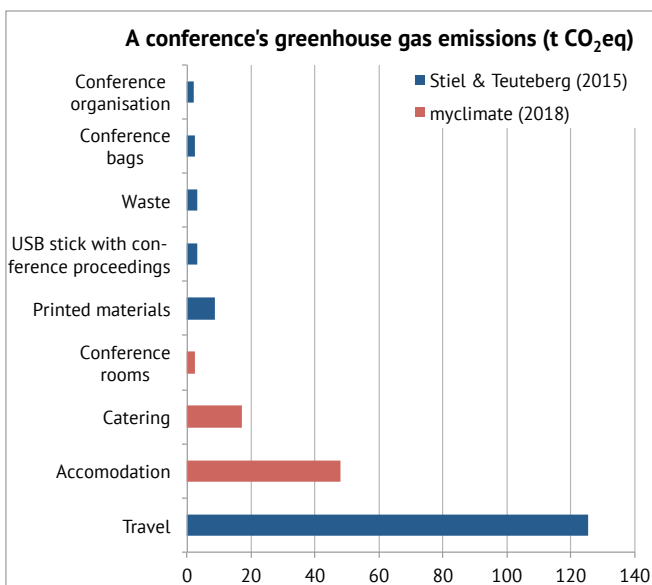


## Guideline: Sustainable Events

### Background

Events involving external participants are regularly held at universities. These include international conferences, workshops and local events. International events especially have a considerable impact on the environment as the participants have to travel to attend. Using greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as an example indicator for environmental impact, the following figure provides an overview of the emissions caused by a typical conference:



Impact on the climate of a three-day conference with 800 participants [1-3]. It was assumed that this conference takes place in Central Europe and thus around 60% of the participants are still able to travel to and from it by train [1]. A higher proportion of air travel would considerably increase the GHG emissions.

For ETH Zurich and University of Zurich, sustainability in research, teaching and operations is of great importance. Sustainability should therefore also be factored into the organisation of events. These guidelines reveal what aspects are relevant for a sustainable event. For local events, please go straight to the section "On site" (p. 2).

#### In a nutshell: Tips for sustainable events

You can reduce the environmental impact most effectively by adopting event formats that limit travel. These include **virtual events** or even decentralised events at various locations which are connected virtually. If this is not possible, participants should travel to and from the event by **train** whenever they can. Recommend **accommodation** that is situated as closely to the venue as possible and stands out on account of its environmentally friendly or social commitment. During the event, you should ensure **accessibility**, provide a public transport pass, offer sustainable **catering**, avoid **waste** and ideally make do without **printed event materials** and freebies. **Inform** the participants that this is organised as a sustainable event and pass on your experiences to others.

**Communication** is important to inform participants that they are attending a sustainable event and how they can do their bit. Pass on your experiences (best practices, challenges) to others.

**As a general rule**, the more of the following criteria are adhered to, the more sustainable the event will be. However, it is clear from the figure that we can only refer to an event as "sustainable" if at least the pollution from travel can be reduced. In contrast, doing without printed event materials for instance is a step in the right direction, yet it usually only compensates for one to ten flights.

### Virtual or physical event

Cutting down on travel is the most effective measure for a sustainable event.

- **Virtual event:** The most environmentally friendly way is to hold an event virtually. The GHG emissions caused are very small in comparison [4, 5]. Moreover, it also enables researchers with a limited budget and from far and wide to attend [6]. If this is not possible, the environmental impact can be reduced by holding an event at several locations with virtual links between the venues [7, 8].
- **Physical event:** The environmental impact can be reduced considerably by selecting a central venue – taking into account the participants' starting point [9]. The train should be recommended as the primary means of transport and the event schedule adjusted so that it is possible to travel in by (night) train from the cities from which the majority of participants are coming. Moreover, a live transmission on the Internet or a webcast should be offered and indicated in the invitation.

### Accommodation

After travel, overnight stays in hotels are responsible for the largest share of GHG emissions [1]. The following aspects should be taken into consideration when choosing hotels.

- **Public transport accessibility:** Hotels near the venue, which are easy to reach by public transport or on foot, reduce the environmental pollution caused by commuting. The conference fee should include a public transport pass for the duration of the event.
- **Labels:** Recommend or reserve hotels that have independently assessed sustainability certificates. Ask your local tourist organisation for an overview of such hotels. If you have a long-standing collaboration with a hotel, ask them to what extent ecological and social aspects (e.g. accessibility) are integrated in the business.

## On site

The following aspects should be considered on site:

- **Catering:** The [Guideline Sustainable Catering](#) describes the most important criteria for sustainable catering. These can also be applied to external restaurant recommendations [10].
- **Waste concept:** The primary goal should be to avoid waste, followed by recycling. For recycling, separate, well-labelled containers should be provided.
- **Avoiding printed event materials:** Materials should be provided electronically in advance, not printed out. Printouts that cannot be avoided should be printed on both sides [11]. Programme information can be displayed in a central place on site. Discuss with your sponsors if they can do without (extensive) advertising brochures.
- **Avoiding carrier bags, notepads and pens:** If bags are unavoidable, those made of recycled plastic which meets the criteria of the “Blaue Engel” label are the most environmentally friendly option [12]. Cotton and nylon bags should be avoided [12-14].
- **Freebies:** When offering material freebies for participants and gifts for speakers, there is the risk that they do not need them. Symbolic gifts that constitute a donation for social or ecological projects are a sustainable alternative.
- **Accessibility:** This enables people with limited mobility or impaired vision or hearing to attend. Ask participants upon registration whether and which supportive technologies they require [15].
- **Safety and Health:** To ensure the safety of participants, follow the [“UZH-Richtlinie zur Gewährleistung von Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei Veranstaltungen an der UZH”](#).

## Offsetting GHG emissions

Unavoidable GHG emissions can be compensated for in monetary form. As this is often criticised [16, 17], avoiding emissions directly should take precedence. For compensation, suppliers with high project standards should be selected. These are discernible from a “Gold Standard” award, for instance.

Further information	
Arrival	Tools to calculate the GHG emissions of the journey to the venue, are for instance <a href="#">Ecopassenger</a> or <a href="#">mobitool</a> .
Labels for accommodation	<a href="#">Fairunterwegs</a> provides an overview of sustainability labels for accommodation. The <a href="#">Schweizer Hoteldatenbank</a> has a list containing the filters “Green Living” and “Sustainable Living”.
Freebies	Gifts where the majority of the amount spent constitutes a donation to sustainability projects are available from <a href="#">Heks</a> or <a href="#">Helvetas</a> , for instance.
Accessibility	The <a href="#">Fachstelle Studium und Behinderung</a> will gladly advise you on the topic.
Safety and Security	The <a href="#">Abteilung Sicherheit und Umwelt</a> will gladly advise you on the topic.

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