

# **'LIVE LIKE A LOCAL' REVISITED**

## **SUMMARY OF SUSTAINABLE VISITATION MARKETING STRATEGY 2021-2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In its connecting role as a partner organisation, Utrecht Marketing aims to play a more active part in promoting Utrecht as a sustainable visitor destination through a cohesive story. To this end, in coordination with local partners, a strategy was drawn up in the first quarter of 2021. Interviews, sounding board sessions with partners and various internal consultations were used to refine the content. The resulting marketing strategy can rely on the support of the partners. A new element of the composed strategy is that Utrecht Marketing will add even more value to the city than before by helping to address Utrecht's most pressing social issues in the coming years. This approach aligns well with the national shift in tourism that focuses on the sector as a means for achieving wider goals. For the near future, Utrecht Marketing aims to place a renewed emphasis on prioritising appropriate sustainable visitation.

### **STRATEGY CONTENT**

The marketing strategy reflects the tourist development (leisure market) 2021–2025 vision which centres on the city's recovery from the coronavirus crisis. This strategy highlights the ambition and goals (the 'why'). It also directs Utrecht Marketing towards the most suitable themes which should be prioritised in the execution of projects (the 'what'). At the same time, the marketing strategy will serve as a beacon to inspire and motivate other partners, including local businesses, non-profit organisations and residents in the coming years.

### **STARTING POINT: DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH, CHERISHING QUALITIES**

As a result of revenue loss due to the coronavirus crisis, museums, hotels, non-essential shops, cafes, restaurants and events crave 'business as usual'. They require initiatives that will contribute to a rapid rebound in visitation and spending. In parallel with this, Utrecht Marketing wants to adopt a more sustainable approach. A differentiated strategy is therefore required. This involves stimulating recovery as well as focusing on the desired transition to sustainable and social. Of course, this may involve rolling out specific efforts for different aspects simultaneously, so good timing will be necessary.

Within its sphere of influence, Utrecht Marketing is committed to ensuring that Utrecht does not become overdeveloped as a tourist destination. If we can provide a well-substantiated story that aligns with the site and soul of the city, this can be avoided, visitors can add value and tourism can become meaningful. By building on the heritage and the cultural attributes of Utrecht and by cherishing the qualities of the city centre, Utrecht Marketing can make a positive contribution to suitable tourism development. The current strategy therefore presents a number of key options that help match visits and resource utilisation with the city profile and what Utrecht has to offer (see 'Strategic choices').

## **FROM MARKETING TO SOCIALLY COMMITTED MANAGEMENT**

Utrecht Marketing can increase its added value to the city by actively ensuring that the broadly shared ambition of healthy urban living becomes a reality in the leisure and tourism sectors. There are various opportunities available. In the years ahead, the city will face several social challenges and Utrecht Marketing can help in the following areas.

- Facilitating amenities and activities for the city's growing population (+105,000 by 2040).
- Responding to the increasing proportion of elderly citizens as part of these efforts.
- Countering the differences between academically and practically educated residents, for example in areas like obesity and exercise.
- Relieving increasing visitor pressure on parks and green spaces by spreading visits (time and space).
- Contributing to preservation of cultural heritage.
- Contributing to a vibrant city centre by addressing vacancy issues and encouraging more social interaction and activities.
- Contributing to the adoption of bicycles as a sustainable, safe and healthy means of transport.

By embracing these challenges and tasks, Utrecht Marketing can explicitly enhance its social relevance. As a result, Utrecht Marketing will gradually evolve into a destination marketing organisation that forges connections in the wider interest of Utrecht. The added advantage is that this strategy can count on broad support from the parties in the city council. It can only serve to strengthen the future viability of Utrecht Marketing. The external partners involved in the drafting of the present marketing strategy also unanimously align themselves with this approach.

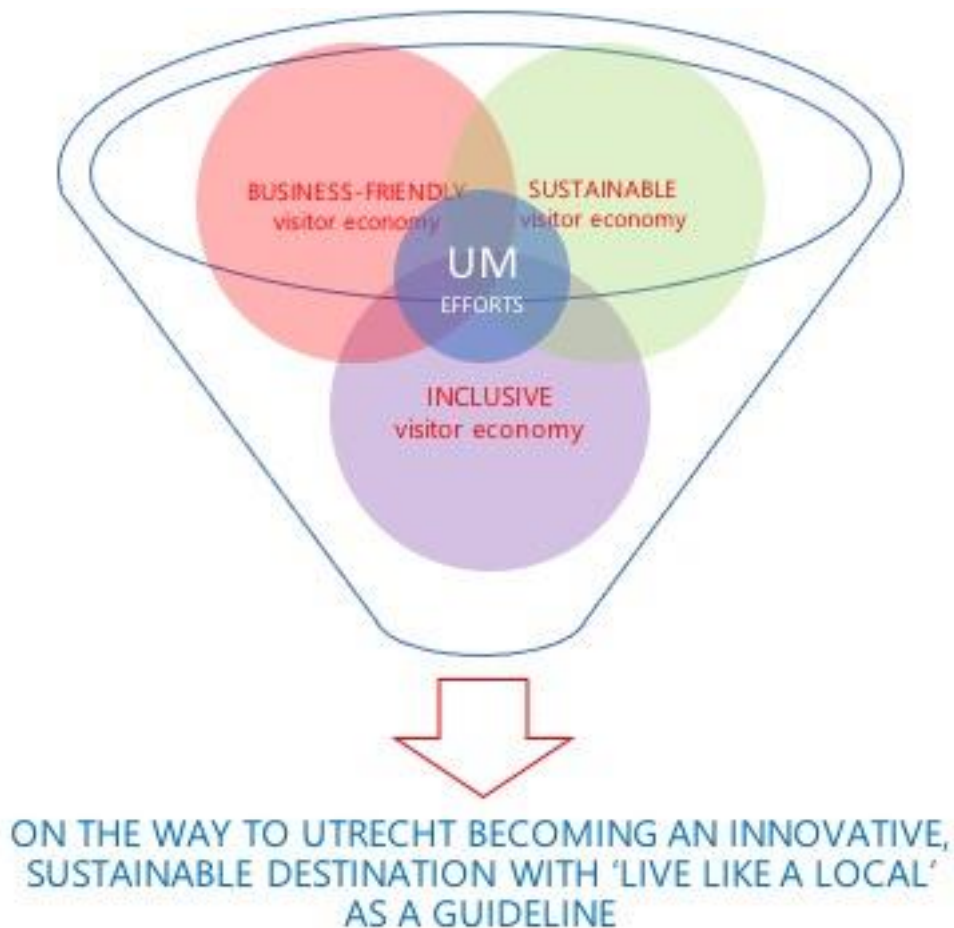
## **AMBITION AND OBJECTIVES**

The ambition for the years ahead is defined as follows:

**Utrecht Marketing and its partners will together strengthen Utrecht as an innovative, sustainable destination with 'live like a local' as a guideline.**

Utrecht Marketing has established multiple goals for the coming period.

1. To contribute to the blossoming of Utrecht as an innovative, sustainable destination.
2. To help ensure that the number of visitors and tourist spending return to pre-pandemic levels (good for the economy).
3. To contribute to a more sustainable visitor economy (good for the planet).
4. To contribute to a more inclusive visitor economy (good for people).



The goals complement each other and lead the way to cherishing and strengthening Utrecht as an innovative, sustainable destination. With this ambition, Utrecht Marketing chooses socially responsible growth that is good for the planet (ecological dimension) and good for people (social dimension). These choices ensure that tourism can be sustained and that Utrecht can continue to focus on developing its unique qualities.

## **INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Back in 2000, the United Nations (UN) made agreements with its 190+ members, including the Netherlands, on sustainable development goals (SDGs). The Netherlands has embraced these goals which have been further articulated in its own national climate agreement. It is feasible to integrate the most fitting SDGs into the tasks and responsibilities of Utrecht Marketing. This concerns the following six SDGs.



In its future projects and action plans, Utrecht Marketing can outline and elaborate in advance how the intended results will contribute to these SDGs, thereby underlining the organisation's commitment to broader sustainability goals.

## **FIVE STRATEGIC CHOICES**

During the drafting of the strategy, a range of analyses, interviews and sounding board sessions were used to reflect on what needs to be done for Utrecht to achieve the desired ambition and objectives. Five strategic choices emerged that will guide Utrecht Marketing's efforts in the coming years.

### **CHOICE I: COMMITTED TO VALUABLE VISITATION**

Each city gets the visitors it deserves. Valuable visitors are those that add positive value because they fit well with the profile and the offer. These visitors rarely cause a nuisance and are spread evenly across the city. They also boost spending and align with the needs and interests of residents. In other words, the visitors that Utrecht Marketing should be aiming for integrate seamlessly with the daily lives of residents. The result will be a good balance between different interests, both now and in the future.

By having a clearly defined range of visitor groups, Utrecht Marketing can specifically focus on desired demand. International target groups comprise 'creatives' and 'socialisers': these groups fit with the profile of Utrecht and are robust in number. For places of origin, the recommendation is to choose countries in close proximity like Germany, Belgium and the UK as key markets, followed by Spain, Italy and France. For the domestic market, Utrecht Marketing will focus on the 'creative and innovative' and 'personal to me' target groups. It should be noted that the focus on these groups does not exclude others. Utrecht is a destination for everyone, but targeted marketing is required as resources and capacity are limited.

### **CHOICE II: SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL AS STANDARD**

A new and highly relevant element for Utrecht is to emphasise the importance of sustainable travel. Utrecht is a major national railway hub, with 60% of all tourist visits to the city centre taking place by train. This proposition can be strengthened, not least because the city centre exudes intimacy and is

ideal for walking due to its compactness. Utrecht is also easy to navigate by bicycle: within just 30 minutes, you can ride from the city centre to neighbouring municipalities. As Utrecht is not a city dominated by the car, Utrecht Marketing's front-end strategy can focus on inspiring more visitors to come by train and then continue their journey on foot or by bicycle. The focus on sustainable travel should be standard throughout all projects and communications.

### **CHOICE III: EXTRA EFFORTS TO ATTRACT STAYING GUESTS**

Based on current plans, Utrecht will have new hotel rooms after the coronavirus crisis, resulting in a more diverse offer. Research has shown that an imbalance exists in Utrecht between its day destination function and its overnight destination role. By focusing more on attracting staying guests, the city's overnight role and amenities will improve and capacity can be better utilised. In terms of economics, staying guests add the most value: they stay longer and spend more money in the city. With increased focus on overnight visitors, we can also create additional opportunities for combined visits within the region (Utrecht as a base). This choice will boost the overall lodging sector, which will in turn stimulate recovery in the post-pandemic period.

### **CHOICE IV: SPREAD OVER TIME AND SPACE**

The aim is to relieve the busier locations at peak times and help develop and/or highlight less popular attractions. The city centre is attractive and serves as a magnet, but light can be shed on the lesser-known gems in Leidsche Rijn and up-and-coming neighbourhoods like Zuilen, Overvecht and Kanaleneiland. The goal is to encourage visits and to attract visitors to the city in the evening and outside of peak season throughout the year, thereby extending the length of stay and the tourist season itself.

### **CHOICE V: MORE FOCUS ON ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY**

There are approximately 2.5 million people in the Netherlands with a disability. Utrecht Marketing should focus more on this socially relevant group, which is steadily growing due to an aging population. It goes without saying that a city should be accessible to all. Utrecht needs to be open to everyone, not least people with disabilities and groups that are less fit and able. Any strategy aimed at boosting accessibility and inclusivity should be worked out at project level for each theme to ensure a tailored approach. Expectation management is an important factor here: Utrecht Marketing is a marketing and partner organisation and its role in promoting inclusivity and accessibility should continue to reflect this position.

### **GENERAL STRATEGY: 'LIVE LIKE A LOCAL' REVISITED**

The general strategy can be described as follows. Utrecht Marketing cherishes the qualities that Utrecht has to offer. A city of history and heritage that is compact and personal. A young city where new and old seamlessly merge and complement one another. A city that holds a central position in the Dutch transport network with excellent rail connections. And with its architectonic bulbous roof, Utrecht Central Station creates an impressive gateway to the city centre.

Utrecht is bouncing back from the coronavirus with fresh events and an attractive bar and restaurant scene. With flagship stores and a varied retail mix in Hoog Catharijne mall as well as a great atmosphere and range of shops and restaurants in the historic city centre, Utrecht offers a diverse shopping experience. It also has 10 museums within walking distance of each other and is a city steeped in history: Utrecht has been inextricably linked with the Dom Tower for more than 600 years. Utrecht has more than its fair share of inspiring art too, not only in museums but also on the street. The city centre serves as a living room, showroom and magnet all at once and the easiest way to get around is by bicycle or on foot.

But Utrecht is more than its city centre. Leidsche Rijn is developing at a rapid pace and is still unknown territory for many residents and visitors. Utrecht Marketing is contributing to increased awareness of the attractive public amenities in this fast-growing part of the city. Utrecht also has up-and-coming neighbourhoods and parks that are worth discovering. In the coming years, Utrecht Marketing will connect the city centre with its surroundings and invite people to discover new places off the beaten track. Think of activities and routes that revolve around street art and public art as well as creative food and events hotspots at Rotsoord, Cartesius and Wisselspoor.

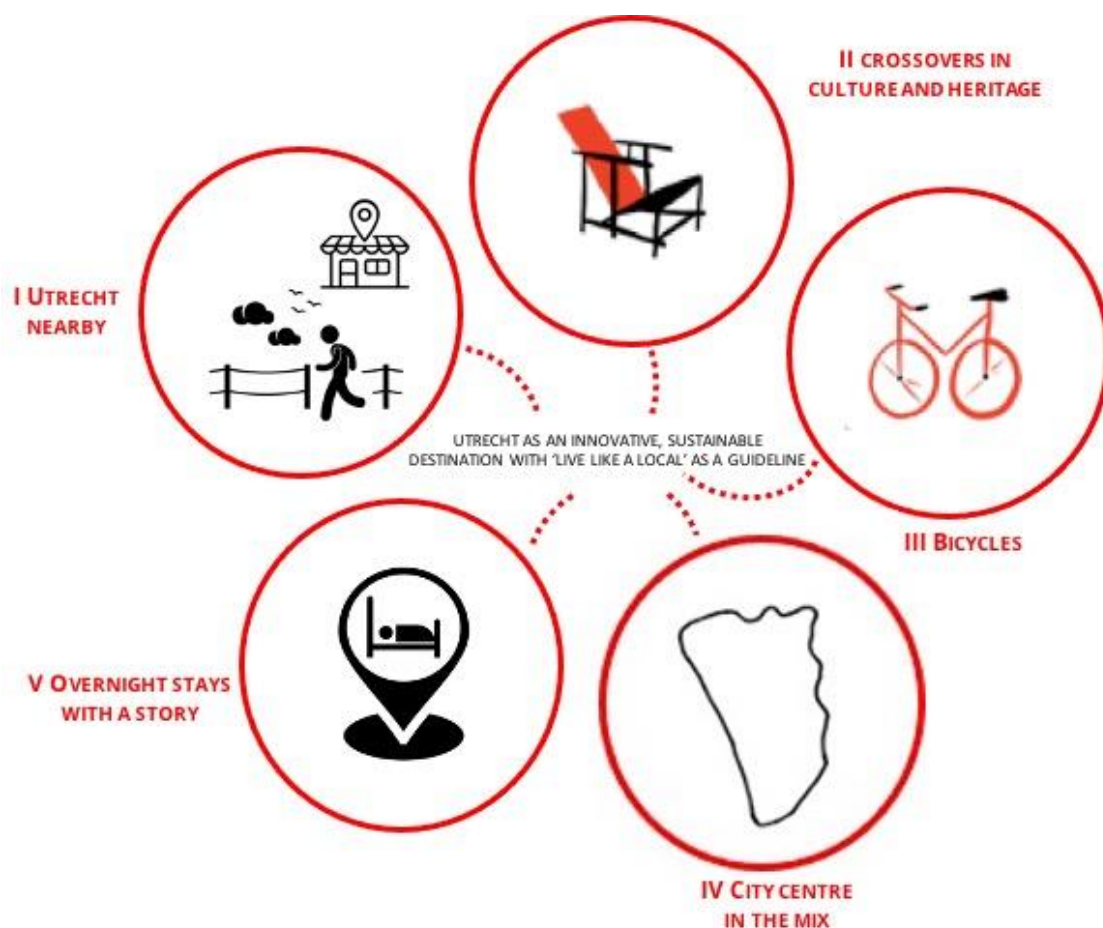
Utrecht is unique because of its compact nature, which results in a likeable bicycle-friendly city. The city is investing a lot in new bicycle infrastructure to further promote cycling. In just 10 minutes, you can cycle from the centre to all districts: Utrecht is the 10-minute cycle city. And there are spectacular landscapes in every direction – all accessible by bicycle within 30 minutes. The Vecht river and lakes are to the north, the Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park lies to the east, the Kromme Rijn river is in the south and the polders of the Green Heart of Holland are to the west. No other city in the Netherlands has such a compact variety of cycle-friendly topographies.

It is precisely these qualities that Utrecht Marketing should further emphasise in the coming years. The Dutch Waterline and the Limes are gaining greater visibility as heritage sites. These, too, offer further opportunities for Utrecht Marketing. More icons will become associated with the city, just like the Dom Tower, TivoliVredenburg and the Daphne Schippers bridge today. These features will also be on Utrecht Marketing's radar in the future.

As a result, the motto 'live like a local' will now take centre stage and acquire new meaning. Visitors will be encouraged to experience the things that residents themselves like and appreciate. There will be no offer that is only suitable for visitors. They will fit in with the rhythm and profile of the locals, who also like to travel around Utrecht on foot or by bicycle. This approach makes Utrecht credible and authentic as a destination. Cherishing the variety and the quality of the many attractive features is paramount: these aspects make the city worthwhile and real. 'Live like a local' also matches the desire to make Utrecht a more sustainable destination.

## **FIVE FITTING THEMES**

Utrecht Marketing will focus on specific themes to optimise the use of limited resources and capacity. Five themes are to be added to the core tasks of Utrecht Marketing. These core tasks involve offering information and playing host, for example via the Tourist Information Centre, managing the Dom Tower and providing guides and tour leaders. The five themes emerged from the analyses, interviews and sounding board sessions and can therefore rely on support from Utrecht Marketing's partners. The themes are outlined below.



### THEME I: UTRECHT NEARBY

Special (from Utrecht) and authentic (the real Utrecht) are central to this theme, which builds on local initiatives that sprung up to support closed shops and restaurants and cancelled events during the coronavirus crisis. The theme aligns well with increasing visitor interest in *couleur locale*. By highlighting local benefits, more attention will be drawn to vendors and activities that contribute to the city's leisure economy. The theme generally applies to museums, shops, bars, restaurants, events and hotels. In terms of sustainability, focusing on 'the nearby' will help reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as products and services will tend to rely on shorter supply chains.

Another element of 'Utrecht nearby' is the growing need for parks and greenery. The number of residents in Utrecht is set to rise sharply and there is already pressure on parks and playgrounds. For many residents without a garden, parkland and green spaces are open-air living rooms and will in future experience more intensive use.

### THEME II: CROSSOVERS IN CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Utrecht is a bustling cultural city. The combination of new and old, the mix of diverse art disciplines and the cross-section of target groups result in culture and heritage being a vital and fitting theme for Utrecht. Given the city's innovative character and the emphasis on crossovers, there are many opportunities for Utrecht Marketing to add value. This theme also dovetails with the core values of the city — 'innovative', 'connecting' and 'personal' — and can count on wide support from within the sector. Moreover, by encouraging visitors to take part in cultural events and activities and visit heritage

sites, additional revenue can be generated to help with the maintenance and upkeep of facilities, which is interesting from a sustainability perspective.

Fresh opportunities will emerge from the expected new UNESCO status of the New Dutch Waterline and Limes. This means Utrecht will soon be associated with four UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Further development of De Stijl, Lumen and the 2022 city celebration year/Vuelta will be important projects too. Other obvious choices within this theme include placing extra focus on connecting street art and showcasing art and culture in Leidsche Rijn along with the new creative hotspots in the city.

From its location in Dom Square, Utrecht Marketing is ideally placed for bringing together the iconic Dom Tower and Dom Church as well as DOMunder to package the rich history of the city. This type of collective product development affords great opportunities. Adjacent locations, including the Utrecht Archives and Catharijne Convent, are perfect for cultural-heritage crossovers. The stories surrounding the Limes, the Union of Utrecht, the Middle Ages and the rich religious past and present form a coherent narrative about the origins and history of the city. This alone makes Utrecht a must-visit destination. And from DOM Square, it is easy to refer visitors to the former castle Vredenburg and surrounding districts such as Castellum Hoge Woerd.

### THEME III: BICYCLES

Utrecht attracts national and international attention as an innovative bicycle-friendly city. In the *Coya Bicycle Cities Index* of the best bicycle cities in the world, Utrecht proudly takes first place, above Münster and Amsterdam. From a tourism point of view, however, this trump card has not yet been played. But changes are afoot. In the last few years, there has been significant investment in new bicycle infrastructure, some of which is undeniably attractive and trendsetting. Although the responsibilities for public utilities and tourism come under the jurisdiction of different authorities (municipal and provincial), public utility regulators have several initiatives aimed at stimulating bicycle use. This is where Utrecht Marketing's core quality can be used to full effect.

The extended reach of Utrecht Marketing and its influential partner network can bring together the best of both worlds. In its role of connecting creator, Utrecht Marketing can break down barriers and accelerate bicycle-based initiatives for residents and visitors alike. It can forge a coherent bicycle narrative and help develop Utrecht as a bicycle destination (a reason to cycle). This will add direct value to Utrecht as a sustainable city, while contributing to the goals of the municipality and the province. In practical terms, bicycle hotspots and infrastructure can be clustered with, say, bicycle-friendly restaurants, bike rental companies, bike hotels and special bicycle-related products and events. By activating individual vendors of bicycle-related products and events, Utrecht Marketing can help reinforce the bicycle theme. At the same time, the organisation can also focus on safety and provide information on busy cycling areas to help public utility partners also achieve their goals.

### THEME IV: CITY CENTRE IN THE MIX

Although the city centre has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis, it is the key destination for most visitors. What makes Utrecht so attractive is the combination of amenities set in a historic environment, with a variety of shops, cafes, restaurants, museums, venues and attractions all within walking distance. To boost the city centre post-pandemic, Utrecht Marketing must adopt a multi-faceted approach.

Initially, this will be done by using online and offline campaigns, content development and influence marketing to showcase Utrecht's appeal. It is quite conceivable that Utrecht Marketing will cease its travel trade efforts or at least adapt them to the new situation. With support from its partners, the



organisation can accurately convey the importance of suitable packages in line with the prevailing leisure vision and, where necessary, support partners with knowledge and promotion in the transition. This will ideally result in different, more purposeful types of group visits to the city. Organising socially responsible corporate outings also offers good opportunities.

An obvious strategy involves encouraging visitors to take the train into the city centre. This is a sustainable option and fits with current preferences and behaviour. Utrecht Central Station is within walking distance of the historic city centre and the station's bulbous roof and the renewed Hoog Catharijne shopping mall serve as a gateway. The successful combination of train travel, shopping, museums and hospitality offers strong potential for further product development and marketing.

Stimulating electric boating and focusing on Utrecht from the water forms the second element of this city centre theme. Since the summer of 2020, Utrecht once again has an uninterrupted boating circuit around the city centre. Aside from enjoying the beautiful greenery, boaters can even pass under Hoog Catharijne mall and catch a glimpse of people shopping through the transparent floor. The city's water recreation subsector has been neglected, but Utrecht Marketing can add value here and help ensure that boaters receive a warm welcome.

#### THEME V: OVERNIGHT STAY WITH A STORY

On all counts, overnight visitors spend more than day visitors (in Utrecht, on average, more than twice as much per day per person). People who stay longer have more time to visit alternative attractions. Their activities can also be better managed in terms of time and space. In Utrecht, as day visitors far outnumber staying guests, the municipality aims to improve the visitor mix by attracting more overnight guests. However, this has been delayed by the coronavirus crisis.

In recent years, an increasing number of hotels have made their business operations more sustainable, including the Star Lodge Hotel and the Mary K. New and innovative concepts have also entered the market, for example Bunk and Hotel Beijers. The city's hotels are increasingly focusing on preserving heritage, while fulfilling the role of neighbourhood living room and meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. Apart from heritage concepts, business hotels and hotel chains offer interesting opportunities for highlighting unique features and conveying personal stories. As part of this theme, Utrecht Marketing will further showcase these hotels and introduce new collective product development initiatives.

The 'Crossovers in culture and heritage', 'City centre in the mix' and 'Overnight stay with a story' themes will make a direct contribution to promoting visits to Utrecht's museums, events, shops, restaurants and hotels, thereby boosting the post-pandemic recovery. 'Utrecht nearby' and 'Bicycles' should be considered as development themes and will involve a more long-term approach.

## **NEW EMPHASIS WITHIN ROLES: OFFER INNOVATOR AND KNOWLEDGE ADVISOR**

To effectively implement the leisure strategy, Utrecht Marketing must expand its partner organisation role with offer innovation. For the development themes 'Utrecht nearby' and 'Bicycles', this means that Utrecht Marketing, in its role of initiator and accelerator, will draw up a programme, arrange multi-year funding and implement with partners to collectively strengthen the product offer. The aim is to enhance the 'Utrecht experience' by focusing on these themes.

Furthermore, it is quite conceivable that Utrecht Marketing's knowledge partner role will be expanded to a regional scale (Visit Utrecht Region) and will be supplemented with the role of expert, delivering solicited and unsolicited advice to both the municipality and the province of Utrecht based on data and insights related to current visitor themes. This would include, for example, comprehensive advice on a better balance between regular hotels and Airbnb in the city, a plan to inspire policy advisors to apply the brand toolkit and further development of the crowd monitor.

## **DEEPENING AND EXPANDING RESIDENTS' INTERESTS**

Utrecht Marketing has discovered a novel way for young residents to formulate and execute their own ideas and projects for an attractive Utrecht by facilitating the Thirty030 residents' group. This group comprises '30 city ambassadors under 30'. Its current profile and composition mainly align with the 'Creatives/Creative and Innovative' segment. It is recommended that the composition of Thirty030 be expanded to include residents who fit the 'Socialisers/Personal to me' segment. This would deepen the membership and support the objective to also attract the 'Socialisers/Personal to me' target group to the city.

A second option to ensure that residents' interests become structurally embedded in planning processes, is to establish a residents' panel in consultation with the research department of the Municipality of Utrecht. For example, every two years, this panel could be questioned on current developments and plans for sustainable visitation in Utrecht.