



Waves of Transformation - GDS-Index 2024 report published

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The GDS-Index 2024 report, titled *Waves of Transformation*, recognises cities that have made significant progress in sustainability, highlighting their commitment to sustainable tourism and event management.

Leaders in sustainable development

Helsinki's activities were rated highest, taking first place ahead of Goteborg, ranked the leader in the last seven reports. Copenhagen, Bergen, Aarhus, Bordeaux, Singapore, Oslo, Belfast and Sydney followed.

The cities' average score was 62.8%, while the top 10 achieved an impressive 86%. Significantly, the destination's average score has increased by 23% over the past nine years, while the top 10 cities boast a 44% improvement in their score.

This year's top 40 destinations include several new entrants, including the cities of Limerick, Victoria, Quebec City, Dublin and Horsens, with Reykjavik returning after a brief absence.

Although there is balance in the top 40 in terms of city size, the top 20 is still dominated by those with larger populations. In this year's report, the evaluation criteria were updated, resulting in a drop in scores for 26 of the top 40 destinations.

Krakow in the GDS-Index

Krakow was ranked 72nd, up by eight places compared to last year. The authors rate Krakow for activities in the *Destination management* category - destination management strategy, as well as for such initiatives as the Civic Budget, Krakow for Equality and the City Helpers campaign. In a ranking produced on the basis of nearly 77 criteria divided into four main categories, we obtained the following results:

- the city's environmental activities 56% (60.3% in 2023),
- the city's community activities 43.8% (56.6% in 2023),
- suppliers' activity 16.2% (16.2% in 2023) and
- destination management activities 62.8% (39.2% in 2023).

Krakow received a total score of 49.3%. Areas that need work are primarily service providers operating in the tourism sector, such as hotels or agencies. The biggest challenge is the certification of entrepreneurs, facilities, and the airport. In addition, the scope of DMO management and strategy and legacy projects should be broadened and structured. It would also be advisable to include tourism in the city's strategic documents and join international tourism initiatives (such as the Glasgow Declaration).

Where to find inspiration

The GDS-Index is a source of inspiration and best practices. Inspiring examples are:



Helsinki - leader in destination management and facility certification

Helsinki has implemented a biodiversity strategy tailored to international and local needs, which includes community-led initiatives, habitat mapping and empowering residents to protect green spaces. The Helsinki City Strategy (2021-2025) has an even stronger focus on environmental protection, creating new protected areas and focusing on reducing marine pollution.

The city has pledged to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions in tourism and events by 2040, with the goal also to achieve carbon neutral status. Helsinki's Climate Action Plan includes active monitoring of carbon emissions, water consumption and residents' opinions to ensure continued progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

Through the Tourism and Events Program (2022-2026), Helsinki is involving residents in decision-making using participatory budgeting and organised events to shape tourism strategy. Helsinki supports suppliers with financial assistance for environmental certification and sustainability training.

Importantly, Helsinki collaborates with another Finnish city, Tampere, through the Urban Climate Leaders in Tourism group, which brings together key stakeholders to address large-scale climate challenges.

CopenPay Campaign

The goal of the CopenPay campaign was to encourage visitors to get involved in climate-responsible activities. The program has enabled tourists as well as residents to become activists for sustainability, transforming their stay in Copenhagen into a more purposeful and informed experience. CopenPay operated on a simple principle, which was offering rewards for taking environmental action. For example, you can get a vegan lunch for choosing a bicycle as transportation or cleaning up trash.

What set CopenPay apart was the potential to replicate similar campaigns in other cities, Wonderful Copenhagen and its partners created an adaptable, scalable sustainable tourism model. Its strategic use of storytelling and involvement of local partners created a compelling narrative, firmly grounded in the values Copenhagen wanted to promote. The campaign showed how tourism can serve as a catalyst for positive environmental change.

More inspiration can be gained in the [report](#)

GDS Index - report or social movement?

The pace of positive change being implemented by destinations around the world must match the challenges of the climate crisis and biodiversity. Decarbonisation, electrification of transportation and the development of artificial intelligence are changing the world at an express pace. The challenges of tourism management are being addressed by the GDS-Index cities. Nine years on, the GDS-Index has become more than just a benchmarking tool. It is a movement calling for a commitment to social, economic and environmental responsibility. Year



**Magiczny
Kraków**

after year, as cities and destination management organisations implement sustainability solutions and set more goals, the gap between ambitious challenges and implemented actions is narrowing.