

SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

How to plan and organize sustainable events in Serbia

ZERO WASTE



NO PLASTIC



GO PAPERLESS



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide has been developed within the project “Reducing the carbon footprint of local communities by applying the principles of the circular economy in the Republic of Serbia - Circular Communities” that aims to support UNDP and all interested stakeholders in organizing sustainable, effective, and efficient workshops and events, in line with the Global Development Agenda and the UN Greening the Blue principles. The purpose of the Guide is to provide recommendations for organizing environment-friendly, sustainable events. The Guide should help the potential users by proposing measures in the areas of event promotion, mobility, energy and water consumption, communication, catering, waste reduction, and waste separation.

The Guide consists of the integral text providing general information on sustainability, the key principles, and the criteria for sustainable events planning and organization with practical examples and tips. Information provided by the text is taken from best global practice examples in event management and adjusted to the specific conditions that are applicable in Serbia.

The Guide is complemented by checklists, providing readers, event planners and organizers with practical information that will guide them through the process of event planning and organization. The Checklists offer a set of questions within each defined area of interventions, providing both basic and additional criteria in some areas. An additional, separate set of questions and principles has been developed for large-scale events, based on their specificities.

All information, practical tips and questions given in this Guide are selected in a way that reflects and enables the sustainability criteria implementation for events organized in Serbian conditions. The Guide endorses the minimum criteria that any event in Serbia can apply immediately, with no additional costs.

1. WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

The most repeated definition of sustainability comes from the UN World Commission on Environment and Development: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Sustainable development is more than environmental protection and climate action. It is the result of an approach that sees the environment, economy and social affairs as equal, mutually connected areas of life.

The UN launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a global initiative adopted by all the United Nations member states in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the heart of this Agenda, addressing global challenges like poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

1.1 SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

Meetings, conferences and other events are a standard business practice that can leave a significant environmental footprint – by consuming energy, water and other natural resources, generating waste, causing air pollution, and indirectly contributing to soil and water pollution and climate change through greenhouse gas emissions.¹

Public events, such as conferences, meetings and/or festivals, have the potential to **leave a positive legacy** in addressing the global sustainability challenges. Events could promote sustainability by implementing sustainability criteria. They have the option to explore innovative ways of organization. They could also serve as a tool for raising public awareness, disseminating knowledge, and promoting values in line with the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development. Finally, they could demonstrate positive effects on the society, climate and environment and therefore serve as good practice examples, contributing to the global sustainability goals.

A sustainable or ‘green’ event is one designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes potential negative impacts and leaves a beneficial legacy for the host community and all involved

Adapted from the UNEP Green Meeting Guide 2009 and based on the principles developed at the ICLEI Greening Events Symposium in Barcelona, Spain, September 2004.

1.2 SUSTAINABLE EVENTS AND SDGS

SDGs could and should be an inspiration for action. Sustainable event management can accelerate the progress towards the SDGs. Event organizers can use all the businesses and supporting activities within the event supply chain to enforce sustainability in transportation, energy

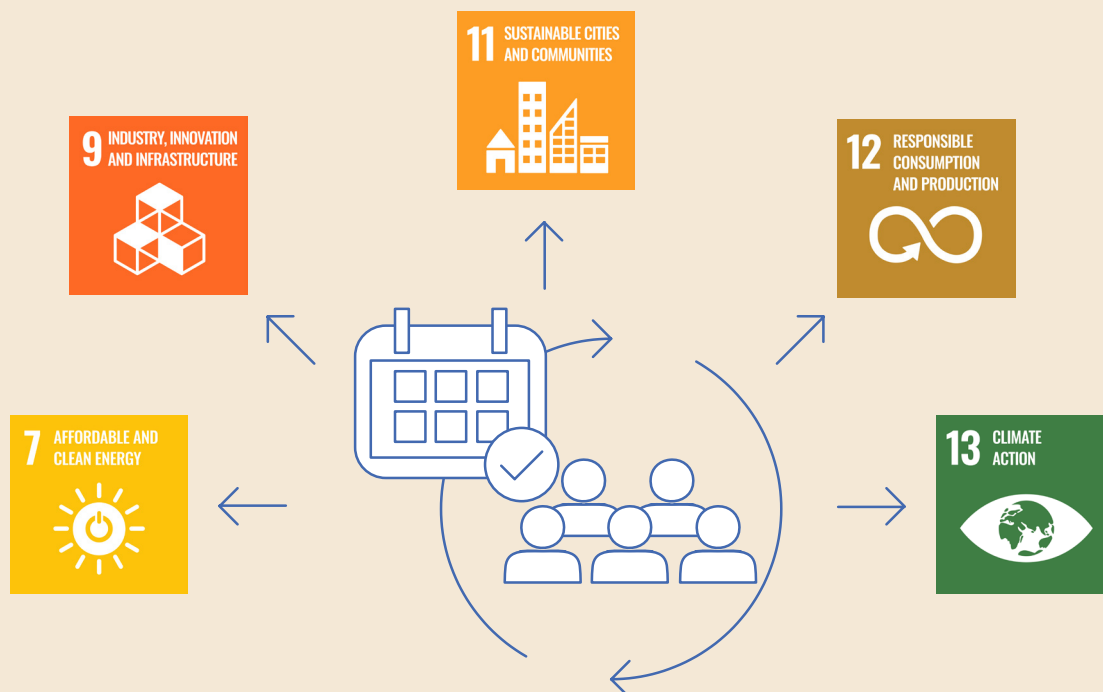
1 Taken from Guidelines for organizing sustainable meetings and events at the Commission https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/pdf/other/EC_Guide_Sustainable_Meetings_and_Events.pdf

consumption, catering, food and beverages, paper and/or waste management, etc. Therefore, when planning and organizing an event, organizers should take an overarching and comprehensive approach, considering not only the effects of the event on attendees and companies, but also on the environment, economy, and society.

Numerous types of events, from sports competitions, to local/internal meetings or workshops, can contribute to the SDGs given their impact on the environment, climate, and resource efficiency. Here are some possible contributions:

The planning and organization of the sustainable events can enhance and support some of the SDGs through promotion and application of sustainable practices, thus contributing to the global efforts in reaching the sustainable targets.

- **Goal 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy:** Promoting energy-efficient solutions and usage of renewable energy at the venues, reducing the usage of fossil fuels and saving resources
- **Goal 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:** Promoting innovative solutions that aim to reduce environmental footprints
- **Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Supporting cities and governments to make their infrastructures and services more sustainable for the events they host
- **Goal 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production:** Continuously using sustainable materials, renewable energy, and local/organic food, reducing unnecessary consumption, and recycling waste
- **Goal 13 – Climate Action:** Continuously raising awareness on the usage of renewable energy, reducing energy consumption, and offsetting the unavoidable impacts.



Picture 1: Possible contribution of the sustainable events to the SDGs

1.3 STANDARDIZATION, GLOBAL PRACTICES AND POLICIES SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

In June 2012, the International Organization for Standardization - ISO² published a new standard ISO 20121. “ISO 20121 offers guidance and best practice to help you manage your event and control its social, economic and environmental impact. Every action counts, from relying on tap water instead of plastic bottles to encouraging use of public transport. You might find that it also helps you cut unnecessary costs. ISO 20121’s flexible approach means that it can be used for all types of events, from music festivals to school outings.”³

The standard quickly became popular in the event management industry, in the context of global events such as Olympics and Paralympics (Rio 2016) or major sporting events (Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) now insists that organizing committees from all host cities must obtain ISO 20121 certification at least three years before their Games.

ISO 20121 is designed to improve the sustainability of events – activities, products and services.

Beyond sports, the standard is also being used by several exhibition and conference venues, large music festivals, and major events such as the World Economic Forum, COP21 Conference/Paris 2015, and Milan 2015 World Expo.

The standard can be applied to a broad range of events, large and small.



Picture 2: Promotion of sustainability in preparation for Tokyo 2020 Games
Source: <https://tokyo2020.org/en/games/sustainability/>

2 <https://www.iso.org/home.html>

3 <https://www.iso.org/iso-20121-sustainable-events.html>

2. SUSTAINABLE EVENTS: CRITERIA AND KEY PRINCIPLES

2.1 IS A PHYSICAL MEETING/EVENT NECESSARY?

Organizers should consider if the physical meeting is necessary, and what are the pros and cons of having a virtual meeting, a conference call, or a webinar instead. When topics are delicate, it is more common and justified to have a physical meeting, as well as when there are technical limitations, or when the personal exchange among participants is required.

A virtual event is a large, multi-session online event that often features webinars and webcasts. The basic definition of a virtual event is an online event that involves people interacting in a virtual environment, rather than at a physical location.⁴ Virtual events can be lectures, conferences, career or other fairs, meetings, etc.

When planning an event, organizers should always look for possibilities to reduce the need for physical meetings, in this way decreasing the negative environmental impact of travel, accommodation and waste, and lowering the costs. Online presentations, live streaming of guest speakers, webinars, or other online training or workshops are less harmful to the environment. While planning, organizers should consider including at least some virtual segments.

Virtual events are more flexible, environmentally friendly and cost-effective than the traditional ones. They can usually host more participants and engage more people. The risks from external circumstances are lower, and analysis and reporting easier.

2.2 WHY SUSTAINABLE EVENTS?

Sustainability for events means acting towards preserving the nature and environment; promoting a healthy, inclusive society; and supporting a thriving economy.

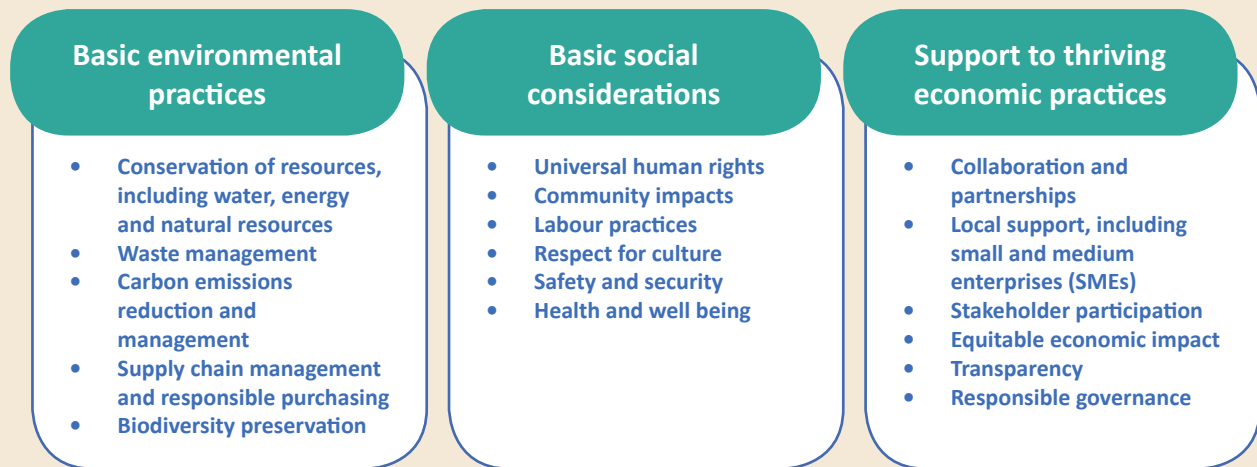
Event planning and organization could be a valuable and interesting platform to promote and apply some of the sustainability criteria. Most organizations, companies and institutions organize at least one event per year – usually many more than that – starting from small-scale events such as internal meetings, staff gatherings, workshops, and steering committees.

Planning and managing sustainable events might include complex challenges, including health, education, infrastructural or mobility issues. However, most organizations, including the EU, give priority to the environmental and climate impact of an event.

There are three key principles of event sustainability, as shown in the picture below:

4 <https://blog.workcast.com/virtual-events-vs-in-person-events>

Event organizers and suppliers share responsibility for implementing and communicating sustainable practices to their stakeholders



Picture 3: Key principles of event sustainability

2.3 PLANNING SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

Proper, timely and careful event planning is crucial for success. For an event to succeed, organizers must plan it in advance, consider various issues and challenges, and engage in timely and informed communication with all stakeholders.

The critical step is that executive management or decision-makers commit to this process. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure clear procedures and policies, and to understand the various groups of people included in or affected by the event. These are event organizers and owners, other sponsors, senior management, workforce, members of the supply chain, participants, attendees, regulatory bodies, CSOs and the wider audience.

The initial phase of event management should be used to **inspire and trigger changes** through informed communication with decision-makers, executives, employees, and potential suppliers – explaining them exactly what is expected of them in terms of sustainability and supporting them to meet the desired sustainability objectives.

Organizers can take a **step-by-step approach**, and at first organize events that will include only some sustainable elements, despite limitations. Small changes can be introduced, focusing on one or two elements, like reducing the use of materials or recycling waste. Then, for subsequent events, aspirations and measures can be further expanded.

Why sustainable events:

- Contribute to the global, national and local efforts for climate smart actions
- Support local economies, social entrepreneurship and social inclusion
- Raise awareness of the various stakeholders' groups on sustainability, climate and environmental challenges
- Trigger innovations and changes
- Improve communication, support exchange and motivate employees
- Decrease costs through conserving energy, reducing waste, purchasing local products, lower the consumption
- Improve positive reputation and image of the institution

The step-by-step approach in sustainable event management is especially interesting for Serbia and the regions where social and environmental awareness is still in the inception phase in the general population, and where there are obvious market limitations in terms of environment-friendly products or socially responsible companies.

Promoting and implementing activities that reduce the negative impact of events may become a driving force in Serbia, resulting in perspective and behavior changes not only among event organizers but also among suppliers, supporting businesses, participants, policymakers, and the wider public.

When planning your event, introduce a step-by-step approach. Start with small changes. Apply low-cost, immediate and feasible measures.

When applying the step-by-step approach, organizers should start with small-scale events, like staff gatherings, working lunches and steering committee meetings, and then gradually expand the scope to external events, providing positive examples and contributing to the global environmental and climate goals. By applying the simple basic steps, organizers can introduce the **minimum standards in event organization**, kick-start the future process, and demonstrate the differences that could be made (by following these steps). Any socially and/or environmentally responsible institution or organization should know the event's goals, purpose, expected number of participants, possible risks, and challenges.

IX International Energy and Investment Days (IEID) in Novi Sad

During the planning phase, the tailor-made checklist has been distributed to the event planners and organizers. The current sustainability practices have been assessed along with the level of interest for introducing more sustainable measures.

Based on the assessment and available resources (venue, time, budget, market conditions), the event has been designed to enable the introduction of immediate, low-cost measures that are feasible. The main goal of the agreed and applied measures was to reduce negative environmental impact at the venue and to raise the awareness of the organizers, participants, visitors, exhibitors and policymakers on sustainability (it is estimated to approximately 1,000 people).

Small, low-cost changes can be introduced, like reducing the use of materials, especially paper and plastic, and improving the waste management efficiency by applying the 4Rs (refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle).

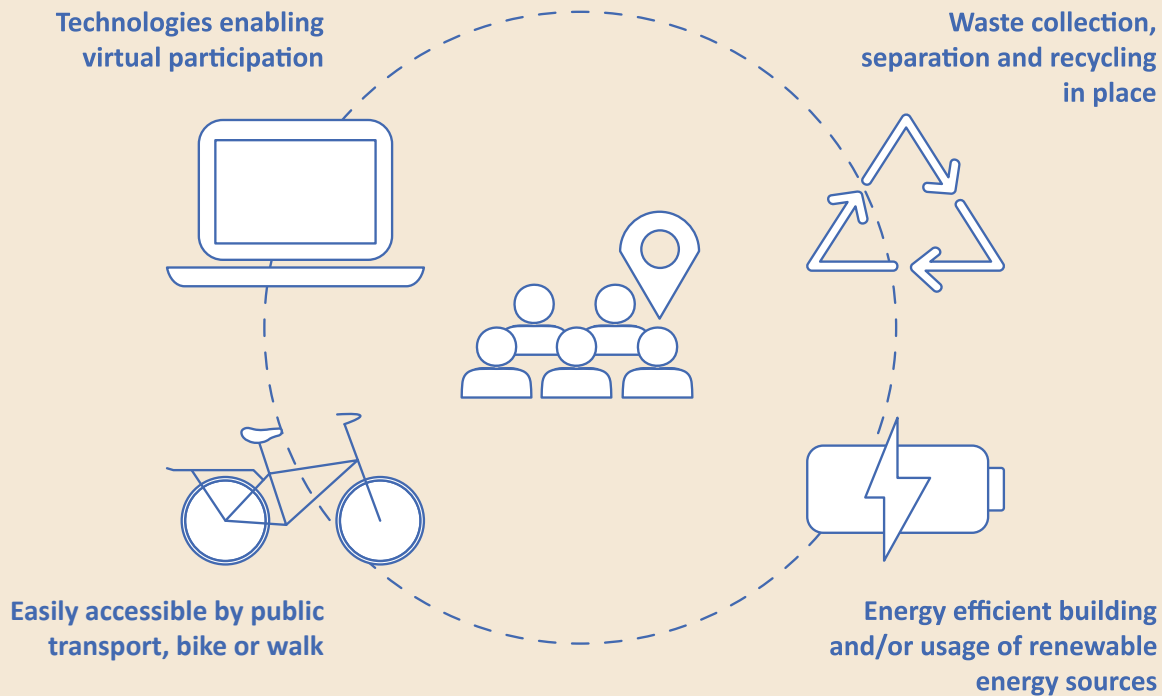
For massive events like fairs, exhibitions, sports games and festivals, waste management remains the biggest challenge, as well as participants' travel arrangements due to the large carbon and environmental footprint they can make. Therefore, for large-scale events, an additional, specific set of sustainability criteria needs to be developed.

2.3.1 THE VENUE

Upon deciding that a physical meeting will be held, organizers must select the venue in line with the various sustainability criteria.

In short, when selecting the venue, at least the minimum sustainability standards should be applied (as pictured below):

- Central location and/or easy access by public transport or alternative transportation (bike, walking),
- Waste management in line with the 4Rs (refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle),
- Energy efficiency and energy savings,
- IT support enabling virtual and distant participation.



Picture 4: Minimal sustainability standards for events

Based on EU Guidelines for Sustainable Meetings and Events

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/pdf/other/EC_Guide_Sustainable_Meetings_and_Events.pdf

2.3.2 MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT OF ATTENDEES

Travel is the main source of emissions generated during an event, which is why **selecting the event location** requires special attention. The selected destination should be centrally located, so that attendees may “meet in the middle”, and it should be easily accessible by public transport (preferably by train or bus). When air travel is necessary, a combination of public transport and direct flights should be used, so that the carbon emissions remain as low as possible.

Organizers should select the location based on the participants’ possibility to use environment-friendly modes of transport. At the same time, organizers should encourage speakers and attendees to use electric or hybrid cars, bicycles and public transport. The parking space for bicycles and electric scooters, or the availability of chargers for electric/hybrid vehicles at the location should also be taken into consideration. Organizers should also promote and support carpooling or car-sharing. They might also consider organizing mass/joint transport for attendees to/from the venue or incentivize the use of alternative means of transportation. It is also possible

to introduce compensation for GHG emissions from participants' travel. All these actions must be further used for promotional and awareness-raising purposes.

When air travel is necessary, CO2 emissions for each itinerary should be calculated, and the one generating the least emissions should be selected.

Event location

A careful selection of the destination can substantially reduce emissions. For example, the standard sustainability measures of an event with 4,000 participants can bring a reduction of 10.5 metric tons of CO2 (equivalent to taking two cars off the road for a year); adding to that the sustainable choice for the destination, these two factors can result in a final reduction of 669 metric tons CO2 , or 134 cars).

Source: UUA/MeetGreen, 2011. <http://greendestinations.blogspot.com/2011/08/not-sexy-but-effective.html>

Another approach to venue selection can include social and economic aspects. For example, organizers can choose to have a meeting in a less developed region, despite the higher costs of transport, because it would boost the local economy. In this case, the overall footprint might not be reduced, but the event would support the local development and leave a positive legacy.

Organizers should see if a venue complies with the existing protocols, standards and procedures, for example ISO environmental standards (ISO 14001 or EMAS), or

sustainability standards, and choose those venues that are already certified or apply sustainable operations (e.g. Green Key, EU Ecolabel) or an environmental management system (e.g. EMAS).

Event organizers in Serbia should give advantage to hotels and other hospitality objects that have received the "Green Key" certificate – the international "eco-label award to accommodations and other hospitality facilities that commit to sustainable business practices"⁵. In Serbia, hotels with this certificate are obliged to comply with a number of sustainability standards, including environmental management systems, education and training of staff, promotion and outreach to guests and clients, strict rules related to water, energy and waste management, etc.⁶

When already certified location or venue is available (like the "Green Key" objects in Serbia) those should be given the advantage, since they are already in line with sustainable standards.

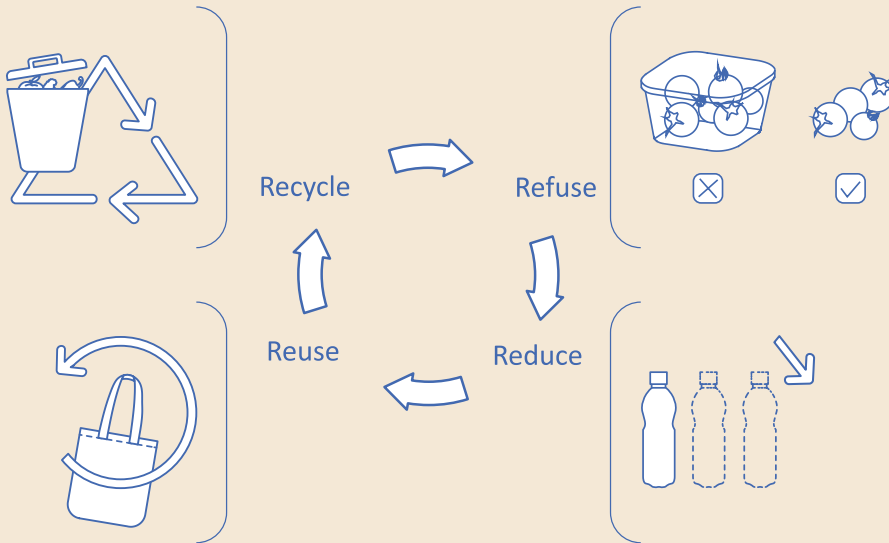
Event organizers should not only consider the existing practices, but also discuss with relevant actors and management how to initiate steps, actions and options that can improve the current conditions and make the venue itself more sustainable.

5 <https://www.greenkey.global/>

6 More details on the Green Key implementation in Serbia can be found at: <http://ambassadors-env.com/project/zeleni-kljuc-medunarodna-eko-sertifikacija-turistickih-objekata/>

2.4 EVENT WASTE MANAGEMENT

Events tend to generate immense amounts of waste. Depending on the event purpose, the role of organizers should always be to recommend the implementation of the 4Rs principle of 'refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle' in waste management.



This is the philosophy. Organizers need to consider what they are buying, how the amounts can be reduced, for what purposes it can be reused, and how it can be disposed of. This is important for events, especially the large-scale ones, since they can generate significant amounts of waste, particularly plastic and food.

The 4Rs are the roadmap for waste-conscious events. Event organizers should consider

how to apply this principle in all phases of event organization. When planning an event, organizers can make smart choices to decrease the amount of waste by refusing wasteful, pollution-generating products (like single-use or individually packed items, or those in plastic wraps, boxes, and cartons). In addition, they can reduce the number of printouts, and promotional and merchandising items, and select goods and products that can be recycled or reused or serve as a resource for future events.

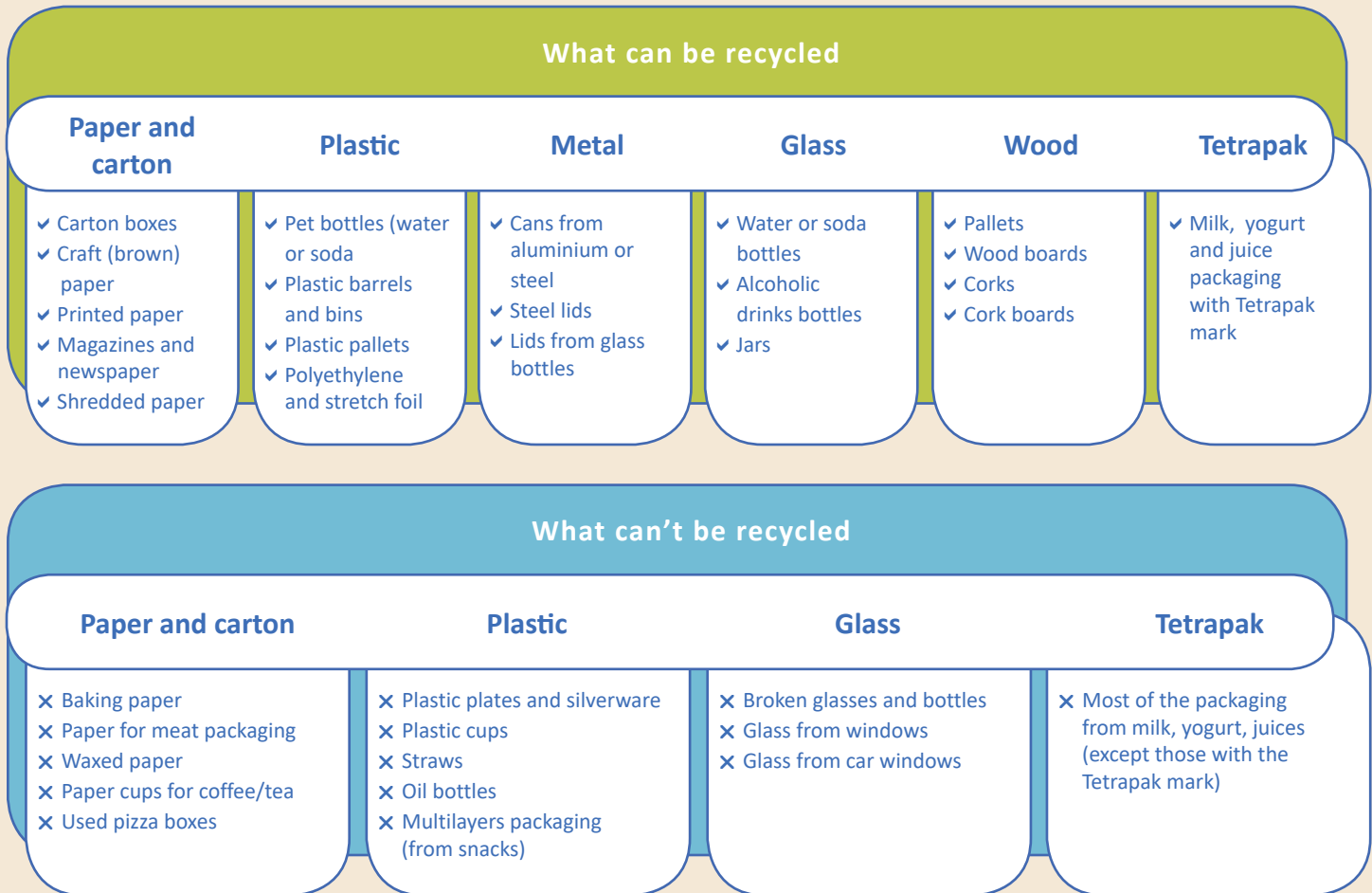
In the event preparation phase, organizers should implement the **paperless principle**, i.e. electronic dissemination for the following activities:

- informing, inviting or confirming (RSVP) participation,
- promotion and registration,
- preparation and dissemination of agendas,
- maps, background materials and/or other necessary information and logistic details,
- e-ticketing.

Follow the principle of **minimal waste generation** at the event. Eliminate the usage of all single-use items like plastic bags, spoons, bottles or cups, and replace them with reusable or compostable alternatives. Alternatives to single-use materials are glass bottles, water containers, textile or paper bags, and low carbon impact biodegradable tableware, made from renewable raw materials such as starch, orange peels, corn oil, and plants.

Make smart choices when planning and procuring items and food for the event. Avoid excessive or single packaging and one time used items.

Event organizers should always strive to further reduce waste at events. In this regard, they can make smart procurement choices by avoiding unnecessary packaging and wrapping, especially when it comes to food and single sachets of sugar, salt or coffee.



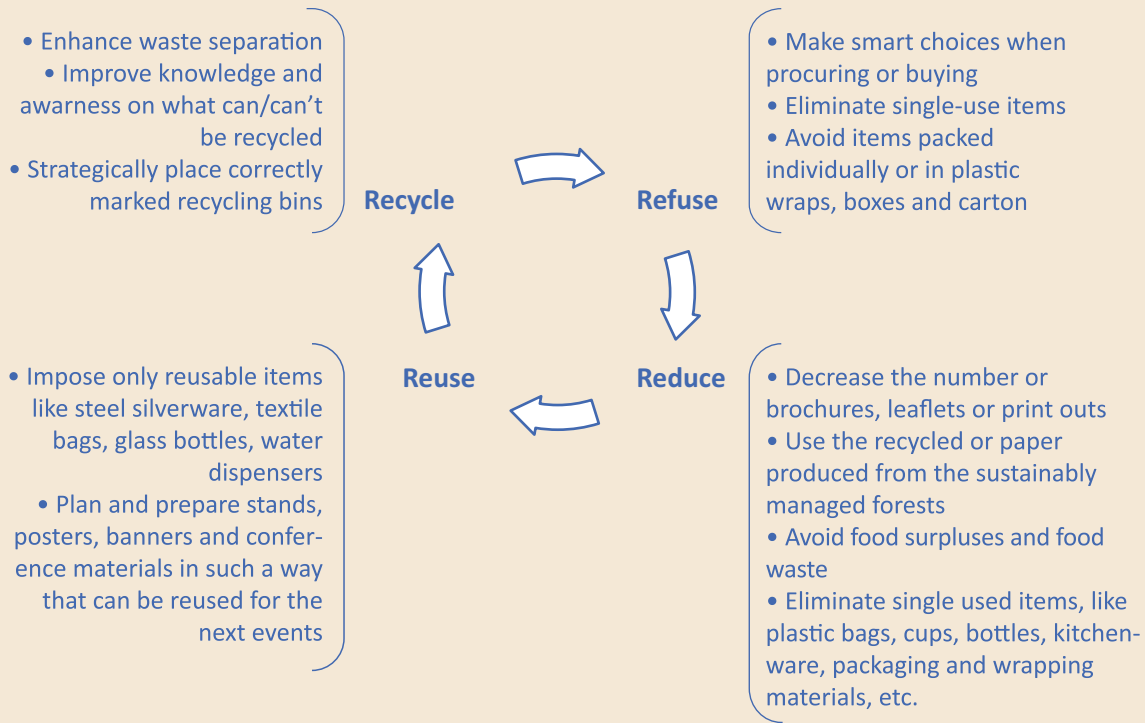
Picture 5: Recyclable and non-recyclable items⁷

During the event, organizers must impose and additionally emphasize the principle of waste separation. In addition to ensuring recycling, they should use the opportunity to educate the wider public about disposable materials and waste management, the 4Rs and zero-waste principles, etc.

Since large-scale events generate large amounts of waste, these events are the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the waste reduction and recycling practices. For large-scale events like festivals, sporting events and concerts, where significant amounts of waste can be generated in a short time, organizers should consider having a dedicated team that will inform and educate the visitors, but also collect, empty and sort the waste that tends to pile up quickly.

In order to implement the 4Rs in waste management, organizers should conduct at least the following activities (as shown below):

⁷ Based on Guide for Packaging Waste developed by Sekopak, <https://sekopak.com/vodic-za-ambalazni-otpad-sta-mozete-da-recikirate/>



2.4.1 FOOD MANAGEMENT

Unused food is more than “just waste”. Once sent to landfills, bio-waste releases greenhouse gases such as methane, directly causing global warming. Besides, all the energy used to produce such food is also wasted.

Minimizing food waste should be one of event management goals. Also, event organizers need to consider, plan and implement strategies for bio-waste treatment and food surplus management during the event.

Food surplus

By carefully planning food quantities, organizers can significantly reduce food surplus at events. The selection and amount of preordered food should be in line with the number and needs of attendees. The food selection and way of serving (small portions, finger food, fresh and local options) can reduce the unnecessary leftovers at events. Organizers can also see if and how food surplus can be donated, composted, or fed to livestock.

When there is a composting practice at the venue/location, the event’s attendees should be educated and encouraged to separate food waste and support the composting efforts.

Food waste or bio-waste

Biodegradable waste or bio-waste is defined as “biodegradable garden and park waste, food and kitchen waste from households, restaurants, caterers and retail premises, and comparable waste from food processing plants”. It does not include forestry or agricultural residues, manure, sewage sludge, or other

LESS IS MORE!

Plan your food at the event carefully, and resourceful. Serve local, fresh and seasonal, avoid surpluses, and enforce composting.

biodegradable waste such as natural textiles, paper or processed wood. It also excludes those by-products of food production that never become waste.⁸

When food is served, it is crucial to avoid the use of disposable items, reduce packaging, and ensure the appropriate collection and recycling or disposal of waste.



How to manage food

- Plan meals carefully and based on the number of participants
- Engage local producers and farmers
- Use buffet style or finger food serving
- Compose menu containing healthy options like vegetarian or vegan food
- Avoid serving meat and fish
- Serve fresh and wholesome food like whole grains, vegetables and proteins
- Reduce food packaging
- Enhance separation of food waste
- Explore and arrange with local organizations specialized in distributing edible leftovers from events

Picture 6: Food management at the event

In Serbia, in the context of event organization, the knowledge on waste separation, bio-waste and composting is low, and the practice is underdeveloped. Therefore, organizers should use every opportunity, including various events, to raise awareness and educate the event industry representatives, but also the event attendees, the general public and other stakeholders.

What can be composted

Fruits and vegetables

- ✓ Fruits
- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Green salads

Meat, dairy and eggs

- ✓ Sandwiches and burgers
- ✓ Eggshells
- ✓ Meat and bones
- ✓ Pizza

Grains

- ✓ Bread, pastries and bakery products (croissants, bagels, donuts)
- ✓ Pasta and other grains

Picture 7: Compostable food⁹

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/compost/index.htm>

⁹ Based on the Green Events Guide developed by the Penn Sustainability Office, Penn University, <https://www.sustainability.upenn.edu/resources/guides-manuals/green-event-guide>

2.4.2 ADDITIONAL WASTE CRITERIA AND ZERO-WASTE EVENTS

“A zero-waste event is not accomplished by merely adding recycling and composting bins. The key to a zero-waste event is careful planning so that all materials used and discarded are reusable, recyclable or compostable.”¹⁰

The zero-waste principle implies a society without waste, where all materials are constantly recycled, often changing their purpose as they move through the cycle. What was surplus in one part of a system becomes food or fuel in another part of the system. The zero-waste event approach aims to design waste out of the system, improving the management of material flows, so that all materials used at an event can keep being useful in the future.

Even if the zero-waste principle started becoming more promoted in recent years, it can still be hard to simply organize a zero-waste event. At a zero-waste event, for example, there’s no distribution of printed material or single-use items, and therefore trashcans can be completely removed and replaced with recycling and composting containers.

However, organizers shouldn’t miss any opportunity to promote and raise awareness at the event, and they should introduce every feasible measure and action that can reduce waste. For example, they can start by incorporating only the 4Rs principle, and later, if there’s opportunity and interest for an advanced measure, they can make it so that only recyclable and compostable materials are distributed at the event.

2.5 RESOURCE EFFICIENCY (ENERGY AND WATER SAVINGS)

The amount of energy and resources used to prepare and conduct an event is an important element in ensuring event sustainability. When selecting the event location, organizers should see if it is possible to use natural, open spaces. If inside areas are used, advantage should be given to the venues with more natural light inside their rooms and lobbies.

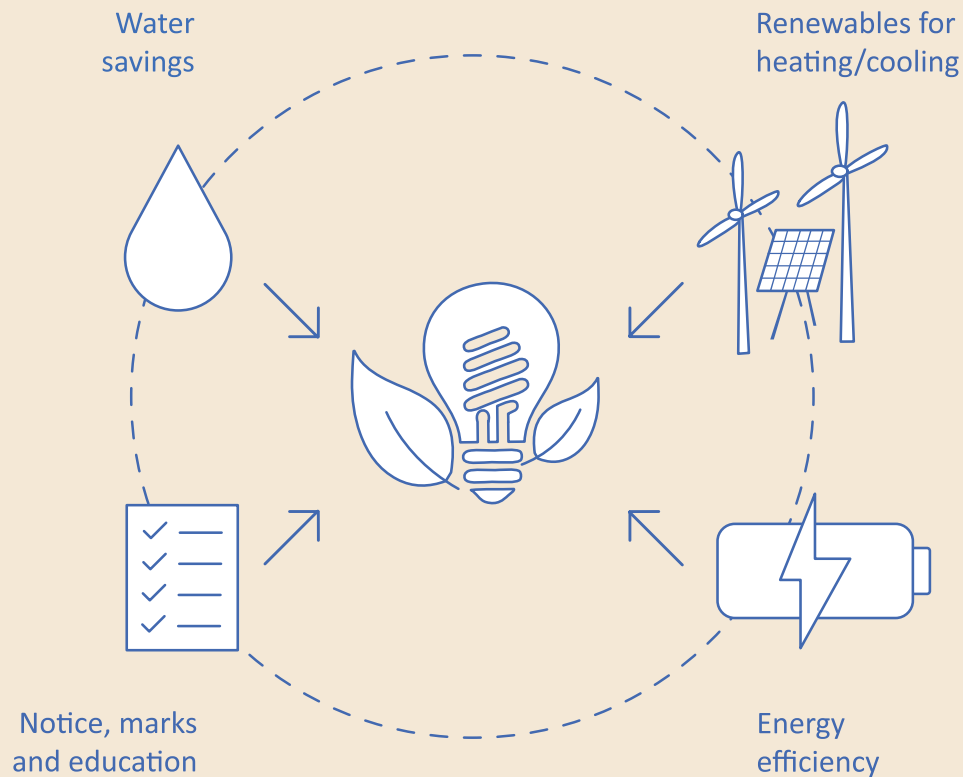
If a venue with sustainable features is not available, it is recommended that organizers, in cooperation with the venue’s management, propose activities or interventions that may reduce electricity consumption, for example. There are simple and easily applicable energy efficiency measures that can be introduced to this purpose. These measures include moderate usage of air-conditioning, heating or cooling equipment, use of energy-saving light bulbs, low-energy appliances and equipment, lighting timers, incorporated sleeping modes on equipment, etc.

In Serbia, every public building (hotels, sports halls or conference centers) is required to have an energy passport¹¹, providing information on thermal energy consumption for heating, and classifying the buildings into 8 categories, from A+ to G. Therefore, organizers should seek buildings

10 According to the Zero Waste Guidelines for Events and Festivals, available at: https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/853544.Zero_Waste_Guidelines_for_Events_and_Festivals.pdf

11 According to the Rulebook on conditions, content and procedure for issuing a certificate on energy conditions of buildings (Pravilnik o uslovima, sadržini i načinu izdavanja sertifikata o energetske svojstvima zgrada, Službeni Glasnik RS, br 69-2012)

of which the energy passport is B or higher. If a hotel or a building has obtained the Green Key certificate, the energy efficiency criteria and measures have already been incorporated.



Picture 8: How to save resources at the event

Event organizers must use every opportunity to inform the event attendees about energy efficiency and savings. Every measure taken to save resources should be noted and highlighted. Organizers must ensure that the attendees understand and proactively support the measures. The measures may be simple, such as switching off lights and equipment upon use or controlling the room temperature.

Organizers should also see if any renewable energy source is used for heating or cooling the venue and promote it as a contribution to sustainability.

In addition, organizers need to consider water consumption at the venue, in particular during the event. The participants should be encouraged to refill their water bottles. If there are no water-saving measures at the venue, organizers can, in cooperation with the event management, propose and introduce certain measures. In the Green Key-certified buildings, strict criteria on water use are imposed. These include, for example, water consumption of dishwashers and toilets, or types of water pipes, taps, and showers. The wastewater treatment should also be considered when possible.

For resource savings, it is important to engage attendees at the event. By applying the learning-by-doing approach, organizers can not only ensure immediate savings, but also enable longer-

ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE!

Encourage delegates and participants at the event to actively contribute to the resource savings. Make clear notes within the venue on how they can save electricity, water, energy...

term behavioral changes. In this engagement exercise, however, organizers must avoid turning this into a burden for the attendees, because this would achieve the opposite effect. It is crucial to provide the attendees with appropriate, timely and clear instructions on what to do and why. Organizers should ensure that all the efforts to reduce water and energy consumption are announced – they should also encourage the attendees to do the same and reward them, if possible.

2.6 PROMOTION AND MERCHANDISING

Before the event, organizers should carefully consider if the promotional materials are absolutely necessary, and if they can be distributed online, partially or completely.

It is important that organizers apply the sustainability criteria in planning and designing promotional activities, materials, merchandising, and other tools that will be used at the event. All distributed items should be aligned with the concept of sustainability, climate-smart and environment-friendly, generating minimal carbon footprint or positively impacting the socioeconomic aspects without harming the environment.

If it is not possible to have an event without any printed material, organizers should reassess the needs and reduce the number of printouts. For printing, organizers should use either recycled paper or paper produced from sustainably managed forests (FSC certification¹²).

Water savings

At the Oracle Corp Annual Software Conference 2008, instead of 500,000 bottles of water, the switch was made to the refill stations with 20-liters containers of water from which attendees refilled the reusable bottles received at registration. The switch saved 1.5 million dollars, which was reinvested in the event next year.

Source: <https://www.businesstravelnews.com/Business-Travel-Agencies/Visions-Of-Green-Oracle-Heralds-Eco-Events-Advances-Its-Quest-For-Zero-Waste-Conference?ida=Technology&a=proc>

Promote smartly:

- Choose reusable items (bags, folders, containers), those with less carbon footprint
- Use eco-friendly and useful promo gifts
- Engage local and small producers or social entrepreneurs
- Highlight sustainability additionally and promote sustainability of the products
- Promote the purpose of the event
- Choose items that can be reused at the next event



Picture 9: Promotional manget for the event “Citizens Build Smart Cities” organized by UNDP Serbia

Gifts or promo items for attendees should be used to highlight the sustainability issues, which opens a lot of space for creativity and innovation. Organizers should avoid the typical promotional materials: bags, pencils, badges, banners, office supplies and textile items made from plastic or non-environment-friendly materials. Instead, they should create, design and distribute items made from reusable and recyclable materials that can demonstrate sustainability and achieve substantial environmental benefits.

2.7 COMMUNICATION

Sustainability promotion

At the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Conference, which took place in Dunkirk, France, in 2010, more than 1,800 participants could visit a sustainable exhibition, where all materials used for decoration and signage were environmentally-friendly: canvases were made from regionally-produced plant fibers; the furniture was entirely made of cardboard; and, as decoration, local plants were used, which were later replanted by a local firm. All stands had LCD screens to allow exhibitors to make presentations and show videos without using paper.

Source:

<http://www.dunkerque2010.org/en/greening-of-the-event/index.html>

Communication is a crucial part of promoting sustainability. When communicating with their stakeholders, organizers should always present clear arguments, reasons, and sustainability goals. Potential suppliers should be involved at the early stage, as to influence procurement decisions or introduce sustainable and green procurement procedures into the event organization. This is a crucial element of awareness-raising and knowledge building, which can demonstrate how events can contribute to the sustainability goals.

Communication is crucial for the success of sustainable events, from planning and implementation, to reporting. In each phase of event management, it requires thoughtful messages adjusted to the needs of the audience and the event's purpose. Being the driver of change, the communication strategy for a sustainable event shouldn't aim only to pass the message, but also to contribute to education and persuasion, building awareness and understanding among the actors and partners involved.

Communicate your sustainability:

- Communicate the expected positive impacts of the event
- Develop short, simple and clear messages
- Use communication channels adequate to the needs of the target audience
- Adjust the message to the audience (content, format, timing)
- Be careful of the greenwashing
- For the large/scale events use large scale promotional campaigns
- Use social media to additionally raise the awareness on sustainability issues
- Design logo and introduce green symbols that can be easily recognized
- Cooperate with suppliers, sponsors and partners to jointly promote and spread the word on the event
- Explain to attendees and help them understand what changes have been made and why: include them as much as possible in the process
- Train the staff if necessary (cleaning services or kitchen staff on how to compost)
- Communicate the achievements and effects of the event with the public

It's always recommended – and especially for large-scale events – to develop a Communication Plan that will lay out all the communication strategy elements: goals, partners, target audience, key messages, means for transferring the message and a precise timeframe.

Organizers should be wary of greenwashing when promoting and communicating the “environmental friendliness” of the event. Greenwashing describes the practice of using potentially deceptive information to present a product, an event or an event-related product as more environmentally responsible than it really is.¹³ This is bad practice, and greenwashing can harm the event, hindering trust and negatively impacting the event promotion. The event attendees and the general public should always be properly and accurately informed.

3. SUSTAINABLE EVENTS PRACTICES IN SERBIA

In Serbia, special attention should be paid to communication and promotion activities, aiming to reach the consensus of introducing at least the minimum sustainable criteria in event management. Sustainable and green procurement practices, eco-certification and similar concepts can trigger positive developments. These processes can contribute to the overall efforts of promoting event sustainability, consequently raising awareness about the positive impacts of events on the environment and climate change issues.

This is particularly important for societies like Serbia, where eco-friendly products are still not widely present in the market, and green procurement practices are in their initial phase of implementation.

Green procurement practices could support sustainable events by promoting the development of eco-friendly products and goods in the market, but this can also work the other way around. Organizers can increase the market demands and motivate suppliers to think about more sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives by introducing sustainable criteria into the procurement of goods, products, or services for their events. These can include products like paper, textile, food and beverages, packaging, hygiene and cleaning services, IT equipment and furniture.

Take immediate, feasible and low-cost actions for planning and managing both small- and large-scale events in Serbia.

- Go paperless
- Disregard single - use plastic
- Promote 4Rs waste philosophy: refuse, reuse, reduce and recycle.

The new Public Procurement Development Program for Serbia (2019-2023)¹⁴, adopted in December 2019, relies on the EU priorities. It emphasizes green public procurement practices and inclusive development that includes improved social cohesion and poverty reduction, facilitates the participation of SMEs in public procurement procedures, and encourages the procurement of innovative products, services and works. Green public procurement should be given more space, since it is the instrument that can indirectly ensure the contribution of the state to the environmental policy goals. Certain sustainability

criteria in public procurement have been incorporated into a specific goal on promoting and supporting social and environmental aspects of public procurement processes and innovations.

13 <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/sustainable-event-management>

14 <http://www.ujn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/1.-UJN-Program-UJN-2019-2023..pdf>

However, the demand for sustainable events in Serbia is still not high, meaning that most of the environment-friendly products in Serbia are faced with procurement challenges. The elements of sustainability that are introduced are rare, but still important: for example, recycling at music festivals like Exit or Beer Fest in Belgrade, or stronger presence of organic, social and local producers and small farmers at local food fairs. The Green Key certificate has been granted to 5 venues in Serbia, and this number will rise in the upcoming years, as demand for more sustainable, alternative and eco-friendly actions and solutions becomes implemented and recognized in the society.

4. SUSTAINABLE EVENT STEPS

