



Sustainable development - the theory and practice on the example of the USA and Poland

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In early August, Northstar Meetings Group - a leading brand providing strategy, creative solutions and services to meeting planners - released a report on sustainability and DEI policies in the meetings industry, entitled *First Look Research: The Slow Progress of Sustainability in Meetings*.

As the title of the report suggests, the meeting industry clients are **lagging behind** in their efforts to improve their sustainability scores. Is the apparent *slow progress* a deliberate marketing ploy to promote CSR, or are the results obtained based on the sample from the United States not as convincing as experts forecasting global trends would like? Let's take a look.

The survey was conducted between 9 May and 3 June 2022 among 352 North American meeting planners. Among the respondents, 30 percent were corporate representatives, 29 percent represented associations, 16 percent were independent planners and 9 percent were professional convention organisers. The remaining 15 percent included trade show and Social, Military, Educational, Religious, Fraternal (SMERF) event planners. Meeting planners in the multicultural United States are more likely to focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI for short, rather than addressing environmental impacts as part of sustainability policies, the new report says.

More than three-quarters of planners (76 percent) include DEI in their sustainability policies, and some 70 percent said they try to 'reduce their environmental impact' as part of their sustainability policies, while 75 percent focus on 'social initiatives'.

Interestingly, US associations (29 percent) and corporations (36 percent) were among the least likely respondents to pursue sustainability policies. In this regard, professional congress organisers are more aware - to the tune of 68 percent.

Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that **only four out of ten planners** have a sustainable development policy in place. **From the point of view of place marketing, the question of the most important preferences used to select an event venue by US planners seems very relevant.**

Trends over the past few years in the tourism and meetings industry clearly indicate that travellers are paying more and more attention to ecology and sustainability. Tourist destinations that show concern in the aforementioned areas are growing in popularity. Hotels and convention centres around the world are taking steps to reduce CO2 emissions, reduce waste and obtain independent certification.

A study by Northstar Meetings Group identifies a group of factors that influence the final location of meetings and events.

Location and easy access to the venue remain the main factors to consider when choosing a given location; the sustainability policy of the convention centre or hotel is a close second, on par with efficient use of utilities (energy, water). The more conscientious planners express growing interest in **whether the facility is certified and the city has a sustainability policy in place.**



Certifications, industry awareness and policies of convention cities in Poland

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), is not a fad, but an obligation for any organisation or destination that wants to protect the planet for future generations. It is also a good way to build their competitive advantage here and now. It is great that we are increasingly aware of this, and despite the difficulties and concerns, Polish cities are taking advantage of best practices and good examples of sustainable development aimed at minimising the negative and increasing the positive impacts on the environment and the local community.

Thanks to the efforts of the **Kraków** Convention Bureau, operating within the Department of Tourism of the Kraków City Hall, the City of Kraków has joined the **GDS-Index (Global Destination Sustainability Index)**, a unique benchmarking initiative. The GDS Index compares cities based on their sustainability performance, and the classification is made on the basis of seventy criteria divided into four main categories:

- The city's environmental activities (including those concerning issues such as climate, air quality, emissions, transportation, green spaces);
- The city's social activities (access to information, safety, inclusion);
- The activities of suppliers (hotels, restaurants, airports, agencies, conference venues, universities);
- Destination management activities (strategies and policies, management, certifications, studies and reports).

Joining the international benchmarking initiative presents an opportunity to accurately diagnose the current state of affairs, as well as to take advantage of guidelines and proposals to develop various areas for improvement. Some of the participants include cities such as Copenhagen, Glasgow, Sydney, Helsinki, Belfast, Lyon and Reykjavik, among others. The Index was created by the Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDSM), which brings together sustainability pioneers from the world of business and leisure tourism.

By taking part in the GDS-Index, Kraków wants to set an example for other Polish cities, and looks forward to the cooperation and involvement of institutions, suppliers, and professional event organisers (PCOs and DMCs) as well as delegates and residents. This is yet another initiative by the Kraków Convention Bureau in its efforts to build the city's reputation as an aware, responsible and caring city that is determined to introduce sustainable development standards in various areas of life, most especially in the field of tourism.

A well-planned event is one that, in addition to bringing content and networking value, results in the so-called positive impact – a lasting positive effect on the area in which it takes place. The positive impact of an event means more than just its financial aspects – it also includes the effects and outcomes of hosting an event or meeting, such as changing the world or the place where the project is carried out. The **Policy for Sustainable Development of the ICE Krakow Congress Center (2022)*** presents some of the particularly good examples of sustainability measures in Kraków that were adopted in the city in order to minimise the negative and grow the positive impact on the surroundings and the local community.



Other cities in Poland are also following the path of sustainable development. This year, the world-renowned *National Geographic Traveller* magazine presented **Łódź** with the **Best of the World 2022 Award in the Sustainable Development category**. The award is a token of recognition for the city's efforts to be increasingly friendly to residents, tourists and the environment.

Another good example is **Wrocław**, which has a dedicated department within its municipal structures to coordinate municipal projects, programmes and strategies in accordance with the idea of sustainable development. The Department for Sustainable Development is also responsible for shaping green and blue infrastructure. The Wrocław Convention Bureau attaches information on alternative means of transportation to the applications it drafts, as well as information on green areas available in the city.

According to more than 46 percent of respondents in a survey run by **SITE Polska**, the use of sustainable development principles, including incentive travel, is necessary for the proper functioning of the tourism market... The association presented the results of the **Sustainability in Tourism*** survey during this year's session dedicated to the issue at Meetings Week Poland. Respondents believe that CSR is a very important part of their companies' development (39 percent). At the same time, 10 percent of respondents point out that the market is not yet ready for solutions in this area, 12 percent do not understand the issue or know too little about it, and 5 percent are not interested in sustainability because they deem it not important.

Those interested in the topic of CSR are probably familiar with the annual **Responsible Business in Poland. Best Practices** report published since 2002 by the **Responsible Business Forum**. It reviews the activities of Polish companies that have reported their CSR activities. The release of the 20th edition of the report took place on 25 May as part of the conference part of the 9th CSR Trade Show in the EXPO XXI **in Warsaw** – the largest event in Poland dedicated to corporate social responsibility. It is worth noting that the activities of the Responsible Business Forum have been recognised in Europe. **CSR Europe**, Europe's leading sustainability business network, has appointed new members and board members, including Marzena Strzelczak, president and CEO of the Responsible Business Forum. The goals set for the new management include strengthening CSR Europe's initiatives for a just transition, including the integration of social factors into European Green Deal activities.

The promotion of CSR in the meetings industry has also been a long-time project of the **Poland Convention Bureau** – the organisation devotes its best efforts to piquing the interest of professionals in the meetings industry in corporate social responsibility, focusing in particular on the cooperation with organisations that support the operation of educational institutions, offering appropriate help. One of the key examples is the 'Back to the Garden' IMEX Challenge project initiated by the PCB, which took place at the Family Children's Home in Wesoła (a district of Warsaw since 2002) in 2010. The goal of the campaign was to revitalise the garden at the Family Children's Home in Wesoła, which had been remodelled and overhauled the previous year. Between 2012 and 2016, these efforts were repeated in other cities in Poland, which had a positive impact on the education and integration of the local meetings industry.

Currently, a lot of the meetings industry's activities and campaigns are aimed at helping Ukraine. There will also be no shortage of such initiatives during the **61st ICCA Congress in**



**Magiczny
Kraków**

Kraków. Even during the sign-up process, delegates from around the world can support Polish humanitarian aid in Ukraine. What is more, the 61st ICCA Congress will shed light on what really matters to our industry as part of the **#TogetherWeCan** stream, which means a number of talks and debates on:

- Diversity, equality and inclusion - together we can make a transformation and include new voices that need to be heard;
- Sustainability - together we can influence the industry by incorporating a sustainability approach into all our business initiatives;
- Legacy - together we can have a strong, long-lasting impact on the communities we work with.

The programme of the Congress will offer unparalleled educational and growth opportunities thanks to world-famous speakers, engaging formats and dynamic panel discussions <http://ow.ly/5LOe50K9Mi4>

Register now <http://ow.ly/1AWv50K9A7I>

Source: Aneta Książek, [a collection of publications entitled *Konkrety Anety*](#)