



POHODA FESTIVAL



CITY, COUNTRY

Trenčín, Slovakia

DAILY CAPACITY

30,000

SITE

Former military airfield of Trenčín Airport

CAMPING

Yes

NUMBER OF DAYS

3

ESTABLISHED IN

1997

GENRE

Alternative, Indie, Electronica, World music, Punk, Classical; film, literature, dance, visual art, theatre

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Dealing with a lack of sustainable suppliers in the region by daring experiments

Photo by Martina Mlcuchova



**POHODA – ADJ. & N. (SLAVIC) = FUN,
EASY-GOING, PEACE, NO PROBLEM,
RELAX, ENJOYMENT, COMFORT**

The name of Pohoda Festival is also its theme; relaxation and comfort are at the heart of the show. Pohoda has grown from a small local event with eight bands to the largest annual music event in Slovakia; a multinational festival which is capped at 30,000 visitors to retain a family feeling.

The programme is made up of performances from a range of creative fields. “There are lots of crazy things going on, but they all have a certain level of artistic quality in common – it’s all based on the love of freedom and free expression,” says Michal Sládek. Sládek is an architect by trade and is part of Pohoda’s production team.

He also coordinates the sustainability program.

Founder Michal Kaščák describes their approach as “the same as when you invite someone into your home. You want them to feel good in your home, you want them to have a good experience and a comfortable place to sit and sleep. You make them food and drinks and do everything possible to make them feel good.” Sládek adds: “The festival is strongly value-based, and one of the key values is care. With the notion of taking care of your festival as if it was your home, it is only natural to care about its environment as well.”





Photo by Martina Mlcuchova

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SUSTAINABILITY WITHOUT A LARGE SYSTEM OF SUPPLIERS

Sládek describes how making the festival more environmentally friendly is an even bigger challenge to Pohoda, because Slovakia has far fewer specialised companies than Western Europe. “We’re developing with an understanding of what’s possible here, especially in terms of suppliers and third-party solutions. I would like to go for compostable toilets, but no one in Slovakia is willing or capable to do it. You have companies in the U.K., but you wouldn’t call them to transport waste over 2000 kilometres,” he says. Sometimes, patience is required. “When in 2014 a company approached us who could do refundable cups, we immediately said: let’s do it. There was nobody else before that who could do it. It’s a long-term process.”

Despite the circumstances, Pohoda has integrated many sustainable features; to connect stages and stands to the main electricity grid, they partnered with a local energy provider and created a mobile solar power station. In 2018, the percentage of electricity created from diesel generators was lowered to 60% – 40% of the electricity came from the grid. To reduce travel emissions, they partnered with the national train company to operate special festival trains across the country, they promoted festival buses, developed carpooling, and provided bicycles on site for staff and artists to use. To reduce waste, they introduced waste separation in 2006, organic waste separation in 2015, compostable food packages and implemented a refundable beer cup system.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL

When Pohoda was awarded the Green Operations Award at the 2017 European Festival Awards, Teresa Moore (A Greener Festival) said: “We acknowledge not just this work, impressive as it is, but creating all of this and more despite a limited infrastructure and support system in their country, particularly in their early days. This festival has championed these initiatives and leads the way for other festivals in the country and more widely in their region by showing what can be done with belief and determination.”

Sládek agrees that Pohoda has become a benchmark in the region. “We are open to do some consulting for other events, or they can just come and learn.” Luckily, as customers increasingly demand sustainability, companies become better suited to offer sustainable solutions and sponsors are more willing to

fund them, Sládek told us. “New products are not always successful though”, he adds, like the barrier tape they tried in 2021. “We found a company who made it from a biodegradable material, but it didn’t work at all. After one night, the tape stuck to itself, forming a rope, making it impossible to read anything printed on it. So, it disappeared pretty quickly,” Sládek says, laughing. “The lesson learnt is that we just keep trying.”

Founder Michal Kaščák’s decision to keep the stages decoration-free was pretty philosophical. “Michal doesn’t like distractions from the show, so he doesn’t want anything but technical equipment on the stage,” Sládek explains. In the end, this decision also helps the environment; fewer single-use decorations also mean less waste.



FINDING DATA-BASED SOLUTIONS

One of the biggest challenges for all festivals, Sládek knows, is finding data-based solutions which answer the question, which approach is really the most sustainable?

This is why Pohoda is part of the Green Europe Experience Project (GEX). According to the project website, 'GEX is a living lab based on co-creation, mentoring, skills building between 4 major music & arts festivals, 2 NGOs and their teams.' The EU-funded project focuses on scenography and food. Innovations to make festival production circular and more sustainable will also be tested by the partners in several workshops.



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