

Decarbonising & Zero- Waste Events: Ljubljana's Green Roadmap

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Dejan Ristić presented Ljubljana's pioneering efforts in **decarbonizing tourism and organizing zero-waste events**, explaining how the Slovenian capital integrates sustainability principles into its tourism and event management strategies. His talk focuses on the city's *business-to-business (B2B)* communication approach, encouraging local event organizers, suppliers, and partners to implement measurable sustainability practices.

Presentation script

Introduction

Hello everyone,

I'll be speaking about the efforts we are making in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, to decarbonize and promote zero-waste events.

I'll cover both open-air and business events and explain how we are approaching sustainability, focusing mainly on B2B communication rather than B2C.

Ljubljana has been recognized as one of the champions of sustainable and regenerative tourism. This journey began when Ljubljana was named the **European Green Capital in 2016**, following the closure of the city center and the creation of an ambitious action plan for sustainable urban development.

Since last year, Ljubljana is also part of the **EU Mission 100 Climate-Neutral Cities by 2030**, which reflects our long-term vision and commitment to sustainability.

Sustainable Event Guidelines

In 2016, we launched the **Ljubljana Sustainable Event Guidelines**, prepared in the context of Ljubljana's Green Capital title.

The idea was to help event organizers apply **zero-waste principles** — focusing on *preventing waste before it happens*, as that is far more effective than managing it afterwards.

The guidelines emphasize:

- Preventing waste during the planning phase,
- Reusing and recycling event materials locally,
- Avoiding single-use plastics and unnecessary packaging,
- Promoting green mobility and smart logistics for both visitors and partners,
- Ensuring transparency and communication about sustainability efforts.

This Sustainable Event Catalogue is shared with all organizers of open-air events in Ljubljana. We estimate around **14,000 events take place annually**, and Ljubljana Tourism **co-finances around 200** of them. Each receives the guidelines and must integrate sustainable event planning into their proposal.

Measurements and Lessons Learned

We have been implementing and measuring zero-waste practices for several years.

In 2023, we monitored **Festive December** events, and in 2024, we assessed **fan zones** for the Euro Championships.

We also measured 12 co-financed open-air events — such as city and music festivals — and surveyed **10 Ljubljana hotels** to evaluate their waste separation practices.

Our findings:

- There is **high diversity and low standardization** among events. Standards cannot be applied uniformly to all events, as some gather 1,000 attendees while others just 20 or 30.
- **Single-use packaging** remains dominant, and **waste separation** is still limited — often due to unclear signage and language barriers.
- Some **green initiatives** exist but are **not communicated effectively** to visitors.

We found that introducing **standardized reusable systems, clearly marked eco-stations, and clear visitor guidance** significantly reduces waste and enhances sustainability visibility.

Events that communicated well before and during their activities were perceived by visitors as the most sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on our experience, we recommend:

1. **Introduce deposit systems** for drinks and offer reusable food containers. (Ljubljana is preparing to adopt these systems for major events, following best

practices from cities like Vienna and Munich.)

2. **Install eco-stations** with clear signage for plastic, mixed waste, and cigarette disposals.
3. **Ban single-use bottles** — use glass bottles or local tap water instead.
4. **Standardize compostable and recyclable materials** among all vendors and partners. Often, unsustainable choices stem from lack of information or cost concerns, so cooperation among vendors helps.
5. **Inform visitors in advance** about your sustainable practices — include a note in invitations or announcements. This not only makes the event greener but also *educates partners and attendees*.
6. **Encourage creative waste disposal** — through reward systems, gamification, or interactive voting boxes.

In Slovenia, we went from barely separating waste to becoming one of the leading countries in waste management — all within a single generation.

This shows how quickly change can happen, even at the event scale.

CO₂ Offset Farms Initiative

Since 2021, we've been implementing our **Strategic Plan for Sustainable Events**, including the **CO₂ Offset Farms** project — which develops *climate contribution and adaptation packages* for event organizers.

With over **130 international events held in Ljubljana annually**, we realized the need to help organizers offset their impact locally.

We designed **five local green projects** to enable them to give back to the destination through a regenerative approach.

Initially, the idea was quite simple — “buy a flower and plant it in the city.” But new EU regulations and global scandals around false carbon offsets pushed us to design **more credible, science-based, and locally grounded projects**.

Our initiatives now focus on:

- **Wetland preservation and urban forest restoration,**
- **Protecting existing trees** and natural heritage rather than planting new ones,
- **Biodiversity and seed bank projects** with the Botanical Garden of Ljubljana,
- **Removing invasive species,**

- **Urban greening and heat adaptation**, creating shaded areas and resilient city spaces.

We analyzed global best practices, developed prototypes, and are now planning the communication strategy.

Interestingly, when asked about offsetting, **56% of international partners** said they prefer to offset in their *own countries*; only **15%** would contribute to the *destination* where the event takes place.

So our next goal is to **communicate better** and **persuade organizers** to reinvest in the destination hosting their events.

Participants receive **certificates aligned with ESG reporting** requirements, connecting their brand to Ljubljana's sustainable image and building mutual trust and visibility.

Key Takeaways

1. **Measure first.**
You can't act effectively if you don't know how much waste or carbon your events generate.
2. **Educate partners.**
Focusing only on visitors isn't enough — sustainable transformation starts with partners and suppliers.
3. **Build trust through partnerships.**
Collaboration with NGOs, academia, and local authorities is essential to achieve real impact.
4. **Communicate your results.**
Even small projects matter — share them through social media, inform visitors, and inspire colleagues to follow.

That's all from my side. Thank you.

