

DGTL



CITY, COUNTRY

Amsterdam, the Netherlands

DAILY CAPACITY

20,000

SITE

NDSM Docklands, an urban area in northern Amsterdam

CAMPING

No

NUMBER OF DAYS

3

ESTABLISHED IN

2013

GENRE

House, Techno; arts, innovation

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Rethinking waste by separating and treating it like resources

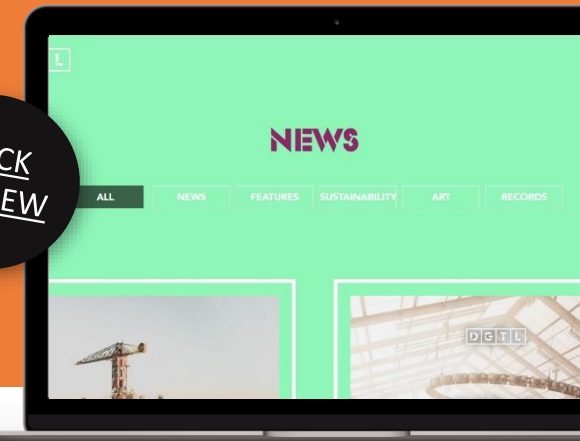


A LIVING LAB FOR CIRCULARITY AND REGENERATION

DGTL has an ambitious goal: to become the first circular, climate-neutral major event. The festival constantly searches for sustainable innovations and has created the Revolution Foundation to share their knowledge. “With the foundation, we are making lots of events more sustainable not just in the Netherlands, but also in Europe. We are helping with the Green Deal Circular festivals initiative to create a norm for the whole event industry,” Mitchell van Dooijeweerd, sustainability manager at the Revolution Foundation, explains.

DGTL focuses on five areas: resources, energy, mobility, sanitation and food. “We want to make everything specific, understandable and measurable – and applicable to cities as well to help create circular innovation cities,” van Dooijeweerd says. Having established editions in Bengaluru, Santiago, São Paulo, Barcelona, Tel Aviv and Madrid, DGTL also strives to become the first regenerative event organisation on a global scale. Besides music, the festival offers an experimental, cultural and arts programme.

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NO MORE RESIDUAL WASTE

DGTL wants zero residual waste. In order to recycle materials that are thrown away, they need to be separated from each other to create what van Dooijeweerd calls “mono-flow,” a collection of a single material. “We need to find ways to change the linear behaviour of visitors – which is take, make and waste – to a circular behaviour, where they return the resources,” the Sustainability Manager explains.

At festivals, visitors tend to drop smaller pieces of garbage like food wrappings simply where they stand. Keeping the grounds free of trash is another aspect of avoiding residual waste that DGTL is working on.

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Photo by
Rob
Lipsius

MAKING EVERYTHING REUSABLE, RECYCLABLE OR COMPOSTABLE

DGTL has adopted many measures in line with the 7 Rs of waste management: Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Repurpose, Reuse, Recycle and Rot. To better understand what happens to materials at the festival, DGTL has created a Material Flow Analysis. “We want to know exactly what’s coming into our event, what is leaving and how it is leaving. Based on that, we can find processes to create mono-flows and can refuse things that we don’t want to have. So, we have zero residual waste during the event, just minimal during build-up and some during break-down.” In 2022, DGTL ended up with about 20 grammes of residual waste per visitor per day – in 2019 it was 93 grammes.

Further, DGTL completely forgoes residual waste bins. Instead, there is a limited number of recycling points in which volunteers separate the waste. “We only have four or five places where visitors can bring their resources back to us. We will put them in the right bin, so we guarantee that we have a clean mono-flow that’s not contaminated.” DGTL has three types of teams handling waste: teams that collect waste, teams that transport the collected waste to the recycling points, and teams that separate the waste at these recycling points.

To keep waste from ending up on the ground, DGTL installed a strict policy that required them to change the way they handle certain things.

For example, ice cream wrappings. They are no longer given to visitors along with the ice cream, but collected behind the counter. They can’t be recycled in the regular plastic stream, but the festival found a company which created a way to melt them and transform them into bins, boards and plates, for example.

At the circular, plant-based food court, a composting machine by the Dutch company [Ecocreation](#) helps avoid residual waste. Food scraps, plates, cutlery and napkins are all biodegradable. “We collect everything in the right bins, and then we make compost out of it on the event site within 24 hours. That’s something the visitors can watch as well.”

A circular hard-cup system makes single-use cups unnecessary. Decorations for stages are modular. Signage is replaced by reusable LED screens. “And we have a circular sanitation programme, where we convert all human waste into fertiliser and compost, which we can grow food with afterwards,” the Sustainability Manager adds.

DGTL explains to its visitors what happens to the materials during and after the festival and shows them how and why it happens – to make visitors aware of environmental issues, but also to make them return their trash bags.

THE SOLUTION



WASTE IS NOT WORTHLESS – IT’S A RESOURCE

Considering waste as materials rather than trash is an important way to rethink resource management, van Dooijeweerd says. “What I learnt is that you should process it in a way that people can see that it is not a wasted material but a valuable resource.” This can be conveyed with a simple trick: “People really see the value of materials if you separate them and put them in crates instead of bags, because then everything looks nice, clean and tidy,” the Sustainability Manager reports.

It also helps to let visitors experience processes first-hand. “When we show our compost to someone and we let them feel and smell it, then they see the value of the product.”

When talking about the economic aspect of the waste treatment, all the hands needed to separate the waste and the time spent communicating a whole new way of organising events to visitors, “definitely costs a lot of money,”

van Dooijeweerd says. But, it is necessary because the festival has found that letting visitors separate waste on their own doesn’t work. “We got a lot of media attention as well, because we are doing the right thing and it’s getting acknowledged. In the end, we create a stronger position in the market.”

And some sustainable measures even earn the festival money: “For example, if you have to let your residual waste get processed, it costs about €200 per tonne, but if you sell cans or clean mono-flow PET to processors who make new products out of it, it will earn you money.”

One unfortunate lesson that the festival team has learnt is that the legal regulations often do not favour recycling. According to the Sustainability Manager, waste processing companies can earn more money on residual waste than on separated waste. “So, it’s kind of a not a good incentive to let them recycle everything,” he says.



WHAT’S NEXT?

DGTL wants to intensify their work on the social component of sustainability. “The social foundation is really important for us as well, so we have implemented a diversity and inclusivity programme with training for the crew and continue to focus on creating a safe space for everyone,” van Dooijeweerd says.

The festival also wants to create a stronger local impact, that means creating jobs for people living in the neighbourhood, traineeships, and income for local restaurants and hotels. Naturally, the search for sustainable innovations and the improvement of the circular system will continue as well.