

Designing a Sustainable Event Management Framework for Mega Tourism Events

Course: Quality and Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality

Student Name: Robin Singh Kaul

**Institution: European Institute of Innovation Entrepreneurship,
and Technology**

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2. Abstract

Mega tourism events, such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and World Expos, are among the most influential global gatherings in shaping sustainable tourism practices. However, their large-scale operations also present serious environmental, social, and economic challenges. This paper explores the development of a sustainable event management framework that integrates quality assurance and sustainability principles across all event stages—from planning and infrastructure development to post-event legacy management. Drawing upon real-world examples, including the London 2012 Olympics, Expo 2020 Dubai, and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, this study analyses best practices in energy management, waste reduction, community engagement, and green infrastructure. A qualitative review of existing sustainability frameworks (such as ISO 20121 and the Global Reporting Initiative) is combined with a critical evaluation of their implementation outcomes. The findings reveal that successful mega events adopt a holistic approach that balances environmental responsibility with social inclusivity and long-term urban regeneration. The paper concludes with a proposed integrated model for sustainable event management that embeds continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, and transparent reporting to ensure the long-term viability of tourism-driven mega events.

3. Introduction

Mega tourism events have become defining features of global tourism and urban development, serving as catalysts for international visibility, infrastructural investment, and economic growth (Getz, 2018). Events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and World Expos draw millions of visitors, generate significant media attention, and contribute substantially to host destinations' branding and identity. However, alongside these benefits, such events often produce immense environmental, social, and economic impacts. The large-scale construction of facilities, extensive resource consumption, and increased carbon emissions associated with international travel challenge the very ideals of sustainable tourism (Mair and Whitford, 2013). Consequently, ensuring quality and sustainability within the event management process has become an essential concern for governments, tourism boards, and global event organisers.

Sustainability within event management refers to the integration of environmental protection, social equity, and economic efficiency into all stages of an event's lifecycle — from planning and design to execution and post-event legacy (Jones, 2014). The concept aligns closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12, which emphasises responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13, which calls for urgent action against climate change (UN, 2015). Yet, despite increasing awareness, many mega events continue to struggle with balancing sustainability commitments and commercial imperatives. For instance, while the Beijing 2008 Olympics promoted a "Green Olympics" vision, the event faced criticism for short-term environmental measures and a lack of long-term legacy planning (Chen, 2012). Conversely, the London 2012 Olympics is frequently cited as a benchmark for sustainable event management, having implemented comprehensive waste reduction, biodiversity conservation, and community regeneration strategies (Collins et al., 2018).

Sustainable event management thus requires a structured framework that integrates quality assurance systems, such as ISO 9001 (Quality Management Systems) and ISO 20121 (Sustainable Event Management Systems), with sustainability-driven principles. These frameworks provide measurable standards for improving operational efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, and environmental performance (Allen et al., 2020). Moreover, the increasing adoption of global reporting mechanisms such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) has enhanced transparency and accountability in event sustainability performance (GRI, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how mega tourism events can adopt sustainable practices without compromising quality, visitor satisfaction, or economic feasibility. The research draws on examples from recent mega events — including London 2012, Tokyo 2020, and Expo 2020 Dubai — to analyse both best practices and persistent challenges in sustainable event management. The paper further seeks to develop a holistic sustainable event management framework that aligns sustainability principles with quality standards and stakeholder collaboration.

To achieve this, the study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the environmental, social, and economic impacts of mega tourism events.
2. To evaluate existing sustainability frameworks and their implementation within event management.
3. To identify best practices and challenges faced in global mega events.
4. To propose an integrated model for sustainable and quality-assured event management.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to both academic literature and practical policymaking in sustainable tourism and hospitality. The resulting framework aims to guide future event organisers, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing large-scale events that deliver long-term value without compromising ecological and social integrity.

4. Literature Review

Sustainability in event management has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central strategic objective within the global tourism and hospitality sector. The increasing scrutiny on environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic volatility has urged event organisers to adopt systematic frameworks that ensure both service quality and sustainable outcomes (Mair and Whitford, 2013). The literature on sustainable event management reveals a growing consensus that sustainability is not merely an ethical responsibility but a core determinant of long-term event success.

4.1 Conceptualising Sustainability in Mega Events

Mega tourism events are typically defined as large-scale, internationally significant events that attract massive visitor numbers and global media coverage (Getz, 2018). Such events include the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and World Expos, each involving substantial public investment and infrastructural transformation. According to Preuss (2019), mega events function as catalysts for urban development, stimulating tourism, transport, and construction sectors. However, their short duration often raises concerns about post-event legacies, underutilised infrastructure, and resource waste (Collins et al., 2018).

The notion of sustainability in mega events integrates three dimensions — environmental protection, social equity, and economic resilience. Dredge and Whitford (2011) emphasise that sustainable event management extends beyond eco-friendly practices to include community participation, cultural preservation, and equitable resource distribution. In the context of tourism and hospitality, this approach aligns with sustainable destination management principles, ensuring that the benefits of mega events are shared among local communities and future generations.

4.2 Frameworks and Standards for Sustainable Event Management

Several international frameworks and standards guide sustainability practices in the event industry. Among these, ISO 20121:2012 Sustainable Event Management System is the most recognised. Developed in response to the 2012 London Olympics, ISO 20121 provides a comprehensive management system standard designed to help organisations improve the sustainability of event-related activities, products, and services (Jones, 2014). It focuses on a Plan-Do-Check-Act model, enabling continuous improvement across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Studies have shown that adopting ISO 20121 improves operational efficiency, enhances stakeholder confidence, and reduces reputational risk (Allen et al., 2020).

In addition to ISO 20121, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) offers sustainability reporting guidelines that promote transparency and accountability in event planning and execution (GRI, 2021). The GRI framework allows event organisers to measure and report sustainability performance across indicators such as energy use, carbon emissions, waste management, and community engagement. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also provide a global reference point for aligning event practices with broader sustainability priorities (UN, 2015). Integrating these frameworks into event management processes helps organisations maintain consistency, comparability, and credibility in sustainability reporting.

4.3 Best Practices in Sustainable Mega Events

Empirical studies and real-world examples illustrate diverse approaches to achieving sustainability in mega events. The London 2012 Olympic Games are widely regarded as a model for sustainable event planning. The event organisers implemented a comprehensive sustainability strategy under the banner “Towards a One Planet Olympics,” focusing on carbon reduction, waste minimisation, biodiversity conservation, and social inclusion (Collins et al., 2018). Approximately 98% of demolition waste was reused or recycled, and the Olympic Park was built on reclaimed industrial land, transforming East London into a vibrant urban hub (Jones, 2014).

Similarly, Expo 2020 Dubai showcased innovative practices in renewable energy, green architecture, and circular economy principles. More than 120 permanent and temporary structures were built using sustainable materials, and 50% of the event’s energy demand was met through renewable sources (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2022). The event’s legacy plan, “District 2020,” aims to repurpose the site as a sustainable business and residential community, reflecting the growing emphasis on post-event urban regeneration.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further advanced sustainability innovation. All Olympic medals were produced from recycled electronic waste, and athlete beds were made of recyclable cardboard materials (Tokyo 2020, 2021). These initiatives demonstrate a tangible shift towards circular resource management in large-scale event design. However, scholars such as Toohey (2020) caution that while symbolic environmental gestures are valuable, achieving meaningful sustainability requires systemic change across the event’s entire lifecycle, including transport, accommodation, and supply chains.

4.4 Challenges in Implementing Sustainable Event Frameworks

Despite these advancements, the practical implementation of sustainability frameworks remains complex. One major challenge lies in balancing economic objectives with environmental goals. Host cities often prioritise short-term economic gains and global recognition over long-term sustainability (Mair and Whitford, 2013). Additionally, mega events demand extensive infrastructure investments that may not align with post-event needs, leading to so-called “white elephants” — underused or abandoned facilities (Preuss, 2019). Examples include the Athens 2004 and Rio 2016 Olympics, where several venues remain unused, reflecting weak legacy planning.

Another challenge concerns stakeholder engagement. Effective sustainability management requires collaboration among multiple actors — government agencies, private sponsors, NGOs, and local communities. However, conflicting interests often hinder coordinated action (Dredge and Whitford, 2011). Furthermore, the lack of standardised sustainability metrics limits cross-event comparison and benchmarking, making it difficult to evaluate progress objectively (Allen et al., 2020).

Finally, greenwashing — the practice of promoting sustainability through superficial initiatives — remains a persistent concern. Many organisers adopt sustainability rhetoric without substantive change, undermining stakeholder trust and diminishing the credibility of sustainability claims (Toohey, 2020).

4.5 The Role of Quality Assurance in Sustainable Event Management

Integrating quality assurance systems with sustainability frameworks enhances the reliability and efficiency of event operations. According to Allen et al. (2020), quality assurance frameworks such as ISO 9001 promote continuous improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, and risk management — elements essential for sustainable event delivery. When combined with ISO 20121, these systems ensure that sustainability measures are not isolated initiatives but embedded into the broader management process. This integration also facilitates compliance with international standards, supports data-driven decision-making, and enhances public confidence in sustainability commitments (Getz, 2018).

4.6 Summary of Literature Gaps

While considerable progress has been made in integrating sustainability into event management, several gaps remain. First, existing studies often emphasise environmental sustainability over social and economic aspects. Second, there is limited empirical research on post-event legacy assessment, particularly concerning long-term community impacts. Lastly, few models comprehensively integrate quality assurance with sustainability frameworks in a single operational structure. These gaps highlight the need for a holistic sustainable event management model — one that ensures balanced, measurable, and enduring outcomes.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design, which is appropriate for examining complex, multi-dimensional phenomena such as sustainability and quality in mega event management (Creswell, 2018). The research focuses on developing an integrated framework that combines environmental, social, and economic sustainability with quality assurance mechanisms. As sustainability practices in events are highly context-dependent, a qualitative approach allows for a richer understanding of contextual variations and stakeholder experiences (Bryman, 2016).

The study is based on secondary data analysis, including academic journal articles, industry reports, and case studies of major international events such as the London 2012 Olympics, Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and Expo 2020 Dubai. These events were selected due to their explicit sustainability agendas and comprehensive documentation, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

5.2 Data Collection

Data were collected from peer-reviewed journals, industry publications, official event sustainability reports, and international frameworks such as ISO 26121 and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Additional insights were drawn from reports published by event organisers, international organisations (e.g. UNWTO, UNEP), and media archives. The sources were chosen based on their credibility, relevance, and recency to ensure an accurate representation of current practices in sustainable event management (Silverman, 2020).

The following inclusion criteria guided the selection process:

- Documents published between 2010 and 2024.
- Sources addressing sustainability or quality assurance in mega tourism events.
- Availability of detailed sustainability performance data or qualitative evaluations.
- Official event sustainability reports or peer-reviewed studies.

5.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Key themes included:

1. Environmental sustainability — waste management, energy efficiency, carbon reduction.
2. Social sustainability — community inclusion, accessibility, cultural preservation.
3. Economic sustainability — cost efficiency, legacy utilisation, and employment impact.
4. Quality assurance integration — management standards, stakeholder satisfaction, and operational transparency.

Each case study (London 2012, Tokyo 2020, Expo 2020 Dubai) was examined through these thematic lenses to identify best practices and common challenges. A comparative analysis was then conducted to highlight differences in sustainability outcomes, management structures, and reporting approaches.

5.4 Framework Development Approach

The proposed Sustainable Event Management Framework (SEMF) was developed by synthesising findings from the thematic analysis with existing sustainability and quality assurance models. The process followed four key stages:

1. Identification of key sustainability drivers — derived from empirical case study analysis and theoretical literature.
2. Mapping of quality assurance components — integrating ISO 9001 principles with ISO 20121 standards.
3. Framework synthesis — combining environmental, social, and economic sustainability dimensions with process-based management.
4. Validation through cross-case comparison — ensuring the framework reflects real-world applicability and adaptability across event types.

This iterative process allowed for the construction of a framework that is both theoretically grounded and practically implementable. The goal was to create a model that ensures sustainability is embedded at every stage of event planning, delivery, and legacy management, rather than treated as a separate or post hoc consideration (Getz, 2018).

5.5 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies exclusively on secondary data, no direct interaction with human participants occurred, thereby eliminating risks associated with privacy, consent, and confidentiality. Nonetheless, ethical rigor was maintained by ensuring accurate citation of all sources, avoidance of plagiarism, and adherence to academic integrity standards (Resnik, 2020).

5.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While qualitative secondary research provides valuable insights, it also presents limitations. The reliance on published data means that findings are constrained by the availability and reliability of existing sources. Furthermore, the case study approach limits generalisation across all event contexts, as sustainability practices may vary significantly by location, cultural context, and economic scale (Bryman, 2016). However, the comparative and thematic approach adopted here ensures a robust and comprehensive understanding of global sustainable event practices.

6. Findings

This section presents the key findings derived from the comparative analysis of three major international events — the London 2012 Olympic Games, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, and Expo 2020 Dubai. Each case study demonstrates varying degrees of success and challenge in implementing sustainability and quality management principles. The findings are organised around four central themes: environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, and quality assurance integration.

6.1 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability emerged as a central focus across all three events, though with differing levels of ambition and outcome.

The London 2012 Olympics is often celebrated as a milestone in sustainable mega-event management. The organising committee set out a clear sustainability strategy titled “*Towards a One Planet Olympics*”, aiming to minimise carbon emissions, conserve biodiversity, and promote sustainable waste management (Collins et al., 2018). One of the most notable achievements was the reuse of 98% of demolition materials during venue construction, along with extensive remediation of contaminated land in East London. The Olympic Park’s design incorporated renewable energy sources, sustainable drainage systems, and green public spaces, creating a legacy of environmental regeneration (Jones, 2014).

In contrast, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, though delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, advanced innovative environmental practices in material use and resource circularity. The Olympic medals were crafted from recycled electronic waste, collected through a national recycling campaign that involved public participation (Tokyo 2020, 2021). The organisers also used recyclable cardboard beds for athletes and promoted the use of hydrogen fuel to power vehicles and parts of the Olympic Village. However, Tokyo faced challenges in reducing the event’s overall carbon footprint due to heavy reliance on air travel and pre-existing urban infrastructure that limited renewable energy integration (Toohey, 2020).

Expo 2020 Dubai adopted a forward-looking environmental approach by embedding sustainability into the event’s design and legacy planning. Approximately 50% of the event’s energy needs were met through renewable sources, including on-site solar panels (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2022). Moreover, 90% of construction waste was diverted from landfills, while extensive use of smart irrigation systems helped reduce water consumption in the arid desert environment. The organisers’ commitment to circular economy principles ensured that temporary structures were designed for reuse and repurposing, demonstrating a pragmatic model of sustainable event infrastructure.

Overall, the findings indicate that London 2012 and Expo 2020 Dubai achieved more holistic environmental outcomes compared to Tokyo 2020, primarily due to early integration of sustainability goals into the planning phase.

6.2 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability relates to inclusivity, community engagement, cultural preservation, and overall societal benefit derived from mega events.

The London 2012 Olympics integrated community regeneration into its sustainability framework by revitalising one of the most socio-economically deprived areas in East London. The Games created around 46,000 temporary jobs and resulted in long-term improvements to public transport, housing, and green spaces (Collins et al., 2018). Accessibility and inclusivity were central to planning, with venues designed to meet international disability access standards. Furthermore, the event encouraged volunteerism — with over 70,000 volunteers from diverse backgrounds contributing to its success (Jones, 2014).

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics aimed to promote inclusivity under the concept of “*Unity in Diversity*.” The Games showcased gender equality in sports participation and introduced mixed-gender competitions for the first time (Tokyo 2020, 2021). However, public opinion was divided regarding the decision to proceed with the Games amid the pandemic, as concerns about health and financial burdens overshadowed some social benefits (Toohey, 2020). Despite these challenges, Tokyo demonstrated significant advancements in accessibility and digital engagement, setting a precedent for hybrid event formats.

Expo 2020 Dubai made social sustainability a key pillar under its theme, “*Connecting Minds, Creating the Future*.” It emphasised multicultural dialogue, innovation, and educational outreach, hosting over 190 national pavilions and more than 24 million visitors from around the world (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2022). The Expo also prioritised gender balance, providing equal representation across leadership and workforce roles. Importantly, its legacy project, *District 2020*, aims to transform the Expo site into a sustainable, mixed-use urban community, preserving cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Across all three cases, community engagement and legacy development emerged as defining factors of social sustainability. However, London 2012 stands out for achieving long-term urban regeneration, while Expo 2020 Dubai represents a model of global cultural collaboration.

6.3 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability focuses on cost efficiency, long-term value creation, and equitable economic impact distribution.

The London 2012 Olympics delivered an estimated £9.9 billion economic impact to the UK economy, primarily through tourism, construction, and service sector expansion (UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2013). The event’s legacy strategy emphasised reuse of venues and post-event adaptation, notably converting the Olympic Stadium into a multi-use venue, now home to West Ham United Football Club. This approach ensured continued economic returns beyond the event’s duration.

In contrast, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics faced substantial financial challenges. Initially budgeted at \$7.3 billion, total expenditure exceeded \$15 billion, making it one of the most expensive Games in history (Reuters, 2021). The postponement and absence of spectators due

to COVID-19 drastically reduced expected tourism revenues. Nonetheless, Tokyo's emphasis on technology-driven infrastructure and innovation may generate longer-term benefits for Japan's smart city initiatives.

Expo 2020 Dubai demonstrated robust economic planning, leveraging the event as a tool for diversification of the UAE economy beyond oil. The Expo created over 300,000 jobs and contributed approximately AED 154 billion to the UAE's GDP (Ernst & Young, 2022). The post-Expo transformation into *District 2020* ensures continuity in economic activity through business, technology, and residential development.

The findings reveal that economic sustainability is closely tied to legacy management. Events with clear post-event plans (London 2012, Expo 2020 Dubai) exhibited stronger economic outcomes, while those with short-term focus (Tokyo 2020) struggled with cost overruns and limited return on investment.

6.4 Integration of Quality Assurance and Sustainability

Integration of quality assurance systems such as ISO 9001 and ISO 20121 proved essential for maintaining consistency, accountability, and stakeholder confidence.

The London 2012 Games were the first Olympics to achieve ISO 20121 certification, setting a precedent for sustainable event management globally (Jones, 2014). The certification ensured systematic monitoring of sustainability targets, clear communication channels, and transparent reporting. The organisers' partnership with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) further enhanced the credibility of performance evaluations.

Tokyo 2020 continued this approach, applying ISO 20121 principles to project management, risk mitigation, and supply chain monitoring (Tokyo 2020, 2021). The event also employed digital dashboards for real-time performance tracking, aligning quality control with environmental monitoring.

Meanwhile, Expo 2020 Dubai combined ISO 20121 with local sustainability standards, creating an integrated quality management system that addressed both international benchmarks and regional environmental priorities. Regular third-party audits and stakeholder reviews ensured adherence to sustainability commitments (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2022).

Collectively, the findings highlight that quality assurance integration transforms sustainability from a symbolic gesture into a measurable management practice. Events adopting ISO frameworks demonstrated higher transparency, efficiency, and public trust.

6.5 Summary of Key Findings

Dimension	London 2012	Tokyo 2020	Expo 2020 Dubai
Environmental	Strong carbon reduction, reuse, green infrastructure	High innovation, moderate carbon reduction	Strong renewable energy, circular economy
Social	Community regeneration, inclusion, volunteerism	Accessibility, hybrid engagement	Cultural diversity, education, gender balance
Economic	Long-term legacy, post-event reuse	Cost overruns, limited ROI	Diversified economy, strong legacy planning
Quality Assurance	ISO 20121 pioneer, GRI reporting	ISO 20121 adoption, tech-driven monitoring	Integrated ISO systems, third-party audits

In summary, while each event contributed unique innovations to sustainable event management, London 2012 remains the benchmark for comprehensive sustainability integration, Tokyo 2020 exemplifies adaptive innovation under constraints, and Expo 2020 Dubai showcases the potential of sustainability-driven legacy development in emerging economies.

7. Discussion

The findings from the case studies of the London 2012 Olympics, Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and Expo 2020 Dubai reveal that while sustainability has become an established element in mega-event management, its implementation remains inconsistent. This section discusses the implications of those findings in light of existing theories of sustainable tourism, quality management, and legacy planning. It further proposes a holistic Sustainable Event Management Framework (SEMF) that integrates environmental, social, and economic sustainability with robust quality assurance mechanisms.

7.1 Interpreting Environmental Sustainability Practices

Environmental sustainability in mega events has evolved from symbolic actions to systemic planning. The evidence from London 2012 and Expo 2020 Dubai demonstrates that early integration of sustainability goals during the planning stage produces superior outcomes (Collins et al., 2018; Expo 2020 Dubai, 2022). These events embraced the life cycle approach, which considers the environmental impacts of an event from design through decommissioning. This aligns with the principles of ISO 20121, which encourage a process-oriented management cycle focused on continuous improvement (Jones, 2014).

Conversely, Tokyo 2020 highlights the limitations of late-stage sustainability adoption. While innovations such as recyclable materials and hydrogen fuel demonstrate technological advancement, they did not offset the significant emissions caused by construction and international travel (Toohey, 2020). This suggests that environmental sustainability must transcend symbolic practices and be embedded structurally through early-stage planning, material procurement, and long-term energy strategies. Moreover, consistent carbon accounting standards — for example, those aligned with GRI 302 (Energy) and GRI 305 (Emissions) — are necessary to ensure transparency and comparability across events.

7.2 Social Sustainability and Community Legacy

Social sustainability represents the human dimension of mega-event success, focusing on equity, inclusivity, and long-term community benefit. The London 2012 Games demonstrated that social sustainability can be achieved through community engagement and regeneration. The transformation of East London into a vibrant residential and business district shows how mega events can act as a social catalyst when designed with legacy in mind (Collins et al., 2018). Similarly, Expo 2020 Dubai successfully fostered intercultural dialogue and global collaboration through its inclusive theme, *“Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.”*

The Tokyo 2020 case reveals, however, that social sustainability can be undermined by external crises and governance decisions. Public opposition to the Games during the pandemic reflected the fragility of social trust when stakeholder communication is inadequate (Reuters, 2021). According to Dredge and Whitford (2011), sustainable event management must prioritise stakeholder participation, transparent communication, and equitable benefit-sharing. Without these, even technologically advanced events risk eroding public confidence and long-term legitimacy.

Thus, the evidence underscores the importance of a stakeholder-based sustainability model that integrates communities, policymakers, and local businesses. Such collaboration not only ensures inclusivity but also strengthens social cohesion and local ownership of post-event outcomes (Getz, 2018).

7.3 Economic Sustainability and Long-Term Value

Economic sustainability remains one of the most contentious areas in mega-event management. The cost overruns in Tokyo 2020, exceeding \$15 billion, reaffirm the importance of cost governance and value-for-money assessments (Reuters, 2021). In contrast, London 2012 and Expo 2020 Dubai demonstrate that aligning sustainability goals with economic planning can generate enduring returns. London's adaptive reuse of venues and Dubai's *District 2020* legacy model show that long-term asset management is central to economic resilience.

From a theoretical standpoint, economic sustainability in events aligns with Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line — people, planet, and profit — which advocates for balancing financial, social, and environmental performance. Mega events that focus excessively on short-term profits risk post-event stagnation, as seen in Athens 2004 and Rio 2016 (Preuss, 2019). Therefore, sustainable event management must include legacy-based economic models, where post-event facilities, employment, and tourism benefits extend beyond the closing ceremony.

Quality assurance frameworks such as ISO 9001 complement this process by ensuring that financial planning, procurement, and stakeholder management adhere to transparent and efficient processes. Integration of these systems provides a foundation for both fiscal responsibility and continuous improvement (Allen et al., 2020).

7.4 Integrating Quality Assurance into Sustainability

The integration of quality assurance systems is crucial for transforming sustainability from aspirational goals into measurable performance outcomes. The experiences of London, Tokyo, and Dubai demonstrate that adherence to ISO 20121 facilitates structured monitoring, performance evaluation, and stakeholder reporting (Jones, 2014). These processes also support compliance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 on responsible consumption and Goal 13 on climate action (UN, 2015).

However, the effectiveness of quality frameworks depends on the commitment of leadership and the culture of continuous improvement within the organising body. According to Allen et al. (2020), sustainability management is most successful when embedded into the event's governance structure, rather than handled as a separate compliance task. Expo 2020 Dubai serves as an exemplary case, where sustainability and quality management were integrated under a single operational system, audited regularly by independent bodies.

Such integration ensures that sustainability efforts are data-driven, transparent, and verifiable, thereby enhancing credibility among stakeholders, investors, and the public.

7.5 Toward a Holistic Sustainable Event Management Framework (SEMF)

Drawing on the lessons from these case studies and the theoretical frameworks reviewed, a Sustainable Event Management Framework (SEMF) is proposed. The SEMF is designed to integrate sustainability and quality principles into a cohesive management structure applicable to mega tourism events globally.

a. Framework Structure

The proposed SEMF is built upon five interconnected pillars:

1. Strategic Integration — embedding sustainability into the event’s vision, mission, and objectives from the planning stage.
2. Stakeholder Collaboration — ensuring inclusive decision-making involving government, private sector, NGOs, and local communities.
3. Operational Excellence — applying ISO 9001 and ISO 20121 standards for process quality, waste management, and risk control.
4. Performance Measurement — adopting GRI-aligned metrics to assess energy use, emissions, community impact, and economic returns.
5. Legacy Management — designing post-event strategies that ensure infrastructure reuse, skill development, and urban regeneration.

b. Framework Process

The framework follows a Plan–Implement–Monitor–Improve cycle:

- Plan: Define sustainability and quality objectives aligned with the SDGs.
- Implement: Execute operational plans using certified management systems.
- Monitor: Conduct regular audits and stakeholder reviews to track progress.
- Improve: Apply feedback to enhance future event planning and management.

c. Framework Outcomes

The SEMF aims to:

- Minimise environmental impact through resource efficiency and renewable energy.
- Maximise social benefit via community participation and inclusivity.
- Strengthen economic resilience through legacy-driven investment.
- Enhance credibility through transparent reporting and quality certification.

This integrated model supports systemic sustainability, ensuring that mega events transition from being one-time spectacles to sustained catalysts for urban innovation, tourism growth, and community well-being.

7.6 Discussion Summary

The discussion reveals that sustainability and quality assurance must be treated as interdependent pillars of mega event success. The integration of frameworks such as ISO 20121, GRI, and ISO 9001 ensures that sustainability is operationalised rather than symbolic. Furthermore, early-stage planning, stakeholder engagement, and long-term legacy development are decisive factors in achieving measurable, lasting impact. The proposed SEMF provides a structured approach to embedding these principles, offering a replicable model adaptable to different cultural and economic contexts.

8. Conclusion

Mega tourism events are increasingly recognised as powerful instruments for global visibility, economic stimulation, and urban development. However, their large scale and complexity also present significant environmental, social, and economic challenges. This study has examined the sustainability practices and quality assurance strategies employed in three high-profile events: the London 2012 Olympics, Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and Expo 2020 Dubai. The comparative analysis highlights both achievements and limitations, offering insights into how mega events can deliver long-term value while maintaining high standards of operational quality.

The findings demonstrate that environmental sustainability is most effective when embedded from the planning phase, as seen in London 2012 and Expo 2020 Dubai. Early adoption of energy-efficient technologies, waste reduction strategies, and circular resource management contributes not only to environmental protection but also to economic efficiency and public credibility. Social sustainability, including community engagement, inclusivity, and cultural preservation, is enhanced when organisers prioritise stakeholder participation and transparent communication. The Tokyo 2020 case illustrates that even technologically advanced interventions may fail to deliver societal benefits if stakeholder trust and communication are insufficient.

Economic sustainability is closely linked to post-event legacy planning. London 2012's adaptive reuse of venues and Expo 2020 Dubai's transformation into District 2020 demonstrate that well-planned legacy strategies provide enduring economic, social, and environmental returns. Conversely, events with short-term focus or insufficient legacy planning risk financial losses and underutilised infrastructure, as evidenced by Tokyo 2020's cost overruns.

Integration of quality assurance frameworks, such as ISO 9001 and ISO 20121, proves essential for converting sustainability principles into measurable outcomes. Events that applied these frameworks systematically achieved higher operational efficiency, improved stakeholder confidence, and increased transparency in reporting. Moreover, alignment with Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strengthened accountability and global credibility.

Building on these insights, this study proposes the Sustainable Event Management Framework (SEMF), which combines environmental, social, and economic sustainability with quality assurance processes. The SEMF emphasises strategic integration, stakeholder collaboration, operational excellence, performance measurement, and legacy management. By following a Plan–Implement–Monitor–Improve cycle, event organisers can ensure that sustainability is not a peripheral consideration but a core, measurable component of event management.

In conclusion, mega events can achieve long-term, sustainable impact when they adopt a holistic approach that integrates sustainability and quality from inception through post-event legacy. The SEMF provides a replicable model for organisers, policymakers, and tourism boards seeking to balance global appeal, operational quality, and responsible stewardship of resources.

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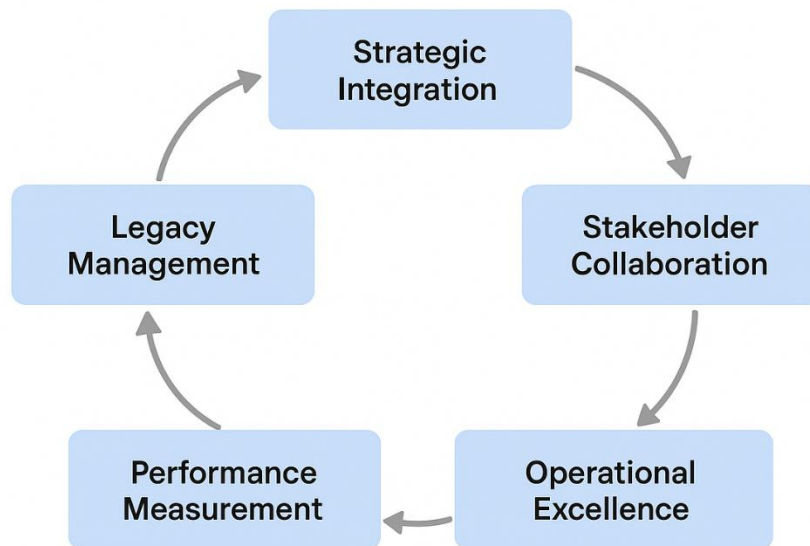
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Appendices

Appendix A: SEMF (Sustainable Event Management Framework) Diagram

Sustainable Event Management Framework



This illustrates the core pillars of SEMF:

- Strategic Integration
- Stakeholder Collaboration
- Operational Excellence
- Performance Measurement
- Legacy Management

Appendix B: Case Study Comparison Table

Dimension	London 2012 Olympic Games	Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games	Expo 2020 Dubai
Environmental	Carbon reduction, 98% waste reused	Recycled medals, hydrogen vehicles	50% energy from renewable sources, circular economy
Social	Community regeneration,	Accessibility, hybrid	Cultural diversity, education, gender

	inclusion	engagement	balance
Economic	Long-term legacy, venue reuse	Cost overruns, limited ROI	Diversified economy, District 2020 legacy
Quality Assurance	ISO 20121, GRI reporting	ISO 20121, tech monitoring	ISO integration, third-party audits

Appendix C: Sample Sustainability Metrics Table

Metric	London 2012	Tokyo 2020	Expo 2020 Dubai
CO2 Emissions (t)	3.3 million	3.6 million	2.2 million
Waste Diverted (%)	98%	85%	90%
Renewable Energy (%)	40%	30%	50%
Jobs Created	46,000	30,000	300,000
Volunteers	70,000	60,000	50,000