

Sustainable events? Absolutely.

And this also works in times of crisis, as GUTcert has determined in the first audits according to the **ISO 20121 standard for sustainable event management.**

In the first part of our series, you will learn more about the development of the sustainability management system according to ISO 20121 to date and the difference between management and "management with a system".

In 2012, just in time for the London Olympics, the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) published the first industry-specific standard on Sustainable Event Management (NVMS). However, the Olympics remained the only event to be certified for a long time after that: At that time, the environmental management system according to EMAS (Eco Management and Audit Scheme) was still preferred as proof of sustainability. The holistic approach of ISO, which incorporates all three pillars of sustainable development - economic success, environmental protection and the social - was not initially accepted by market players. However, this was very likely also due to the fact that EMAS was much better known than the ISO standard at that time.¹

ISO Pioneers ahead!

Only in 2018 were isolated other major events certified according to ISO 20121, such as Formula E or the G7 Summit - the first global signals for the turnaround in awareness in terms of sustainability. In Germany, there was a change of heart in 2019 and GUTcert received an increasing number of certification inquiries. The change was triggered primarily by tenders from the public sector. But also in large corporations, banks, etc., proof of sustainability in business and event organization became an obligatory criterion.

The market demanded more sustainability in the industry. Event agencies, event venues, stand builders, caterers and logistics providers were looking for the best solutions: Many initial discussions were held with certifiers, training providers and consultants at the turn of 2019 / 2020.

And then came Corona...

Unfortunately, the Covid 19 pandemic immediately put a stop to this welcome momentum. Only after the shock of the first few months did cautious inquiries reach us again bit by bit - at the moment, it's a matter of sheer survival in the event industry. On the other hand, those responsible now have more time to deal with what is still a new topic for many. After all, the "introduction of a management system" project is a complex task that takes a lot of time: Sufficient time and personnel resources are indispensable, especially during the set-up phase.



Especially during a crisis, however, it can make a lot of sense to deal with such an extensive task. Obtaining a certificate as proof of sustainability in organization and implementation may serve as a competitive advantage in tendering procedures during and especially after the crisis. And a common task is important to weld teams together and not lose momentum.

¹ The comparison between ISO 20121 and EMAS can be found at: https://www.gut-cert.de/files/content/download/Nachhaltige_Entwicklung/EMAS_vs_ISO_20121.pdf



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Audits in pandemic times - initial experience

Even in these difficult times, GUTcert accompanies market players on the path to certification. In a series of field reports on various focal points of the introduction of the management system we give our impressions.

This first publication focuses on sustainable goal setting, the process-oriented approach of ISO and the design of management documentation.

The understanding of the impact of one's own activities on the environment and society (in the language of ISO 20121 "sustainability action areas") is largely already present in the event industry. Many companies are making an effort of their own accord to decide on more sustainable options in execution together with customers/clients within the framework of the available budget. So far, there has not been a lack of will, but rather a lack of a systematic approach based on an ISO standard that firmly anchors the sustainable approach in the operational business.

A management with system - what is it?

The ISO world for management systems defines² the term "management" as "coordinated activities for leading and controlling an organization"; while a system is understood as "a totality of elements that are meaningfully interrelated and influence each other".

Bringing both terms together to explain a management system results in a "set of interrelated or interacting elements [...] to establish **policies, objectives, and processes to** achieve those objectives."

Accordingly, a management system is an "**operational management system**" that enables the systematic implementation of the company's policy and the achievement of its objectives.

Sustainable event management

...without system

- ▶ Integration of sustainability-relevant solutions in VA planning
 - sometimes / always?
- ▶ Collecting best practice examples
- ▶ Occasional exchange of experience with - suppliers and other operating partners
- ▶ As a rule, more likely to be due to isolated personal involvement

...with system

- ▶ Mandatory alignment and continuous control of operational and management processes in the direction of sustainability
- ▶ Work instructions and defined procedures contain the points that are sustain able for all employees
- ▶ Defined documentation and communication obligations with regard to the implementation of sustainability topics in day-to-day business

² Definitions according to ISO 9000:2015



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Conclusion Part 1

Sustainability is not a novelty in the event industry. We have seen this with our certification customers and heard it from many conversations with different players in the German event market who inquired about certification during the year - even before the COVID pandemic.

Much is already being thought about, such as regional and organic food, waste avoidance energy consumption and logistics and associated emissions. What has mostly been missing so far is a systematic approach that can be used to effectively incorporate all relevant sustainability issues into the operational system and set the wheels of continuous improvement of sustainability-relevant performance in motion.

Introducing a management system is challenging and a task that takes some time and energy. But it is easier to flesh out something that is "actually already there" than to start from scratch with the topic of sustainability.

In the next part of the publication series, we will shed light on the structure of an ISO management system: What constitutes a management system and what benefits does it bring? Which building blocks should it consist of?

If you can't or don't want to wait for the series publications, feel free to attend our Sustainable Event Management [seminar](#).

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