



# 2023

# TREND SPOTTING

*12 Trends in Place Branding  
& Place Development*

Future Place  
Leadership™

# A FOREWORD *from* CEO MARCUS ANDERSSON

It's safe to say that the last few years have brought many new behaviours and work, relocation, travel and investment patterns. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, energy crisis, economic downturn and, not the least, the accelerating climate crisis have all impacted our places.

We have changed the way we work and from where we work, which triggered new trends, some of which we haven't seen in decades. Smaller regions that have lost people to big cities for – for the first time in decades – instead began gaining people. This new reality undoubtedly presents a historic opportunity for many rural regions, towns and villages to attract and welcome more people.

The new trends around remote work have also changed the game for place branding and talent attraction. As more companies and major brands, such as Spotify, are recruiting remote workers, the need for people to relocate decreases. This means that Spotify's role in acting as a brand champion and magnet for Sweden is diminishing. This, in turn, means that the country's own nation branding efforts as well as Stockholm's city branding efforts need to compensate for this with intensified efforts. For example, smaller and more unknown companies do not have the luxury to rely on their own employer brand, they will still need the place brand to attract talent. Places also need to improve the capacity to both attract and welcome those that want to work remotely, fully or completely.

City centres have come even more under strain when consumers both stayed at home and in some cases moved away during the pandemic. This added to the squeeze from competing e-commerce and suburban shopping malls, prompting the question: is the city centre a dying breed? And, ultimately, what do we need city centres for in the future? The answer is of course that the city centres need to transform themselves into something else by offering more experiences, meeting places and culture to stay a relevant part of our lives.

New investment patterns have also emerged in the wake of the pandemic and the energy crisis. The re-shoring trend for one means that companies bring back production closer to home.

Tourism changed, too. With travel bans and closed borders during the pandemic, more people became tourists in their own neighbourhoods and regions – many of which discovered that their place was quite attractive, after all. Some global tourism hotspots, like Madeira, quickly adapted and began targeting digital nomads

and remote workers instead of regular tourists. Long-stay and co-living concepts emerged, at the crossroads of tourism promotion and talent attraction (who is a tourist and who is a worker?). And what happens when you can experience a place through VR and AR, maybe before you travel, invest in or move to a given place?

In an increasingly fragmented and fast paced world – imbued with geopolitical and economic uncertainty – our need for connection, belonging, tradition and permanence becomes all the more desirable. The superficial and short-term creates a pursuit for meaningfulness, authenticity and simplicity.

These megatrends impact how we live and how we use our places. In this report, we have defined 12 specific trends that we have seen take shape during 2023 (categorised into four main areas: place development, place branding, investment promotion, destination development & tourism, and talent attraction). One of them being the foundation on which all the other ones lie: Places will increasingly focus their attention on the good life.

It's high time to ask ourselves: how can we create Good Places For a Good Life? And what better place to do that than in Helsinki, Finland? For five consecutive years, Finland has been said to have the happiest people in the world. Helsinki, the nation's capital, has long focused on creating a good life for its residents, emphasised in their brand slogan "It's a Good Life". Helsinki's human and purpose driven branding is strongly anchored to the city's strive towards creating a place where people can lead a good life; one that is free, safe and marked by the possibility to choose this and that instead of having to make either-or choices.

Nordic Place Branding Conference is a platform for discussing and co-creating practical advice, innovations and insights related to place branding, place development and place attractiveness. The overall goal is to help the participants create better places for people and business, now and in the future.

Welcome to the Nordic Place Branding Conference 2023!



Marcus Andersson  
CEO and Founder, Future Place Leadership,  
on behalf of the Future Place Leadership team

## ABOUT FUTURE PLACE LEADERSHIP

Future Place Leadership is a data-led agency that empowers places – cities, regions and countries – to attract and develop people and business.

We help our clients by providing actionable data and insights, advice and strategy support, marketing and activation support and training and community building.

Our focus areas are talent attraction and talent development, investment promotion, place development and regional and economic development.

## CONTACT US

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# 12 TRENDS

- 1 Places will increasingly focus their attention on the good life
- 2 Culture and experiences are replacing retail in city centres
- 3 Place development and digital storytelling need to merge to create a holistic experience of the place
- 4 Place brand, service level and hospitality are becoming the winning recipe for landing big investments
- 5 Investment reshoring continues to grow – creating new opportunities for Nordic regions
- 6 ChatGPT creates your content and becomes your personal travel guide
- 7 A desire for digital detox and “Joy of Missing Out” creates a demand for authentic places
- 8 Talent retention is the new attraction
- 9 From high skilled specialist to... Well, everything
- 10 Workcation
- 11 From work-life balance to balanced well-being
- 12 From competition to collaboration



## 1 PLACES WILL INCREASINGLY FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON THE GOOD LIFE

Places that are sustainable, healthy, car free and safe, combined with attractive living environments, culture, experience and opportunities for personal development and learning will thrive in the coming decade. The extensive interest in the 15-minute city – where we can reach everything we need in our daily life within a 15-minute bike ride or walk – can be understood in this context. The pandemic surely gave this trend a push, by changing our values to become more community and family focused.



# 2

## CULTURE AND EXPERIENCES ARE REPLACING RETAIL IN CITY CENTRES.

We've all heard about the death of the high street. Malls, e-commerce and the pandemic have all contributed to lining up traditional city centre shops for a massive knockout. This begs a very serious question: what are we going to have city centres for, in the future? But there is salvation. A study in Sweden showed that more culture and experiences in the city centres create more turnover for shops, as well as bring social benefits, such as more safety. Investing in more culture and experiences will create both a livable but also more prosperous place.

# 3

## PLACE DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL STORYTELLING NEED TO MERGE TO CREATE A HOLISTIC EXPERIENCE OF THE PLACE

We are approaching the so-called "spatial internet" at a fast pace, meaning that internet will become an increasingly three-dimensional space, not the least through an accelerating use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, and further into the future, metaverse applications. This means that a talent, an investor, or a visitor will be able to experience the place before they move, invest or visit. Places thus need to craft a seamless and coherent place brand identity that looks and feels consistent and credible across the boundaries of the physical place and digital space.





# 4

## PLACE BRAND, SERVICE LEVEL AND HOSPITALITY ARE BECOMING THE WINNING RECIPE FOR LANDING BIG INVESTMENTS

The last few years, a range of Nordic and European locations have landed mega-investments, such as data centres or battery factories. This has triggered a renaissance for investment promotion at the local and regional level, and more and more municipalities and regions are now professionalising their work with investment promotion. Proactively making land available, and packing the information and data the investor needs, are measures taken by many locations. When everyone is stepping up their game, what will be the deciding factors for investors? Most likely softer factors, like place brand image and which locations that can provide the best service and hospitality to the investor.

# 5

## INVESTMENT RESHORING CONTINUES TO GROW - CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORDIC REGIONS

Reshoring, meaning that corporations bring back production and other functions from remote markets started accelerating in 2020, driven by effects of the pandemic. Other accelerators have been the accumulating perception of risk driven by geopolitical forces of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, rapidly changing supply chains due to the growth of clean energy and the risk of China decoupling. Figures from the US show that the total value of reshoring exceeded general foreign direct investment in 2020 and 2021. A study published in the beginning of 2022<sup>1</sup> showed that over 60% of European and US manufacturing companies expect to onshore or re-shore part of their Asia production in the next three years. What does this mean for Nordic regions? That investment promotion activities should not only focus on firms that are not already in the region but also companies that have operations elsewhere in the world.

<sup>1</sup> <https://bciglobal.com/en/reshoring-production-back-to-europe-and-the-us-is-on-the-rise-particularly-for-critical-parts-and-final-production-processes>



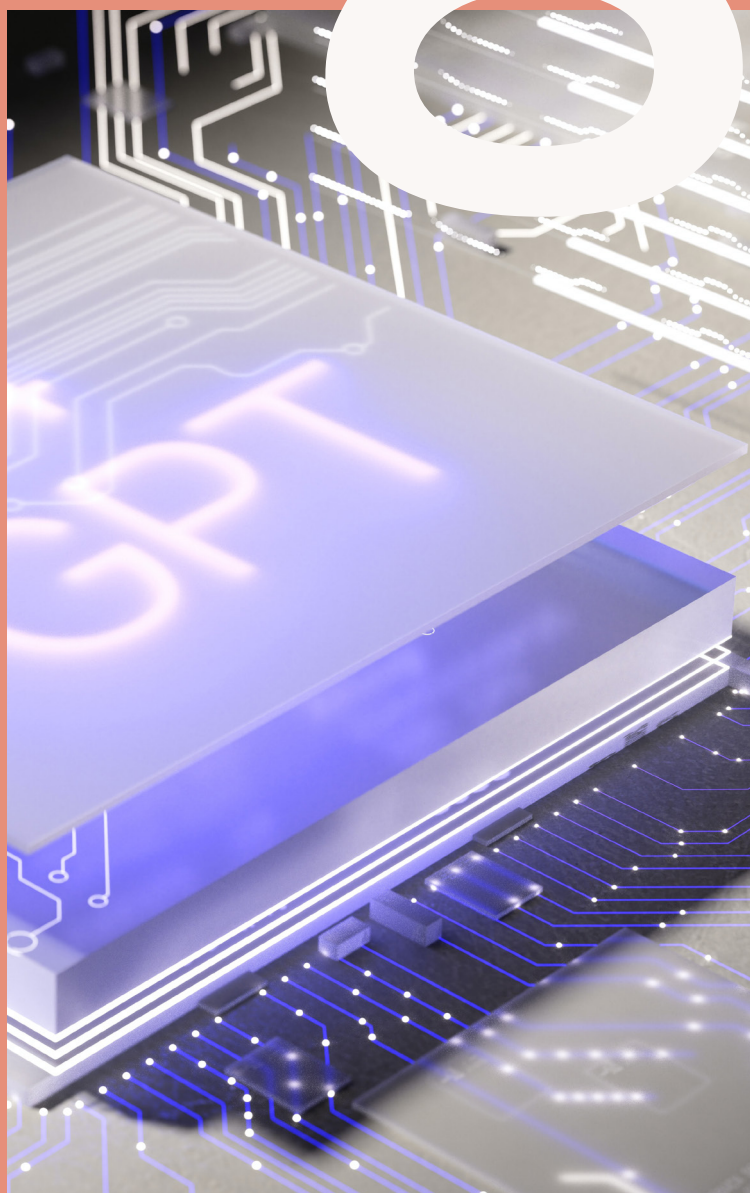




# 6

## CHATGPT CREATES YOUR CONTENT AND BECOMES YOUR PERSONAL TRAVEL GUIDE

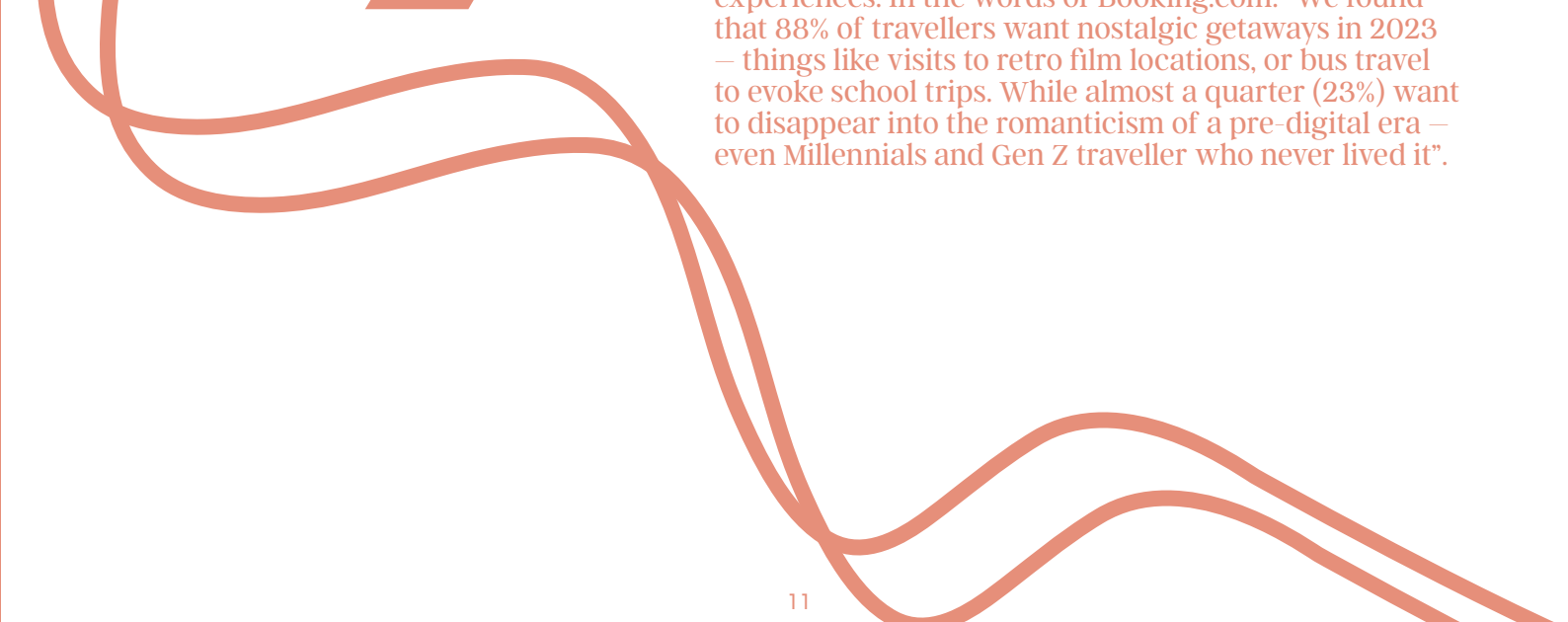
Have you heard about ChatGPT? You probably have. It is by now the fastest spread application in the history of the internet. It reached 100 million users in 2 months (it took TikTok 9 months and Instagram 2,5 years to do the same). What impact on places can we expect? First, ChatGPT and image create AI apps will make content creation for marketing and storytelling much easier and cheaper. Anyone can now create great stories, texts and images that can be used to market the place. Secondly, ChatGPT can with ease become your local, personal travel guide, challenging Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), tourist information centres and travel guides. Imagine strolling around in, say Helsinki, you can ask ChatGPT to give you the story and history of any place or attraction of your interest in the city.



# 7

## A DESIRE FOR DIGITAL DETOX AND “JOY OF MISSING OUT” CREATES A DEMAND FOR AUTHENTIC PLACES

Yes, we will see many digital trends accelerate in the years to come. But also trends pointing in the opposite direction. Sometimes we want to unplug and get off the grid. Booking.com’s trend study 2023 shows that many travelers (55%) are looking for off-grid style vacations to escape from reality, and almost half (44%) want their travel experiences to have a more back-to-basics feel. Also, travelers are craving nostalgia and authentic experiences. In the words of Booking.com: “We found that 88% of travellers want nostalgic getaways in 2023 – things like visits to retro film locations, or bus travel to evoke school trips. While almost a quarter (23%) want to disappear into the romanticism of a pre-digital era – even Millennials and Gen Z traveller who never lived it”.





# 8

## TALENT RETENTION IS THE NEW ATTRACTION

With accelerating talent shortages in most parts of the economy, more and more places invest in helping their employers attract and retain talent. Quite often, there is a one-sided focus on attracting new people, and too little focus on welcoming and integrating those that come. In a study of international students in Sweden that we did for the “Switch to Sweden” project last year, we could conclude that the students’ experience of the place during the first half year plays an enormous role for their staying prospects and their willingness to spread the word to others. If they are happy, they will gladly communicate this to their peers – meaning that retention is becoming the new attraction.



# 9

## FROM HIGH SKILLED SPECIALIST TO ... WELL, EVERYTHING

Talent attraction for places and associated immigration schemes are no longer aimed at only highly educated specialists. Yes, we still see a high demand in typical STEM associated fields – from software development to engineering – but increasingly technical and vocational skills are in demand. Chefs to the restaurants, service personal to the hospitality sector, nurses to the hospitals, or electricians to drive the green transition to name a few.



# 10

## WORKCATION

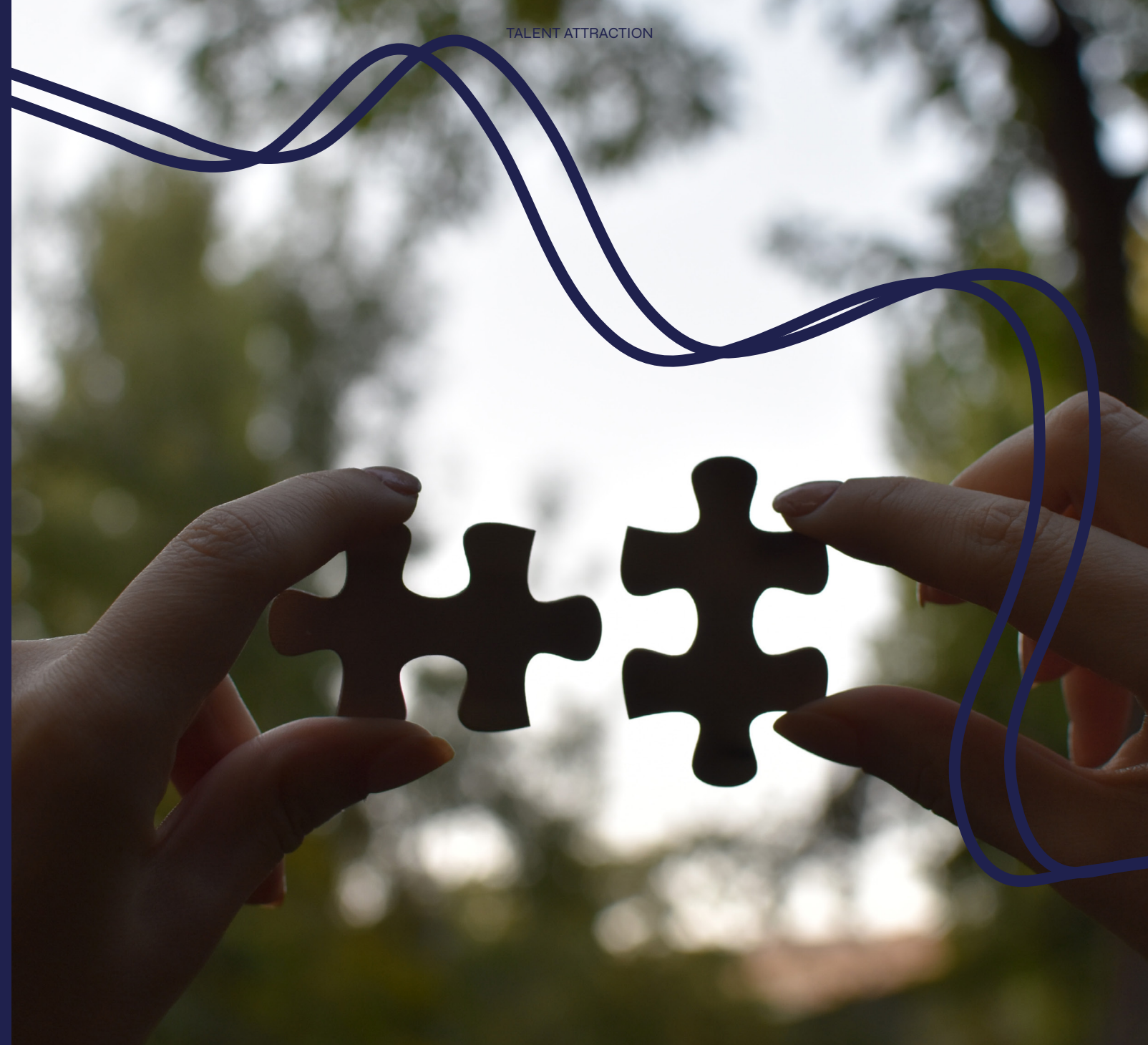
We have already seen how investment promotion and talent attraction are strongly interlinked. The decision to choose a given location for a green field investment is often heavily dependent on access to local skills. Interestingly, in this post pandemic era – with more remote work being favored by many – the tourist may no longer “just” be on vacation, they may stay longer and work remotely while visiting or simply become a digital nomad.



# 11

## FROM WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO BALANCED WELL-BEING

Copenhagen talks about the software, the brainware, and the hardware in their value proposition to global talent. In other words: the place, the competitive industry, and the actual jobs. Particularly evident in the Nordics, where we have recently seen a much stronger focus on happiness, well-being and the balanced life as the key message in what the place has to offer. The drivers of the target group for talent acquisition is changing and messaging must do so accordingly. Of course, only to the degree that you can offer a more balance life.



## FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION

Ultimately each place wants the talent to live and work within their borders, that being a municipality or a country. Yet, to be attractive to the target group the trendsetters are looking to collaborate with its neighbors to offer a much stronger place setting and value proposition. “You can work here, but live there”, as an example. They find ways to bake the cake together rather than fight over who gets the biggest piece, so to speak. European Talent Mobility Forum, initiated by Future Place Leadership is an example to follow. Here 10 different organisations from 9 countries are sharing best practices and principles, while working together to make Europe THE career destination of the future.

# 12





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