Interreg Baltic Sea Region

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY Change(K)now!

Change(K)now! project is co-funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region. The project´s main objective is a mindset change from single-use to circular or multiple-use of food delivery systems in cities and residents of the Baltic Sea Region.

31.10.2025

REUSABLE SOLUTIONS FOR EVENTS

Case studies for food delivery operators "Eat-at-place"

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1. Introduction

This document presents case studies for implementing reusable systems at events. The practical insights compiled here were gathered during the pilot phase of the Interreg project *Change(K)now!*. The tested measures support the transformation from single-use to multi-use packaging at events and are intended to inspire learning, motivation, and replication. The case studies are addressed primarily to event organizers, municipalities, and all participating stakeholders in an event.

In 2024, the main challenges and solution approaches for events were developed collaboratively within the international working group "Events," together with the following partners:

- Latvia, Riga City Council
- Latvia, Liepāja city municipality administration
- Estonia, Tallinn Strategic Management Office
- Denmark, Copenhagen municipality
- Germany, Green Events Hamburg

In 2025, the most promising measures were piloted.

1.1. Recap: Objectives, challenges and solution approaches

The following key insights were developed during the first project phase and served as the foundation for the pilot activities. A detailed description can be found in the *Draft Solution* document.

Why are reusable systems at events important?

- High environmental impact from single-use plastics: These items are mostly made from fossil-based materials and contribute several gigatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide (OECD 2022). Events generate enormous amounts of single-use waste, especially from tableware, cups, and cutlery
- Plastic pollution: A large proportion of plastic waste ends up in the environment and oceans – up to 23 million tonnes annually (WWF 2024).
- Climate protection and resource conservation: Reuse reduces the consumption of raw materials and energy, extends product lifecycles, and is a key element of the circular economy (R0–R3 strategies: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse).
- Events as learning spaces: Events provide ideal platforms for raising awareness. Visitors experience sustainability in practice and can transfer new behaviours into their daily lives.

What are the challenges to implementing reusable products at events?

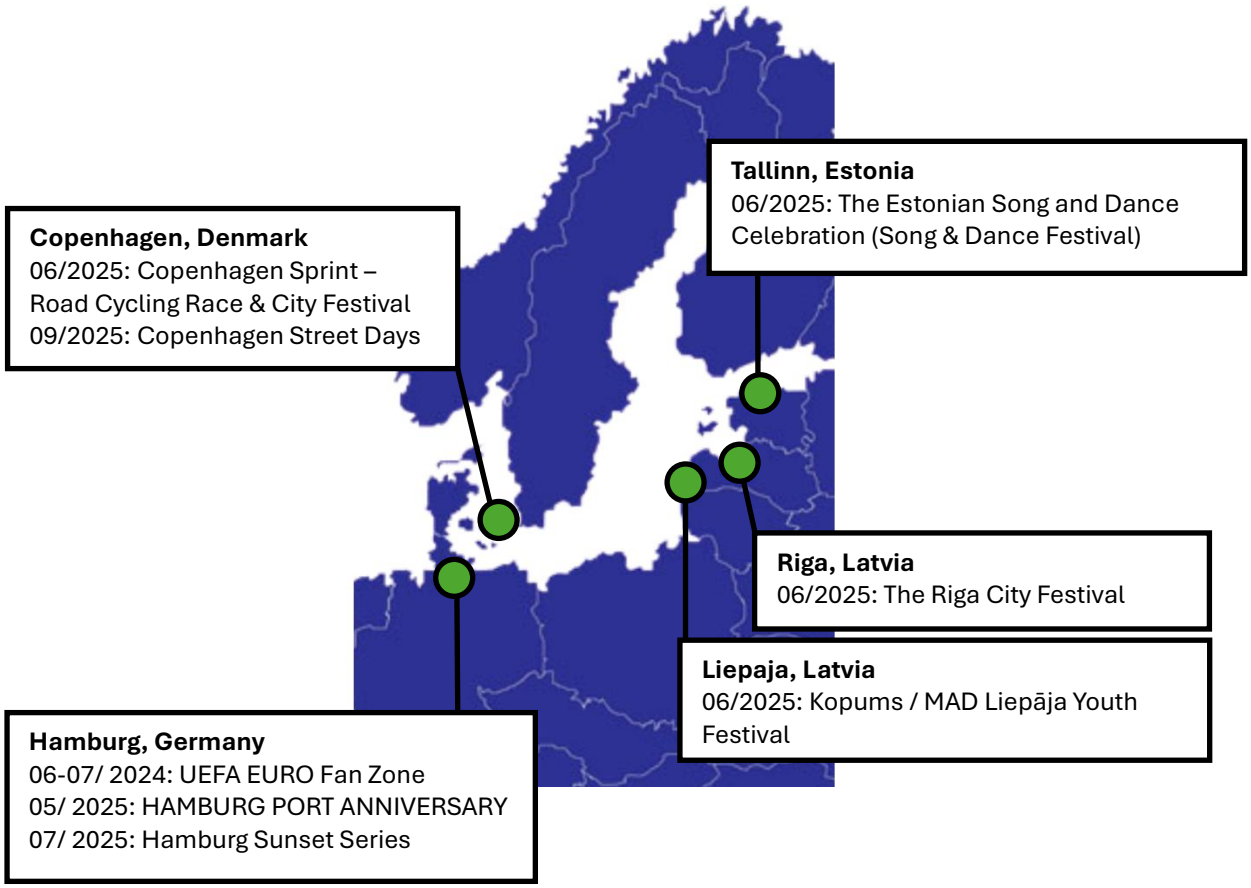
The solution to address these issues in the context of events is the establishment of reusable systems. However, several challenges were identified in their implementation:

- Technical issues: Lack of infrastructure e.g. washing & storage facilities, standardised containers, digital deposit systems.
- Regulatory uncertainties: Different national regulations and weak enforcement result in limited implementation; lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and requirements.
- Financial barriers: High initial investments and additional costs for logistics, cleaning, and staffing make economic viability uncertain.
- Knowledge and behavioural barriers: Limited awareness among organisers, vendors, and guests about the ecological benefits and practical handling of reuse systems. Many still prefer the convenience of single-use.
- Communication deficits: Insufficient training and information for staff and visitors lead to misunderstandings and low return rates.

The goal of the *Change(K)now!* pilot phase was to test measures at events that address these challenges and foster an overall mindset shift from single-use to reuse.

1.2. Overview of the pilot phase

The pilot activities took place in various cities across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR)



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The pilot projects took place in a wide variety of event types and infrastructural and legal contexts. While all events were public in nature, they differed considerably in size, number of participants, and occasion—and so the reusable measures also differed considerably in their approach and scope of application. These ranged from a small running event to a culturally significant song and dance festival with over 100,000 participants and a Fan Zone during the UEFA EURO, where over 600,000 visitors used reusable products over the course of a month. The reusable measures were implemented partly centrally, partly decentrally, digitally and analog, sometimes with broad support from the city administration, sometimes with great reservations.

Nevertheless, the following measures can be named as the central ones that were applied at the various events. They are illustrated in the subsequent sections through concrete best-practices:

- Testing and optimising reusable requirements and single-use bans in the specific context of events.
- Improving return rates through convenient return options such as reverse vending machines, central return stations, donation-based incentives and digital refund options.
- Training and familiarisation of event organisers, stall operators, and visitors with various reusable systems.
- Communication and awareness-raising: Posters, step-by-step visuals, social media posts, website updates, and live radio coverage informed visitors about the deposit system and encouraged environmentally friendly actions, such as refilling bottles or bringing personal containers.

2. Case studies: Reusable solutions for events

2.1. Copenhagen Sprint – Road Cycling Race & City Festival 2025

Event profile

- **Copenhagen Sprint:** Road cycling race with public festivities
- **Location**: Denmark, Copenhagen, near Statens Museum for Kunst, Nørrebros Runddel, Rådhuspladsen
- **Date:** 21–22 June 2025
- **Visitors:** approx. 10,000 per day
- **Event type**: Public event, free entry
- **Target group:** Cycling enthusiasts, families, young people
- **Website:** copenhagensprint.com


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Overview

The Copenhagen Sprint is an international road cycling race and part of the Tour de France side program held annually in Denmark. Complemented by a vibrant public festival it is offering family-friendly activities like live music and community events celebrating cycling culture. The pilot introduced a mandatory reuse system for food and beverage packaging, combining return incentives with digital reverse vending machines.

Objectives

- Introduce and test a reuse system in a public event setting.
- Familiarize visitors and stall operators with the system.
- Improve return rates through incentives and convenient return infrastructure.
- Gather experience and data for future upscaling.

Measures and approach

Four reverse vending machines, seven small return boxes, and ten donation boxes were installed. The service provider New Loop was responsible for logistics, deposit management, and monitoring. Visitors were informed through stall staff, signage, and direct communication, while a donation option was integrated to make returns more attractive. In addition, feedback from both visitors and vendors was collected during the event to support future improvements.

Resources

- **Financial:** Investment in vending machines, boxes, deposit system, and communication materials.
- **Personnel:** Stall staff, New Loop service teams.
- **Other:** Planning and placement of machines and boxes, coordination with vendors.

Success factors

- Visitors largely responded positively, with the donation option proving especially popular. In total, 23,750 items were returned, achieving a return rate of 87.54%; of these, 21% were donated.
- Reverse vending machines increased trust in the reuse system.
- Reliable data was collected to guide further system development and scaling.

Challenges

- Visitors initially struggled with the digital return process (smartphones, card data entry, multiple steps).
- Machines occasionally caused queues, discouraging some users.
- Small return boxes filled up quickly and proved impractical.
- Some stall staff lacked sufficient knowledge to explain the system.
- For small vendors, costs, storage, and pre-financing remained significant barriers.


Lessons learned

- Digital return systems must be simple, intuitive, and supported by staff.
- Stall staff need clear training and should act as ambassadors for reuse.
- Donation options are an effective way to boost acceptance and generate charity contributions.
- Food packaging return boxes should be larger, centrally located, and clearly marked.
- Standardization and broad adoption are key to long-term acceptance of digital systems.
- Overall, the measures saved 71 kg of waste and 1,111 kg of CO_2.

Conclusion

The pilot demonstrated that reverse vending machines and digital reuse models can work at large events and gain visitor acceptance. Despite teething issues (operation, staffing, costs), the system is seen as promising and will be further developed and tested at future events.

2.2. Copenhagen Street Days 2025

Event profile

• **Copenhagen Street Days**: European 3x3 Basketball Championship and urban sports festival

• **Date:** 5–7 September 2025

• **Location**: Denmark, Central Copenhagen (food court, basket arena, public areas)

• **Visitors:** approx. 8,000–10,000 per day

• **Event type:** Public, free entry

• **Target group:** Families, young people, sports fans, local community

• **Website:** cphstreetdays.kk.dk

Overview

The Copenhagen Street Days 2025 combined international 3x3 basketball competitions with diverse urban activities, food stalls, and community experiences. The festival implemented a reuse system for food packaging and cups. Reverse vending machines and donation boxes where implemented to test a digital return and deposit system in a large open-space event.

Objectives

- Test and optimize the reuse system under real-life festival conditions.
- Encourage visitors and vendors to adopt reusable packaging.
- Improve return rates through convenient return options and donation incentives.
- Collect operational and behavioural data for future scaling across city events.

Measures and approach

- Eight return stations were installed across key event areas.
- The setup enabled both refund of deposits and donation options, with proceeds supporting the youth NGO GAME.
- The service provider New Loop managed logistics, washing, digital payments, and monitoring.
- On-site staff and signage explained the system, though communication consistency varied between vendors.

Resources

- Financial: Investment in machines, logistics, and communication; average vendor deposit prepayment DKK 10,000–15,000.
- Personnel: Stall staff, New Loop teams, event volunteers.
- Other: On-site setup, coordination with vendors, donation setup, digital platform management.

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Success factors

- Return rate: 89.17% overall (net); 99.6% for bowls and trays, 80.9% for cups.
- CO_2 savings: 200 kg CO_2 and 12 kg waste avoided.
- Engagement: 53.8% of returned items were donated, generating almost 16.000 DKK.
- Visitors showed high acceptance, citing sustainability and ease of use as main motivators.
- Smooth logistics and experienced vendors improved system operation.

Challenges

- Mixing single-use and reusable cups confused guests and staff. Single-use items were distributed from external actors.
- Some stations underused; others overcrowded during peaks.
- Some users experienced digital payment difficulties or privacy concerns entering card details.
- Small vendors struggled with high upfront deposits and limited flexibility for restocking.
- Lack of communication from stall staff and missing signage reduced visibility.

Lessons learned

- Reuse systems perform best when single-use items are completely excluded.
- Deposit models should be financially easier for small vendors (e.g., post-event settlement).
- Donation options are highly effective to motivate returns and boost engagement.
- Return stations must be clearly marked, centrally located, and easy to operate.
- Staff should receive dedicated training to assist guests and communicate sustainability goals.

Conclusion

The reusable measures achieved a **return rate of nearly 90%**, with strong visitor acceptance and meaningful CO_2 and waste savings. The donation option proved highly successful and contributed to youth initiatives.

2.3. UEFA EURO Fan Zone Hamburg

Event profile

- **Location**: Germany, Hamburg, Heiligengeistfeld
- **Date**: 14 June – 14 July 2024
- **Visitors**: 614,000 in total, up to 50,000 daily
- **Target group**: International football fans of all ages
- **Event type**: Public, free entry organized by bergmanngruppe
- **Special features:** High sustainability standards, diverse schedule of events and activities, long-term volunteer work

Overview

The Fan Zone in Hamburg, which took place as part of UEFA EURO 2024, aimed to provide a meeting place for soccer fans from different countries and backgrounds. A binding sustainability concept was introduced, including a mandatory reusable system for food and beverages. A central return station facilitated container collection.

Objectives

- Reduce plastic waste
- Establish reusables as the standard
- Create equal rules for all vendors
- Make the guest experience simple and user-friendly

Measures and approach

- The sustainability concept centered on a mandatory reusable system.
- Vendors ordered required containers in advance; the service provider FAIRPLATE Mehrwegsysteme GmbH (Sustable) provided various models, subsidized to avoid extra costs.
- A central return station ensured smooth processes for visitors.
- Communication took place via screens, signage, the website, and “Green Volunteers” on-site.

Resources

The system required significant personnel and financial support, partly subsidized by the City of Hamburg.

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Success factors

- Participation must be mandatory, supported by a central return station.
- No app may be required for guests, deposits must remain under €3, and subsidies are essential for voluntary adoption.
- Containers must be versatile, supported by a digital ordering system and climate-friendly logistics.
- Around 384,000 disposable cups and 30,000 disposable food containers were saved during the event.

Challenges

- Selecting a suitable service provider was time-consuming, as few could handle the scale.
- An initial cash-based return system without tokens led to professional cup collecting and theft; introducing tokens solved this issue.
- Internationality: The level of knowledge regarding the use of reusable products varied greatly, which is why intensive, multilingual communication was necessary on side.

Lessons learned

- Uniform, binding regulations are essential.
- The additional return station simplified the system for visitors.
- The stand operators largely accepted the reusable system, partly because its implementation was practical and well prepared.
- Where monitoring was weak, some vendors reverted to disposables or served exclusively on paper. This reduced waste but limited the reuse effect.

Conclusion

The Hamburg Fan Zone demonstrated that large-scale reuse is feasible under the right conditions. The pilot significantly reduced emissions and waste. Implementation ran smoothly, and stakeholders were satisfied. Similar measures will be applied at future events, though cost arrangements must be negotiated individually.

2.4. HAMBURG PORT ANNIVERSARY 2025

Event profile

• **Location:** Germany**,** Hamburg (St. Pauli), along the Elbe river)

• **Date:** 9–11 May 2025

• **Visitors:** approx. 1.2 million visitors

• **Event type**: Public, large-scale maritime festival celebrating the port's anniversary

• **Target group:** General public, families, local and international visitors

• **Website:** https://www.hamburg.de/tourismus/hamburger-hafen/hafengeburtstag-hamburg

Overview

The HAFENGEBURTSTAG HAMBURG 2025 marked the 836th birthday of one of Germany's largest ports. With around 1.2 million visitors over the weekend, the festival spans maritime tradition, featuring ships, exhibitions, live entertainment, food and drink stands. A return machine for reusable cups was tested in one event area.

Objectives

- Test a return vending machine (RVM) for reusable cups in a high-volume public event.
- Facilitate cup return through additional return point and automation.
- Reduce the workload for stand operators, especially during peak times.
- Monitor practical feasibility, logistics and personnel relief for future scaling.
- Collect data and user feedback for possible rollout on a larger scale.

Measures and approach

- Installation of one RVM provided and managed by ÖkoRAST placed in direct proximity to a beverage sales stand at bergmanngruppe event area.
- The deposit refund for returned cups was set at **€1 in cash** to allow access for all visitors (no app, no card payment).
- Visual design and bilingual (German/English) signage and wraps were applied to the machine to simplify user experience and reduce explanations.
- Stand personnel received prior briefing and were tasked with drawing attention to the machine.
- Support teams were on site for troubleshooting.

Resources

- Financial: Rent for RVM, visual design/foil, cash deposit funds, logistics and staffing.
- Personnel resources for instructions, monitoring and maintenance.

Success factors

- Care was taken to ensure that the machine was intuitive to understand and use.
- Low-threshold return: Cash refunds for deposits meant that no smartphone, internet, credit card, or similar was required.
- Communication: The machine's signage focused the most important information, stand operators pointed out the option of using the machine when returning items.

Challenges

- The pilot was limited to the bergmanngruppe event area. It was not possible to return cups from other stands. This was attempted frequently, which is a sign of high acceptance but led to frustration among visitors.
- The detection camera had initial difficulty recognising transparent cups when foam residues remained.
- Operational disruptions: if the collection sack was full or the coin box empty, the machine stopped functioning; monitoring was difficult because stand staff were busy.

Lessons learned

- Training of stand personnel is crucial—they must know the system well, be able to communicate with visitors and deal with issues.
- Clear signage, placement, and visibility of the machine are essential to minimise queues and ensure high return rates.
- While cash refunds are simple and inclusive, digital payment options could reduce maintenance efforts and security risks.

Conclusion

The pilot project was particularly successful due to its high level of user acceptance and demonstrated that the implementation of a machine can optimize the workload. An expansion of the system would be desirable but brings with it further hurdles in terms of scaling (compatibility, cash flow, etc.) that need to be considered.

2.5. Hamburg Sunset Series

Event profile

- **Location**: Germany, Hamburg, Wilhelmsburger Inselpark
- **Date**: 16 July 2025
- **Event Type:** Running event with registration
- **Participants**: 700
- **Target group**: Athletes/ Runners
- **Website:** https://www.sunset-series.de/infos-hamburg/

Overview

SUNSET Hamburg is an evening running event set in the Wilhelmsburger Inselpark, combining natural surroundings, waterways and industrial urban flair. A reusable cup system was piloted directly along the running track to reduce single-use waste typically generated at refreshment points during races.

Objectives

- Pilot a reusable cup system along a running track.
- Ensure intuitive and safe return of cups during the race.
- Test cooperation with a local service provider offering delivery, collection and washing.
- Assess scalability potential for larger running events.

Measures and approach

- The service provider FAIRPLATE Mehrwegsysteme GmbH delivered, collected and washed the cups.
- Return baskets were placed every 100 meters after the water station.
- Posters with clear visual symbols were used for quick recognition while running.
- Participants were informed in advance via the runner's newsletter about the reusable concept and at the event from the event moderator.

Resources

- **Financial:** Higher costs compared to single-use cups (approx. +100% for 3,000 cups including logistics and washing).
- **Personnel:** Some extra work for controlling the return baskets.

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Success factors

- Full service provider with nearby washing facility significantly relieved event staff.
- The signage for the return process was clear, and runners intuitively understood how to use it.

Challenges

- Both runners and staff are used to disposable cups, requiring guidance, persuasion, and clear communication.
- The cost increase is a major barrier.
- Scaling to major running events requires large-volume water stations and return containers, additional supervision and higher-capacity logistics. Cups left on the track can pose tripping hazards which can be a major security risk with thousands of cups.

Lessons learned

- Strong communication (before and during the event) is essential.
- Loop courses are ideal for implementing reusable cups due to centralised supply points.
- Local service providers with full-loop logistics greatly improve feasibility.
- Return points must be visually prominent, high-capacity and placed according to running dynamics.
- Runners accept reuse systems when they do not interfere with performance.

Conclusion

The pilot demonstrated that a return system can function smoothly even under high-paced conditions such as during a small running event. The almost waste-free course, minimal loss rate and high user acceptance confirm that runners are willing to adapt to reusable solutions when they are seamlessly integrated into the event flow.
However, the organizer has serious concerns about scaling up to a larger running event, as the costs, personnel resources, and safety concerns are too great.

2.6. The Estonian Song and Dance Celebration (Song & Dance Festival) 2025

Event profile

- **Location**: Estonia, Tallinn (Song Festival Grounds, Kalevi Stadium, schools for accommodation)
- **Date**: 28 June – 6 July 2025
- **Event type:** Public event, free entry
- **Visitors/Participants**: ca. 120,000 visitors, 40,000 performers (singers, dancers, musicians)
- **Target group**: General public, cultural tourists, families, local communities, performers of all ages
- **Special features:** UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, one of the world's largest amateur choral and dance festivals, includes parade, concerts, mass dances, and side events
- **Website**: 2025.laulupidu.ee

Overview

The Song & Dance Festival in Tallinn is a massive cultural celebration that unites communities through music, dance, and shared national heritage. Recognized as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage it is one of the world's largest amateur choral and dance events. A multi-level reuse system was introduced covering performer catering, visitor food courts, and meal deliveries to accommodation schools.

Objectives

- Reduce single-use packaging.
- Increase return rates for reusable tableware across all areas.
- Test communication methods to influence user behaviour.
- Assess the practicality of a unified multi-vendor system.
- Evaluate easy return options for reusable food delivery packaging in schools.

Measures and approach

Different settings applied different reuse models:

- Performer catering: No single-use option and no deposit; dishes were returned directly at collection points managed by staff.
- Main event venue with food stalls for visitors: Deposit system (€1 per item, cutlery excluded). Multiple staffed return stations allowed guest easily get their deposit back. Donation boxes allowed guests to give their deposit to charity.
- Performer accomondation schools: Optional reuse for meal deliveries, with return bins placed in accommodation buildings. Communication included posters and in-app reminders via Bolt and Wolt.

- Drinking water containers were brought to the venue, from where both visitors and performers could fill their reusable bottles with drinking water for free.
- Communication tools such as posters, pictograms, banners, a green visitor video, and training sessions for schools, caterers, and volunteers supported the system.

Resources
The project required funding for communication materials, video production, and volunteer coordination; personnel for training, return station staffing, and supervision; as well as digital visibility in apps and social media.

Success Factors
Clear visual instructions, pre-event seminars, and visible volunteers were crucial enablers. The donation option for deposits was well received, while in-app messaging increased awareness among performers and visitors.

Challenges
Some vendors ignored guidelines without close monitoring. The overall loss rates of cups and bowls remained relatively high (11%) with no single clear cause.

Lessons learned

- Consistent rules, communication, and close stakeholder cooperation are essential.
- Mandatory vendor training and stronger supervision are needed.
- Practical tools such as checklists support implementation.
- Donation-based returns were motivating for many visitors.
- On warm days, having even more water refill points would be helpful. Many people. brought their own bottles and refilled them regularly.

Conclusion
The Tallinn Song & Dance Festival demonstrated that large-scale reuse is possible even at complex cultural mega-events. Consistent rules, strong communication, and close cooperation among stakeholders are key.

2.7. The Riga City Festival 2025

Event profile

- **Location**: Latvia, Riga (11 November Embankment)
- **Date**: 16 August 2025
- **Event type:** Public event, free entry
- **Visitors:** approx. 60.000
- **Target group**: General public and tourists

Overview

The Riga City Festival 2025 is one of Latvia's largest public events, held across several city locations. The pilot focussed on the event venue at 11 November Krastmala. A decentralized deposit cup system was tested (meaning returns can only be made at the issuing stand). The festival served as a testbed to assess whether a decentralized approach would be feasible or whether future events should transition to a centralized model with multiple return points.

Objectives

- Assess the feasibility and social acceptance of a decentralized deposit cup model in a large outdoor event.
- Evaluate the impact on vendor workload and visitor experience.
- Identify practical challenges such as queues, payment logistics, and cup identification.
- Derive recommendations for future adoption.

Measures and approach

- Vendors issued reusable cups for a deposit and refunded the amount upon return at the same stand.
- Communication materials like posters and stickers with deposit information and usage instructions were placed at each stand.
- Vendors were briefed before the event, including a unified price policy and basic instructions.
- Real-time communication: A shared group chat for vendors and organisers was created to deal with urgent questions and adjustments.

Resources

- Financial: Costs were limited to printing materials and coordination efforts; vendors covered deposit flows.
- Personnel: Municipal coordinators, vendor staff, project observers.

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Success factors

- The unified deposit price of €2 reduced misunderstandings. Public support for reuse in principle: Visitors expressed willingness to use reusable systems if they are simple, transparent, and efficient.

Challenges

- The return process often merged with purchase queues, causing visitors' dissatisfaction.
- Cash refunds caused bottlenecks: Most visitors paid for drinks by card but the cash was required for refunds; small change shortages occurred frequently.
- The "return only where you bought it" rule discouraged returns when visitors moved across venues.
- Refund processing, explanations, and managing queues slowed sales and strained staff capacity.
- Absence of instructions in English complicated the system's use for foreign visitors.

Lessons learned

- Centralized return points with multiple stations and separate queues are essential for scaling the system.
- Cashless refunds (POS terminals or reverse vending machines) are needed to eliminate cash flow issues and speed up operations.
- Training must be expanded: structured vendor briefings and simple FAQ cards.
- Full LV/EN visual package including maps, icons, and QR codes should be mandatory.

Conclusion

The pilot confirmed strong public willingness to use reusable systems when convenience is ensured. While the decentralized model demonstrated basic feasibility, it also imposed excessive operational burdens on vendors and created user frustration due to queues, cash handling, and unclear return

2.8. Kopums / MAD Liepāja Youth Festival

Event profile

- **Location:** Latvia, Liepāja (Jūrmalas Park, by the Baltic Sea)
- **Date:** 16–17 August 2025
- **Participants:** approx. 16,000
- **Event type:** Public event, free entry
- **Target group:** Young people and youth organisations; families and the general public
- **Website:** madliepaja.com | liepaja.lv/jauniesu-iespeju-festivals-kopums-mad-liepaja

Overview

The event Kopmus / MAD Liepāja is a two-day youth opportunities festival. It brings together young people, youth workers, and organizations to break stereotypes, discuss socially relevant topics, and showcase creativity, culture, sports, and civic engagement. At the event a shared reusable cup and deposit system was tested for the first time to reduce the use of disposable beverage cups

Objectives

- Test the feasibility of a reusable system at public events and assess its practical, technical, and behavioural aspects.
- Implement a unified deposit system involving all food and drink vendors.
- Raise environmental awareness among young people and promote reuse behaviour.
- Prepare for the upcoming 2026 city regulation requiring reusable cups at all public events.

Measures and approach

- Deposit system: Visitors paid a deposit for reusable cups, refundable in cash or by card at a central return station.
- One staffed return station in the food court area served all caterers.
- Electronic solution: Card payments and deposit refunds were possible without mobile apps or linked accounts; in case of technical interruptions, cash refunds were provided.
- Workshops: Two pre-event workshops introduced caterers and event organizers to the reuse system, addressed concerns, and clarified responsibilities.
- Communication: Posters, step-by-step visuals, social media posts, website updates, and live radio coverage informed visitors about the deposit system.
- Funding: The municipality covered all system-related costs, including service fees, cup rental, and communication materials, to lower barriers for small businesses.

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Resources

The project required financial resources for service provision, rental of reusable cups, tents, and communication materials. Personnel resources included staff from multiple municipal departments, legal experts, procurement specialists, and event organizers coordinating logistics and stakeholder communication.

Success factors

- Close and continuous communication between all stakeholders.
- Financial support from the city, which enabled small vendors to participate.
- Clear visual communication and public information through radio and social media.
- Positive visitor feedback on the option to refund deposits by card, improving convenience and trust.

Challenges

The absence of mandatory participation rules meant that not all caterers joined the system. Some vendors were reluctant to prepay the deposit, citing cash-flow concerns. Visitor flow was irregular, making data collection on return rates difficult. Although the return station was visible, a physical map of its location was missing at the venue.

Lessons learned

- Binding participation rules for all caterers are necessary for full implementation.
- Workshops and training sessions should become mandatory for all involved parties.
- Future contracts should include partial prepayment options and smaller batch sizes of reusable cups to suit small vendors.
- The deposit refund by card was well received, worked smoothly, and could be implemented on a larger scale.
- Consistent multi-channel communication (visual, digital, personal) is key to influencing user behaviour.

Conclusion

The Liepāja Youth Festival demonstrated that a reusable system can work effectively even at dynamic, youth-focused outdoor events. For long-term success, a stable legal framework, shared cost distribution between the city, organizers, vendors, and visitors, and standardized communication tools are essential.

3. Key takeaways

Events are as diverse as the possible reusable solutions that can be implemented—there is no blank answer as to which measures are most practical and effective. Nevertheless, the following key takeaways can be drawn from the pilot projects:

- Binding rules and standardization are crucial for widespread participation.
- Early involvement and support of all stakeholders, especially small companies like stall operators (e.g., through financial relief) ensures broad implementation.
- Simple, intuitive systems—both digital and analog—increase return rates.
- Technical simplicity > high-tech complexity: Cash or card solutions are often more user-friendly than app-based systems.
- Central (automated) return stations and clear signage prevent chaos and queues.
- Donation options increase response rates and acceptance. And they can also generate significant revenue for refinancing the reusable system—or for charitable purposes.
- Staff training is essential: booth personnel act as “reuse ambassadors.”
- Communication must be visual, digital, and personal in order to reach all target groups.
- Data monitoring and feedback loops help to adapt systems and measure acceptance.
- Long term: A legal framework, infrastructure (washing capacity, storage), and national standards are necessary to ensure scalability.

4. The role of transnational cooperation

The transnational cooperation within the Change(K)now! project proved to be fruitful and enriching. The participating partner cities and organizations brought with them very different infrastructural, legal, and organizational conditions, which enabled an intensive exchange of knowledge and diverse learning processes.

While, for example, there are currently only a few established system providers in Latvia and the legal regulations for reusable packaging are rather lax in cities such as Liepaja, Hamburg has a wide range of professional service providers and proven infrastructures. In Tallinn, on the other hand, the legal basis is already more advanced – there is a binding requirement for reusable packaging at events. This heterogeneity provided ideal conditions for learning from each other, comparing different approaches, and flexibly adapting measures to the respective national contexts.

Testing measures in a wide variety of event formats and sizes – from small sporting events to urban festivals and major cultural events – created a valuable basis for mutual inspiration and the joint development of a long-term vision. This diversity enabled the consortium to identify a wide range of cases and understand the factors that determine the success of reusable systems in different environments.

Regular exchanges within the transnational consortium – in the form of online meetings, workshops, and conferences – not only promote knowledge transfer but also a common understanding of sustainable event planning in the Baltic Sea region.

There are plans to scale the successful models transnationally. In particular, opportunities are being explored to establish city-wide reusable systems based on the insights gained and to extend the cooperation to other cities and regions. The transnational collaboration has thus not only led to concrete pilot solutions, but has also laid the foundation for a long-term, cross-border transformation towards a sustainable event culture.