

"Boosting Sustainable Tourism Development and Capacity of Tourism SMEs through Transnational Cooperation and Knowledge Transfer"

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Tourban

Individual cities' exploitation plans

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1. Introduction

The present report has been elaborated within the framework of the [Tourban project](#), which is co-funded by the COSME programme of the European Union. The main objective of Tourban is to spearhead a transnational and cross-sectoral movement towards tourism sustainability in urban areas across Europe, leveraging SMEs' (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) capacities and skills to uptake best practices and develop innovative solutions that make them both more sustainable and competitive. In this regard, identifying opportunities for urban tourism SMEs necessarily requires an initial focus on the challenges they face and the contextual situations in which they are operating. Therefore, this report focuses on mapping urban tourism challenges in the seven Tourban pilot cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Dubrovnik, Kiel, Budapest and Tallinn), with the participation of local stakeholders.

This report is the result of the activity 4.4 - Update of the individual cities' exploitation plans. In the Grant Agreement it was announced that *"on basis of the developed projects and solutions in the Tourban SMEs, the involved partners and cities will develop their individual exploitation plans and activities to take advantage of and capitalise on the solutions or results most relevant for their territory. Under this activity the project will make use again of its stakeholder network and the public support granted to it, which has been already expressed by several institutions at project proposal stage (e.g. Wonderful Copenhagen and City of Copenhagen, Turisme de Barcelona) to make the best use of the created solutions for the cities and guarantee their sustainability and uptake. The exploitation plans will consist in a very concise and straight to the point document elaborated by each partner (D4.15) under the instructions and common criteria defined by NIT."*

2. Aim and methodology of this report

As this is the very last deliverable of the Tourban project, it has to close the loop and link the outcome of the project with the challenges that Tourban has identified at the start of the project in early 2021 (*D1.1 Report of urban tourism challenges in the partner cities*). It is also there to display per city how the destinations are profiting from the solutions that were developed in the SMEs by their Tourban projects. Lastly, by using Tourban's stakeholder network, this report should show how the cities are making use of the Tourban solutions and how the uptake of these solutions helps to make the city more sustainable in the future – and this way ensuring the sustainability of the Tourban funding. In order to do so, the Tourban partners have agreed on the following structure of the individual cities' exploitation plans:

1. A short recap of major challenges for city tourism that were identified at the beginning of the Tourban project: For each city, the responsible partner reviewed in the *Report of urban tourism challenges in the partner cities*, which were the major challenges identified in 2021? One main source for this point was the summary of focus groups per city conducted in February/March 2021. The main focus of the city exploitation plans lies on the city challenges, but depending on the city, it might be difficult to link all the Tourban projects to the main city challenges in step 2). For this reason, we have also included the major SME challenges in each city in order to be able to make a connection with all the projects.
2. For each city, the responsible partner reflected on how the Tourban SMEs have coped with the challenges identified under step 1). In this document we now provide a list of all projects per city and show how they managed to meet the identified challenges.
3. This third step combines and reflects on the first two steps – and this way describes how the project results have been and will be exploited in each city. By using the stakeholder network contacts in each city, each responsible undertook 2-3 in-depth interviews with city tourism stakeholders (ideally someone who was part of the focus group in 2021) in May/June 2023. As preparation for the interviews, the interview partners were sent the identified main challenges from 2021 and a list and short description of the Tourban projects in the respective city. The guideline questions that all partners had agreed upon were:
 - *What has happened in the meantime in your city in terms of sustainable tourism development and the challenges identified in 2021?*
 - *How did Tourban fit into this development?*
 - *How are you planning to tackle challenges in the future?*

The document then finishes with a conclusion and outlook that tries to combine the findings of the individual cities' exploitation plans and with a TOURBAN PLEDGE of all project partners to build on the learnings of the Tourban Project in the future.

3. AMSTERDAM

3.1 Major challenges for city tourism

On a destination level, Amsterdam has been significantly struggling to cope with the negative consequences of excessive tourism pressure, which has been negatively impacting the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of inhabitants (especially the ones living in the city centre). Amsterdam suffers several of the well-known consequences of overtourism and overcrowding in urban city centres, which can be summarised in two particularly challenging areas:

- **Socio-cultural challenges** determined by tourism pressure especially on the city centre. This determines negative consequences such as overcrowding of public spaces and facilities, homogenisation of the urban landscape and facilities, posing a risk of destroying the character of the city that people come to experience. Steady increase in visitors to the city centre generates the overall impression of living in a theme park. The streets feel less lived in, and even the tourists have started complaining that they only see other tourists.
- **Environmental challenges:** mainly related to littering, degradation of green areas and pollution of the urban environment, including canals (mainly due to engines of the enormous number of boats and plastic and other garbage ending in the water because of not environmentally friendly behaviours of visitors).

Many residents in Amsterdam feel the tourism industry has had a marked impact on the local neighbourhoods. Moreover, tourists' offensive behaviour, often induced by irresponsible consumption of drugs and alcohol, seems to be particularly problematic, especially in some areas of the city (such as the red-light district). Many studies have highlighted the different perspectives of different neighbourhoods, meaning that the highest levels of overcrowding, irritations and hostility against tourism were perceived in the city centre and the most touristic areas.

In addition to raising tourist taxes, local officials have sought to deal with the situation by banning new hotel developments in certain areas and launching communication campaigns to **encourage visitors to explore less touristic parts of the city**. Nevertheless, to be effective and lead to a real change, any solution needs the strong cooperation of the tourism SMEs, which represent the backbone of the industry in the city.

The main challenges mentioned by SME representatives in 2021 were:

- Offering sustainable services is generally more expensive and clients are not always willing to pay for this. In this sense, **marketing and communication skills** on how to communicate sustainability and sustainable principles is often lacking, with the consequence that SMEs do not feel comfortable in "pushing" for sustainable options as they might risk to lose customers.
- Business owners often indicate they do not have the **technical and managerial knowledge** on how to implement more sustainable business solutions and they lack of time & skills to gain that knowledge. This lack of time and skill also translates into weak training for employees on sustainability aspects.
- **Financial capacities** to move to sustainable business are limited, after Covid even more. Grants and subsidies are difficult or go with bureaucratic procedures. Banks are conservative and not open to innovations.
- Most SME owners are **not collaborating with others** when developing sustainable solutions. As a consequence, they feel left alone, they don't know what should be prioritised and they **don't know where to start from**.

3.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Inside Rotterdam	WTT – Walk the talk	<i>Socio-cultural and environmental (city) challenges:</i> The SME is now Travelife certified. The necessary changes regarding its internal operations (e.g. use of plastic and working conditions) and other business practices (e.g. selection of business partners) allows the business to contribute in making the city's tourism industry more sustainable.



		<p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The requirements to become Travelife certified, offered a form of guidance for understanding where to start from, identify priorities and implement practical changes necessary to become a more sustainable business</p>
Camping Zeeburg	R&D CZ - Research & Design off-grid accommodations	<p><i>Environmental (city) challenges:</i> A development plan is now available to the SME. This plan explores the possibilities for environmentally sustainable use of new acquired land for fully sustainable, circular, and off-grid accommodations. This will allow the business to set an example of environmental sustainable development of campsites within urban destinations.</p> <p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The plan offers guidance for understanding where to start from and identify priorities and actions to become a more sustainable business.</p>
Tours that matter	TTC - Tours as a Tool for Change	<p><i>Socio-cultural (city) challenges:</i> A new tour model has been used to design and run tours in less visited areas of the city, creating transformational encounters and providing meaningful opportunities for vulnerable groups. This allows the SME to set an example of socially sustainable tour business and give their contribution to ease some of the most visible overtourism impacts in the city.</p> <p><i>Lack of marketing and communication skills:</i> New infographics and a video that communicate the impact the tours are aiming for. This provides the SME with new instruments to communicate the societal value of their sustainable offer and positioning.</p>
Holland Private Tours	SoG - So Green	<p><i>Socio-cultural and environmental (city) challenges:</i> The SME is now Travelife certified and has completed the course “become a better tour operator”. This determined changes regarding its internal operations and other business practices, allowing the business to contribute in making the tourism industry more sustainable.</p> <p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The requirements to become Travelife certified, offered a form of guidance for understanding where to start from, identify priorities and implement practical changes necessary to become a more sustainable business</p> <p><i>Lack of marketing and communication skills:</i> The SME now has improved communication tools and website, to better communicate the societal value of their sustainable efforts.</p>



Who is Amsterdam Tours	WIA SB - Who is Amsterdam Skills Boost	<p><i>Socio-cultural (city) challenges:</i> Setting up a platform which aims at giving visibility to sustainable tourism offers in the city, promoting responsible travel in Amsterdam and inspiring visitors to explore Amsterdam in a sustainable way. This allows the SME to give their contribution in easing some of the most visible overtourism impacts in the city.</p> <p><i>Lack of marketing and communication skills:</i> Improved communication strategies and content, allowing to inspire visitors and partners to be part of a healthy ecosystem that contributes to a more balanced tourism in the city.</p> <p><i>Not collaborating with others:</i> Through Tourban new collaborations have been established and other Tourban participants are included in the platform as service providers.</p>
Avontuur Dichbij	UFT- Urban Food Tour	<p><i>Socio-cultural and environmental (city) challenges:</i> Development of Better City trips (also outside Amsterdam, helping to ease the tourism pressure on the city), with minimum carbon emissions, a strong focus on plant-based food and social enterprises.</p> <p><i>Not collaborating with others:</i> In the new developed city trips, other Tourban participants have been included as service providers.</p>
Hungry Birds Street Food Tours	SHSC - Stay Hungry, Stay Conscious	<p><i>Socio-cultural and environmental (city) challenges:</i> The SME is now Travelife certified. The necessary changes regarding its internal operations and other business practices allows the business to contribute in making the city's tourism industry more sustainable.</p> <p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The requirements to become Travelife certified offered a form of guidance for understanding where to start from, identify priorities and implement practical changes necessary to become a more sustainable business.</p> <p><i>Lack of marketing and communication skills:</i> New branding package and communication materials to better convey the societal value of their sustainable offer and positioning.</p>
Romantic Tours Amsterdam	Feasibility research for fully sustainable romantic weekend package for couples in Amsterdam	<p><i>Environmental (city) challenges:</i> Feasibility study determining the CO₂ footprint of the current boat tours offer, identifying opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint of the standard RTA boat tour and options available to customers to further reduce it through conscious choices.</p> <p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The plan offers guidance for understanding where to start from and identify priorities and actions to become a more sustainable business.</p>
SE Production – Badass Tours	BTA - Badass Tours' Self-Guided Tour App	<p><i>Socio-cultural (city) challenges:</i> New Self-Curated Digital Walking Tour, accessible to visitors with differing abilities, such as people with physical impairments and neuroatypical people. Tours are about stories of</p>



		<p>empowerment and resilience taken from women's history, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) history, Jewish history, and LGBT+ history. This will allow the business to set an example of socially sustainable business able to position inclusivity at the centre of their business model.</p> <p><i>Lack of technical and managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> Tourban gave the SME the access to the necessary external skills and expertise to set up, initiate and implement this ambitious project.</p>
Sabine Linz – Reinvent Tourism	RTA - Reinvent Tourism Accelerator	<p><i>Socio-cultural (city) challenges, lack of financial capabilities:</i> Business plan to ensure the financial sustainability of the SME as a platform able to facilitate and stimulate sustainable initiatives and practices within the city's tourism industry.</p> <p><i>Lack of managerial knowledge, not knowing where to start from:</i> The plan provides guidance on how to pursue the mission of the SME in the future.</p>

3.3 Amsterdam's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of Amsterdam Metropolitan Region, MRA): The challenges that have been detected in the beginning of Tourban for urban SMEs are still very much present. On top of that, since tourism is recovering fast, for Amsterdam the issue of overtourism and related negative impacts is high on the agenda again. This leads to some new policy developments from MRA perspective: Amsterdam targets maximum 20 million visitors (1019: 22,7 million), so wants to actively reduce tourism numbers. This is done by campaigns, different legal frameworks for accommodations and conversations with surrounding municipalities to avoid the 'waterbed' effect. Some municipalities in the region still want more numbers so they are open to a joint approach on tackling overtourism.

When it comes to future challenges and strategies: MRA zooms into three main areas:

- Nudging of visitors: make sure the visitors have the preferred profile and adjusting the tourism supply to that profile (so less sex, drugs and related events).
- Accommodations: collaborate on more sustainable solutions. The Green Hotels Group is a nice example of this.
- Transport: making mobility more green, less impactful. An example is the municipality of Haarlemmermeer where hotels have pooled together to develop an electrical shuttle bus service.

The SMEs supported through Tourban are seen as great examples on how things can be done and a nice kick-start. MRA is always looking for best practices and these SMEs are very nice to pitch. MRA would love to give them a platform in their next sessions.

Summary interview 2 (Representative of Artz University of applied Sciences, Amsterdam): The challenges and concerns identified in the research still largely apply to the situation in Amsterdam today as the city is still struggling with the impact of overtourism. The city still faces issues of overcrowding, especially in the city centre, leading to a sort of "Disneyfication". This phenomenon does not only affect the quality of life for residents, but it also has the potential to degrade the authentic experience that tourists seek. The environmental impact of tourism also remains a significant concern, particularly with regards to littering and pollution and non-environmentally friendly behaviour of some visitors is not helping.

For tourism SMEs operating in the city, the struggle to implement sustainable practices while maintaining competitiveness is very much real. Given the economic pressures, especially post-Covid, and the lack of technical knowledge and skills, many find it challenging to transition to more sustainable business models. The need for collaboration and knowledge-sharing among SMEs is crucial to overcome these hurdles and drive innovation in sustainability. This is why programmes such as Tourban are very important to support and help SMES to actually make that transition. These projects also provide an example for other businesses to follow. Collectively these projects can drive the change in Amsterdam's tourism industry, making it more sustainable for the future.

Conclusion: Not much seems to have changed in Amsterdam since the pre-pandemic situation, when it comes to sustainable tourism challenges in the city and the difficulties of tourism SMEs to move towards more sustainable business operations.

Nevertheless, tourism stakeholders seem to value the contribution of the Tourban project and they recognize the SMEs projects as best practices in which each project gave their own contribution in making tourism more sustainable in the city. Of course, 10 SMEs alone cannot change the entire industry, but they represent positive examples and they might inspire other businesses to follow the same path. This can initiate a local SMEs movement that might have a substantial impact in the medium term. Hopefully Tourban planted the seeds for this movement, as the SMEs involved in the project are now determined to keep collaborating, inspiring and supporting each other. The possible support of other stakeholders (such as the MRA) might even facilitate and enhance this process.

4. BARCELONA

4.1 Major challenges for city tourism

One challenge for the city of Barcelona is the **involvement of the local economy into the generation of a sustainable tourism offer**. This is especially relevant to strike a balance between economic growth and preserving the local economy's and community's interest and unique character. For local businesses it is often hard to face the tough competition from global brands and multinational corporations in the city. At the same time, small businesses often lack the capacity and skills to develop and market their offerings to the tourism sector. Collaboration and engagement with stakeholders and other actors from the tourism value chain become vital in addressing this. The challenge therefore lies in creating a favourable environment for small businesses to navigate through the sector and match their offering with the tourist demand, while providing training and the right tools and assistance for local businesses to thrive. Eventually, by empowering the local economy and fostering a collaborative environment, the city can create a sustainable tourism sector that benefits both visitors and the community.

Overtourism presents a significant challenge for the city of Barcelona - even though during the COVID-19 pandemic it temporarily turned into the opposite, the same pattern as before rapidly returned with the recovery of the sector. The city's popularity as a tourist destination has led to a surge in visitor numbers, resulting in overcrowding and straining the city's infrastructure, especially in the centre (the Gothic Quarter, the Ramblas and "el Born") and around mayor tourist attractions such as the Sagrada Familia, Parc Guëll or the beach area (Barceloneta). Overtourism also has negative impacts on local neighbourhoods. Areas like the Gothic Quarter and La Rambla, once vibrant and authentic, have become overrun with tourists, leading to noise, littering, and a loss of the neighbourhood's character. This has also led to a gentrification tendency, where local residents and businesses are displaced and the liveability and sense of community in these areas is lost. The heavy influx of tourists has also led to the commercialisation and homogenisation of local culture in tourist areas where business offers prioritise catering to tourist demands, resulting in a disconnection from the city's true essence and a very low business resilience. This became very evident during the pandemic, where businesses who uniquely relied on tourists as clients could not maintain their operations. The challenge of overtourism is also reflected in the creation of tension and resentment between tourists and locals, impacting the social fabric of the community. Barcelona has implemented various measures to mitigate the effects of overtourism, such as regulating accommodation rentals, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and diversifying tourism offerings to spread visitors more evenly throughout the city. Engaging and involving local communities in decision-making processes, encouraging responsible tourism behaviour, and implementing effective visitor management strategies are further initiatives to address this challenge on the part of the city.

The city of Barcelona and businesses face the challenge of **providing accessible and sustainable tourism offerings**. From the perspective of businesses, prioritizing accessibility and sustainability presents an opportunity to attract a broader customer base, enhance the visitor experience, and contribute to long-term success. By catering to diverse needs and implementing sustainable practices, businesses can align with evolving traveller expectations and position themselves as inclusive and environmentally conscious. However, businesses may encounter challenges in ensuring accessibility and implementing sustainable measures due to resource constraints, regulatory requirements, and the need for continuous improvement. From the perspective of the city, the challenge lies in creating an environment that fosters accessibility and sustainability throughout the tourism sector. Barcelona must invest in infrastructure enhancements, collaborate with businesses to establish

standards, provide support and incentives for sustainable initiatives, and balance the preservation of natural and cultural assets with the demands of tourism. Overcoming these challenges requires collaboration, proactive planning, and a shared commitment between the city and businesses to create a tourism offering that is both accessible and sustainable, enhancing Barcelona's reputation as a responsible and desirable destination.

The **commitment and engagement of tourists in business sustainability** pose a significant challenge for businesses in the tourism sector. One obstacle is the lack of awareness and understanding among tourists about the impact of their choices on sustainability. Many tourists may not be fully aware of the environmental, social and cultural implications of their travel decisions. Overcoming this requires educating and raising awareness about sustainable practices and highlighting the benefits of supporting responsible businesses. Additionally, perceptions of cost and convenience hinder sustainable choices. Businesses must demonstrate how sustainability enhances the travel experience. Furthermore, there can be a gap between tourists' intentions and their actual behaviour. While some tourists may express an interest in sustainable practices, their actions during their trip might not always reflect this commitment. Overcoming this challenge requires businesses to create clear and accessible channels for tourists to engage in sustainable behaviours, such as providing information, incentives, and practical ways to contribute to sustainability efforts. This applies for instance to the responsible use of resources such as energy and water, the latter being a particularly scarce good in Barcelona and the region. Businesses also face the challenge of effectively communicating their sustainability initiatives to tourists. Simply implementing sustainable practices is not enough; businesses must actively promote and market their sustainability efforts to capture the attention and engagement of tourists. Transparent and compelling communication strategies can help convey the positive impacts of sustainable choices and encourage tourists to actively support these businesses.

For tourism businesses, **measuring resource use** poses a challenge, as they need to track and optimize their energy consumption, water usage, waste management and carbon footprint. This requires implementing systems and processes to gather data, analyse resource consumption patterns and identify opportunities for efficiency improvements. Businesses must navigate the complexities of monitoring and reducing their resource use while maintaining quality service for guests, ensuring cost-effectiveness and complying with sustainability standards. The challenge lies in balancing resource conservation with guest satisfaction, operational efficiency and financial viability. For the perspective of the city, the challenge lies in measuring the **sustainability impact of tourists visiting the destination**. This involves assessing factors such as transportation choices, accommodation preferences and consumption patterns of guests. Understanding the sustainability impact helps the destination and businesses identify areas where they can influence guest behaviour, promote sustainable practices and enhance the overall sustainability of the destination. However, measuring this impact requires gathering and analysing data from diverse sources, engaging with tourists effectively and collaborating with other stakeholders. It demands businesses to find innovative ways to educate, motivate and engage guests in sustainable actions, all while delivering memorable experiences and meeting guest expectations.

4.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
AETHNIC (association for promotion of sustainable tourism)	Sustainable Tourism Network of Barcelona	<i>Involvement of local economy in generating a sustainable tourism offer:</i> They co-created a set of tourist experiences in and around the city of Barcelona in a participatory process together with entities and agents from the commercial and social fabric of the city. They thereby involved the local economy, giving local businesses the opportunity to create and market their offers while at the same time providing them with tools and channels to reach potential clients through their commercialisation platform.
Turismo Vivencial (travel agency)	Fishing a Sea Recipe	<i>Involvement of local economy in generating a sustainable tourism offer / Commitment and engagement of tourists in sustainability:</i> Development of a sustainable tourism offer/experience involving fishing sector and other local businesses and sustainable accommodation providers. They thereby fostered tourism activity in less visited areas bringing

		local culture and sustainable practices closer to tourists.
ID Tech & Com (operator for promotion of culture)	Identify App	<i>Overtourism and congestion of touristic hotspots / Measurement of sustainability and tourist impact:</i> They developed a digital solution to guide tourists to less known points of cultural and touristic interest and support hotels to advice their guest in visiting less congested areas. Their application furthermore gathers data on tourist flows and movements which allows to deduct information on their behaviour and sustainable choices.
Cloud 5 (holiday apartment management company)	5 senses fir conscious travelling	<i>Commitment of tourists in sustainability:</i> Providing inspiration for guests of their tourist apartments to behave sustainably and chose sustainable local tourist offers surging from local collaboration established through the project with proximity providers of sustainable tourist products and experiences.
Apartments Barcelona You Stylish (holiday apartment management company)	Intelligent Energy Management System (Stylish Energy)	<i>Commitment of tourists in sustainability / Measurement of sustainability and tourist impact:</i> They carried out measurement of energy use and efficiency and corresponding adaptations in their tourist apartments. And guest nudging for sustainable use of energy through and awareness raising campaign linked with an improvement of internal protocols and staff training to ensure full commitment.
Accessible Spain Travel (travel agency specialised in accessible tourism)	AST	<i>Accessibility and sustainability of tourism offer / Involvement of local economy in generating a sustainable tourism offer:</i> They designed and audited accessible tourism products in the city of Barcelona involving local and sustainable providers in the creation of their packages. They furthermore adapted their website to accessibility criteria. This supports the availability of accessible products and the positioning of the city as a responsible and socially inclusive destination.
Winenium (travel agency specialised in high-end wine tourism and experiences)	Vinex	<i>Overtourism and Congestion of touristic hotspots:</i> The travel agency designed several tourism products to guide tourists outside the city centre to enjoy wine tourism in the near surrounding of the city and thereby ease pressure on the main tourist hot spots and promote local culture.
InOut Hostel (hostel specialised in accessible tourism)	Second Phase	<i>Accessibility and sustainability of tourism offer:</i> They undertook accessibility audit of their entire facilities ensuring an offer compliant and adapted to any sort of clients with special needs. They furthermore implemented a system for sustainable use of water (outdoor irrigation by rainwater).
Dena Travel (travel agency for school and educational trips)	Ikurius	<i>Measurement of sustainability / Involvement of local economy in generating a sustainable tourism offer:</i> They thoroughly analysed and measured the social, environmental and economic impact of school and educational trips (virtual trips vs. physical trips) creating a solid knowledge base to be able to calculate and promote their offer in a corresponding way. With their



		virtual travel option, they furthermore investigated ways to involve and create a monetisation channel to benefit the local economy.
Clama Cultura (Local tour guide company)	Clama for Future	<i>Measurement of sustainability / commitment of guest in sustainability:</i> Development of a prototype solution for the measurement of the carbon footprint of travellers through an app using geo-localisation and other metrics to track tourists while at the same time guiding them to the most sustainable offers (accommodation, commerce, tourist attractions, experiences).
eXplorins (Hub for dynamisation of the local economy)	eXplorins Hub	<i>Involvement of local community in generating a sustainable tourism offer / Overtourism and Congestion of touristic hotspots:</i> They dynamised the involvement of local economy actors and the community in a socially disadvantaged neighbourhood into the creation of products of tourist interest, while providing local actors with the necessary skills to get involved in the co-creative process.

4.3 Barcelona's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of the Catalan Tourist Board): In Barcelona, the tourism industry is still heavily influenced by the pre-pandemic peak of 2019, which is often regarded as a benchmark. The industry's performance is typically measured using quantitative data, such as visitor numbers, which led to a tendency to rely on the same approach when assessing the sector's recovery post-pandemic. However, this narrow focus on quantitative metrics overlooks significant sustainability considerations, including the quality of visitors and the tourism offerings in terms of environmental standards and accessibility. Consequently, shifting the evaluation paradigm from quantity to quality has proven challenging, despite the interruption and reflection prompted by the pandemic. There is a need to emphasise sustainability aspects in measuring the success of the tourism industry in Barcelona, taking into account visitor quality, environmental standards and accessibility alongside traditional quantitative metrics.

As an organisation the Catalan Tourist Board has however worked towards sustainability internally and externally:

- defining its mission, vision and purpose, same as through training and the establishment of and an ethical code, e.g. for tender processes.
- through marked demand analyses and an adapted strategy to attract demand from sustainability conscient and respectful travellers.
- identifying sustainable tourism businesses in the territory, request a sustainability auto-evaluation from them to detect their needs and build up training programmes for them based on their capacity building necessities in the field of sustainability. The questionnaire administered to Catalan tourism companies yielded 375 valid responses.

According to the interviewee, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for many tourism businesses to reevaluate their sustainability strategies. While this shift was driven by market necessity due to decreased demand, it resulted in positive outcomes in various aspects. For instance, many companies reworked their accessibility to accommodate a broader range of clients, tapping into previously untapped client segments.

The questionnaires also revealed that companies with sustainability labels or certificates tend to evaluate themselves more rigorously and conservatively, despite a potentially higher objective sustainability performance. This suggests that the certification process fosters awareness and encourages businesses to adopt a modest vision, recognising the journey towards achieving perfect sustainability.

She believes that this dynamic, sparked not only by the pandemic but also by growing concerns about climate change and a changing customer demand, will continue, albeit at a slower pace than desired. The demand for environmentally friendly offerings, particularly in the MICE tourism sector, is evident, and public organisations are providing knowledge, tools and support such as CO₂-footprint measurement tools, training and certification schemes. She is confident that sustainability will remain a prominent trend in the tourism sector, albeit as a niche

movement, with increasing significance in the future. However, she emphasises the need for joint strategies and collaborative projects across sectors to achieve desired outcomes, as tourism's impact extends beyond its own sphere and intertwines with other sectors.

Projects as Tourban in her view provide the adequate incentives and support for businesses to initiate their transformation. Since usually once the seed is planted, companies tend to move on with small but steady improvements, it is essential to get as many businesses onboarding the transformation as possible. Knowledge, the right and inspiring examples play a crucial role in this.

Summary interview 2 (Representative of Turisme de Barcelona, the city DMO): The efforts of Turisme de Barcelona to promote itself as a sustainable destination gained momentum in 2011 when Barcelona became the first city worldwide to receive the Biosphere Certification as a responsible destination. In 2018, the city began enrolling companies in the certification programme, initially adhering to businesses to the city's certifying, with the intention of launching a segmented marketing programme for tourism companies interested in showcasing their sustainable practices and promoting themselves in this niche. Turisme de Barcelona manages the certification programme for companies in the city of Barcelona, while the Provincial Council of Barcelona oversees companies in the province. The programme is funded through the tourism tax. Currently, the city certifies approximately 100 businesses per year, with currently around 400 businesses in Barcelona and 931 in the province holding the certification.

In 2021, the Biosphere certification was combined with the Safe Travels label, which focuses on COVID-19 health and safety protocols. This year, following the pandemic, around 150 companies joined the programme, possibly driven by the need to obtain the Safe Travels label in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

The Biosphere certification requires renewal every year, based on three sustainability improvements implemented by each tourism company. Generally, companies that join the programme once tend to renew their certification annually and make progressive sustainability advancements. The high retention rate of approximately 90% indicates the programme's usefulness for companies and their commitment to investing time and effort into it. It is worth noting that some companies rehired staff members who were previously on government support during the pandemic to ensure they had personnel dedicated to remaining in the programme and implementing sustainability measures, highlighting the importance these companies place on sustainability.

Regarding specific topics like waste production, the pandemic caused setbacks, which were necessary to adapt to the circumstances, nevertheless meaning a decline in sustainability, e.g. very clearly observable in single-use plastic items and other practices generating a significant amount of waste. Fortunately, the situation has since improved, and there is now a clear trend among conscious and committed companies to go beyond simple recycling measure or waste reductions towards embracing circular economy practices.

As for water usage, there is a downward trend in tourist consumption, although it remains higher than the average domestic use per person. In terms of energy consumption, the rising energy prices have prompted companies to invest more in renewable energies and other energy-efficient measures. This shift is economically profitable and has become a default consideration in the renovation and construction of tourist accommodations, even though there is limited new construction in Barcelona. Aspects such as greywater recovery and green roofs to lower temperatures in enclosed spaces are taken into account, as exemplified by the Hotel Intercontinental on Carrer del Lleida.

Overall, certifications and sustainability protocols have gained importance and value among companies during and after the pandemic. Simultaneously, the pandemic greatly accelerated the digitalisation of processes in companies, which, in some areas such as paperless operations, also contributes to sustainability.

Looking towards the future, although tourism may not be the primary driver of sustainable innovation in cities, it will gradually adopt sustainable practices as it aligns with the 2030 and 2050 goals for reducing CO₂ emissions and other sustainability targets. Being highly integrated with other sectors like mobility, the tourism industry will, according to the expert's opinion, follow general trends and developments in sustainability.

However, it is important to note that there is a clear tendency in tourism to increase the volume of tourists. Consequently, public administrations must strengthen their efforts to manage and impose sustainability criteria. Providing companies with the necessary tools and information to adapt and implement corresponding measures is crucial. Projects like Tourban play a vital role in guiding and supporting companies in their sustainability efforts.

5. BUDAPEST

5.1 Major challenges for city tourism

City Challenges: The major challenges for Budapest that have been identified in 2021 by the city's tourism stakeholders were **difficulty of financing** and the **lack of education and knowledge** on sustainability.

- **Difficulty of financing:** According to interviews conducted with tourism SMEs in Budapest, sustainability holds significant importance for their companies, driven mainly by moral considerations and the expectations of partners and customers. However, **the lack of financial resources** poses a significant challenge. Implementing sustainable, green solutions and tools **requires substantial investments** with **extended payback periods**, especially when accompanied by effective marketing strategies. Accessing loans for sustainability transformations proves to be a difficult endeavour, characterized by **excessive bureaucracy** and **administrative burdens**. The majority of available loans are either property- or turnover-based, offering relatively low profits. Despite the efforts of NGOs to promote sustainability, they often struggle due to inadequate funding. Due to the lack of the EU financing, there is a hold also on the green initiatives. The banks are reluctant to finance SMEs, if they do, it will now cost 20% or even more. Furthermore, state subsidies for sustainability tend to be more accessible in rural areas, **leaving the central region predominantly excluded**.
- **Lack of education and knowledge:** Tourism stakeholders in Budapest know that incorporating sustainability into their long-term business policies sets them apart and contributes to their uniqueness. Among the challenges faced by them, **the lack of knowledge** emerges as a significant influencing factor, surpassing even the issue of time constraints. **Without access to sufficient knowledge and information, implementing innovative practices becomes difficult**. These SMEs express a **strong desire for professional materials** that offer practical applications for their everyday operations. Some of them have not considered pursuing certifications due to their lack of awareness. A recurring observation is also made regarding the lack of proactivity exhibited by society and certain service providers. **The absence of accessible information** on sustainable development poses a challenge in incorporating best practices into their daily operations.

SME Challenges: The main challenges mentioned by SME representatives in 2021 were:

- Lack of knowledge on how to develop
- A need for change in attitude
- Lack of human resources
- Financial restraints

5.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Jet Travel Kft.	SFFL – Step further for less	<i>Lack of knowledge on how to develop:</i> The SME received and implemented training on how to become a certified, sustainable tourism stakeholder, and passed it on to it's workforce.
CRB Cityrama Kft.	Budapest SUSTOUR – Spend sustainably a day in Budapest	<i>A need for change in attitude:</i> Rethought their usual process for giving sightseeing tours and implemented a new “sustaintour” while also going through the certification process for Travelife.
TryIt Kft.	TRY:Special – Activate and attract people with special needs	<i>Financial restrains:</i> By joining international platform Wheel the World, they marketed their services without extra financing. <i>Lack of human resources:</i> The owners mapped and developed new accessible tours by themselves.



Stagland Kft.	FPTIST – Urban Short-term rental transformation into green and sustainable accomodation	<i>Lack of knowledge on how to develop:</i> With the help of the certification, the SME found a whole new route for themselves. <i>A need for change in attitude:</i> Their target group changed entirely, instead of stag- and hen parties, now they are only accepting smaller families and environmentally more conscious visitors.
Wireless Communications Kft.	WFC – Wired for change	<i>Lack of knowledge on how to develop:</i> Their map development helped to collaborate with new partners and it opened new doors.
Best Step Guide Kft.	BUWT – Budapest Urban Walking Tours for Locals and Tourists	<i>Financial restraints:</i> With the help of their mentor, they learned and found new methods of campaigning, previously they were spending extra amounts on marketing.
P92 Primus Kft.	FWB – The Prónay Castle, For the wellbeing of the environment, the body and mind	<i>A need for change in attitude:</i> Gave constant trainings on how to operate sustainably to their workforce, prepared an energy-management system and rethought their partnerships to be more sustainable.

5.3 Budapest's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of Budapest Brand Nonprofit Plc.): According to the representative, the focus in Budapest lies in smaller sustainable improvements, particularly in the area of accessibility features that have been developed. As of this year, their website displays all accessible attractions and places for visitors to easily locate.

The current situation can be summarized through five key points:

- 1) One challenge is the **formulation of a unified message among tourism stakeholders**. Smaller actors within the tourism industry need to have a voice and representation for their ideas on sustainable development. These individuals, numbering between 350,000 and 400,000, lack the opportunity to be heard unlike larger employer associations. An illustrative example of local involvement in tourism is the documentary series on YouTube titled "[From the Ruins](#)," which explores the development of ruin pubs and the party district in Budapest. The series features intriguing personalities whose stories provide insights into an exciting but sustainability-wise questionable world.
- 2) There is a **need for improved communication among locals, visitors, and decision makers**. It is crucial for Budapest's sustainable development goals to align with the interests of both locals and visitors. For instance, visitors and travel agencies must understand that it is in the local population's best interest to restrict tourist buses from entering Buda Castle. Instead, four alternative and more sustainable methods of accessing the attraction exist. Respecting the living spaces of those who reside in the area is of utmost importance. Better and closer communication would also help address instances of local intolerance towards visitors.
- 3) **The decentralization of tourism is essential, with a focus on highlighting the attractions in the countryside**. She highlights that during international forums involving tourism stakeholders representing destination marketing, it remains unclear whether there are any other tourist attractions in Hungary, apart from Budapest. To achieve a sustainable visitor economy, it is crucial to distribute visitors more evenly across the country. Improving and maintaining the road network in Budapest and rural cities plays a vital role in achieving this goal.
- 4) **Bureaucratic obstacles result in prolonged processes**. Restaurants and accommodations that seek to implement sustainability-oriented changes face excessive procedures before obtaining permits for renovations or energy-efficient upgrades. By the time they receive approval, the market landscape may have evolved significantly, rendering their chosen methods outdated and suboptimal.
- 5) **Social sustainability is affected by labour shortages and the reliance on imported foreign workers**. According to the [Tourism Conjunction Index](#), approximately 12,000 individuals are absent from the

tourism workforce, leading to the importation of around 80,000 foreign workers to help mitigate the labour gap. Ensuring social sustainability involves implementing changes that are appropriate for the foreign workers' cultural background. Moreover, it raises the question of the sustainability of relying heavily on foreign labour. For the future, employer branding is the key for tourism stakeholders to save themselves the effort and resources spent on headhunting and onboarding processes.

The activities undertaken by Hungarian companies involved in the Tourban project align seamlessly with the city's sustainability vision. These companies actively contribute to the overall development of Budapest, and visitors can already experience the best practices and sustainable services from these operators upon arrival. These initiatives are captivating and serve as a catalyst for wider adoption by other entities over time. Additionally, these companies play a crucial role in educating visitors, which is of utmost importance. Furthermore, these sustainable developments lead to significant financial savings for the companies involved. These savings can then be reinvested in their marketing endeavours, thereby facilitating their own growth as well as that of Budapest as a whole.

Summary interview 2 (Sustainability expert and University Professor, Edutus University): Since 2021 in Budapest we have seen the following actions supporting sustainability and sustainable tourism:

- Planet Budapest 2021 Hungexpo: central Europe's largest sustainability event showcasing new sustainable technologies and sustainable food
- Sustainable transport in Budapest: promotion of bicycle routes, electric buses
- Preserving green spaces: new parks, community spaces (Városliget City Park)
- Solar panels: more investment has been made in solar panels, and business and residential properties that have installed solar panels have benefited from tax incentives
- The Budapest Urban Planning and Construction Public Foundation launched a sustainable urban development project on the Danube in 2021: upgrading of the waterfront promenades, energy-efficient building design, extension of bicycle paths
- Budapest Liszt Ferenc Airport aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2035
- Key objectives: modern waste management, improving energy efficiency, raising social awareness, water quality development and a healthy urban environment
- Budapest has a number of initiatives to make public catering more sustainable; Budapest Food Roundtable, (Let's) Eat Better Budapest, Developing Sustainable Food Systems in the Capital

The initiatives undertaken by the seven Hungarian SMEs in Tourban are highly positive and have the potential to trigger a multiplier effect. If these actions are emulated by other SMEs, following their good examples, it could bring about substantial changes to the environment of Budapest. The widespread adoption of these ideas is likely to have a significant impact on the city, but it is important to note that each SME may require financial support to achieve this. The Tourban project serves as a compelling illustration, highlighting the effectiveness of even modest financial investments. The initiation of transformative changes in the "ruin pub" area is particularly commendable and it should be expanded to encompass numerous other companies, extending its reach to other burdened areas as well. Additionally, noteworthy traffic improvement ideas have emerged, showcasing their potential to yield fuel-saving benefits. Given these seven exemplary cases, it is advisable for the city management to consider and integrate them into the development strategy for Budapest.

Summary interview 3 (Specialist Advisor, GD Consulting): According to the specialist, the Vienna-Budapest agreement in May 2022 marked a significant milestone in sustainable development. The capital cities mutually agreed to regularly consult and exchange best practices on digital and sustainable development initiatives they wish to implement. While there is currently no tangible evidence of progress, the foundation and framework for collaboration have been established.

The specialist believes that addressing the agreement's implementation is among the top three priorities for Budapest's city management. However, it is possible that their attention is primarily occupied by dealing with immediate challenges on a day-to-day basis.

In his view, there is a shift in what is considered trendy and what is no longer sustainable. For instance, taking long plane rides solely for the purpose of showing off a visit to a distant destination is losing its appeal.

The projects and forward-thinking mindset demonstrated by the SMEs implementing the Tourban project serve as a highly influential and inspiring example. Their efforts are expected to have a multiplying effect across the entire sector. Additionally, through partnerships, they are reaching a significant segment of visitors and even a large portion of the Hungarian tourism industry. According to the interviewee, it is now their time to become thought leaders and emphasize that sustainability is a critical aspect of competitiveness that can no longer be neglected. In the future, companies need to follow such leading examples to achieve sustainable development rather than viewing it as merely a component of successful marketing and year-end profit.

Conclusion: The situation faced by Budapest and its SMEs in the tourism industry in 2021, compared to the findings of 2023, shed light on the major challenges faced by Budapest in the realm of sustainable tourism and the commendable efforts made to address them. The Individual City Exploration Plan underscores the importance of financing, education, and knowledge in driving sustainable practices within the tourism industry.

Budapest's tourism SMEs have demonstrated resilience and creativity in tackling these challenges. Through various projects and initiatives, they have embraced sustainable development, implemented innovative practices and sought certifications. These endeavours have not only contributed to their own growth but also positioned Budapest as a city committed to sustainable tourism.

The interviews with city tourism stakeholders provide valuable insights into the current state of sustainable tourism in Budapest. The significance of effective communication, decentralization of tourism, streamlined bureaucratic processes and social sustainability has been highlighted. These factors play a crucial role in achieving a well-rounded and sustainable visitor economy while respecting the needs and aspirations of both locals and tourists.

The document also emphasizes specific initiatives undertaken in Budapest, such as promoting sustainable transport, preserving green spaces, adopting renewable energy sources, and improving waste management. These actions reflect a comprehensive approach to creating a healthy and sustainable urban environment.

The assessment of the initiatives carried out by Hungarian SMEs participating in the Tourban project is overwhelmingly positive. Their efforts serve as inspiring examples and have the potential to influence the wider tourism industry. It is imperative that these successful cases are integrated into Budapest's development strategy, providing a blueprint for other companies and fostering a multiplier effect that amplifies the positive impact of sustainable practices.

The efforts made by the city and tourism stakeholders demonstrate Budapest's commitment to overcoming challenges and embracing sustainable tourism. By addressing financial constraints, promoting education and awareness, and implementing innovative projects, Budapest will hopefully position itself as a leading destination for sustainable tourism.

6. COPENHAGEN

6.1 Major challenges for city tourism

City Challenges: During the 2021 focus group interview stakeholders emphasised the importance of communicating clearly to tourists about Copenhagen's sustainability efforts and actively involving tourists as part of those efforts. Likewise, they focused on the need to spread out tourists and secure that other parts of Copenhagen and Greater Copenhagen are viable and attractive options for visitors. This will ensure a lesser degree of overtourism.

- Incorporating sustainable efforts on a city level is one thing. Making tourist aware and understand the impact these changes have is another. Many of the initiatives done in Copenhagen are embedded into the infrastructure and are not visible as such. To obtain visibility and go beyond this level of sustainability, an active participation from the tourists is needed. It has to be done on a level that is understandable and straight forward. Examples mentioned were recycling, organic food, and social initiatives. Clear goals and communication will also help minimize suspicion of greenwashing.
- Both representatives from the municipality and SMEs agreed that a strategy to spread tourists throughout the city is a good and needed action. The City of Copenhagen and Wonderful Copenhagen

have had this as part of their strategy for years and welcome all efforts from local SMEs in supporting this development.

SME Challenges: The main challenges highlighted by SMEs during the 2021 interviews were:

- Access to finance or resources in a broader sense.
- Marketing – financial means to execute and proper knowledge on best practices.
- Pricing the product(s).
- Knowledge, inspiration, ideas.
- Time and capacity to measure sustainability efforts.
- Regulatory framework (lack of visibility to make long-term costly investments).

6.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Skipit ApS	Skipit travel local	<i>Clear Communication:</i> Giving tourist in Copenhagen an easy and efficient way of using public transportation around the city.
RideinStyle ApS	Local Copenhagen	<i>Overtourism:</i> Has developed new tours focusing on the local neighbourhoods of Copenhagen. By doing so tourist can discover new and hidden areas of the city and are spread out in areas with traditionally less tourism.
Nakka ApS	ROW – Rings on the water	<i>Clear communication, marketing, and knowledge:</i> Has reduces their water usage by 25% and a decrease in electricity use by 75% while at the same time involving guests in the efforts through marketing campaigns. Finally, Nakka has introduced a clear call to action for their guests who can book directly with them and in doing so support the reduction of water.
Seek+See	Seek+See – exploring the city with kids	<i>Overtourism and marketing:</i> Has created several tours for kids and adults to enjoy the city away from the beaten path. A great marketing effort has been set in place to attract both local and foreign tourists.
CoolCopenhagen	CoolCopenhagen Sustainable	<i>Marketing, knowledge and overtourism:</i> Has created a platform for sustainable offers on hotels, restaurants, and transportation. This has been done while upskilling on marketing, business, and sustainable transportation means. The site offers famous ambassador videos with recommendation of spots to see that are outside of the traditional offerings in Copenhagen providing the perfect nudging for tourists and local to spread out throughout the city.
Nordic NDC	GAFA – Green Atlas for Agencies	<i>Measuring sustainable efforts:</i> With GAFA this project is offering a unique and easy way for clients to measure and monitor their carbon offsetting.
JobPool	TMC Tourist Services – a matchmaking app for the hotel industry	<i>Marketing:</i> With their app JobPool has set out to reduce the CO ₂ footprint of the tourism industry. In order to do so, they needed an extensive upgrade on their marketing efforts to onboard and convince hotel owners of the value of their product.



Greenelimo ApS	COPS22 – Copenhagen 2022 – A sustainable tourist & transportation destination	<i>Clear communication, marketing, and access to finance:</i> Greenelimo now offers a variety of 0-emission vehicles to tourists traveling to Copenhagen. They have developed sustainable quizzes during the rides to put a focus on the need for more 0-emission transportation and done advocacy work within the industry. Through the project they have received consulting in finding the best possible financing for the future.
Amitylux	Amitylux Sustainable Custom Tours in Copenhagen	<i>Clear communication and overtourism:</i> New tours have been developed with a focus on sustainability and marketing of the sustainable elements. Amitylux has even won several prizes during the Tourban program for their upgraded sustainable luxury tours.
PERE ApS	ARSH – Ancillary revenue stream for hotels	<i>Marketing and access to finance:</i> Pere have focused on understanding their target group and upgraded their storytelling to support the spread of their services. In addition, they have focused on developing a sustainable destination strategy with a focus on economical sustainability for them and the sector.
Tripful	Tripful becomes sustainable	<i>Clear communication and marketing:</i> Development of tours and offerings with a clear purpose on social inclusion and sustainability.

6.3 Copenhagen's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of Copenhagen Business Hub (business support organisation)): A lot has happened in the area of sustainable tourism in your city since 2021. Not least because there is to a large extent a well-defined sustainability focus in the National Tourism Strategy, and thus we can feel, and will feel, a need from companies within the experience industry to work with their green transition, including certifications/label schemes and communication of their initiatives. In our sparring process, we refer to the subsidy programs SME: Green, SME: Grønne Komtetenser CO₂, which can help companies to, among other things, strengthen their green competences, to help them choose the right certification/environmental labelling and to draw up their climate accounts.

The Tourban project helps to focus on the green transition and helps to motivate to work with green initiatives. Unfortunately, I can't remember the project in detail, and won't be able to read up on it in the short run to be able to give a more in-depth answer.

Summary interview 2 (Representative of Copenhagen Municipality): Since 2021, Copenhagen has witnessed significant advancements in sustainable tourism. Numerous hotels, attractions, and experiences in the city have successfully obtained sustainability certifications, highlighting their commitment to environmental and social responsibility. These efforts have been guided by the comprehensive "Planet Copenhagen" plan, which serves as a blueprint for sustainable tourism development.

Under the "Comeback Copenhagen" tourism recovery plan, there has been a notable emphasis on fostering sustainable tourism. This initiative recognized the importance of integrating sustainability principles into the revitalization of the tourism sector, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. At present, Copenhagen stands as a city that has embraced and prioritized sustainable tourism practices. However, as all existing tourism strategies are set to expire in 2023, the city is now at a juncture where a new direction for tourism needs to be charted. Moving forward, it is expected that regenerative tourism will occupy a prominent position in shaping Copenhagen's tourism landscape. In the context of Copenhagen, regenerative tourism entails not only minimizing negative impacts but also proactively working towards positive outcomes. Looking to the near future, Copenhagen is poised to experience further growth and innovation in sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, collaborations between tourism stakeholders, local communities, and environmental organizations will play a pivotal role in propelling sustainable and regenerative tourism initiatives forward.

Tourban projects can incorporate interactive elements that allow tourists to actively participate in sustainable practices, such as recycling programs or organic food initiatives. By making these efforts visible and easily understandable, tourists can better appreciate the impact of their actions and become advocates for sustainability. Clear communication and goals will also help build trust and credibility, minimizing any suspicion of greenwashing. Spreading tourists throughout the city is crucial to mitigate overtourism and ensure the viability of other areas in Copenhagen and Greater Copenhagen. Tourban projects can contribute by promoting alternative attractions and experiences beyond the traditional tourist hotspots. This can involve collaborating with SMEs to develop and market unique offerings in different parts of the city, diversifying the tourism landscape and distributing visitor traffic more evenly.

7. DUBROVNIK

7.1 Major challenges for city tourism

CITY Challenges: The major challenges for Dubrovnik in 2021, identified by relevant city's tourism stakeholders were:

- **Need for stronger cooperation between public and private sector in providing sustainable solutions and tourist services:** Collaboration of both public and private sector on sustainability issues and new tourism services was pointed as one of the main challenges of the stakeholders involved in the focus group, mostly because there is a big discrepancy in sustainability knowledge levels among SMEs but also degree of untrust and unaligned practices by public and private sector which concern identification of sustainability standards, setting the goals, creating new tourism sustainable products and in the end promoting and raising awareness. Since this is push-pull dependant system, it was clear that there has to be a common policy for both sectors to unite in order to cope with all challenges brought by high influx of tourism on our resources by creating sustainable ecosystem and providing sustainable tourist services/products.
- **Finding the ways to incentivize sustainable practices:** Dubrovnik, as well as all other tourism centres in the world faced with the lack of finances in 2021 due the influence of COVID 19 on travelling industry. It was a very hard period for the city where tourism income makes big share in GDP, and the city needed to find all possible ways to keep its head above the surface in order to finance all obligations and regular everyday activities. This being said, it was also hard to expect that the city will be able to finance and incentivize SMEs in any sense, including applying the sustainability practices. However, city recognized that the COVID 19 pause was an opportunity to get to know better with the SMEs' needs and open some new horizons and common activities in the future, therefore a serious of meetings was held where SMEs expressed their thoughts on future of tourism (where sustainability was emphasized as crucial, together with digital nomads) and agreed on tight cooperation in finding the best instruments for financial help to get on sustainability path and respect all its postulates.

SME Challenges:

- Since unfortunately Dubrovnik (and Croatia in general) is still struggling to accept and apply sustainable practices, there is a lack of knowledge not only in private, but also in public sector and general population. By raising awareness and sharing specific benefits from implementing sustainability standards and practices, this problem should be easy to overcome in short period.
- Bureaucracy procedures and lack of digital services- everyday business requires lots of paperwork and 'waiting in lines', and that includes applying sustainability procedures, getting permits and everything linked to sustainability business practices, therefore the challenge identified by the SME's is the big need for digitalization of administrative activities in order to save time and resources.

7.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Majeutika	DU WALK	<i>Creating new sustainable tourism services:</i> Development of a walking trail which connects the Old Town with the Gruž port area, ending with the Red History Museum and the growing creative hub in the Gruž area. Using this route company helps in dispersing tourists across various locations, lower the strain on the Old Town, reduce the traffic jams and emissions, and create new possibilities in the rest of Dubrovnik area.
Gulliver DMC	Dubrovnik Sustainable Tours	<i>Digitalization and creating new sustainable tourism services:</i> Design of more sustainable tours to be recognized on the market with sustainable tours made to avoid crowded areas. Furthermore, new booking engine software that is designed to present the customer's product or service in the best possible way. The software has translation management support which helps clients to better understand and make purchases.
Maskeron	"Great value, low impact"	<i>Cooperation and new sustainable products:</i> Project "Great value, low impact" is about sustainable destination strategy and combination of technology, digitalization and promotion of less visited places in Dubrovnik's vicinity that addresses a modern tourist who is aware that sustainability creates benefits not only to visitors but to a local community as well.
Eco Tuk Tours	Sustainable Visitor	<i>Education on sustainability and creating new sustainable products:</i> Sustainable Visitor footprint in Dubrovnik- Exploring the ways to use digital and technology solutions to get insights from customers, but also to find ways to show how sustainable company is.
Dubrovnik Rentals	EFFA - EFFICIENT ADMIN	<i>Digitization and sustainable service:</i> Digitalisation of agency business, Diversification of the agency offering, Promotion of clean energy and smart energy management in line with city's sustainability goals.
Du2Remember	Dubrovnik Deconstructed – DuDe	<i>Collaboration and new sustainable service:</i> Encouraging sustainable tourism activities on as many levels in our community as possible. It will integrate various existing sustainable services, venues, companies, products.
Huck Finn	DEIN	<i>Education and sustainable promotion:</i> DEIN contributes to better quality of life and visitor experience of a less known part of Dubrovnik – Dubrovnik River area and its islands, but also reducing the stress and congestion of the central city area by spreading the visitors to suburban areas – Dubrovnik River Bay and Elafiti Islands. Huck Finn is a destination management company developing travel service/product that extends tourist season, attracts visitors to less known Dubrovnik Island areas and stimulates longer stay. Local people were hired and educated for the new service.

7.3 Dubrovnik's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of ADRIATIC DMC, one of the pioneers in providing sustainable services in Dubrovnik): Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, costs were not an inhibiting factor on sustainability journey for most of the companies, but after, as with many things that are beyond day-today company management, finding the budget required to move forward at a significant pace (as many would desire) is getting very difficult. On the other hand, sustainability becomes crucial factor for many people in determine which location to visit and which services to choose. So now we have more or less contradictory situation where everyone became aware of the importance of sustainable practices, but all the prices went high, inflation also caused earthquakes in financial sector, so we try to cooperate with our suppliers to deliver our sustainability policy. On the general level, day by day many tourism related SMEs turn to sustainability practices and we believe that we will reach the point when everyone will be using them by default.

All of the Tourban projects were written with the best intentions and delivered very interesting results and activities. Since the main scope of the Grant was to use the money in order to make progress in doing business (or at least some part of the business) as sustainable as possible, it is no wonder that many fantastic products were created, as well as awareness raised among stakeholders. Also, we strongly believe that, if the Tourban granted companies continue with development and implementation of their products- stay on the same track- that they will definitely influence the others to proceed with similar practices (monkey see-monkey do effect).

Summary interview 2 (Sustainability expert, owner of two SME'S handling tourism related services and accommodation): Sustainability is important for all of us, for every part of everyday life (or it needs to be), at least in my companies. Sustainability is especially important in tourism business because we use natural and social resources to make a profit. That is why the way we use these resources; how responsible we are and how we give back to the local community is extremely important. At the same time, the goal must not be quick and easy earnings. It is a trap. The goal is longevity and quality. It must always be borne in mind that resources are not eternal and that we must be careful in the way we use them. In many ways being sustainable can lower the costs in a long run. It is also about personal responsibility. Sustainability is now in (hopefully not a short time), and we believe that we, as one of the firsts to implement sustainability policies, economy of sharing, green economy, etc. make a good example for the other SMEs operating in Dubrovnik. In the past few years, interest for sustainability is growing and we believe that, with city administration support, we are progressing forward year by year. Still many things ahead of us, but we believe we are getting there. We need to use these shaky times to build better future for all of us. Dubrovnik was on a brick of being mass tourism destination without clear strategy and plan. It was all about quick money with quality constantly lacking. We must invest in infrastructure, more creative tourism offers, better city for all of citizens and all based on sustainability guidelines. We need to rethink tourism and negative effect it has on destination.

The Tourban SMEs and their projects certainly contribute because not many people get grants for implementation of the new sustainable practices. To be honest, I'm just discovering all the options for Government subsidies for green transformation. I would like for Croatia Government to provide more information and options. I would also like to more actively be part of this transformation not just for my business. It needs to start with Government and local authorities. It is quite costly and complicated to implement sustainability "all the way". We need to have clear government strategy and guidelines and all the help needed. We need to have better education on all levels. Tourban exactly did this with EU funds, and all the projects that came out of the project will definitely help in setting the new path for others and help in raising general awareness.

8. KIEL

6.1 Major challenges for city tourism

City Challenges: The major challenges for Kiel that have been identified in 2021 by the city's tourism stakeholders were a **lack of cooperation on all levels** and the need for a **clear way of communicating sustainability to costumers for the whole city**.

- **Local cooperation on all levels:** It was identified that there are a number of bigger players who are already doing pretty well in the area of sustainability. The challenge is to get smaller SMEs on all levels on board who are currently too scared to change anything. This is possible by giving practical examples that are easy to implement and local/regional storytelling: eye-catching, simple messages that encourage as many companies as possible to get on board.

- **One paramount slogan for the whole city “Meeresschutzstadt Kiel”:** In the local tourism development concept from 2019, the idea has formed to promote Kiel as the “Meeresschutzstadt”. The focus group participants agree that this is a great slogan because it avoids the bulky term “sustainability” and can be charged with many different aspects of sustainable tourism. This slogan should be used for a **strong communication**. For SMEs in Kiel the term “Meeresschutzstadt” can be used in marketing and storytelling. **Necessary: one key person in charge of the whole communication and cooperation between Kiel’s tourism businesses**, initiating and directing the whole sustainability process.

SME Challenges: The main challenges mentioned by SME representatives in 2021 were:

- Not knowing where to begin
- Not having enough time
- Financial restraints
- Lack of demand on the customer side

6.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Hotel zur Alten Post, Büsum	From food supply to food waste – optimizing the cycle and protecting the climate in a small hotel with restaurant	<i>Local cooperation:</i> The owners plan to share the best practices of this project with other SMEs in the region and the country.
Willem und Konsorten	A sustainable ripple effect in vacation homes	<i>Lack of demand on the customer side:</i> Inspire guests and raise awareness for sustainable everyday-situations.
Hotel Lütje Burg, Lütjenburg	FAST – Food As Sustainability Tool	<i>Local cooperation:</i> The owners plan to share the best practices of this project with other SMEs in the region and the country.
Lifestyle Hotel SAND, Timmendorfer Strand	SAND - Sustainability As Natural Doing	<i>Not knowing where to begin:</i> Start with small, manageable steps. <i>Local cooperation:</i> Plan outreach event to inspire ten others SME of the same region.
Hotel Prisma, Neumünster	EMMA – Energetic Modernizing of Main Aspects	<i>not knowing where to begin, not having enough time:</i> One employee will be trained as an energy efficiency and sustainability ambassador.
Ole Liese	Circular economy with planning a kitchen garden	<i>Cooperation:</i> Staff training, exchange with other tourism stakeholders in the region and storytelling activities are planned around the central activity of planning of the kitchen garden.
Strandhotel, Strande	Supported by the sea	<i>Communication:</i> Direct possibility to use the towels for marketing and storytelling for “Meeresschutzstadt”.

6.3 Kiel’s individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of the Chamber of Commerce of Kiel) and interview 2 (Representative of Kiel Marketing, the city DMO): Since 2021, Kiel has made commendable strides in sustainable destination development, aligning well with the objectives of Tourban. However, despite these positive advancements, there are still barriers that need to be overcome, and progress has been slower than anticipated. Recognizing the importance of sustainability, it has become one of the pillars of the tourism strategy for the region of Schleswig-Holstein, positioning Kiel as an advocate for environmentally responsible travel experiences. Kiel's sustainability efforts have been widely recognized, attracting attention from prominent organizations such as the DZT/GNTB,

which has conducted numerous press trips highlighting the city's initiatives. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement in coordinating sustainability actions between the city of Kiel and the Destination Management Organization (DMO), enhancing collaboration at all levels.

One significant challenge lies in acquiring the necessary resources, both in terms of human capital and financial support, to drive sustainable tourism development at the destination level. Additionally, it can sometimes be challenging to identify and promote the specific aspects of sustainable tourism that appeal to leisure travellers. However, there has been a noticeable increase in the importance of sustainability for business and organized travel, indicating a growing demand for sustainability labels and certifications.

SMEs in the region seek guidance on obtaining relevant sustainability labels, but currently lack the necessary knowledge and support from the DMO. This knowledge gap is not exclusive to Kiel, as other destinations in the region face similar challenges. Furthermore, in the post-COVID era, staffing concerns have become a prominent topic among SMEs. Interestingly, businesses that prioritize sustainability seem to attract and retain employees more effectively, suggesting that sustainability plays a crucial role in employer branding.

The challenges identified by SMEs in 2021 remain relevant today, hindering the widespread adoption of innovative practices pioneered by projects like Tourban. To overcome this hurdle, it is essential to disseminate practical Tourban examples throughout Kiel and the broader region of Schleswig-Holstein. By showcasing these tangible success stories, other SMEs can be inspired and motivated to embrace sustainability practices. To further accelerate sustainable tourism efforts, an idea worth considering is organizing a joint workshop or event in the fall of 2023. This gathering would aim to inspire SMEs across the region by showcasing not only the Tourban initiative but also other ongoing sustainability initiatives. By fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange, this event can spur innovation and propel the region's sustainable tourism agenda forward.

In conclusion, Kiel has made noteworthy progress in sustainable tourism since 2021, yet challenges persist. However, with continued collaboration, resource allocation, and knowledge sharing, the city can overcome these hurdles and build a thriving, environmentally conscious tourism industry. Projects like Tourban serve as valuable examples, illustrating how practical initiatives can be implemented and scaled to drive sustainable tourism development in Kiel and the broader region of Schleswig-Holstein.

Conclusion: Tourban has played a vital role in facilitating the ongoing sustainability transformation of the destination and SMEs in Kiel and its surroundings. While the impact may be challenging to measure, Tourban has successfully created lighthouse examples and fostered a broader network of stakeholders, both from the private and public sectors, who are enthusiastic about advancing and accelerating sustainable tourism development. Moreover, Tourban has effectively highlighted the interconnectedness of ecological and social sustainability within tourism enterprises. The relevance of Tourban's projects extends beyond its immediate context, providing valuable insights and inspiration for other SMEs in Kiel and its surroundings. Looking ahead, it is evident that further knowledge and emphasis on sustainable tourism labels are necessary in the near future. As part of the plan, a Schleswig-Holstein-wide meeting is scheduled for autumn 2023 to showcase and build upon the accomplishments of the German SMEs' Tourban projects.

9. TALLINN

9.1 Major challenges for city tourism

City Challenges: The major challenges for Tallinn identified in 2021 by the city's tourism stakeholders were:

- a) **Demand for more sustainable options:** Awareness regarding sustainability is different from generation to generation, the older generation of tourists may still put comfort over sustainability, but general awareness is rising and there is demand for sustainable tourism products and services. Due to Covid-19 related issues many companies have put sustainability on the backburner in order to deal with more pressing matters.
- b) **Lack of governmental support:** It was identified that companies have self-funded a lot of their energy-saving projects and hotels are not aware of support measures for sustainable solutions except of solar energy measure. Lack of money has been the biggest problem in implementing sustainable solutions. There have not been any support measures for travel companies yet, but now Tallinn city will open financial support measure for sustainable conferences as well as will start offering financial support for implementing digital solutions, but the requirement for the latter is turnover of 20,000-60,000 EUR (in 2020) and it is a big problem for travel companies, since most of them had less revenue in 2020.

SME Challenges: The main challenges mentioned by SME representatives in 2021 were:

- Financial restraints
- Lack of know-how
- Customers are price sensitive, which hinders making changes
- Waste management system in the city centre not up to par

9.2 How the Tourban SMEs coped with/ helped to meet the identified challenges

Company Name	Project Name	Response to challenges
Kalevi Veekeskus	KSGK	<p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Enabling customers to sort their trash and use less non-recyclable plastic.</p> <p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Obtained a Green Key certificate.</p> <p><i>Lack of know-how:</i> Continuously discussing sustainability topics in management meetings as well as training the staff.</p>
Marta Vintage	HOOW	<p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Inspire guests and raise awareness for sustainable activities.</p> <p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Since March 2023 started to obtaining a Green Key certificate.</p>
Erinev	SFT	<p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Became a Travelife partner status food tour operator.</p>
Citybox Tallinn	Citybox goes green	<p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Obtained a Green Key certificate.</p>
Estravel	DIRS	<p><i>Lack of know-how:</i> Consultations with an expert helped to create a reporting system, which lessens cyber waste caused by emails.</p> <p><i>Demand for more sustainable options:</i> Started to obtaining Travelite certificate.</p>
Navicup	DEIST	<p><i>Lack of know-how:</i> Through consultations with an expert, they were able to significantly better their SEO.</p>
Your Guide	SUSPAT	<p><i>Waste management system in the city centre not up to par:</i> Motivating tourists to recycle their cigarette butts but providing them a map to designated bins that offer a scenic route.</p>

9.3 Tallinn's individual exploitation of Tourban results

Summary interview 1 (Representative of Tallinn Tourism Department) and interview 2 (Representative of Visit Estonia/Enterprise Estonia): Generally, the direction and challenges are still the same as they were in 2021 and the interest in sustainable tourism has had a fast growth. The hotels are obtaining Green Key certificates at a fast pace, now about 50% of overall rooms are Green Key certified. Green Destinations program has been launched also. There are seven Estonian Destinations awarded with Green Destinations Award.

The city of Tallinn has adopted requirements for sustainable event organisation, which apply both to local and international conferences etc. Tallinn has a considerable amount of event organisation companies, who follow sustainable practices and are a great example for the who tourism sector, for example recycling, weighing and sorting waste, as well as working together with the Foodbank, where they donate leftovers from buffets etc.



Additionally, City of Tallinn has improved accessibility database LIPS, which has information about Tallinn's cultural and tourism objects that are accessible for people with special needs. This is an important tool for tourism sector enterprises. City continue to work towards museums applying for a green museum certification and making exhibitions more accessible for people with special needs. For example, the Estonian Maritime Museum's Fat Margaret is a great role model in this field: the medieval building has been made wheelchair-accessible in the maximum extent possible, in the extent of approximately 90%, and has been equipped with an elevator, an induction loop with sound amplification which is compatible with hearing aids, a guideline for the visually impaired, tactile copies of selected ship models.

Tallinn has introduced a grant for international conferences, but in order to qualify for it the company needs to adapt to green practices. Entrepreneurs are coming up with very innovative solutions. Tallinn continues to offer free public transport for international delegates to promote soft mobility. The city is about to organize international Green Destinations network yearly conference in October 2023, and is also the host for the Baltic Sea Region Tourism forum, which will take place in October. In collaboration with Helsinki and other Baltic Sea cities there are plans extensive support activities for helping to get Baltic Sea region's tourism sector carbon neutral, including joining the Glasgow Declaration. Estonian Tourist Board (Enterprise Estonia), the coordinator of the Green Key in Estonia, is planning to bring out a simpler set of criteria based on self-assessment. The aim is to help hotels to make first steps towards sustainability solution. The result of this process is here: <https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/turismiprofessionaalile/tootearendus-ja-kvaliteet/kestlik-turismiteenus-kellele-ja-milleks>

Regarding the present outlook, the future for tourism is currently looking a bit grim, as **there is a planned tax change** where the value added tax for tourism enterprises would be raised from 9% to 13% since 2025. This is a significant tax raise, which will manifest in price rises for the tourists. Estonia's **domestic tourism is not very high**, people are opting to go abroad as a weekend in a spa here could cost the same as a city break somewhere else. The fear is that if the prices do get higher, it is feared that the amount of both internal and external tourists will decrease. This would result in companies having less funds to be able to continue to make sustainable changes in their operations. Due to circumstances out of our hands **the tourism in Tallinn does continue to be seasonal**. Business tourism growth is inhibited by *lack of big conference centres* and *lack of investments to get big hotel chains here*. In case the VAT for hotels will be raised, then it is not likely that previously planned projects will come to fruition. Tallinn continues to be the digital centre of Baltics, where employees do not necessarily need to work from offices and are mostly remote. **International access to the city is also lacking**, as our flight plans are not the best for business travels. In 2023 there are additional challenges for SMEs: To increase the cooperation between government and SME- in tourism sector - the messages from government and SME-s have to be the similar - not just one wonderful original idea after another.

Looking at the Tourban SMEs in Tallinn and their projects, it can be stated that participants in the project have already made a very strong start. Hotels have obtained Green Key certificates, and the Marta Guesthouse has started to apply for one, based on the knowledge gained during the project. The others are investing both in scattering tourists from Tallinn's Old Town to other counties and in a paperless service. There is still a lot to be done in sustainable tourism, which is still to be solved at national and municipal level.

A very recent example that shows that Tallinn is working along the values that were also the core of the Tourban project: This year Tallinn is the European Green Capital and a very good example is the joint contribution and efforts taken by the City of Tallinn, citizens and Tallinn SMEs to decrease the environmental footprint of the song and dance festival, a major event in Estonia this summer. From 30 June to 2 July 2023, Tallinn hosted the XIII Youth Song and Dance Festival with more than 90,000 visitors and 31,000 participants.

- Transportation: From 30 June to 2 July 2023, use of Tallinn's public transport was free for everyone (Elron trains were free for performers and one companion from 27 June to 2 July 2023). There were several temporary bus lines connecting different parts of Tallinn with festival grounds so that there was not need to use personal cars.
- Non-motorised transport – there were organized several unguarded bicycle parking areas next to the festival ground.
- By the end of the song festival TLT put out its entire tram fleet to help people from Kadriorg to the city centre.
- Tallinn has also made agreements with electric scooter companies to create a separate place for scooter parking.
- No single-use dishes: Such a large number of people have never been fed with reusable dishes in Estonia before—both performers and spectators get their food from reusable dishes.
- Recycling: 70 waste collection points have been created in the Song Festival Ground alone, where were boxes for collecting waste by type. In addition to the participants-visitors of the song and dance party, the traders



themselves had also collect waste by type – from souvenir providers to caterers. There were volunteer green ambassadors at all events, who explained to visitors how waste is collected by type and the return of deposit items works, where to find water taps, ...

- Environment: To celebrate the European Green Capital Year and the 13th Youth Song and Dance Festival, the city of Tallinn, together with the Tallinn collectives participating in the festival, planted 150 trees in 22 different locations across the city in schoolyards, youth centre areas, playgrounds and sports fields.
- In addition, in cooperation with the Estonian Handicraft Teachers' Society, the Estonian Folk Art and Handicraft Union and the organizing team of the youth song and dance party, 22 Tallinn schools made 76 flower boxes, where they planted native Estonian flowers. Two small park areas were formed from the boxes in the middle of the city.
- At the joint festival of traditional culture Baltica in Tallinn in June 2023, young craftspeople braided different ribbons from outdated clothes and cloths and these braids decorated the trees lining the route of the Tallinn Song and Dance Festival procession. The idea came from the desire to offer a joyful participation to children and young people who are not involved in singing and dancing. The ribbons were used to decorate 13 trees along the route of the procession. The braided ribbons will be reused in November 2023 at the Estonian Craft Festival *Mardilaat*.

10. Conclusion & Outlook

It can be clearly seen that in all the Tourban cities the Tourban SMEs with their projects have significantly contributed to the sustainable development of tourism in the cities and their surroundings. It can also be seen that these seven to eleven SMEs per city alone cannot solve the big challenges that were identified on the destination level – but they are a part of the solution.

The individual exploitation plans of each city show that Tourban can be counted as a big success factor from the destination perspective as well as from the individual SME perspective because the projects are so very much integrated. They are integrated into the business models of the SMEs and the SMEs are the heart and soul of the tourism offer in the destination. In all the interviews in all the Tourban cities it was stated by the destination stakeholders and sustainable tourism experts that the Tourban projects and the Tourban SMEs make great practice examples and cases studies – and this is exactly what is needed for the further development of the destination: No long paper reports about strategies and trends (because everybody knows the challenges and also the theoretical solutions) but tested and approved solutions that can be applied in other companies as well - to change the destination into a direction that the public level is fostering. So, the Tourban approach can be evaluated as a classical win-win-scenario both from the private (company) and the public (administration and residents) level.

The approach of funding comparatively many projects with comparatively little money has had two very positive effects: (1) The Tourban projects really had to be concise and fit very well to the further development of the SMEs' business models and their DNAs – there was no way that the money could have been used as a parallel source of income, just to generate profit. (2) To have at least seven Tourban projects per city and 60 all over Europe gives the destinations and SMEs a great variety and contacts of good practices that can be presented, uptaken, duplicated, used for inspiration etc.

The beauty of this approach (the deep integration of the Tourban project in both the SME and destination development) is that there is no necessity of a complicated plan to ensure the sustainability and longevity of the project outcomes and which usually seldom work. The longevity and sustainability of Tourban will happen very naturally because the project results form part and feed into the process of business development and destination development. Then only question is how fast and wide the uptake of the Tourban project outcomes will happen in each city. In all cities there are plans to capitalize on the project results by showcasing them as good practices – the more concrete the plans for dissemination are (e.g. in Kiel by organizing further events) and the closer the Tourban SMEs work together and network with each other and hand-in-hand with the destination (e.g. in Amsterdam, where they have been meeting on a regular basis) the faster the uptake will happen.

Plans by the project partners to spread the good Tourban practices beyond the seven Tourban cities are also in place, e.g. using their contracts with European networks such as NECSTouR and ETOA to send out the Tourban Good Practice Brochure to their members or to talk about the Tourban cases on international conferences (e.g. the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2023 as part of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region).



11. The TOURBAN PLEDGE

The eight partners of the Tourban consortium would like to express their appreciation of the general project approach for Tourban as originally set out by the EASME call. The concept of directly funding (quite a lot of) SMEs with (comparatively little) money under a clearly defined project objective has worked in our view tremendously well.

In our observation, the total impact of the project in the destinations and in the companies has been much bigger and is likely to be longer lasting than in other kinds of projects that were funded with similar aims but following other approaches.

The Tourban partners will stay committed to spread the word in their networks about the success of Tourban – its concrete project results but also as an example of how good funding of SMEs to foster desired bottom-up solutions can work.

If in their power, the Tourban partners will explain the Tourban funding approach to funding authorities to inspire them and their programs with the Tourban example.

The Tourban partner will be happy to apply their knowledge gained during the Tourban project in future projects that follow a similar funding approach.