

Headquarters

NOVEMBER 2023 #112 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



Mavence

How Can Associations Stand out and Be Competitive in Talent Pools?

Wings Global Travel

Launches its Travel Academy

Sydney

The Sweet Spot for Conference Organisation!

Kenes MarCom Manager

Reviews *"The Art of Gathering"*

Standout Feature

Lviv is Unbroken

Lessons From the Event Sector in Ukraine



HOW TO ATTRACT THE NEXT GENERATION OF TALENT TO YOUR ORGANISATION?



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Editor's Letter



A DIFFICULT TASK!

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

Everywhere I stand or go, I see signs saying “Staff wanted.” Often it says: “We are looking for talented people.” In this issue of *HQ*, we tackle a major pain point in the meetings industry, and actually, across all industries. Talent and workforce are concepts from the HR world, and are currently the focus of many organisations.

For several years now, companies in certain sectors have been struggling with a severe staff shortage. Good staff are proving difficult to find, and most applicants simply do not fit the bill. I imagine that many managers in the conference and meetings industry are at their wits' end. How on earth do we solve this problem? As is often the case, there is no simple answer to this question, but we have to consider several causes that have led to the problem.

Let's stick to three causes for now. We see around us major technological developments that go hand in hand with an increasing ageing population, which has a huge impact on the labour market.

Another cause is the fact that a large proportion of the working population is only working part-time. Part of the workforce shortage could be solved if this large group of part-timers decided to work a few more hours a week. Employers would then have to make this option attractive and encourage it. One of the big mistakes made by associations in recent years, for example, has been to lay off older and skilled employees, which has resulted in a lot of knowledge being lost in organisations. And it is precisely this group, the over-50s, who are finding it more difficult to access the labour market because they represent a higher cost.

Unfortunately, I can't offer many solutions, which will have to come from the evolution of the labour market and the economic situation as a whole. But, in the meantime, I invite you to read what our industry colleagues have written on the subject to get some fresh ideas. It may provide solace!

HQ

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MAGAZINE

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IN THE MEETINGS
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65€ in Belgium
75€ in the EU
95€ in the rest of the world

Cover Photo:
Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias,
Valencia
© VisitValencia



Lviv Meeting
Sector

The Unbroken
Forum and
Rehabilitation
Centre



Mavence

“Associations are
not asking for more
than before”



Melva Lajoy
Legrand

“When you
serve, abundance
comes”





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Legacies from a Conference Wonderland!

AI, Data and Robotics Association

All European organisations can and should take advantage of the data economy

AIM

Nurturing well-being





TALENT WANTED: HOW TO ATTRACT THE BEST IN CLASS AND RETAIN THE MOST VALUABLE VETS?

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES,
HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER

As we approach the end of the year, we find ourselves increasingly compelled by the concept of megatrends that influence both the vision of event destinations and the ultimate mission of associations. Everyone is finally realising that the global societal, economic and environmental challenges are also the challenges facing social organisations. We are beginning to realise that we cannot live in isolation, and that associations can/should be the stewards of our communities and spokespeople for the growing frustrations and anxieties in a global scenario of polycrisis.

As I write to you, in October 2023, the world is slowly waking up from a three-year pandemic sleepwalking to a reality of regional wars, galloping inflation and an environmental emergency – all combining to pave the way for a slowdown in globalisation. A multipolar world, as many call it! In fact, this is what centred many of the debates among sustainability managers and DMOs in the sessions organised for the last **GDS-Forum & CityDNA Autumn Conference** in Valencia (*see report on page 32*). How can we build inspired collective actions for better destinations? What kind of sustainable and regenerative leadership do we want to apply to our events? What kind of tourism do we want for our cities? In the joint exploration of blocks for positive destinations, I watched in amazement as **Pr. Xavier Font**, from the University of Surrey, called on the courage of decision-makers to move towards more conscious choices for their built environments. “If DMOs don’t require a long-term visitor strategy, if we are mere pawns in the face of the waves of tourists arriving in our cities, why do we need them at all? If profit is sanity, volume is vanity!”

In this last *HQ* of 2023, we address one of these megatrends that, despite being of great importance for the association events sector, has been under-emphasised as a matter of concern in such a competitive market. How can we attract the best talent to our associations, train our staff and retain the best professionals? In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the interview with **Jason Descamps**, CEO of the recruitment firm **Mavence**. As he used to say, “Employers are the demand, candidates are the offer”. That’s because in that previous world we lived in, the clients were the demand, and the candidates were supposed to do “anything” to meet the demand... Well, not anymore, right? On the other hand, we also visited the Academy of the Travel Management Company **Wings**, which, through this training camp, is trying to combat the rampant unemployment among young people in South Africa and steer their careers towards the industry. Also, not to be missed are a series of exciting articles featuring the **AI, Data and Robotics Association**, the event planner **Melva LaJoy** and her post-pandemic experiences, and a tour of **Sydney**.

Last but not least, a mandatory reference for our stand-out piece on **Lviv**, a beacon of hope in the Ukrainian war. We present you with an extensive and detailed report on how the city went from being an event powerhouse in western Ukraine to the largest humanitarian hub on the continent. Or, in the words of its mayor, **Andriy Sadovyi**: “We need expertise to build new operating theatres, we need support to manufacture a large number of prosthetics, we need accommodation for injured people. We need collaboration, we need new partners, and we need to build our future together! Today, the Ukrainian people protect democratic values, maybe that’s our mission, but I believe in our future.” So

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Lviv:

An **Unbroken Spirit** in the Face of War!

Ukraine's indefatigable spirit among its business events community and political structures has fuelled optimistic prospects, generating a remarkable example of legacy in the **Unbroken** project. In the shadow of war, Lviv has become Europe's largest humanitarian hub and a haven for millions of displaced, injured and homeless people. We caught up with **Yuliia Katynska** from the **Lviv Convention Bureau** to break down the Unbroken project – a beacon of hope in Ukraine for association activism.

Author: Manuel A. Fernandes



“ *Events are mainly about knowledge and the added value they can bring to communities.* ”



In 2017, when our founder and editor Marcel Visser was invited to visit Lviv for the first time, he found a surprisingly bohemian and forward-looking city – with a glimpse of an old world in its urban fabric and architecture that blended with a young, high-flying society marked by its universities, festivals and cultural centres. A city that embraced the international community and, therefore, hosted the **17th annual ICCA Central European Chapter Summer Meeting**, in what was our first coverage of the Ukrainian city. Five years later, the world watched in shock as the Russian Federation began a military invasion of the country on several fronts. Today, the city of Lviv has turned into a big humanitarian hub in which people fleeing the war are finding refuge. Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe, stretching some 1,300 km from east to west, where Lviv is just 70 km from the Polish border. They have no active battles but still suffer tactical attacks from Russian missiles. “We are fortunate to be

relatively far from the war fronts, but the missiles continue to hit our critical infrastructure and, because of the old maps Russians use, they also hit residential buildings, as happened in July this year.” Day after day, they are forced to live under the yoke of emergency sirens as they make their way to shelters and, unfortunately, the city has already suffered some damage to critical infrastructure such as power stations and reservoirs.

Surprisingly, Lviv managed to host 593 conferences – local, national and international – in that same year, 2022, and Lviv hasn't slowed down, winning titles such as **European Youth Capital 2025** and securing a steady stream of international conferences despite the odds. It was at these events that Lviv's uncompromising spirit revealed itself, cleverly harnessing the impact of the meetings it hosted to convene rehabilitation forums, cross-industrial reflections and dialogues on urban planning and reconstruction.



“Lviv was the first and is currently the only convention bureau here in Ukraine. Since 2013, when the convention bureau was founded, we have scratched the surface of an ecosystem of business communities, stakeholders and partners in a joint network to leverage new assets around conferences and conventions. We made some attempts to create a national convention bureau in the country, but unfortunately, there is no staff to operate it on a national level for various reasons,” **Yuliia Katynska, Deputy Director of Lviv Convention Bureau**, tells us in a Zoom call.

Destined to become Ukraine’s main business city for association meetings and conferences, Lviv is now a temporary shelter for more than 150,000 internally displaced people and a transit point for another five million people. For this young DMO team, the dynamics of the tender process migrated from a purely economic point of view to public discussion forums and conferences with direct and lasting impacts on the frontline needs of a city in a constant state of alert. To stimulate a joint network of thinkers and creators, they began reaching out to the

various scientific and academic communities with their ambassador programme to involve local experts and professionals in different fields, whether it be medicine, IT or logistics. “How to create a functioning market that attracts all these communities in the city to understand the legacy and intellectual capital left behind by these international events. Before the war, we took the first steps with a data collection system to know and measure the type of events that were taking place at that time and account for our built infrastructure. In 2013, we had 57 international conferences in Lviv, and today, we have almost 200 international events of different sizes. Even last year, we hosted 110 international conferences,” Katynska tells us.

Humanitarian centres and innovation projects marked this response, with hotels transformed into shelters, IT companies becoming command and information centres and sectoral priorities focusing on medicine, IT development and urban planning. Strategic cooperation and networking between international associations and local Lviv professionals is one of the objectives to be

achieved in the next series of events. “We’re trying to take part in international medical events to promote Lviv’s rehabilitation ecosystem and achieve tangible results.” Last month, the first **Lviv Medical Union** together with the **UNBROKEN National Rehabilitation Center** visited **Luxembourg Healthcare Week 2023** to discuss the medical sector among training, programmes and cooperation with international medical associations. The country is performing many surgeries at the moment, with international colleagues expressing their interest in new techniques and equipment. International dentists have been contacting their Ukrainian counterparts to test new models of oral health care, and the need for prostheses and amputation surgery has increased, given the scarcity of resources. “Ukraine has become fertile ground for these areas. It’s a win-win cooperation – delegates and scouts benefit from a unique experience in the field and local health professionals reap the benefits with training, know-how and medical assistance. Science can be the silver lining of our war context,” says Katynska.

On the other hand, funding for infrastructure projects is another urgent issue to be resolved due to the lack of medical departments and facilities that can deliver adequate treatment. The DMO is also focusing on the IT sector, developing different technologies, the city is home to almost 90,000 specialists who represent a large part of Lviv’s economy. “At the end of September, we hosted the **IT Arena**, the largest IT conference in Eastern Europe, with almost 3,000 people during the war. It was a huge challenge for the PCOs to organise this event from a security and logistics point of view. They divided the city into 15 different venues to realise what kind of venues were included and to reinforce the security points for the participants.” As far as the conference infrastructure is concerned, they can operate at various levels. International organisations such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, UN, UNESCO and UNICEF continue to choose the city to carry out their trainings and field operations.

The Unbroken Forum and Rehabilitation Centre

With the outbreak of war, Lviv’s medical community began to think about how it could treat frontline combatants and the war wounded. Realising that the medical facilities and resources were not enough and trying to unite more and more international players, this group began organising small meetings for 100 people in what was the beginning of **Unbroken**. In April 2023, Lviv hosted the **International Rehabilitation Forum** as a specific follow-up convention with experts from around the world, international companies, entrepreneurs and ambassadors, to look for new financial solutions and design a new social rehabilitation plan. The forum was the culmination of a series of talks between the business



“

The greatest legacy that comes from Unbroken is the seeds of a national policy of rehabilitation for Ukrainians.

Upcoming international conventions in Lviv

- *International ABDOS Conference, 2024*
- *Wilhelm Bernhard Workshop, 2025*
- *European Crystallographic Meeting (ECM) 2025*
- *6th International Conference “UNESCO Historic Cities, Heritage of Peace” 2025*
- *International Conference on Solid Compounds of Transition Elements (SCTE), 2026*

events sector and Lviv’s political leaders, with the aim of generating global attention for this humanitarian tragedy. This convention was followed in June by the **Lviv Urban Forum**, where 700 participants gathered in the city to discuss architecture, urbanism and urban planning. After the forum, Japanese architect **Shigeru Ban**, known for his involvement in humanitarian aid projects, began work on the new surgical block for the UNBROKEN National Rehabilitation Centre. “It’s not just about the rehabilitation centre, but a whole ecosystem of different medical buildings, including physiotherapy, neuroscience and mental health, single mothers and pregnant women and residential buildings,” says Katynska.

Almost six million Ukrainians have fled abroad for security reasons, but also for economic reasons. Many people have lost their jobs, and those who are currently abroad will later need an economic roadmap to return. “I think all these meetings and experts can also help our communities, cities and the country to steer towards solutions for the return of Ukrainians. We are talking to different associations about possible European memberships at organisational level for Ukraine and Lviv. If we speak about international associations, they look at our city as a good place to get new members and to help their associations

grow.” The medical and IT sectors in Lviv are backed by local and government bodies; the local bureau knows that as far as membership association events are concerned, this is a long-term strategy that will begin to take root in four to four years. “We have to start thinking about it now and help them make that contribution. I’m sure everyone has a legacy in mind and wants to be part of this process. We can’t wait until the war is over to take action,” she replies.

The **Unbroken Emergency Summit**, which took place on 30 October at Lviv City Council, formalised this call to action to mission-based associations, foundations, corporations, NGO’s and event planners. “We planned to create this platform so that international associations would understand all the gaps to be filled in Lviv. We don’t need money, we need their expertise. Certainly, the priority for us is medicine, engineering, social and life sciences, critical infrastructure around energy and the environment, and education aimed at society in different areas. Right now, for example, we’re focusing on accessibility in our urban planning to turn the city into a friendly space for people with disabilities,” Katynska concludes.

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The talent market is currently a very sensitive issue for both associations and event planners. We know today that many associations imploded due to the pandemic disruption; others emerged with a new identity, but certainly, most of them have very different staffs, from the secretariat to management. However, not all employees have the same perspectives: while many qualified newcomers get into this market due to sector-based commitment and governance aspects, seniors, on the other hand, yearn for salary progression and natural career advancement. And if we move on to event planners, we see that the position is among the most stressful jobs in the world.



“Employers are the demand, candidates are the offer. Is that still true?”

Mavence is an international recruiting firm that connects employers with talent and people with opportunities in public affairs and in associations. Flexible work arrangements and work-life balance? More specialisation or greater breadth of knowledge? A more regional or global positioning? **Founder and CEO, Jason Descamps**, tried to address all these issues in our conversation.

If we’re strictly talking about the associations you work with, what are they asking for at the moment?

Associations are not asking for more than before. But, unlike large corporates, they probably can’t afford to follow the current trends of people (their staff) working from abroad, either fully remotely or by agreeing to travel to the office once or twice a week. Associations tend to have only one location and, for those that have multiple offices around the world, the challenge remains the same: to create synergies and team dynamics without everyone becoming a free electron. That’s why, when they recruit people, they ask them to maintain a certain level of connection to reality, to their local teams and to their stakeholders, which, in my opinion, is only fair in the representation game. This is all about influence, communication, sharing good practices, aligning positions, creating consensus, and it’s not always possible to achieve the expected level if you or your team aren’t there.

Is an organisation’s value structure now more

important to attract the best in class at the associative level?

Yes, it’s a generational issue. I don’t really like previous generations calling me a ‘millennial’ because I was born in 1986, but the latest generations see things differently from us. The typical requirements of newcomers to the market range from work culture and on-site presence needs, to the values and purpose of the organisation, through the ability to reach consensus among members, their reputation and their working style in their own organisations. They distinguish between different types of flexibility, whether it’s working from home or leaving the office early if they need to solve an urgent problem and then working from home, which obviously clashes with a certain generation of managers who find it difficult to adapt to these new needs, and who therefore see talent leave in a very short period of time. Working in this new style requires more trust more quickly, and control freaks are finding it harder than ever.

How can associations stand out and be competitive in the talent pools? What can a mission-based association offer a candidate that a listed company can't?

This is a tough one, since people in Brussels generally dream of two golden cages: in-house jobs or the Commission. So, indeed, competition is tough. The working culture is probably less aggressive in associations than in companies or consultancies. I remember headhunting a very competent lawyer from a top law firm for an association, just because she had recently become a mum and could no longer afford to spend evenings and part of her nights on the computer. However, one aspect that is probably often overlooked in the associations' elevator pitch is the horizontal, 360° view they offer of their sector or niche. Most associations are sector-specific, which is very interesting for those who are curious to get a full perspective on what is happening, for instance, in the world of financial services, renewable energies or medical technology. They will be part of a platform that centralises data on who is doing what and who are the movers and shakers of a category, which I find very interesting if you are passionate about something. However, that won't apply to certain people in Brussels whose passion is... politics, not the sector.

Do you struggle to find professionals in the events field? Do you think that the event planner role is a red flag when it comes to finding talent?

Not really, but we are probably biased by the fact that when we need to find such talent, we only look into a pool of very experienced people who already know the difficulties of this profession. I've attended events organised by people who weren't based in Brussels, for example, and you could really tell by their choice of venue and speakers that they didn't come from the EU policy world, nor had they taken the time to study how the bubble thinks and who the best speakers to invite are. Therefore, to be successful in planning events when you are not a native of the place where the event is to

be held, you need to compensate with a quick understanding of that market.

How can the event industry create a strong sense of belonging among its human resources?

I am not sure there is category-specific solution for events people. There are certain links actually between events and recruitment: on both sides, we look for the most skilled people to join it. I think it depends on what drives your people. What is it in the event industry? The magnitude of an event in number of attendees, budget size, the prestige of the event measured by the calibre of people who participate, or the feedback from people who attend? You don't really grow into big titles, but you acquire a large network, and you may well become a middleman in some fields. This is often a great position to be in, as people come to you for all sorts of requests, and, at some point, you can monetise that.

What message would you like to leave our readers on how to strengthen their association in 2024?

I think the world is adapting to this new reality. I used to say, "Employers are the demand, candidates are the offer." Because in the world where we lived, the client was the employer who is the demand, and the offer (the candidate) was supposed to do "anything" to meet the demand. The battle for talent may have dealt some cards, but now who has to meet whose demands? Talent performance is not always a matter of on-site presence or availability – top performers will remain, even with an evolving list of demands, as they set their own limits to achieve their goals before the employer has to. Employers should look for people who have this mindset, and accept that the need to control what employees do is diminishing. Employees should look for employers who can trust them even in times of disconnection, also accepting the reality of their profession – i.e. if they are paid to represent, they must also be present.



Now
Hiring

Wings Global Travel Launches its **Travel Academy** for **Unemployed Young People**

More than a third of South Africa's population is unemployed, but that figure rises to over 60% for younger working-age people up to the age of 24. The **Wings Global Travel Academy programme** will select candidates who completed their secondary education with the Thandulwazi Trust but were unable to secure a university place. We spoke to **Kevin Lomax, Managing Director of Wings**, to find out how the industry can play a pivotal role in driving careers for young South Africans, and this perspective on corporations as active training centres and talent factories.



On our recurring visits to **Meetings Africa**, we couldn't help but notice the large number of young people who make up the majority of the workforce in the South African business events sector, from catering and logistics to secretarial work and project management. In a country where more than half of the population is under the age of 30 and where almost two-thirds of these young people of working-age are unemployed, **Wings Global Travel®** has launched an initiative to reconnect young people in South Africa with this industry and offer them prospects for the future. Helping to reintroduce a stuck generation into the workforce, the Wings Global Travel Academy is for those who have missed out on tertiary education opportunities, unlike other learning schemes typically aimed at university students. The Academy aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to work in corporate travel.

Founded in 1992, global travel management company Wings owns and manages comprehensive operations across 16 international hubs, cutting-edge technology and unmatched service standards. Globally, the company employs more than 450 people, generating annual sales of more than £420 million. "The travel and tourism sector is capable of absorbing people with low skill levels and, through structured programmes, increasing them quickly. We currently have a skills shortage in the travel sector. Many people have left due to lockdowns, and those who found work in other sectors do not return. Therefore, the opportunity is to identify people with the right attitude and prepare them for formal employment," Kevin Lomax, tells us.

Wings has partnered with the **Thandulwazi Trust** to create 25 learnerships for students on a ten-week course between September and October. "We chose to partner with Thandulwazi because we believe in the work they do when it comes to the **Saturday School Initiative** offering extra classes to achieve better results." By working with Thandulwazi, Wings gained access to a pool of enrollees who had achieved grade 12 (17-18 years old), but who had not had the opportunity to enter formal employment or tertiary education. Identifying students who voluntarily attended extra classes also said something about their desires and mindsets to improve and achieve. Furthermore, Wings advocates that South African companies should participate in corporate social responsibility schemes as part of the **Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE)** legislation that aims to improve the life opportunities of designated groups. "Inevitably, many companies approach BBBEE purely from a compliance perspective and do the minimum, but corporate social responsibility has to be more than a tick-box exercise. Unless we engage fully with the challenge, we not only risk prolonging social injustice but

harming the economic prospects of the country. People desperately need work, and businesses need to play a more active part in building the talent pipeline," says Lomax.

According to several studies, one of the main causes of youth unemployment in South Africa is the mismatch between what employers demand and what young people – determined by technical under-qualification in relation to employers' expectations – lack. However, today, we also know that the main factor for career success is improving interpersonal skills, including problem-solving, networking and leadership – in other words, "soft skills". "When we met as a team to decide where we wanted to focus our efforts on comprehensive support and improvement, we concluded that the intervention needed to satisfy two requirements: meet a need at Wings that was identified as a skills shortage; and make a difference in the face of country's challenges from the perspective of youth unemployment." Although many tutors and institutions run apprenticeship programmes, they generally appeal to a student base that already attends formal education. "We then decided to focus on unemployed youth by choosing to partner with **Future Fit** so that in addition to travel skills, learners could also acquire other critical skills to succeed in the workplace. Things like dealing with ambiguity and increasing connectedness with stakeholders," adds Lomax.

The Wings Global Travel Academy course was developed with **Dr. Eric Albertini of Future Fit Academy**, focusing on 15 essential skills. Graduates will earn certificates for use in further education and employment applications delivered by the Wings and Future Fit staffs. The company will create job placements for eight graduates from the course in administration, consulting and sales support roles, and hopes to help the rest find work elsewhere in its supply network. "Whilst there are many good travel diplomas and courses offered by higher education institutions, I am not convinced that this is necessary to start a career in travel," he argued. "With the right training and attitude, we can absorb people and train them to be very productive, very quickly. Education is a lifelong learning process, and we will look to partner with formal education institutions for learners' ongoing education." All travel management companies are seeing a rapid increase in demand for services, which means there is demand for talent even though many qualified people have left the industry. "The biggest challenges are finding the right resources that fit our culture and ideals, while competitors are also on a growth path. Wings is an employer of choice, so we are able to capture and retain talent," concludes Kevin Lomax.

Our interviewee is not only an award-winning event producer, but also an accredited public speaker and advocate for social change. **Melva Lajoy Legrand, founder and CEO** of Washington DC-based event planning firm **Lajoy Plans**, relaunched her business in 2019 just before the pandemic, when she was faced with losing nearly 98% of her business. Instead of giving up, she chose to fight for her sector, joining forces with other industry leaders in the Live Events Coalition and creating a community support series called Beyond the Blackout, together with Margo Fischer, owner of Bright Occasions. She also co-launched with Margo the Head Table Talks with a diverse community of event organisers that resulted in a three-part series highlighting talented vendors. Her thought leadership has been featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Modern Luxury* and *Architectural Digest*, on sustaining businesses post-pandemic, the gender pay gap and being a black leader.

“There's a difference between being in the room and **being at the table!**”

By the end of the year you'll have your hands full with ten events in seven different cities around initiatives to support the climate crisis, the LGBTQ+ community, prison reform, education, etc. What was the big motivation behind this mission-focused vision?

I would attribute it to my personal values. I built my business on the conviction that not all money is good money. I want to use my gift and my logistical experience to help these organisations have greater visibility and impact. I've been on the other side – the more *instagrammable* celebrity-focused work – but for me, waking up every day and knowing that our conferences are moving the world forward is very rewarding. At the end of the day, that's what drives my business. The crisis has made me pay more attention to what it all means, but also to my family values. My parents were real servants, and I attribute my work ethic to them. That's the model I inherited, and that's what I tell anyone in this sector: there's great power in servant leadership. And the fact that my company is independently funded is proof of that. When you serve, abundance comes.

Meanwhile, you joined forces with other industry leaders to provide resources and support for planners who were experiencing the industry lockdown, joining the Live Events Coalition, and creating a community support series called Beyond the Blackout. Tell us more about this adventure.

When I think about everything that happened during COVID-19, it became clear to me that I couldn't survive if it wasn't for the spirit of collaboration. We had to relearn how to network and retain some of the lessons learnt from that period.

I wanted to reassure my colleagues in the sector that we could get through this together. That's when I found myself as a board member of the Live Events Coalition, and co-launching an educational programme focused on mental health and recovery. This openness allowed many small businesses to continue working in partnership with larger organisations. The fact that I opened up, stayed humble and didn't get stuck in old habits was the reason my business took off again when the tides turned. Besides, our sector has always glorified the burning of the midnight oil, the hustle culture, and suddenly, the pandemic forced us to stop. What is the end result of creating burned-out people? Many have left the sector because, finally, they have decided to put their mental health first. We have to take care of ourselves, and my fear is that even though work has come back so quickly, everyone will be rushing headlong at the same pace again.



Photo © Ana Isabel



If you're in a leadership position, make time for people who have likely done it for you.



Nowadays, we have all heard about megatrends that are influencing bidding processes towards another level of professionalisation for associations. For LaJoy, what was the new factor that started to be heard more frequently by your customers?

Risk management is an important issue, and, unfortunately, risk management against gun violence is something we are often asked to consider and plan. The other thing I've been doing for years, but which I'm increasingly being asked to analyse, is the diversity and accessibility audit. We spend more time journey-mapping our visits, especially in the case of conferences: what is the experience like for someone who has a mobility problem or hearing impairment? The third aspect of this list of trends that organisations are increasingly interested in covering is sustainability. How can you reuse heavy decorations? How do you find an alternative to plastic or go fully vegan? The reason it seems different this time is that I see people spending real money. Instead of including the usual hashtag with *#climatechange*, I'm seeing clients placing sustainability and net zero efforts in various areas of their budget.

You also launched a quarterly luncheon in DC, Head Table Talks, to offer a safe space for event planners to network and raise issues such as inclusion and diversity in terms of popularity and visibility. If we talk strictly about the events and meetings industry, how inclusive and diverse is it today?

I believe we have the best intentions, but we're not fully there. Just to give you an example: when looking for

a photographer for one of our events, my colleague discovered that some of these professionals were leading with an associate who was white because they didn't trust that if they led with a black or Latino, they would get that offer. This was in 2023! On the positive side, what I love about our sector is that when I go to a conference, there's a feeling of otherness. What I wonder is how that trickles into the leadership levels. I think that our sector, unlike others that are more rigid, is very creative, innovative and intelligent, and that we quickly realise the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. However, we have to keep moving forward. Staying on the surface is comfortable and safe, and coming to terms with our own concepts is vulnerable. It's easy to be performative in that situation. It's easier to ask the question "tell me how you got here" than to fight micro-aggressions. There's a difference between being in the room and being at the table! It's great that a lot have made it into the room, but what I really want to know is, if I sit at that table, will I be valued and listened to?

“ *When you serve, abundance comes.* ”

How do you interpret the duality between impact and influence, and what is legacy for you from the perspective of an event organiser?

Legacy is 100% about impact. When we buried my father, who was definitely not an influencer, many people spoke of him as a husband, as a father and as a servant. My father had an impact. One of my most



I realise that time is at a premium in this business, but if someone reaches you, be available. We all have five minutes to exchange a few ideas.



valuable principles is the way I've been able to reach, touch and change people through my work. The way I've been able to create a safe space for non-influential people to be seen, heard and valued. For me, influence is an action of power that is often motivated by ego. Impact, on the other hand, is about planting the seed, regardless of whether your name is attached to it, and seeing it harvested. There are a lot of things I do behind the scenes. I don't have many followers or clicks on social media, but what I do know is that if today was my last day on earth, I would have had an impact. When we do that, our events are magical. Maybe it's naive of me, but I think that nowadays, more people are interested in impact than influence. We just don't see them because of the algorithm and the whole culture around instant fame.

“Power can corrupt or it can provide the necessary impetus for change,” is a very relevant phrase at a time when there is so much talk about talent retention and the whole sector as a space for professional growth. How can we attract new talent and convince young people that they have a future in the event industry?

If we are in a position of power, we will know how to use it correctly if we answer the following question: how can I use my power to move people forward? Do I use my power according to my unique purpose and remain passionate about doing so? On the flip side, if your access to power is self-serving or requires constant clapping, then you're not ready for it, or you need to change. If people use the framework of their power to boost the capacity of their peers and to bring them along, then it's a good thing. Because you can be empowered by power! As a leader, you have to be able to relate to people. From a talent point of view, you have to be available and accessible. Don't climb too high on your pedestal. I realise that time is at a premium in this business, but if someone reaches you, be available. We all have five minutes to exchange a few ideas. To be where you are, someone gave you an opportunity, so spread those opportunities throughout your environment. Give it forward!



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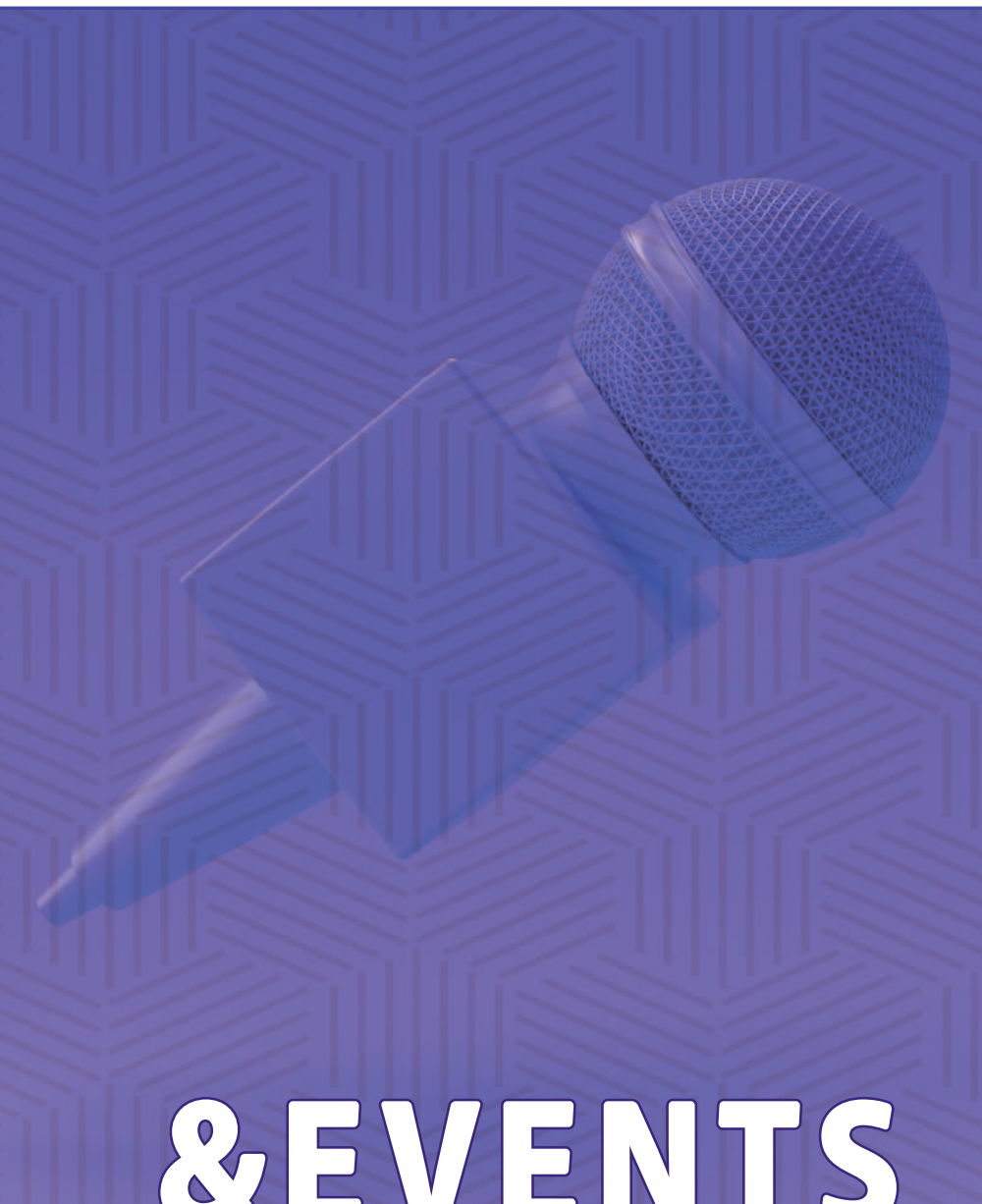
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HQ DESTINATION INTERVIEWS



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Budapest:

An Ever-growing Star in Central Europe!



Capitalising on a privileged position in Central Europe, Budapest has invested massively in its business and association sector, offering today a perfect combination of leisure, *workation*, corporate and incentive programmes and, of course, event venues and excellent infrastructure for conventions and trade fairs.

Budapest Connects, Innovates, and Invests in its Future

The Pearl of the Danube is today an affordable destination with high

potential and excellent value for money, offering high-quality services for unique local experiences for both scientific congresses and high-level business events. In addition, the city has fantastic accessibility both by air (with direct connections to around 128 airports and 140 destinations within two hours from major European air hubs) and by rail (with direct connections to more than 50 destinations between its three main stations), making for a seamless and borderless travelling experience within the European Union.

Once they arrive at Liszt Ferenc International Airport, conference-goers will be able to take advantage of multiple public and private transport links to the centre (40 minutes away), and more than 200 bus lines, 32 trams, 15 trolleys and four metro lines in a city that is also very walkable. There are many opportunities for cycling in Budapest, exploring both banks of the Danube: Buda, the most historical and traditional part

of the city, and Pest, with all the leisure, and catering offers which makes its atmosphere much more vibrant and trendy. What's more, Budapest has also made great strides to ensure that both residents and delegates with special needs can use the city's transport and meeting spaces with step-free access, lifts and barrier-free solutions during their stay.

Budapest has also seen significant investments in infrastructure and services in recent times. With the development of **HUNGEXPO Budapest Congress & Exhibition Center** which opened two years ago, Budapest now has its convention centre of choice, serving as the preferred venue for international congresses, conferences or exhibitions of any size. The project included the expansion of the event space up to 15,000 people with the addition of two new halls, the renovation of all the existing pavilions, a new congress centre and a state-of-the-art audiovisual system. To date, Hungexpo Budapest has hosted major international events such as the **International Eucharistic Congress 2021**, **AIPC Annual Conference 2022**, and the **annual congress of the European Academy of Neurology 2023**, with more than 6,000 participants from all over the world. Also noteworthy is the **Liget Budapest Project**, which won the coveted



The Liget Budapest Project has claimed the prestigious title of Europe's Best Tourism Development at this year's International Travel Awards in Dubai. Honoured as Europe's most complex and largest-scale cultural urban development project, the initiative aims to transform Budapest's City Park into a visionary masterpiece, with the renovation and expansion of the park's green spaces, recreational facilities and historic institutions, and spanning 150 years of heritage and innovation.

title of Europe's Best Tourism Development at this year's International Travel Awards in Dubai.

Since 2017, more than 17,000 developments have taken place in the Hungarian tourism sector, with the renovation of 40 new hotels, many of them specifically aimed at the high-end segment, 14,000 private accommodation units, and almost 600 guesthouses, as well as the improvement of dozens of attractions, castles, fortresses and spas. In 2022, a total of 23 new hotels opened in Hungary, increasing the number of hotel rooms by 1,511 across the country, with the majority of these 8 new units opening operations in Budapest. Furthermore, new brands were also introduced last year for visitors to the capital, such as the 137-room **Dormero Hotel Budapest**, the 5-star **Hard Rock Hotel Budapest**, the chain's first hotel in Central Europe, with 136 rooms and suites, two restaurants and a rooftop events venue. It's also worth mentioning that the **W Budapest** opened in July this year, following the renovation of a historic building opposite the Opera House that will become the first W Hotel in the country. The 16,000 m² hotel will offer 162 rooms and suites, a presidential suite, a spa, a fitness centre and a restaurant.

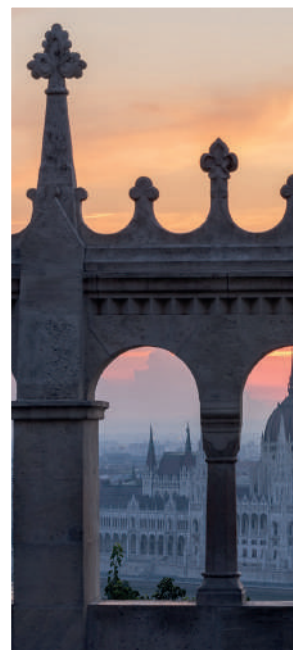
Verno House, **Áurea Ana Palace**, **Est Grand Hotel Savoy** and **Matild Luxury Collection Hotel** followed suit, while a 332-room **ibis-Tribe hotel** will open next

year, along with the luxurious **St Regis in Klotild Palace**. The city's hotel capacity currently stands at 2,200 rooms, with 727 new rooms to be built in 2024. In addition to the numerous conference hotels, Budapest also boasts other classic venues such as the **Vigadó Concert Hall** (*pictured next page*), the **Kiscelli Museum** built on the site of an 18th-century baroque church, the **Museum of Fine Arts**, several unique event spaces such as the **House of Hungarian Music**, **Báňa Budapest** or **Twentysix**, as well as huge sporting venues such as the **Puskás Arena** or the **MVM Dome**.

An Inspiration and Delight for Visitors

Budapest is a vibrant and unique cultural destination for mega-events with a number of attributes, including its burgeoning world-class gastronomy and viticulture, impressive culture and architecture, and newly created attractions. An exceptionally safe destination, Budapest's landmarks are countless with its historic buildings, such as the Buda Castle Palace, and world-famous attractions, such as the Hungarian State Opera (*pictured right*), the embankments of the Danube River and the entire Andrassy Avenue, all recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, in addition to the Hungarian National Gallery, the Matthias Church, the Parliament Building and the splendid Margaret Island.

The city has great cultural offers like the newly





renovated opera house, the biggest synagogue in Europe on Dohány street, and several ruin bars with a very pleasant atmosphere. Budapest is also the world capital of thermal baths, with more than 100 hot springs and wells scattered around the city, including the Széchenyi Thermal Bath Gellért, Thermal Bath and Rudas Thermal Spa. Finally, Hungarian cuisine is known worldwide for its uniqueness, combining centuries-old traditions with the latest gastronomic trends, and Budapest is also a categorical example of this. This year's Hungarian edition of the MICHELIN Guide continues to feature two restaurants with two Michelin stars and seven with one Michelin star, while 59 restaurants received Michelin recommendations, 14 more than last year, including eight in Budapest. The fact that Hungary's high-quality gastronomy is a significant attraction in many source markets leads to the conclusion that catering is one of the most common factors influencing travel decisions. Thanks to this multiplicity of choices, Budapest has become one of Central Europe's prominent culinary centres.

Committed to promoting the sustainability of the sector, the importance of environmental responsibility and the social impact of its event legacies, the Budapest Convention Bureau is the central actor in the Hungarian capital's MICE ecosystem for successful congress hosting by adopting sustainable and progressive practices for the industry.

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“

Among the top global tourism landmarks around the world, the Hungarian Parliament building has also won the prestigious title of World's Best Tourist Attraction, as declared by Stasher Tourism. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, it is a symbol of the historical grandeur that adorns the banks of the Danube, adding to its allure as one of Budapest's most emblematic buildings.





Valencia Conference Centre: A Benchmark for Business Travel!

At the end of the last century, one of the city's most emblematic buildings was born in València (Spain). Designed by Norman Foster, the **Valencia Conference Centre (VCC)** is a landmark in the city's history as a congress and conference venue, having been voted the World's Best Convention Centre in 2018 and 2010. The building that was envisioned as one of the city's strategic points of reference for event tourism is celebrating its 25th anniversary, having become one of the most important business forums and a benchmark for management, innovation and activity. To mark this milestone, *HQ* spoke with **Sylvia Andrés, Managing Director** at the VCC.

Congratulations on the 25th anniversary of Palacio de Congresos València! Can you reflect on some of the most significant milestones and successes over the past 25 years?

For a quarter of a century, the VCC has been leading the way. On 2 July 1998, the building that would be the precursor to the transformation of the northeast area of the city of Valencia opened its doors. Today, it is an iconic building that attracts people from all over the country and the world. Since it opened, the venue has hosted 3,300 events and welcomed 2.4 million attendees.

Furthermore, the VCC was also recognised as the World's Best Convention Centre in 2018 and 2010. The AIPC Apex Award is the highest international recognition a conference centre can receive, and its importance lies in the fact that it is based entirely on the opinions of clients who organise events, mainly congresses and conventions.

What are some of the most memorable events that have taken place at the VCC over the years?

There have been many national and international congresses, business meetings and events of all kinds that have made the VCC a diverse space. The importance of our activity is reflected in the nature of the events held here. Out of the total

number of events hosted, over 1,000 were congresses and conventions, attracting over 665,000 delegates to the venue.

In terms of international events, the **African Development Bank Group (AfDB)** held its first-ever meeting outside of Africa here. Other events held at the venue included the **54th NATO Parliamentary Assembly**, the **3rd Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism**, the **15th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government**, the **European Framework Programmes** and the **Conference on the Mediterranean Solar Plan**.

A significant part of the work of the VCC is focused on hosting national and international scientific and medical events, organised by leading associations and organisations. Notable events include: the **7th Global 5G Event**; **European Conference on Networks and Communications EuCNC**; **European Congress of the European Headache Federation**, etc. The centre is also an ideal venue for private organisations to hold their conventions, corporate meetings or new product launches, whether they are multinationals in the pharmaceutical sector such as Roche, Ammiral or Astra Zeneca; technology companies such as Microsoft, Vodafone, Sony or Electrolux; or the most cutting-edge companies from the automotive industry such as Mercedes Benz, Audi and BMW.





How has the VCC contributed to the growth and development of València as a conference and convention destination?

València is currently well-positioned in terms of conferences. Its good quality-to-price ratio, cuisine, climate, accommodation, transport connections, and specialised infrastructure, such as the VCC, boasting cutting-edge technology and national and international competitiveness, are crucial factors in maintaining the city's appeal for hosting events and enhancing brand recognition.

The VCC's activity has generated more than 2.4 million overnight stays in Valencia, providing a great boost to the local economy and making the city an important destination for international importance congresses. Valencia is currently ranked 28th in Europe and 36th in the world by the International Congress and Convention Association.

What are some of the new and innovative ways that you are working to attract and retain meetings and events?

The VCC stands out for its firm commitment to technology, innovation, and sustainability. This allows it to turn every event into a unique experience and align its activity with the SDGs.

This year's investments (€3,6 million) will improve the existing facilities, allowing us to continue to contribute to Valencia's positioning as a leading destination in the congress and convention sector. This includes the installation of solar panels for the building's own energy needs, LED lighting that will light 90% of the building with this technology, and the installation of chargers for electric vehicles in the car park.

With the same objective, some areas will be upgraded, and we will have better audiovisual equipment, including more powerful projectors and screens with larger surfaces in the auditoriums.

A digital twin of the building is also planned. This smart model will not only allow for more efficient maintenance and control of the facilities, but will also provide more accurate and interactive proposals for the organisers, who will be able to digitally recreate different set-ups for their events.

València is a vibrant and dynamic city. How do you plan to continue promoting the VCC as a premier destination to attract international events and conferences to Spain?

Achieving a state-of-the-art building in order to be at the forefront of technology and maintaining our commitment to society will continue to be the cornerstones of our strategy. Cutting-edge infrastructures undoubtedly require a team that is prepared – our human capital is one of the most important assets of our venue. The trust our customers place in us is the result of our team's involvement and dedication. Our staff are constantly learning, and acquiring knowledge and skills that helps them to give their best at all times.

What are your hopes and dreams for the *Palacio de Congresos* in the next 25 years?

At the VCC, we have set ourselves a challenge: to achieve a greater awareness of sustainability and, at the same time, to enrich the experience of those attending events, while having a positive social impact on our community. In addition to sharing our enthusiasm for promoting healthy lifestyles and incorporating sustainable behavioural habits into our daily lives, we lead by example to serve as an inspirational model for the sector.

In addition, technology and innovation applied to the tourism sector are generating structural changes that are shaping a new business environment. We aim to offer solutions to remain competitive and attract domestic and international events in order to be a hub for national and international congresses in Valencia.



Sydney: The Sweet Spot for Conference Organisation!

Sydney, the capital of New South Wales (NSW), is Australia's largest state economy accounting for a third of national economic output. Its destination management organisation, BESydney, has focused on partnerships with the NSW Government, universities and innovation hubs, aligning financial objectives with impact and leveraging business events to create social legacies.

Business Events Sydney (BESydney) unveiled a new face to the world in September, with a new institutional branding, website and complete content refresh, sending a bold signal that the destination has reached a new phase in its global positioning. As the city's international advocates with responsibility for attracting global associations and academic audiences to Sydney, this corporate brand facelift is designed to appeal to the various business travel segments such as association conferences, incentive activities and corporate meetings. "As the world of events has changed dramatically, with new business models, new ways of working and meeting, we feel the time is right for this significant change in our identity and the way we sell our city," says **BESydney CEO, Lyn Lewis-Smith** (pictured right). In the wake of megatrends and as different global markets awaken from the pandemic in different ways, BESydney identified that associations are now looking for destinations that tangibly demonstrate how organising a meeting benefits both the association's membership and the host city. "Our customers want to know where we stand on sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion, and delivering CSR outcomes. They are requiring values-alignment, a deeper cultural connection, and a more immersive experience when they get here." An example was this year's most welcoming, inclusive, accessible and sustainable **Sydney WorldPride festival and Human Rights Conference** – a 17-day 'party with a purpose'. BESydney's new brand reflects that confidence on the international stage – after all, this is Sydney, Australia's sweet spot.

And what services influence bidding processes? "We can support bringing in delegates from nearby developing countries, social impact projects, connections to government, industry experts and suppliers, and connect clients with Australia's greater understanding of our industry's strengths, thought leaders and innovations." BESydney partners with the NSW Government to use business events as catalysts for foreign direct investment and talent attraction. In addition, they partner with other entities including the city's globally ranked universities as well as research and innovation centres, such as **Australian Space Agency, Cicada Innovations** (a leading incubator for start-ups and scale-ups involved in science and engineering innovation, also known as *deep tech*). Sydney's industry strengths lie in areas such as **Aerospace & Defence, Finance & Professional Services, Health & Life Sciences, Science & Engineering** and **Technology & Innovation**. Just like investors, association members are voting with their feet, aligning their spending with destinations, partners and employers who practice what they say. In this way, BESydney is taking steps to stay ahead of the curve by consulting with its Global Ambassadors and the broader network of member suppliers and partners to explore ways of generating social impact on a large scale. "ESG and CSR in boardrooms has quickly gone from being a nice-to-have to a must-have in the proposals we receive from our global customer base," adds Lewis-Smith.





Sydney's long-term and proactive approach to sustainability has helped the city consistently rank in the top 30 of the **Global Destination Sustainability (GDS)-Index**. The DMO is an associate member of the City of Sydney's **Sustainable Destination Partnership**, which brings together hotels,

cultural institutions, venues and industry influencers to make Sydney a sustainable destination for visitors and improve the environmental performance of tourism and event suppliers. BESydney is also a certified member of the **Climate Active Network** (the first CVB in Australia), an ongoing partnership between the Australian government and businesses to drive voluntary climate action and invest in projects by reducing carbon emissions to near zero or neutral. "We have also purchased 100% of our offsets through the **Aboriginal Carbon Foundation Company** for the **Karlantijpa North Savanna Burning Project**, bringing benefits to the traditional owners, including training, income, cultural sustainability and ownership of the project. Seeing these trends and knowing that this is something our venues and PCOs do very well, we felt we could confidently tell our story about Sydney as one of the most diverse, inclusive and sustainable meeting destinations in the world," says Lewis-Smith.

A good example is the city's harbourside **International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney)** the standard-bearer for sustainable events as a founding signatory of the **Joint Meetings Industry Council's Net Zero Carbon Events** pledge. Based on its Silver EarthCheck and ISO

14001 – Environmental Management accreditations, its Sustainability policy objectives limit environmental impact through the sustainable use of resources to manage the building and its operational management of events. Through its **Legacy Programme**, the ICC Sydney team collaborates with PCOs and AMCs, corporations and their partners across all aspects of its culinary services, water, energy and waste management, and providing positive social impacts for the community.

Having been industry leaders in legacy research for the past decade, BESydney has taken the next step in formalising processes, education and tools to more responsibly define and measure these social impacts. To do this, the DMO has collaborated with **#MEET4IMPACT** over the past 12 months to build and trial a social legacy management methodology and framework, and provide early measurement of event impacts that can be meaningful to both associations and the destination. As a result, this work was awarded the inaugural **GDS Movement & #MEET4IMPACT Impact Award** for DMOs committed to legacy through business events.

The NSW Government is also taking a social perspective to attract global talent and foreign direct investment as it builds and develops a series of new innovation districts such as **Tech Central, Barangaroo** and the **Westmead Health and Innovation District**. BESydney then connects to introduce delegates to local industrial sectors, research, technology and commerce. "At BESydney, we take a multi-faceted strategic approach when assessing which global business event opportunities to pursue. Firstly, we prioritise events that align with the NSW government's priority sectors and then, within each priority sector, assess business event opportunities



based on overall collaboration, industry development and impact. We also engage with global communities that align with broader industry and community needs,” **BESydney’s Executive General Manager of Client Engagement, Kristian Nicholls**, tells us.

The opportunity to attract business events in key industry sectors has a huge influence on the city’s social legacy. As the **BESydney Ambassador and CEO of Cicada Innovations, Sally-Ann Williams** (pictured right), said: “If we are to solve the really serious problems facing the world, they will be solved by people doing business, researching, working and investing together. Ultimately, it’s people who drive innovation and transformative change, both in Sydney and around the world.”

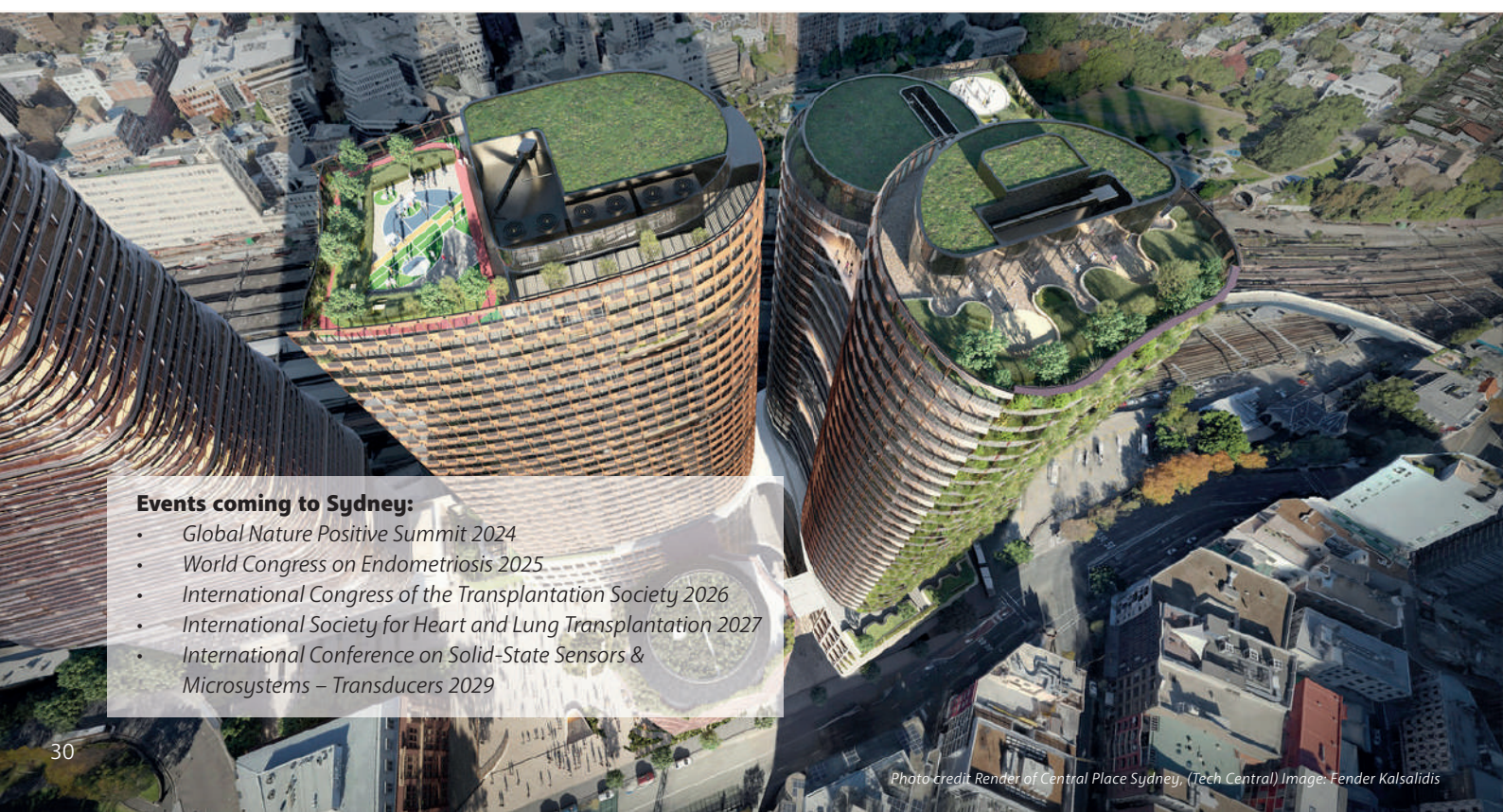
Finally, inclusion is also present in the structure of Tech Central under the leadership of its **inaugural executive director Annie Parker**, the district prioritises meaningful consultation with diverse communities and minorities within an inclusive, sustainable and creative vision. “It can be as simple as when we’re organising a conference or an event, making sure there are crèches available, making sure there are closed captions on the screens so that people who receive information differently don’t feel like they have to sit there and listen to every word and write it down,” she says. Spanning eleven floors of a building, the **Sydney Startup Hub**, for example, is the highest density startup space in the Southern Hemisphere, offering 17,000m² of affordable office spaces with a prayer room, a feeding room and a baby-changing room. Regular consultation

with First Nations representatives as well as the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce is also an integral part of achieving economic outcomes and skills for these communities. **Liam Ridgeway** is **co-founder of Indigitek**, Australia’s non-profit organisation that aims to increase the participation of First Nations people in the technology industry. A proud First Nations man, Ridgeway credits Tech Central with opening up new pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in areas such as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) and facilitating internships and ongoing employment opportunities at top tech companies.



In Sydney, there are many ways to immerse delegates in local First Nations culture and perspectives at a conference, sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and customs. “We know that diversity is key to innovation, so it’s even more important that diverse groups can come together. Making events accessible and inclusive broadens the range of audiences able to participate, which means events will be better attended by a more diverse group of people,” says Lewis-Smith. “For change starts here.”

For more information, please visit: besydney.com.au



Events coming to Sydney:

- Global Nature Positive Summit 2024
- World Congress on Endometriosis 2025
- International Congress of the Transplantation Society 2026
- International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation 2027
- International Conference on Solid-State Sensors & Microsystems – Transducers 2029

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City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference 2023: Shaping Positive Urban Tourism

The **City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference 2023**, held in Valencia from October 3 to 7, was a beacon of hope and inspiration for those committed to sustainable urban tourism and willing a positive transformation for urban destinations. This event, which has grown to an unprecedented 240 attendees, brought together forward-thinkers, visionaries, and tourism professionals from around the world. The conference's central theme, “**Building Blocks for Destination Positive**,” served as a guiding light for exploring innovative approaches and solutions to transform urban destinations into havens of positive change.

Rhys Williams, representing the **University of Glasgow**, set the tone for the conference by emphasising the importance of educated hope and critical optimism in envisioning a brighter future for urban destinations. In a world facing countless challenges, he urged attendees to approach these issues with hope rooted in knowledge, and optimism grounded in reality. His words resonated as the foundation for the subsequent discussions.

Alison Brooks shared **Visit Mesa**'s comprehensive sensory design for an autism-friendly destination that showcased their dedication to inclusivity and accessibility. This initiative not only benefits those with sensory needs but also highlights the potential of DMOs in training hospitality staff and providing accessibility information, enabling all visitors to make informed choices. This initiative provided a shining example of positive change.

Julie Benisty Oviedo, from the **Office de Tourisme et des Congrès de Bordeaux Métropole**, highlighted best practices for social tourism through Solid'Air. She demonstrated how tourism can benefit communities, particularly those in need of leisure opportunities. This serves as a testament to tourism's potential to foster social inclusion and support disadvantaged communities.

Aino Mellais from **Helsinki Partners**, **Dejan Ristić** from **Ljubljana Tourism**, and **Jana Werl** from **Vienna Tourist Board**, who are members of the **CityDNA Advisory Council**, unveiled a roadmap for the alliance towards diversity and belonging. Their emphasis on inclusivity and the importance of recognising the diversity of voices within urban destinations highlighted the pivotal role of these destinations in fostering an open, inclusive, and fair experience for all.

Solange Cleutjens from **amsterdam&partners** and **Tuya**

Beyers from **VISITFLANDERS** conducted an interactive workshop on legacy and impact. The workshop that was prepared together with **Gemmeke De Jongh** from **VISITFLANDERS**, introduced a new purposeful business model for the positive impact of congresses. This innovation promises to reshape the way we approach the business side of tourism, ensuring that it leaves a lasting, positive impact.

Damiano Cerrone introduced **UrbanistAI**'s groundbreaking AI-based tools, which empower individuals to actively contribute to the urban design process and share their vision for urban spaces using smart devices. This integration of technology in urban planning promises to create more inclusive and dynamic urban environments.

In the final session of the conference, **TOPOSOPHY**'s **Peter Jordan** and **Chris Armstrong** led a discussion on resident well-being, with contributions from **Geerte Udo** from **amsterdam&partners**, **Els Van Zele** from **Visit Mechelen**, and **Anna Young** from **Glasgow Life**. This discussion unfolded strategies to enhance resident well-being while advancing true regenerative practices on DMOs' way to Destination Positive.

Petra Stušek, **President of City Destinations Alliance**, highlighted the conference's mission, stating, “Our mission, ‘Building Blocks for Destination Positive,’ fosters hope, and we believe in the power of WeGeneration to shape better cities and destinations.”

The event brought together other participants from various members and destinations, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bologna, Bolzano, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, Flanders, Florence, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Helsinki, Ljubljana, Mechelen, Oslo, Valencia and Vienna. CityDNA partners and collaborators, including ForwardKeys, Global Destination





Sustainability Movement, Mabrian Technologies, Modul University Vienna, Place Generation, Simpleview, The Data Appeal Company and TOPOSOPHY, as well as other companies and universities like #MEET4IMPACT, RIFF Restaurant, Teejit, The Valuegraphics Project, ÜberQuell Hamburg, University of Glasgow, University of Surrey and UrbanistAI contributed to the conference's success.

In Petra Stušek's words: "Let us shift our focus from problems to solutions, from obstacles to opportunities, and, together, we can turn the dream of Destination Positive into our shared reality. This CityDNA Autumn Conference has left attendees inspired, empowered, and eager to work towards a brighter future for urban destinations. Stay tuned for future initiatives and opportunities at CityDNA to make the vision of 'Destination Positive' a reality."

The CityDNA Autumn Conference 2023 highlighted the immense potential of sustainable urban tourism. It has provided the essential building blocks for positive change in urban destinations across the globe. But it's crucial to remember that the real power lies in taking action. Each of us has a role to play in turning these ideas into reality. The conference has not only inspired hope and optimism but also armed us with the knowledge and connections needed to bring about meaningful change. Initiatives like the **Glasgow Declaration** or the **UNWTO Sustainable Development Goals**, to name a few, offer a roadmap for collective action and commitment to a more sustainable and inclusive future. We have the tools; now it's time to put them to use!

The next **CityDNA International Conference & General Assembly** will be held in Bologna in spring 2024. More information to come on citydestinationsalliance.eu

The GDS Forum

Prior to the CityDNA Autumn Conference, the first ever **GDS-Forum** brought together destination leaders, sustainability champions, tourism experts, and entrepreneurs, all driven by a common goal: fostering innovation for urban renewal. Through a unique collaboration involving City Destinations Alliance, the Global Destination Sustainability Movement and Visit València, the event served as a platform to enhance the well-being of cities in social, environmental, and economic aspects. The GDS-Forum featured an innovative un-conference programme, aiming to spark collective intelligence, meaningful exchanges, and regenerative strategies.

The **GDS-Awards Ceremony** was held in partnership with #Meet4Impact and ICCA, brought both GDS-Movement and CityDNA communities together in an entertaining and inspiring celebration to recognise the winners of the 2023 edition of the awards.

Congratulations to the winning destinations:

- Leadership Award: Gothenburg, Göteborg & Co
- Most Improved Destination Award: Liverpool, Liverpool Convention Bureau
- Innovation Award: Washington DC, Destination DC
- Impact Award brought by the GDS-Movement and #MEET4IMPACT: Sydney, Business Events Sydney

All photos courtesy of City Destinations Alliance



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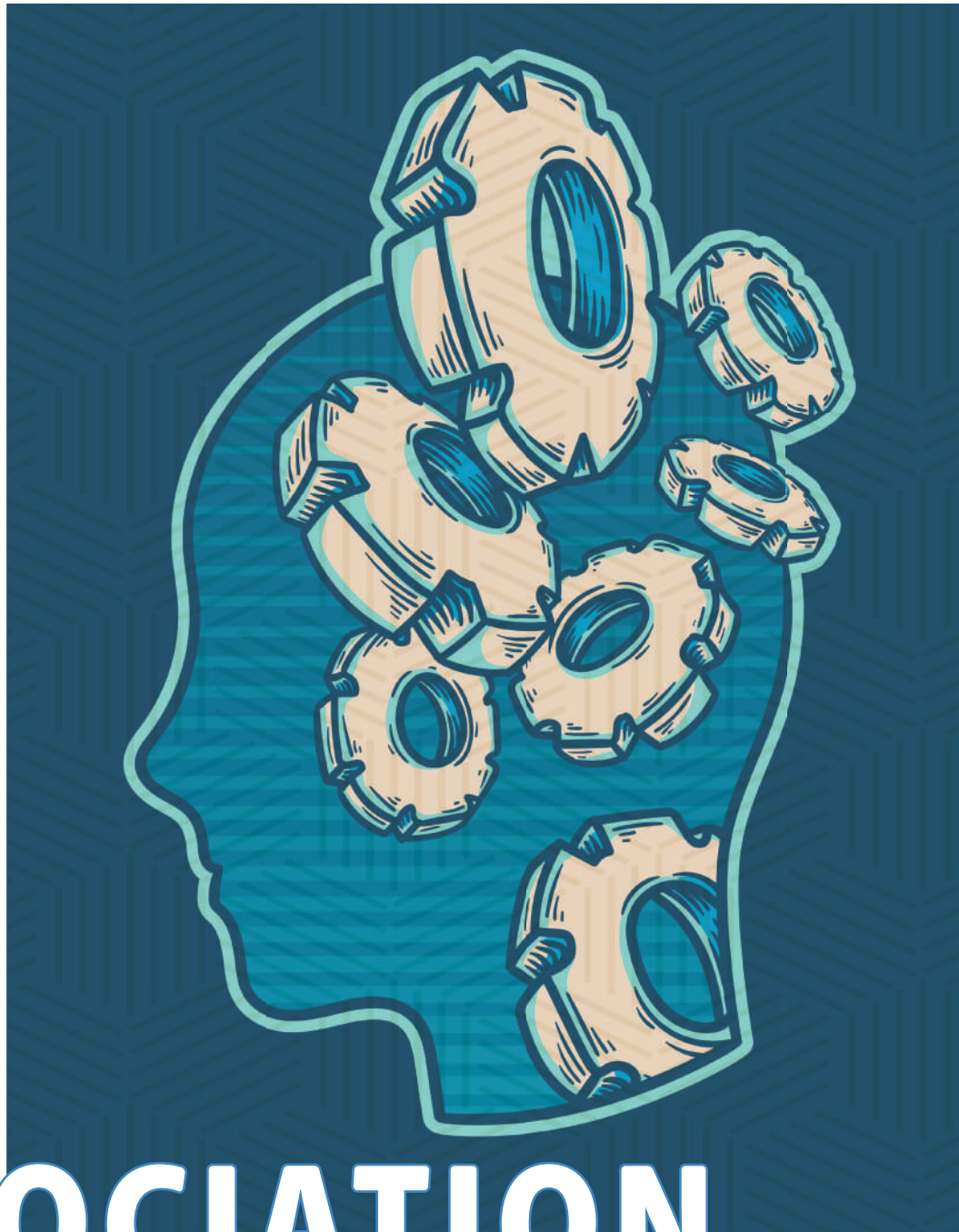
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Artisans of Meetings: Reflections from Priya Parker's *The Art of Gathering*



When we discover the universal meaning behind our day-to-day activities, we can connect our work to a greater good and, ultimately, move towards our objectives with much more enthusiasm and determination. Virtues which, when strengthened, can have a significant impact on the satisfaction and motivation of the world's current workforce.

In this year's final edition of *HQ*, instead of the usual Kenes Group PCO Insights, I'll be sharing a few reflections from *The Art of Gathering*, a 2018 book that found its place on my bedside table during my exploration of the meetings sector's higher purpose.

The author, **Priya Parker**, draws on approximately 140 case studies and examples to illustrate why and how humans gather, providing profound inspiration for us, as event organisers, to guide the meeting process and create meaningful experiences.

BY ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA, MARCOM MANAGER AT KENES GROUP

A Category (*networking or celebration*) is Not a Purpose

Priya Parker invites us to create meetings that take a stand, committing to a specific, singular purpose that is open to questions. She points out that meetings designed to please everyone are rarely exciting ones. She also offers some practical approaches to define the purpose of a gathering:

- To step back and consider where our meeting fits into the bigger picture.
- To scrutinise it by questioning each of the initial statements regarding why we want to host this gathering. "Don't ask yourself what your country can do for your meeting but what your meeting can do for your country," Parker exemplifies.
- To apply reverse engineering from the desired result, starting by considering the expected outcomes of the meetings and working backwards until the purpose becomes clear.

- Without a genuine purpose, give people their time back and refrain from organising a gathering.

A well-defined Purpose serves as a Filter

The individuals invited to the event, as well as the venue in which it is held, should embody the purpose.

Parker elaborates on the "kindness of exclusion" for those who will not contribute to achieving the expected outcomes as a gesture of appreciation to the attendees. "People who don't fulfil the purpose of the meeting subtract value from it," she writes. The author encourages hosts to reflect upon the following three questions to create a purpose-oriented guest list:

- Who, aside from fitting the meeting's purpose, helps in achieving it?
- Who jeopardises the purpose of the meeting?
- Who is irrelevant to the purpose of the meeting, but you feel obliged to invite?

This is followed by a thorough discussion about inclusion in the book, where Parker argues that over-inclusion can lead to superficial connections, and she discusses the values that take precedence in groups of different sizes. For instance, intimacy and exchange are fostered in groups of up to six people; an exciting and inclusive conversation takes place in groups of between eight and twelve, with enough diversity of opinions for decision-making; groups of thirty already create a vibrant, party-like atmosphere; groups of 150 to 200 resemble a tribe, according to some anthropologists, and anything over that number, she describes as “tides of humanity,” tapping into a convulsive energy.

Create a Temporary Alternative World

Regarding the venue, Parker suggests that each location comes with its own script and, therefore, brings forth a certain version of people. She conveys that logistics are often prioritised over purpose in the choice of a venue. “You should, for starters, seek a setting that embodies the reason for your gathering. When a place embodies an idea, it engages a person’s body and whole being in the experience, not just their mind,” she explains. Other factors like perimeter, area, and density are also considered.

The book includes many examples that show how a place can either contribute to a purpose or completely sabotage it. Parker recounts a story that gave rise to the Château Principle – a multi-million dollar deal between US and French telecommunication companies that fell apart after two years of amicable discussions when a castle in France replaced the original, more neutral location, upsetting the sense of equity among the organisations’ leaders.

Beyond the venue, Parker elaborates on how pop-up rules that only apply during meetings help transport attendees to a temporary alternative world that only exists while the gathering takes place. She also discusses the significance of physically or metaphorically transporting guests in and out of the meeting through a corridor that will guide them in leaving an inauthentic version of themselves outside of the experience. And reminds us that the event begins before the official opening, from the moment the invitation is sent out until the guests return to their original worlds.

A Good Controversy, the Beginning and the End

Some of the key lessons of this book concern what the author calls the “generous authority” of the organisers, referring to the hosts’ ability to serve the audience as well as skillfully lead a good argument in favour of the expected outcomes. “Don’t be a chill host. ‘Chill’ is selfishness disguised as kindness,” is one of the book section’s headings.

Another interesting principle she delves into is based on studies showing that event attendees tend to remember the first and last five per cent of the gathering with a much higher level of accuracy and emotional involvement. Parker places strong emphasis on both the beginning and the end of a meeting, explicitly encouraging hosts to avoid squandering these moments on announcements, logistics, or acknowledgements and, instead, connect them back to the purpose.

Gathering, when embraced as an Art

The stories and experiences compiled by Priya Parker in *The Art of Gathering* are evidence of her life’s work, fully dedicated to embracing the act of meeting as a complex and wholesome expression of a core human need. They are intelligent and humorous illustrations of what happens in society when people are placed at the centre of an event, rather than operations and logistics, and what happens when the opposite is the case.

While 2023 ends with a lively discussion about the talents that will prevail in the face of the rise of artificial intelligence and other technologies of our era, *The Art of Gathering* presents a compelling proposition: when embraced as an art form, our work in this niche – which I personally refuse to call an “industry” – reveals its higher purpose of enabling meaningful connections, creating alternative worlds, elevating conversations, shifting mindsets, and changing outdated structures to give birth to entirely new societies.



Don’t be a chill host. ‘Chill’ is selfishness disguised as kindness,” is one of the book section’s headings.



“We really are on the cusp of a significant **revolution for humanity**”



The **Association for AI, Data and Robotics (Adra)** is the private arm of the European partnership for **AI, Data and Robotics (ADR)** under Horizon Europe, the EU’s research and innovation initiative. Founded by the European data science and industrial AI and robotics communities, the association believes that innovation over the next 20 years will result from the pooling of expertise from these different disciplines. The European Commission has pledged to invest €1.3 billion over the course of the programme, leveraging at least an equal investment of €1.3 billion from industry, and encouraging member states to increase their levels of scientific spending by 50% over the 2021-2027 period. In addition, Adra seeks to identify commercial applications at the intersection of ADR technologies. *HQ* spoke to **Philip Piatkiewicz, Secretary General** of the association, about the intersection of these issues with the meetings sector.

How can these technological solutions enable Europe’s sustainable development and strategic autonomy in its various key sectors and flagship industries?

ADR has a transversal and almost universal relevance for our society. Over the next two decades, Europe will have to deal simultaneously with climate change, a demographic shift, a reduced career ratio and lower productivity, urbanisation and global competition from China and the US. And that’s not even counting the impact of events such as the war in Ukraine and COVID-19. From renewable energy technologies to unlocking the circular economy and autonomous vehicles, Adra has enormous potential to improve people’s lives and significantly accelerate efforts to achieve the SDGs and combat climate change. At the moment, adoption is progressing, Europe is a leader in the field of industrial robotics and has excellent AI researchers. Still, there is an urgent need to increase investment in ADR to ensure that the continent is able to capitalise on the market opportunity and that the technology developed also enshrines core European values. **Europe’s Digital Decade** [EU’s overarching framework to guide all actions related to the digital economy] requires that everyone has the necessary skills to use everyday technologies.

Is it possible to use robotics to increase efficiency and personalise an event without neglecting the human interaction that accompanies this type of networking?

The personalisation of services is one of the main opportunities for associations, and it seems to me that there is a general trend towards personalisation in many

sectors. The use of robots is just one example, and in fact, if used correctly, this and other technologies can enhance the human experience, creating a talking point during an event or function, and encouraging engagement and discourse. ADR technologies, at least as we understand them, should be used in a human-centred and collaborative way.



Still, there is an urgent need to increase investment in AI and robotics data to ensure that Europe is able to capitalise on the market opportunity and that the technology developed also enshrines core European values.

How can the combination of ADR technologies accelerate the reduction of CO₂ emissions by 2030 in order to achieve the goal of climate neutrality in Europe?

AI can be applied to improve hazard prediction for long-term regionalised events such as sea level rise, for immediate extreme weather events, as well as to bolster climate research and modelling efforts - funding, education and behaviour change. We already see some of these technologies gradually permeating the construction sector through energy saving and power management. On the other hand, as well as freeing us from repetitive labour, robots play an important role in reducing material

waste and realising the circular economy. For example, due to consumers' increased adoption of electric vehicles, the battery supply chain has seen an upsurge in demand. To meet this need, manufacturers are looking to robotic automation for fast and reliable assembly and disassembly options. Similarly, this can be seen in agriculture, where the so-called "convergence" of these technologies could see an increase in productivity in line with that of the invention of fertilisers. We really are on the cusp of a significant revolution for humanity.

How can associations empower their members and innovate revenue streams through data?

All European organisations can and should take advantage of the data economy. In particular, associations can collect and analyse market and member data to offer new personalised services, improve communication activities, and optimise the use of internal resources. Event data provides crucial insights to help you improve the overall user experience at live, hybrid and virtual conferences. By understanding how participants engage with the content, which sessions and speakers they find most interesting, we can personalise their journey. Importantly, you can also support lead generation and increase revenue opportunities by targeting new audiences based on previous attendance patterns.

How do you interpret the relationship between the development of AI and responsible data management? How can this benefit the success of the event in a way that a classic face-to-face event cannot?

COVID has changed that a lot. Some of these things have stuck, and the increased use of digital and data technology has been one of them. While this change now allows associations to gain crucial insights to achieve better results, it has also created concerns about how best to manage this information, and ensure that the data is secure. Fortunately, most online event platforms offer cloud solutions that include additional layers of encryption and authentication to protect sensitive data. However, there is a much greater responsibility on the backs of organisers to manage their data responsibly

and in accordance with the GDPR. One very practical application for these technologies is the use of AI for a better customer service experience that would have never been possible without the explosion in data collection.

How can we safeguard consumer communications and data privacy to build cyber resilience in a digital society?

The European Commission is about to approve the Cybersecurity Act, a proposal for a regulation on horizontal cybersecurity requirements for products with digital components. The regulation aims to guarantee the safety of products with digital components, such as domestic cameras or smart fridges, before they enter the market. The proposed regulation will apply to all products connected directly or indirectly to another device or network, with some exceptions for products already subject to cybersecurity requirements under existing EU rules. Considering the relevance of European policy for innovation ecosystems, at Adra, we have set up a working group on AI data and robotics policy at Adra, with the aim of keeping members up to date on new EU regulations such as cybersecurity law, AI and data law. We also organise regular meetings with European Commission Directors and MEPs to get information on new regulations and to provide input from the innovation ecosystem to European governments.

Event in the pipeline

AI, Data and Robotics Forum | November 8-9 2023 | Versailles, France

The ADRF Forum is a premier annual event organised by Adra in collaboration with the European Commission that brings together innovators, policy-makers, leading experts and enthusiasts from this community. The ADRF's mission is to shape the future of these transformative technologies by fostering an inclusive and collaborative environment that drives responsible innovation and social impact.

Who Will Lead the Next Generation in the Hospitality Industry?

This fall, here in the U.S., we had a month-long political crisis during which there was a fight over who was going to be the next Speaker of the House of Representatives. This is an incredibly important leadership role in our government, since the Speaker not only controls the flow of the work of the House of Representatives, they are also the second in line to succeed the Presidency. That's why having that office vacant for more than three weeks was truly a crisis in leadership for the country.

Many institutions and organisations in the association and hospitality industries are also dealing with leadership challenges right now. They are wondering where the next group of leaders in their industry or profession are going to come from, given all the changes that have impacted hospitality, travel, association management, and volunteering in the past couple of decades. These changes have included:

- the continuing impact of technology, which has changed how people work, how potential clients and members make decisions, and how people communicate. Technology has also raised the expectations of customers and members, especially their expectations regarding the ability to participate in meetings and conventions virtually and their expectation of instantaneous feedback and response;
- the ageing of the baby boomer generation, which is seeing senior people in businesses, governments, and organisations move into retirement, after leading these institutions for a longer period than any of their predecessors. These people have become icons in their fields because of the longevity of their leadership, and replacing them won't be easy;
- the changing nature of volunteering, as lifestyle choices and work-related activities tend to reduce the average number of hours people spend volunteering in person (vs. virtual volunteering, another trend).



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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Those of us in the hospitality and association professions need to address these challenges as we try to build a solid foundation for the future of our organisations. In the business world, we have people working for us who do want to ascend to a leadership role, but they are frustrated by the amount of time it takes to reach the top levels of their organisations (part of this is because baby boomers stayed in leadership positions for such a long time). This leads to them seeking new positions in organisations where they feel their leadership opportunities are greater or can be achieved faster.

The most important way of overcoming these leadership challenges is to have a formalised plan for leadership development. The days of having a call for volunteers or bringing people up through some sort of leadership “ladder” are over.

Here are some techniques that can be used to start attracting, training, and keeping that next generation of leaders for your company or organisation:

1. Reverse engineer your recruitment process

Even in today’s world, where hiring interviews are often virtual, we should avoid the mistake of thinking that attracting people to work (or accept volunteer roles) in the hospitality industry is about job descriptions, compensation, time commitment, and benefits. Focus your message on the positive outcomes of working in this exciting field. Talk about skills people can build on the job, as well as the skills you want them to bring to the job. This kind of discussion will make them think about a career in hospitality, not just a job in hospitality.

2. Be sure to have an identifiable leadership development programme in your organisation

Show your commitment to employees by providing a path to leadership, as well as the training to be successful at each step on that path. This is true whether you are a company (hotel, supplier, tour operator, etc.) or

an organisation (association, convention bureau, etc.). The specifics of the leadership opportunities may be slightly different, but the rewards are basically the same: personal growth, recognition, skill development, and achievement.

Note: major employment studies have consistently shown that the top skills employers are looking for in their employees are: communications skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, and interpersonal skills. These skills can be taught, just as sales, marketing, customer service, and financial management can be taught. These so-called soft skills are the ones that can turn an effective technical person into a company, industry or organisational leader. This is where a **Leadership Development** programme makes a difference.

3. Make recognition part of the paycheck

If you want people in your company or organisation to aspire to leadership roles, let them see how others who have achieved those roles have been rewarded for their efforts (and skills). In the private sector, that reward could easily include job advancement, increased compensation, and creating an industry-wide reputation. In the not-for-profit sector, those rewards include skill enhancement, acknowledgement within the employing company or organisation, and, once again, industry-wide recognition.

There may be a leadership crisis in government in many companies, but that doesn’t mean there needs to be a leadership crisis in the hospitality industry. Leadership can be a burden (due to time commitments, etc.), and it can be frustrating to (when things aren’t getting done), but leadership can also be a gift. The gift of leadership is what you take away from your leadership position (those “soft” skills) and use back in your personal and professional lives.

Now is a great time for the hospitality industry to prosper by providing the gift of leadership to the next generation of industry professionals.

The Transformation Challenge

Like many other industries, the convention centre business is going through a high number of changes. At the same time, venues are still facing a shortage of staff and/or a high turnover of human resources. Combined with change fatigue, convention centre leaders are facing a massive challenge in making transformations happen. Prioritising physical and mental health becomes even more important.

AUTHOR: **SVEN BOSSU**, CEO AIPC

During our first-ever **Canada Academy** – a co-creation with **Convention Centres of Canada** – we asked the 36 participants from 15 Canadian venues what their challenges are. Attracting and retaining talent were by far the biggest challenges, but there were many more. New technology, changing client requirements, sustainability, inflation... the list goes on and on. Dealing with these challenges will require changes on individual, team, and organisation levels.

Implementing these much-needed changes will be a big challenge. One venue CEO was very clear: he was still lacking 10% of staff, and staff turnover had skyrocketed to over 30%. He actually reduced the number of events in his venue in order to allow his staff to get a minimum of rest. Not exactly the environment where you want to push your staff even further by rolling out a transformation programme. This was confirmed during a CEO panel debate where all agreed that staff burnout was the number one thing keeping them awake at night.

Venues are not the only industry facing this challenge. Recent research by Gartner showed that managers worldwide are facing a double challenge: on the one hand, there is pressure to increase productivity and efficiency in order to boost bottom line figures, and at the same time, they are overwhelmed with more responsibilities, more decisions to be taken and more direct reports to manage. In addition to that, change volume has increased fivefold, while staff willingness to change has fallen from 74% to 43%.

There does not seem to be a magic recipe to deal with this situation, other than prioritising those changes which address some of these issues. Even then, success will depend heavily on the way planned changes are communicated to staff. Employees need to understand and agree with the market context, the goals of the company, the strategy applied and what is expected from them.

However, the shortage of staff, the challenge to retain talent and the many changes also offer opportunities. One of them is to revisit the way careers are managed. Traditionally, this is built on organisational structure and defined via job descriptions. Instead – and especially given the need to retain and foster talent – it will be important to take the existing staff as a starting point, consider the portfolio of skills available and build on experience. The event industry, perhaps more than any other industry, allows for this type of professional flexibility, as demonstrated when I asked three venue CEOs to describe how they got to their current positions. None of them had a linear career path. They all had very different functions in very different industries before getting into their current roles.

Dealing with all the changes mentioned above will require a lot from venue leadership. Of key importance will be to prioritise their mental and physical health to stay resilient and having a robust network to fall back on. Both will be addressed even more in future editions of the Academy.



“ *Employees need to understand and agree with the market context, the goals of the company, the strategy applied and what is expected from them.* ”

AIPC

 AIPC.ORG

Spotlight On: Cvent CONNECT Europe 2023

Cvent, a market-leading meetings, events and hospitality technology provider, will bring event planners, marketing and hospitality industry professionals together for its annual technology conference: Cvent CONNECT Europe.

The hybrid conference will take place from 7-9 November at the Hilton London Metropole, offering both in-person and virtual experiences. An additional in-person event, **Cvent CONNECT** in Deutschland, will also be held on 8 November at Frankfurt's **SPARK** venue. This event will provide attendees with the opportunity to engage with conference content broadcast live from London. It will also offer localised breakout sessions, roundtable discussions and networking opportunities with regional peers and industry experts. The Frankfurt event also features the **Cvent Tech Tour**, consistently rated as one of the most popular sessions. This immersive tour will guide attendees through the in-person event tech customer journey, from onsite registration and check-in to session tracking and post-event analytics.

“With the rapid digital transformation sweeping across our industry, this year’s Cvent CONNECT Europe agenda was designed to empower industry professionals with the tools and best practices they need to thrive in this new era of events,” commented **Cvent SVP & Chief Marketing Officer, Patrick Smith**. “The sessions were thoroughly curated to unpack emerging trends and discuss insightful strategies that resonate with event planners, marketers and hospitality professionals alike. Our return to both London and Frankfurt highlights the positive industry momentum and the growing importance of event technology to deliver true business impact.”

The conference agenda includes more than 45 sessions and will feature presentations by event planners, hoteliers, industry leaders and Cvent experts.

New 2023 Programming:

- **Cvent Academy Training Workshops:** This immersive, in-person training day, will allow Cvent users to enhance their event technology skills and gain a competitive edge through industry-recognised Cvent Certifications. Event professionals will also get the fundamentals of event

design, virtual content creation and email marketing, while hospitality professionals will be able to optimise their use of the **Cvent Supplier Network** to engage planners and drive more MICE business.

- **Cvent Sourcing Summit:** An exclusive experience where highly qualified event planners from across the continent will do business with top hotels and destinations.

Conference Highlights:

- **Featured Keynote Speakers:** BAFTA award-winning presenter and journalist, Claudia Winkleman, will take on the role of master of ceremonies. Featured keynote speakers with inspiring presentations including double Olympic Champion, Colonel Dame Kelly Holmes MBE and Mike Ford, CEO and Founder of Grateful Lemon. On the main stage, **Cvent CEO and founder Reggie Aggarwal** will give the opening keynote speech.
- **Cvent Excellence Awards:** The awards ceremony will take place in-person at the Hilton London Metropole and will also be broadcast live to a global virtual audience. The awards recognise leading organisations and hotels in the industry that demonstrate the powerful role technology plays in delivering more engaging experiences and driving positive results.
- **Innovation Pavilion:** Providing a dynamic place for attendees to explore and interact with Cvent’s current and upcoming solutions.
- **Networking:** This year’s event offers more dedicated networking opportunities than ever before, including special meetups for first-time CONNECT Europe attendees, informal huddles throughout the conference, peer-to-peer networking and more. Virtual attendees can engage in real-time roundtables using the Cvent Discussions capabilities, and make new connections with Instant Networking.

To see more highlights from the conference sessions, please visit meetingmediagroup.com





Nurturing Well-being: **AIM Group's** Holistic Approach to Employee Mental Health

At AIM Group, we are acutely aware of the challenges that the events industry presents, characterised by its high-stress levels and demanding nature. In an industry that operates at a relentless pace, driven by tight deadlines and irregular schedules, prioritising the mental well-being of our employees requires a holistic approach that encompasses multiple dimensions.

AUTHOR: GIULIA TOLVE, HR MANAGER AIM GROUP INTERNATIONAL

For us, well-being is a comprehensive concept that encompasses several elements: the cultivation of happiness and engagement, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging and empowering individuals with a perception of control over their own lives. To address this critical issue, we have developed a strategy based on three main pillars:

1. Creating a Supportive Working Environment

In a supportive work environment, leaders play a pivotal role in their teams' well-being by being accessible, receptive and open to dialogue. We consider this to be the cornerstone of a people-centric approach, vital for the mental well-being of our employees. To promote positive habits in this regard, we have implemented HR processes that encourage open communication between managers and their team members, cultivating a culture of continuous feedback. Additionally, we provide comprehensive leadership development and management training programmes specifically designed to empower managers as effective coaches for their teams. Recently, we revamped our onboarding process to ensure that new team members feel supported from day one. We also facilitate a hybrid working scheme that allows employees to work from home for a portion of their weekly schedule, promoting a healthier work-life balance.

2. Improving Organisational Connections

We firmly believe that fostering meaningful connections within the workplace serves as an informal support system for coping with stress and pressure. To this

end, we are actively enhancing connections among different teams within the organisation, leveraging new communication tools such as the Intranet and an internal social network. We celebrate the successes of our various teams and individuals through regular internal news updates. We share information about inspiring new projects on a daily basis, emphasising their impact on our community and enhancing our colleagues' sense of belonging and engagement. We also arrange in-person events to facilitate team gatherings and strengthen bonds.

3. Encouraging Self-Care

We actively encourage our employees to prioritise self-care. This year, for instance, we introduced a digital training library featuring a comprehensive catalogue of training modules focused on personal well-being, mindfulness and stress management. This tool empowers employees to conduct self-assessments of their stress levels and motivation. In a broader sense, we firmly believe that continuous learning is a powerful catalyst for well-being. By nurturing curiosity and self-assuredness through ongoing education, we can foster greater satisfaction and optimism among our employees. Consequently, we promote a wide range of training opportunities throughout the year, covering both soft skills and technical competencies.

In conclusion, by creating a nurturing work environment, strengthening organisational connections and promoting self-care, we think that team members thrive both personally and professionally, even in the fast-paced and demanding events industry.



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Małopolska - unique experiences at your fingertips

Kraków: convenient access, a comfortable hotel, a professionally organised meeting, and then... Whether there is a demand for thrilling experiences or relaxation, a wealth of attractions awaits in the Małopolska region - attractions which are tailored to various target market groups which will leave you with extraordinary memories.

The Gateway to Małopolska - Kraków fully deserves this name, as it opens up an enormous wealth of possibilities for visitors to spend time. In southern Poland, the legacy of a thousand years of culture and tradition, unique folklore, modern infrastructure and, last but not least, wild nature - from the peaks of the Tatra Mountains to the rushing rivers and the Bledowska Desert - coexist in harmony within a relatively small area.

The region is an ideal place for blissful relaxation and integration, e.g. in the numerous spas and thermal water facilities located in the Podhale region. The latter not only provide relaxation, but also have a positive impact on health. Tasting famous local cheeses or highlander dishes in the atmospheric setting of a shepherd's hut or a wooden inn will be a real feast for the senses. Those who prefer an active way of spending their time and are open to interesting experiences will also be satisfied. They can, for example, soar beneath the clouds on a paraglider or go deep underground - a tour of the mining route in the Wieliczka Salt Mine allows you to learn the ins and outs of the profession and feel the thrill. Collectors of thrilling experiences, albeit of a different type, can opt for rafting on the Dunajec - a mountain river where rafting has a 200-year tradition and has recently been included on the UNESCO National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Every visitor to Małopolska will leave with a solid dose of motivation and inspiration in their luggage that will last a long time, feeling relaxed and full of energy to do more. But they will probably want to come back soon - to experience everything again or try something completely new.

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