

# Sustainable Denmark:

## Leading the Charge or Falling Behind?

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# Outline

- 1 Denmark's 2024 GDS-Index results overview and analysis
- 2 Insights and opportunities
- 3 Key questions for the future
- 4 What's next for the GDS-Index?
- 5 Close and Q&A



# Lets start with some numbers

How do Danish Cities  
perform in the GDS-  
Index?

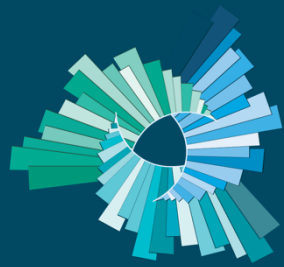


# WHAT IS THE GDS-INDEX?

The GDS-Index is the leading global performance improvement program for urban tourism and events destinations.

Aalborg, Aarhus and Copenhagen were co-creators in 2012 of concept.

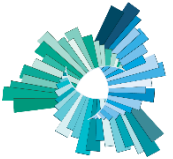
Over 100 destinations benchmarked and supported in 2024. 8 from Denmark



GLOBAL  
**DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY**  
INDEX

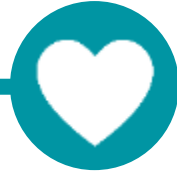


# GDS-Index: What Do We Benchmark?



- Climate, Energy and Emissions
- Circularity and Waste
- Water
- Air Quality
- Transportation
- Biodiversity
- Alignment with tourism

## City Environmental Performance



- SDGs Alignment
- Corruption
- Personal safety
- Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity
- Health, Safety, and Wellness
- Accessibility
- Resident Engagement
- Funding Mechanisms

## City Social Performance



- Hotels
- Airport
- Agencies (PCOs & DMCs)
- Restaurants
- Venues
- Attractions
- Academia
- Tourism and event businesses

## Supplier Performance



- Destination Strategy
- Governance and Reporting
- Policy and Certification
- Capacity Building
- Measurement, Impact
- Marketing and Communications
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Mobility
- Climate Action

## Destination Management



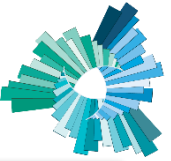
Co-created by destinations for destinations

77 qualitative and quantitative criteria

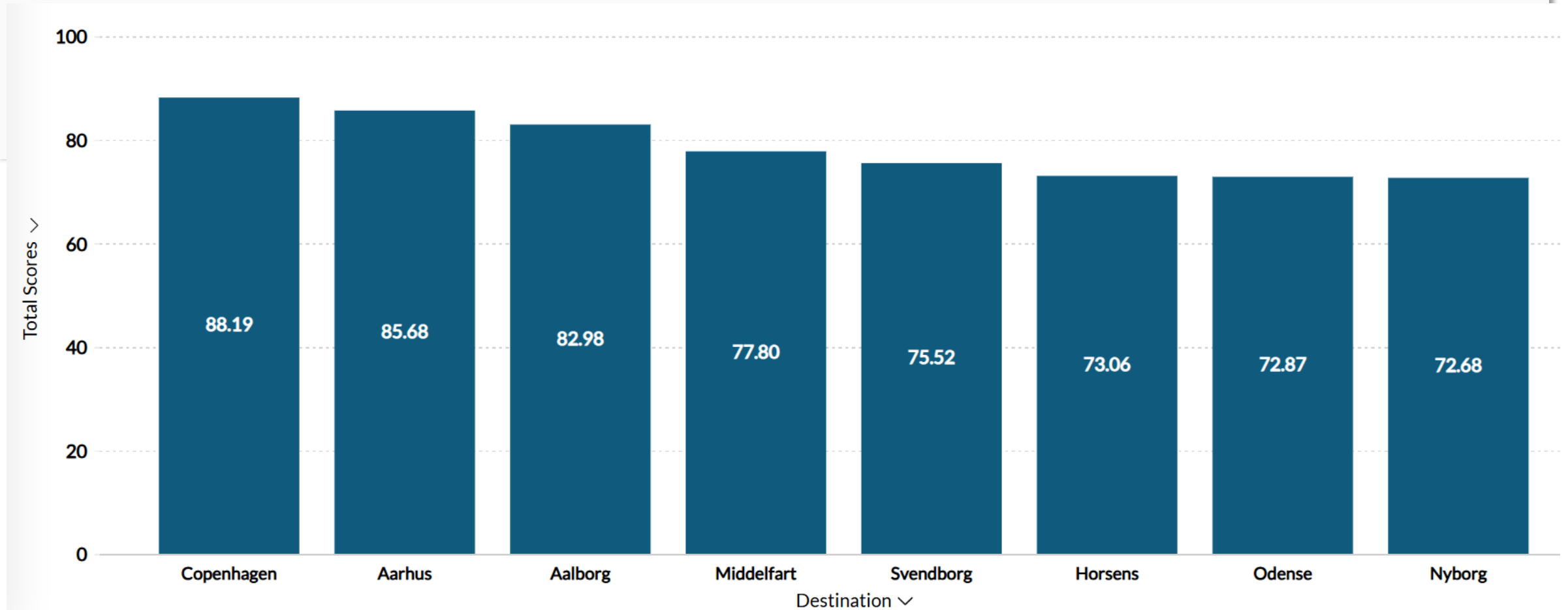
Informed and closely-aligned to UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and to the GSTC Destination Criteria.

For more detail visit: [www.gds.earth/index](http://www.gds.earth/index)

# 2024 Danish Performance Summary



In the 2024 GDS-Index, 8 of the 100 participating destinations were from Denmark



# The GDS-Index 2024

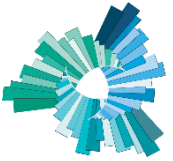
## Top 40 Danish destinations leading the charge

The presence of 7 Danish cities in the top 40 demonstrates clearly that Denmark is effectively competing on the world stage. But competition is fierce.

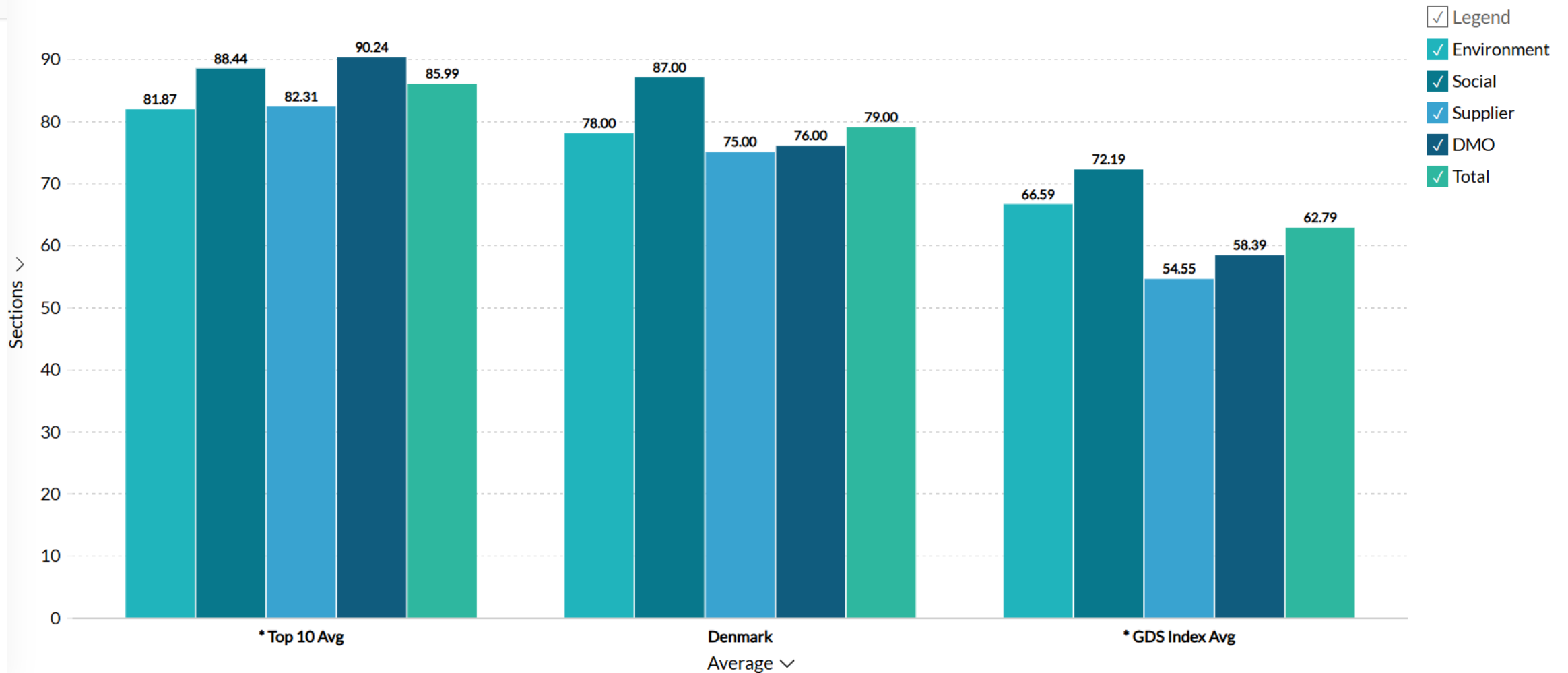
	2024	2023		2024	2023		2024	2023		2024	2023				
Helsinki*	1	92.43	90.49	Aalborg	11	82.98	87.70	Cork	21	77.18	77.86	Barcelona	31	75.57	74.52
Gothenburg	2	90.83	94.64	Glasgow	12	81.88	87.47	Victoria	22	77.17	66.15	Svendborg	32	75.52	77.06
Copenhagen*	3	88.19	91.73	Zurich	13	81.08	84.35	Tampere	23	76.96	78.33	Brisbane	33	75.23	73.07
Bergen	4	86.49	90.15	Bilbao	14	80.27	78.83	Melbourne	24	76.61	77.53	Songkhla	34	74.89	79.56
Aarhus	5	85.68	88.64	Lyon	15	80.16	82.85	Galway	25	76.06	71.85	Faroe Islands	35	74.88	77.31
Bordeaux	6	83.37	87.10	Goyang	16	78.90	82.66	Berlin*	26	75.92	76.69	Montreal	36	74.54	75.12
Singapore*	7	83.37	81.83	Reykjavik*	17	78.28		Tirol	27	75.80	82.53	Quebec City	37	73.74	64.43
Oslo*	8	83.26	92.46	Middelfart	18	77.80	82.16	Clare	28	75.77	72.01	Limerick	38	73.51	71.39
Belfast	9	83.14	86.40	Kerry	19	77.65	80.61	Dublin*	29	75.69	63.89	Horsens	39	73.06	62.03
Sydney	10	83.13	77.21	Paris*	20	77.24	80.12	Stockholm*	30	75.57	86.74	Odense	40	72.87	79.94

\*Capital Cities

# Danish destinations leading the charge

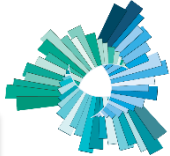


The average score for all participating Denmark Destinations is 79%. This is way above average of 63 but slightly below the Top-10 average of 86.



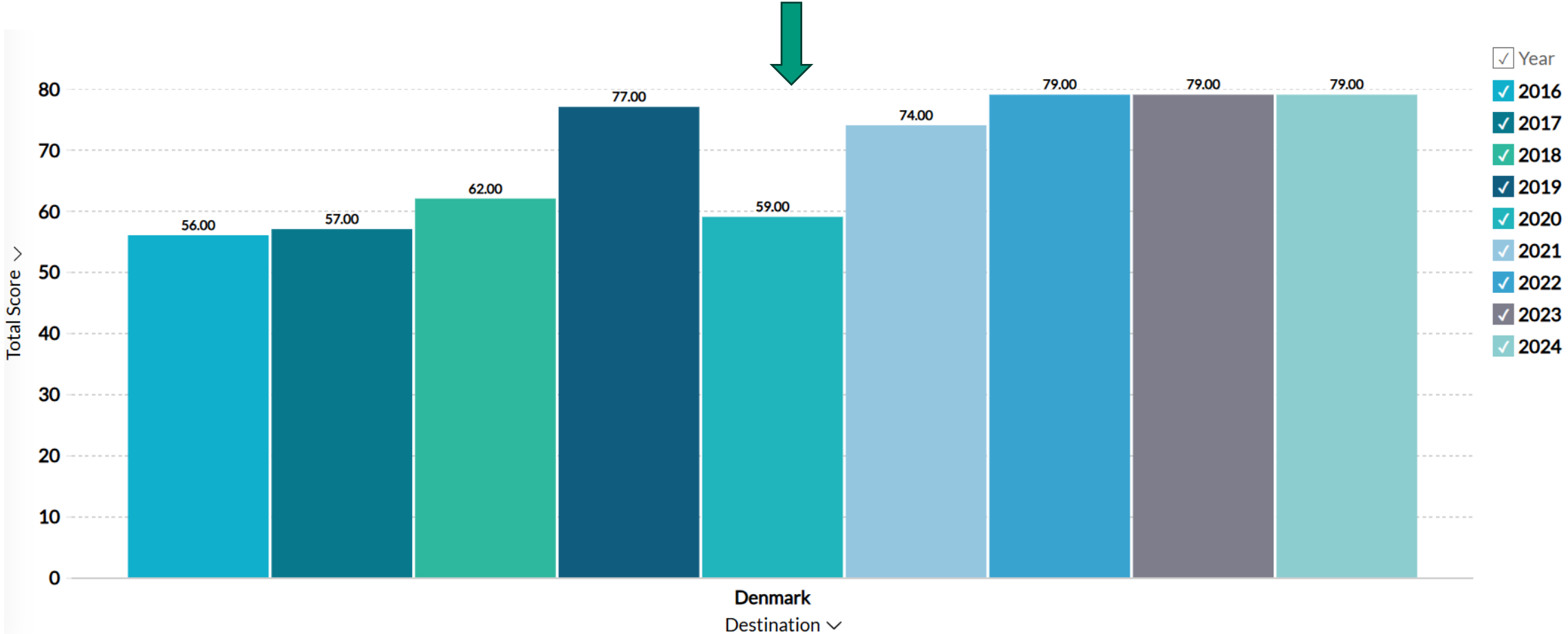


# Surge and maintain?

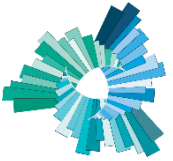


There is a remarkable **41.1%** improvement overall in Index scores since 2016!

However, only **2.53%** improvement since 2019

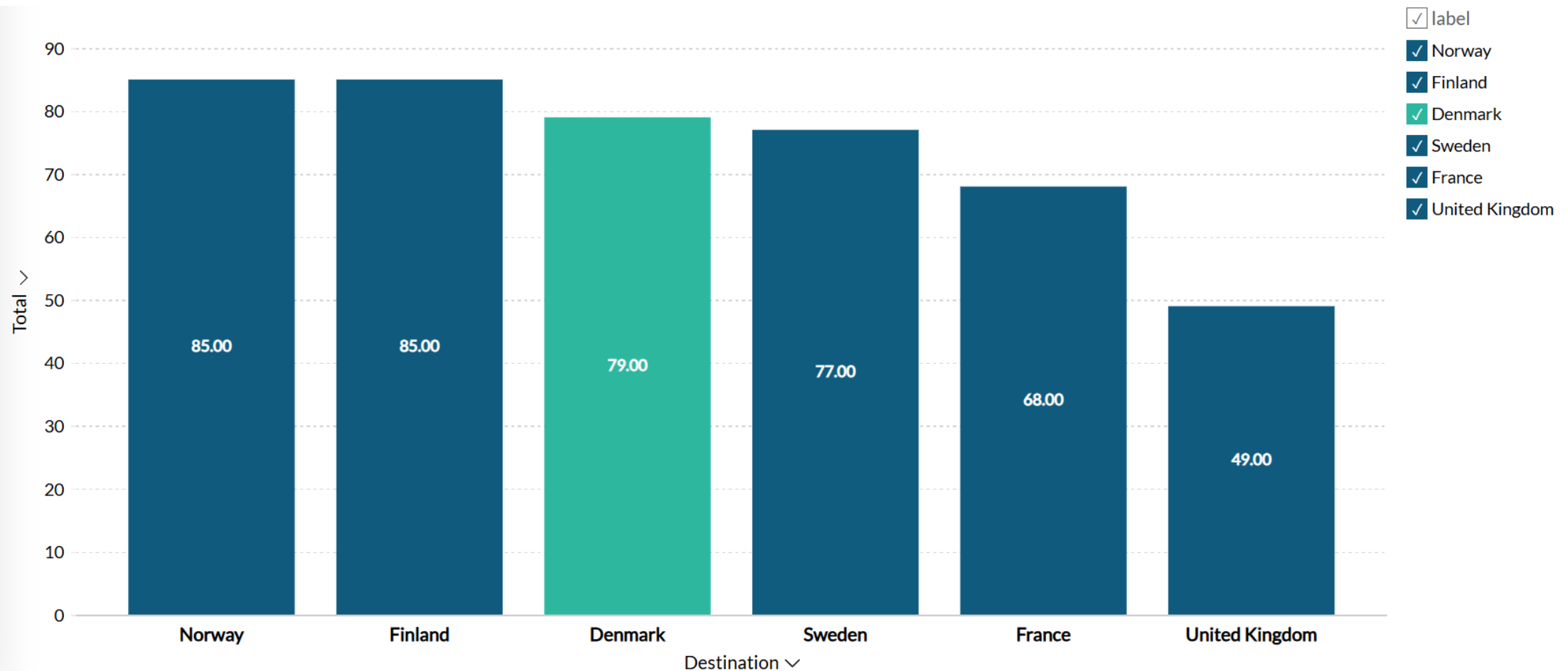


# National Performance Comparison



Norway and Finland are tied for first place with an average overall score of 85, scoring better in supply chain and destination management.

Denmark follows closely behind the leaders, though it is also not far ahead of Sweden, and France who is catching up



# Leading the charge

Strategy and Policy Development

Dedicated Resources

Sustainability Mobility

Industry Training

Pioneers in Legacy

Pioneers in innovation



*Staying  
on track*

CLIMATE STRATEGY

CERTIFICATION LEVELS

DEI



# FALLING BEHIND

Only 2.53% improvement in GDS-Index since 2019



Climate Action

Crisis Management

Visitor Management

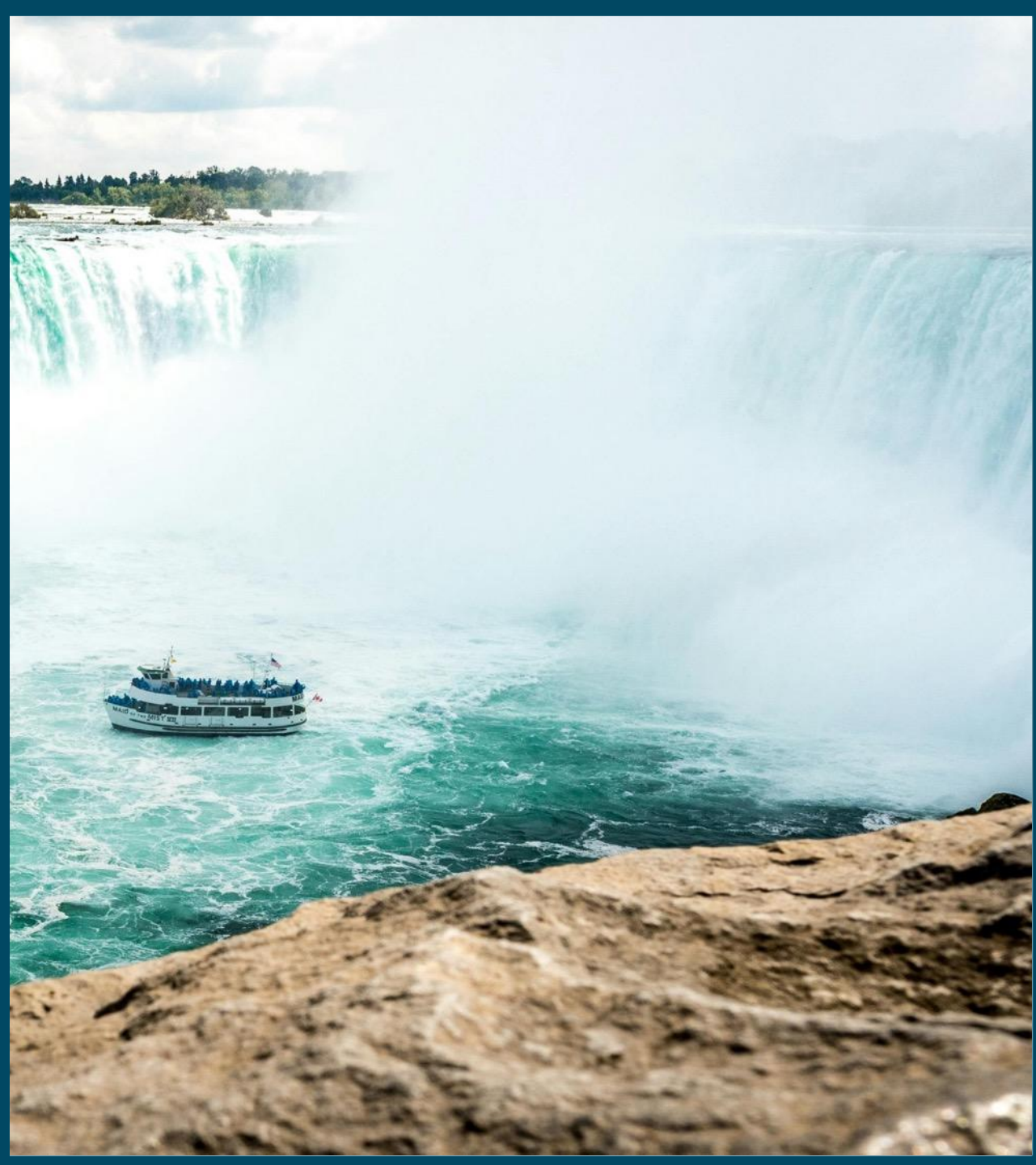
Storytelling



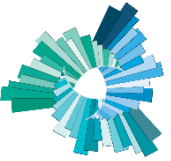


**What is next for  
Denmark?**

**7  
questions to be  
asked**



# 1. Are your strategies regenerative or are you maintaining a status quo?



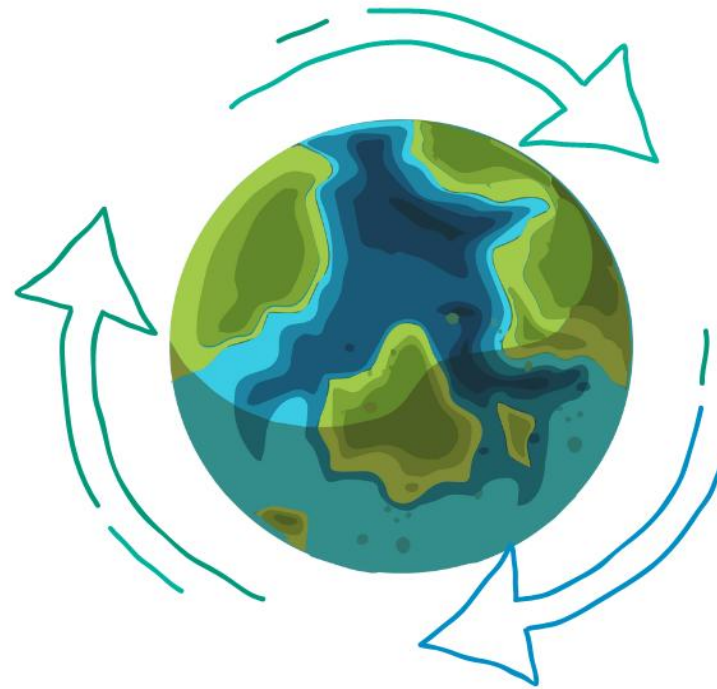
Stop doing **harm**

Minimize **impacts**

Create **positive impact**



**Degenerative**

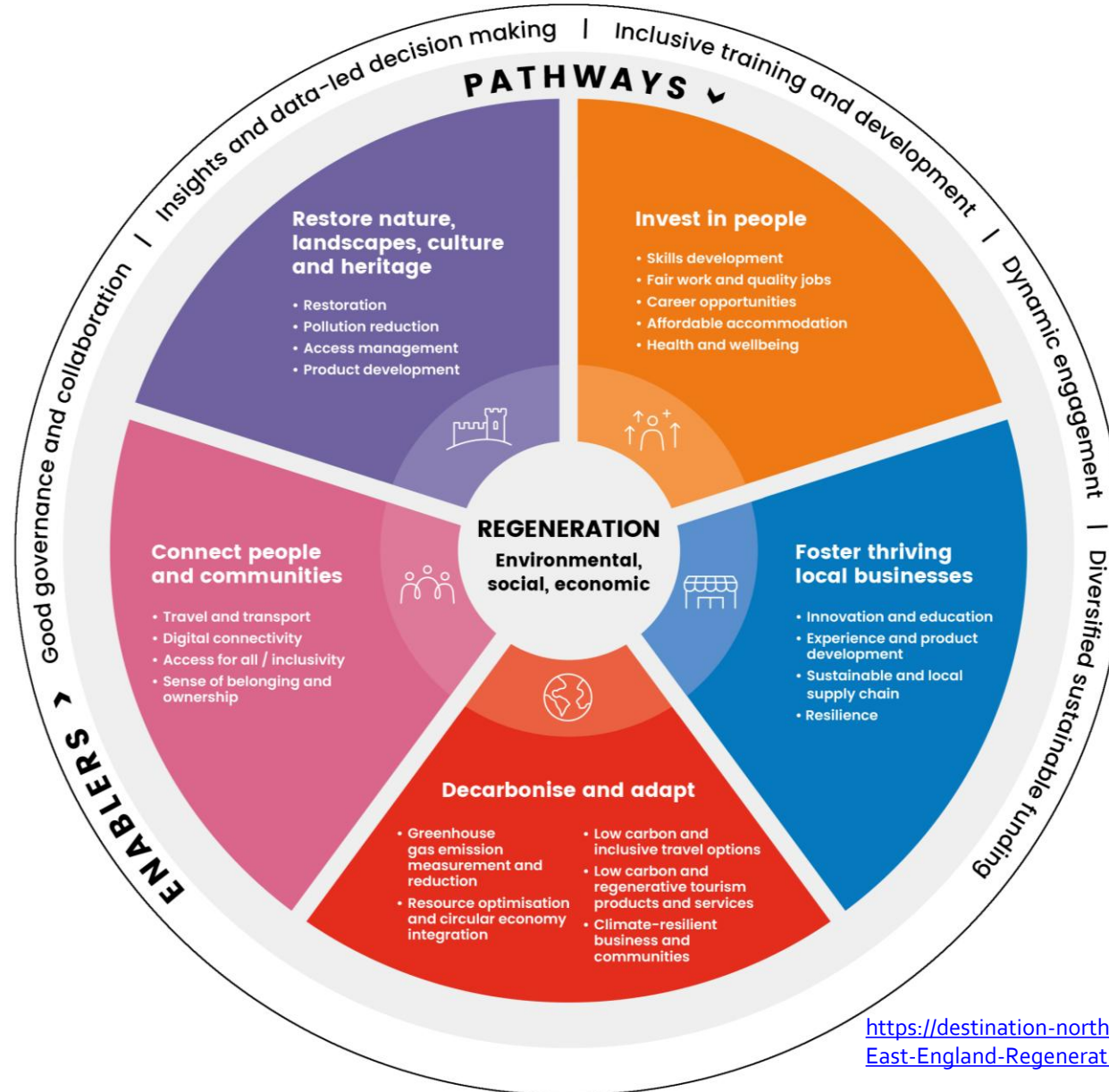
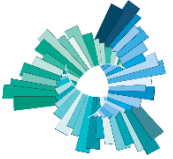


**Sustainable**



**Regenerative**

# Northeast England: Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework

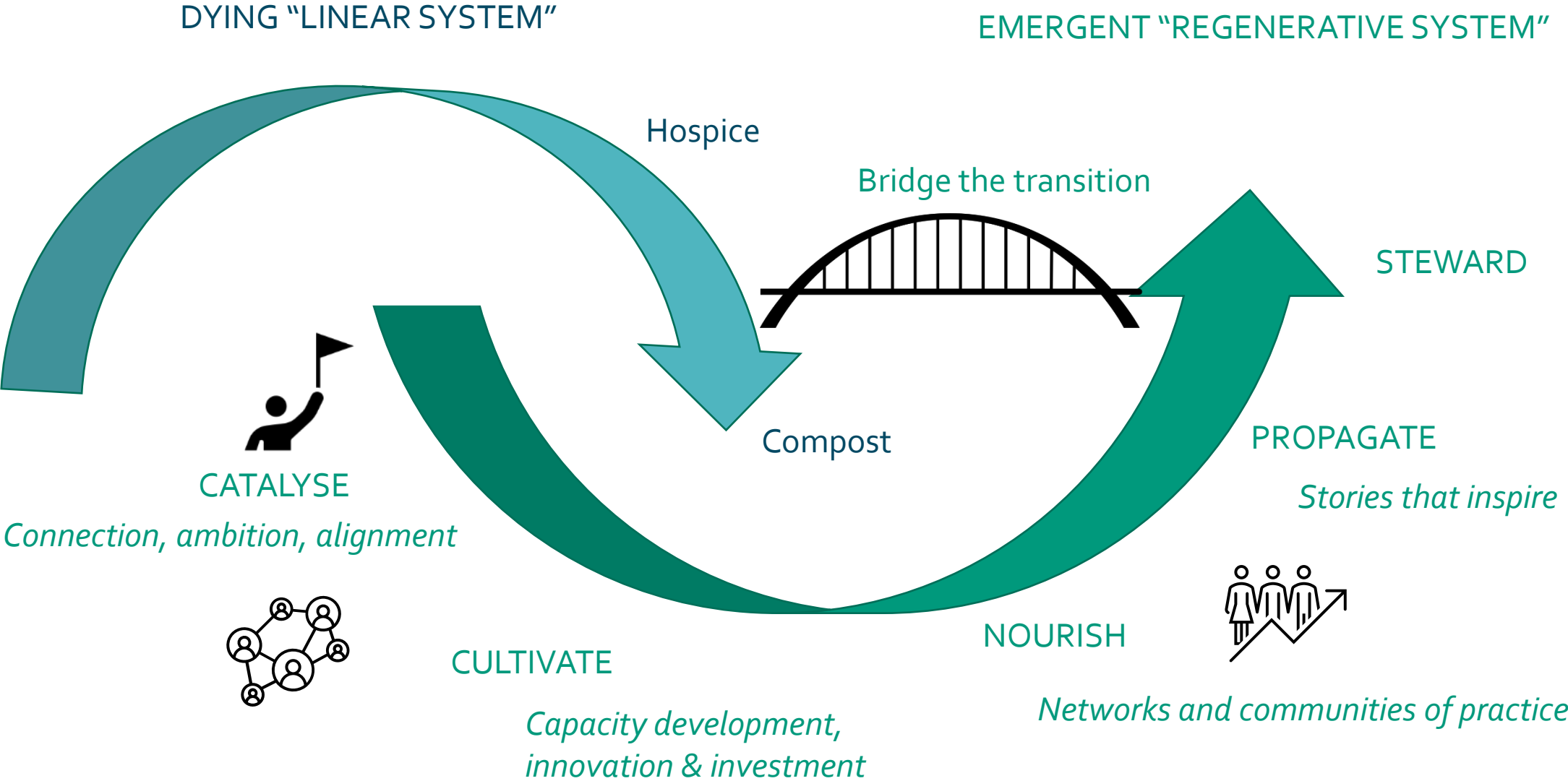
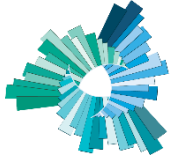


<https://destination-northeast.files.svdcdn.com/production/Destination-North-East-England-Regenerative-Visitor-Economy-Framework.pdf?dm=1725885735>

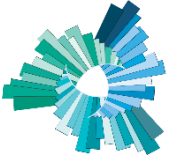




# 2. Are your strategies disruptive and/or truly accelerating the transition?



# 3. Are you truly supporting each other to evolve?



## STARTUP

- **Passionate Volunteer**
- Build an internal green team
- Basic Stakeholder Engagement
- Starts CSR and Green projects

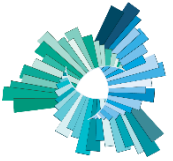
## INTEGRATED

- **Dedicated Sustainability Manager and Budget**
- Build external advisory working group
- Conduct stakeholder sentiment analysis
- Start partnerships
- Siloed activities in organisation
- Focus on outputs

## EMPOWERED

- **VP Sustainability**
- Embedded into business models
- Builds culture of partnership
- Participative strategy development and governance
- Empowerment of & ownership by business units
- Focus on outcomes and impact

# 4. Are you really adapting to climate change?



## Helsinki Tourism Climate Action Plan

33 measures for the years 2023–26, including e.g. training and product development for tourism businesses, collaboration with educational institutions, reforming Tourism Information Centre practices, monitoring destination-level carbon footprint and developing new funding methods for regenerative tourism.



Helsinki  
Business  
Helsinki



**A: Free from emissions**



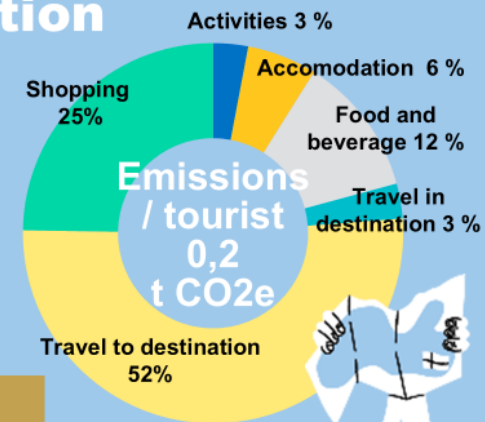
**B: Regenerative tourism**



**C: Collaboration**

**D: Resources**

**E: Measuring**

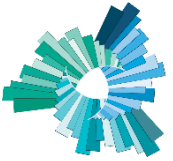


**Goal:  
Half the emissions  
by 2030**

Helsinki tourism emissions 2021  
(Sitowise & Novago 2023)



# 5. Will you be ready for the new legislation?



## Unfair Commercial Practices Directive

- It is not allowed to mislead the consumer
- Claims must be
  - Truthful
  - Supported by evidence
  - Presentation must be clear, specific, accurate and unambiguous
- Updated and in force today

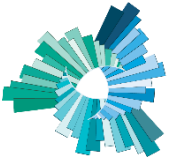
## Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive

- All sustainability labels must be based on certification schemes
- Prohibits self-certified sustainability labels
- Prohibits generic environmental and ethical claims
  - (e.g. 'sustainable' 'ecological' 'climate neutral')
- Valid from Sept 2026

## The Green Claims Directive

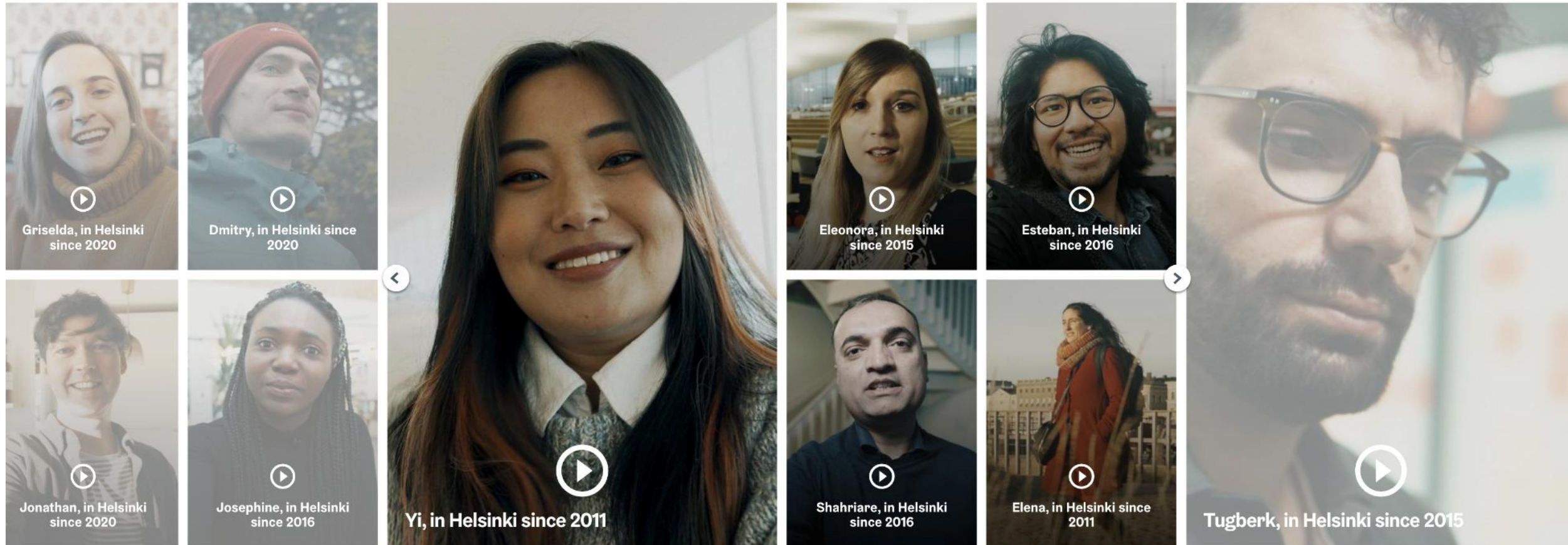
- Clear criteria on how businesses should prove their environmental claims and labels
- Requires science-based evidence backing up the claims
- Claims and labels must be checked by an independent and accredited verifier
- New rules on governance of environmental labelling schemes to ensure they are solid, transparent and reliable
- To be validated. Expected 2027

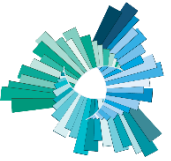
# 6. Are you telling stories collectively and with the heart?



In addition to an extensive [sustainability guide for visitors](#) and for [meetings professionals](#), a separate campaign from Helsinki Partners presents itself as a diverse and inclusive destination through [first-hand, micro-video testimonials](#). Its residents reveal how the city gives them a “life that looks like you”. The video series explores universal themes like education, business, career, networking, work-life balance, family, trust, support, green spaces, safety, security, and creativity. **Bucket list status, achieved!**

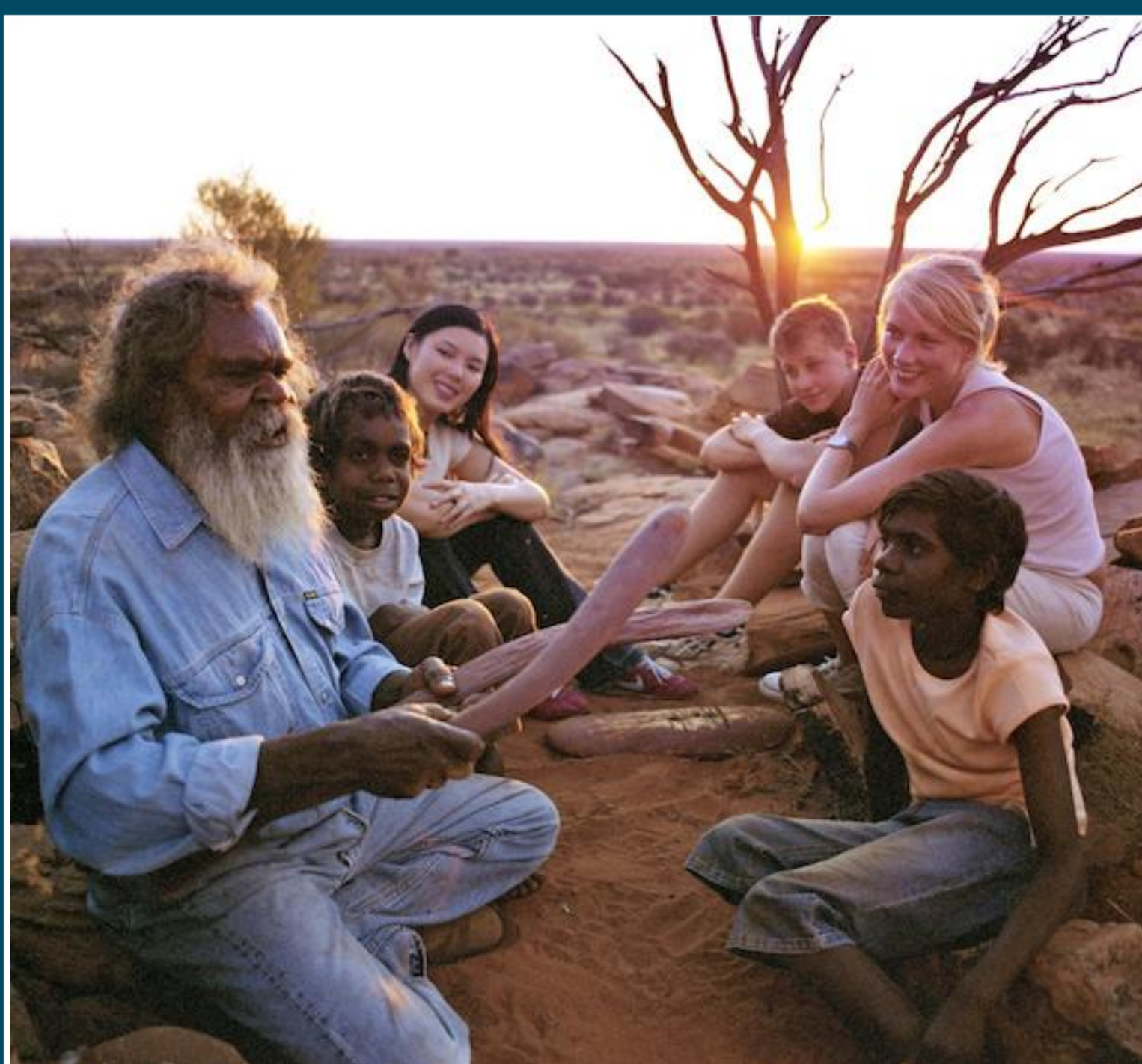
## My Freedom Stories from Helsinki





“If we hope to bring about  
transformative, paradigm-shifting  
change, we must  
**replace the old stories  
with new ones**  
embodying  
the beliefs, values, norms,  
and ethics of  
a regenerative future.”

- *Sahana Chattopadhyay*



# Developing the story as a team



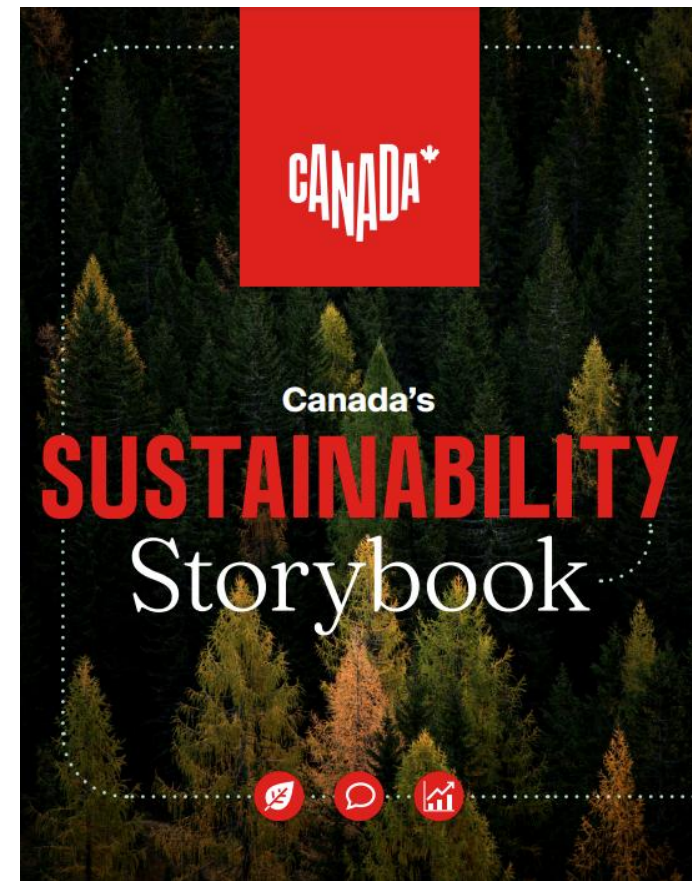
## Global Destination Sustainability Index

From coast to coast to coast, 16 Canadian destinations have embarked on the [Global Destination Sustainability \(GDS\) Index](#) annual benchmarking process – The GDS-Index is a global leading destination-level program that promotes scalable sustainability and responsible practices among tourism destinations globally. It measures, benchmarks and suggests improvements for the sustainability strategy and performance of tourism and events each year. Using 69 indicators as its guide, the index evaluates destinations across four key areas from environmental and social progress to supplier and destination management performance.



This work is aligned with internationally-recognized standards and initiatives such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)'s One Planet Vision and with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(UN SDGs\)](#), which act as a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



The zero-waste program in place at the Edmonton EXPO Centre and Edmonton Convention Centre aims to divert 90% of waste from landfill. The unique program offers sustainable site, guidelines for attendees and exhibitors, and staff support for proper recycling and sorting. This program is part of a broader zero-waste initiative that also promotes reusable items, encourages bringing water bottles, installs hand dryers and uses compostable single-use items.

“There was no more about the Journey than the destination.”



The events industry generates significant waste, but these zero-waste programs help create sustainable processes and innovative environmental solutions, advancing Edmonton's sustainability. In 2023, the program diverted 95,000 kg of waste from landfill through donation, reuse, recycling and composting, reducing the environmental footprint and promoting a cleaner, healthier community. The Edmonton EXPO Centre and the Edmonton Convention Centre's zero-waste programs help you address the increasing demand for sustainable practices and waste reduction at business events.

### GET RESULTS

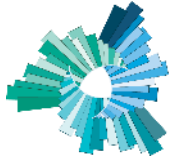
Through this zero-waste program, planners can reduce the amount of waste associated with their events and engage their attendees in the process. Sustainability staff will assist you in planning a customized waste reduction strategy for your event, making the process simple and efficient.

**NEED TO KNOW**  
Participate in a zero-waste program to achieve a cleaner, more sustainable community.

Learn more



# And sharing stories of these with the world

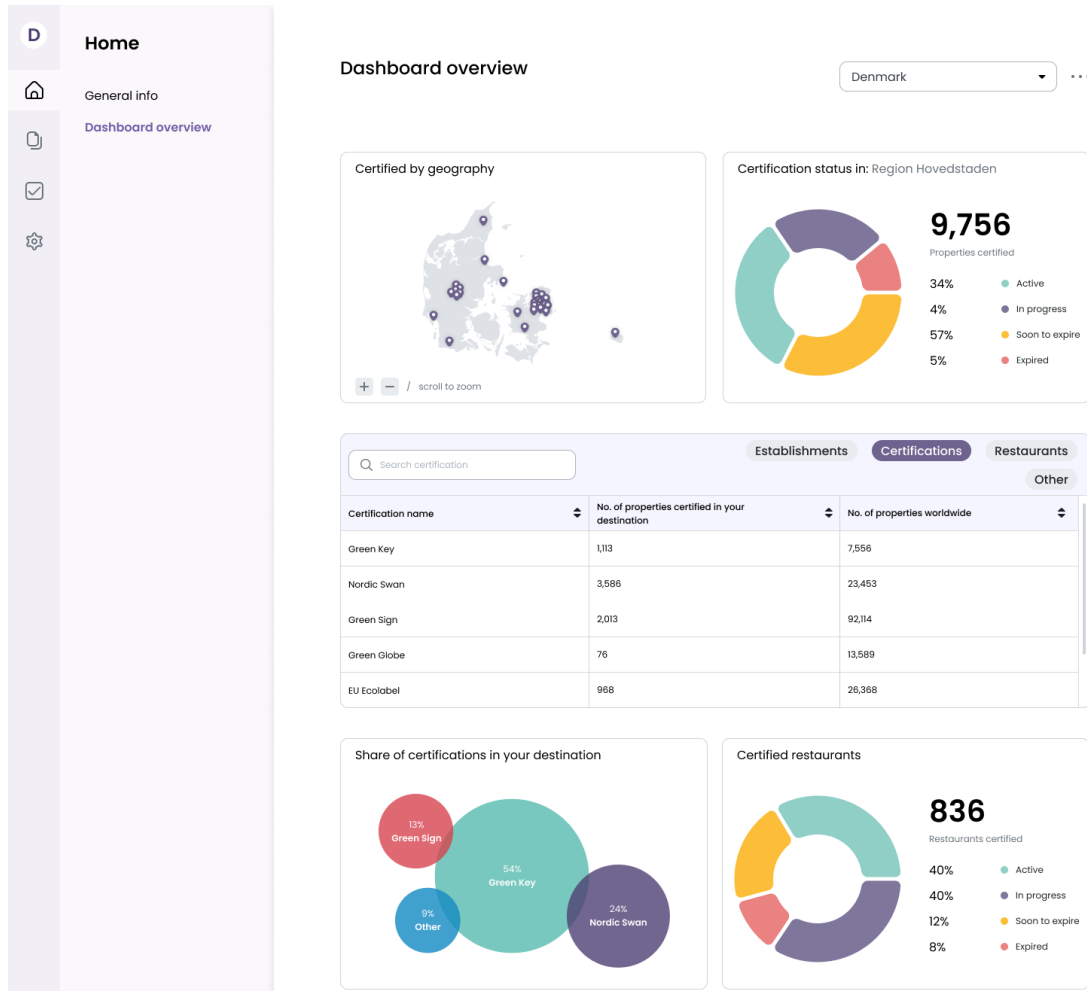




## 7. Are you influencing your visitor flows and behaviour



# 8. Are you using technology to optimise reporting and decision making?



# What is next for the GDS- Movement



We are growing in skills and geographically  
- Consulting, Academy, Technology



↓  
Welcome Marta Mills.  
New Relationship Manager  
for Nordics



## Navigating New EU Sustainability Regulations

What destination management organisations need to know

JANUARY 2023



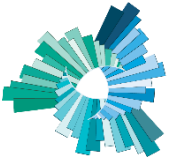
## Better Destinations

A Guide to Regenerative  
Tourism Management

August 2024



# GDS-Index pathway and roadmap



## PLAN

### Level 1 - GDS-Lite

- **Basic performance improvement tool to support cities start their sustainability journey**
- Approx. 15-20 indicators. Focus on planning and policy
- **Goals: Increase number of cities with a basic sustainable destination strategy and initiatives**
- Launch Q3 2025

## DO

### Level 2- GDS-Index

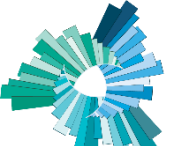
- **Advanced performance improvement tool for cities and regions**
- Streamlined criteria and data collection process, importing more 3rd party data
- Additional management functionality
- Development of better indicator reporting & dashboarding
- **Goals: Reduce completion time and deliver more value**

## CHECK

### Level 3 – Certified

- **Third party destination certification**
- Focus on Verification of a High-Performance Sustainability management system using accredited criteria
- Conducted by a third-party EU accredited certification body.
- Cities must achieve a minimum score in Index before being able to go level 3
- **Goals: Drive and support advanced cities to achieve certification, reducing cost and time**
- Full launch 2026

# Looking for a host and new ideas for the GDS-Forum 25/26

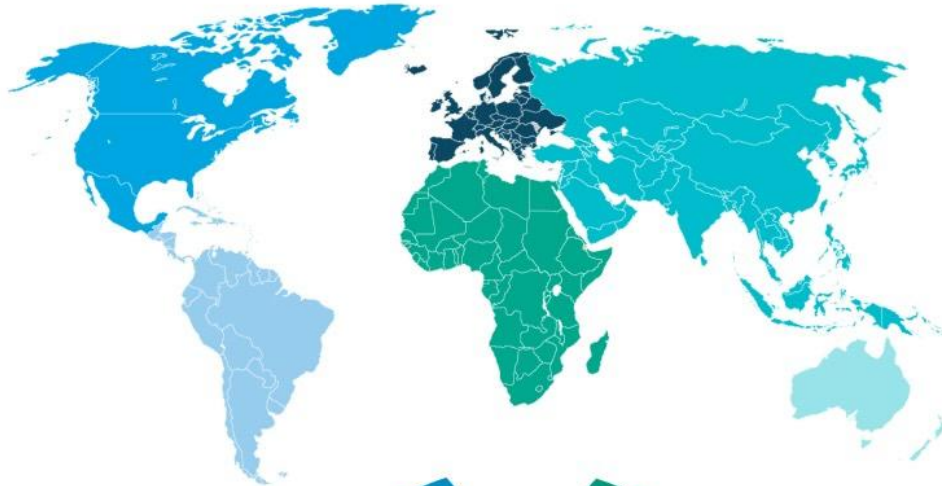




# THANK YOU



GLOBAL  
DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY  
MOVEMENT



31  
COUNTRIES

100+  
DESTINATIONS  
GLOBALLY

THE LEADING MOVEMENT  
OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT  
ORGANISATIONS COMMITTED TO  
SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION