



# Reuse on Christmas Markets

→ Guidelines for municipalities

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# Imprint

Published by: [mehrweg.einfach.machen](https://mehrweg.einfach.machen).

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# Reuse paves the way to zero-waste Christmas markets

Going to a Christmas market is one of the most enjoyable traditions of the Advent season. Christmas markets bring people closer together and influence cultural life in our cities and municipalities. More than any other, these public events stand for social gatherings with good food and hot drinks, for arts and crafts offers and holiday spirit. However, there is a downside: the merry throngs visiting the markets leave behind enormous amounts of single-use waste.

While many places already serve mulled wine in reusable mugs, food is often still served on paper plates, in paper bags and with wooden cutlery. Once used, these all end up in the bin. This kind of tableware and cutlery – be they made from plastic, paper or compostable materials – don't just create waste, they also consume a lot of resources.

It doesn't have to be like that: there is another way. A reuse concept that is in line with the requirements of the respective market and incorporates the catering offer helps reduce waste considerably. And what's more: reuse helps prevent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and lowers the costs of municipal waste disposal. A study conducted by Environmental Action Germany (DUH) has shown that switching completely to reusable tableware helps avoid around 3,500 tonnes of waste and

6,600 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.<sup>1</sup> Reuse allows Christmas markets to truly shine, creating an untroubled holiday atmosphere – without overfilled waste bins.

We have proved it is possible to run entire large-scale events with reusables. All it takes is determination, courage and clear structures. Another indispensable factor is a shared understanding among all parties involved, from municipalities to organisers to exhibitors, catering businesses and visitors. These guidelines address municipalities across Germany and support you in your transition to reuse when organising Christmas markets.

**Please note: As for the most part, drinks are already served in reusables, these guidelines focus on reuse for food offers.**

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1) The DUH Reuse Check: Christmas markets produce mountains of unnecessary single-use waste for pasta, chips and co. – DUH (German only)

Transitioning to reuse primarily helps conserve resources and create a sustainable event atmosphere. However, reuse also entails a number of seemingly insurmountable challenges, from financing and logistics to a dishwashing infrastructure and communications with exhibitors. With each challenge, the opportunities for innovation and cooperation increase. The examples of numerous municipalities, such as Düsseldorf and Bonn, show that reusable systems that work are doable, that sustainability and a holiday atmosphere complement one another and that markets benefit from less waste and more cleanliness.

**Events should remain places for people to meet and enjoy themselves – benefiting from being in harmony with ecological responsibility.**



Eva Badem,  
Project Manager WWF Germany

This roadmap was compiled as part of the “Zero-Waste Events” alliance, a project of implementation alliance **mehrweg.einfach.machen** – the name of which is a play on words that means both “just reuse” and “reuse made easy” – in cooperation with Deutsche Städtetag, the association of German cities and towns. It aims to provide support and inspiration to municipalities that would like to implement more reuse at their events and provides answers on how to implement reuse and on what needs to be considered.

## The “Zero-Waste Events” alliance

The “Zero-Waste Events” alliance is a project of **implementation alliance mehrweg.einfach.machen** in cooperation with **Deutsche Städtetag**.

It helps municipalities introduce reusable packaging for food at Christmas markets. The alliance’s work thus contributes significantly to preventing waste and conserving resources. Its aim is to develop solution-oriented approaches to achieve a reuse rate of 100% and to provide practical support to municipalities in accordance with their individual implementation status.

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Städtetag

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### Project

**Duration:**  
December 2024 –  
February 2026

**Organisation:**  
Deutscher Städtetag,  
ProjectTogether, WWF Germany,  
with the support of German reuse  
association Mehrwegverband  
Deutschland

**Participating municipalities:**  
Cologne, Düsseldorf, Ebersberg,  
Frankfurt, Freiburg, Göppingen,  
Jena, Kiel, Krefeld, Leipzig,  
Lübeck, Münster, Neuwied,  
Nuremberg, Regensburg

### The alliance’s activities

- Establishing regular **exchange formats** between municipalities
- **Providing individual advice and practical support** around the introduction, communication and implementation of reuse through Deutsche Städtetag and the implementation alliance in form of materials, networks and talks.
- **Ensuring the efficient use of resources** by pooling knowledge and exchanging experiences
- **Finding solutions together** (for example around challenges with deposit systems, dishwashing, communication)
- **Sending a signal** to other cities and disseminating successful approaches
- Offering **networking** opportunities in the national reuse community

# A step-by-step approach to reuse on Christmas markets

## 1 The analysis phase: Documenting and assessing the initial situation

### 1.1 A first status analysis

#### Taking stock of the market situation and structure

Planning a reuse concept begins by taking systematic stock of the market/markets, of structures and conditions. Questions such as the following can help you:

- What Christmas markets are held in the municipality and who organises them?
- What role does the municipality play?
- How much space does the area offer and what (reuse) logistics are already in place
- Are stand constructions provided by the organiser or concessionaire<sup>2</sup> or do exhibitors travel with their own stands?

2) A concessionaire is a person or business that acts in the interests of the organiser or responsible municipality and has obtained a permit (concession) for commercial activities at an event. Concessionaires are responsible for selecting exhibitors and assigning stands.

This type of analysis gives you an overview of existing conditions and helps you quickly identify where you can start to make changes.

To assess the effect of reuse, it may make sense to gather data on previous waste volumes, as this creates a robust framework for comparison. In

most cases, gathering data requires communication with municipal waste disposal companies.

#### Identifying relevant actors

An actor map can help give you a better understanding of the market and its conditions. This is an overview where you can map relevant and

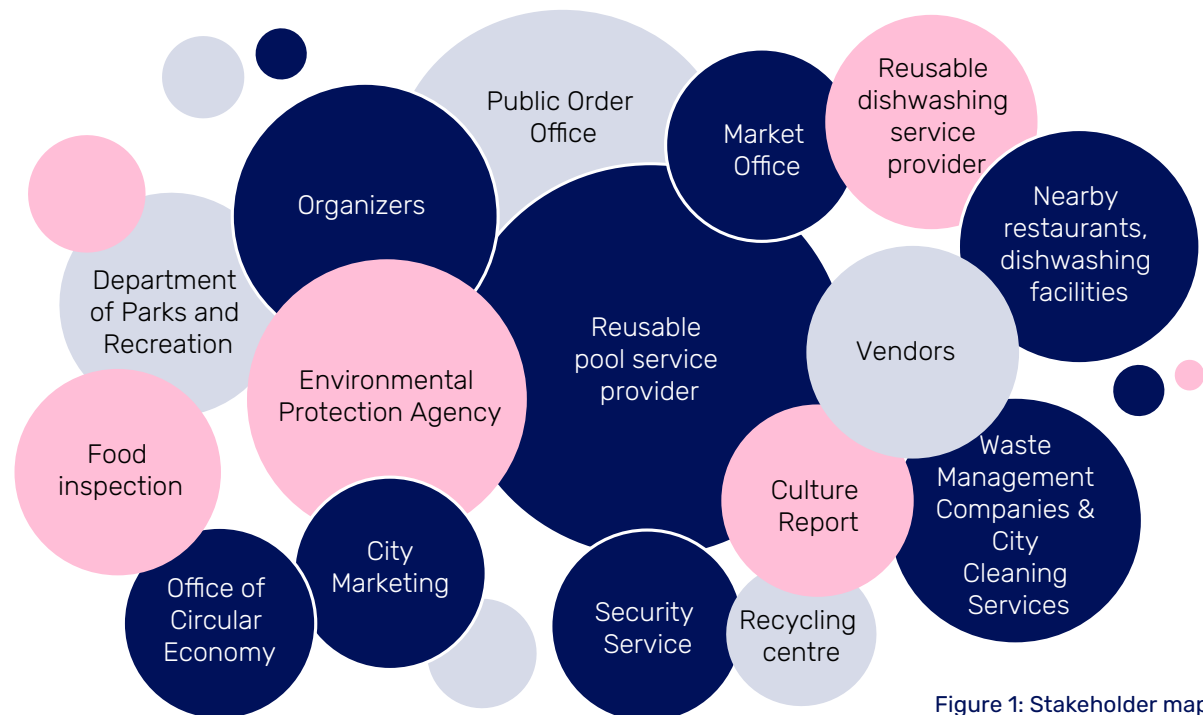


Figure 1: Stakeholder mapping

involved actors. (Actors may differ depending on municipality and framework conditions.) This kind of depiction provides clarity on who is responsible and/or on where decisions are made.

In general, we recommend appointing a main point of contact for exhibitors and other relevant actors on the organiser's and/or municipality's side.

### **Analysing offers, packaging and demands**

When looking for a suitable solution, engage with exhibitors at an early stage, also presenting offers of potential service providers in the course. Together with the exhibitors, identify the demand for food and drinks offered at the market as well as for the reusable containers required to do so. This query should be done annually, be compared to the utilisation data from previous years and segue into a compulsory order going forward.

The aim of the status analysis is to identify the demands and desires of each actor so as to be able to consider these specifically when selecting and shaping a suitable reusable system.



*This document (German only) can be used as a template for the status analysis.*



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### **Reuse regulations, legal requirements and political framework conditions**

Municipal events are subject to legal municipal framework conditions. We therefore recommend obtaining an overview of the market's relevant byelaws, contracts and structures; these define the extent to which reuse can be implemented in municipal spaces. Check...

- whether reuse has been considered in market rules/waste regulations;
- whether a reuse order or single-use ban is already in place;
- what the hygiene regulations are;
- what requirements exist in adjacent fields such as water supply, security, etc.

In addition, find out whether you might be able to expect municipal support to strengthen reusable systems in public spaces. There may be funding available, initiatives or other – financial – supporting parameters.

Every municipality organises events in public spaces differently. In general, there are two different models:

**a.** The municipality itself organises an event in its own urban area.

**b.** An organiser organises the event, acting either on behalf of the municipality or after being awarded a contract by the municipality or on their own initiative. In the latter case, the municipality

grants permission to implement the event in the form of a (special) permit.

Depending on the model, the municipality's role and influence will change. If the municipality itself is the organiser, it will act in accordance with its byelaws but will also be able to carry out measures beyond the existing legal framework. These have to be documented in contracts with third parties, for example with concessionaires or exhibitors. Especially when the municipality itself organises a market, it functions as a role model. It has to set an, and ideally lead by, example by complying with existing regulations.

If an organiser takes on the organisation, the municipality primarily assumes the role of regulator and approval authority. It is not responsible

for implementing the event; its direct influence is limited. The municipality can only mandate the utilisation of reusables through byelaws, market rules and special use permits or integrate this mandate into civil law contracts with the organiser.

→ *This diagram (German only) shows the role the municipality plays in shaping the event and what influence it can exert.*

## 1.2 Recognising and driving potential for change

When it comes to drinks, Christmas markets have been employing reusables comprehensively for years – with success. The use of (china) mugs has since become a matter of course for everyone

involved. The processes necessary to do so have been adapted successfully and have now become a fixed component of market procedures. Now we need to make sure reuse becomes the default when it comes to food, as well!

### Changes at legal level:

#### Waste regulations and market byelaws

For many municipalities, we recommend adapting the market's legal framework and conditions. It takes political decisions and efforts to guarantee more reuse in the long term.

- Reuse should be embedded in waste regulations and market byelaws for public spaces.
- Municipalities should declare themselves in favour of an obligation for reusables or a ban on single-use packaging for events in public spaces.

## International and national legal frameworks



Reuse is the object of several laws. The following are especially relevant for the event industry.

### ■ EUROPEAN REQUIREMENTS

**Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD, 2019/904):** Restriction and, in parts, ban of certain single-use products; requirements to reduce the consumption of packaging and cups for takeaways; marking responsibilities for single-use products; and extended manufacturer responsibilities

**Regulation (EU) 2025/40 on packaging and packaging waste (PPWR):**

Immediately applicable EU regulation with targets to prevent waste; requirements on packaging design and on how to increase reuse and recycling, including binding reuse and recycling targets

### ■ NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS (GERMANY)

**Packaging Act ("Verpackungsgesetz", VerpackG):** Regulates the distribution, return and reuse of packaging and establishes obligations for manufacturers and distributors

**Obligation to offer reusable containers in accordance with VerpackG:** Providers of food and drink takeaways have to offer a reusable alternative to single-use packaging

### ■ REQUIREMENTS AT STATE/MUNICIPAL LEVEL

**Municipal taxes for single-use packaging:** Municipalities may levy their own taxes on single-use packaging for takeaways. These make single-use packaging more expensive compared to reusables and provide additional economic incentive to employ reusable solutions or avoid single-use packaging.

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## Bans on single-use packaging versus the obligation to offer reusables versus a reuse order/offer

Bans on single-use packaging and the obligation to offer reusables have a particularly strong effect during the transition. While a ban prohibits single-use packaging, an obligation to offer reusables theoretically still allows single-use packaging; at the same time, however, reusables have to be used. A reuse order, or offer, on the other hand, merely speaks in favour of reusables as the primary option while still allowing single-use packaging. Examples from the State Capital of Düsseldorf and Bonn:

**“At events in public spaces, food and drinks may only be served in reusable containers. Exceptions may be permitted in justified individual cases”**

(excerpt from the *Waste Regulations* issued by Düsseldorf Council; German only; author's translation)

**“The organiser agrees that no single-use items will be used or given out at his or her event. The organiser agrees to implement and monitor this ban on single-use items vis-à-vis his or her subcontractors, contractual partners and subtenants.”**

(Excerpt from a Düsseldorf Council *contractual clause*; German only; author's translation)

**“Single-use packaging, single-use tableware, single-use cups and single-use cutlery that is not cleaned and reused is prohibited! (...) The same applies to single-use plates and cutlery made of cardboard that are only partly made of plastic or have a plastic coating; these are also covered by the ban.”**

(Excerpt from the contractual *provisions and conditions of Bonn Council*; author's translation)

**Stipulate reuse in contracts and tenders**  
Irrespective of regulations, municipalities and organisers can also embed reuse in calls for tenders and contracts (e.g. with exhibitors) as well as in special permits. In general, waste prevention and the use of reusables should be a criterion for organisers and concessionaires when selecting exhibitors.

! If you are looking for inspiration, find out more about the *Best Practices* of other municipalities and reach out to them; practical tips and experiences are always helpful.

**Violation of imposed reuse conditions as an administrative offence**

Monitoring that conditions are met is the linchpin for the successful and effective implementation of reuse. Establishing that violations are an administrative offence associated with a fine strengthens public perception of the measures. Experience has shown that even the threat of a fine or reference to contractual penalties unfolds an effect.

In this context, Frankfurt am Main Council communicates as follows:

“On principle, it is only permitted to sell food and drinks intended for consumption on event grounds in reusable containers. (...) Adherence to rules is monitored continually. Violations may be fined €500.00 per each day of the event on which regulations are violated.” (Excerpt from the *Reuse Bulletin* issued by Frankfurt Council; German only; author's translation)

## 2 The planning phase: Developing and communicating strategies

**A general note:** the phases of implementing a reuse concept are not always clearly distinguishable from one another. Frequently, dialogues, decision-making processes and implementation steps occur in parallel and intermesh.

### 2.1 The right reusable system

Once you have completed your analysis of framework conditions and structures and have gained an overview of possible potential for change, the next step is to engage in discussions with the actors involved and to develop actual targets and measures. The aim of the planning phase is to get exhibitors “on board”, to define the scope of the measures and to prepare implementation.

Defining a clear target at the start can help:

**“At the upcoming market, all food and drink will be served exclusively in reusable containers.”**

or

**“The following measures will help guide the next market step-by-step towards a comprehensive reusable system.”**

Targets are defined by the responsible persons and the relevant parties involved (the task force

or core team) before being discussed with other relevant actors. It can also make sense to define milestones or a time frame, for example over the course of several years with an increasing obligation to reuse.

#### Reusable systems: An overview

→ **Pooling services:** The same reusable tableware is provided to all exhibitors by the organiser and/or an external service provider. Exhibitors announce their tableware needs in advance and receive the required reusable containers from the service provider at the start of the event. Logistics and dishwashing services are organised centrally and are the sole responsibility of the organiser and/or service provider. This reduces operative efforts for exhibitors; however, it is associated with an increase in organisational efforts and financial expenses on the part of the

organiser. In general, the costs for the system are split between exhibitors, unless external financing has been secured (funds or similar).

→ **Individual systems:** In this model, each stand employs its own reusable tableware. No central services for dishwashing, distribution or returns are provided; exhibitors are responsible for the procurement, cleaning, storage and logistics of reusable containers. This means an increase in organisational efforts for exhibitors, while the organiser’s coordination and implementation efforts remain low.

→ **(Systemic) hybrid forms:** This option combines elements of both systems. For example, exhibitors might purchase and employ their own reusable tableware while dishwashing services are provided by an external service provider or a central mobile dishwashing unit. This model is good for smaller markets (see *best practice Ebersberg (German only)*). Alternatively, tableware is obtained from a pooling service (e.g. Vytal), while each stand is responsible for cleaning and handling reusables. Another option is for the majority of exhibitors to join a pooling service while individual exhibitors use their own tableware.

#### Engaging in conversations

One thing that is essential for the implementation of a comprehensive reusable system to be a lasting success is continuous, close exchange with the relevant actors – and especially with the exhibitors. It is important to hear their concerns, questions and

### The ecological sense of reuse

Reuse unfolds its ecological benefits frequently when the containers employed are used frequently. The higher the circulation rate, the better the environmental footprint compared to single-use items. This applies both to pooling services and individual reusable systems. From an ecological perspective, the latter makes most sense if tableware is not just used at one but at several events. When individual tableware is used, municipalities and organisers should appeal to exhibitors to switch to reuse permanently and to use existing tableware more than once.

## Pros and cons: Pooling service versus an individual system

### Pooling service



- Relieves exhibitors as procurement, dishwashing and logistic processes are handled externally
- Visitor-oriented return logistics by accepting used tableware at all stands or designated return stations
- Ecological profitability through the higher circulation rates of pooling service containers, as provider lends them elsewhere as well



- Costs must be carried by organisers and split between exhibitors
- Efforts for coordination and decision-making when selecting a common reusable tableware design

### Individual system

- More flexibility as tableware remains the property of each exhibitor and can be used continually and in many places
- Independent decisions on choice and use of tableware design that has been adapted to the foods on offer, esp. with regard to size and shape
- Less effort on the part of the organiser

- Investment costs for procurement of reusable tableware, for dishwashing and storage logistics
- Space required for storing tableware
- Necessary water connections
- Costs only worthwhile if tableware is used repeatedly
- Inconvenient return modus for customers, especially for groups getting food from different stands

the practical challenges they face, all of which should be discussed openly. An argumentarium (German only) can help deal with uncertainties and reservations.

#### → *Argumentarium (German only)*

Establish a strong network of allies; the support and cooperation of parties outside of the core team is often necessary as well. When communicating with exhibitors, keeping in close contact with the (regional) association of exhibitors can be especially helpful. Shared information and support formats help connect the parties involved; one example of this type of offer is the Reuse Trade Fair in Bonn.

Experience gathered at successful reuse Christmas markets has shown: close guidance and face-to-face communication are key success factors. Especially when it comes to shaping the system, and to the practical details of the system, it is important to invite the parties involved to contribute. Don't hesitate to bring together the external parties involved – the reusable service provider and the exhibitors – at an early stage, for example at a kick-off meeting.

#### **Kick-off meetings can be used to...**

- ... introduce procedures, targets and responsibilities to make them transparent.
- ... present the market's various catering offers and suitable reuse solutions (for suggestions, see the overview on Food Offers at Christmas Markets (German only)).

#### → *Food Offers at Christmas Markets (German only)*

- ... present planning around logistics for, and the returning and cleaning of, containers. Incidentally, meetings like these are ideal for making key decisions together.
- ... discuss schedules, to-dos and clear responsibilities.
- ... discuss possible "exceptions" and/or restrictions to the implementation of reusables (e.g. individual wrappers, single-use cutlery made of wood), ideally in close coordination with exhibitors.

**Please note: As a rule, no single-use utensils should be employed. Reuse is the system of choice! Nonetheless, being willing to compromise in the beginning, as well as during a gradual implementation of reuse, can lead you towards your goal as well.**

- ... offer trainings for employees at the stands and exhibitors, for example in the shape of short presentations.

We recommend making materials that will help exhibitors implement reuse available at an early stage of planning. This includes bulletins; guidelines on the hygienic handling of reusables; overviews of framework conditions; requirements including bans and any single-use exceptions.

In its communications with the parties involved, Bonn Council provides a bundle of all municipal documents related to reuse. Known as the "Reuse Primer", it is used for events held in public spaces.

The website [Wegweiser-Mehrweg.de](http://Wegweiser-Mehrweg.de) (German only) which translates to "The Reuse Map", offers a well thought-out selection of other materials to support and inspire you.

→ [Wegweiser-Mehrweg.de](http://Wegweiser-Mehrweg.de) (German only)

### **Deciding on a reusable system**

Based on the status analysis you conducted at the start as well as on your conversations with the relevant actors and consideration of the different reusable systems with their respective pros and cons, you can now decide on how to shape your reuse concept. In the course, take into account both the practical implementability as well as the

## **Organic alternatives – single-use still means consumption of resources**

Organic single-use packaging is not a sustainable alternative to (reusable) plastic packaging. It is made of valuable, renewable commodities, which, in light of limited cultivation areas and resources, disqualifies it as a true alternative. In addition, it doesn't solve the problem of waste. After a short time of use these single-use products too will become waste, be released into the environment and impact waste disposal.

Under real-world environmental conditions, so-called compostable packaging usually does not degrade any quicker than conventional plastics (several 100 years). And at industrial composting plants, it is generally sorted out and recycled energetically. That's why the consistent use of reusables at events is the best way to conserve resources, prevent waste and reduce environmental pollution.

acceptance of the actors involved. In parallel, it is important to not lose sight of the importance of reuse as a pivotal factor in preventing waste and for the future of sustainable events.

The transition takes the courage to break new ground and test solutions. View the transition as an ongoing process, in the course of which you gradually advance and improve the system. It takes a constant willingness to optimise as well as a shared goal and conviction on all sides.

## **2.2 Defining measures**

After you have made a general decision in favour of reuse, the next step is to plan actual measures for its implementation. To help you do so, on the following pages we will present a selection of strategies and measures that may be relevant depending on which reuse model you choose.

### **2.2.1 Pooling service**

Using the same reusable tableware at all stands has lots of convincing benefits (see table above). But even when opting for such a standardised system, its actual shape may differ from market to market:

External service providers (e.g. Vytal, cup&more or DishCircle) or an actor affiliated with the municipality, such as a municipal waste disposal company, provide reusable containers and, in addition, take on the affiliated logistics and cleaning processes. Service providers deliver tableware at specific times, collecting and cleaning it after use and then returning it to the market.

This is the way things are done at the Christmas market in Düsseldorf. Here, municipal waste disposal company AWISTA provides a pool of reusable tableware. Stands announce their demands and

pay rental fees, washing the tableware themselves over the course of the market.

→ **Düsseldorf: Best Practice. (German only)**

The Christmas market in Constance also uses a standardised pooling system. Since 2024, the organiser has cooperated with reusables provider Vytal. Our best practice (German only) summarises the info on implementation in Constance.

→ **Konstanz: Best Practice. (German only)**

Another option is for the municipality to invest in its own pool of reusable tableware, including a mobile dishwashing unit and/or logistics. The municipality is then able to use the pool not just at Christmas markets but at other municipal events, as well.

Constance Council already uses a model like this;

→ **Konstanz: Case Study. (German only)**

The following overview can help with your search for a rental provider or dishwashing service:

→ **Map of Rental Providers and Dishwashing Services (German only)**

Deciding to use a pooling service for reusables goes hand in hand with the decision on a central selection of reusable containers and the design thereof. When looking for products, you should therefore ask:

- Which products should/have to be offered in reusables?
- Which products does the service provider offer?
- Do the products meet the exhibitors' needs?

As a rule, keeping the number of different shaped containers as low as possible makes things more transparent for exhibitors and visitors alike.

**Please note: When estimating the required number of reusable containers, we recommend basing the maximum need on the number of single-use items previously used.**

To determine which container types are actually needed, regular communication with vendors is required, along with an analysis of available service providers. When registering their needs, vendors specify which food and beverages they will offer at the market and which reusable containers they require for this purpose. Ideally, this survey should be conducted annually, cross-referenced with actual usage from previous years, and can be carried out via a mandatory order form.

.....

**“I’ve been doing it this way for 10 years, without any problems. All you need is an industrial dishwasher.”**

food vendor, Dresden Christmas Market

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## Implementation aspects: Questions, solutions, tips

### Determining the concept for dishwashing, storage and logistics

- When and how are reusable containers delivered to the stands? At the beginning of the entire event or at the beginning of each day of the event?
- If tableware is cleaned by a dishwashing service, when and how are items collected for washing?
- Is it possible to wash tableware at the market – in the stands themselves or at a central dishwashing station or mobile dishwashing unit?
  - Who runs this dishwashing station (organiser, service provider, third party, municipality)?
  - At what times is it open?
  - Does this station have staff to ensure compliance with hygiene regulations?
  - Will you possibly need more than one dishwashing station?
  - Who finances the station: the organiser or the municipality?
- Are there any existing dishwashing solutions (e.g. for mugs) that can be used?

### Alternatives when there are not storage and dishwashing facilities on site

- If you are able to organise a central storage space for the duration of the entire event or daily collections:

- who collects the tableware: the service provider or the exhibitors themselves?
- Tableware is washed at...
  - municipal facilities;
  - professional dishwashing centres;
  - regional companies (e.g. workshops for the disabled, hotels, canteens);
  - adjacent/municipal stationary catering establishments.
- Check whether you can harness synergies by using events happening at around the same time
- Plan temporary, short-term storage in lorries, for example
- Rent (large) storage containers shared by several stands

### Returns and dealing with visitors

- Where can visitors return their tableware:
  - at the stands themselves or
  - at central return stations?
- What is doable, what desired? Establish...
  - fast lanes for returns;
  - separate return areas;
  - return boxes (make sure tableware is inaccessible to visitors after being returned).
- Where are the (covered) eating areas? These encourage visitors to eat food on site and promote the acceptance of reusables.

### Ensuring supply and reserves

- Can exhibitors order additional tableware from the service provider during the event?
- How and from whom do exhibitors get supplies in the event of bottlenecks?
  - Set up a hotline or central point of contact
- Does the organiser retain a reserve and/or emergency pool?
- Is the event team available during opening hours?

### Correcting imbalances in the pooling system

- Ensure that exhibitors can actively exchange information (e.g. via WhatsApp groups). This enables them to ask other stands for help if they experience a tableware bottleneck.

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**“You don’t have that extreme amount of litter, or your product lying around everywhere on paper plates (at the festival grounds).”**

Visitor, Frankfurt am Main Christmas Market

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## PACKAGING TAX FUNDS INFRASTRUCTURE

A tax on single-use packaging can generate revenue for municipal budgets. The funds raised in this way could be used to expand and finance reusable packaging infrastructure, e.g. for a mobile washing unit or a washing line.

### 2.2.2 Individual system

With an individual system, the exhibitors themselves are responsible for all reuse logistics. The reusable tableware is different at each stand.

- Exhibitors have to take care of their stock of reusable tableware, dishwashing and storage capacities themselves, and bear the costs.
- In the context of individual tableware and procurement of a dishwasher, power and water connections need to be sorted out. Storage space also plays a greater role. Booths/stands may need structural alterations to create additional space for a dishwasher and/or storage space.
- In this case, the workload and financial effort for the municipality and organiser are lower and limited to providing advice and support, raising awareness and conducting inspections.

#### Ideas, measures and other implementation aspects

##### Determining the concept for dishwashing, storage and logistics

- Where are reusables washed and stored – immediately within or behind the exhibitor’s own stand? Does this require a dishwasher?
- Can several stands share (large) storage containers?
- Is it possible to run a central dishwashing station? This will need staffing, including to ensure compliance with hygiene regulations.
- Can smaller stands team up and wash their dishes together (e.g. using an existing dishwasher at a larger stand)?

- Is it possible to join an existing dishwashing or storage infrastructure in the surrounding area (e.g. catering establishments, hotels, public facilities)?
- Have dishwashing systems already been put in place to wash mugs and can they be used as well?
- Small dishwashing units on bikes might help at smaller markets; these don’t require high-voltage currents or running water. The Green League (“Grüne Liga”) in Berlin, for example, uses a mobile dishwashing bike at their markets.
- Does a hybrid solution make sense for smaller markets, for example a combination of individual tableware and shared dishwashing services? This is something that works at the market in Ebersberg.

→ [click here for best practice \(German only\)](#)

##### Organising logistics & distribution

- Are financial means or staffing capacities (for example volunteers) available for dishwashing logistics and handling reusables?
- Have responsibilities for dishwashing, storage and supplies been clearly agreed?
- Has a small reserve of single-use items been arranged for use in emergencies to reduce concerns around quantities among exhibitors?
- Can stands join up to use standardised tableware? While the costs for procurement would still need to be borne by the exhibitors, the municipality could help connect exhibitors.

## Returns and dealing with visitors

- Where does used tableware go: back to the stands that handed it out or will other stands accept it as well?
- Is there a fast lane for returns, are there separate return areas or return boxes (with reusables inaccessible after their return)?
- Are the barriers for returns low and are return stations easily recognisable to visitors?
- Consider setting up or suggesting (covered) eating areas! These encourage visitors to eat food on site and promote the acceptance of reusables.

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**“Switching to reusables does not only mean additional financial effort, but also a significant reduction in waste disposal costs.”**

Levin Stracke,  
Organizer, Weihnachtsmarkt am See GbR

.....

## 2.2.3 Financing & accounting

When we look at financing, similar points apply both to pooling services and individual systems:

- Check suitable financing sources (project or other funding; sponsors; applying for the municipality to take over or share costs; transferring costs to stand fees).
- We recommend establishing a cash-free accounting system, especially for returning deposits by debit card.
- Agree on charging (ideally) the same deposit amounts, even for different items of tableware, to simplify returns and accounting.
- Deposits on tableware can always also include cutlery (forks/spoons).
- Clarify whether storage space and eating areas can be classified as sales areas to reduce stand fees or enable shared storage space (separation of storage space and sales areas).
- Asking for tableware donations is a motivating measure to activate, and raise awareness among, residents.

**Imposing a tax on single-use packaging generates income for municipal budgets. Funds thus generated could be used to expand and finance a reuse infrastructure, e.g. a mobile dishwashing unit or a dishwashing line.**



## RETURNING USED DISHES AT OTHER VENDORS' STALLS?"

At a market with individual reusable tableware in Bonn, that's exactly what happens! Here, visitors can return individual tableware at any stand ( the amount of tableware returned to a different stand was very low at the 2025 market). Exhibitors communicate with one another via a WhatsApp group and return the tableware they accepted to its respective owner at the end of the day. We have summarised more information on reuse at the Christmas market in Bonn in this *best practice (German only)*.

## 3 The implementation phase: Reuse in action

After the analysis and planning phases, you can now begin implementing the project. All parties involved have agreed: you want to take the reuse path. The decision on how to implement reuse has been made, you have planned measures and informed everyone involved.

### 3.1 Just before the market

#### Final (online) meeting with actors

At the last meeting before the market opens, clarify last issues and remove uncertainties. In the course, make all relevant information on the local implementation of reuse at the Christmas market available once more, and provide exhibitors with communication materials. This is also a last opportunity to agree on channels of communication so that everyone is well connected over the course of the event.

#### Communicating with exhibitors

- Just before the Christmas market opens, exhibitors are again provided with materials to help them handle the implementation of reuse. (*The Wegweiser-Mehrweg.de website* has a selection of corresponding documents (German only): *bulletins, guidelines; information sheets; a flyer on how to handle reusables*, etc.)
- Trainings and instructions for staff are particularly helpful; if possible, enlist the support of the local health authorities.

#### Communicating with visitors

- Develop communication measures/a communication plan
- Prepare for “reuse” via public communication channels (press releases, social media, flyers, public advertising spaces, etc.)
- Plan measures to raise awareness, e.g. ...
  - by providing information on site
  - on posters
  - in website posts
  - in newspaper articles
  - through social media campaigns
- Link to other municipal reuse campaigns

→ *Overview of various communication measures (German only)*

.....  
“At Christmas markets, reusables are particularly effective because the event runs over an extended period of time.”

Peter Barth Jr.,  
Owner, Grillimbiss / Bonn Showmen’s Association  
.....

#### Staff and inspections

- Plan staffing resources (incl. organisation, coordination and especially with regard to inspections). Appointing a central point of contact to coordinate things is decisive; they can be supported by a fixed task force comprising the organiser, waste removal company and environmental agency. It should be possible to call in additional expert advice from the council or external expertise if needed.

### 3.2 During the market

To ensure implementation and acceptance, the event should be accompanied by various measures.

#### Monitoring and gathering data

- Gather waste data around reuse; this can then be used to measure the success of the latter. Photos of bins taken over the course of the day also paint a conclusive picture of waste reduction.
- Adapt processes quickly by a constant exchange between all parties involved during inspections and checks.

#### On-site inspections

- Integrate municipal regulatory agencies and food inspectors to inspect the stands. In practice, “enforcement days” have proved effective, on which various agencies perform combined inspections.
- Anonymous test shoppers also provide information on actual on-site implementation

- Clarify whether it is possible to involve volunteers/local initiatives/environmental associations
- If violations are detected, warnings are issued; we furthermore recommend imposing fines.

### Communicating with exhibitors

- Provide exhibitors with information materials and/or signs in several languages to raise customer awareness (“Where do I return my tableware?”)
- Visit the *Wegweiser-Mehrweg website (German only)* for inspiration and templates.
- Should questions or issues arise, the organisation team is available via a hotline or WhatsApp groups.
- Stands are well connected to keep communication channels short.



Dear guests, we are legally obliged to serve you with reusable tableware. Thank you for your contribution to protecting our environment.

### Communicating with visitors

- Use fun means to get visitors on board with reuse, for example through a reuse quiz or gamification elements
- Explanations on deposits in several languages are accessible via QR code
- Teams of volunteers are at hand to answer questions and provide information
- Signs and info boards provide information on how to handle reusables (in several languages or at least in English (“speech-less” with pictographs where applicable))
- To prevent some visitors collecting and returning large numbers of reusables against deposit, communicate a return limit per person
- Communicate the use of reuse via social media posts straight from the market, for example in interviews and stories with exhibitors

### Other measures

- Advertise reuse through influencers and local media
- Win over sponsors for reuse with prominent placement at the market; visibly involve sponsors (if applicable)
- Develop an eye-catching reuse label or logo at the market



## **4 The optimisation and stabilisation phase: Reuse as the new normal**

The (first) implementation of reuse at Christmas markets is followed by a phase that is no less important than the introduction itself. Looking ahead to the next event, the Christmas market just past is now followed by continuous improvement and long-term integration. The aim here should be to establish reuse as a permanent and comprehensive part of the market, to professionalise processes and strengthen the acceptance of reuse among all parties involved. Our experience has shown: things get easier from the second year on.

The following steps help reuse become a permanent practice.

### **4.1 Monitoring and evaluating measures**

A comprehensive debriefing is essential to ensure reuse works well and is successful in the long run. After the market has ended, every actor involved – from exhibitors to organisers to municipal departments – should come together for a structured feedback process. In a joint debriefing session, the following can be documented:

- What worked well, what worked less well?
- What challenges did you face?
- Which aspects should be improved in the coming year?
- How much tableware was needed, how much needs planning for the coming year?

Document these findings as Lessons Learned. These are the foundation for next year's adaptations – for example in logistics, communications, stand organisation or monitoring mechanisms. An annual review steadily helps make reuse more reliable, more efficient, and expandable.

If you used a pooling service, the following also applies:

- during their annual announcement of needs, exhibitors state which foods and drinks they offer and what reusable tableware they need to do so. This enquiry should be made on a yearly basis and compared with the utilisation data from the previous season, which are stored in the previous order form.

A central element of this phase is the data evaluation. The amounts of waste and reusables as well as qualitative feedback from the parties involved provide information on the effect of the measures. If possible, the data evaluation should focus on the number of items and/or the quantity of single-use packaging avoided, not on the weight thereof.

### **4.2 Make reuse binding and integrate it in the long term**

In principle, the aim should be to make reuse “normal” at Christmas markets. It will have become normal when no one can really imagine things ever having been different. Reaching this point takes a change in regulations that prescribe this practice of resource conservation and make it binding. Politics and administrations are called upon here. They have to adapt the enforcement instruments of reuse orders/single-use bans accordingly for public events and make them binding in municipal regulations and contractual texts.

Once reuse has been embedded in law, inspections must ensure compliance with regulations. A balance between recognising exemplary behaviour on the one hand and consistently pursuing violations on the other creates fairness and reliability.

Reuse is the path towards low-waste events and has potential that far exceeds Christmas markets. Other events would also benefit from comprehensive council and municipal reuse concepts. The following approaches are therefore worth thinking about:

- Partnerships with other events (taking place at or around the same time), social facilities or regional companies generate synergies and would help use existing resources more effectively.
- Continuous support promises to establish long-term partnerships, for example with reusable system providers, the association of exhibitors or regional companies. Long-term framework agreements with reusable system providers, for example, create planning security for organisers and service providers alike.
- Partnerships with workshops for the disabled, hotels, canteens or schools are suitable for bringing reuse processes into other areas of society and are always an opportunity to simplify reuse logistics processes for events.

- Exhibitors who assume a pioneering role in conserving resources through their use of reusables deserve to be appreciated for doing so, for example through discounts on stand fees, simplified permit procedures or public awards. A municipal sustainability award for particularly committed actors could generate additional awareness.
- A key component of stabilisation is public communication. Success stories – for example about declining amounts of waste or an unusually clean street-scape even after highly frequented public events (images of waste bins, spick and span squares and streets...) – should be shared actively. Portraits and interviews with stands that practice reuse in the local press garner attention and people who follow suit. At the same time, they are way to thank companies for their commitment.
- The experiences gathered over the course of the project have taught us how much sense it can make for municipal waste disposal companies to expand their offer to include cleaning reusable tableware and operating mobile dishwashing units. This benefits clubs and associations as well as (municipal) events in the long term (see Constance Council).

.....

**“I think it would be great if we had [reusables] ... but it would be nice if the whole Christmas market got on board.”**

Visitor, Gießen Christmas Market

.....



## Conclusion & appendix

As the implementation alliance *mehrweg.einfach.machen*, we are convinced that it is possible to implement 100% reuse at Christmas markets, thus conserving resources and paving the way for low-waste municipal events across the nation.

It is time to lead by example, to look to other municipalities for inspiration and to prove that the Christmas holiday season can be both a time of reflection and environmental protection. By embedding an obligation for reuse in municipal regulations and establishing clear obligations for exhibitors, through partnerships and convictions, the commitment of municipalities and organisers can raise the bar considerably – for the industry, for the environment and for us all.

These guidelines aim to support municipalities and municipal organisers on this journey, to guide them through each step of the process, providing ideas and showing that reuse is feasible through best practices. The contents of this roadmap were developed as part of the “Zero-Waste Events – Reuse on Christmas Markets” alliance, a project of the implementation alliance in cooperation with Deutsche Städtetag on the basis of exchanged experiences and the expertise of various municipalities.

### Further materials and networking opportunities

- “Wegweiser-Mehrweg” – The Reuse Map: All materials developed as part of the project have been bundled on the information platform *Wegweiser-Mehrweg (German only)*.
- Christmas market booklet: We have provided a summary of project findings and further information on the alliance in our project report (“German only”).
- Best practices of other municipalities: You are welcome to contact the responsible parties; practical tips and experience are always helpful.
- The MEHRCE Community: One of 20 innovation communities financed under the DATIpilot funding guidelines by the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR). MEHRCE stands for reuse (German “Mehrweg”) and circular economy and promotes the transition from single-use to reusable packaging in various fields. Information from the world of reuse and on community calls is shared regularly via their *newsletter (“German only”)*.
- “Tacheles”: An overarching format for exchanging information and experiences around reuse, the name of which loosely translates to “brass tacks”. For more information, [click here \(German only\)](#).
- For another example of how reuse works at other large-scale events as well, read the *MEM\_Handbook Reuse at Large-Scale Events.pdf*

**If you have any questions or would like to give feedback on these guidelines, please contact Eva Badem (eva.badem@wwf.de).**

### The implementation alliance ...

... *mehrweg.einfach.machen* was founded by WWF Germany, German reuse association Mehrwegverband Deutschland and ProjectTogether in 2022 to support the new obligation to offer reusables and strengthen reuse in the takeaway field in Germany.

Together with over 200 partners, reusable system providers, final distributors and municipalities, the alliance realises innovative and implementation-oriented projects.

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machen.**

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We would like to extend our special thanks to Tim Bagner of Deutsche Städtetag for the excellent cooperation.

We would also like to thank the alliance municipalities:

- Kerstin Maida, Cologne
- Leonhard Krause, State Capital Düsseldorf
- Alin Schulz, D.LIVE
- Agnes Lang, Ebersberg
- Kai Platz, Ebersberg
- Dr. Nina Malaviya, Frankfurt am Main
- Anne Joost, Freiburg
- Oliver Sihler, Göppingen
- Oliver Klinke, Jena
- Selina Kahl, Kiel
- Lisa Genzel, Krefeld
- Anne-Marie van der Beek, Leipzig
- Mirko Schimmelschmidt, Leipzig
- Inke Moeller, Lübeck
- Inken Liepold, Lübeck
- Jana Sperlich, Lübeck
- Miriam Figge, Münster
- Nicolai Meyer, Münster
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# Working Together for More Reusable Items

**More about our work –  
useful links:**

Implementation Alliance  
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