

Disposable-free for the climate

– a learning manual for disposable-free events



Disposable-free for the climate is a learning manual with checklists, tips, and recommendations to help organisers create enjoyable events with less waste and increased profitability.

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Baltic Sea Region



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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

MI-RAP

gothenburg



MI-RAP

Sweden's largest disposable-free event to date

Through the EU project MI-RAP (Music Industry Resilience Acceleration Programme), the Gothenburg Culture Festival, in collaboration with the Streetfood Festival and the supplier Light My Fire*, organised Sweden's largest event and pilot test in central Gothenburg from August 29th to September 1st, 2024.



Photo: Press photo Light my Fire

*Light My Fire manufactures sustainable and functional outdoor products, such as meal kits and utensils, made in Sweden from biobased materials and BPA-free. During the Gothenburg Culture Festival 2024, their meal kits/reusable items made from recycled plastic were rented, and Light My Fire were responsible for managing the rotation system, including distribution, information to food trucks, visitor communication, and dish management.

Why disposable-free events?

Nature pays a high price for our use of single-use items. United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) report predicting that there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050 led the EU to ban many single-use plastic products. These include items like cutlery, plates, and straws — items frequently used at events. To achieve behaviour change, a viable concept is needed that brings us closer to a circular economy where reusable products become the norm.



Here is how we did it!

Many of the project's challenges were known in advance, including budget and limited space. A requirement was that the project can not affect sales negatively.

The largest previous disposable-free initiative involved a maximum of ten food trucks. For the Streetfood Festival, it was estimated that approximately 150,000 visitors would be served by sixty food trucks alongside two large bars.



Photo: Peter Kvarnström, Göteborg & Co

Key questions

- Who are our primary target audiences?
- What is most important to prioritise within budget?
- How do we create clear on-site communication to encourage visitors to act responsibly?
- How can we use "nudging" to promote the desired behaviour?
- How do we ensure smooth handling of reusable items at sorting- and dishwashing stations?

Our focus was on creating the best possible guest experience to encourage behaviour change among visitors. The handling of reusable items had to feel smooth and user-friendly, with clear messages and instructions guiding visitors on-site.



Photo: Peter Kvarnström, Göteborg & Co

Disposable-free for the climate – part of MI-RAP

The music industry faces significant challenges and changes. To address these challenges, Göteborg & Co has become a part of the Music Industry Resilience Acceleration Programme (MI-RAP), supported by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme and the European Union. MI-RAP is a three-year project aimed at enhancing the music industry's viability and resilience in the Baltic Sea region.

Göteborg & Co, as a project partner, will contribute to the development of a "Green and Sustainable Events Playbook" (Green Playbook) for sustainable music events. A priority area for reducing the climate footprint of events is eliminating single-use items.

Since 2016, Gothenburg Culture Festival has made smaller efforts towards single-use free events, which is why the Streetfood Festival, held during Gothenburg Culture Festival, next to the main concert area, was considered a suitable event for conducting a large-scale pilot test.

Dishwashing

Light My Fire, the partner providing the reusable items, also managed the dishwashing. With extensive experience of reusable projects, although in a smaller scale, the team faced a logistical challenge handling over 80,000 items. Around the mobile dishwashing cart, there were stations for rinsing, sorting, and drying, through which reusable items passed before being returned to the food trucks for reuse.

Better pre-sorting at the stations, such as thoroughly scraped plates and a more consistent flow of dishes, facilitated the dishwashing process. Initially, a 190-litre bin was filled with dishes, resulting in the dish station being empty for a long time, only to become overwhelmed when multiple full bins arrived simultaneously.

This issue was resolved by continuously transporting reusable items in bags to the dishwashing station.



Photo: Peter Kvarnström, Göteborg & Co

Communication

An external agency was assigned to create simple and clear communication.

The presented concept in green colours was based on two key messages:

- Disposable-free for the climate – explains what we are doing and why.
- Return your dishes to one of our sorting stations – describes and encourages the desired visitor behaviour.

The goal was to communicate that reusable items were used to reduce the event's climate footprint and to encourage guests to return their reusable items to the appropriate locations. It should be easy to do the right thing!

We decided to name the reusable items as "dishes" at the sorting stations as this is a common word most people can relate to.

Via Gothenburg Culture Festival's existing communication channels, information about the project was shared before, during, and after the festival.

Sorting stations

The event area was limited to simplify and optimise the return process for reusable items for visitors. Ten sorting stations were evenly distributed throughout the area, sorted into four categories: reusable items (dishes), can recycling, food waste, and other waste. All to be sorted into 190-litre bins.

A handball club from the Gothenburg region hosted the sorting stations as "environment hosts," assisting visitors in sorting waste and returning dishes to the right bin. Engaging a club reduced wage costs while providing club members an opportunity to earn money for their organisation. Our environmental hosts wore black reflective vests with stickers attached, in the same design as the communication concept.

Due to limited space and the requirement that sales should not be negatively affected, it was not possible to place enough sorting stations. Although the stations functioned very well, the distance to the nearest station was sometimes too long for visitors. Signs needed to be placed high up to be visible - even from a distance.



Photo: Göteborg & Co

An important aspect is that all garbage bins and sorting stations must always be overseen.

It is also crucial to find incentives for visitors to return their dishes.



Photo: Göteborg & Co

Results in numbers:

- 150,000 visitors bought food from food trucks at the festival.
- Plates were washed an average of 6.5 times over four days. Each plate can be washed about 400 times before being recycled into a new plate.
- Total loss amounted to 16.6%. However, there are no figures on how many units ended up in the trash or were taken home by visitors. Sporks, in particular, were popular for personal reuse.

Approximately 93,000 single-use items were eliminated during the four-day festival.



53,000 plates



12.9% loss

22,530 sporks



31.5% loss

5,172 cups



17% loss

12,000 glasses



10% loss



Photo: Peter Kvarnström, Göteborg & Co

Positive effects

The event area was cleaner than usual at a festival, contributing to a more positive experience. The dishwashing stations used the same amount of water as a typical restaurant. Sveriges Radio P4 Göteborg was on-site for interviews, and study visits were arranged for various stakeholders. Throughout the event, numerous positive comments were made about our initiative.



Tips and recommendations

For the initiative to be successful, it is essential that all involved parties agree on the conditions and follow the established plans.

It may be beneficial to introduce some form of accountability tied to the food vendors, ensuring that everyone shares the same goals and feels responsible for the outcomes. This could include financial incentives or similar measures.

Logistical flows are almost impossible to predict. A fence may direct visitors in an unintended direction, or unexpected lines may disrupt a planned flow. Flexibility is essential for quickly finding alternative logistical solutions.

Survey

Göteborg & Co's survey on The Gothenburg Culture Festival 2024 included three specific questions to assess visitor opinions on the disposable-free initiative.

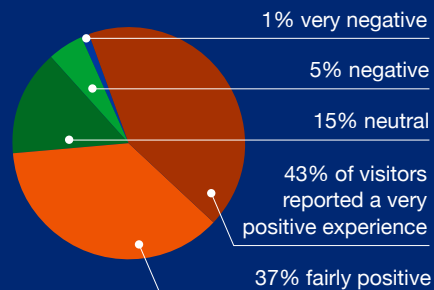
Did you buy any food or drink from the food trucks at the Streetfood Festival?

Out of 1,372 responses

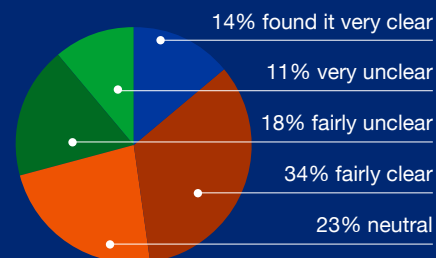
56%

reported purchasing food from a food truck.

What was your experience of food or drink served in reusable items at Streetfood Festival?



How clear was the communication about a disposable-free event and instructions for returning plates, cups, and cutlery?



"80% of visitors who purchased food found the experience fairly positive or very positive."

Checklist – for a successful disposable-free event

Before the event

- Investigate the possibility of funding support for the initiative.
 - Create a simple and appealing concept for both visitors and vendors. Instead of purchasing a system, reusable plastic items can be rented. Can a deposit, cash or digital, be applied to the items?
 - Make a rough estimate of the number of units needed for the event and the potential savings from using reusable items.
 - An approximate need for rented reusable items for an event can be calculated as sales \times 3. For example, if around 500 drinks are sold per day, 1,500 glasses should be rented, assuming there is dishwashing capacity to reuse them. If dishwashing is unavailable, rent more glasses to cover the entire event.
 - Dishwashing can be handled through a rented dish container. There may also be opportunities to use dishwashers at local school cafeterias. Plan for a backup in case of sudden and unexpected breakdowns
 - Clear and simple communication/information is crucial for both participants and visitors. Choose as few messages as possible and repeat the most important information several times.
 - Consider waste minimisation according to the Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle principles. Questions to ask include: How can suppliers help reduce waste? Does the food need to be served on a plate? Are utensils necessary? Could drinks be served in cans or bottles with a deposit?
 - If possible, ban all single-use items, including portion packages (e.g., for milk, sugar, salt) and one-time-use flyers or giveaways.
 - Optionally, introduce a fee for single-use items. Experience shows that this is more effective in encouraging behavioural change than offering a discount on reusable items.
 - How can waste sorting be maximised?
 - Is there a need for external labour? Is it possible to engage an organisation or club? Write a clear job description!
 - Already at an early stage in the process, think about how the project will be evaluated. Draft a few questions to be answered before the event and later used on-site.
 - Communicate the initiative in suitable channels and formats.
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During the event

- Before the start, hold an on-site meeting with everyone involved to align on how any last-minute changes should be handled.
- Assign a responsible person to monitor logistics regularly.
- Ensure that no waste bins are left unattended.
- Observe flows and quickly make changes if significant deviations occur.
- Communicate the initiative in suitable channels and formats.

After the event

- Changing established behaviours is a process that takes time. By influencing physical factors such as information, exposure and architecture, we can create short-term behaviour changes. Continue with similar initiatives consistently over time - continuity and repetition are key to shifting norms and habits long term.
- Evaluate and summarise the financial benefits of using reusable items compared to single-use items.
- Document the project and share your learnings to help others contribute to the transition.
- Communicate the results of the initiative in suitable channels and formats.



Photo: Peter Kvamström, Göteborg & Co

Previous initiatives for disposable-free events

Research shows that festivals and events serve as natural testing grounds for promoting positive behavior change. The Gothenburg Culture Festival has implemented several prior initiatives to reduce single-use waste and promote sustainability.

Here are some of the initiatives that have been carried out in the past:

- Deposit system for reusable plates and utensils: Visitors pay a deposit for reusable plates and forks, use them, and then return them for a refund via the PantaPå app or similar. The system is scalable.
- Dishwashing containers: Efficient dishwashing with rented containers ensures that reusable materials can be quickly cleaned and reused.
- Discount for bringing own container/cup: Visitors who bring their own reusable containers/cups receive a discount, encouraging more people to avoid single-use items.
- Reusable drinking glasses: Single-use glasses have been replaced with durable plastic glasses at beverage stations, significantly reducing waste.

Collaboration for greater impact

Collaboration between stakeholders such as cities, event organisers, suppliers, businesses, and interest organisations strengthens the change efforts and serves as a key source of knowledge exchange. This is also why Göteborg & Co is a project partner of MI-RAP, where nine project partners from eight countries around the Baltic Sea Region jointly develop solutions and promote future collaboration to strengthen the vitality, resilience, and sustainability of the music sector. By facing common challenges and finding solutions together, collaboration can create ripple effects and lead to real, sustainable change.

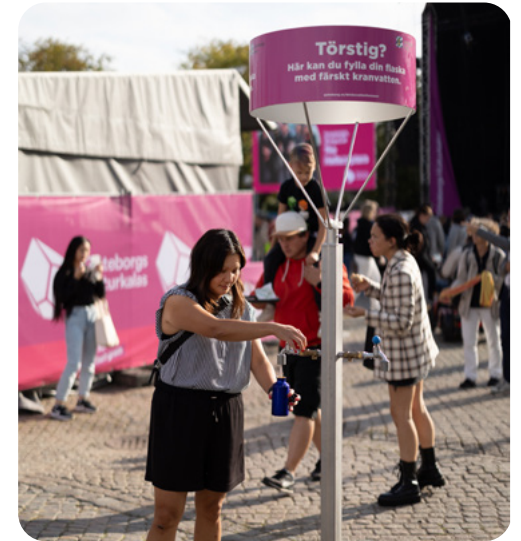


Photo: Peter Kvamström, Göteborg & Co

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