

Sustainability & Wellness

Sissi Lygnou, CEO, Congress & Events, AFEA Travel & Congress Services looks at how Sustainability can be intertwined with Wellness for the greater good... and that of associations. In fact, she argues that they can help the players of our industry coming out stronger of the current crisis.



Back in the time where I was asked to contribute to IAPCO' s knowledge community, by writing this article, I could never have imagined that this would be happening within a “lock-down” period and in a world which battles with the COVID-19 disease. We are all experience challenging times. Everything around us is so different to what it once was and the meetings industry is already suffering unimaginable loss from the disease. Even the subject of this article seems to have an alternative approach than before, and on the occasion of what is currently happening in the world, I decided to give it a different “twist”.

Some definitions

Let's fist start with some definitions. *Sustainability & Wellness*, two very powerful factors which entered of our lives in the 21st century. Two meanings that have a great value when used individually, and serve different missions, but can create, now more than ever, a much stronger value when combined together.

So, what is *Sustainability*? Many definitions and approaches, one meaning. Sustainability is the capacity to improve the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the Earth's supporting eco-systems, whereas in the 21st century it refers to the capacity for the [biosphere](#) and human [civilization](#) to coexist. The survival of humans is only possible in healthy ecosystems. A more general approach describes sustainability as the effort to meet our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations. Three pillars set the foundation for sustainability: economic, social and environment; principles also informally used as profit, people and planet. Three elements that should be perfectly combined and balanced to each other in an ideal world.

At the same time sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are vital elements of the planning, vision and existence of nations, governments, and organizations. A pre-requisite for companies wishing to adapt to future trends and thrive in the future. A very strong tool used in strategies and event-design modules in our meetings industry worldwide.

Let's move on to *Wellness*. The Global Wellness Institute defines Wellness as the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health—meaning that it extends beyond physical health and incorporates many different dimensions that should work in harmony. Wellness is an individual pursuit—we have self-responsibility for our own choices, behaviors and lifestyles—but it is also significantly influenced by the physical, social and cultural environments in which we live. And that is the highlight when speaking about wellness. It is absolutely linked with our personal health and well-being; our physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social health.

Organizations which adapt to current trends, embrace the human factor and take care of their employees' health and well-being, include wellness practices in their schedule and planning. And this is happily observed more and more in current times. Our industry has embraced wellness as key factor to apply to strategic planning when dealing with people. Mindfulness, meditation, yoga & breathing exercises, online weekly classes and other practices that contribute to a healthy and balanced life of employees are now part our business life.

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Leaders should motivate their workforce to practice healthy habits on a daily basis, to attain better physical and mental health outcomes, so that instead of just surviving, they are thriving. And this will only contribute positively to the future of their organizations on multiple levels.

Bridging the gap

In an effort to bridge the gap between *Sustainability* and *Wellness*, we find that they are perfectly linked to each other, even complete each other. The health and wellness of people is a vital part to the sustainability of our community. On another perspective, sustainability isn't just about the health and well-being of the planet; it's about the health and well-being of people.

Coming back to the current period, it appears that *Sustainability* and *Wellness* might be the strong players coming out of this crisis. Opportunities arise in every crisis, and in these difficult times we have the opportunity to highlight their value in our industry, in every sector and aspect of our lives.

Apart from the disruption and the disastrous consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the modern world and global economies, the world will definitely not be the same after this.

Sustainability and Wellness will be key elements of our lives, via different realities, such as remote work (from home), virtual and digital connectivity, more investment in our health and well-being, in the effort to stay healthy, less stress of constantly chasing time, more stress and anxiety to get over this crisis, plus a greater need for wellness practices, in order to improve our mental health. We will learn to give more value to the little things and develop our business through new tools. Our society will seek different roads to embrace people. The planet will pause and restart. But we will survive and will be stronger when the next day comes.

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