



Brewing Sustainability: How Beer Events Adapt to the Ecological Transition

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is about on how beer festivals and brewing events could be made more sustainable and responsible. The goal was to understand how the events industry and in particular the craft beer sector is responding to current environmental challenges. It examines current practices, international trends and the explications of the public and partners.

The study combined academic sources, European case studies and six-month internship at Brussels Beer Project (BBP) during which I helped coordinate a number of events. The main question was: How do beer-related events keep the ecological transition alive as a culture and social value?

The results show that sustainability is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion. According to the public, sustainability translates into waste reduction, transparency and local partnership. Festival have therefore evolved from purely entertaining activities to a balance between pleasure and purpose, which may include alcohol-free options, reduce energy consumption and collaborate with NGOs. With the case of BBP, the study show that change can event be driven by small breweries that adapt their formats values and communication.

The thesis also proposes recommendations for better sustainable practices at events such as planning public involvement and strong local networks. Despite some limitations (such as a lack of precise data), the study offers a valuable overview of a sector in transition

Key words: Sustainability, Events, Beer festivals, Circular Economy, Climate change, Responsible Consumption, Ecological Transition.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this day, climate crises are spread just as economic and social crises, obstructing the former development paradigm to which we could subscribe. Thus, a change had to come in the event industry where it was used to gather people, spending so much of energy and dishing out wastes. Festivals, fairs and trade show must be pressed into the mold of new environmental laws, apply public polices and conform to the changing society. Sustainability really is not an option any longer, it is the priority

Beer events stand as a main example. One of the many tickets incidents has been thus created across Europe with the rise and expansion of microbreweries and the craft beer movement: beer tastings, brewery visits and beer tourism. Mostly these are local ecosystems that endorse the artisanal value; yet they indisputably harm our environment. Some casting issues include public transport, water, energy use and waste. Brewing depends on agriculture, which is itself vulnerable to climate variability. From these extreme weather events in Europe, hops and barley are under increased

Even other stakeholders such as visitors, cities and sponsors have changed. They want transparency, sets of clearly defined goals and consequent commitment to green actions. Among these cities, Paris and Brussels grant funding only for events with a green policy. This repositioning also led the way for the emergence of other innovations like recycle everything, short food supply chains, renewable energies and hybrid or local event formats.

Within this framework, beer occasions represent a very appropriate test for monitoring changes in the event industry. The thesis investigates beer related activities in their engagement with environmental challenges and social change with special focus on their viability as sites for sustainable innovation

The objective of the thesis is to obtain an understanding of how the beer events industry in Europe can be made sustainable through knowledge drawn from environmental studies, economics and cultural management.

This practice-based thesis seeks to identify concrete activities, models and actionable strategies that enable beer event organisers to combine a festive atmosphere with local identity and ecological responsibility. This analysis draws from fieldwork and the author's internship experience at the Brussels Beer Project

Thesis tries to find out how can the beer event industry in Europe combine environmental responsibility with cultural authenticity and economic viability in the context of climate change?"

Practice-based method is selected because it gained experience in understanding the subject because it does not collect new data through surveys, but rather emphasizes real-life experience, reflection and the application of knowledge in practice. It is ideal projects that seek to develop operations, improve practices and find solution to existing problems in the field.

Thesis methods to be applied include examples like the Brussels Beer Project) where I worked on event planning, sustainability communication and partners coordination. This internship enabled me to understand in practice the problems and solutions related to organising eco-responsible beer events. And to illustrate I used literature review from professional and institutional sources.

The presentation of the thesis will be divided into three: first, an overview of environmental challenges in the event industry; second, changes in scale at global and local levels; and third, responses from professionals in the beer industry.

In this thesis, the use of generative AI proved to be useful. As English is not my native language, I used a few digital tools to help me during the writing and thinking process for the thesis. I used ChatGPT-4 to help me clarify and improve. It could help me simply serve as a brainstorming partner for structure.

I also used DeepL to translate or expressing myself for certain expressions or words whose meaning was unclear to me in English. The tools were particularly useful during the editing phase of this thesis, making the final version more accessible and fluid, thus reflecting my current voices and ideas.

2 EVENT MANAGEMENT & ECO-RESPONSIBILITY – AN GOING TRANSFORMATION

2.1 Current situation of the event industry

This little "segment" of the event industry considered one of the richest reflections of contemporary social change. Once simple, it used to be a rather rough mechanism for territorial development or marketing: today, events have a lot to worry in this regard, as they increasingly focus on the ability to bring people together safely and sustainably. Changing behaviors, a shortage of natural resources and increasing scientific warning about the urgency of responding to climate change could characterize the change underway

Nowadays, there is the chance for it to be rightly acknowledged that large-scale events can bring many environmental hazards from transport, energy, waste and use of nature resources. According to ADEME's report (2023), these factors contribute almost 70% of CO₂ emissions of an event. One stated reason was that festivalgoers could travel very far by private cars or plane flights to the venue another was poor accessibility to several festivals' venues. (ADEME, 2023)

For outdoors-only events, diesel generators are used to power temporary facilities, isolated poorly and light that are truly heavy on power load, generating tens of tons of waste in just few days. In France, as I learned in school, the waste from a medium-sized festival amounts to around 500g to 2kg per visitor per day. The culture of disposable has shaped plastics for food containers, communication media and stage design elements, it persists. From a waste management perspective, disposable consumables, less sustainable merchandising, plastic tarpaulins and decorations have been described as huge problems.

Then, even more environmentally friendly, the food available such events. Catering primarily means heavy servings of meat, processing far away from the venue and plastic packaging that in a way can't be recycled. As Kalle Lasn, founder of Abusters, said "overconsumption is the mother of all environmental problems, For the first time in the history of capitalism, consumption itself has become contro-

versial” (Lasn, n.d.). This idea shows that catering at large events generally follows a sustainable model, unless it is specifically redesigned to take environmental concerns into account. (Lasn, n.d)

Depending on the event, GHG (Green Gas Protocol) emissions may be quite fast to big and at times could event support of possible generated by a small municipality for a day. Under such circumstances, the management started to accept some measurement tools like the Bilan Carbone or some customised impact calculators developed by organisations like Julie’s Bicycle in the United Kingdom. (Julie Bicycle, 2024).

These vectors have not yet gained in promulgation, particularly smaller and medium-size events, which simply do not contain the capacity or are lacking in house expertise to undertake such efforts.

Canadian urban planner Bren Toderian has said, “EcoDensity continues to generate considerable interest across the Country and internationally, with many cities accessing the website and requesting presentations or information”. This points out that the idea one has to shift events from being problems to levers for cultural change. This also encourages the reflection of how events can be educational in increasing public awareness about sustainability issues, both by example and direct experience. (Toderian, 2009)

As we can see in the New Yorker (2020) with this statement: “Most major festivals now have sustainability initiatives in place; Glastonbury recently banned single-use plastic bottler and allows only compostable or reusable plates and cutlery”. These opportunities feature the ability of events to reach expansive and diverse audiences, by way of emotion, education and active participation. (The New Yorker, 2020)

So, the question can be summarized in two answers: technical ones of restricting emission and waste disposal, its symbolic, questioning what sort of festivity we have, how much sacred space we accord to it in our society and possibly the form it will take in an era of energy waste restraint. With this interrogation of the dominant festive model, a point of change for contemporary event production is arrived at and demands particular answers.

Given these alarming facts, over the past decade, regulation and external pressures intensified. Internationally, the ISO 20121:2012 standard implemented in tandem with the 2012 London Olympic Games aims to present a systemic framework for greater organization of sustainable events. Based on the principle of continuous improvement, the commitment invites organizers to analyse, plan, implement, and then evaluate how well they have performed environmentally, socially, and economically (International Organization for Standardization, 2012).

Since 2014, the French agency ADEME has issued technical and methodological guides to help organizers reduce the ecological footprints of their events. These guides come with aids for transition from public authorities, mostly providing subsidies for shared equipment rental, dry toilet combinations, or sorting on-site (ADEME 2023).

Voluntary certification systems are recognized in different Belgian regions like Brussels Environnement's "Événement Écoresponsable" Label. The label assesses an event under 9 themes from mobility to catering and communication to assign a grade depending on the extent the organizer has committed to the spirit of the label. Yet it is never mandatory, even if reliance on the approach is often a prime criterion to acquire logistical or financial support.

The pressure does not come only from institutions. Media slowly gained the higher power to create a public/environmental consciousness through disseminating stories about the environmental impact of festivals. Social networks have proved especially influential in spreading horrifying images: fields filled with plastic waste, abandoned campsites, endless lines of automobiles. These media paint a bad character for those events as irresponsible. As judges Judith Rodin, a noted American expert (Rodin 2014), the social license to operate for institutions increasingly hinges on their responsiveness to environmental and social challenges. The reputation capital of outdoor events depends on whether or not they can credibly and measurably suffer the commitment of ecological transition. (Rodin,2014)

Artists and speakers are expected to do the same. Many, such as the British DJ Fatboy Slim and activist-artist Björk, refuse to participate in any festival that does not share their ecological values. This trend changes the power relations between programmers and artists, thus enforcing a new moral and cultural standard. This trend is changing the power dynamics between organisers and performers, reinforcing a new cultural norm based on environmental responsibility. Sponsors have also responded to these changes. According to the Net Zero Carbon Events Roadmap (2022), various stakeholders have put increasing pressure on event organisers to implement concrete and measurable carbon reduction strategies; as a result, most sponsors now request a carbon footprint estimate for an event before accepting a partnership proposal. (Net Zero Carbon Events Roadmap, 2022)

Civil society actors like NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and citizens' collectives, along with environmental movements, provide a level for measurement, where commitment rankings, exposure, and awareness campaigns are contributed, this was witnessed in the case of the "Leave no Trace" campaign launched between alternative festival circles and later instituted in several major European events.

The intersection of regulatory, media, and social pressures works in group to create a climate where green considerations cannot be an after the fact any longer. It is becoming a strategic necessity and a condition for symbolic and operating existence for the event organizers, forcing them to rethink their practices and their role in disseminating a culture of sustainability.

Gone are the days when events used to be evaluated just in terms of programming or logistics. Nowadays, the legitimacy of some events is increasingly being measured against whether they provide solutions to ethical, social, and environmental concerns of all stakeholders. Demands can be set for transparency, limitation of environmental impact, social inclusion, and ethical selection of partners. This is forcing event organizers into deep jurisprudential reflection concerning their positioning, governance, and management philosophy.

The audience, especially the young generation, is becoming the driving force in this transformation. According to a 2023 survey by CGA Strategy, 70% of festivalgoers consider the promotion of environmental sustainability as a major or important factor when choosing which festival to attend. This demand is aggravated by the militants of climate culture, focus on the ethical consistency of brands, and desire to have experiences that are consistent with their values. These audiences ask for a relatively enhanced sense of community experience—they want no plastic at all, local products, fewer wastes, inclusivity, and respect. Any cheap version of it becomes a something repulsive. (CGA strategy, 2023)

That trend is also confirmed by my experience with Brussels Beer Project (BBP). On the occasion of the Wanderlust Festival, with under 4,000 visitors, the company mobilized its crowd-funder community as participants and volunteers. This participatory mechanism reinforced the feeling of belonging and co-construction. Crowdfunders had free entry and free drinks; this action helped reduce the lack of labour and reinforced relationships with a dependable group of consumers committed to the cause. Additionally, during so-called “Crowdnights”, reserved for community investors, comparative tastings of craft and industrial beers were held. In the is document, they became mutually educating on ingredients, environmental impact, and less impactful alternatives for consumption. Festive co-education clearly symbolised the expectations of the current aware, participation culture.

Local administrations spent, logistically facilitated, and went to manage the public spaces in expectation that events would serve public interest. In Brussels, Paris, and Bordeaux, respectively, granting is to be conditioned upon adoption of eco-responsible criteria set out in the file submitted for approval by the organising committee. For instance, in Paris, sustainability efforts include the deployment of over 200 new waste sorting bins and more than 400 Trilib sorting stations across the city to make selective waste collection visible and accessible to all (City of Paris, 2023). These criteria should be seen as a much-appreciated ecological transition in the regions. In BBP's case, partnering with the Brussels-Capital Region creates a possibility for intervention while the local positive impact can be shown in promotion of artisans, facility sharing's, cultural anchorage, and raising public awareness. (City of Paris,2023)

Sponsors are in the very core of radical changes to economic models of events. In their new paradigm, feeling mere brand visibility is not enough, but instead the values alignment. According to recent industry report, “sponsoring a music festival that generates a large amount of waste and harms the environment may not align with a company’s values” (Bizzabo, 2023). This indicates that sponsors are increasing more and more their demand for events that have become not only popular, but also increasingly responsible and sustainable. The focus at BBP is on partnerships with local or responsible brands. For instance, local producers were considered for all food stands at the Lille Braderie. At the event jointly organized with TikTok Europe, BBP created a responsible approach on a high-profile night with an educational beer tasting featuring alcohol-free beers and “pro-European” IPA. This responsible message was mixed with the expectations of both institutional and commercial partners present. (Bizzabo, 2023)

Since then, staking events have increasingly been incorporated within various systems of participatory governance, where stakeholders articulate their concerns and actively participate in the decision-making process. These may take the form of prior consultations, citizen’s committees, or thematic working groups. Such instances enable local circumstances to truly be considered, while also conferring legitimacy upon the chosen course of action. They are also well received in the anticipation of social risks (local opposition, conflicting use, rejection from locals) so that concomitant solutions can be incorporated. (OECD, 2022)

Events are now competing against socio-environmental pressures posed by stakeholders on these increasing fronts. Serving such standards has become a survival issue in this landscape where buying behaviour, participation, and engagement are all increasingly adopted as per ethical and environmental values. Sustainable development has graduated from being just an advertisement filling to an emerging systemic obligation-shared, measured, and claimed jointly by all stakeholders.

2.2 The specific case of beer-related events

Brewery events are far from being just another newest addition to the modern festive culture; they are at the interface of rural traditions, artisanal realities, and urban aspirations of meeting and eating. Their vitality is provided by numerous types of events that differ of intention, organisation and local focus. Essentially, four types of brewing events stand forth: festivals, fairs, trade shows, and brewing tourism, all of different nature and carrying different sustainability considerations.

Beer festivals have indeed the marked the revival of brewing. Generally, things happen outdoors, with degustation during the day, music, food stalls, and sometimes even workshops. These festivals, akin to BXL Beer Fest, bring dozens of craft breweries beside an inquisitive public, usually young, usually urbane, and looking for meaning. During my internship at Brussels Beer Project (BBP), I was happy to have engaged in the logistics coordination of this BXL Beer Fest with over six thousand visitors packed in two days. BXL Beer Fest symbolizes the present-day conception of beer as something for everyone and something decentralized and somehow related to social and environmental causes. Looking at these events with an ecological eye, the question of their impacts remains still open, transports from breweries all over Europe, extremely high energy consumption, waste generated by mobile catering and others. As we can see in recent studies, while these festivals promote an artisanal and responsible image, their logistics are still too dependent on intensive models.

Local brewery fairs are part of the more local, agriculturally resourced traditions. They are often organized alongside some rural activities such as agricultural competitions and harvest festivals, so short distribution channels and origins are very much local. Their success link in the relationship between producers and consumers, the showcasing of local products, and the ambiance of village life. These festivals could convey an ecological message if the organizers start executing the entire supply chain assessment along with eco-responsible criteria (waste management, transport, water consumption).

Trade fairs are the second pillar of brewing events. They exist mainly for the Brewer, Distributor and Manager. Braubeviale in Germany and Salon du Brasseur

in France are considered the two biggest platforms at the European level. Besides talking about technical issues (water saving, energy efficiency, sustainable packaging), these events also help to structure transitional ecosystems: for example, at Braubeviale 2023, circular brewing was the topic of a panel that explored heat recovery from brewing and its investment into the production circuit, with energy savings. (Krones AG, 2023)

Tourism around the brewery is the next fastest growing type of event. It can include guided tours to breweries, participatory workshops, hop tours, and themed holidays promoting local knowledge. From a sustainability point of view, this kind of event is very important: it educates consumers while supporting local know-how and slow tourism. For instance, taproom tours at BBP were designed as immersive and engaging experiences that blend tasting with education related to ingredients (hops, cereals, recycled bread) and an overview of the brewery's sustainable commitments. This type of format builds emotional ties between consumers and the product, making the beer a medium through which a transitory narrative becomes gloriously intertwined with the local ecosystem. (Brussels Beer Project, 2024)

Meanwhile, in this transition, hybrid-junction formats are emerging by merging multiple approaches. The Lyon Beer Festival blends tastings with conferences, music, graphic art, and discussions on inclusivity and responsibility. This kind of “new generation” festival is an expression of the growing degree of professionalisation in the brewing business and a reinforced consciousness of responsibility. According to the festival's official press release, the event is designed to be “a place where taste, culture and commitment meet to create a complete and meaningful experience” (Lyon Beer Festival, 2023).

As noted by the Brewers Association, “community involvement is central to the craft beer movement, it's not just about the product, but about people coming together around shared values” (Brewers Association, 2023). Sustainable event growing reflect a joint commitment to raising awareness of social and environmental issues. (Brewers Association, 2023)

In a short, the typology of brewing events provides insight into the tensions between tradition and innovation. Such diversity enriches but calls for adaptation of

practices for each format. For transitions to succeed, organisers will have to switch, festival like public expectations under increasing ecological constraints and maximize the use of local resources and participatory approaches.

Beer does not just represent an industrial product. The culture of beer is linked to soils, seasons, and natural resources. To the extent that this beverage almost embodies the agricultural process of interacting with nature, its ingredients-barley, hops, water, and sometimes wheat or other cereals depend on soils, climatic cycles, and biodiversity of the region. Therefore, beer is agriculturally based; consequently, it is also at risk from all sorts of environmental disruption.

Barley for malting, as it were required an excellent draining soil, with equable temperature and regularly distributed humidity in the spring. Climatic extremes, such as a late raining or late heat waves, destroy quality and reduce performance. However, hops as an essential aromatic ingredient, are very demanding about their environment. They want very long sunny days, irrigation and fertile soil. Hops are grown in a few areas of Europe (Bavaria, Alsace, and Bohemia) and in the United States (Washington and Oregon). Any little alteration in climate might change its aromatic profile and alpha acid content or cause massive losses through drought or diseases.

As Katie Wallace, Director of Environmental and social Impact at new Belgian brewing say" Extreme climate events are already affecting our people, our communities and our customers not to mention the threat they pose to the very future of beer" (AVEVA 2025). This statement puts the brewing industry in the paradoxical context of a seeming systemic fragility that depends on the increasingly untenable climatic stability. The problems are not limited to just raw material availability but also extend to quality and pricing, as a result constraining small breweries from competing in the market. (AVEVA, 2025)

Next has to be that seasonality, which influences the whole beer production and organization of brewing events. The brewing calendar follows the growing years of barley (sown either in autumn or in spring and harvested in summer) and hops (harvested during August/September). Beer festivals are so held much in the

spirit of summer or autumn, much before the actual harvesting. It lends culture to tying beer with the seasons and the land; it is precise from a communication perspective (winter beer, spring IPA, season) but in return, more vulnerable to any weather inconsistencies.

During my internship at the Brussels Beer Project (BBP), I was able to see an urban brewery work around this constraint and create a much closer connection with its region. BBP has produced several ephemeral recipes employing seasonal or recycled ingredients such as unsold bread (Babylone beer), Belgian hops from a small-scale grower, and cold fermented fruit toward the end of summer. They represent a resilient, circular, and narrative approach to production, each beer reflects a moment, a place, and an ethical choice.

I can see then that the link between beer and the terroir transcends the elementary concept of geographical place of origin. It is the ecological or environment of production and celebration, where every single ingredient speaks of soil, climate, and culture. Hence brewing events-as the festive expression of production needs to pay more attention to this agricultural dimension, especially in promoting local products and regulating their calendars according to natural cycles and in raising awareness of the fragility of all brewing resources.

Being agricultural, climate is the vector with which the brewing industry shares much dependence. Therefore, the increasingly regarded area of vulnerability with intensified climate variations over the years. Prolonged droughts or heat waves which shower sporadically, any intense movement of storms and the coming of any new fungal diseases these interferences are affecting barley and hop production, which are the two fundamental beer ingredients.

Hops require a particular balance of sunlight, water, and cool temperatures. Deposit-holder producers in Bavaria, Bohemia and Slovenia, producers have already experienced performance drops and quality fluctuations. Dues to climate change, hops are ripening earlier, which prevents the formation of alpha acids, which are very important for bitterness and preservation of beer. According to a

recent scientific study, “hops ripening started approximately 20 days earlier, production declined by almost 0.2t/ha/year and the alpha content decreased by circa 0.6%”, they anticipate a decline in agricultural performance of 4 to 18% and a drop in alpha acid production of 20 to 31% by 2050 (Martin Mozny, Miroslav Trnka, Vojtech Vlach, Zdenek Zalud, Tomas Cejka, Lenka Hajkova, Vera Potopova, Mikhail Semenov, Daniela Semeradova &Ulf Büntgen, 2023).

Heat waves induce premature maturation and that induces a reduction in the alpha acids content, which is so secondary for bittering and keeping qualities in beer. Conversely, barley suffers from the precipitation uncertainty: too much water means many grains will germinate prematurely and too little, these grains will not develop into mature products. All this disrupts maltings operational balance, upon which both brewing and having good and constant quality depend on.

Ecologically, such disruptions lead to price hikes on agricultural markets, increased volatility in supply, and difficulty in assuring constant income flow. A study by Donner, P., Trnka, M., Svoboda, L., Hlavinka, P., & Balek, J. (2023), warns that by 2050, alpha acid content in European hops may drop by up to 30%. As for craft breweries, this means having to sometimes import hops from more stable regions (US, New Zealand), going against their principles of Localism and Sustainability. While this may aggravate production, some key beers may lose their characteristic aroma, thus threatening brand identity. (Donner et al, 2023)

This deep vulnerability is accentuated by two different customs: names were given to brewing episodes as happy, prosperous, and sumptuous traditions, while the events systematically compressed the painful contradictions of the agricultural world. The public at large considered that issues to be secondary and has often, failed to recognize how fragile the product to which it is giving attention really is. In other words, ignoring these realities in event formats risks denying the causes of climate disruption as well as its consequences.

Aware of such problems, some brewers are developing interesting responses. The Brussels Beer Project, for example, works on recipes that use more sustainable materials (recycled bread and local hops with low water requirements) or at least reduce dependency on imports. I was able to discuss new partnerships with

local producers in Wallonia around climate adaptation and securing supply chains during my internship at BBP. These approaches are experimental, which can be seen as a testimony to a growing consciousness about integrated resilience.

On the contrary, brewing events deserve a metamorphosis. This means that they need to include the story of production conditions of beer and incorporate this in entertainment. It means that these events should step outside the usual timetables to align themselves with actual harvests. That encourage organisers to engage the brewers in awareness events, by exposing the complexities of production chains, such as events can become meeting places for agriculture, culture, and civilly.

The dual function of beer-related events (festive celebrations and local anchors) finds itself increasingly strained by arguments of attractiveness and accountability. On the one hand, we want these events to bring people together, entertain, and promote a convivial popular culture. On the other hand, they are now assessed based on their environmental impact, their meeting of sustainability goals, and their capacity to be a credible embodiment of ecological transition.

Festivals draw their appeal from what are environmentally costly elements: huge crowds, diverse music programming, food trucks, large logistics operations, iconic venues. These choices in event marketing are meant to attain maximum attendance and enhance participant experience. At times, these same approaches contradict the principles of simplicity, circularity, or localisation advocated by sustainable development.

On the other side, organisers are faced with a choice between visibility and ecological responsibility. Reducing the size of the event or limiting the distance visitors would need to travel, or maybe by completely doing away with those heavy energy intensive formats, such could seem counterproductive at first, from a positive point of view, these would become strong levers for long-run adaptation.

These tensions are also present in audience expectations. While some participants appreciate eco-friendly innovations (such as reusable cups, composting toilets, or local food stands), others may feel frustrated by the limited prioritisation,

which results in fewer choices and a less impressive experience. It hereby becomes decisive to imagine and redesign the festive imaginary around ecological sobriety, with reinventions of celebration codes without compromising social people.

An exemplary reflection on the experience of Brussels Beer Project to illustrate this. During the festival, organisers purposely decided to downscale the event, favour local partnerships (food, furniture, suppliers), and convey transparent communication regarding their sustainability approach. Feedback from audiences suggested that these were not seen as restrictions but rather as sincere acts of engagement.

This is in accordance with the argument advanced by Tim Jackson (2009) "in any meaningful sense of the word, transcend material concerns. It resides in the quality of our lives and relationships, in the resilience of our communities and in our sense of individual and collective meaning." Such an approach, cultural events have a different formula for success, which restores value to experience conducive to growth by presenting a paradigm of value-based criteria. (Tim Jackson, 2009)

Finally, innovations can still overcome this tension between appeal and responsibility. Events designed or co-designed with the citizens (participatory budgeting), events that use low-impact technology (LEDs, sustainable scenography), and encourage soft mobility, can survive on both pleasure and awareness. It builds on skilled teams, robust evaluation tools, and the logo of the local stakeholders.

The sustainable transformation of beer festivals, thus depends on a paradigm shift: instead of doing "less damage," action is taken to do things "differently." These tensions should therefore not be seen as obstacles but rather as indicators showing a deep transformation occurring within cultural and economic practices.

3 GLOBAL AND LOCAL DYNAMICS IN CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

3.1 International dynamics

To help events become more environmentally friendly, various international organisations have proposed certain standards. One of the most important is ISO 2021, which provides event organisers with a structured framework for addressing sustainability issues. The focus is on continuous improvement, stakeholder participation and reducing negative impacts in the environmental, social and economic fields (ISO,2012, p.4). Since its adoption at the London Olympics in 2012, ISO 20121:2012 has established itself as the global standard in this area. (International Organization for Standardization, 2012).

Other programs such as Green Event Europe, Sustainable Event Alliance and a Green Festival have promoted sustainability through trainings, networking opportunities and certification. As we can see with such groups share the application of best practices and encourage innovation. According to Tölkes and Butzmann (2018, p.23) these platforms are important as they get event professionals to share ideas and progress beyond legal obligations. (Tölkes and Butzmann, 2018, p.23)

Global beer festivals offer some concrete examples of sustainability. In the United States, the SAVOR Craft Beer & Food Experience focuses on local sourcing and minimal packaging, with food and beer, pairings developed using regional ingredients. The Oregon Brewers Festival has reduced waste by offering reusable cup systems and composting stations (CraftBeer.com, 2015)

In the United Kingdom, the Manchester Beer and Cider Festival works with local councils and transport authorities to promote sustainable travel. (Manchester Beer and Cider Festival, 2020)

In Denmark the Copenhagen Ølfestival offers free transport tickets to participant and bans single use plastic items. These practices are now an integral part of the festival's identity. (Ølfestival, 2022)

Jones and Comfort (2019, p.112) argue that “the visibility of sustainability measures enhances trust and public reputation”. International case studies show that environmental measures fit well into the festive atmosphere. (Jones and Comfort, 2019, p112)

The three trends in sustainable development that many events are now following. The first is that digitisation reduces the environmental costs associated with administration. Many festivals usually have their own apps or use QR codes and digital tickets. This saves paper and reduces emissions from printing and transport (UNEP, 2021, p.7)

The second is carbon offsetting, which is becoming increasingly common. Events calculate their emissions and fund reforestation and clean energy projects through platforms such as ClimatePartner. However, it is emissions reduction that has a real impact, not offsetting alone (Anderson, 2020, p.52)

3.2 Local and Regional responses

The governments and institutions working in different parts of Europe are promoting sustainable event. In cities such as Paris, Brussels and Helsinki, event funding depends on some environmental aspects, such as waste management, access and energy consumption. These cities also provide guides and training for small event organisers to adapt (City of Helsinki, 2023)

Some regions have gone even further in certifying green initiatives in order to promote them. In Belgium, events recognised and certified as “Eco-Responsible Events” meet criteria related to local food, reusable materials and energy efficiency. In Finland, the EcoCompass certificate support small businesses and festivals through practical tools and audits (EcoCompass, 2023)

According to the authors Laing and Frost (2010, p.261), such initiatives are more effective when combined with education and collaboration between public authorities and cultural actors. (Laing and Frost, 2010, p.261)

The few established can serve as laboratories for innovation in sustainable event modelling. Given their size, they are able to offer a certain flexibility and sometimes have close ties to their local community. During my internship at Brussels Beer Project (BBP) where I saw how environmental values are considered when creating events.

During my internship, I observed that during the annual BBP festival use recycled furniture, plant-based menus, reusable signs and waste sorting systems. It was held in a former industrial area with local street vendors and on-site beer brewing. Special attention is given to Babylone beer, brewed from leftover bread collected from local bakeries, which perfectly illustrates beer brewing in the circular economy.

On another level, I was able to attend the “crowdnights” organised by BBP, which are another model of community cocreation. These are evenings where beer enthusiasts who invested in the brewery vote on future projects and participate in events. This unusual form of governance strengthens loyalty and enables the collaborative implementation of environmentally friendly projects.

Other European microbreweries, such as Tempest Brewing Co. in Scotland and Oedipus Brewing in the Netherlands organise that promote values such as inclusion, transparency and low impact logistics (Getz & Page, 2020, p.205)

Local events and micro-events are increasingly becoming opportunities to test countless solutions aimed to reducing environmental impact. One of the major changes observed is the use of reusable cup systems. At public festivals in Lyon and Ghent, for example, the use of these cups is mandatory and washing stations are provided on site.

Secondly, short supply chains are favoured. Food trucks and caterers source their ingredients from local suppliers and generally offer seasonal vegetarian or organic menus. According to Kiss, Ruskai and Takács-György (2019), “short supply chains are connected most widely to circularity and sustainability by the subjects of environmental burden (transport, production method, emission), health, food quality, consumer’s behavior, producer consumer relationships and

local economy.” This promotes community relation and reduces emissions associated with long-distance transport. (Kiss, Ruszkai and Takács-György, 2019)

Thridly, festivals finance clean energy solutions: solar panels, battery powered shows, low energy lighting. Some sites also offer human powered installations to involve the public. The visibility of these initiatives helps to raise awareness and inspire the public. (The Green Gathering, 2023).

Finally, implementation can be considered from an eco-design prespective like recycled signage, portable composting toilets and modular infrastructure. Platforms such as the Green Deal Circular Festivals in the Netherlands enable small organisers to pool their resources and support the application fo common sustainability criteria. (Green Deal Circular Festivals, 2023)

4 RESPONSES, INNOVATION AND EMERGING TRENDS IN THE BREWING INDUSTRY

4.1 Current responses from the beer event industry

As environmental concerns have become critically pressing, slowly but surely practical applications are being integrated into beer event industry. These range from changes in transport, energy, waste and local sourcing to public engagement. This section presents how festivals and breweries are integrating sustainability into their work.

Transport is one of the main factors contributing to the carbon footprint of beer related events. As say by ADEME (2023, 14) “public transport accounts for an average of 70% of an event’s greenhouse gas emissions”. Recently festivals in Strasbourg and Copenhagen have echoed calls for the public to favour public transport, bike stations and shuttles as green alternatives (ADEME, 2023)

Energy is the second one concern, many festivals operate using renewable energy sources such as solar power and LEDs. According to Powerful Thinking (2021, 8),” audience travel is the largest contributor to a festival’s carbon footprint, often accounting for up to 80% of total emissions”, but the other almost complete percentage of the carbon footprint comes from energy use during events, which is an area where efforts are being made to improve. Events such as the Green Hathering held in the United Kingdom, have become important examples of venues that now operate solely on renewable energy. Festivals are limiting the use of single-use plastics and have introduced reusable cups and compostable food containers. (Powerful Thinking, 2021, 8)

At the Wanderlust Festival, an event organised with the Brussel Beer Project (BBP), I have promoted reusable cups and separate bins for organic and recyclable waste, which reduced landfill waste by more than 30% compared to the previous year.

Agriculture is increasingly threatened by climate change, which directly affects beer production. Nelson, Gerald C.; Rosegrant, Mark W. ; Koo, Jawoo; Robertson, Richard D.; Sulser, Timothy; Zhu, Tingju; Ringler, Claudia ; Msangi, Siwa; Palazzo, Amanda; Batka, Miroslav; Magalhaes, Marilia; Valmonte-Santos, Rowena; Ewing, Mandy; Lee, David R (2021, 23) say that “Climate change is projected to yields performance of major crops in developing countries”, including those of ingredients essential to brewing such as barley and hops. To reduce dependence of fragile supply chains, many events and breweries now support local and seasonal sourcing. (Nelson et al, 2021, 23)

During the internship, BBP adopted this approach with the “Babylone” beer, which is brewed with unsold bread from local bakeries, a form of circular brewing. For Wanderlust 2024, we selected our food partners based on their local and plant-based menus, sourcing ingredients such as hops and fruit from Belgian farmers. This adds value to local economies and limits emissions from transport.

As Getz and Page (2016, 392) argues, “embedding events in the local economy and community enhances their sustainability and long-term success.” The BBP supports regional producers while telling stories about these efforts to raise awareness and enable visitors to understand the impact of their choices. (Getz and Page, 2016, 392)

Promoting environmental awareness is now a growing concern for event organisers. According to Mair and Laig (2013, 114), “sustainability-focused events can serve as catalysts for pro-environmental behaviour change among attendees.” A few festivals incorporate workshops, guided tastings and more recently, digital tools (such as QR codes) to educate and engage the public. (Mair and Laig, 2013, 114)

At the BBP stand at the Tiktok Europe event in 2024, during my internship I was able to observe the development of a communications strategy focused on non-alcoholic beers, locally sourced ingredients and circular production. We had posters and tasting cards describing our environmental commitments. Many visitors, including policy makers and influencers, appreciated the educational aspect.

Consistency is also key internally, BBP holds weekly information meetings and monthly reviews on sustainable development in all departments. This concerted approach strengthens the credibility and cohesion of external communications. As Mair and Laing (2013, 1117) say “the effectiveness of sustainability messaging depends largely on the perceived credibility and commitment of the organisers” Mair and Laing (2013, 1117)

4.2 Emerging trends

The beer events industry is entering a new era, with climate concerns, national values and innovation all contributing to the reshaping of the festival and non-alcoholic beverage industry in terms of how we gather, celebrate and connect. Three major trends are meaning: hybrid and low-carbon formats, local community involvement and the circular economy. Each of these reveals a deeper transformation, moving away from quick fixes in favour of meaningful, long-term change.

The global pandemic has changed the way people attend events, with festival now offering a mix of online and in-person events. This new hybrid format reduces long-distance travel and makes events more accessible and sustainable. According to PheedLoop (2025), hybrids events can reduce emission and waste, provided an alternative that is friendlier to inclusion and the environment than could traditional forms of gathering. (PheedLoop, 2025)

Worldwide Beer Fest (2023) say “Hybrid beer festivals that incorporate virtual components can significantly reduce their environmental report”. It is now commonplace to broadcast beer tastings, organise online Q&A sessions with brewers and sell digital tickets. All of this helps to reduce the carbon footprint while reaching an unlimited audience. (Worldwide Beer Fest, 2023)

According to my experience, the organisation of “Crowdnights” with the BBP, an event where the community decides on the names and recipes for beers, while reducing emissions and promoting inclusivity and creativity. These hybrid formats take nothing away from the joys of human interaction. However, they show how technology can be a force for expanding events without harming the planet.

Beer has always been a special product. Today, beer festivals are becoming mechanisms for community engagement. Local artists, chefs, farmers and musicians are invited to participate in shaping the identity of the event. So, they support local economies and promote authentic experience. Craft Beer Joe (2024) writes “By working together, breweries can create beers that celebrate local culture and support community causes.” (Craft Beer Joe, 2024)

During my internship, for the BBP Wanderlust Festival, I notice that we worked with food trucks, artists and volunteers from the area. We didn’t just organise an event, we co-created a moment of pride for our city. Our co-founder said, “It’s not just a festival, it’s celebration of our community.” Some go even further by letting customers vote on beer styles and participating in brewing workshops. This direct experience creates an emotional connection and long-term loyalty.

A third trend transforming the industry is linked to the circular economy, a system in which nothing is wasted and everything has value. In a brewing context, this could mean giving spent grain to farmers, recycling anything that is useless into something usable for stage construction, or perhaps converting leftovers into new products. Proximity Malt (2024) explains “By focusing on the circulation of resources and the regeneration of nature, breweries can minimize waste and create value from by products.” (Proximity Malt, 2024)

The best example of this at BBP is Babylon, a bold beer made from unsold bread. At the tiktok Europe event, we helped tell the story to visitors through tasting and images. People were and impressed to see that something so tasty could be produced from a product that is usually thrown away.

In recent years, more and more festivals are using reclaimed wood, shared logistics and reusable systems. More than just a question of efficiency, it’s about being creative, responsible and rethinking the meaning of celebration. For example, the Roskilde Festival in Denmark, the GENTRÆ initiative handled 18 tons of recycled wood, encouraging the reuse and recycle of material used in temporary construction. These initiatives not only enhance operational efficiency but also inspire

a more conscious and meaningful approach to event organization. While the first initiative came to chart antithetical enhancements in operational efficiencies, the second emboldens the consciousness-engagement and the meaningful engagement of the event organizers. (Copenhagen Convention Bureau. 2023)

4.3 Sustainability as a new marketing cost

Sustainability is no longer just a responsibility, it has become a marketing advantage in the beer industry. Festivals and breweries are not only reducing and minimising their environmental impact, they are also promoting their green initiatives to reach new audiences, mainly the younger generation. This section looks at three main aspects, the growing appeal of green events, the expectations of new audiences and the emergence of a new culture of celebration. According to the report of CGA strategy, 56 % of festivalgoers report that they have become more concerned about the environmental, social and sustainability aspects of festivals than the previous year and a very significant majority of 81 % will hold festivals responsible for actively harming their environment. (CGA strategy, 2023)

Green events attract attention, festivals that can demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development through measures such as reusable cups, plant-based food and the use of local suppliers stand out in an already highly fragmented sector. In Sustainable business Toolkit (2024) argues "Sustainable event marketing is not just about reducing environmental impact : it's strategic approach that enhances brand image and attract eco-conscious attendees." (Sustainable Business Toolkit, 2024)

Many beer brands have now integrated environmental sustainability measures into their marketing strategies. Like the Great American Beer Festival has focuses its sustainability aspects, such as waste reduction and energy awareness operations, to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

At the Brussel Beer Project, I learned, along with the marketing team, to develop event materials that highlighted the circular brewing model and listed the locally

sourced Belgian Ingredients used, which served a dual purpose: to educate attendees while reinforcing the perception of internal consistency around brand application through sound sustainability practices.

Younger generations, particularly Gen Zers and Millennials, base their preference for a brand on its alignment with their environmental responsibility and social justice. Events that affirm these values attract their support. According to a report by NielsenIQ (2024) "Gen Z consumers are more likely to purchase from companies that prioritize eco-friendly practices, such as using sustainable materials, reducing carbon footprints and supporting fair trade initiatives."(NielsenIQ, 2024)

For these customers, buying beer goes far beyond purchasing the product itself. In fact, they are joining a movement by supporting a brand that defends their ideals. This is where storytelling comes in. In BBP, I have observed we use social media to tell the story of our brewing processes, the origin of our ingredients and the values that improve each beer details, creating stronger engagement and loyalty among the public.

During my internship, I learned that appreciation for the story was shared and retold by participants, creating a new group of users that goes beyond consumers already affiliated with the brand, who appreciated transparency and a commitment to sustainability.

Historically, festivals have been associated with gluttony, wasteful consumption of food, drink and pressure on the environment. But a new holiday culture is emerging, in which people enjoy celebrations in a deliberate and responsible manner, with respect for nature.

At the same time, participants are seeking meaningful experiences that go hand in hand with enjoyment. As Euromonitor International (2023) say "Conscious consumption is driving new forms of entertainment, where people seek experiences that align with their values."(Euromonitor, 2023)

I was able to observe in BBP, we have embraced this shift by offering non- alcoholic beers, working with environmental NGOs (non-gonvernmental organizations) at events and integrating sustainability into the entire festival experience. These initiatives have shown that it is possible to have fun while celebrating responsibly. The emerging festive approach reflects changes at the societal level where pleasure coexists with purpose and where festivals can be a platform for raising environmental concerns and community engagement

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of results

The initial thesis statement was simple but important: How can beer-related events be made sustainable in the face of a climate crisis? The results show that the beer event industry is undergoing major changes. Event and festivals that have long been environmental offenders are now rethinking how they are organised, striving to find a balance between celebration and responsibility

Firstly, increasing environmental pressures are becoming clear and obvious. Climate change, waste pollution and social expectations have forced changes in how events are organised. Governments, the media and festivalgoers are forcing them to be more environmentally friendly. At the same time, the events industry has realised that sustainability is an opportunity, not an obstacle. It reduces costs, attracts new partners and builds a good reputation.

Secondly, the world of brewing is playing a key role in this transformation. Beer festivals are a very special type of event. They combine culture, agriculture and good company. They involve small producers, local communities and visitors. This makes them an opportunity to try out new ideas. During this practice based study, it was discovered that breweries such as Brussels Beer Project have already started. Their small steps are important because they create new habits and new expectations.

Thirdly, the younger generation is always changing the game. Today, there is a large population of 18-35 years old who expect events to do more than just entertain them, they want to support events that align with their values; respect for environment, inclusivity and transparency. If a festival uses excessive amounts of plastic or sponsors polluting brands, young people may want to take a stand by refusing to attend. This is a significant change. In the past, festivals were all about music or beer. According to research by Pew Research Center (2021), Gen Z show more interest than previous generations and which demands a strong environmental responsibility from institutions and businesses. (Pew Research Center, 2021)

Fourthly, sponsors and public partners are also changing. Many companies want their sponsorships to demonstrate a commitment to the planet. In some cities, such as Paris and Brussels, the public support is considered more important because it is seen as eco responsible. This shows that sustainability is increasingly becoming a factor in funding and legitimacy.

Finally, we are seeing the emergence of new types of festivals. More than just parties, they offer cultural spaces that combine fun with learning. For example, the Lyon Beer festival offers not only conferences but also arts and debates. These hybrid formats allow sustainability to be placed at the heart of the celebration. They demonstrate that an event can be both educational and environmentally friendly without losing its fun side.

5.2 Recommendations for improvement/development

Based on my observations during my internship and studying the subject on articles and research papers, several recommendations can be made to help beer-related events become more sustainable and meaningful. These suggestions apply not only to breweries and event organisers but also to public authorities, sponsors and participants.

1) Make sustainability part of the planning process from the beginning

Too often, ecological actions are added at the end of planning, just as decoration. Instead, sustainability should be integrated from the first steps: choosing the location, the suppliers, the transport options and the waste management systems. For example, using local providers reduces transport emissions, while palling for reusable materials avoids last minute waste.

2) Strengthen partnership with local communities

Beer festivals should not be isolated events but part of the social and economic life of their region. Working with local farmers, artisans and associations helps

reduce environmental impact and increases the event value to the area. Like at BBP, working with Brussels based NGOs during event helped raise awareness and create that.

3) Communicate clearly and honestly

Participants appreciate transparency, organisers should explain what they are doing for environment, what still needs to be improved and how participants can help. This includes clear signage for recycling, explaining food choices or publishing the festival's environmental goals. A transparent message builds a stronger relationship with the audience.

4) Use festivals as educational tools

Events are powerful moments to raise awareness and inspire change. Organisers can include talks, workshops, or exhibitions about climate, circular economy or responsible consumption. These formats don't reduce the fun, they add meaning. They turn the event into a place of learning and exchange.

5) Train the staff and volunteers

Many ecological goals fail because the staff is not trained. Provided short training on sustainable practices, recycling procedures or public communication is a simple way to make real impact. Trained volunteers can also explain sustainability efforts to the public in a positive way.

6) Collect data and measure impact

Few events measure their carbon footprint or waste production. Yet, data is essential to improve. Organisers should try to collect simple indicators: numbers of visitors, transport modes, waste collected, reusable items used, etc. This information can guide decisions and attract partners looking for proof of impact.

7) Work together through networks

Organisers, brewers and institutions should join networks such as Green Events Europe, Net Zero Carbon Events, or local initiatives. These platforms allow professionals to share tools, mistakes and good practices. They help avoid working alone and allow small events to benefit from larger experience.

These recommendations are not always easy to implement. However, they show that change is possible without losing the spirit of celebration. A responsible beer event is not only better for the planet, but it can also be more creative, more authentic and more appreciated by the audience.

5.3 Critical evaluation of the research design and implementation

This study aimed to examine the relationship between sustainability and beer related activities, with a particular focus on actual practices, innovations and perceptions. It emphasised the fusion of academic theory with practical ideas, through the inclusion of an internship experience at the Brussels Beer Project (BBP). Although many of results are of great value, it is nevertheless important to consider certain limitations and the validity of the results.

Validity refers to the extent to which the research measures what it set out to study. The study aimed to investigate how the beer industry is adapting to environmental challenges. The use of reliable academic sources, combined with recent industry reports and concrete examples from BBP. However, most of the analysis is based on secondary sources and personal experience. No formal interviews or surveys were conducted with festivalgoers or industry professionals with the expectation of BBP. Therefore, to some extent, some conclusions are drawn from interpretation rather than direct data input.

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research. Is there a chance that the results of the study would be the same if were repeated? In general, thanks to the clear structure of the thesis, the use of well-documented sources and the

clarified methodology. However, the experience gained at BBP during my internship is entirely unique. Another person at another brewery would probably have seen things differently and drawn different conclusions. This undermines objectivity and also limits the generalisability of certain observations.

Another obstacle is the speed at which this topic is evolving. Practices in sustainability and events are changing rapidly. In the space of just a few months, a new technology or regulation or a slight change in public expectations can shift the entire landscape. For example, the rapid adoption of digital tools after COVID-19 has completely transformed the way events are viewed and judged. We may therefore need to update certain chapters of the thesis soon.

Geocultural factors are considered last. Most of the examples come from Europe, particularly Belgium and France. In other regions (Asia, Africa, Latin America), practices may be completely different due to different economic, social or regulatory conditions. This limits the applicability of the results on a global scale.

Despite these limitations, this thesis will prove useful as a starting point for future work. It is both a synthesis of theory and practice on an emerging topic and a concrete reflection on how the events sector can be made more sustainable. The documentary study combined with real world experience adds value and realism to the thesis.

5.4 Future research topics

The thesis arose from an examination of the challenge of sustainability for the world of beer. It focused on offering a coexistence between celebration and the environment. There is therefore plenty of scope for more recent and in-depth studies. As the industry is still developing.

A future topic could focus on the long-term impact of sustainable practices at beer festivals. Many events are testing reusable cups, sourcing local products and reporting on carbon emissions. But we do not yet know whether these actions reduce emissions in the long term or whether they contribute in some way to a

green image. Future studies could use data spread over several years to examine whether adopting sustainable changes works.

Consumer perceptions of green festivals could be another pressing topic. How do people really feel about paying more for a sustainable event? Are they willing to change their habits travel less, accept fewer choices at bars for environmental causes? Surveys and interviews with festivalgoers could provide some clarity.

Research could also explore the role of digitalisation and emerging technologies. Hybrid events and smart ticketing systems, for example can minimise waste and reduce carbon footprint. But are these tools accessible festivals? Do they really promote sustainability or do they just create another form of inequality?

Another topic could be regulation and public policy. Although some cities, such as Paris and Brussels, have introduced eco-criteria, many other venues do not have clear guidelines. Future studies could examine how different local governments promote or hinder sustainable innovations in events.

Finally, it is necessary to study the global perspective. In this thesis, most of the examples come from Europe. But craft beer is also booming in Asia, Latin America and Africa. How do climatic conditions, economic constraints or cultural values influence the way sustainability is interpreted in these regions? An intercultural comparison will provide a better picture of the global industry.

To conclude, this thesis is a step towards understanding a complex and evolving sector. Festivals are not just about beer, but also about community, culture and creativity. Events can be strong platform of sustainability, not only through communication but also concrete action. Some advances should be undertaken to facilitate this transition where celebration goes hand in hand with ecological responsibility for future generations. So, we have to ask ourselves some questions, what will the beer festivals of 2030 look like? Will sustainability become the norm or will it remain a trend reserved for the most conscious organisers? Can local and global values really align in tomorrow's events? Above all: can celebration become a driver of long-term ecological change?

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APPENDICES