

# BEST PRACTISES IN PLASTIC-FREE SOLUTIONS

The BALTIPLAST project co-financed by Interreg BSR helps to drive the transition to a green and resilient Baltic Sea region.

## Green event: Youth Song and Dance Celebration TALLINN, ESTONIA

Tallinn Strategic Management Office Tourism Department, Photo: Kaupo Kalda



**TALLINN**, the capital of Estonia, is a vibrant and diverse city with the population of 460 000 people, representing over 140 nationalities. Tallinn is known for its forward-thinking approach to public services, and the city offers free public transport to its residents, making it an environmentally friendly and convenient place to live.

Tallinn is an important promoter of the smart and circular consumption model and a creator of a system for circular products and services that support it. Tallinn operates resource-efficiently by reducing primary material consumption, increasing waste recycling, and actively promoting reuse, providing businesses and residents with various opportunities to participate in the circular economy.

# 80 %

**CO2 reduction**

Achieved by the switch  
to reusable dishware

The Youth Song and Dance Celebration took place on 30 June – 2 July 2023, bringing together ca. 350 000 participants and visitors. Tallinn aimed to organise the festival with as small as possible ecological footprint, using local raw materials and resources, and educating public about waste during the event. The festival turned out to be a great success and now serves as the best practice for all future zero-waste public events in Estonia and beyond.

# Challenges and actions

Most of the public events in the city of Tallinn have relied only on single-used tableware for serving food and drinks. This made public events very wasteful and a huge amount of mixed waste was generated afterwards. In addition, it created littering problems and visual pollution (overloaded waste containers).

During the pre-festive week and the 3-day event of the song and dance festival around 125 000 participants required multiple daily meals. Around 320 000 pieces of single-used plates/cups/utensils were used at the festive week generating tons of mixed waste that ended up in incineration or landfill. This made the visitors and organizers of events unsatisfied and therefore actions needed to be taken.

To respond to this problem and to move towards circular events, **in 2019 the city of Tallinn decided to ban single-used plastic dishes** (plates, cups, forks, knives, spoons, etc.) in all public events held in Tallinn. Although this was a big step forward decreasing the amount of single-used fossil-based plastic dishes and cutlery, it did not reduce the amount of waste generated.

Therefore, as a second step, **Tallinn amended this regulation by banning all single-use dishes made of any material and allowing only reusable ones**. In this way, from June 2023, only reusable dishes (plates, cups, forks, knives, spoons) are allowed in public events in Tallinn.

Although in summer of 2023 this regulation was compulsory to events that had less than 30 000 visitors per day and the Youth Song and Dance Festival could still use single-use compostable tableware, **it was decided that within the European Green Capital Year 2023 sustainability is in focus and only reusable tableware will be used to serve food and drinks**.

**Estonian XIII Youth Song and Dance Festival „Holy is the Land“ held in the summer of 2023 was the biggest event in Estonia (and according to our knowledge, in the world) where all food and drinks were served in reusable plates and cups and only reusable utensils were used.**

Reusable tableware was used during the pre-festive week and the 3-day event both for visitors and performers/participants. The song celebration area was covered with 70 waste collection points where biowaste, packaging waste, deposit bottles and mixed waste was sorted separately with the help of around 100 green ambassadors (advisors for reuse and waste sorting). To ensure smooth deposit return for the visitors, 11 reusable tableware collection points were installed. In addition to the permanent water taps, extra water tanks were added to promote the use of tap water and to reduce the amount of single-used bottles generated.

Thanks to well-organized planning and the involvement of all stakeholders the event turned out as a great success.

## Brief description of activities

- **Green ambassadors:** around 100 green ambassadors (volunteer advisors for reuse and waste sorting) were recruited and trained.
- **Reusable tableware collection points:** A total of 11 reusable tableware collection points were set up at the Song Festival Ground where visitors could return their reusable dishes. Visitors had to pay a 2 euro deposit for using a reusable plate/cup, while the utensils were for free. The deposit was fully refunded by cash or to a credit card when the cup/plate was returned to the collection point by the visitor.

- **Waste collection points:** 70 waste collection points were installed where the waste was sorted into 4 fractions (biowaste, packaging waste, deposit beverage packaging and mixed waste). Around 100 green ambassadors guided visitors in sorting waste and providing information about the reuse system at all 70 waste collection points.
- **Water refill:** in addition to the permanent water taps extra water tanks were added to encourage visitors to use own reusable water bottles and buy fewer single-used plastic bottles.

## Target groups

Participants, visitors, organizers

All Estonians and other tourists around the world

Reusable tableware service providers

Waste management companies

## Timeline

The preparation of the Youth Song and Dance Celebration "Holy is the Land" started already **1,5 years before the event** with forming a strategic partnership to plan and execute the waste management and arrangement of the reusable tableware system. The **sustainability team** was formed, a **series of meetings** were organized with different stakeholders (including catering and service providers), around **100 green ambassadors were recruited and trained** to advise on reuse and waste sorting, and finally, the **procurement for finding a service provider for reusable dishes** was carried out.

## Results

In this event, food and drink were served only on reusable tableware for both visitors and performers/participants. More than 100 000 people used:

- **85 000 pcs** reusable cups.
- **155 000 pcs** reusable food packages.
- **161 500 pcs** reusable cutlery.
- about **500 000** disposable dishes and utensils were avoided.

Thanks to the reuse system significantly less waste was generated compared to the previous festival in 2019. In 2019, a total of **40 tons** of waste (all unsorted mixed waste) was generated while in 2023 only **22,1 tons** of waste was generated out of which 8,3 tons was biowaste, 3,9 tons was plastic and metal packaging waste, 0,5 tons was paper and cardboard waste, 1,5 tons was glass packaging waste and 7,9 tons was mixed waste.

**In total, the amount of waste generated was reduced by around 50%.**



# Enablers



- + Strong **support from the stakeholders** and interest of target groups
- + Special **sustainability team** formed
- + **Regulations** that support the use of reuse systems at public event
- + **Clear and understandable *Guidelines for Organizing Sustainable Events*** in the city of Tallinn
- + **Budget** provided by the city of Tallinn
- + Being the **Green Capital of Europe in 2023**

# Barriers



- **Demand for human resources** to manage the development process
- **Financial constraints** might pose a risk
- **Without extra budget it is hard to set deposit without a service fee and to motivate green ambassadors** to advise visitors next to each waste collection point
- **Participants do not know how to sort waste.** Without green ambassadors most of the waste would have ended up as a mixed waste

# Key takeaways

The event turned out to be a great success and serves as the **best practice for all future zero-waste public events** in Estonia and beyond. The proper organizational approach (reusable dishes service providers, reusable dishes collection system, green ambassadors, clear informative materials/ guides/ communication, early involvement of all stakeholders, etc) showed that **it is possible to organize mass events in a circular manner**.

