010).

At the same time that the ISO have been developing event standards, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) have also been developing sustainability reporting guidelines for the event organizers sector. The G3 Guidelines are to be used by organizations for measuring and reporting on the economic, environmental, social, and governance dimensions of their activities, products, and services and set out reporting principles and performance indicators for economic, environmental, and social disclosures. In addition, the Supplement includes specific commentary on content and additional performance indicators. The Supplement covers the following key issues for the sector, expanded from the G3 Guidelines: economic impacts of events, environmental impacts by attendees, knowledge transfer, legacy, sourcing, commissions and gifting, site selection and bidding process, participant and attendee management, food and beverage, accessibility, inclusivity and external partners (GRI, 2011).

The GRI events project is funded by the Austrian and Swiss governments, who jointly hosted the 2008 European Soccer Championships, The London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and

Paralympic Games (LOCOG), who will host the London 2012 Olympic Games, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (GRI, 2011). Development of the GRI supplement was undertaken in conjunction with Sustainable Events Ltd., part of a group of companies of which Fiona Pelham, a panel member and chair of BS8901 Specification for a Sustainability Management System standard, as well as committee chair of the ISO events standard, is a managing director.

Standards are also being established at the national level. For example, in addition to the British standard, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA Standards), announced in December 2010 a new CSA Z2010-10 Requirements and Guidance for Organizers of Sustainable Events standard for use by event organizers seeking to plan and execute sustainable events. The standard was built on the work of The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) and the VANOC Sustainability Management and Reporting System (SMRS) and the International Academy of Sports Science and Technology’s (AISTS) Sustainable Sport and Event Toolkit, which was itself developed in collaboration with VANOC (CSA, 2010). According to Bonnie Rose, President, CSA Standards:

Implementing this standard will help to make an event more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable in an ethical and transparent manner. . . . CSA is committed to helping preserve the environment and building on the important work of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. By using those events as an example for others to emulate when organizing events with the health of the environment and society in mind, CSA is helping to ensure the legacy of the Games lives on through this standard. (CSA Standards, 2010)

The principles of a sustainable event according to CSA Standards (2010) include:

ethical behavior, accountability, and transparency; engagement of the community and local stakeholders; positive benefits for the environment and society; accessible and inclusive setting; safe and secure atmosphere and facilities for spectators, participants, and workers; excellent customer/client experience; and a positive legacy.

With all this sustainable tourism discourse and sustainable mega-event activity, one might expect tourism itself to have become more sustainable. However, in environmental terms tourism is less sustainable than ever. There are more emissions in absolute terms, greater resource use (energy, land use), and contribution to biodiversity loss (C. M. Hall, 2011). However, we also keep being told that tourism is one of the world's largest industries, as of 2011 "supporting more than 258 million jobs worldwide and generating some 9.1% of global GDP" (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2011).

The growing contribution of tourism to environmental change while simultaneously being promoted as a means of economic growth suggests that sustainable tourism development is a significant policy problem. Maybe even a policy failure (C. M. Hall, 2011)? In the case of sustainable mega-events perhaps even more so (Dredge & Whitford, 2010; C. M. Hall, 2006). Yet, of course, it could be argued why would governments and interest groups continue to bid and seek to attract mega-events if they were not regarded as sustainable—why indeed?

Sustainability as a Policy Problem

Sustainable development is usually defined in terms of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), commonly known as the Brundtland Report, where "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 49). Five basic principles of sustainability were identified in the report: holistic planning and strategy-making that links economic, environmental, and social concerns; importance of preserving essential ecological processes; protection of both biodiversity and human heritage; the need for development to occur in such a way that productivity can be sustained over the long term for future generations (the concept of intergenerational equity); and the goal of achieving a better balance of fairness and opportunity between nations.

Despite the wide adoption of the term and its recognized importance, sustainable development has not been achieved at a global level in general or in

tourism. C. M. Hall (2011) argues that this represents a case of policy failure, while Dovers (1995, 1996) regards sustainable development as a significant policy problem, a suite of issues that are perceived to require resolution in some way. Indeed, some of the identified difficulties in achieving sustainability are very similar to the issues associated with assessing the impacts of mega-events:

Temporality: Time scales that are often significantly greater than those of political and policy cycles, especially in democratic nations.

Spatiality: Sustainability and impact problems are cross-boundary in nature and determination of boundaries is highly significant in impact assessment and management processes.

Limits: The concept of sustainability suggests that there are limits to resource exploitation because of its capacity for renewal as well as opportunity costs.

Cumulative: Most human impacts on natural and social capital are cumulative rather than discrete. Because of its size and the time span over which dedicated infrastructure is developed and then in use, the effects of mega-events should be regarded as cumulative.

Irreversibility: Some natural, economic, and social capital cannot be renewed once it has gone, (i.e., the timescale for renewal is well outside the normal parameters of policy cycles). This has substantial implications for the opportunity costs associated with development.

Complexity and connectivity: Sustainability problems are interconnected, meaning that issues cannot be easily separated in scientific terms although they often are in policy-making and the design of institutional arrangements.

Uncertainty: Some aspects of sustainability are characterized by "pervasive uncertainty" making it difficult to judge the efficacy, implications, and socio-economic impacts of policy measures.

Ethical issues: Although ethical questions are integral to all policy choices, sustainability is complicated by the centrality of generational and intergenerational equity to the concept.

Responsiveness of political systems: Because of the complex cross-boundary nature of sustainability, many political systems are unable to

adequately respond and are constantly reactive rather than proactive.

That the various elements of sustainability affect the capacity of public policy-making to provide effective sustainable tourism outcomes have long been recognized (e.g., B. Wheeler, 1993). Yet there has been little advance in making the sustainability of tourism, including events, more tractable to solution. Several reasons as to why this has occurred can be advanced. First, the relationship between tourism and sustainable development is often treated in an overly simplistic fashion that while perhaps appealing to some academics, practitioners and policy makers fails to manage policy complexity (Dredge & Whitford, 2010; C. M. Hall, 2008, 2011). Second, policy making may be continually playing “catch up” with the issue of sustainability because environmental change, along with associated economic, social, and political change, is occurring faster than the policy system can respond. Indeed, the sheer complexity of sustainability issues potentially requires a “whole of government” response that lies outside of the usual jurisdiction of tourism or event specific governance (C. M. Hall, 2008). This may be an issue of spatial scale, in that a government body may have limited spatial jurisdiction over a policy problem, or it may be an issue of means in terms of operational policy processes, technologies, and/or institutional arrangements. Or, the policy capacity to respond to issues of sustainable tourism is constrained by the political acceptability of any solution (i.e., increases in tax, greater regulation) (C. M. Hall, 2011). A third, and potentially all-encompassing, reason to the lack of tractability of sustainable tourism is related to the way in which the policy problem of sustainable tourism is framed. The widely used WCED (1987) definition is based on the intergenerational equity principle, which stipulates that no avoidable environmental burdens should be inherited by future generations. However, it is also strongly anthropocentric. In contrast, sustainable development can be defined from a more ecocentric perspective: “Improving the quality of human life, while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems” (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1991, p. 10). This latter approach recognizes that the capacity of the environment to improve living conditions

for people is limited. This may contrast strongly with perspectives that suggest that there are no or few limits to both economic growth and natural capital. The potentially different ways in which sustainability may be framed, and its implications for institutional arrangements, policy practice and policy definition, is discussed in the next section.

Three Frames of Sustainability

C. M. Hall (2011) has argued that there are three main formulations of sustainable tourism development: economic sustainability; balanced sustainability; and a third approach that is grounded in ecological economics and is often termed a degrowth or steady-state perspective. These approaches can be imagined as occurring on a continuum that stresses the significance of natural capital as the economic foundation of human society. The three approaches to sustainability and their application to mega-events is outlined in Table 1.

Although the concept of sustainable development has been described as “the central challenge of our times” (S. M. Wheeler, 2002, p. 110), its impact on policy and governance has arguably been one of incremental rather than paradigmatic change. The different orders of change represented in different approaches to sustainability are also significant with respect to the capability for shifts in paradigmatic thinking with respect to sustainable development.

Economic Sustainability

An economic sustainability approach is one in which sustainability is primarily seen as being “environmental” and development as “economic” (and to a lesser extent “social”) and the concept of sustainable tourism or sustainable mega-events aims to mitigate the paradox between them (C. M. Hall, 2011). Baeten (2000) argues that as portrayed via government and supranational institutions the sustainable development concept suggests that contemporary economic development paradigms are able to cope with environmental crisis without fundamentally affecting existing economic relationships. This approach is perhaps most widely identifiable in the work of extremely influential supranational organizations in international tourism policy networks such as the World Economic Forum (2009a, 2009b) and the WTTC (2009),

Table 1
Three Approaches to Sustainability

Approach to Sustainability	Policy Characteristics
<p>Economic: Seeks to portray the sustainability of hosting mega-events primarily in terms of a single type of impact, usually economic impact (though may have a long-term economic growth perspective). The event system is defined in primarily economic terms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability is portrayed in relatively crude economic terms, though may include mid to long-term perspectives on ROI of economic capital. • Focus on contribution to economic growth, GDP, as well as on visitor numbers and expenditure. • A “trickle-down” or exemplar approach to promoting the benefits of the event for host communities. • Insufficient attention given to opportunity costs or long-term effects. The loss of natural capital is not costed and is usually regarded as a public good. • Substantial emphasis given to the use of the event to enhance international and domestic profile and image. • Also a strong focus on self-regulation and destination competitiveness. • First order policy learning
<p>Balanced: Seeks to “balance” economic impacts of mega-events with environmental and social ones (also historically referred to as economic conservation). The event system does include economic, social and environmental elements but these are supposedly given equal weight in system management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to and promotion of “triple-bottom line” of economic, environmental and social dimensions of the event. Although economic impacts and visitor numbers remain as core indicators of development. • Multiple evaluation and assessment. Usually accompanied by decision to go ahead anyway because of perceived economic benefits. Although in theory all three dimensions are considered. • Focus on efficiency and technological solutions to the sustainability problem. • Use of standards and management systems approaches. • Promotion of the relative per-capita improvements with respect to sustainability rather than absolute contribution. • Relatively little comment on equity dimension of sustainability. • Concurrent with economic sustainability approach. • Second-order policy learning.
<p>Steady-state: Sustainability is understood as being grounded in the constraints of natural capital/natural systems. It includes some aspects of sustained yield together with a more fundamental notion of environmental conservation (also referred to as degrowth). Event system is recognized as being dependent on natural capital.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded in ecological economics. • Looks to develop a steady-state approach, related to sustainable consumption, that pays attention to systemic effects of hosting event. • Examines opportunity costs and does not regard economic growth or impacts as a good indicator of development. • Use of a broader set of economic, social and environmental indicators as part of a quality of life approach. • Reduce, reuse, recycle, and regulate (also including tax and charge for running down and damage to natural capital). • Environmental and sustainability dimensions are evaluated before bids to host proceed. • Strong focus on opportunity costs. • In some cases hosting a mega-event might not even be considered as a development option. • Third-order policy learning.

Source: Hall (2010a).

along with mega-event bodies such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA.

Significantly, a center point of an economic sustainability approach is its focus on the contribution of mega-events to place competitiveness and imaging. Competition, whether it be as a tourism destination or in a wider sense of regional competitiveness, is usually portrayed as a “given” and what places “must” do. In relation to meta-political narratives, competitiveness is also seen as a discourse that “provides some shared sense of meaning and a

means of legitimizing neoliberalism rather than a material focus on the actual improvements of economic welfare” (Bristow, 2005, p. 300). Many policies at different levels of the state, as well as policy documents from industry present the concept of competitiveness in an unproblematic manner as an unambiguously beneficial attribute of a regional economy or of a destination. As Bristow (2005) observes, “Competitiveness is portrayed as the means by which regional economies are externally validated in an era of globalization, such that there

can be no principled objection to policies and strategies deemed to be competitiveness enhancing, whatever their indirect consequences” (p. 285).

The identification of competitiveness as a significant policy goal has led to the development of a range of indicators that model and measure competitiveness, thereby identifying which places are winning in the annual “Premier League” of place competition (e.g., various reports of the World Economic Forum). Nevertheless, while all this is being done there is still substantial confusion “as to what the concept actually means and how it can be effectively operationalized . . . policy acceptance of the existence of regional competitiveness and its measurement appears to have run ahead of a number of fundamental theoretical and empirical questions” (Bristow, 2005, p. 286). It is, as Markusen (1999) would say, a relatively “fuzzy concept”: “characterizations lacking conceptual clarity and difficult to operationalize. In some cases, no attempt is made to offer evidence at all. Elsewhere, evidence marshaled is highly selective. Methodology is little discussed” (p. 870). Nevertheless, more often than not, it is accepted.

Within regional studies, the hosting of mega-events is primarily seen as part of an imitative “low road” policy in contrast to “high road” knowledge-based policies, with Malecki (2004) noting that “The disadvantages of competition mainly concern the perils that low road strategies build so that no strengths can prevail over the long term, which presents particular difficulties for regions trying to catch up in the context of territorial competition based on knowledge” (p. 1103). Low road strategies are regarded as being focused on traditional location factors such as land, labor, capital, infrastructure, and location, more intangible factors such as intellectual capital and institutional capacity are secondary. Low road strategies are bound up with the property-oriented growth machines that focus on the packaging of place product, reimagining, and the gaining of media attention. Investment in infrastructure is “similar from city to city” with respect to meetings and conventions, sports, events, and entertainment because they are aimed at the same markets with few cities being able to “forgo competition in each of these sectors” (Judd, 2003, p. 14).

In the case of mega-events, many normal policy and planning practices are abandoned. For example,

large tax exemptions may be provided helps bids to host mega-events. Indeed, in many cases they may be essential to win such bids. For example, in the case of the FIFA World Cup: “Any host country requires a comprehensive tax exemption to be given to FIFA and further parties involved in the hosting and staging of an event.” Guarantee No. 3 requires “Full tax exemption of FIFA and FIFA subsidiaries” and “is not limited to the events and is not limited time-wise.” “The exemption stated in this section shall encompass all revenues, profits, income, expenses, costs, investments and any and all kind of payments, in cash or otherwise, including through (i) the delivery of goods or services, (ii) accounting credits, (iii) other deliveries, (iv) applications, or (v) remittances, made by or to FIFA and/or FIFA subsidiaries” (Pollock, 2010). This means that to be successful in its bid, a government must agree to forgo tens of millions of pounds in tax for the benefit of FIFA, which, a charitable organization pays little tax in its home country Switzerland. In the 2010 competition in South Africa, a “tax-free bubble” was established around the tournament at FIFA’s request, relieving FIFA, its subsidiaries, and foreign football associations that are taking part, of income tax, customs duties, and value-added tax (VAT). This also applied to the various organizations designated as FIFA’s commercial affiliates, licensees, host broadcasters, broadcast rights agencies, merchandise partners, service providers, concession operators, and providers of hospitality. It also means that the tournament income of the players, some of whom are among the highest paid earners in the world, were exempt from tax for World Cup related activities in South Africa. According to Moray Wilson, who is from the professional advisory firm Deloitte in Cape Town, “The host government has given away almost the entire tax-take to FIFA” (cited in Pollock, 2010).

The desire to host sport mega-events and the requirements of having to constantly develop new and upgrade existing sports and visitor infrastructure has meant that cities and countries have been “caught in a vicious cycle of having to provide larger subsidies to finance projects that deliver even fewer public benefits” (Leitner & Garner, 1993, p. 72) (e.g., the escalating cost of the London Olympic Games or the poor returns on the 2010

FIFA World Cup in South Africa). Yet even in such situations where corporate interests clearly benefit more than the public, such is the strength of the discourse of competitiveness and the “necessity” to become a place in which capital supposedly “sticks” that the desirability to host mega-events by urban growth coalitions seems likely to remain unconstrained. The discourse of mega-event sustainability in this context is an example of first order change which is characterized by incremental, routinized, satisficing behavior that leads to change in the levels (or settings) of the basic instruments of policy but no fundamental change in approach (P. A. Hall, 1993).

Balanced Sustainability

Balanced sustainability is an extension of the economic anthropocentrism of the economic sustainability approach. This is also the approach that is most visible in terms of the justifications associated with event public policy making in Western countries and is also arguably the dominant approach in academic discourse on sustainable tourism. In the case of UNWTO policy recommendations, as well as those of many other supranational, national, and destination governance bodies, one of the cornerstones of the sustainable tourism policy paradigm is that of “balance.” According to the then UNWTO Secretary-General Francesco Frangjalli, the UNWTO (2007) is “committed to seek balanced and equitable policies to encourage both responsible energy related consumption as well as antipoverty operational patterns. This can and must lead to truly sustainable growth within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals.” Getz (2009) argued that the supposedly “new paradigm [of sustainable and responsible events] is generating increasing pressure for the application of a [Triple-Bottom Line] approach in which both the worth and impacts of planned events are evaluated with balanced measures reflecting economic, social/cultural and environmental considerations” (p. 64). Similarly, the UNEP and UNWTO (2005) stated: “Delivering sustainable development means striking a balance between [economic, social and environmental sustainability]” (p. 9). While the Canadian Standards Association (2010) comments: “When organizing a

sustainable event, the overarching goal for an organization is to maximize the value and experience of the event while striving to support a high quality of life, environmental health, and economic prosperity.”

The balanced sustainability approach to mega-events emphasizes:

- Attention to/promotion of “triple-bottom line” of economic, environmental, and social dimensions of hosting mega-events.
- Multiple evaluation and assessment. Usually accompanied by decision to go ahead anyway because of perceived economic benefits.
- Focus on “balanced” economic growth and contribution to national competitiveness.

Measures to achieve sustainability within the balanced sustainability approach often focus on new sets of indicators, objectives, or systems. Examples, of such measures include the adoption of quality systems (usually with a focus on environmental dimensions) and triple-bottom line approaches (Canadian Standards Association, 2010; Dolles & Söderman, 2010; Getz, 2009; Hayes, 2007; Jones, 2010; Ponsford, 2011; Raj & Musgrave, 2009), improved education and training (Dickson & Arcodia, 2010; O’Brien & Gardiner, 2006), and greater efficiency (Jones, 2010; Smith, 2009). The incorporation of environmental goals by the Olympic Movement without also embracing community and social impact concerns also fits into this category (C. M. Hall, 2001, 2006; Vanwynsberghe, Kwan, & van Luijk, 2011). Such approaches are symptomatic of second-order change that is change characterized by the selection of new policy instruments, techniques, and policy settings due to previous policy experience but the overarching policy goals remain the same. According to Greener (2001) this order of change is extremely significant for policy learning given that a change in an indicator or a policy instrument may also be a “symptom of possible future paradigm change, or at least present paradigm dissatisfaction” (p. 139). Indeed, the selection of policy indicators is not a neutral device. Callone (1998) stated that “Imposing the rules of the game, that is to say, the rules used to calculate decisions, by imposing the tools in which these rules are incorporated, is the starting point of relationships of domination” (p. 46), not only between

institutions, but also of one policy paradigm over another. Similarly, Majone (1989) stressed that “policy instruments are seldom ideologically neutral . . . distributionally neutral . . . [and] . . . cannot be neatly separated from goals” (pp. 116–117) and instead tend to reflect the values of the policy paradigms within which they are selected. “The performance of instruments depends less on their formal properties than on the political and administrative context in which they operate” (Majone, 1989, p. 118). Majone (1989) states that:

The choice of policy instruments is not a technical problem that can be safely left to experts. It raises institutional, social, and moral issues that must be clarified. . . . The naive faith of some analysts in the fail-safe properties of certain instruments allegedly capable of lifting the entire regulatory process out of the morass of public debate and compromise can only be explained by the constraining hold on their minds of a model of policymaking in which decisions are, in James Buchanan’s words, “handed down from on high by omniscient beings who cannot err.” (p. 143)

Steady-State Sustainability

Third-order change, or a policy paradigm shift, takes place when a new goal hierarchy is adopted by policy makers because the coherence of existing policy paradigm(s) has been undermined in light of actual results or experiences (Greener, 2001). One potential driver for a change in policy paradigms is the influence of exogenous shocks or “crises” on wider public opinion (P. A. Hall, 1993; C. M. Hall, 2010a). In the case of mega-events this is most likely associated with the realization that their costs far exceed their benefits (Andranovich, Burbank, & Heying, 2002; Crompton 1995; C. M. Hall, 1992, 2004, 2006; C. M. Hall & Wilson, 2011; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Schimmel, 2006; Whitson & Horne, 2006; Whitson & Macintosh, 2003). With specific reference to the Olympics, Minnaert (2011) found that “as opposed to the rhetoric sometimes used in the bidding stages, the Olympic Games do not automatically bring non-infrastructure benefits for all” (p. 9). McCartney et al. (2010) note in their systematic literature review of the health and socioeconomic benefits of major sporting events, “There is little evidence that major multisport events held between 1978 and 2008 delivered health, or

socioeconomic benefits for the population of the host country.” In line with other more critical studies of the hosting of mega-events, they also suggested that until decision-makers include robust, long-term evaluations as part of their design and implementation of events, it is unclear how the costs of major multisport events can be justified in terms of benefits to the host population. Going on to conclude, “Both the commissioning of studies and their publication could well be biased towards positive results. . . . The available evidence does not refute expectations of a legacy, positive or negative, but it does establish that very little is known about the impacts of previous large multisport events and, therefore, the possible impacts of future events. This contrasts with official documentation used recently to promote such events.”

One articulation of an alternative paradigm for sustainable tourism relevant to mega-events is that of a steady-state approach towards sustainability. From this perspective, sustainable tourism is understood from a steady-state economic position that explicitly recognizes the extent to which economic development, including tourism, is dependent on the stock of natural capital. Such an approach is therefore grounded in ecological economics rather than neoclassical economics. Steady-state tourism is a tourism system that encourages qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth to the detriment of natural capital. A steady-state economy, including at the destination level, can therefore be defined in terms of “a constant flow of throughput at a sustainable (low) level, with population and capital stock free to adjust to whatever size can be maintained by the constant throughput beginning with depletion and ending with pollution” (Daly, 2008, p. 3). From a steady-state approach the sustainability of mega-events is grounded in:

- An emphasis on sustainable consumption, which pays attention to the systemic effects of hosting events.
- Examines opportunity costs and does not regard economic growth or economic impact as a good indicator of development and instead focuses on a broader understanding of costs and benefits.
- Focuses on the four Rs of steady-state sustainability: reduce, reuse, recycle, and regulate (including tax).

- Gives greater equity in decision making by providing an opportunity for communities to say no to the hosting of mega-events.

A steady-state approach focuses on sufficiency as well as the efficiency focus which is a hallmark of the balanced sustainability perspective. An efficiency or “green growth” approach focuses on reducing throughput on a per capita/per unit basis. This is usually accomplished via technological innovations and/or improved environmental systems. However, such an approach by itself is regarded as insufficient to reduce a run-down in natural capital. Indeed, improved efficiencies may also reduce costs therefore actually increasing consumption overall. For example, larger event facilities may have lower per capita emissions but the overall extent of emissions remains high.

A sufficiency approach aims to slow the rate and amount of consumption overall via a mix of market and regulatory mechanisms. Elements of such an approach in tourism policy terms include (C. M. Hall, 2010b):

- The development of voluntary and mandated environmental standards at various scales of governance.
- The adoption of cradle-to-cradle lifecycle analysis in determining tourism infrastructure and product life spans.
- Relocalization schemes that reinforce the potential economic, social, and environmental benefits of consuming, producing, and traveling locally.
- Ethical consumption measures that focus on living better by consuming less and the satisfaction of nonmaterial needs.
- Taxation and other measures that reflect the full environmental cost of travel and tourism development.

Significantly, the key indicators for such a steady-state approach to mega-events would be grounded in indicators that reflect the maintenance or enhancement of natural capital, such as emissions. Social considerations, such as health and well-being, would also be given greater prominence, with events such as the Olympics requiring a social charter as well as an environmental one (C. M. Hall, 2001, 2006). Economic indicators

such as gross domestic product (GDP) would not be utilized because they are a poor indicator of the overall effects of mega-events. Indeed, “much tourism growth, as with much economic growth in general, is already uneconomic at the present margin as we currently measure it given that it is leading to a clear running down of natural capital” (C. M. Hall, 2010b, p. 137). Of course, an interesting question raised by the application of a steady-state approach to mega-events is: Would they even be hosted? In some cases they certainly would if there were greater adaptive reuse of infrastructure and stronger attention given to equity and emissions reduction. But if full consideration of the opportunity costs of mega-events were assessed many would not go ahead in their current form. Instead, by placing mega-event policy in a wider context rather than seeing them in isolation it is likely that investment decisions of scarce resources will be better considered.

Conclusion: And the Winner Is . . . the Sustainability of Mega-Events

Mega-events are symbolic of an unsophisticated approach towards sustainable development. They provide substantial corporate benefits with the costs accommodated by the wider public. The problems of understanding the factors of sustainability are very similar to those faced in evaluating the impacts of events. Most mega-event policy has a simplistic growth focus and even the triple-bottom line approach is geared towards maintaining a growth focus. Such an approach is not a paradigm shift (Getz, 2009) at all, and should instead be understood as a shift in indicators and objectives rather than reflecting a more fundamental reassessment of the policy paradigm within which events are promoted as being sustainable (Dredge & Whitford, 2010).

The small and slow is a beautiful approach embedded in steady-state sustainability does not apply to mega-events. By definition they are grand statements of belief in the discourse of place competitiveness. A steady-state approach would not regard most, if any, mega-events as sustainable in their current form, at least those that move from site to site seeking to maximize returns to the “non-profit” associations that grant places the right to

host such events. However, the steady-state approach presents a major challenge to those that claim that a balanced triple-bottom line approach is what is required for sustainable events (Getz, 2009) by emphasizing that if natural capital is drawn down then by definition it cannot be sustainable; and, perhaps more profoundly, questioning what is being balanced for whom? The paradigm therefore presents a real need to challenge/change thinking on events and on sustainability by seeking answers to the questions of who wins from hosting such events and how does that fit in with our understanding of sustainability?

Even Kotler, Haidar, and Rein (1993), who provide the standard case text for place marketing, acknowledged that the continued competition to host mega-events may not be an appropriate route to creating better places, as “the escalating competition . . . for business attraction has the marks of a zero-sum game or worse, a negative-sum game, in that the winner ultimately becomes the loser” (p. 15). Instead, places should be seeking to innovate as opposed to duplicating other place strategies that utilize events (Malecki, 2004). Indeed, C. M. Hall (2010c) suggests that the investment by the Greek and Spanish government in mega-event infrastructure that is relative unproductive over the long term has been a significant contributor to those countries’ debt crises.

The use of gross economic impact or contribution to GDP measures by those who seek to justify events also serves to disguise the overall impacts of events. Arguably, it is not economic analysis but political economy that is required (C. M. Hall, 2012), given the extensive body of critical literature that highlights the poor contribution of mega-events to economic and social equity and the maintenance and enhancement of natural capital. Although much of this literature is ironically found outside of what could be categorized as the mainstream events literature where there does not appear to be a desire to “bite the hand that feeds.” Indeed, given the long-term promotion of events as being good for places and their prosperity despite evidence to the contrary, policy makers may also “well realize that existing policy is not working, but be afraid of the political implications of appearing to learn from the error” (Greener, 2001, p. 140). Of course, do political and event growth coalitions

even care, so long as the real estate and financial deals are made and the reimagining opportunities keep on coming?

Perhaps the neoliberal paradigm that marks contemporary mega-events has become so all pervasive that it is difficult to think other. Many of the people who support mega-events probably genuinely believe that they make a great contribution to the economy and society. However, as with most contemporary tourism, they are not sustainable in their current form. Instead, sustainable events are more likely to be found in the smaller localized community based events that run over the longer-term or at least help maximize the use of existing infrastructure. Trouble is, those events are not as appealing for the self-promotion of political and corporate interests, as well as profit driven consulting firms and academics, that thrive off large-scale events. Indeed, the increasing dependence of universities on third-stream funding may well decrease the likelihood of encouragement for paradigm change coming from the university sector. Instead, the combined external pressures of biodiversity loss, climate change and peak oil as well as financial and economic crisis and lack of equity might be the most significant contributors to a policy paradigm change with respect to sustainable tourism/events. Trouble is, for far too many people and places, hosting a mega-event so as to remain competitive in a declining global economy and environment has become the solution rather than a symptom of the problem.

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