

# ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS PRINCIPLES IN EVENT MANAGEMENT

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From a corporate perspective, events are not only costly undertakings, but also pose substantial challenges in complying with environmental regulations and standards. In recent years, environmental, social and governance (ESG) requirements have introduced conditions whose fulfilment often entails significant financial and resource-related burdens. This research examines the event types organised by companies, such as exhibitions, conferences and internal corporate events, through the lens of environmental considerations. In a literature review an international overview of sustainable event management is assembled as a background for deeper understanding the general issues of the industry. As primary research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eight experts in 2024/25, through which we obtained up-to-date insights into the sustainability efforts and challenges faced by Hungarian companies in the context of event organisation. The sampling strategy applied in this study followed a combination of purposive, expert, and maximum variation sampling. The study contributes to the emerging literature on green event management by outlining the organisational, regulatory and cultural factors shaping adoption. The paper concludes with managerial implications and recommendations for enhancing supplier capacity and reducing cost barriers, while highlighting directions for further research on recycling systems and environmental education in event contexts.

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## 1 Introduction

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that, in recent years, companies have been required not merely to articulate a straightforward objective for their events, but also to adopt an educational role by raising participants' awareness of the importance of environmental protection. The purpose of an event extends beyond entertainment; organizations have an obligation to ensure that they do not deplete their resources in a self-serving manner, but instead consider opportunities to create a positive impact on society and the environment. Depending on the type of event, companies have a wide range of possibilities for showcasing their sustainability commitments. These will be examined in detail in this work.

Throughout our research, we engaged with Hungarian professionals who are deeply committed to advancing sustainability and willingly shared their international expertise. In these discussions, they outlined the challenges companies face in complying with regulations, implementing environmental protection measures, and managing the associated costs.

By synthesising these insights, together with the findings presented in existing guidelines, publications, and scholarly articles, our aim is to provide guidance and practical support for companies in organising successful green events, thereby setting a positive example for their employees and partners. The paper addresses organisational steps, supplier preparedness, and cost implications.

## 2 Literature review

The focus of our analysis is corporate events in Hungary, whose objectives must consistently align with the company's overarching strategy and key messages (Dér, 2013). For companies whose operations generate substantial pollution, it is essential during networking occasions to highlight how they compensate for their environmental impacts, what sustainability commitments they uphold, and what concrete actions they take to protect their surroundings (Jones, 2017).

Sustainability now requires conscious action because the impacts of different actors are deeply interconnected. Yet corporate and consumer responsibilities are still often treated separately, with companies focusing on CSR and individuals expected to

practice responsible consumption. Events offer a powerful platform to bridge this gap by bringing these actors together and fostering shared, practical sustainability commitments (Szigeti et al., 2023).

The event industry, while contributing significant social, cultural, educational and economic value to global tourism, simultaneously poses environmental risks by generating substantial waste through the excessive use of materials before, during and after events. According to Wang: “altering the event operations to be green is becoming a necessity to improve competitiveness in the whole market and provide a healthy earth for the next generation” (Wang, 2017).

According to data from the European Environmental Agency (EEA), the global population is projected to exceed 10 billion by 2060, and the expanding economy will require resources equivalent to twice the Earth’s current capacity. Energy consumption is expected to increase by 60%, and water use by 55%. The zero-pollution ambition aims to reduce pollution by 2050 to levels that no longer pose risks to human health or natural ecosystems (European Green Deal, 2021). However, the EEA’s most recent Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook 2025 report indicates that current progress falls far short of these targets. Municipal waste was intended to be reduced by 50% by 2030, yet even selective waste collection is insufficient to bring the EU closer to this goal. Without ambitious measures, the volume of waste, growing in parallel with the EU’s GDP, will not meet the target either (European Environment Agency., 2025). From this, we conclude that our task is not limited to reducing waste generation; it also requires the deliberate and well-designed implementation of recycling practices.

According to other studies, the composting, food donation programs, and waste audits are excellent waste reduction methods (Surbhi & Bose, 2025).

Whether it is a company executive, a conference organiser, or the owner of an exhibition venue, the overarching aim is to design an event that reflects the organisation’s strategic direction, to define appropriate success indicators, and thereby contribute to improving corporate performance. At the 2024 “Rendezvény Restart” event, speakers unanimously emphasised that sustainability requirements must be initiated at the leadership level; however, without adequate education and awareness-raising, implementation will inevitably fall short. As Lőrincz sums up in

his study: “both the organizers and the visitors can, and also have to, take their share in the efforts towards sustainability” (Lőrincz et al., 2022)

Focusing solely on making a single event more sustainable risks overlooking the broader potential of events to support sustainable development. Beyond reducing their own environmental footprint, events can function as platforms that educate, motivate, and expose participants to experiences that may encourage the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles (Mair & Smith, 2021).

ISO 20121 is an international management system standard specifically developed for the events industry, providing a structured framework for integrating sustainability into all stages of event planning and delivery. The standard emphasises continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and the identification of social, environmental, and economic impacts across the entire event lifecycle. Rather than prescribing specific performance criteria, ISO 20121 focuses on establishing processes that enable organisations to set objectives, monitor progress, and implement corrective actions. It was first introduced in the context of the London 2012 Olympic Games, which served as a major catalyst for its global adoption (ISO 20121:2024, 2024). Today, ISO 20121 is widely recognised as the most comprehensive sustainability framework for event organisers, venues, and suppliers. The involvement of professionals who are familiar with environmental regulations and the ISO 20121 standard significantly facilitates proper implementation (Jones, 2017). However, due to the high cost of certification, in Hungary only a handful of companies currently possess this accreditation.

The professional contributors to events are the specialised suppliers whose expertise and experience provide a foundation for articulating and operationalising environmental objectives. In the Hungarian capital, the Budapest Congress Center and Hungexpo currently offer the most extensive event infrastructure. When selecting a venue, it is advisable to consider its accessibility by public transport and whether it provides charging stations for electric cars or scooters (Jones, 2025).

According to a Hungarian study conducted in 2023, climate anxiety among Generation Z is significantly stronger than among individuals over the age of 30. Interestingly, within Generation Y, it is the 45–54-year-old members of Generation X who express greater concern for their children’s future (Szeberényi, 2024).

These findings should be considered when formulating event messages targeted at specific audience segments. Younger participants tend to have a stronger demand for factual information and concrete solutions. It is reasonable to expect Generation Z to use selective waste-collection points correctly, as they have largely been socialised into such practices. However, due to their age, they also require the most accurate and accessible information. Providing this guidance is the responsibility of event organisers.

A study examining 350 large corporations demonstrates that financial performance improves following the implementation of ESG practices (Bruna et al., 2022). This finding is not surprising, given that the demand for sustainability reporting originally emerged from the financial sector.

As highlighted by András Szeberényi (2024, p. 131), although individuals consider climate-related actions important, everyday challenges often leave them with insufficient capacity to translate these concerns into concrete behaviour. He also points out that material prosperity does not necessarily foster commitment to environmental protection, as “the intensive influence of consumer society exacerbates the wasteful use of resources.” This observation was echoed by several interviewees during the primary research.

In the implementation of sustainable corporate events, resource optimization is not only an environmental imperative but also a key factor in economic efficiency and corporate reputation.

Overall, the literature highlights that the adoption of sustainable event management practices is shaped by organisational strategy, supplier capacity, and participant attitudes. International studies and professional standards discuss these dimensions mainly as related but separate requirements, including strategic commitment and stakeholder management under ISO 20121, the educational role of events (Mair & Smith, 2021), and the behavioural expectations placed on participants (Wang, 2017). However, empirical evidence on how these factors interact in the Hungarian corporate event context remains limited, especially in studies that consider both client-side and supplier-side perspectives. This study addresses that gap by examining how organisational commitment, market readiness, and cost-related

constraints shape the practical implementation of environmentally conscious corporate events in Hungary.

### 3 Methodology

In addition to the literature review, the core foundation of this empirical investigation is a series of semi-structured expert interviews with professionals who have long-standing experience in the event industry and who, through direct client interactions, can provide an accurate picture of both Hungarian and international corporate practice. The interview guide followed the same structure in each case and was organised around the three research questions, with follow-up prompts used to clarify concrete practices, implementation barriers, and cost-related considerations.

The sampling strategy applied in this study followed a combination of purposive, expert, and maximum variation sampling. The eight interview participants included event managers, an event director, sustainability specialists, and leaders from hospitality and exhibition stand construction. All interviewees had between 10 and 20 years of professional experience in the Hungarian and international event industry, ensuring a high level of expertise and practical insight. Maximum variation sampling was important because it enabled comparison across different parts of the event ecosystem. During the analysis, credibility was supported through iterative questioning and constant comparison across the interview materials, while dependability was strengthened by the consistent interview guide and the documentation of analytical decisions.

This study is guided by three research questions: (1) What steps must companies take to organise environmentally conscious events? (2) How well prepared are Hungarian suppliers and agencies to support corporate environmental ambitions? (3) Do sustainable events necessarily involve additional costs? These questions informed the interview guide, the analytical procedure, and the structure of the results section.

The analysis of the interviews aims to identify and synthesise good practices that can be adopted by other enterprises to enhance their environmental performance and advance sustainability. It also enables a structured comparison between client-side and supplier-side interpretations of the same implementation problems.

## 4 Results

The results are organised according to the three research questions set out in Section 3.

Q1: What steps must companies take to organise their events in an environmentally conscious manner?

Based on the interviews, multinational companies typically have global strategies that already incorporate sustainability actions. According to the interviewed sustainability specialist, "among Hungarian SMEs, such initiatives usually begin only when senior management explicitly supports environmental measures". Corporate-side respondents emphasised internal training and the early definition of sustainability criteria, while supplier-side respondents stressed the need for early briefing and realistic expectations toward venues and service providers. When financial resources are allocated, the training of internal staff becomes essential to ensure that the organisation can identify and follow the appropriate direction. Moreover, planning a green event requires early engagement with well-prepared partners. Table 1 summarises the options identified in the interviews to support the implementation of environmental actions in line with the company's level of sustainability awareness and commitment.

Q2: How well prepared are suppliers and agencies in Hungary to support companies' environmental ambitions?

With a few exceptions, only a small proportion of venues and partners in Hungary are equipped to offer environmentally conscious options. As one large-venue manager explained, "venues can improve their sustainability performance only through significant financial investment, the cost of which they are often compelled to pass on to their clients". Supplier-side respondents consistently identified infrastructure, waste-sorting capacity, and the limited availability of alternative materials as the main barriers, while corporate-side respondents pointed to the uneven market availability of credible green options. This suggests that supplier readiness is constrained not only by willingness, but also by the current material and infrastructural conditions of the market.

Q3: Can sustainable events only be implemented at additional cost?

Green events generally require extra expenditure, and although there are opportunities to reduce costs in certain areas, most additional services remain expensive at present. As two event managers suggested, "It is advisable to prepare two budgets: one for a traditional event and one for a green event." The interviews also showed that cost effects differ by type of measure: reducing printed materials, unnecessary giveaways, or over-ordering can lower expenditure, whereas audited catering, alternative materials, and more complex logistics usually increase budgets. Well-designed environmental measures can therefore reallocate costs rather than simply raise them, but large-scale events still tend to require higher spending and additional labour.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Table 1: Environmental actions undertaken by companies based on their level of commitment

Area	Basic actions	Advanced Sustainability Measures
Printing / Digitalisation	Digitalising printed informational materials Printing or renting stand walls Use of digital displays QR-code-based promotional materials	Use of recycled paper Reusing exhibition stands Energy-efficient operation of LED walls
Giveaways	Bamboo or recycled-material items	Experience-based gifts, vouchers Donations to foundations
Catering	Replacing single-use items with porcelain and metal cutlery Glass-bottled drinks or filtered water instead of PET bottles Seasonal menus	Minimal meat content Local suppliers Monitoring kitchen packaging and energy use
Transportation	Organised shuttle buses	Venue located near public transport or rail network Car-sharing services
Waste	Selective waste collection (if provided by the venue)	Waste sorting with external partners Waste reduction through planning Food bank donations
Energy Use	Measures taken primarily for business efficiency	Conscious management and measurement of electricity and water consumption

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

Table 1 summarises the interview-based measures and distinguishes basic from more advanced sustainability actions.

The findings of this research reveal a clear gap between the sustainability ambitions articulated in international guidelines and the practical realities of the Hungarian event industry. Across the interviews, three connected themes emerged: leadership commitment within client organisations, supplier and venue readiness, and the limited measurement of environmental performance. While multinational companies often operate within established global frameworks, smaller domestic firms tend to rely on ad-hoc initiatives driven by individual managerial commitment. According to some interviewees, clients do not yet demand such services to a degree that would justify agencies investing more energy in further training. This indicates that the main drivers identified in the literature do not operate evenly in Hungary: strategic intent may already be present, but market demand and operational capacity often lag behind.

The results also highlight structural limitations within the supplier ecosystem. Even at the largest venues, selective waste management remains a major challenge, suggesting that infrastructural constraints significantly hinder the implementation of higher-level sustainability measures. This aligns with international studies emphasising that environmental performance in events is strongly dependent on venue capabilities and supplier readiness. The lack of affordable, degradable stand-construction materials and the continued reliance on single-use catering equipment further illustrate how technological and market gaps restrict progress. Supplier-side respondents described these limits primarily as operational constraints, whereas client-side respondents experienced them mainly as a shortage of credible options on the market. Most interviewees noted that many Western European countries, affluent Arab states, and the United States often overlook circular-economy principles, as adhering to them would require event organisers to reduce the use of extravagant booth elements and marketing materials, practices that are typically prioritised to maximise visitor comfort and create a strong impression.

At the same time, the interviews point to areas where meaningful improvements are already emerging. Companies in Hungary increasingly replace single-use items with reusable alternatives and reduce PET bottle usage, demonstrating that low-cost, high-impact interventions are feasible even within current constraints. These

findings support the argument that sustainable event management does not necessarily entail higher overall costs; rather, savings from reduced printing, more accurate ordering, and the elimination of unnecessary giveaways can be redirected toward impactful environmental measures.

However, the absence of carbon-footprint calculation systems remains a critical bottleneck. Without reliable measurement tools, companies cannot evaluate the effectiveness of their actions or communicate their achievements transparently, both of which are essential components of ESG-driven corporate communication.

Overall, the study demonstrates that while the foundations of environmentally conscious event management are present in Hungary, the transition toward advanced sustainability practices requires stronger client demand, improved supplier capacity, and broader access to technological solutions. Given the exploratory design and the small expert sample, these findings should be read as analytical insights rather than statistically representative evidence. Future research should focus on recycling systems for event-generated waste, environmental education, and measurement tools that make environmental outcomes comparable across events. These dimensions are likely to determine how effectively the industry can move beyond basic compliance toward genuinely circular and socially responsible event practices.

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