



Sustainability behind the bar

Aho, Kimmo

JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Referencing: Aho, Kimmo. Sustainability behind the bar. Circular Economy UAS; 2020.

Introduction

Some bartenders, bars and other stakeholders in the alcohol business have started to focus on sustainability in themselves, living and businesses in recent years. This paper discusses and benchmarks tested good practices for all the stakeholders in the bar and hospitality industry to develop their sustainability effort. The focus is on the environmental impact and the idea is obviously to make the impact smaller. This can be achieved by applying, for example, circular economy methods or simply by reducing the initial environmental load in terms of resource wisdom. The improvement activities in this report involve other dimensions of sustainability as well. These activities can include, for example, financial benefits achieved by using the material resources more wisely, an improved company image or the increased well-being of the employees.

Several professionals working in the industry across Finland were interviewed for this report. These interviewees were all applying various sustainability practices in their work. Additionally, they are all working, or have previously been working in positions relating to the alcohol service business. They have a relative wealth of experience in the industry, and therefore they are expected to have knowledge and insight for the subject. To generalize, all the interviewees were practicing sustainable activities on their jobs, and they wondered why sustainability activities are only slightly applied among Finnish bartenders. The interviewees felt that improving environmental sustainability in particular is easy and will not require much, but it can benefit you a lot in terms of energy, time saving and resources, therefore leading to financial savings.

Additionally, many interviewees were demanding stronger actions from restaurant chains, as their influence would naturally be greater. However, as someone needs to be a forerunner with these actions, it must be noted that small and privately-owned companies can be such forerunners as well. Now is the right time to start your environmental activities, or even a programme in your bar, pub, club or restaurant and this paper provides you with some ideas on how to get started.





Biowaste

Finnish households have collected their organic waste with varying levels of eagerness within the last twenty-something years and professional kitchens have also recycled their organic waste for a long time. Therefore, it is surprising that bartenders have just recently begun recycling organic waste. Tatu Torikka, a facilitator at Altia, has observed that collecting and recycling bio waste in bars is only on an elementary level, such as environmental sustainability on the whole seems to be. Additionally, Mika Koivula, the founder of the Tiskillä network, agrees with this perspective. He actually tells that he has seen the work community fighting against the recycling of bio waste. However, Koivula is positive towards the collecting of bio waste, and he gave some practical hints for making it easy. According to Koivula, mise en place is where you produce most of the bio waste and therefore it is easy to separate. Doing so will reduce the needed trash bins and save space. Additionally, this saves money as the trash bags needed are smaller and cheaper.

Bio waste is easy to collect invisibly with the small bio waste collectors placed behind or under the bar counter next to other recycling vessels. You can also place a bio waste vessel next to fruit cutting station. Another invisible and functional option can be dropping the bio waste into a hidden bio waste collector. This just requires a drilled hole on a work station and a bio waste collector under the station. Another critical point is at the glass washing station. According to Mikko Ahonen, a bartender at Ravintola Hankala, they collect the bio waste this way in order to collect the leftover fruit garnishes. This is something that unfortunately is not done in every bar. However, this would be one of the easiest ways to start the environmental activities behind every bar. Most likely the lack of recycling bio waste is due to unchallenged traditions at work and this is something that modern bartenders should start doing. Ahonen continues that they are aiming to optimize the mise en place for fruit garnishes and rather prepare them during the shift than waste them by cutting the fruit beforehand. He also reminds that if you cover freshly cut fruit garnishes with a moist cheese cloth or paper, you can most likely still use them during a shift next morning.

Regardless of bio waste recycling, the most important way to reduce any waste is to minimize it before it actually occurs. This is important especially in food waste, as the waste itself generates bigger environmental emissions than manufacturing food packages and delivery combined.

Composting

There are effective industrial composting machines that will compost the food waste into organic fertilizer in a few days or even in a single day. This fertilizer, known as compost, can then be used in your own herb garden or given to subcontractors to be used in larger scale cultivation. However, the price of an industrial scale composting machine might be too high for many bars. Therefore, it could be something that several different companies, or for example departments within a hotel, acquire and use together in terms of shared use.



Home growing herbs

Many bartenders are not using domestic mint as they do not find it tasteful enough. Most likely the lack of taste relates to the growing methods instead of the country of production. Big, commercial scale market gardens are using hydroponics in growing the herbs. This method enables efficient and ecological large scale cultivation, but to the bartenders' disappointment they are lacking in taste, just as commercially grown tomatoes are when compared to self-sufficiency grown ones.

However, mint is easy to grow inside in a flowerpot or outdoors in the summertime. Home-grown mint is, naturally varying from variety to variety, stronger than commercially grown. Therefore, a bar can gain added value by providing self-grown mint. Mint and other herbs can be considered an interior decoration, but this has to be taken into consideration in your self-supervision plan as self-grown organic matter can be a risk within the foodstuff service and production areas.

According to Paula Eskelinen, food inspector of the Helsinki Food Safety Unit, washing these herbs is crucial, especially if they are not heated or there is an opportunity that guests have been touching them. Several restaurants within Finland are experienced in self-sufficient cultivation. For example Muru and Savoy in Helsinki are known for growing their herbs in their roof gardens. Even more, some restaurants such as Satulinna in Hirvensalmi, Savutuvan Apaja in Jyväskylä, and especially Tertin kartano in Mikkeli are growing a notable portion of their herbs and vegetables in their own gardens.

Glass

Tatu Torikka argues that the biggest factor in the life cycle of an alcoholic beverage is the glass bottle. The packaging materials are constantly being improved and their weight lightened. This has a big impact, especially on the products imported overseas. This is due to the fact that generally the longer the transportation, the bigger the emissions. In addition, Mika Koivula considers the reduction of packaging and he notices that lately producers have also focused on reducing their bottle weight. Often premium products are packed so that the package itself reflects the premium image. Therefore, some expensive wines are stored in heavier bottles and even individual wooden boxes. Respectively, premium cognacs can be packed in expensive crystal carafes which are then packed into boxes lined with silk. However, in bar-use these single boxes rarely add value as most likely for example wine is not presented to a guest with the wooden case. Additionally, nowadays a heavy packaging is hardly a sales argument, but rather the other way around as such elements are rather a deal-breaker for the environmentally conscious consumer. Therefore, it is important that the bartenders are challenging the suppliers to consider how to reduce the environmental impact, especially if it provides no added value for the bar or its guests. According to Mika Koivula, the crowd pressure can, and will, have an impact on suppliers



and subcontractors. Therefore, exploring the background and demanding sustainability from stakeholders and the supply chain is important.

Also the serving vessel makes a difference. Mira Ritasmäki, Chief of Restaurant Operations at Night People Group, is in charge of sustainability work and its implementation within approximately 20 clubs around Finland. She noticed that they were the first night club to start using polycarbonate instead of glasses and this happened well before when it became sexy to promote environmental actions within the night club sector. In a night club glasses are breaking at a high volume and therefore the life cycle of a glass is short, only weeks or mostly months while the life cycle of polycarbonate is longer, even years. This will also increase the customer satisfaction as they don't need to worry about broken glass on a floor. On the other hand, the drinking experience might be lower due to the idea that plastic vessels are not as comfortable when drinking as glass alternatives. However, nowadays polycarbonate has a glass-like feeling and clubbers are already used to using them.

Plastic

Traditionally most of the plastic waste produced in bars has been packaging material and plastic straws. The use of plastic straws has reduced radically during the last few years, and will be eliminated within the EU legislation by 2021 in all the EU member countries. The awareness of the environmental issues related to the use of straws grew when Bacardi started a campaign to give up the use of plastic straws and stirrers in 2016. Jarkko Issukka, who worked as an ambassador for Bacardi in Finland during that time, was actively promoting the campaign and many bartenders started to talk with their guests about the harm the straws are causing for marine fauna. Mira Ritasmäki told that when Night People Group gave up using plastic straws years ago, the staff, consisting mostly of Generation Z, gave more feedback on the company's Facebook than any other activity before or ever since. The feedback was only positive.

Nowadays bars are using mostly biodegradable, bamboo, metal or even original, old fashioned straws. Ravintola Hankala uses hollow spaghettis as straws. Mikko Ahonen tells that they adopted the practice from a music festival, and guests have been delighted. For the gluten-free guests they provide normal biodegradable straws.

There are also other perspectives for the straws. Tatu Torikka discusses the use of straws from different perspectives, noticing the expense of metal and glass straws and also the hygiene of bamboo straws. According to Torikka, using straws for enjoying the drink means that some of the aromas and mouthfeel is lost. Knowing this, it is the task of the staffs to guide the guests to consider enjoying the drinks without straws. Marko Kankare, bartender at On the Rocks, agrees with this and he has been suggesting his guests to enjoy the drinks without the straws already for years. Both Kankare and Torikka mention that you can quite easily drink your cider without the straw. In any case, adults seldom use straws when at home.



Mira Ritasmäki tells that they are not selling bottled water in Night People Group clubs, only tap water. In a large club this certainly does not promote the sales, but on the other hand, in a country with excellent tap water it has positive environmental effects. It can strengthen the company's other environmental activities, too.

Metal and batteries

A notable share of bars' metal waste is made up of different metal bottle stoppers. These include for example crown caps and the metal cages on sparkling wines. These can be easily collected separately and then recycled as metal. Mika Koivula gives an example of his previous workplace in New Zealand. They were collecting the disposable aluminium foil candle holders for possible reuse. By doing this, the aluminium foil was not considered as a waste, but rather a resource for reuse.

In Finland we have a functional beverage container recycling system. This system includes the majority of cans, glass and plastic bottles used for beverages and is based on a deposit. Therefore, very little goes outside of the system. This applies to the hospitality industry as well. Many bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants are collecting cans or other utensils directly behind the bar into designated Palpa-recycling bags which are then emptied at the end of the shift.

Hotel Kämp's bar manager Ville Liikanen tells that although there is very limited space behind their bars, they are collecting all the metals behind the bar. However, still regrettably few bars are collecting all the other metal containers except cans. The reason for the lack of metal recycling is most likely inconsideration instead of the complication of the recycling. In many bars crown caps are, together with metal cans, the major source of metal waste. Recycling metal is extremely important as they can be recycled infinitely.

Also batteries can be easily recycled. Mikko Ahonen tells that they are collecting batteries separately which are every now and then taken into communal recycling stations. According to Ahonen, this is an easy thing to do and nowadays he could not think of not recycling them.

Energy saving

An easy way to save energy is to keep the refrigeration devices constantly clean and maintained. This includes not only cleaning and de-icing, but also taking care of door seals and making sure there is sufficient ventilation behind the devices. Also hoovering the dust away from the back of the refrigeration and freezer is important and needs to be done on a regular basis. Using thermometers is important in terms of both foodstuff safety and energy saving as well.

Mika Koivula discusses energy saving further by challenging the way we are used to using the devices. He asks that would it be possible to turn the refrigeration devices off for a



certain period, such as nighttime, when not in use, or is it more ecological to keep them on. Koivula also considers how night clubs could save energy by adjusting its air conditioning and heating based on the customer volumes. These are important considerations and something that all the professionals could do within their own workplaces.

Mira Ritasmäki has also been considering similar issues in the clubs under her management. According to her, they have shifted to using led lights and also turning off the refrigeration devices at night. However, Ritasmäki says that more pressure is needed by the legislation on the EU level as well as many operators do not shift into environmental activities until forced to do so.

Tomi Hiltunen, a partner of the cocktail bar Delorean, tells that they have been using touchless faucets and motion sensor lighting since opening the bar. By doing so, they have been able to control and minimize guest-based use of water and electricity. For minimizing the employee-based use Hiltunen recommends evaluating when it is sensible to turn on the needed devices. He points out an example of a dish washing machine, which can be turned on when washing the first baskets. This can have a huge impact especially on a bar's quiet morning shift, as the washing machine uses electricity even unused, when switched on.

Also coffee can be brewed when the first guest asks for it, not hours before. The advantage would be saving energy and freshly brewed coffee. Jarkko Issukka, the roastery ambassador for Robert Paulig, masters these useful hints for us. Based on his experience, coffee could be poured into a thermos instead of keeping it in a pot. The benefits are twofold; first of all the quality will be better in a thermos and secondly, the loss is reduced as the coffee in a pot will not last as long as in a thermos.

Another hint Issukka provides is for the maintenance of the espresso machine, as it can be switched to energy saving mode at night. By doing so it will use very little energy when not in use, but does not need lots of energy when turned on.

Something we all can do to improve the optimal use of coffee machines is again knowing their use and maintenance. It is important that all the staff members know how to properly use the machines as it guarantees the high quality of coffee, longer life cycle of machinery and service reliability during the busy shifts. The maintenance involves regular deliming as lime in the water can clog the coffee machine. The cleaning applies to ice makers as well, and again, the benefits are twofold, as the result would be better hygiene and energy efficiency.

Water efficiency

Due to the fact that we have water galore in Finland, there has been a tendency of excessive use of water. This is something we really need to work on in the future to reduce the use of water and, fortunately, there are several activities we can do. Activities easily applied include waterless urinals, adjusting the water pressure and temperature and also the amount used for



flushing the toilets. More energy and water sensitive devices can also be purchased. These could be for example ice makers, dishwashing machines and water sensitive faucets. Measuring the use of water and discussing this with the staff also helps to improve water efficiency. Importantly, observing the correct function of water faucets and toilets is needed and if leakage is found, they need to be fixed as soon as possible. Even if it seems insignificant, a single toilet seat, urinal or water tap leaking can lead to losses worth hundreds of euros a year.

Locally produced foodstuff

The transportation length of food is referred as food miles and when talking about beverages, wine miles respectively. These descriptors refer to the distance the product travels before consumption. The distance has an impact on CO²-emissions, among others. However, the transportation is only a fraction of a product's food print and a majority of the emissions are formed during the production. Therefore, a product produced even at a long distance can be produced environmentally friendly when whole life cycle of the product is taken into account. Despite this, during the last decade more and more consumers have been concerned about local production.

Partly this concern can be due to the megatrends of health and sustainability, but also partly due to more and higher quality local production. For example in Finland we have currently more than 100 craft breweries and several distilleries. These are located across the country and favoring them benefits sustainability in several ways. Locally production generates local financial profit and this leads to an improved local economy. Additionally, a business buying local production can promote its desirability among the local business network as others are then mutually supporting its business as well. Often local production will strengthen the brand image as it can be associated with craftsmanship.

Mika Koivula advocates local production and favors them, but just with a slight condition. He says, that a sustainable overseas product can be better than an unsustainable local one. Tomi Hiltunen further notices the reasons for the guest to come to the bar. He emphasizes consumer escapism, which means guests desire to escape from everyday life to a bed of roses unavailable at home. This bears on the service experience. According to Hiltunen, sometime ago there was a tendency to replace citrus fruit with vinegar, even if it does not result in a better service experience. Therefore, we cannot consider only local production, but we have to accept the fact that we are a northern country in need of some imported foodstuffs and other resources. Nevertheless, Hiltunen says that he favors high quality domestic ingredients whenever possible. He uses a Strawberry Margarita as an example. As they do not keep the strawberries in their selection, they often recommend other variations of a Margarita for a guest requesting one. These recommended alternatives include Margaritas made using cranberries or lingonberries as both of them are in a selection anyway.



Ari Manninen, teacher at Lapland Education Center REDU, is also well-known for advocating local ingredients and materials in a bartender's work and cocktail-making. For years he has promoted using berries from Lapland, such as lingonberries and cloudberries, instead of imported fruits. Certainly, an Asian or European tourist hardly finds tropical fruits exotic, but foraged wild Laplander berries are the ultimate exotic manifest of nature. Additionally, they are loaded with intense aromas, flavors and health benefits as well as stories and anecdotes to support the cocktails.

Utilizing the ingredients several times

Delorean is a circular economy pioneer within the Finnish cocktail and bartending business. They are trying to utilize the foodstuff as much as possible before recycling them. Delorean uses its leftover citrus peels in making cordial and used coffee grounds in home-made coffee liqueur. Tomi Hiltunen tells that they are actually collecting the leftover ingredients from neighboring bars as well. According to Hiltunen, making cordial can be considered as an environmental act as it saves money, reduces the kilos of needed citrus and therefore reduces the environmental impact. They have also used leftover citrus fruits in making beer in collaboration with the local Hiisi brewery and sorbet with the Art Gelato ice cream maker.

Mika Koivula shares an example of using one ingredient several times. He guides to juicing the ginger first, then boiling the syrup out of the ginger and finally making candies with the remaining ginger. He says additionally that a similar method can be applied for example to the utilization of berries.

Several restaurants and bars are suffering from a loss of wine as the opened bottles are turning into vinegar. Tomi Hiltunen is experienced in terms of using leftover wines, as he makes cordial from white and red wines. He says that they always have a cocktail on a menu that uses wine cordial and therefore loss can be minimized.

Ville Liikanen also says that as they always serve a selection of Champagnes by the glass, it is inevitable that some loss actualizes, as the quality of the Champagne served has to be perfect with each glass. Therefore, Liikanen suggests using flat Champagne as a base for Champagne syrup which is then used for cocktails. The benefit here, in addition to the ones already discussed, is that the bar is able to serve something that other bars don't, while also maintaining the image of top-quality cocktails.

Organic

Organic farming and production within agriculture aims to use less chemicals and better environmental practices in order to make production more sustainable. Many bars are already having organic beers and wines in their selection. Also organic fruits are something bartenders could use more as they are lacking in chemicals, making for example the use of the



citrus peel easy. Organic products are more expensive than ones produced by conventional agriculture, but many consumers are willing to pay the premium price.

Some consumers are against organic production as they see Finnish agriculture products being safe and pure on their own. However, organic production also ensures the well-being of agriculture workers and animals, so there are other benefits as well. Nowadays biodynamic and natural wines have become popular as well. These can be seen as an ultimate form of organic production, and even if there is no certification for natural wines, they present a form of sustainability.

Fair trade

Fair trade is a certificate that ensures a decent income for, among other producers, coffee, tea, wine and cocoa growers. A decent income enables, for example, children to go to school instead of working at the farm, or more environmentally friendly growing methods. Fair trade products are also imported to Finnish markets. Actually, the markets for Fair trade are mostly in the Western world, as local markets in poor countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are typically not willing to pay the premium price, as opposed to Finland, for example.

Some agriculture products, such as banana and cocoa, are especially vulnerable to unethical practices. These can include underpayment, the use of child labour and a lack of work safety. Therefore, it is important to notice the circumstances that may be affected within Fair trade. However, Fair trade has faced some challenges as well recently. British supermarket chain Sainsbury's gave up using the Fair trade certificate within their teas. Instead they created their own certificate partnered by another chain, Tesco. However, according to Finnwatch, Fair trade is the best certification system for tea and they encourage to use Fair trade tea only.

Conclusion

Many guests already find different sustainability activities a stable part of their lives. This is something that the bar and hospitality business is still learning. However, doing sustainability activities is something that is an expectation today. Additionally, these activities will offer several benefits such as better control of loss and savings on purchases, inventory and waste management. Also many employees consider it a norm and it will have an effect on the company image as well.

There are several ways to promote sustainability activities behind the bar or generally in the hospitality business. First of all, eliminate unnecessary use of resources in the first place. Reuse all the possible ingredients and resources whenever possible. Then make sure you have easy and comprehensive recycling procedures. The most important thing is to get started, the sooner the better!