

## Circular Economy in the Event Sector

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### A Framework for Circular Festivals

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### Abstract

The events industry is a very competitive and continuously growing sector, capable of playing a fundamental role in the transformation and development of the territories. At the same time, the sector contributes considerably to the environmental problem, mainly in terms of the use of energy, waste produced, emissions, water usage, food waste, and noise. For these reasons, many players in the sector have therefore decided to start adopting tools to measure their environmental impact and to reduce it. One of the strategies that companies are evaluating to deal with the adverse effects caused by the event industry is circular economy (CE). CE is an alternative model regenerative by design, based on renewable sources, and where the concept of waste is replaced by that of the resource. In light of the above, this paper investigates the possibility of applying the principles of the circular economy to the event sector. Particularly, this paper deals with a specific type of events that are very widespread and therefore cause significant environmental consequences: festivals. As a matter of fact, festivals to continue to thrive over time should adopt a circular approach, trying to minimize the use of resources and preserving the value produced for as long as possible. The aim of this work is therefore to propose a model for the development of a circular events industry. Particularly, for the organization and management of a circular festival throughout its entire life cycle. Firstly, the paper reviews significant circular economy initiatives for the festivals industry. Then, a framework to systematize circular economy practices applicable in the sector has been proposed. The methodology adopted is based on the construction of a matrix built on three variables: Rs of CE, festivals' phases, and environmental aspects. In particular, as regards the chosen Rs, a study of the existing literature was first carried out, considering that several authors have adopted and defined different R frameworks. As for events' phases, an attempt was made to reproduce the life cycle of an event. Finally, the selection of the environmental aspects was based in part on data regarding the major environmental impacts of festivals and in part on the indications provided the most significant standards of the sector. Once the framework

is developed it should be possible to have some insights on the impact of CE principles on festivals management and organization and on which are the areas that require greater attention in terms of research and investments to enhance a more sustainable festival sector.

SDG12 - Target 12.2: Sustainable management and use of natural resources - In 2020, the events sector was hit by an unprecedented crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic. The events sector to restart post-COVID is becoming more aware of the fact that it contributes considerably to the environmental problem, in particular through travels to events' venues, the use of energy, and the production of waste. Many players in the sector have therefore decided to start adopting tools to measure their environmental impact and to reduce it.

**Keywords:** circular economy, circular festivals, sustainable events, events industry, circular festivals framework

## 1. Introduction

Events have always been essential parts of the history of human civilization. Their primary function has always been that of providing the possibility of living memorable and unique experiences while reinforcing cultural values and beliefs (Ferdinand and Shaw, 2019). Since the 1980s, the increase in leisure time and the availability of income destined for unnecessary expenses has led to a proliferation of events in all countries of the world (Mayr and Whitford, 2013), and in the 2000s, the spread of the Experience Economy as an evolution of the service economy has led to a dramatic growth of the events sector (Getz and Page, 2016).

Donald Getz (2007) defines an event as “*an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence*”. All events, therefore, are phenomena confined in space and time, having a beginning and an end and taking place in defined and delineated spaces. Fundamental elements of event planning are design, location, facilities, a detailed program, and advertising. Furthermore, planned events present several stakeholders, such as paying customers, organizers, staff, suppliers, regulators, producers, workers, participants (in sporting events mainly), volunteers, and many others (Getz, 2007). Events are typically classified by size and form. As regards the size, events can be divided into mega-events, regional events, major events, and minor events (Der Wagen and Carlos, 2006). Considering the events form it is possible to identify several typologies such as festivals, sporting events, religious events, political and state events, entertainment arts and cultural events, business and trade events, scientific events and private events (Der Wagen and Carlos, 2006; Donald Getz, 2007).

There is no doubt that the organization of events has numerous economic advantages. Events have the power to attract new resources to a specific area (Krajnović and Gortan-Carlin, 2018). A study from OECD (2017) based on 30 countries demonstrates that hosting an event can lead to economic growth,

job creation, new infrastructures, destination branding, and urban regeneration. For most events, spending by visitors in the local area and in particular on accommodation ticket sales, other purchases, taxes, and tips is the most significant factor in generating economic impact. Events have also significant social impacts on the communities in which they take place. Events can strengthen community pride, improve the relationship between community members, increase community cohesiveness, enrich recreational activities offer and shopping opportunities. At the same time events can also lead to an increase in crime rate, enhance traffic, and intensify pressure on local services and infrastructures (Kim and Muzaffer, 2003). Together with economic and social impacts, events are also associated with a series of negative consequences on the environment. Events by nature are activities that draw a lot of people and services into a specific place, inevitably causing environmental damages that can arise from the transport of people and goods, waste, energy, and water use by venues and accommodations (OECD, 2017). Generally, the environmental impacts resulting from the organization of an event concern five main areas: air quality, waste, water management, noise pollution, flora, and fauna together with geological conditions. It goes without saying that as the number of facilities, staff required, and participants raise, the effects on those areas increase (Raj and Musgrave, 2009). In 2020, the events sector was hit by an unprecedented crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic that generated a total paralysis of the events and live communication sector throughout its supply chain. The health emergency has had a destructive effect on economies and communities, at the same time the stop of all activities, including events, has produced temporary environmental benefits such as the reduction of polluting emissions and air quality improvements. Those economic losses and environmental improvements generated from the pandemic stressed the trade-off between the Economy and the Environment highlighting the matter of sustainable consumption (Jones and Comfort, 2020). Inevitably, in this situation, some mainstream business models will decline while others will arise and that is true also in the case of the event industry. Covid-19 can be seen as a starting point to plan the transition towards a greener and more sustainable event sector (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020). In this transition, the leading players of the events industry will necessarily have to change and revolutionize their business models to build them more sustainable and resilient (Jones and Comfort, 2020). In conclusion, it is possible to claim that the Pandemic has negatively impacted the event sector, but at the same time it offered an occasion to reinvent the industry adopting a stronger commitment to sustainability and circular economy principles (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020; Jones and Comfort, 2020). Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, many realities within the event industry, from large sporting events and Olympics Games to small corporate events, assured their commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and started to implement solutions aimed at reducing the impact of their events on the environment and communities. Sustainability in the events sector represents a growing trend, and it is changing the culture and business models of the event industry. Also, during the last decade, there has been an increase in modules and dissertations dedicated to events sustainability in universities all over the world together with an increase in chapters dedicated to sustainability within

events management books and the existence of dedicated journals (Pelham, 2011). Further evidence of the growing relevance of sustainable events is that many national and international organizations have worked to develop specific certifications for the sector. Standards are developed only when there is a clear market need (ISO, 2012a), consequently, the development of two globally accepted frameworks ISO 20121 and the Global Reporting Event Organizer Sector Supplement are confirmation of the significant nature of the event industry and its potential in contributing to the goal of sustainable development. As said, the pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the current economic and production system based on a linear supply chain and excessive use of virgin raw materials. Economic actors should focus on the circular economy as an instrument to decouple economic growth from resource use and to build an economic system more resilient against global risks (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020). The European Union was already committed to promoting CE principles, but the Covid-19 outbreak made it further necessary (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020). Next Generation Eu, the tool aimed at mitigating the economic and social impact of Covid-19, is based on the transition to a green and digital Europe and therefore on investments in renewable energy, clean transport, sustainable food, and circular economy. The European Union is fully aware that the transition to a circular, resource-efficient, and climate-neutral economy is the key to success for the recovery. In particular, the European Commission has proposed to allocate an additional € 30 billion to the Just Transition Fund, bringing it to € 40 billion. The JTF money will support countries and SMEs to create new economic opportunities and investing in energy transition and circular economy (European Commission, 2020). Given the growing importance that circular economy will assume in the future, it is likely to hypothesize that CE related projects will increasingly involve the events sector. Circular events are the maximum expression of events that are sustainable over time both from an economic and environmental point of view. Specifically, A circular event is an event regenerative by design in which every single aspect of the organization is based on the principles of the circular economy. There is one particular type of event that is extremely widespread and therefore causes significant environmental consequences: festivals. To date, festivals, especially music festivals, play an important role in tourism and they represent, tourism assets and are treated as touristic products (Quinn, 2006). Festivals can create great pressure on local resources as a consequence of tourist trips described as tourist traffic. Festivals also impose a high cost in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and quantity of waste produced as well as noise. That's the reason why many organizations are starting to adopt policies to address the environmental and social impact of festivals. While sustainable festivals and events are already studied and discussed, there is relatively scarce literature published on circular festivals and the implementation of CE principles in the event sector. This paper could be said to be filling this gap in the literature. The ultimate goal of this work is to analyse the integration of CE in the event sector and to develop a framework to manage a circular festival throughout its entire life cycle. The framework will be based on three variables: the R-strategies of the Circular Economy, environmental aspects, and festival phases.

## **2. Methods**

A type of event that has been gaining more and more importance in the last two years is the circular event based on the principles of the circular economy. The objective of this paper is to develop a framework to manage sustainable festivals. For the construction of the framework, it is necessary to pay attention to what the circular economy is and what are the advantages of abandoning the traditional linear (take-make-dispose) model, even more so in light of the events of 2020. In fact, the importance of the circular economy has now been strengthened, because of its potential to build resilient communities through a tech-driven growth. In essence, the circular economy represents an exceptional opportunity to rebuild the world economies stronger, greener and better (Forslund, 2020). As mentioned, this paper's objective is to develop a toolkit aimed at managing circular festivals, given the strategic importance of this type of event, and given the environmental impacts that it can generate. This paper spotlights on the events sector, first retrieving the best practices promoted by events organizers analysing three different case studies of circular events implementation (Green Europe Experience (GEX), Green Deal "Circular Festivals" (GDCF) and DGTL festival). Then the paper tries to classify and categorize circular events best practices. To do so a Circular Festival framework has been proposed. The methodology used for the construction of the toolkit is based on all the literature analysis carried out, afterwards integrated with a collection of case studies and best practices collected through the consultation of festivals and event organizers websites and, a series of guidelines developed by local authorities and associations that are dealing with sustainable events. The form designated for developing the toolkit is that of a matrix built on three variables: Rs of CE, Event phases, and environmental aspects. The practices collected and identified in the previous phases of the work are then organized on the basis of those variables

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The main goal of the present work is to assess the implementation of circular economy principles on the event sector. It has been decided to focus on a specific type of events: festivals. Festivals are periodic social celebrations to which all members of a community are invited to participate and to share experiences. The main objective of Festivals is to deliver an experience that is different from everyday life, involving a large number of people. There are several typologies of festivals such as music, dance, art theatre, film, literature, comedy, food, and beverages (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Der Wagen and Carlos, 2006; Getz and Page, 2016). In recent years, some organizers and institutions are starting to realize that the linear take-make-dispose model that relies on large quantities of cheap and easily accessible resources is not viable any longer and it is necessary to adopt a circular approach trying to minimize the use of resources and preserving the value produced for as long as possible (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). In particular CE principles will be applied to festival industry through the development of a framework designed for the organization and management of circular festivals. The starting point for

the construction of the toolkit is the work of some European organizations working in the area and that in recent years have begun to deal with circular festivals.

The first of those realities is Green Europe Experience (GEX), a network of 6 European partners, four festivals and two NGOs that decided to collaborate to co-create a new future for music and arts festivals, and events in general. The objective of GEX is that of rethinking how festivals are organized focusing mainly on two topics: scenography and Food e relying on the 7R model: rethink, reduce, re-use, repair, refurbish, recover, recycle. GEX project will take place for three years, from Sept 2019 – Sept 2023 (originally it was September 2022, but it was postponed due to Coronavirus). Year one is dedicated to Scenography, while year two will be dedicated to Food. In the end, GEX will write two specific charters based on the 7R for the two main topics, and it will create some develop analysis tools such as evaluation grids, survey dedicated to the project (GEX, 2020).

Another significant initiative was the Green Deal "Circular Festivals" (GDCF), launched in 2019, it is one of the numerous Green Deal initiatives supported by the Dutch Government (Green Deal, 2019). This initiative is directed by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and it aims at reducing the environmental impact of European festivals. GDCF's principal goals are designing and realizing a model for circular festivals, encouraging the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practices, and communicating to inspire other parties and visitors to more circular practices. The ambition of the initiative is to set the standard for circularity the event industry by 2025, by developing solutions that can be put into practice by other festivals worldwide (Circular Festival, 2021).

Exceptionally relevant is also the DGTL festival, an electronic music festival which takes place in Amsterdam. DGTL festival is a pioneer in the field of sustainability and circularity. DGTL festival has set itself the goal of organizing the world's first circular festival for 2021. To reach its purpose, the festival profoundly redesigns the entire event. During the whole year, DGTL organizers examine the latest technological breakthroughs to close material loops, eliminate CO2 emissions and increase environmental awareness. The final objective of DGTL is that of becoming a living-lab for future city innovations (DGTL, 2021). In particular, in 2018 DGTL introduced the world's first circular food court within the festival. In the circular food court, local vendors will serve tasty vegetarian and vegan meals to festival attendees, using compostable plates and cutlery. Once they have finished eating, guests can bring the leftover food and dishes to the collection area where a composting machine is installed. Within 24 hours, the machine converts leftovers and dishes into compost which will then be brought to local farmers and used to produce vegetables and other ingredients for next year's festival menu closing the loop. Additionally, the festival collaborates with local associations such as The Food Line Up and Instock to present festival attendees with original menus based on existing local food surplus and flawed food from local traders to prevent this food from going to waste (DGTL, 2021).

Starting from the main elements of the case studies described above a toolkit was developed using three main variables described below.

The first variable taken into consideration is that of the Rs of circular economy. The R framework is frequently used as a guide for the implementation of the circular economy. In the literature there are several R frameworks that differ both in terms of R used and in terms of the meaning of the single R. However, all those frameworks have in common a hierarchy of the Rs based on the principle of preferability for the circular economy. In fact, the different Rs are always introduced in an order that reflects the degree of circularity, so the Rs that are at the beginning represent a high circularity value and those towards the end represent a low circularity value (Kirchherr et al., 2017). The Rs framework used for the construction of this toolkit is an 11 R framework developed by Acampora et al. (2020) for circular tourism and therefore easily adaptable to the festival sector valued from the perspective of a sub-category or branch of the wider tourism sector (Table 1).

*Table 1. 11Rs framework adapted from Acampora et al. (2020)*

<b>Rs</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Refuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delivering the same task and offering the same function with a radically different product</li> <li>- Refusing to use raw materials and natural resources</li> <li>- Rejecting in first place to purchase to prevent the production of waste</li> <li>- Reflection on the need to hold the event.</li> </ul>
<b>Re-servitization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver a service virtually instead of employing a physical product</li> <li>- Smarter and more intensive use of products</li> </ul>
<b>Reduce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reducing the use of primary energy, raw materials and natural resources</li> <li>- Minimizing waste production</li> </ul>
<b>Regenerate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restoring and protecting ecosystems</li> <li>- Returning biological resources to nature</li> </ul>
<b>Re-use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reusing products in good condition by transferring them in their original form to another user</li> </ul>
<b>Repair</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repairing defective products to maintain their original function</li> <li>- Maintenance of components and parts so that products can be used longer by one and the same user.</li> </ul>
<b>Refurbish</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renovating products by replacing malfunctioning components and parts by new ones</li> </ul>
<b>Remanufacture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-processing of already used product</li> <li>- Creating new products with functioning parts of old products</li> </ul>
<b>Re-purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-using a product or its part for a different purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Recycle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reprocessing waste materials into new products</li> </ul>
<b>Recover</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recovering embedded energy from non-recyclable waste material where feasible</li> </ul>

The phases for the implementation of a festival are the second element considered for the construction of the matrix. In particular, it was decided to use the phases in reference to the fact that almost all the events related standards and certifications require to evaluate the environmental impact during all the phases of the event and all the activities associated with it. Specifically, the phases chosen are planning, setting-up, day of the event, and strip down/clear up (Table 2).

Table 2. Event' phases

Phases	Description
<b>Planning</b>	Initial phase of the organization of a festival in which fundamental decisions are made such as location, date, times, capacity and also the aim of the festival. During this phase, the organizer will need to contact local authorities, to confirm requirements, permissions and licensing for the event. Besides, the organizer in the planning phase will take care of hiring the staff, contacting the suppliers and artists who will perform. If the organizer opts for a circular festival, he must start from the planning stage to adopt the principles of circularity.
<b>Setting-up</b>	Site preparation phase for the festival. In this phase, the stage, the signage, the decorations will be assembled, and the power generation devices are installed.
<b>Day of the event</b>	The main phase of the festival in which the most significant environmental impacts are produced, that because of the arrival of an impressive flow of festival tourists at the same time. To make the tool easier to use and to try to include the various activities related to the festival, the central phase (day of the event) has been divided into four sub-phases, namely, transport, event site, toilets, and food court.
<b>Strip down</b>	Closing phase in which the structures, the camping area and the food stalls are dismantled. Furthermore, in this phase, the signs are removed, the site is cleaned, and the procedures for the collection and differentiation of waste for recycling begin. The ultimate goal of a circular festival should be to leave no trace after the clear-up stage.

The third element that has been considered is that of environmental aspects which will be indicated for each practice classified in the matrix at the meeting point between the single R and the phase of the event. The aspects identified are those that are assumed to be particularly relevant for the festival sector and those envisaged by the standards and certifications of the event sector, such as Green Globe (Green Globe, 2021) or ISO 20121 and ISO 14001 (ISO, 2015, 2012b) namely resource utilization, emissions, biodiversity preservation, waste production, energy management and water use. It goes without saying that those impact can be interlinked, and each practice can act on more than one aspect. In the matrix the environmental impacts will be indicated with colored dots as described in the following legend (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Legend of environmental aspects.

Resource utilization	Emissions	Biodiversity preservation	Waste production	Energy management	Water use
●	●	●	●	●	●

Table 3 presents the Circular Festival Framework showing the combination of these variables. In the intersection between the areas and the Rs the best circular practices will be described. The collection and systematization of these best practices will be founded on a deep study of the literature, international reports and specifically circular events case studies. However, this paper presents just the results of a preliminary study on circular practices implementation in events proving a theoretical tool to systematize these practices. Further efforts will be dedicated to fill in the table presented in Table 3. Just as an example we tried to fill in the REFUSE row of the table.

Table 3. Circular Festival Framework

			DAY OF THE EVENT				
	PLANNING	SETTING UP	Transport	Food Court	Toilets/Showers	Festival site	STRIP DOWN
REFUSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Fallow year" every four years of festival to give the land a rest ●●</li> <li>• Reducing festival capacity to reduce the natural area ●●</li> <li>• when choosing artists and workers/security involve locals as much as possible to avoid travel related emission ●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding printing and when it is unavoidable it is done using solar-powered printer and sustainably sourced paper ●●</li> <li>• Paint or projections instead of flags and banners ●</li> <li>• Choose wood instead of PVC whenever is possible ●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives on choosing train over plane (slow travel) ●</li> <li>• Special voucher to buy food or merchandise ●</li> <li>• handled to those arriving by public transport or Bicycle ●</li> <li>• Combine amount of festival tickets with coach bus or public transport ticket ●</li> <li>• Train instead of flights for artists that live reasonably closely ●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose food suppliers certified ●●</li> <li>• vegan or vegetarian menu ●●</li> <li>• Ban on unnecessary packaging ●</li> <li>• Ban on plastic straws ●</li> <li>• Ban on single portions for condiments and sauces, replacement with dispenser ●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banning chemicals on site ●</li> <li>• Charging a price to use showers as a deterrent ●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on samples from promoters (chewing gums, candies etc.), encourage companies to involve audience with activities instead of disposable giveaways ●</li> </ul>	n.a.
RE-SERVITIZATION							
REDUCE							
REGENERATE							
RE-USE							
REPAIR							
REFURBISH							
REMANUFACTURE							
RE-PURPOSE							
RECYCLE							
RECOVER							

#### 4. Conclusions

The transition from the current economic system based on linear production processes towards a circular system based on closed loops is one of the fundamental challenges that the European Union will face in building a sustainable, resilient and internationally competitive Europe. That is true especially when considering the effects of Covid-19 pandemic which has shown how much the current production system and the different economic sectors were unprepared to react to global risks. Covid-19 has, in fact, massively hit the world economy, however, it has also been recognized as a potential green stimulus, forcing companies to rethink their business model to shape a better tomorrow. The events sector is no exception, it has been one of the sectors that most of all suffered the consequences of the pandemic and now, it can be among the protagonists of the paradigm shift by implementing circular economy's principles in events' management strategies. Therefore, the present work aims at investigating the impact of the circular economy on the events sector, in particular with regard to festivals which are exceptionally popular events, especially among millennials. Festivals are also capable of producing important environmental impacts, especially considering that these usually take place near or in protected natural areas. This is just a preliminary phase of the research; at this stage the focus is that of examining the festival sector to identify the key elements for the construction of a framework to organize and manage festivals according to the principles of circular economy on the base of the best practices available at European level. Future steps will see the classification of all the practices collected in this first phase of investigation. Once the different practices are correctly organized within the matrix, it will be possible to have further insights on which are the areas that require greater attention in terms of research and investments in order to deliver a circular festival.

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