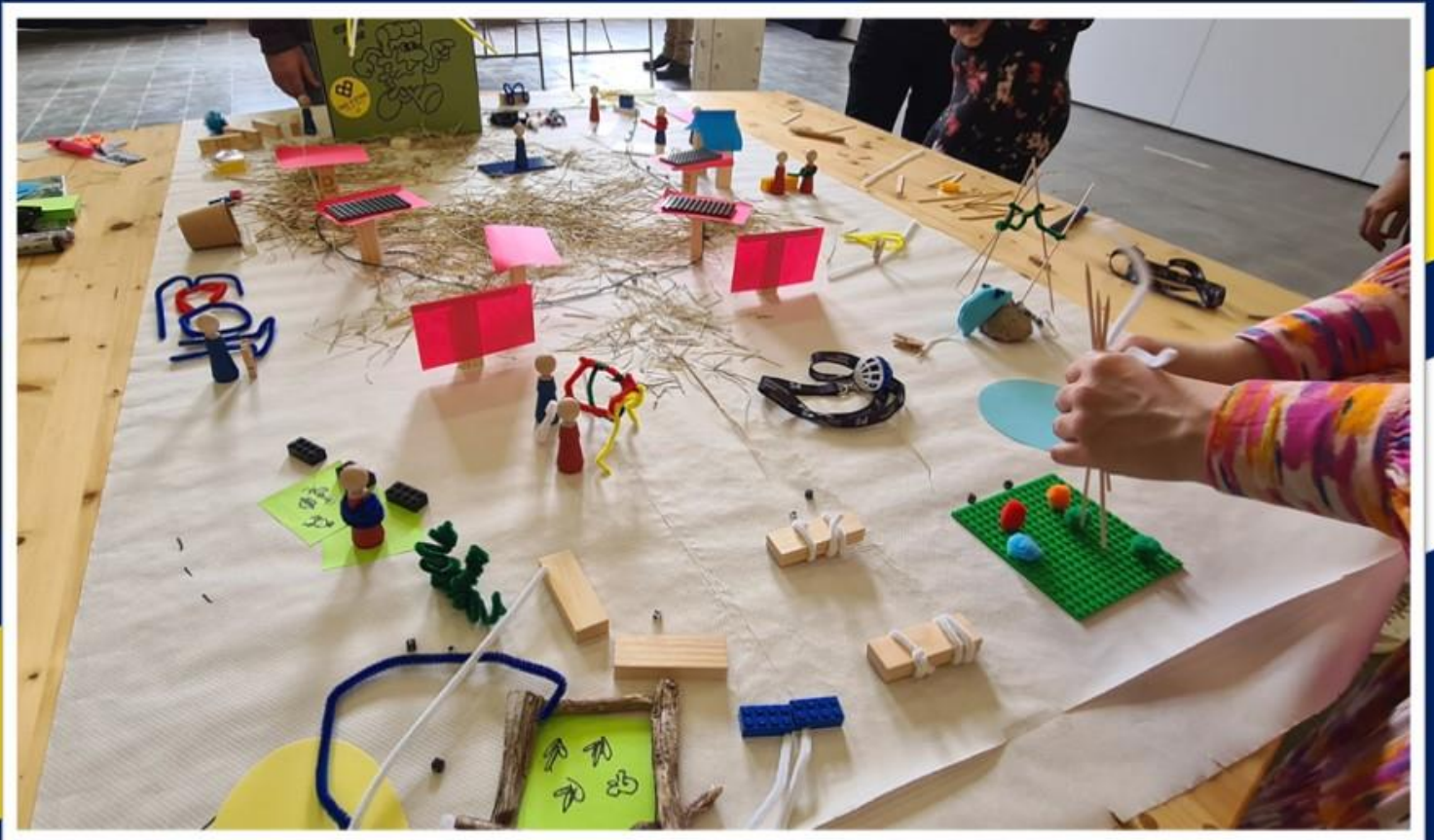


# GO Group workshop in Barcelona



**Future-Fit Festivals at  
9th international GO Group workshop**  
3F Training event E 3.6 | April 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Fabra i Coats: F brica de Creaci n**  
**Carrer de Sant Adri , 20, 08030 Barcelona**

Report written by Katharina Weber

Images by Holger Jan Schmidt, Katharina Weber & Fine Stammnitz

## GO Group Workshop Barcelona

Fàbrica de Creació Fabra i Coats, Carrer de Sant Adrià, 20, 08030 Barcelona, Spain

Monday & Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> /18<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Report written by Katharina Weber



The 32 GO Group workshop participants come from 10 different countries in 2023.

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## New Workshop, Old Motto: "Harder, Faster, Greener, please!"

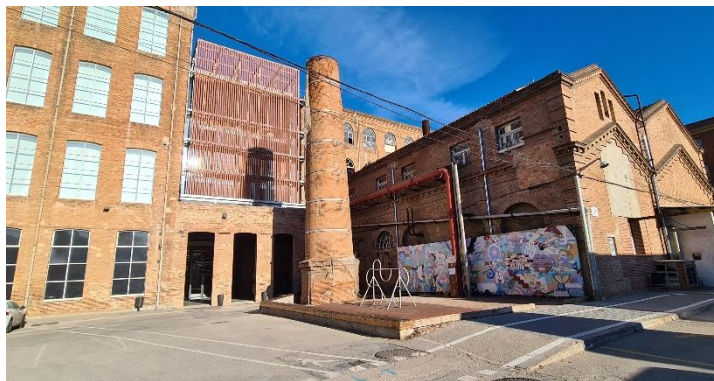
If you want to learn how to make your event more sustainable, have intense conversations about the future of the events industry and some fun with the "green festival family", GO Group is the place for you. Green Operations Europe, the pan-European and cross-industry think-tank, is known for its annual training events. However, due to the pandemic, the industry had to go without a GO Group workshop for three years. In 2023, the event finally returned for its 9<sup>th</sup> edition in Barcelona.



*This year's workshop was the 9th time that GO Group organized its annual training event. Photo by Katharina Weber*

Fabra i Coats, a former industrial area turned center for creativity and arts, became the hub for panels and workshops on the most recent tools, guides and information on greener events. Facilitated by YOUROPE – The European Festival Association, the workshop was made possible with the further support of Barcelona-based festival [Primavera Sound](#), the research consultancy [Sound Diplomacy](#), the Spanish festival association [FMA](#), and of course [Fabra i Coats](#). The 32 participants came from 10 countries.

"The goal of GO Group workshops has always been to make festivals smarter, greener and more sustainable," said YOUROPE General Secretary and GO Group co-founder, Holger Jan Schmidt, in his opening speech. Its motto "Harder, Faster, Greener, please!" was initially the slogan of the Green Music initiative from ten years ago, but according to him, it has only become more relevant.



*Fabra i Coats, a former textile factory turned creative center, is the location of the GO Group workshop 2023. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Shortly before the workshop, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had published its new report, in which IPCC Chair Hoesung Lee said: "This Synthesis Report underscores the urgency of taking more ambitious action and shows that, if we act now, we can still secure a liveable sustainable future for all." In short: everyone needs to try harder to reach a sustainable future – this also goes for frontrunners in the festival industry like Schmidt who

have already been trying hard for decades. We also need to act faster, Schmidt said, since the year 2030, when the EU wants to have reached a 55% cut in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, is close. "We need to do more in less time," Schmidt concluded.

Southern Europe, where permanent droughts have become normal, is already affected by climate change today. But no region is safe from climate impacts, Schmidt warned. He witnessed the flash floods in the Ahr valley, close to his home, that devastated an entire region in central Germany without warning and killed dozens of people in 2021. "This can happen to you, too. This can happen everywhere."

Luckily, we already have the tools to run our operations greener, Schmidt continued. “We need to ask everybody to jump on the bandwagon.” Every festival needs to join, and creating sustainable events is a team effort – a single sustainability manager per event is not enough. All departments and the audience need to be involved. Definitely a challenge, but not an impossible one. Fortunately, the workshop offered plenty of inspiration on how to tackle it.

→ Find Holger Jan Schmidt’s whole presentation [here](#).

## Future Festival Tools: All you Need to Start your Sustainability Journey

Every beginning is difficult. To enable festivals to start on their sustainability journey, the EU-funded project Future Festival Tools (FFT) has created a number of free, easy-to-use knowledge tools. Chris Johnson ([Green Events International](#), [VISION: 2025](#), [Shambala Festival](#), UK) and Fine Stammnitz ([Green Music Initiative](#) & [Green Touring Network](#), DE), both part of the project team, presented them in Barcelona.

“Only about 5% of music festivals in the UK are very professionalized when it comes to sustainability,” Johnson said. But to reach climate goals, it is essential to reach the other 95% as well. This gap is what the project addresses: before FFT, knowledge of sustainable production methods had already been available, but it wasn’t packaged in a way that made it easy to understand for event professionals and students.

The project partners, among them event sustainability experts like GO Group, Green Events and [Julie’s Bicycle](#), created **four tools** that are free to use:

- [A self-assessment tool](#) to assess how sustainable an event is compared to the industry average
- [An inspirational guide](#) with good-practice examples offering detailed insights about sustainability solutions from 21 European festivals
- [An e-learning course](#) on event sustainability
- [A handbook for VET trainers](#), explaining how to use the resources in a classroom setting

The resources focus on **six key areas**:

- Energy
- Materials and waste
- Food and drink
- Water
- Travel and transport
- Strategy



*Chris Johnson (Green Events/Shambala) and Fine Stammnitz (Green Touring Network/Green Music Initiative) helped develop the Future Festival Tools resources. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Being an EU-funded project, the **EU Green Deal** was used as a framework, so the tools further address some of its key pillars like:

- Decarbonization: phasing out fossil fuels by 2050
- Circular economy: decoupling economic growth from resource use
- Just transition: leave no place behind



*Fine Stammnitz presents the six focus areas of Future Festival Tools.  
Photo by Katharina Weber*

Stammnitz presented a selection of case studies from the **inspirational guide**. Dutch [Lowlands Festival](#) finally managed the transition to renewable energies after having tried to get rid of Diesel generators for 16 years. They now operate a carport solar park with 90,000 panels on their land, generating about a hundred times the amount of energy they need for their festival – surplus energy they can sell.

German [Futur 2](#) reversed the energy planning process: instead of creating a program and a festival site and then calculating how much energy is needed, the team calculated

how much energy they can produce with an on-site solar plant/battery system and then created a program suitable to the available energy supply.

Irish [Body & Soul](#) found ways to improve waste separation and recycling rates by negotiating firmly with their waste hauliers and litter pickers. Out of a frustration over the lack of sustainable event equipment in Ireland, festival co-founder Megan Best also founded the company [Native Events](#) to acquire and rent out some equipment to other events. Frontrunner Dutch [DGTL](#) completely rethought waste by treating it as materials and creating a circular festival – probably the first worldwide – with an incredibly low amount of residual waste (20 g per visitor per day).

Afterwards, Johnson introduced the **e-learning** course. A module is dedicated to each of the six focus areas of the project, each taking about 40–60 minutes to complete for the core content (there is also optional additional content like links for further reading). Each module is introduced by a video giving the global and European context. Furthermore, every module has information on three key learning goals, test questions, information about measuring, reporting, and communicating the respective topic, as well as a test at the end. If participants answer all questions correctly, they will receive a certificate.

The **VET trainers' handbook** was still in development at the time of the workshop, but has been published in the meantime. It consists of two parts: (1) a **trainer's handbook** for vocational education and training (VET) that targets managers and teaching staff of post-secondary VET organisations providing taught courses primarily in the field of event management, and (2) a **learning and skills guide** that sets out learning objectives and topics, learner progression levels



and assessment criteria, as well as knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained for each of the 3 Future Festival Tools key training resources.

All resources are available in English, some also in French and German.

- Find Fine Stammnitz and Chris Johnson's and whole presentation [here](#).
- Find all Future Festival Tools resources [here](#).

## Green Festival Roadmap: Setting Reduction Goals, Creating a Strategy



*Nikita Coulter (A Greener Future; left) and Linnéa Svensson (Greener Events) led the development of the Green Festival Roadmap 2030. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

When rethinking your event to make it more sustainable, it's smart to plan for the long term. To offer some orientation in this complex field, YOUROPE developed the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030. The comprehensive framework for the improvement of festivals, but also other events, is part of YOUROPE's EU-funded Future Fit-Festivals (3F) project.

Nikita Coulter ([A Greener Future](#) (AGF), UK) and GO Group co-founder Linnéa Vågen Svensson ([Greener Events](#), NO) led the development of the roadmap and also presented it at the workshop. It uses the framework of the EU Green Deal, which unfortunately doesn't include clear indicators for the events industry. So, the roadmap's vision is inspired by the general goal of the Green Deal: reduce emissions by 55% by 2030.

In the Green Deal, the reduction goal is compared to 1990. Most festivals won't have data available from back then, so the speakers recommended to choose an own starting point, e. g., the first year in which a festival collected data on carbon emissions, and go from there. The roadmap contains an explanation of the often-used emission scopes of the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#) and information on how to calculate your carbon footprint.

However, the roadmap goes beyond carbon emissions; it offers a "wholistic environmental look at things", as Coulter said. After all, in order to become more sustainable, you also need to reduce, e. g., your waste output and water pollution, save biodiversity, etc.

Furthermore, the roadmap offers four levels of actions festivals can take: basic, moderate, challenging and ambitious, offering content to both just starting and expert events. Additionally, the roadmap includes a timeline with goals that should be completed until 2030; e. g., the first goal is to create a strategy with an action plan, and basic actions should be completed until the end of 2024.

The roadmap uses the same six focus areas of Future Festival Tools: energy, materials and waste, food and drink, water, travel and transport, and strategy – and adds another one: community and biodiversity. Each section contains an introduction to the context, suggested actions and links to the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

In addition to the document, the team will offer an online spreadsheet containing only the suggested actions. This way, people will be able to download, edit and sort the actions by level.



*Nikita Coulter (A Greener Future) explains the different sections of the roadmap. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

The participants received the roadmap well and had lots of feedback. For example, they suggested to open the spreadsheet to comments, so users can leave resources that helped them for others to read. Someone suggested to additionally categorize actions by budget, so “cheap” actions can be identified more easily. A similar idea was mentioned, namely to categorize actions based on the effort that is involved in applying them, so low-effort, high-impact actions can easily be identified. The wish for more information on the cost of actions was also uttered, i. e. mentioning when actions cost money without producing a return.

➔ Find Linnéa Svensson and Nikita Coulter’s whole presentation [here](#).

## A Greener Future Assessment: The Case Study of Primavera Sound

[A Greener Future](#) (AGF; formerly A Greener Festival, UK) is known for conducting detailed assessments of the sustainability efforts of events all over the world. As Nikita Coulter (AGF) reported, more than 1000 events, festivals and venues have been audited since 2007 thanks to a global assessor network. One such festival was Spanish [Primavera Sound](#), which became the topic of a presentation in the workshop.

Primavera has been assessed regularly since 2016, when they first achieved the “improver level”, said Miriam Torres, who is an assessor for AGF, but participated in the workshop as a representative of Primavera Sound. They held it for two years before reaching “commended”. In the meantime, they have reached “highly commended” – “outstanding” being the next and final level. After each assessment, the festival implemented the recommendations given by AGF. The AGF standard improves each year, so events actually have to do more to keep the same rating, Torres added.

### The AGF assessment process

Before their event takes place, organizers have to fill out a self-assessment questionnaire. During the event, a junior and a senior assessor of AGF perform a thorough assessment onsite according to a holistic approach comprising 12 categories. The assessors need access to all areas, but a non-disclosure agreement is signed beforehand. Post-event, the event organisers are given some additional time to send in more data that might be needed. Approximately two weeks after the cut-off date, the scoring will be calculated.

AGF further provides a CO<sub>2</sub> analysis and an optional feedback report. If the results are good enough, events will receive a certification for one of four levels (1 to 4-star rating). The best events from each level will be nominated for the annual AGF awards.

Anybody who is interested can apply for AGF's assessor training, which consists of two stages: online and in-class training (stage 1) as well as actually assessing an event (stage 2). After a couple of assessments, assessors move from junior to senior level.

On top of the assessment, Primavera Sound voluntarily signed an agreement on the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), Torres reported, which determines that they will aim to improve two main aspects: power and waste management. These measures include, for instance, connecting most stages to the power grid and installing batteries on generators to increase energy efficiency.

The festival is also strong on the social side of sustainability. "The commitment of Primavera Sound to social is immense," said Ramon Garriga ([Primavera Sound Foundation](#), ES). The foundation promotes social cohesion and inclusion, interculturalism and equality – both during the festival days and during the rest of the year.



*Nikita Coulter (A Greener Future), Miriam Torres (Primavera Sound) and Ramon Garriga (Primavera Sound Foundation) discuss the festival's assessment by AGF. Photo by Katharina Weber*

For example, together with Primavera Sound, they launched "[Nobody is Normal](#)", "an action to raise awareness of and take precautions against aggression and harassment towards those people who challenge gender stereotypes." The foundation is also responsible for "[Invisible Cities](#)", a project to bring marginalized people and realities into the center of attention. During the rest

of the year, the foundation continues these campaigns, focuses on community action through music, gives young people a place for their creativity, and helps them foster change.

→ Find Nikita Coulter's presentation [here](#).



## Did Somebody Mention... Beer?

Beer undeniably has a big impact on the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint of a festival, but because it simultaneously represents a huge revenue stream, it's also hard to imagine festivals without it. Reason enough to dedicate a part of the workshop to festival-goers' favorite drink, hosted by GO Group co-founder Linnéa Vågen Svensson ([Greener Events](#), NO). Bob van Oort connected online from Norway to Barcelona to give an insight into the environmental impacts of beer. Van Oort is a biologist and researcher at the [Cicero Research Center in Oslo](#), Norway's leading institute for climate research. Many of his projects are dealing with food and how it affects the climate and the environment (and vice versa).

Between 23% and 42% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide are food related, he said. The lower estimate comprises emissions from production, the required land, transport and retail as well as consumption. The higher estimate further includes emissions produced, e. g., by building a tractor. "If we don't change emissions, we will change the entire world," he warned. Current policies will already bring us above the target of the Paris agreement of 2°C global warming.

2/3 of the emissions related to food are caused by animal products, 1/3 by plant-based food, van Oort reported. While meat has a high impact in general, the amount of carbon released varies between meat types: beef causes by far the highest emissions, followed by lamb, while poultry emits the lowest emissions in the meat category (not considering fish).

Most plant-based foods cause lower emissions compared to animal products. The largest share of emissions is caused by the production of food, but other factors like transport matter as well.

A case study of PiPfest 2022 revealed that travel and transport was the area causing most emissions at the festival, closely followed by food and drink. In the food and drink category, beer was the highest post, causing 18% of food/drinks emissions – the equivalent of nearly 20 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e. However, according to van Oort, with 0.65 kg per pint (on average), beer has a relatively low emissions output compared to other drinks. It's the sheer volume of beer served at festival that creates its large impact, compared, for example, to a beef burger. Although the beef burger has higher emissions and was the food item with the most emissions at the festival, it just wasn't served as often compared to beer.

Van Oort's recommendations to festivals when it comes to food and drink emissions:

- Try to reduce the volume of beer served.



*Bob van Oort (Cicero Research Center Oslo) is an expert on food-related emissions. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

- Since the most emissions related to beer are caused during its production and processing, serve a beer with low inputs.
- Serve a locally produced beer to reduce transport emissions.
- Focus on high impact foods like beef burgers and try to replace them with low impact foods like falafel.
- To reduce emissions caused by packaging, it might be a good idea to bring in beer in large tankers, rather than individual cans.

A question from the audience was if organic food/beer might perform better in terms of CO<sub>2</sub>e output, but according to van Oort, there is no clear emission trend that organic foods have higher or lower emissions than conventional food. Nevertheless, he remarked, the production methods in organic and conventional farming can vary widely, causing different ratings when looking at sustainability holistically rather than just at emissions.

→ Find Bob van Oort's whole presentation [here](#).

## Build your Own Festival Utopia: Creative 3D Mapping Group Workshop



*Jérôme Oppliger (Gadget abc Entertainment Group) selects objects to help build a festival utopia.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

After an interesting round of presentations, it was time for a more interactive session. In a 3D mapping activity, the participants split up into four groups and built their own festival sites out of many different objects like modeling clay, straw, boxes, wooden figurines, dice, Lego pieces, pens, string and so on. The 3D mapping and process is based on Theory U by Otto Scharmer and Peter Senge (MIT) as well as Symbols Process (Ashland Institute).

At first, the participants were asked to produce a model that represents the current state of festivals. Each member could place one item or more on the table, while explaining to the team what the item represents.

In the next part, the participants were asked to reflect on their result from four different angles. These came with different questions each:

- **Feeling & relationship:** What do you love in this picture? What about it ignites your best energies? What other emotions arise? If this emotion could talk, what would it say? What



are the essential relationships, connections or separations between the parts and what feelings do these generate?

- **Truth & action:** What are the key conflicts and hard truths that you have to face in order to move forward? Where do the different sources of power lie in this system?
- **Perspective:** What are the most important barriers or bottlenecks that if removed could help the current system to evolve?
- **Purpose:** What is ending in this situation [wanting to die], and what is seeking to emerge [wanting to be born]? What do you feel is the highest future potential that is being called for in this situation?



*Four groups develop different festival models according to their experiences and visions.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

In part three, participants were asked to adapt their models to map their preferred vision of the future of festivals. This could mean moving, removing or adding objects or giving them new meaning.

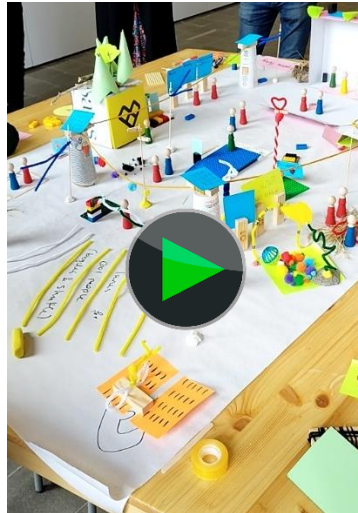
The last part asked them to reflect on the differences between their models:

- **Result:** What are the most important structural differences between model 1 and 2?
- **Process:** What were the most important changes that transformed model 1 into model 2? What key intervention shifted the old structure model 1 into the new model 2? What did you do first? What was the first significant change that you undertook as a team?
- **Leverage Points:** What in your view might be the most important leverage points that if you were to focus on them as a team could help you to move the old model system to the new?

In the end, each group presented their models and thought processes to the others.



*Looking at the results from different angles is also part of the exercise. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*



- ➔ Click on the thumbnail to watch how Fine Stammnitz (Green Touring Network & Green Music Initiative) and Rob van Wegen (ESNS) present their group's ideal festival site.

## Managing Materials: FMA's New Guide to Circular Festivals



Marina de la Fuente (Gabeiras y Asociados; left) and Paula Raez (FMA) focus on waste management in their presentation of FMA's guide to circular festivals.  
Photo by Katharina Weber

Day 2 opened with a topic that relates to sustainability beyond emissions: circularity. In a circular economy, products are reused or recycled rather than thrown away and replaced by new products made out of new resources. Waste is no longer regarded as trash, but rather as valuable materials, ready to be used again.

That circular festivals are possible has been proven by pioneers like Dutch [DGTL](#), but to achieve this status is quite a challenge. To help festivals on this journey, the Spanish Asociación de Festivales de Música ([FMA](#)) has recently published a [guide to circular festivals](#), which Marina de la Fuente ([Gabeiras y Asociados](#), ES) and Paula Raez (FMA) presented in the workshop.

Festivals bring together a massive audience in a limited amount of time, so they can serve as social and innovation labs, said de la Fuente. Why the focus on circularity? First of all, because it is one of the basic pillars of sustainability, and secondly because there are new regulations on waste at local, Spanish and EU levels. The topic has been neglected by politicians because it is not a popular topic with voters, she said.

Some context: 4813 kg of waste was generated per person in the EU on average in 2021; in Spain, it was 2230 kg. Only 39% of waste was recycled at an EU level in 2020, although the goal is to recycle 55% of municipal waste. Spain has failed to fulfill this EU goal. New goals set by the Spanish government are to reduce waste by 13% by 2025 (compared to 2010) and 15% by 2030. On an EU level, the reuse and recycling rates will go up: by 2025 a minimum of 55% of municipal waste (by weight) have to be prepared for reuse and recycling, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035.



What do festivals have to do to comply with these goals? According to de la Fuente, they have to take responsibility for the waste they produce (by law), e. g., by delivering it to public or private waste handlers. There are new sanctions for not taking care of the waste you produce as well as for littering. When it comes to packaging, you now have to offer free and unpackaged water sources.

Consequently, the guide focuses mainly on waste management. It can help figuring out when, where and how much waste is generated at a festival. It suggests providing training on waste separation for festival staff to get everyone on board. Furthermore, the guide presents bad practices and their impacts on nature and cities and offers good, alternative practices. It includes recommendations on how to progress towards a circular festival.

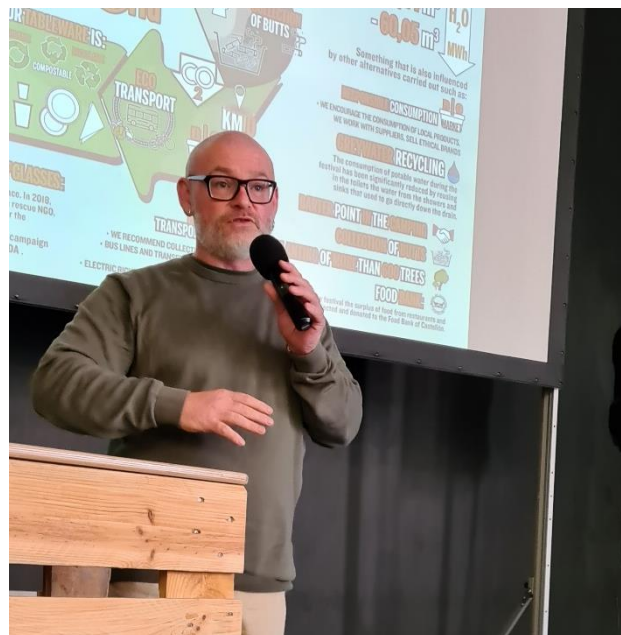
A topic that didn't make it into the guide, because it turned out to be too extensive, was festivals' impacts on coastal areas. Information on this will be published in a separate document.

- ➔ Find Paula Raez and Marina de la Fuente's presentation [here](#).
- ➔ Find FMA's "Guide towards circular festivals" [here](#).

## Festival Case Study: Rototom Sunsplash's Green Efforts

Presenting good-practice cases is a tradition of GO Group. This time, it was Rototom Sunsplash's time to shine. The Reggae festival takes place in the Spanish city Benicàssim, which is known for its beaches and popular with tourists. Under the label "Greensplash", the festival has initiated plenty of measures over the years, ranging from waste and water management to energy and beyond – despite the fact that the festival is largely self-financed. Only about 4% of the funding comes from public sources, said Fiachra McDonagh (Rototom Festival).

For example, by using solar panels, solar umbrellas and LED lighting for the stages, the festival saves 84% of their energy. Used materials are collected in 500 containers, separating wrappings as well as paper and carton, which reduced Rototom's carbon footprint by about 15 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.



*Fiachra McDonagh (Rototom Festival) presents the festival's "Greensplash" sustainability program.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Still, waste management is "a bit of a struggle", McDonagh admitted: recycling with an international audience is difficult, because the colors of bins vary from country to country, sometimes even from city to city. The local waste management firm "isn't very good" either, according to McDonagh, but there is no alternative to working with them. Nevertheless, Rototom manages to save about 10 tons of plastic by replacing plastic straws and cutlery with biodegradable alternatives, having different types of reusable bottles and cups and offering more than 50 water points with filtered still or sparkling water.

The festival doesn't have a deposit system on their glasses. Instead, they are sold as a collector's items, and visitors are free to donate their glasses for the benefit of Greenpeace or local NGOs. The festival has worked with and donated to a whole array of organizations over the years.

Furthermore, the festival offers a bicycle rental service, electric bicycles and segways for the staff, and encourages collective transport. Bus routes are extended, so they run 24 hours between the festival, Benicàssim and its beaches. Cigarette butts are collected, and grey water from showers and sinks is reused in the toilets. There are barter points on the campsites to exchange stuff people don't need anymore.

### Why the festival moved from Italy to Spain

Originally, the festival was started in 1994 in Italy by a group of friends because there was no public space for young people to express themselves creatively, said Fiachra McDonagh (Rototom Festival). Eventually, after having changed locations in Italy, they moved to Benicàssim (Spain), when Italy introduced new legislation that held festival organizers responsible for any drugs being consumed at their festival.

The team agreed that these were no conditions to hold a Reggae Festival. "It was basically a law to attack Rototom," McDonagh criticized. Luckily, much of the crew remained despite the move and kept fighting to clear the festival's name. Which they eventually accomplished – and the law was retracted as well.

The social aspect of sustainability is also considered. Since the beginning, the festival has been about social commitment to create change through culture, McDonagh said. This is why the festival is free for everyone under the age of 18, and unemployed people only have to pay €5. The organizers value a strong connection to the local community, so financial gains are usually spent on local businesses. 80% of the materials used come from the area. Although the festival is a company, the foundation which it originally derived from still exists. It enables them to work, e. g., on social projects with prisons, McDonagh said.

"A lot depends on what kind of public you have and how you communicate with it," McDonagh concluded his presentation.

- Find Fiachra McDonagh's presentation [here](#).
- Read more about Rototom's sustainability efforts [here](#).

## FUSION: Using Festivals as Platforms for Social Innovation

The social aspect of sustainability was the focus of another EU-funded project presented at the GO Group workshop: FUSION – Festivals as Social Innovation Incubators. The project recognized the potential of festivals for bringing about social change and delivered tools that can help festival organizers and outside organizations to create on-site projects. These include a good-practice guide with 15 initiatives from European festivals, a toolbox for project development, and alliances between experts on festivals and social innovation.

Social innovation can be hard to define, said Katharina Weber ([YOUROPE](#) / GO Group), who helped develop the tools. With an interactive Mentimeter presentation, she and team member





Holger Jan Schmidt and Katharina Weber (both YOUROPE/GO Group) led the creation of the FUSION Toolbox for festival project development. Photo by Fine Stammnitz

Holger Jan Schmidt (YOUROPE / GO Group) asked the participants what they consider social innovation to be like. Answers like “making things better”, “ability to use new ideas for change” and “improvement, community development” were close to the definition the project team adhered to: social innovation are new solutions that are better than old solutions; they benefit the whole society or groups of people, rather than individuals; and they can be a number of things, e. g., an idea, a movement, technology, product, or piece of legislation.

Festivals can be more than “just” a collection of concerts, Weber said.

Creating, for instance, a dedicated area for outside organizations like NGOs and social initiatives can offer new experiences to all those involved. Values can be conveyed in a playful manner, both enhancing the festival experience and enabling the festival to use its outreach for good causes. To give an impression of what this can look like in the field, [FUSION's guide “Social Innovation at Festivals – A Collection of 15 Inspiring Initiatives from across Europe”](#) presents successful social innovation projects at festivals like [Pohoda](#), [Exit](#), [Ruisrock](#), [We Love Green](#), [Sziget](#), [Cruilla](#), and [Rocken am Brocken](#).

Roskilde Festival was heavily involved in the project and the creation of the guide. Since the festival has been pioneering young social innovation for decades, it's not surprising that four of its projects made it into the guide: [the Circular Lab](#), which is a testing ground for innovative and sustainable solutions by young entrepreneurs; [Dream City](#), which is a special area on the campsite dedicated to building a better tomorrow; [Turning Tables](#), an NGO connecting young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods with music and arts; and [FLOKKR](#), Roskilde's stage for arts and activism.

German [Superbloom's NGO Area YOUR Planet](#) also made it into the guide. Schmidt personally helped set it up for the first time in 2022. Music makes only 50% of Superbloom's program, he explained. The other half consists of various topics like art, dance, theater, science, and sustainability. YOUR Planet focuses on topics like nature, society, human rights, and inclusion. 4000 m<sup>2</sup> are provided to 30 NGOs, social institutions, and activist groups to present activism, interaction and social activation. The interactive aspect was particularly important to the festival: visitors were supposed to engage with topics, rather than just read information about them (“gamification”), so they would take new ideas gathered at the festival home and engage with them in their everyday life.



Workshop participants can take part in the interactive FUSION presentation by adding terms to a word cloud. Photo by Fine Stammnitz

The second resource, the [FUSION Toolbox](#), is both dedicated to festival makers and organizations like NGOs, social initiatives, youth workers etc. It guides readers through the process of creating a project specifically for the festival context in eight stages, from ideation to implementation and evaluation. Every stage asks important questions that the project organizers need to answer during the development process. Throughout the toolbox, both perspectives (festival makers and NGOs) are considered and presented alongside each other. The questions are accompanied by photos, videos, links etc. which provide more explanations and inspiration. Additionally, the toolbox offers a glossary of festival and youth work language, so both sides can understand each other better.

Lastly, the [FUSION Alliances](#) focused on connecting experts from four fields: festivals, social innovation, education and youth work. In four countries (Denmark, Germany, Spain, and Ireland), an alliance was formed and its members met (online) three times. The goal was to identify and write down the strengths and weaknesses of festivals as platforms for social innovation and to make it easier for the participants to cooperate. The results of the meetings will be collected in an Alliance report and in action plans that will enable interested organizations to host their own alliances.

- Find Katharina Weber and Holger Jan Schmidt's presentation [here](#).
- Find the [FUSION Guide](#) [here](#).
- Find the [FUSION Toolbox](#) [here](#).

## The Value of Events: Measuring your Economic and Social Impact



*Azuzena Micó (Sound Diplomacy) helped create a methodology to assess the value that an event brings to a city.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Can the value of events actually be put into numbers, especially when it comes to funding? To answer this question, the international consultancy [Sound Diplomacy](#) has developed a methodology to show the public value that events bring to their cities in a measurable way. The benefit of this methodology is that now city governments can allocate public funds based on comparable facts and numbers rather than assumptions on the economic impact of cultural events.

### What is Sound Diplomacy?

“SOUND DIPLOMACY is the global expert in delivering economic growth to cities and regions, and the tourism and real estate sectors, using strategies focused on music, culture and the night time economy,” said representative Azucena Micó. “Our clients depend on Sound Diplomacy to demonstrate the ways in which music, culture and the night time economy add value to their existing enterprises, investments and strategies.”

The consultancy offers research and analysis, infrastructure and development consultancy, solutions for stakeholder engagement, explanations on the economic impact of events, mapping as well as their own events.

Their many clients include: the city of San Francisco, the mayor of London, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as well as developers like Dakia, Moorgarth and Orms.

Sound Diplomacy is convinced that music has a value: it is everywhere, makes cities wealthier, creates jobs and skill, and supports inclusion, says Azucena Micó (Sound Diplomacy). “Not all governments understand the value that events bring to their cities and towns. The effects events can have are not limited to the days of the event itself. We believe this is something all governments should care for and be able to measure.”

The Barcelona city council has obviously realized the benefits that events bring to their city, so they approached Sound Diplomacy, asking for a method of assessing what they called “the public value of events,” Micó explained. They wanted a way to rate events, giving the city government a factual basis to assess how much funding they should give to which of the numerous events taking place in the city.

After the initial development of the methodology, public money was allocated according to this system for the first time in a trial run with four festivals, Micó said. Afterwards, the team refined the questionnaire used and tested it again. This year, according to Micó, there were 7 cultural or musical events in Barcelona that requested public funding through their system.

**The methodology:** The Sound Diplomacy team developed a questionnaire to be filled out by events that comprises four areas:

- **Economic Impact and Business Development**, e. g., number of visitors, job creation, money spent on food and accommodation
- **Local and Cultural Values**, e. g., famous artists, opportunities for local artists, innovation
- **Social Values and Cultural Rights**, e. g., diversity, equity, inclusion, education, city branding
- **Sustainability**, e. g., plastic glasses, recycling bins, carbon footprint reduction, sustainable mobility



*Azucena Micó and her team at Sound Diplomacy developed the methodology for the city of Barcelona.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*



The four dimensions were determined based on values represented in official documents released by the city and cultural institutions. In theory, they could be adapted from city to city, if other cities have different priorities. Each goal or indicator is measured with the help of a proxy. For example: the indicator “direct impact – employment” is measured with the proxies “number of jobs (full-time, all year)” and “number of jobs (closer to the festival).” In addition to the questionnaire, Sound Diplomacy conducts a survey among the attendees of the events and an analysis of media and social media coverage. Some of the data is objective (e. g., yes/no questions), while some is subjective (e. g., plans for the future, explanations in the survey).

Of course, like in every other methodology, there are some limitations. For instance, the creation of indicators: the team had to create a concise questionnaire that is still answerable for the event organizers and that is asking for data that is actually providable. This means that the number of indicators had to be limited. The criteria must also be applicable to all kinds of events, requiring a certain unification of the criteria.

Still, Micó is convinced that through this methodology it is possible to collect homogenous data from events of different kinds and sizes. According to her, “it’s not perfect, but better than just counting the most obvious values.” The next step would be for the public administration to adapt the system city-wide.

→ Find Azucena Micó’s whole presentation [here](#).

## Fluctuations – A Festival Traveling on European Rivers

When several disciplines are combined in a single person, it can lead to interesting outcomes. One such example is Vincent Langlade (Fluctuations, FR): The Frenchman studied physics (Bachelor) and environmental sciences (Master) in Paris, Berlin and Warsaw, worked with experts on water in Berlin and Brussels, worked for a festival in France, and for the past three years has combined everything. The result is Fluctuations, the idea of a floating festival traveling on rivers to mobilize citizens on social justice and ecology.

Langlade has been working for the past six months on this idea, he said in the workshop. The **goals of Fluctuations** are

- 1) **lowering the carbon emissions** of festivals,
- 2) **reconciling different people** around a positive narrative on sustainability, because there is still a widespread lack of climate knowledge as well as a strong eco-anxiety in many European countries, and
- 3) creating a strong, positive **European identity**.



*Vincent Langlade (Fluctuations) closes his presentation with neologisms relating to nature. Photo by Katharina Weber*

Water ways connect many major European cities from Strasbourg to Prague, making them ideal to connect cultures as well. The Fluctuations riverboat is designed to host a single, sustainable stage. It can ride into the inner cities, stop at the river bank and entertain an audience on the shore. "The festival goes to the visitors", Langlade emphasized. About 3000 - 10,000 people are possible at each stop, depending on the site, he estimated. On the shore, a temporary city can be built, including room for debates and workshops, and "a village of solutions," as Langlade called it, with purposeful NGOs from the local area, connecting those interested in their topics and those who originally just came to have fun. There are also plans for a food court and a kids' area. The European Youth Parliament is supposed to become involved to create a strong movement of young European citizens, initiated by the attraction of the festival.

So far, the Fluctuations team consists only of volunteers, but everyone is experienced in their respective field, according to Langlade. This year in March, the team has applied for EU funding. They hope to be able to host the first prototype events in Strasbourg, Amsterdam, Berlin and Budapest in 2024 and have the first full Fluctuations year in 2025, with four stops from May to September.

→ Find Vincent Langlade's whole presentation [here](#).

## How AI could Shape the Future of Sustainability, Society and Festivals



Milan Meyberg calls for a paradigm shift from an ego-centric towards a gaia-centric worldview.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

The last presentation of the 2023 GO Group workshop left the plane of practical measures and dove deep into worldview theory and artificial intelligence (AI).

In early 2023, it was hard to avoid news on ChatGPT, a chatbot that uses artificial intelligence to communicate with users via text-based messages. It uses advanced machine learning technology to generate responses that sound natural and are intended to be relevant to the conversation. But people started using it to write all kinds of things, from emails to academic papers.

With this in mind, Milan Meyberg explored with the audience what AIs could do for sustainability. Meyberg is a freelance sustainability strategist from the Netherlands, who, e. g., led the efforts of Dutch DGTL festival to become the first circular festival in the world.

"Time is running out. That is the truth," he said regarding climate change. The scientific data proving globally rising temperatures is publicly known, but many people either blissfully ignore the data or even decide to reject it. Meyberg painted a gloomy outlook of our future. At our current 1.2°C warming, we are already entering

the zone of critical tipping points: permafrost will thaw, releasing even more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. This could lead to the tipping of five more systems, e. g., the Barents Sea could become permanently ice-free and alpine glaciers could be lost forever. Beyond 2°C global warming, the African Monsoon and Amazon rains might stop. With the current prospects, 1/3 of the world's population (3 billion people) could live in permanent heat zones by the year 2100.

"I am not a doomsayer and generally an optimistic person, but sometimes I'm not sure. What else can you do?" There is only so much you can do as an individual, he added. "The stories we tell determine the fate of our shared planet, and they are rooted either in new or old paradigms." His goal is thus to shift paradigms, he said.

According to him, we still live in the "**egocentric paradigm**": many people view themselves as separated from nature, although indigenous leaders have warned us for decades of the consequences of what that entails. In a stressful montage of three simultaneously running videos, Meyberg underlined how insane it is that humans have followed the same pattern for decades: extract, produce, discard – repeat. A paradigm shift to the **eco-centric worldview**, including a **circular economy** and a focus on **mutualism/collectivism**, would be better for both humans and nature.



*Meyberg introduces the participants to theoretical concepts relating to nature and environmental protection.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

And even better: a **gaia-centric worldview** with a **regenerative economy** and a focus on **symbioism/eudaimonism**. In this worldview, there is no individualism; everyone functions in a symbiosis. Eudaimonia, in the works of Aristotle was the term for the highest human good in older Greek tradition. Giving purpose to your life, even if this means sacrifice. Currently, people rather pursue pleasure and happiness than purpose, Meyberg said.

So how do we get from the current Anthropocene to the **new age of Symbio(s)cene**? The term is a combination of the words "symbiosis", "scene" and "cene", Meyberg explained, and the new age would revolve around the **Gaia hypothesis**, meaning all life on earth is one being, one single organism. This theory could have quite tangible implications for environmental protection, even today. Take, for example, **the rights of nature**, a legal framework that recognizes natural entities like lakes or forests to have rights. "If you give rights to nature, you can defend it in court – a powerful way to prevent an ecosystem collapse."

The concept of **environmental personhood** goes one step further by designating persona rights to bodies of nature. Rivers and forests become non-human persons. "To me, this is the most



important ideology currently emerging,” Meyberg said. James Cameron’s *Avatar* movies have brought the concept into mainstream awareness with “Eywa”, the goddess and biological sentient guiding force on the fictional planet of Pandora that connects all beings on the planet.

#### More concepts introduced by Meyberg

- **Decentralized transformative collectivism**
  - ➔ Describes collectives that want change, e. g., Extinction Rebellion, seed banks, even neighborhood libraries
- **Conscious (constructive) hedonism**
  - ➔ Have fun, but not at the expense of the planet.
- **Transhumanism**
  - ➔ Extended human capabilities through technology, e. g., through online avatars in the Metaverse
- **Techno-Gaianism**
  - ➔ Technology isn’t outside of nature, it *is* nature. Humans are technological beings. By creating technology, we are not destroying but creating a new form of nature.

**What if nature could talk to humans?** Meyberg showed what this could look like in a video, featuring a humanoid representation of a forest that talks about the pollution and destruction humanity has brought upon it, but also of a potential better future.

**And what if humans could talk to nature?** Then we could ask it which kind of future it wants. This is where AI comes into play. By combining Gaianism and AI technology, this could become a reality. Meyberg’s suggestion: combining environmental personhood and AI (ENVAI). This would have multiple advantages:

- Connect humans to nature
- Accelerate the speed of the necessary change
- Protect nature with laws
- An AI can take part, e. g., in policy meetings
- A good vehicle for tools such as those presented in the GO Group workshop (Future Festival Tools, the FUSION Toolbox, and FMA’s guide on circularity)
- Combine different datasets, for example of AGF and other climate institutions
- Reach hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously

Meyberg’s hope is to create a “culture shock ripple in society.” In theory, every body of nature could be represented by its own ENVAI, which could be assembled in GAIA (Geospatial Artificial Intelligence Assembly). “It’s still science fiction at the moment, but who knows for how long,” Meyberg said.

Unfortunately, Meyberg exceeded the time limit of his presentation slot, which was also the closing slot of the workshop, so there was no time left to discuss his concept. Nevertheless, his presentation left the participants with much to think about on their way home or during their last night in Barcelona.

## Beyond the Content: Dinners and a Tour of Fabra i Coats

A GO Group workshop is never just presentations and panels – it also leaves time for getting to know new people and exploring new cities. On the eve of the workshop, those who were already in Barcelona met at La Forastera Restaurant.

The first day had given the participants lots of food for thought. To give their stomachs something to digest as well, GO Group hosted a dinner at *Fat Barbies*. The restaurant is known for its barbecue specialties, and did not disappoint: all dishes, which were of course served tapas-style, were delicious. So delicious, it was easy to forgive the restaurant for serving meat when YOUROPE had in fact requested a “fat veggies dinner.”

Day 2 of the workshop held a tour of their location for the participants. The Fabra i Coats or “Fábrica de Creación” used to be a thread and textile factory. The iconic building is rooted deeply in the history of the Sant Andreu neighborhood in which it is located and has



*Carles Sala (l.), Executive Coordinator of Fabra i Coats, takes the participants on a tour through the creative center.  
Photo by Katharina Weber*

become a space for artistic creation in multiple disciplines. Carles Sala, Executive Coordinator of Fabra i Coats, took the time to show the participants around the different floors of the building himself. They discovered an active dance class, rooms with instruments and for recording music, space for quiet working, huge rooms for co-working with high ceilings and divided by giant partitions.



*Dinner at "Fat Barbies" comes with delicious dessert. Photo by Katharina Weber*



*Painting found at Fabra i Coats.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

## Appendix

### About GO GROUP (Green Operations Europe)

GO stands for Green Operations. GO Group is an independent, pan-European, cross-industry think-tank with the goal to inspire people in the music festival and events industry to run their operations greener, smarter and more sustainable. GO Group was initiated at the 1<sup>st</sup> International GreenEvents Conference in Bonn in November 2010. It was co-founded by YOUROPE (the European Festival Association), GreenEvents Conference, Green Music Initiative (GMI) and Bucks University in early 2011. Since then, GO Group has been stimulating exchange and has been leading the discussion on social and ecological responsibility. The group Inspires and connects hundreds of festivals, initiatives and scientists.

It is the aim that GO Group

- 1) identifies international best practices in sustainable innovations for the music festival and event industry,
- 2) aggregates, communicates and shares the collective knowledge with interested stakeholders from all over Europe,
- 3) establishes working relationships between different industry groups to enable practical and spontaneous exchange of personal experiences, and
- 4) supports initiatives and takes part in projects related to GO Group's fields of action.

Within its ten years of existence, GO Group has lifted green issues up on the agenda within the live music and festival industry by delivering:

- 5 international conferences with up to 180 participants
- 9 international two-day workshops and 3 festival field trips with up to 50 participants
- 60 conference contributions (such as panels, presentations, keynotes) in 18 European countries
- 9 Green Operation Award Winners at the European Festival Awards

GO Group is a regular contributor to the most important conferences and conventions of the (live) music industry such as [ESNS](#), [Green Innovations & Innovations](#) (GEI), [International Live Music Conference](#) (ILMC), [BIME](#), [ADE Green](#), [Reeperbahn Festival](#), [by:Larm](#) Oslo, [MaMA](#) Paris, [Nouvelle Prague](#) etc.

In fall 2012, GO Group and YOUROPE initiated the Green Operations Award as a category of the European Festival Awards. Its target group are festivals that have made a significant contribution to or achievement towards developing more sustainable events. The award is given out by a panel made up of experts that are not directly linked to any specific festival. GO Group is a proud supporter of [Take a Stand](#) – the awareness campaign for the music and creative industries promoting civic engagement in Europe.

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**Organizations participating in GO Group's 2023 workshop**

A Greener Future (AGF) (UK)	Greener Events Foundation (UK)
Colours Of Ostrava (CZ)	Live Nation Barcelona (ES)
ESNS (NL)	OpenAir St.Gallen (CH)
Fluctuations (FR)	Pohoda Festival (SK)
FMA – Asociación de Festivales de Música (ES)	Primavera Sound (ES)
Freelance sustainability strategist (NL)	Primavera Sound Foundation (ES)
Gabeiras Y Asociados (ES)	Rototom Festival (ES)
Gadget abc Entertainment Group (CH)	Sonar Festival (ES)
Goethe Institut (DE)	Sound Diplomacy (intl.)
Green Events Intl. (NL)	Summer Breeze Festival (DE)
Green Music Initiative (DE)	University of Bonn (DE)
Green Touring Network (DE)	VISION: 2025 (UK)