The Peter A. Allard School of Law

Allard Research Commons

Transnational Business Governance
Interactions Working Papers

Working Paper Series

2012

Process vs. Performance Standards for Sustainable Meeting and Event Management

Andrew Stephen Walker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.allard.ubc.ca/tbgi>

Part of the [Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons](#), and the [Environmental Studies Commons](#)

OSGOODE

OSGOODE HALL LAW SCHOOL
YORK UNIVERSITY

OSGOODE HALL LAW SCHOOL

Comparative Research in Law & Political Economy

RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Research Paper No. 17/2012

TBGI Project Subseries No. 5

Process vs. Performance Standards for Sustainable Meeting and Event Management

Andrew Stephen Walker

Editors:

Peer Zumbansen (Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto, Director,
Comparative Research in Law and Political Economy)

John W. Cioffi (University of California at Riverside)

Leeanne Footman (Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto, Production Editor)

The TBGI Project

Transnational initiatives to regulate business activities interact increasingly with each other and with official regulation, generating complex governance ensembles. Heterogeneous actors and institutions interact at multiple levels and in various ways, from mimicry and cooperation to competition and conflict. The TBGI Project investigates the forms, drivers, mechanisms, dynamics, outputs and impacts of transnational business governance interactions (TBGI) from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. It is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant led by Professor Stepan Wood, Osgoode.

Comparative Research in
Law & Political Economy

Abstract:

This paper examines two emerging voluntary industry standards – the process-based *ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* and the performance-based *APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standard* – and examines whether they can complement, rather than compete with, each other to provide a more comprehensive approach to the complex task of managing and measuring sustainability within meetings and events. A framework for analysis was developed through examining the academic literature on competition between process and performance-based sustainability standards within the forestry sector where several internationally-recognized standards have interacted in the marketplace for over a decade. Three criteria – legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness – were identified to evaluate the potential competition and complementarity between the two standards. The resulting analysis demonstrated that considering who was involved, how the process was managed, and the resulting final output, both standards have succeeded in their quest for legitimacy. The greater challenge will be to ensure that each standard holds users, and the wider meetings industry, accountable for their activities to ensure effectiveness. A balance of the flexible process-based ISO 20121, combined with the more stringent performance-based APEX/ASTM, is recommended to minimize the potential barriers that will undoubtedly exist considering the complexity of both standards. Used together, a more well-rounded approach is possible. APEX/ASTM will specify the agreed-upon environmental issues that must be addressed in order to reduce the growing ecological footprint of the meetings industry. However, while this may achieve success in the short term, it will take the systems thinking associated with ISO 20121 to really enable users to imbed these practices into their organizational culture to ensure long term success through continuous improvement. Effectiveness is more achievable through widespread use, hence the need for trade organizations such as the Green Meeting Industry Council and Meeting Professionals International to champion the implementation of both standards in combination to accelerate the journey towards a more sustainable global meetings industry.

Key words: Sustainability, Green, Meeting, Sustainable, Event, Corporate Social Responsibility, Voluntary Standards, ISO, ASTM

Process vs. Performance Standards for Sustainable Meeting and Event Management

Osgoode CLPE Research Paper 17/2012

Vol. 08 No. 04 (2012)

Andrew Stephen Walker

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	5
<i>Industry Associations.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Standard-setting Process.....</i>	<i>6</i>
Framework.....	8
<i>Process vs. Performance.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Legitimacy.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Accountability.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Effectiveness.....</i>	<i>19</i>
Analysis.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>ISO 20121 Process vs. APEX/ASTM Performance.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Legitimacy, Accountability and Effectiveness</i>	<i>28</i>
Conclusion	53
References	57

Introduction

According to the MPI Foundation Canada (2008) report *The Economic Contribution of Meetings Activity in Canada* produced by Maritz Research and the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Meetings Industry in 2006 organized 671,000 meetings, welcoming 70.2 million participants and creating the equivalent of 235,500 full-year jobs. This meetings activity accounted for \$32.2 billion¹ in direct spending, of which \$23.3 billion was by meeting participants and \$8.9 billion by non-participant sponsors and stakeholders (MPI Foundation Canada, 2008). Combined with the indirect and induced contribution, otherwise known as ‘spinoff’ activity (\$1.21 for every dollar spent directly), business events generated \$71 billion for the Canadian economy, which is equal to the forestry, fishing and agricultural sectors combined (MPI Foundation Canada, 2008). The direct, indirect, and induced effect on federal, provincial and municipal taxes exceeded \$14.5 billion (MPI Foundation Canada, 2008). While these results are staggering, reinforcing what meeting professionals already know about the tremendous contribution meetings, conference, exhibitions and events make to the Canadian economy, they also remind us of the huge environmental and social impacts associated with meetings-related activity. Indeed, the report acknowledged the connection these results had with the broader focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), citing the obligation our industry has to look beyond what is consumed and also take stock of what is produced, both positive and negative (MPI Foundation Canada, 2008). How can we measure and manage the environmental and social impacts of these face-to-face gatherings?

The meetings industry comprises the wide range of organizations that provide “facilities and

¹ Canadian dollars (CAD) unless otherwise noted.

services to the millions of delegates who annually attend meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, incentive travel and corporate hospitality” (International Congress and Convention Association [ICCA], 2007). According to Spatrisano and Wilson (2007), the concept of ‘green meetings’ originated in the late 1980s and largely focused on the environmental impact of meetings; unfortunately, it did not gain much attention within the industry at the time. It wasn’t until the Convention Industry Council (CIC) published the *Green Meetings Report* in 2004 that the term became more widely known, reaffirming that a “green meeting or event incorporates environmental considerations to minimize its negative impact on the environment” (Convention Industry Council, 2004, p.3). With this increased level of awareness also brought confusion about the various claims being made by organizations about their environmental credentials. How could one be sure that a meeting or event was actually green or sustainable? Incidentally, while these terms are often used interchangeably (another source of confusion), green typically refers to the environmental pillar of sustainability which, similar to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, also includes social and economic considerations (McDonald and Oates, 2006). While eco-labels for related sectors existed, such as accommodations (e.g. Green Globe, Green Key), conference venues (e.g. LEED) and procurement (e.g. Fair Trade), there was no single sustainability standard yet available that addressed the meeting industry as a whole. In light of the increased awareness within organizations to incorporate sustainable practices into all aspects of their operations, including management of their business meetings and events, the need for industry-wide guidelines was evident.

This paper will examine two emerging voluntary standards – the process-based *ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* (‘ISO 20121’) (International Organization for Standardization, 2011), and the performance-based *APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable*

Event Standard ('APEX/ASTM')(ASTM International, 2011) – and discuss whether they can complement, rather than compete with, each other to provide a more comprehensive approach to the complex task of managing and measuring sustainability within meetings and events. It is important to note that two other sustainable event standards were published in Canada recently: *BNQ 9700-253 Développement durable — Gestion responsable d'évènements* (Bureau de normalisation du Québec, 2010)² and *CSA Z2010 Requirements and Guidance for Organizers of Sustainable Events* (Canadian Standards Association, 2010)³. However, ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM are the focus of this paper as they are expected to have a greater level of industry uptake internationally, including within Canada. Other compelling reasons to compare ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM are that they are both created by international standards bodies and supported and endorsed by two major industry associations involved in the event sustainability dialogue. Furthermore, many of the same actors (i.e. participants) have been involved in the development of both standards and will likely support them upon their release. Perhaps most importantly, each of these standards takes a very different approach to addressing sustainability within events. While there is a genuine concern with having multiple standards, citing the potential to cause confusion among an industry already overwhelmed by the amount of information that has been disseminated in recent years on the topic of sustainable meeting and event management, it is important to recognize that due to the fragmented nature of the global meetings industry, it is highly unlikely that any one standard will be sufficient to address the sustainability needs of all relevant stakeholders.

² BNQ is the standards body for the province of Quebec, accredited by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC). BNQ 9700 -253 is also available in English: *Sustainable Development – Responsible Event Management*.

³ CSA Z2010 was largely based on the sustainability management and reporting work of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC).

Methodology

As this topic is relatively new, the body of academic knowledge is limited. Thus, the framework for analysis was developed by examining the literature on competition between process and performance-based sustainability standards within the forestry sector, where several internationally-recognized standards have interacted in the marketplace for over a decade and present some of the “most advanced cases of non-state rulemaking and governance” (Gulbrandsen, 2010, p.2). This framework is used to analyze competition and complementarity between the two sustainable event standards and how they are influenced by their respective degrees of legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. The analysis is based on reviewing draft versions of ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, in addition to participant observations⁴ through active membership in two meetings industry associations and direct involvement in the development of both standards.

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Since 1972, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) has empowered its nearly 23,000 members in 71 chapters and clubs across the world to increase their strategic value through education, clearly defined career pathways, and business growth opportunities (Meeting Professionals International [MPI], 2010). Corporate Social Responsibility was recently identified as one of MPI’s five strategic priorities, alongside Strategic Meetings Management, Business Value of Meetings, Future of Meetings, and Core Meeting and Event Skills. Participant observation activities included chairing the Toronto Chapter CSR Task Force; connecting with other members globally through CSR online discussion groups; attending sustainability-related educational sessions at over ten local, regional and international conferences; and training as a

⁴ Defined as a qualitative method in which the researcher involves themselves in the activities of a target group of people over a specific period of time (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002).

chapter CSR/sustainability speaker. The Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) was formed in 2003 to improve meeting management practices by promoting environmentally, socially and economically responsible strategies through the collaborative efforts of the hospitality industry, corporations, government, and community organizations (Green Meeting Industry Council [GMIC], 2010). Participant observation activities included attending the annual conference every year since 2008 (in Vancouver, Pittsburgh, Denver and Portland); engaging in face-to-face and online discussions about sustainability strategies and best practices with the member community; co-facilitating the first APEX/ASTM Train the Trainer session; and serving on the International Board of Directors (ongoing since July 2010).

STANDARD-SETTING PROCESS

The world's first certifiable sustainable event management standard was *BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use* ('BS8901') (London: British Standards Institution, 2007). The British Standards Institution (BSI) was also the first national standards organization in the world, with over 31,000 standards available and between 6,000 and 7,000 in development at any one time (British Standards Institution [BSI], 2010). The initial motivation for developing BS 8901 was London's winning bid for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, which pledged a strong commitment to sustainability throughout all stages of the event planning process. A revision in 2009, followed by evidence of use internationally, prompted BSI and the Brazilian National Standards Body, Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (ABNT), to jointly submit a proposal to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to transform BS 8901 into a global standard. ISO is the world's largest developer and publisher of International Standards, a federation of national standards bodies

from 163 member countries (one member per country) based in Geneva, Switzerland (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010). The development of *ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* involves 35 ISO Participant (P) and Observer (O) member countries (including Canada), as well as eight liaison organizations (including MPI and GMIC).

BS 8901 and ISO 20121 take a procedural or process-based management system approach (Meidinger, 2001) that consists of three phases – planning, implementation and review – and can be applied by organizers, venues and suppliers of all types of events (British Standards Institution [BSI], 2010). Participant observation activities included joining the Standards Council of Canada CAC/ISO/TC 250⁵ and serving as Vice Chair; attending the first of five international meetings (London, January 2010); engaging in peer to peer discussions on the ISO 20121 LinkedIn group; and managing the collection and reconciliation of CAC comments on four subsequent drafts of the standard.

Since 2008, GMIC has worked with the Convention Industry Council (CIC) – an umbrella organization of 31 member associations (including GMIC) which represent more than 103,500 individuals and 19,500 companies working in the meetings industry around the world (Convention Industry Council [CIC], 2010) – and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to develop substantive performance-based (Meidinger, 2001) measurement standards for environmentally sustainable meetings and events. APEX (Accepted Practices Exchange) is a CIC initiative designed to provide standardized procedures for core functions within the meetings industry, such as request for proposal (RFP) forms, housing and registration, contracts and post-event reporting (CIC, 2010). Similar to previous APEX standards, a

⁵ Canadian Advisory Committee on ISO Technical Committee 250, with subject area mandate to develop standardization in the field of sustainability in event management.

committee was formed to lead the process; in this case, the Green Meetings and Events Practices Panel (GMEPP). The US EPA required an ANSI-certified⁶ standardization body to be involved; hence ASTM International (formerly the American Society for Testing and Materials) was consulted to formalize the process. ASTM International is one of the largest voluntary standards development organizations in the world, with over 30,000 technical expert members in 135 countries (ASTM International, 2011).

The work of the GMEPP was arranged as a subcommittee of the ASTM Technical Committee E60 on Sustainability, specifically E60.02 Hospitality. Nine guides for standard practice were developed, representing the main areas of consideration within meeting and event management: evaluation and selection of destinations, meeting venue, accommodations, food and beverage, audio visual equipment, transportation, and communication supplies, as well as the establishment of exhibits and onsite offices. Participant observation activities included direct involvement in the development of one of these nine guides – *Work Item (WK) 22676 New Guide for Standard Practice for the establishment of Onsite Offices for Meetings, Events, Trade Show and Conferences* – comprising committee communication via email and conference calls to review and revise the document over an 18-month period; co-facilitating the Toronto City Discussion Group (CDG) to engage the local meetings industry to provide input; and subsequently voting on multiple ballots of all nine draft standards as an ASTM member.

Framework

The concept of voluntary standards for meetings is relatively new, especially concerning sustainability practices. However, many of the organizations that organize and/or support events (e.g. corporations, hotels, meeting venues etc.) are likely familiar with standards in other areas of

⁶ American National Standards Institute.

their operations, such as ISO 9001 for quality management and/or ISO 14001 for environmental management. A brief historical overview of standards development follows to provide context for the design of our analytical framework.

The existence of industry standards and certification for sustainability can be traced back to the early 1990s (Overdevest, 2009), due to a perceived lack of government legislation and international cooperation amidst concerns related to social (e.g. fair labour) and environmental (e.g. deforestation) practices (Bartley, 2007) in the face of increasing globalization (Bartley, 2007; Herberg, 2009). The result was the emergence of a system of “voluntary private transnational regulatory schemes” (Overdevest, 2009, p.4), in which “coalitions of non-state actors codify, monitor, and in some cases certify firms’ compliance with labor, environmental, human rights, or other standards of accountability” (Bartley, 2007, p.298). These actors included non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements and trade unions (Bartley, 2003), both national and international (Overdevest, 2009).

In the case of sustainable forestry standards, a failed attempt by environmentalists to get the intergovernmental International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) to create a certification system for tropical hardwoods led to an endorsement of a similar proposal by the Woodworkers’ Alliance for Rain Forest Protection (WARP) in 1990 (Meidinger, 1999). Inspired by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro – which further indoctrinated the concept of Sustainable Development⁷ outlined in the 1987 UN Brundtland Report (Meidinger, 2006) – and spearheaded by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was founded in 1993 in Toronto as an independent, non-governmental and not-for-profit multi-stakeholder organization (Meidinger, 2006). The founding

⁷ Defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

group comprised NGOs, timber producers, furniture makers, retailers and professionals from within the forestry sector. The core mission of the FSC was to promote “environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economic viable forest management” (Gulbrandsen, 2010, p.53) through a set of substantive, performance-based principles and criteria that would strive to protect biodiversity; address issues concerning the rights of property owners, indigenous people, workers and local communities; while at the same time respect applicable laws and treaties (Meidinger, 2006).

At that time, the leading standard setting body was the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), which was founded in 1947 with the mission “to promote the development of standardization and related activities in the world with a view to facilitating international exchanges of goods and services, and to developing cooperation in the spheres or intellectual, scientific, technological and economic activity” (Meidinger, 1999, p183). ISO comprised over 130 national standard setting organizations at the time, and standards were developed in over 200 technical committees, further divided into hundreds of subcommittees and working groups. Largely known for their technical standards, ISO was beginning to explore non-industry specific management system standards with the release of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems series in 1987, which was the first international set of guidelines that set out to measure how a product was made versus the characteristics of the product (Blair et al, 2008). This is significant because it meant that these standards could be applied by companies across a diverse range of sectors. Following the widespread acceptance of ISO 9000 and in preparation for the UNCED, ISO began developing the ISO 14000 series for environmental management (Meidinger, 2006; Clapp, 2001), which was eventually published in 1997.

PROCESS VS. PERFORMANCE

Several analytical tools in the form of questions comprise the framework for assessing how ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM could work together once these standards are released⁸. The first asks to describe the defining characteristics of each of the draft standards. To do this, we refer back to the forestry literature. There are essentially two basic types of sustainability standards: procedural or process-based standards which require the implementation of a management system, and substantive performance-based standards which set specific targets that must be met in order to be in compliance (Meidinger, 2001). In essence, the process standard outlines the steps that will help the user to achieve their sustainability objectives, while the performance standard specifies what those sustainability objectives should be. Within a management system standard, organizations may choose to incorporate performance-based metrics as well; however, the only requirement for compliance is that they outline the internal mechanisms that will be implemented in order to achieve these targets (Meidinger, 2001). This allows for a significant amount of flexibility, which can be helpful considering that no two organizations are alike. The steps typically required in a management system include creating a sustainability policy, identifying the organization's impacts or issues; planning to reduce the inherent negative impacts, while at the same time increase the positive benefits; and implementing a process for monitoring performance and reporting results, all while focusing on continuous improvement (Meidinger, 2006). The fact that performance targets are not explicit within most process-based standards has led to criticism that they are much less rigorous; however, this focus on continuous improvement is intended to result in performance enhancements over time (Bell, 1997) while

⁸ Eight of the nine APEX/ASTM sector standards were approved in October 2011 and are scheduled to be published before the end of the year, with the remaining sector standard (accommodations) anticipated being ready in early 2012. ISO 20121 is in the final phase of development and is expected to be launched in June 2012, in advance of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

being more efficient and adaptable (Meidinger, 2001). Our framework incorporates these opposing viewpoints with respect to standards design and will outline the management system process requirements of ISO 20121 and the prescriptive checklist-style performance requirements of APEX/ASTM.

The underlying research question is whether these two standards can be used together; in other words, can they complement versus merely compete with each other. Again looking at the forestry literature, Meidinger (2001) argues that a combination of both process and performance-based approaches is possible and likely inevitable as different standards and certification systems interact and often are purpose-built to compete with one another. Bartley (2003) expands on this idea by suggesting that competition between actors, conflicts and solutions often leads to new forms of regulation. Opposition to the FSC manifested in the formation of competing sustainability programs, specifically with the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) in 1994; the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Sustainable Forest Management Standard CSA-Z809 in 1996; and the Pan-European Forest Certification Council (PEFC) in 1999 (renamed the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification in 2003). These three programs were largely built on the more process-based ISO approach to standard setting with some degree of substantive elements (Meidinger, 2006), but unlike FSC there was very limited involvement by non-industry stakeholders in their development (Gulbrandsen, 2010). The rationale by producers was that sustainable forestry standards should be created by those that understand the realities of the forestry industry, not to mention being primarily responsible for managing the process and cost of implementation (Gulbrandsen, 2010). In our case, both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM have been developed

mainly by industry stakeholders, although the different approaches (process versus performance) taken by the two international standard-setting bodies (ISO versus ASTM) reinforce their inherent competitiveness. To measure the degree of competition and complementarity of ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, three frequently cited and closely linked criteria were identified in the forestry literature: legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. They present additional insights into how process and performance-based standards compete and complement one another.

LEGITIMACY

According to Black (2008), legitimacy is essentially the desire for credibility; to be “perceived as having a right to govern both by those it seeks to govern and those on behalf of whom it purports to govern” (p.144). This is especially important in the case of non-governmental standard setting where jurisdiction is not clearly defined (Black, 2008). Bostrom and Tamm Hallstrom (2010) suggest that there are three types of strategies that standard setters should consider to strengthen legitimacy: input legitimacy (i.e. who is involved in the standard-setting process), procedural legitimacy (i.e. how that process is managed) and output legitimacy (i.e. what is the end result). Looking more closely at the forestry standards, all three strategies are evident. In the case of the FSC, while environmental groups and other NGOs supported the program and its stringent set of Principles and Criteria, the forestry industry distrusted it precisely because of the heavy involvement of environmental organizations (Gulbrandsen, 2005). Not surprisingly one of FSC’s main competitors, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), was initiated by the AF&PA with very little input from environmental groups and NGOs (Meidinger, 1999). With a membership comprising a majority of the wood products and papers firms in the United States, the SFI program was created largely in response to concerns about their declining reputation, especially with respect to environmental issues (Meidinger, 1999). It was purpose-built to be compatible

with ISO 14001, a decision likely intended to provide a certain degree of credibility; in fact, the expectation was that an increasing number of firms would make use of both standards in combination (Meidinger, 1999). As a requirement of membership, the AF&PA mandated that companies follow a set of Principles and Objectives, including practicing sustainable forestry that is both economically and environmentally responsible, protecting and improving long-term health and productivity of forests, taking consideration for lands of special significance, and committing to continuous improvement (Meidinger, 1999), allowing greater flexibility and discretion compared to the FSC Principles and Criteria (Meidinger, 2006).

Part of the challenge associated with the way private regulation is created results from its fragmented and complex nature (Black, 2008), which diffuses power and accountability among multiple actors (Richardson, 2009) who are liable to behave in an opportunistic way (Herberg, 2009). This is inevitable when there is an inherent diversity of opinions with respect to the nature of the problem and how best to resolve it (Herberg, 2009; Black, 2008). However, Black (2008) maintains that it is precisely this diversity that is required during the standard-setting process to build legitimacy. In the case of FSC, having representative participation (Meidinger, 1999) of the relevant stakeholders that strives for consensus (Meidinger, 2006) is meant to ensure legitimacy of the decisions that result. Nonetheless, Meidinger (1999) also suggests that it is unclear how the FSC actually determines which stakeholders should be involved in the ongoing development of the standard. What selection criteria should be used? The International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance, in which FSC is a founding member, uses the term ‘interested parties’ in reference to stakeholders, and defines them as “any person or group concerned with or directly affected by a standard”(Meidinger, 2006, p26).

ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice include the Standard-Setting Code, which outlines the manner in which a standard should be developed, including an open and transparent process which incorporates a diverse and balanced group of stakeholders (ISEAL Alliance, 2010). This balance should exist between subject area experts and those directly affected by the resulting standard, as well as assurances that no one group will dominate the process (Meidinger, 2006). The work is typically undertaken by volunteer committees who follow a formal set of rules and procedures, with an emphasis on cooperation and consensus (Werle et al, 2006). These committees should consider comments related to the standard's purpose and objectives, in addition to two rounds of public comment, documenting the process and releasing a written summary of how each of the comments were addressed (Meidinger, 2006).

Aside from the manner in which a standard is developed, the content of the standard is equally as important in the quest for legitimacy and with forestry standards there continues to be a struggle between the competing goals of stringency and participation (Bartley, 2010; Meidinger, 1999). Substantive performance-based standards like FSC are typically more stringent, largely attributed to the heavy involvement of NGOs, who criticize the management system approach as too lenient and discretionary (Gulbrandsen, 2010). Conversely, the perceived inflexibility, cost and intrusiveness of the FSC standards (Gulbrandsen, 2005; Gulbrandsen, 2010) prevent many forestry companies from participating, who instead seek out less stringent, more industry friendly process-based standards (Gulbrandsen, 2010). However, over time these industry supported programs have become more stringent largely due to competition with FSC (Gulbrandsen, 2010; Meidinger, 2006). In our framework, we will analyse to what extent ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM achieve input, procedural and output legitimacy.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Gulbrandsen (2008) suggests that standards organizations were created precisely to ensure companies remained accountable for the environmental and social impacts of their activities. This accountability, in turn, helps reaffirm the legitimacy of forest management standards (Meidinger, 2006, Gulbrandsen 2010). Bartley (2003) cites this social pressure on companies as one of the primary reasons for the emergence of standards and certification. In the absence of government intervention due to issues of jurisdiction (Black, 2008), standards organizations may actually be more effective in enhancing what Gulbrandsen (2008) calls “transnational accountability” (p.566), which is why NGOs turned their attention to developing these programs in the first place (Bartley, 2003). In other words, the move to create standards demonstrates an inherent desire for accountability (Gulbrandsen, 2010). Conversely, Bartley (2003) contends that the private nature of voluntary standards is at odds with the concept of accountability. They have been criticized for sidestepping national and international law, while being non-transparent and undemocratic in their consultation process (Black, 2008). Voluntary standards also have the potential for ‘greenwashing’ in terms of being used merely as a public relations tool (Bartley, 2003).

Gulbrandsen (2008) proposes two types of accountability structures within standards organizations: accountability as responsiveness to stakeholders and accountability as external control. Responsiveness to stakeholders is more proactive and flexible, and the choice of which standard to support clearly indicates how forest owners and companies chose to be accountable: to their peers on the one hand and to a variety of stakeholders (environmental, social and economic) on the other (Gulbrandsen, 2010). This choice of who to be accountable to is an

interesting one, as it relates back to the question of legitimacy. While the stringency of the FSC standards is one of the reasons many forest owners did not support it, the involvement of environmental and social NGOs was also an important factor as many did not feel an obligation to be accountable to this particular group of stakeholders (Gulbrandsen, 2010). With regards to ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, both standards were initiated and largely driven by industry stakeholders with very limited NGO involvement, which will factor into our analysis of accountability.

Looking at the second accountability structure proposed by Gulbrandsen (2008), while it is agreed that there exists a need for internal controls, the debate continues on the degree of external controls necessary (Meidinger, 2001). Third-party certification is a common type of enforcement mechanism that is implemented (Blair et al., 2008), and is recognized as a form of regulation because it is based on a set of standards and outlines the procedure for ensuring compliance (Bartley, 2010). In the case of forestry, the FSC standard provides a solid foundation for certification, including sections relating to national and regional laws and treaties, property rights, effective management, in addition to the protection of stakeholder groups and biological diversity (Meidinger, 2006). The SFI also sets out guidelines for certification, while the PEFC acts as an umbrella organization that endorses close to 30 national forest certification systems around the globe (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, 2010). In essence, certification exists primarily to provide a reliable measure that marks the distinction between good and bad forest management (Meidinger, 2006). Bartley (2003) suggests that an important outcome of certification is that it provides NGOs with concrete metrics against which the performance of companies can be measured. In turn, these NGOs pressure large organizations

that produce forest products to embrace independent third-party certification, which is further reinforced by the global networks in which these actors operate (Meidinger, 2006).

However, Williams et al (2008) cautions that “while reputational enforcement mechanisms can be quite powerful in getting large, highly visible organizations to live up to contract requirements and social norms, the same communications capabilities that can make reputation important can also be used to publish misleading information, distort perceptions, free ride on the reputations of others, conceal norm violations, and generally introduce at least as much noise as useful information into the process of determining whether legitimate expectations have been met on all sides” (p9). Another challenge is that the certification bodies themselves have certain limitations in terms of the extent of their authority to ensure companies are in compliance, since participation is entirely voluntary, while at the same time responding to ongoing pressures to be accountable to their respective stakeholders (Gulbrandsen, 2008). Nevertheless, as the forestry industry increases its use and acceptance of certification, the more difficult it will be to turn back, thus making it standard practice (Meidinger, 2006). As with many ISO standards, ISO 20121 allows for first⁹, second¹⁰ and third¹¹ party verification although it was made clear during the development process by the chair that this was not within the scope of the technical committee. On the other hand, APEX/ASTM will only be self-certifying at the outset with additional verification options to be explored in the near future once the standards have been put into practice. The existence or absence of this external control mechanism will nevertheless be discussed as part of our analysis.

⁹ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as “self-determination and self-declaration by the organization seeking compliance” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011).

¹⁰ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as “confirmation of conformance by parties having an interest in the organization, such as clients, or by other persons on their behalf” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011).

¹¹ For example, a certification body.

EFFECTIVENESS

There is ongoing debate about the effectiveness of standards. On the one hand, many standards are viewed as too lenient and difficult to enforce (Bartley, 2010), while on the other a solid argument can be made that the resulting sustainability improvements might not have occurred in the absence of the standard (Meidinger, 2001). To be clear, what we mean by effectiveness is that the standard helps alleviate or resolve the problems that they were designed to address, largely through the changing of behaviour (Gulbrandsen, 2010). Gulbrandsen (2010) outlines four interrelated factors that influence effectiveness: producer participation, stringency of standards, system operation and consequences of non-compliance. With regards to producer participation, the more companies that decide to adopt a particular standard, the higher the chances that there will be a widespread change in behaviour. However as we have already seen, the stringency of standards can have a significant impact on these “patterns of adoption” (Gulbrandsen, 2010, p. 74). If standards are too stringent, industry uptake may be negatively impacted but conversely if standards are not stringent enough then the positive environmental and social impacts could be minimal. Bartley (2007) therefore describes transnational private regulation as a compromised outcome, since the power of measuring compliance rests in the hands of companies, consumers and certifiers. Meidinger (2006) suggests this reality can be interpreted in one of two ways: ‘weak’ norms that are vague and watered-down versus ‘strong’ norms that represent a significant move forward in the ongoing journey to a more sustainable world.

System operation refers to the process and/or performance requirements of the standard and Without a doubt, 2012 is going to be an interesting year in the meetings industry as not one, but two internationally-recognized standards are set to be released to help planners and suppliers implement sustainable practices in a more organized and systematic way. Both standards will

inevitably compete for credibility (legitimacy), authority (accountability) and widespread use (effectiveness) within the marketplace. The question is, which standard will the industry more widely adopt: the process-based ISO 20121 or the performance-based APEX/ASTM? While each standard is robust and designed to stand alone, our analysis will look at how they may in fact be optimized when used in combination and thus complement versus compete with each other. We will first outline the defining characteristics and requirements of each standard, and then discuss how the three criteria identified in the forestry literature – legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness – further support the position of complementarity.

ISO 20121 PROCESS VS. APEX/ASTM PERFORMANCE

As the title indicates, the *ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* standard necessitates the implementation of a management system in order to be in compliance. The initial draft document was based on *BS 8901:2009 Specification for a sustainability management system for events*¹² (London: British Standards Institution, 2009), which grouped the required steps into four main categories commonly found in process-based standards: Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA). Despite subsequent revisions, this PDCA structure remains central to the ISO 20121 standard. The *APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standard*, on the other hand, specifies performance-based requirements that must be achieved in order to be in compliance based on a format jointly prescribed by APEX and ASTM International.

Before we examine the key components of each, it is worth noting a few additional characteristics that distinguish this process-based standard from its performance-based

¹² The revised version of the originating standard *BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use* (London: British Standards Institution, 2007).

counterpart. ISO 20121 is designed to be applied to any type of event (e.g. sporting, cultural, business etc.), whereas APEX/ASTM is more suitable for business events, such as meetings, conferences and exhibitions. ISO 20121 includes a balanced approach to the triple bottom line of social ('people'), environmental ('planet') and economic ('profit'); however, APEX/ASTM mainly emphasizes environmental sustainability, with some consideration for social and economic impacts¹³. ISO 20121 can be used by any organization that is involved in the delivery of events (including *event owners*¹⁴, *event organizers*¹⁵ and *event suppliers*¹⁶), while APEX/ASTM is designed to be used by both event planners and key suppliers in partnership to achieve success. With ISO 20121, it is the management system itself and not the output of the management system (i.e. the event) that is the focus of the standard, whereas with APEX/ASTM, the event is what is measured against the performance requirements of the standard. While both are internationally recognized, proponents of ISO 20121 maintain that the flexible design accommodates geographic, cultural and social diversity, whereas APEX/ASTM supporters acknowledge that the prescriptive checklist-style requirements may be more feasible in developed versus developing countries based on available infrastructure.

This last distinction may also relate to the arrangement of the standard-setting organizations developing each standard. As we outlined previously, ISO is an umbrella organization of the national standards bodies from 163 countries, with one member and one vote per country. Conversely, ASTM is a US-based but internationally-focused standards development organization whose membership comprises over 30,000 individual technical experts from 135

¹³ Additional societal considerations are expected to be integrated as the standard evolves in the marketplace.

¹⁴ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as 'Entity that commissions the event' (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p4).

¹⁵ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as 'Entity that produces and/or manages all or some aspects of an event (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p4).

¹⁶ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as 'Entity that provides products and/or services related to the event' (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p4).

countries and is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), another umbrella organization of national standards bodies which also serves as the ISO representative for the United States. Experts from at least 25 countries participated in the development of ISO 20121 to varying degrees, while in the case of APEX/ASTM, committee members came primarily from the US, Canada and Europe but the industry consultation process was open to CIC members worldwide. Furthermore, the vetting process allowed for any ASTM E60 members to provide comments, but the majority were US-based and from outside the meetings industry. Understandably, the British Standards Institution (BSI) continues to play a major role in the development of ISO 20121 representing the United Kingdom, plus one of the co-chairs of this process also chaired the original BS 8901 project committee. Several noteworthy organizations outside the standard-setting world have also been integral to the development of each of these standards. From a user perspective, the key stakeholder driving APEX/ASTM has been the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), while for ISO 20121 it is the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). Once released, both organizations are expected to implement their respective standard and incorporate it into their procurement processes; LOCOG has already done this with BS 8901, making it a requirement that all vendors wishing to do business with them be taking steps towards implementing this system.

Despite the different approaches used (i.e. process vs. performance), there are certain commonalities that exist between the two standards. Both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM outline the respective standard's scope at the outset, namely who it is designed for, how it should be used, and what the requirements are for compliance. Both documents provide definitions for the important terms used throughout each standard, although the terms themselves vary. Finally,

both standards require the establishment and documentation of a sustainability policy, clearly defined goals and objectives, as well as some form of internal and/or external audit to ensure compliance. For the most part, however, the structure of the two standards is very different.

ISO 20121 Structure

The term process is defined within ISO 20121 as a “set of interrelated or interacting activities which transforms inputs into outputs” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p6), while *procedure* is a “specified way to carry out an activity or a process” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p6). The draft document is divided into two parts: the normative text which outlines what processes and procedures should be followed in order to be in compliance with the standard, and the guidance text (located in the annexes) which provides optional supporting information that may help the user implement the standard. In the introduction of ISO 20121, it is made very clear that this standard is neither a checklist nor a reporting framework. There is a strong emphasis on its flexibility, including the ability to integrate with an organization’s existing systems, and the focus on continuous improvement that is inherent to process-based standards. A figure outlining the key steps involved following the PDCA model is included to provide a visual representation of the work that lies ahead. The main considerations (PLAN) include identifying and engaging with *interested parties*¹⁷ to determine the relevant event sustainability issues; defining the scope of the management system (i.e. what will be addressed), as well as the organization’s *governing principles of sustainable development*¹⁸; establishing and documenting a sustainability *policy*¹⁹ that will guide the

¹⁷ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as a “person or group of people that holds a view that can affect the organization” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p5); Also commonly known as ‘stakeholder’.

¹⁸ ISO DIS 20121 uses the commonly held definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p3).

decision-making process throughout the entire event cycle; assigning and communicating roles and responsibilities; identifying environmental, social and economic issues specific to the organization and its events within the scope of the management system; and setting related objectives and plans to achieve them. While executing these steps (DO), the organization should make decisions related to resources, competence, awareness and communication. The event sustainability management system should be well documented and processes for operational control must be established and implemented, including how it impacts the supply chain. The organization should then decide what, how and when to monitor and evaluate the performance of the system, including conducting periodic internal audits and management reviews (CHECK). Finally, any discrepancies between what was supposed to happen and what actually happened (referred to as *nonconformities*²⁰) should be identified and corrective action be taken (ACT).

There are three annexes that provide guidance on how to approach implementing the standard. *Annex A - Guidance on planning and implementing ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* provides supporting information for the normative text. For example, a list of potential interested parties is included with examples for each of the following: event organizer, workforce, supply chain, participants, attendees, regulatory bodies and community. When determining the organization's governing principles of sustainable development related to event management, the normative text suggests including references to inclusivity, integrity, stewardship and transparency; the guidance text, in turn, provides further explanation for each of

¹⁹ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as “intentions and direction of an organization as formally expressed by its *top management*”, which in turn is defined as “person or group of people who directs and controls an organization at the highest level” (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p3).

²⁰ Defined in ISO DIS 20121 as “non-fulfilment of a requirement”, which in turn is defined as an “obligatory need or expectation that is stated or implied (Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, 2011, p8).

these terms and includes questions for the user to consider. Another example provided includes how to create objectives using the SMART approach (i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time-bound) and a sample objective with relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) is shown. *Annex B - Supply Chain Management (SCM)* focuses on sustainable procurement and how to work with suppliers to achieve the objectives outlined in the event sustainability management system. Finally, *Annex C - Guidelines for issue identification and evaluation* is designed to help users determine what sustainability areas they should focus on and prioritize based on the relevance of each issue to their organization and event(s).

APEX/ASTM Structure

It is clearly stated in the Introduction of APEX/ASTM that this standard focuses on environmental sustainability, with the ultimate goal to establish benchmarks for both planners and suppliers who must work together to achieve success. While the emphasis is on “measurable outcomes and policies” (West Conshohocken: ASTM International, 2011, p2), the standard does not prescribe how these goals must be achieved, leaving it up to users to decide for themselves which methods they will use. Whereas ISO 20121 is a single document, the APEX/ASTM standard is a compilation of nine separate standards covering the main sectors of meeting management (see Table 1). All nine sector standards are structured similarly with planner and supplier specifications in eight categories: staff management and environmental policy, communications, waste management, energy, air quality, water, procurement, and community partners. Each of the nine sector standards may be used separately or in combination, based

Table 1. APEX/ASTM Sectors and Project Status as of October 31, 2011

Standard Sector	ASTM Standard	Status	Notes
Accommodations	--	Draft	In balloting
Audio/Visual and Production	E2745	Complete	November publication

Communications & Marketing	E2746	Complete	November publication
Destinations	E2741	Complete	November publication
Exhibits	E2742	Complete	November publication
Food & Beverage	E2773	Complete	November publication
Meeting Venue	E2774	Complete	November publication
On-Site Offices	E2747	Complete	November publication
Transportation	E2743	Complete	November publication

Source: <http://www.conventionindustry.org/StandardsPractices/APEXASTM/APEXASTMstatus.aspx>

on the specific requirements of the meeting (e.g. if there are no exhibits, then the guide for exhibits need not be referenced). If used separately, the minimum requirements must be achieved in all eight categories in order to meet that particular sector standard. However, in order to claim that a meeting or event is environmentally sustainable, the minimum requirements must be achieved across all eight categories, in all applicable sectors standards.

During the early development stages of APEX/ASTM, a point system was created to measure performance against the stated requirements, but was later changed to a more straightforward approach with four clearly defined levels of achievement (i.e. levels 1-4). The rationale for this is explained in the Scope section:

The use of levels within this specification recognizes that the path to environmentally sustainable events is a multi-stage effort. The idea behind the levels is to provide a coherent baseline for measuring environmental performance, while being flexible enough to adapt to the needs of more advanced planners and establish a performance path that encourages further environmental performance improvement. In addition, evolution of products and services to support events is expected allowing additional advancements and underscoring the dynamic nature of environmental sustainability (West Conshohocken: ASTM International, 2011, p4).

Level 1 requirements for both planners and suppliers are included in the main section of the standard as they represent the minimum level of achievement that must be reached in order to be in compliance. An example from the accommodations sector standard is shown in Table 2,

outlining the level 1 planner and supplier specifications for the waste management category.

Level 2-4 requirements for all categories are

Table 2. Planner and Supplier Specifications for the category Waste Management within the Accommodations Sector Standard

4. Level 1 Requirements
<i>4.1. Planner Performance Requirements</i>
<i>4.1.3. Waste Management</i>
4.1.3.1. The planner shall include a clause in the RFP and the contract for supplier's services requiring suppliers meet a minimum of supplier Level 1 waste management practices and environmental performance outcome measures as defined within this standard and shall require the suppliers to assist the planner in reducing the amount of waste created and increasing the amount of waste diverted.
4.1.3.2. The planner shall request additional resource collection stations based on the specific event's requirements if such stations are required to meet waste collection goals.
4.1.3.3. The planner shall have waste reduction practices in place that assist the supplier in reducing the amount of waste created and increasing the amount of waste diverted.
<i>4.2. Supplier Performance Requirements</i>
<i>4.2.3. Waste Management</i>
4.2.3.1. The supplier shall create a 12-month waste diversion and disposal baseline (or for all months of operation for suppliers operating less than 12 months). The baseline shall be normalized by appropriate industry practice. Baselines shall be recalculated a minimum of every three years or when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one-third or more of the rooms are remodelled • the facility is expanded, for example, adding rooms or restaurant. • major capital expenditures are undertaken affecting over 50% of square footage • the facility adopts a new measurement system or process • change in ownership of the facility occurs
4.2.3.2. The supplier shall conduct a waste stream audit a minimum of once annually focusing on any new waste streams, and modify the waste reduction and diversion plan.
4.2.3.3. The supplier shall achieve a minimum diversion rate of 25 % for a particular event or 15 % over the course of the year inclusive of the accommodation's recycling, hazardous waste disposal and other methods of diversion including food waste composting.
4.2.3.4. The supplier shall place clearly labelled recycling bins at each trash bin with either recyclable bags or reusable containers, or shall have a waste sort program back-of-house.

Source: West Conshohocken: Standard Specification for the Evaluation and Selection of Accommodations for Environmentally Sustainable Meetings, Events, Trade Shows and Conferences, 2011.

outlined in the annexes but unlike ISO 20121, they are considered mandatory should the user decide to work towards achieving a higher level. As previously mentioned, in order to meet the standard in any of the nine sectors, the level 1 specification in all eight categories must be achieved. While it is encouraged to strive for level 2 or higher specifications whenever possible,

only the lowest level score achieved across all categories will be counted. For example, if level 1 is achieved in all relevant sectors (i.e. destinations, accommodations, food & beverage, transportation, audio visual equipment etc.), but level 2 is achieved in the meeting venue sector, users may communicate what level was achieved in each sector but the overall claim of planning an environmentally sustainable event can only report achievement at level 1 across all sectors collectively. It is important to note that not all users will be interested in reaching this minimum level across all categories and sectors when they start using these standards as it may not be feasible depending on their own unique circumstances and needs. Regardless of whether or not achieving compliance with the standard is the goal, once released APEX/ASTM will be the most comprehensive checklist-style resource available anywhere in the world for planners and suppliers to organize an environmentally sustainable meeting or event.

LEGITIMACY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Despite the countless differences between ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, one thing that unites them is their inherent desire for legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. Indeed, sustainability standards can only be successful at changing behaviour on a larger scale if they receive widespread use, and that will depend largely on how they are viewed in relation to these three criteria. Will both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM be embraced by the meetings industry as appropriate ways to approach the complex task of managing event sustainability? Only time will tell. However, we can make certain assumptions based on their perceived degrees of legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness during the development phase of each standard. As outlined in

our framework, three strategies to strengthen legitimacy include assessing who is involved in the standard-setting process (i.e. input legitimacy), how that process is managed (i.e. procedural legitimacy) and what the end result is (i.e. output legitimacy). A related question is for whom is legitimacy important, as it differs between actors who have varying expectations in relation to these event sustainability standards. On the question of accountability, our analysis will look at the level of responsiveness to stakeholders throughout the standard development process, as well as the degree of external control likely to be present once the standards are in use. Finally, their potential effectiveness will be discussed based on assumptions related to the participation of producers (in our case, the meetings industry), the degree of stringency of both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, how each of the standards work in practice and how compliance is determined, in addition to the consequences associated with non-compliance.

While the development of ISO 20121 got underway in late 2009 compared with 2007 for APEX/ASTM, the process to develop standards for managing event sustainability began in July 2005 with the announcement that London won the opportunity to host the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012. Sustainability was a key component of the bid and it soon became apparent that while there were existing standards to manage certain aspects of sustainability, such as ISO 14001, there was no single standard available that addressed social, environmental and economic sustainability, let alone one suitable for the complex set of tasks and adaptable to the wide range of industry sectors involved in the planning of events (Cumming and Pelham, 2011). Under the direction of the British Standards Institution, experts from the events, standards and certification sectors within the United Kingdom all came together in 2006 and the resulting standard BS 8901 was published in late 2007. Many of these experts were invited to join the

process either through personal connection to someone already involved or in response to an industry-wide call to participate.

Similarly, the ISO 20121 standard development process involved experts from both the events and standards sectors via the national standards bodies of each of the participating countries, of which there were 25 as of November 2011²¹. As each national standard body is free to determine who can participate in their ISO/TC 250 mirror committee, our analysis is based primarily on the participant observations of being directly involved in the activities of the Canadian Advisory Committee (CAC), managed by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC). The CAC/ISO/TC 250 comprised representatives from the Canadian meetings and events industry, including consultants, planners, hotel and convention venues, and audio visual companies (many with a specialized knowledge and/or background in sustainability), coupled with a representative from each of two SCC sanctioned standards bodies within Canada: BNQ and CSA²². There were neither NGOs nor sustainability professionals from outside the meetings and events industry involved in the process in Canada. At the international level, the representatives at the working group meetings and/or project committee²³ held in London, Paris, San Francisco and Sao Paolo, as well as the additional editing meeting in Tokyo (January 2011), were mainly experts in standards or events (many also having a specialized knowledge and/or

²¹ According to ISO rules, Participating (P) member countries are those that wish to take an active role in the development of the standard, while Observer (O) member countries follow the development of the standard and can contribute to its development without obligation to do so. In the case of ISO 20121, there were 10 observer countries involved as of November 2011.

²² As previously mentioned, both of these organizations had recently published event sustainability standards in Canada, namely BNQ 9700-253 and CSA Z2010.

²³ Working group (WG) meetings are where participants represent themselves as individual experts and work on the development of the standard. WG meetings were held at all four meetings in London, Paris, San Francisco and Sao Paolo. Project committee (PC) meetings are where participants represent their respective countries and vote on the results of the WG, with one vote per country. Three PC meetings were held at the London, San Francisco and Sao Paolo gatherings immediately after the WG meetings.

background in sustainability). Seven of the eight liaison bodies to the process are international member-based associations representing different segments of the meetings and hospitality industries, which sought input from their members throughout the development process, as well as encouraged them to engage in the process through their national standards body. The eighth liaison body is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), an organization known for their internationally-recognized and widely used sustainability reporting framework. Their interest in ISO 20121 relates to the development of a GRI sector supplement designed specifically for the events industry and their desire to ensure alignment of the two documents.

While ISO 20121 engaged industry and standards experts from around the globe in the standard development process, APEX/ASTM was initially created by industry experts based in the United States. This is not unusual considering the fundamental role the US EPA played in the creation of the standard. Indeed, it was an EPA energy bill put forward in the US House of Representatives that started the ball rolling back in 2007. A clause which would have made green meetings mandatory based on a simple 14 question checklist was eventually struck from the bill when it passed, which prompted GMIC to start a discussion with the EPA about collaborating on a standard that was developed by industry. The only EPA requirement was that the standard had to be developed by an ANSI-certified standards body, and they recommended ASTM International. Once released, the plan was that the standards would be endorsed by the EPA. The CIC became aware of the preliminary discussions and approached GMIC about supporting the development of these standards through APEX. The co-founder of GMIC agreed to chair the newly formed APEX Green Meetings and Events Practice Panel, which comprised 15 subject area experts from the US, Canada²⁴ and Europe (including the chair of the BS 8901 process), representing various sectors of the meetings industry. The work was divided up into committees,

²⁴ A representative from Environment Canada was also involved in the development process.

one for each of the nine sector standards being developed, with two co-chairs and at least one EPA representative per committee. Similar to BS 8901 and ISO 20121, volunteers were recruited through word of mouth, as well as announcements in trade publications and at industry conferences.

Again, our analysis is somewhat limited by our direct involvement with only one of these committees, specifically charged with developing the on-site office sector standard, after becoming aware of the need for volunteers during a sustainability-focused seminar at the 2008 MPI World Education Congress. As expected, most of the members of our committee were based in the US. While this may raise questions around input legitimacy, one thing is for certain: this was by far the most comprehensive group of volunteers (300+) ever gathered to provide input into the creation of a performance-based standard for sustainability in meetings and events. Many of these participants have been engaged in the discussion around both standards, including the chairs. It is important to note that similar to APEX/ASTM, the chair of ISO 20121 comes from the industry and both of these individuals are renowned for their long standing commitment, knowledge and practice in event sustainability in their respective businesses which certainly helps lend credibility to each of the standards being developed. Furthermore, similar to the producer supported forestry standards, both chairs maintained the view that it was of the utmost importance that those that will be implementing the standards should be directly involved in their creation. There were even discussions in the first few years between the two chairs to have BS 8901 endorse the prescriptive APEX/ASTM guidelines as a requirement of their management system, but once it switched to the ISO standard development process this option was no longer available.

Over the next two years, all nine APEX/ASTM sector standards took shape via periodic conference calls and email correspondence with their respective committees, in addition to one round of public comment via the CIC website and numerous industry consultation sessions held in the US, Canada and Europe²⁵. In early 2010, the standards began the process of balloting through ASTM. Initially, it was expected that they would be approved before the end of that year. However, with the involvement at this stage of E60 ASTM members, largely from sectors outside of the event industry, the process took an additional year to complete as every single negative vote had to be addressed. While the initial standards were clearly US-centric in their design and content, the involvement of ASTM as well as industry consultation from organizations such as GMIC and MPI (which although based in the US, both serve members globally), led to a significantly more robust and internationally-focused final draft, including the removal of any reference to US-based organizations or standards. Still, it does remain to be seen to what extent these standards will be viewed as viable outside of North America based on their origins and links with the EPA.

The APEX/ASTM standards have taken much longer to complete than originally anticipated. On the contrary, with ISO 20121 there has been some concern expressed by participants about the seemingly rapid pace of the standard's development – about two and a half years from the initial meeting held in London in January 2010 to the proposed publication date of June 2012. However, ISO rules outline three possible timelines when developing standards: two, three and four years. As ISO 20121 was based on a robust existing standard that had already been in use since 2007 and revised in 2009, the secretariat chose to pursue the three year timeline (i.e. neither the quickest nor the slowest option), with the plan to finish within two and a half

²⁵ European meeting industry engagement took place at the two major two international trade shows held annually: IMEX in Frankfurt (May) and EIBTM in Barcelona (November).

years. Regardless of which timeline is selected, the development of an ISO standard must follow six distinct stages each with its own ‘product’ or output. The proposal stage identifies the need for a specific international standard and results in a new work item proposal (NP); in the case of ISO 20121, the initial NP was jointly submitted by BSI and ABNT. Once approved, the preparatory stage involves the assembly of an expert working group that shapes the document, known as a working draft (WD), until it reaches a satisfactory level. For ISO 20121, comments related to WD 1 were discussed at the London Working Group (WG) meeting in January 2010, and the decision by consensus (i.e. majority vote) at the Project Committee (PC) meeting that immediately followed was to continue at this stage, with WD 2 distributed for comment among the working group. At the second international WG meeting in Paris (April 2010), the resulting update of the draft document based on the reconciliation of comments led to the decision to move to the third stage, committee draft (CD).

It was also announced at this meeting that a separate group had been established within ISO, ISO/TMB Tag 13 Joint Technical Coordination Group on Management System Standards (JTCG – MSS), to create a standardized structure for all ISO management system standards going forward, including clauses, sub-clauses and definitions. Any ISO committees currently in the process of developing a management system standard were encouraged to start using the JTCG format in anticipation of its approval by the end of 2010. The CD document was updated accordingly, with the proposed MSS standardized text highlighted in blue font to distinguish it from the original text. CD 20121 was then distributed for comment and voting by the P-members involved in the development of this standard, the results of which became the focus of discussion at the third international WG/PC meeting in San Francisco. In light of the shortened three year

timeline, the desired next step after this meeting was to move to the enquiry stage where the draft International Standard (DIS) would be circulated for public comment to all ISO member bodies. However, the new JTCG text complicated the process as working group members felt that the merged draft was not yet ready for distribution, hence the additional international meeting scheduled in Tokyo specifically to edit the document. All participating countries had the option to provide comments on the pre-DIS version of the standard, and these comments were discussed at this meeting held in January 2011.

After Japan, the DIS was finally ready for wider distribution in April 2011, which led to a required five month public comment period. Once again, comments were collected by the P-member countries and liaison bodies and discussed at the final international meeting scheduled for early November 2011 in Sao Paolo. In order to move to the fifth approval stage and final draft International Standard (FDIS), two-thirds of the P-members of TC 250 must vote in favour and less than 25% of the total votes cast may be negative. Although the resulting vote was to move ahead, it was also announced at this meeting that the final JTCG text still in development was scheduled for release in December and it was agreed by those present that a final review of the ISO 20121 document should take place before releasing as the FDIS. Depending on the extent of changes to the JTCG text, this meeting could take place via conference call or if significant changes are required, one additional face to face meeting would be scheduled in Geneva. Finally, after a two month review period, another vote will take place in early 2012 and if the FDIS is approved by two-thirds of the TC 250 P-members and less than 25% of the total votes cast are negative, the standard will be approved and will have reached the sixth and final publication stage. The motivation to finish by June is largely related to the potential media attention that the standard will receive once the Olympics get underway, although participants

were told by the secretariat that it was always possible to extend the deadline if more time was needed.

Although the development process for these two standards is quite different, they are each legitimized in their own right by virtue of the organizations that created them, namely ISO and ASTM International, two of the largest and most recognized standard-setting bodies in the world. The additional input and support from the US EPA and LOCOG for APEX/ASTM and ISO 20121 respectively also add credibility, although it is important to note that one is a government agency specializing in environmental policy making, while the other is a non-profit organization running one of the largest sporting events in the world – one that has been the frequent target of environmental and social activists in previous years. NGOs may not take kindly to the fact that they were not invited to participate in the development of either standard, although once again the pivotal role played by the US EPA in APEX/ASTM may address some of their concerns about how rigorous these standards are. As we discovered in the forestry literature, generally NGOs are less trusting of management system standards as they believe there is too much flexibility which encourages companies to perform only at the minimum level required. Supporters of ISO 20121 maintain that this is not a concern as the required step of stakeholder engagement helps to identify the sustainability issues that are relevant to the organization in question, and in theory hold them accountable to address them. Nevertheless, including the environmental sustainability performance requirements of APEX/ASTM within the ISO 20121 event sustainability management system would certainly help improve credibility in the eyes of the NGO community. Perhaps the bigger question is: does the meeting industry even need or care to be accountable to this segment of society? Like Corporate Social Responsibility in

general, no doubt there is a certain degree of pressure for businesses to improve their sustainability performance in order to avoid the potential backlash from environmental and social groups, but more often than not the main motivator is the desire to remain competitive and meet the ever changing needs of customers. The meetings industry is no different in terms of their responsiveness to what clients want, and increasingly questions about supplier sustainability credentials are finding their way into RFPs.

Assuming they are seeking greater accountability with regards to the sustainability of their events, these clients – business actors outside the meetings industry who are consumers of event-related products and services – will likely be satisfied with each of these standard's claims of legitimacy, especially if they are already familiar with the standard setting bodies ISO or ASTM. Otherwise, they will need to rely on their meeting industry partners to provide assurances that either standard is a credible option available to them. Within the meetings industry, both of these standards already have their share of supporters, which certainly helps to strengthen their legitimacy. As the industry becomes increasingly aware of how each of the standards is structured (i.e. process vs. performance) through various communication channels in the build-up to their upcoming release, the debate continues as to which one makes more sense for industry-wide adoption. Similar to the forestry example, the challenge inherent in standards development is the diversity of opinions with respect to what the nature of the problem is and how best to resolve it. Is a flexible system for managing a broad range of self-determined social, environmental and economic issues throughout the entire event cycle what the industry needs to ensure long term sustainability, or is there a more urgent need to manage the specific environmental impacts typically associated with business events (the original focus of the green meeting movement) by creating a common language and minimum performance metrics around

such issues as waste management, energy efficiency, water conservation and procurement? The compromise here could be the integration of both standards to provide a more well-rounded approach, using the APEX/ASTM checklist to identify the environmental issues that should be addressed and the ISO 20121 management system framework to help integrate these performance requirements (among others) into the structure and culture of the organization to ensure ongoing success.

Regardless of which approach is preferred, the manner in which these two standards were developed (i.e. input and procedural legitimacy) and the resulting documents (i.e. output legitimacy) reinforce the credibility of both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM. Neither process was perfect, nor will either standard be perfect when they are first published. However, ‘perfection’ is a near impossible outcome of any standard-setting process, as there are simply too many different perspectives involved. The chairs and many of the industry participants involved in the development of ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM share the perspective that it is important to get the standards out in the marketplace so it can be determined how they actually work in practice. The resulting feedback could then be used to revise the standards at a later date. Meetings industry professionals, the primary stakeholder group that both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM desire legitimacy from, are generally quite pragmatic people. In terms of legitimacy, they will likely accept that the process was managed in a credible manner based on the involvement of ISO and ASTM, but at the same time recognize and appreciate that the standards are in line with the operational realities of the industry thanks to the involvement of the CIC, GMIC, MPI (among others) and hundreds of committed planners and suppliers knowledgeable about meeting and event management. The bigger challenge inherent in these standards is their ability to hold users

accountable and ultimately, their effectiveness in helping to solve the problems that they were designed to address.

In terms of accountability, both standards were responsive mainly to the needs of stakeholders from industry, with less concern for NGOs and other community groups. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing emphasis on CSR and sustainability within the meetings industry, lagging somewhat behind the movement within business in general. Indeed, while many companies were implementing elaborate corporate responsibility policies and programs to engage their employees, customers, suppliers and communities, there was often a disconnect when it came to the meetings and events that they organized. The focus of these business events was understandably on the core products and/or services of the organization; however, there was little or no thought regarding the associated environmental and social impacts from the manner in which they were planned. That has changed over time with increased awareness and education through trade publications and industry organizations such as MPI and GMIC. In fact, GMIC was founded during this period precisely to help advance knowledge and inspire action among the meetings industry and has been steadily growing in size and influence ever since. As with most subject areas, the more enlightened people become, the more questions they have and with it, the potential for confusion based on a multitude of opinions. Sustainability is no different. As the concept of ‘green meetings’ grew in significance, questions such as ‘what exactly is a green meeting’ became more prevalent and it soon became clear that there were no easy answers. Even the term ‘green’ was causing confusion, hence the push for industry-wide guidelines to help bring a certain degree of resolution to the ongoing debate, not to mention a formalized approach on how to implement sustainable practices within events. As outlined previously, both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM are just two of the resulting standards that came

out of this drive for clarity and uniformity across a very large and diverse global industry. Voluntary standards, as we discovered in the forestry literature, are designed to hold people and organizations accountable, which reinforces their legitimacy. In the case of APEX/ASTM, GMIC was responding on behalf of the meetings industry to the very real possibility that regulation would be imposed (at the very least on meetings and events organized by the US government) without having any input whatsoever in their design. For many, this was a scary prospect. By leading the process, the organizers of both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM were taking a proactive approach through the engagement of industry stakeholders over a period of several years to build a credible standard respectively that was also feasible to implement.

The forestry literature also presented an opposing viewpoint about the private nature of standards development, specifically that it is at odds with the concept of accountability. In the case of APEX/ASTM, it would be hard to claim that these standards are side-stepping national law due to the heavy involvement of the US EPA, while in the case of ISO 20121 there has been a concerted effort to imbed a respect for both national and international laws as part of the standard. Even APEX/ASTM took international law into consideration in its decision to place less emphasis on social sustainability, as it was considered to be more difficult to impose across borders due to greater variances in customs and norms, not to mention that there were fewer references available for social responsibility earlier on in the standards development process (unlike today with ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility as one example). What did remain in the standard were more general social elements that directly impact meetings and events, such as fair labour practices, leftover food donation and community outreach programs which are somewhat easier to measure; in this case, verifying human resources policies, quantity

of food collected and total number of volunteer hours, respectively. Environmental policies were seen as less open to interpretation internationally and much easier to measure, with the exception of requirements for carbon emissions which were deliberately omitted from the final version of the standards because they are still being debated globally.

Our experience being involved in the development processes of both standards is that those who were actively engaged in the process throughout shared the underlying desire to create guidelines that were robust in order to hold users accountable. At the same time, the need for practicality was ever present as there was no point putting in all this effort to create standards that would get little use. Each standard took a different approach to address these concerns. With APEX/ASTM, the vetting process (largely managed virtually in lieu of face-to-face meetings) required that every single negative vote had to be addressed, even if they had been discussed previously. On the other hand, with ISO 20121 comments that were collected by the national mirror committees, submitted to ISO, compiled and discussed at the international face-to-face meetings, were discussed individually but were accepted, noted (i.e. no action taken) or rejected based on the discussion and consensus of those members who were able to make the journey to London, Paris, San Francisco or Sao Paulo (at most, about 30 attendees per meeting). It soon became apparent that as a country, it was essential to be present at these meetings in order to defend your committee's comments; otherwise they were often simply noted, or worse, rejected. Furthermore, comments that had been resolved at earlier meetings were not meant to be discussed again. This is understandable to a certain degree considering the ISO process is based on a majority vote rule, and with the volume of comments received for each draft (over 500 for the most recent draft), it would have been a much more difficult task to manage otherwise. Still, it does raise questions about how responsive the core TC 250 was to stakeholders outside the

working group. APEX and ASTM, on the other hand, had no choice but to respond to stakeholders including those from outside the meetings industry who did not for the most part understand the complexity of events, but instead were concerned about how these prescriptive standards would impact their industries (e.g. plastics, wood, materials etc.). Definitions for terms such as hazardous waste, toxics, biodegradable, and alternative fuel were endlessly debated until sufficiently resolved. While in some respects this approach appears to be more thorough and fair compared with the ISO consensus approach, it did significantly delay the process; the APEX/ASTM standards were scheduled to be completed in 2009 but will not be fully complete until early 2012. It is hard to hold the industry accountable to a standard when it is not yet available!

The other form of accountability evident in the forestry literature was external control, and our focus here is primarily on certification. This is a common type of enforcement mechanism to regulate behaviour, essentially measuring compliance against the set of requirements outlined within a given standard. As previously mentioned, ISO 20121 explicitly states that the standard can be first (i.e. self), second (i.e. industry peers) or third (i.e. independent) party verified, while APEX/ASTM has no specific instructions about verification within the standard. However, our understanding based on communications with CIC and GMIC, among others, is that it will initially be self-certifying. In other words, the planner(s) and supplier(s) involved in implementing the relevant sector standards will be responsible for auditing their work and determining if they are in compliance. Similarly, ISO 20121 could be self-certified, and this has been the preferred option by many users of BS 8901 largely due to the cost associated with hiring an independent third-party certifier. Second party verification is essentially when another

organization within the industry, such as a supplier, competitor or trade association, is asked to verify that the requirements of the standard have been met. This could be a viable option for the meetings industry to strike the right balance between ensuring a sufficient level of credibility with practical realities (i.e. cost). In the case of ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, both standards are supported by associations GMIC and MPI, and it would appear to be a logical step for both of these organizations to act as second party verifiers to provide assurances to their members and the wider meetings industry that claims made by users of either standard have been substantiated.

For APEX/ASTM, the CIC is taking this a step further with the possibility of adding event sustainability as a sub-specialty of their long-standing Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation, which certifies individual planners and suppliers around knowledge, competencies and experience in meeting and event management. Within the industry, the CMP is one of the most widely recognized and respected credentials a meeting professional can obtain, especially in North America. It remains to be seen if and when this sub-specialty will be created; likely at least 12-18 months after the standards are released. Related questions to be resolved during its development is who would be responsible for designing the criteria (i.e. CIC, GMIC, or both) and how would it compare to the actual APEX/ASTM standards, which are designed to measure an event versus verifying the event sustainability knowledge, competencies and experience of the individual planner or supplier. Furthermore, how will this additional accreditation impact the planning and/or auditing of a meeting or event in accordance with the standards? In other words, just because a planner or supplier has the CMP sub-specialty credential doesn't necessarily mean that every meeting they are involved with will be in compliance with the standards. Needless to say, there are many potential issues raised with the concept of certifying an individual to implement and/or verify the standards that will be discussed in greater detail once the standards

are released and key stakeholders can gauge what need (if any) there exists for this additional credential.

Third-party certification is a viable option considering the strong foundation the performance requirements provide within APEX/ASTM. Again, the bigger question is not how, but who and to a lesser extent, when? While ASTM would appear to be the obvious choice to certify their own standard, many of the existing certifiers are unlikely to understand the unique and complex nature of the meetings industry without additional education and training, which leads to a related question of who will be responsible for managing that process? The CIC is also involved in this discussion, since they administer the APEX program, so it remains to be seen how this will be resolved. Certification of ISO 20121 will likely be possible sooner than APEX/ASTM, precisely because it has been available for BS 8901 for several years and therefore easier in theory for existing certifiers to adapt their auditing systems to the requirements of the updated standard. However, based on the most recent international meeting in Sao Paulo, it would appear that the updated draft of the standard is still impaired somewhat by the integration of the JTCG MSS text and may very well prove difficult for certifiers to wrap their heads around, let alone the average user within the meetings industry. Again, the impact of these modifications will not be fully understood until the document is published and put into practice. Furthermore, as an international standard the level of interest by certification bodies will vary by country, which depends to a certain extent on whether the ISO-member national standards body decides to adopt the standard as their national standard once published. In Canada, SCC could opt not to adopt ISO 20121, especially considering there are already two existing event sustainability standards available within the country. The CAC/ISO/TC 250

members certainly are aware of this option, but likely will support the standard at the final FDIS stage to give the Canadian meetings and events industry the opportunity to trial it themselves.

Perhaps the bigger question around third-party certification is whether it is actually necessary to ensure accountability. On the one hand, there are strong arguments to be made in support of this level of verification, including the same need for consistency that was a driving force in the creation of the standards in the first place. How will event stakeholders truly know if claims of compliance with a particular standard are truthful without it? Third-party certification can provide independent and objective evidence that sustainability performance has indeed been achieved. On the other hand, many organizations within the meetings industry are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and may not necessarily be able to afford the costs associated with hiring a certifier, hence why many have opted for first and second party verification of BS 8901 instead. As we will soon explore in our discussion about effectiveness, the perception that third party certification is the only option to ensure credibility may very well pose a barrier to those meeting and event professionals who are contemplating implementing ISO 20121. In order for a standard to be truly effective on a larger scale (and ultimately improve the situation it was designed to address), it needs to be accessible to encourage widespread use.

What might we expect from these two standards in terms of effectiveness based on our lessons from the forestry literature? As they are yet to be published and put into practice, the question of effectiveness is entirely hypothetical at this stage. Can ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM help resolve the issues that they were both designed to address? Those individuals and organizations who have been actively involved in their development would certainly hope so; otherwise why spend countless volunteer hours over several years to create something that would simply collect dust from lack of use? In order to improve the sustainability of events, these

standards need to effectively change the behaviour of those stakeholders central to the decision making process, namely planners and suppliers, but also senior management within client organizations that commission events (e.g. corporations, associations) and key influencers (e.g. media). At the end of the day, these are voluntary standards thus in theory no one is obligated to use them. However, the US EPA are likely to adopt the APEX/ASTM standards (in fact, they are required to use prevailing standards if they exist) and so anyone who wishes to provide goods and services for government meetings will need to be in compliance eventually. As mentioned previously, LOCOG requires all vendors partnering with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to be working towards BS 8901, which will (assuming it is published in time) be replaced by ISO 20121. In both cases, there is a strong business argument to be made for adopting one or both of these standards. But these are just two organizations with significant buying power, what about the rest?

As we discovered in the forestry literature, there are four factors that can influence effectiveness: producer participation, stringency of standards, system operation and cost of non-compliance. By producers, we are primarily referring to the meetings industry organizations that are responsible for all the components involved in the planning and implementation of meetings, conferences, exhibitions and other business events. Essentially, the more producers that adopt one or both of these standards, the more likely there will be a widespread change in behaviour; critical mass is essentially here. As these standards have been largely developed by representatives from the industry, there has been a significant amount of coverage in trade publications and industry associations to raise awareness about what they are about, why they are important and how to actually put them into practice. GMIC, as one example, has understandably

been a huge supporter of the APEX/ASTM standards which they were instrumental in creating, and have focused much of the educational content for its members around their adoption. They have even trained a group of trainers to help educate the industry on how to implement the standards once they are released. As a liaison member of the ISO 20121 process, GMIC has also been promoting the use of its predecessor BS 8901 and is actively encouraging the use of both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM together once published as part of a more comprehensive approach to managing sustainability within meetings and events.

MPI, which unlike GMIC is not solely focused on sustainability within their mandate, has nevertheless made CSR a strategic priority and has also been devoting a significant amount of their educational content on building awareness around the standards. Many MPI members have been involved in the development of both draft documents, and the association itself has been an active participant in the ISO 20121 process as a liaison member. In 2010, MPI launched its own online Sustainable Event Measurement Tool (SEMT) which allows planners and suppliers to upload and track their event related data on issues such as waste, water, energy, emissions and community involvement. The tool was designed to be compatible with both BS 8901/ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM, and is free to use by all MPI and GMIC members, as well as non-member venue suppliers who can upload their performance data for all users to see. MPI is also promoting the use of both standards together.

Based on the level of interest in BS 8901, it is assumed that ISO 20121 will also be well received by those organizations that are already tuned in to the need for a more systematic approach to managing sustainability issues within their business and events. APEX/ASTM, on the other hand, will appeal to busy meeting planners and the suppliers that service them, because it essentially outlines exactly what they need to do to ensure their event is planned with

environmental sustainability in mind. Although cliché, planners are widely known for their attention to detail and their appreciation of checklists to manage the wide range of tasks involved in meeting management. While the industry as a whole has been trying to increase the strategic value of the planner role within organizations, the tactical side is still a fundamental part of the job. In other words, based on our experience working on the development of both standards, planners are likely to be more inclined towards adopting the performance-based APEX/ASTM before considering the need for implementing the strategic ISO 20121 management system approach. Planners are feeling stretched with additional pressures to ‘do more with less’ in light of the prolonged economic downturn and many assume they do not have the time required to think about sustainability in great depth. Nevertheless, they know it is important and potentially a requirement in the (near) future, hence the desire for a simple checklist to tell them what to do. Unfortunately (but not surprisingly), the APEX/ASTM checklist is far from simple. Nor is ISO 20121 a straightforward step by step process, which can at least partially be attributed to the integration of the JTCG MSS text as discussed previously, but also because it is written in standards language which most meeting professionals are unlikely to be familiar with.

Suppliers will be inclined to adopt APEX/ASTM if it helps them to win more business and/or improve operational efficiencies. Because there are nine separate standards representing the main functions within meeting and event management, the relevant supplier organizations (i.e. convention and visitor bureaux, hotels, convention centres, catering, audio visual, exhibition and transportation companies) have a vested interest in working towards a minimum level 1 compliance of the applicable sector standard(s), especially in light of the strong emphasis on the partnership between planners and suppliers to make them work effectively. The marketing

benefits alone could justify their efforts. On the other hand, despite the claim that ISO 20121 can be used by any size of organization, the perception exists among those involved in its development that it is better suited for larger organizations and events (even with the existence of case studies showing how smaller organizations successfully used the BS 8901 standard on which it is based). Whereas APEX/ASTM is built to measure the event performance, ISO 20121 focuses more on the process of managing event sustainability and can be applied to any of the key stakeholders involved in the delivery of the event, including the supply chain. Many of these supplier organizations are likely familiar with other ISO standards, such as ISO 9001 for Quality Management and ISO 14001 for Environmental Management, and thus may be more inclined to adapt their systems to support the implementation of ISO 20121. Taking this strategic management system approach will certainly benefit their business, including identifying their relevant sustainability issues and putting a plan in place to address them, not to mention improve their brand image within the marketplace.

Although we have suggested that the structure of APEX/ASTM is better suited for the more pragmatic meetings industry, the issue of stringency further complicates the discussion on producer participation. Closely linked to stringency is system operation, which refers to the process or performance requirements of each standard and how compliance is determined. Performance-based standards are significantly more stringent than their process-based counterparts, and APEX/ASTM is no different. Indeed, at first glance its prescriptive requirements may be viewed as too stringent and therefore not feasible in practice, which could lead to a lower adoption rate. However, the flexibility inherent in the process-based ISO 20121 may conversely lead to minimal improvements if only the 'low hanging fruit' (i.e. easy wins) are addressed within the management system. The stakeholder engagement component is designed

to prevent this, but it all depends on whether or not the key stakeholders are knowledgeable about the issues and willing to be held accountable to fixing them. The fact that ISO 20121 is not prescriptive does not necessarily mean that it is easier to implement. In fact, the most recent draft reviewed during the public consultation period is hardly user friendly, which participants involved in its development attribute largely to the inclusion of the JTCG MSS text. Indeed, during our involvement with the CAC/ISO/TC 250, specifically going through the process of collecting comments on four drafts of the standard, one of the common complaints about ISO 20121 was that it was not written in the everyday language of event practitioners. However, this comment was repeatedly struck down at the international meetings based on the rationale that all ISO standards had to be written using a common standards language that can be easily understood by a wide variety of users around the world. To address these concerns, the guidance text provides supporting information written in ‘plain English’, while liaison organizations and national standards bodies are encouraged to create their own guidance documents to help their constituents through the process. It remains to be seen how quickly these organizations will be able to produce such guidelines in order to take advantage of a potentially narrow window of time between when the standards are released and when the level of interest within the industry starts to dissipate. APEX/ASTM will also need support to help interpret them for the industry, but again the look and feel of these standards may work in their favour; despite the size and complexity of each of the nine sector documents, there is significant overlap and a great deal of consistency in form and function. Ultimately, both standards will require a significant amount of time investment in the beginning to understand and implement, but like all things will get easier over the long run with repeated use.

From a cost perspective – another potential barrier to industry uptake – the APEX/ASTM requirements for level 1 have been purposely designed to be cost-neutral or lead to cost savings. The same could be said of ISO 20121, but largely depends on what issues are identified and the associated goals and objectives that are set to address them. The compromise here would be to use the two standards in combination, hence our argument for complementarity. The ISO 20121 management system would no doubt be enhanced by some of the prescriptive requirements of APEX/ASTM, at least when it comes to addressing environmental (and to a lesser extent, social) sustainability issues. While ISO will not endorse the standards of other organizations such as ASTM, the meetings industry can certainly choose to embrace the use of both standards. The concern around stringency can be addressed by taking a more moderate approach and implementing only those items from APEX/ASTM that are feasible in the beginning, with a commitment to continuous improvement inspired by ISO 20121 that hopefully results in compliance with the level 1 requirements in all relevant sectors, and so on. Using ISO 20121 at the same time will help users think about sustainability in a more holistic way, looking at their entire operations as it relates to events and striving to imbed this new way of working into the culture of the organization. A combined approach also helps to measure both the way in which sustainability is managed (i.e. process) and the resulting impacts on the event (i.e. performance).

Another cost to consider in our discussion of effectiveness is the cost for non-compliance. In other words, what potential impacts will an organization face should they choose not to implement either standard? The reality is these are voluntary guidelines that help demonstrate how to improve the sustainability of meetings and events. Many organizations may already be making progress in this area and may not see the value in investing more time and/or money in implementing complex management systems and checklists. Others will see this as an

opportunity to use the standards to validate their efforts, or help them get started if they have not already done so. At least with APEX/ASTM, the rationale for their creation was to create an industry-wide benchmark by which an organization could measure their environmental and social performance. ISO 20121 on the other hand, was based on BS 8901 which was designed to help event professionals understand how to address sustainability within their specific organization and events, and put a system into place to ensure that they manage their impacts both in the short and long terms.

Regardless of which approach is preferred, at this early stage it will be difficult to measure the true cost of non-compliance. Initially, it will take time for the industry to become aware of the existence of both of these standards and to start putting them into practice. Some organizations may use these standards as a way to choose preferred suppliers, while many will instead reference them in their discussions with their suppliers but not make it a requirement to do business with them just yet. Certification has also been discussed previously as a way to ensure accountability, and as more organizations embrace it there will be a greater emphasis on validation of event sustainability claims by credible sources. Rather than penalize non-users, it would be more helpful in the beginning to promote various incentives to encourage the widespread adoption of standards, such as improved reputation, competitive advantage, employee and client satisfaction and other benefits associated with CSR. For planners, these benefits include satisfying the various event stakeholders, helping to increase quality, efficiencies and cost savings, as well as enhancing their own strategic value within the organization. Suppliers again are motivated by the opportunities associated with being a more responsible business, including reducing costs and increasing sales. While there might not be a

price premium available to suppliers who choose to implement either standard, there is a strong chance that they will increase their brand reputation and market share. As sustainability becomes more common within the meetings industry, competitive advantage might decrease but by then it will simply be a requirement of doing business.

Conclusion

The underlying research question this paper set out to address was whether or not two international voluntary standards developed over the past few years and scheduled to be released in 2012 can complement, versus compete with, each other to help meeting professionals integrate considerations for environmental, social and economic sustainability into the planning and execution of business events. Both of these standards, including the process-based *ISO 20121 Event sustainability management systems* and the performance-based *APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standard*, ask users to think about sustainability in highly different ways. ISO 20121 assumes that in such a diverse and fragmented industry, a ‘one size fits all’ solution is not possible, therefore it has chosen instead to embrace the management system model ISO is renowned for while building on the relative success of *BS 8901:2009 Specification for a sustainability management system for events*. Instead of prescribing what specific sustainability issues should be addressed, it puts the decision solely in the hands of the user. This built-in flexibility can help promote the widespread use of a given standard but may also attract criticism for the potential lack of stringency. APEX/ASTM, on the other hand, is far more prescriptive and specifically centered on environmental sustainability, which was the initial focus of the green meetings movement which inspired the creation of these standards in the first place. The rationale here is that the industry needs a shared knowledge and understanding of what the minimum level of performance required is in order to reduce the negative

environmental impact of meetings, while increasing the social and economic benefits. The ‘one size fits all’ philosophy is more apparent as the scope is limited to business events but of course, only those sectors that apply must be implemented in order to be in compliance. Both standards have their inherent strengths and weaknesses. Based on our analysis of their respective structures, in addition to the influence of legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness, it is evident that while each standard is robust and designed to stand alone, the resulting benefits can be optimized significantly by using them together. In fact, without this combined approach, each of the standards (at least within the meetings industry) may be at risk of not achieving the level of uptake required to ensure their viability.

In spite of the growing presence of CSR within business, there exists a disconnect between the sustainability policies of many companies and the meetings that they produce. Aside from larger organizations, such as LOCOG and the US EPA, the demand for sustainable practices from meeting and event suppliers has been slow to manifest, further complicated by challenging economic conditions. For those individuals who contributed countless volunteer hours to help shape these standards, and in spite of the wide range of opinions about the right approach necessary, there is certainly a shared desire in the need for industry guidelines to improve long term sustainability. In order for these standards to be viewed as legitimate by the industry, they had to be created by people who understand the realities and inherent challenges of meeting and event management. Our analysis demonstrated that considering who was involved, how the process was managed, and the resulting final output, both standards have succeeded in their quest for legitimacy. The greater challenge will be to ensure that each standard holds users, and the wider meetings industry, accountable for their activities to ensure effectiveness.

Understandably, as an industry-led process both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM were highly responsive to the needs of their primary stakeholder group, the meetings industry. The success of these standards will be based largely on how effective they are in managing the environmental, social and economic considerations they were designed to address. Our analysis shows that a balance of the flexible process-based ISO 20121, combined with the more stringent performance-based APEX/ASTM, is recommended to minimize the potential barriers that will undoubtedly exist considering the complexity of both standards. Used together, a more well-rounded approach is possible. APEX/ASTM will specify the agreed-upon environmental issues that must be addressed in order to reduce the growing ecological footprint of the meetings industry. However, while this may achieve success in the short term, it will take the systems thinking associated with ISO 20121 to really enable users to imbed these practices into their organizational culture to ensure long term success through continuous improvement. Meanwhile, other important environmental, social and/or economic issues related to events can be addressed in this management system. Concerns about accountability related to user-defined issues and goal setting in ISO 20121 will be alleviated somewhat by the prescriptive requirements of APEX/ASTM. Meanwhile, concerns about the inflexibility of APEX/ASTM will be minimized by the more moderate step by step approach encouraged by ISO 20121. Working in favour for both standards will be the prevailing attitude within the industry that these are not mandatory guidelines, and at least for now they are not a required condition of doing business. However, as the economy slowly recovers, this perspective will certainly change, further reinforced by the use and growing acceptance of both of these standards.

This positive outcome is by no means guaranteed. As many people involved in the development of either standard knows well, the road to this point has been long and not without

significant bumps along the way. Will it have all been worth it? For some, APEX/ASTM took far too long to complete and potentially missed the window of opportunity before the economy tumbled to capitalize on the growing awareness of and demand for greener meetings. Others believe that ISO 20121 feels rushed and will not be ready in time for the proposed publication date. Again, our analysis shows that there were legitimate reasons for the length of time taken to develop each of these standards. What matters now is how they are rolled out to the industry at large. The high profile and tremendous buying power of LOCOG and the US EPA will no doubt shine the spotlight on both ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM respectively when they are released. However, in order to ensure the long term viability of these two international standards, it is highly recommended that GMIC and MPI, two global industry organizations each dedicated to sustainability and CSR but approaching it in different ways, must strongly encourage the use of both standards together from the moment they are released. While they have already indicated their support for this joint approach, our analysis shows that as an industry-led initiative the long term survival of these standards absolutely depend on it. While each standard will likely achieve its stated objectives if used separately, a combination of the process and performance requirements of ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM will ensure the goals of legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness are achieved to accelerate the journey towards a more sustainable global meetings industry.

References

- ASTM International, 2011. <http://www.astm.org/ABOUT/overview.html>
- ASTM International (2011, September) Standard Specification for the Evaluation and Selection of Accommodations for Environmentally Sustainable Meetings, Events, Trade Shows and Conferences, 2011.
- Bartley, T. (2003). Certifying Forests and Factories: States, Social Movements, and the Rise of Private Regulation in the Apparel and Forest Products Fields. *Politics & Society*, 31 (3), 433-464.
- Bartley, T. (2007). Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization: The Rise of Transnational Private Regulation of Labor and Environmental Conditions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113 (2), 297-351.
- Bartley, T. (2010). Certification as a Mode of Social Regulation. In Levi-Faur, D. (Ed.) *Handbook of the Politics of Regulation*.
- Bell, C. (1997). The ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems Standard: A Modest Perspective. *Environmental Law Reporter*, XXVII (publication page references not available).
- Black, J. (2008). Constructing and contesting legitimacy and accountability in polycentric regulatory regimes. *Regulation & Governance*, 2, 137-164.
- Blair, C., Williams, C., & Lin, L. W. (2008). The Roles of Standardization, Certification and Assurance Services in Global Commerce. *Comparative Research in Law & Political Economy*, 4 (3), 1-44.
- Bostrom and Tamm Hallstrom (2010). The Fragile Authority of Multi-Stakeholder Standard Setting. *Journal to be confirmed*.
- BS 8901: 2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use. *British Standards Institution*.
- BNQ 9700-253 (2010) Développement durable — Gestion responsable d'évènements. *Bureau de normalisation du Québec*.
- CSA Z2010 Requirements and Guidance for Organizers of Sustainable Events. *Canadian Standards Association*.
- Clapp, J. (2001). ISO Environmental Standards: Industry's Gift to a Polluted Globe or the Developed World's Competition-Killing Strategy? in Olav Schram Stokke and Øystein B. Thommessen (eds.), *Yearbook of International Co-operation on Environment and Development 2001/2002* (London: Earthscan Publications), 27-33.
- Convention Industry Council. (2004, March). Green Meetings Report.

Convention Industry Council, 2010.

<http://www.conventionindustry.org/CICMembers/OverviewMission.aspx>

Convention Industry Council, 2010

<http://www.conventionindustry.org/StandardsPractices/APEX.aspx>

Cumming, P., & Pelham, F. (2011). *Making Events More Sustainable. A Guide to BS 8901*. London: British Standards Institution.

DeWalt, K. M. & DeWalt, B. R. (2002). *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers*. AltaMira Press.

Gulbrandsen, L. H. (2005). Mark of Sustainability? Challenges for Fishery and Forestry Eco-labeling. *Environment*, 47 (5), 8-23.

Gulbrandsen, L. H. (2008). Accountability Arrangements in Non-State Standards Organizations: Instrumental Design and Imitation. *Organization*, 15 (4), 563-583.

Gulbrandsen, L. H. (2010). *Transnational Environmental Governance. The Emergence and Effects of the Certification of Forests and Fisheries*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Herberg, M. (2009). Reconstructing Global Governance Networks: The Case of the OECD Test Guidelines Programme for the Testing of Chemicals. *TranState Working Papers*, 104

International Organization for Standardization, 2010. <http://www.iso.org/iso/about.htm>

ISO 20121 Sustainability in event management (still to be published).

International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance, 2010. <http://www.isealalliance.org/content/codes-good-practice>

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, 2010. <http://www.pefc.org/index.php/about-pefc/who-we-are>

Meidinger, E. (1999). Private Environmental Regulation, Human Rights, and Community. *Buffalo Environmental Law Journal*, 7, 123-237.

Meidinger, E. (2001). Environmental Certification Programs and U.S. Environmental Law: Closer Than You May Think . *Environmental Law Reporter*, 31 (2), 10162-10179.

Meidinger, E. (2006). The Administrative Law of Global Private-Public Regulation: the Case of Forestry. *The European Journal of International Law*, (17 (1), 47-87.

Meeting Professionals International (2008). The Economic Contribution of Meetings Activity in Canada.

- Overdevest, C. (2009). Comparing forest certifications schemes: the case of ratcheting standards in the forest sector. *Socil-Economic Review*, 1-30.
- Richardson, A. (2009). Regulatory networks for accounting and auditing standards: A social network analysis of Canadian and international standard-setting. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 34, 571-588
- Spatrisano, A., Wilson, N. J. (2007). *Simple Steps to Green Meetings and Events*. Meeting Strategies Worldwide.
- Werle, R. & Iverson, E. J. (2006). Promoting Legitimacy in Technical Standardization. *Science, Technology & Innovation Studies*, 2, 19-39.