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Sustainable events

A guideline for academic events, conferences and congresses
at the University of Vienna



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1. Introduction

For Conference and Event Management at the University of Vienna, sustainability is not only a trend or a pure mandate that must be implemented, but a guiding principle for all areas of life. This guideline shows numerous ways how eco-friendly events can become a reality. This includes 'classical' elements, such as waste management, travelling to and from an event, criteria for the event venue itself as well as catering and restaurants, procurement, communication and social aspects.

Vienna is one of the favourite destinations for international conferences and congresses. The University of Vienna hosts more than 1,500 events every year. These include approximately 200 international and national conferences and congresses. Every year, approximately 100,000 event participants and attendants visit the University of Vienna in addition to regular study operations.

***“What we do today will determine
what the world looks like tomorrow.”***

— Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

The present guideline serves to demonstrate several of the manifold and easy opportunities to make events more sustainable and to encourage people to implement these opportunities.

The Conference and Event Management service unit is the University of Vienna's 'conference and event node'. The team of Conference and Event Management supports you in planning and implementing events and coordinates all workflows making your event a success. From the first planning phase to the de-briefing, the team has location, equipment, technology, personnel and much more in hand. Conference and Event Management pays particular attention to approaches and ways of implementation that are as sustainable as possible in accordance with the [Development Plan of the University of Vienna](#).

2. Sustainable measures for events and fairs

An event does not need to be a certified [Öko Event](#) or [Green Meeting](#) to be sustainable. When organising events, fairs or specialist exhibitions, acting sustainably already starts with the responsible use of resources. New stands for fairs should be produced in a fair and CO₂-neutral manner, ideally by local enterprises that are probably also certified (such as the company [Syma](#)). After the fair, the stands should be re-used as often as possible. The number of promotional gifts and give-away articles used is minimised as far as possible or you give away only those that meet sustainability criteria. This means that you can contribute to sustainability in many areas, also without a certification. You can start with questions about necessity, especially with regard to printed materials, congress materials and give-away articles/promotional gifts (for further information, see [2.5](#)).

Following the list of criteria of UZ62 Green Meetings and Green Events, prepared by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism in cooperation with the Austrian Consumers' Association, in this section, we would like to emphasise the most important points when planning and implementing events, fairs and specialist exhibitions.

2.1. Communication

If you decide to hold your event according to the rules for Green Events, you should inform all persons involved (team, guests, sponsors, exhibitors, later also participants) about the fact that and, especially, which sustainability aspects and environmental standards are applied when you plan and implement your event.

2.2. Social aspects

In addition to logistics and organisation, sustainability also includes the social aspects of an event:

- **Diversity:** Packages for retired persons and discounts for students are an optimal supplement to the early-bird offer and on-site registration.
- **Accessibility:** A still often neglected topic is accessibility. This does not only include the building in which the event is taking place (see entry options and moving within the building) but also event technology (see induction loops).
- **Social programme:** Regional cultural events and excursions to nature as well as social and cultural initiatives are alternatives to 'classical' side events, such as a dinner at a Heurigen wine tavern.
- **Choosing speakers:** It is very important to select speakers according to gender fairness and diversity. Moreover, it is essential to use gender-sensitive language and to follow accessibility guidelines in communication.

2.3. Mobility and climate protection

2.3.1. Information about arriving by public transport

Can people reach the event venue by public transport? If yes, you should provide information about arriving by [public means of transport](#):

- Arriving by train, public transport or bicycle, including frequent connections, walking and driving times
- Bicycle racks and [WienMobil bicycle rental](#)
- CO₂ compensation when booking flights, e.g. using [Atmosfair](#)
- E-sharing pilot project Share Me through the [Wien Mobil app](#)
- [Green Taxi](#)

This information should be easily accessible through the navigation menu on your event website.

2.3.2. Mobility for side events

If possible, choose locations for your side events that can be reached by public transport, by bicycle or even by foot.

2.3.3. CO₂ compensation

If CO₂ emissions cannot be avoided, you should at least take measures to reduce emissions as far as possible. Offer your guests a [CO₂ compensation option](#) (e.g. when booking flights). For the team on site, you can arrange for a train trip or a team bus. For longer distances, you can also cater for CO₂ offsetting.

2.3.4. Incentives for arriving by public transport

Try to motivate your guests to use public transport when travelling to the event and during the entire event duration, for example, by:

- Including a public transport pass in the conference fee;
- Offering a ticket variant for public transport;
- Arranging for bike rentals;
- Arranging for shuttle services;
- Providing information about public transport (timetables, passes, etc.) and bike rental outlets.

2.4. Accommodation

If you are offering hotel rooms, you should ideally offer rooms in certified hotels. You may also inform your participants and guests about hotels that have, e.g. the following certifications:

- [Austrian Ecolabel for hotels](#)
- [European Ecolabel](#)
- [EMAS](#)

2.5. Event venue

The majority of the locations of the University of Vienna can be easily reached by public transport. If you are using an event location that is not at the University, you should also consider its reachability by public transport.

Certified venues

More and more locations of the University of Vienna are certified according to the criteria of the [Austrian Ecolabel](#).

Certified locations are:

- Main Building of the University of Vienna
- Campus of the University of Vienna (except for: Old Chapel due to limited accessibility)
- Oskar-Morgenstern-Platz 1
- University of Vienna Biology Building (UBB)

The University of Vienna's building at Oskar-Morgenstern-Platz 1 is a certified Green Building according to the EU standard at the time of opening.

The new University of Vienna Biology Building (UBB) has been awarded the klimaaktiv SILBER label. [klimaaktiv](#) is the climate protection initiative of the [Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology \(BMK\)](#).

2.6. Printed materials, congress materials, give-away articles/promotional gifts

Not only for many event organisers but also for many participants it is hard not having printed materials, congress materials (such as name badges, folders and bags) as well as give-away articles or promotional materials at events. They are simply part of them. Especially in times of digitalisation and sustainability you should really ask yourself if printed materials and congress materials are actually needed. You may also think about alternatives.

2.6.1. Printed materials

You can easily avoid printed materials nowadays. If you cannot avoid them, you should select a printing shop according to sustainable offers (eco-label according to ISO Type I, 100 % recycling paper, at least bleached free from chlorine (TCF), listed in the database for ecological printing paper by [Ökokauf Wien](#)).

***Please note:** FSC or PEFC certification alone is not enough. When producing printed roll-ups, banners or flags, you should use subjects that are not too specific in order to be able to re-use them in the future.*

Alternatives to printed materials are:

- Online versions on your website
- [Event app](#) of the University of Vienna
- Electronic flip books, e-poster
- Digital roll-ups, e.g. by [koke](#) (in German)

2.6.2. Congress materials

In addition to printed materials, you can also avoid the use of or reduce the number of congress materials (conference bags, name badges, give-away articles/promotional gifts). Also here, you should ask yourself what is really necessary. After you have clarified this question, you can resort to low-resource and eco-friendly alternatives in procurement.

- **Conference bags:** If you really need conference bags, you may use bags made of 100 % recycling material or of natural, environmentally friendly materials (e.g. felt, organic cotton, hemp).
- **Re-use lanyards and (name) badges:** If you place return boxes at a visible space, participants can return their lanyards and badges at the end of the event.

***Hygiene tip:** Clean the lanyards before re-using them for your next event.*

***Tip:** You can donate remaining materials, such as conference bags, notepads, pens or banners for re-use and processing (upcycling) ([Nachbarinnen](#); [Wörkerei](#); [Caritas](#); [Gabarage](#); [ZuKi](#)).*

2.6.3. Give-away articles/promotional gifts

Similar to printed materials and congress materials, you should also ask yourself if give-away articles and promotional gifts are really necessary:

- If give-away articles/promotional gifts are really necessary, you can use eco-friendly products or products that have been produced in a social project or are supporting a social project (by persons with impairments by [Caritas Shop](#), [VinziRast Chance Shop](#), Weltladen, etc.).
- Ideally, you should avoid give-away articles/promotional gifts that cause large amounts of waste or waste having a negative impact on the environment (e.g. non-returnable packages for beverages, products with batteries or rechargeable batteries) as they are not really sustainable.
- Give-away articles/promotional gifts should not be packaged individually and should be made of eco-friendly or natural materials or carry a recognised label (e.g. Umweltzeichen, organic label, Fair Trade label).

You can find organic promotional gifts, e.g. at [GreenGimix data base](#) (in German), which should ideally also have a recognised label, such as:

- Austrian Ecolabel
- Organic label
- Fair Trade
- Blue Angel
- bluesign PRODUCT
- GOTS label

***Tip:** You can order different eco-friendly congress materials by the University of Vienna with the [online order form](#) (pens, folder, notepads, name badges, paper bags).*

2.6.4. Transporting materials

Environmental protection and sustainability do not only apply to the production of printed materials and congress materials but also to their transport.

- **Delivery trips:** You can optimise the delivery trips and reduce the number of materials to be transported and stored.
- **Transport:** In addition to [transport by train](#) there are shipping companies that adhere to green logistics principles, strive to reduce CO₂ emissions and cater for climate-efficient tours (e.g. [DHL GoGreen environmental protection programme](#); [Cargo Green Carrier certification programme](#)).

2.7. Decoration and floral arrangements

Another topic that is of relevance for sustainability is decoration and floral arrangements. If you need floral arrangements for your event, you can use potted plants instead of cut flowers (you can also rent them, for example from [Toifl Blumen](#)).

If you need any (other) decoration, you may use re-usable decoration made of eco-friendly or natural materials (e.g. of local timber, natural fibre), if possible, produced in local/regional workshops and/or by local/regional artists.

***Tip:** For gala dinners and banquets, small potted plants are a suitable flower decoration on the tables (e.g. pots with herbs). If you are holding a national event with national guests, you can gift these plants as a small give-away to them at the end of the event, in case they are not rented.*

2.8. Catering/gastronomy

The most sustainable catering is plant-based, organic, seasonal and local, in that order. In order to offer the most sustainable catering/food possible at events, the following points should be taken into consideration:

2.8.1. Food

- Mainly plant-based dishes
- Sourcing of products from organic farming
- Seasonality and locality of the products

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-023-00795-w>

<https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>

<https://www.fibl.org/de/infothek/meldung/fibl-studie-startclim>

2.8.2. Beverages

- Replacing still mineral water with tap water in carafes, however, always adhering to the current safety and hygiene provisions
- Buying regional and seasonal (non-alcoholic) beverages (e.g. apple, grape, elder juice; beer, wine)

Please note: Vienna is supplied with [mountain spring water](#) from the Alps to the south of Vienna which has supreme drinking water quality. You can inform your participants about this in advance on your event website and/or during (on-site) registration.

Alternatively, you can rent water dispensers from, e.g. [aqua alpina](#), at which participants can re-fill their own water bottles.

Tip: On the website of Conference and Event Management, under [External suppliers](#), you can find all catering firms with which Conference and Event Management has already cooperated, including those certified with the Austrian Ecolabel.

2.8.3. Dishes

- Use dishes made of pottery or re-usable dishes; disposable cups, if needed, should be recyclable or biodegradable.
- Offer a rolling buffet or sustainable brownbag lunches instead of lunch boxes made of plastic.

2.8.4. Electronic devices

Electronic devices that are necessary (e.g. refrigerator) should belong to the highest energy efficiency category. Coffee machines using capsules should be avoided. If you absolutely need a coffee machine with capsules, you should ideally use recyclable or bio-degradable capsules.

2.8.5. TafelBox – Taking food home instead of throwing it away

A constant issue related to catering or a buffet is the fate of remaining food and beverages (in the form of so-called ‘opened bottles’). With [TafelBox](#) (in German), your guests and employees can pack remaining food themselves and take it home.

Please note: A TafelBox costs EUR 0.50. You can order it from Conference and Event Management at the University of Vienna. For each TafelBox, 20 cents are donated to the non-profit Tafel organisations saving food. With 1 euro, the Tafel organisations can supply 10 persons in poverty with saved food. Alternatively, you can agree with the catering firm to donate remaining food or re-use it, e.g. in projects such as [Too Good To Go](#).

2.8.6. Waste

The provision of a sufficient number of waste bins contributes to correct waste separation, and thus, disposal.

2.9. Technical equipment

Sustainability also applies to technical equipment, especially energy efficiency:

- **Lighting and projection:** Using LED technology reduces the generation of heat.
- **Buying new equipment:** Certifications allude to the energy efficiency of devices ([TCO-certified](#), environmental label according to ISO Type I, listed at [topprodukte.at](#) (in German), etc.).

3. Corporate social responsibility

Numerous organisations assume social responsibility. They are voluntarily contributing to sustainable development, thereby meeting ecological and social requirements and going beyond legal requirements. As part of your event, you can support a social and/or ecological national or international project in the region.

In the following, we list some options:

- **Dialog im Dunklen:** The only exhibition where you see nothing. The guides help you to find a way through 'blind reality', characterised by a wealth of different sensory impressions. You learn how a visual impairment affects other sensory channels in everyday life.
- **Shades Tours Vienna:** Shades Tours Vienna organises moving tours addressing the topics of poverty and homelessness, flight and integration as well as addiction and drugs in Vienna and Graz.
- **SozialMarie:** SozialMarie is a prize for social innovation awarded to 15 extraordinary projects in Central and Eastern Europe every year.
- **Spendeninfo:** You are supported in finding a suitable project of an Austrian aid organisation to which you can make a donation.
- **ZUKI – Zukunft für Kinder (future for children):** The association supports street children and children deprived of school education and medical care in the Global South.

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