

Complex Networks 2023

Sustainability Report

This year, Complex Networks embarked on a sustainability journey, which proved to be a significant challenge: organizing an eco-conference by selecting partners committed to this sustainability approach and encouraging attendees to use the website and applications for accessing necessary information and documents.

Partners' Selection

The venue choice, Palais de l'Europe, was the result of a careful consideration of both economic and practical factors, as well as ecological arguments.

The material resources met the conference needs: three conference rooms (an amphitheater, a medium sized room, a small sized room), a forum suitable for different activities (posters display, meetings, coffee breaks, lunches, welcome reception and dinner banquet), technical and IT equipment.

The Palais de l'Europe embraced this sustainability approach at various levels: energy and water-saving programs, accessibility for people with reduced mobility, waste management (introduction of a recycling system), acquisition of reusable equipment for all events (encouraging the use of recyclable materials and reducing single-use plastic, such as purchasing water carafes for our event). It is worth noting that the Palais de l'Europe hosted first eco-conference, thus striving to meet our needs while achieving its goal of becoming a sustainable site.

Hotels' selection reflected the sustainability approach. Menton is a small town, and hotels as well as restaurants are all located within a two-kilometer radius, allowing attendees to reach the conference venue by walking, which aligns with the eco-event vision. Most hotels also adopted sustainable practices, such as not changing sheets and towels daily and saving water and electricity through signs placed on beds or in bathrooms. Some attendees made conscious choices regarding eco-friendly accommodation and applied these sustainable practices while being mindful of water and electricity consumption.

The choice of caterer, aligned with our commitments, was challenging. Developing the specifications required frequent and lengthy discussions between the conference organizers, the head of the Palais de l'Europe, and the caterer. We agreed on the menu content, though the quote was increased due to our sustainability requirements. Meals made from local and seasonal ingredients were provided to reduce the carbon footprint related to food. We minimized food waste by planning appropriate portions based on the survey sent to attendees and discussions with the caterer.

The selected printing companies also adhered to sustainability practices, using durable materials, ensuring low-emission production, and implementing environmental protection measures and climate-neutral transportation. The badges were produced without plastic.

Gifts for Attendees

The glass water bottles, and the organic cotton tote bags were available as self-serve items. The glass bottles are environmentally friendly and reusable, hence helping to reduce plastic waste. They serve as beverage containers, and water carafes were provided to attendees to refill their bottles easily. The organic tote bags also meet the same eco-friendly objectives.

Digital Communication

A "Sustainability" page (<https://complexnetworks.org/sustainability/>) was created on the conference website, featuring a drop-down menu for each commitment. Attendees had access to all the information on the conference website, enabling us to work towards zero paper use. An email was sent before and at the beginning of the conference with key information (schedule, rooms, sessions, coffee breaks, lunches, and social events). This information was also available through a QR code displayed at the registration desk and at various points of the venue. Five weeks before the conference, an email was sent to all attendees to further raise awareness about two crucial aspects:

- **Accommodation:** Attendees were offered a list of accommodations that take sustainable development into consideration, in particular hotels that are at a walking distance to the Palais de l'Europe.
- **Travel arrangements:** We encouraged attendees to choose sustainable transport options when feasible and suggested compensating for the carbon emissions related to their travel.

The conference began with an introductory speech during which the sustainability approach was presented.

An Event for All

Complex Networks is committed to ensuring that the conference serves as a platform for exchange, not only for experienced researchers but also for students in master, doctoral, and post-doctoral programs. Economic barriers often hinder students from participating in such events. To address this, we implemented a tiered pricing system, and several students benefited from half-price or even free registration, either by volunteering or by being from Group A countries (as determined by the World Bank, free access via Research 4 life <https://www.research4life.org/access/eligibility/>).

Another key element is the strong representation of women in the conference. Women were present at all levels of Complex Networks committees and among the attendees, with their representation significantly higher than the average in this type of event.

Quantitative and Qualitative Indicators

- Attendees emphasized the pleasure of walking to the conference venue, with walking being the most sustainable mode of transportation (Source: Survey dedicated to transportation modes).
- 2 liters of cigarette butts were collected, with one of the ashtrays placed outside the Palais de l'Europe at the entrance, where passersby could also dispose of their cigarette butts.
- Green plants used for decorating social spaces during a previous event were reused for the conference.
- During coffee and lunch breaks, 100% of the tableware used by attendees (cutlery, glasses, cups, plates, napkins) was recyclable (except for reusable stainless-steel teaspoons). Some attendees brought their own cutlery and mugs, a practice that should be encouraged further. Others reused the same cup or glass throughout the day.
- 90% of serving dishes were made of stainless steel or glass.

Additional Costs for Sustainability Initiatives

This cost includes sustainable gifts, Reeve company membership. Based on those expenses, 1.1% of the budget has been allocated to sustainability commitments. It excludes additional costs for sustainability related to the catering, and hotels that have been chosen on the basis of their geographical proximity and their engagement in sustainability, which are not straight forward to calculate.

Participant Engagement

- 86.4% of attendees arrived on the first days, allowing for meal planning. 89% of attendees stayed until the end of the conference.
- On average, 9 out of 10 attendees stayed on-site for lunch, and 75% attended the gala dinner.
- 20% of attendees had specific dietary requirements, which were considered in menu planning.
- No food was wasted; some attendees even refilled their plates, demonstrating ecological awareness.

(Source: Survey dedicated to meal attendance and diet constraints)

To conclude, it appears that attendees appreciated this initiative related to sustainability and mentioned that it was the first international eco-conference they had attended. As an interesting perspective, most of the survey respondents intend to apply similar practices in future events they would organize. Our actions and proposals, therefore, raised awareness among attendees of sustainability linked to scientific events (Source: Survey dedicated to global appreciation of the sustainability approach developed for the event).