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Tomorrow Today: how European cities plan to reinvent the role of DMOs to reach a sustainable visitor economy



The European Cities Marketing (ECM) International Conference in Ljubljana was the opportunity for the record breaking 205 delegates from European cities to meet and focus on "Tomorrow Today" or what's coming next in their way. The many ideas, insights and challenges shared by speakers and delegates lead to a common need and desire from DMOs: evolve to be as sustainable as possible.

Significant changes are needed in the global tourism system to reduce resource consumption: Nobel prize winner and climatologist, **Lučka Kajfez Bogataj**, kicked off the conference with a sharp wake-up call to fundamentally rethink destination management, moving from maximization to optimization!

Travel Expert and Keynote **Frank Cuypers** presented the concept of Liquid Tourism as a new model and also advised DMOs to go from Win-Win to Win-Win-Win aka the Triple Bottom Line: Planet / Profit / People.

On the road to sustainability important transformations are required

The conference highlighted outstanding sustainable actions and ideas which can serve as inspiration for the industry worldwide.

Fuchsia Claire Sims, Co-Founder of *Adventure Junky* explained how her company wants to gamify 'sustainable travel' to lighten negative effects of mass tourism - one adventure at a time. By

using fun tools, points, patches, surprise and delight moments they reward and nudge their community towards completing their travel goals and inspire them to go out and collect adventures that are high on experience and low on impact.

Sustainability is now mainstream as brands, visitors and event attendees demand greater social responsibility and environmental performance from destinations and suppliers. Still, destinations often struggle to adopt a framework for actual implementation of the Global Sustainability Goals in their business plan and destination strategy. "*Less conversation, more actions*", quoted **Guy Bigwood**, Managing Director, *Global Destination Sustainability Index*, who shared how destinations around the globe are leveraging sustainability for success! Case studies and data from the GDS-Index proved his point. At the European Cities Marketing International Conference, the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) also released their third [Whitepaper](#) that details the case studies, data analysis and the actions taken by 47 Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and municipalities to become destinations of choice for meetings, events and business tourism.

Signe Jungersted, former Director of Development, *Wonderful Copenhagen* & **Signe Gjelstrup Mouridsen**, Project Manager 10X Copenhagen & Analytical Advisor, *Wonderful Copenhagen* dissected the sentiments, core issues & political schisms defining perception of tourism down to all neighbourhood of Copenhagen in order to pursue localhood & people-based growth in their city!

FairBnB co-Founder, **Damiano Avellino**, aims to make vacation rental ethical and serve local communities. Four radical rules make *FairBnB* different: 1) Strict 'one host, one home' policy, 2) They actually ask to pay taxes at the local level, 3) 50% of the commission will be reinvested in community projects and 4) *FairBnB* is to be owned and run as a worker cooperative. Damiano and friends are now launching in five cities across Europe. Might your city be next?

Using data analyses to anticipates future needs

Ted Sullivan, and **Sara Pastor** from *ADARA* shared great insights as to how we can use data from hundreds of millions of travellers to understand and project what is going on at our destinations. DMOs need to guide their marketing strategies and optimise media spend with data-driven analyses and knowledge of how real travellers respond.

Vice President Insights at *ForwardKeys*, **Olivier Ponti**, said it "*We can't predict the future but we can predict several futures.*" He shared fresh insights about the upcoming summer to the attendees based on the bookings and air capacity data and gave 6 points that DMOs should follow if they really want to be better at what they are doing: 1) Do your homework, 2) Beware of shortcuts, 3) Turn insights into action, 4) Plan ahead, 5) Get the big picture, 6) Don't wait for the perfect dataset!

Chris Adams, Head of Research & Insights & **C.A. Clark**, VP Digital Marketing, *Miles Partnership* highlighted powerful opportunities for promoting destinations & business partners using a range of free tools across Google Maps, Google Search, Google Street View, Google My Business Listings, Google Travel Guides and more.

"Society changes, the way we meet changes as well"

Matthias Schultze, Managing Director, *German Convention Bureau*, introduced this way the Future Meeting Space Project and revealed its latest results: Interactive fora, multisite conferences, self-organized co-working spaces, unplugged togetherness or virtually wired hybrids... With focus on putting customer first, tomorrow's meetings formats will look different from today's commoditised standard packages.

As a note to the conference debates and themes, **Petra Stusek**, *European Cities Marketing's* President, said: "*Overall, the conferences polling and debates demonstrated a high degree of agreement that "sustainable tourism" is the new priority. Of course, it's easier said than done, but the content that was provided to the attendees during the conference will for sure help them begin,*

continue or finish their transition to a more sustainable way of working as DMOs depending on where they belong at the moment. Also, something really important is that ECM conferences are all about sharing, inspiring and connecting to be better."

Participants also got the latest from ECM Member cities/countries such as *Aarhus, Benidorm, Helsinki, Ljubljana, Lyon and Mechelen* but also from companies like *Addock, Airfinity, Dragon Trail Interactive, Hopstay, Inspirators Factory, Q°Emotion* and *Welcome City Lab*, as well as ECM Partners: *MODUL University* and *TOPOSOPHY*.

The conference was co-moderated by **Yvonne Coulin**, ECM Board Member and CEO of *Nuremberg Convention & Tourist Office* and **Peter Rømer Hansen**, Founder and CEO of *Rømer Agency* and ECM Meetings facilitator.

The next **ECM International Conference & General Assembly** will take place in *Poznan* on June 10-13, 2020. The theme of the event will be "*Soft Power of Cities*". More information and registration will be available in 2020 on www.europeancitiesmarketing.com

***European Cities Marketing** is a non-profit organisation improving the competitiveness and performance of leading cities of Europe by providing a platform for convention, leisure and city marketing professionals to exchange knowledge, best practice and widen their network to build new business. European Cities Marketing is promoting and linking the interests of members from more than 115 major cities in 39 countries.

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