France – initiatives and solutions for more sustainable events

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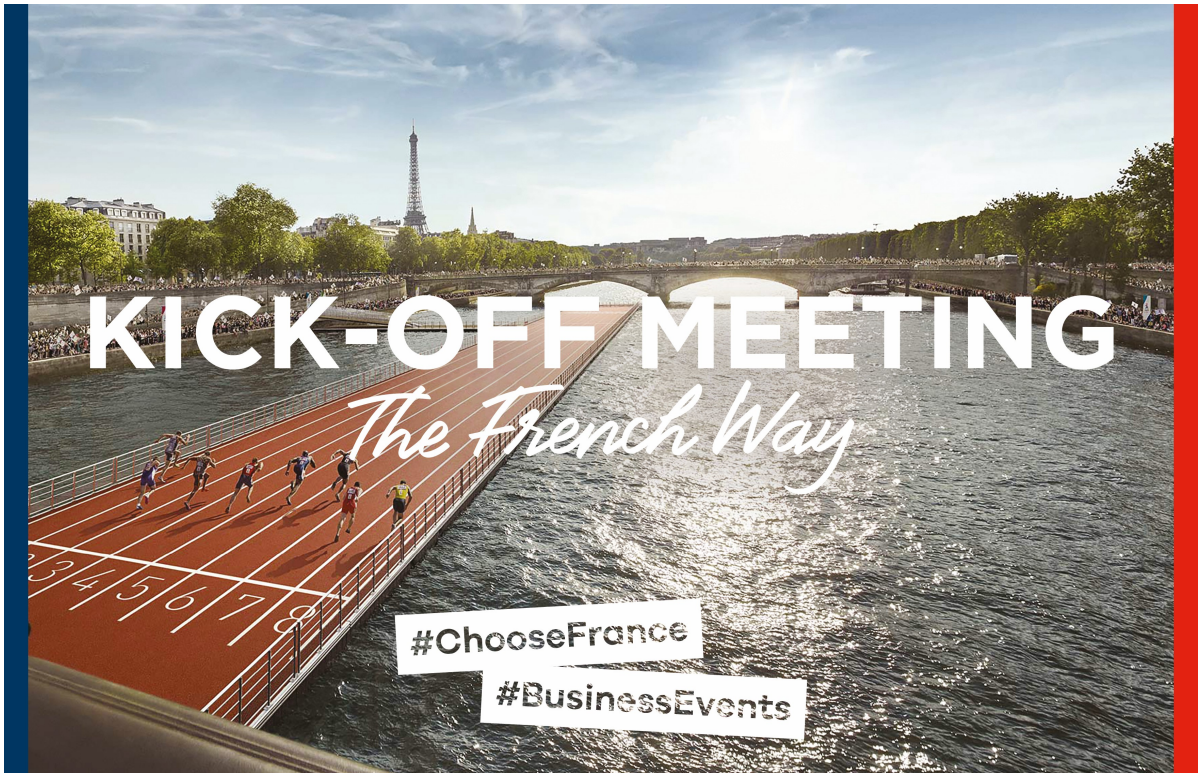
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Sustainable Events



For several years now, France has demonstrated its willingness to position sustainable development at the heart of its international influence. As a shop window for the country, the event sector has gradually established itself as the perfect testing ground in which to introduce concrete initiatives, in so doing fulfilling the objective of **Emmanuel Macron**, who hopes to make France the world's "*leading socially and environmentally sustainable tourism destination by 2030*".



Paris 2024: Olympics and Paralympics with a more environmental and sustainable focus

The Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics are perfect illustrations of this ambition. The organisers of the Games succeeded in reducing their carbon footprint by 54.6% compared with the average at both London 2012 and Rio 2016. "*This was the aim from the moment Paris puts its name in the hat for the 2O24 Olympics, and we succeeded: creating a new era of Olympics which were more environmentally responsible but equally as spectacular. In every area we aimed to fulfil our brief with less, to do better, and to leave a meaningful legacy to reduce the impact of the world's biggest event on the environment and the climate*", declared Tony Estanguet, President of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games' Organising Committee in a press release published in December 2024.

This approach is in line with the ISO?20121 standard created for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In the build-up to the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, France made significant revisions to this standard in order to make it more ambitious in terms of CSR.

The standard now includes a growing number of players from one end to the other of the event industry value chain who are keen to benefit from an effective framework in order to structure their CSR approach: Event Venues - Organisers – Service Providers - Partners – Advertisers and Sponsors – Local/Regional Authorities and Destinations…

In this respect, France has also won a gold medal! On 31 December 2022, an ISO study (2023) registered a total of 247 ISO 20121 certificates issued worldwide, 124 of which were for French organisations covering 216 sites – in other words, 50% of all certificates issued.

A sector committed to ecological transition

ISO 20121 certification is not the only benchmark in terms of a commitment to a strict ecological strategy for the event industry.

As an example, in the accommodation sector, France is the second country worldwide to have developed the Green Key label and has, since 2021, been the leading country in terms of the number of properties awarded this distinction. This momentum can be explained by the growth of responsible tourism and the willingness of French professionals within the sector to differentiate themselves through their environmentally focused actions.

Another initiative, namely the CLEO Carbone programme introduced by the Union Française des Métiers de l'Événement (UNIMEV) in 2024, enables organisers to precisely measure and manage the CO? emissions generated by a show or event. In concrete terms, this tool provides organisers with a personalised diagnostic analysis covering the entire value chain, followed by a precise action plan which, in particular, incorporates eco-design and the use of renewable energies. Lastly, the programme's experts carry out regular monitoring in order to measure progress and make any necessary adjustments.

French cities among the world's most sustainably responsible destinations

Created in 2021, the GDS Index (Global Destination Sustainability Index) is an international barometer that lists the 40 cities most actively engaged in sustainable tourism. As part of this index, the actions of towns and cities and tourist bodies are analysed through criteria such as waste management, air quality, water, a respect for biodiversity, carbon emissions, the use of renewable energies, etc. In 2024, the GDS Index recognised the efforts of cities in Northern Europe, with Helsinki, Gothenburg and Copenhagen at the top of the list, with Bordeaux, the leading French destination, in sixth place, followed by Lyon and Paris in fifteenth and twentieth places respectively – an illustration of the dynamic environmental approach of France's urban landscape.

Bordeaux stands out, in particular, thanks to the creation of an ecological transition monitoring programme for tourism and event professionals within a particular destination, including accommodation providers, restaurateurs, agencies and activity providers. Since 2022, 240 companies have benefited from support for their eco-labelling process. "*The city has implemented a responsible tourism strategy that is bearing fruit, particularly through the introduction of highly effective actions for accommodation providers, restaurateurs and tourism activity providers by working alongside them, offering advice and contributing financially to their process of environmental transition*", explains Christine Bost, president of Bordeaux Métropole.

Transformation and investment projects: renewed impetus in France

Through LINKEUS Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur and working alongside five other countries, France is a key part of the European BEFuture project to bring positive change to the professional event sector. Its aims are to encourage those involved in the industry to adopt more eco-responsible, inclusive and innovative practices to ensure greater resilience. A call for proposals enabled 80 innovative projects that met its objective to be selected and to receive support. Sixteen French innovations have been chosen in areas as varied as the reduction of emissions, waste management, and the use of AI to enhance the customer experience and inclusivity.

In addition, the French State is committed to this approach through policies that support targeted investments. The Call for Expressions of interest (CEI), launched by Atout France for conference, trade show and event facilities, provides finance for the engineering aspect of investment projects focused on optimising hosting facilities. The reduction of the event industry's environmental footprint through the modernisation of infrastructures or innovations in organisational aspects is the key to the sustainable future of the sector.

Creativity, durability, flexibility and technologies are at the heart of investment projects. This is the case in Dijon, where all local authorities have come together around a solid business tourism strategy, backed up by an investment of close to 40 million euros. This funding has been used to maintain city-centre facilities that place business activities at the heart of the city's commercial and tourism dynamism and the complete renovation of the Palais Congrès Expo to create a modern, innovative and optimised facility.



A collective effort to build a responsible legacy

The success of the country's ambitious policies is based upon a collective effort by all those who are part of the value chain. Event management companies raise awareness of this aspect at the design phase and are keen to recommend "labelled" or "certified" venues, eco-designed scenographies, and the used of digital solutions to limit paper waste. Conference venues and exhibition centres are also modernising their infrastructure to optimise the management of resources, and to encourage the selective collection and recycling of waste. As an example, the new MEET exhibition centre in Toulouse and the Parc des Expositions at the Porte de Versailles in Paris stand out for their ambitious environmental approach. An on-site waste treatment centre enables materials to be directly assessed and sorted, which avoids the use of unnecessary transport.

Major cultural events are following the same trend, as witnessed by the efforts of the Cannes Film Festival and its ambitious road map for 2030, involving the removal of plastic bottles, digital ticketing, an environmental contribution of 20 euros for each participant, etc, with the aim of achieving a reduction of

greenhouse gas emissions of at least **21% compared with 2019**.

The collective involvement of all these players enables events to be the vectors for economic, social and societal development in each region. The IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) conference, held in Marseille in 2021, is an illustration of this strategy. By bringing together international players around biodiversity and sustainable development, it generated economic benefits while at the same time raising awareness of environmental challenges to the public at large.

Actions such as waste management, the use of local suppliers and carbon offsetting have strengthened local roots. The legacy of the conference has made it possible to support hoteliers in their drive towards “Green Key” certification, increasing the percentage of certified guestrooms from 6% in 2021 to 47% in 2024.

This approach demonstrates how a major event can have a positive impact on the economic, and ecological development of a destination. It raises awareness and, through its legacy, contributes to the long-term establishment of new, responsible behavioural patterns that can positively impact an entire ecosystem.

Sustainability Hub for Events (SHE)

The France Convention Bureau contributes to the Sustainability Hub for Events (SHE), alongside other European Convention Bureaux, as part of the sector’s broader commitment to advancing sustainable events in Europe. This initiative turns sustainability ambitions into practical action. This AI-powered platform provides MICE professionals with tailored recommendations, checklists and resources to support the integration of more sustainable practices throughout the event planning and delivery process.

- ? Read the full article and discover SHE

France offers a growing range of infrastructure, initiatives and tools designed to support more sustainable business events. From certified venues and carbon measurement tools to innovative projects and destination-level initiatives, event professionals can draw on a wide ecosystem of solutions to integrate environmental considerations throughout the event planning and delivery process.
