

## **Speech at Fragrant Hills Tourism Summit, Qingdao 7.9.2019**

### **Main Forum (Keynote Speech session): “Building of Tourism City Brand”**

#### **Case from Helsinki - The Most Functional City in the World**

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Excellencies,

Esteemed Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am proud to bring you the experiences from Helsinki on building of tourism brand. Our brand is simple and the same for city residents and visitors alike: to be the most functional city in the world.

Before going deeper into the subject of my keynote, I want to congratulate Qingdao for successfully hosting this year’s WTTC Fragrant Hills Summit. It is always impressive to visit China and to witness the remarkable urban development, which is ongoing.

That is also a key reason why China is such an important target for Helsinki. Exactly 30 years ago, in 1988, Beijing and Helsinki were connected by the first ever commercial flight from Europe to China. Since then, the national carrier Finnair has persistently worked to develop the connections between China and Europe. Today we have almost 40 weekly flights from Helsinki to seven different cities in China. Globally, Helsinki Airport connects the city to 140 destinations.

Global is also tourism and all business, for that matter. Different innovations in many areas, including travel, are making our world smaller. People are more able and interested to explore new places and make the world their own. Also, the ways we travel and how we prefer to experience have changed.

Cities are at the core of this change. First of all, more and more people live in urban areas, making up 55 % of the world’s population in 2018 and increasing to almost 70 percent by 2050. Secondly, cities are taking over the traditional role of nation states. We hold the tools needed to tackle the greatest challenges of our time, such as climate change, and to build high-quality living environments. In a similar way, travel destinations are chosen based primarily on which city – not country – people want to visit. You travel to Barcelona,

not to Spain, fly to Qingdao instead of China, and to London rather than the United Kingdom, and so on.

The World Tourism Cities Federation is in the core of this new way of thinking. It is an important platform for the cities to connect, change thoughts and experiences, and learn from each other.

WTTCF opened us a fantastic opportunity to work with the Chinese tech giant Tencent in order to develop smart travel services for Chinese tourists. From Helsinki's point of view, this co-operation has inspired completely new ways of communicating the city to Chinese audience as tech-oriented, innovative and highly digitalized city. More profoundly, it has also transformed the way we carry out city marketing and how we brand the city globally.

Our emphasis has shifted from marketing campaigns to digital development and provision of open data resources for third parties. Content, in this case reliable, curated place, event and activity data is the new marketing tool.

As the President of the Board of Helsinki Marketing Ltd, our official city marketing company, I have had the privilege to lead the change and witness the commitment and enthusiasm, with which the Sino-Finnish team has been working. This is the value of such networks, when peer-to-peer experiences are changed and people are working together for a common purpose.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Qingdao has been ranked as the most liveable city in China. Helsinki, too, has regularly topped international surveys on liveability, happiness, education and literacy. These are all connected to functionality, how well the city works.

Therefore, Helsinki has set an ambitious goal to become the most functional city in the world. In pursuing this vision, Helsinki seeks to create the best conditions possible for urban life for its residents and for visitors. A functional city means concrete actions and choices that make everyday life smooth and enjoyable. A functional city means that child day care is close at hand, children feel safe walking to school, buses run on time, and tap water is clean drinkable.

This relates back how and why people travel. We want to be the safest, most functional, happiest place to visit. For the travel industry, this means that the infrastructure is reliable, it's easy to get to Helsinki, stress-free to move around. The services work.

The sense of discovery and localness can be further enhanced by modern technology that allows us to plan, dream and interconnect in the ways that have never been possible before. For instance, more Chinese people prefer to experience the cities as independent travelers and try local, genuine experiences.

In Helsinki, this will be enabled by the new app created together by Helsinki and Tencent. Designed especially for Chinese visitors, the WeChat MyHelsinki mini program will soon be the first city app in the world to combine tailored personal recommendations, mobility planning and purchase options for travelers. In the near future, Chinese travelers visiting Helsinki will be able to use WeChat to review local recommendations about best restaurants and sights in town, plan how they can get from their hotel to the restaurant of their choice and pay for both their transportation and the restaurant check using the same app.

We strongly believe that visitors are interested in the same things as the locals are. They should therefore be given the opportunity to explore the city like a local: use the city bikes to discover the beautiful seashore, take a dip in the cold sea after a hot sauna or take the subway to go blueberry picking in the nearest forest.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Helsinki is committed to being a global pioneer in providing access to open data for businesses. The MyHelsinki mini program is a great example what companies can do with the open data sources. Here, it utilises Helsinki's open data about places, events and public transport and bases its recommendations on this information. It helps to tell what's best of Helsinki, providing recommendations one can trust, to millions of Chinese in a way that creates a shareable, local experience.

I want to use this opportunity to thank WTCF and Tencent for this extremely fruitful collaboration. Such innovations and digital development are the central building bricks in Helsinki's tourism brand. Already at this point, the number of Chinese overnight stays in

Helsinki has more than doubled within the past three years. The growing number of travelers and changing travel habits demand new ways from the city to cater for these needs.

Indeed, Helsinki and Finland are committed to being forerunners in developing services for Chinese travelers and aim to be a prime destination for the Chinese market.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I've talked a lot about digital services, but in the end, it's a matter of people and encounters. The World Tourism Cities Federation is an important platform for the cities to connect, change thoughts and experiences, and to learn from each other.

That is also why I and the whole Helsinki delegation is here; to learn from Qingdao and all other WTCF partners. Helsinki wants to take a new role on the global scene and actively participate in defining the future of business and way of life: tourism.