



In collaboration with:



Weekly #SportPositive Twitter Chat

Tuesday, 30 June

Sport and Sustainability Certification

Please note we have just taken salient points that were added in the discussion and have not given attribution. This document is to give a flavour of the Twitter Chat, it is not a transcription. If you wish to see who wrote points that resonate with you, to pick up a discussion, search #SportPositive on Twitter and you will be able to see the original tweets.

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Q1: What standards and certifications exist that would be relevant for those in sport looking to focus/enhance their sustainability efforts to meet an external standard?

There are many generic and specific schemes relevant to sport: ISO20121; Albert Sustainable Production (media); LEED and WELL Building (stadia and other sports buildings). Not forgetting about all the supply chain certifications and labels such as [@fsc_ic](#) [@MSCecolabel](#)

Essentially 3 approaches: bespoke certification schemes within certain sports (golf, motor racing), signing up to charters/conventions (UN Global Compact, “eco-responsible sports events” in France) or 3rd party certification to ISO standards ([#ISO20121](#)). Each approach has pros and cons. The sport-specific ones tend to be more detailed and prescriptive, focusing on tangible sustainability improvements. What they lack is wider recognition outside their sectors. [#ISO20121](#), is the most relevant ISO standard for sport. It's a specification for an event sustainability management system. If you have this you will be well set to achieve your goals.

There's GRI, ISO, USGBC LEED, @WELLcertified, @CouncilForSport, @UNFCCC Sports for Climate Change Framework, and a host of others. These all play into the roles and themes of sport business whether participant or spectator sport

-> is ISO 14001:2015 more stringent than ISO 20121?

—> #ISO20121 is a sustainability management systems standard, specifically aimed at events, so is particularly relevant for sport. #ISO14001 is an environmental management system and has broader application across many sectors. A bit heavy duty for sport maybe

Important to remember Iso14001 is about management systems and takes in documentation, etc rather than actual measurement of impacts.

-> Good point on importance of performance criteria and specific KPI measurement to measure the effect of systems!

Golf has its own system - GEO Certified - maybe appropriate, coming from such a landscape and ecosystem-based sport. It's the result of 10 years+ collaborative setting of standards and regional criteria; assurance/verification network; monitoring and more.

Coming soon via @BASIS_org a certification scheme for venues, that focuses on taking simple proactive steps to keep improving the operations. Data, measurement, proactive actions, and a tangible commitment to keep improving will be key drivers

Q2: What are the benefits for a sports organisation/tournament/venue being certified?

Benefits of certification depend largely on why you are doing it. Generally it's for public recognition/credibility. It's an independent validation of your sustainability efforts. The more independent the process the better in terms of wider credibility. Certification benefits = greater public support, funding opportunities, attractiveness to sponsors, pride & motivation among workforce, members/fans etc. There should also be more efficiencies and savings through better management processes.

Credibility, Values alignment with sponsors/partners who are purpose-driven, have strong Env Social Gov. These also tend to be better performing companies in the market, so more stable partnerships.

Huge benefits of being certified, but even more benefits of being properly audited each year, and those certification standards getting higher.

Certifiers can also be advisors and bring in sustainable innovations. Meeting targets can mean better practices

Benefits include validation; reporting; continual improvement support; recognition; basis for strengthened comms; inspiration to others; and ability for associations to set policies and minimum requirements for hosting events etc.

Sets defined targets, goals, with generally accepted metrics. Also, encourage organizations to strive for continual growth and improvement - certifications like [@CouncilForSport](#) allow for initial steps to greater commitment once organizational capacity grows

Continual improvement and the ability to really embed sustainability across an organisation are key benefits. Credibility is also a major factor as an organisation who implements well can really benefit from certification.

Another type of certification lies within the city's domain - a "Global Active City" certification that promotes the positive impact physical activity can have on a community - this relies on accessible & sustainable venues as well [@AWBInitiative](#) [@TafisaOffice](#)

Though there are no negatives for sports organizations to pursue third-party certifications on their face, the threat to [#positivechange](#) emerges when organizations lean on certifications too heavily. Third-parties like consultants must help avoid greenwashing!

Working towards certification can help develop the culture of an organisation in a tangible manner, through building staff engagement, with the teams working together and generating ideas to improve ops

Q3: Are there any drawbacks for a sports organisation/tournament/venue being certified?

I wouldn't say there are drawbacks for a sports organisation to be certified, but it needs to be a conscious decision recognising that there is no going back and they have to keep up the effort and continually improve. Critics might say it is costly, too much effort and a distraction from their main purpose. Frankly those are excuses based on misperceptions. Any organisation seriously wanting to be fit for the future should definitely look at certification opportunities. However, not all certification schemes are top notch, so look before you leap. The other critical thing to be wary of is auditor competence. This can be patchy unless there is an accreditation framework for those doing the certifications

Potential drawbacks may include individuals or organisations being concerned or uncomfortable about a level of transparency they've not been used to. Another challenge may be getting all the relevant stakeholders on the same sustainability page from the outset to ensure a smooth route to certification as possible, and of course to resourcing the system!

-> Agree. We're pushing for [#RadicalTransparency](#) or [#ActiveTransparency](#) as a key measure in [#sustainability](#). Organisations will need to feel uncomfortable about sharing in the next decade. It's the next step

Biggest drawback. Choosing the easy certification in the world, then patting yourself on the back for achieving the lowest bar imaginable... It happens...

-> Very true, unfortunately. Additionally, I often see organisations making claims about sustainability achievements that the certification does not actually confer! Or the scope is ridiculously limited to avoid the hard parts.

—> Agree both, the certification has to be well regarded, independent, measurable, etc etc otherwise it's just a meaningless badge that's been bought.

Low % of fans/stakeholders knowing or caring much abt. certifying agency. What brand enhancement does the sport org. get (e.g., increased consumer confidence, goodwill)? Cost, time, picking the 'right' certification, exhaustion from pursuing multiple certs. Example - Why pursue official designation & cost of certification when the recipe is already provided & the org reaps the \$\$ savings and other social, enviro, economic benefits of pursuing initiatives? Especially if fans or customers don't know much about it.

-> Do you think there are ways to make fans/stakeholders care more about being certified or achieving a high standard?

—> This goes into the communication of the sports organization but also the certifying agency as to what the designation actually means and how it may be personally relevant to the fan. Example [@WELLcertified](#) and their efforts should communicate how certified sport orgs and venues have reduced risks and alleviates fears related to COVID and attending live events again to resonate and be effective in this way.

Agree that cert orgs need to establish some level of 'brand recognition' to ensure outward-facing value in eyes of fans, or just partners. Brian's comment re: fatigue from multiple certs also very valid

Q4: At what stage of a sports organisation's sustainability journey do you think personnel should go down the route of being certified?

For golf tournaments, we normally recommend at least a one year lead-in period to build strategy and approaches so they can align fully with certification criteria ahead of verification.

-> Great! And at what stage do you think a golf tournament should look at beginning this lead in period to certification? i.e. at the very beginning of them getting to grips with a sustainability policy, or when they are further along the road?

Best to equate [#certification](#) with [#qualification](#) and [#training](#). There can be radical new concepts of "best in class" over a decade or two: continual certification allows personnel to improve knowledge and standards to embed within their organisation

Certification should be considered as part and parcel of developing your sustainability strategy, not as an isolated shall we shan't we exercise. It is a commitment, so needs wide buy-in across the organisation first. Depending on the scheme, you don't have to be perfect before you start. Most certifications have levels or principles of continual improvement, so a

relative novice organisation can start and build up over time. Also, you can make an early commitment to being certified to whichever scheme and plan a pathway towards achieving that goal. I have worked with several clients who aimed for #ISO20121 certification over a 2-3 year lead in.

Third Party Certifications are best utilized as a validation tool, but can also support organizations to set up guidelines and look to best practices. Though the certifications should not guide decision-making, they can support the path to holistic decisions.

There's no one size fits all - we work with tournaments to help shape their policy and systems and can also support those, further along, to advance and communicate their work, set new targets, etc

Sport orgs should start looking at certification as soon as they can, so they can collect data and focus on clear goals. They can vary their time frame for actually achieving certification depending on their operational frequency e.g. daily, weekly, seasonal, yearly events

Q5: Do you think the number of sports organisations getting certified/keeping their certification will be impacted in a world with COVID19?

Initially there may be some practical issues with certification audits due to COVID-19, but longer-term the new realisation that sustainability is so important for future resilience should lead to wider uptake

Think we'll see new standards addressing human health; existing standards revised and broadened; and further innovations in auditing / assurance. Emphasis on measuring and reporting real impacts will continue.

We're currently looking at further integration of human health and wellbeing criteria into our standards, including COVID-19 safety, but are also aware of other health & safety and buildings-based schemes that may be better placed to assure this than we are

Oo, that's an interesting thought. Perhaps someone will come up with a 'Covid-safe' certification? My worry about this whole period is the 'back to business' push that ignores the climate change threat (or in the U.K. is overtaken by 'now 4 brexit'...)

I imagine we would all hope that this number will increase rather than decrease as sustainability hopefully comes to the fore as part of the 'new normal'. The only major issues are the unknowns of what events look like in the next as well as the extended future

We might have to be aware of issues if reduced capacity within associations, clubs, events etc. This means connecting certification (recognition) with support programs and beneficial pathways becomes all the more importance. It's why we created OnCourse programs for golf....

Thank You!

If you contributed to the #SportPositive Twitter Chat this week, thank you for being a part of it! If you didn't, I hope you find this document useful, and mark your diaries now to join us next week, **Tuesday, July 7th at 4-5pm UTC.**

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