



Sustainability in sport: Fair play for the environment

Major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are a very effective means of conveying a message to a global public. Firstly, these major events always attract substantial media coverage and reach a very large audience. Secondly, they enable information to be communicated on an emotional level, thus increasing its impact.

By committing to protect the environment and climate, organisers can stage events with a smaller ecological footprint while raising fans' awareness of these issues. For local clubs and the "sports for all" sector, these events can be an inspiring example of how environmental and climate issues can be integrated into sports and venues can operate sustainably.

Major sporting events: Models of good practice

Major sporting events can serve as models of good practice by showing, in a large-scale format, what can be done by the world of sport to avoid negative impacts on the environment and climate. Energy consumption at the venues themselves and team and spectator travel are significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainably designed stadiums and eco-friendly visitor offers (e.g. attractive green transport schemes) can therefore help to reduce carbon emissions.

However, major events – not only in sport – often generate very large amounts of waste, much of it consisting of flyers, paper plates and plastic cups. Smart strategies and digital solutions have a key role to play in waste avoidance. In addition, non-stadium sports often have a negative impact on sensitive open spaces, putting biodiversity at risk.

Appropriate measures can help to mitigate these negative environmental impacts. Overall, major sporting events can set standards that can then be applied in the staging of national or smaller-scale events.

Greener sports for all

It is important to ensure that environmental and sustainability principles are adopted by Germany's many sports clubs and embedded more generally in sports for all. Take the climate footprint: with their regular events and day-to-day operations, local sports clubs produce far more greenhouse gas emissions than are generated by the limited number of major sporting events.

But progress is often very difficult to achieve here. One fundamental problem is that sports venues are, in many cases, not owned by the clubs themselves: many of these facilities are local authority-owned. As leases do not generally cover energy consumption, clubs have no incentive to cut costs by reducing their consumption of energy or water.

Furthermore, in the sports for all sector, much of the work at club level is undertaken by volunteers; in such a setting, there are no professional environmental officers who view their prime responsibility as being to promote environmental concerns. Nevertheless, funding is available at this level: under the Local Authorities Guideline (*Kommunalrichtlinie*), which was adopted as part of the German Environment Ministry's National Climate Initiative and came into effect in 2019, local sports clubs can apply for support to undertake energy upgrading.

The Oeko-Institut is working on various projects that aim to make major sporting events more eco-friendly and embed environmental performance more firmly in sports. Institute researchers are collaborating with the German Football Association (DFB) in order to identify potential points of leverage.

Study: Sustainability Concept EURO 2024 for the German Football Association (DFB)

Since the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the Oeko-Institut has served as an ongoing source of advice on environmental issues for the DFB. It has also developed participatory events and produced decision-making aids for clubs and event organisers. As part of their collaboration, the DFB and the Oeko-Institut have prepared a comprehensive Sustainability Concept for the UEFA EURO 2024 football championship.

A key element of the Sustainability Concept is a waste strategy based on consistent avoidance of plastic waste. Reusable tableware and free water dispensers at venues make a major contribution to reducing waste. A well thought-out recycling strategy ensures that any residual waste is reused or recycled. Cutting large stadiums' energy consumption also contributes to meeting climate protection targets. The German Sports Climate Fund will be a designated lighthouse project beyond UEFA EURO 2024 and will assist clubs to carry out energy-saving measures.

Another key factor at any major sporting event is mobility, not only for the public but also for teams and stadium employees. At UEFA EURO 2024, waymarked "fan routes" will guide spectators to venues, while bike-sharing schemes will give employees access to climate-friendly mobility. For fans arriving from outside Germany or travelling long distances between venues, the Combi-Ticket Plus will encourage the use of eco-friendly modes of transport.

[Study: "United by Football - Sustainability Concept UEFA EURO 2024 Germany" by the Oeko-Institut for the DFB](#)

Study: Olympic and Paralympic Games Hamburg 2024 – Sustainability Concept

Although Hamburg and Kiel will not host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2024 following a local referendum on 29 November 2015, the study "Olympic and Paralympic Games Hamburg 2024. Sustainability Concept" by the Oeko-Institut and the German Sport University Cologne maps out a pathway towards stringent environmental and social standards in the staging of major events.

The Concept was based on a comprehensive approach which gave equal consideration to all three pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic and social. It thus aimed to ensure that all the

measures adopted before, during and after the Games were eco-friendly, socially equitable and economically viable.

Sustainability at all levels

Based on these three pillars of sustainability and in a participatory process, the team of experts looked at all the key topics and fields of activity: infrastructure and mobility, ecology and resources, climate and energy, social affairs and participation, and economy and utilisation, focusing equally on the environmental, social and economic dimensions.

An environmental assessment was carried out in advance for all planned sporting venues, examining the impacts of sporting events on nature and landscape, energy, water, soil, climate, air and human health. Methods were worked out in more detail in 20 pilot projects aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Many of the planned measures would have guaranteed the availability of sustainable infrastructures long after the Olympic Games had finished. Expanding the cycle network and local public transport is good for everyone, while investing in barrier-free access to sports venues, leisure amenities and public transport promotes inclusion and brings benefits to the public as a whole, particularly the elderly.

["Olympic and Paralympic Games Hamburg 2024. Sustainability Concept" by the Oeko-Institut and the German Sport University Cologne on the website of the event application company Hamburg 2024](#)

Further information

[Green Goal: Football's Footprint – Legacy Report \(Final report on the environmental initiative of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2011\) by the Oeko-Institut](#)

[Green Champions in Sport and Environment: Guide to Environmentally-Sound Large Sporting Events by the Oeko-Institut](#)

[Website: Green Champions for Sustainable Sports Events \(partners: Oeko-Institut and the German Sport University Cologne\)](#)

[Website: *Umweltschutz im Fußball* \(Environmental protection in football\) \(partners: German Football Association and the Oeko-Institut\)](#)

Contact

Dr. Hartmut Stahl

Senior Researcher

Resources & Transport (Darmstadt)

Oeko-Institut e.V., Office Darmstadt

Phone: +49 6151 8191-18

Mail: h.stahl@oeko.de

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