

Guidelines for More Sustainable Local Sports Events for Youth Leaders



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Sport organisations are increasingly aware of environmental sustainability when organising their events due to their potential to damage the environment but also the potential to contribute to environmental protection. Indeed, sport events imply resource consumption, the potential for a massive carbon footprint and the potential danger to flora and fauna of the event host, to name a few potential environmental issues. When organising sport events, the organisers, in addition to taking action to prevent the environmental harms of the event, also recognise that they can use their sport and societal position to reach out to broad audiences to raise awareness and educate communities about environmental sustainability.

While large sport organisations may have expertise and resources for implementing environmental considerations for their events, grassroots organisations may lack the capacity to enhance their events' en-

vironmental sustainability. Youth is a relevant stakeholder and a valuable resource in sports organisations, either in their role as participants of sport events, organisers or volunteers. However, they are often not empowered to take action or lack the resources to do so. This document aims to respond to the latter challenge. It puts forward guidelines and discussion points to trigger good practices and offer recommendations for young sport leaders to implement preventive and reactive environmentally sustainable actions linked to sport and outdoor activities. In this sense, these guidelines aim to inspire youth to address environmental sustainability through grassroots sport events. After reading these guidelines, young sports event organisers in grassroots sports clubs will be equipped with ideas about sustainable event management principles and environmentally protective sport activities.



The youth enthusiasm, we hope, could be transferred on to their sport organisations or sport club by adjusting event management practices, administrative processes (e.g., digitalisation, partnerships with environment-friendly service and energy providers, etc.), or being a sustainability role-model for their members of any age.

These guidelines are a product of a youth activity organised by ENGSO Youth in Palermo, Italy, from 01.04 – 05.04.2022, supported by

the Council of Europe through the European Youth Foundation. Thirty young people from all over Europe contributed to the guidelines. During the “YOU(th) for sustainable sports” youth exchange, participants shared their views and experiences. This document summarises their work. After the introduction, we present some practices in the European context, followed by concrete recommendations from youth to youth on how to start making small changes.

Ideas for practice

Youth sport leaders can be influencers independently or within their organisations and undertake various awareness-raising and advocacy activities for sustainability. To this effect, campaigns and sustainability challenges for individuals to be included in daily routines could be launched. They need to be exciting and motivational for children, adolescents, adults and the elderly to increase the chances of people participating. Such campaigns and/or sustainability challenges may concern the areas of mobility, plastic use, consumption behaviour, food (local and no waste), energy source and use, etc. Furthermore, the importance of outdoor sports and connection with nature could also be highlighted. In addition to such animating activities, the organisations may host educational sessions and workshops for the different age groups (in order to focus on specific approaches, motifs, concerns and capacities, good practice case studies, etc.), but also on intergenerational exchanges.

Youth leaders can act as role models and insist on individual change. Most of the changes we wish to see in our surroundings should be rooted in ourselves. There are numerous ways of taking care of our environment individually while practising sports. Choosing an alternative form of transportation, such as riding the bike over public transport and using car sharing, are all great ways to start with. In many cities, the municipality and/or local companies offer low-cost public bicycle services to facilitate commuting and reduce the emissions caused by cars.

An example of practice comes from Slovakia: students in the primary education system compete against each other to achieve higher distances by bike during commuting to school.

Organising such competitive activities could easily be implemented in sports clubs too, in which employers encourage the staff members to use alternative transportation methods to the workplace, like a bicycle or car sharing. This creates a fun and entertaining environment for employees and volunteers.



There are many different ways for sports organisations to commit to environmental sustainability either by reducing the consequences of the environmental damage or acting proactively to mitigate them in the first place. It is up to the sport organisation to determine its strategy depending on the wider socio-economic and environmental context and its potential and risks regarding the environment. Some of the straightforward examples of how to do this include regulating the amount of printing allowed and switching to digital solutions, consciously choosing office materials and reevaluating the real need for producing

merchandising items. Furthermore, all materials used for sport events should come from certified sources and they should also be checked if the suppliers act on what they preach. Another alternative solution is providing the opportunity to work more days in the home-office which reduces the possible emission production caused by commuting to the workplace or subsidising bikes or e-bikes to the employers.

In the following, we introduce two programs from sports organisations that promote sustainability through and with the help of sport.

Sustainable Sports Program (SSP)

The sustainable sports program is a grassroots initiative for local sports clubs to motivate youth and family engagement in sustainable habits to benefit their community. Their goal is to help sports clubs adopt more sustainable practices that players can be proud of, allowing everyone to play a leadership role in the community.

The organisation considers the following steps in order to make a positive change for the environment:

– RECYCLE AND REPLANT

In the framework of a sports competition event, players and their families bring their old, but still useable sports gear, T-shirts, tops, shorts, jackets, tracksuits and any other clothing item that they no longer use and donate it to indigenous sports programs created for mental health, farming communities affected by fire and floods, special rural groups needing support for youth in sport. The people who donated received a tree sapling to plant in order to build their local carbon storage system.

– PROMOTE BIKING

During this program, there were seven sites identified for clean-ups, and were able to mobilise many youngsters close to their club's playing field. The sports clubs registered for the Clean Up received clean up kits that contained gloves and compostable bags. From the clean ups there were plastics collected and recycled where possible.

Sustainability Day organised by FC Internationale Berlin

Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, and it attracts the most spectators on-site therefore, its impact on our environment is not negligible. The FC Internationale Berlin football club intends to play a crucial role in promoting sustainability for their fans and players. During the "Sustainability Day" the football club offers different programs throughout the day, such as workshops on plastic and clothes recycling. Moreover, they shared with the public their next Sustainability campaign and their fair and ecological merchandise.

Youngsters can promote sustainability not only through sports clubs but through sports NGOs as well. Thanks to the Erasmus + framework, numerous projects have been

funded with a specific focus on sustainability. The project "Eco-friendly sports" is a two year long initiative through which a great number of sports events were organised with the specific target of collecting waste in the organisation's direct and extended surroundings. Canoeing and hiking trips have been implemented whereby participants learned about the region of the event and cleaned the environment from plastic waste and other litter.

A similar incentive from the Slovenian Mountaineering Association ("Očistimo naše gore") engages youth in sustainability by organising hiking events through which participants clean the trails and paths.



Recommendations from youth to youth

1. Influence the leadership to include environmental considerations in the mission, vision and values of the organisation

Youth is an essential stakeholder in grassroots sport organisations. Even though the leadership structures often do not consider youth in the decision-making processes, young people in sport should have a role in what their organisation stands for and in the development and implementation of the strategies. An important element of

youth engagement should be advocacy and environmental activism within their organisations. In that way, if environmental sustainability is prioritised within foundational aspects of a grassroots sport organisation, it would provide a solid grounding for organising environmentally sustainable sport events.

2. Identify, communicate with and influence all stakeholders

Sport events and, therefore, environmental sustainability initiatives include a plethora of stakeholders. The stakeholders vary between grassroots sport organisation considering various cultural contexts, sport systems or types of sports. When trying to implement environmentally friendly sports events, youth should identify and approach all the relevant stakeholders. This is relevant because of the complexity of sport events,

including, for instance, supply chains and environmental sustainability of the sponsors – in this way, youth will have an overview of the environmentally-relevant issues for the event. Secondly, it will secure the buy-in from a wider audience. Communication is the key to every phase of stakeholder engagement, especially in communicating environmental initiatives.

3. Be a role model in your social circle

Credibility and legitimacy are relevant when advocating for more environmental sport events, and buy-in from relevant stakeholders depends on the perceived credibility of

the advocate. Therefore, following the “do what you preach” principle will enable youth to be perceived as credible and serious in their attempt to advocate for change.

4. No need to reinvent the wheel: consult the existing relevant guidelines



Although the topic of environmentally sustainable sport events is relatively recent, strategies, recommendations, tools, and guidance are available to consult when advocating and strategising. Environmental considerations regarding carbon emission, meat consumption, waste and recycling, water, air and noise pollution, infrastructure, supply chain, and deforestation, to name a few, have been addressed in other contexts. Most of the guidance for sport events has been developed for mega-sport events, yet some principles can also be used for much smaller sport events.

There are plenty more, but some of them include:

- **SUSTAINABLE SPORT AND EVENT TOOLKIT (SSET)**
- **EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS MUNICH 2022 SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

Existing guidelines with some adjustments can be used in various sectors, including sports. Make sure to get familiar with the [Sustainability checklist](#) prepared in partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.

5. Be ambitious but realistic

Changing towards more environmentally sustainable sport events is not simple as it involves many stakeholders and changes of processes and practices. Another problematic factor is the capacity of the organisations to embrace sustainable development in their sport events. The definition of scope

for environmental sustainability at a sport event should reflect realistically the current capacity of the organisation but always have in mind more ambitious goals. Youth should also remember that every little step counts, even though, at the moment, it might not reflect a more ambitious scope.

6. Align with international sustainability policies and initiatives

Environmental sustainability is implemented locally, but the importance is global. A part of advocacy for more sustainable sport events is also highlighting global issues caused by environmental degradation as a rationale for accepting change. A legitima-

tion is provided by the numerous policies issued by international organisations. The most prominent is Agenda 2030 – it explicitly mentions sport organisations as relevant players in sustainability!

7. Be strategic and think in long-term

Even though the beginnings may be modest, the youth should advocate for long-term and planned environmental sustainability at their grassroots sport events. Sustainable development is a continuous process rather than a one-off activity. A strategic approach and persistence are the key!



Final words

We, the youth, are leaders of sport today, not tomorrow. We will also stay dependent and connected to the environment for many years, not only for our basic needs but also for practicing and competing in our sports

events. Sport is dependent on the environment, and we must be those who will take the initiative, influence and lead the change through rethinking the way we organise grassroots sport events.



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