



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Veszprém, using the European Capital of Culture programme's transformative power to become a sustainable destination.

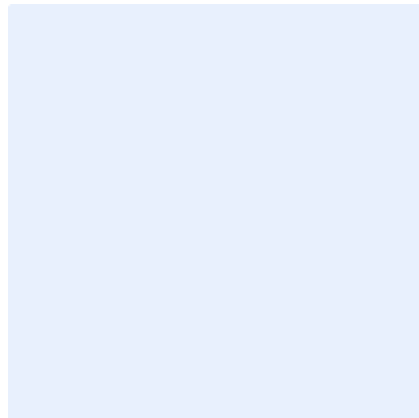
Destination, Country: The City of Veszprém, Hungary

Submitted by: Zoltán Takács, Head of Office at the Mayor's Office

In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

Click or tap here to enter a brief explanation of your picture.



Summary:

Veszprém's story is framed by the preparation for the 2023 European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme, amidst the challenges of a global pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war bringing economic and psychological crises. It unfolds through the city's journey repositioning its tourism offerings and making its mark on the international stage, with an emerging sustainability focus, looking beyond the ECoC programme. To lay the groundwork for the transformation, a comprehensive tourism audit was conducted, evaluating attractions, institutions, and areas requiring improvement. Drawing from the findings, the '10 Months - 10 Challenges' programme was created and ensured that all tourist facilities implemented sustainability and accessibility programmes, coordinated at the city level. Paralelly, a robust destination management system, supported by digital platforms, was established to meet evolving demands and solidify Veszprém's commitment to sustainable tourism. Veszprém's achievements make it a trailblazer in Hungary, inspiring others to adopt comprehensive sustainability measures and embrace a holistic approach to destination management.



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

Nestled upon seven hills, Veszprém's captivating history spans well over a millennium, serving as a crossroads between cultures and bridging the divide between East and West. Legends speak of its castle that stood tall even before the arrival of the nomadic Hungarian tribes, and then witnessed them settle and adapt to the European, christian life. For centuries, it held the right of coronation of Hungary's queens, rightfully earning the city its moniker as "the City of Queens."

Throughout its vibrant past, Veszprém experienced the ebb and flow of power, including Austrian and Ottoman occupation in the 17th century. Each corner of the city holds untold secrets, and every step unveils a tapestry of history merging with the present. Music and contemporary art pulsate through the city's cultural fabric, nurturing a sense of community and creativity.

Walking the streets of Veszprém, ancient and modern, unveils an ever-unfolding narrative, where each detail and fragment adds another layer to the city's rich heritage. Veszprém is a living history book, beckoning to be explored time and time again. Recognizing its dynamic music scene, Veszprém proudly earned the UNESCO City of Music designation in 2019. As the European Capital of Culture in 2023, the city's present and future converge, uniting its illustrious past with the promise of a global stage. Collaborating with the enchanting Balaton region, Veszprém embraces its role as a cultural hub, ready to welcome the world and reclaim its position as a crossroads of culture and creativity.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

During the arduous period of preparing for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), Veszprém faced the daunting task of not only swiftly adapting to the ever-changing needs of its regular, predominantly local visitors but also gearing up to cater to the demands of international tourists arriving in 2023 and beyond. This meant repositioning the city's tourism offerings and venturing into the international market as a Cultural Capital.

In order to better understand this story, we shall familiarize the reader with the socio-cultural context of Veszprém (and of Hungary). Beneath the surface of the present challenges lay the echoes of a tumultuous history, marred by numerous, aggressive regime changes from the world wars until 1989, presenting the following issues: „Scratch the surface a bit though, and things aren't quite so shiny: an overshadowed city with multiple traumas and fragmented identities becomes visible. Surrounded by a region that's overly dependent on summer tourism and rural areas that are literally in a dead end – and all this paralysed by inherited helplessness. A dense network of medium-sized problems blocks our local creativity from being unleashed and allowing us to realise the potential of this very special European region.” To comprehend and address all these challenges, the initial step in the preparation process involved conducting an extensive tourism audit, which uncovered the following key findings:

1. The city lacked clear messages that positioned it as a 21st-century international destination, resulting in a substantial disparity between the city's image and its actual offerings.
2. A coherent system for managing the destination as a whole was absent, preventing a comprehensive understanding of the role of individual institutions within the context of a major urban destination.
3. There was a lack of a unified, comprehensive visitor management system capable of providing suitable tourist information aligned with the city's overarching values. Such a system would optimize visitor flows at various attractions using Big Data-driven solutions to ensure sustainability.
4. The city's inability to adapt to constantly evolving trends at the destination level meant that planned improvements and investments would either fall short or only yield partial results.
5. Despite the exceptional professional standards of all institutions, their true potential remained untapped. This stemmed from inadequate communication, insufficient collaboration, and a dearth of network building at the city level.

- The attractions offered a fragmented experience, lacking cohesive elements in their offerings. Communication and information provided by various institutions were often insufficient or misleading. Furthermore, many staff members lacked the necessary skills to welcome tourists. Additionally, the absence of data-driven management hindered the implementation of 21st-century digitalization solutions.

As Veszprém embarked on its journey towards becoming a Cultural Capital, these insights would guide the city's efforts in overcoming its challenges and transforming into a vibrant, internationally acclaimed destination.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

In the autumn of 2021, we were faced with the aforementioned challenges and had to devise a solution at both the destination and institutional levels. This task required us to consider international trends, the lingering effects of COVID, and the impact of war on tourism.

With the invaluable assistance of Innotime Hungary Kft, we developed a customized programme that was truly unique in terms of methodology and content. The ultimate goal was to foster a sustainable development that would contribute to the long-term economic, social, and environmental well-being of the city's tourism sector.

The first step was to strategically rethink the objectives with the stakeholders and prepare a work plan/master plan for the practical implementation.

Aligned with the overarching objectives of the ECoC programme, we aimed to achieve the following:

- Establish a comprehensive program and action plan for the city and all its institutions to promote sustainable tourism.
- Ensure that the tourism offerings are accessible to all target audiences, breaking down language and physical barriers.
- Make the city's assets appealing to specific groups of visitors, particularly families, cyclists, and dog owners.
- Address specific deficiencies within the visitor facilities of the city's main institutions.

The issues identified through the audit were categorized into main themes, guided by the key sustainability principles of the ECoC. To address each issue, an extensive capacity-building program was designed for the staff members of the city's primary tourism attractions, giving birth to the "10 Months 10 Challenges" initiative. Each month was dedicated to a specific theme, encompassing live workshops, online webinars, tailored support materials for individual attractions, one-on-one goal-setting meetings and consultations, group meetings, as well as follow-ups and checklists to track progress toward the goals. The themes were:

- Institutional attraction and capacity building
- Awareness raising – capacity building
- Knowledge sharing
- Enhancing online interfaces
- Streamlining ticketing processes
- Implementing effective visitor management strategies
- Promoting sustainability
- Enhancing and creating local and sustainable product offerings
- Improving accessibility
- Enhancing language skills

The programme encompassed the ten most frequently visited entities in Veszprém: Agóra Veszprém Cultural Centre, Kabóca Puppet Theatre, Lackó Dezső Museum, House of Arts Veszprém, Pannon Castle Theatre, Veszprém Petőfi Theatre, Archdiocese of Veszprém, Veszprém Programme Office, Tourism Office, and the Kálmán Kittenberger Zoo.

Concurrently, preparations were underway at the destination level, facilitated by the destination itself and supported by the ECoC programme. These preparations aimed to establish long-term market positioning strategies for the destination, and included the following schemes:

- Development of an integrated tourism system, utilizing digital tools for ticketing and real-time information management to effectively control visitor flow and distribution and making all attractions visible on one platform.
- Rethinking networked product development and initiating the creation of joint ticketing options.
- Launching an integrated sales and monitoring system in 2023, enabling the fulfillment of guest needs, product/service development, and effective marketing.
- Implementing an internal real-time information system for staff members working in customer-facing areas.
- Initiating an accessibility program across all institutions.
- Providing comprehensive training on raising awareness for all personnel within tourist facilities and tourist offices.

Through the diligent implementation of this comprehensive program, Veszprém aimed to overcome its challenges, elevate its tourism sector, and establish itself as a model destination with a sustainable and inclusive approach.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

The program's success was underpinned by several key elements. The foremost among these was the humble approach adopted by the Mayor's Office, recognizing the criticality of engaging professional tourism consultants for effective and sustainable destination management in the future.

Taking the next crucial step, the Mayor personally commissioned and supported the programme, ensuring regular meetings that provided the necessary motivation and pressure on the participating entities. The program's content was designed to encompass the entire destination, making all materials available to any institution or entity within Veszprém free of charge.

A technical factor contributing to the program's success was the decision to conduct a comprehensive tourism audit of Veszprém. This audit helped identify the challenges that were sensed but not formally measured or documented.

Once the need for a destination-wide program was established to overcome these challenges, it became imperative to avoid simply copying and mechanically applying methods employed in other countries or destinations. Instead, a personalized and artisanal approach was essential to tailor the program to the specific environment of Veszprém.

Drawing from the feedback received from other Capital of Culture cities, special emphasis was placed on strengthening local networking among institutions and fostering community unity, thereby instilling a shared mission.

These key success factors, including the recognition of the value of professional expertise, the commitment of the Mayor's Office, the comprehensive and inclusive approach, the personalized adaptation of methods, and the focus on local networking and community engagement, played instrumental roles in the program's achievements.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

The preparations for the ECoC in Veszprém provided us with valuable lessons that have shaped our approach to tourism management. Initially, lacking a dedicated destination management organization, we were unaware of the challenges that lay ahead. It was only through the tourism audit proposed by Innotime Hungary that these shortcomings were brought to light. This experience

taught us the significance of establishing a sustainable tourism management department, working in collaboration with urban development teams. The ongoing mission for 2023 is to establish this management system.

Throughout the 10-month programme, we encountered difficulties in terms of human resources within the staff of various institutions. While having a remarkable program in place is important, it became evident that capacity building and orientation for the personnel were vital and that individual meetings were necessary. Without these elements, individuals/institutions perceived the programme as an intrusion upon their comfort zones and viewed change as a threat, resulting in defensive attitudes.

Another valuable lesson we learned was the challenge of integrating 10 different visions into a unified mission. To address this, we fostered alliances and formed a cohesive mission within a tight timeframe. All 10 institutions had to come together and be prepared for the commencement of the ECoC year.

To ensure that each institution found its place and received recognition throughout the process, Innotime Hungary devised a unique approach. They broke down the program into 10 institutions and 10 distinct visions. The solution involved providing individual mentoring and fostering open dialogue with each institution. This personalized journey allowed them to feel a sense of ownership and contribution to the larger picture. While the mission and goals remained the same, the approach was tailored to each institution's specific needs, enabling them to embrace the project as their own.

These lessons in recognizing the importance of sustainable tourism management, the necessity of capacity building and orientation for staff, the challenges of integrating diverse visions, and the value of personalized approaches have significantly influenced our journey toward the ECoC title, shaping our mindset and fostering a more inclusive and effective approach.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

Embracing the fact that a livable future starts in the present, Veszprém's tourist attractions and program venues have joined forces to reduce their ecological impact, be more inclusive and prepared for international guests through the 10 Months - 10 Challenges programme. This pioneering initiative stands out as no other major Hungarian city has implemented such a comprehensive and conscious package of green measures across all institutions. Each institution not only implemented practical steps to decrease their ecological footprint but also communicated their sustainability goals collectively. Now, local residents, staff, and guests can witness the institutions' daily contributions to the Earth's future upon entering their buildings.

Significant progress has been made through collaborative efforts, including the introduction of selective waste collection in all institutions, the removal of bottled drinks from buffets, the transition to electronic administration whenever possible, and the inclusion of products from local and regional producers in gift shops. Institutions also highlight their sustainability initiatives on their websites, complemented by a Green Wall at their entrances, showcasing their actions.

While these achievements mark an important initial step in the city's tourism offerings, a sustainable tourism system strives to achieve a balance between natural, economic, and social sustainability.

The 10 Months - 10 Challenges programme surpasses a mere checklist of improvements on specific themes. Through collective work and ongoing dialogue, it has evolved into a comprehensive system extending beyond the ECoC programme. This enables continuous enhancement and adaptation of institutions, tourist accommodations and the destination management itself to meet evolving needs, establishing a cohesive network that ensures the competitiveness of the city's offerings.

The true challenge lies not in the year 2023, when a well-prepared and impressive programme will place the city at the forefront of Europe, but in the post-EcoC period, where Veszprém must sustain its position as one of Hungary's premier cultural tourism destinations in a more competitive environment, shining brightly on a smaller scale.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

When it comes to tourism management in a destination, it is crucial to involve a tourism expert when it is not already a separate entity from the municipality. This expertise brings valuable insights and tools that can drive the necessary changes in the destination's DNA and pinpoint the need for a DMO.

Adopting a top-down approach can provide the essential tools and create the pressure needed to initiate transformative shifts in the destination. By rallying stakeholders around a common goal or project, it becomes possible to build a sense of community and foster collaboration.

Avoid adopting a project-based attitude alone. Sustainable progress is achieved through a slow and continuous process. If efforts cease after a specific deadline, true change cannot be realized.

Consistency and persistence are key to bringing about lasting transformations in a destination.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

The case study about the programme was published and printed in the Tourism and Rural Development Studies (VOLUME VIII NO. 1):

<https://www.turisztikaitanulmanyok.hu/aktualis-szamunk/>