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Sustainability Practices of Mega Events in Portugal: A Qualitative Case Study of Web Summit Lisbon

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Session 15 - Virtual Presentation: SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE PROJECTS IN TOURISM

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Introduction

Mega events are large-scale international events with significant economic, social, and media impact. They involve high levels of organization, infrastructure investment, and tourist mobility (Ludvigsen and Rookwood, 2022).

They usually attract international audiences, investors, and tourism flows. They can influence destination image and urban development for many years (Ludvigsen and Rookwood, 2022).



Source: websummit.com, Media



Source: websummit.com, Media

Introduction

Mega events have become increasingly important in global tourism development

These events attract large numbers of international visitors and global media attention. Portugal has strengthened its position as an international event destination in recent years (Cerezo-Esteve, Inglés, Segui-Urbaneja et al, 2022)

Despite economic benefits, mega events also generate environmental and social challenges.

Research objective



Source: websummit.com, Media

- Analyse the environmental footprint of mega events in Portugal through the Web Summit Lisbon.
- Identify sustainable management practices. Compare the literature with the Web Summit case.
- Propose recommendations

Management strategies **Sustainable practices** **Possible solutions**

Sustainable Development Goals

Qualitative research methodology focused on literature analysis

1. Environmental Impacts of Mega Events
2. Tourism and Overtourism Effects
3. Infrastructure and Urban Sustainability
4. Sustainable Management Strategies





Negative impacts

Environmental Impacts

- High carbon emissions caused by international transportation and energy consumption
- Excessive use of water and electricity
- Large amounts of waste generated by visitors and event operations
- Increased ecological footprint by temporary infrastructures and logistics

(Kim, Han; Kim et al., 2022)

Urban and Social Impacts

- Urban congestion caused by increased visitor concentration
- Overtourism and pressure on public spaces and local services
- Stress on transportation systems and local infrastructure
- Possible negative impacts on residents and local communities

(Kim, Han; Kim et al, 2022)

Environmental Issue	Sustainable Responses Proposed in the Literature
High carbon emissions (especially from air travel)	Carbon accounting, carbon offset programmes, hybrid/virtual participation, promotion of rail travel and low-carbon transport
High energy consumption	Renewable energy sources, energy-efficient venues, LED lighting, smart energy management systems
Food waste	Sustainable catering, accurate demand forecasting, food donation programmes, apps such as *Too Good To Go*
Packaging and plastic waste	Zero-waste policies, reusable materials, banning single-use plastics and improved recycling systems
Traffic congestion	Public transport incentives, park-and-ride systems, cycling and walking infrastructure
Unsustainable buildings	Green building certifications (LEED, BREEAM), natural lighting, natural ventilation, energy-efficient design
Lack of integrated sustainability planning	Triple Bottom Line (People, Planet, Profit) framework, sustainability management system
Unsustainable mobility	Sustainable mobility plans, public transport, carpooling, electric mobility, bicycle infrastructure
Unsustainable food supply chains	Local and seasonal sourcing, sustainable procurement, responsible catering practices
Limited stakeholder collaboration	Public-private partnerships, stakeholder engagement, environmental education, "eco-champions" within organizations
High dependence on physical attendance	Hybrid and virtual event formats, digital technologies, online participation platforms

Framework

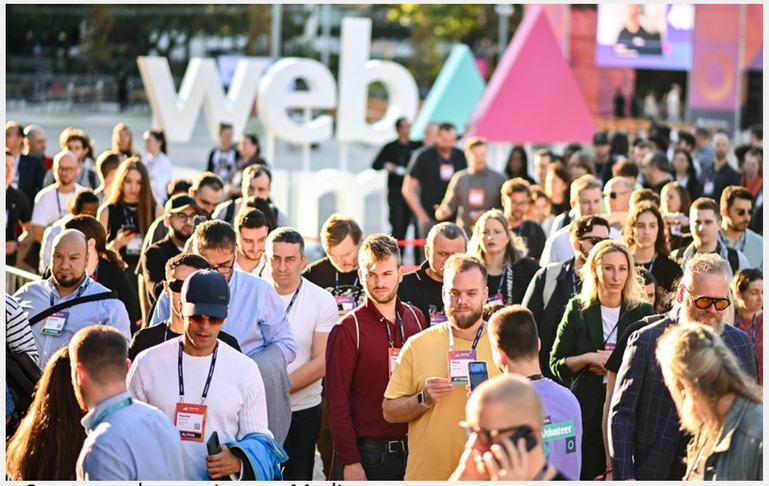
Case study

Web Summit Lisbon is one of the world's largest and most influential annual technology conferences, bringing together over 70,000 attendees in Lisbon, Portugal, for networking, talks, and insights into the future of tech, marketing, and venture capitalism (Web Summit, n.d.).

- Attracts thousands of international participants every year
- Strong focus on innovation, technology, and smart city development
- Frequently associated with sustainability initiatives and green mobility discourse

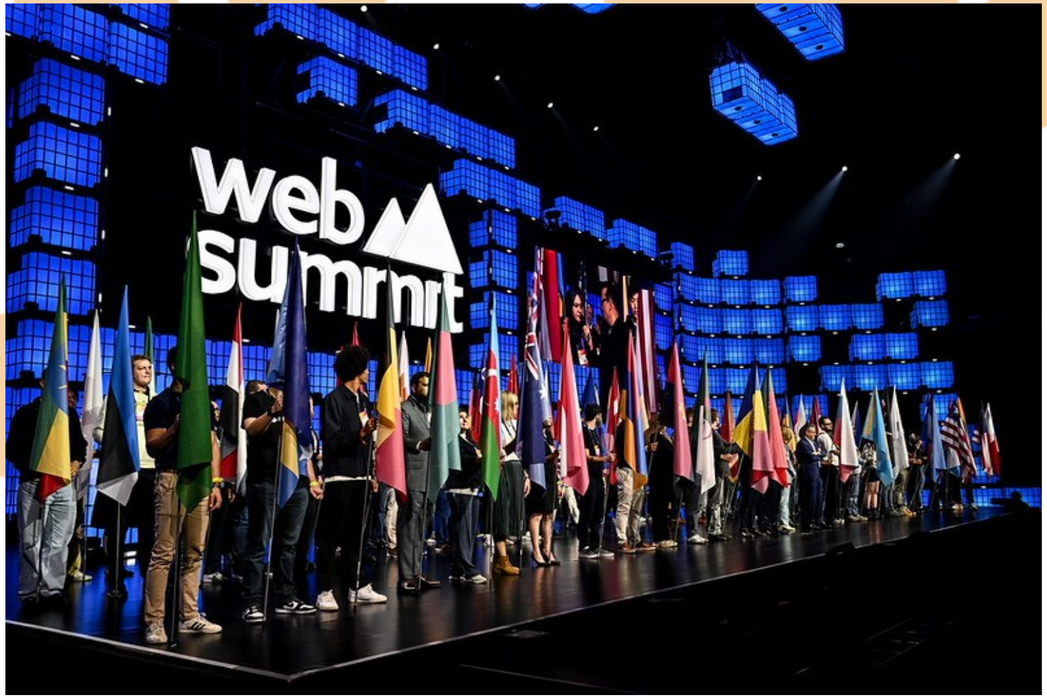


Source: websummit.com, Media



Source: websummit.com, Media

Results



Source: websummit.com, Media

Good Sustainability Practices

- ✓ Food donation programmes
- ✓ Reduced single-use plastics
- ✓ Public transport promotion
- ✓ Local procurement
- ✓ Stakeholder partnerships
- ✓ Sustainability strategy aligned with SDGs

(Web Summit, 2026)

⚠ Air travel emissions

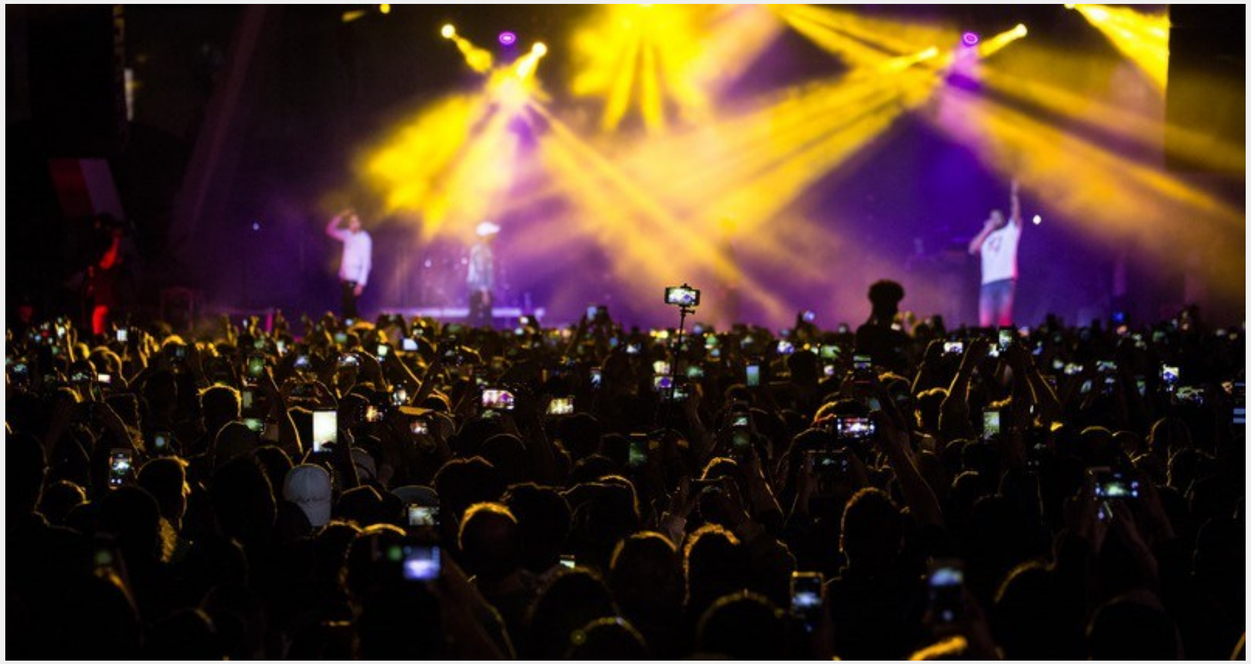
⚠ Limited energy transparency

Dependence on in-person attendance

Conclusion

Innovation and sustainability should go hand in hand. Mega events can continue to drive tourism development while reducing their environmental footprint through responsible planning and continuous improvement.

- Expand hybrid participation.
- Encourage rail travel.
- Publish standardized sustainability reports.
- Increase renewable energy use.
- Strengthen sustainability requirements for exhibitors.



Source: websummit.com, Media

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