

& BODY & SOUL FESTIVAL



CITY, COUNTRY

County Westmeath, Ireland

DAILY CAPACITY

5500

SITE

Ballinlough Castle

CAMPING

Yes

NUMBER OF DAYS

3

ESTABLISHED IN

2010

GENRE

From light electronica to world and traditional music

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Improving materials separation, reuse and recycling rates by engaging with local waste handlers

Body & Soul Festival, which takes place every year in June on a beautiful estate in the Midlands in Ireland, has grown from 1500 guests in 2010 to 15,000 in 2017. What's special about it is that the festival is now getting smaller again: in 2022, they offered a limited number of tickets; just 5500. Megan Best, the festival's operations manager, explains that during the pandemic break the team realised that, as the festival had grown over the years, it had turned "into the beast that it was in 2017" and lost a little bit of "that sparkle and specialness".

To make it more intimate again, the team decided to downsize in 2019 and again in 2022. "We said: 'let's go back to somewhere closer to what the original thoughts, feelings and ethos of it was and something that we all want to put on.'"

Body & Soul stands out because of its art and aesthetic; sustainability has also been a running theme. "It's very much based around holistic ideas and wellbeing," Best adds.



DOWNSIZING TO RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL SPIRIT

IRELAND LACKS SUSTAINABLE EVENT SUPPLIERS

A big challenge for Body & Soul is designing and understanding what kind of infrastructure they need to make the festival more sustainable. According to Best, the operating conditions in Ireland don't favour sustainable events. The reason is that there's very little infrastructure and expertise in Ireland for sustainability at festivals. "We only have one supplier who can do renewable energy. We don't have any suppliers that can do natural or composting toilets. We have one supplier that can do reusable cups and that only opened up last year."

To try to encourage sustainability at events, Body & Soul festival has been "pushing the envelope in this space": Best and one of her business partners co-founded [Native Events](#) in 2017 to supply sustainable equipment for events and festivals and has partnered with Body & Soul on sustainability each year since. "Native Events was born out of frustration of not having the availability of sustainable infrastructure in Ireland," Best emphasises. "So, there's appetite and awareness of Body & Soul to be a sustainable festival. But we're only about halfway there because there's also wider conditions at play."

This drive also led to wanting to gain a better understanding of how materials and waste are handled at the festival.

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THE CHALLENGE



COOPERATING WITH EXISTING COMPANIES TO MAKE THEM MORE SUSTAINABLE

To improve recycling rates and get better at source segregation, the team reviewed the contracts for the waste handler and litter pickers in 2014. Back then, the festival team talked to their waste handler and litter pickers to see if they could do a better job at waste segregation. When they didn't agree to the festival's terms, Body & Soul tendered out the waste management and separated the waste handler and litter pickers contracts (these contracts are usually joined together, Best says). Luckily, they found a waste haulier with a focus on recycling. After an "incredibly challenging" initial year, the original litter pickers returned to Body & Soul, agreeing to separate the waste they collect.

Between 2015 and 2019, the festival developed the project further with everyone involved, including the landowners and the local community. "We really gave it a lot of focus and emphasis," says Best. As a result, Body & Soul

was able to improve recycling rates to 60% on-site, plus a further recovery rate afterwards. Over the course of 2020 and 2021, during the pandemic, Native Events continued to work with the waste hauliers by visiting their material recovery and compost facilities to better understand the end destination of the materials produced by festivals.

One of the things Body & Soul put in place was a three-bin system front of house; specifically in the traders' areas, they briefed the litter pickers and policed them when they emptied the bins into the skips. They also hired volunteers (called Earth Guardians) to monitor these bin stations and engage with the attendees so that the waste material flows would be kept separated. The main challenge here is scheduling and communicating, said Best.



GIANT POSTERS DELIVER A QUICK WIN

Body & Soul have also been working on tackling their campsite waste since 2015; the team created a new campsite, called “Us and You”, that didn’t cost more than regular camping but had “some nice incentives”. The festival asked everybody who stayed there to sign a pledge to leave no trace, to use the bins correctly and to be respectful to each other. “It was a huge success. Nothing was left behind in the first and second year.” Actually, people bought into it so much and had such a lovely time in there that people who stayed outside of it started wanting to be in there, Best reports. Over the course of six years, the “Us and You” camp took over half of the festival’s total campsite.

As a method for a ‘quick win’, Body & Soul printed A0 posters of untidy campsites and put them up in

campsite areas that they knew were hot spots for people to be really messy. Next to them, they would put up other posters with a simple message like ‘Please take your tents home’. And it worked: in a 20-metre diameter around these posters the floor was spotless, Best reports. Beyond that it would get messier again, though.

The biggest lesson festival organisers can take away from Body & Soul is that it’s important to bring everybody into the room and to spend time working and consulting with the contractors, Best says. Everybody from waste handlers, litter pickers, to electricians, plumbers and even the local community should be considered as part of the team.



WHAT’S NEXT?

Body & Soul is part of the Green Deal Circular Festivals initiative of Netherlands-based Green Events International and the Dutch government. This means Body & Soul is part of a five-year roadmap to circularity. In 2022, the festival will thus introduce reusable cups. Body & Soul will pilot a circular food court with an on-site bio digester and will bring in natural toilets from the UK – a first for the festival and, in fact, for any festival in the country.