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Guide to organizing events ecologically





Preface

Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 if not before organizing political conferences and multilateral events ecologically has become the accepted standard in international affairs. During its EU Presidency, Austria will be judged partly by the extent to which the conferences and events that it is responsible for fulfil these international expectations.

The Austrian “Lebensministerium” has accordingly drawn up a Guide to organizing events ecologically, as an aid in planning the various meetings of experts and the informal Minister Councils. The Guide contains clear recommendations and practical instructions for numerous areas of importance. The criteria provided are meant as guidelines for the staff concerned with organization in all departments, to achieve the target of “Greening the Presidency – Greening Events”.

I hope that we jointly succeed in enacting the Austrian Presidency as ecologically and sustainably as possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Josef Pröll'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Josef Pröll

Minister of Environment

Introduction

With an eye to the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006, the “Guide to organizing events ecologically“ is aimed **specially at organizing ecologically acceptable conferences.**

Ten areas with probably the greatest ecological relevance to how conferences are organized have been selected. To do justice to the idea of sustainability, the **two areas** “Freedom from barriers“ and “Gender Mainstreaming“ have also been included.

The areas in question:

- Waste management
- Procurement
- Energy and climate
- Transport
- Food
- Water
- Freedom from barriers
- Gender Mainstreaming
- Hotel facilities / venues for events
- Side events
- Documentation and communication
- Gifts

The relevance of each area to the environment and to sustainability is explained in the Guide, before the aspects that need to be taken into account as part of organizing an event – often at an early stage, i.e. during the planning – are discussed.

First there are the “**key aspects**“ to be borne in mind: these may be quite general, e.g. avoiding waste throughout the conference, or priority for public transport. Here the most important principles for the area in question are to be found. Then come “**priority 1 measures**“. Implementing these concrete measures is a sharp-focus recommendation; for instance, during the conference no aluminium cans should be used (section 1), and tap water should be provided to drink (section 6).

Conferences are often organized under time pressure – there is so much to be dealt with simultaneously: getting hold of papers, putting lists of hotels together, negotiating with catering partners, etc., so it is easy to overlook ecological and sustainability criteria during planning and organizing the event.

However, the Guide has been drawn up in such a way that, even with a limited time budget, no vital criteria are skimped.

The Guide repeatedly indicates, as a “priority 1 measure“, that preference should be given to products bearing the Austrian or European ecolabel i.e. the official ecological approval seal, or products complying with the requirements of the relevant Environmental Performance Datasheets in the “Guidelines for ecologizing the Federal Administration, with special emphasis on procurement“.

The **Environmental Performance Datasheets** provide additional help with identifying, among the mass of products on offer, the most ecologically acceptable one. The Environmental Performance Datasheets relevant to organizing conferences are appended in Annex 3.

Alongside the Guide itself the subject of ecologically acceptable events is treated in the **Guide worksheets** (see Annex 2).

In these the areas listed above are dealt with systematically in **tabular form**: additional information about the individual topics is provided and further options for action are discussed. These worksheets have been drawn up specially for organizing events and conferences during the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006. However, **the criteria are of general relevance to organizing conferences**.

The individual worksheets correspond to the sections of the Guide, and include the outline of the issue in question and the “key aspects” already mentioned there.

The “priority 1 measures“ are underlaid in green. All other suggestions for action have been assigned priority 2; varying weight can be attached to this from case to case.

Apart from the actual “measures“, the worksheets feature entries in the columns:

“Comments” (brief explanation of the issue / the measure);

“Procedure, source, reference“ (to help with implementation).

Where topics overlap, cross-references to other issues are provided in the column “See section“; for instance, worksheet 1 (waste management) includes references to “2” – and in worksheet 2 (procurement) one or more related measures are presented.

Since selecting the catering partner for events and conferences is specially important, a separate **list of criteria for “environmentally acceptable catering”** is included as Annex 1.

While many of the criteria listed are perfectly valid for events over and above those connected with the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006, the Guide and the worksheets have not been designed for events such as major sporting events, concerts etc.

Annexes to the Guide:

Annex 1: list of criteria for “environmentally acceptable catering”

Annex 2: worksheets

Guide to organizing events ecologically

with regard to the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006

In the first half of 2006 Austria will assume the Presidency of the European Union. As a result, Austria is then responsible for the way in which EU events, sessions, conferences and meetings are held during this period.

This guide to organizing events in an ecologically acceptable and sustainable way is intended to give all the Austrian departments concerned practical help in arranging and holding such events.

To make it easier to tackle the various issues systematically, the subject matter has been divided into twelve areas (listed below); the numbering has nothing to do with relative importance. However, the measures labelled “priority 1” in each area should be implemented in all cases.

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1. Waste management

The main issue in waste management is restricting the flood of waste at the conference venue (catering, conference materials, separate refuse containers etc.), in hotels and during preparation (mailing handouts/papers). Above all, serious waste management should not be undermined by plastic bottles or beverage cans on conference tables.

Key aspects:

- Avoiding waste / reducing the volume of waste during the conference
- Avoiding non-returnables (e.g. by serving milk in jugs)
- Restricting the flood of paper typical of conferences

Priority 1 measures:

- Installing groups of containers for different kinds of refuse
- At all events connected with the Presidency: no non-returnable plastic bottles, no beverage cans and no composite packs

2. Procurement

The subject of procurement is interwoven with several other areas; the central issue here is purchasing all the various commodities needed for the event in as ecologically acceptable a way as possible. It is vital that criteria of sustainability are written into procurement procedures and incorporated in calls for proposals and in contracts. Large conferences also provide a suitable setting for presenting innovative products and services.

Key aspects:

- Applying the “Guidelines for ecologizing the Federal Administration, with special emphasis on procurement“, and consulting the Environmental Performance Datasheets these include, in connexion with calls for quotations or direct purchasing
- “Check it“ – catalogue of criteria for procurement
- Taking the ecolabel guidelines into account

Priority 1 measures:

- Purchasing products that satisfy the criteria given in the Environmental Performance Datasheets included in the “Guidelines for ecologizing the Federal Administration, with special emphasis on procurement“; for instance, products bearing the Austrian or EU ecolabel meet these criteria
- For all official publications, handouts, copies etc. in connexion with the EU Presidency using only paper that satisfies the requirements of the relevant Environmental Performance Datasheets included in the “Guidelines for ecologizing the Federal Administration, with special emphasis on procurement“; for instance, products bearing the Austrian or another comparable ecolabel fulfil these requirements.

3. Energy and climate

Energy and climate protection involve the supply and use of energy at the conference venue and in hotels etc. The best time to implement many energy-saving measures in conference facilities is when buildings are being planned, built or renovated. Since no new conference

centres are to be built for the EU Presidency, the need is to implement the most effective energy and climate protection measures in the circumstances obtaining – which also plays a part in selecting conference facilities.

Key aspects:

- Taking events' impact on the climate into account
- Measures directed at energy efficiency (e.g. room temperature, energy-efficient appliances)
- Using renewable forms of energy, such as electricity from renewable sources, throughout the EU Presidency. Electricity with the Austrian Ecolabel satisfies this requirement.

Priority 1 measure:

- Not heating above / not cooling below 21 °C in all conference facilities throughout the EU Presidency

4. Transporting people

The subject of transporting people involves both travel to and from the conference venue and all journeys made during the event.

Key aspects:

- Selecting venues that can be reached by public transport
- Arranging for shuttle services to operate between hotel and conference venue
- Using low-emission vehicles, e.g. powered by alternative sources of energy (diesel vehicles only with particulate filter)

Priority 1 measures:

- Short journeys should not be made by car
- Systematic information about arriving by public transport

5. Food

Food is a major component in the areas of procurement and transport, and one of the most important ways of conveying messages about sustainability (regional, seasonal, biological). The subject of hygiene involves the areas staff, food and premises (sanitation, kitchen, storage). In any case there are a number of legal regulations to be complied with.

Key aspects:

- “Fair traded” products
- Using foodstuffs produced locally and in season, preference for non-imported i.e. domestic food
- Short distances between producer and consumer

Priority 1 measures:

- Preference for national seals of approval, fruit juice made locally and fair traded products (e.g. coffee, tea, fruit juice)
- Selecting catering partners in line with defined criteria (written into the relevant calls for proposals) such as an acceptable proportion of organic foods, fair traded coffee; see also the “Guidelines for ecologizing the Federal Administration, with special emphasis on procurement” on the subject of catering.

6. Water

Apart from using water as a resource responsibly, the message should also be conveyed that Austria has an excellent supply and quality of water and tap water can therefore be recommended for drinking, with no need for additional packaging or transport.

Key aspects:

- Economical use of water as a resource
- Conveying the message “Austria has exceptionally pure water”

Priority 1 measure:

- Providing tap water to drink (along with other things) at all events connected with the EU Presidency

7. Freedom from barriers

Even if only a few of those attending any given event are persons with a physical handicap, all events connected with the EU Presidency must be fully accessible barrier-free, particularly for wheelchair occupants.

Key aspects:

- Increased attention to the needs of persons with a physical handicap

Priority 1 measures:

- Barrier-free access for wheelchair occupants to all events connected with the EU Presidency
- Full wheelchair access to toilets
- Suitable measures to be implemented for persons with other handicaps (e.g. persons with impaired sight or hearing).

8. Gender Mainstreaming

Significant stimuli in the direction of "Gender Mainstreaming" can derive from conferences, too. This is mainly a question of selecting speakers and of using language in a gender-sensitive way.

Key aspects:

- Taking the principles of Gender Mainstreaming into account in the way the event is managed

Priority 1 measures:

- Gender-sensitive use of the written and spoken language (in line with the Cabinet of Ministers decision of 18 April 2001)
- Balance between men and women in selecting speakers and panel members

9. Hotel facilities / venues for events

Venues for events and hotel facilities are a subject interwoven with most of the other areas dealt with here.

Key aspects:

- As far as possible, select venues for events and hotels within walking distance of each other
- Give preference to hotels that fulfil / comply with ecological requirements, e.g. hotels or event organizers that the Austrian or EU ecolabel has been awarded to
- Event centres certified in line with the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)

Priority 1 measures:

- Selecting hotels and conference centres that comply with ecological requirements, e.g. those with an environmental management system and / or ecolabel
- Taking care that only flowers grown locally / in season are used for decoration
- Implementing priority 1 measures relevant to more than one area

10. Side events

As far as the side events put on are concerned, these should be as ecologically acceptable as possible and be adapted to the specific situation of the venue (e.g. cultural features); as part of the thrust toward sustainability, they should benefit the local economy.

Key aspects:

- Promoting travel by public transport
- Providing shuttle bus services
- Presenting the cultural offer of the region in question
- Presenting sustainable / social projects

Priority 1 measures:

- Involving the local media / population
- No fireworks, no helicopter flights
- Developing a concept specific to the region and the subject matter (varying with the venue) for side events, taking criteria of sustainability into account

11. Documentation and communication

Maximizing the impact of measures actually implemented involves getting the word out about them, to encourage imitation. A comprehensive communication concept for “Greening the presidency“ is yet to be drawn up; the target groups will be participants at events, the general public at home and abroad, local councils and employees. As the project is intended to serve as a model for other events, comprehensive project documentation is desirable.

As part of this, aims, measures and procedure should be documented at an early stage. It is also important to collect and document the necessary data (key values). Where ecolabels or environmental management systems (e.g. the Austrian or EU ecological approval seals, EMAS or ISO 14001) are on hand at the venue in question, this would simplify the task of collecting and checking data.

Key aspects:

- Once implemented, the measures in question can be publicized by means of systematic PR work
- Clear messages to and communication with local media
- Involving the local population
- Comprehensive staff training

Priority 1 measures:

- Those responsible within the institutions for organizing the event in question see to it that the priority 1 measures are implemented
- Comprehensive documentation and communication of the project “Green Events“, aimed at specific target groups

12. Gifts

First, the gifts handed out in the course of the Presidency should not simply get thrown away after a short time; second, producing and delivering them should involve as little ecological impairment as possible, and should also be socially acceptable.

Key aspects:

- See also “Procurement“
- The way gifts are produced and used should be socially, ecologically and economically sustainable, e.g.
 - (propelling) pencils or ball-points made of cardboard / wood
 - coffee/chocolate gifts from domestic producers / made of fair traded ingredients

Priority 1 measures:

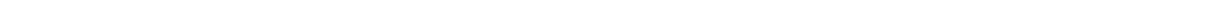
- Ensuring that gifts are durable
- Products handed out should have been transported over the shortest possible distances

Who to contact

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Annex 1

Criteria for ecologically acceptable catering



Criteria for ecologically acceptable catering

At conferences and events that last longer than half a day a buffet will be required for participants and speakers.

In some cases it is possible to obtain quotations from catering firms at the planning stage; but frequently one is committed to a particular catering firm / firm operating the facility by the choice of venue.

None the less, the organizers can provide definite directives – particularly in this field – to steer these partners in the right direction.

At the very first meeting with a catering firm it must be made clear that "Greening Events" requires the firm in question to comply with specific criteria of ecology and sustainability in connexion with food and drink, crockery, cutlery and tablecloths, and avoiding / sorting refuse.

The table below is intended to help in deciding whether a potential catering partner satisfies the ecological requirements applying to events organized in an ecologically acceptable way.

-	+
Waste management	
Non-returnable plastic bottles COMPOSITE PACKS	Providing beverages (mineral water, fizzy drinks, beer) in returnable bottles ; providing tap water in jugs
Beverage cans	The conference venue is a " can-free zone "; any drinks dispensers installed must operate with returnable bottles and beakers only.
Mini-packs – the more of them, the more refuse	Milk in jugs, sugar in bowls
Disposable crockery / cutlery	Reusable crockery , glasses
Paper tablecloths / place mats	Fabric tablecloths / place mats
Bleached filters for coffee or tea	Unbleached filters for coffee or tea

-	+
Food	
<p>Food involving long distances in transport, e.g. mangos, pineapples, kiwis, bananas etc. ...</p> <p>Endangered species such as shrimps, salmon, Victoria perch, sturgeon (caviar) ...</p>	<p>The buffet should have a noticeable emphasis on local and seasonal products: Austrian strawberries in June, apples and grapes in autumn – which helps to shorten distances in transport!</p>
<p>“Meat / eggs from intensive livestock rearing, genetically modified foodstuffs</p>	<p>Foodstuffs with a high proportion of organically farmed products from Austria, eggs from free-run chickens</p>
<p>“How am I supposed to know where that comes from?”</p>	<p>Austrian seals of approval for foodstuffs guarantee GM freedom and strict inspection procedures.</p>
<p>“The vegetarians can just eat the vegetables.”</p>	<p>The buffet must include an attractive selection of vegetarian dishes.</p>
<p>Fruit juice predominantly not from Austrian fruit, e.g. orange or pineapple juice</p>	<p>Austrian fruit juice, e.g. grape or apple juice</p> <p>Definitely tap water, possibly milk drinks</p>
<p>“But you can’t grow coffee in Austria.”</p>	<p>Various brands of coffee and tea are available with the “Fair Trade” seal of approval; this also applies to chocolate and (if it has to be) orange juice.</p>

Annex 2

Guide Worksheets

