

# From destination marketing to destination management

Bratislava Tourist Board

Ján Šifra  
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## Concept for sustainable tourism in the destination of Bratislava

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Can a city be a well-known tourism destination without losing its soul? How can we offer visitors – whether they come for business or leisure – with unforgettable experiences, sustainably finance the sector, and simultaneously ensure that Bratislava's local economy, residents, and ecosystem thrive?

This concept outlines how Bratislava can achieve long-term sustainability in tourism across all key areas: economic, environmental, technological, cultural, and social. It provides a clear yet systemically effective framework for managing and developing sustainable tourism in the Slovak capital in the coming years and decades.

This publication draws upon insights gathered from group and individual conversations with stakeholders of the Bratislava Tourist Board, which has a major role in representing tourism in the Slovak capital. The interviewees included members of the organisation's team and its board of directors.

Other sources include studies, concepts, and surveys from the DMO environment in Slovakia, Europe, and the world. These included, among others: the World Economic Forum's TTDI Index, the Smart Tourism initiative of the European Commission, documents and UNWTO reports, the think tanks Luzern Regenerative Tourism Initiative and GroupNAO, and the Toposophy organisation.

The concept envisions a future where tourism generates economic prosperity while enriching the city's cultural, environmental, and social well-being, leading to increased satisfaction for both residents and visitors.

Büro Milk and Bratislava Tourist Board

## Table of Contents

### I

#### What is destination sustainability?

Destination sustainability is the balance between long-term local prosperity (encompassing all aspects of the sustainability concept) and visitor experiences. This chapter defines sustainability based on the latest DMO standards worldwide and explores its implications for tourism, particularly in Bratislava.

→ p. 7

### II

#### Three new mandates of the Bratislava Tourist Board

The mission of a modern DMO is destination management, which includes marketing. In recent years, DMOs have been shifting their primary focus from marketing to management. The main reasons being to ensure the long-term prosperity of a place and destination sustainability. This chapter describes the three mandates that the BTB will take on in the near future as a management organisation – not just a marketing one – to drive sustainable tourism and ensure the city's long-term prosperity.

→ p. 23

### III

#### Visual summary

Goodbye yesterday, hello tomorrow. This chapter provides a visual summary of the concept's key points, designed for those who do not have time to read the full document or who simply want to get acquainted with its main ideas.

→ p. 75

I

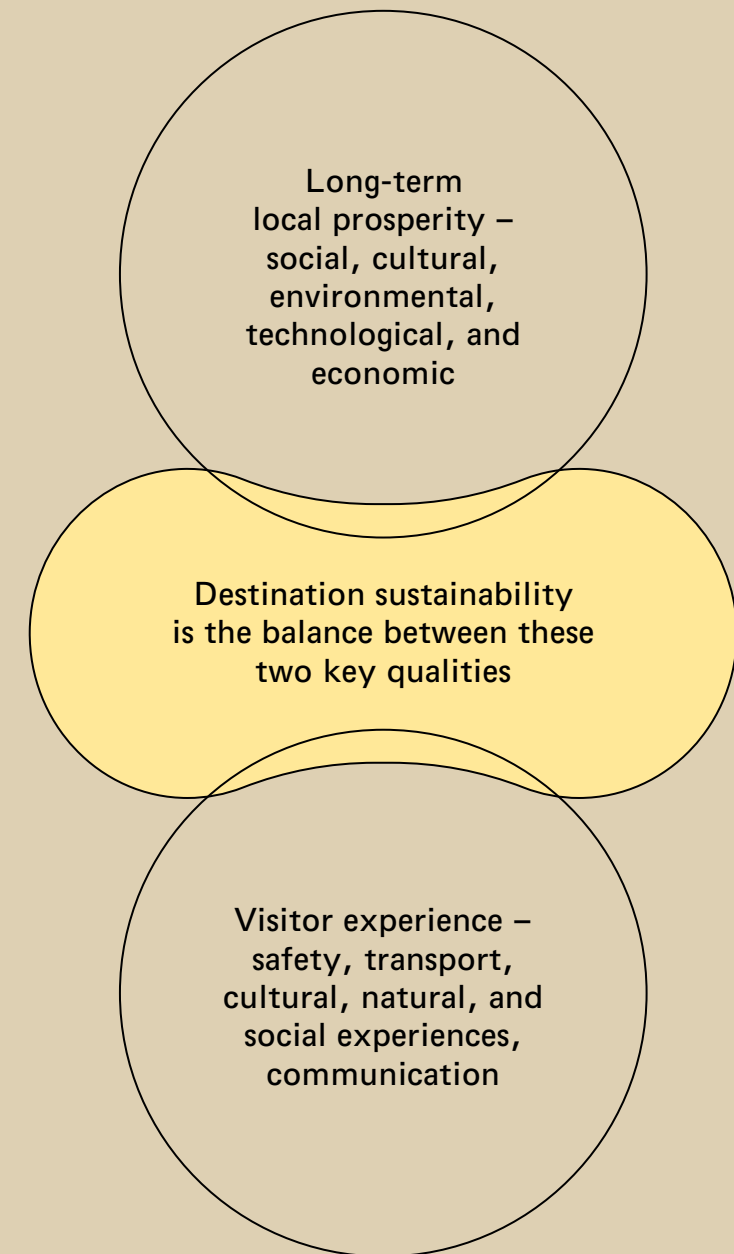
What is  
destination  
sustainability?

# Destination sustainability is the balance between a location's long-term prosperity and visitor experience.

Imagine finding yourself among an endless crowd of visitors at Prague Castle, Notre-Dame in Paris, or any other international landmark. There is an overload of sensations: the old-world charm is overshadowed by the anxiety of crowds and rows of souvenir shops; in the once quiet courtyard of a sacred building, a line of people snakes through, waiting for a Starbucks coffee; and across the street, an Asian street-food-inspired bubble-tea shop stands in contrast. It's a stark reminder of how tourism – while offering many economic benefits – can erode the prevailing character and have an unfortunate impact on the cultural heritage and social fabric of the city.

However, complications of this type are not exclusive to these sites. Cities and destinations are grappling with tourism challenges all over the world. Residents are increasingly vocal in protesting against the decline in quality of life and the commodification of their cultural heritage. On the one hand, tourism generates much-needed revenue, contributes to the economic prosperity of many businesses and organisations, and provides vital resources for the preservation of cultural heritage. On the other hand, it can overwhelm a city, stifle its authenticity and make residents and visitors feel alienated.

## Defining sustainability in the destination context



Bratislava is at a turning point. As the least visited city of the five Central European capitals (alongside Prague, Vienna, Budapest, and Warsaw), Bratislava has finally reached a new level of tourism maturity and is ready and attractive enough to significantly expand its visitor numbers. The cultural scene and public life have begun to flourish. The culinary scene is booming. The city has finally recognised the immense value of the Danube River and the surrounding forests and lowlands, from which several environmental, economic, and tourism benefits are derived.

The city's perception of its own identity is also changing. Bratislava no longer identifies itself only through its historical centre, but also as a vibrant city at the crossroads of three Central European countries, with a diverse range of offerings, and set among a rich and beautiful natural landscape. The time has come to seize the opportunity to put Bratislava on the world map. The tourism industry is a key part of this journey, bringing local revenue, international business opportunities for both Bratislava and the whole country, and enhancing Slovakia's global recognition.

How will Bratislava navigate the inherent tension between embracing the growth of tourism and protecting the qualities that make the city special? Can the city avoid the pitfalls of tourism and create a balanced, sustainable, and responsible development? And how can all this be properly managed and financed?

One way to approach this challenge is to define sustainability as a balance between long-term local prosperity and a quality visitor experience. Tourism has long been seen more through the prism of quantitative than qualitative growth. Focusing on quality means that tourism will work in balance. Whenever one component (tourism or the city itself) changes, the other component has to balance it.

## How to achieve a sustainable balance in practice? Through the public-private partnership (PPP) model

Achieving the delicate balance between visitor experience and local prosperity requires a collaborative approach that goes beyond the traditional public-private sector boundaries. This is where the concept of public-private partnerships (PPPs) comes into play. PPP projects (or public-private collaborations, as in the case of BTB) bring together the resources, expertise, and perspectives of government entities and private businesses to address complex challenges and achieve common goals. The PPP model has also been applied to large investment projects in Slovakia. These include project partnerships with local government, commercial partnerships, and sponsorship in line with BTB's objective. In sustainable tourism, PPP projects and public-private collaborations assist in aligning the interests of various stakeholders, including residents, businesses, visitors, and government agencies.

### How do PPP projects work?

PPP projects are characterised by sharing responsibilities, risks, and rewards between public and private partners. This collaborative model allows for a more systematic and integrated approach to tourism development, ensuring that all economic, social, cultural, technological, and environmental aspects are considered.

## Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) focus on collaboration based on private-public partnerships

DMOs (known as Destination Marketing Organisations, or regional tourism organisations in the Slovak context), i.e. the entities in charge of destination promotion, are already a form of PPP. They usually bring together representatives of the state/city, the tourism industry, and local communities.

To truly achieve sustainability as defined in this document, DMOs in Slovakia need to evolve beyond their traditional role. The letter “M” in DMO has long stood for marketing. Now, the new meaning of the “M” signifies a shift towards a broader mandate – management.

### From marketing to management

The shift from marketing to management implies a more proactive and strategic role of the DMO in shaping tourism. It requires:

- **Facilitating stakeholder engagement**  
Actively involve residents, businesses, and visitors in decision-making processes.
- **Developing and implementing a sustainable tourism strategy**  
Go beyond promoting the destination to actively managing the destination, its growth, and tourism’s impact.
- **Monitoring and measuring the impact of tourism**  
Track key qualitative and quantitative indicators related to visitor experience and local prosperity, to ensure a balanced approach.
- **Promoting innovation and cooperation**  
Encourage the development of new tourism products and experiences that benefit visitors and locals alike. Apply new digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) in management processes.

As an established public-private partnership in the capital, Bratislava Tourist Board is best positioned to lead the city towards sustainability. Beyond marketing, it takes on a broader role in facilitating and developing Bratislava as a destination.

BTB – as the main organisation responsible for promoting tourism in Bratislava, and one of the few Slovak examples of long-term public-private cooperation – has extensive knowledge of the city’s strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as the overall context of how Bratislava functions as a destination.

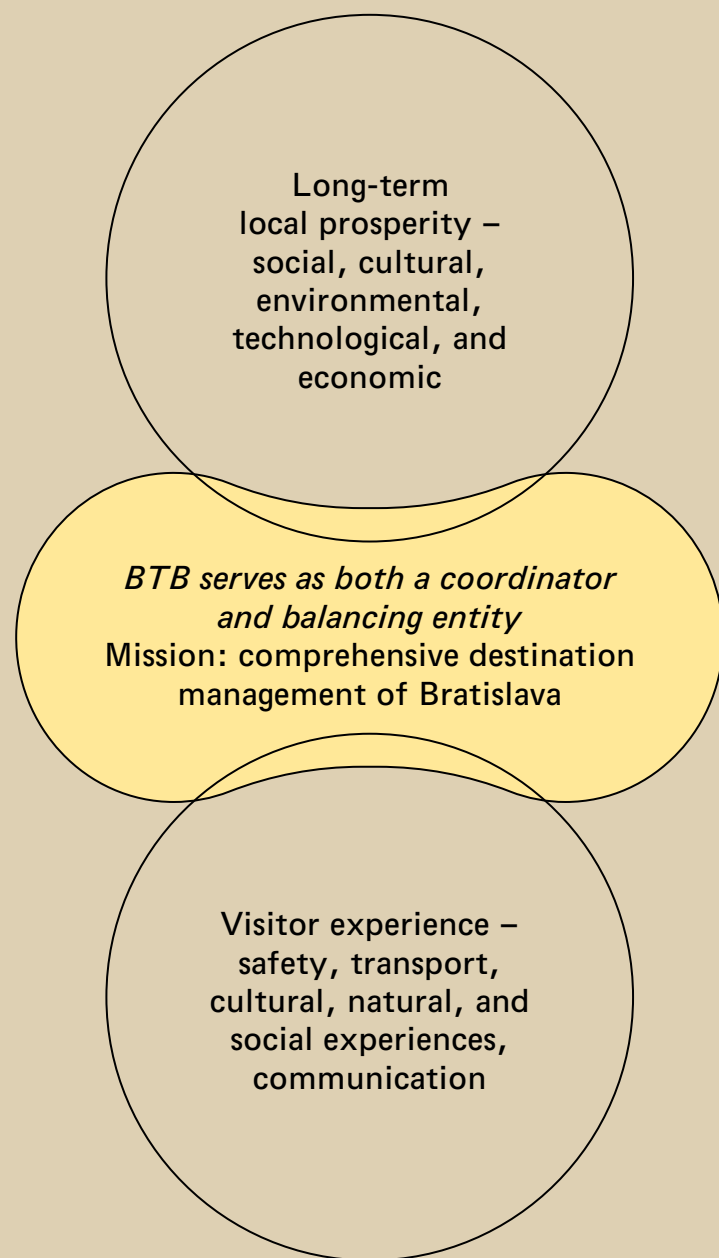
As a public-private entity, it actively builds relationships with key stakeholders – including government institutions, tourism businesses, and local communities. This strong foundation enables BTB to evolve into a true destination management organisation – one that balances the city’s long-term prosperity with visitor experiences.

BTB should become the orchestrator of sustainable tourism development in Bratislava. Its activities and know-how should lead the city towards a future in which tourism contributes to its economic vitality, social well-being, and cultural richness, while simultaneously preserving the metropolis’ unique character and environmental integrity.

To fulfil this role effectively, BTB needs a clear mandate and the necessary resources. This mandate entails direct responsibility for three key areas essential to achieving sustainable tourism development (explored further in Chapter II).

With this mandate, BTB gains the authority and tools to manage the destination efficiently, balance diverse interests, and drive long-term development beyond the next decade.





## What do we actually want to sustain?

Expanding the role of a DMO from marketing to management also requires a clearer understanding of sustainability. It's no longer just about minimising negative environmental impacts. It's about actively contributing to the destination's growth across all key areas of life. Let's define them.

### Economic sustainability

#### *It's not just economic growth*

Economic sustainability is not just about increasing visitor numbers and direct (revenue) and indirect (tax) income from tourism. It's about fostering a resilient and equitable economy that benefits all community members. This includes supporting local businesses, promoting fair wages and good working conditions, and ensuring a fair distribution of tourism revenues among all stakeholders.

#### *Long-term economic vision*

It requires a long-term perspective, with investment in sustainable infrastructure, diversification of tourism revenue streams, and ensuring the long-term viability of the tourism industry over several decades, not just the next few quarters.

### Environmental sustainability

#### *Protection and conservation of Bratislava's ecosystems*

Environmental sustainability includes protecting and conserving the natural environment, minimising pollution, reducing waste, and promoting responsible resource management in tourism.

#### *Climate action*

BTB must take the lead in mitigating climate change by supporting national strategies and international standards in Bratislava. This includes sustainable transportation options, green buildings, renewable energy initiatives, and education. Both the community and visitors need to be engaged in protecting nature and ecosystems.

## Cultural sustainability

### *Authenticity and respect*

Cultural sustainability involves preserving and promoting authentic cultural experiences, and respecting local traditions and customs, but also complementing them and ensuring tourism contributes to the vitality and development of local culture.

### *Supporting local communities*

Tourism is intended to empower local communities to protect their cultural heritage and participate in tourism growth in a way that brings them cultural and economic benefits.

## Social sustainability

### *Well-being and inclusion*

Social sustainability prioritises the well-being of all members of the community, ensuring that tourism contributes to social inclusion, and promotes access to services and quality of life.

### *Community engagement*

BTB must actively engage with local communities and ensure that their voices are heard in the planning and development of tourism services.

## Technological sustainability

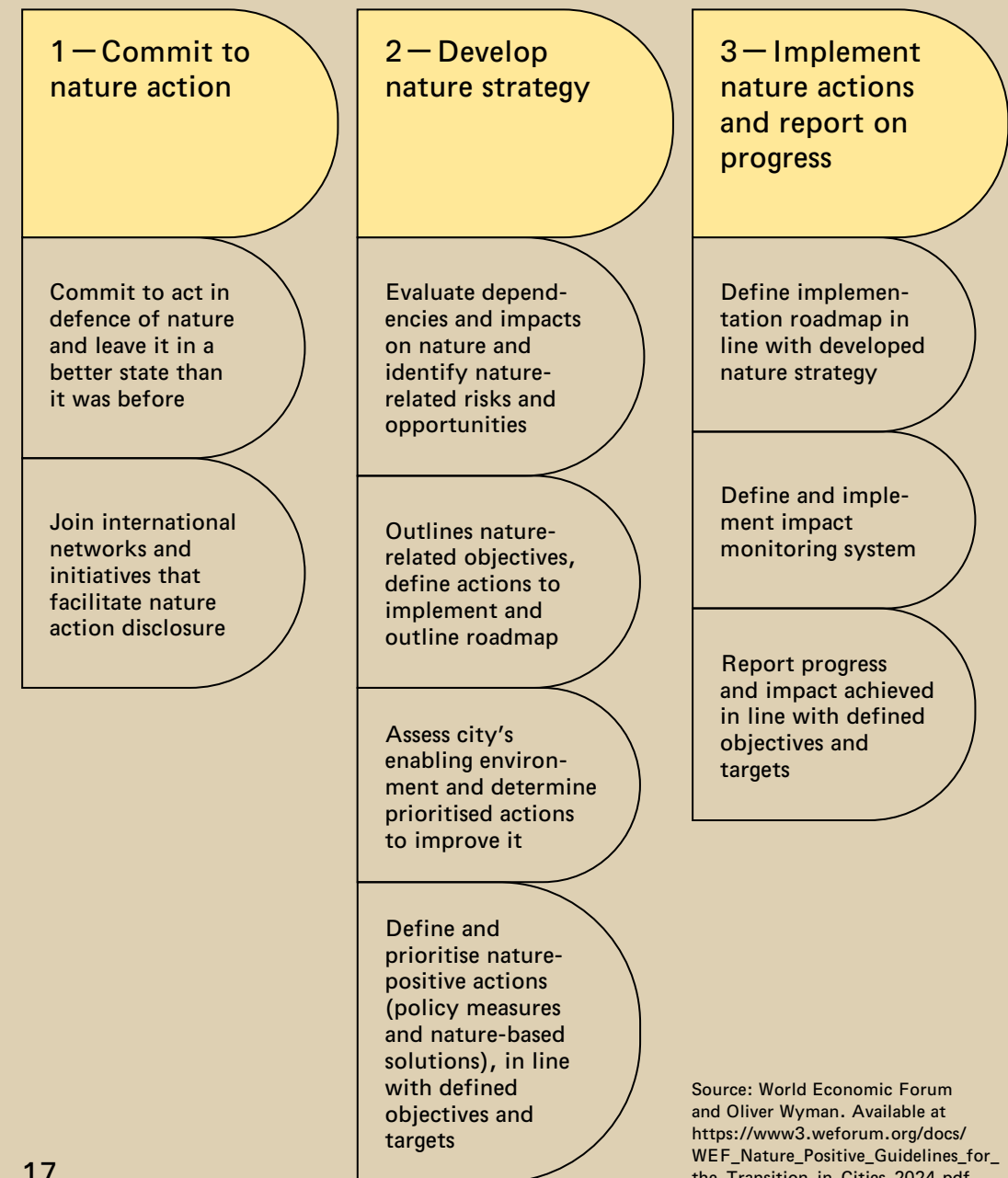
### *Responsible innovations*

Technology can play a key role in enhancing sustainability, but it must be developed and implemented responsibly, considering all aspects of sustainability. BTB should promote the use of technology for sustainable practices – supporting smart tourism solutions, online booking platforms that promote local businesses, and the latest digital tools, including AI, for visitor management.

### *Accessibility and connectivity*

Technology can also improve accessibility and connectivity, making tourism more inclusive and facilitating meaningful interactions between visitors and locals.

## Managing environmental sustainability according to the World Economic Forum



Source: World Economic Forum and Oliver Wyman. Available at [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Nature\\_Positive\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_Transition\\_in\\_Cities\\_2024.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Nature_Positive_Guidelines_for_the_Transition_in_Cities_2024.pdf)

## From Lanfranconi Bridge to the Lužný Bridge

The Danube and its bridges in Bratislava connect the city districts with each other, and Slovakia with its neighbouring countries and the world. The DMO must operate on a similar principle – as a unifying force that balances economic prosperity with the protection of natural systems, culture, social prosperity, and technological innovation. The Danube bridges of our capital city therefore serve as ideal metaphorical pillars for this concept of sustainable tourism, “Bratislava style”.

**Lanfranconi Bridge:**  
*The bridge of connection*

Symbolises the important connections between the various stakeholders both within Bratislava and between Bratislava and the region. We call it point zero – signifying that continuous and persistent cooperation across all stakeholders and throughout the whole region is the starting point for the sustainable tourism concept.

**SNP Bridge (New Bridge):**  
*The bridge of innovation in tourism*

Represents new methods, technologies, and innovative approaches to destination management and the connection of Bratislava with the world of tourism and its innovative practices.

**Old Bridge:**  
*The bridge of history, food, and culture*

A symbol of respect for the rich history, gastronomy, and culture of Bratislava. It ensures both their preservation and continued development.

**Apollo Bridge:**  
*The crossroads of local life*

Connecting three large parts of the city, including the developing downtown: Ružinov, Petržalka, and Staré Mesto, it is a symbol of the vibrant social life in Bratislava, of fostering connections between visitors and residents, and promoting community-based tourism initiatives.

**Harbour Bridge:**  
*The bridge of industry, business, and economy*

Represents the contribution of industry, services, and trade for the long-term sustainability of Bratislava. The bridge is also important for the congress tourism sector.

**Lužný Bridge:**  
*Bridge of ecology*

Symbolises the big picture – the interconnectedness of Bratislava with its natural environment, and promoting ecological awareness and respect for the land, waters, forests, and the natural inner-city systems of Bratislava.

# A visit that will leave the city in a better state

More than a decade ago, academics (e.g. Daniel Wahl) and management theorists (e.g. Hutchins, Storm) asked the question: when we talk about sustainability, what do we actually want to sustain? And the answer was surprising: we don't really want to sustain things. When we as a society talk about sustainability, we actually want to regenerate what has been lost and damaged, and build regenerative systems that positively impact the economy, the environment, and local life in the future.

The current trend of sustainability thinking is thus the idea of regeneration, which also applies to the tourism sector. It aims to ensure that every visitor leaves the city in a slightly better condition than it was found. This concept is already being explored and implemented by culturally and geographically close destinations such as Ljubljana and Lucerne.

While sustainability is the framework within which we operate, the ultimate goal should be the regeneration of Bratislava. This means that tourism must actively contribute to the renewal and improvement of the city and leave it in a better condition than before.

## *Restoring what has been lost*

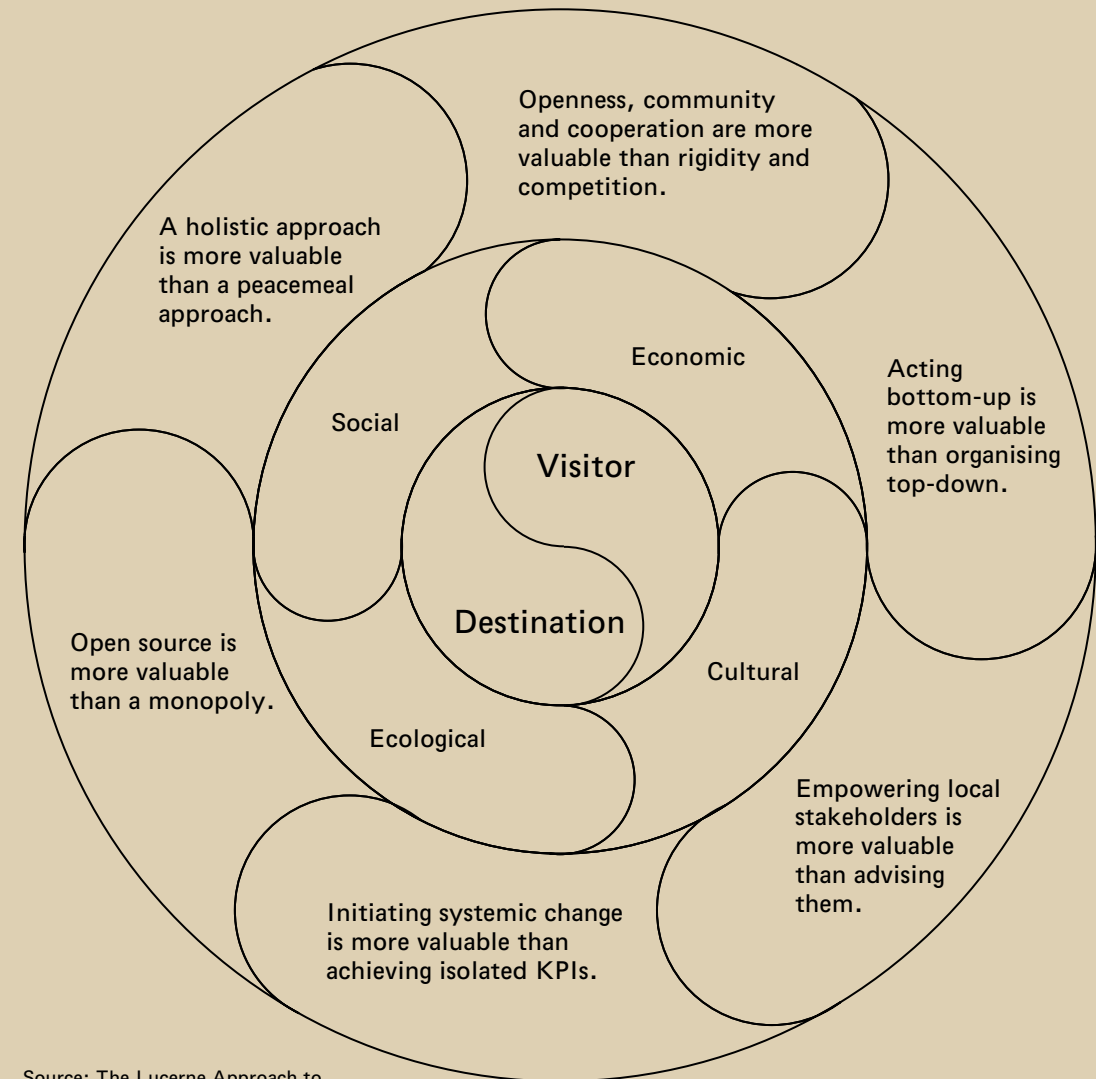
This involves restoring degraded environments, revitalising cultural heritage, and addressing social inequalities.

## *Creating a positive impact*

Regeneration means ensuring that tourism has a positive impact on the economy, natural systems, the exchange of expert know-how, culture, and the life of the Bratislava's residents.

The Lucerne model of regenerative tourism helps to understand sustainable tourism. It emphasises a comprehensive approach, recognising the interconnectedness of economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

## The Lucerne model of regenerative tourism



Source: The Lucerne Approach to Regenerative Tourism. Available at <https://regenerative-tourism.org/>

In simple words, we don't just want to sustain the status quo; we want to continuously improve and renew our city through tourism.

Sustainable tourism principles highlighted in the model include:

*A systemic approach*

Considering the interconnectedness of all aspects of a destination – from the environment and economy to social and cultural values.

*Open source*

“Sharing” knowledge and resources to foster collaboration and innovation in tourism development.

*Acting bottom-up*

Strengthening the participation of local communities and all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

*Initiating systemic change*

A shift from isolated initiatives to systemic actions that will bring lasting positive change to the tourism industry.

*Empowering local stakeholders*

Providing local communities with the resources, education, and support they need to benefit from and contribute to sustainable tourism development.

By adhering to these principles, destinations such as Bratislava can move beyond just mitigating the negative impacts of tourism. They can strive to create positive impacts that regenerate and enhance the destination for future generations.

*Note on regeneration:*

*The visitor is also an active participant in the regenerative processes and is responsible for the place they visit.*

The regenerative model is specific in that it also changes the view of the visitor. In this model, the visitor is not “just our customer – our master”. It redefines the visitor as a guest with “both feet on the ground”. The concept of regeneration from the Luzern initiative says:

“A regenerative tourist is, so to speak, a person ‘with both feet on the ground’ (von Redecker, 2023, p. 127). The further they travel, the longer they linger in order to fully immerse themselves in the dimensions of the regenerative. But the same applies here: neither tourists nor destinations alone can be regenerative. It only works in the relationship with each other and in mutual action. The individual is an active element in the system (Dürr, 2009).”

## II

# Three new mandates of the Bratislava Tourist Board

**The new mission of the BTB is to focus on comprehensive destination management, going beyond just marketing the city. In this framework, BTB should serve as a catalyst and orchestrator for the destination's development. The aim is to create and promote a balance between Bratislava's long-term prosperity and visitor experience.**

Marketing is often shrouded in mystery. It's a world of trial and error, constant adaptation, and refinement. This is especially true in destination marketing, where the many variables and huge global competition enter the equation.

But is destination marketing really just about promotion and outpacing competitors in brand recognition? We believe it's something more profound – and that is developing the destination itself from the perspective of both residents and visitors. DMOs act as facilitators of relationships among various tourism stakeholders – connecting the city, the commercial sector, the academic world, and the government. We, too, cultivate awareness of the destination abroad and at home. It's an incredibly creative, engaging, yet challenging role, as we must carefully balance the perspectives of target audiences and residents. The ideal is to ensure that Bratislava resonates with potential visitors as a place worth visiting.

The role of BTB already goes beyond city promotion. We operate a visitor information centre, maintain a multilingual website for visitors, represent Bratislava internationally, produce maps and brochures, and even address small-scale tourism infrastructure needs. We create the framework for tourism development, and our role also includes commercial diplomacy and relationships with foreign media.

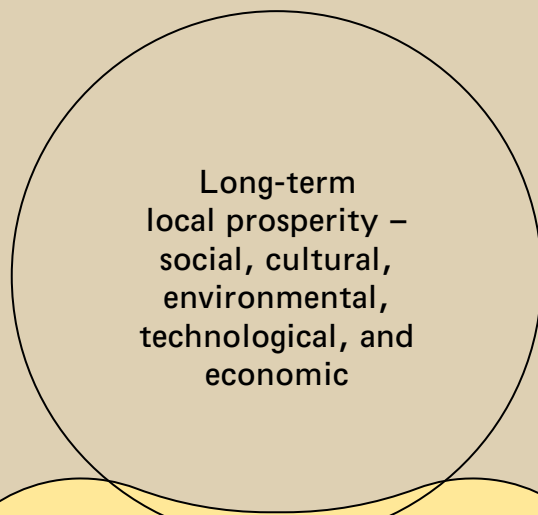
While we describe these roles in the present tense, the reality is that with our current resources, we are predominantly focused on destination marketing. The challenge lies not in our expertise, but in securing the necessary funding and capacity to fulfil our broader mandate. Since we provide public services, we currently rely primarily on public finances. To truly become the driving force behind sustainable tourism in Bratislava and achieve a balance between visitor experience and local prosperity, we must evolve – we need to become a true Destination Management Organisation.

Our vision is to reposition Bratislava Tourist Board within the tourism ecosystem.

This requires a fundamental shift in how we operate and how we are perceived. To deliver on our new vision, we need to acquire three key mandates: a destination management mandate, a facilitation mandate, and a destination development mandate. These three mandates will help us become an active curator of destination management.

Ing. Nina Erneker  
Chairwoman, Bratislava Tourist Board





Long-term  
local prosperity –  
social, cultural,  
environmental,  
technological, and  
economic

*1 – Destination management mandate*  
Development and discovery of the Bratislava  
destination – its cultural and natural assets,  
along with infrastructure building

*2 – Facilitation mandate*  
Connecting and networking tourism,  
the city, the state, and its residents

*3 – Destination development mandate*  
Managing marketing to support the  
comprehensive growth of the destination



Visitor experience –  
safety, transport,  
cultural, natural, and  
social experiences,  
communication

## The new mission of the DMO is sustainable destination management as a whole

What makes a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) truly sustainable? A sustainable DMO understands that its role extends far beyond promotion.

As a facilitator, curator, and comprehensive destination designer, a sustainable DMO ensures that tourism contributes to the long-term development of a destination and enriches the lives of residents and visitors alike.

This requires not only an understanding of the delicate balance between economic growth and environmental protection, but also the discovery, preservation, and responsible sharing of the city's cultural, social, and environmental beauty. All of this must be done respectfully.

Traditionally, the “M” in DMO stood for marketing. DMOs focused on promoting the destination, attracting visitors, and driving economic growth. While these functions remain essential, the new “M” signifies a shift towards a more systemic approach – management in line with standard KPIs. Management now encompasses a broader range of responsibilities and three new mandates: destination management, facilitation, and destination development.

# 1 — Destination management mandate

A core sustainability mandate. It discovers, preserves, accesses, and develops the city's historical, cultural, social, and natural beauty in a responsible way that respects local life.

Within this mandate, BTB ensures:

- **A deeper understanding of Bratislava**  
BTB invests in research and analysis to better understand the city's cultural, social, and environmental richness. This includes uncovering unique stories and recognising the interconnectedness of the various elements that make up Bratislava's identity.
- **Co-creation of local narratives**  
BTB becomes a co-creator and storyteller of great stories about Bratislava that reflect the essence of the city's identity. This requires an understanding of the city's history, traditions, and social structure, as well as ensuring their alignment with the vision of development represented by other city organisations, residents, citizens, and the state. The next step is to communicate these stories in a way that resonates with visitors and locals alike.

- **Discovery, development, protection, and accessibility of Bratislava's hidden treasures**  
Identification and promotion of lesser-known cultural and natural sites and experiences. Supporting local artists and craftspeople, local events with international potential, and finding undiscovered corners, magical places, and sights within the city and the wider region.
- **Infrastructure development**  
BTB is becoming a significant player in infrastructure development associated with the city's cultural, business, and natural assets.
- **Cultivation of cultural and natural assets**  
BTB is responsible for continuously exploring, discovering, and developing the value of the destination. This includes finding new financing and cooperation models for the continued development of the city in the following forms:
  - *Cultural programmes*  
Funding or linking cultural events, supporting local artists and craftspeople, preserving historical sites, and promoting cultural heritage.
  - *Social initiatives*  
Investing in community development projects, promoting social inclusion, and supporting initiatives that enhance residents' quality of life in the context of tourism.
  - *Environmental stewardship*  
Protecting natural resources, and promoting sustainable practices and initiatives that enhance biodiversity and ecological resilience.



# Destination management mandate – examples from Europe

## Exploration and growth in Ljubljana

### Discovering and developing cultural values

Ljubljana spends around €27 million annually (11% of its budget) to fund arts and culture. It then uses this cultural capital to ensure quality and repeated visits.

### Local prosperity and visitor experience

More than 90% of Ljubljana's residents agree that the development of tourism has led to the positive development of their city. [https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/ljubljana-category-winner-sustainability\\_en](https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/ljubljana-category-winner-sustainability_en)

### Local prosperity and visitor experience

In developing its tourism, Ljubljana has not only used visitor data, but also data on environmental impacts or the so-called sentiment analysis, which focuses on the life and opinions of the local population. On the basis of such a wide-ranging tourism strategy, Ljubljana won the European Capital of Smart Tourism initiative organised by the European Commission. <https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu>

## Tourism as a source of pride in Italy

### Local prosperity and visitor experience

The Italian city of Matera, the European Capital of Culture 2019, has invested heavily in restoring its ancient cave dwellings (Sassi di Matera) and promoting its cultural heritage. This has attracted visitors, revitalised the local economy, and instilled a sense of pride in the community. <https://cdnmedia.mapei.com/docs/projects-documents/realta-mapei-international-75---matera-2019-pdf743ac77879c562e49128f601007028e9.pdf>

## New congress and cultural centre in Krakow

### Development of cultural and business assets

The Kraków5020 organisation was founded to strengthen Krakow's image and attract international events. It's an example of how strategic investment in destination development can boost tourism growth and improve a city's image on the global business scene.

A key example of their work is the ICE Kraków Congress Centre, a state-of-the-art facility featuring a hybrid studio for cultural, business, and academic events. By investing in this innovative infrastructure, Kraków has become one of the leading congress destinations, helping the domestic economy and bringing valuable new cultural infrastructure to the city, which residents will use for years to come. <https://icekrakow.pl/en/about-ice-krakow>

## Culinary experiences in Turin

### Discovering the city

The TorinoMercati city app connects and promotes culinary “slow food” experiences in Turin. It maps the city’s markets and guides locals and visitors through the culinary scene and traditions of Turin.

## Grosseto develops urban trekking

### Development of natural assets

Grosseto in Italy is developing Urban Trekking, a regional project to promote slow tourism, local art, and history. The goal is to create a network of walking and cycling trails linking the entire province. The project inspires green mobility and enables discovery of the city’s natural and historical values. [https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/grosseto-shortlisted-2024-green-pioneer-competition\\_en](https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/grosseto-shortlisted-2024-green-pioneer-competition_en)

## Tallinn promotes its creative districts

### Local prosperity and visitor experience

Tallinn actively promotes specific districts, such as Telliskivi, a former industrial area transformed into a hub for artists, designers, and small entrepreneurs, attracting visitors interested in alternative culture and local experiences. <https://telliskivi.cc/en>

# How to get started with a destination management mandate in Bratislava

During the interviews and workshops, we identified three main priorities.

## 1 — Create a dedicated budget for Bratislava's tourism development (2025–2035)

Develop a framework budget and specific plan to support Bratislava's goals as a sustainable tourism destination from 2025 to 2035, with annual updates. This budget must be preceded by a detailed sustainability strategy and a unified narrative for Bratislava, followed by the strategic allocation of resources across five key areas:

### *Tourism infrastructure development*

Funding for projects that enhance the visitor experience, including improvements to public spaces, transportation networks, intra-urban navigation, and tourist facilities.

### *Environmental initiatives*

Support for environmental protection projects, responsible tourism practices, and community engagement.

### *Cultural initiatives*

Investments in projects that preserve and promote Bratislava's cultural heritage, support local artists and cultural organisations, and develop new cultural attractions and events. Including:

- Restoration and preservation of historic sites and monuments.
- Support for museums, galleries, theatres, and other cultural institutions.
- Funding for festivals, cultural events, and artistic performances.
- Development of cultural tourism.

### *Product development*

Support the creation of new and innovative tourism products and experiences, including cultural tours, culinary events, and outdoor activities.

### *Congress tourism and business events*

Supporting bids and candidacies while helping to develop Bratislava as a congress tourism destination.

## 2 — Establish/redefine the position of the Mayor's advisor for sustainable tourism

Establish and activate the role of an advisor to the Mayor responsible for sustainable tourism in Bratislava, with a primary focus on the first mandate – destination management. This mandate aligns with the Mayor's broader agenda of shaping the city's future. The advisor's role would be to ensure that destination management principles are integrated into citywide initiatives, planning, and operations. We propose that this advisor be appointed from within BTB.

## 3 — Create a cross-sectoral team to develop a unified narrative for a sustainable city and ensure its subsequent application towards tourism

To capture the essence of Bratislava and keep the visitor experience in balance with the needs of the locals, it's important to move beyond a mere listing of attractions. Together, the city, residents, and the tourism industry must create an authentic narrative of the city that locals will be proud of and that will guide visitors through the city in a positive way.

This is not just a job for advertising and PR creatives, nor is it about creating a slogan for a billboard. It's about naming and defining the authentic value of the city. The narrative should tie together the history, culture, and unique spirit of Bratislava and foster a deeper connection with locals and visitors alike. The narrative should be created by a team of city officials, tourism professionals, residents, and cultural figures from Bratislava, Slovakia, and abroad.

A few other needs and ideas that have emerged from interviews with stakeholders, with higher priority:

*Integrate tourism into urban planning*

Ensure that BTB has a representative in city planning discussions and decision-making to provide a tourism perspective and ensure that the sector is aligned with the city's overall development goals.

*Annual destination development planning and budgeting at the city level, and subsequently at the BTB level*

Implement a yearly development planning cycle to ensure that all activities contribute effectively to the sustainable development of the destination, i.e. maintaining a balance between local prosperity and visitor experience.

*Address the lack of qualitative data and qualitative KPIs*

The balance between local life and visitor experience can be mapped with good qualitative data. Bratislava lacks regular qualitative surveys and analyses that would provide valuable information on visitors and their needs, and the impact of tourism on residents' lives. While government institutions should provide quantitative data, BTB should focus on collecting qualitative data and KPIs.

*Implement a visitor data collection system*

Introduce a unified system for collecting data on visitors, their preferences, and economic activity in the city. Data should include surveys at key locations, online feedback forms, and analysis of existing data sources.

*Improve Bratislava's access points*

"Maybe you could start by sweeping the streets better," said world-renowned urbanist Jan Gehl upon arriving in Prague for the first time. BTB should actively collaborate and participate in projects that enhance visitors' first impressions at the city's main entry points. Bratislava needs investment in creating a strong first impression – improving and ideally

unifying signage and wayfinding at train stations, the airport, the bus station, the Danube waterfront, and other key locations. Priority should be given to cleanliness, clear and consistent navigation, and accessibility.

*Amend current national and potential municipal legislation on tourism promotion towards sustainability and new roles for BTB*

The amendment to the Tourism Promotion Act clearly defines the public-private (PPP) mandate of BTB destination development, which should include responsibility for research, product development, capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainability. In addition, the amendment should grant PPPs the necessary powers to access data, allocate resources, form partnerships, and influence policy. This way, tourism development will be strategically aligned with the city's objectives.

*Create an environmental assets inventory*

Collaborate with environmental organisations to create a database of the city's environmental assets – both rare natural systems and sites suitable for tourism development (e.g. a list of Danube beaches, the main Carpathian urban trekking routes, etc.). This inventory will serve as a valuable resource to promote sustainable tourism practices and opportunities for nature-based experiences. The database should also take the form of maps to guide locals and visitors alike. From a natural benefits perspective, it is essential to map forests, wetlands, agricultural landscapes, the Danube, and natural systems within the city.

*Create a cultural assets inventory*

The same applies to the city's cultural assets. In collaboration with institutions, ethnologists, religionists, cultural figures, and interest groups, Bratislava should create a unified inventory of the cultural values of the capital and its surrounding area (within a 30 km radius).

*Implement a permanent project management system, which will regularly bring new funding opportunities for projects and initiatives to the BTB*

Actively pursue opportunities for funding destination development from various sources, including grant schemes, commercial partnerships, and sponsorships.

### *Develop cycling tourism infrastructure*

Bratislava has enormous potential to connect seamlessly with international cycling routes (EuroVelo), but this potential remains underutilised. Upon crossing the border from Austria, navigation becomes unclear, limiting the opportunity to explore the city and region by bike. Despite excellent cycling infrastructure – such as levees and various connections – this potential is barely tapped into.

### *Link tourism initiatives in Bratislava with other economic policies and export activities within the country, e.g.:*

- Work with the academic and scientific sectors to attract scientific events, academic fairs, and educational potential to the city.
- Cooperate with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic.
- Cooperate with the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic and SARIO (the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency) on the strategic positioning of Bratislava as a business centre and on attracting foreign capital to the country.
- Cooperate with the Ministry of Transport of the Slovak Republic on infrastructure solutions.

Tourism is not currently perceived as a cross-cutting issue, which limits its integration with culture, mobility, and the environment, as well as with Slovakia's overall branding and positioning. In some other countries, national tourism boards are, for example, part of state export agencies.

### *Establish a process and standard for feasibility studies*

Introduce a standardised process for conducting feasibility studies to assess the quality of proposed tourism projects. This will include market research, financial analysis, and stakeholder consultations to ensure that investments are strategic and sustainable.

### *Create a platform (e.g. a series of workshops with Slovakia Travel) to link tourism in Bratislava with the "brand" of the whole country*

Bratislava's good reputation is a good reputation for Slovakia. These two tourism strategies must go hand in hand.

### *Better connections between tourism and public transport*

Public transportation in Bratislava is of high quality, but its usage by tourists remains low. It is therefore necessary to better promote public transport routes to visitors, clearly and visibly mark key stops, place them in major locations outside the city centre, and offer interactive maps of attractions. Collaboration with public transport providers in the city is needed to optimise routes and navigation promotion for visitors.

### *Research and co-create flagship events/event series*

Invest in research and collaborate with local stakeholders to co-create events or even series that will be Bratislava's flagships, authentically capture its unique atmosphere, and resonate with residents and visitors alike.

### *Decentralise tourism information points*

To improve the visitor experience and promote sustainable tourism, Bratislava should focus on enhancing less-visited parts of the city, such as Železná Studnička, Devín Castle, and Petržalka. One approach could be to create a network of digital information kiosks in each location, offering tailored information and services. This decentralised approach will encourage exploration beyond the city centre, helping to spread the economic benefits of tourism. It will also provide visitors with a more diverse experience. Meanwhile, the main Tourist Information Centre in the city centre will continue to serve as a central hub.

To enhance visitor experience, local prosperity, and environmental quality, the capital city needs a dedicated budget for the development of Bratislava as an attractive destination for tourism.

## Three mandates as three separate BTB budgets

Budgeting and mandates go hand in hand. BTB as a destination manager must have sufficient financial resources: three separate budgets financed from both public and private sources.

### DMO mandates in the 21st century

#### 1 — Destination management mandate

The goal is to discover and develop social, cultural, and natural beauty of the region.

#### 2 — Facilitation mandate

The aim is to facilitate collaboration across the city, businesses, communities, and organisations, build professional capacities, and unify their activities.

#### 3 — Destination development mandate

Entails directing and supporting sustainable tourism development (by funding innovation, strategic storytelling, and targeted promotion).

### Budgets administered by the DMO in the 21st century

#### 1 — Destination management budget

Budget for investment in infrastructure, cultural and environmental assets, and product development.

#### 2 — Facilitation budget

Budget to foster connections between stakeholders, educate both BTB members and non-members, connect communities with tourism, and support other facilitation activities.

#### 3 — Destination development budget

Budget contains four sub-chapters and focuses on the comprehensive development of tourism in the city:

- Momentum budget to support established activities and markets
- MICE budget
- New Markets budget – discovering new markets for Bratislava
- Visitor Experience budget – improving the work with the visitor

## As of 2024, BTB only operates the so-called Momentum budget, and even that is at a limited level

Apart from the operating costs of BTB and the Tourist Information Centre, the only significant budget the organisation currently works with is what we call in this concept of budgeting for the DMO, the “Momentum Budget”. This budget focuses on keeping the inflow of visitors from established destinations to Bratislava. The way this budget is formulated limits the development potential of the destination to merely maintaining and slightly improving the status quo.

## What are the strengths of fully funding a sustainable destination for Bratislava and Slovakia?

- **Enhanced competitiveness of Bratislava**  
Tourism does not only generate direct financial revenue but also puts Bratislava on the world map, and attracts broader investment and interest in the city.
- **Enhanced competitiveness of Slovakia**  
Similar to the previous point. Investing in increased awareness of Bratislava means increased awareness of the whole country.
- **Increased positive economic impact**  
Sustainable tourism attracts visitors who are willing to spend more and it supports longer stays and local organisations and businesses, thus generating more income and jobs.
- **More funds for preserving cultural heritage**  
Sustainably funded destination management will create an impetus to rediscover and preserve cultural heritage.
- **Improved sustainability**  
Financing environmental initiatives and responsible tourism protects the natural and cultural wealth of Bratislava for future generations.
- **Enhanced cooperation across the city**  
A separate facilitation budget will strengthen partnerships and involve more communities in tourism development.

## What weaknesses would sustainable destination financing prevent?

- **Stagnation and decline**  
Without sufficient funding, tourism in Bratislava may stagnate or decline and lose competitiveness. Dedicated budgets allow for proactive investments to enhance visitor experience and attract new types of visitors.
- **Missed opportunities**  
Lack of funding can lead to missed opportunities in product development, marketing innovation, and infrastructure improvement.
- **Environmental degradation**  
Without investment in sustainable stewardship, the potential tourism growth could negatively affect Bratislava's living environment and cultural resources. Dedicated funds allow for implementing environmentally friendly initiatives and responsible local tourism management.
- **Social and cultural disruption**  
Unplanned or unsustainable tourism development can disrupt local communities and local culture and life. Sustainable destination financing enables destinations to invest in initiatives that mitigate negative impacts and promote responsible tourism practices.
- **Uneven development**  
Without a balanced approach to financing, some areas of tourism development may be neglected, leading to an unequal distribution of benefits and a potential over-reliance on specific areas, locations, or products.



## Trends in sustainable tourism (the balance between local prosperity and visitor experience) and their associated opportunities or threats:

### ■ Growing global demand for sustainable tourism

**Opportunity** Bratislava can attract environmentally and socially conscious travellers by showing its commitment to sustainability.

**Threat** Failure to invest in sustainability may make Bratislava less competitive compared to other destinations.

### ■ The rise of experiential travel

**Opportunity** A dedicated Visitor Experience budget makes it possible to create unique and unforgettable experiences that cater to this trend.

**Threat** Without investment in this area, Bratislava will not be sufficiently attractive compared to destinations in the vicinity that offer more engaging activities.

### ■ Technological progress

**Opportunity** Funding digital innovation can enhance tourism growth and the engagement of visitors or locals through technology.

**Threat** Without investment in digital tools, Bratislava could be left significantly behind in a rapidly evolving tourism environment.

### ■ The socio-economic impact of structured funding through three separate budgets (destination management budget, facilitation budget, destination development budget)

#### ■ *Job creation*

Increased activity leads to more jobs in the hotel, transportation, tour guiding, and related sectors.

#### ■ *Local business support*

Sustainable tourism prioritises local businesses, generates income, influences the exchange of expert know-how, and contributes to the community's well-being.

#### ■ *Improving infrastructure*

Investments in tourism infrastructure benefits visitors and residents alike, and improves the quality of life in Bratislava.

#### ■ *Environmental protection*

Destination development and discovery budget will contribute to protecting nature and making suitable visitor sites accessible.

#### ■ *Cultural preservation*

Sustainable tourism promotes the development of cultural heritage and traditions, benefiting present and future generations.

#### ■ *Increased tax revenue*

Tourism spending generates tax revenue that can be reinvested in public services and infrastructure.

#### ■ *Positive image of Bratislava*

A well-managed and sustainable tourism sector enhances Bratislava's reputation and attracts further investment.

Investing in sustainable tourism ensures both a thriving visitor experience and lasting long-term prosperity for Bratislava, its residents, and the environment.



# Goodbye yesterday's budget

The current budget structure severely restricts the growth of both Bratislava and its tourism industry.

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1 — Momentum budget

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(+) BTB operating costs

# Hello tomorrow's budget

BTB as a sustainable tourism manager comprehensively develops Bratislava.

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1 — Destination management mandate budget

- Infrastructure development
  - Environmental initiatives
  - Cultural initiatives
  - Development of tourism products and strategies
  - Congresses and business tourism – development budget
- 

2 — Facilitation mandate budget

- Intra-city coordination budget
  - Education and capacity building in tourism
  - Commercial diplomacy (establishing relations and connecting the world and Bratislava)
- 

3 — Destination development mandate budget

- Momentum budget – maintaining existing markets
  - New Markets budget – acquisition from new markets (niche verticals and new locations)
  - MICE communication budget
  - Visitor Experience budget
- 

(+) BTB operating costs

# 2— Facilitation mandate

BTB serves as a facilitator and catalyst for meaningful, inspiring collaborations – connecting tourism stakeholders with the city, businesses with communities, Slovakia with the world, and the state with local governance.

## The BTB's tasks within this mandate include:

- **Mediating missing contacts**  
BTB is to act as an intermediary between the public and the private sector, residents, visitors, and different communities.
- **Creating platforms for dialogue**  
BTB is tasked with opening permanent communication channels and platforms that enable better cooperation, such as forums, workshops, roundtables, and online platforms where stakeholders can share ideas, address concerns, and work together towards common goals.
- **Coordination and facilitation of city assets**  
BTB will act as a central hub for information about the culture, gastronomy, and nature of Bratislava, and making them accessible to the residents and foreign visitors. This involves developing and maintaining comprehensive databases and interactive calendars that provide detailed information on attractions, events, and resources. By centralising this information and making it easily accessible to stakeholders, BTB can foster collaboration, promote efficient planning, and ensure its effective use. Examples of this role include:

- *Centralised databases*  
Developing and maintaining databases of cultural events, natural sites, tourism enterprises, and other relevant stakeholders. This will create a valuable resource for collaboration and activity planning.
- *Interactive calendars*  
Creating and promoting citywide calendars of events, festivals, and activities. This will help with the coordination of activities, avoid scheduling conflicts, and maximise value for locals and visitors.
- *Open data initiatives*  
Sharing information and data between stakeholders through open data platforms. This encourages innovation, cooperation, and the development of new products and services.

- **Education, skills development, and capacity building**  
The DMO takes on an educational role and provides actors with the tools and education they need to effectively participate in sustainable tourism development. This includes:

- *Raising awareness of the full breadth of sustainability*  
Educating stakeholders on the importance of economic, technological, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability, as well as the potential impacts of tourism on sustainability.
- *Skills development*  
Organising events and providing resources to help the tourism industry develop the necessary skills. Training in hospitality, business and management skills, and sustainable tourism practices.
- *Brand alignment*  
Educating people working in tourism about the identity and values of the destination and implementing this identity in individual products to make visitor experiences coherent and authentic.

- **Development of certification programmes and incentive schemes to improve service quality**  
Bratislava aims to become a sustainable tourism destination, making it essential to measure and evaluate sustainability in a tangible way.

# The facilitation mandate – examples from Europe

Prague's tourism strategy was created in close cooperation between several actors in the city. Together, they continue to build infrastructure

## Creating platforms for dialogue

In 2020, in cooperation with the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (IPR Praha), the city's management and Prague City Tourism prepared a new concept for inbound tourism in Prague.

At the same time, the city's management, in cooperation with Prague City Tourism, undertook the first steps in line with this strategy – an example of which is the creation of new routes that lead visitors to interesting locations outside the city centre. <https://iprpraha.cz/stranka/3890/prague-has-a-new-tourism-strategy-increasing-the-number-of-domestic-tourists-and-putting-the-city-s-needs-first>

## Tallinn's coordinated database of assets

### City resources in one place

Tallinn manages its tourism-related assets through a centralised digital platform. This database consolidates information on attractions, accommodation, events, and services, making it easily accessible to businesses, organisers, and city officials.

## Collaboration with universities in Budapest

### Creating platforms for dialogue

Budapest collaborates with universities on research projects related to tourism and sustainability. This helps them to gather data and make informed decisions about tourism development.

## A reward scheme for sustainable organisations in Slovenia

### Certification and quality certification

Slovenia strives to make its tourism as environmentally friendly as possible. One of its key initiatives is the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, a program that certifies and rewards businesses that prioritise environmental sustainability. The scheme also includes quality measurement and reporting.

## Assisting tourism organisations with human resources development

### Capacity building

Slovenia is improving working conditions for employees in hotels and restaurants. They are developing a system to help businesses with workforce management, and are identifying the key skills tourism employees should have. This initiative aims to enhance the prestige of jobs in the sector. <https://gov.si/en/topics/sustainable-tourism>

## Skills development in Scotland

### Capacity building

Scotland is working to improve the skills of people employed in tourism. They have developed a plan in collaboration with industry businesses to identify key skills and propose ways to develop them among employees. The goal is to ensure the sustainable growth of tourism in Scotland. <https://skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/apprenticeships/modern-apprenticeships/modern-apprenticeship-frameworks/hospitality-tourism>

## Ecolabel in Austria

### Creating platforms for dialogue

Austria is the first country in the world to launch Ecolabels for companies in the tourism industry that behave responsibly towards the environment. The certification aims to motivate organisations to introduce sustainable practices into their daily work.

## Turin integrates artificial intelligence and 5G into its visitor experience

### Technological coordination of tourism

Turin uses technology to improve daily life for both residents and visitors. Thanks to projects such as 5G-Tours and NETA, it connects artificial intelligence with cultural offerings, providing visitors with a better experience. In addition, Turin is developing useful apps that simplify access to culture and urban services.

# How to get started with the facilitation mandate in Bratislava?

During the interviews and workshops, we identified three main priorities.

### 1 — Precisely define BTB membership benefits

The benefits and resources available through BTB membership need to be redefined with a focus on sustainable tourism development. This should include a proposal for tiered levels or membership packages that both meet the needs of existing members and create space for new members to join.

### 2 — Create a “Bratislava Essential Pack”

Design a welcome package for new and existing tourism stakeholders (hotels, travel agencies, etc.) that includes basic information about the city, key themes, attractions, events, access to a regularly updated image library, a shared calendar, and an information hub.

### 3 — Establish the position of Tourism Coordinator at the city hall

A separate position to that of Advisor to the Mayor, a Tourism Coordinator (or a team) should be selected within the municipal government to assist BTB with tourism strategy and coordination. This position will focus on supporting the day-to-day operations, rather than advising the Mayor. The Tourism Coordinator will ensure that tourism is integrated into other city processes and initiatives on a daily and weekly basis, while the Mayor’s Advisor will focus on aligning strategic decisions.

A few other needs and ideas that have emerged from conversations with stakeholders, with higher priority:

#### *Actively recruit new members*

BTB is to establish a process to actively recruit new members from diverse sectors. BTB membership should be multi-tiered and cover more areas than the established ones.

#### *Foster joint planning processes and inter-organisational communication channels*

Nurture collaboration with municipal organisations and establish communication channels and joint planning processes with relevant municipal organisations, such as BKIS, STaRZ, museums, and cultural institutions.

#### *Collaborate on organising strategically important events*

BTB should proactively identify and engage with the organisers of key city events and offer assistance in aligning them with Bratislava’s tourism strategy. The aim is to provide support and advice to enhance visitor experience and maximise tourism benefits of these events.

#### *Link existing cultural and social activities in the city*

BTB should propose and organise collaboration among all stakeholders in existing city projects and events (for example, bringing together the multiple autumn classical music events from various organisations under one single, unified brand, such as “Autumn Music in Bratislava”).

While the fragmentation of events can make the cultural scene more stable, it’s essential to create shared themes that are easier to grasp for international and out-of-town visitors.

It’s also necessary to develop a centralised online platform where all significant events, attractions, and tourism services in Bratislava will be listed, including those organised by BTB members and other organisations.

### ***Certification programme associated with the Bratislava CARD***

A certification program should be introduced for businesses and activities linked with the Bratislava CARD system. This will ensure a high-quality standard of services for cardholders. Certified partners will be featured in marketing materials and online platforms for Bratislava CARD, giving them a competitive advantage.

### ***One account for tourism***

BTB should create a system for better data collection and analysis on tourism and business events (MICE). This system could be a simplified version of the satellite tourism account for Bratislava. The goal is to more accurately determine the financial contribution of visitors to the city. Ideally, a separate account would also be established to collect taxes on overnight stays and other tourism-related fees. This would provide the city with a clear overview of how much revenue is generated from tourism and how much can be reinvested into its development.

### ***Facilitation budget and yearly planning***

Implementing the annual cycle of the facilitation mandate. The aim is to ensure that facilitation functions effectively throughout the year.

### ***City districts as BTB's collaborators***

Bratislava's districts should become advisors to the BTB in the development of tourism in non-central parts of Bratislava. This will ensure that tourism benefits the whole city and is developed in a sustainable way.

### ***Create a green "coalition"***

We recommend creating a network of tourism stakeholders in Bratislava with a deeper interest in cultivating sustainable tourism. This network will bring together organisations, businesses, community groups, environmental organisations, and city officials to work together on initiatives that minimise the impact of tourism. The network can facilitate the dissemination of know-how and the launch of joint projects focusing on waste reduction, energy efficiency, and responsible resource management.

### ***Design new routes for visitors and optimise existing ones***

To improve and expand the offer for visitors to Bratislava, create new and optimise existing sightseeing routes, and harmonise the logistics of the routes with the local conditions in the city. The city tours should also be thematically oriented with content adapted to the interests of different visitor groups.

### ***"Get to Know Your City" programme***

The Get to Know Your City programme will help Bratislava residents better understand and experience their city. With an emphasis on children and youths, the programme will help residents develop a deeper relationship with Bratislava and feel responsible for its development. A similar programme could be introduced for children and students across Slovakia to help them get to know our capital city better.

### ***Conservation initiatives***

Facilitating partnerships between tourism stakeholders and local communities and civic associations to support conservation initiatives. This could include collaboration on projects such as biotope restoration or a clean-up campaign in natural areas popular with visitors.

### ***Establish a contact line/email for tourism***

Create dedicated communication channels for tourism entrepreneurs within the BTB municipality. The aim is to solve problems quickly, provide support, and get feedback. This will create a collaborative environment capable of responding adequately to the needs of the various stakeholders involved.

### ***Develop training curricula for BTB members***

Design workshops and training for BTB members on relevant topics such as sustainable tourism practices, business management, marketing, and visitor services.



# 3 — Destination development mandate

BTB is an organisation responsible not only for the marketing and promotion of Bratislava, but also for the overall prosperity of the city (economic, environmental, cultural, social, and technological development). Development strategies, including communication and marketing, need to be aligned with this broader role.

While marketing and promotion remain key aspects of the third mandate, BTB must now also consider the sustainability of the entire city in these activities. Therefore, the third mandate is being redefined as sustainable destination development. BTB is becoming a co-creator of Bratislava's development, responsibly attracting the right mix of visitors to the capital in line with the city's prosperity, and guiding them within the city itself.

- **Prioritising and bundling campaigns**  
BTB will strategically manage communications and maximise its impact on the overall prosperity of Bratislava. It will prioritise initiatives consistent with the destination's sustainability objectives and have the greatest potential to positively impact the city's prosperity in all five areas listed below.
  - *Strategic allocation of resources*  
BTB is to carefully evaluate project proposals and funding applications to prioritise those consistent with Bratislava's sustainability objectives and have the greatest potential for positive impacts. In this way, only the most valuable initiatives will be supported.
  - *Bundling campaigns*  
Grouping smaller promotional activities into larger, more impactful campaigns. This will create synergies, reduce branding costs, and reinforce the overall message for the target audience.
  - *Joint marketing initiatives*  
Promoting collaboration between entrepreneurs and tourism organisations in creating joint marketing campaigns, sharing costs, and extending campaign reach.
  - *Thematic packaging*  
Developing thematic packages that combine various tourism products and experiences, to appeal to specific visitor interests and promote a diverse range of local businesses.
- **Financing innovation**  
BTB's role is to support and facilitate the financing of innovations to foster the cultivation of sustainable tourism and community initiatives. This may include:
  - *Crowdfunding platforms*  
Helping local businesses and community groups access crowdfunding to launch sustainable tourism projects.
  - *Impact investing*  
Connecting investors with projects that generate financial returns and positive social and environmental impacts.
  - *Grant writing support*  
Providing guidance and practical assistance in applying for grants and global or national funding schemes.

## ■ Strategic “storytelling”

A sustainable city is not just a list of attractions, but above all, an authentic story. BTB is the coordinator and catalyst of telling the city’s story to visitors, both within the city itself and through external media campaigns.

## ■ Properly targeted marketing

Collect and utilise data to identify and reach strategically important visitor segments.

## ■ Curating experiences

Working with local businesses and communities to develop and promote authentic experiences that showcase the best of Bratislava. This includes cultural and creative activities, urban trekking, culinary experiences, and community initiatives.

## ■ Digital innovation

Involves utilising digital platforms and technologies to reach a wider audience and improve visitor experience. This includes developing interactive websites, creating engaging content on social media and using mobile apps to provide information to visitors.

## ■ Trade diplomacy

Building strong relationships with international partners, such as tour operators and airlines, to promote Bratislava and attract new investments. This requires active participation in international tourism events and conferences to show Bratislava’s commitment to becoming a sustainable city.

Prioritising projects and bundling communication campaigns under BTB’s leadership will ensure that every euro invested in tourism will return in the form of a better visitor experience and increased local prosperity.

# A selection of Bratislava’s strengths and weaknesses in terms of sustainable tourism

## Strengths

### “Three countries in one”

Bratislava’s unique location makes it easy for visitors to experience the diverse cultures and landscapes of Slovakia, Austria, and Hungary at once.

### Crowd-free tourism

Unlike many overcrowded European capitals, Bratislava offers a more relaxed and intimate experience without having to struggle with large crowds.

### 100 km of river “coastline” in the city and its surroundings

Perhaps the most important point, Bratislava and its surroundings boast nearly 100 km of true “waterfront” along the Danube. From Hainburg to Šamorín and back along the other side, this is not just the bank of a small river but a genuine shoreline along a vast body of water. Stretching kilometre after kilometre, it constantly shifts in character, offering endless opportunities for recreation – from walking, cycling, and boating to swimming, relaxing in floodplain forests, enjoying art, or making the most of the many sports facilities along the Danube.



## Unexpected history: 10 castles, forts, chateaus, and ruins within a wider city region

Bratislava isn't just about its well-preserved medieval city centre, churches, and monasteries – it also boasts an impressive collection of 10 castles, multiple fortresses, manor houses, and ruins within its wider metropolitan region. From Devín Castle and Bratislava Castle to the Celtic stronghold of Braunsberg, Hainburg Castle, Pajštún, Pottenburg, Rusovce Manor, the Roman military town of Carnuntum, Gerulata in Rusovce, and the grand Schloss Hof Palace, history is woven into the landscape. These sites can be perfectly combined with a visit to the city's 100 km of Danube waterfront, offering a unique blend of history and nature.

## Green Capital

Bratislava is recognised as one of Europe's greenest capitals, especially in the spring and summer months when the city surprises visitors with the amount of visible greenery. Moreover, Bratislava has extensive forests in the Carpathian Mountains and along the Danube as well as river beaches, parks, and public green spaces that provide a refreshing urban environment.

## Other strengths

### *Extensive network of trekking and cycling routes in the Carpathians*

Bratislava offers many opportunities for urban trekking thanks to its extensive and well-marked network of hiking and cycling trails in the Carpathian Mountains.

### *Unexpected gastronomy*

Bratislava has a vibrant and surprisingly diverse culinary scene, full of innovative restaurants, cosy cafés, new food festivals, as well as older and traditional feasts, and wine routes.

### *Security*

Bratislava is a safe city with a low crime rate and a friendly atmosphere that makes visitors feel safe and comfortable.

### *"Slovak Vienna"*

Bratislava, known for its rich musical heritage and vibrant classical music scene, offers the charm of Vienna in a smaller package, both in terms of architecture and the abundance of classical music.

### *Limited awareness of the Bratislava "brand"*

Bratislava's unique character is often overshadowed by its proximity to major European capitals like Vienna and Prague. While the city centre is undeniably charming, it does not stand out significantly from other historic towns in the region, making it harder for the average visitor to identify its distinct appeal and find a compelling reason to visit. To strengthen its position, Bratislava needs to connect more effectively with its wider surroundings and highlight experiences that set it apart – such as its network of nearby castles, the rare opportunity to explore three countries in one trip, and urban trekking adventures.

### *Airport confusion*

Bratislava undoubtedly benefits from the proximity of two international airports. However, Vienna Airport, due to its size and name, can create a misleading impression for visitors, often leading them to overlook how easily accessible Bratislava is from Vienna.

### *Day trips*

Many visitors consider Bratislava as a destination for day trips, i.e. without overnight stays and the associated expenses and benefits for the local community (e.g. evening cultural visits). This severely limits the development of the tourism sector and its economic performance.

### *Underdeveloped infrastructure for foreign visitors*

Bratislava has forests, vineyards, meadows, and rivers that are appealing to visitors, yet the infrastructure for international tourists remains largely underdeveloped.

### *Limited international accessibility to the cultural scene*

Bratislava boasts a rich and diverse cultural scene that focuses mainly on locals. Language barriers, lack of information in English, non-existent subtitles in theatres, and difficulties in booking tickets in languages other than Slovak can prevent visitors from taking full advantage of the city's cultural offerings.

## How to get started with the destination development mandate in Bratislava?

Interviews and workshops revealed the need to structure the budget more effectively, focusing on sustainability and securing funding from multiple sources. The new budget should have four key sections, each driving a different aspect of Bratislava's development as a destination.

### 1 — Momentum budget

#### *Goal*

Maintain and strengthen visitor flows from key source markets that already bring many visitors to Bratislava.

#### *Key steps*

- Optimise campaign performance.
- Aim for repeat visitors.
- Strengthen relationships with key partners in established markets.
- Monitor visitor satisfaction and address areas for improvement.
- Invest in developing visitor-attractive products to make the destination's offering more attractive.

## 2 — New Markets growth budget

### *Goal*

Expand Bratislava's reach by attracting visitors from emerging and high-potential markets that are well-connected but have low awareness of the city. This doesn't need to be a single destination, but can focus on niche visitor segments across multiple regions – for example, history enthusiasts or those keen on urban trekking.

### *Key steps*

- Conduct market research to identify new visitor segments or organise an innovative workshop with the same objective.
- Analyse competing destinations to either differentiate from them or explore opportunities for collaboration.
- Develop and evaluate tailored pilot marketing campaigns.
- Build relationships with travel agencies in new prospective markets.
- Participate in international events and trade fairs in prospective markets.
- Create language-specific promotional material and online content.
- Implement co-marketing campaigns with both airports in Bratislava and Vienna, and other carriers.

## 3 — MICE communication budget

### *Goal*

Ensure growth in the number of congresses and business visits.

### *Key steps*

- Finance marketing campaigns targeting B2B audiences.
- Provide subsidy schemes for event organisers.
- Explore innovative funding schemes (grants, sponsorship).
- Promote sustainable MICE practices.

## 4 — Visitor Experience budget

This budget is to be at least partially linked to the Bratislava CARD.

### *Goal*

Continuously enhance the overall visitor experience and engage with Bratislava's visitors in real time.

### *Key steps*

- Expand the sale of the Bratislava CARD.
- Enhance the selection of services available with the Bratislava CARD and enhance the quality of its benefits.
- Support initiatives aimed at attracting socially suitable segments of domestic and international visitors, such as schoolchildren and students.
- Promote technological initiatives, including specialised apps and digital kiosks at key locations where visitor flow should be directed (e.g. Železná studnička, Petržalka).
- Implement real-time campaigns targeting visitors who are already in the city.

A few other needs and ideas that have emerged from conversations with stakeholders, with higher priority:

*Create a "Reason to Fly" document*

A short and engaging Reason to Fly document can unify the campaigns and encapsulate Bratislava's attractiveness for different visitor segments. This document should highlight the key strengths of the city and be easy for tourism professionals to work with.

*Annual communication planning (in all four communication budgets)*

Implement the annual communication planning cycle to ensure marketing activities directly and effectively contribute to the sustainable economic development of Bratislava.

*Expand the Bratislava CARD (strategy)*

Bratislava CARD is an excellent product, but the card must be even more attractive for visitors and businesses. It needs more partners to provide more benefits and become a must-have item when exploring Bratislava.

At the same time:

- Clearly define the benefits for B2B partners and emphasise that the more people that use the Bratislava CARD, the higher the direct revenue for them.
- Implement a comprehensive card-communication plan.
- Develop a business plan that assesses the current status, outlines future goals, and shows how to achieve a year-on-year increase in card sales.

*A network of suppliers who support sustainability*

Create a strong network of external specialists and communication agencies that understand the concept of sustainability and complement BTB's internal resources. Redirect internal capacities towards fundraising, a proper information hub and, in particular, strategic communication planning.

*Secure full funding of BTB from municipal taxes*

The challenge is to find a sustainable and mutually acceptable way to reinvest part of the city tax in tourism growth.

*International network of ambassadors*

Establish an international ambassador network with strong ties to Bratislava and expertise in various fields. These ambassadors will promote the city as a desirable destination for conferences and events, leveraging their network and influence to attract organisers.

BTB will support the ambassadors through fam trips and by connecting with elites in the local academic and business communities. In this way, we will raise Bratislava's international credit and create a new group of people with the potential to organise conferences and events.

*More fam trips*

Organise more familiarisation trips and press trips for international event buyers, travel agents, and media, so that Bratislava can effectively present its offer and build relationships with key influencers.

*Shared contact database*

Create and maintain a comprehensive database of tourism stakeholders, including contact information, services offered, and areas of expertise. This will greatly facilitate networking and collaboration within the industry.

# Where to direct marketing spending in the coming years?

For the BTB to begin its journey towards sustainable tourism growth, it must focus on three communication priorities over the next few years. These areas follow the new budget structure.

## 1 — Core priority: Streamline what works (Momentum budget)

A stepping stone to sustainable development is to further expand the already functional and effective activities. BTB needs to stabilise its Momentum budget and the processes and activities linked to it. This will maintain the interest of visitors who are aware of Bratislava and can get here comfortably, such as people from German-speaking countries or other similar markets with good transportation connections by train, car, bus, boat, or air.

A more effective campaign aimed at these markets should focus on raising awareness of the city's physical accessibility and promote a "trial" in the form of a weekend visit or a visit linked to a specific occasion (e.g. a major event such as a festival, a conference, a feast).

The marketing goal is to improve "physical accessibility". This means:

- Concise and clear information for visitors in all relevant languages.
- Easy-to-use booking systems and convenient visitor packages.
- Targeted campaigns highlighting convenient transport options (flights, trains, buses).
- Partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators in those markets.

## 2 — New Markets priority: Pilot campaigns targeting new visitor groups

Bratislava has excellent trekking infrastructure and nature accessible directly from the city. We recommend pilot campaigns to attract this type of visitor, which can be defined as an urban trekking visitor or history + trekking visitor, or in the summer months of the year, as cyclists. However, pilot campaigns can also be created for various other visitor groups, e.g. targeting visitors from other countries (outside the current Momentum countries), or other niches such as culture, gastronomy, or other types of niche tourism.

However, we recommend the urban trekking category mainly for the following reasons:

- *Existing infrastructure*  
It's easy to leverage Bratislava's extensive network of hiking and cycling trails that promote accessibility and connection to the surrounding natural areas.
- *Historical heritage*  
There is no hike in Bratislava (or in Slovakia) that doesn't include some exploration of cultural heritage. Just think of the castles (Devín), natural history sites (Sandberg), and so on. Bratislava is authentic in this theme.
- *Expanding beyond city limits*  
Promoting trekking in the wider radius of the city means extending the stay in the city.
- *Partnerships with outdoor brands and influencers*  
Pilot campaigns can be tested with new types of partners, such as relevant outdoor brands and influencers.

## 3 — Optimise real-time visitor marketing (Visitor Experience budget)

The key tactic here is the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) approach – a marketing strategy that recognises visitor reviews as a crucial factor in shaping travel decisions. If a visitor experiences or captures something particularly remarkable in Bratislava, it can attract more like-minded travellers through social media, YouTube, and search engines.

To encourage visitors to share their experiences, the entire journey – from arrival to departure – must be continuously optimised.

- *Planning (before the trip)*  
Provide comprehensive information and documents to help visitors plan their trip, including itinerary suggestions, transport options, and accommodation recommendations. Featuring testimonials from previous visitors can enhance credibility and inspiration.
- *On the spot – Unexpected visitor experiences*  
While clear signage, accessible information centres, and helpful staff improve the visitor experience, ZMOT requires more. Bratislava should regularly offer unexpected, shareable experiences, such as public art installations and visually engaging initiatives.
- *On the spot – Urban “storytelling”*  
Stories resonate more than plain facts, making them a powerful draw for potential visitors. Engaging storytelling – delivered through tourist information centres, hotels, and key visitor touchpoints – helps spread the city’s unique narratives.
- *On the spot – Amplifying user-generated content (UGC)*  
Photos, videos, and reviews are valuable and freely available – it’s just a matter of leveraging them. Authentic visitor perspectives help showcase Bratislava in a genuine way and inspire others to visit.
- *Feedback*  
The city must actively seek and encourage visitor feedback, whether through reviews, recommendations, or direct input. Understanding visitor experiences helps identify areas for improvement that locals might overlook.
- *Personalisation*  
Using available technology to offer visitors tailored recommendations, experiences, and services based on their preferences.

This priority also includes active online reputation management, ensuring continuous monitoring of reviews and timely responses. BTB must establish Bratislava as an engaged and responsive city, unafraid of open communication with its visitors.

## Redefining the “Bratislava Brand” – a three-step methodology

To effectively redefine the Bratislava brand and enhance its appeal as a sustainable destination, we propose a structured approach built around three key steps. All steps should be carried out collaboratively within a broader working group, bringing together representatives from various city organisations, local communities, and cultural figures – both from Bratislava and abroad.

### 1 – Asset Mapping

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory mapping of sustainable tourism assets in Bratislava, including its cultural attractions, historical monuments, natural landscapes, and social customs.
- Analyse and categorise assets based on themes, target groups, and the potential for sustainable tourism development.
- Identify key strengths, differences, and opportunities for Bratislava’s tourism development through benefit analysis. (We recommend the Symmathesy mapping method of contextual analysis).

## 2 — Partial narratives and “Reason to Fly” documentary

- The next phase involves developing a set of cohesive micro-narratives that capture the essence of Bratislava’s identity and resonate with key target audiences. This includes creating specialised narratives that highlight different aspects of the city, such as history, culture, natural surroundings, and gastronomy.
- A Reason to Fly document should be developed to clearly define Bratislava’s unique appeal, showcasing key attractions, experiences, and overall atmosphere.
- These narratives and key messages should be tailored to specific visitor segments, aligning with their motivations, interests, and travel preferences.

## 3 — “One Phrase Value”: value in one sentence

- Building on insights from asset mapping and the development of partial narratives, we will distill the essence of the Bratislava brand into a single, concise, and memorable sentence that captures its unique appeal.
- This statement should be clear, emotionally engaging, and capable of uniting various narratives while effectively conveying the city’s core value to visitors.
- Once defined, it will be consistently used across all marketing and communication materials to strengthen brand identity and enhance awareness.

# III

# Visual summary

# Goodbye yesterday

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Tourism is all about marketing.

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Short-term marketing goals.

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Visitors, visitors, visitors, visitors!

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Quantity over quality.

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Day-trippers.

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BTB has a single mandate: to promote Bratislava.

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One (low) budget.

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Public-private sector cooperation.

# Hello tomorrow

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Tourism is about sustainable destination management.

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Thinking in decades (shaping the city's vision and narrative, developing business infrastructure, protecting cultural heritage...).

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Long-term prosperity of the destination and visitor experience.

---

Quality over quantity.

---

Visitors fully immerse themselves in Bratislava.

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BTB has three mandates: destination management mandate, facilitation mandate, and destination development mandate.

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Multi-source funding with three budgets for each mandate.

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Public-private sector cooperation remains – it works!



# From destination marketing to destination management

Concept for  
sustainable tourism  
in the destination  
of Bratislava

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