

CASE STUDY

DANISH SUSTAINABLE EVENTS INITIATIVE GATHERS MOMENTUM WITH ISO20121 CERTIFICATION SUCCESS

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The Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has achieved certification to ISO20121 with SGS for the meetings that took place under the Danish European Union Presidency, in the first half of 2012.

ISO 20121 describes the building blocks of a sustainability management system that help an event organisation continue to be financially successful, become more socially responsible, and reduce its environmental impact.

The standard requires an organisation to have in place a transparent process through which it systematically evaluates the issues relevant to its operations and sets its own objectives and targets for improvement.

THE JOURNEY TO ISO20121

Certification to ISO20121 marks the next step in a sustainability journey that began with COP15, the UN Climate Change Conference, the largest political event ever held in Europe.



At COP15 the logistics team successfully met the BS8901 standard with the active support of Copenhagen hotels, venues and transport partners. This raised awareness levels for sustainability and showed that Denmark was engaging with meeting industry suppliers and intent on becoming a world leader in sustainability. Out of this experience came the Danish Sustainable Events Initiative (DSEI).

Andreas Clausen Boor, deputy logistics chief of EU2012, explains the Danish government's approach to sustainable event management:

"We started planning the new presidency and we realised we wanted to do it in a sustainable way. We had good experience from COP15, the climate summit held in Copenhagen in 2009. But we wanted a strategic and integrated approach to sustainability, which is why we went for ISO20121."

Due to the scale and complexity of the EU Presidency, this project was the most ambitious event certification project attempted in the business meetings and events sector. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised over 100 meetings from January 1st to June 30th, attracting more than 15.000 participants (including 400 ministers and 2000 press) visiting Copenhagen and the city of Horsens in central Jutland.

Adding to the Presidency's sustainability, the meetings were held in only three venues: Bella Center from January to April, Forum Horsens from April to June

and Eigtveds Pakhus in Copenhagen throughout the presidency for small meetings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged 10 high level meetings (ministers and other VIPs) and up to 90 meetings at expert/civil servant level.

In fact, with a team of just 22 people, the logistics team delivered an EU Presidency at a fraction of the total cost of past Presidencies. These savings were an important result of the sustainable event management system.

SGS INVOLVEMENT

The SGS auditor met with Andreas Clausen Boor and his logistics team in October 2011 and undertook a gap analysis. The auditor returned in early 2012 to check the management system was in place, and then chose the most complicated meeting – the Financial Ministers meeting – to audit.

"They did a very good job," said the SGS auditor. "The meeting went smoothly and everyone was very relaxed. In addition, they achieved their success with a very small team. They involved partners and venues from the start to deliver a very good sustainability performance using the minimum of resources. This is an important lesson."

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SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES IN PLACE

"We had a number of initiatives in place," says Andreas Clausen Boor. "For example, we had lanyards made from recycled materials that we collected from guests. We didn't use cut flowers so we reduced waste. We cut CO2-emissions and costs by using tap water only."

"We showed we cared about resources, waste and CO2 emissions. We used biodegradable plastic glasses, electricity from Danish Wind Turbines, and we had a waste management system in place around the venue, sorting all the waste into categories. We even had carpets made from corn in the conference venues".

"We adopted sustainable initiatives in the kitchen too. Our menus were based on seasonal ingredients from local suppliers. And 50% of all our groceries came from Scandinavia. All our food waste was redirected to a plant and converted into energy for Danish households.

"It's also important in building a sustainable event to look at what we do outside the event hall. We only used eco-certified hotel rooms, and we chose a location close to public transportation.

Another important lesson was that demanding sustainable products and documentation for sustainability policies from our suppliers in connection with our procurement made sustainability a competition parameter. This meant that we got sustainable products without having to spend more money. In fact, I believe our focus on sustainability and therefore also on not overusing resources have reduced the overall cost of the presidency."

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT A STANDOUT EXAMPLE OF INNOVATION

The SGS auditor highlighted the team's software development as a key standout feature. "Their approach was highly innovative. By making their software the basis for the event planning it was easy for them to do the right thing from a sustainability point of view in a very efficient way."

For example, attendees were presented with a choice of hotels online that met the team's criteria for sustainability. As well, the team knew the means of transport used by the attendees. One of their partners was a local airline, which committed to offset the carbon emissions generated by the flights of the attendees that used their company for these meetings..

In this way, the team was able to collect its own sustainability performance management data accurately.

MINISTRY SUCCESSFULLY DEMONSTRATES KEY ISO20121 SUSTAINABILITY VALUES

The Ministry also successfully demonstrated the key sustainability values of leadership, legacy, integrity, transparency, stewardship and inclusivity, as required by the ISO20121 standard.

"They proved their leadership credentials by being the first presidency to have done anything like this, and raised the profile of Denmark as an event organiser," says the SGS auditor.

"And they did this not only by delivering a coherent, systematic approach to sustainability but also by verifying the system and the results."

In addition, the team leaves a powerful and long-lasting legacy. Firstly, the team worked closely with three local venues, each with its own local suppliers that were given the chance to showcase Danish products.

Secondly, the team has produced a series of videos on You Tube, alongside press releases and blog postings, each designed to raise awareness of the achievement.

SUSTAINABILITY GOING FORWARD

Following the successful IOS20121 Sustainable Events Management System Certification the DSEI will leverage the momentum of the 2012 EU Presidency to inspire businesses to greater collaboration, innovation and sustainable development.

"My great hope is that receiving our certificate will show we have produced the first ever sustainable presidency, and that we can serve as an example and show that Denmark is capable of producing events of this magnitude in a sustainable way," adds Andreas Clausen Boor.

ABOUT SGS

SGS is the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company. SGS is recognised as the global benchmark for quality and integrity. With more than 70,000 employees, SGS operates a network of over 1,350 offices and laboratories around the world.

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