



Photo by Cagdas Alagoz

CITY, COUNTRY

Idanha-a-Nova, Portugal

DAILY CAPACITY

40,000

SITE

Rural area close to Idanha-A-Nova Lake

CAMPING

Yes

NUMBER OF DAYS

8

ESTABLISHED IN

1997

GENRE

21 stages ranging from electronic and world music to yoga, lectures and workshops

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Reducing water consumption by treating water on-site



Boom serves as a perfect example for a festival that pursues a holistic sustainability approach and that keeps giving back to the local community. The festival has bought the land it takes place on; a 180-hectare homestead called Boomland and year round, the festival engages in the preservation and natural regeneration of the land. Boom is an independent, non-sponsored and truly international festival: visitors come from 177 countries in the 2022 edition; tickets are sold online and via a global network of 63 ambassadors in 60 countries.

Artur Mendes is one of four co-managers of Boom. “Sustainability is an ongoing lifetime endeavour,” he says. Their sustainability efforts are not limited to the festival and the other events taking place

at Boomland, but include using the outputs of the festival (e. g., financial resources, water, and compost) to preserve and regenerate the land. “We look at sustainability influenced by permaculture, regenerative design and its interaction with the land, while applying human-centred solutions,” Mendes explains.

This means the festival has developed a sustainability paradigm with 12 variables (e. g., water, soil, waste as a resource, and energy) that is the foundation of every Boomland project. “All the variables are interdependent and interact simultaneously. The end result is countless projects that take place on the land, in every edition of the festival and the other events we do at Boomland.”

Photo by Pierre Ekman

A PSYCHEDELIC GLOBAL GATHERING OF MUSIC, ARTS, CULTURE WITH HANDS-ON SUSTAINABILITY

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DROUGHT HAS BECOME NORMAL IN PORTUGAL

Many of these “countless projects” focus on Boom’s efforts towards water. While water shortage might not be a problem in Northern Europe (yet), climate change is already affecting Portugal: at the time of writing this piece and even as early as April 2022, the country’s entire landmass was in some state of drought, according to the [Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere](#). Scientific evidence predicts less rain and more intense heat waves for the country, Mendes knows. “There is an imperative need to change the paradigm of water management. Our

approach has been to maximise the water available as much as possible and reintroduce it on the hydrologic system in place as much as possible,” he explains.

A further challenge for both festival and local authorities is that the water treatment facilities in the region of Idanha-A-Nova are calculated for a population of about 10,000 people, Mendes reports – four times as many people visit Boom each edition.



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REDUCING WATER CONSUMPTION

To support the local area, Boom has built not one, but two biological water treatment plants. The first one, which went live in 2010, is still used on a daily basis at Boomland for smaller human occupation.

Mendes says that “in 2020 we started a brand-new one that can treat up to 7 million litres of water and reintroduce all that for irrigation. Treatment of water and its reintroduction for irrigation after treatment: this is a circular approach to water and a zero-waste measure.”

All water used at Boom comes from the public grid. To keep grey water from polluting the lake, the festival has built a site-specific 40-kilometre network of underground pipelines that leads to their water treatment stations. After treatment, the water can be used to water plants on Boomland. “It is important to note that grey waters of Boom are exclusively from showers and restaurants. There is no water from toilets – they are waterless,” Mendes emphasises.

According to the co-manager, the new plant cost 250,000 Euros. By comparison: every edition of Boom costs between 500,000 and 750,000 Euros. “Some festivals prefer to invest in line-ups, which is understandable. Our concept is about human transformation and land regeneration; therefore, sustainability is a priority.” Being an independent festival, costs for the sustainability programme at Boom are covered by the revenue of ticket sales,

Mendes explains. This is why guest tickets (in contrast to regular audience tickets) come with an impact fee that goes directly to Boom’s reforestation programme.

To reduce water consumption, Boom Festival has put several measures in place: in showers and at water points, water pressure has been reduced and showers are closed at certain times during the day and night. All plant species planted in the gardens are drought-resistant and mostly native. Compost toilets were introduced in 2006 as a pioneering measure for festivals of this scale. The compost that is produced by these toilets is used to fertilise Boomland, mostly its forests. “The university of Castelo Branco city analysed our compost and gave quality A++ – that can be used for bio-agriculture purposes,” Mendes explains.

Furthermore, the procurement department has clear instructions on purchasing goods (e. g., fabrics) that use less water in production. Similarly, food providers at the staff canteen and restaurants are instructed to use products with a smaller water footprint. The food on the entire festival is 85% plant-based. If used, meat can only be locally sourced and must come with a certification of animal well-being. “We don’t take a prohibitionist approach on food. Our focus is on delivering information so the audience can make informed decisions,” Mendes explains.

THE SOLUTION



EVERY DROP COUNTS

Many of the measures Mendes recommends not only for other festivals, but also for society as a whole, e. g., choosing food and fabric based on their water footprints, planting drought-resistant plants in public spaces, and reducing water pressure in showers.

Considering Portugal's drought situation, it feels almost natural that the festival's motto is: "every drop counts." "Working with water is a humbling experience while at the same time it is indeed working with the core of life: there is no species on Earth that can live

without water, so we must be extra careful on working with it," Mendes says. Yet, he notes, "most people do not value water, because they take it for granted. It is important to remember that all the time."

His advice? "Look at the water cycle and apply it on your festival or land as much as possible. Water changes its state all the time and adapts. We all, as promoters, should regard it as it is, not send it away or flush it out. It is important for all of us to understand that water is a limited and expensive resource."



WHAT'S NEXT?

Boom plans to develop its long-term, independent sustainability program even further. "In Portugal climate change is already a fact, the water droughts are common. We must reframe all approaches, starting with the politicians and the public policies that still haven't woken up to the challenges in this field," Mendes emphasises.