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Sustainability at Essen Light Festival

an Imagine Peace Sustainability Report

October 2025



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1. Introduction

The Essen Light Festival is one of Germany's most prominent urban light art events and a flagship cultural highlight of the Ruhr region. Since its launch in 2016, the festival has steadily expanded in scope and visibility, transforming the city centre of Essen into a walkable stage for immersive light installations, large-scale projections and interactive artworks. Now in its 10th edition, the festival attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors and has earned national recognition for its artistic quality, innovative curatorial approach and contribution to city branding. Showcasing both international and local artists, the Essen Light Festival celebrates creativity, community and the transformative potential of light in public space.

Held annually in late September and early October, the festival stretches across central urban spaces—from the main square Kennedyplatz through the main pedestrian zone to selected architectural landmarks—creating an accessible and vibrant atmosphere for audiences of all ages. Signature features include 3D video mappings, sculptural installations and interactive elements that invite visitors to slow down, explore and engage with light-based art. As a member of the International Light Festivals Organisation (ILO), the festival also fosters international collaboration, professional knowledge exchange and cross-border partnerships.

In 2025, the Essen Light Festival deepened its commitment to sustainability and stakeholder engagement through its participation in the Imagine Peace project, which included conducting a sustainability audit based on multiple guidelines assessing economic, social and environmental dimensions. As part of this process, a public questionnaire was distributed from October 2nd to October 17th, 2025, covering the entire festival period and several additional days to maximise participation. The survey gathered a total of 163 responses, out of which 125 fully completed and an additional 24 partially usable. Promotion of the survey was carried out via QR codes printed and distributed on site at one key festival location, where three tablets were also made available for visitors to complete the questionnaire on the spot. Additional social media posts further supported the outreach and encouraged participation.

Building on the insights collected through this questionnaire, as well as contributions from the festival organisers and members of the audit committee, a structured sustainability audit was conducted on December 4th, 2025 to evaluate the festival's performance at the management, processes and results levels. The "results" level was primarily informed by the questionnaire responses and enriched through collaborative discussion. The audit consisted of a half-day online workshop involving the scientific partners, the Essen Light Festival team, a representative of the partner association Visualia Festival of Light, and a local stakeholder. Each guideline was reviewed individually, with points assigned based on available evidence and stakeholder input, resulting in a comprehensive assessment of the festival's alignment with ecological, social and economic sustainability objectives. The following report presents the outcomes of this process¹.

¹ This document is a report in line with the expected deliverables listed in Work Package 3 – Sustainability of the Imagine Peace project: <https://imaginepeaceproject.eu/>.

2. Economic Sustainability



	Guideline	Guideline ID	Relevance Points (RP)	Scoring Points (SP)	Weighted Points (RP*SP)
Management	Selection of Installations	C 1.1.	4	3	12
	Stakeholder Involvement	C 1.2.	4	4	16
	Financial Planning	C 1.3.	3	3	9
	Risk Assessment	C 1.4.	1	3	3
	Employee Wellbeing	C 1.5.	3	2	6
	Workforce Management	C 1.6.	2	2	4
	Knowledge Management	C 1.7.	3	2	6
	Total Management				
Processes	Financial Flows	C 2.1.	1	4	4
	Knowledge Capture	C 2.2.	2	3	6
	Quality Controls	C 2.3.	4	2	8
	Public Relations Strategy	C 2.4.	4	2	8
	Supplier Reliability	C 2.5.	3	4	12
	Dealing with Complaints	C 2.6.	3	2	6
	Total Processes				
Results	Festival Continuity	C 3.1.	1	4	4
	Economic and Tourism Value	C 3.2.	4	2	8
	Sponsoring	C 3.3.	3	4	12
	Perceived Communication	C 3.4.	3	2	6
	Complaints	C 3.5.	2	2	4
	Total Results				
Total					134/200 (67%)

Table 1: Overview of the Economic Sustainability Guidelines

2.1. Assessment Level: Management

2.1.1. Selection of Installations (C 1.1.)

The festival's installation selection process is led by experts and curators who ensure a diverse and artistically strong programme. During the audit, it became clear that the overall conceptual quality of the installations was successfully achieved. The artistic concepts were well aligned with the festival mission and were positively perceived by the wide target group, which includes experts, families, and visitors of all ages.

Technical feasibility is generally considered during the selection process, and most installations were suitable for the festival setting. However, the audit revealed that weather-related risks (particularly wind and rain, which are typical for Essen during this season) require stronger consideration, as these conditions caused disruptions during the event.

Cost and financial feasibility play an important role due to a limited overall budget. The festival team demonstrated awareness of this constraint by carefully assessing production, transport, installation, and maintenance expenses while still ensuring a high-quality artistic programme.

Artist reliability is ensured through individual agreements that clearly define roles, responsibilities, and expectations. These agreements help secure smooth collaboration and reinforce the professionalism required from participating artists.

Overall, the selection process shows strong achievements in conceptual quality, responsible budgeting, and reliable artist partnerships, with room for further improvement in considering weather-related technical risks.

2.1.2. Stakeholder Involvement (C 1.2.)

The festival demonstrates a strong and structured approach to stakeholder involvement. More than seven stakeholders (including local associations, cultural institutions, and municipal authorities) actively contribute to the organisational process. Their engagement is formalised through official invitations, structured meetings, and documented exchanges, ensuring that diverse perspectives and relevant expertise are systematically integrated into festival planning.

Additionally, the opening ceremony included a dedicated event for stakeholders, further underscoring the organisers' commitment to transparent communication and formal collaboration. This comprehensive and well-organised involvement process supports informed decision-making and strengthens the festival's connection to the local community and institutional partners.

2.1.3. Financial Planning (C 1.3.)

The festival demonstrates a solid and well-structured approach to financial planning. Detailed budgeting processes are in place, and financial planning is continuously updated throughout the organisational phase. As a public organisation, the festival team maintains clear and comprehensive documentation of all financial flows, ensuring transparency and accountability in the management of public funds.

The financial structure relies heavily on sponsorships, which are effectively integrated into the planning process. However, this dependence also introduces vulnerabilities, as replacing withdrawn sponsors at short notice is challenging. While core financial planning elements (such as detailed budgets, documentation, and compliance procedures) are well established, some minor aspects, particularly related to systematic risk assessment, require further development to strengthen overall financial resilience.

Overall, the festival shows strong financial governance supported by transparent public-sector documentation practices, with opportunities to enhance its risk management processes.

2.1.4. Risk Assessment (C 1.4.)

The festival has established a structured risk management approach that addresses both technical and operational risks associated with installations in public spaces. A general risk assessment is conducted, and potential hazards (such as electrical issues or the need for cables to be placed on the ground) are actively considered. On-site teams and technicians are well-informed about the risks and remain present throughout the festival to ensure safety and respond quickly to emerging issues. Technical feasibility checks are carried out through pre-festival tests and simulations, allowing the team to identify and resolve potential problems before the event begins. The festival itself maintains public liability insurance, and artists are expected to provide professional liability insurance. While this requirement is included in the contractual agreements, not all artists were sufficiently informed about the necessity of supplying proof of insurance, indicating room to strengthen communication and enforcement.

Overall, the festival's risk management practices show clear preventive action, structured procedures, and appropriate insurance coverage, with an opportunity to improve compliance regarding artists' insurance obligations.

2.1.5. Employee Wellbeing (C 1.5.)

The festival benefits from a stable and cohesive team, with strong informal collaboration and a director who actively ensures that key information is shared among staff members. Team members rely heavily on each other's expertise, and knowledge is generally maintained through ongoing, informal communication within the group.

While this close teamwork supports smooth operations, knowledge preservation currently depends largely on the continuity of individuals rather than on formal structures. There is no systematic archiving process, and information is primarily kept through experience and internal coordination. As a result, the organisation shows early steps toward maintaining employee wellbeing and knowledge continuity but still has opportunities to formalise workflows, document responsibilities, and strengthen long-term retention strategies.

2.1.6. Workforce Management (C 1.6.)

The festival operates with a small but committed team that manages the core organisational tasks effectively. Despite limited staffing, the team can coordinate and deliver the festival, demonstrating solid internal organisation and practical allocation of responsibilities.

However, the small team size also creates vulnerabilities. If a team member becomes unavailable during the festival, replacement is difficult, as the budget does not allow for hiring additional permanent staff or expanding the pool of responsible personnel. While the current structure enables the festival to function, additional staffing or more flexible personnel resources would help reduce workload pressures and improve resilience during unforeseen situations.

Overall, workforce management is functional and reliable but would benefit from increased capacity to support the team and reduce operational risks.

2.1.7. Knowledge Management (C 1.7.)

The festival benefits from active knowledge sharing within the team, supported by online tools and real-time communication channels such as shared digital platforms and a WhatsApp group used during the festival. These tools ensure that essential information is accessible to organisers and facilitate smooth coordination in day-to-day operations.

While internal processes are not formally documented, the organisation engages in structured knowledge exchange at the international level, particularly through participation in IP and ILO meetings. These platforms enable systematic sharing of experiences, learning from other festivals, and contributing to broader professional networks. This external exchange enriches organisational knowledge and provides valuable insights for ongoing development.

Internally, however, knowledge management remains informal, and there is no dedicated system for storing processes, insights, or best practices. As a result, the organisation has a functioning but limited approach to knowledge retention, with strong external exchange but room to formalise internal structures for long-term continuity.

2.2. Assessment Level: Processes

2.2.1. Financial Flows (C 2.1.)

The festival maintains a highly transparent and comprehensive financial documentation system. Although there are no ticket sales, all other financial flows (including sponsorship income, staff and artist payments, and supplier-related expenses) are systematically recorded. As a municipal institution, the organising body adheres to strict public-sector requirements, ensuring that every incoming and outgoing invoice is documented and traceable.

This level of oversight minimizes the risk of untracked financial flows and supports effective financial planning. The thoroughness of the documentation reflects strong financial governance and contributes to the overall financial stability and accountability of the festival.

2.2.2. Knowledge Capture (C 2.2.)

The festival demonstrates several effective practices for capturing and transferring knowledge across the different phases of the event. Before the festival, research is conducted by reviewing proposals and drawing on insights gained through international projects and associations, allowing organisers to integrate best practices into planning. During the festival, continuous real-time communication ensures that artists, curators, and organisers can quickly exchange information and resolve issues collaboratively.

Following the event, informal post-festival reflections take place, enabling the team to discuss experiences and identify areas for improvement. While these activities support learning and operational development, the organisation does not yet have a dedicated manager or centralized system to formally archive knowledge, meaning insights remain distributed across individuals rather than consolidated in a structured format.

2.2.3. Quality Controls (C 2.3.)

The festival applies several quality control measures to ensure that installations function effectively and contribute positively to the visitor experience. Although the festival does not have a changing motto, it focuses on specific aspects each year, ensuring thematic direction. Pre-festival planning and checks are conducted, enabling the team to assess feasibility and address potential issues.

After the festival, a structured discussion is held to evaluate what worked well and what could be improved. These formal reflections help the organisers document key insights and refine planning for future editions. While these practices provide a foundation for quality control, the system remains mostly practical and experience-based, with opportunities to introduce more formalised and comprehensive procedures.

2.2.4. Public Relations Strategy (C 2.4.)

The festival employs a public relations approach that makes use of multiple communication channels and addresses different target audiences. Various materials and platforms are used to reach the public, demonstrating an awareness of the diverse ways in which attendees seek information.

However, the audit revealed opportunities to strengthen the overall planning and execution of communication efforts. Early communication could have been more timely, especially during the first

hours of the festival, when high visitor numbers caused parking challenges that might have been mitigated with clearer guidance. Attempts to distribute the visitor questionnaire via social media were also less effective than expected, indicating room to refine channel selection and messaging strategies. Overall, the festival has a moderately developed public relations strategy that makes use of several channels and audience groups. With more advanced planning (particularly regarding timing, clarity, and proactive visitor information) the communication approach could be further enhanced to support a smoother festival experience and deeper visitor engagement.

2.2.5. Supplier Reliability (C 2.5.)

The festival has established strong and dependable relationships with its suppliers, supported by formal agreements that ensure clarity and reliability. A diverse set of suppliers is engaged (especially for key technical components) reducing dependence on any single provider and strengthening the festival's resilience.

Organisers consciously spread responsibilities across multiple partners to mitigate risks and ensure continuity even if challenges arise with one supplier. The search for larger and more capable companies further reflects a forward-looking approach to strengthening logistical and technical support.

2.2.6. Dealing with Complaints (C 2.6.)

The festival has an established approach for receiving and responding to visitors' complaints, with inquiries typically directed at the public relations department. Depending on the communication channel chosen by the visitor, responses are provided by the responsible team members, ensuring that feedback is acknowledged across multiple platforms.

While this system ensures that complaints are received and answered, the response process remains informal, and the timeline for handling issues is not yet clearly defined. While there is openness to public feedback, a centralized, time-bound procedure is absent.

Overall, the festival demonstrates a responsive attitude toward visitors' concerns, acknowledging and addressing feedback across various channels. There is potential to enhance this system by centralizing the process and introducing clearer timelines for response and resolution.

2.3. Assessment Level: Results

2.3.1. Festival Continuity (C 3.1.)

The survey results show a very strong outlook for the festival's long-term continuity and its ability to sustain and grow its visitor base. A clear majority of respondents (76.1%) reported having visited past editions, demonstrating a solid foundation of loyal, returning attendees.

Future intentions are even more positive. An overwhelming 87% of respondents stated they would visit the festival again, while only 2.9% indicated they would not. An additional 10.1% were undecided, representing further potential as they have not ruled out returning.

This combination of high past attendance and very strong intentions to revisit indicates both sustained loyalty and promising future growth.

2.3.2. Economic and Tourism Value (C 3.2.)

The survey results indicate that the festival generates meaningful economic and tourism value for the destination. A significant share of visitors (58.7%) reported that the festival was their main reason for traveling, demonstrating the event's capacity to attract non-local audiences and enhance the destination's visibility.

Among these visitors, 22.2% stayed overnight. While this represents a smaller portion of the group, it still contributes to measurable economic benefits, particularly in accommodation and related services during the season.

Visitor perceptions of the festival's economic contribution were more moderate, with an average rating of 4.22 out of 10. This indicates that, although the festival succeeds in drawing visitors and generating overnight stays, there remains potential to further strengthen and communicate its economic and tourism impact.

2.3.3. Sponsoring (C 3.3.)

The festival demonstrates strong performance in securing sponsorships that significantly contribute to its financial sustainability. More than five sponsors support the event, providing substantial funding that exceeds 20% of the overall budget. These partnerships not only ensure essential financial resources but also reinforce the festival's visibility and credibility by aligning with its mission and thematic focus. The breadth and strength of these collaborations highlight a well-established sponsorship network that enhances the festival's long-term resilience and its capacity to continue delivering a high-quality cultural offering.

2.3.4. Perceived Communication (C 3.4.)

Survey results indicate that the festival's communication is perceived as moderately effective by attendees. Satisfaction with communication before and during the event reached an average of 3.8, reflecting generally positive but not yet outstanding evaluations. The relevance of communication for participants was rated equally at 3.8, showing that visitors consider clear and timely information important for their festival experience.

The alignment of medium satisfaction and relevance suggests that communication performs reasonably well but still holds potential for improvement. Enhancing clarity, timeliness, and the accessibility of information could further support visitor expectations and strengthen overall audience engagement.

2.3.5. Complaints (C 3.5.)

Survey results show that visitors perceive their feedback and complaints as being partially considered, with an average rating of 3.45. This indicates that attendees generally feel heard, although there is room to strengthen responsiveness and visibility of follow-up actions.

More than 5% of respondents submitted feedback, suggesting that visitors are willing to share their opinions and that communication channels for doing so are active. The presence of submitted feedback, combined with medium–high satisfaction levels, reflects an engaged audience that sees value in contributing to the festival's improvement.

Overall, the festival demonstrates a functioning system for collecting and responding to visitor input, with opportunities to further enhance the perception of how feedback is acknowledged and acted upon.

3. Social Sustainability



	Guideline	Guideline ID	Relevance Points (RP)	Scoring Points (SP)	Weighted Points (RP*SP)
Management	Selection of Installations	S 1.1.	4	3	12
	Collaboration with Schools and Associations	S 1.2.	2	2	4
	Social Inclusion	S 1.3.	3	2	6
	Family Concept	S 1.4.	4	0	0
	Conflict Management (Residents)	S 1.5.	4	2	8
	Gender Concept	S 1.6.	1	2	2
	Employee Training	S 1.7.	2	4	8
	Total Management				
Processes	Noise Reduction	S 2.1.	1	2	2
	Light Pollution	S 2.2.	3	1	3
	Accessible Communication	S 2.3.	4	2	8
	Safety Measures	S 2.4.	4	2	8
	Active Participation	S 2.5.	4	2	8
	Parking	S 2.6.	1	2	2
	Total Processes				
Results	Light and Noise Disturbance	S 3.1.	1	2	2
	Traffic Disturbance	S 3.2.	2	2	4
	Cross-Generational Inclusiveness	S 3.3.	3	2	6
	Participants with Disabilities	S 3.4.	4	2	8
	Consideration of Local Needs	S 3.5.	3	3	9
	Total Results				
Total					100/200 (50%)

Table 2: Overview of the Social Sustainability Guidelines

3.1. Assessment Level: Management

3.1.1. Selection of Installations (S 1.1.)

The festival demonstrates strong engagement with several social sustainability aspects in the selection of installations. Participative works were present, encouraging visitors to actively engage. Local artistic involvement was integrated, strengthening the festival's regional cultural identity and supporting community-based creativity. At the same time, international participation was secured through the IP network, fostering cultural exchange and contributing to a diverse artistic programme. Gender balance, however, was not pursued as a selection criterion. The organisers prioritize artistic content and conceptual strength over gender representation, resulting in an imbalance in this area. Overall, the festival successfully incorporates participation, local engagement, and international cultural exchange into its selection process, contributing positively to its social sustainability profile.

3.1.2. Collaborations with Schools and Associations (S 1.2.)

The festival maintains ongoing collaborations with local schools, supporting creative engagement and participation among children and young people. In past editions, partnerships were established with up to three or four schools, where pupils worked in art lessons alongside local artists to create artworks that were later incorporated into festival installations. In the current edition, one school participated in the development of the "Imagine Peace" project. While the scale of collaborations varies from year to year, the engagement with at least one school demonstrates the festival's commitment to fostering local involvement of younger generations through artistic co-creation.

3.1.3. Social Inclusion (S 1.3.)

The festival places importance on social inclusiveness and ensures that basic accessibility measures are in place to support participation by people with disabilities. Guided tours were organised with the assistance of police and fire brigade services, helping visitors with mobility challenges navigate the festival environment safely. In areas where crowds became dense, staff members also provided individual support, such as helping wheelchair users move through narrow passages. While these actions enhance physical accessibility, no additional measures were implemented specifically for non-physical disabilities, such as hearing or visual impairments.

3.1.4. Family Concept (S 1.4.)

The festival places value on being welcoming and enjoyable for families, and many installations naturally appeal to children due to their visual and interactive character. However, there is currently no structured family concept guiding the planning, selection, or design of activities. While the festival succeeds in being family-friendly in practice, this occurs organically rather than through intentional programming. As a result, children can enjoy the festival experience, but there are no specific family-focused measures, such as dedicated children's programmes or structured initiatives designed specifically with families in mind.

3.1.5. Conflict Management (Residents) (S 1.5.)

While there is no formally structured conflict or complaint management system in place, the festival benefits from the organisers' extensive experience and their awareness of potential conflict areas within the city. Past editions have provided valuable insight into locations or situations that may create

disturbances for residents, allowing the team to proactively adjust plans and avoid issues before they arise.

Although responsibilities are not formally defined in a documented system, the organisers' practical knowledge and anticipatory approach help minimize complaints and maintain positive relations with the local community. The relatively low number of resident complaints reflects the effectiveness of this informal yet experience-based strategy.

3.1.6. Gender Concept (S 1.6.)

The festival follows a basic gender concept that reflects principles of equality and non-discrimination. Inclusive language and openness toward all genders are applied in communication and organisational practices, helping to create an environment that is welcoming and fair to participants and audiences. However, gender balance is not actively pursued in the selection of artists. While the festival upholds equality in principle, representation is not used as a guiding criterion, and no structured measures are in place to ensure balanced gender participation. The concept exists at a general level but is not strongly emphasized or systematically integrated into artistic programming or internal decision-making.

3.1.7. Employee Training (S 1.7.)

The festival demonstrates a strong commitment to staff development through knowledge exchange and practical learning opportunities. Employees and helpers regularly participate in best practice sharing, including workshops and visits to other festivals. In many cases, the entire team takes part in these learning tours, ensuring a broad transfer of insights and strengthening collective expertise. Additionally, active involvement in international networks such as the ILO provides further opportunities for structured exchange with other festival organisers. Although training is not formalised through a fixed internal programme, the engagement in external learning activities ensures that employees stay informed about industry standards, organisational approaches, and innovative practices.

3.2. Assessment Level: Processes

3.2.1. Noise Reduction (S 2.1.)

The festival adopts measures to manage and reduce noise impacts on residents. Many installations are intentionally kept at lower sound levels, and adjustments are routinely made to comply with legal regulations and community expectations. When complaints arise (or when issues were reported in previous years) the organisers respond by lowering volume levels or relocating installations to more suitable spots. This demonstrates a practical, experience-based approach to minimizing noise-related disturbances.

While these measures effectively address technical noise sources, broader communication initiatives to raise visitor awareness are not yet established.

3.2.2. Light Pollution (S 2.2.)

The festival currently addresses light pollution at a basic level. The main measure in place is avoiding projections directly onto residential buildings. Beyond this precaution, there are no structured assessments, detailed guidelines, or technical measures specifically aimed at minimizing light pollution. Wider considerations – such as evaluating light tones, communicating potential impacts to residents, or conducting regular reviews – are not implemented. Discussions within the ILO network have raised awareness about the topic, but no formal steps have been integrated into the festival's planning or communication strategy.

3.2.3. Accessible Communication (S 2.3.)

The festival takes some steps toward accessible communication, with inclusivity considered in parts of the information provided to visitors. Additional explanations were provided online, and some of the communication materials were designed to be clear and accessible to a wide audience.

However, these measures are not applied consistently. Some materials – especially the printed flyers – were sometimes found to be unclear or not intuitive, suggesting that plain language and accessible design were only partially implemented. While the intention to communicate inclusively is present, it is not yet supported by a structured or comprehensive strategy.

3.2.4. Safety Measures (S 2.4.)

Safety is treated as an important aspect of the festival, and several measures are in place to manage visitor security. A professional security company is contracted, and personnel are present across the festival area, although in some cases one person supervises multiple installations rather than being stationed at each location continuously. CCTV coverage is available in many areas, supporting general oversight.

These measures build on past experiences and reflect a heightened awareness of security needs, particularly in light of previous terror-related incidents in the region. However, some elements – such as continuous on-site monitoring or more installation-specific coverage – are not fully implemented. While preparations and risk considerations are carried out, the setup does not yet meet the level of comprehensive, integrated safety planning that includes all key elements.

3.2.5. Active Participation (S 2.5.)

The festival offers a limited but meaningful set of opportunities for public participation. A small number of installations encouraged visitors to engage directly, such as the Imagine Peace work by Claudia Reh involving also children in the creative process. Additional participatory elements took place before the festival in preparation for certain installations like the “tree of wishes” at the main square, which required school pupils to submit their wishes before the event.

While these initiatives contribute positively to community involvement and provide opportunities for visitors to actively participate, the overall number of interactive installations remains modest.

Participation opportunities exist but are not yet a central or extensive feature of the festival programme.

3.2.6. Parking (S 2.6.)

The festival relies on the city’s existing parking infrastructure, which provides a range of available spaces in and around the city centre. No additional parking services or temporary solutions were created. This approach is consistent with sustainability principles, as it avoids unnecessary land use or resource expenditure.

However, the audit noted challenges during peak times, particularly on the weekend, when many visitors arrived simultaneously and congestion occurred. The lack of strong incentives to use public transport also contributed to the heavy car traffic. Because festival visitors cannot be easily distinguished from other city visitors, implementing targeted measures such as dedicated shuttles would be difficult.

3.3. Assessment Level: Results

3.3.1. Light and Noise Disturbance (S 3.1.)

Survey results show that residents perceive a moderate increase in both light and noise levels during the festival. The average rating for additional light pollution was 2.7, while additional noise was rated at 2.65 on a 5-point Likert scale. These values indicate that the impacts are noticeable but remain within a medium range, not reaching levels considered highly disturbing.

3.3.2. Traffic Disturbance (S 3.2.)

Survey results indicate that residents and visitors perceive a moderate increase in traffic during the festival, with an average rating of 3.19 on a 5-point Likert scale. This suggests that congestion is noticeable but not at a level considered severe or highly disruptive.

Satisfaction with parking availability and organisation reached an average score of 3.33, indicating that while there are some challenges, visitors generally view the parking situation as acceptable. These results reflect a mixed but manageable mobility situation: increased traffic is felt by attendees, yet parking solutions still meet most visitors' needs.

3.3.3. Cross-Generational Inclusiveness (S 3.3.)

Survey results show that 10.4% of respondents belonged either to younger age groups or older adults, placing the festival within the medium range of cross-generational participation. This indicates that the festival attracts a mix of age groups, though younger and older visitors still represent a smaller share of the audience.

Some appealing initiatives for children and youth were present, for example, interactive installations which helped engage younger participants. However, these initiatives are limited in scope, and there are currently no tailored measures designed specifically for these age groups.

3.3.4. Participants with Disabilities (S 3.4.)

Survey results indicate a moderate level of perceived accessibility and inclusiveness for people with disabilities at the festival. Accessibility of installations received an average score of 3.5, while inclusivity was rated at 3.3, resulting in a combined average of 3.4 on a 5-point scale. These values suggest that visitors generally view the festival as reasonably accessible, though not yet fully inclusive.

The results reflect that many installations and areas can be accessed by people with mobility challenges, and that efforts toward inclusiveness are noticed by attendees. However, the scores also show that accessibility is not perceived as consistently strong across all elements of the festival. More targeted measures, particularly for non-physical disabilities or clearer communication, could further enhance the experience for visitors with diverse needs.

3.3.5. Consideration of Local Needs (S 3.5.)

Survey feedback indicates that residents feel their needs are considered to a good extent during the festival. The perceived consideration of local interests received an average score of 3.78, reflecting a medium-to-high level of satisfaction with how the festival integrates community concerns into its planning and execution.

At the same time, perceived disturbance to residents was relatively low, with an average score of 2.70. This suggests that, while the festival creates some additional activity, most respondents do not experience it as disruptive. A positive evaluation of how local needs are addressed, combined with the relatively low level of disruption, suggests that the festival integrates well into its urban setting.

4. Ecological Sustainability



	Guideline	Guideline ID	Relevance Points (RP)	Scoring Points (SP)	Weighted Points (RP*SP)
Management	Selection of Installations	E 1.1.	4	3	12
	Environment Management	E 1.2.	2	0	0
	Waste Prevention	E 1.3.	3	2	6
	Energy Saving Plan	E 1.4.	3	3	9
	Cooperation with Environmental Organisations	E 1.5.	1	0	1
	Life Cycle Assessment	E 1.6.	3	2	6
	Environmental Awareness	E 1.7.	4	0	0
	Total Management				
Processes	Energy Saving Measures	E 2.1.	1	2	2
	Wildlife Impact Measures	E 2.2.	3	0	0
	Public Transportation Support Measures	E 2.3.	4	0	0
	Environmentally Sustainable Printing	E 2.4.	2	2	4
	Environmentally Sustainable Resources	E 2.5.	3	2	6
	Technical Quality Controls	E 2.6.	4	2	8
	Total Processes				
Results	Energy Consumption	E 3.1.	3	3	9
	Energy Savings	E 3.2.	1	2	2
	Energy from Renewable Sources	E 3.3.	2	3	6
	Waste Generation	E 3.4.	3	2	6
	Sustainable Transportation	E 3.5.	4	3	12
	Total Results				
Total					89/200 (44,5%)

Table 3: Overview of the Ecological Sustainability Guidelines

4.1. Assessment Level: Management

4.1.1. Selection of Installations (E 1.1.)

Ecological considerations are increasingly integrated into the festival's installation selection process. Several sustainability-related aspects are actively taken into account. The use of sustainable or recycled materials is evident in multiple works, such as the Imagine Peace pallet-based installation. Energy efficiency is also prioritized, with organisers focusing on low-consumption solutions and communicating these efforts publicly, particularly in response to the recent energy crisis.

The festival additionally considers the use of alternative energy sources where possible and incorporates lifecycle planning into the selection process. Some installations (such as the Imagine Peace ones and other touring works) have documented plans for reuse or future exhibition, reducing waste and extending their artistic lifespan.

While not all ecological criteria have been fully integrated, and artistic quality remains the primary selection factor, the festival demonstrates a solid commitment to environmental sustainability by adopting several key measures. These efforts reflect a balanced approach that aligns creative goals with ecological responsibility.

4.1.2. Environmental Management (E 1.2.)

No formal environmental management plan is currently in place for the festival. The organisers do not implement specific environmental measures, as they perceive the festival's installations and activities to have minimal or no lasting ecological impact. While the city of Essen may have broader environmental policies, these are not integrated directly into festival planning or operations.

While the festival takes place in the city centre of Essen, which is a strongly urbanized area, aspects such as appointing an environmental officer, assessing wildlife impact, consulting environmental organisations, or documenting environmental measures are not addressed within the festival's organisational framework.

4.1.3. Waste Prevention (E 1.3.)

The festival applies several basic waste prevention measures, even though no dedicated festival-specific waste plan exists. Under city regulations, food vendors, pubs, and restaurants participating in the event are required to use reusable tableware and glasses. While these rules are not unique to the festival, they nevertheless help reduce single-use waste during the event. Many of the food trucks coordinated by Essen Marketing also follow these reusable-material requirements.

In addition, the festival makes efforts to minimize waste from printed materials by avoiding overproduction and limiting distribution to what is necessary. These practices support a more resource-efficient approach.

4.1.4. Energy-Saving Plan (E 1.4.)

The festival incorporates several energy-saving measures into its planning and selection of installations. When choosing artworks, the organisers prioritize energy-efficient and economically sustainable solutions, and they favor renewable energy sources whenever possible. These choices help reduce overall energy consumption and demonstrate an awareness of ecological and financial considerations.

Essen Marketing, as the organising body, also holds an official certificate confirming the adoption of energy-saving measures across its activities. This provides an additional framework supporting the festival's efforts and reflects a broader organisational commitment to responsible energy use.

While no compensation strategies or full energy-neutral concepts are implemented, the existing approach places the festival within a solid sustainability practice.

4.1.5. Cooperation with Environmental Organisations (E 1.5.)

There is currently no consultation or cooperation with environmental organisations in planning or implementing the festival. While past editions included isolated initiatives (such as a presentation in the city centre and a workshop in the park addressing environmental themes), these activities took place several years ago and are not part of the current festival practice.

As a result, environmental expertise is not actively integrated into decision-making, and recommendations from specialized organisations are not consulted or applied in preparing installations or managing ecological considerations.

4.1.6. Life Cycle Assessment (E 1.6.)

The festival does not conduct a full life cycle assessment but applies partial measures that relate to LCA principles. These efforts focus on measurable aspects, particularly the festival's energy consumption and the materials used for installations. Such considerations are guided largely by broader city regulations rather than a festival-specific strategy.

While these partial assessments provide some insight into environmental impacts, they are not embedded in a structured LCA framework, and no explicit strategy exists to systematically minimize negative outcomes across the full life cycle of the event.

4.1.7. Environmental Awareness (E 1.7.)

The festival does not currently implement measures aimed at raising environmental awareness.

Environmental themes are not part of the guiding concept for the event, and no structured communication or artistic initiatives address topics such as biodiversity, energy consumption, or light pollution in the present edition.

While the Imagine Peace installation introduces the possibility of engaging with environmental themes in the future, this represents an initial consideration rather than an established practice.

4.2. Assessment Level: Processes

4.2.1. Energy-Saving Measures (E 2.1.)

The festival incorporates some energy-saving measures into its operations, particularly through the optimisation of energy efficiency in installations. Organisers prioritize artworks that consume less energy and make use of modern, efficient technologies. In addition, compensation measures, such as turning off other public lighting during the festival, help balance overall energy consumption. However, no broader proactive initiatives are in place. Stakeholders such as local businesses are not specifically encouraged to adopt additional energy-saving practices, and no innovative strategies have been implemented to actively manage the increased energy demand associated with festival growth. Overall, the festival demonstrates partial progress in energy-saving measures, applying two key practices but leaving further opportunities for more comprehensive and proactive energy management.

4.2.2. Wildlife Impact Measures (E 2.2.)

The festival currently does not implement measures aimed at minimizing impacts on wildlife. No guidelines or selection criteria are in place to address environmentally sensitive practices, and no assessments or instructions are provided to artists regarding potential ecological effects.

There is also no consultation with environmental organisations or analysis of how installations might influence local ecosystems. As a result, even if the festival takes place in the city centre of Essen, which

is a strongly urbanized area with limited wildlife presence, wildlife-related considerations are not yet integrated into the festival's planning or operational processes.

4.2.3. Public Transportation Support Measures (E 2.3.)

No specific measures are currently implemented to promote the use of public transportation for reaching the festival. Although the event benefits from an already well-connected urban location with strong public transport options, the organisers do not actively encourage attendees to use these services. No recommendations are communicated via festival channels, and no additional transit enhancements or mobility incentives have been introduced.

As a result, sustainable mobility is not explicitly supported through festival-specific actions, and public transportation promotion remains outside the current scope of the festival's operational planning.

4.2.4. Environmentally Sustainable Printing (E 2.4.)

The festival has taken steps to reduce the environmental impact of its printed materials. Over recent years, the number of printed flyers has been significantly reduced, and in the most recent edition, most available flyers were distributed by the end of the festival, suggesting that overproduction was largely avoided.

Some materials are also made available online, helping to decrease reliance on printed communication. While the festival still uses print products, these reductions reflect an effort to be more resource efficient and limit unnecessary waste.

4.2.5. Environmentally Sustainable Resources (E 2.5.)

The festival applies some environmentally sustainable resource practices, though these are limited in scope. Reusability is supported through the use of rented materials and equipment, reducing the need for new purchases and minimising long-term waste. In addition, decorative elements are kept to a minimum. Other aspects of sustainable resource management (such as optimising transport to reduce long routes, prioritizing circular-economy principles, or systematically considering the environmental impact of artist travel) are not currently addressed. Some installations are transported from distant locations, and the organisers have limited visibility regarding how these materials are shipped.

4.2.6. Technical Quality Controls (E 2.6.)

The festival implements basic technical quality controls to ensure installations operate efficiently and avoid unnecessary energy or resource use. While there is no large technical team to conduct systematic checks on every installation, several practical measures support ongoing monitoring. A small group of professional staff members regularly tour the festival area to verify that installations are functioning properly, and a dedicated app is used to monitor CCTV and detect issues in real time.

Some checks are carried out immediately before the festival opens, helping to address last-minute technical needs. However, comprehensive technical inspections by both the technical team and artists are not yet part of the process.

4.3. Assessment Level: Results

4.3.1. Energy Consumption (E 3.1.)

The festival demonstrates effective management of energy consumption. For the 17 installations presented, total energy use amounted to 186.85 kW, resulting in an average of 10.1 kW per installation.

This places the festival well within the range of 3–12 kW per installation, indicating a relatively low energy demand for a light-based event.

While not yet achieving energy neutrality, the festival's current consumption profile shows meaningful progress toward reducing environmental impact.

4.3.2. Energy Savings (E 3.2.)

Survey responses indicate a moderate perception of the festival's energy use and ecological sustainability. Attendees rated the perceived additional energy consumption at 3.21, suggesting that they view the installations as requiring some noticeable amount of energy, though not excessively so. At the same time, the perceived ecological sustainability of the installations received a relatively positive score of 3.87, indicating that visitors generally regard the festival as operating in an environmentally conscious manner.

These results do not meet the threshold for very low perceived consumption or very high perceived sustainability, but they reflect a balanced, generally positive perception among attendees.

4.3.3. Energy from Renewable Sources² (E 3.3.)

The festival relies significantly on renewable energy sources. According to the certificate provided by the organiser, between 50% and 75% of the electricity used for the event is sourced from renewables. This demonstrates commitment to reducing the environmental impact associated with energy consumption and supports the festival's broader sustainability objectives.

4.3.4. Waste Generation (E 3.4.)

Survey results indicate a moderate perception of additional waste and its effects on city cleanliness during the festival. Attendees rated the perceived increase in waste at 2.84 and the impact on city cleanliness at 2.55 on a 5-point Likert scale. These values fall within the medium range, suggesting that visitors notice some additional waste but do not view it as causing significant or severe disturbances. Overall, the findings show that waste generation is not perceived as a major issue, though it is visible enough to suggest that continued attention to waste prevention and clean-up measures could further improve the visitor experience and reduce environmental impact.

4.3.5. Sustainable Transportation (E 3.5.)

According to the survey, 50.77% of respondents reached the festival using sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling, or public transportation. Satisfaction with public transport scored 4.24 on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating that users viewed the available options positively. These results show that a substantial share of visitors relied on low-impact travel modes and that public transport, where used, was generally well regarded.

² Renewable energy sources, also called renewables, are energy sources that replenish (or renew) themselves naturally. Typical examples are solar energy, wind and biomass ([Eurostat, 2025](#)).

5. Conclusion

This sustainability audit of the Essen Light Festival provides a comprehensive overview of its current performance across the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. The analysis identifies notable strengths that characterize the festival's organisational maturity, cultural relevance, and growing environmental awareness, while also revealing clear opportunities for structural improvement. Together, these findings establish a baseline for tracking future progress and guiding strategic development.

Economically, the Essen Light Festival demonstrates a solid organisational foundation supported by a professional curatorial process, reliable supplier networks, transparent financial governance, and strong sponsorship collaborations. The festival excels in stakeholder involvement, maintains robust documentation practices as part of municipal requirements, and benefits from long-standing partnerships that ensure continuity and artistic quality. At the same time, the audit highlights opportunities to strengthen financial resilience – potentially through more formalised risk management, clearer communication of insurance requirements, and expanded workforce capacity. Enhancing systematic knowledge management would further contribute to long-term stability and organisational learning.

Socially, the festival presents an inclusive and accessible cultural offer that attracts diverse audiences and demonstrates responsiveness to local needs. Basic accessibility measures contribute positively to its social impact. Survey results confirm generally positive perceptions of inclusiveness, resident consideration, and cross-generational appeal. However, the absence of a structured family concept, limited formal inclusion strategies, modest collaboration with community organisations, and lack of gender-balanced programming indicate room for further development. A more intentional integration of social sustainability principles would strengthen the festival's contribution to community well-being.

Environmentally, the audit reveals a mix of emerging strengths and significant gaps. The selection of installations increasingly incorporates energy efficiency, material reuse, and lifecycle considerations, and the event benefits from a high share of renewable energy in its electricity supply. Visitors perceive the festival as moderately sustainable, and overall energy consumption remains relatively low. Nonetheless, ecological sustainability remains the least developed dimension. The festival currently lacks a careful environmental management and does not integrate public transport promotion, or structured waste-prevention strategies beyond city-regulated rules. Strengthening environmental awareness (both through operational measures and festival communication) represents a key opportunity for future editions.

Overall, the audit confirms that the Essen Light Festival is a well-established, culturally significant event with a strong organisational backbone and a committed team. The festival's strengths lie in its transparent financial management, stakeholder collaboration, artistic quality, and ability to attract and satisfy a broad audience. By addressing identified gaps – particularly the formalisation of processes, strengthening of social and ecological strategies, and expansion of internal capacities – the festival can evolve toward a more integrated sustainability framework. Building on existing achievements while embracing structured improvements will enable the Essen Light Festival to enhance its long-term resilience, cultural value, and responsibility across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.