

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY – CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Beata PALIS^{1*}, Matylda SIWEK²

¹ Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Department of Management in Tourism and Sport, Institute of Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Social Communication; beata.palis@uj.edu.pl,

ORCID: 0000-0003-3788-1166

² University of the National Education Commission, Faculty of Tourism and Regional Studies, Krakow; matylda.siwek@up.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-0487-1263

* Correspondence author

Purpose: The article aims to verify whether the meetings industry is taking actions for sustainable development and, if so, what kind of projects they are. Implementation of sustainable development principles is currently a trend in management in every field, including the meetings industry. The meetings industry also recognises this problem's essence and implements sustainable development principles into its operations.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the intended research goal, an in-depth search of literature and online sources and interviews with 21 industry representatives were used. The article discusses the following research problem: what actions are taken by the meetings industry for sustainable development; whether it implements a sustainable development strategy and policy; whether and how the idea of sustainable development is implemented in cooperation with partners; how the industry perceives sustainable development activities in the area of MICE and what is its opinion in terms of shaping the right conditions in this area; what actions are vital in shaping sustainable development by the meetings industry?

Findings: Research has proven that the business tourism industry implements sustainability measures in its operations.

Research limitations/implications: Research limitation is the amount of industry feedback obtained. Due to the inability to obtain a larger number of research questionnaires, a sample of only 20 interviews with experts was used.

Practical implications: The utilitarian goal of the research is to provide useful guidelines for the meetings industry in implementing of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance) policies.

Social implications: Research based on the issues it undertakes relates to and raises important social issues.

Originality/value: Although the meetings industry implements activities in sustainable development, they are not sufficient, especially in the context of the European Commission's Directive on Corporate Sustainability Reporting (CSRD). The presented research and guidelines for the industry in this area are currently a critical topic. They are a scientific novelty, and, as such, a research approach has not been presented in the context of this industry so far.

Keywords: meetings industry, MICE, sustainable development, recommendations, CSRD directive.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The management of tourism, including the meetings industry, is currently facing many challenges and it is therefore very important to develop new tourism models based on sustainability. (Żemła, Paliś, 2023, p. 76). Implementing sustainable development principles in tourism can be an essential tool to address specific problems. Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, tourism can play a significant role in the implementation of the principles of sustainable development through the socioeconomic activation of local communities or the stimulation of other areas of activity and links with nature conservation (Kapera, 2018, p. 46).

The meeting industry is a very dynamic sector, as the Covid-19 pandemic showed when it hit this industry hard. Implementing the principles of sustainable development is currently a management trend in the meetings industry (Paliś, Siwek, 2023). Indeed, the report *Event marketing 2023/2024: The impact of sustainability on the meetings industry* (MeetingPlaner.co.uk, 2024) shows that clients expect event agencies to, among other things, provide information about their carbon footprint and implement environmentally friendly solutions during events.

The main research goal was to verify whether the meeting industry is taking action for sustainable development. The utilitarian goal of the conducted research was to indicate guidelines for the sector in the appropriate implementation of ESG (environmental, social and corporate governance). The following research problems were assumed: whether and what activities are taken by the meeting industry for sustainable development; does it implement a strategy and policy of sustainable development; whether the idea of sustainable development is implemented in cooperation with partners and how; whether and how Covid-19 influenced the industry's approach to developing sustainable business tourism products; what activities are crucial for shaping sustainable development by the meeting industry.

To achieve the intended research goal, an in-depth query of literature and internet sources of leading industry associations, as well as interviews with industry representatives, were used. The study collects opinions based on the deliberate selection of people participating in the study. Each respondent was deliberately chosen and was an expert in his field. Experts were required to answer the questions contained in the questionnaire. Twenty entities representing the Polish meeting industry took part in the study. Research has proven that the business tourism industry implements sustainable development activities. There are activities such as cooperation with local partners or using ecological means of transport.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The idea and concept of sustainable development in the context of sustainable tourism

Sustainable development is not a new concept, but it has recently become more critical, especially in the face of rapidly advancing climate change, emerging new epidemiological threats, and the rapid development of technology. Researchers are looking at this phenomenon from different perspectives in many fields, including tourism.

The concept of sustainable development was first formulated by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in the nineteenth century in the context of sustainable forest management. In the 70s of the last century, more and more issues related to the climate, the environment, its protection, inhibition or stopping negative changes were raised in international forums. At this point, the reports of the Secretary-General should be mentioned, above all the UN's U Thant's "Man and His Environment" from 1969 and the Club of Rome's 1972 report "The Limits to Growth" (http://acteco.pl/articles.php?article_id=89, 3.08.2024). Issues related to sustainable development, particularly the relationship between socioeconomic growth and ecological sustainability, were also discussed at the UN conference in Stockholm in 1972 (<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972>, 4.08.2024).

Sustainable development is a very complex concept and, thus, as mentioned above, it must be considered on many levels, including economic ones. These ideas were presented in a WCDE report (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, United Nations, 1987), the so-called Brundtland, "Our Common Future" from 1987 stating "At the present level of civilization, sustainable development is possible, that is, development in which the needs of the present generation can be satisfied without diminishing the chances of future generations to meet them" (United Nations, 1987, p. 15). The report raises the issues of balance between economic growth and the natural and anthropological environment, as well as human welfare, including human needs and health. Sustainable development was defined by Gro Harlem Brundtland, a Norwegian politician and doctor, as: "... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987). Dasgupta (2007) explains this definition in such a way that, for the balance to be maintained, each generation should pass on to the next at least the same production base that it inherited from the previous generation. The economy's productive base includes, as Dasgupta (2007) further argues, its capital assets and institutions, which offer an infrastructure open to people. The concept of development based on the satisfaction of basic needs was formulated by Chichilnisky (1977).

Another important international event addressing the issues of sustainable development took place in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro at the so-called Second Earth Summit, which resulted in the signing of the Rio Declaration, including 27 principles and Agenda 21, including guidelines for territorial units. In 2015, 17 Goals were developed as part of the Sustainable Development

Agenda, divided into smaller ones. They are based on: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, and the links between them (<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>, 4.08.2024).

According to Stappen (2006), "Sustainable development of the Earth is a development that meets the basic needs of all human beings and which conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and without going over the limits of long term capacity of the Earth's ecosystem". The author further claims that it concerns two main concepts: *Needs*, in particular, the basic needs of the poorest and the limitations imposed by the state of technology, and social organisation on the ability to meet current and future needs (Stappen, 2006). The concept of sustainable development has evolved. Social aspects have also been integrated into the relationship between the economy and the environment (Seuring, Muller, 2008). In reviewing the definition of sustainable development, Walosik (2014) distinguished three main areas: natural, economic, and civilisational. On the other hand Tuszyńska (2015) argued that, in everyday language, sustainable development is identified with pro-ecological behaviour, while in environments related to entrepreneurship and economy – with innovation and achieving success. Innovation is one of the key elements towards increasing sustainability (Silvestre, Silva Neto, 2014). Thanks to them, it can be implemented at various levels through organisations, institutions, communities, regions or countries (Silvestre, 2015). According to Silvestre and Țircăb (2018), it is important that the implemented innovations are sustainable and, at the same time, address social, environmental and economic aspects, as well as their implications.

From the viewpoint of implementing the idea of sustainable development in business in Europe, legal guidelines relating to this issue are crucial.

2.2. ESG legal guidelines in Europe

Sustainability issues are also becoming increasingly relevant in the activities of companies. They concern three issues: *Environment* – E (e.g., climate change mitigation, resource use, and circular economy, biodiversity and ecosystems), *Social responsibility* – S (e.g., occupational health and safety, employee diversity and inclusion, relations with the community) and *Governance* – G (e.g., corporate culture and responsible business conduct, political influence and lobbying activities, relations with suppliers). It is commonly accepted to use the abbreviation ESG to discuss the above issues (*ESG Reporting Guidelines*, 2023). In pursuit of sustainable development, companies are required to report ESG, the purpose of which is to provide stakeholders (investors, customers, employees, local communities and regulators) with comprehensive and reliable information on the company's operations. As part of the reporting, activities in the three areas mentioned above areas should be analysed:

- *Environmental*: the impact of activities on the natural environment, including greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, water consumption, waste production, biodiversity protection and management of natural resources,
- *Social*: relations with social stakeholders, including employees, local communities, customers and suppliers. This includes issues related to workers' rights, health and safety in the workplace, equality, social engagement, and relations with local communities,
- *Governance*: management structures, processes and practices. These include risk management, ethics and compliance, corporate responsibility, governing bodies' independence, and information transparency.

The first action plan to steer companies' investments and activities towards more environmentally sustainable economic activities was adopted in March 2018 and is part of a broader agenda requiring companies and institutions to be more transparent about their sustainability and reporting activities. It includes, among others, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) with its complementary ESRS (European Sustainability Reporting Standards), the EU Taxonomy, enabling a standard classification system, and the SFDR (Sustainable Accounting Disclosure Regulations) regulation, aimed at increasing the transparency of sustainable development in the financial sector. The CSRD was introduced in January 2023, thus amending the previous NFRD, which was the first piece of legislation in the EU to require certain companies to report on sustainability (Directive 2022/2464, Directive 2014/95/EU, European Sustainability Reporting Standards, *ESG Reporting Guidelines*, 2023, <https://poradnikprzedsiębiorcy.pl/-dyrektywa-csrd-obowiazki-dla-przedsiębiorstw>, 21.05.2024).

The CSRD will cover all large companies, listed companies and public interest organisations in the EU. The ESG reporting obligation will be introduced gradually, and the first reports will have to be submitted in 2025 by large companies with more than 500 employees. The ESG reporting obligation currently applies primarily to business entities. It mainly focuses on public and large private companies with a significant environmental, social and economic impact. Subsequently, other companies will also be subject to this obligation. ERP systems will support ESG reporting. A company's ESG can be carried out by publishing annual, integrated or sustainability reports, and GRI (*Global Reporting Initiative*) and SASB (*Sustainability Accounting Standards Board*) reports. ESG policy will be an essential part of the activities of an increasing number of business entities in the coming years. In addition to the CSRD, companies must prepare for reporting according to ESRS (*European Sustainability Reporting Standards*). They include the aggregation of data necessary to prepare the annual non-financial report. Companies will be required to report based on environmental, social and governance standards. This will require a detailed analysis and adaptation of the business strategy to ESG expectations.

The EU directive governing the obligations of companies in sustainable development imposes on companies the first reporting obligations, which, in the light of the applicable regulations, they will have to comply with for the financial year, i.e., starting from 1 January, 2024, or after that date. The first reporting obligation resulting from the implementation of CSRD in Poland for 2024 covered only 150 largest companies, which so far have fulfilled the reporting obligation imposed by the so-called NFRD (Non-Financial Reporting Directive). However, the European Union stipulates that, according to the assumption of the drafters, the CSRD Directive in Poland will be directly applicable to all companies of the regulated market in the European Union until 2029.

As sustainability issues have increasingly broad legal implications, it is important to examine this issue in the meetings industry as well.

3. Research Framework

To verify knowledge about the activities in the field of sustainable development implemented or planned by institutions and companies operating in the MICE sector, 21 extended standardised interviews with industry representatives were conducted. The survey was conducted between January 2023 and May 2024. A tool in the form of an interview questionnaire was used to perform the study (Glinka, Czakon, 2021). Interviews were conducted with representatives of the following entities: convention bureau, hotels, conference and convention centres, and business tourism organisers (PCOs, Incentives Companies, DMCs). During this interview, the following research issues were discussed: what actions the meetings industry is taking for sustainable development; whether it implements a sustainable development strategy and policy; whether and how the idea of sustainable development is implemented in cooperation with partners; whether and how Covid-19 has affected the industry's approach to creating sustainable business tourism products; what actions are key to shaping sustainable development by the meetings industry. In qualitative research, the sample is deliberate and includes 20-50 people. The study used a method of collecting opinions based on the intentional selection of people participating in them. Each respondent was selected consciously and was an expert in their field. The experts were tasked with answering questions that were included in a special questionnaire and included the problems being discussed (Maison, 2021).

An e-interview questionnaire was developed, which consisted of 14 questions, including: 11 open questions, two closed questions, and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 150 entities from the meetings industry: convention bureaus, PCO and DMC companies, event companies, convention and conference centres, hotels, and industry associations. Twenty entities representing the Polish meetings industry took part in the survey.

The list of respondents who participated in the survey is presented in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1.

Participants of the research

Yes	Kind of company	Interview, no
1.	Convention Bureau	Int.1
2.	Convention Bureau	Int. 2
3.	Convention Bureau	Int. 3
4.	Convention Bureau	Int. 4
5.	Conference and congress facility	Int. 5
6.	Conference and congress facility	Int. 6
7.	Exhibition Center	Int. 7
8.	Conference, congress, and event facility	Int. 8
9.	Conference and congress facility, exhibition centre, sports and entertainment hall	Int. 9
10.	Conference and congress facility	Int. 10
11.	Conference and Progress Association	Int.11
12.	Event Agency/DMC	Int. 12
13.	Event agency	Int. 13
14.	Event agency	Int. 14
15.	Event agency	Int. 15
16.	Hotel	Int. 16
17.	Hotel	Int. 17
18.	Hotel	Int. 18
19.	Hotel	Int. 19
20.	Hotel	Int. 20
21	PCO	Int.21

Source: Own elaboration.

The survey was attended by experts representing eight types of entities¹ operating in the MICE industry, i.e., Convention Bureau, PCO,² DMC³, event company, congress centre, conference and exhibition centre, and hotel facility. The experts who took part in the survey were represented by presidents, vice presidents, directors, convention bureau managers, and marketing and event acquisition specialists (Paliś, Siwek, 2023)⁴.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results of the study are presented broken down into individual thematic issues, in subsequent subsections.

¹ The following entities participated in the survey: inter alia: Targi w Krakowie Ltd. EXPO KRAKÓW, Kraków Convention Bureau, Łódź Convention Bureau, Nosalowy Dwór - New Business Development; ICE Kraków Congress Center, Hula Events, BLUEXPRIENCE, Hotel Europejski.

² PCO – Professional Congress Organizer.

³ DMC – Destination Management Company.

⁴ More on other research results in this area can be found in the article by Paliś, Siwek (2023).

4.1. Activities in the area of sustainable development of the MICE industry

To find out whether the subject of sustainable development is the subject of activity of the entities participating in the survey, the respondents were asked the question: *Do you implement activities for sustainable business tourism?* Seventeen respondents gave a positive answer, two – representatives of smaller hotel facilities – answered that they do not implement measures for sustainable business tourism and a conference and event facility that rents its space to various customers.

Research shows that convention bureaus implement the idea of sustainable development mainly by monitoring the local market, and providing current information in this area, i.e., raising awareness and consulting in terms of potential changes that will be in the spirit of sustainable development. In the city of Katowice, for example, the product of the city of Katowice, "City Break in Katowice", has been developed for several years and, every few months, places related to the history and culture of the city, and the local community are promoted. Numerous meetings with the industry and the local community are also organised.

The City of Krakow has I and is implementing the Sustainable Tourism Policy of Krakow for 2021-2028 (<https://convention.krakow.pl/aktualnosci>). The Krakow Convention Bureau has joined the GDS Index (<https://convention.krakow.pl/aktualnosci>) initiative. Activity such as the Legacy Project Bank (<https://convention.krakow.pl/aktualnosci>) has been implemented.

The Convention Bureau in Łódź is implementing several activities towards sustainable development.

Yes, the use of environmentally friendly means of public transport, the reduction of the production and distribution of printed marketing materials, the use of reusable and products made of natural and ecological materials (Int. 1).

As far as hotels are concerned, three out of five facilities that took part in the survey implement sustainable development activities by, for example, hiring employees from the local market, cooperating with local subcontractors, ordering regional gastronomic products, or cooperating with agencies and companies from the region.

We promote local tourist attractions and local culture... (Int. 18).

They also work towards reducing CO₂, certification and standardisation of activities, and organise employee training.

Congress, conference and exhibition centres are implementing more intensive activities in this area. These are initiatives such as facility management according to the introduced eco-policy (<http://www.mckkatowice.pl/pl/polityka-eko/359/>, 20.05.2024); maximum cooperation with local service providers in the organisation of events; optimisation – reuse of products, resources from the warehouse to minimise subsequent productions; offer for residents and tourists (visiting the facilities, the offer of daily cultural and sports activities), partnership with the local community (co-creation of the leisure offer); membership in organisations such as the Silesia Convention Bureau; activities in the organisation of own events, taking into account

gender equality and increasing the participation of women, inter alia as speakers at congresses and fairs; activities in the organisation of own events, taking into account respect for the environment – reduction of plastic during event production or paper materials; hybrid events; using the accessibility of facilities – inclusiveness of people with disabilities or special needs; recommending the use of public transport in information channels (website, social media); replacement of lighting with energy-efficient ones; promotion of local products; promotion of other institutions as places complementing the offer for business tourism. As the respondent acknowledged, one of the facilities is very modern – in terms of technology, and a number of solutions used are based on the idea of sustainable action. For example – photovoltaics, recovery and use of rainwater, special air purifying filters, energy efficiency, and accessibility of the facility for the disabled. The operating procedures are also sustainable, e.g., careful segregation and minimisation of the amount of waste.

Another of the ICE Kraków facilities bases its activities on the idea of new hospitality, i.e., balancing the needs of residents, tourists and destinations through open communication, mutual respect, respect for specific rules, permitted behaviours, and understanding of various needs, as well as mutual benefits (win-win).

Yet another company, Targi w Krakowie Ltd., has introduced solutions in EXPO Krakow⁵ regarding garbage and waste; the exhibition industry produces a very large amount of rubbish and waste, which is why the company tries to reduce this number to a minimum, avoid materials that are not suitable for recycling, e.g., artificial, disposable smoothing and chipboards used to build exhibition stands are abandoned; waste is segregated; restrictive rules are introduced regarding waste distribution; various types of incentives are introduced to encourage and persuade exhibitors to use more ecological solutions when building and organising their stands, such as environmental exhibition systems or canvas walls; certain investments are implemented, e.g., appropriate, protection, impregnation of the floor so that it does not have to be laid with disposable, artificial carpets, retention tanks for rainwater, solar panels, taking care of greenery in the vicinity of the facility, etc.; developed cooperation with local service providers and the community.

Event companies or organisers of conferences and congresses undertake activities such as supporting the local industry by cooperating with subcontractors from the region, inter alia: catering companies, assembly companies, transport companies; enabling the local community to use public transport to get to events organised in the facility;- encouraging customers to choose hotels close to the event venue to neutralise the carbon footprint; giving up printed materials Advertising; emphasis on cooperation within the broadly understood region (including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Hungary); collaboration with facilities that introduce actual actions for sustainable development, e.g., minimising food waste; optimisation of transport, e.g., connecting people in a car; lower alcohol consumption, e.g., during teambuilding events, shorter availability of a bar.

⁵ EXPO Krakow - International Exhibition and Convention Centre.

In addition, the surveyed entities are developing programmes that take into account the issues of sustainable travel. Hotels are checked for their commitment to the zero-emission strategy and recommended to customers that have an advantage over their competitors in this field using the services of local subcontractors, choosing to travel by public transport, and vegetarian meals are chosen for organised meetings. Other activities include industry education and certifications. The individual components of each project and company's functioning are analysed, and solutions that have a minimal impact on the surrounding world proposed.

4.2. Sustainability strategy in the meetings industry

Because an appropriate strategy may be necessary for implementing of sustainable development activities, respondents were asked whether they implement a sustainable development strategy or policy. The results of research in this area are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Strategy/policy of sustainable development in the meetings industry

Type of entity	Type of document you have	Number of entities
Convention Bureau	Not applicable	4
Hotel	Operate by the principle of sustainable development but do not have a policy/strategy in the form of a document.	5
Conference/Congress/Exhibition Centre	Yesx2; "I don't have this formalised document yet, but I have plans to do so" (Int. 6); "Yes, it is mainly based on four assumptions – investments in human resources, support for environmental protection, good relations with the local community, building relationships with partners" (Int. 10); "We are implementing in terms of care for the environment, limiting the lighting of large LED screens, planned installation of photovoltaic panels, organisation of large pro-ecological events, waste segregation, etc." (Int. 9).	6
Event companies, PCOs	"The corporations we work with ask about it, we fill in audits at their request" (Int. 14), not applicable	5

Source: own study based on research.

Based on Table 2, it should be concluded that the entities that have implemented a sustainable development strategy or policy are mainly conference and congress centres or exhibition centres. The ICE Krakow Conference Centre has introduced the "Sustainable Development Policy of the ICE Krakow Congress Centre" (We announce the "Sustainable Development Policy of ICE Krakow"! - Krakow Convention Bureau). Meanwhile, the 2024 document 'Decarbonisation Strategy. From WHY to Offset'. The Carbon Foot Foundation developed it and responds to the dynamically growing needs of business, including the meetings industry in terms of, among other things, education, raising competencies in the area of sustainable development, identifying opportunities and building competitive advantages for the City of Kraków. The document sets directions, builds and systematises knowledge on ESG, decarbonisation, and carbon footprint (more on the strategy: <https://www.meetingplanner.pl/news>, 15.08.2024).

Other entities, such as hotels or convention bureaus, do not have such a document or consider that it does not apply to them. The Fair in Krakow, which is the owner and operator of EXPO Krakow, has been facing the topic of sustainable development since the beginning of the facility's existence; the company believes that, thanks to well-thought-out solutions and an experienced team, it can do a lot for the environment. This facility was built in 2014. The investment has revived this area and introduced the revitalisation of the post-industrial district of Czyżyny in Krakow. The building is managed by a BMS - Building Management System - which coordinates and optimises the operation of all devices in the facility. Ninety-five per cent of the property has access to daylight. At the design stage of the facility, special attention was paid to the need to use modern technologies and materials with the highest thermal insulation class.

Based on detailed analyses carried out (in close cooperation with MPEC), an automatic ECO mode of heating the facility was introduced, which, by adequately controlling the dampers of heating devices, allows for a significant reduction in the consumption of technological heat. The lighting was replaced with LED bulbs. Waste segregation is carried out in the office. Special fees for waste from exhibitors have been introduced – the cleaning service carries out additional segregation. A type of system that is reusable is preferred. There is a separate sewage system in the media channels in the halls. The installation of photovoltaic panels is planned. Employees are encouraged to come to work by bike. The company participates in the Bike to Work programme. There is a parking lot for bicycles next to the facility. Water consumption is controlled, and rainwater is supervised.

What is essential, however, is that event companies or PCOs have emphasised that the companies/corporations they work with pay attention to the issues of having and implementing a Sustainable Development Strategy.

4.3. Sustainable development strategy as a criterion for choosing a facility

In addition, respondents were asked whether event clients are guided by the fact that they have a sustainable venue strategy when choosing a venue. Convention bureaus decided that they have no opinion on this subject, but there is a noticeable change in the organisers more often ask about ecological or CSR solutions. Hotels emphasised that sometimes, questions are asked in this regard. Conference and congresses or exhibition centres answered that such questions are often asked. However, it depends on the nature of the event. For example, events such as the European Economic Congress, and events organised by the United Nations such as the World Urban Forum or PRECOP conferences, are priorities. However, there are still organisers for whom it does not matter. The question about sustainable development strategies is often asked, especially by foreign customers, who are organising world congresses and mainly outside Europe.

Event companies and PCOs have found that such questions are sometimes asked most often by large corporations. Sometimes Polish companies draw their customers' attention to the fact that this should become one of the selection criteria in the meetings industry.

I talk to clients about the fact that this should become one of the selection criteria, I hear more and more often, yes, soon (Int. 12).

However, the Polish meetings industry notices that this is happening more and more often, depending on its awareness. Only some companies are responsible and aware enough consider this factor into account beyond attractiveness and price.

4.4. Idea of sustainability in cooperation with partners

The respondents were asked how sustainable development is implemented in cooperation with partners and in what areas it is present (Fig. 1). Vertical and horizontal cooperation were distinguished.

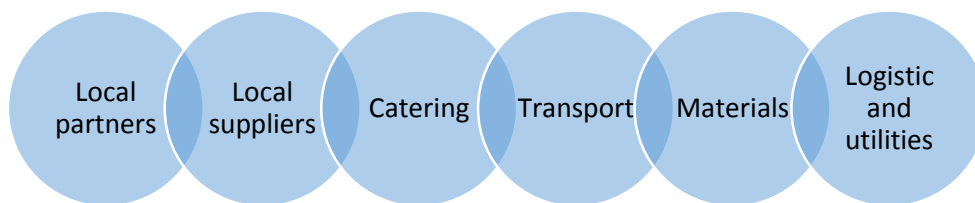


Figure 1. Areas of implementation of the idea of sustainable development in partnership cooperation of the meetings industry.

Source: own study.

Convention bureaus cooperate in the field of distribution of public transport tickets, plant-based and local diets during conferences, and information guides in the form of applications. At the level of offering, they ask about activities in the spirit of sustainable development, mainly in terms of catering (e.g., whether food left over from the event is used, e.g., when delivering it to community fridges, and what dishes catering companies use during implementation) and the venue itself – whether actions are taken in connection with the above topic.

The idea of sustainable development manifests itself in various areas, from hotel, restaurant, transport and guide services. However, its implementation depends on the policy of the relevant companies (Int. 4).

By organising their own events, hotels cooperate with local subcontractors and promote and recommend additional attractions based on local products. However, when they are only in the role of the landlord of the facility/halls, etc., they always recommend contractors from the local market in the first place precisely because of the logistical and ecological aspects. They also make sure that guests visiting hotel facilities can taste both cuisines and take advantage of additional attractions related to the values available in the region, so attractions such as "Łscypek" workshops, a concert of a highlander band, etc., are promoted (Int. 16).

Focusing on local suppliers and regional products, choosing Polish suppliers, local as far as possible (Int. 18).

In our hotel, we offer products from local farms – for example, honey from local apiaries (Int. 19).

Conference and congress centres undertake the following activities: using food left over from events for further distribution to the extent permitted by law; using a local brewery to deliver beer to the facilities; organisation events accompanying events in neighbouring cultural facilities; meetings with the local community of the district on the organisation of parking in the area; obtaining white certificates allowing for further pro-ecological investments; supporting local charities by providing facilities; financial support; use of biodegradable tableware by catering companies (Int. 5).

One of the facilities is located in a multifunctional complex, including a conference centre, fitness centre, hotel, museum, and several unique restaurants. According to the respondent, *This comprehensiveness can be used to promote the pleasure trend; it is also an example of successful revitalisation of a post-industrial area and the promotion of less apparent parts of the city (Int. 6).*

Another facility, the ICE Kraków Congress Centre, has a sustainable development policy that *contains examples of the most important solutions implemented since the opening of the facility in the context of the building's operation, administrative and educational activities, as well as initiated CSR campaigns, such m.in as the creation of the world's first Congress Avenue, the organisation of environmental training for the meetings industry as part of the Kraków Network initiative, and cooperation with the Food Bank (Int. 8).*

In addition, the facilities cooperate with local subcontractors and introduce a short supply chain. Yet another facility also pointed to cooperation with a catering company in the field of reusable plastic cups for drinks or biodegradable disposable tableware, as well as cooperation with a cleaning company in the field of complete segregation during mass events. The facility, which rents space for various events, stated:

Many initiatives were undertaken, but most turned out to be unprofitable, e.g., catering companies – reusable plastic cups for drinks, biodegradable disposable tableware; cleaning companies – complete segregation during mass events (Int. 9).

Event companies pointed to cooperation with the local industry. They choose partners from the region, m.in. catering companies, assembly and transport companies. The right amount of food is ordered so that it is not wasted. Local transport suppliers were also indicated. One of the respondents emphasised that: *It is difficult to demand effort from suppliers in this area if our end customers do not pay so much attention to it yet. I try to sensitise suppliers so that it will soon become one of the selection criteria. That is more consultations than active action/shopping (Int. 12).* It is essential that the organisers recommend moving around a given destination by public transport or accommodation at a so-called walking distance from the meeting point, meals without meat or with a small amount, using seasonal products. Yet another respondent emphasised that: *This is part of the educational activities of the organisation, and the associated organisations share good practices in this area, and we pay attention to catering, branding materials, etc., at the events we co-organise (Int. 11).* A representative of a significant

event company said: *We try to work with conscious partners or impose certain solutions on partners such as catering, transport, venue, but you have to take into account the fact that currently price and availability are the first two factors of choice* (Int. 13). Representatives of the meetings industry believe that the fact that they are increasingly aware of this as an industry is the right way to implement and increase the importance of sustainable development.

In the meetings industry, cooperation takes place both within the framework of vertical and horizontal cooperation. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate actions to implement the principles of sustainable development within these two types of collaboration, which is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Sustainability in vertical and horizontal collaborations in the meetings industry

Type of entity	Vertical cooperation activities	Horizontal cooperation activities
Convention bureaus	<i>We pay attention to the locality of producers/suppliers</i> (Int. 1); <i>It is more networking and establishing business relationships with partners and subcontractors</i> (Int. 2); <i>The City of Katowice is a co-host of events</i> (Int. 3).	<i>Limiting face-to-face meetings in favour of videoconferencing and printed materials in favour of cloud files</i> (Int. 1); <i>The City of Katowice is a co-host of events</i> (Int. 3).
Hotels	<i>We cooperate with local subcontractors and promote and recommend additional attractions from local products</i> (Int. 16); <i>Some event organisers require compliance with certain ESG-related standards and parameters, have their carbon footprint calculators, etc., these criteria are co-determining the selection of the final venue and ..., accommodation</i> (Int. 18); <i>Transport logistics management, stakeholder relationship management, emphasis on sustainable packaging</i> (Int. 20).	<i>... long-standing sustainability policy, promoting environmental performance, biodegradable materials, reusable materials, carbon footprint reductions, waste production and resource consumption (energy, water, zero waste), etc.</i> (Int. 18); <i>Creating a central transport strategy, reporting, transparency</i> (Int. 20).
Conference, congress and exhibition centres	<i>... local staff and using local contractors..., cooperation during pro-social initiatives, local subcontractors, ecological products, partial abandonment of paper bills and documents (e-invoices make life easier and are beneficial for the environment, reduction of plastic, especially in the provision of catering services, reuse of boxes for shipments" ,taking initiatives for the sake of the environment and care for the local community, implementing the idea of corporate social responsibility...</i> (Int. 7, 10); <i>... cooperation with the Food Bank, etc.</i> (Int. 8);	<i>Cooperation and relationships with organisations in the industry, supporting pro-social initiatives, exchanging experiences...</i> (Int. 7); <i>Involvement of people and institutions associated in the Kraków Network in educational campaigns on pro-ecological activities and CSR, the Congress Avenue project</i> (Int. 8); <i>Taking care of the appropriate image of the company..., awareness of being watched by the society, we cooperate for the development and strengthening of the industry, we introduce activities by the Sustainable Tourism Policy of Krakow</i> (Int. 10).
Event companies/PCOs	<i>By defining design guidelines, if any</i> (Int. 13).	<i>... We can offer customers various ecological solutions (e.g., the use of spelled plates), but we have little influence on their decisions</i> (Int. 14); <i>We talk a lot about sustainability in our industry organisations: SOIT and SITE Poland</i> (Int. 12); <i>Among other things, by sharing the same common resources – cross rental</i> (Int. 13).

Source: own study based on research.

In the area of vertical cooperation, representatives of the meetings industry emphasised cooperation with local partners and suppliers or the use of local products. On the other hand, in horizontal cooperation, the key is primarily the mutual exchange of experience within the created networks, such as the Krakow Network⁶ (<https://krakownetwork.pl/en/home/>, 19.05.2024). An event company representative stated: *It is easier to enforce sustainability activities between entities operating in the industry than customers* (Int. 14).

4.5. Sustainability assessment and key actions for shaping sustainability in the meetings industry

Representatives of the meetings industry referred to how they perceive sustainable development activities in the MICE industry and their opinion in shaping appropriate conditions in this area.

Representatives of conventions bureaus have the following opinions on this subject:

- One person considered that the MICE industry does not require any action for sustainable development. Possible pro-ecological elements are treated as marketing activities to promote the event to specific groups of recipients. *Shaping the conditions for sustainable development in Poland has not yet begun* (Int. 1);
- *We are pleased with the growing awareness and more and more sustainability activities on the part of service providers and the facilities themselves, but it is still needs to be a fast pace of development. Customers, on the other hand, often put the price as a priority* (Int. 2);
- *After the pandemic, the meetings industry has started to develop more in this area; organisers pay attention to these issues because they have more knowledge and awareness of organising better 'quality events'* (Int. 4).

A slightly different position on this issue is presented by hotel representatives, who believe that:

- *In newly created facilities, such actions are undertaken, but in existing facilities, it is not easy to implement due to habits and habits to specific actions* (Int. 17);
- *The topic in Poland is at a preliminary stage, but MICE facilities that care about large clients and large corporations must work on implementing these solutions because more and more customers are paying attention to it* (Int. 18);

⁶ The Kraków Network project aims to develop a group of organizations operating as part of the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) sector to help the industry increase the number of academic and business events held in Kraków. The group also aims to develop Kraków's image as a strong brand in the meetings industry. The activities of the Kraków Network include analysis of the development trends in the industry, measuring the effectiveness of its activities, and monitoring the economic impact of the meetings industry on the city's prosperity. The initiative also provides a platform for discussion, and exchange of experiences, knowledge and good practice (<https://krakownetwork.pl/en/home/>, 19.05.2024).

A slightly different view on this issue is taken by hotel representatives, who believe that:

- In newly established venues such measures are being taken, but in existing venues, it is not easy to implement due to habits and habits of certain activities;
- The topic in Poland is at a preliminary stage, but MICE venues that care about large clients and large corporations need to work on implementing these solutions, as more and more clients are paying attention.

Representatives of the event industry and PCO believe that there is a growing awareness among companies as well as customers in the field of sustainable tourism, which is also related to the implementation of various regulations, requirements and certifications. However, some respondents did not notice more significant activity in this area:

- *Certifications and ESG policy will become the standard. The industry is increasingly aware of this, solutions and policies are being sought. For example, this can also be seen in the destination, e.g., Krakow joined the initiative as the first Polish city, GDS-index (Int. 11);*
- *We have a lot to do in this matter..., but recent years have seen a great increase in awareness, and effectiveness of activities (Int. 13);*
- *I believe that customers are forcing the industry to act towards sustainable development (Int. 14);*
- *There is more and more training and education in the field.... There are a lot of certifications, but they are made by foreign centres, which is why many entrepreneurs, CB or DMO offices cannot afford such certificates. For example, greater understanding in city authorities, does not translate into financing such activities (Int. 15);*
- *...There are not many specifics from the business side (Int. 12).*

Industry representatives also expressed their opinions on the necessary actions in their industry to shape sustainable development. They believe that legal action is required at the national or EU level to enforce actions for sustainable development, e.g., mandatory certification of facilities or services/products.

In their opinion, activities such as education, exchange of experience and good practices, or consultations with experts on the possibilities that exist or may be, and making customers aware of the importance of these activities are necessary. Integrating the community and increasing local awareness and its high added value is important for business visitors to individual cities in Poland. It is required to create and implement long-term strategies with the involvement of experts, coherent, joint action and involvement of stakeholders. Appropriate solutions should be implemented, but to do this, the criteria for "green" and "sustainable" should be unified. First of all the industry should understand the principles and their importance. Other necessary actions that are listed are:

- building a stable infrastructure,
- economic development,

- promoting sustainable development,
- supporting innovation,
- regulations,
- promoting and informing about the advantages of using renewable energy sources, waste management, and recycling,
- inclusiveness - the offer is to reach a wide range of interested parties, taking into account, for example, the needs of older people or parents who combine work with parenthood and participate in business events with children,
- well-thought-out action in the field of transport, energy management, reduction of the production of materials (including marketing), waste and their recycling, or reduction of CO₂ emissions,
- imposing guidelines and restrictions on exhibitors or participants to eliminate the negative environmental impact,
- developing standards for work and cooperation with partners based on sustainable development goals,
- organisation of ecological events that have a positive social impact,
- reducing your carbon footprint,
- hybridity, online, digitisation,
- reduce unnecessary travel,
- choosing ecological solutions and conscious partners,
- support for local entities and sustainable development of the destination.

The representative of the conference and congress facility also stated that it should be noted that the meetings industry, due to the large amount of air travel it generates, will need to be more sustainable. The following activities seem to be necessary and possible to implement:

- 1) building awareness of organisers and participants regarding the minimisation of the adverse effects of actions taken by the industry,
- 2) avoiding unnecessary printing of paper, preventing the use of cheap gadgets made of environmentally harmful materials that are not produced locally),
- 3) promotion of local products in gastronomy,
- 4) use of public transport,
- 5) activities for the integration of the local community (e.g., promotion of health-promoting behaviours in the context of medical congresses),
- 6) CSR.

It is also necessary to educate customers about sustainable development, as many companies do not know about it, and some top-down regulations should be introduced, e.g., a ban on building one-off stands. The key is to sustainability awareness among industry operators and collaborate with them to exchange experiences. It is important to know that there are organisations that have implemented very advanced processes related to sustainable development, and there are those that are not aware of this topic.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research conducted, the following actions are recommended to ensure that the meetings industry is well-prepared for the implementation of ESG reporting guidelines:

- development of a handbook of good practices;
- development of guidelines for the preparation of a sustainable development strategy;
- recommended actions in terms of the type of entities, i.e., Convention Bureaus, PCOs, DMCs, Incentives or event companies; conference and congress centres;
- educational activities;
- unification of standards for the industry.

In addition, it is worth taking into account the recommended ESG indicators in individual areas, i.e., general information (i.e., business model, management of sustainability issues, or stakeholder engagement) as part of the conducted activities and implemented projects in the ESG area); environmental indicators (requiring monitoring, e.g., water consumption, energy consumption, etc.); social indicators (e.g., in their area, develop and implement e.g., diversity, employment, anti-mobbing or anti-discrimination policies, etc.); corporate governance indicators (in this respect, the structure of management bodies should be reviewed, diversity issues in management bodies should be taken into account, a code of ethics should be implemented, and personal data protection procedures should be followed) (WSE, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2023, pp. 55-56).

It should also be emphasised that all guidelines result and will result from current legal regulations, the changes of which should be followed and taken into account in the area of your activities.

To sum up the research, it should be recognised that the meetings industry implements measures for sustainable development, but there needs to be more. Research shows that these activities vary depending on the entity type, although many repetitive activities can be distinguished. There are no uniform guidelines and standards in this industry. The fact of having a sustainable development strategy is and will be taken into account in the selection of an entity or a place to organise a business meeting. In addition, due to the applicable legal regulations, these actions have already become necessary. Within the scope of the issue in question, further research on this topic is recommended, depending on the type of entities, in terms of the requirements and awareness of the organisers, in terms of global trends.

References

1. BluExperience (2024). *The report "Event marketing 2023/2024: The impact of sustainability on the meetings industry"*. Meeting Planner.pl.
2. Brundtland, G.H. (1987). *The U. N. World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Carbon Footprint Foundation (2024). *Strategy decarbonization: From WHY to Offset*. Kraków.
4. Chichilnisky, G. (1977). Development patterns and the international order. *Journal of International Affairs*, 31(2).
5. Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2772 of 31 July 2023 supplementing Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards sustainability reporting standards.
6. Dasgupta, P. (2007). The idea of sustainable development. *Sustainability Science*, 2, pp. 5-11, DOI 10.1007/s11625-007-0024-y
7. Directive (EU) 2022/2464 of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 14, 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No. 537/2014, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC and Directive 2013/34/EU with regard to corporate sustainability reporting (OJ EU. L. 2022 No. 322).
8. Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of October 22, 2014, amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial, and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups (OJ L of 2014, No. 330, p. 1, as amended).
9. Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups Text with EEA relevance.
10. *ESG reporting in compliance with the directive CSRD KPMG Poland*. Retrieved from: <https://kpmg.com/pl/pl/home/services/esg-environmental-social-and-governance/raportowanie-esg-zgodne-z-dyrektywa-csrd.html>, 9.06.2024.
11. *ESG Reporting Obligation - a complete guide - enova365*. Retrieved from: <https://www.enova.pl/blog/nadazaj-w-biznesie/obowiazek-raportowania-esg-wszystko-comusisz-o-nim-wiedziec/>, 30.05.2024.
12. Glinka, B., Czakon, W. (2021). *Basics of qualitative research*. Warsaw: PWE.
13. *How ERP supports sustainability and environmental management in companies - ForFirmy.eu*. Retrieved from: <https://dlafirmy.eu/technologie/jak-system-erp-wspiera-zrownowazony-rozwoj-i-zarzadzanie-srodowiskowe-w-firmach>, 9.06.2024.
14. http://acteco.pl/articles.php?article_id=89, 3.08.2024.
15. <http://www.mckkatowice.pl/pl/polityka-eko/359/>, 20.05.2024.

16. <https://convention.krakow.pl/aktualnosci>, 20.05.2024.
17. <https://krakownetwork.pl/en/home/>, 19.05.2024.
18. <https://poradnikprzedsiębiorcy.pl/-dyrektywa-csr-d-obowiazki-dla-przedsiębiorstw>, 21.05.2024.
19. <https://www.meetingplanner.pl/news/branza/1053056-paula-fanderowska-esg-w-branzy-potkan.html>, 15.08.2024.
20. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>, 4.08.2024.
21. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972>, 4.08.2024.
22. Maison, D. (2023). *Qualitative marketing research methods*. OWN.
23. Paliś, B., Siwek, M. (2023) *Shaping the area product of sustainable business tourism in the world as a tool for healing the tourism economy after the pandemic*.
24. Seuring, S., Muller, M. (2008). From a literature review to a conceptual framework for sustainable supply chain management. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16(15), pp. 1699-1710.
25. Silvestra, B.S., Țircăb, D. M. (2018). Innovations for sustainable development: Moving toward a sustainable future. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 208, pp. 325-332.
26. Silvestre, B.S. (2015). Sustainable supply chain management in emerging economies: environmental turbulence, institutional voids and sustainability trajectories. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 167, pp. 156-169.
27. Silvestre, B.S., Silva Neto, R. (2014). Capability accumulation, innovation, and technology diffusion: lessons from a Base of the Pyramid cluster. *Technovation*, 34(5), pp. 270-283.
28. Stappen, R.K. (2006). *A Sustainable World is Possible. Der Wise Consensus: Problemlösungen für das 21. Jahrhundert*. Impulse – document Manuskript, 1.2.
29. Statement from Rio, World Charter for Nature. Stockholm Conference 1972.
30. Sustainable supply chain management. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16(15), pp. 1699-1710.
31. The Stock Exchange, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2023). *ESG Reporting Guidelines. A Guide for Companies*.
32. Tuszyńska, L. (2015). Nature as a value of early childhood education on the path of sustainable development. In: L. Tuszyńska (ed.,) *The concept of sustainable development in the education of teachers of the early grades* (pp. 101-124). Warsaw: Publishing House of the Academy of Special Pedagogy.
33. United Nations (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future*.
34. Walosik, A. (2014). *Through education to sustainable development*. Kraków: Pedagogical University Publishing House.
35. Żemła, M., Paliś, B. (2023). Book review Contemporary Tourism. An International Approach. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 55, pp. 76-77.