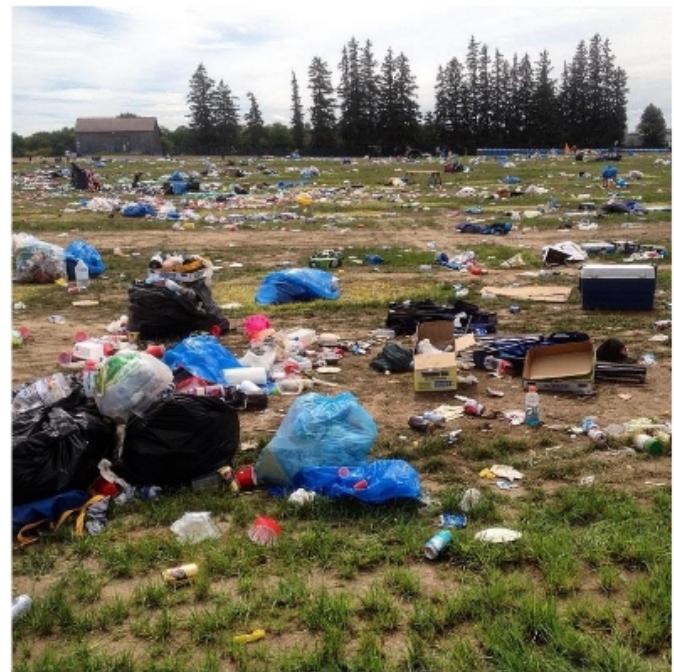
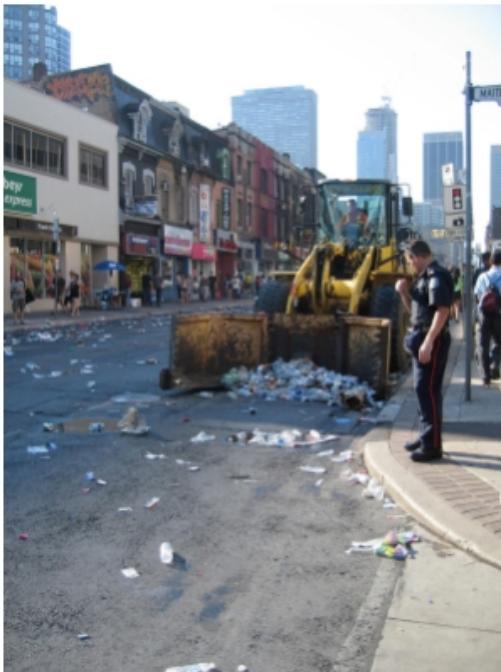


# Sustainability in Canadian Festivals

Rachel Dodds, a professor at Ryerson University, conducted a study on sustainability initiatives in Canadian festivals. Overall, findings revealed that the majority of festivals focus on environmental sustainability, especially waste, but rarely do they consider social elements. Economically, well-established and for-profit festivals fair better, however, whether for-profit or not-for-profit does not affect sustainability efforts. Data in this study represents over 60 million festival goers.



## Table of contents

Introduction .....	1
Key findings .....	6
By the numbers .....	6
Communication of sustainability efforts .....	8
What sustainability efforts are being communicated? .....	9
Waste diversion at festivals .....	11
Average waste generation per person in festivals .....	12
Support/assistance/sponsorship for sustainability at festivals .....	12
Perception of sustainability by festival managers .....	12
Consumer information .....	13
What are the triggers/incentives for festivals to be more sustainable? .....	16
What are the barriers for scaling up sustainability? .....	16
What are the key success tactics for implementing sustainability? .....	17
Recommendations for increasing sustainability efforts in Canadian festivals .....	19
Government: .....	19
Festivals .....	19
APPENDIX A .....	21
Methods .....	21

## Introduction

Festivals and live events of all kinds are important to the Canadian economy because they attract visitors from across the country, the United States and internationally. Socially, festivals unite people of diverse backgrounds and interests to celebrate a common event or purpose and this celebrates equality, knowledge and understanding. Socially and environmentally, however, events and festivals can be a burden on local communities if they are not managed with a sustainability mindset. Events and festivals create enormous amounts of waste and use an extraordinary amount of water. They also impact the festival grounds because there are so many people in one place as well as can be responsible for crowding, congestion and carbon impacts.

This study examined the level of sustainability across Canadian festivals. It built on previous research and online environmental festivals guide developed ([www.greenfestivals.ca](http://www.greenfestivals.ca)). For the purpose of this research sustainability considered environmental, social and economic sustainability aspects and is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (n.d.) as:

*"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"*

Overall, findings revealed that the majority of festivals focus on environmental sustainability, especially waste, but rarely do they consider social elements. Economically, well-established and for-profit festivals fair better, however, whether for-profit or not-for-profit does not affect sustainability efforts.

Some festival and event organizers are beginning to “green” their events to minimize their impact; however, this is not commonplace and there is no standard for sustainability of festivals in Canada. The purpose of this research was fourfold. First it sought to understand how festivals communicate sustainability practices to the public. Second, it aimed to better understand festival organizers motivations and challenges in undertaking such practices. Third, it sought to understand the amount of waste generated at festivals as well as diversion rates. Finally, this research looked at Canadian festival goers to understand the extent to which they look for and participate in greener festivals.

Three phases of research were conducted (see appendix A for a full methodology). First 303 festivals across Canada were reviewed online to determine size, length, type as well as sustainability practices and funding communicated. Second, social media (Twitter and Facebook) were reviewed for sustainability practices communicated. Then 45 in-depth interviews (representing 56 festivals) were conducted to understand challenges and how to scale up sustainability efforts. Finally, 1509 surveys were conducted with Canada wide to understand the extent to which festivalgoers look for sustainability practices at festivals. (see tables 1 and 2 and figure 1 and 2 for information).

Table 1: Festival type and location

Festival Type	ON	BC	QC	MB	AB	SK	NS	NL	NB	PE	Total
<b>Music</b>	34	18	10	4	8	5	2	2	1	1	<b>85</b>
<b>Cultural</b>	35	19	5	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	<b>65</b>
<b>Community</b>	13	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	<b>21</b>
<b>Other</b>	5	1	4	4	0	2	2	0	1	0	<b>20</b>
<b>Sports</b>	5	8	3	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	<b>19</b>
<b>Food and Wine</b>	14	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>18</b>
<b>Agricultural</b>	7	3	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	<b>16</b>
<b>Celebration</b>	6	6	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	<b>16</b>
<b>Seasonal</b>	3	2	4	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	<b>13</b>
<b>Performing Arts</b>	1	5	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	<b>11</b>
<b>Exhibition</b>	3	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	<b>9</b>
<b>Pride</b>	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	<b>9</b>
<b>Theatre</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>303</b>

Figure 1: festival attributes

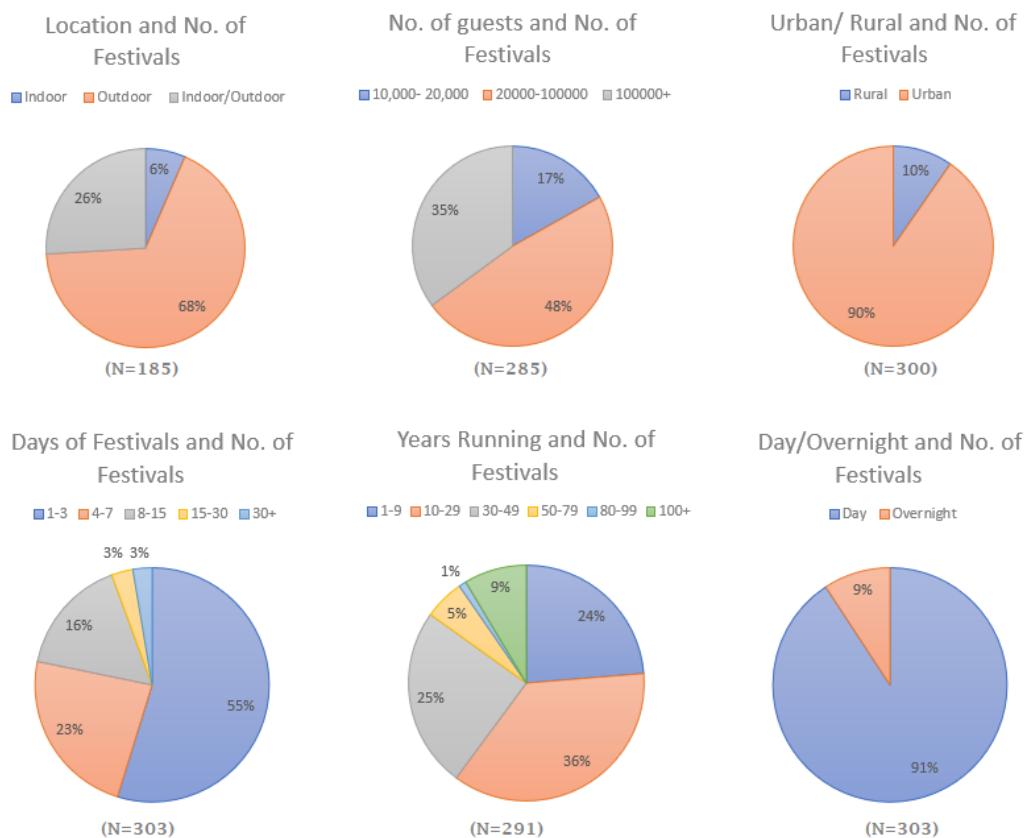
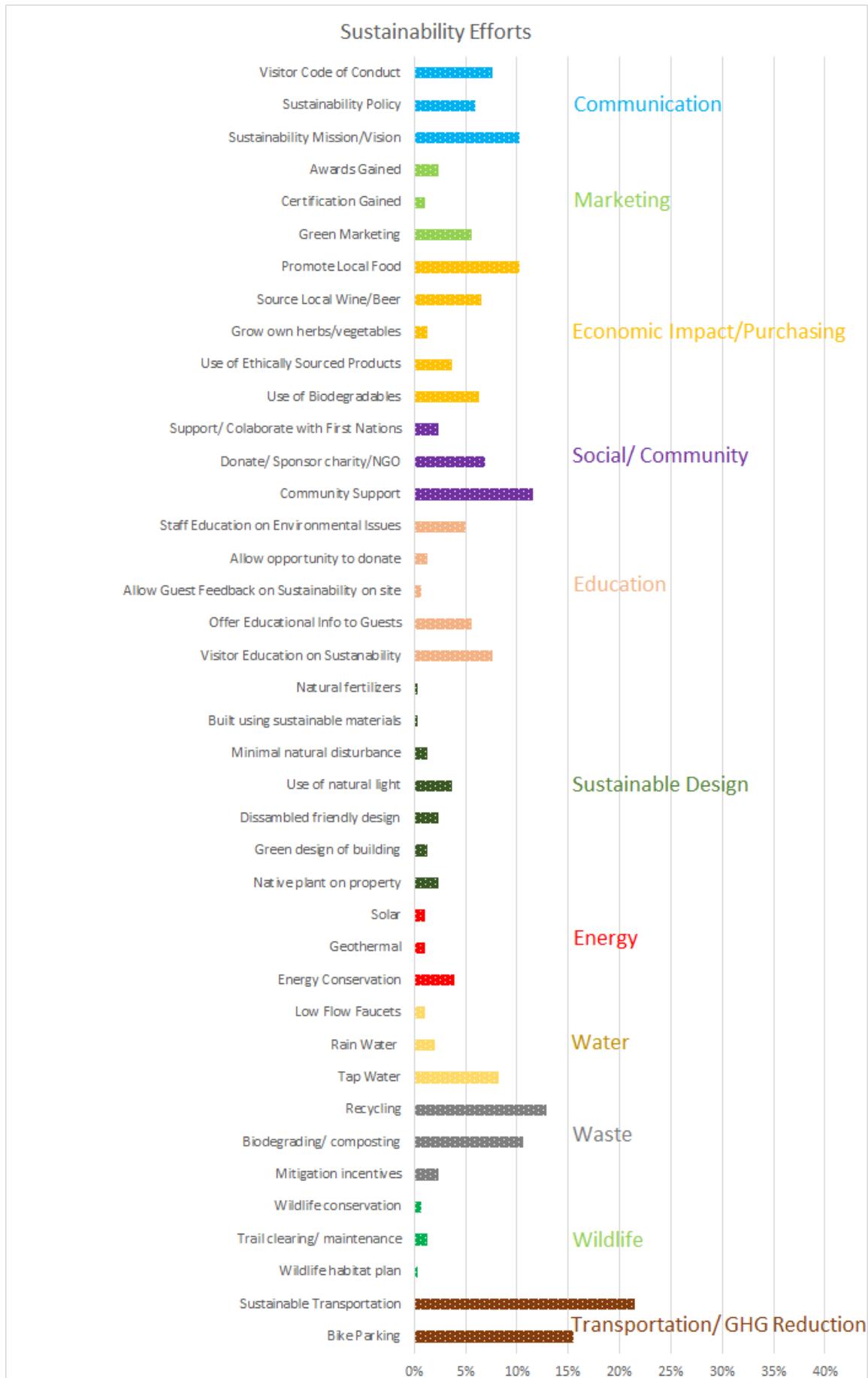


Figure 2: Festival sustainability attributes



*Table 2: Sustainability categories*

Visitor/guest education Educational Tours	Waste Management	Energy	Transportation	Water Conservation	Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitor/guest education</li> <li>Offer educational tours/info</li> <li>Staff enviro education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biodegrading/composting</li> <li>Recycling</li> <li>Designed to be disassembled</li> <li>Reward green behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Energy conservation</li> <li>Solar</li> <li>Geothermal</li> <li>Green design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shuttle</li> <li>Bike parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide tap water</li> <li>Rainwater collection</li> <li>Low flow faucets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable vision/mission</li> <li>Green policy</li> </ul>
Recognition	Visitor Engagement	Community Outreach/Engagement	Economic Benefits (e.g. Sustainable Procurement)	Habitat Management	Marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awards</li> <li>Certification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitor code of conduct</li> <li>Guest feedback to provide a high quality experience and value for money</li> <li>Allow guests to donate to environmental causes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support (youth groups, food banks, etc.)</li> <li>Donations /charities</li> <li>Support / collaboration with First Nations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve local food</li> <li>Source ethically produced goods</li> <li>Serve local beer / wine</li> <li>Grow own plants/produce</li> <li>Use no pesticides</li> <li>Purchase of biodegradable/compostable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wildlife conservation</li> <li>Wildlife habitat plan</li> <li>Minimal natural disturbances</li> <li>Trail management</li> <li>Natural plants on property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green marketing</li> <li>Promote walking/biking</li> </ul>

## Key Findings



The average festival goer generates between **0.02 - 4.4 KG** of waste each

Only **5%** of festivals reported that they received **external funding** to support sustainability initiatives



**23%** of respondents said that they would be willing to pay more to attend a festival that practices sustainability initiatives



only **8%** of waste reported by festivals is being diverted from landfill

**67%** of festivals did not communicate any sustainability initiatives



Only **6%** of festivals communicated sustainability initiatives on **social media**

The largest focus of sustainability efforts at festivals was **waste diversion**



Alberta and Quebec communicated sustainability at festivals the most of any provinces



## Key findings

Findings portrayed are a mix of content analysis findings as well as interview findings.

### By the numbers

- In 2016, 60.547 million people attended one or more of the 303 festivals. Of this, 17 festivals had over one million people in attendance.
- Only 10.6% out of 303 festivals had communicated six or more sustainable practices. British Columbia and Ontario had nine sustainable festivals each, followed by Quebec at six, and Alberta, and Manitoba at four. Ratio wise, however, Alberta at 22.22% and Quebec at 19.35% are doing the best out of all provinces to make their festivals green.
- Festival type wise, sports festivals tended to communicate sustainable practices the most (21.05). Music festivals, however, showcased the most practices at 16 (see Chart 1 and figure 3).

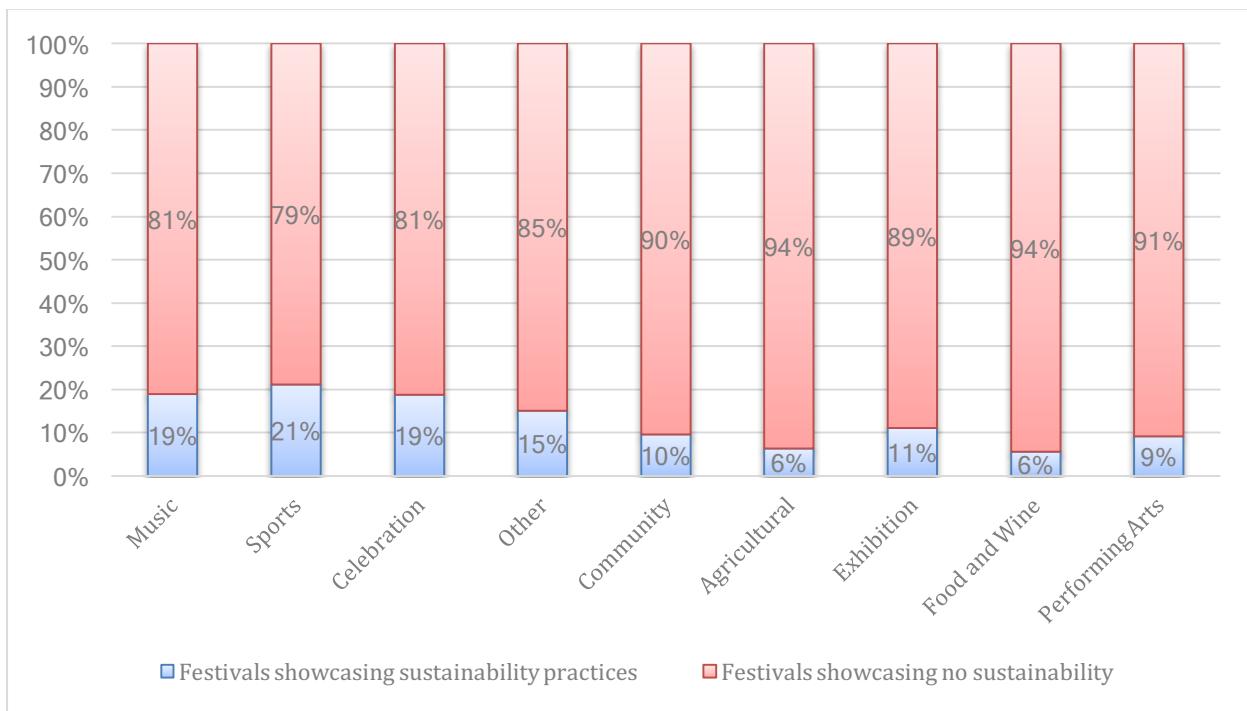


Chart 1: Sustainable Festivals with Festival Types

Free standing numbers are the total number of medium to large festivals in the province.

Numbers in () represent the festivals that are communicating 6+ sustainability efforts via their websites or social media in the province.

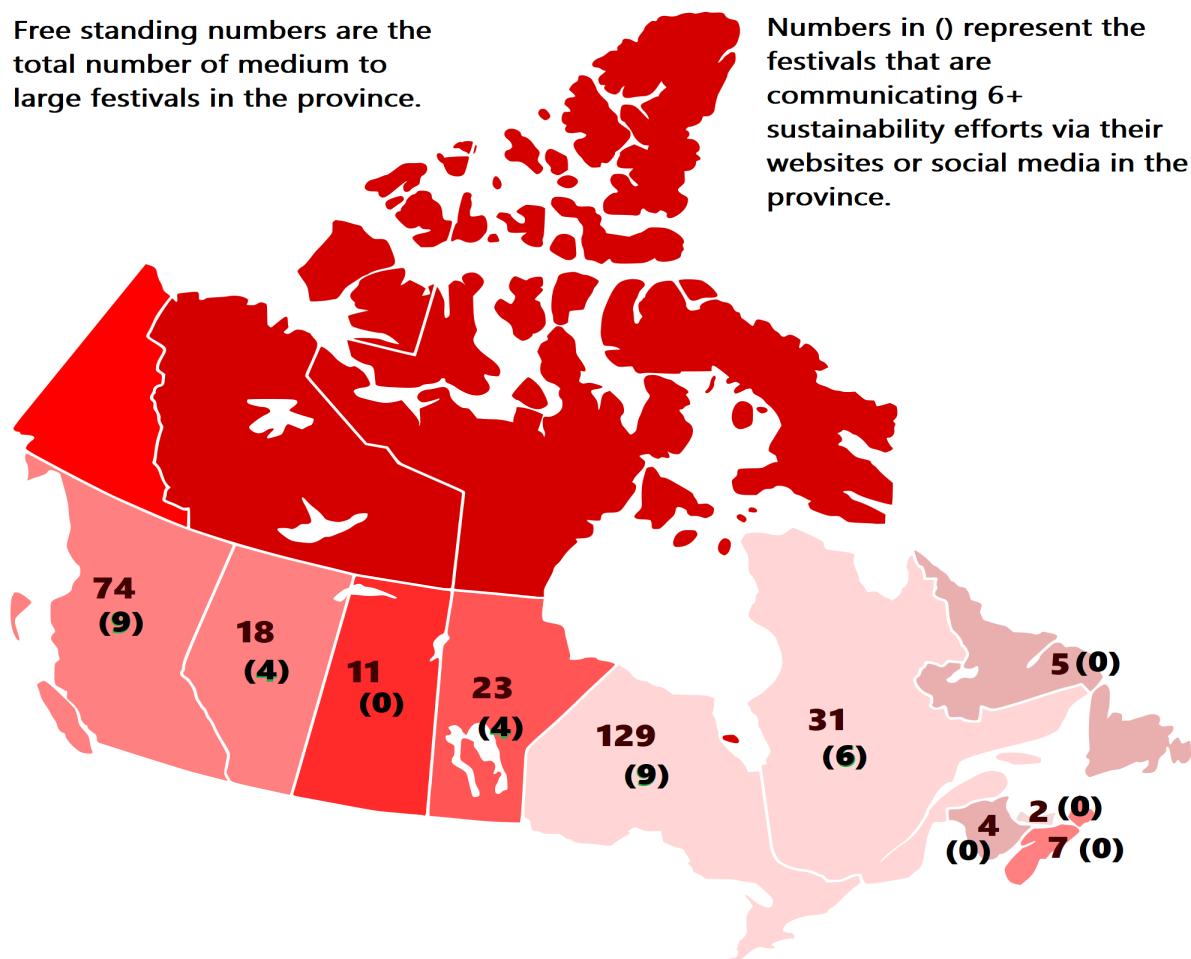


Figure 3: Canada's Provinces showing Total # of Festivals and # of Sustainable Festivals

- Of these 32 sustainable festivals that were considered to be best practices, 87.5% were urban festivals and 12.5% were rural festivals. Of these, younger festivals aged less than 40 years old tended to adopt more sustainable practices than older festivals. An anomaly occurs with the Calgary Stampede Festival (106 years old) with 20 sustainability practices, and the Canadian National Exhibition (138 years old) with 10 sustainability practices. It should be noted that these festivals also have fixed infrastructure with year round staff which differs from many festivals which run once per year with few full time staff and no fixed infrastructure.
- Of the total 303 festivals 40% of festivals that are older than 100 years (10 out of 25), have communicated at least 1 sustainability effort in their websites. Younger Festivals (<40 years old), in general, however, seems to be communicating better about their sustainability practices overall (see Chart 2).

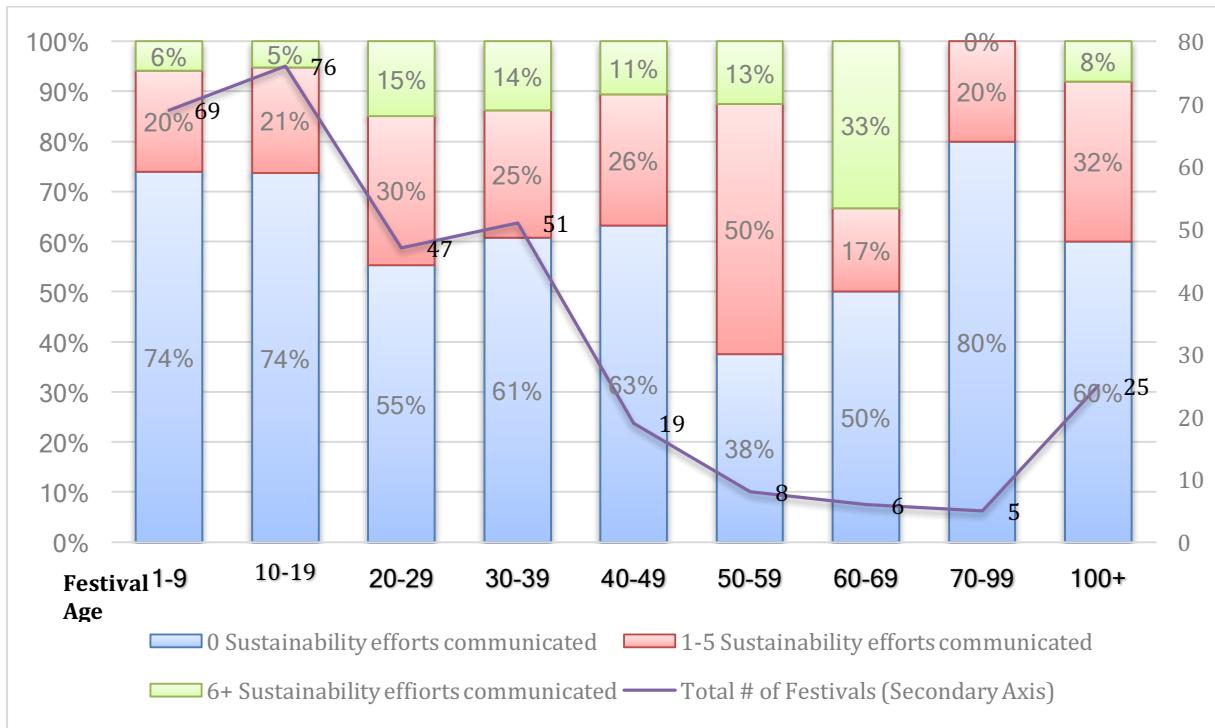


Chart 2: Relation of Age of Festival and its Sustainability Communications

### Communication of sustainability efforts

- Even though websites and online media are the most common platforms for communication due to their cost effectiveness and ability to reach a large audience (Klöckner, 2015), there is a clear lack of communication on festival websites regarding any of their sustainability initiatives. Information on websites as well as social media sites was difficult to locate and was rarely located on the homepage indicating that sustainability is not the key focus of most festivals.
  - From the website analysis, only 37% of all festivals communicated at least one sustainability initiative (see chart 3).
  - When examining social media efforts (Twitter and Facebook), even less evidence of sustainability communications was found with only 6% (see chart 5).
- From interviews, it was found that even though some festivals may be undertaking sustainability efforts, for the most part communication and marketing is an oversight and efforts rarely communicated to festivalgoers. Very few mentioned any outreach or communication about their sustainability efforts although those who were implementing multiple initiatives (those also considered best practices) tended to focus on on-site communication efforts (e.g. stage announcements and on-site signage such as labeled waste bins)
- Few festivals share best practices for sustainability and it is not a key undertaking for many festivals organizations.

- There is little communication of social sustainability efforts among any festivals (one exception would be the International Dragon Boat festival who focuses on engaging youth, accessibility for all, as well as community engagement and First Nations involvement)

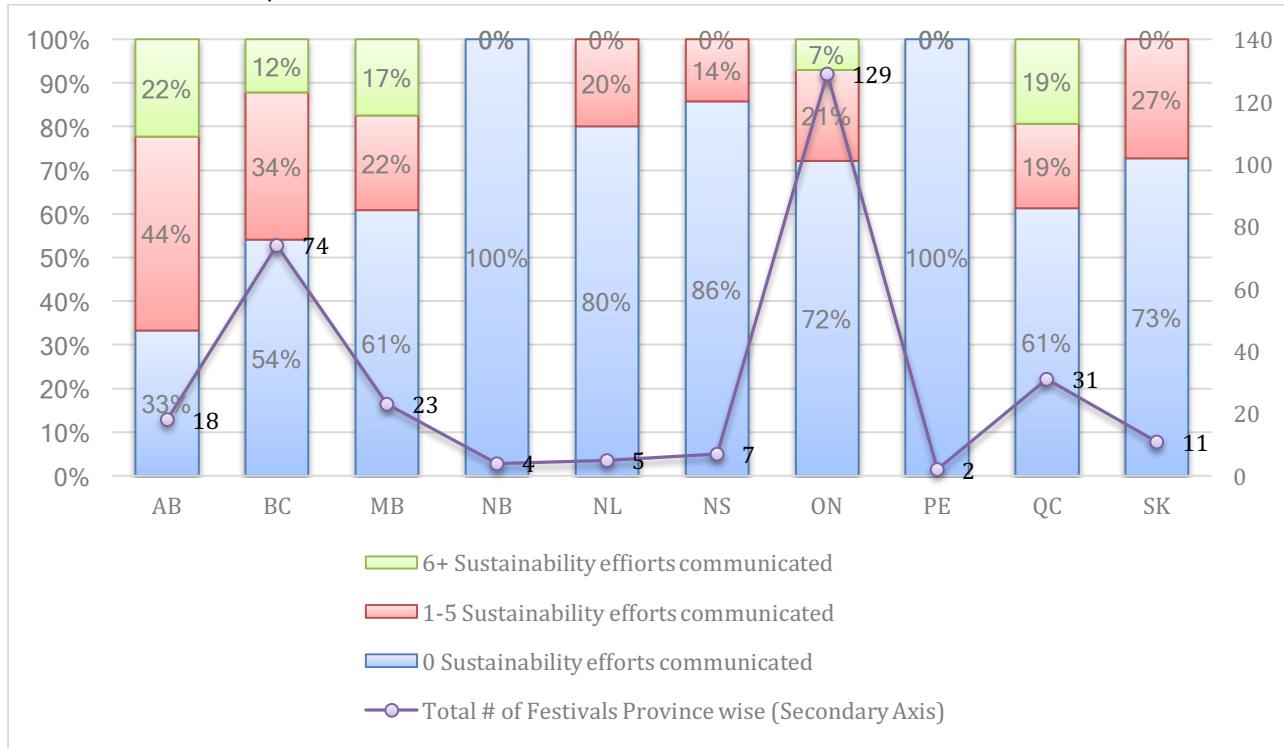


Chart 3: Sustainable Festivals by Website Communications

### What sustainability efforts are being communicated?

- Website communication:
  - Of the festivals that communicated any practices listed in table 2 and figure 1, the most common practice was the mention of sustainable transportation such as promoting walking, carpooling or using a provided shuttle system (22%) and 16% listed they have bike parking. Other more common practices communicated were recycling (11%) and serving local food (10%) (see chart 4)
- Social media communication:
  - Festival types that were communicating sustainability through social media most frequent was music and culture
  - Messages communicated through social media included education, partnerships and waste management
- Interviews:
  - From the 45 interviews representing 56 festivals, it was found that the most common sustainability initiatives were waste separation such as composting

and recycling as well as offering a bike valet. Only a few practices communicated by festivals go beyond greening / environmental practices

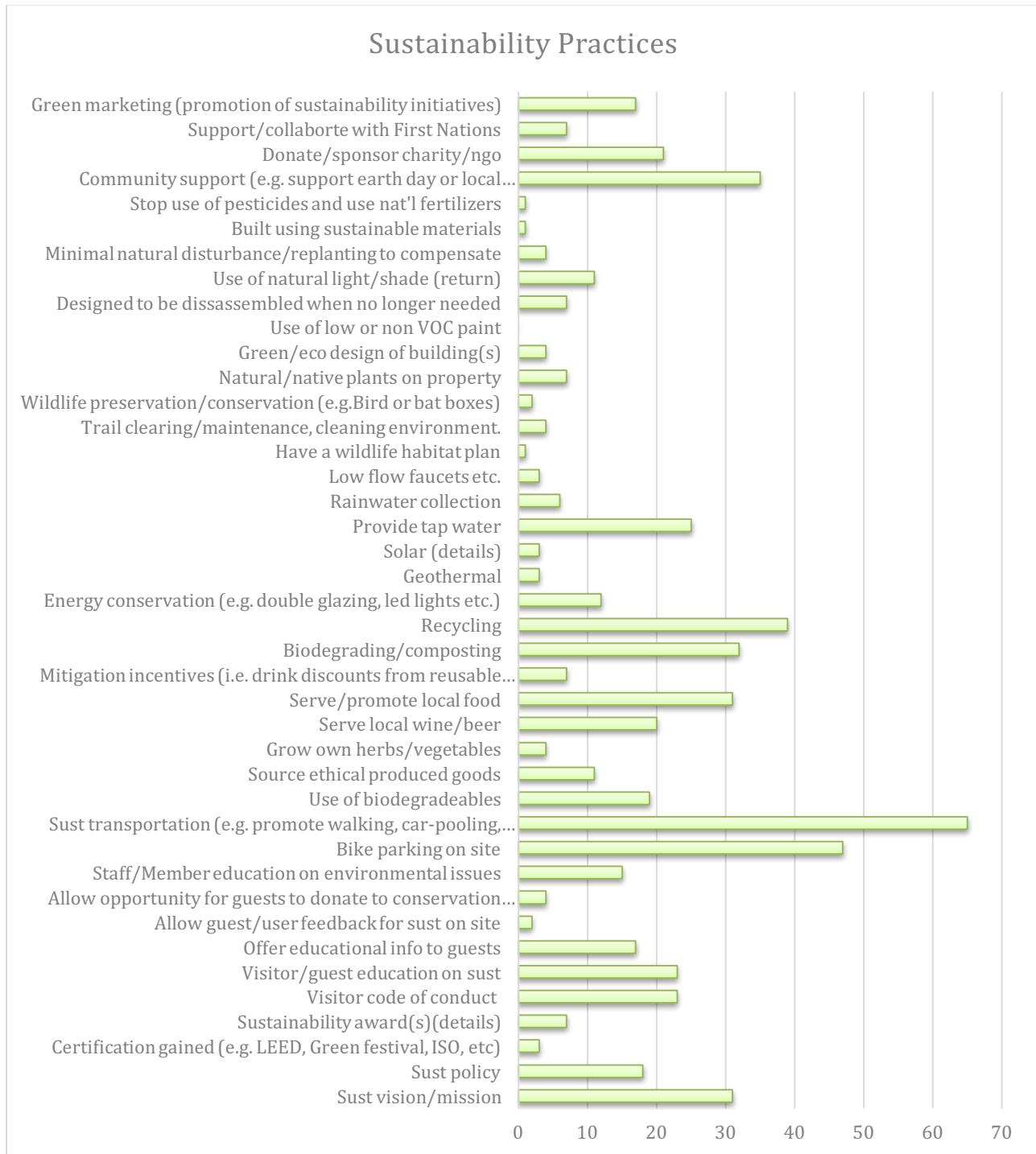


Chart 4: Most common sustainability practices of those festivals that communicated sustainability

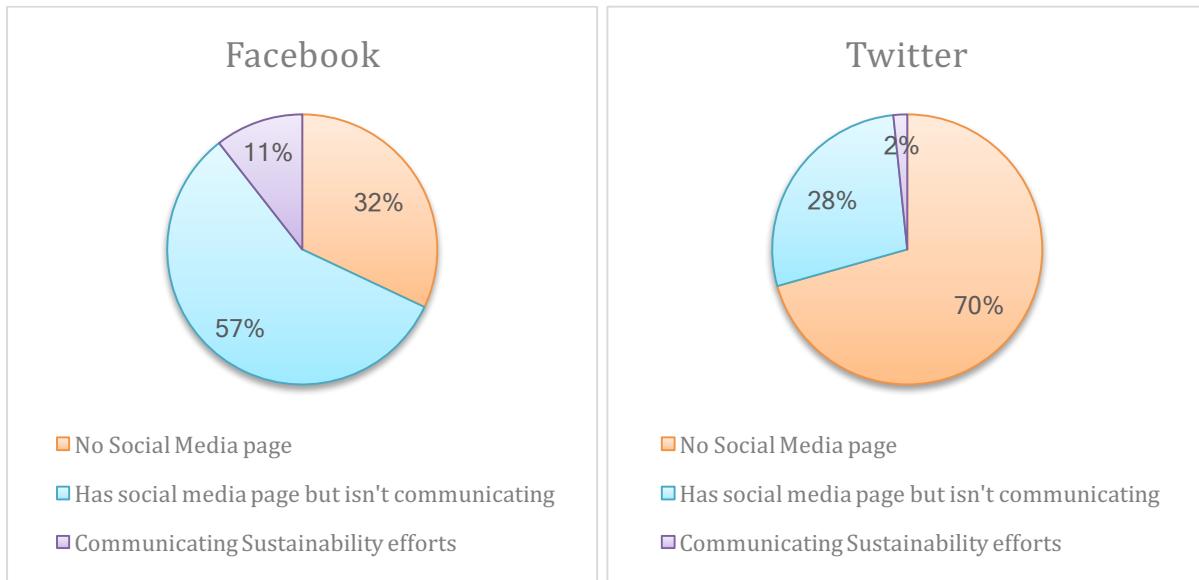


Chart 5: Usage of Social Media to Communicate Sustainable Efforts by the Festivals n=303

### Waste diversion at festivals

- Of the information received from 42 festivals only 8% of 1.646 Million Kg of waste produced was diverted to recycling and organic composting (See Chart 6). An anomaly and outlier to this was the Exhibition Place, which hosted 215 events in 2016, produced by itself a total of 10,631,125 kg of waste and diverted, therefore this was not calculated into the total as they have permanent facilities and may be able to invest and maintain more environmentally sustainable facilities.
- 48% of festivals confirmed that they either don't divert their wastes or they don't track it.

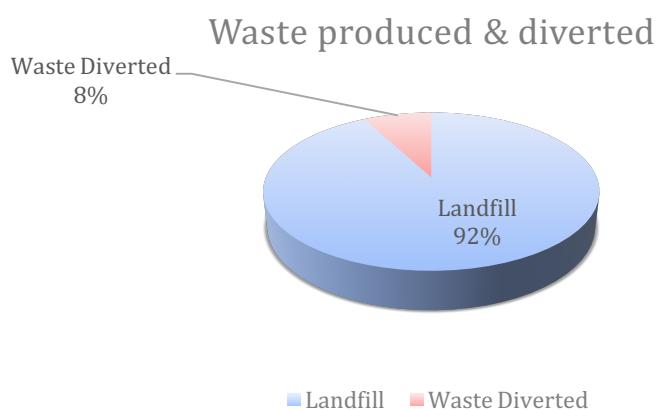


Chart 6: Waste Produced & Diverted.

## **Average waste generation per person in festivals**

- Waste ranges from 002 kg - 4.4 kg per person although please note that most small festivals do not even track their waste so this figure is from only a small number of festivals

## **Support/assistance/sponsorship for sustainability at festivals**

- Within Canada, there are no mandates to ensure festivals undertake any sustainability efforts. There are also no certifications or grant structures in Canada to assist festivals become more sustainable
- Very few festivals have received some assistance in the past (examples include TD Friends of the Environment or funds from sponsors such as Big Rock Brewery)
- Only 5% of festivals communicated external funding for their sustainability efforts.
  - Over 85% of festivals that receive Sustainability Sponsorship communicate at least 10 sustainability practices via their websites and/or social media.

## **Perception of sustainability by festival managers**

- 100% of festivals managers interviewed believed that sustainability efforts can be seen as an asset to a festival, however, only one festival interviewed believed that sustainability practices could benefit a festival through increased attendance levels due to other motivating factors such as event line up, etc.
- Sustainability efforts are generally not seen as the key priority of a festival. They are more concerned with music line-ups or promoting/furthering their cause. Sustainability efforts are often seen as an afterthought and, apart from folk music festivals and a few sporting events, are not integrated into the early stages of festival planning
- Most festival managers believed there was a lack of participation and engagement by festivals goers regarding sustainability although many admitted that they could be doing much more in terms of communicating sustainability efforts to their audience and that this was an oversight on their part.

## Consumer information

- Younger responders, practiced the most sustainability. These represent over half of all respondents (see chart 7) and it could be inferred that as this population are actively making environmentally friendly choices in future

Consumer responses: Green festivals by age groups

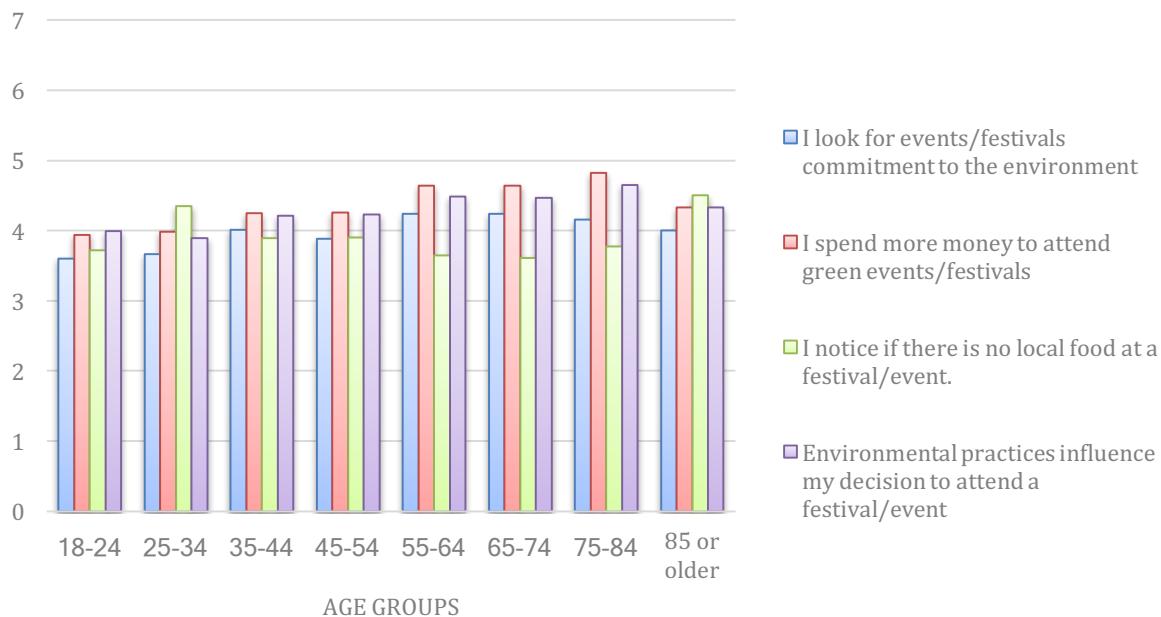
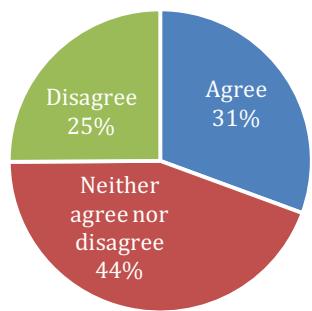


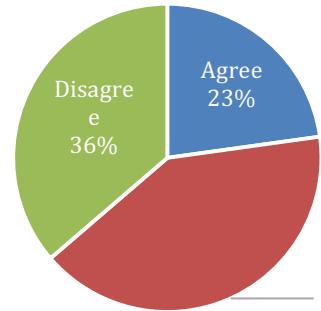
Chart 7: Consumer responses: Green festivals by age groups.

- 31% of responders noted that they actively looked for a festival's commitment to the environment.
- Almost one quarter of respondents (23%) said that they were willing to spend more money for green festivals and that their decision is influenced by the festivals environmental practices (26%) (see chart 8)
- 37% of respondents said that they would notice if the festival didn't serve local food,

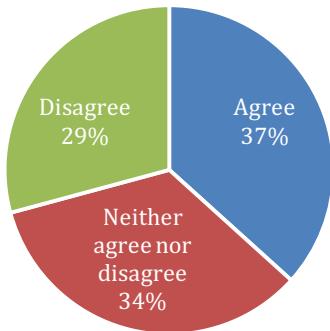
I look for festival's commitment to the environment



I spend more money to attend green festivals



I notice if there is no local food at the festival



Environmental practices influence decision to attend

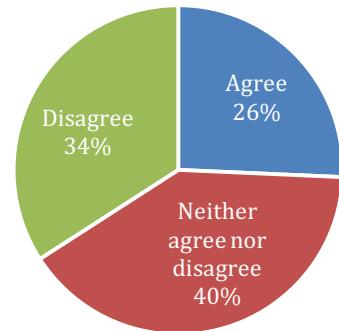


Chart 8: Consumer responses to environmental practices in festivals

- Province wise, festival-goers' response to whether they consider the negative impacts of festivals on environment (ex. garbage, crowding, etc.) was best for Yukon (2.75), British Columbia (2.90), and Ontario (2.98), The average was 3.03 and the mode 3, meaning that most festival goers from all other Canadian provinces responded that they considered at least 'Somewhat, (3 on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 being 'A great deal' and 5 being 'Not at all'), the negative impacts of festivals on the environment. (See Table 3)
- Festival goers from every province responded that their perception of how a festival impacts the environment negatively, would impact their decision to attend that festival with overall average response at 3.56 meaning between 'Somewhat' and 'A lot'. (See Table 3)

Please indicate your province/territory of residence		To what extent have you considered the negative impacts of a festival on the environment (e.g., garbage, crowding, etc.).	To what extent has your consideration for the negative impacts that festivals have on the environment impacted your decision to attend an event?
British Columbia	Mean	2.90	3.51
	N	215	214
Alberta	Mean	3.02	3.66
	N	219	219
Saskatchewan	Mean	3.24	4.04
	N	49	49
Manitoba	Mean	3.27	3.91
	N	99	99
Ontario	Mean	2.98	3.35
	N	333	333
Quebec	Mean	2.99	3.45
	N	406	406
Nova Scotia	Mean	3.14	3.70
	N	79	79
New Brunswick	Mean	3.34	3.70
	N	50	50
PEI	Mean	3.08	3.38
	N	13	13
Newfoundland	Mean	3.36	4.12
	N	33	33
Yukon	Mean	2.75	4.50
	N	4	4
Northwest Territories	Mean	3.29	3.57
	N	7	7
Nunavut	Mean	3.00	4.50
	N	2	2
Total	Mean	3.03	3.56
	N	1509	1508

Table 3: Province wise consumer responses

## **What are the triggers/incentives for festivals to be more sustainable?**

There is a clear divide among festivals in Canada. Some believe that reducing waste and taking care of the environment is part of their festivals core values and efforts to become more sustainable are integrated into planning and festival operations. The others see any sustainability effort as cost prohibitive and difficult to implement citing a lack of resources: both capital and human as reasons for lack of effort.

### *Key incentives:*

- Municipality support plays a significant role in the acceptance of sustainability practices by the festivals. Municipalities that have provisions for waste management, and that support their local festivals with subsidies like reductions in haulage fees, tend to have greener festivals.
  - The City of Calgary has a 70% waste diversion target by 2025 (City of Calgary, 2016). The City of Vancouver has a goal of reducing solid waste going to landfill or incinerator by 50% of the 2008 level by 2020 (City of Vancouver, 2017). These cities are helping and encouraging the festivals to adopt more sustainable initiatives by asking for waste information in their permit applications or providing subsidies on haulage fees
- The existence of dedicated festival waste management companies in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia have improved waste diversion rates in both these provinces. Festivals in both these provinces noted improvement in their waste diversion rates by paying third-party waste hauling companies. Some festivals in Ontario (11) that captured this data showed an average price of \$2.59/kg of recycling or composting for their waste diversion when using third-party waste hauling companies.
- Having a mission or vision increases sustainability efforts:
  - Festivals who implement the most sustainability are those who have it integrated into the vision/mission of their festival
- Outdoor festivals, especially those held in parks, are more cognizant of waste diversion issues due to their promise to leave festival grounds as they were found.

## **What are the barriers for scaling up sustainability?**

- Lack of infrastructure
  - Inadequate composting and the absence of waste management facilities are a key inhibitor to a festival's sustainability effort. Regina started composting only two years ago. Parts of Manitoba, Ontario, and Alberta still don't have composting facilities, limiting any or all waste diversion from the festivals.

- Use of solar energy/other renewable energy in the stages and the fields are limited by the lack of technology and/or cost at the moment.
- Some festivals struggle to get waste haulers to take compostables as they want only food waste
- Cost:
  - Almost half of festivals interviewed (46%) noted that cost is a barrier for sustainability practices. Renting additional bins, manning waste stations or separation of waste was seen as an extra effort that was not feasible by many younger festivals. When asked in more detail, however, most festivals confirmed that it is not the cost but that sustainability is not made a priority from the outset and therefore is increasingly more expensive in hindsight
  - Waste diversion takes efforts to separate but saves money on waste haulage
- Lack of consistency:
  - Compost and recycling bins across Canada are different colours.
  - Different regions take different products which further confuses the consumer as well as festival planners
- Awareness:
  - There is an overall lack of awareness and education about sustainability in many festivals (38% of interviewees) and there is a need to offer guides or materials

### **What are the key success tactics for implementing sustainability?**

- Waste diversion is most successful when there are separate recycling, compost and garbage bins in multiple locations that are manned by dedicated volunteers or staff
- Waste diversion must be carried out in three stages:
  - 1. System or plan set up before festival that has organized/planned how waste will be managed.
  - 2. Separate bins in multiple locations with a focus on food areas – these bins must be manned.
  - 3. Post separation by a dedicated team to ensure that waste is not contaminated
- Sustainability efforts must be incremental – start with waste diversion and bike valets – two elements which can be more easily managed and do not take much financial capital – then scale up to other efforts
- There needs to be a dedicated person or team in charge of sustainability – this can be a volunteer or paid position and does not necessarily have to be a separate job. There must, however, be one person who is conscious about environmental and social impacts and monitors progress and ensures it is embedded into wider festival planning



## Hillside Festival (ON)

Hillside Festival in Ontario was the number one festival practicing sustainability (by number of practices) in Canada!

Environmental practices influenced 26% of festival goers decision to attend a festival



### Recommendations



#### Festivals need to communicate with sponsors and patrons to gain support to implement sustainability initiatives

In order to shift behaviour, festivals need to communicate sustainability with festival goers and the general public.



#### Improve infrastructure to give festivals the tools to implement sustainable initiatives

Infrastructure is a key issue. Some provinces do not have adequate composting facilities or dumpsters to facilitate waste management and diversion efforts.

Municipalities who tie sustainability practices with permit approval are more successful.



#### Festivals need to share best practices and communicate sustainability initiatives with each other

Currently festivals do not share best practices. Leaders in this industry need to share their information and encourage others to do the same.

## **Recommendations for increasing sustainability efforts in Canadian festivals**

### **Government:**

1. There is a clear lack of infrastructure in many Canadian municipalities which must be rectified if waste diversion is to be increased (e.g. Manitoba and parts of Ontario and Alberta do not have adequate compost facilities)
2. Facilitate sustainability through the event planning/permitting process
  - o E.g. permits are provided to festivals based on their waste and other sustainability planning
  - o E.g. providing festivals with supplier lists for waste removal, cleaning, sustainable procurement etc.
3. Grants or financial incentives for sustainability efforts would push festivals to implement waste diversion tactics as well as other sustainability efforts. This is of interest of all types of festivals (for profit, not-for-profit, smaller and larger festivals)
4. There is a need for consistency of color for all waste bins – e.g. black for landfill, blue for recycling and green for compost to reduce consumer confusion
5. A Canada –wide beverage deposit system may be a big incentive for festivals to divert waste. This has proved hugely successful in Alberta and British Columbia
6. Food, plates and cutlery are the biggest source of waste. If compostable food packaging and cutlery was legislated, waste would reduce dramatically. This also has huge implications for the fast food and food delivery methods in Canada. France as a country just banned plastic utensils and could be a model for moving forward.
7. Compostable materials need to become more affordable to stop being a barrier for many smaller or non-profit festivals or municipalities could offer bulk purchasing if they mandated all festivals with food to use compostables.
8. Municipalities need to recognize that what can be accomplished at festivals can spill over into city initiatives (as festivals are mini cities in many respects)

### **Festivals**

1. There is a need for festivals to communicate to sponsors in order to get support for sustainability initiatives. As sponsors increasingly need to align their support with CSR values, this would be a win-win for both parties
2. There is a need to share best practices among festivals. A benchmark of festivals may be an incentive for action. Currently only folk music festivals share their efforts with each other.
3. Festivals need to engage their volunteers into their sustainability efforts – those who had a strong sustainability ethos had no problem engaging or retaining volunteers to assist with such efforts and had year over year commitment from volunteers
4. Consumers must be communicated to and encourage to participate in sustainability efforts. There is a clear indication of consumers who are looking for and interested in sustainability at festivals

Waste is only one issue at festivals and other environmental issues as well as social and financial impacts need to be considered if a festival is to have long-term success

For any questions about this report, please contact Rachel Dodds at [r2dodds@ryerson.ca](mailto:r2dodds@ryerson.ca)

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  - Festival owners and managers
  - Waste providers
  - Municipalities

## APPENDIX A

### Methods

This study used a multi-method research process. First festivals were found using Google and searches were done numerous times in April and May 2017 to determine a list. Due to the large number of festivals, only festivals over 10,000 attendees were selected as this was characterized as a medium (10,000- 20,000 participants) or large festivals (over 20,000 participants)(Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2009). From searches, 303 festivals were found. This list yielded a list of host provinces and several types of festivals including music, culture, community, food and wine, sports, agricultural, celebration, seasonal, performing arts, exhibition, pride, theatre, and others (see table 1). It should be noted that due to the changing nature of festivals and the Internet, a list as exhaustive as possible was created, however some festivals may have been omitted due to lack of listing, website or visibility online). Festivals were then evaluated via their website for a number of attributes (see Table 2).

Second, a web content analysis as well as a social media analysis (Twitter and Facebook) was conducted to ascertain sustainability practices. Sustainability practices include a range of 38 elements that are outlined in table 2.

Third, all festivals were emailed asking for their waste numbers as well as contacted for a qualitative interview. Waste numbers were collected from 43 festivals (14.2%), and 45 interviews representing 56 festivals (19%) were conducted from August to October 2017.

Finally, a Canadian wide survey to gauge responses from 1509 festivalgoers from different provinces of Canada was conducted.

As the research topic was about sustainability, it was also assumed that only those who implemented sustainability efforts would answer. There was, however, a good representation of festivals that were not doing any initiatives at all. Therefore, a fair representation of views was gained. Interview questions asked about sustainability practices, how such practices were communicated, what assistance for sustainability was provided from external sources and what were the key influences in becoming more sustainable. Festival organizers were also asked about motivations, incentive, and barriers to moving forward with sustainability practices.