

The relationship between grading and responsible event practices

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Abstract

The events sector is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry in South Africa, supported by continued growth in the number of graded establishments in the country. Research into both events and responsible or sustainable tourism is a relatively new and growing development. However, not much of the research considers the actual practising of responsible events, as current research focuses more on generating theoretical strategies and guidelines. Responsible events and tourism strategies created by public sector organisations may be effective in theory, but not necessarily in practice. Thus, this research investigates how the expansion of tourism grading in South Africa is linked to responsible event practices. The results should assist event stakeholders in ascertaining the success of the existing theory and should provide practical insight into responsible events. A study of responsible events practices at geological heritage sites in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, found a significant correlation between the prevalence of grading and the actual practising of responsible events. Graded events venues in the study area indicated a generally positive stance towards following a number of responsible tourism guidelines, compared to ungraded establishments. The research results support the promotion of tourism grading, responsible event awareness creation, and continued control of the implementation of tourism strategies. The implementation of responsible events is imperative in order to ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry as a whole.

Keywords: events, responsible tourism, tourism grading

Introduction

In recent years, the importance of events as tourist attractions has been widely recognised and researched (Getz, 2007). In addition, there is an increasing tendency towards responsible tourism, for tourism to go “green” or to become progressively more environmentally friendly (Frey & George, 2008). This has been the result of global pressures; primarily those concerning global warming (Bramwell & Lane, 2008). However, there are other global issues, including social and economic inequalities, that should also be addressed and for which there are priorities in research, according to Bramwell and Lane (2008). Thus, event activities should become more responsible. In order for this to happen, the focus should be on the environmental, social and economic impacts of events. These factors, together with grading, form the basis of this research paper.

In South Africa, a recent development that is important for this study is the grading of events venues, supplementing the current grading of hospitality facilities (SA, 2008). The Annual Report (SA, 2008) of the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT, prior to 2009) indicates a remarkable increase in the number of graded

establishments in the country, primarily because of marketing campaigns for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

In their study, Mair and Jago (2010) found that although sustainable event development is widely promoted, it primarily promotes environmental sustainability, while there is a lack of literature on the application of sustainable management in the services sector. Most tourism strategies originating from the public sector in South Africa include elements of responsible tourism practices. However, it is not known how well these strategies were actually researched and whether these strategies and policies are understood and practised by those stakeholders for whom they have been created. Further research is therefore needed to determine the degree and effectiveness of the implementation of tourism guidelines and strategies.

A study conducted at geological heritage sites in the Gauteng Province of South Africa analysed responsible events practices, and identified trends relating to tourism grading and the actual practising of responsible events. This province is considered the commercial heart of South and Southern Africa and is home to major cities such as Johannesburg and Pretoria. Against this background, the purpose of this research paper was to determine the relationship between grading and responsible event practices from data generated in the study. More specifically, this research had two objectives, namely to:

- determine the current grading of venues hosting events in the study area; and
- to ascertain the practising of responsible events by the venues.

The paper has four parts. First, it reviews the literature relevant to responsible tourism and events. Then the research methodology is presented and the data analysis techniques are discussed. Next, the research results are discussed and summarised, followed by the research conclusions.

Literature review

Event tourism is noted to be one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry (Uysal & Xiangping, 2008; Dwyer, 2008), which, itself, is considered to be the largest industry in the world (Middleton & Clarke, 2001). Events are an important motivator of tourism and form part of the marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2007; Dwyer, Forsyth & Spurr, 2007). The benefits of events tourism are increasingly being realised (Tassiopoulos, 2005).

South Africa has benefited from the growth in the tourism industry, as tourist arrivals to the country have increased significantly since the advent of democracy in 1994 (SA, 2009). The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), a public-private initiative, was created in 2000 for the quality assurance of the growing local tourism industry (TGCSA, 2009). Initially established for the grading of hospitality venues, the TGCSA, since 2004, has also introduced grading for the meetings, exhibitions and special events (MESE) sector venues.

In South Africa, tourism grading, including MESE grading, is a voluntary process. The process is primarily aimed at assessing the quality of specific venue features such as building exterior, function rooms, public areas, toilets, and food and beverage facilities (TGCSA,

2004). This grading system, a world first, is flexible and focuses more on customer expectations and each facility's capacity than on a fixed standard.

However, there is no clear indication of the number of event venues that exist in South Africa, as no clear uniform classification of venues is in place (Tassiopoulos, 2005). It is hoped that the development of event venue grading and the associated grading criteria will bridge this gap. The event venues that do exist encompass a variety of different types, ranging from hotels and academic venues to sporting facilities and other purpose-built venues (Getz, 2007; Fenich, 2008). The predominant types of venues that host events are hotels and other accommodation establishments. These establishments form part of the accommodation sector and are not entirely part of the events sector. This statement is supported by the number of establishments in South Africa graded as accommodation establishments that host events.

The location of the event could influence, among others, the type of visitors to the event, the taste and style of the event and the scale of investment in support facilities required to host the event at that location (Goldblatt, 2005). Larger events such as sporting events and large business and corporate events may require special venues for hosting (George, 2007; Berridge, 2007). TGCSA has identified these business and corporate events venues since 2004. Thus, events held at venues such as accommodation establishments may be considered small-scale and do not require specific MESE grading, as they are graded as a whole with the accommodation facilities. In general, the Gauteng Province predominately attracts business tourists of a local nature, compared to a city such as Cape Town, which attracts larger numbers of international business tourists (Hermann, 2010).

The events sector of the tourism industry is a relatively new research field with an increasing number of authors and researchers focusing on events as a field of study. Getz (2007), the most prominent author, discusses the recent development of research on the fields of events and events tourism. However, the extent of literature in this field is limited, compared to other sectors of tourism. This is supported by the seemingly high levels of duplication of information as well as a tendency towards a lack of consistency.

An additional field of tourism (including events) that has attracted increased levels of attention is responsible and sustainable tourism. The terms “responsible tourism” and “sustainable tourism” are often used in the same context and are often not differentiated between when literature on the topic is analysed, which could lead to misunderstanding (Kasim, 2006). In practice, sustainable and responsible tourism have a number of similarities. Keyser (2002) and Hall (2000) indicate that the principles of sustainable tourism and responsible tourism are essentially the same, but when analysing the use of these terms more precisely a differentiation can be made. Both responsible tourism and sustainable tourism focus on the environmental, economic and socio-cultural protection and upliftment that should ideally result in sustainability (SA, 2002). The development of sustainable tourism is the basis of tourism development in South Africa, as tourism development strategies have been found to focus attention on the three pillars of responsible, sustainable tourism.

It could be concluded that responsible tourism has to do with the present, whereas sustainable tourism has to do with the future, or that responsible tourism is more practical while sustainable tourism has a more strategic focus. Sustainable tourism activities strive towards practising tourism today (responsibly) in such a way that it meets present needs and does not jeopardise its utility for the future. Responsible tourism activities should therefore result in sustainable tourism, or are a form of sustainable tourism (Myburgh & Saayman, 1999).

Essentially, in order to manage tourism and event practices responsibly, three pillars of sustainability need to be addressed (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP & WTO), 2005), namely:

- Economic sustainability – this includes promoting the viability of business enterprises in the long term.
- Social sustainability – this involves promoting and respecting human rights and equal opportunities for all in society.
- Environmental sustainability – this forms the basis for the protection of resources; especially resources originating from non-renewable sources.

In order to promote responsible event practices, the negative effects of events on the three pillars should be minimised or even eliminated, while the positive effects should be promoted (UNDP & WTO, 2005).

The development of events in South Africa is governed by various levels of public administration. The principal document produced specifically for the governing of events and tourism in the country is the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism (White Paper) (SA, 1996). More detailed strategies have been created by provincial and local governments. The strategies have been found to encompass numerous aspects of responsible management. Documents that deal more specifically with responsible tourism have also been generated, including the Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa (SA, 2002), the Responsible Tourism Handbook (SA, 2003) and the Gauteng Responsible Tourism Manual (Gauteng, 2006). Few strategies exist in South Africa that focus specifically on the management of events. The findings of Stokes (2008) support the view that strategies for events should be configurational or amalgamated strategies with all stakeholders being involved in order to enhance buy-in.

The Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa is a practical guide to the implementation of responsible tourism. For the purposes of this research paper, various aspects of responsible tourism implementation were identified and tested. These aspects were sourced from the Responsible Tourism Manual (SA, 2002) and are applicable to the three pillars of responsible tourism and events.

Methodology

This research paper forms part of a broader research project on responsible events at geological heritage sites in Gauteng. For the purpose of this paper, various elements of responsible event management were selected and tested in terms of their use at events venues located at geological heritage sites in the province.

The population and sample

The context within which this study took place was from the Tswaing Meteorite Crater in the north of the Gauteng Province to the Vaal River to the south and the Magaliesberg Mountains in the west to the small mining town of Cullinan in the east. Figure 1 gives an indication of the location of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. Other sites were, among others:

- The Bronberg Mountains east of Pretoria.
- The Melville Koppies in Johannesburg.
- The Cradle of Humankind (Sterkfontein Caves and environs).
- The Suikerbosrand Mountains south of Gauteng near the town of Heidelberg.



Figure 1. The location of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. Courtesy of SA Venues (2010).

The target population of the study included the management of events venues located at geological heritage sites in the Gauteng Province. Therefore, the population of this study had to meet four basic requirements:

- The members of the population had to be directly involved in the hosting of events.
- The members of the population were geographically restricted to the Gauteng Province.
- The members of the population had to be located at a geological heritage feature.

- Preferred respondents to the survey would include those persons who were directly responsible for the management of events at the particular sites, such as events managers and general managers.

After determining the requirements of the population, the population size was established. As a clear database that specifically lists all the events venues in Gauteng was not available, it was necessary to create a new database particularly for this purpose. The final target population consisted of 70 organisations.

Due to the small population size, namely 70 organisations, a saturation sample was used and all venues identified were approached to participate in the study. All these venues had an equal opportunity to provide a response to the questionnaire forwarded to them. In this manner, the technique of simple random sampling was employed.

A general profile of respondents is provided in Table 1. The majority of respondents to this survey were located in the private sector, consisting of accommodation and conference and events venues. These venues also were predominantly SMMEs (small, medium and micro enterprises), each employing fewer than 50 employees.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

		Frequency (n)	Percent
Category of operations	Private	28	75.68
	Public	2	5.41
	Both	7	18.92
Sector of activities	Accommodation	29	37.18
	Tour operations	1	1.28
	Transport	0	0
	Conference and events	26	33.33
	Destination / Site management	7	8.97
	Attraction	2	2.56
	Museum	5	6.41
Size of business by employee count	Wildlife park/Game park	8	10.26
	Fewer than 5	8	21.62
	6 – 10	7	18.92
	11 -50	14	37.84
	51 – 100	3	8.11
More than 100	5	13.51	

The questionnaire

The 15 criteria that were to be tested were obtained from the Responsible Tourism Manual (SA, 2002). This manual contains a number of strategies and articles on responsible tourism management practices. Five statements per pillar of responsible tourism were identified. These three pillars focus on the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism activities.

The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions, and focused on collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. In the range of these questions, response sets encompassing scales of measurement were used to test the levels of importance. These scales included ranking scales and Likert scales.

Data collection

The questionnaires to be administered were first used in a pilot study in order to ensure that the categories provided for questions were valid and reliable measures, that the terms were understandable and that the question order flowed, and to determine how long the questionnaire took to complete. The pilot study also tested the sustainability of the measures of analysis and it had the added advantage that it enabled the researcher to inspect the events venues that were visited.

A computer-aided self-administered survey utilising QuestionPro (<http://www.questionpro.com>) was the primary means of data collection for this research project. Each organisation was contacted individually in order to ensure that the correspondence was sent to the person dealing with events. To increase the response rate, follow-up telephonic interviews were conducted and questionnaires were completed during personal interviews at some of the sites.

The data collection took place over six weeks, during May and June 2009. Thirty-seven out of 70 organisations participated, resulting in a 53% response rate. Several of the findings have been compared through various t-tests (t) and Chi Square Tests ($\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(o-e)^2}{e}$) and the comparative findings of this paper were encountered.

Results

Event venue grading

The initial investigation of findings relates to the grading of the events venues of respondents. Table 2 below gives an indication of the relation between graded and non-graded establishments and the grading that was achieved.

Table 2. Event venue grading

		Frequency (n)	Percent
Grading	Have been graded	22	59.46
	Have not been graded	15	40.54
Grading achieved	1 Star	0	0
	2 Star	0	0
	3 Star	9	40.91
	4 Star	10	45.45
	5 Star	3	13.64

The majority of respondents, namely 59.46%, indicated that they had been graded by the TGCSA. At the establishments that indicated that they had been graded, the prevalence was greatly towards four-star grading. No respondents indicated that they had one- or two-star grading. The grading achieved does not represent events venues alone, since it is indicated in the profile of respondents that the venues that host events consist primarily of accommodation establishments, and, to a lesser extent, conference and events venues.

The rationale behind the number of events venues positioned in the accommodation sector will be revealed in the reasoning about why events are utilised.

Reasons for events utilisation

The findings regarding the reasons why events venues at geological heritage sites presented events indicate that the majority of respondents (43.24%) acknowledged that events were not their core business, but indicated that events were used to diversify their income. This could be attributed to an earlier finding that 48.28% of respondents classified themselves as being in the accommodation sector and not directly in the conference and events sector. Therefore, accommodation establishments may be viewed as using events to supplement their income.

However, a significant 40.54% of respondents did indicate that events were considered the primary activity of their organisations. The reason for this is that these businesses are not severely influenced by seasonality because of their predominantly localised market. Thus, these businesses do not need to supplement their income. The principal market for events venues in Gauteng were localised, with very few visitors from markets further afield.

Other reasons given for hosting events were for promotional purposes (28%), for managing seasonality (2.7%) and for other reasons (5.41%).

Importance of origin markets

Events venues in the study area have indicated a trend towards local markets. The most important origin market to events venues in the study area are visitors originating from within the Gauteng province, followed by local visitors. Visitors from elsewhere in South Africa and

visitors from international markets were the least important. Thus, the closer the market is, the more significant it is to events venues in Gauteng, supporting a previous finding that the Gauteng Province predominantly attracts local business tourists (Hermann, 2010).

Responsible tourism management awareness

The respondents indicating that they had an understanding of responsible tourism comprised 51.43% (n=18). The remaining 48.57% (n=17) did not have an understanding of the term. Two respondents failed to complete this section; this suggests that these respondents did not relate to the term and possibly did not understand it.

The respondents who indicated that they did understand the term were asked to qualify their understanding by providing details of how they perceived the term. The predominant trend of understanding focused on environmental aspects, such as:

- protecting the environment;
- ensuring that clients do not damage the environment;
- preserving the environment in its natural state;
- providing a safe operating environment; and
- low- or no-impact tourism.

Other responses indicated that responsible tourism refers to providing a high-quality service, improving service and not affecting the community negatively. These results indicate that the respondents' knowledge of responsible tourism may not be adequate, as their understanding is largely focused on the environmental pillar and fails to address the other two pillars of economic and socio-cultural factors adequately.

Most responses obtained with regard to the participation and implementation of government tourism strategies developed by various levels of government indicated a negative prevalence (24.32% to 27.03% support), as depicted in Table 3. This may be the result of the large number of respondents not being aware of the strategies and therefore not actively implementing them. Less than a third of respondents actively participated in these strategies.

Table 3. Knowledge of and participation in tourism strategies

	National strategies	Provincial strategies	Local strategies
Do participate	27.03%	24.32%	27.03%
Do not participate	16.22%	16.22%	16.22%
Not aware of the strategies	56.76%	59.46%	56.76%

Some respondents indicated in their suggestions that improved communication and collaboration should take place between government strategists of tourism and tourism stakeholders. This should bring about greater levels of understanding and thus greater levels of implementation. This lack of communication may be the reason for the poor understanding of the strategies and ultimately their inadequate implementation.

Responsible events practices

The 15 responsible tourism practices were identified and tested. Respondents were asked to rate the 15 practices on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 depicted very unimportant, 2 depicted unimportant, 3 depicted neutral, 4 depicted important and 5 depicted highly important. In Table 4, the results of this investigation are shown. The table depicts the mean scores of each responsible tourism practice on the scale of 1 to 5 as well as their standard deviation (SD).

Table 4. Summary of responsible tourism practice scores.

	Responsible Tourism Practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
1	New product development	3.250	1.317
2	Using local products and services	3.856	1.228
3	Links and partnerships with SMMEs	3.200	1.256
4	The creation of local employment	4.459	0.767
5	The promotion of infrastructural development	3.514	1.446
6	Host community engagement	4.081	0.862
7	Community development	3.737	1.038
8	Support for local handcraft	3.054	1.409
9	Seasonality of employment	3.222	1.355
10	Capacity building	3.730	0.962
11	Landscape management and the use of indigenous fauna and flora	3.973	1.280
12	Management of noise	4.027	1.213
13	Recycling, use of poisons and cleaning material	3.892	1.075
14	Energy-saving initiatives	3.838	1.041
15	Environmental education of staff and visitors	3.838	1.093

Although some of the 15 practices posed to respondents, such as support for the local handcraft industry, did not receive high ratings, the responses were generally positive as all mean scores were above 3. As indicated in the table, the practice that received the least amount of support with a mean of only 3.054 (SD=1.409) was support for the local handcraft industry. The practices that drew the most positive responses were local employment creation (M=4.459) and host community engagement (M=4.081).

Responses to grading inclination and the various responsible tourism practices were compared and it was found that the organisations that were graded were more inclined to support the development of the local handcraft industry. With a P-value of 0.03 (Pr=0.03), the null hypothesis (Ho) is not accepted on a confidence level of 95%. The null hypothesis supports the rationale that no relationship exists between two variables (Jennings, 2001). This indicates that there is a significant relationship between organisations that have been graded and support for the local handcraft industry.

Although support for the local handcraft industry as a practice achieved the least amount of support, graded establishments were more likely to support this initiative. A total of 86.36% of respondents who indicated that they had been graded rated support for the handcraft industry above neutral (3), and thus positive, when rating this practice. The remaining 13.67% of graded establishments did not support the practice. The ungraded respondents were less inclined to support the local handcraft industry; only 46.66% of ungraded establishments supported handcraft while 53.34% did not support the practice.

The main finding of this study confirmed that events venues at geological heritage sites in Gauteng consist predominantly of businesses that offer events as secondary business activities, as in the case of accommodation establishments. A large number of events are additionally offered by venues as their core business activity, such as small conference and wedding venues. The majority of these venues have been graded and predominantly offer their services to markets of a localised nature.

In general, the 15 responsible tourism practices tested in this study were positively received, although a large percentage of these events venues are not aware of responsible tourism and its associated strategies. The following section will provide insight to the conclusion and recommendations of this study.

Discussion and relevance

This study investigated the relationship between grading and responsible tourism practices. This should assist events stakeholders in determining the success of the existing theory and provide a practical insight into responsible events.

Summary of findings

The results from the sample show that most events venues at geological heritage sites in the study area are graded. This increase may be due to marketing campaigns for the FIFA Football World Cup 2010. The graded establishments achieved relatively high levels of grading. This grading encompassed both events venues and accommodation establishments.

The majority of events hosted in the study area were hosted at venues that were not directly affiliated with the events sector. The majority of venues hosting events were located in the accommodation sector of the tourism industry. These establishments hosted events as a means of diversifying their income base.

With regard to visitor origins as a contributing factor to grading, it was found that most visitors to venues originate from markets close by. This is supported by the fact that Johannesburg (Gauteng) is considered a bigger market for domestic business than other cities in South Africa. This suggests that events venues in this province are predominantly geared to host domestic business events such as conferences and conventions, as opposed to leisure events. For this reason, these venues attach more importance to a localised market for their operations. Grading could be utilised in this situation as a marketing tool for these venues to improve their competitiveness, supported by the number of venues achieving relatively high levels of grading.

In the investigation of responsible tourism practices, the initial findings suggested that a significant number of events venues in the study area are not aware of responsible tourism. The respondents that did indicate an understanding of the term were found to have only a limited understanding, as they generally only perceived the environmental pillar of responsible tourism and were not familiar with the economic and social pillars.

~~An attribute to t~~The poor awareness of responsible tourism may be indicated by the significant number of respondents that do not proactively participate in tourism strategy implementation. Very few actively participate in tourism strategies. Suggestions by respondents for greater communication of these strategies and greater involvement from authorities show that these organisations are willing to learn and possibly adopt these strategies in future.

In general, the response is positive towards practicing responsible events, even though the venues participating in this study failed to implement government strategies adequately. Few respondents are aware of the existing tourism strategies, but the findings indicate that a large number of venues find responsible tourism practices important. The implementation of these tourism strategies may be assisted through improvements in communication channels and engagement by the government with all tourism stakeholders. Additional measures that could encourage greater proactive implementation of responsible tourism and tourism strategies

may be the introduction of a recognition system of responsible events venues and an associated reward system.

Graded establishments were generally seen as more responsible when compared to those establishments that were ungraded, although, possibly due to the relatively small respondent size, no statistical backing is provided to support this finding. There was, however, statistical proof that graded establishments indicated more willingness to support the local handcraft industry. Of all the responsible tourism practices put forward to respondents, support for the local handcraft industry was the lowest, although graded establishments were more inclined to support this practice. Graded respondents indicated a heightened awareness of responsible tourism and its implementation. This may have been as a result of the TGCSA setting minimum requirements as well as grading requirements for establishments wishing to be star graded. These minimum requirements could result in candidate venues applying for grading and in currently graded venues having to comply with regulations and policies that heighten awareness of the environment in which they operate.

Managerial implications

The study indicates that responsible tourism awareness is relatively poor among events venues at geological heritage sites in Gauteng. Although it was found that these venues generally supported the principles of responsible tourism, graded establishments were generally more aware of the environment in which they operate, which resulted in a higher consciousness of responsible events practices, compared to non-graded establishments.

This suggests that improvements are needed in the communication of responsible tourism and its associated strategies. Secondly, the creation of a recognition system for those venues that proactively implement the strategies could be beneficial for motivating events venues to implement responsible events. Lastly, it is suggested that the grading of events venues be advanced.

Limitations and direction for further research

One limitation encountered during this research is related to the collecting of data, namely the poor cooperation by the research sample in the survey. The research field of responsible tourism and perhaps the poor comprehension of associated terminology by the sample could have caused the lower than desired response.

Confidence in these results could be further strengthened through additional research on the field of responsible tourism and responsible events, as well as additional comparative studies at other geographical locations.

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