CONNECTIVE CITIES



DOCUMENTATION

Global Green Sports: Sustainability Strategies for Major Sports Events

CONNECTIVE CITIES DIALOGUE EVENT FROM 20 TO 22 OCTOBER 2026 IN BERLIN

31 experts | from 15 municipaities | from 8 countries

Commissioned by

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Partners of Connective Cities

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Introduction: Major sports events – sustainability challenges and opportunities

Major sports events inspire millions of people worldwide. At the same time, they are also at the centre of the global sustainability debate. Due to the extensive international travel involved in attending these events, their infrastructure requirements and energy consumption, they generate high CO_2 emissions. The construction of sports facilities for short-term use, along with their high resource consumption, poses major environmental and financial challenges. Social aspects such as displacement effects, rising rents and unequal distribution of economic benefits are also being critically discussed.

However, major sports events can also be a powerful driver of change. They can establish new environmental standards in event management and foster innovation in sustainable urban development. In addition, they have a strong signalling effect and can raise awareness of sustainability issues both locally and globally. If planned effectively, they can create positive long-term environmental, social and economic impacts.

So how can cities design major sports events so that they generate environmental, social and economic benefits? Which solutions are already proving successful in practice? And what can cities learn from one another?

> *"With our educational activities during major sports events, we want to raise awareness among sports fans of issues such as sustainable consumption."*
>
> Oliver Schruoffeneger, District Councillor, Berlin District of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf

The dialogue event: the start of a peer learning process

Connective Cities, the Berlin District of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf and the Berlin Senate Department for the Interior and Sport invited 31 experts from eight countries to meet in Berlin from 20 to 22 October 2026 to discuss sustainability strategies for major sports events. They addressed topics such as green event management guidelines, educational and participatory formats and impact monitoring.

The participants shared examples of good municipal practice, advised one another on local government challenges and jointly developed approaches to address them. The event in Berlin marked the start of a one-year learning process supported by Connective Cities.

Municipalities participating in the learning process

International

- *Buenos Aires (Argentina)*
- *Johannesburg (South Africa)*
- *Kitwe (Zambia)*
- *Mexico-City (Mexico)*
- *Monastir (Tunesia)*
- *Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*
- *Stockholm (Sweden)*

Germany

- *Berlin Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf*
- *Berlin Mitte*
- *Frankfurt am Main*
- *Hamburg*
- *Hanover*
- *Karlsruhe*
- *Leipzig*
- *Rostock*

Keynote

EVENT LEGACY IN STOCKHOLM

Peter Ahlström, Head of Sport Strategy, and Patrik Tengwall, Head of Event Strategy with the City of Stockholm, **presented the city's approach** to creating a positive sustainability legacy for major sports events.

For the City of Stockholm, it is important that large-scale sports events have not only positive economic effects but also social and environmental benefits. This is crucial because host cities typically use taxpayers' money to stage these events. They are seen as an opportunity to further develop the city's core operations and are expected to leave a lasting legacy in the following areas:

- I**nfrastructure:** buildings and sports arenas for sustainable reuse, upgraded public transport, sustainable urban development projects
- **Economy:** long-term growth of sustainable tourism, sustained local business activity, job creation
- **Society and culture:** increased community pride, more civic engagement, social cohesion and awareness of charitable causes, identification with cultural traditions
- **Knowledge and skills:** workforce training, academic collaboration, sharing examples of best practice across the industry
- **Environment:** sustainable infrastructure, reduced carbon footprint, long-term environmental improvements.

A prime example of social impact was the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Stockholm, which the city made more inclusive. It enabled children with disabilities to attend a World Championship match, introduced quiet zones where people could take a break from the hectic environment, and provided audio descriptions and hearing loops. A handbook on more inclusive sports events was developed as a legacy for future events.



Presentation of the Stockholm approach to sustainable sporting events | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado



2025 Ice Hockey World Championship in Stockholm | Photo: Egon Eagle via Wikimedia Commons

"The goosebumps effect is crucial for social cohesion: When people collectively experience goosebumps at a large event, something greater happens than the moment itself. The situation fosters a sense of togetherness."

Patrik Tengwall, City of Stockholm

Good practice examples

The participating municipalities shared their experiences with their peers, outlining how they make sports events more sustainable:

BERLIN CHARLOTTENBURG-WILMERSDORF (GERMANY)

During the 2026 FIBA Women's World Cup, the district office promoted sustainability issues at a pop-up basketball court on Breitscheidplatz, a lively public space in Berlin. The programme included school workshops on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), free playtime on the court, tournaments and cultural activities. In this way, the World Cup became an opportunity to promote community-building, the inclusion of vulnerable groups and gender equality.

BERLIN – MITTE (GERMANY)

Using sport as a learning space for education for sustainable development is the idea behind the planned district's event "Mitte Moves!": People explore the district by running, walking, cycling or other physical activity and receive wooden tokens called "Mitties" as a reward for their engagement. With these tokens, they can vote for sustainable neighbourhood projects, combining physical activity with democratic participation.

BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA)

The Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires, developed the cross-cutting "Sello Verde Evento" framework. This free, voluntary certification scheme sets standards for the environmental management of major sports events in five areas: waste, water, energy, supplies and integrated management. The tool is designed to educate, support and encourage event organisers to make their events more sustainable, assess the measures implemented and recognise different levels of environmental performance.

FRANKFURT AM MAIN (GERMANY)

Frankfurt will host the EuroGames 2028, an inclusive sports event organised under the umbrella of the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF). The city aims to use the event to stand up for diversity and cohesion, address binary gender roles and sexuality-based discrimination in sports and promote diversity and democracy. The queer sports community is involved in the event planning at an early stage.



Pop-up basketball court in Berlin | Photo: Berlin Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, SBNE

HAMBURG (GERMANY)

In July 2026, the Rugby 7s European Championship was held in Hamburg for the fourth time, receiving certification from Netzwerk Green Events (Green Events Network). The certification scheme provided a robust framework for implementing sustainability measures. They included heat preparedness initiatives, improved accessibility, a broader range of vegetarian and vegan food options and a solar-powered mobile phone charging station, contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and the safety of athletes, staff and spectators.

> *"Certification is not only a goal in itself. It is a tool for continuous learning and improvement."*
>
> Elisabeth Birkner, City ofHamburg

HANOVER (GERMANY)

In 2026, Hanover hosted "Die Finals", a multi-sport event featuring 28 German championships over four days. The city implemented a comprehensive anti-discrimination strategy, including safe spaces and awareness teams for visitors and athletes. A code of conduct was shared and six "safer spaces" rooms were made available for counselling and retreat. A team of more than 80 professionals and trained volunteers assisted spectators and athletes.



An awareness team in action during the finals in Hanover | Photo: Leona Ohsiek

JOHANNESBURG (SOUTH AFRICA)

As host of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Johannesburg fast-tracked Rea Vaya, Africa's first full Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. The city later expanded it into the Corridors of Freedom transit-oriented development programme. The mega sports event catalysed lasting sustainable urban change. It reduced congestion and carbon emissions and gave more than 80 per cent of residents access to a BRT route, extending its legacy far beyond the tournament itself.

KITWE (ZAMBIA)

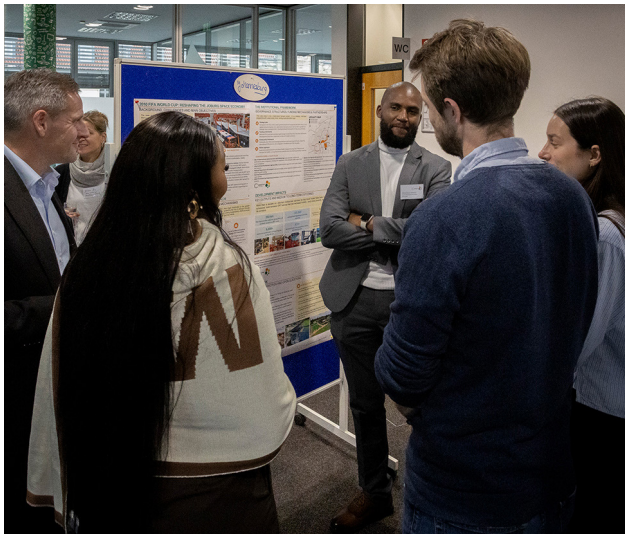
The ZALASA Games are an annual national sports event for local authorities across Zambia, bringing together local government workers to compete in various sports. The event promotes social cohesion, team-building and well-being. Waste collection during the event is a major concern for Kitwe's city administration, however. The municipality therefore aims to establish green event management guidelines, raise participants' and visitors' awareness of waste prevention and collection and cooperate with recycling companies in a public-private partnership.

"Sport is a great tool for raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals."

Mwaka Luguru, City of Kitwe

LEIPZIG (GERMANY)

Building on its experience with UEFA Euro 2024, the UEFA Conference League and the Turnfest, Leipzig redefined host-city standards by establishing an environmental, social and governance (ESG) management system. The system integrates climate action, the circular economy and social inclusion as strategic cross-functional priorities and is promoted through a professional awareness-raising strategy.



Discussion on the impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in Johannesburg | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado

MEXICO CITY (MEXICO)

The city used the 2026 Football World Cup as a catalyst to accelerate its environmental policies. Standards such as circular procurement, reduced use of plastic, return systems, recyclable urban furniture, waste separation, refillable water systems, food recovery, clean air, land conservation and sustainable transport for tourists were incorporated into the planning from the outset, rather than being added at a later stage of event organisation.



The Estadio Banorte following its refurbishment for the 2026 FIFA World Cup | Photo: Arlette Lopez, Shutterstock

MONASTIR (TUNESIA)

Monastir integrated sustainability into the planning and organisation of the 2026 Africa Triathlon Cup. It reduced single-use plastics, promoted waste collection and sorting and raised environmental awareness among athletes and spectators. The city administration collaborated closely with civil society organisations and involved young people and volunteers in environmental initiatives.



Clean-up campaign at the Africa Triathlon Cup in Monastir | Photo: City of Monastir

ROSTOCK (GERMANY)

The City of Rostock has introduced an action plan to make the major international sailing event, Hanse Sail, more sustainable. Various pilot projects focused on waste reduction, separation and recycling, sustainability criteria for ships, dry composting toilets, social inclusion and local value creation. The city shared knowledge and good practice examples with other cities and cooperates with a university to monitor and evaluate project results.



Sustainability at the Hanse Sail in Rostock, presented by Mila Zarkh | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado

SARAJEVO (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

The 2019 European Youth Olympic Winter Festival brought the Olympic spirit back to Sarajevo and East Sarajevo 35 years after the 1984 Winter Olympic Games. The event strengthened youth sport, cooperation and the cities' international visibility. Community participation and intercultural youth dialogue were integrated into the entire event programme.



Naida Murtić reported on the 2019 European Youth Olympic Winter Festival in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado

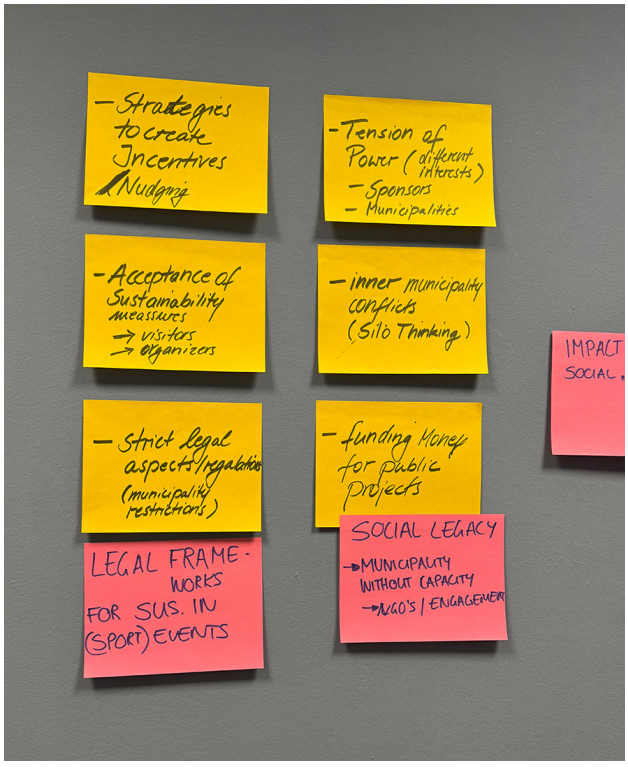
Challenges in making events more sustainable

The municipalities participating in the dialogue event face various challenges when promoting sustainability before and during major sports events. Creating a lasting impact and convincing organisers, sponsors and spectators of the added value of sustainability measures is not easy. The challenges they face include competing interests and priorities between the municipality and the event organiser, sponsors and residents, stringent legal requirements that make delivering sustainability measures more difficult, limited funding for sustainability projects and too little focus on the social impacts of an event.

It was therefore agreed that greater efforts are needed to secure stakeholders' commitment to implementing sustainability measures. During the peer-to-peer consultations on the second event day, eight municipalities had the opportunity to receive advice on concrete challenges from their local contexts and collectively identify practical solutions, drawing on the diverse expertise of their peers.

The topics of the peer-to-peer consultations

- *Initiating and promoting changes in visitors' behaviour,*
- *developing comprehensive frameworks on a larger scale (e.g. in major cities), as sporting events are governed by numerous regulations in various fields such as transport, economic development and environmental protection, potentially affecting delivery of sustainability actions,*
- *measuring impact to make a case for sustainability and secure political buy-in,*
- *opening a community event to the wider public while safeguarding its safe-space character for vulnerable communities,*
- *increasing external partners' and organisations' commitment to sustainability,*
- *finding shortcuts in the administration when attempting to implement a sustainability strategy,*
- *uniting fragmented sustainability responsibility in the municipality and*
- *improving waste reduction and collection during sports events.*



The challenges facing local authorities range from legal to social issues | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado



Working together to find solutions | Photo: Raquel Gómez Delgado

Sustainability solutions in detail

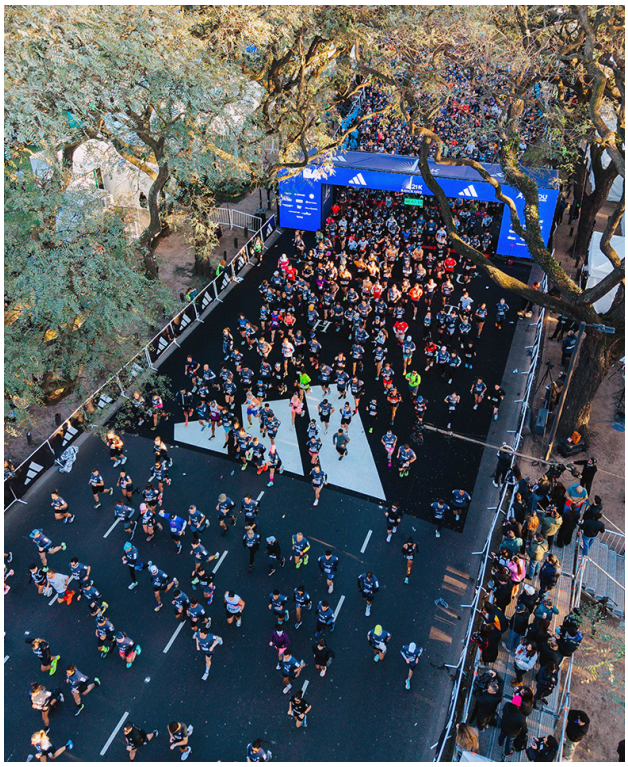
The peer-generated solutions include the following, some of which were worked up into specific project ideas.

SENSITISATION FOR BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE AND INCREASED ACCEPTANCE

Here, one option is to offer incentives, such as a free drink, a free bicycle repair or a partial ticket-price reimbursement, to visitors who travel to a sports venue by public transport, bicycle or scooter. They can also be rewarded through a prize draw supported by a social media campaign. Prizes could include photo opportunities with well-known athletes or celebrities. Operators of bicycle or scooter rental systems should be encouraged to set up pop-up stations at the venue.

Key partners for incentive schemes include public transport operators, sponsors and local sports clubs, whose members can be encouraged to participate in specific local initiatives.

In addition, the number of car parks can be reduced and parking fees increased to make travelling to the venue by car less attractive.



Buenos Aires Marathon | Photo: Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires

FROM EVENT-RELATED SUCCESS TO LONG-TERM MUNICIPAL COMMITMENT

In many municipalities, the responsibility for the sustainability of sports events is fragmented. To make a lasting impact, it is important to unite the various efforts. Existing guidelines issued by other local authorities or organisations such as sports federations can provide a common framework here. It is essential to also include other stakeholders such as citizen assemblies and non-governmental organisations. Sustainability ambassadors can reach out to other stakeholders such as sponsors and the local business community.

Sustainability activities with high visibility can pave the way to convincing stakeholders to continue these efforts after the event. Results must be presented in an engaging way. Under certain circumstances, it might be advisable to refrain from using the "sustainability" label, thus making it easier for other department to adopt the issue as part of their own agenda.



Winners at the ZALASA Games in Kitwe | Photo: Kitwe City Council

In the long term, it is vital to keep up the momentum and incorporate sustainability principles into a long-term strategy and other relevant policy documents. The transfer of responsibility to permanent units within the administration, once the event is over, should be planned well in advance.

WASTE MANAGEMENT: REDUCE AND REUSE

Green waste management starts with waste reduction, for example by providing reusable cups instead of plastic bottles. Waste separation helps ensure that waste is recycled wherever possible. Good cooperation with waste management and recycling companies is needed to ensure that the city is properly cleaned during and after the event. Spectators must also be encouraged to reduce waste and use the bins provided. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns that use gamification. Youth organisations and volunteers can help implement this strategy on the ground. Guidelines and standards established before the event provide the basis for the various waste-related activities.



A clear message against plastic waste at the 2026 Africa Triathlon Cup in Monastir | Photo: City of Monastir

MAKING AN EVENT A CELEBRATION OF INCLUSIVITY

Sports events with a strong social component such as the EuroGames 2028 in Frankfurt for LGBTIQ+ athletes are a good opportunity to promote inclusion in the host city. A communication strategy helps to reach all stakeholders and also the general public. Local sports club are a good entry point and should be involved well in advance of the event itself. Sensitisation activities could include branding in public spaces and on buildings and public transport, organising local tournaments that include the LGBTIQ+ community, social media campaigns, and cultural events.



Buenos Aires uses sporting events to raise public awareness | Photo: Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires



A huge celebration: the 2024 European Football Championship in Leipzig | Photo: Tim Hard Media



A central square in Berlin was turned into a temporary basketball court | Photo: Berlin Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, SBNE

Field trip: the Olympic stadium in Berlin

The dialogue event concluded with a guided tour of Berlin's Olympic Stadium, which hosted the Olympic Games in August 1936. In the stadium, a wide range of measures help to reduce the environmental impacts of large events, including roof-mounted solar energy generation, the use of energy-efficient LED lighting and water-saving measures such as cisterns. In addition, accessibility and inclusion of a diverse range of visitors have been improved.



Field trip to the Olympic Stadium in Berlin* | *Photo: Lorena Schejtman

Interim conclusions and next steps

The dialogue event marked the start of a one-year learning process supported by Connective Cities. It will continue through online networking and peer-to-peer exchange, virtual events focusing on specific aspects of sustainable major sporting events, and expert exchange visits between participating municipalities. These activities will foster continued knowledge-sharing, strengthen cooperation and potentially lead to the joint development and implementation of project ideas.

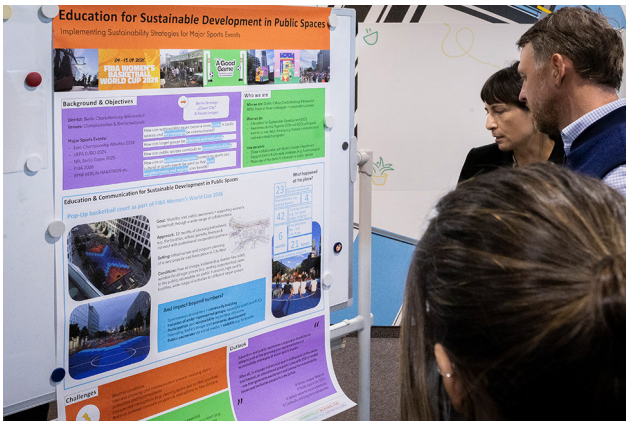
Key takeaways

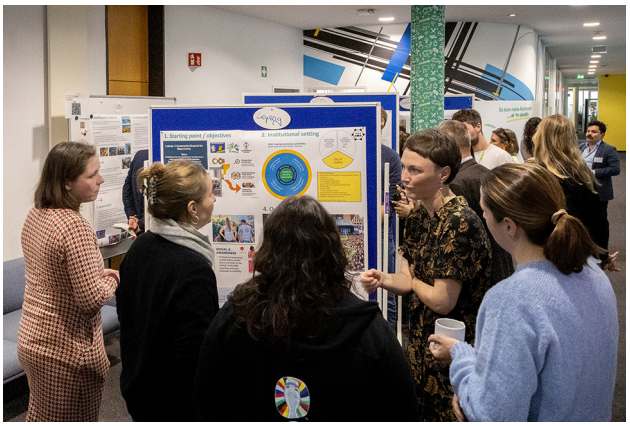
- The impact of a sporting event should be long-term, showcasing innovation and including the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.
- Guidelines and certification schemes help stakeholders to implement sustainability measures in the organisation of major sporting events. There must be a good balance between voluntary and mandatory requirements.
- Buy-in from partners is obligatory. It is imperative that they recognise the added value of increased sustainability and find it inspiring.
- Sporting events are a perfect opportunity to promote the SDGs.
- Visitors can be incentivised to act more sustainably. This means offering them rewards such as food vouchers if they use public transport to get to the venue.
- Municipalities should ensure that all sections of society benefit from sporting events in the long run, e.g. through public transport, housing and social cohesion.
- Impact data help to make a case for more sustainability efforts.
- Involving local sports clubs before the event is key to making it more inclusive.
- Managing expectations: Don't try to achieve too much. It's better to start small and grow from there.

Impressions in words and pictures

"Major sporting events offer unique opportunities to inspire people, raise awareness of sustainability issues and provide impetus for sustainable urban transformation."

Jürgen Kretz, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)





"The good practice examples from other cities highlight the many opportunities we have to address our challenges."

Lorena Schejtman, City of Buenos Aires

"I really appreciate how practical the solutions are that we developed together. The dialogue event's methodology was great!"

Thandeka Mlaza-Lloyd, City of Johannesburg





"Our challenges may seem unique to us, but they are shared by people and communities around the world."

Christoph Masche, City of Leipzig

All photos: Raquel Gómez Delgado

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Connective Cities – International Community of Practice for Sustainable Municipal Development

Since 2013, Connective Cities has been promoting the worldwide exchange of municipal expertise. Within the framework of structured learning processes, the platform disseminates proven-practice solutions for sustainable municipal development and supports peer learning between German and international municipal experts, as well as the joint development of project ideas.

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Further information can be found here:
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