



ØYAFESTIVALEN



Photo by Bjørnar Elvestad

CITY, COUNTRY

Oslo, Norway

DAILY CAPACITY

20,000

SITE

Tøyenparken; clubs and venues in Oslo

CAMPING

No

NUMBER OF DAYS

4 + 1 club day

ESTABLISHED IN

1999

GENRE

All kinds

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Phasing out diesel generators by connecting to the grid



ONE OF THE MOST SUSTAINABLE FESTIVALS IN THE WORLD

You might wonder why a festival taking place in the middle of Oslo is called Øyafestivalen (“Island Festival”). This is because for the first two years, Øyafestivalen was held on the island of Kalvøya near Sandvika, just outside of Oslo. In 2001, it relocated to the Middelalderparken (Medieval Park) in downtown Oslo, before in 2014 moving to its current site, the Tøyenparken, which also lies in the heart of the city.

Øyafestivalen has grown to become the most popular Norwegian festival. It sells 60,000 unique tickets and has 100,000 visitors total over five days. Nearly 3000 people make it happen, including 2700 volunteers. Øyafestivalen kicks off in clubs and venues across the city on a Tuesday. From Wednesday to Saturday the festival takes place in Tøyenparken, and once the festival site closes, it finishes with the “Øya

night” afterparty in Oslo’s clubs. “We create unique audience experiences, with a selection of Oslo’s best food and music of high artistic quality,” says Tonje Kaada, CEO of Øyafestivalen. The festival combines big headliners with newcomers and a good chunk of Norwegian artists, while splitting the bill 50/50 between male and female artists.

Øya is consistently recognised as one of the world’s greenest events. For instance, the festival has been winning the “Outstanding Award”, the highest category in the A Greener Festival Awards, for more than 10 years. In 2020, it won the “International Greener Festival Award”, meaning Øya was the highest scoring festival of all festivals globally assessed by the NGO A Greener Festival.





GETTING CONNECTED TO THE POWER GRID

“Since 2002, it has been our goal at Øyafestivalen to be one of the world’s greenest events. For us, this means finding sustainable solutions for waste, food, transportation, energy and the things we buy – from toilet paper to power grids,” says CEO Kaada. For example, the site operates free of fossil fuels: 98% of the energy used comes from renewable sources, all construction machinery either runs on electricity from the grid or, when this is not possible, biofuel, Kaada explains. “A progressive approach is also applied to everything from recycling (75% of all waste is recycled, having been sorted by hand) to travel (98% of attendees arrive by bike, foot or public transport,” she adds.

Once the sustainability work had started, it quickly became a priority to find solutions on how to phase out harmful diesel generators that were still being used in the earlier editions. “I think that if your festival is running on energy from diesel generators, there is a good chance that this is the item that will have the greatest effect if you manage to change the sourcing,” Kaada says. The best solution is to get connected to the local power grid. So, the challenge was to invest in building the proper infrastructure as well as to get both the municipality and the energy provider on board. Because Øya changed locations in 2014, they had to do this twice – first for the site in Middelalderparken in 2009, then in Tøyenparken.

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CONVINCING THE MUNICIPALITY AND ENERGY PROVIDER TO SHARE THE COSTS

It did not take much convincing to get the local government and energy supplier on board, Kaada reports, and the cost to connect the festival to the grid was split between these three parties. In 2009, the festival started phasing out diesel generators and has been running on renewable energy from the grid since 2011.

“It’s always important to have the whole organization on board – from the senior management to the people working on the ground. We all need to know why we do it and what it means, so that we can convince our audience and partners that this is the way forward – and maybe even inspire others to choose the same path for a bigger impact,” the CEO explains. For example, in the beginning, Øya’s bookers had a hard time convincing some agents that it was safe to run the stages from the mains, even though there is a much greater risk for power outages when running on generators.

Investment in the infrastructure paid off fast and the festival now actually saves money on energy. “Most of our sustainability costs have paid off within a year or three; it’s cheaper to run energy-efficient and to deliver waste sorted in fractions to be recycled,” Kaada says.

“Changing from generators to the mains has made the festival 80% more energy-efficient, and in the period 2009-2018 it has saved around 200,000 litres of diesel – or almost 400,000 km of diesel driving.”

Because the festival feels like a small city that is built from the ground up each year, it considers itself the perfect arena to showcase and test sustainable innovations. The environmental impact is measured, surveyed and reported to make sure they find the best solutions. One important lesson that the team has learnt is to keep trying out new methods, even though some of them might not work after all. “I think it’s important that we encourage experimentation and allow failure in our business, and it’s equally important that we are transparent – so that we can learn from each other’s trials and errors.”

Although Øya has gained national recognition as an expert festival and willingly shares their knowledge with other festivals, it welcomes competition: “What the world needs is that as many as possible fight as hard as they can to become one of the greenest events in the world.”

THE SOLUTION



REDUCING FOOD WASTE

Despite their best efforts to reduce their food footprint and prevent food waste, food is still responsible for almost half of Øya's greenhouse gas emissions, which now represents the festival's biggest area of emissions. "This year, we have delved further into what sustainable food and production is. We are committed to choosing organic raw materials from agriculture that minimizes runoff and pollution, soil depletion and the threat to biodiversity," Kaada says.

Øyafestivalen's considerations revolve around everything from the role of food in the climate crisis, emissions of raw materials and agriculture's relationship with biological diversity to food systems, distributors and consumers.



Photo by Helge Brekke

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