

# GO Group workshop in Warsaw



**Future-Fit Festivals at  
12th international GO Group workshop**  
3F Training event E 4.2 | April 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie  
Marszałkowska 103, 00-110 Warszawa, Poland

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## **12<sup>th</sup> international GO Group workshop**

**Museum of Modern Art, Marszałkowska 103, 00-110, Warsaw, Poland**

**Monday – Tuesday, April 13-14, 2026**

*Report written by Katharina Weber*

*Photos by Katharina Weber, Linnéa Vågen Svensson & Holger Jan Schmidt*

### **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	1
The Green Changeover – What’s Holding us Back? .....	2
How to Make Plant-Based Food Sexy.....	6
Why Plant-Based Food? .....	6
How to Succeed with Plant-Based Dishes? .....	7
Communication .....	7
The Pros and Cons of each Strategy .....	8
Sponsorship & Sustainability.....	9
How to Use the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030.....	11
Give me Hope: The Green Group Workout.....	13
Put a Smile on the Face of a Child in a War Zone.....	17
More Ambitious than a Major Festival: Štěrkovna Open Music.....	18
ŠOM’s Sustainability Journey in a Nutshell .....	19
Key Sustainability Topics .....	19
Operating Principles .....	21
The Nasty Reality of Textile Production.....	22
Evaluate Me! Sustainable Certifications.....	25
AGF’s “Greener Festivals Certification” .....	25
ISO 20121 .....	26
General Considerations and Other Certificates .....	27
Deep Dive: Insights into CO <sub>2</sub> Analysis.....	27
AGF’s annual sustainability report.....	28
Green Deal Circular Festivals.....	28
Øyafestivalen .....	29
Turning your Audience into Activists .....	31
Project EGG.....	32
Examples of Fan Engagement .....	32
How much do you <i>actually</i> know? The 1 <sup>st</sup> GO Group Pub Quiz.....	33
What remains? Takeaways from the 12 <sup>th</sup> GO Group Workshop .....	34
Fun Stuff: Two Dinners and a Great View.....	35

## Introduction

*In this report, you will find a summary of each session of the 12<sup>th</sup> GO Group workshop on sustainable festival production in Warsaw, Poland. Feel free to read the report to find ideas to make your festival more sustainable. Please refer to the table of contents to see which topics were covered. The workshop's organization was kindly supported by Polish promoter Alter Art, whose festivals Open'er, Orange Warsaw and Kraków Live are YOUROPE members.*



View of Warsaw. Photo by Linnéa Vågen Svensson

This year, Green Operations Europe (GO Group) celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was initiated at Green Events conference in Bonn in 2010, celebrated its inaugural edition in 2011, and has helped festivals to run smarter, greener and more sustainable ever since. Almost every year, GO Group has organized a public workshop for everyone interested in event sustainability – always in another place and usually with the help of a YOUROPE member festival.

This time, the place of choice was Warsaw, home of Polish promoter Alter Art, more specifically the Museum of Modern Art in the city center. The workshop's motto: "the green changeover." 38 participants from 14 countries joined over two days.

In the opening session, the two hosts, **Holger Jan Schmidt (YOUROPE General Secretary)** and **Linnéa Vågen Svensson (YOUROPE's green anchorwoman & Greener Events Norway)**, introduced some of the parts of YOUROPE's work relating to green issues: the [Green Operations Award](#), the [Future-Fit Festivals \(3F\)](#) project, the sustainability section of the [European Festival Report](#), and the recently published [Weather Preparedness and Resilience Toolbox](#).

GO Group has now also become the home of [Green Deal Circular Festivals](#) to keep the community alive and the dialogue going after the project had ended in December 2025. If you are interested in joining the conversation on creating more sustainable and circular festivals, feel free to reach out to [office@yourope.org](mailto:office@yourope.org).

The most recent thing to come out of GO Group is the new WIRE to GO webinar series, where YOUROPE's working groups WIRE and GO collaborate to invite speakers on social and environmental sustainability topics every couple of months. Find out when the next webinar is planned in the [events section on YOUROPE's website](#).

**Mikołaj Ziółkowski, the CEO of Alter Art**, also addressed the participants in the opening. The area of the city they met in used to be quite empty and grey, he said, but has been changing with the Museum of Modern Art opening just last year, a new park, and other buildings still under construction. Warsaw is changing, and so is Poland with the green energy transformation being under way. Considering the ongoing wars and increasingly popular populist narratives everywhere, GO Group's work is most important right now, he added. But there is hope: the election loss of Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán happened just on the eve of the workshop. "If Orbán loses power, it means anything is possible," Mikołaj said.

## The Green Changeover – What’s Holding us Back?

True to the workshop’s motto, the first session called “The Green Changeover” dove right into the challenges festivals face when trying to become more sustainable. Are they still the same as ten years ago? Did they evolve? Interviewed by **Rob van Wegen (Sustainability manager at ESNS)**, the speakers looked for answers.

**Insa Trede (Festival Production & Sustainability Manager at Wacken Open Air)** opened the round by talking about the realities of the world’s biggest metal festival. Wacken offers four days of music and a week of camping, with campers spreading out over 440 ha. Their sustainability program Green Wacken focuses on mobility, energy, resource management – but also inclusion and awareness. “We call it ‘wellbeing’ because it’s a more positive word than ‘social sustainability,’” Insa explained.

Wacken is the name of the small village the festival is named after, located in a very rural area in Northern Germany, about an hour from Hamburg. Most of the festival happens on green fields



*Speakers Insa Trede, Ondrej Poláček, Saku Juvonen and host Rob van Wegen. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

normally occupied by cows. The company wants to return the fields as good as they found them, but they struggle a lot with the weather. “2025 was especially bad. It rained more in five hours than its usually does in a whole month,” Insa said. The fields were completely muddy. This showed that there is a need to adapt but also a big challenge for production. In the aftermath, sustainability had to take a step back at first, Insa said.

When Wacken started involving the community in the measures, they were really into it after the end of the pandemic, but the interest in sustainability is waning. Insa thinks the festival needs to find a solution for that, because they as a festival have the ability to engage people in the topic and make them take it home.

About 1000 km Southeast of Wacken and about 150 km north of the Slovakian capital Bratislava, Pohoda Festival takes place on an airport field in Trenčín. The medium-sized open-air festival has about 30,000 visitors, selling only full-event tickets (three days).

The festival has had a sustainability approach since its founding in 1997, **Ondrej Poláček (Production Manager at Pohoda Festival)** told the audience, expressed, e.g., by them joining Green Deal Circular Festivals. They focus on different topics – transportation, energy, materials and waste, water management – and improve in small steps every year. They face the same problems as Wacken, plus, the political situation in Slovakia hasn’t been the best. The awareness of climate change is receding there as well, Ondrej said.

The green transition takes a lot of time for them, and the introduction of new solutions requires money, of course. The first step they always take is doing research – you need to know how to implement something specifically at your festival. For example, they have thought a lot about

their energy management but haven't moved forward yet because of different obstacles they need to clear first.

If you go all the way north in Europe, you can find Blockfest in the center of Tampere, Finland – a 30,000 capacity 2-day Hip Hop festival. The audience is mostly 18–25-year-olds – a promising group of customers, said **Blockfest's sustainability manager Saku Juvonen**, but in this genre also a bit challenging because misbehaving is a part of Hip Hop. "Getting them to join in the sustainability efforts? They usually don't listen, so we have to plan around that."



*Blockfest's Saku Juvonen and ESNS' Rob van Wegen.  
Photo: Katharina Weber*

"Initially, our challenge was data, especially a lack of data," he added.

There was no data on electricity consumption, recycling rates etc. Luckily, they had a good infrastructure in place, and many of their suppliers and partners had their own measuring systems established already, so starting to collect data wasn't too big of a problem. Blockfest can log into the systems of their suppliers and installed meters for the things their partners don't measure, e.g. how much electricity is consumed.

There are still some uncertainties, e.g. in audience transport, Saku said. Blockfest sends out a visitor survey, but it's usually filled out by a certain type of people who probably gives answers that are more positive than the real numbers.

**"[Our visitors] usually don't listen, so we have to plan around that."**

**Saku Juvonen  
Blockfest**

**Did measuring create new issues?** "Data is a tool," Saku said. He can show it to leadership to illustrate problems and progress alike.

Insa told the participants that, at Wacken, they have implemented a lot of low-cost measures in the past years – which looks good but isn't enough yet. Now, they have measured the festival's emissions for the first time in ten years, and Insa hopes that it will take them a step further in tackling the big issues.

**Are the problems getting bigger once we're further in the change?** Ondrej replied that in some situations that's true.

Around 45% of Pohoda's energy comes from the grid, but they cannot increase it because they are located at a military airport and not allowed to build infrastructure there.

**What is the challenge with suppliers?** It can be hard to force them to collect data, or they reject green energy because they feel safer with a diesel aggregator behind them, Ondrej said. It can be

difficult to change their mindsets. "If it costs something, if it requires knowledge, they are not willing to do it."



*Pohoda Festival's Ondrej Poláček. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

**Is this situation different for city festivals?** Saku replied the core challenges are somewhat similar – audience transport, waste, energy, etc. – but the infrastructure is indeed available for Blockfest as a city festival. For green field festivals? Not so much. Half of Blockfest's audience comes from Tampere, half from the rest of Finland, but they all like to drive. "If you have the choice to bring your car, you will," Saku said.

**Space** can be another limiting factor. For example, Wacken still grows every year. "We need to find a way to get smaller again. Some people have to walk an hour from their camp to the infield," Insa said.

Wacken is trying to encourage people to use **public transport**, but the average audience age is 42, so many people come for a whole week with their camper vans. The audience is also very international with 20% traveling from abroad, and the majority of visitors doesn't come from the region. So, they don't want to limit car travel because they still want people to come to the festival, but need to find other ways to deal with audience travel – which is a hassle and often doesn't seem worth the effort, according to Insa.

**What is the audience like at your festivals?** According to Ondrej, Pohoda has a friendly audience with a good vibe, which is a little bit on the older side and usually cooperates with the festival. For example, waste separation is done by the audience with help from volunteers in on-site separation centers. Pohoda has started separating waste in 2006, and in 2018, they launched a cooperation with a local university. Its students create campaigns during class and compete against each other at the festival to get as much waste separated as possible. It's a fun element, and the best team wins tickets to the next edition.

The festival site is mostly clean after the end of the event, which might also be owed to a difference in mindset between people from Eastern and Western Europe. People don't tend to buy single-use items as much in the East, Ondrej said.

The challenge with material use for Blockfest is sponsorship, Saku said. They don't allow giveaways but have a lot of different partners who want to build "something cool." Hip Hop / Rap activations need to look a bit different than at other festivals, so most installations/sponsorship items are built just for Blockfest. To prevent one-time activations, the festival is trying to find partners who want to do multi-year deals, so their elements will be reused.

**"If it costs something, if it requires knowledge, [our vendors] are not willing to do it."**

Ondrej Poláček  
Pohoda Festival



Wacken Open Air's Insa Trede.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

**Moving on to food:** not all festivals are adapting plant based-food equally well; some don't make it delicious or of high quality. At Blockfest, food vendors must have plant-based items on their menu and price them slightly lower than meat dishes. Vendors at Wacken have the requirement to offer at least one vegetarian or vegan dish in their contract, but still these dishes make up only a small percentage of all dishes sold, Insa said. Now, they plan to put stickers on menus pointing out the dish with the lowest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but they don't want to lay out rules on the pricing.

As a nice reminder of the power festivals hold, Rob added: "We are the mayors of the small cities that we build for a small period of time."

From the audience, Martin Gustafsson (LiveGreen) told the participants about Sweden Rock, where local hockey teams separate every bit of trash. The festival pays them for their work, and the teams use the money to fund their activities. The teams depend on this funding, so they reliably show up and do the work.

**What other challenges do you face?** Resources. Time. And money! But also the national infrastructure of a country: transport, energy networks, national food polices. Other specific national challenges in the speakers' countries included a lack of support of positive behavior change by the government in Slovakia, outdated regulations when it comes to waste sorting in Germany, and a change from waste to energy towards more recycling in Finland.

To close the panel, Rob asked the speakers about any **achievements of which they are particularly proud**. Insa replied that Wacken had a water treatment plant on site for the first time last year, which saved water and even money because treating the water was cheaper than transporting grey water off site for treatment. She also mentioned a crowdsurfing campaign for people in wheelchairs. "It was a touching moment and great to see everyone having fun together. It motivates me to do more when I see happy people," Insa said.

Ondrej talked about a group of visitors who cycled 150 km from the capital to Pohoda and which has grown from 50 to 100 people in two years. They are accompanied by a few vehicles which carry their luggage and are allowed to do a "victory lap" through the festival site, where bikes are otherwise not allowed.

**"It motivates  
me to do  
more when  
I see happy  
people."  
Insa Trede  
Wacken Open Air**

## How to Make Plant-Based Food Sexy



Food and behavior consultant Daniel Barrera Madsen. Photo by Linnéa Vågen Svensson

Removing meat and fish from festival menus can be a great way to cut down on emissions. Food is also a simple way for visitors to support a festival in its sustainability efforts because everybody has to eat, making it a low-threshold topic to engage in sustainability. But how do we actually get visitors to choose the meat-free, less CO<sub>2</sub>-intense option?

In his presentation “Working with Music Festivals to Make Plant-Based Meals a Success” **Daniel Barrera Madsen** explained how to communicate food better to festival audiences. Daniel works at the **Danish Center for a Plant-based and Organic Future** as a food and behavior consultant specialized in festivals and amusement parks. He is also on the Gastronomic Advisory Board of **Roskilde Festival**.

The Center’s goal is to make plant-based food normal at festivals – not the climate-friendly alternative but the normal choice. They started in 2022 by working with NorthSide, when the Danish festival wanted to go plant based. Now they are working with 20 different festivals reaching approximately 2.7 million visitors each year. The Center conducted studies on festival goers and analyzed more than 700 menus from food vendors (among other things).

### Why Plant-Based Food?

The reasons to go plant-based are obvious from a climate perspective: while a single beef burger causes around 3.7 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e, the vegetarian alternative only produces 0.5 kg. Plant-based food simply causes much fewer emissions than meat and fish dishes.

But plant-based food is also more sustainable in other ways. Growing organic, plant-based food means contributing to a more sustainable food system that protects soil, water resources and wildlife, reduces land use, and leads to greater biodiversity. It's also healthier to eat, better for your gut, and improves a country's food security in times of crises.

### How to Succeed with Plant-Based Dishes?

In his presentation, Daniel delivered advice specifically on how to deal with food vendors, disregarding other aspects like crew catering. His first recommendation is to consider the target

**“[Plant-based food] has to taste good, and it has to be for everyone.”**

Daniel Barrera Madsen  
Center for a Plant-Based  
& Organic Future

audience: “Don't focus on the vegetarians and vegans – they will eat plant-based food anyway. Target anyone who wants to eat delicious food – that means everyone,” he said. It all comes down to taste: “It has to taste good. If it doesn't, no one wants to eat it.” His simple mantra: “It has to taste good, and it has to be for everyone.”

**Nudging** is a great way to subtly encourage people to choose the plant-based option by “changing the choice architecture of our decisions, so we can promote better behaviors at a large scale,” according to Daniel. The best nudging tool is **appetizing naming**. “Call it something nice,” he said.

For example, changing the name of a dish from ‘veggie lasagna’ to ‘spinach ricotta lasagna’ drove up the sales of a vendor by 200%. At NorthSide, the ‘New York Style Mushroom Sub’ sold better than the ‘New York Style veggie sub’ although both were plant based.

“When naming a dish, **describe the taste** of it,” Daniel recommended. Is it salty, smoky, strong, fragrant? How is the **texture**? Crunchy, juicy, soft? How is it **processed**? Fried, grilled, oven baked, slow stirred? How does it **look** like? What are the **ingredients**? Never use words like vegan, vegetarian, healthy, low fat, meat free, or low calorie.

He added: **recommend** plant-based dishes on a menu, e.g. “Mama's chili”, “our signature dish”, or “chef's recommendation,” and put them **on the top of the menu**. Have more than one plant-based dish, and make them **cheaper** than meat dishes (only if the quality doesn't suffer). If you want, use **pictograms**, but don't use the words “veggie” or “vegan” in writing – vegetarians and vegans will know what the pictograms mean, and for others, use appetizing names and descriptions. Another option is to use **price structure**: make the plant-based version the default with the option to add meat for an extra cost.

### Communication

Communication is crucial but difficult. “**Don't communicate about plant based or sustainability in food,**” Daniel said. Their data shows that dishes like the ‘one planet pizza’ and ‘vegan vibes pizza’ don't sell.

He also doesn't believe that **CO<sub>2</sub>-labeling** dishes has a great effect on the audience. The ones who know what it means already know that plant-based food has lower emissions. However, as Claire O'Neill (A Greener Future) from the session's audience remarked, they influence food

vendors, because they don't like seeing the red label for a high CO<sub>2</sub> impact on their menus, motivating them to do better.



*Knows all about how to sell plant-based food even to meat lovers: Daniel Barrera Madsen.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Daniel brought a successful example of not communicating about plant-based food. A vendor who sold burgers with patties made of 50% beef and 50% plant protein at 16 festivals didn't promote the patties were balanced. The result: 40,000 burgers sold, happy customers, 2.5 tons less beef, and 75 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e saved. If you promote anything, Daniel said, highlight the positive features such as 'burger with added fiber' or 'balanced protein'.

In a conversation round at the end of the presentation, Linnéa Vågen Svensson revealed from her work at Rosendal Garden Party that the festival offers an e-learning course to food vendors, in which they teach them tricks like that. The vendors kept using the new menus they created at other events as well. Claire O'Neill told the story of the British football club Forest Green Rovers, which went vegan 10 years ago. Not surprisingly, they faced backlash for their decision caused by media coverage – but they also gained new fans because of it and in the end even increased sales.

### The Pros and Cons of each Strategy

Which are the pros and cons of different strategies to increase the number of plant-based items for food vendors at festivals? Daniel asked the participants to get together in groups and discuss. After the workshop, he kindly summarized their thoughts. Find the full list [here](#). Some examples:

- **Good idea: take out meat gradually.** ESNS did it over three years in their crew catering, as their sustainability manager Rob van Wegen reported. In the first year, plant-based food was put at the beginning of the buffet and meat at the end. In the second year, there was a sign that said you had to ask if you wanted meat. In the third year, it was gone completely. People said they could see it coming so it was less of a surprise.
- **Requiring vendors to offer a plant-based dish.** Con: vendors need to make money, and if plant-based food doesn't sell, they are reluctant to offer it.
- **Good idea: start a competition between traders:** if you have the least carbon emissions or are the greenest trader, you can get your pitch at the festival for free next year or a better position on the festival site.
- **All dishes need to show CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions.** Pro: helps festivals and vendors to know how much CO<sub>2</sub>e vendors emit. Might cause some conversations in audience. Con: It is difficult to understand what 0.5 kg means – compare it to something, like x km driven in a car.

- Most people who are angry about a festival going plant-based wouldn't buy tickets for the event anyway.
- Beware: a meal needs to make you full, so a plant-based dish must contain the right amount of **vegetarian protein**.

## Sponsorship & Sustainability

Can sponsors help green your event? This question was the center of a session with **Hendryk Martin (Bonoer & The Wow)** and **Rob van Wegen (Construction Site of the Future)**, hosted by **Holger Jan Schmidt (YOUROPE General Secretary)**. The short answer: yes, but it requires thorough planning.

**Hendryk Martin (Bonoer & The Wow)** started out in the music business in 2000, working for *Intro* – Germany's biggest music magazine at the time. When its owner bought Melt Festival out of the blue, Hendryk found himself suddenly responsible for sponsoring at a music festival without knowing what this would entail – the first steps he took in bringing together festivals and brands to create a meaningful connection and an added value for the visitors.



*Sponsorship expert Hendryk Martin and workshop host Holger Jan Schmidt. Photo by Linnéa Vågen Svensson*

Melt wasn't sustainable at all in the beginning, Hendryk said, but soon research showed that Melt's visitors wanted more things like organic, regional food and waste separation. When the team found out that a festival has an environmental footprint comparable to a small village, they started working with a German sustainability network to introduce basic measures like LED lighting and organic food; they even offered train rides directly onto the festival site.

Hendryk liked connecting festivals and brands so much that he eventually left *Intro* to focus full time on this work by founding [Bonoer](#). The problem: their clients highlight that they want Bonoer to be as sustainable as possible, but often don't behave sustainably themselves, mostly due to the related costs.

"Being sustainable needs a different planning," Hendryk said. All suppliers and participants of a festival need to be on board for it to work. It can't be communicated from the top down only. "In the end, if you look at the costs, being more sustainable isn't more expensive than doing it conventionally. You just need to plan in a different way."

Bonoer started the green sponsoring process by measuring the impact of festival sponsoring activations, resulting in a data set of about 250 carbon footprints. They know exactly which levers to pull to change a footprint. For example, they could create a clear roadmap for one of their clients who has several festival activations and wants to reduce scope 3 emissions by 30% by 2030.

Hendryk found that a sustainable activation only works if the brand is intrinsically motivated. Bonoer works with two big clients on sustainability and with other clients on “regular” business. Hendryk admitted that the first wouldn’t be possible without the latter.

Talking about festival sustainability often revolves around energy, although it causes just 1% of the carbon footprint, Hendryk said. However, it is also a very visible topic, so it became the subject that they are really trying to activate. They started with a trial on hydrogen power at Reeperbahn Festival – nobody knew how to handle it in the beginning, but now the expertise is there. “I believe, if a brand is able to support a festival in changing, for example, from diesel to hydrogen, that this is good sponsoring,” Hendryk said. If you as a brand enable a zero-emission supply of a festival, it’s a win-win situation.

Unfortunately, he found the interest of companies in sustainability waning over the past years. His advice to companies who are interested in sustainable sponsorship: ask the festivals what they need and where they need support to deliver the best possible brand activations.

**“Being more sustainable isn’t more expensive than doing it conventionally. You just need to plan in a different way.”**

Hendryk Martin  
Bonoer & The Wow

In the second part of the session, **Rob van Wegen** talked about [Construction Site of the Future](#), a cross-sectoral partnership (to avoid the term “sponsorship”) between Dutch festival Into the Great Wide Open (ITGWO) and companies. As Rob told the audience, the festival doesn’t want sponsorship on their site but was looking for new revenue streams, so they came up with the idea of the construction site as a place to invite others to experiment and test new solutions. ITGWO considers festivals as agents of change and wanted to lean more into this role.

Emissions-free construction sites already exist, but people don’t get to see them – unless you move them onto a festival site. The collaboration deals with four topics: 1) fossil-free energy, 2) circular water use, 3) fossil-free transportation, and 4) bio-based materials.

For example, for circular water use, the festival works with a company called [SEA Water](#), which turns salt water into drinking water. Supporting the company in developing its treatment system



*Loves bringing brands and festivals together in a meaningful way:  
Hendryk Martin.  
Photo by Katharina Weber*

is also beneficial for the place where ITGW0 takes place – the island Vlieland, which has been struggling with its water reserves due to a rise in tourism.

In the first year, the festival found three companies who wanted to help them deliver proof of concept. Now they're in the second year. "Festivals are kind of sexy to these companies, way sexier than a construction site," Rob said, so currently, they are scaling up the project with more partners. Together they can work on questions like:

- How can the festival help validate new solutions?
- How can the festival use its stage to showcase solutions?
- How can the festival contribute to fixing the company's challenge?



*Enthusiastic about the Construction Site of the Future at Into the Great Wide Open: Rob van Wegen. Photo by Katharina Weber*

In addition to Into the Great Wide Open, Rob presented Zwarte Cross and Innofest as examples.

**"Festivals are kind of sexy to these companies, way sexier than a construction site."**

Rob van Wegen

Construction Site of the Future

**Zwarte Cross** has struggled with both the transportation of drinking water and the contamination of the bodies of water on the festival grounds. So, they brought together 300 people with knowledge on innovative and circular water management in the [WijWater project](#) to work on solutions, while the festival acted as a testing ground.

**Innofest's** declared goal is to accelerate the sustainable and social transformation, giving companies wanting to make the world a better place some space to test their solutions.

## How to Use the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030

In 2023, YOUROPE released the [European Green Festival Roadmap 2030](#) with the help of [A Greener Future](#) and [Greener Events Norway](#). The guide with dozens of practical measures for live events to become more sustainable is based on research, experiences and experiments by festivals from two decades. In Warsaw, **co-creator Linnéa Vågen Svensson (Greener Events)** talked about how festivals can use the roadmap to organize themselves and their sustainability measures.

In short, the roadmap is “a tool to make sure we move from ambition to actual practice,” Linnéa said. YOUROPE decided to develop it because festivals help shape culture and what people get to see and experience. “We curate a whole society for our audience. That’s a lot of power and opportunity,” Linnéa said.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, resource pressure and increasing expectations from audiences and artists all add to the urgency for festivals to transform to a greener version of themselves – but unlike in other industries, no direct regulations are available for festivals. It’s not enough to have 10% frontrunners – we also need to reach the other 90%.



*Helped create the roadmap in 2023 and now presenting it at the GO Group Workshop in Warsaw: Linnéa Vågen Svensson.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Several surveys conducted by different festivals have proven that audiences are interested in sustainability. And while visitors usually don’t ask directly for sustainable measures, they criticize a lack thereof.

The roadmap’s goal is a reduction of 55% of festivals’ emissions. You are free to choose your own baseline for comparison, e.g. the year you started measuring. The roadmap contains a timeline, which starts in the year of publication 2023, but of course it is possible to start out later and postpone the end date.

Actions are sorted by four levels – basic, moderate, ambitious, and challenging – in seven key problem areas – energy, travel & transport, food & drinks, materials & waste, water, biodiversity, and strategy. Based on their own data, festivals can create a plan from the actions on offer.

**Why measure emissions?** “You can’t reduce what you don’t measure,” Linnéa said. A carbon footprint analysis is a great decision-making tool. She recommended focusing on high impact areas. “You can’t do everything at once, so it’s better to prioritize than be perfect.” Equally important: it’s about creating a structural change in your organization rather than simply compensating your emissions.

**What does ‘good’ look like?** Renewable energy, low-carbon transport, and local and circular systems.

**How to use the roadmap?** Linnéa recommended starting where you are and adapting to your context. The roadmap works for all levels of sustainability – it also has something for you if you’re very advanced. Thanks to the seven areas it covers, everybody in your organization can play a role here. For example, Øyafestivalen started 20+ years ago and is still working on sustainability successfully because they gave everybody in their organization a role in the process. “You are not alone in solving this. It’s for everybody. And it can be fun,” Linnéa said.

Strategy must come first – “that means you really have to plan for structure,” Linnéa said. Build the ownership within your budget, create clear goals and an action plan, determine KPIs so you know when you have succeeded, focus on your baseline and measurements.

**“You are not alone  
in solving this. It’s  
for everybody.**

**And it can be fun.”**

Linnéa Svensson  
Greener Events

Success factors are leadership commitment – “if the leadership is not on board, this will be hard” –, cross team involvement, and continuous improvement.

On the last page of the PDF, you can find [a link to a sheet with all actions that you can download and adapt to your own liking](#). YOUROPE has plans to turn this into an even more interactive version next year.

Just recently, the roadmap was translated into Polish with the help of the National Center for Culture Poland (Narodowe Centrum Kultury). Find it [here](#) at the bottom of the page.

→ Want to translate the roadmap into your local language or know someone who could help? Reach out to [office@yourope.org](mailto:office@yourope.org).

**“You can’t  
reduce what  
you don’t  
measure.”**

Linnéa Svensson  
Greener Events

## Give me Hope: The Green Group Workout

How do you keep on pushing for a better, greener, fairer world when everything we have achieved in sustainability gets challenged left and right? When wars are setting us back years in terms of environmental progress? When the political climate is hostile and the USA are pulling out of the Paris agreement? How do you talk to artists about biodegradable confetti when millions of liters of oil are burning in Iran? If no one cares about this, why should you?

In the “Green Group Workout”, hosts **Holger Jan Schmidt (YOUROPE General Secretary)** and **Linnéa Vågen Svensson (Greener Events)** engaged the participants in a session that didn’t explain how to create more sustainable events, but that was about finding hope and motivation to keep on doing what’s so important and so unpopular in the public discourse at the same time – fighting for the green transformation.

**Claire O’Neill (Co-Founder & CEO of A Greener Future, AGF)** opened the conversation with a short presentation about the recently-released third edition of The Show Must Go On Report. The goal was to create a benchmark with the available data on sustainability at festivals in the UK to get the British government to move. When you are considered small, like the festival sector, the government is unlikely to pick up your topic unless you tell them specifically and in detail what you need.



*Talking about the recent update of the Show Must Go On Report: AGF’s Claire O’Neill. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

“The hope is by doing it together, we will do the change more rapidly,” Claire said. You can only do so much on your own and need the buy-in from others in a leadership position. However, the most difficult thing about the report was making everyone, also competitors, work together on the same goal, according to Claire.

84 festivals delivered reliable data, which the writers used to create an average for the industry, e.g. on fuel use per person per day, waste produced, water consumed, etc. When calculating the per person impact of a festival, one has to make a lot of assumptions, Claire admitted, but it helps to measure and to benchmark. One of the results is that being at a festival actually creates fewer emissions than staying at home (15.9 kg vs. 36 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e).

Audience travel was shown to be the biggest source of emissions (64% of a visitor’s 15.9 kg), followed by “new materials – embodied carbon (excluding sets)” with 10%, which is a new category to assess materials beyond waste. “Embodied carbon (set materials)” on the other hand describes the impact of the lifecycle of materials that were discarded at the festivals (4%).

The report also identified potential emission reductions from key initiatives – where can we make a reduction without spending too much money? Does the solution exist at scale in the country? Can you do it without a lot of staff and resources? These include, among others, a 32% reduction in audience travel emissions, which would lead to an overall reduction in sector emissions of 20%, and halving virgin material use, which would lead to an 8% reduction.

The not so good news: even if all these key initiatives were to be implemented, the UK festival sector would still be nearly 13% short of a 50% overall emissions reduction.

Another thing included in the report is a climate actions checklist with 30 points that are recommended for any size of festival to do. They are based on the UK, but much is also applicable to other countries.

For its Climate Transition Plan 2030 the report asks, e.g., for the national adoption of the Green Events Code of Practice, a task force to accelerate the installation of grid connections in public outdoor spaces, and a national ban on single-use cups/bottles at festivals. “This is a model of working together for more of us to do, to work with ministries and find the baseline and gaps,” Claire concluded.

→ Download [The Show Must Go On Report 3](#).

In the second part of the session, the two hosts sparked conversations in smaller groups with the goal of finding things that can give us hope.

Question: **What have we as the festival industry achieved so far that we are proud of?** Answers included:

- We can reinvent ourselves every year – or quicker if you have multiple events. That gives hope because you know that next year, you can do better.
- The stories and examples that are being shared in the GO Group workshop give hope because they show that change is possible.
- Every year, our events get a little bit better.
- Feedback from volunteers: more and more people want to participate in these kinds of storylines.
- Green chef education has changed F&B managers' perspectives.
- Equal rights for peeing made possible by Lapee – what started at festivals is now part of the London marathon, a quick pee opportunity with dignity for women.
- Producing the lowest-ever carbon emissions show with Massive Attack last year.

Question: **Which headlines (connected to our sector) do you want to see in 2040? What should be key goals and ambitions in the years to come for us to succeed?** Answers included:

- “No one wants to eat meat anymore! Lentils are taking over”
- “Live Nation finally to dismantle unfair ticket system”
- “Women are headlining the biggest European festivals”

**“The hope is  
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**Claire O’Neill  
A Greener Future**



Workshop participants drafting headlines they want to see in 2040. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

- “Trump, Musk, Netanyahu lost on the way to Mars – Putin made it but no fuel for return”
- “Recycling company says: ‘We have nothing to sort!’”
- “Last oil production site closes operation due to low demand”
- “Last plastic bottle sold”
- “Festivals went vegan – and no one noticed”
- “Earth Overshoot Day is in December – finally”
- “Festival goers’ footprint undetectable”
- “Earth’s emissions are now declining”
- “Remember the beef burger? How festivals changed public behavior”
- “Festival experts to consult industry CEOs”
- “100% renewable energy achieved in European festival sector”

**Question: What is holding us back from achieving these headlines? And what do we need to reach our goals?**

- **Holding us back:**
  - Finding the money and the investors willing to invest in a big change that might not pay back over their lifetime.
  - How difficult it is to make regular people change their habits.
  - Missing legislation on sustainability.
  - Political decision making takes too long to have an immediate effect.
  - Cultural differences / differences in communication on sustainability between countries.
  - How social media made us unable to communicate face to face.
- **What we need:**
  - Investors willing to invest in the good cause, maybe not just for profit.
  - Long term financial support and planning.
  - To subsidize those doing good (there is a lack of monetary incentives).
  - To invest in young leaders.
  - A peaceful revolution.
  - A silent revolution (if you’re too outspoken, you get resistance).
  - To upscale the number of experts like those in the GO Group workshop.
  - To be present in politics.
  - A change in political structure and politicians pushing for change.
  - For legislation to come about, solutions already need to exist that the legislation can be based on.
  - To push the green agenda from below and attack the problem from different angles.
  - More common sense.
  - To get the political will, we need to win the cultural narrative. We need to beat the populist narrative, right wing media, and algorithms that are enforcing a negative opinion on the population. Then we can also win over businesses and politicians.

- Sustainability should be taught as a subject from an early age.
- To push big organizations and companies to work together.
- To speak the same language when it comes to climate change across borders.
- To find people with different ways of communicating – music, panels, activism – and have them talk to each other.
- To use festivals as a platform to have diplomatic conversations.
- To upscale solutions from the small cities that festivals are to actual cities.
- To make festival audiences and suppliers empowered to take actions.



*Some of the workshop participants presenting their ideas. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

## Put a Smile on the Face of a Child in a War Zone

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the Ukrainian music industry didn't hesitate long to found Music Saves Ukraine (MSU), an aid organization to support the Ukrainian population during the war. They started out providing humanitarian help and supplies, collecting donations from and at other European festivals. In the meantime, their focus has changed to supporting Ukrainian music and culture because of Russia's attempt to wipe it out entirely. In Warsaw, Vlad Yaremchuk (Atlas Festival & MSU) explained how festivals can support MSU's newest initiative: helping out music schools in Ukraine.

They launched the initiative last year with the help of the [Culture & Education for Life Foundation](#), which was founded by Christof Huber (OpenAir St.Gallen & YOUROPE chairman), Fruzsina Szép (YOUROPE board member) and Cyrill Stadler (YOUROPE member Summer Days) specifically to support music education. The cultural sector is at the bottom of the list to receive help in Ukraine, so MSU highly appreciated the support, Vlad told the audience.

Together, MSU and the foundation printed 31,000+ music school textbooks. MSU also organized a mini grant scheme for music schools. Of the 1300 known music schools in Ukraine, about 300 applied for funding, which came as a shock even to the MSU team. Russia intentionally targets cultural institutions in Ukraine and "some music schools are completely destroyed," Vlad said.

Schools can receive a grant of up to €4000. In the first round, MSU chose 12 schools, many in frontline regions, which mostly spent the grants on technical equipment and instruments to do something for their communities.

The team travelled to each school and captured their stories, resulting in moving videos. "Every school has a unique problem, and every school has a unique set of amazing teachers," Vlad said. "The teachers work on sheer enthusiasm and the love of children. It's not a sustainable job, so we desperately wanted to help them."



Presenting Music Saves Ukraine's micro grant scheme for music schools: Vlad Yaremchuk. Photo by Katharina Weber

MSU tested the scheme in 2025 and saw how much value and joy it brings. "We are people from music helping people from music," Vlad said. Before the initiative, they often couldn't tell people what they would do with the money because it hadn't been determined then – now they can say up to €4000 will go to an individual school.

If festivals or artists support a mini grant, their logo can be put onto the funded equipment. Donors can also give less than €4000 and be paired with other sponsors.

**"Every school has a unique problem, and every school has a unique set of amazing teachers."**

Vlad Yaremchuk  
Music Saves Ukraine

This year, new schools will receive funds collected at festivals last season, and the plan is to do it again later with funds collected at festivals this year.

- Get in touch with Vlad, if you want to help: [vlad@musicsavesua.com](mailto:vlad@musicsavesua.com)
- Find out how to organize awareness and fundraising activities at your festival with the [Festivals for Ukraine Toolkit](#) (works for any social cause).
- Watch the most recent documentary about the [Music Ambassadors Tour](#) (December 2025) to get a firsthand insight into the life in Ukraine. Reach out to Vlad if you want to be an ambassador in the 2026 tour.

## More Ambitious than a Major Festival: Štěrkovna Open Music

This year's winner of the Green Operations Award at the European Festival Awards was a not so widely known small Czech Festival called [Štěrkovna Open Music](#) (ŠOM). The jury wanted to honor the extraordinary ambition and clear sustainability goals the 10,000-capacity event had set for itself. In Warsaw, Štěrkovna's **Jan Halfar (ŠOM's Sustainability Manager / Researcher at Technical University of Ostrava, VSB)** and **Matěj Ostárek (CEO & Owner)** shared their strategy and results with the participants.

“Festival of extraordinary projects” is the tagline of the event that runs for three days, offering local music, Rap, Pop, and Metal on five stages. At the European Festival Awards 2024, ŠOM was shortlisted among the top 10 small festivals in Europe. They focus on sustainability, visual effects and services because they have reached the maximum capacity of their venue, Jan said. The festival has no camping facilities of its own, but there is a campsite nearby that festival visitors use.

### ŠOM's Sustainability Journey in a Nutshell

In 2019, Matěj realized how much of the festival's **waste** went directly to landfill – then COVID hit, giving them plenty of time to figure out how to improve the situation. In 2021 they worked with a Czech company to separate their waste, but the company didn't care what happened to the waste afterwards, which felt like **greenwashing** to Matěj.



Štěrkovna Open Music's Matěj Ostárek (left) and Jan Halfar.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

In 2022, they set the goal to become the most sustainable event in Czechia, introducing reusable cups and tableware, but realizing that they wouldn't be successful without having someone dedicated to taking care of sustainability. So, they invited Jan to the team.

During his first year in 2023, they started looking in more detail at the festival – where is what type of waste being generated? What about food packaging? They figured out that **biodegradable tableware** was the best choice for them and also started manual waste separation. Additionally, they built infrastructure for both **drinking water** and **wastewater**.

In 2024 they realized they need more **data** to improve, so they started measuring the event's **carbon footprint**. In addition, they improved their waste management system.

In 2025, they could make decisions and changes based on their carbon assessment for the first time. Their waste management system was well-established by that time, so they started focusing on visitors by preparing kiosks occupied by staff to **share info** about sustainability from waste sorting to water.

In 2026, they are being **assessed by A Greener Future (AGF)** and put their focus **on social sustainability**, e.g. mental health issues. They also launched a **public transport campaign**. Most visitors are from Czechia and only a few travel more than 100 km to the event, so they want to encourage visitors to leave their cars at home.

### Key Sustainability Topics

According to Jan, ŠOM's five key sustainability topics are waste management, carbon footprint journey, mobility, social sustainability, and cultural sustainability.

**Waste management**, Jan's "small baby" as he calls it, was the first topic they wanted to solve "because it's the most visible problem also for the visitors." They identified where waste is generated, the types of waste, and then implemented an easy system for waste sorting for visitors.

They have been working on it for three years and are still adapting it, e.g. with feedback from visitors who need bins to look a certain way to be able to easily recognize which waste goes

## "The up to three beers effect"

→ At night, visitors don't separate trash correctly anymore – witnessed by the team of Štěrkovna Open Music

where. A sticker on the front explaining what is supposed to go in was not enough because the bins are sometimes covered by other stuff, so they added stickers on the top. They also have colorful backs to indicate the contents to the team sorting the trash bags.

Jan mentioned that they noticed the "up to three beers effect" – during the day, people don't have problems sorting, but during the night they do, so they introduced post-sorting the waste by their team. It's easier to sort pre-sorted material, which makes it faster, Jan said. The team sorts the waste in a tent containing a mobile sorting line which is

basically a moving belt attended by several people at once. This enables ŠOM to sort many material types, e.g. PET, aluminum cans, paper, glass, bio waste, e-cigarettes, and cooking oil.

Another problem: vendor waste management. The festival team fights with its vendors every year because they don't want to separate waste and put all waste materials into one bag – paper, oil, raw meat etc. The team even noticed that some vendors bring their trash from Colours of Ostrava, which takes place one week earlier. Still, the festival takes on the responsibility to separate all vendor trash.

ŠOM has now reached a separation rate of nearly 80%, representing 7.05 tons of the total 8.89 tons of waste, which is up almost 10 percentage points from the previous year.

Regarding the **carbon footprint**, the festival aims to be net zero by 2028. They collaborate with VSB, a university which has experts on carbon footprint calculation. "A good example of the connection of universities and the private sector," Jan said. The 2025 footprint was not ready in time for Warsaw, but in 2024 the biggest source of emissions was **transportation**.

Matěj told the workshop participants that they doubled the price for car parking, trying to disincentivize using cars, but their number remained the same. ŠOM offers free bike parking in safe spots, which isn't used as much as they'd like yet. They analyze mobile phone data to see where most people come from. The festival site can even be reached by train. "If you know how to persuade people to leave their car at home, let us know," Matěj said.

This year, ŠOM launched a campaign to encourage visitors to use the bus, which is supported by the municipality by supplying more buses. The idea is to have a competition between festival goers. "If they are on a bus and take a video or selfie and tag the festival, we can choose maybe two of them and they win VIP tickets for next year," Jan said. Another plan is to switch to e-vehicles for on-site transportation.

On the **social sustainability** side, everybody who works at the festival gets paid, and paid above minimum wage – there are no volunteers. Many workers are students from universities and secondary schools. The festival further supports the local economy by hiring 90% of their suppliers from within a 100 km radius. Local clubs and NGOs can present themselves on site for free – “everyone who works within the region and helps others,” Matěj said. The festival lets them collect donations, e.g. via cup deposits.

Lastly, **cultural sustainability** means: “We don’t just buy and sell the show,” Matěj said. He explained where the festival’s tagline comes from: they cooperate with a local art school and their headliner, making it possible for the school’s pupils to sing on stage with the headliner to collect some stage experience. In addition, by connecting a



*Štěrkovna Open Music's CEO and owner: Matěj Ostárek.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

DJ and a symphonic orchestra, they create a 90-minute symphonic dance music show, mixing Classic music with Rock and Pop. Plus, they book traditional Czech bands.

### Operating Principles

On top of their five key sustainability topics, ŠOM has a couple of **key operating principles**. The first is the academic **connection to the university**. Three master theses have already been written on the festival, and another one is in the making. ŠOM is supposed to be a living lab to test sustainable solutions with their 10,000 visitors.

The second principle is **empowering the team**. The festival has a small team, but everybody is involved in sustainability. “It’s our core value,” Matěj said. A nice team building activity: The team collects leftover food from the backstage each night to share together for breakfast the next day, which gives them time to connect and discuss things before the work begins.

The third key operating principle is **stakeholder engagement**. They promote their sustainable measures to their stakeholders, some of whom wanted to become a partner specifically because of the strong sustainability strategy.

**Audience engagement** is another operating principle. The team prepares campaigns around sustainable measures on multiple spots on the festival site, so people can see what they are doing. They use the same templates every year and just update the numbers to save on materials. Additionally, they collect feedback via visitor surveys. The next step will be a study conducted by the University of Prague to assess ŠOM’s local economic impact.

In a little Q&A after the presentation, participants offered input to tackle fan travel emissions. Rob van Wegen (ESNS) said they have had good experiences with framing. E.g., many people don't care that the bus is the environmentally better alternative to their car, but if you frame taking the bus as something fun – meet new friends, have a beer, extend your festival experience – then people are more likely to take the bus.

Carpooling can be encouraged by offering people in full cars the best parking or camping spots. Other festivals have created a party train to the festival site that offers meet and greets and other fun activities that you can only join if you take the train.

When asked how they solved the toilet problem, Matěj replied that they installed mobile drainage throughout the site to allow flushable toilets. The water goes to the local treatment plant, which they pay for every year – but the service is worth it. They found out that more women are coming to their festival since they have flushable toilets rather than porta potties.



*Was invited to Štěrkovna to manage everything related to sustainability: Jan Halfar. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

## The Nasty Reality of Textile Production

**Ákos Dominus** has effectively been **Sziget Festival's sustainability manger** for 20 years – although he wasn't called "sustainability manager" in the beginning. He could have talked about many topics in the GO Group workshop but chose textile production "because it's the area where ecological and social sustainability interrelate the most," he said. It shows the challenges of both areas, and it's something that many parts of the music industry are involved in – and the visitors.

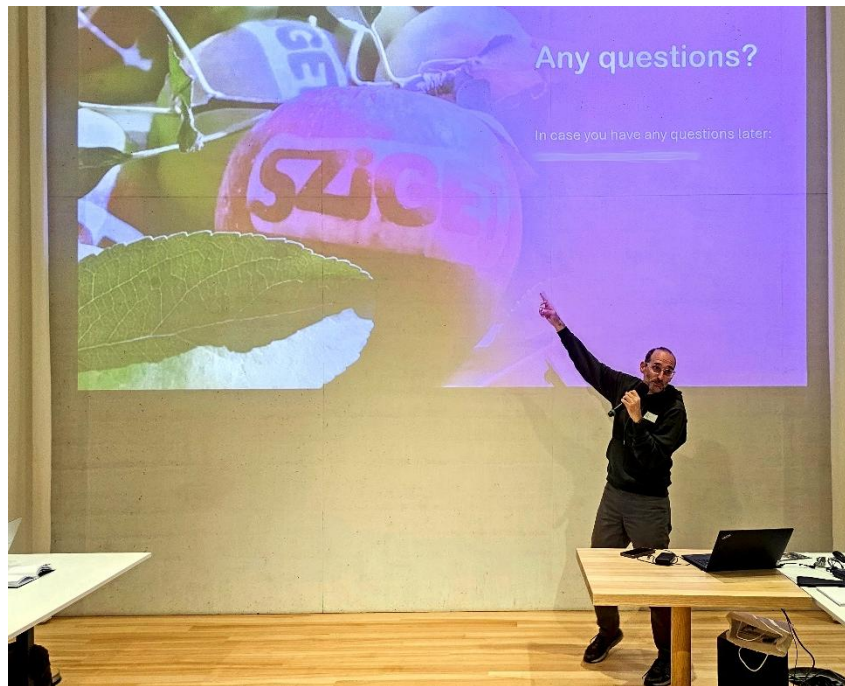
Merch isn't a huge issue in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> but carries a symbolic role in how we do things, he said. In his presentation, he focused on the larger issues of textile production, while adding some good-practice examples of fair, social and sustainable textile production from Sziget at the end.

He started out with the **impacts of the life cycle of textile products**. For example:

- About 65% of all clothes created are fossil fuel based, with polyester alone making up 55%.
- Around 2700 liters of water are used to produce one t-shirt.
- Most workers in textile production are paid only half the living wage of their country, and most are based in developing countries.
- Transport makes up 30% of the emissions caused by textile production, leading to more than two billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> every year.
- After wearing, only 1% of textiles are recycled.

- Between 92 and 120 million tons of textiles are going to waste every year, meaning each second, one truck load of textiles goes to landfill.

Constantly changing fashion trends result in hyper-consumption leading to an excessive need to produce, so companies need quick and cheap resources and labor, Ákos explained. More interesting numbers: globally, clothes are worn 7-10 times before being discarded, and people from the global north buy 50-70 items per year. "We aim for a circular system, but it's linear, from production to landfill," Ákos said.



*Pointing out a Sziget-branded apple, created using the power of the sun: Ákos Dominus. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

Ákos continued with a closer look at the **environmental and social challenges/impacts of textile production**. While about 65% of all clothes created are fossil fuel based, growing natural fibers for clothes like cotton impacts the environment and human health through pesticides and fertilizers, monocultures, soil erosion and biodiversity loss. Production requires huge amounts of water in countries where water is scarce.

Often, toxic chemicals are used for the dyes, which end up in rivers because of very low safety production standards in developing countries. According to Ákos, about 20% of cotton globally comes from the Uyghur region in China. Reports claim that the cotton production there involves forced labor, child labor and other human rights violations, which the Chinese government has denied.

80% of the people working in textile production are women, minorities or children. Workers are often paid per item. If an order gets cancelled, they might not be paid for their work at all.

The label "made in a European country" might mean nothing, because it can be applied even if only the last step in production was made in Europe. This means the cotton might still come from the Uyghur region, the item might still be processed in Bangladesh and dyed in India. Transporting textiles causes emissions, and packaging them produces further waste. After being discarded, textiles produce (micro-)plastic pollution, go to landfill and mainly accumulate in the global south.

Despite all these impacts, there are **solutions** to reduce them:

- Use organic or recycled materials as well as certified materials, e.g. by the [Global Organic Textile Standard](#) (GOTS).
- Avoid overproduction by producing on demand.
- Produce locally and use verified manufacturers.
- Think about the impact of an item already when designing it – what is going to happen to the product later? How durable will it be?
- Use better materials and design a more durable product.
- Use natural textiles and dyes.
- Have a code of conduct in production.
- Produce items from a single material, so they are easy to recycle/biodegradable.
- Offer clear use instructions with your product.

**“Material durability and emotional durability.”**

Ákos Dominus

Sziget Festival

on what makes clothing items be reused

**What makes an item reused? “Material durability and emotional durability** – if the quality is good and if an item has sentimental value,” according to Ákos.

**What did Sziget do? Good-practice examples from the festival:**

- The festival stopped producing an annual volunteer shirt. It wasn’t popular with the volunteers anymore because it often didn’t fit the way they wanted it to. Now Sziget produces a symbolic vest that is made from old festival banners – not a full vest, but basically a few bands connected by Velcro. It can be worn over normal clothing, passed to other people, and easily washed. “After a redesign, it became a huge success in the second year,” Ákos said. The vests are returned at the end of an edition and reused in the following year.
- Sziget sold **bags** made by the Hungarian backpack brand [Háti](#) in cooperation with the Hungarian band Carson Coma, who donated old tour posters to be upcycled into bags. The proceeds went into housing projects for the unhoused, according to Ákos.
- Together with the Hungarian upcycling brand [Ursuslupus](#), Sziget turned damaged left-behind **tents into official merch items like fanny packs** (undamaged tents were donated).
- In collaboration with the sustainable fashion design studio [Pinkponilo](#), Sziget offered **overproduced shirts** that their visitors could buy for less than their original price and **customize** in a workshop. They could also print the Sziget logo on their own clothes. Letting visitors brand their own items actually turned a profit for the festival, Ákos said.

**“Nothing is better merchandising than what people can eat right there.”**

Ákos Dominus

Sziget Festival

- Sziget has a lot of commercial sponsors which want to hand out merch as **giveaways**. Thanks to an ongoing debate, “we managed to influence which giveaways they use,” Ákos said. It used to be low-value items like plastic sunglasses that were to be used at the festival and then discarded; now the contracts say that every merch item has to be approved by Sziget. The criteria: **no individual packing, no festival use only**. “And it works,” according to Ákos.
- A farm produces **Sziget-branded apples** by putting stickers on the fruit before it turns red, which leaves the logo in a lighter shade after the sticker gets removed. “Nothing is better merchandising than what people can eat right there,” Ákos said.

## Evaluate Me! Sustainable Certifications

Sustainable certifications are a great way to have a third party validate your sustainability efforts. In a session at the GO Group workshop, the participants learned about A Greener Future’s “greener festivals certification”, ISO20121 (an international standard for sustainable event management, created by the International Organization for Standardization), as well as a handful of local Norwegian certificates.

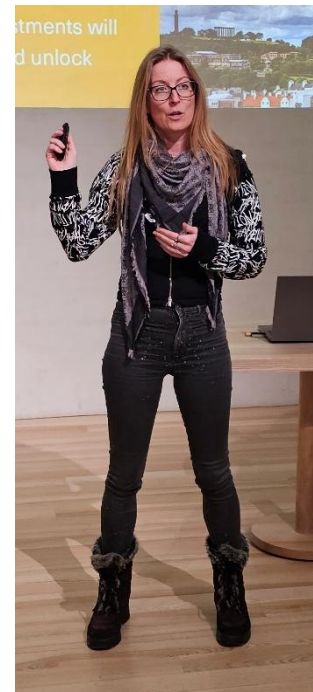
### AGF’s “Greener Festivals Certification”

**AGF’s** certification has its origins in research done by **co-founder Claire O’Neill** in 2004 on whether UK music festivals should implement environmental practices (spoiler: the answer was yes). What started out as a small checklist of actions has now developed into a “very comprehensive certification,” Claire said. AGF no longer only certifies festivals, but other events, arenas, suppliers, and tours as well.

The “greener festivals certification” covers classic impact areas plus categories like governance, local environments, and local communities. “The idea is to have a holistic approach to all the elements you could approach from a sustainability perspective,” Claire explained.

You start with a self-assessment, where you need to answer questions about your planning, which can also be used as an event sustainability action plan. Then follows an on-site assessment usually done by two assessors trained by AGF (AGF’s assessor network now consists of about 300 people around the world). After the festival, more data, e.g. on actual usage, must be handed in.

The result is one of four ratings: Outstanding, Highly Recommended, Commended, or Improver – unless you didn’t reach the minimum requirements, in which case you don’t get certified. Festivals also receive feedback on how to improve and qualify for the annual AGF Awards, which are given out at Green Events and Innovations Conference (GEI). AGF turns the collected results from all festivals it assesses into a festival sustainability insights report on the state of the industry each year.



AGF's Claire O'Neill. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt



*Host Linnéa Vågen Svensson and speakers Daniele Murgia, Claire O'Neill, and Marie Rosted Furseth.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

At the moment, festivals must still enter data into a spreadsheet during the assessment, but AGF is in the process of creating an interactive, more streamlined, user-friendly digital assessment tool – which is quite a process. “It’s like moving house after 20 years,” Claire said.

For those unwilling or unable to be scrutinized publicly in the assessment, AGF offers a sustainability diagnosis, which essentially serves as a gap analysis.

### ISO 20121

**Daniele Murgia**, who is speaker manager at German festival fair **Future of Festivals** and part of their ISO 20121 certification process, reported on his first-hand experiences with ISO in Warsaw. “ISO is not a monster, but it’s a lot of German-style bureaucracy,” he said.

The international standard was born after the success of the British BS 8901 standard for sustainable event management, which was created with the London 2012 Olympic Games in mind. BS 8901 was received enthusiastically even outside of the UK, leading to interest in creating an international standard on top of it.

**“ISO doesn’t say  
you need to be 100%  
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you to have a plan.”**

**Daniele Murgia**  
Future of Festivals

ISO 20121 brings together all three dimensions of sustainability: ecological, economic, and social. It is a framework to help identify harmful impacts of an event in these three categories. “ISO gives you a framework, a guideline through this whole process,” Daniele said. It was last updated in 2024 to focus more on inclusivity, among other things.

Future of Festivals started the certification process only few weeks before the workshop, but Daniele has worked with it at other events before. “I know the whole progress – the struggles but also the opportunities you have,” he said. Every member of

an organization has a role to play and gets an opportunity to bring in their knowledge and experience. Stakeholder communication is another very important aspect.

The festival fair conducted a gap analysis by systematically reviewing their areas of work. At the end, they received a feedback protocol telling them where the gaps are and how they can improve. "ISO doesn't say you need to be 100% perfect – it wants you to have a plan," Daniele said. The goal is to establish a continuous improvement process.

### General Considerations and Other Certificates

**Øyafestivalen**, a frontrunner when it comes to sustainable festivals, is part of five sustainability certification schemes, told us **Marie Rosted Furseth (Head of Sustainability)**. Besides AGF, this includes the national schemes Norwegian [Eco-Lighthouse](#) certification for "enterprises seeking to document their environmental efforts and demonstrate social responsibility," [Balansekunst](#) (The art of Balance – for diversity, inclusion and equality), [Tilgjengelighetsmerket](#) (accessibility certificate by Norwegian Live), and [Debio](#) Gold (90%+ organic food).

According to her, Eco-Lighthouse is much easier than AGF. "I do the Lighthouse in half a day and do AGF in three months," she said. Marie thinks that AGF is useful for festivals because you get a certificate specific to your business. Øya uses the Eco-Lighthouse only for management, i.e. things like energy use in the office and staff travel, while the AGF certificate covers the actual event.

"I think we kind of overdo it when it comes to certifications, but it is useful to have their seals on the website, especially the accessibility ones, because it shows people with special needs that they are being thought of," Marie said. Certificates are a great excuse to tell people about the work that you do and to get an evaluation from an external party. "You get honest feedback on your gaps and where you can improve."



*Master of Norwegian certificates:  
Marie Rosted Furseth.  
Photo by Katharina Weber*

And the downsides? Getting through the certification process is a lot of work, Marie said. It makes sense to have a dedicated person like a sustainability manager for it, but for some festivals such a position is a luxury they cannot afford. But even doing a certification just once can help because it gives you access to a toolbox for improvements.

### Deep Dive: Insights into CO<sub>2</sub> Analysis

Measuring your carbon footprint is the first step in setting a benchmark to compare your reductions to – but what does the data actually mean? In the session "Getting Nerdy: Diving into CO<sub>2</sub>-Calculations" speakers presented findings from AGF's annual sustainability report, Green Deal Circular Festivals combined data on CO<sub>2</sub>, and Øyafestivalen's carbon footprint analysis.

## AGF's annual sustainability report

AGF calculates the carbon footprint for many festivals, e.g. Boom (PT) and Paradise City (BE). According to **Claire O'Neill (Co-founder & CEO of AGF)**, the challenge is to make sure the data remains comparable year by year, even if the methodology changes. Since the data gathering improves continually, there is a risk the festivals might look worse when they actually improved.

The NGO publishes the combined data sets of all festivals it had assessed in the previous year in an annual sustainability report. For the current version (2024), AGF analyzed 40 events across 16 countries.

The report shows distinct differences between camping and non-camping festivals and even differences within the categories. This is due to different event sizes and other differentiating factors, Claire explained. E.g., larger events tend to rely mostly on generators with HVO fuels, while smaller events are more often connected to the grid. The event type is also a significant factor influencing impacts (multi day, one day, weeklong).

One example from AGF's data: the recorded carbon footprint (per person per day) including audience travel for non-camping festivals is 28.9 kg on average, with a minimum of 8.9 kg and a maximum of 45.6 kg. For camping festivals, the average is 12.8 kg, the minimum 11.5 kg and the maximum 14.8 kg. Artist popularity impacts audience emissions because people will travel farther for a more popular artist, Claire said.

→ Find more data in "[AGF Annual Festival Sustainability Insights](#)."



Has the numbers of AGF's combined CO<sub>2</sub> analysis: Claire O'Neill. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

## Green Deal Circular Festivals

The pan-European project Green Deal Circular Festivals (GDCF) was a community for festivals striving to become circular and climate neutral. The project funded by the Dutch government officially ended in December 2025, but the community will live on as a part of GO Group. In Warsaw, **Rob van Wegen, who was a part of GDCF with ESNS**, could present combined data coming out of the project's participating festivals for the first time ever.

The data is based on 26 festivals that all invested in circularity and sustainability, so the numbers are not representative of the sector, Rob noted. Most data is from 2025 – if a festival didn't complete the 2025 assessment, the data is from 2024. Emissions varied greatly from festival to festival (between 25 and 21,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e), with an average of 18.7 kg per visitor per day.

Not every festival delivered data in every category relevant to the project – "materials & waste" was the most reported on category (26 festivals), while "digital" was least reported on (15 festivals). Some findings:

- The data set revealed differences between **countries**. Dutch festivals stood out with a high recycling rate (likely due to the country's well-developed waste management industry) and a high degree of fossil-free transport on site.

- **Size** matters: medium-sized festivals (5000-20,000 visitors) turned out to have the highest recycling rates and degree of fossil-free audience travel. Other size categories: small: <5000, large: 20,000-50,000, mega: 50,000+ visitors.
- The team examined whether there are differences related to the **age** of a festival and found that festivals younger than five years tended to have a higher rate of fossil-free travel and recycling. Additionally, established (5-20 years) and institutionalized festivals (>20 years) had a higher percentage of people traveling by plane.
- The team further examined the differences between **rural** and **urban** festivals, revealing that rural events have much more car travel but less plane travel.
- Two mega festivals (Sziget and Tomorrowland) likely had an impact **skewing** the results in certain areas, e.g. when looking at the difference in audience travel options between camping and non-camping festivals.
- The **travel distance** is longer for camping festivals, and it increases with the age of an event.
- The percentage of people **traveling sustainability** to urban festivals is twice as high as at rural festivals. The size of the festival doesn't seem to play a role here – but the age does, with older festivals having less sustainable travel.
- Camping festivals have a much higher **use of electricity and gas** per visitor per day than non-camping festivals. When looking at the influence of the festival size on this, medium-sized festivals stand out in terms of gas use, but the team isn't sure why yet. Older festivals tend to use much more gas – why, the team doesn't know yet either.
- Looking at the **genres** of festivals showed that the visitors of electronic festivals **eat** the least compared to Rock/Pop and mixed genre events. Mixed events' visitors **drink** the least, while Rock/Pop leads in both categories. Comparing rural and urban events revealed that visitors at urban festivals eat much less and also drink less at the events. Plus, the older the event, the more people eat and drink there.



*Presenting Green Deal Circular Festivals' carbon analysis for the first time: Rob van Wegen. Photo by Katharina Weber*

### Øyafestivalen

Norwegian Øyafestivalen has been measuring its environmental impacts for 20 years, **Øya's Head of Sustainability Marie Rosted Furseth** told the audience. They started with energy and waste and gradually added on more categories. Transport was added in 2011, food in 2015, and audience travel in 2024.

Since 2022, they have been using the [Green Producers Tool](#) to measure their CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions, which uses lifecycle assessment, i.e. it calculates the emissions from cradle to grave for everything you register. For example, the tool does not register a bicycle ride as zero emissions because in order to use a bike, it first has to be made, which causes emissions through the

extraction of materials and the assembly process. Marie appreciates the tool because it is quite specific to festivals and constantly improving.

For a **new report**, Øya assembled all of their old and new data to figure out where and how much they have improved over time. The challenge was that they needed to convert the old figures because the emission factors have changed over time.

What's more, they now measure more activities than in the beginning. Since 2005, the number of activities measured has increased from 7 to 800+. One such activity is the total amount of kilowatt hours (kwh) spent at the festival. Improved data leads to higher transparency, but sometimes also higher numbers, Marie said.

Looking at the annual carbon footprints from 2005 to 2024 "seems a bit random," Marie said, with the total emissions going up and down, sometimes without apparent reason. 2011 shows a massive spike because they started measuring transport emissions. 2022, when they started using the Green Producers Tool but wanted to keep their old categories, shows a clear dip. Then, in 2023, they realized that they needed a new benchmark, which led to a sharp increase in measured emissions.

"Just looking at the numbers is not going to tell you anything," Marie concluded. Changes in venue, the addition of an extra day, and other things influencing carbon emissions are not visible in the total amount of emissions produced.

Øyafestivalen's data, together with the data of about 300 other productions, flows into the "**Green Producers Club Annual Report.**" The current report identified transport (artists & internal) as the single largest emission source within the festival sector, representing 44% of total

**"Just looking at the numbers is not going to tell you anything."**

Marie Rosted Furseth  
Øyafestivalen

emissions. Food and beverage follows at 36.5%. With 43% for transport and 35% for F&B, Øya comes quite close to these numbers. However, if audience travel is taken into account, the picture changes quite drastically – it is responsible for 73% of the total emissions at the festival, lowering internal transport to 11.5% and F&B to 9.4%.

To make carbon emissions better comparable, it's helpful to calculate the emissions per person per day (pppd). When using 2023 as a benchmark, Øya has reduced the CO<sub>2</sub>e pppd emissions from 6.7kg to 5.73kg in 2025, showing that the festival is going into the right direction.

One of their biggest challenges, according to Marie, is **calculating audience travel**. Their basis is a visitor survey asking questions like: How many days are visitors at the festival? How did they



*Looking back at 20 years of impact assessment at Øyafestivalen: Marie Rosted Furseth. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

travel to Oslo? How did they get to the site? How many people were in their car/taxi? Did they come specifically for the festival? If people would have come to Oslo anyway, their journey is removed from the dataset (ca. 30% of the responses in 2025).

On top of that, the team needs to make some assumptions, e.g., how many times the visitors traveled to the festival site, which depends on where they traveled from – e.g., people from Oslo probably go back and forth every day. To measure the distance from a country to Øya, they always calculate the distance from the country’s capital; and they assume visitors left the same way they had come. Lastly, they need to upscale the number of responses to the total number of visitors, meaning their travel footprint is also influenced by the type of people answering the survey.

The results: 78% of visitors come from Oslo and the surrounding area and only 2.5% from abroad – mainly Sweden, Denmark and the UK. 49% use public transport, 34% walk or take the bike, 8.7% come by plane, and 6.4% use a car/taxi.

➔ Check out [Onboard:earth](#) if you are looking for a travel footprint calculator.

## Turning your Audience into Activists

LiveGreen Festivals & Academy is one of Sweden’s leading pioneers within festival-driven transformation, artistic and fan activism. In Warsaw, LiveGreen followed up on a conversation started at the GO Group workshop in Roskilde in 2025 – how to engage fans and festival goers in sustainability. In addition, participants learned more about LiveGreen’s newest project – the EU-funded “Project EGG.” Its goal is to create a personal sustainability assistant as an app for event organizers of all kinds.



*LiveGreen’s Martin Gustafsson (left) and Andreas Magnusson.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt*

**LiveGreen’s Andreas Magnusson (Partnership & Engagement) and Martin Gustafsson (PR & Marketing)** showed the participants the clip on the climate crisis by a Swedish pop artist that inspired Greta Thunberg to start her school strikes. “Music is a powerful way to get us to do stuff,” Andreas said.

**What is LiveGreen?** The organization started out as a youth-driven festival. Today, instead of organizing a festival, they are working with festivals, changemakers, and cultural experts towards positive change. “We focus a lot on empowerment,” Andreas said. This includes questions like how to get people to engage more, especially the ones visiting our festivals, and how to turn bold ideas into action. They want to engage cultural changemakers like festival organizers but also artists and fan communities.

They work with “Scope X” – the influence we have on society, our partners and relationships, extending the Greenhouse Gas Protocol’s Scope 1-3 – and offer a masterclass on sustainable festival and event production.

### Project EGG

LiveGreen is currently part of an Erasmus+ project with partners from all over Europe called EGG – Events Go Green. According to Martin, the name is not 100% set yet, but so far it has stuck because it’s easy to pronounce in a lot of languages. It’s an app targeting all event producers, not just festivals.

Why EGG? It’s unique because it targets all kinds of events that want to do better and minimize their impacts, even private events like weddings and birthday parties. “We aim for scale,” Martin said. “We want many people to do something instead of a few doing everything.”

**“We want many people to do something instead of a few doing everything.”**

Martin Gustafsson

LiveGreen  
on Project EGG

The app is supposed to be fun, inspiring, playful and easy to use, even if you know nothing about sustainability. The design is still kept secret, but the app will be available in English, Czech, Swedish, and German initially, with more languages to be added later. The plan is to launch an advisory board soon, so people from the events industry can bring in their knowledge.

### Examples of Fan Engagement

Andreas brought some great examples of artists engaging their fans in their values:

- In 2025, **Lady Gaga** performed a huge concert at Copacabana beach in Brazil. **GreenPeace** wanted to raise awareness of their work in the Amazonas region, so they reached out to Lady Gaga’s fan community to do something together. They ended up unveiling a 12-meter banner with the message “Respeitem a Amazônia” (“Respect the Amazon”) during the show, and people from the fan community walked around the city with placards showing the same message.
- When **Jimmy Kimmel** was briefly removed from his talk show on ABC by ABC’s parent company Disney, people started boycotting Disney by unsubscribing from its streaming service Disney+. It wasn’t until the Star Wars community joined that the movement reached momentum. The **Star Wars community** took the franchise’s story of anti-fascism and projected it onto the political events happening in the USA. They used the series “Andor” from the Star Wars universe as a concrete example. Ultimately, Jimmy Kimmel was allowed back on the show.
- Swedish Festival **Rosendal Garden Party** started a campaign to purchase an endangered forest together with LiveGreen and a couple of other expert organizations. They put emphasis on involving their visitors in the campaign, who can, e.g., donate via QR codes on posters exhibited on the festival site.

- **Bob hund**, often called the best live band in Sweden, announced in 2024 that they wouldn't tour anymore because it's so unsustainable. Martin said: "They are the hardest band to work with in the Swedish industry, but everybody loves them and the singer is an icon." Through a meeting at a book fair, a collaboration between LiveGreen and bob hund was born. For their very last concert, which took place outside an arena in Stockholm, the band organized a parade leading to the venue. They wanted people in the **parade to protest climate change**, so they ended up with their hardcore fans carrying placards with slogans like "Fuck off as much as possible and throw away as little food as possible."
- When LiveGreen connected **bob hund** with a rhetoric teacher – they teach all their artists in communication – the teacher suggested doing a dinner rather than a workshop. The cooks reinvented sustainable dishes out of pizza, falafel etc., inspiring the band to do something with food. Bob hund ended up hosting a **food truck at Way out West** with these kinds of dishes, drawing a huge crowd.



*Talking about LiveGreen's cooperation with the Swedish band bob hund (in the background):  
Andreas Magnusson.  
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt*

Andreas and Martin closed the session with an exercise, in which the participants were asked to think of their own ideas for great fan activations.

## How much do you *actually* know? The 1<sup>st</sup> GO Group Pub Quiz

Could you list all seven (groups of) greenhouse gases from the top of your head? No? Neither could most of the GO Group workshop's participants. The last full session of the day tested their knowledge of event sustainability and sustainable festivals in the first-ever GO Group Pub Quiz, created and moderated by **Katharina Weber (YOUROPE project manager)**.

Three teams – The Killers, Lemon Nation, and GO Groupies – competed against each other. The quiz checked whether participants had read the news on sustainable progress at European festivals, whether they were aware of what was going on in the sustainability departments of Europe's frontrunners, and whether they knew their sustainability basics.

If they hadn't known it yet, participants learned that in 2026, British meat-free Shambala Festival released a [poll on whether to put venison sourced from local deer back on the menu](#) – a creative attempt at environmental protection because the deer population in the UK, lacking a natural predator, is decimating ecosystems. They learned that [Paléo Festival Nyon became Switzerland's first festival with its own solar farm in 2026](#), and that Dutch Lowlands Festival has a carport solar park with a whopping 90,000 panels.

Other questions focused on the 7R of waste management, the time it takes a biodigester at Dutch DGTL to produce compost (only 24 hours), or [the average carbon footprint of a British festival goer](#) (it's lower than that of a UK citizen).



Pub quiz host and author of this report: Katharina Weber.  
Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

The quiz revealed that a retention basin at Boom can hold and treat 7 million liters of water at once, that festival goers can travel for free with public transport to OpenAir St.Gallen, and that a newspaper handed out free hotdogs at Way out West when the Swedish festival went vegetarian in 2012 – among other things. The results:

- 🥇 1 Lemon Nation
- 🥈 2 GO Groupies
- 🥉 3 The Killers

Due to the early time of day, participants enjoyed delicious pastries instead of drinks kindly supplied by the workshop's partners at Alter Art. What a fun way to end the workshop!

## What remains? Takeaways from the 12<sup>th</sup> GO Group Workshop

Before everyone went their separate ways, **workshop host Linnéa Vågen Svensson** asked the participants to reflect on what they had learned in the two days of the workshop and share it with the group. Here are some takeaways:

- [Don't use words like "vegan" to describe plant-based food](#) – focus on characteristics like texture, taste and ingredients instead!
- Sometimes you need to rethink sustainability, e.g. [like Shambala did with their poll on reintroducing venison to the menu](#).
- [CO<sub>2</sub> calculation matters](#) if you want to improve your event's sustainability.

- The participants were curious about [project EGG's upcoming app](#) and its potential for everyday events like birthday parties.
- Some participants realized that [we are all struggling with the same things](#) – there is power in us being and working together.
- GO Group workshops are a great place to connect and [return home full of hope for the future!](#)
- Music Saves Ukraine offers a great way to have a direct positive impact on the lives of Ukrainians, especially children, with their [micro grant scheme for music schools](#). Please consider supporting it!
- New friendships were made and old ones reinforced.

The next go group workshop will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany, in April 2027 (exact dates to be confirmed).

## Fun Stuff: Two Dinners and a Great View

Those participants who were already in Warsaw on the eve of the workshop, met at Hopito, an Italian restaurant/Polish pub serving craft beer and delicious pizza. They found themselves accidentally crashing into the local pub quiz that had the room packed to the last chair. Unfortunately, it was held in Polish, so our internationals couldn't compete.



*Part of the special GO Group dinner at Manna 2: faux duck and cake.  
Photos by Katharina Weber*

As is tradition, YOUROPE invited all workshop participants to a dinner on the night of the first workshop day.

Recommended by the workshop's partner Alter Art, they met at [Manna 2](#), a vegan restaurant serving unique plant-based cuisine, an interesting selection of organic and vegan wines, craft beers as well as special teas.

At the request of GO Group, Manna 2 cooked vegan interpretations of local dishes, and every course included at least one traditional Polish option. Dishes like faux duck and cruelty-free foie de gras looked so close to the originals that you had to do a double take to make sure you weren't accidentally eating animal products. But no – everything was 100% vegan – and delicious!

As a bonus treat on the second day, whoever did not have an immediate train or plane to catch, could join the group to visit Warsaw's Palace of Culture (Pałac Kultury i Nauki) right after the workshop's end. The iconic building from the 1950s is home to arts and culture as well as a viewing platform on the 30<sup>th</sup> floor. From there, the participants had a magnificent view of Warsaw's center



*The Palace of Culture (left) and the view of downtown Warsaw from its 30<sup>th</sup> floor. Photos: Holger Jan Schmidt & Katharina Weber*

with its many architecturally interesting buildings. The tickets had been kindly supplied by Alter Art.