



Sustainable management practices developing in the mass events industry through the implementation of "Global Model" protocols

Márcio Luiz Marietto

Universiy Federal Rural of Rio de Janeiro - Postgraduate Program in Management and Strategy

Alessandra Cassol

Universiy Federal Rural of Rio de Janeiro - Postgraduate Program in Management and Strategy

Abstract

The mass events industry (musical concerts, sporting events, cultural festivals, among others) constitutes a substantial sector on a global scale and represents a significant component of the services segment. Major world capitals and prominent tourist destinations have actively sought to attract the audience associated with such events recognizing their considerable market potential and their propensity to spend more compared to consumers of other recreational services. However, mass events also generate adverse effects, particularly on the environment of host community, as they serve as significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and waste generation. In this study we investigated the adopting sustainable management practices within the mass event industry. The study was based on the single case study of a large-scale event where managers adopted protocols from "global models" recommended by internationally recognized sustainability organizations to align their management practices to provide the first fully sustainable coastal event in Latin America. We analyzed the event management practices using primary and secondary data from multiple sources as organizations involved in sustainability activities, official websites; news portals, videos event in social media and In-depth interviews with event operators and managers. The results showed that the adoption of sustainable practices based on international protocols could be incorporated with efficiency and efficacy into the planning, organization and execution of



large-scale events to reduce or eliminate environmental damage. Also, showed that implementation of these practices tends to enhance recognition, social legitimacy and environmental credibility for the events. The managerial contribution was providing a practical example of management actions aimed at achieving total sustainability in mass events. Also, we proposed a framework, based on 3 propositions, to help mass event managers either initiate the adoption of sustainable practices or achieve full sustainability in large-scale events.

Keywords: Mass Event Industry; Sustainability; Global Models; Sustainable Management Practices; Case Study.

1. Introduction

Mass events are considered a form of service provide, however, due to their frequency, global reach, and socio-economic importance, they are also recognized as an industry (Santos et al., 2023). The scale of this industry is remarkable: in 2019, the global mass events industry generated USD 1.13 trillion, with forecasts predicting revenues of USD 2.04 trillion by 2032. This market is categorized into four main sectors, based on the movement of people and financial volume in 2022: Sports; Music Concerts; Festivals; and Others (including religious, cultural, corporate events, exhibitions, and more) (CMI, 2024). These events involve complex planning and require large-scale infrastructure, often mobilizing thousands of people simultaneously over several days. As a result, they tend to generate significant negative impacts, particularly on the environment. Such events are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and produce large amounts of organic and inorganic waste (Santos et al., 2023). Consequently, like other industries (Kurusatienkit, 2022; Ying Lu et al., 2022; Heidary Dahooie



et al., 2021; Rossoni et al., 2020), managers of mass events face growing pressure to adopt sustainable management practices. This requires ensuring that mass events are not only economically viable, but also environmentally sustainable by reducing and ideally eliminating their social and environmental impacts on the host region and all stakeholders involved (Mair and Smith, 2021).

Our research problem focuses on the social influence of adopting sustainable management practices within the mass event industry. While sustainability in mass events is widely promoted in the media, the technical and operational practices adopted by event managers have received little attention. Many managers of mass events continue to resist implementing such practices, and others adopt them only partially (Carswell et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2023; Mair and Smith, 2021). This raises the question whether it is feasible for the mass event industry to fully embrace management practices aimed at achieving total sustainability in mass events. Additionally, both the scientific community and management professionals have shown limited focus on this issue, underscoring a significant gap in the field that warrants further exploration.

A potential solution to this issue could be the adoption of sustainable protocols established by globally recognized organizations, like those implemented in other industries (Kurusatienkit, 2022; Ying Lu et al., 2022; Mair and Smith, 2021; Heidary Dahooie et al., 2021; Rossoni et al., 2020). Adherence to international sustainability protocols is crucial for fostering responsible organizational practices that balance economic efficiency with environmental sustainability. Organizations that promote "global models" for cleaner and more sustainable actions have become fundamental in encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices. These



efforts help create operational frameworks that are better aligned with global environmental and economic demands (Meyer et al., 1997; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995).

These global organizations offer managers technical and operational protocols grounded in internationally recognized standards, encouraging practices that integrate economic efficiency with environmental responsibility. Implementing these sustainable management practices can generate positive social and economic outcomes within the mass event industry. These outcomes not only provide the industry with legitimacy and validation for its sustainable practices in line with established global sustainability protocols (structural compliance) but also help raise social awareness about the importance of environmental preservation (Rossoni et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 1997; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995).

Our study intention was to present an example of sustainable management practices that can be implemented by managers of mass events to achieve full sustainability. To accomplish this, we analyzed a single, but complex, case study of a large-scale event that became the first fully sustainable coastal event in Latin America. The event, known as "*Marejada*," is a cultural and traditional large-scale gathering held on Brazil's southern coast, specifically in the coastal city of Itajaí, located in the State of Santa Catarina. The edition of the event we examined attracted over 235,000 participants.

Our objective was to demonstrate how adopting and adhering to sustainable protocols established by globally recognized organizations can serve as a foundation for implementing sustainable management practices in the mass event industry. Thus, this paper examines sustainable management practices in mass events, focusing on how the adoption of global protocols helps reduce environmental and social impacts. The study addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with this process, drawing on a review of existing literature and



practical cases within the sector. By doing so, it seeks to offer both theoretical and practical insights to support a more effective transition toward sustainable management models in this industry.

The case study results demonstrated that managers in the mass event industry can successfully adopt global sustainability protocols to align their management practices with environmental sustainability. Moreover, these protocols enable the integration of sustainable practices at any stage of event planning and execution, even for managers with no prior experience in sustainability initiatives. Ultimately, implementing these practices tends to enhance recognition, social legitimacy, and environmental credibility for the events.

The study makes two significant contributions. First, it presents a Figure 1 summarizing the research findings providing a practical example of management actions aimed at achieving total sustainability in events. Second, the study proposes a framework to support management practices based on international sustainability protocols. This framework is designed to help mass event managers either initiate the adoption of sustainable practices or achieve full sustainability in large-scale events. On a theoretical level, it identifies current event management practices aligned with sustainable development principles and highlights their specific characteristics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Managerial compliance with protocols from global sustainable organizations

The academic literature has extensively examined the role of socially legitimized organizations in promoting "global models" of structure, policies and socio-economic practices (Meyer et al., 1997). These organizations aim to influence and disseminate socio-economic



practices across various structural levels, ranging from nation-states to local cultural practices. Their primary goal is to establish and guide operational compliance standards that align social activities with globally institutionalized processes. Notable examples include the United Nations (UN), the World Bank and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). These organizations play a central role in influence organizational practices within the ecological and social boundaries of economic growth. It is therefore natural that their influence extends to addressing the challenges of balancing economic and ecological considerations in sustainable business management.

Organizations that develop and promote "global models" of sustainable management primarily aim to disseminate globally recognized social protocols that ensure long-term organizational survival, particularly in economic and ecological-environmental contexts. These organizations also serve as benchmarks, encouraging businesses to adopt practices that foster sustainable balance. Additionally, they provide guidance for organizations at various levels of structural compliance, helping them implement actions aligned with sustainability principles (Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995). Examples of such organizations include the United Nations (UN) with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 14001), among others.

The sustainable organizational practices promoted by these organizations align with socially and environmentally accepted standards. They are designed to create value through responsible business approaches that encompass technical, economic, social, and, most importantly, environmental dimensions. These practices are not unique to individual organizations but instead aim to foster uniformity and consistency across the industry. As a result, their adoption and adherence not only enhance the legitimacy and validation of



sustainable practices within and between organizations but also address technical and operational challenges in managing sustainable businesses (Rossoni et al., 2020).

Rossoni et al. (2020) highlighted that adopting sustainable practices can often be a complex process. Their findings indicated that the closer the alignment between the content of a sustainability protocol and an organization's core values and institutional logic, the more effective its adoption tends to be. Conversely, when sustainable practices (protocols) conflict with these core values and institutional logic, adoption becomes significantly more challenging. In essence, the success of environmental management practices based on international protocols depends on several factors, including the commitment of management, employee engagement, and the availability of suitable technologies and resources.

The isomorphic nature of management practices outlined in global sustainability protocols (Rossoni et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 1997; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995) provides organizations with a clear starting point for identifying sustainable technical and operational actions they can adopt and implement. These protocols offer standardized guidelines, making them especially valuable for organizations unsure where to begin or which specific actions to prioritize. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that aligning organizational practices with globally recognized sustainability protocols - or even attempting to do so - often leads to positive outcomes. These benefits are evident in both economic performance and environmental impact when compared to organizations that do not take such initiatives (Kurusatienkit, 2022; Ying Lu et al., 2022; Heidary Dahooie et al., 2021; Rossoni et al., 2020).

2.2 Management in the mass event industry



Mass events are temporary gatherings planned that bring together large crowds at one or more specific locations, including itinerant events such as Oktoberfest in Germany, the Olympics, Carnival, or LGBT parades in various world cities. These events revolve around a shared activity or purpose. However, there is no universal agreement in the literature regarding the specific number of attendees or characteristics required to classify an event as a mass event. Typically, such classifications are determined by local public authorities. For instance, the City of New York (USA) defines a mass event as one with more than 5,000 participants (New York State and Dutchess County, 2024), while São Paulo (Brazil) classifies events with over 1,000 attendees as mass events (São Paulo County, 2022). These events demand extensive resource coordination and infrastructure to manage crowds ensure security and provide support facilities. They are often organized to entertain, educate, advocate for a cause, or celebrate a special occasion (Bowdin et al., 2021; Hall, 1992).

Events encompass a wide range of purposes and types including music festivals, sports competitions, conferences, exhibitions, trade fairs, shows, parades, ceremonies, and cultural or religious activities, among others (Getz, 2005; Hall, 1992). Mass events are distinguished by several key characteristics: large audiences, extensive infrastructure, complex planning and organization for logistics, security, and risk management, as well as significant economic, social, and environmental impacts. They also serve diverse purposes and often exert cultural and community influence, among other effects (Getz and Page, 2020).

The management at the mass event industry involves coordinating and overseeing all aspects of large-scale events including their planning, organization, execution and evaluation (Jones, 2017). This field is inherently complex requiring the application of management principles across various domains such as logistics, marketing, finance, human resources,



among others. Its goal is to ensure the successful execution of large events while addressing their economic, social and environmental impacts (Getz and Page, 2020). Mass event management can be defined as "a set of practices and strategies designed to effectively coordinate all phases of an event's lifecycle - from conception to post-event evaluation - with a focus on creating value for all stakeholder groups" (Raj, Walters and Rashid, 2021).

The literature on management in the mass event industry lacks a definitive seminal study; however, this discussion is framed around Robertson (2016) research, which provides valuable insights. Robertson's study analyzed festivals and events as social phenomena within political and sustainability contexts, emphasizing their socio-cultural impacts and the responsibility associated with managing them. The research explored leadership and decision-making in these events, addressing the evolving demands of stakeholders and the skills required by managers to drive social transformation. Robertson (2016), also, noted that early studies on mass event management originated in the tourism field, particularly with Jamal and Getz's (1995) seminal work, *"Collaboration Theory and Community Tourism Planning"*. This research introduced interorganizational collaboration as a framework for analyzing stakeholder groups involved in event activities and outcomes, referred to as event tourism.

The relationship between event tourism, location planning, socio-economic activity and government policies has since been widely explored, especially in the context of public and fiscal planning for large sporting events. This discourse later expanded to include public urban festivals (Weller, 2013), and the progression of research in the field began to address a broader range of events, including festivals, community gatherings, and cultural events. These developments have been discussed extensively in subsequent studies (Schulenkorf, Giannoulakis and Blom, 2018; Robertson, 2016; Spirou, 2013; Getz, 2005).



Mass events, however, can have a substantial negative impact on the environment contributing to carbon dioxide emissions, various forms of pollution and waste generation (Santos et al., 2023). While concerns about the sustainability of events have been noted since the early days of mass event management studies, the topic was initially not treated as a primary research focus (Getz, 2009). Discussions around event sustainability gained momentum in the late 1990s, largely in response to criticism of the environmental and social impacts of large events. The Sydney 2000 Olympics marked a turning point by introducing sustainable practices, which later became a model for future events (Ritchie, Shipway, and Cleeve, 2009; Getz, 2009). Researchers have identified three main categories of environmental impacts associated with mass events. The first involves the use of resources, including the consumption and depletion of materials, space, water, and energy. The second category focuses on waste and pollution encompassing ecosystem damage, reduced air quality, noise pollution, aesthetic degradation, and water contamination. The third category relates to behaviors associated with food, accommodation, and transportation (Santos et al., 2023; Yuan, 2013).

Sustainability only emerged as a central focus in mass event management during the mid-2010s. In the United Kingdom, the BS8901:2007 standard was introduced as a British guideline for sustainable event management (Gallagher and Pike, 2011). Additionally, the development of the ISO 20121 and CSA Z2010 Management System Standards - providing requirements and guidelines for sustainable event organizers - demonstrates the growing global emphasis on cleaner production and sustainable practices within the mass event industry (Mair and Laing, 2012). Finally, Liu and Lei (2021) research provided an overview of the primary "Green Certificates" across different sectors of the event industry.



2.3 Management practices in sustainable mass event organization

Research on mass event management has grown to encompass a wide range of disciplines beyond sustainability itself, making it a multidisciplinary field. It now includes areas such as hospitality, logistics, engineering, biology, biosafety, marine studies, public policy, among others (Jones, 2017). This expansion even drew the attention of the United Nations which incorporated terms related to sustainable event production and organization into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to support the Sustainable Development Goals (Chumakova, 2020). Earlier, the UN had already established expectations for managing medium- and small-scale sustainable events (approximately 200 attendees) defining them as events that are "designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes potential negative impacts and leaves a beneficial legacy for the host community and all involved" (Mair and Smith, 2021; UNEP, 2009). However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to the mass event industry, and studies on the sustainability impacts of the sector in the post-pandemic context are still in the early stages of development (Carswell et al., 2023). Similarly, research focused specifically on management practices for sustainable mass events remains scarce (Liu and Lei, 2021). Nevertheless, some studies have examined sustainability practices in specific contexts offering theoretical insights that contribute to this study.

Gallagher and Pike (2011) explored sustainable management principles and practices in maritime and coastal events and festivals. Their findings highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders, involving local communities, and regularly collecting longitudinal data from festivals. This data helps identify priorities and select effective management strategies for continuously improving efforts to reduce social and environmental impacts. Similarly, Wilson and Garcia (2011) and Kasim and Ismail (2012) examined the food service industry, suggesting



that small adjustments in input and waste management practices could significantly contribute to sustainability and be adapted for use in mass event contexts.

Trisnayoni, Astawa, and Utama (2022) examined the challenges faced by an event organization company in Bali, Indonesia, when trying to implement sustainable practices. The study found that high costs and customer preferences for less environmentally friendly options posed significant obstacles. These findings highlight that economic constraints and customer expectations are important factors to consider in mass event management.

Barakat et al. (2023) studied the impact of green training on sustainable business practices, focusing on green supply chain practices such as eco-friendly procurement, production, transportation, and disposal methods. Their findings demonstrated that adopting green practices in supply chain management enhanced operational efficiency, optimized resource use, and improved environmental performance. These practices are applicable to various sectors, including the mass event industry. Similarly, Abhisha and Melvin (2024) highlighted the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into organizational practices and human resource training, emphasizing that such initiatives are essential for mass event management teams to adopt more sustainable practices. Additionally, Odeyemi et al. (2023) and Adongo, Choe and Sulemana (2023) explored sustainable entrepreneurship and eco-friendly practices in the hospitality industry, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering insights that could guide sustainable practices in mass event management.

Santos et al. (2023) conducted a study on the sustainable transformation of academic conferences, focusing on how sociodemographic factors, such as gender and age, influence attitudes toward making these events more environmentally friendly. The findings revealed that these variables significantly impact attitudes: women and older adults were found to have



stronger pro-environmental attitudes regarding event sustainability. Overall, the study showed that attitudes toward more sustainable academic conferences are generally positive. Key factors, including the sustainability of event venues, catering, conference materials and accommodations were found to strongly influence attendees' support for more sustainable conferences.

Liu and Lei (2022) investigated environmental sustainability practices within the MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibitions) sector of the event industry. Their study used interviews to explore themes such as environmental impacts, green certification standards, and the implementation of sustainable practices, focusing on the perspectives of professional event planners in Macao. The findings offered practical insights for planners, operators, and event training professionals, highlighting sustainable practices and the economic benefits of adopting them. The study emphasized the feasibility of implementing sustainable practices and underscored the importance of structured training programs to enhance industry professionals' knowledge and awareness of sustainability.

In summary, the studies reviewed do not specifically focus on sustainable management practices for mass events. However, they collectively emphasize key aspects of management practices, including addressing stakeholder expectations, managing economic challenges, implementing human resource policies, providing training to adopt cleaner practices, and strategically integrating sustainability. These elements are critical for the various social actors involved in organizing, participating and managing the positive and negative impacts of mass events.

3. Research Method and Data Collection



The case study method is a qualitative research approach that involves a detailed and in-depth examination of one or more specific cases within a real-world context, without researcher interference (Eisenhardt, 2021; Yin, 2014). When applied to mass events such as festivals, protests, sports competitions, or other large-scale gatherings involving dense crowds, this method is particularly valuable for analyzing the complexity and dynamics of organization, execution, outcomes, and post-event impacts. One of the main strengths of the case study method is its ability to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the specific event being studied, capturing its unique characteristics and nuances (Eisenhardt, 2021; Yin, 2014). Additionally, the method is highly flexible (Yin, 2014), making it adaptable to various types of events and research questions. However, the method has limitations. Yin (2014) and Eisenhardt (1989) caution that findings from case studies are often difficult to generalize to other events or contexts. Furthermore, data interpretation can be influenced by the researchers' perspectives and biases, which may affect the objectivity of the analysis.

Various researchers have conducted case studies in fields such as fashion, tourism, and hospitality, highlighting sustainable practices that could also be applied to mass events (e.g., Adongo, Choe, and Sulemana, 2023; Al-Ababneh and Rawashdeh, 2021; Trisnayoni, Astawa and Sutama, 2022; Bigliardi and Bottani, 2012). However, there remains a scarcity of studies specifically addressing sustainable management practices within the mass event industry. To address this gap, we followed the recommendations of Fedele and Formisano (2023), as guided by Yin (2009), for developing a case study protocol. This protocol included structured steps for data collection, analysis, and the formalization of results.

The chosen method reflects our decision to structure the case study chronologically, aligning with the characteristics and objectives of our research. By integrating various data



sources, we connected the content and phases of the case through the sequence of events. Unlike approaches based on pre-established theoretical or analytical categories, we allowed the facts to emerge naturally, organized in chronological and procedural order, to reveal the contextual phenomena being analyzed. This interpretivist approach to case construction is less common, as many authors argue that case studies should follow positivist paradigms, such as hypothesis generation and testing or theory validation, however, while this approach demands more effort, it enhances the reliability and credibility of the case and its results (Schwandt and Gates, 2018).

Specifically, the sections that follow, including the case itself, were developed using an interpretative epistemology (Grix, 2002; Marietto and Maccari, 2015). This allowed us to extract insights from multiple data sources and conduct multi-level analyses within a single scenario. Additionally, we sought to understand the processes and social interactions that unfolded within the historical context of the events and to correlate these contexts with their outcomes. By not relying on a pre-established theoretical framework for constructing the case and analyzing the data, we aimed to minimize cognitive biases that could influence the interpretation of results. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Fedele and Formisano (2023), Eisenhardt (2021), Schwandt and Gates (2018), Bryman (2016), and Yin (2014).

The event "*Marejada - The Largest Fish Festival in Brazil*," held in 2019, was selected for this study due to its pioneering focus on sustainability as a fully sustainable coastal event in the Latin America. Additional factors supporting this choice included easy access to event data, accessibility to the event managers and, most importantly, the availability of extensive data on the event's outcomes. This data allowed a more rigorous and reliable assessment of the managers' practices. We also believe this case provides sufficient information to meet our



research objectives. Specifically: a) It offers practical and detailed examples of how mass event managers implement sustainability initiatives. b) It enables the evaluation of the social and environmental outcomes of these practices. c) It reveals the institutional frameworks and resources managers relied on to define and implement these sustainability practices.

The primary objective of the event, as widely promoted by its management, was "Zero Plastic: an important step toward ocean preservation." The event qualified as a large-scale gathering, attracting over 235,000 participants during its 13-day duration in the coastal city of Itajaí, State of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Although the event occurred several years ago and might initially appear outdated, its analysis was only possible later due to the availability and impact of its post-event socio-environmental outcomes. These included awards for the event and its partner companies, recognition from the local community for its environmental practices and acknowledgment from government authorities.

This case study provided evidence to address how and why a series of actions related to mass event management occurred in a contemporary event, without any influence or control by the researchers (Fedele and Formisano, 2023; Yin, 2014). By integrating insights from the case with theoretical perspectives on mass event industry management and sustainable event practices, we developed a new conceptual framework specifically focused on sustainable mass event management. This framework (Figure 1) aims to identify and promote practices that can drive transformations and adaptations in the mass event industry, ultimately supporting the production of cleaner and more sustainable events.

3.1 Data collection context



Information for the case study was gathered using primary and secondary data from multiple sources, including: i) Analysis of the broader context through data collection from organizations involved in sustainability activities, such as the UN, UN/SDGs, WWF-Brazil, Oceana Brazil, Zero Waste Alliance Brazil (ARZB), SOS Mata Atlântica, Institute for Energy and Environment (IEMA), National Solid Waste Policy Observatory and the Research Center on Organizations, Society, and Sustainability at the University of São Paulo (USP); ii) Data collection from official websites, including the Municipality of Itajaí and the *Marejada* Event (Appendix 1); iii) News portals such as NSC Total (an affiliate of the Globo TV); iv) Analysis of event videos available online, including social media, YouTube, and the Globo TV News website; and v) In-depth interviews with event operators and managers.

3.2. Results' robustness and validation

To ensure the reliability and validity of results, the study followed the criteria outlined by Bryman (2016) in the execution of data treatment protocols. These criteria include credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the results, we employed data triangulation. As previously mentioned, secondary data were collected from multiple virtual sources and cross-checked for consistency. For instance, if a video posted on the event's Instagram (social media) presented information relevant to the research, the same data were verified using other sources, such as the event's official website, the municipality's website, or television channels. This same approach was used to validate numerical data from the case study. This triangulation process, combined with the case study, ensured the reliability of the data presented in Figure 1.



To enhance the transferability of results, we provided detailed descriptions of the investigated context focusing on the management practices observed. Due space restrictions we chose to organize sustainable management practices and their results from the data investigated. This approach aimed to facilitate the potential replication of the findings, particularly those presented in Figure 1.

To ensure the confirmability of results, we applied strict criteria in designing the research method and selecting the case study (as outlined in the previous subsection). These measures were intended to eliminate the influence of personal values, biases, or relationships with participants on the outcomes. Additionally, we followed rigorous protocols for developing, formalizing, analyzing, and discussing the case study, adhering to the methodologies recommended by Fedele and Formisano (2023), Eisenhardt (2021), Schwandt and Gates (2018), Bryman (2016) and Yin (2014).

4. Findings

4.1 Case context: The current state of oceanic environmental destruction

A study by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, 2019) conducted in partnership with the United Nations (UN) estimated that approximately 13 million tons of plastic are dumped into the oceans worldwide each year. Additionally, the study predicts that if current plastic consumption trends continue, around 12 billion tons of plastic waste could accumulate in landfills and the environment by 2050. According to data from the World Bank included in the WWF (2019) report, Brazil generates an average of about 1 kilogram of plastic waste per person each week. The study, which analyzed over 200 countries, ranked Brazil as the fourth-largest producer of plastic waste globally with 11.3 million tons annually - surpassed only by



the United States, China, and India. Although over 10.3 million tons (91%) of Brazil's plastic waste is collected, only 145,000 tons (1.28%) are recycled and reintegrated into the production chain as secondary materials. This recycling rate is one of the lowest among the countries studied and falls significantly below the global average of 9%. The amount of plastic waste accumulating in soils and rivers is believed to surpass that found in the oceans, causing harm to countless animals and contaminating ecosystems worldwide.

In Brazil, most of the marine litter found along the coastline consists of plastic waste, including items such as plastic bags, PET bottles, straws, shampoo containers, and Styrofoam. According to WWF-Brazil's Atlantic Forest and Marine Programs, "the oceans are responsible for producing 54.7% of the oxygen on the planet." Plastic pollution causes global economic losses exceeding \$8 billion impacting sectors such as fishing, maritime trade, and tourism, as reported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Additionally, studies conducted in Brazil have confirmed that seafood contains high levels of plastic-derived toxins, which directly affect human health. This is particularly concerning given that seafood consumption has increased by nearly 200% in recent decades. Furthermore, even coral colonies - often referred to as "underwater forests" - are dying as a result of this environmental crisis.

The Foundation SOS Mata Atlântica said that in Brazil's alarming environmental scenario, the state of Santa Catarina stands out as one of the regions with the highest number of heavily polluted rivers. Only Rio de Janeiro with 12 rivers and Pernambuco with 11 surpass it. Santa Catarina has 10 rivers on this list, collectively contributing 2.3 tons of plastic to the ocean annually. Among them, the Itajaí-Açu River is particularly notable. Stretching 187 kilometers toward the Atlantic Ocean and passing through several cities, including Itajaí, this river alone releases 641.8 thousand kilograms of plastic into the ocean each year.



Several organizations dedicated to reducing plastic waste in Brazil, such as Oceana Brazil, the Zero Waste Alliance Brazil (ARZB), SOS Mata Atlântica, the Institute for Energy and Environment (IEMA) and the National Solid Waste Policy Observatory, emphasize that the most effective way to address the harm caused by plastic is to reduce its production and availability. They argue that recycling alone is insufficient to resolve the issue. In response, many Brazilian states are enacting laws that mandate replacing disposable plastic bottles, cups, plates, and cutlery at events and establishments. These measures aim to protect the environment, promote recycling, and support the transition to a circular economy.

In April 2018, the coastal municipality of Itajaí, Santa Catarina, became a pioneer in Latin America by signing the "Clean Seas" commitment letter in partnership with the UN, as part of its efforts to combat marine pollution. Alongside this initiative, the Department of Tourism and Events introduced guidelines outlining key principles for reducing waste generation and implementing proper waste management practices.

The Waste Management Plan covers all stages of the process including generation, segregation, packaging, labeling, internal collection, internal transportation, temporary storage, internal treatment, external storage, external collection and transportation, external treatment and final disposal. All steps are conducted under licenses issued by the Environmental Foundation of Itajaí, the municipality's authorized environmental agency.

4.2 The Case

The *Marejada* Festival is a cultural event held in the coastal city of Itajaí, located in the State of Santa Catarina (SC), Brazil. First organized in 1987, the festival was created to celebrate and preserve the Azorean culture and cuisine brought by the city's settlers. Today, it



is recognized as the largest Portuguese festival in Brazil. The name "*Marejada*" originates from a term used by the Portuguese to describe the ebb and flow of the sea during fishing.

The festival takes place in October and features attractions such as music, dance, and traditional Azorean cuisine. Visitors can enjoy performances by local and national bands, craft displays, the Itajaí Fishing Market, children's activities, and folkloric groups. The 2019 edition welcomed over 235,000 participants and showcased more than 100 local and regional performances across a 50,000 m² area. The venue includes a main pavilion with a spacious area for restaurants and live music, as well as mezzanines for craft exhibitions, a VIP area, and a children's play space.

The event was built around two fundamental pillars: sustainability and accessibility. These features were crucial to the success of the last editions of the festival. Sustainability initiatives included the use of reusable cups and biodegradable plates and utensils, free water distribution, recyclable packaging, and efficient waste management systems, as shown in Image 1.

Image 1: Sustainability initiatives





Sourche: NSC, an open television station affiliated with Globo TV.

In terms of accessibility, the event offered a range of inclusive services, such as an accessibility counter with sign language interpreters, audio-described menus, support for individuals with intellectual disabilities, available wheelchairs, and a tactile table for visually impaired visitors (Image 2). The physical infrastructure was also carefully designed to ensure visitor safety, featuring accessible restrooms and adapted parking spaces.

Image 2: Social inclusion practices



Sourche: Official social media of the Marejada Itajaí Event, Instagram. Access: <https://www.instagram.com/marejadaitajai/reel/DBXSBtnRLko/>



The "Largest Fish Festival in Brazil" faced a major challenge: reducing plastic waste emissions during the event. The goal was to become the first entertainment event in Santa Catarina to completely eliminate plastic use across all its operations. This objective was closely aligned with the commitment made by the city of Itajaí, which became a pioneer in Brazil by signing the United Nations (UN) Clean Seas Commitment Letter in 2018.

To address this challenge, the festival, with over 30 years of history, took significant steps to minimize plastic waste generation and achieve its ambitious goal of eliminating plastic use entirely, setting a benchmark for sustainability in entertainment events in Santa Catarina. To achieve a zero-plastic event, the organizers had to implement the following measures: a) Provide free treated water to approximately 235,000 participants over the event's 13 days; b) Replace disposable cups with eco-friendly alternatives; c) Eliminate the use of plastic plates and cutlery in the event's restaurants; d) Introduce sustainable practices aimed at reducing waste, promoting social inclusion, and facilitating eco-friendly transportation to the event (Image 3).

Image 3: Bike parking



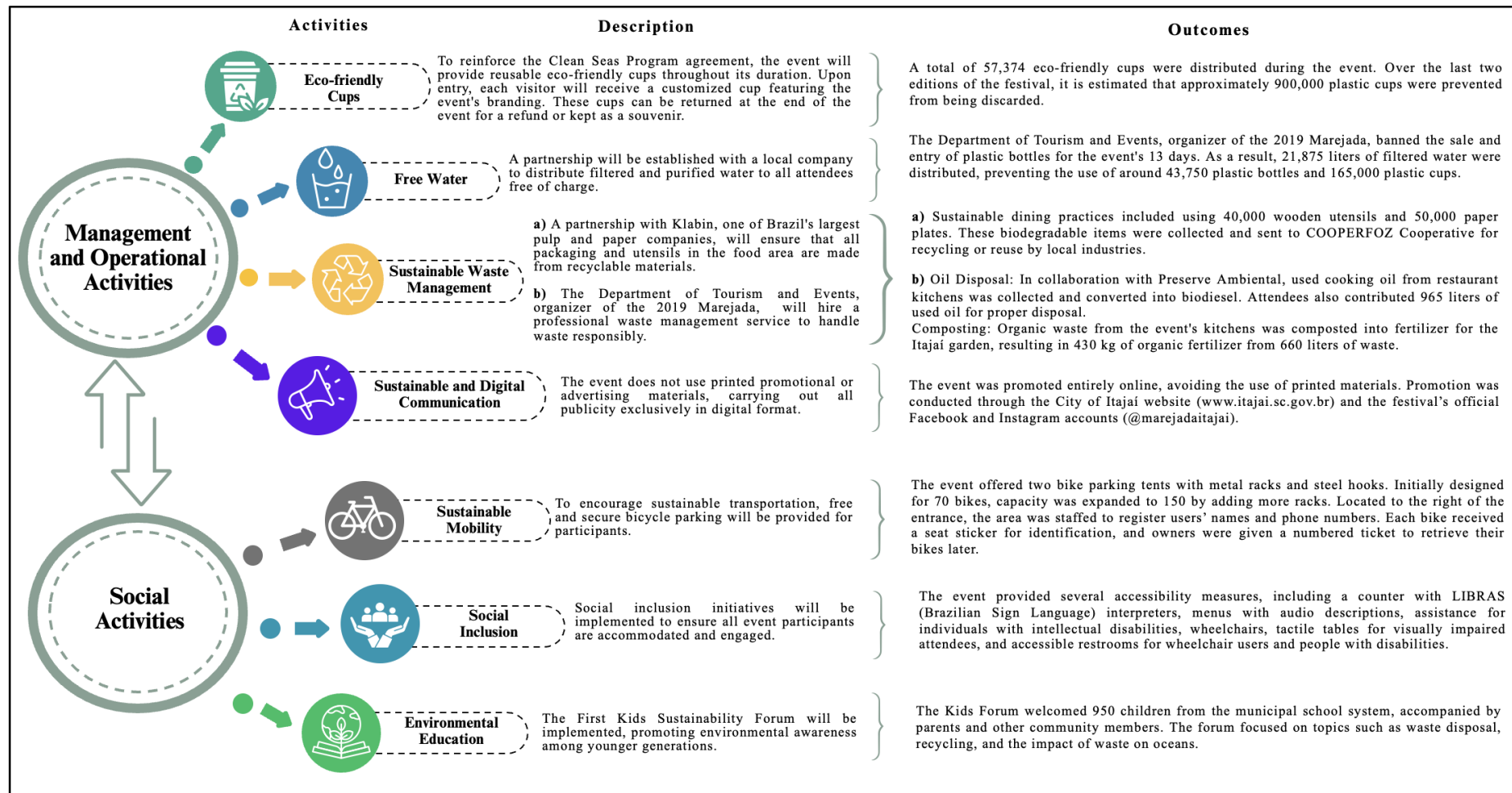


Source: Official social media of the Marejada Itajaí Event, Instagram. Access: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DBHldLJRkat/?igsh=MThvcG83YmFwbGI5bQ%3D%3D>

To meet these objectives, the event managers created an activity plan that was later recognized and awarded by the federal public administration body responsible for environmental sustainability. This plan was designed following the guidelines outlined in the United Nations (UN) Clean Seas commitment letter. The readers can access the plan (A3P 8°Premio, 2020) through institutional references.

The sustainable practices adopted by the event managers were summarized and presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Marejada's Sustainable Management Practices.



Source: the data.

4.3 Outcomes of the Event Management Practices

One of the positive outcomes reported by the event managers was the strengthened commitment of the municipality of Itajaí, SC, to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Prefeitura de Itajaí, 2022; Movimento Nacional ODS Santa Catarina, 2021). The actions undertaken specifically contributed to three of these goals:

- a) SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities: Promote inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.*
- b) SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production: Foster sustainable consumption and production practices.*
- c) SDG 14 - Life Below Water: Protect and sustainably manage oceans, seas, and marine resources to support sustainable development (UN, n.d).*

Another notable achievement was the event's recognition as one of the 33 finalists in the *"National Tourism Award 2019,"* organized by the Ministry of Tourism and the National Tourism Council. This award aims to highlight, recognize and reward innovative initiatives that have made significant contributions to Brazilian tourism. In 2019, a total of 418 projects were submitted and 33 were selected as finalists. Following the evaluation process, the *"33rd Marejada"* was honored in the Social Tourism category.

In 2020, the event received the *"Best Sustainability Practices Award"* for the initiatives implemented during the 2019 *Marejada*, specifically in the special category *"Combat to Marine Litter."* This award was organized by the Environmental Public Administration Program of the Ministry of the Environment. At the end of 2020, Eurovip, the local representative of the European Water Filters Company was honored with the *"Citizen Company Award"* by the Association of Sales and Marketing Executives of Brazil (ADVB/SC). The award recognized the successful case *"Sustainable Marejada."*

Eurovip played a key role in the event by supplying purified water to nearly 235,000 participants.

5. Discussion

This study examined the *Marejada* festival as a case study to propose sustainable management practices for the mass event industry. The proposal is grounded in adherence to "global models" recommended by internationally recognized sustainability organizations. To evaluate the effectiveness of these practices, we considered that managers can adopt these protocols regardless of their current level of technical and operational development. This adherence can serve as a starting point or an opportunity to improve sustainable management within the sector. As noted earlier, research on sustainable management practices in the mass event industry remains limited, even as global media strongly advocates for progress in this area. Using a research protocol supported by the case study method (Fedele and Formisano, 2023; Eisenhardt, 2021; Yin, 2014), this study analyzed the feasibility and integration of sustainable management practices for a mass event held in a coastal city.

The *Marejada* festival demonstrated its commitment to sustainability by hosting an event with extensive infrastructure to accommodate over 235,000 participants while completely eliminating disposable plastics. The case analysis provided practical examples of how sustainable management practices, aligned with international protocols, can be incorporated into the planning, organization, and execution of large-scale events, as detailed in Figure 1. These actions addressed the growing institutional demand for solutions that reduce the environmental, social, and economic impacts of such events. The case adhered to environmental and sociocultural responsibility guidelines proposed by Robertson (2016) and aligned with sustainable event standards for coastal festivals

discussed by Gallagher and Pike (2011), additionally, it reinforces the importance of adopting sustainable management practices in the mass event industry, as emphasized by Liu and Lei (2022).

Proposition 1: *Sustainable management practices aligned with international protocols can be successfully implemented in the mass event industry, even if managers have no prior experience.*

The event started as a coastal social phenomenon planned and discussed within a broad sociopolitical context and supported by an institutional sustainability framework (Gallagher and Pike, 2011). In other words, before making operational decisions, the event managers prioritized understanding and aligning their practices with the institutional principles of sustainability in the mass event industry. This focus is evident in the organizers' efforts to promote and implement management practices guided by leading environmental organizations responsible for sustainability frameworks, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the "Clean Seas" initiative, WWF, Oceana Brazil, and the Zero Waste Alliance Brazil (ARZB), among others (Kurusatienkit, 2022; Ying Lu et al., 2022; Heidary Dahooie et al., 2021).

To address the interests of different stakeholder groups (Robertson, 2016; Weller, 2013), public organizations such as the Department of Tourism and Events of Itajaí and the Environmental Foundation expanded discussions on management practices to mitigate the socio-environmental impact on coastal areas, including the sea, rivers, cities, and communities directly affected by the event, whether positively or negatively. These practices were aligned with environmental organizations such as the UN "Clean Seas" initiative, Oceana Brazil, and the Zero Waste Alliance Brazil (ARZB). The goal was to

legitimize a new paradigm of socio-environmental responsibility within the mass event industry (Rossoni et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 1997; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995).

The WWF (2019) study on plastic pollution emphasized the importance of initiatives like those implemented by *Marejada* in Brazil. The event made substantial efforts to combat plastic pollution by aligning with SDG 14 (*Life Below Water*), aiming to reduce the risk of plastic waste in oceans, rivers, and surrounding areas—an especially critical issue for a coastal municipality like Itajaí. Besides, by adhering to the UN *Clean Seas* Commitment Letter, the event demonstrated a strategic alignment with public policies and the commitments made by the city of Itajaí. Also, during event to prevent plastic waste, measures such as the use of biodegradable materials were implemented during the festival to promote environmental preservation. These efforts also supported SDG 11 (*Sustainable Cities and Communities*) and SDG 12 (*Responsible Consumption and Production*), reinforcing a commitment to sustainable management practices. The event's alignment with the SDGs highlights the potential of cultural events to contribute meaningfully to global environmental goals (Chumakova, 2020; Rossoni et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 1997; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995).

The results also highlighted the public recognition of *Marejada's* sustainable practices, emphasizing the importance of aligning mass event management with environmental public policies and organizations dedicated to sustainability and green practices. The event received the *National Tourism Award* in 2019 and the *Best Sustainability Practices Award* in 2020. Additionally, the contribution of local businesses was recognized. Eurovip, the local representative of the European Water Filters Company, which provided purified water throughout the event, was honored with the *Citizen Company Award* for its successful participation. These accolades not only underscored the event's success in aligning with sustainable management principles but

also validated its positive impact on legitimizing environmental practices. This alignment adhered to global sustainability guidelines, green practices, standards, and certifications (Kurusatienkit, 2022; Ying Lu et al., 2022; Heidary Dahooie et al., 2021; Liu and Lei, 2021).

Proposition 2: *The closer the alignment between sustainable management practices and the institutional elements of global sustainability protocols, the greater is the tendency the event's institutional recognition and social legitimacy.*

The event, already a cultural tradition in Itajaí, took on the challenge of becoming the first entertainment event in Santa Catarina to eliminate plastic use entirely in its operations. The management of mass events is a complex process involving logistical, economic, social, and environmental challenges. These events demand meticulous planning and coordination of various elements, including security, crowd management, infrastructure, and sustainability (Jones, 2017; Getz, 2005; Hall, 1992). Implementing sustainable practices in the festival came with significant challenges. One major obstacle in mass events is the high cost of eco-friendly alternatives and the resistance of consumers, who are often unwilling to pay more for sustainable products or services (Trisnayoni, Astawa and Sutama, 2022). In Itajaí, the primary challenge was upholding the municipality's commitment to the UN *Clean Seas* protocol signed in 2018 while transitioning to eco-friendly cups and utensils. This effort required substantial initial investment and a concerted effort to shift public perception toward recognizing the long-term benefits of these actions (Rossoni et al., 2020).

The managers of the *Marejada* event implemented several sustainable practices in both its planning and execution, we call these practices “Management and Operational Activities” (Figure 1). The transition to "zero plastic" practices included the use of eco-

friendly cups, biodegradable utensils, and the elimination of plastic bottles. Free treated water was made available at designated stations, and logistical efforts were coordinated with partners to ensure attendees did not need to purchase plastic bottles or cups. Additionally, all event publicity was conducted exclusively through digital media, eliminating the use of printed promotional materials. These measures demonstrated the feasibility of implementing sustainable solutions in large-scale events (Abhisha and Melvin, 2024; Barakat et al., 2023).

Another important focus was waste management. A comprehensive plan was put in place, which involved training staff and volunteers on proper material segregation from collection to final disposal. *Marejada* demonstrated a significant positive social impact through its focus on community participation and stakeholder engagement. The event managers fostered partnerships between *Marejada*, local businesses, cooperatives, and environmental organizations to ensure the proper collection and disposal of waste and cooking oil (Santos et al., 2023; Kasim and Ismail, 2012; Wilson and Garcia, 2011). Initiatives such as composting, oil disposal for biodiesel production and the reuse of organic waste helped create local value by involving the recycling industry and producing organic fertilizer (Raj, Walters and Rashid, 2021). These efforts exemplify principles of the "*circular economy*" (Fedele and Formisano, 2023).

The event management incorporated accessibility and social inclusion practices to ensure a more inclusive experience, which we call "Social Activities" (Figure 1). These included a service counter with sign language interpreters, menus with audio descriptions and support for individuals with intellectual disabilities, wheelchairs available for use, a tactile table for visually impaired attendees, accessible restrooms for wheelchair users and people with disabilities and a bicycle parking system to promote sustainable mobility. In addition to these measures, the event hosted the *Kids Forum*, an initiative aimed at

fostering environmental education among future generations. This approach highlighted the potential of sustainability practices to raise environmental awareness among participants and inspire more responsible behaviors within their communities.

The adoption of accessibility policies and the inclusion of diverse audiences further demonstrated that sustainability, when effectively implemented, can lead to more inclusive and socially responsible events (Odeyemi et al., 2023; Adongo, Choe and Sulemana, 2023).

Proposition 3: *The implementation of accessibility policies and the inclusion of diverse audiences highlighted that, when effectively applied, sustainability could create events that are not only environmentally conscious, but also more inclusive and socially responsible.*

5.1 Conclusions and implications

This study aimed to demonstrate how adopting and following sustainability protocols established by globally recognized organizations can provide a foundation for implementing sustainable management practices in the large-scale event industry. The analysis showcased an example of sustainable practices implemented by the managers of Latin America's first fully sustainable mass event. These practices were developed in alignment with global sustainability protocols set by leading international organizations.

Initially, this study concluded that managers in the mass event industry can adopt global sustainability management protocols to align their practices with the environmental and ecological balance of the event's region. Additionally, the isomorphic nature of these global protocols enables mass event managers to incorporate sustainable management practices at any stage, even for those without prior experience in implementing such actions. Finally, the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of

sustainable practices aligned with global sustainability management protocols tend to grant mass events greater recognition, as well as social and environmental legitimacy.

Empirically, this analysis was possible because it focused on a single case study, specifically the first fully sustainable public event in Latin America. The case was built using a comprehensive approach to data collection, analysis, and multi-level triangulation from various sources, prioritizing not only the management practices but also their social outcomes. This research makes a direct contribution to the theoretical understanding of sustainable practices in the mass event industry. By showing that these practices can be implemented in alignment with global sustainability protocols - regardless of the organization's stage, whether lacking prior experience or having only limited experience - it provides a valuable theoretical framework. This contribution aims to help the mass event industry reduce its environmental and social impacts through sustainable management practices.

This study offers several practical implications. First, as highlighted, the mass event industry plays a significant economic role but also generates considerable environmental impacts. For managers facing pressure to align their operations with more sustainable practices, this study provides a practical framework to guide such transitions. Furthermore, the findings are relevant for event organizers who have not yet adopted sustainable practices, regardless of the reasons for their hesitation. While case studies often reflect specific contexts, the sustainable practices highlighted here, based on global sustainability protocols, can serve as useful examples for organizations and managers beginning their journey toward sustainability. Lastly, a key practical contribution lies in the potential of sustainable practices to enhance environmental recognition and legitimacy for large-scale event organizers, further motivating the adoption of sustainability-driven processes.

5.2 Limitations and future research

The limitations of this study's design offer opportunities for future research. First, there is a need for studies focused on other event contexts. This research examined a traditional, large public event organized by the municipality of Itajaí - SC, Brazil. One limitation was the lack of access to the event's economic outcomes. It appears that government organizations have a vested interest in the sustainability of mass events, as their negative impacts often lead to economic and social repercussions. These repercussions can increase the socio-economic burden on the state when it assumes costs to mitigate the adverse effects of such events. We recommend future research on mass events in different contexts, including those organized by private entities or featuring various characteristics and objectives. These studies could yield diverse results, as sustainable management practices can be tailored to fit the unique economic costs and requirements of each event type.

A second suggestion is to conduct multi-case studies, which could compare the outcomes of management practices and their corresponding socio-environmental impacts. These studies should focus on similar event contexts but could be conducted in different locations or even across different countries. Since environmental concerns are universal, it would be valuable to explore the similarities and differences in sustainable management practices implemented in various international settings while examining events of the same type.

Finally, we recommend studies that explore the adoption and adherence to sustainability protocols established by globally recognized organizations. This research demonstrated not only the effectiveness of management practices based on these protocols but also the institutional legitimacy gained by event organizers. Future studies could build on this by examining similar cases in different social contexts. For instance,

it would be valuable to investigate whether large private events that implement global sustainability management protocols also achieve similar institutional benefits.

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Appendix 1

Category	Activities	Evidence
Management or Operational Activities	Eco-friendly Cups	News on the website of the State Secretariat of Tourism (SETUR) of Santa Catarina. Access: click here
	Free Water	Citizen Company Award, presented by ADVB/SC in 2020, for the success story "Sustainable Marejada" to Eurovip. Access: click here
	Sustainable Waste Management	Article published in the Business Communication Magazine of ABERJE - Brazilian Association of Business Communication, presenting the case of the partnership between the organizers of the Marejada event and the company Klabin, aimed at eliminating the use. Access: click here
		News published on the Itajaí City Hall website. Title: How the Itajaí Tide Became a Reference in Sustainability. Access: click here
	Sustainable and Digital Communication	News article published on the Itajaí Online website, the city's news portal, titled: Marejada is a Finalist for the National Sustainability Award. Access: click here
Social Activities	Sustainable Mobility	Publication regarding the Marejada bike rack, shared on the official Instagram account of the Itajaí City Hall. Access: click here
	Social Inclusion	A video detailing the Accessibility Plan developed by the organizers of Marejada in collaboration with the Municipal Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of Itajaí (Comadefi), available on the official Marejada Itajaí event Facebook page. Access: click here
	Environmental Education	News published on the official website of the Itajaí City Hall, titled: 1st Marejada Kids Sustainability Forum Brings Together 500 Children from the Municipal Education Network. Access: click here