

Headquarters

MAY 2022 #104 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

Sola Power Europe

Making solar the lead energy source in Europe

Social Economy Europe

Building a more diversified economy for society and the planet

A conversation with Vincent Walsh

Creating resilient, hyper-localised and regenerative events

Gothenburg

Targeting climate neutral events

Meetings Africa 2022 (cover story)

A gateway to African business events



THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE



*SUSTAINABLE EVENTS FOR
CONSCIOUS ASSOCIATIONS*



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ARE THE SAME, RIGHT?**

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CONVERSATION**

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THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE

BUILDING BRIDGES
IN THE MEETINGS
INDUSTRY

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65€ in Belgium
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95€ in the rest of the world



SolarPower EU
How Can the Sun
Power our Energy
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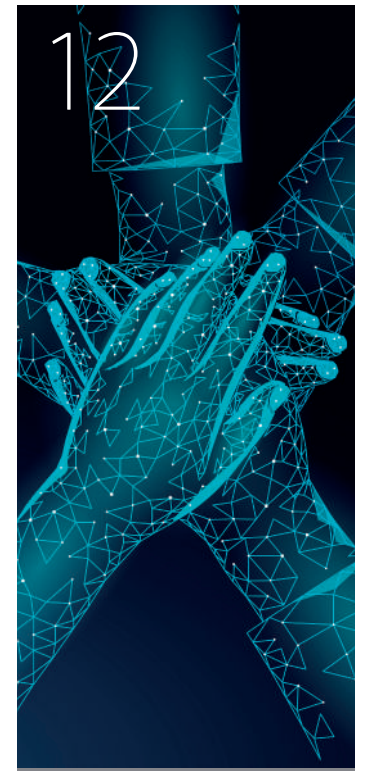
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Leading a New Sustainable
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Leading an Inclusive
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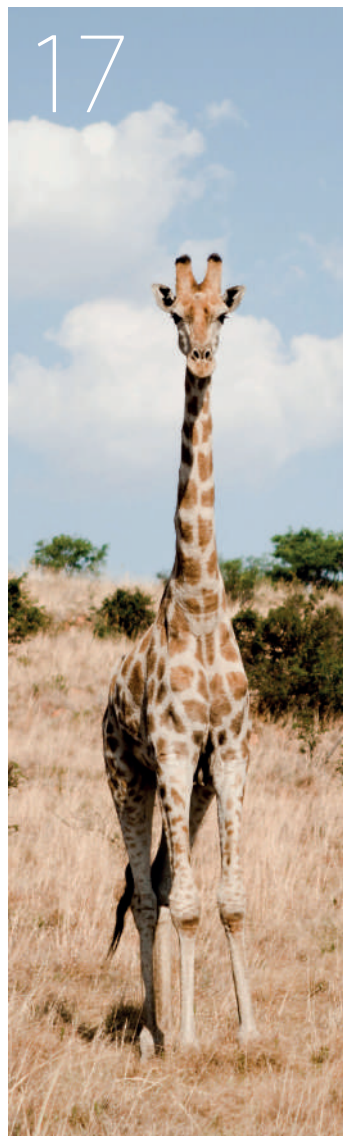
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Editor's Letter



EARTH DAY MUST BECOME EARTH YEAR

AUTHOR: MARCEL A.M. VISSERS, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Last year around the same time I invited the global meetings industry to pay more attention to the celebration of our planet. What does that mean?

Who invented the name “Earth”? Nobody knows exactly. We do know why the Earth is round. However, what is happening to Earth right now is something that few people care about. This year on Earth Day (every year April 22nd), I was chatting with a nature lover about the state of nature on Earth. He was telling me that nature will save us from all evil things in the world. Food, health, healing, fitness, agriculture, etc. must become one big chain in our daily life. He was also arguing that one day’s celebration is not enough to save our beloved planet. Year after year we have to give full attention to our daily activities in the surroundings of air, land and water. But starting with a day is already a perfect start.

Have you ever wondered how Earth Day started? The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, when San Francisco activist, John McConnell, and Wisconsin Senator, Gaylord Nelson, separately asked Americans to participate in a grassroots demonstration. Dealing with dangerously serious issues related to toxic drinking water, air pollution and the effects of pesticides, a staggering 20 million Americans – 10% of the population – ventured outdoors and protested together. President Richard Nixon led the nation in creating the Environmental Protection Agency, which followed up with successful laws including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. McConnell had originally chosen the spring equinox (March 20, 1970), but Nelson chose April 22, which eventually became the official date for the celebration.

Today, Earth Day is not only a day meant to raise awareness of environmental issues, it is also becoming a popular time for many communities to gather together to clean up trash, plant trees or simply reflect on the beauty of nature. We also now know that the Meeting Industry is a major polluter on Earth and we definitely need to do more about it in the future. Over the past few years, I have often thought that sustainability was a hackneyed concept, but after reading more about Earth Day, I realised that we are just at the beginning of a battle with the Earth.

This *HQ #104* brings us several concrete examples of environmental action, interviews with experts and initiatives carried out by destinations at the top of this agenda. How to articulate destination marketing with sustainable features applied by hotels, convention centres or restaurants? How to integrate environmental concepts in associations and how to convince members that profit and sustainability can go hand in hand? How can industry leaders and political authorities support and strengthen services and products that promote, vis-à-vis, the ecology and sustainable development of their cities? See the answer to these and more questions on the following pages.

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“By 2030, we could reach the ‘terawatt’ level of EU Solar and free Europe from Russian gas”

SolarPower Europe is the legitimate link in the dialogue between policy makers and the solar PV value chain, representing 260 organisations across the sector. Its mission is to ensure that solar becomes Europe’s leading energy source by 2030, and lead this transition towards a smart, sustainable and secure network. We spoke to CEO **Walburga Hemetsberger** (pictured below) and head of events & marketing **Charlotte Otten** (pictured above), about how the sun can power our energy consumption, lower our electricity bills, and provide a reliable and secure source of endless energy.



As a member-led association representing several national organisations, how have you overcome these difficulties and dealt with the “new normal”?

Walburga Hemetsberger: During the pandemic, we launched the “Shine On” digital series, featuring podcasts, webinars and executive interviews with EU policymakers. We also hosted several events online, from **SolarPower Summit**, **Solar Quality** to **RE-Source**. The pandemic has taught us many lessons: working remotely can be highly effective, underlining the importance of our creativity, mental and physical well-being.

Furthermore, the SolarPower team became “MS Team” and “Zoom” experts in record time, since these platforms are an integral part of the way we work today.

The solar market was impacted by the pandemic, mostly in terms of supply chain disruptions. Despite COVID-19, solar has continued to grow, demonstrating its resilience and reliability. In 2021, the EU has seen an estimated 25.9 GW of new solar photovoltaics (PV) capacity connected to the grid, an increase of 34% over the 19.3 GW installed

in 2020. In order not to forget the lessons of the pandemic we will have to go back to building greener and installing solar power faster than ever before.

Can you please introduce us to the SolarPower Europe’s Sustainability Task Force?

WH: Our Sustainability work stream attempts to influence EU legislation related to solar PV sustainability, and highlight the best performance of solar sustainability to policy makers and the broader public. This workstream is particularly active on Ecodesign and Energy Label policy proposals for solar PV products, with the purpose of ensuring the implementation of strong and future-proof measures for the EU solar sector. In 2021, the workstream published the “**Solar Sustainability Best Practices Benchmark**”, focusing on case studies and best practices along the solar value chain. The report aims to guide and accompany solar companies in demonstrating thought leadership in sustainability. The Sustainability workstream consists of over 50 members and is chaired by **Matthew Merfert** of **First Solar**.



How challenging was the organisation of the SolarPower Summit in this post-pandemic period?

Charlotte Otten: Although the pandemic is still very much present in Belgium, we had more clarity this year about the rules and regulations that we had to follow. Nevertheless, a few weeks before the event, there were still many regulations in place that prevented us from organising the event exactly as we had planned. For instance, there was a maximum capacity restriction of 200 attendees, COVID safe ticket scans, and tight rules on food service. We were fortunate that the Belgian government had lifted all these measures shortly before the summit took place on 31 March. While the organisation remained a challenge, we learned to be more flexible with last minute changes and always prepare alternative plans. On the attendee side, we saw a strong willingness from our members and stakeholders to travel and attend the event in person, recording a higher attendance than any previous edition of the SolarPower Summit.

Considering that several countries are at different paces of implementation and many of them are still clinging to their own fossil resources, how can solar energy stir up a carbon-neutral economy in Europe?

WH: Solar is today the most low-cost and easily deployed clean energy technology, and can be installed almost anywhere. It is also Europe's fastest growing energy technology, even if it is only at the beginning of harvesting solar's enormous potential and benefits in Europe. Today, more than 90% of roofs in Europe go unused when they could help mitigate climate change by having solar panels on them. It is assumed that deploying solar on all suitable roofs in the EU could meet around 25% of the EU's annual electricity consumption.

With solar energy we can accelerate the energy transition, champion sustainable growth and innovation, create new green jobs and help deliver a climate neutral Europe before 2050. The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** has warned us that we are entering a code red for humanity: 2°C of warming will be

“*Today, more than 90% of roofs in Europe go unused when they could help mitigate climate change by having solar panels on them. It is assumed that deploying solar on all suitable roofs in the EU could meet around 25% of the EU's annual electricity consumption.*”

exceeded this century unless we make deep reductions in GHG emissions. Solar energy is poised to help tackle the climate crisis, but we still need to ensure there are no barriers to our technology's growth by making licensing procedures easier.

Could the war in Ukraine be another step towards clean and sustainable energies over fossil fuels?

WH: The Russian war in Ukraine has reshuffled the deck, and highlighted the EU's need for energy security and independence. SolarPower Europe condemns this Russian war, and is working with the Solar Energy Association of Ukraine to support the nation's power infrastructure needs. With the right support, solar is ready to step up and help the continent move away from Russian gas. In the short term, we can deliver 39 GW of additional EU solar power this year – 13 more than last year. By 2030 we could reach the “terawatt” level of EU solar – over 1000 GW total capacity – and free Europe from Russian gas almost entirely.

What is crucial is to fast-track European solar PV manufacturing to head demand and ensure our energy independence. SolarPower Europe has launched the **European Solar Initiative**, an industrial alliance for solar with its partner **EIT InnoEnergy**, that aims to achieve at least 20 GW of annual production capacity by 2025.

What kind of campaigns SolarPower Europe is working on at the moment?

CO: SolarPower Europe in partnership with ten other renewable energy and city associations, with the endorsement of scientists from the IPCC and leading universities, has launched a campaign calling for the EU to endorse a minimum 45% renewable energy target by 2030. A higher renewable energy target is necessary to meet our Paris Agreement commitments and to increase our energy independence. SolarPower Europe has also launched **#SolarWorks**, a campaign to highlight the diverse job opportunities in the European solar sector. In a 5-part video series, we speak with solar workers in the fastest growing European markets about their motivation and advice for starting a career in the industry. Along those lines, together with “Grow with Google”, we created a website featuring training programmes to get started in solar.



**SolarPower
Europe**

The **Global Mobility Call**, the flagship project of **IFEMA MADRID** and **Smobhub**, will be held on 14-16 June in Madrid, sponsored by the **Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda**. At a key moment in which a major transformation is needed for economic and social recovery after the pandemic, the event will bring together more than 7,000 international leaders from their respective sectors to promote sustainable mobility policies and initiatives with an interest in attracting new investment and cutting-edge projects.

Global Mobility Call 2022:

Leading a New Sustainable Mobility Ecosystem



The congress aims to become the ultimate benchmark for sustainable mobility, contributing to post-pandemic economic and social recovery and building much-needed energy resilience in the face of international shocks. As they refer, “Global Mobility Call is not an event, it is a movement.” To find out more about this movement we went to speak to **IFEMA Mobility** and congress director **David Moneo** about their focal strategy.

The congress comes at a perfect timing to discuss the post-pandemic recovery plans between new sustainable mobility options and a new era of positive impacts on society, environment and economy. Was this context a game changer for holding this congress?

Global Mobility Call comes at a critical time. Following the triple economic, social and health crisis, institutions and companies are developing post-pandemic recovery plans. As part of this, Europe is seizing the opportunity to redefine the role of sustainable mobility to generate social, economic and environmental benefits.

The congress also arises from the need for shared leadership that can bring together a broad ecosystem such as sustainable mobility, which is one of the key concepts in today’s society – one capable of transforming the lives of millions of people. This is an opportune moment for changes in mobility. The industry is transforming, and society is demanding new ways of moving. We still have time to create innovative and ambitious projects that can take advantage of the EU Recovery Funds to foster public and private partnerships and aspire to connect all stakeholders and sectors of this vast ecosystem.

We also noticed that this Global Mobility Call will have strong governmental support from the Spanish authorities to promote sustainable mobility in the country. How deeply is Spain involved in these future strategies for the coming years?

The public sector is responsible for managing mobility policies. We believe that its leadership will be essential in this process to achieve the development this is needed in the way we are proposing. But it must do so in close partnership with the private sector, as it is private sector activity that directly or indirectly impacts on the progress of mobility.

We have made some progress in Spain, but there is still a long way to go. We have public policy strategies in place, aligned with the European Union context, which are a fundamental long-term framework. Spain’s industry is doing important development work in the automotive, energy, infrastructure, logistics, transportation, technology and other sectors. That is why we are providing Global Mobility Call with an ongoing enabling tool through the LiveConnect online platform to provide long-term continuity for all the congress outcomes.



“ *The congress also arises from the need for shared leadership that can bring together a broad ecosystem such as sustainable mobility, which is one of the key concepts in today’s society – one capable of transforming the lives of millions of people.* ”

Is it impossible today to talk about urban sustainability without the contribution of technology?

Yes, it is. Technological development is involved in all the sectors that make up the mobility ecosystem. It is ubiquitous and plays a leading role in most of the solutions being developed to enable more sustainable, inclusive and safe mobility. Therefore, technological development is an inseparable part of the process.

The Global Mobility Call congress will feature influential speakers from across the industry, and one of its five main themes will be **Tech, Data & Innovation**, which will address new technologies in infrastructure, data, automation and new services in mobility.

How can the meetings industry shape itself in this new circular economy with so many factors at play?

We are an industry that works with all the other sectors, and like many of them, we have unfulfilled social responsibility commitments, especially sustainability. Trade fair institutions can do a lot to promote the circular economy in aspects like energy saving, water saving, waste treatment, resource optimisation and other actions. Digitalisation and technological development are also crucial to all this.

IFEMA’s role goes far beyond being the physical venue of the event, since – together with Smobhub

– we are also the organisers and coordinate many of its public and private sponsors. In this respect, as a trade fair institution, we also have a commitment to understanding, public discussion and broad participation in the transformation of mobility, which is another way of adapting to these changes to promote sustainability.

How is IFEMA adapting to the landscape around it and to the new sustainable demands claimed by associations, meeting planners and congress organisers?

When we talk about facing climate change and all the environmental challenges, as a trade fair institution, we have to be part of the global effort to overcome these challenges. In fact, IFEMA MADRID has had a sustainability policy for several years and is committed to energy efficiency and the environment, which is manifested at each of the fairs at our premises.

The institution’s Sustainability Report sets our efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions in recent years. The Madrid Exhibition Centre also hosted COP25, which was declared a sustainable summit and many other events in recent years. Sustainability is something that we always keep in mind as a trade fair institution.

“No **growth** is worthwhile unless it is **underpinned by sustainability**”



Social Economy Europe (SEE) is the voice of 2.8 million Social Economy enterprises and organisations in Europe and was established in 2000 to represent the collective interests of cooperatives, mutuals, associations and charities, foundations and social enterprises, among other legal and organisational forms. Since its creation, SEE is also the secretariat of the European Parliament’s Social Economy Intergroup. We spoke to **Victor Meseguer**, the organisation’s director, about what social democracy really means today.

First of all, please tell us more about the vision of your organisation and how your membership contributes to your goals?

The social economy is a diverse universe of organisations and enterprises of all sizes, ranging from SMEs to large transnational corporations. According to the latest data in the EU there are 2.8 million social economy enterprises and organisations, employing 13.6 million people – 6.3% of the EU’s workforce – and accounting for 8% of the GDP. All these organisations share common values and characteristics as the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users or society at large, and democratic/participatory governance.

Therefore, our vision is building a more diverse economy that works for people and the planet, and a more favourable ecosystem for the further development of social economy entrepreneurship across the EU and beyond. In this sense, last December, the Commission presented its **Social Economy Action Plan**, an ambitious public policy for which we have been collectively advocating since 2014. Thanks to our members, we are able to bring the national dimension to our European work. Working with our members enables us to collect experiences from the ground so as to inform and influence policy making at the European level.

What are the key points on which you want to base an inclusive green and digital transition in Europe?

SEE’s response to the European Commission’s consultation on Scenarios for co-creating transition

pathways to a resilient, sustainable and digitally mastered ecosystem is the result of collective work with our members. Social economy has the potential to lead a fair and inclusive green and digital transition in Europe and, in this regard, SEE can play a pivotal role. We have social economy innovators and entrepreneurs, the participation, the commitment from the main EU institutions, and last but not least the citizens, all ready to take the future into their own hands and become enablers of change. We see it in every economic sector.

SEE has the capacity to mobilise stakeholders “on the ground” and create shared value, especially at the local level. Another key SEE priority is to build alliances for upskilling social economy entrepreneurs while building alliances to increase access to finance for ‘green’ projects. One of our main objectives is to see an increase from 6.3% to at least 10% of all jobs by 2030.

How connected is your work and the outlining of your goals in sustainable development and climate action?

SEE and its members are aligned with sustainable development – it’s in our DNA. No growth is worthwhile unless it is underpinned by sustainability. For instance, in the paper ‘**For a Sustainable Europe by 2030**’, the European Commission states that the social economy is a driver for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of our main objectives is to create an ecosystem for the social economy in Europe from sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Another example, the social economy pays great attention to the inclusion of vulnerable people, especially people with disabilities. Among the social economy entities, in fact, there are

Working Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), that are especially focused on giving access to disadvantaged people to employment.

Social economy entities given their intrinsic features and purposes can play a key role in the achievement of the SDGs, as they already have proved combining the creation of jobs with responsible social and environmental practices. We are persuaded that it is possible to adopt an alternative way of doing business, putting people first, reducing inequalities, working for cohesion, promoting inclusion and reinvesting profits for social or environmental purposes, yet being solid and successful companies.

In your opinion, was the COVID-19 pandemic the spark that triggered a cross-cutting revolution at the base of our society or did it just follow the normal course of things?

COVID-19 has changed a lot of things, actually. We are now, more than two years ago, aware of the importance of healthcare, and absolutely immersed in digitalisation. In addition, it is necessary to mention the loss of jobs and the closure of companies during those two years. We knew that the social economy was a resilient model, an economy that goes forward serving people and the planet, but now it's clearer than ever.

It may sound confusing, but the pandemic was a great opportunity to reaffirm the potential of the social economy. There are numerous examples of enterprises

that have kept jobs and created new ones, bailing out companies that were about to go out of business, and turning them into social economy. More interestingly, some social start-ups were created to respond to the resulting social challenges. A strong reason why I think COVID-19 has empowered our socio-economic model and is now clearly the future standard for Europe's recovery.

Do you think this war in Ukraine could escalate into a new dichotomy between democracy vs autocracy?

This is exactly an attack on democracy, and democracy will prevail. The social economy is a project of peace, solidarity and cooperation and indeed has democracy at its core. A movement arising from a free civil society in order to provide collective solutions to social issues. There is no room for autocracy and violation of social rights.

However, even in this tragic context, the potential of the Social Economy is crucial. We have been in contact with the **Ukrainian Social Academy**, with which SEE has been collaborating for many years and many entrepreneurs and organisations are committed to providing help and assistance to those in need and to responding to the current issue of internally displaced people – they will be the key actors in the rebuilding of Ukraine. Unequivocally, we call for peace, and advocate for freedom, democracy and cooperation.

What's up your sleeve as 2022's headline event?

"The main event for the EU Social Economy family in 2022 is about to come and will be the Strasbourg Conference titled "Social Economy, the future of Europe". This conference, organised by the French Presidency of the Council of the EU will be a great opportunity to debate and exchange views among decision-makers and social economy stakeholders concerning the role that social economy can play for the future of Europe. In the agenda there are over twenty plenaries, workshops and conferences on entrepreneurship, public policies, innovation, cooperation, inclusion, funding, solutions for the Future and so many more. For two days during the conference, all social economy actors and institutions will share points of view and tools to push the social economy forward for a better Europe for us all."

“Words like '**resilience**', '**circular**', '**regeneration**' are not ideologies but critical design approaches”



For many people today, recycling is downcycling, and the way we design products greatly dictates much of their changing process. Regeneration is a key design feature of the biosphere, as planet earth has always operated on an upcycling basis. **Vincent Walsh** is the **Founder and CEO of RegenfarmCo**, a regenerative agriculture platform, **Mycoloops**, circular mushroom company and **Herblabism**, a plant-based food company. Focused on turning coffee grounds into mushrooms, he designs agro-forestry models and supplies conferences with plant-based and sustainable food. We spoke to him about innovative models in F&B management for the MICE industry.

How do you integrate regenerative and circularity elements in your projects?

All my work is interconnected by regenerative and circular food infrastructures. Regenerative is all about what happens at the very beginning of the farm: How do you create farming systems that put more carbon in the soil, increase site biodiversity and enable better water infrastructure, etc.? In order to get more sustainable, adaptable and greener systems. Driving innovation at the beginning of the supply chain in particular in food and agriculture is critical, the more innovation at this point supports further innovation opportunities throughout the supply chain. Enhancing the value of organic food by minimising any waste. The circularity part is what happens to the food when it leaves the farm. When investing in your agricultural infrastructure, the first thing you'll want to do is make sure that by having a farm surplus, you can retain that food in the most sustainable way. To be used in processes such as fermentation and dehydration. Circularity is also what happens at the end of a supply chain, allowing for more innovation on waste – upcycling rather than downcycling or recycling. Products like coffee waste can be turned into mushrooms, or even use that waste as compost. We need a whole range of different ways of looking at our infrastructure.

How can we initiate such a process with association meetings in the events industry?

There will always be an opportunity to act more locally within each event. What we're trying to do in the UK is hyper localise everything – identify the venue roadmap and then link them to surrounding land and farms in order to create new supply platforms. A biological network of integrated farms, developing open logistics for various events and connecting them to various food sources. I think design is a really important discussion to have, feeding into different approaches to include planning as a key part of strategies. Creating a resilient, hyper-localised and regenerative event requires considerable planning. Obviously, F&B is a highly important part of it. In a recent survey, over 60% of delegates and conference organisers said that F&B was the most important aspect of an event. I also think infrastructure is an interesting part. For example, at Fira Barcelona, all those materials such as plastic and carbon booths and stands could be looked at continuously for new purposes, turning their process within the venue into a bottom-up cycle. Every tradeshow needs a dedicated sustainability team working with all the traders to better manage the resources that come through the doors, and make sure they are hyper-localised. These are the standards we expect from convention centres when they host our shows.

Is sustaining what we have enough for you? Should we take a step forward in terms of regeneration?

We really need to start changing our vocabulary and adjust our claims and strategic plans. Get some substance in our

“

I think design is a really important discussion to have, feeding into different approaches to include planning as a key part of strategies. Creating a resilient, hyper-localised and regenerative event requires considerable planning. Obviously, F&B is a highly important part of it. In a recent survey, over 60% of delegates and conference organisers said that F&B was the most important aspect of an event.

actions and stop the greenwashing of the conversation. Since the concept, sustainable development, was created and put into practice around the 1987, what have we sustained? You only have to look at the last IPCC report to realise that we have sustained nothing. I think that's the difference between words like “resilience”, “circular”, “regenerative” – these are not ideologies, they are design systems. To create a resilient forest system, you need density and diversity, otherwise you get a monoculture. The idea of regenerative design is not a new concept, but there are key methods for creating a more robust system. There are key design features that you need to develop to enable circularity – where you don't get that in sustainability because it's an empty word. It's a kind of ideology that proclaims the sustainability of things, but if you don't have a design methodology that allows an ecosystem to sustain itself, it becomes a numbing word.

Can technology and new forms of innovation make a push?

If you think about the architecture of a city, you might argue that it is an extension of your mind. We create cities. And what do cities give us? First and foremost, a shelter. A denser, more diverse environment in which we live and thrive. The same for any group of species: a termite mound is an extension of a termite's mind; a beehive is an extension of a bee's mind; a nest is an extension of a bird's mind. And they all provide the same thing that cities provide us: a refuge. So, I always see a city as a technology, even though we haven't really created the idea of technology. In a sense, the big bang is a form of super-expanded technology. This is what is happening in human societies – the very idea of coexisting with technology. The cities we are building today, 100 years from now, will be completely rudimentary. Today you can see from our old cities the marked differences with

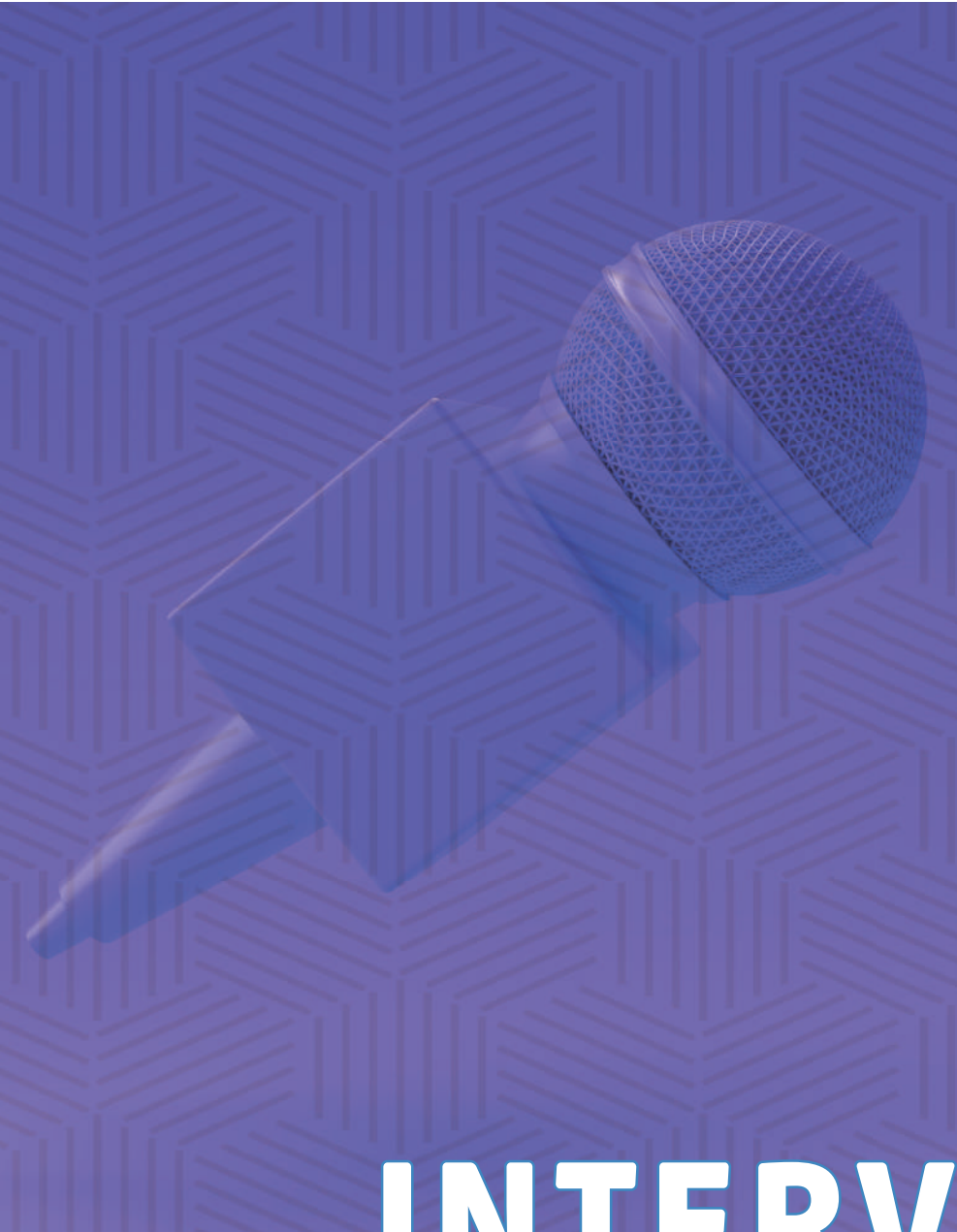
the new Asian and Middle Eastern cities. And they will all have brilliant and radical ways to cut carbon emissions and integrate clean energy because they are imagining themselves from the scratch.

Do you think that the next international wars and conflicts could be driven by food crises and inflation in the prices of essential goods?

We can feel it already here; the UK is highly dependent on Europe for food. There is an imbalance in import/export rates, and the world is beginning to realise that our resources are dwindling within our food systems. In times of war, if your domestic market is heavily dependent on countries outside your diplomatic domain there could be problems. In the UK, fertiliser prices are already on the rise because most of the nitrogen we use in our farming systems comes from Ukraine. How can we reduce this dependency? The reason we use a lot of nitrogen, phosphates, pesticides, is because of the way we farm our land using monocultures. The first thing to do is to look at creating better ecosystems that produce our food. To put an end to this situation, we need to create more biodiverse and self-regenerating ecosystems. In several countries in Europe today we can see thousands of hectares of agricultural land abandoned or not properly used. At the same time, we are giving subsidies to farmers to keep these fields as they are, and importing food that we could probably grow ourselves here. Every country needs to maximise its agricultural infrastructure so it can put more carbon in the soil, increase biodiversity and create food adapted to our climate. Europe as a whole needs to produce more food on our own doorstep.

To find out more about Dr Walsh's work visit www.drvincentwalsh.com

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INTERVIEW & REPORT



South Africa: Restoring the Bridge to be Better Together

After a gap of almost 2 years, the business events industry has finally come face to face again in the magical destination of South Africa, where **Meetings Africa 2022** was successfully hosted in early March this year. *HQ* was invited to witness the re-opening of this premium MICE trade show in the vibrant city of Johannesburg.

AUTHOR: VIVIAN XU, HQ MANAGING DIRECTOR

Meetings Africa 2022

The 16th edition of Meetings Africa hosted by **South Africa National Convention Bureau** (SANCB) aimed to boost and advance the economic development of the African continent in the post-COVID time, by creating a platform for physical meetings and embracing the challenges as well as opportunities. The 2-day's exhibition, brought together 14 exhibitors and 216 buyers representing 40 countries under one roof. The show floor blossomed with laughter, joys and touching moments – the long-awaited in-person connection was finally realised.

“Opening trade corridors across the continent should also open pathways for intra-African tourism to thrive, and vice versa. It is us – the African business events sector – who have to be intentional and strategic to ensure we leverage this mutual benefit between trade and tourism,” said **Tourism Minister of South Africa, Lindiwe Sisulu**, at the trade floor opening. “Meetings Africa will play a role in our industry's recovery mainly by focusing on regional buyers to align with South Africa's Tourism Industry Recovery Plan, which focuses on domestic and regional recovery first. It will also look at reintroducing international buyers to Africa as the COVID travel restrictions are eased,” added **Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo**, SANCB's **Chief Convention Bureau Officer**.

Meetings Africa is also acting as a gateway and a stage to share and unite the business events industry in Africa. In Particular, the bidding process for international association congress can be a tool that will encourage collaborative efforts among African countries. “It is a collaborative effort to bid for these international events. With our culture of sharing, Africa as a continent has the capacity and opportunity to rotate the meetings between different countries. We can help build this knowledge economy on the continent,” Kotze-Nhlapo concluded.

Meanwhile, SANCB celebrated its 10-year anniversary at the show floor. Over the past 10 years, SANCB has successfully built an international image and reputation of South Africa in the MICE industry. Moreover, it has also achieved and contributed a great deal to the country's economy by hosting some of the biggest conferences that have brought billions of rands to the South African economy. In this spirit, of the 66 bids for international events submitted for the period 2022-2027, the SANCB team has won 20 so far. These have secured an estimated contribution of R269 million approximately to the national economy between 2022 and 2027, and will attract 8,775 international and regional delegates.

It is all about sustainability!

Since 2017, SANCB has been in collaboration with the **Event Greening Forum (EGF)** – a non-profit organisation that has invested in sustainability in the MICE industry, by launching an innovative green gifting system at Meetings Africa, called the **Sustainability Village**. Instead of corporate gifts, SANCB offers visitors a **gift voucher system** during events, which grants delegates freedom to choose from a wide variety of local and authentic souvenirs, rather than being given uninterested gifts. The concept of Sustainability Village not only ensured delegates’ appreciation, but also uplifted and supported the local small businesses. In the meantime, the beauty and culture of South Africa was also represented and promoted to the world. “It is an indelible feature of Meetings Africa that epitomises the beauty of home-grown arts and crafts. I am delighted to see it being emulated at numerous national and provincial events. It is a true beacon of our national pride,” Kotze-Nhlapo shared. Lately, Sustainability Village’s online shop is open to the world, and it is featured virtually at **Expo Dubai 2020**. Visit rsamade.co.za to know more!

At Meetings Africa 2022, sustainable actions were implemented throughout the show floor. LED lights were used for the eco-friendly lighting and most of the booth structures were built with recycled materials from previous shows, as well as the furniture. Due to the COVID hygienic restrictions, shared-water dispensers were not allowed to be used during any events, which encouraged sustainable transformation such as full use of bottled-water glasses. However, it also created challenges for sustainable practices such as more waste in plastic packaging to protect food from airborne virus transmission, etc.

Congress in the jungle

Skukuza, is the administrative headquarter and the “Capital city” of the **Kruger National Park**, located in **Mpumalanga** province. A part of the national park is designated by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve. It is directly connected to **Johannesburg O.R Tambo airport** by an-hour flight. From mid-November this year, **Eurowings Discover**, part of German-based Lufthansa Group, will extend its African network with three flights per week to **Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport** near Mbombela via Frankfurt Airport. This will provide congress attendees with easy access to this magical destination, where nearly 2 million hectares of unrivalled diversity of life forms merge with historical and archaeological sites.

The **Nombolo Mdhului Conference Centre** sits in the heart of **Skukuza Rest Camp**, and offers congress planners a unique opportunity for an authentic conference atmosphere. It can cater up to 500 delegates in banquet style. A 5-minute walk from the conference centre is the newly-built **Skukuza Safari Lodge** (pictured below). Enjoying a perfect balance of luxurious comforts and wildlife style, the lodge consisting of 128 units is the ultimate choice for a bush-escape experience.

Another exclusive choice for small groups is **Kruger Shalati Hotel** (pictured right up) – The Train on the Bridge. Situated above the **Sabie River**, this iconic hotel guarantees the most anticipated and thrilling experience for guests – the most unique and splendid accommodation on a glass-walled train reassembled on the bridge. With 31 rooms decorated with local arts and crafts, Shalati is ready to take its guests on an unforgettable journey.

For a larger group of delegates, **Protea Hotel Kruger Gate** will be an excellent option. A 4-star lodge-style hotel set in a tranquil riverine woodland of immense African trees. Apart from a wide range of elegant and refined accommodation from standard to large guest rooms, and from exclusive to presidential suites, Protea Hotel also offers attractive conference facilities, including an ideal venue for outdoor ceremonies up to 150 people.

Voco Johannesburg Rosebank

Opened last February, **Voco Johannesburg Rosebank** is the perfect mix of sophistication and art. From its cutting-edge interior design to the attentive staff, the hotel has brought the quality of service to the next level. Moreover, the hotel possesses 131 guest rooms and the **Workshop17**, a 12,000 square foot meeting space that is open to business travellers. **Proud Mary** (pictured right down), its all-day restaurant and wine-bar, offers a petite yet selective menu. With the vibrant atmosphere, a delicious meal accommodated with a glass of *Pinot*

Noir, la vie est belle!





HQ Recommendations

Kruger National Park Bush Braais

Contact: Skukuza Safari Lodge

Tel: +27 13 329 9000

Nombolo Mdlhuli Conference Centre:

Tel: +27 13 735 4332

Private transfer and guided adventure

Company: Sable Tours & Transfers

Tour guide: Duane Botha

Hot Air Balloon Ride

Company: Hot Air Balloon SA

Captain: Vicent Cook

Tel: +27 11 802 4318



“We must seize the **opportunity** to **rebuild** better and **reorient** our economy”

During HQ’s visit at Meetings Africa, we couldn’t miss the opportunity to speak to the local convention bureau in order to set the record straight on the Johannesburg meetings and events scene. Joburg is a key city in both South Africa’s positioning in the meetings industry and the overall performance of the African continent within the MICE business sphere. We spoke to **Rendani Khorommbi** (*pictured below*), **deputy director of Johannesburg Convention Bureau** about the pandemic, the present and the future.

What were the impacts and costs that the pandemic brought to your destination? How did you manage to stay active in the sector?

The impact of the pandemic on us all has been immense. From Johannesburg’s perspective alone, prior to its takeover, our city had recorded just over 4.2 million visitors, while achieving 6th place in the index of the top 10 city-destinations in the Middle East and Africa, according to **Euromonitor International 2019**. In the aforementioned ranking, the city follows Dubai, Mecca, Medina, Cairo and Riyadh.

However, while our world has changed dramatically since March 2020, staging major national and global conferences in partnership with our peers and bid partners – **South African Tourism, Gauteng Tourism** and **Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI)** – has remained a priority in our efforts to reignite business tourism in Johannesburg. Most notably, business travel is one of the identified niche development areas in the recently approved Tourism Strategy in April 2021, so we are assured by the city of a greater focus on the sub-sector. A case in point is a collaboration embarked on between the city and SAACI with effect from 20th May 2021.

What is the plan and objectives you have in mind for the city’s internationalisation strategy?

In line with the priority to achieve an increase in visitor arrivals to the city and contribute to our growth targets, the strategic objective in relation to tourism is to promote Johannesburg as one of Africa’s leading lifestyle and business destinations with a global competitive advantage, thereby helping to:

- improve seasonality, length of stay and tourist spend during visits to the city;
- improve a diversified tourism offering;
- build a positive image for the city amongst domestic, regional and international target markets;
- be a business-friendly city using tourism as an enabling key economic sector.

We heard about 2021 JCI World Congress which focused on the JCI RISE, a response to the effects of





the Covid-19 pandemic from an economic and mental wellbeing perspective. Can you please share more details with us?

This initiative – **JCI RISE** – stands for **Rebuild, Invest, Sustain, Evolve**. It calls upon enterprising young leaders across the world to work together to make economies and workforces more resilient. We must seize the opportunity presented by the crisis to rebuild and reorient our economy, ensuring that it is more competitive and adapted to the changes that pandemic and technology have brought to the world. A greener, more technology-absorbing and labour-intensive economy is possible if aligned with a better mindset and better planning.

From Johannesburg's perspective, it is our intention to play our part in building partnerships between government, the private sector and research institutions to achieve this goal.

What do you think 2022 and beyond holds for your destination?

We have been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – our communities and economy have suffered blows both in human and economic terms. Although economies around the world are still recovering from the collapse in output following the widespread lockdowns, the road back from the pandemic will be, in the words of the **International Monetary Fund**, long, uneven and highly uncertain.

However, after two-year hiatus, it's truly encouraging and exciting to see that Joburg is back in business. We're thrilled to see investors expressing their confidence in our city once again. We welcome them with open arms and look forward to promoting and supporting them as our future stakeholders.

What kind of social legacy do you want to leave for the region in the field of events and meetings?

The Tourism Directorate aims to support and promote the meetings and events sector to ensure sustained continuity in the economic performance of the city's tourism and related industries. The Directorate uses this platform to profile business travel (destination brand positioning and brand equity) and attract visitors from various countries who contribute to the city's economic growth through various linked activities such as shopping, property buying, business meetings, medical events and educational activities to stimulate economic growth.



A greener, more technology-absorbing and labour-intensive economy is possible if aligned with a better mindset and planning.



“**Events** have become one of the **key drivers** of **Rwanda’s economic growth**”

Hosting events and meetings in Rwanda soon revealed a strong impact on its society and local communities transforming direct incomes into large scale resources such as job creation, knowledge induction and a multiplier effect for the economy. Find out here in this conversation with **Frank Murangwa** (*pictured below*), director of destination marketing at the **Rwanda Convention Bureau (RCB)**, why this Central African country is the continent’s new premier event destination.



How did you manage to stay active in the sector during the pandemic?

In Rwanda, as in most parts of the world, the business events industry has been heavily affected as we have been forced to suspend all public social gatherings since 21 March 2020 when

the government imposed a total shutdown across the country. As we know, from small meetings to large trade shows, face-to-face events are part of the MICE DNA, so RCB and all our industry partners had to quickly familiarise themselves with the alternative of virtual and hybrid events, having hosted and coordinated a number of webinars, notably the **GSMA**, the **African Society of Association Executives** and the **African Green Revolution Conference** to name a few.

Some of these efforts put forward by RCB to ensure that events prevailed during and after the pandemic were: strengthening the domestic market with membership of the **global exhibition industry association – UFI**;



Rwanda recently won the bid to host the Women Deliver Conference in July 2023 and the World Climate Research Programme Open Science Conference in October next year.

applying health protocols to safeguard delegates and stakeholders; involvement of the various PCOs and local associations in order to come up with a strategic approach to get the conferences and events off the ground; and finally, providing an image of stability for business resumption, evidenced by the *Lowy Institute's Covid Performance Index*, where we ranked first in Africa and seventh globally.

What is the plan and goals you have in mind for the city's internationalisation strategy?

Kigali, the country's capital, remains open for MICE business and is positioning itself as a preferred destination in the region. RCB is implementing its sales and marketing strategy by participating in international MICE trade fairs. In recent months, Rwanda has participated in major trade shows such as **IMEX Las Vegas 2021**, **IBTM World 2021**, **UFI Congress 2022**, **Meetings Africa 2022**, **MALT 2022**, and will participate in upcoming trade shows such as **IMEX Frankfurt 2022**, **ICCA Congress** among others.

What are the latest sustainable practices being undertaken by the RCB?

RCB has been reducing the amount of paper printed in the office as an effort to contribute to the sustainability agenda. Most of our promotional material is accessible online. In addition, RCB has been putting in place destination advocacy in terms of implementing sustainable principles and this is done through engagements with industry to create awareness on

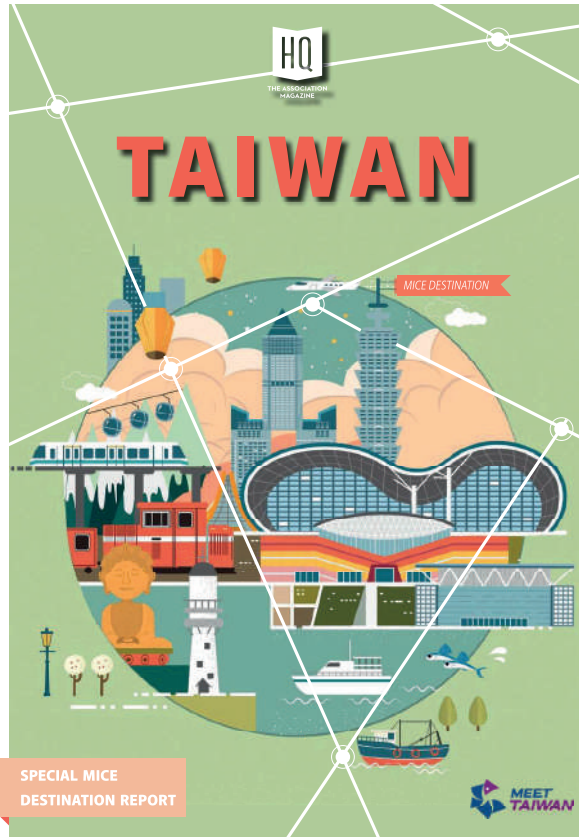
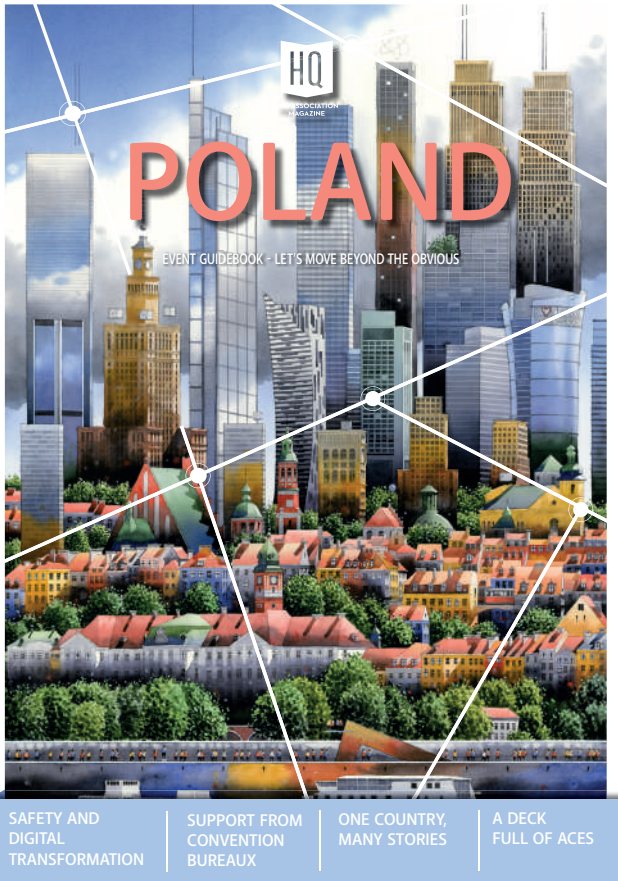
minimising and eradicating activities that harm the environment. For example, RCB encourages industry players to stop using single-use plastic bottles at conferences. This is a work in progress and we believe the goal will eventually be achieved.

What do you think 2022 and beyond holds for your destination?

Rwanda as a MICE destination is more than ever ready and excited to welcome MICE communities as it has become clear to our industry professionals and stakeholders that events have become one of the key drivers of Rwanda's economic growth this past decade. As we continue to evolve, we firmly believe that collaboration between destinations and organisations will be a key pillar for RCB to build a strong and long term industry.

Our industry relies heavily on international travel and without collaboration, we would not be able to achieve what we set out to do as private organisations and destination. The prospects for 2022 look bright: Rwanda will host a number of major events such as the **Commonwealth Heads of Government Annual Meeting** in June 2022, the **ITU – World Telecommunications Development Conference** in June 2022, the **Ironman Rwanda triathlon**, the **GSMA Mobile Congress**, among others. Furthermore, Rwanda recently won the bid to host the **Women Deliver Conference** in July 2023 and the **World Climate Research Programme Open Science Conference** in October next year.

HQ SPECIAL



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A SPECIAL REPORT FOR
YOUR DESTINATION?

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REPORTS HQ

“Smile Traveller, You’re in Thailand!”

While peak season for fam trips remains on a distant horizon, Thailand has jumped the gun and brought forward some MICE rebound; and what a tremendous way to showcase this new country brand the Thailand MICE fam trip 2022 turned out to be.

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES, HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER

Following confirmation as the base for the 62nd annual ICCA Congress in 2023, as well as the opportunity to host the 2026 International Horticulture Exhibition and launch the First International Air Show in 2027, it can’t be said that the upswing in Thai events is going badly. Buoyed by this growing trend, the **Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)** in conjunction with **Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA)** hosted 43 MICE event professionals for a week-long site inspection with business and team mentoring - the first such trip in the Thai kingdom after the pandemic. As part of the tour around Bangkok together with several congress organisers, our magazine was able to witness how Thai hospitality and friendliness (their claim to fame) came together with a vast and integrated network of venues and hotels that make up a very practical map for events of various sizes and types. In addition to a problem-solving attitude and thanks to the country’s pandemic control measures, Bangkok’s capital city was also praised for its standard of excellence throughout, its sustainable management, urban accessibility, safety and security, and flexibility of choice in services. “We have been working hard to create community engagement and provide different groups with the intel and knowledge they need to play a big role as a host city. We also ask them to step up and contribute to a better destination when we bring new international events to the region,” **Nichapa Yoswee, Senior Vice President of TCEB**, told us.

Upon arrival in the “great city of angels”, we stayed at the sumptuous and grand **Millennium Hilton Bangkok**. Nestled in the riverside district, this award-winning hotel provides a Grand Ballroom of almost 600sqm and Thonburi Ballroom of 338sqm, 14 venues for smaller groups, and 533 guest rooms. After a rest day where guests could enjoy a traditional massage at **BHAWA Spa** and make first contact with the fascinating Thai cuisine at **Blue Elephant Thai Restaurant**, we went into action on the second day with a battery of on-site visits. Waiting for us in the morning were the officials of **Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Centre (BITEC)**, one of the premier exhibition and convention centres in Southeast Asia. With a total event space of 70,000 sqm, this large column-free event centre suitable for international tradeshows and exhibitions is designed to accommodate 40,000 delegates between 7 expansive exhibition halls, 6 large convention halls and 28 breakout meeting rooms.

From that point to the splendid Benjasiri Park, we were able to board the **BTS Sky Train** – the first certified carbon-neutral rail transport company – for a short walk to the **Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen’s Park Hotel**. With three distinct ballrooms and over 30 event venues with 50,000 square feet of meeting space, this all-inclusive hotel can host up to around 1,500 guests enjoying truly unique and expansive facilities for corporate retreats and incentive travel. The next move was to the **Queen Sirikit National Conventional Center (QSNCC)**, the largest

convention centre in Bangkok’s central business district. There, we could see the overall refurbishment of the QSNCC towards a five times larger venue with a wider variety of commercial spaces – the new QSNCC will be ready to break the limitations in organising events with 8 exhibition halls, 4 plenary rooms, 4 ballrooms and 50 flexible rooms. The final chapter of the day fell to the **Bangkok Convention Centre at Centara Grand Central World**. An amazing space right in the heart of the city, featuring complete and integrated solutions ranging from the convention centre and hotel, to the paired amenities of rooftop bars and the **UNO MAS** restaurant.

The following morning, we attended a Briefing and Networking session with the entire Thai MICE ecosystem. **“Thailand NOW”**, the new economic revival concept opened a window for guests to connect with local suppliers to strengthen strategic relationships. We have concluded why Bangkok has risen to 6th place in GainingEdge’s Global Convention Cities Ranking, and collected more data that helps explain this performance: Thailand ranks 1st in the “countries to start a business” in 2020 for US News, and tops the “emerging markets” list for Bloomberg. In the afternoon, we headed to **IMPACT Muang Thong Thani** – a huge MICE complex that offers a modern and technologically advanced facility spanning over 140,000 sqm of interconnected indoor spaces, making it the second largest exhibition and convention venue in Asia. The company has also adopted energy efficiency practices supported by ISO 50001 certification and an extensive network of solar panels as a green resource for its operations. That’s where we moved on to our second stay: the **Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok**. Providing over 30 different function rooms, including the grand hall with a maximum capacity of 1,500 people and another ballroom, the Athenee is also the world’s first ISO 20121 certified hotel to achieve the Sustainability Event Management Systems standard and the first to receive 100% “All-Star certification” from The PLEDGE on Food Waste.

Just opposite the Athenee, we had within reach the splendid **Nai Lert Park Heritage Home**, private residence turned into museum which was built using golden teak wood where small Buddhist shrines and a western-style park and secluded sanctuary surrounded a museum filled with historical memorabilia. The multifunctional **The Glass House** erected there has 336sqm of internal area within a private and versatile

space that can serve as a cocktail party or 200 people for a more formal event. The second stand-out venue was built as a colonial mansion going on to become an elegant restaurant and events venue. **The House on Sathorn** is a cluster of four buildings with an outdoor courtyard leading to its “Conservatory” – a 99sqm state-of-the-art meeting and event space with capacity for up to 120 people. All buildings can cater events with up to 600 people. Getting back to the starting point of this journey we could finally contemplate the impressive **TRUE ICON HALL**. Integrated into the ICONSIAM building (*pictured right below*), this 2,700-seat ultra-hybrid auditorium promises to be an Asian benchmark for large conferences within the most advanced MICE technology supporting first-class facilities. Across the bank of the Chao Phraya River, final mention for yet another resort hotel: **The Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok**, a charming riverside retreat boasting over 23 fully equipped rooms for different meetings and the signature Grand Ballroom which can accommodate up to 1,500 guests for a special gala event.

During the farewell Gala Dinner with all the Thai meetings community, there was still room for some final notes. According to the organisation, this collective visit produced 57 leads worth 1,900 million baht in revenue and more than 30,000 international meetings visitors. Delegates were also able to take home the direct impact their carbon footprint left during the week. The total reduction was 6,603.19kgCO₂e – equivalent to planting 400 trees –and several of the materials displayed will be reused or recycled for other purposes. “We are expecting a strong rebound in Thailand’s meeting and incentive sectors in the short term, followed by a broader-based recovery in the medium term. We believe visitors to Thailand this year will find the experience extraordinarily rewarding,” **TCEB president Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya** said.

And, so do we...







Thailand MICE Fam Trip:

What did the planners think?

In many of the site inspections conducted on this fam trip, the regenerative and sustainable approach of the spaces we visited was always well ingrained in the corporate culture and was evident in the business pitch of venues, hotels and convention centres. However, sustainability is not the only criterion and the truth is that the multiple Thai services and facilities ended up surprising many of the guests, including PCOs and MICE planners who accompanied us on this trip. HQ spoke to three of them and asked what kind of message they would convey to their clients and partners:

1. Given what you saw and witnessed in Bangkok, how prepared is Thailand to host a future congress of your agency?
2. What kind of features, leads and key advantages are you looking for in a conference destination during this pandemic recovery period?
3. What kind of importance do you attach to sustainability when choosing the best bid?

GERGANA RALENEKOVA

ASSISTANT ASSOCIATION MANAGER IN *KENES GROUP*



1. Bangkok is a cosmopolitan city with a very good infrastructure and transport network, which is of great importance for international meetings. My personal opinion is that the convention centres and hotels are perfectly equipped and prepared to accommodate any kind of events. Kenes already has a history in organising congresses in Bangkok and is now working on the next one, which will take place in 2022 at **BITEC**.

2. Kenes has worked hard on developing a virtual platform that makes it possible for both exhibitors and participants to be everywhere and still attend the congress. Therefore, maintaining a hybrid event is no longer considered an advantage but a must. Another relevant topic for this post-pandemic period are the entry requirements. Talking about

international events, it is really important that the borders are open and that there are few restrictions or minor requirements for most visitors. If there are, they should be easy to comply with.

3. Kenes Group is a very “green” organisation, committed to integrating sustainable business practices that could result in useful achievements. Kenes’ Sustainability Policy and minimum sustainable event practices ensure that all clients and original events are organised with sustainability in mind – for the planet, the environment and for all stakeholders. It is the only way to ensure opportunities for a good life for present and future generations.





WERNER VAN CLEEMPUTTE

FOUNDER & OWNER OF *MEDICONGRESS*

1. Thailand has always been an attractive country surely for leisure. With the developments and investments Bangkok has undergone, it surely is to be considered as a future important player in the congress and association market. New congress centers are opened or under construction as well as public transport is increasingly developed, so that moving within the city now becomes less of a hustle and bustle.

2. The MICE world has indeed focused on hybrid and virtual events during this pandemic. But in view of the need to meet face-to-face, to “smell” the atmosphere of a congress and what is around, I believe we will definitely see all those smiling faces again during a live congress. However, my fear is that in the future we will have to deal with ecological, financial and economic aspects that

may influence the congress attendance in a way that we will see less delegates physically. I do not see how hybrid congresses can be used in the future, as sitting in front of a computer for a congress is something that no one can stand for more than an hour.

3. Ecological aspects play an important role but in my opinion and from my experience, it is more a marketing and discussion tool rather than one of implementation. The MICE industry is not sustainable at all with exhibitions where we see a lot of waste, with delegates from all over the world flying in, with the abundance of food and leftovers. We all need to make every effort possible, but we also need to face reality: in most cases, this topic will not really influence the final decision on the location or the venue.



PATRICIA CHEONG

MANAGING DIRECTOR, ASIA, *INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SERVICES (ICS)*

1. This Fam trip has given me a better understanding of how much Bangkok has reinvented during the pandemic and has prepared itself to be ready to welcome back international events as Thailand reopens its borders. Health and safety protocols, strict hygiene and sanitation practices in all hospitality facilities, and the **Test & Go quarantine-free programme** for fully vaccinated people will go a long way to instilling confidence in delegates that Bangkok is a safe destination. Despite all the strictest hygiene practices, the unique Thai cultural and gastronomic experience is not compromised demonstrating that it is possible to host a safe meeting without losing the sparkle of the destination’s local flavour and experience.

2. The health and safety of our attendees is a top priority, especially in this period of pandemic recovery. We must demonstrate the utmost care for the health and safety of our attendees by selecting a conference destination with expertise in running safe meetings, high cleanliness protocols and sanitisation standards, COVID testing availability, and that puts the necessary precautions in place to ensure a successful meeting. There is pent-up demand for the return of face-to-face meetings which creates high expectations from event attendees for

unique and authentic travel experiences that go beyond food and culture. Business event organisers are looking to collaborate more closely with destinations to achieve greater results in this area. Ease of travel and its related costs will obviously impact an event’s ability to attract more in-person attendees. Quarantine-free travel, ease of border restrictions, all play an important role in helping planners decide on the ideal conference destination. Last but not least is the destination’s readiness to support hybrid meetings. Destinations that have a strong hybrid infrastructure and a robust set of experienced and skilled digital vendors, will be able to offer a competitive advantage in this space.

3. Sustainability and the drive to reduce the carbon footprint at all our events has always been high on the ICS agenda. We understand that one of the greatest responsibilities, both individually and corporately, is to respect nature and to do everything in our power to use resources wisely. Hence, over the years, we have developed an extensive guideline for “Green Meetings” to help guide our clients in reducing the carbon footprint of their events. This guideline serves as a cornerstone of how we do business, as we actively seek to partner sustainable destination, hotels, venues, transport, organisations, in our bids and RFPs.



Sky High **Green Events** in **Tirol**

Among stunning, testing and winding trails right in the heart of the Alps, we find a leading winter destination that has simultaneously provided excellent models for the conceptual transition that the meetings industry has been facing.

In Tirol, there are endless possibilities to capture the imagination of your delegates, unusual venues carefully carved out of Alpine landscapes, high safety and living standards, and a unique sense of “regionality” which is revealed in their traditions and culture. Now, after two years in which people have been deprived of travel, the historic austrian region – far from the hustle and bustle of large metropolises – has drawn between its high mountain peaks and steep valleys, a sustainable, innovative and sui generis destination for business events and association conferences. Socio-economic development is also quite cemented here with 7 start-up companies springing up daily, 60 scientific research facilities, and the experience of major undertakings with 3 Winter Olympics in the portfolio. As an encouraging sign for the industry, in October 2021 the **Convention Bureau Tirol (CBT)** designed “**Tirol Connect**”, a hybrid customer event, which served as a case-study for both Tirol convention partners and meeting planners in the DACH region. Together with stakeholders and meeting experts, they tried to shed light on the question of how to integrate nature into healthy and regenerative events.

“As if under a magnifying glass, what was already noticeable before has clearly emerged during this time. Now we are all “hybrid professionals” and “COVID-19 commissioners”. The “soul” of the events – enthusiasm, emotion, encounter – will remain, but the “body” – format, size, concept – will have to be rethought,” **Veronika Schumann, CBT team leader**, told us. This wisdom has encouraged both her team and partners to see the crisis as an opportunity and

an accelerator. “In the meetings industry, the issue of sustainability in the form of “green meetings” has long played an important role and here too, Corona has favoured demand.” For Tirol, this is much more than just a theoretical approach and resource-saving action, but mostly about social responsibility, inclusion and regional decisions. Tirolean companies also see this as an opportunity to act as role models in terms of ecological, economic and social sustainability. “We see ourselves as a destination that unites several regions and a successful combination of alpine and urban. To exaggerate, our concept is that of ‘renting a region’, where people work together,” she adds.

The **Global Destination Sustainability Benchmark 2021** clearly demonstrated this strong performance in the environmental dimension – Tirol leads the ranking in first place. As a transit valley, the challenges lie especially in preserving intact natural places through an increased focus on alternative mobility solutions. In a collaborative process involving public consultation and experts from the tourism and meeting industry together with external stakeholders, CBT has developed a sustainability strategy entitled “**ReGeneration NOW**”. “It includes a comprehensive action plan with 46 concrete goals based on the UN SDGs and, in the four defined fields of action, it also commits to a strong model effect, through a significant increase in certifications, sustainable mobility, social engagement and green meetings,” says Schumann.





This regenerative transformation is addressed by the bureau in these three commandments: first, building trust and authenticity as an example to follow; second, spreading this conviction in different networks (national and international); and third, empowering partners for sustainable ways of doing business. This will help pave the way for Tirol to assume a social, economic and ecological pioneering role in the congress and conference sector.

On the other hand, we are now returning to a VUCA world having to deal directly with such complex problems as the pandemic or the war in Ukraine. This shows how important it is to have a strong vision and strategy in place to ensure a certain stability. “I would say the word of the moment is *flexicurity* – providing security, but being flexible and agile in different situations.” In order to stay in touch with its partners and to further promote networking, the CBT organised various meetings, including live and remote, under the crystal clouds at the **Swarovski Crystal Worlds**, in the **Innsbruck Hofgarten** or in the form of a hybrid advisory board meeting at the Wattens workshop. “We also created the virtual meeting series **Tea(m) Time**’, where our experts informed about current measures, alternative marketing activities and innovative event possibilities offering the platform for an active exchange of experiences,” Schumann reported. The **Incentiveland Tirol** offers a diverse range of activities and the ideal framework programme, clustering various experiences based on the requirements different target audiences. A strong focus will be put on the so-called soft incentives with educational, regenerative or charitable character.

Not lagging behind the race, **Conventionland Tirol’s** partners have used the last two years to equip their companies for hybrid events, adapting this format for various meetings, such as the **European Forum Alpbach**. “One of the most notable examples is probably our sustainable hybrid event ‘Tirol Connect’. It was run as a “green event”, verified and certified by the Austrian Ecolabel, with the content focusing heavily on health and sustainability. The biggest learning was that by running it sustainably, it did not really increase any costs, but the quality of the event.” Furthermore, as part of ‘**Lebensraum Tirol Holding**’, it is highly commended that meetings and events in the Tirolean living space leave a respectful and sustainable mark, where participants and residents can interact eye to eye. “This is also why we focus on positive and empowering messages in our communications – such as talking about green, good practices, real personal stories, showing events that generate positive impact, not only economically, but also socially and ecologically,” concludes Schumann.

“ *For Tirol, sustainability is much more than just a theoretical approach and resource-saving action, but mostly about social responsibility, inclusion and regional decisions.* ”



Gothenburg:

A Place Where Sustainability is the Engine of Change!

For Gothenburg, rankings and competitions are all about driving change and sharing best practice by adopting a visionary and long-term development process. The common focus is on sustainable growth and building a future-proof destination.

Gothenburg is not your typical European megalopolis, but it has positioned itself firmly as a leading destination for conventions and conferences. Since 2016, Gothenburg has topped the rankings in the **Global Destination Sustainability Index** and doesn't seem to want to leave that place any time soon. Perhaps better than any other destination, the Swedish city has benefited from its 360-degree sustainable strategy to create jobs and business opportunities and make Gothenburg a shining city in the already competitive visitor economy. Long-term partnerships between public and private stakeholders at local, regional, national and international levels have increased the capacity to innovate, work together and respond to the new challenges facing the global events roadmap.

“We’ve been put a lot of effort in supporting the hospitality and meeting industry during this tough period. When digital and hybrid meetings took off, we helped showcase local skills, culture and the city in new ways,” says **Annika Hallman** (pictured right), **director of Gothenburg Convention Bureau at Göteborg & Co** – the official destination management organisation of Gothenburg. To strengthen this sense of place, it is important for the CVB that a digital meeting still has a Gothenburg feel. On the other hand, the organisers also imposed several other demands based on changes linked to the pandemic. An important part was digitalisation, fostering conditions for hybrid meetings

and educating the meetings industry. “We always strive to strengthen relationships and collaboration with the industry, researchers, in various networks. For us it is even more important now, being in line with our strategic plan established in 2018.” The plan builds on broad collective efforts together with the public, private and academic sectors, continuing to put a focus on bidding processes for future meetings.

Gothenburg has been designated as the **European Capital of Smart Tourism 2020**, boosting substantial performances in four different categories: accessibility, sustainability, digitalisation and heritage/cultural creativity. “The award, and the pandemic, were catalysts in new innovation projects launched together with new stakeholders, for example the **Destination Data Platform** together with **Mastercard**. Another example is **Experience Next**, an innovation programme for the experience industry. Another big consequence was also trying to learn how other destinations were reacting to open data initiatives,” says Hallman. There is a growing demand for legacy-creating activities in the Swedish city: contributing to future research and care, capturing future talent and inciting early vocations already at school. “To give a ripple effect, we work even more closely with different organisations with support, guidance and tools for the conferences





In addition to working with digitalisation, we also work in the development of the city centre and data-based industry knowledge to strengthen competitiveness and secure the future of the hospitality industry

that are organised here. Building on this momentum, we created the **Gothenburg Way to Legacy** model that we are currently offering to our clients.”

Both the previous and the current crisis have shown the importance of trust in the society and within the meetings industry. Sweden did not shut down during the pandemic, but there have been clear guidelines and measures in place. Occupancy of venues and enquiries naturally reached record low levels, with demand driven by domestic travel and national delegates. The major players in Gothenburg had to compulsorily adjust their offers and their workforce. “As well as working with digitalisation, we also look at city centre development and data-based industry knowledge to strengthen competitiveness and secure the future of the hospitality industry,” adds Hallman. Göteborg & Co is responsible for the city’s **Visitor Industry Development Programme – 2030 Strategy**, serving as a guiding document on how the city should support and strengthen the hospitality industry as a whole. “The focus is on collaboration, knowledge, and legacy-creating work. That is what makes Gothenburg strong as a meeting destination and why organisations choose us.”

On the technological side, the innovation project **Hybrid+** was developed to provide guidance on hybrid formats for event organisers. The model is based on the organiser’s objectives, target groups, business standard and technical possibilities, resulting

in a basis for decisions and a project plan. In parallel, the impact of new investments in the city has been felt by the commitment to the “green deal” and sustainable meetings. The trend in electrical mobility is exceptionally strong, and the city last year launched **Gothenburg Green Zone** together with **Volvo** among others, testing the emission-free transport system of the future. New eco-friendly hotels are currently being built, and they are close to reaching 100% environmentally certified hotels in the city.

Gothenburg has set ambitious sustainable targets and has clear goals on being climate neutral by 2030. As well as integrating the visitor and event perspective into urban planning processes, they drive this transformation through high standards for events, testing new methods – for example in “free disposable public events” and “climate neutral events” – or supporting associations to co-design sustainable meeting solutions. “Our mission as a DMO/CVB is clear – through wide-reaching collaboration, we are to lead and promote the development of Gothenburg as a sustainable destination, so that everyone who lives and works here benefits from a growing hospitality industry,” concludes the CVB director. “We aim to be a welcoming and inclusive city where everyone – residents and visitors – feel at home, an environmentally smart destination with a zero footprint, and a thriving industry with sustainable offerings and attractive jobs for our citizens.”



IMEX Frankfurt 2022:

The Heartbeat of the Global Business Events Community!

A first-class business experience, full of transformational ideas and designed to renew human connections, the German tradeshow returns to Frankfurt at the end of May with over 2,000 buyers from the most varied market sectors.

“From our conversations with buyers, suppliers and partners around the world, we know there is a huge appetite to meet in person and to be together again, doing business and building better.

“The return of IMEX in Frankfurt this May is set to supercharge this momentum, bringing the global business events community together for three days of business, networking, inspiration and celebrating the sheer joy of being face-to-face again. We can’t wait to see old friends, make new connections and enjoy the energy of the show floor together with our friends from across the globe,” **Carina Bauer, IMEX CEO**, sets out how IMEX in Frankfurt will return in style from 31 May to 2 June 2022.

The destinations, venues and suppliers confirmed so far span the world and include Boston, Cuba, Egypt, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Istanbul, Malta, Meliá Hotels, Radisson Hotel Group, Titanic Hotels, Singapore and Spain.

Over 2,000 buyers from agencies, corporates, associations and more have already committed to attending the show and with three months still to go, many more are expected to join them. New intermediaries are bringing buyer groups from countries as far afield as Australia, Brazil and the USA. 10 hotel intermediaries including Meliá, Hilton, Marriott, Radisson and Hyatt are also set to bring their international clients to the show in force.

A chance to shape the agenda – dedicated learning for planners

As well as meeting suppliers, colleagues and clients all in the one global marketplace, planners can also refresh their skillsets with dedicated education taking place the day before IMEX in Frankfurt, on Monday 30 May.

Experts from SAP, KPMG, Bolt and LinkedIn lead a compelling programme of learning and networking for corporate executives. Case study-led education and peer-to-peer discussions will cover several topics, including how experiential marketing and innovation are revolutionising corporate events and how to reduce the environmental impact of events.

Agency planners can shape the focus of IMEX’s co-created Agency Directors Forum, choosing what best fits their needs from subjects including: growth opportunities, lessons learned from the pandemic, adapting to a changed event landscape, trends and technology impacting business strategy and reconsidering staffing options.

Separately, association focus will deliver learning and networking exclusively for association professionals of all levels. The collaborative programme offers insight, inspiration and real-world recommendations and resolutions to the challenges facing associations across the world today.

“Being the best you can be is an inside job” – mindset matters

A free learning programme, open to all, takes place during the three days of the show. Over 150 education sessions will address the most urgent business issues of the moment including: community engagement, sustainable leadership, brand-building, regenerative event management and policy engagement. Experts will share first-hand experiences gathered from their time within the business events sector or, in the case of **Paul McVeigh**, from the world of elite sport.

As a Premier League and International football player for Tottenham Hotspur, Norwich City and Northern



IMEX GROUP

ALL CONNECTED

Ireland, Paul competed with and against the best players in the world, which has shaped his understanding of high performance and the psychology of success. In his session, Psychology of Performance for Leaders, Paul will outline the mental tools required to elevate the performance of leaders and teams from organisations across the world. He explains: “After 28 years competing, observing and study elite performance, I’m fascinated by the habits and behaviours that people who’ve reached the top of their chosen field have in common. However, no time-blocking technique, influence skills or life hacks can improve your performance if what’s going on inside your head is full of ineffective and unhelpful thoughts, contradictions, or doubts. Being the best you can be is an inside job and it starts and ends with your own mindset. At IMEX in Frankfurt, I’ll be sharing some of the ‘tried and tested’ techniques that elite performers use to help them reach – and more importantly stay at – the top of their game.”

Fine tuning leaderships skills to hone-in on the three Ps – people, planet, profit – will be the focus of another education session by Claudia van’t Hullenaar, founder of Sustained Impact. In her session, Why we need conscious leadership and mindset shifts for a regenerative future, Claudia will share details on how business leaders can manage companies with environment, society, and long-term sustainable development goals in mind.

Sustainability in the spotlight

The **IMEX Group** will be demonstrating its continued commitment to sustainability through their Talking Point for this year, “Giving Nature a Second Chance”. This will be championed at the **IMEX|EIC People & Planet Village**, a dedicated area of the show floor where IMEX’s own “Green Squad” will share what the company is doing around sustainability and DEI as well as showcasing best practice and ideas from across the industry. The show itself will also be measuring its sustainability performance for the first time, with results distributed openly post-show.

Bauer concludes: “The year marks 20 years of IMEX in Frankfurt and we’re set to share a very special edition of the show, one that centres on cherishing human connections. Our connection to the planet, our community, our purpose and each other will all be celebrated at the show. This May, the global business events sector can expect a best-in-class business experience, full of transformational ideas. Above all, we’ll be relishing the chance to be together again, talking business and planning ahead for 2023 and beyond.”

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ASSOCIATION & PCO



Circular Economy: A Viable Model for Associations?

Learn what stands in the way of circular economy to be applied by non-profit organisations.

AUTHOR: LOUISE GORRINGER, DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT AT KENES

The European Union (EU) defines a circular economy as “aiming to maintain the value of products, materials, and resources for as long as possible by returning them into the product cycle at the end of their use, while minimising the generation of waste. The fewer products we discard, the less materials we extract, the better for our environment.” With non-profit associations focused on advancing different fields, the idea of a circular economy sounds abstract, at the very least, however, if the “process starts at the very beginning of a product’s lifecycle: smart product design and production processes can help save resources, avoid inefficient waste management and create new business opportunities.” Can associations use the concept – and how – as their primary resources and outputs are, in fact, not physical products?

An often-cited challenge with circular economy comes from the fact that it is overwhelming for companies, who have to completely redesign their processes to only achieve at best 70% success rate – as on average 30% of products used in the cycle would be retired at some point, due to their limited amount of recycling options or because they lose quality and quantity of the given substance. This, in turn, fuels the other challenge with the concept of desirability. There are limited economic incentives, a lack of standardisation and guidelines, and most of all, a weakness in how to include the social dimension.

The outputs of associations come in the form of the development of new guidelines, knowledge, and ideas, or other educational materials and formats striving to relieve society of global issues. To arrive at this end product,

non-profit organisations use as resources the work of (mostly) passionate volunteers, as well as the support of commercial companies that have a vested interest in the topic.

If we are to apply the circular economy concept to associations, the resources that would need to be optimised would be the contents produced. This is now a tactic often employed, known as content recycling – re-using one piece of content in various shapes and forms, with the aim to satisfy different learning styles, or to attract new potential members. While content recycling is truly a smart concept in today’s fast-paced world, the issue with it is newness. If we look at the challenges of circular economy, associations will face the same 70/30 issue, where they are to lose 30% of the content in this recycling process. There will be the issue of desirability coming from learners, supporting organisations and the content producers, who are committed to novelties, sharing new information and not reusing old information for too long. Thus, even if we apply the process to associations whose outcomes are not physical products, the challenges remain.

While the concept is well-meaning, its usual issues prevent it from being a practical model for associations. While content recycling is already in circulation, content upcycling may provide another opportunity to give associations, by allowing them to ethically build on old knowledge. The circular economy as a broader concept may prove valuable if the social dimension problem is cracked and then applied to non-profit organisations, as they are human-centred and revolve around humanity’s better living experience.



ABOUT KENES GROUP

For over fifty years, Kenes Group has been creating success stories with associations around the world. We’re experts in helping associations reach their true potential by strategically

building awareness, loyalty and satisfaction among current and potential members, as well as stakeholders. We harness the power of community, strengthening your association’s brand through unforgettable experiences - fostering change, inspiring members, educating, and improving your association’s business performance.

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Diversity and Inclusion in the Events Industry

“Diversity” is a term that has touched many sectors worldwide, including education, publishing, media and business. The concept is also becoming a familiar, albeit still relatively new, theme in the events industry.

The **World PCO Alliance** reached out to some of its partners to get their thoughts on the role of diversity and inclusion in the meetings and conferences sector.

What does diversity, in the context of the meetings industry, mean to you?

Gregg Talley of U.S.-based **Talley Management Group Inc.:** “It means a full range of diversity: race, gender/sexual identity and disability. Our industry has a responsibility to allow all people to be seen, heard and appreciated on stages and panels, and in articles.”

Jean-Paul de Lavison of Canada-based **JPD International Inc.:** “Diversity is a tool that allows us, as meeting organisers, to see things from as many perspectives as possible. This fuller awareness goes into how we approach each event.”

Thania Carrera of Mexico-based **T&C Group:** “Diversity, in the context of what resonates with me, is an opportunity for more space for women in our industry, as well as for more events that focus on the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ community and of individuals with disabilities.”

What are some practices your firm incorporates to support diversity as an SDG goal?

GT: “As a firm, we make it our goal to be much more mindful of language used in our workspace and to

provide opportunities that include greater diversity.”

JDL: “We support diversity by not making it a thing. We choose instead to focus on the skills and value that our team offers our clients.”

TC: “Our company has a committee that guides us in the principles and value of diversity and how to weave it into our corporate culture as well as in our collaborations with clients.”

Ikuko Nishimura of Japan-based **Congrès Inc.:** “Promotion of diversity in the workplace and empowerment of women are important issues and here in Japan we are particularly conscious about dedicating efforts in this area. Even prior to COVID-19, Congrès was offering flexible working hours and styles to support the diverse needs and life roles of our employees.

“Furthermore, in Japan, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has established several schemes related to the Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, under which companies can be certified as ones that actively promote empowerment of women and work-life balance that have been judged to have met certain criteria. Congrès holds this certification.

“These certifications highlight companies’ efforts to promote workplace diversity and gender equality and are, in fact, one of the criteria used for evaluating companies in various Japanese government procurement and



World PCO Alliance

tender processes, including PCOs, when bidding for Japanese government-hosted meetings and events.

“Promoting employment of people with disabilities is another important aspect of diversity and inclusion, and we at Congrès have achieved our statutory target and are further striving to generate more work opportunities.

“All of these endeavors are related to the SDGs, 5: Gender Equality, 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and 10: Reduced Inequalities.”

Is this commitment to diversity an added value for your clients? If yes, how?

GT: “Yes, the value for our clients is the same as for us as a business – greater perspectives offer greater learning opportunities, appreciation and understanding.”

JDL: “By each member of our team providing different perspectives and approaches to a client’s event, that event has a much more inclusive and diverse foundation.”

TC: “I think it depends. It is certainly an added value for clients organising events focused on subjects that naturally implicate diversity, or for those clients seeking to forge relationships with suppliers that share similar values.”

Noel Mitchell of Ireland-based **Keynote PCO:** “Our clients are quite focused on gender mix on committees and for speakers. As an organiser, we would also be conscious of accessibility for those with disabilities and dietary requirements.”

In what ways do you find conferences embracing diversity as an SDG goal?

GT: “Conferences are optimising diversity’s role in their events. They are doing what’s necessary to offer attendees a full range of diversity – by race, gender/sexual identity and disability – on a conference programme.”

JDL: “We’re noticing that conferences are increasingly leveraging virtual and hybrid formats to include emerging countries in their events.”

IN: “Echoing Gregg and Jean-Paul’s comments, diversity can be seen in logistical arrangements for conferences. With regards to food, for instance, careful consideration needs to be taken to provide a suitable range of cuisine to meet the diverse needs of participants, from vegetarian, to vegan, to Halal and incorporating allergen-sensitive menus. Congrès is well aware that peace of mind related to food is a key factor for a delegate’s well-being and productivity when abroad.

“Accessibility in venues is also an important factor to give the organiser, the international association, as well as all its members, peace of mind when planning a conference. Congrès Inc. serves as a consultant in Japan on conference and event venue development projects, providing experience-related advice on access issues and solutions.”

What are your predictions for diversity, as an SDG principle, in the meetings industry?

GT: “Diversity is here to stay, and we can and should be leading the way!”

TC: “I think there is a long way to go before diversity has truly bloomed in our industry. This is especially true in Latin America where men occupy most positions of power, and members of the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities are not even considered as part of this industry. It is only when there is more diversity in all industries that we can aspire to have a more equal and developed society.”

IN: “Through management of meetings and events, especially those that involve the local community, we as PCOs in the meetings industry can raise awareness of the SDGs in society as a whole and, in turn, the importance of D&I to enable every member of society to fulfill their potential, towards a world where ‘no one is left behind.’”

In conclusion, clearly, diversity is an important component of events of today and the future. Yet, despite its significance, there is still much work to be done. As members of the meetings industry who regularly bring people together, we have a unique opportunity to optimise all the possibilities that diversity and inclusion bring. By ensuring that events feature as many voices as possible, we can lead by example and show the world diversity’s limitless potential.



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Brussels Hotels Association: Polishing the Events Lobby for Recovery!



The **Brussels Hotels Association (BHA)** is the institutional voice of Brussels hoteliers, with 15,000 rooms in its portfolio and representing almost 85% of hotels in the capital city. After a period when government support measures and Covid surveillance systems were a common presence in the hotel community, it has now opened its (various) doors to welcome Ukrainian refugees in the face of the exodus from Eastern Europe. Plenty of reasons to talk to the **general secretary, Rodolphe Van Weyenbergh**, about these and more topics on the BHA's agenda.

After two years of walking in the dark, the meetings industry has felt a palpable drift in hotel strategy quite driven by the pandemic and hybrid phenomenon. Hotels are not just places where delegates go to rest and take break but also where they meet for breakout sessions and business meetings, on par with other destination venues. On the other hand, hotels are definitely ambassadors for cities and temporary shelter for thousands of visitors – if these cities are increasingly aware of resource management, their carbon footprint and their environmental role, so should they.

How have your members been picking up new activity and bookings at this stage? Do they see an upturn on the horizon?

After two difficult years, we are indeed seeing a steady increase in the number of overnight stays, although

we are still far from the pre-crisis level. There has been an increase in leisure tourism, and business mobility is also gradually picking up. We are aware that the COVID narrative is not a closed issue, but we are by now familiar with a whole series of additional procedures to guarantee the safety of our guests. Moreover, we are facing new challenges such as inflation and the search for qualified personnel. In the future, it will be important to work with all parties involved to provide good training in order to continue to deliver an excellent service to our guests.

How are hotels becoming better places to work, meet and extend business event stays? How can the hotel industry come up with a new business model from this idea of “co-working space”?

Hotels are certainly also a meeting place; the hotel lobby or bar are good examples of this, as they are always



accessible to everyone. Recently, there has been a tendency for hotels to focus more on common areas. In this way, the hotels also attract more local companies that make good use of conference rooms for their meetings or events, thus creating opportunities to meet in a different environment. Of course, hotels are also responding to changing trends such as online meetings. The meeting rooms are therefore increasingly equipped with the latest technologies.

A very curious aspect observed after the pandemic, has been the growing affirmation of new trends of hotel stays, such as “workcation” or “bleisure”. Have hotels in Brussels been identifying this profile and addressing their offers in this direction?

We are indeed observing a changing trend. It is certainly true that since the Coronavirus crisis there has been a greater focus on personal well-being, and this has consequently had an impact on business trips. This creates a potential for hotels, especially business hotels that are broadening their focus to the well-being of their guests, and we expect this trend to develop further. In any case, our capital city has a lot to offer to those who want to add a few days to their business stay.

I believe that never before has the hotel community felt so much pressure to move towards a sustainable path and balanced vision of its global business. How much has this been an “issue” with your board and its members?

It is true that sustainability has attracted more and more attention in recent years, but this is not new to us. The BHA and its member hotels have been working with the

government for years to achieve sustainable labels. More and more hotels are being awarded a sustainable label like **Green Key** because they definitely meet the conditions. On the one hand, this is because the hotels themselves recognise the importance of sustainability and want to work towards it, but on the other hand, we also notice that more and more guests are sensitive to a sustainable approach.

The Brussels hotel community has made almost 200 rooms available free of charge for the reception of Ukrainian refugees, in an unprecedented act of solidarity. How did this initiative take shape among several of your representatives?

The hotels have been working together since the start of the refugee flow from Ukraine. They immediately came up with the proposal to jointly provide free rooms to guarantee emergency accommodation, and as BHA we took on a coordinating role in this, working together with **Fedasil, Brussels Prevention and Safety, Red Cross, Citizens’ Platform and Brussel’Help**. As a result, we were soon able to make hundreds of rooms available to the refugees. The Brussels hoteliers are also doing their utmost to ensure that people who fled their country in terrible circumstances can find a peaceful refuge. Answering you, this was a natural step to take within our CSR framework.





The Real News: Your Association can Create **Positive, Lasting Change** Through its **Events**

As we reel from the shockwaves of increasing climate instability, the recent global pandemic, and fresh geopolitical unrest, it's helpful to zoom out and reframe the meeting's game with good news. If the climate-leadership focus of the world's largest money manager and shareholder is any kind of gauge for global market opportunity, sustainability is definitely on the **To Do list**.

New economics for travel and tourism

Pull focus to the business of travel, which is changing fast, and it's clear that there's a huge opportunity for all stakeholders keen on greater sustainability. The inherent interdependence that defines sustainability is beautifully expressed in the Southern African adage of *ubuntu*, which translates roughly into "I am because you are". This fundamental philosophy can guide attitudes and actions towards increased positive impact. It makes marvelous business sense, too. As business events begin to return to pre-Covid production levels, post-Covid travellers demand sustainability from destinations, and Google ranks flights by carbon emission and hotels by eco-certification. Then there's the bad news: business and leisure travel contribute significantly to carbon emissions and waste.

How can associations be part of the solution? By changing the game.

The game is on, but is it the good game?

If we assume the average human being wants peace, freedom, and prosperity, we must assert that the majority of the systems we've developed to date want the opposite, and work against those aspirations. We might have been well-meaning when we developed the technologies and take-make-waste mindset that brought us to the new now, but, unmitigated, they define our undoing rather than our destiny.

The data cannot be disputed. We can't undo what's done, but we can change reality promptly with long-term, living strategy that's both responsive and respectful.

How strategy raises the game

Good intentions lead to isolated triumphs, but good strategy leads to sustained success, and successful sustainability strategy leads to more regenerative systems and enhanced circular economy.

- For example, it's great that events and business meetings' service providers recycle their "waste", but it's better for them to reduce that waste with reuse and by repurposing the valuable materials in a circular system.
- It's wonderful to see a crop of biodiversity projects take root, but they're more likely to flourish going forward forty or fifty years (or even just five!) if these efforts are centralised, coordinated, and corroborated by everyone (and everything) they affect, not just the conference attendees who enjoy picnicking beneath them on a Spring afternoon.
- It's fantastic that equity and integration are listed by name in a meeting supplier's HR policy; it's noticeable when that supplier hires a "nameless" individual who has refugee status and offers them the opportunity to become a team leader.

Strategic choices like these are, of course, easier for Associations to make if it's easy to find host destinations with a demonstrated commitment to sustainability.

Destination Sustainability ranked and rated with the GDS-Index

The **Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS-Movement)** walks the talk by supporting





The data cannot be disputed. We can't undo what's done, but we can change reality promptly with long-term, living strategy that's both responsive and respectful.

destinations to embrace and fully develop their strategies and DMO, social, supplier, and environmental impact by benchmarking with the GDS-Index. Its vision is to engage, inspire, and empower destinations to become more regenerative and sustainable places to visit, meet and thrive in. In 2021, GDS-Index benchmarked 73 brave destinations that care enough to be counted. The list includes cities small to large, and even whole country regions. They all benefit from measurement and reporting from our proven approaches and methodologies, but it's collaborative strategy creation that is the true seed for productive change. And this is where the power of the Association comes in.

By making informed business decisions, an association can tackle its own goals and simultaneously co-create a system and strategy with destinations to develop teams with absolute buy-in, engage stakeholders towards total market integration, communicate efforts, share learnings, and celebrate achievement.

If we want to make the most of opportunities in our reach and win the game, we must dispense with despondency, and systematically invest in collaborative action based on living strategy. We already have amazing natural models to inspire us. Note that nature does not evolve in isolation – each element responds to every other in an immaculate and constantly changing web of inter-relationships.

We need to do the same, to recognise every other as a part of the process. Like melting poles and rising sea levels, positive impact can be exponential, and like hope, it can be determined and infectious.

The power of community

It's benchmarking season right now with GDS-Index. We're calling all destinations to develop strategies that are resilient, competitive, and future-fit.

Enquiries info@gds.earth

6 ways Associations can deliver lasting, positive impact

1. Educate: train members on the principals of regeneration and data-based examples of a future without them. Try using: engaging workshops, pre-recorded webinars, and on-demand materials.

2. Advocate: Unite members with common goals and values to address policymakers and the public and push for positive change. Gold star: align with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. Activate: Raise awareness with a dedicated plan to showcase relevant sustainability best practices to all members.

4. Regulate: Develop, use, and share standards and certifications that raise the sustainability standard.

5. Measure and Report: Rate and communicate your efforts, goals, and journeys to ensure accountability and continual improvement. Demand that the suppliers and destinations you choose also measure, benchmark, and report.

6. Network like there's no tomorrow: Associations that strategically champion and nurture professional partnerships can empower SMEs that lack the budget to develop sustainability by themselves. A great example of the collective power of networking arose between **Conferli** and **GDS-Movement**. Conferli's enhanced search tool uses data from GDS-Index to match associations with destinations with a sustainability commitment.



Sustainability in a **Time of Uncertainty**

A year ago, when we discussed association sustainability we were still under the shadow of a worldwide pandemic. People were still hesitant to travel; mask and meeting restrictions were still the norm; and retaining members was one of the highest priorities for membership organisations.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Levin, CAE, CSP has more than 20 years of experience as an association executive and is also an internationally-known speaker and consultant to the nonprofit and association community. He currently serves as Executive Vice President of the Chain Link Fence Manufacturers Institute, an international trade association, and as President of B.A.I., Inc., his speaking and consulting firm.



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We identified four key areas where associations needed to focus their efforts:

1. Reviewing and revising the organisation's strategic plan to assure that it is reflective of what had happened during the past year;
2. Looking at benchmarking metrics and updating/revising them;
3. Reconnecting with ALL of your organisation's stakeholders;
4. Developing a specific value message for former members.

A year later, some of those strategies are still relevant, of course, but we now find ourselves in a different environment. The war in Ukraine may well create a number of global realities that will have a significant impact on the not-for-profit community, just as they have on the governmental/political sector, and the private sector.

Tourism, travel, meetings, associations, and charitable organisations, all will need to show real empathy for their members, supporters, funding agencies, and other stakeholders to sustain the recovery of the past twelve months. Here are some of the "new" realities that will impact organisational sustainability in the near future.

Political issues will force associations to make some hard choices

Most associations and not-for-profit organisations tend to try to stay neutral on international political issues, but the invasion of Ukraine has an ancillary impact on our sector. For example, will delegates refuse to meet in certain countries or cities, depending on their stance on Ukraine? What is our organisation's plan if political disputes arise during one of our meetings? Do we need to review contracts with destinations, facilities, vendors, etc., to determine if the war has impacted the ability of members to travel to events or our partners' ability to host them (i.e. is a planned meeting facility being used to shelter refugees)?

The economic impact of the upheaval in Europe will be felt globally and impact the hospitality industry in a number of ways

Last year's supply chain problems, shortages, and higher prices are only going to get worse. Meeting planners have to take a closer look at food costs, transportation costs, and related costs when putting event budgets together.

Registration fees must go up to cover rising food costs; delegates have to pay far more for airline tickets than a year ago; the cost of hiring and transporting speakers is going up. Organisations cannot just absorb these costs; they have to be passed on to the delegates. What is the point at which meetings will become too expensive for delegates to justify their attendance?

The long-term impact of the political crisis in Ukraine is impossible to predict but still must be considered when moving forward

How do organisations plan for their sustainability in an environment that is as unsettled and complicated as the one we face now? The only real choice is to develop a practical and flexible contingency plan for virtually every aspect of their meetings and their financial well-being. Some of the elements of these contingency plans could include:

- although studies show people are anxious to travel and meet in-person again, be prepared to continue offering virtual options for all events, including mandatory continuing education activities;
- develop updated, well-communicated cancellation policies for your members, and insist on the same from your industry partners and vendors;
- if you have members in countries impacted by the Ukraine crisis, establish guidelines for a membership dues waiver for the current/next dues year.

If you have not done a member needs survey since before the pandemic, this might be a good time to do one. Find out what changes your members and stakeholders have made in their buying habits, their communications preferences, and their travel/meeting priorities (including costs). Some of the adjustments that were made by members and their companies/employers during the COVID-19 period may have become permanent policies. The crisis in Ukraine may have pushed some companies and institutions that were just starting to ease some travel restrictions to go back to an "only as needed" status again. Be sure you are working with current market information as you implement contingency plans.

Nothing in the meetings, hospitality, and association world has ever been static. We have always gone through cycles, through good times and bad.

And, we have also had some rather lengthy periods where we have seen some level of stability. This is not one of those periods.

CITY DESTINATIONS ALLIANCE

City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA) is the new name and identity of the organisation formerly known as European Cities Marketing. The rebranding marks a key shift that has been underway for several years, and accelerated by the pandemic, namely that destination leadership involves much more than marketing.

In a time of division, crisis, and war, it is more important than ever to stand together and to stand up for our shared values and beliefs. As always, City Destinations Alliance is for and by its members – and as an alliance, members are coming together not only around their shared identity as European city destinations, but more importantly, they are coming together to form an alliance that celebrates and empowers the thriving visitor ecosystems and economies, they represent.

City Destinations Alliance’s president, Petra Stušek says: “As a community of urban tourism professionals and an alliance of more than 115 European city destinations, we are as European as ever, we share the passion and love for urban experience and city life in general. As an alliance, our purpose is to improve quality of life in Europe’s cities. While working on the DNA of our cities, we are committed to a sustainable and responsible visitor economy that works for people, place, and planet.”

Over the last decade, the business of Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) has changed significantly. Whereas most DMOs used to focus narrowly on city marketing and visitor welcome, today’s operations are much more complex and diverse. Today, lead destinations are tasked with ensuring sustainable and responsible practices in the visitor economy, understanding and managing visitor behaviour,

facilitating public engagement and ensuring usage of smart applications across the urban landscape, and much more. “With the new brand identity – City Destinations Alliance – we recognise that destination leadership involves so much more than marketing”, Petra Stušek says.

Geerte Udo, City Destinations Alliance’s Board member and Director of Amsterdam & Partners, has been part of the task force in charge of developing the new brand identity, and explains how the new brand identity was born: “Over the past six months, the ECM Board has led a collaborative process of member engagement and dialogue, market research and analysis of the global association landscape. It was important for us, that this brand like everything else in the Alliance, was developed for and by the members”, she says. “Our community is a unique culture with a high degree of trust, engagement, and professional curiosity – all of which helps catalyse the power to share...we wanted the new brand identity to reflect the familiar, yet progressive spirit of our community”, Geerte Udo says.

Formally, the City Destinations Alliance assumed its new name at the General Assembly, on Wednesday, March 30, 2022. Over the next months, the Alliance will gradually apply the new visuals across all platforms and channels.

CITYDNA Summer School evolves to fit today's world and include destination regeneration

In challenging times, it is fundamental to keep our values high and stay one step ahead. City Destinations Alliance is honoured and proud to keep its beliefs strong and continue the tradition of the ECM Summer School by carrying out the CityDNA Summer School this year in Turin, in person, on August 27-31, 2022.

The upcoming CityDNA Summer School is the proof of the resilience of the European Meetings Industry. After two years of holding this flagship event online, CityDNA launches a refreshed programme containing the most advanced issues of the industry, explained by the best experts on the market.

More than 15 experienced professionals will lead the newcomers and the freshly-employed professionals of the institutions belonging to the global meetings industry through the most advanced professional protocols for a successful introduction to the industry, complimented by hands-on workshops. There will also be a challenging hackathon among the students coming from all over the world, in order to seed the principles of an effective network in a very efficient competition.

One of the most important changes in the new programme is the addition of a session on sustainability and regenerative destinations. Led by

Guy Bigwood, chief changemaker of the GDS-Movement, this session will focus on giving the newcomers in the meetings industry all the necessary tools to implement a strategy in their destination with sustainability and regeneration at its heart. This session will also be followed by a more hands-on workshop where students will discuss all the practical details and collaboratively look for ideas and solutions.

“Since 1987, the ECM then CityDNA Summer School gives a thorough introduction to all the necessary bases to start off a career in the meetings industry on the right track but also state-of-the-art practices, brought by the most experienced European professionals. The format of the Summer School also guarantees students will meet with as many counterparts as possible whether challenging and interacting with speakers and peers in plenary sessions, group work, networking or socialising.” said **Pier Paolo Mariotti, CityDNA Summer School course leader**. “It’s a crucial task for top management in each organisation, whether it is a convention bureau (CVB), tourism board, congress centre, airline, hotel, DMC, PCO or meeting planner, to train every employee continuously,” added Mariotti.

Register now on citydestinationsalliance.eu and learn for your future success in the meetings industry.

DID YOU KNOW?

The colour of the City Destinations Alliance’s logo was inspired by the UN SDG #11’s orange colour.

The official mission of SDG #11 is to “*Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*” one the main goals of all CityDNA’s member cities.



CITY
DNA

Event planners can look to COP26 in setting the standard of conference planning in the post-pandemic world. Here we look at the organisers' successes.

What the Successes of **COP26** Can **Teach Event Planners**



AUTHOR: SVEN BOSSU, AIPC CEO

Event planners have made it through two years of uncertainty about the future of the convention industry. Many event organisers have invested in digitisation strategies to make virtual events not only possible but just as enriching as attending a conference in-person.

In particular, COP26 represented a significant turning point in the event industry's response to the global pandemic. As a hybrid in-person and virtual event that ran for two weeks from the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, COP26's positive impact rippled across to all corners of the globe.

Its leading cause – to further worldwide efforts to reduce CO₂ and build an environmentally sustainable future – captured the imagination of millions. Despite public health concerns at the time, COP26 was deemed too vital to be sidelined. Organisers moved heaven and earth to enable the conference to go ahead without a hitch.

For convention planners, COP26 sets a fantastic example of what conventions can look and function like in a post-pandemic world.

In a recent AIPC interview with **Kathleen Warden, director of conference sales at Scottish Event Campus** in Glasgow, they discussed the lessons events planners can learn from COP26. Here, we will run through a few top tips that event teams can use to bounce back after two years of economic setbacks.

1. Build strong relationships with stakeholders and event organisers

Rescheduling conferences poses many logistical challenges for event organisers. But for COP26, effective communication between key stakeholders, clients and teams ensured that everyone could come together to move ahead with the event scheduled for 31st October to 12th November 2021.

Belief in the purpose of COP26 was a critical driving force for getting everyone involved on the same page in overcoming the logistical challenges drawn from rescheduling an event of this scale. As Kathleen Warden notes: “In this industry, we do nothing in isolation – it is an industry of teamwork, and we were consistently met with a supportive and collaborative attitude from everyone involved.”

Trust, collective responsibility and clearly articulated common goals have always underpinned successful event delivery. This was more important than ever when hosting the largest event to take place anywhere in the world since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

2. Place visitors at the centre of your conference planning

Flexibility to meet attendees' needs was another area where COP26 triumphed in providing a high level of customer service for Summit visitors. With the possibility that some key people may not be able to join in person, the incentive to provide attendees with all the technological solutions they need to maximise their conference experience became more important than ever before.

In total, the organisers have created parallel

online resources for all 2,500 meetings held over the two-week COP26 timetable. The future of conference planning is about providing a great visitor experience – both online and offline.

3 Plan for the long-term sustainability of your event

COP26 planners looked beyond the scope of their two-week event and ensured that wherever possible, equipment and furniture used for the Summit was sustainably sourced and would have a use long after COP26 concluded.

For instance, grey was selected as the carpet colour of choice throughout the Scottish Event Campus (rather than the UN's primary shade of blue). The organisers' reasoning behind their choice of installing grey carpet rather than blue was purely made from a sustainability perspective. It seems such a small detail, but the implications of this decision were significant.

As COP26 organisers planned on donating the conference carpet tiles to Glasgow's Social Housing Project after the Summit ended, they recognised that grey would work better in a residential setting than blue.

Thinking of the long-term sustainability goals of your event can help you plan charitable outreach schemes that really add value to people's lives, and can also inspire wider audiences to become aware

About AIPC

AIPC is a global network of more than 190 convention centres across 64 countries. Their goal is to promote the best in convention centre management by providing education, research and networking opportunities to management-level events professionals worldwide. Visit aipc.org for more information.

of the positive impacts – adding greater purpose for your participants and stakeholders.

4 Expand your event beyond the scope of your exhibition plan

Additionally, local volunteers have signed up to provide a warm welcome for delegates arriving in the city from all corners of the world. Working with local councils and convention bureaux is another way organisers can promote their cause and gain support from the wider community.

Fundamentally, events and conferences bring together people that want to make a real difference to the world. Therefore, creating an environment where actions can match mission statements will help emphasise your event's message and inspire attendees long after the last person has left the convention site.

In summary, COP26 set high standards for event planners in the years to come. While the industry as a whole may be catching up after two years of setbacks, digitisation, personalisation, and a keen eye for sustainability initiatives can help the sector thrive once more.





In the slow shift to a post-covid era, stable steps are done towards a new normality. Countries, cities, communities, organisations and individuals are investing in the design of a different future. In this process, priority and focus shift is given to new perspectives and developments, which will be key to moving forward, such as those linked to Sustainability.

Long-term Strategy for Associations - New Circular Economies



AUTHOR: SISSI LYGKOU, IAPCO COUNCIL MEMBER, CEO OF AFEA, AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF HAPCO

ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria are now on the top of the agenda, among other important topics. ESG factors are used to assess companies and countries on how far they have progressed in sustainability. Investors are increasingly applying these non-financial factors as part of their analysis process to identify material risks and growth opportunities. In addition, since 2017, the EU has launched tools to measure the success of industries based also on their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions.

Thus, the value and power of an organisation today is not only dependent on its financial results, but also on its contribution and efforts to create a better world. Moreover, research has shown that companies that show important progress in sustainability elements, have a quicker access to funding and higher profitability.

The importance of a holistic approach to sustainability and CSR, which can deliver measurable results, will be a driving factor in the future., the implementation of long-term strategies at the national level, through multi-stakeholder collaboration and with the aim of providing a holistic solution to sustainability challenges, should not be considered optional in the new circular economies.

All industries must play their part and contribute to this global effort, and this requires teamwork and collaboration.

The meetings industry has proven to be a key player, not only for the economic development of a country, but also for the crisis recovery process. It goes without saying that events can rescue economies, but now it is also time for events to be additionally recognised as key drivers in circular economies. Our industry definitely has the power to contribute to the creation of a sustainable future.

While there is a growing focus on sustainability more widely, there has been little academic research on this topic in the meetings industry compared to the existing body of research on sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industries.

It is time for associations, event professionals and all stakeholders in our industry to realise that investing in long-term strategies around sustainability is the only way forward in the event design process, in all aspects and stages of planning, starting from the bidding procedure up to the post-event reporting and data analytics. Soon this will not be a matter of selection but an element of positive evaluation and growth. Associations can definitely play a leading role in this process, if they manage to integrate the sustainability element into multiple channels, such as their educational and scientific objectives, their strategic plan, the destination and venue selection, as well as collaboration with the professional congress organiser who understands the value of sustainable development.

“ *It is time for associations, event professionals and all stakeholders in our industry to realise that investing in long-term strategies around sustainability is the only way forward in the event design process, in all aspects and stages of planning, starting from the bidding procedure up to the post-event reporting and data analytics.* ”

Destinations, associations, event professionals, all key stakeholders in our industry have to join forces with the aim of keeping up with all recent trends on the value of CSR and sustainability. This requires collaboration, education, creation of new knowledge and guidance by the experts of the field. It also requires innovation, thinking outside of the box, but also monitoring and adaptation of best practices.

Speaking of best practices, let's look at an interesting perspective on how to create awareness about sustainability at national level.

CSR HELLAS was founded in 2000, for the promotion and implementation of CSR in the strategies and operations of businesses and organisations in Greece, regardless of their size or sector.

It is currently composed of a dynamic group of companies acting as leaders in shaping new and innovative business practices, contributing to sustainable development and value creation for all shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, local community and environment, as well as for the national economy and society at large. CSR Hellas belongs to the CSR Europe Network which consists of 42 European Networks and 10.000 corporate members and operates with a shared mission and vision (2030 Agenda).

In 2019, AFEA became a member of CSR Hellas Network, being the first meeting organiser in Greece to join this network. At the same time, AFEA is a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which calls companies to take action for the protection of labour and human rights, environment and anti-corruption since 2018. AFEA has incorporated the 10 principles of the UNGC and declared its support to those principles.

During the pandemic, AFEA and CSR decided to join forces, with the aim of raising awareness on the importance of sustainability in meetings and events, as well as in the Tourism sector in the country. Jointly, the two organisations designed a number of webinars and activities throughout the year, inviting key stakeholders and decision-makers in Greece to discuss and exchange views, as well as agree on future steps in the sustainable development agenda. Some of the key speakers and panel members of these webinars were, among others, Ministers of Tourism and Commerce, city representatives, Heads and Board members of hotels and other associations, involved in tourism, senior managers of the biggest enterprises in Greece, representatives of the national air carrier and other important personalities. The success of these joint activities led to the creation of greater awareness and knowledge around sustainability, broadened the network and influence of CSR Hellas and, of course, contributed to the design of more strategies towards the implementation of sustainable events. Overall, an important initiative that is now turning into something bigger for the entire sector in Greece and opens new perspectives.

The collaboration led to a greater success, as the two organisations received the IAPCO Collaboration award for their joint efforts and teamwork on a very important topic. This has also contributed to greater awareness about the value of sustainability within the IAPCO community.

It is up to us in the meetings industry, to create more of these best practices and stories around sustainability and to showcase our industry's power in shaping the future!

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers. IAPCO represents today 137 companies from 40 countries, comprised of over 9900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events. www.iapco.org





Membership Engagement: Shedding New Light Through Collaboration



Members are the lifeblood of an association. Fully engaged, they make our associations thrive, have impact and offer a meaningful experience. But having active involvement can be hard – and when it dips, so does membership, morale, finances & results. So, how to boost engagement?

We're investigating engagement strategies – what's your association doing to ensure members grasp your **purpose** and are able to **participate** in your causes? Do you have a **platform** in place that makes collaboration easy? Are your members making **progress** together? How do you **promote** their contribution?

Bruce Douglas speaks with **Jeffery London** about members teaming up to make progress. As business development & communications director at **Eurelectric**, Bruce leads business expansion and multi-channel communications, always being on a look out for exciting collaboration opportunities within the power sector, but also with adjacent markets.

PURPOSE How do members make sense of your *raison d'être*?

Bruce Douglas: Eurelectric is a member-led and members-based association representing the power sector. We are the voice for the industry in over 32 European countries, speaking on behalf of more than 3,500 companies, known as our full members. In order to engage with our members and integrate their expertise on key topics we operate 21 working groups with over 900 people. On top of that, we represent our business members – more than 40 corporations offering a range of products and services for the electricity industry. We also connect power utilities

with the software, hardware, and knowledge providers harnessing the business and sustainability potential of electrification.

We are all committed to driving the energy transition: as we accelerate the decarbonisation of the electricity mix, we are seeking to provide Europe with a cost-efficient solution to reach carbon neutrality in other sectors of the economy. One of them is the transport sector. By working together with companies across the ecosystem, we aim to accelerate the transition to electrified, clean and sustainable mobility for Europeans.

PARTICIPATION How do your members get involved?

BD: Our members are at the very heart of our working culture and governance. Our full members sit on our Board of Directors as well as policy working groups. Their input is key to the decisions we make as an organisation. In fact, given their wide-ranging knowledge and valuable insights, we are proud to describe our members as our “Structure of Expertise”. For that reason, all our publications, projects and events are led, supported, or developed with our members. Online meetings and collaboration have now become essential to our collaboration with members, which is now facilitated by a sophisticated internal MemberNet system. This allows real time exchange of knowledge, shared documents, meeting notes, contact details and much more.

Innovation is key. Eurelectric has always understood the need to break down silos and encourage exchanges between game changers to foster the development of those cutting-edge, forward-looking business models that are indispensable for the transition to a net-zero emissions society. This led to the creation of several collaborative hubs which include the EVision Business Hub, the Beyond Digital Platform, and the Renewables 24/7 Task Force.

PLATFORM How do your members connect and collaborate?

BD: The main collaboration with members during the pandemic has been through regular online meetings and the use of our MemberNet system, allowing engagement and exchange across multiple

diverse groups. The aim is to rapidly move back to (a more limited number of) physical meetings, whilst maintaining the advantages of online collaboration.

Consensus building is central to our work, as we seek to lead the charge on Europe’s decarbonisation agenda. Our regular meetings with the members enable discussions both on technical and strategic levels, aiming to address current sectoral issues and the long-term evolution of our sector.

Their country-specific viewpoints and discussions inform our policy recommendations, position papers and studies. These exchanges are extremely valuable as they lead to the development of solid and factual evidence, which is essential when engaging with policymakers on the latest proposals on the EU agenda or setting the trend for future transformations. Our business members, meanwhile, complement our advocacy work by exchanging market experiences, challenges and solutions, and sharing business intelligence.

PROGRESS How do your members move things forward?

BD: Thanks to a comprehensive advocacy strategy and engagement with members, all our projects have had significant impact on multiple levels. On one side, we proactively engage with policymakers to promote the joint positions and studies. On the other, we have a fully-fledged communications team which employs the press and social media to deliver our messages to a wider audience. Members also support our advocacy efforts by actively spreading the messages through their national communication channels.



Online meetings and collaboration have now become essential to our collaboration with members, which is now facilitated by a sophisticated internal MemberNet system. This allows real time exchange of knowledge, shared documents, meeting notes, contact details and much more.



PROMOTE How do you recognise a member's talents?

BD: We are proud to celebrate the achievements of our members by showcasing them on our website, supporting them on social media and publishing their many success stories and case studies in our newsletters. To date, we have highlighted successes from every corner of Europe – from developments in e-mobility and innovative district heating solutions, to the construction of solar and wind plants to power millions of homes. However, as much as we are happy to share our members' stories online, we are even happier to invite them to talk about their achievements in person at our events and meetings.

POSTSCRIPT Any other advice for creating engagement?

BD: In 2021, we were delighted to double our business-member base by welcoming market leaders such as Amazon, Daimler Truck, Google, Microsoft, Huawei, Mitsubishi, and Siemens, among others. This engagement was the direct result of providing accessible business opportunities, connections and synergies with new sectors. It shows that the power sector is fast expanding beyond the traditional scope of electricity generators, distributors, and suppliers. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that power utilities need to collaborate with the likes of Microsoft, BMW and PwC – not only to meet the net-zero policy targets, but the expectation of the consumer today.

In times of accelerated transformation, proactive communication, carefully crafted narratives, and cross-sectorial exchanges are key to finding the innovative solutions that will help us win the race against climate change. Our members value the numerous opportunities we offer to engage with each other and new sectors in an easy, open and transparent way.



ABOUT AUTHOR

*Jeffer London is on the board to the **International Association of Facilitators (IAF)** and hosts the **Facilitation Impact Awards**.*

More info at jefferlondon.com or [@jefferlondon](https://twitter.com/jefferlondon).

The IAF promotes facilitators and all who use facilitation to help people work together effectively. Looking for better facilitation? Check out IAF-world.org or talk to Jeffer directly about facilitating leadership teams and association-wide engagement initiatives.



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ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

***Bruce Douglas** is **Eurelectric's** director for business development and communications. He is an astute business professional, with over 20 years' experience in the energy sector, mostly dealing with strategic, operational and financial matters across a range of international markets. Check out Eurelectric.org or get directly in touch with Bruce at bdouglas@eurelectric.org or on his social media accounts.*

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