

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.

Utena Goes Green: Plastic-free event initiative

UTENA, LITHUANIA



UTENA is a city in north-east Lithuania. It is one of the oldest settlements of Lithuania and is home to over 25 000 residents.

The city is recognized for its commitment to sustainability, integrating green infrastructure, and fostering eco-friendly initiatives. Its *Strategic Waste Management Plan* focuses on reducing pollution and improving waste management. The Utena District Council has banned single-use plastic containers at public events, highlighting its commitment to sustainability.

81 %
CO2 reduction

The challenge of single-use plastic waste during events was addressed through the Utena Green Event initiative. Key activities included stakeholder engagement and data collection to assess the impact of reducing single-use plastics. Municipal support, along with public interest, contributed to the pilot's success. The pilot underscored the importance of collaboration, education, and the potential for future green events to succeed in promoting sustainability.

Challenges and actions

One key challenge recognised in Utena is the accumulation of waste during public events. A major contributor to this issue is the **widespread use of single-use plastic containers** by caterers providing food and beverages. Compounding this issue is a **lack of awareness and understanding** among some residents and event participants about the importance of using reusable containers. This reliance on disposable packaging not only generates large amounts of waste but also hinders the city's sustainability efforts. Addressing this challenge is critical to advancing Utena's commitment to environmental responsibility.

Brief description of activities

- In accordance with the "Rules for the Organization of Events Held in Public Places of the Utena District Municipality," **an active Utena neighborhood was selected as the pilot location** to organize a plastic-free event.
- **Event organizers ensured that all food was served without single-use plastic packaging.** As an alternative, the community purchased palm leaf containers at their own expense. These containers were collected, washed, and reused after the event.
- **A proactive public awareness campaign about the plastic-free initiative** was conducted before and during the event to engage and educate participants.
- To evaluate the initiative's success, **an inventory was conducted post-event to record the number of reusable containers used.** While participants were informed in advance about the plastic-free policy, the results remain estimates due to the absence of baseline data from similar events using plastic containers.

These activities reflect a significant step forward in promoting sustainable practices and reducing plastic waste in Utena.

Target groups

City departments (involved in event planning and environmental management)

Event organisers

Caterers

Event attendees (local residents, tourists)

Timeline

The pilot took about **3 months** to implement, from initial discussions to event execution and post-event data collection.



Results

The data collection questionnaire prepared in the BALTIPLAST project provided a good insight on what data needs to be collected, which guided the planning and execution of the pilot. The results were:

- **Successful plastic-free event.**
- **Stronger collaboration** between municipal authorities and community.
- **Decreased amount of disposable plastic containers** for serving food and filling drinks entering the municipal waste stream.
- **Less pollution** during events in public spaces.

The reduction measures not only successfully minimized plastic waste but also heightened public awareness, as attendees were encouraged to avoid using or bringing single-use plastics to the event.

Enablers



- + **Strong support from the municipality**
- + **Interest and cooperation from the neighborhood** selected for the pilot
- + **Growing public interest** in sustainability and waste reduction

Barriers



- **Moderate demand for human resources**
- **Financial constraints**, particularly for purchasing reusable containers
- **Limited baseline data**, making it challenging to measure precise impact

Key takeaways

It is crucial to **involve stakeholders** – municipality departments, businesses and the public to ensure project success. It is important to **educate and raise awareness** about the effects of single-use plastic and sustainability.

Collaboration with caterers, general public and local associations amplifies the reach and effectiveness of plastic-free events.