



CITY, COUNTRY

Aarhus, Denmark

DAILY CAPACITY

35,000

SITE

Near-natural city park/event area
Eskelunden (since 2022)

CAMPING

No

NUMBER OF DAYS

3

ESTABLISHED IN

2010

GENRE

Indie

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Reducing food carbon footprint by
offering plant-based meals only

Photo by Georgia Nociloi Hildebrand

“Lead the way” has been NorthSide’s motto since its conception. Even a decade ago, back when sustainability wasn’t on everyone’s radar, its creators wanted to make it into one of the greenest cultural events out there.

This year (2022) NorthSide has moved location from Adalen to Eskelunden. The municipality only recently modernised the infrastructure of the event area in the large, near-natural park to secure water supply, wastewater management and a power supply based on renewable energies, explains Martin Thim. Thim is Partner and Sustainability Manager at DTD Group, one of the biggest festival organizers in Denmark who is also responsible for NorthSide. He adds: “In order to reach our goals, we need the right partners, and that’s the reason why I

manage both Sustainability and Partnerships together. We simply can’t do this alone.”

That’s why for example, NorthSide collaborated with the city government to upgrade the event area in Eskelunden. “We, as cultural figures and facilitators, have an obligation to step up and do our very best to help move society into the right direction. We believe that we can actually make a difference. It’s never easy doing these projects, but it’s very rewarding when you realise that you have gotten rid of the diesel generators or that you are now taking part in changing the entire food industry,” Thim states on the festival’s motivation. “I would just love to one day be at a festival and feel safe knowing that the environmental footprint is low. To be able to enjoy the music without having to deal with the bad conscience.”



URBAN FESTIVAL WITH SUSTAINABILITY AT ITS HEART



Photos by Marcus Glavind



THE CHALLENGE

REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF MEAT SERVED AT THE FESTIVAL

NorthSide has been experimenting with their food and drinks menu for years. When changing to Tuborg as official beverage supplier, NorthSide (among other festivals) demanded that the company created an organic beer – which they did in 2015 with the introduction of Tuborg Raw. Fostering this long-standing partnership now also pays off indirectly: because of investments that Tuborg's parent company Carlsberg has recently made in Danish breweries, producing NorthSide's beer will from now on create 50% fewer CO₂ emissions, Thim told us.

In 2017, NorthSide became almost entirely organic in all their food and drinks. To find out more about their environmental footprint, the festival had the London-based organization A Greener Festival analyse its CO₂ output. This analysis found out that meat was responsible for about 60% of the carbon emissions of the festival's foods, so the natural goal became to make food for audience, artists and crew 100% plant-based.

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Photo by Regine Vilhelmsborg

INTRODUCING A PLANT-BASED MENU

To achieve this in 2022, the festival has collaborated with the Danish Plant-based Knowledge Centre. It defines a plant-based meal as “a meal that is based on plants and can be supplemented with a small amount of animal products”. For NorthSide, this means: no meat, no fish and a maximum of 15% of cheese, egg and mayonnaise per portion.

“Food is something that all our guests are in contact with several times a day. It’s a really nice way of communicating with people without actually communicating. It’s also something we can directly influence. We can set demands for restaurants and kitchens,” Thim explains.

When they first decided on serving more organic food at the festival, not many caterers were prepared. To get them on board, the festival used the “carrot and stick” approach: caterers must pay a fee for their festival food stalls, and the higher their percentage of organic food, the lower the fee. “That worked really well,” Thim says. With their demands, the festival changed the Aarhus food scene over the years, while creating new business opportunities for caterers. “We have seen some of those businesses really grow because they

worked with us, and now they’re producing organic stuff all over the country.” Thim admits, however, it can be challenging for the restaurants to procure enough organic raw materials.

When NorthSide announced to go plant-based in 2021, they had “never gotten as much media attention in the history of the festival,” Thim remembers. “Every journalist in this country is going to be at our festival this year just to report that we’ve made a huge mistake with this initiative. But we’re going to prove them wrong, obviously.” Lots of people were angry about the change, he says, but analysis has shown that the critics mostly belong to the age group 60+, who sit far outside the festival’s demographic target group of 20- to 45-year-olds. “We’re not too concerned about that. We believe that our audience has the ability to actually make a change.”

For festivals struggling with changing their menu, Thim suggests starting with an 80-20 ratio of plant-based and animal products and getting a CO₂ analysis also helps. “When you have the data, it’s easier seeing where you can make the biggest impact,” he recommends.

A PLASTIC-FREE FESTIVAL

NorthSide has plenty of ideas for new sustainable projects: 2022 will see a new area called NorthSide Forum with knowledge-based content on sustainability; the festival started building its own bars and will store them in a large, rented storage facility for reuse next year; they plan to set up a cooperation with local civic

waste collection points to use their materials that would otherwise go to waste incineration plants instead to be used across construction projects on the festival site; and Thim has a vision of a plastic-free festival eventually.



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