

**Balkonnect**  
FESTIVAL  
Business Without Borders **2026**

# AGENDA

**21-22 MAY 2026**

Piramida, Tirana

OPENING CEREMONY 10:00h - 11:15h

DAY 1

MAINSTAGE



## Opening of Balkonnect Festival 2026

### Overview

The Official Opening Ceremony launches the second edition of Balkonnect Festival and sets the strategic and thematic direction for the three days. The session positions Albania and the Western Balkans as a connected economic space, introduces the festival logic and outlines the key themes: tourism investment, green transition, digital economy and deal-making.

### Topics

- Welcome and introduction to Balkonnect Festival 2026
- Lessons from Balkonnect 2025 and evolution of the festival
- Albania and Tirana as host of the 2026 edition
- Overview of the program and objectives

“Investment Pathway: From Narrative - Deal - Follow-up”

NON-STOP SESSION 10:00h – 16:30h

DAY 1

B2B CUBE



# B2B Matchmaking Sessions

(Pre-Arranged 1:1 Meetings)

## Overview

The B2B Matchmaking is the festival's structured deal-making activity, running in parallel to the day's sessions. Companies and stakeholders create profiles on the B2Match platform, publish what they offer/seek and then request meetings based on mutual interests. The system auto-builds each participant's agenda, enabling efficient, time-boxed 1:1 meetings designed to spark concrete partnerships, cross-border collaboration and follow-up commercial discussions - leading to Business Partnership Agreements.

MORNING SESSION 11:30h – 12:30h

DAY 1

MAINSTAGE

## Tourism Investment in Albania & the Western Balkans (2026–2030)



### Overview

This mainstage session sets the strategic tone for Day 1 by addressing tourism as a core investment pillar for Albania and the Western Balkans. The discussion focuses on where capital is realistically flowing, what types of tourism projects are bankable and how destinations can position themselves competitively in the next investment cycle.

### Topics

- Tourism investment trends in Albania and the Western Balkans
- What makes tourism projects bankable
- Risk, seasonality and return expectations, what works and what doesn't?
- Strategic Investment Opportunity (Public-private) collaboration models
- From destination branding to investable products

# THEMATIC SESSIONS

BLOCK 1 13:30h – 14:15h

DAY 1

## THEMATIC CUBES

### Season Extension & Destination Management

This session explores how destinations can reduce seasonality and build year-round tourism demand through integrated destination management, events, niche tourism products and data-driven planning.

1 TOPICS

- Seasonality challenges and solutions
- Destination management governance
- Events, culture, heritage and niche tourism
- Data and digital tools in destination planning

### Hospitality Technology & Experience Design

This session examines how technology improves hospitality operations and guest experience, focusing on practical, already-adopted solutions rather than experimental concepts.

2 TOPICS

- Revenue management and pricing
- Guest experience personalization
- Automation and AI in hospitality operations
- Balancing efficiency and authenticity
- Digitalised services and customer care conceptualisation

BLOCK 2 14:30h - 15:15h

## THEMATIC CUBES

### Tourism, Real Estate & Infrastructure: What's Bankable

This session focuses on the intersection between tourism development, real estate and supporting infrastructure, highlighting investment structures that are realistic and financially viable.

1 TOPICS

- Tourism-driven real estate development
- Infrastructure needs and investment gaps
- Strategic Investment Opportunity (PP investment models)
- Risk allocation and long-term returns

### Cultural Heritage and Creative Economy as Tourism Infrastructure

This session highlights how culture, music, festivals, outreach, heritage, film and creative industries function as core tourism infrastructure and economic multipliers. Is there a Legacy-Identity?

2 TOPICS

- Cultural heritage diverse tourism offer
- Creative industries as destination drivers
- Festivals and events as economic assets
- Linking culture with tourism investment
- Sustainability of creative ecosystems

AFTERNOON SESSION 15:00h – 16:15h

DAY 1

MAINSTAGE



## World Business Angels Forum: Western Balkans Meetup

Investment Narratives & Angels

The Western Balkans as the Next Frontier for Angel & Smart Capital

### Overview

This flagship investment session reframes the Western Balkans from an overlooked region to a strategic near-EU growth zone with compelling fundamentals for angel investors and smart capital.

### Topics

- **Macro-to-Micro Reality**

Translating regional economic trends into specific, investable opportunities with clear entry points

- **The Angel Advantage**

Why angel capital is uniquely suited to Western Balkans ventures - flexibility, mentorship and strategic value-add

- **Albania as Entry Platform**

Why now, why the Western Balkans and specifically why Albania serves as the optimal gateway market

- **From Inspiration to Transaction**

Structured pathways from interest to investment - due diligence, deal structures and follow-up mechanisms

AFTERNOON SESSION 16:30h – 19:00h

**DAY 1**

**THEMATIC CUBES**

## **City & Public Sector Project Pitches**

### **From Concepts to Bankable Projects**

This session provides cities and public agencies with a structured platform to present mature or near-mature investment projects. The focus is on readiness, financing needs and clear implementation pathways rather than early-stage concepts.

## **Overview:**

### **1. Project Maturity Assessment**

Readiness levels, feasibility studies completed and regulatory approvals secured

### **2. Investment Requirements**

Total investment size, financing gaps and capital structure expectations

### **3. Partnership Models**

Public-private partnership structures, risk allocation and governance frameworks

### **4. Bankable Attractions**

Expected returns, revenue models and strategic value for investors

### **5. Implementation Timeline**

Realistic schedules, milestones and opportunities for synergy with other projects



EVENING SESSION 20:30h – 22:30h

DAY 1

TOP OF PIRAMIDA

## Networking Cocktail

(Invitation-Only)

### Overview

This curated, high-value networking environment closes Day 1 by bringing together investors, speakers, institutional leaders and selected founders in a relaxed setting where meaningful business relationships begin.

### Purpose & Format

- Curated seating to mix key players
- Informal networking over dinner & drinks
- Cultural live performance (non-distracting)
- Short welcome note (no long speeches)

### Why it Matters

- Trust is Built After Hours
- Business Deals Begin Here
- Content Shifts to Connection

Invitation-only. Quality over quantity. No randomness.



NON-STOP SESSION 10:00h – 19:30h

DAY 2

B2B CUBE



# B2B Matchmaking Sessions

(Pre-Arranged 1:1 Meetings)

## Overview

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MORNING SESSION 10:00h – 11:00h

DAY 2

MAINSTAGE



## Renewables & Green Growth Reality in the Western Balkans

### Overview

This session addresses the green transition from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on renewable energy deployment, grid readiness, permitting and financing structures that determine whether projects can be implemented at scale (EU-WB Growth Plan).

### Topics

- Renewable energy potential vs grid capacity
- Permitting and regulatory barriers
- Bankability and financing structures
- Role of FDIs and private capital
- Growth Plan strategy and innovation predictability

# THEMATIC SESSIONS

MORNING SESSION 11:15h – 12:00h

# DAY 2

## THEMATIC CUBES



### Green Buildings & Energy Efficiency

This session focuses on energy efficiency and green building solutions across private and public infrastructure, highlighting replicable models and financing mechanisms.

**1**  
TOPICS

- Energy-efficient building standards
- ESCO and performance-based models
- Financing retrofitting projects
- Strategic Investment/ Public and private case studies

### Circular Economy for SMEs

This session explores how SMEs can adopt circular economy models in commercially viable ways, moving from policy concepts to practical implementation.

**2**  
TOPICS

- Circular business models
- Waste-to-value solutions
- Market demand for circular products
- Barriers to scaling and competitiveness

# THEMATIC SESSIONS

MIDDAY SESSION 13:00h – 14:00h

# DAY 2

## THEMATIC CUBES



### Urban & Tourism Infrastructure Projects

Infrastructure investments that support urban development and tourism competitiveness

**1**  
TOPICS

- Urban regeneration and place-making strategies
- Tourism-supporting infrastructure (airports, roads, utilities)
- Financing models and operational sustainability

### Energy, Mobility & Circular Infrastructure

Integrated infrastructure investments for energy, transport and circular economy

**2**  
TOPICS

- Energy distribution and mobility systems integration
- Smart and sustainable transport solutions
- Circular infrastructure (waste management, resource recovery)
- Implementation challenges and financing structures

AFTERNOON SESSION 14:00h – 15:00h

DAY 2

MAINSTAGE



## Trust in Digital Finance & the Digital Economy

### Overview

This session focuses on trust as the foundation of the digital economy, examining how digital identity, cybersecurity, compliance, trusted digital services enable secure financial transactions and cross-border digital business.

### Topics

- **Digital Identity and Trust Services**

eID systems, digital signatures and cross-border authentication

- **Cybersecurity and Fraud Prevention**

Threat landscape, protective technologies and incident response

- **Regulatory Compliance Frameworks**

GDPR, PSD2 and emerging digital finance regulations

- **Building Trust in Digital Transactions**

Consumer protection, dispute resolution and transparency mechanisms

# THEMATIC SESSIONS

AFTERNOON SESSION 15:00h – 16:00h

# DAY 2

## THEMATIC CUBES



### Fintech & Open Banking in SEE

This session examines the current state of fintech and open banking in Southeast Europe, focusing on realistic use cases, regulatory frameworks and collaboration models.



- Open banking frameworks and APIs
- Ban-fintech collaboration
- Regulatory constraints and opportunities
- Financial inclusion and innovation

### SaaS & Digital Export from the Western Balkans

This session explores the Western Balkans as an export hub for software and digital services, focusing on scaling strategies, compliance and international market access.



- International scaling strategies
- Go-to-market and pricing models
- Compliance and data protection
- Talent and operational challenges

AFTERNOON SESSION 16:00h – 19:30h

**DAY 2**

**THEMATIC CUBES**



## **Investor & Scale-up Readiness Masterclasses**

### **Investors' Masterclass**

Due diligence frameworks,  
portfolio construction strategies  
and Western Balkans-specific  
investment approaches

**Led by**  
**World Business Angels Forum**  
(16:00-17:30)

### **e-Wallet Masterclass**

Mobile payment systems,  
user experience design,  
regulatory requirements and  
digital wallet deployment strategies

**Led by**  
**Evrotrust Technologies**  
(17:30-18:30)

### **e-Banking Masterclass**

Modern banking system  
architecture, API integration,  
security protocols and  
technical foundations  
of open banking

**Programming &  
Banking Architecture**  
(18:30-19:30)

EVENING SESSION 18:00h – 19:30h

DAY 2

MAINSTAGE



## Startup & SME Pitching

### Investment-Ready Businesses from the Western Balkans

This mainstage session provides startups and growth-oriented SMEs with a structured platform to present their businesses to investors, corporate partners and financial institutions. The focus is on scalability, demonstrated traction and clear investment readiness.

## Pitching Criteria & Focus Areas:

### 1. Scalable Business Models

Clear path to 10x growth, not lifestyle businesses

### 2. Revenue and Growth Strategies

Proven unit economics and customer acquisition

### 3. Investment Structure

Funding needs, use of capital and exit potential

### 4. Strategic Partnerships

Expansion plans and market entry strategies

### 5. Execution Capacity

Team strength and governance structures

CLOSING SESSION 20:00h – 21:00h

MAINSTAGE

DAY 2



## Balkonnect Festival Awards and Closing Session

Changemakers Innovation Awards

Closing Ceremony & Next Host Announcement

### Overview

The Closing Session celebrates standout achievements from the festival, summarizes key outcomes, outlines follow-up actions and officially announces the 2027 host city. This reinforces Balkonnect's identity as a rotating, regional deal-making platform rather than a fixed event.

- **Festival Highlights**

Summary of key insights, announced deals and partnership commitments from the two-day program

- **Changemaker Awards**

Recognition of startups, investors and public sector leaders demonstrating exceptional innovation and impact

- **Follow-Up Framework**

Investment and project follow-up pathways to ensure momentum continues after the festival

- **2027 Host City Reveal**

Official announcement of Balkonnect 2027 location, signaling the festival's regional rotation model

## Final Message



**Balkonnect 2026** is not bigger by accident  
It is **sharper by design**.

### **Built on Real Lessons**

Every element reflects learnings from Balkonnect 2025—what worked, what didn't and how to scale intelligently

### **Adapted to Piramida**

The program architecture fits Piramida Tirana's unique venue characteristics and capacity constraints

### **Focused on Deals, Projects, and Credibility**

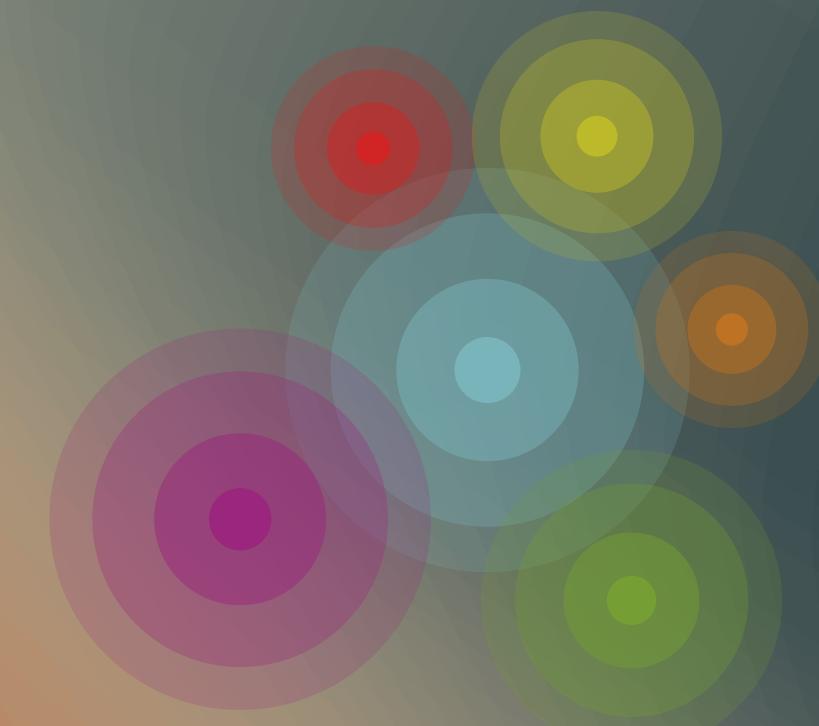
Not just conversations—structured pathways from dialogue to transactions, with follow-up mechanisms that work

### **Ready to Scale to Future Host Cities**

The model is replicable, adaptable and designed to strengthen with each iteration across the Western Balkans

Balkonnect Festival Tirana 2026

represents the maturation of a regional platform - professionally designed, investor-focused and built for sustainable growth.



# Balkonnect FESTIVAL Business Without Borders **2026**