

# Headquarters

MARCH 2024 #113 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



## **The Eastside Rooms**

Cost of Living Impact Survey

## **ESAE**

Takes the Reins of the European Association Summit 2024

## **IBTM Asia Pacific in Hong Kong**

A Super Connector for the Greater Bay Area

## **Antwerp**

When the City is Your Venue

## *Standout Feature*

An Interview with The Associated Country Women of the World



*EMBRACING LIFELONG LEARNING & PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE*

W E L C O M E T O

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# Editor's Letter



## **PARTNERSHIPS AND EDUCATION ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS**

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

As I researched various sources of information on the topics covered in this issue of *HQ*, Partnership and Education, I came across a surprising statement: a lifelong partnership, rather than a brief adventure, is the ultimate hope for two individuals trying to navigate life together. In many cases, they succeed, but sometimes they do not. Does this also apply to professional partnerships? I believe so. Echoing the words of American businessman Warren Buffet, “a partnership is not a legal contract between two equal individuals. It’s an emotional alliance between two people committed to each other’s success.” So, the most important reason to engage in a partnership is to further each other’s interests and prosper as a result. Choosing the right partner is, therefore, of paramount importance. I recall a robust discussion during last year’s PCMA Convening EMEA in Copenhagen about a partnership between PCMA and the **Strategic Alliance of the National Convention Bureaux of Europe (SANCBE)**, a network formed in 2014 by 29 European destination marketing organisations. This European Alliance is partnering with PCMA, an outstanding organisation with a distinctly American character. Ever since I heard about it last year, I’ve wondered: what better idea could there be? (Stay tuned for more information on this partnership as we delve into it in upcoming issues of *HQ*).

I’ve imagined a European partnership between the SANCBE and the European Commission as a critical instrument for implementing Horizon Europe, the European Union’s flagship research and innovation funding programme, with an impressive budget of €95,5 billion. At its heart, the programme aims to tackle climate change frontally, support the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and boost the EU’s competitiveness and growth. It stimulates partnerships and seeks to lead innovative solutions to global challenges. The meetings industry could make a significant contribution to achieving the EU’s policy priorities. So why push for partnership? Collaboration involves a great deal of thought and commitment to achieve the right results. The meetings industry can play an essential role in all this.

In this issue of *HQ*, we also focus on education. We have now understood that education is one of the most outstanding values in society, which means it is vital. It brings wealth and development. It leads to progress and, ideally, happiness for many people. For all these reasons and many more, we should increase our efforts in education in the meetings industry. Just look at what businesses are doing. The most successful industries are those that invest the most in learning and training. Do not hesitate any longer!

HQ

#113

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THE ASSOCIATION  
MAGAZINE

BUILDING BRIDGES  
IN THE MEETINGS  
INDUSTRY

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Embracing  
**Lifelong  
Learning** in  
Brussels

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ESAE

Takes the Reins  
of the European  
Association Summit  
2024



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ACWW

Its Incredible  
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IBTM Asia Pacific in **Hong Kong**



**São Paulo**

To Lead and not to be Led!



**Antwerp**

When the City is Your Venue



**The Association Place**

A Premier First-stop Shop for the International Association Community





## TO CONCEIVE THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE AND NOT BY THE SUM OF ITS PARTS!

*AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES,  
HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER*

to complete staff restructurings. From publishing and digital content to marketing and sales channels, all stages of the value chain will be marked by increasing automation since the corresponding tools will be easier to use or integrated into existing standard programmes. The trick here will be to develop an unmistakable communication identity and raise the branding of our companies – again, I believe

this also applies to associations. In three years in which we have been so alarmed by the effects of the pandemic and in which stakeholder interaction have been based solely on the recovery of the sector, issues such as data protection, metaverse and AI, the serious recruitment problem affecting the MICE sector, the huge carbon footprint left by the industry, tourism taxes by design, and the bold attempts to ban international conferences must return to the centre of the table.

It has become a recurring habit for me to take advantage of the year-end break to put the *HQ* editorial in check and carefully consider the state of the meetings industry and the needs of international associations. I also wanted to reflect on the current role of the media in this industry and how the big trends are changing the organisational and business model of small publishers like ours. News flash: it's not very different from the associations we deal with and speak to frequently.

With the great technological opportunity and the sustainable development goals to which the sector has committed itself, association journalism will become more personal, regionalised, diversified and efficient during this decade. AI tools, for example, will allow content to be constantly adapted to the different needs of consumers in a convenient and accessible way, creating different text variants or moulding content into an animated video. Similarly, associations will look to optimise the user experience on the web with search engines and chatboxes, while AI-based content creation is expanding the digital plane of their management.

The journalistic language will also move in a more personalised direction as the automation of work by generative AI will lead the publishing sector to cut out some steps in the individual process; this could open up new business opportunities in the sector or lead

My honest conclusion was that instead of dealing with these issues in isolation and reading the industry in silos, it would be very beneficial to adopt a circular perspective where all these trends and go-to-topics could be analysed as a whole. Nowadays, it is impossible to talk about sustainability measures without talking about technological resources; it is impossible to discuss talent flows without mentioning diversity, equity and inclusion, while getting into the minds of new generations; and it's impossible to talk about event legacies and impacts without safeguarding the sector, advocating for the social importance of associations, and attracting professional sectors that can fight for major conferences. To limit the discussion of a topic without touching on its web of influences is to fall short of its results.

# HO ESSENTIAL INTERVIEWS



# & STORIES

# Embracing **Lifelong Learning:** **Brussels'** Gateway to Excellence for Association Executives

This editorial unravels the wide variety of opportunities that Brussels, the beating heart of European policy and decision-making, offers association executives looking to enhance their skills. Belgium's capital is uniquely positioned to provide face-to-face and online opportunities for upskilling in key areas such as technology adoption, sustainable development, leadership and strategic planning.

*AUTHOR: JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN, HQ'S SENIOR EDITOR*

At a time when technology is evolving at lightning speed and global challenges are becoming increasingly complex, lifelong learning has never been more important for association executives, especially in the face of disruptive challenges and threats posed by artificial intelligence. Skilled in the intricate dynamics of policy-making at European and international levels, association professionals are on a constant journey to refine their skills and broaden their knowledge base.

This article highlights the critical role of lifelong learning in empowering association executives to navigate and excel in their ever-changing professional environment. Beyond individual skill enhancement, we also explore various European initiatives that promote continuous learning and professional growth within the general public.

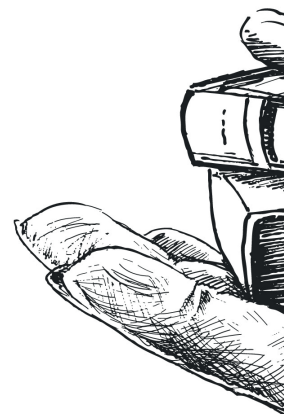
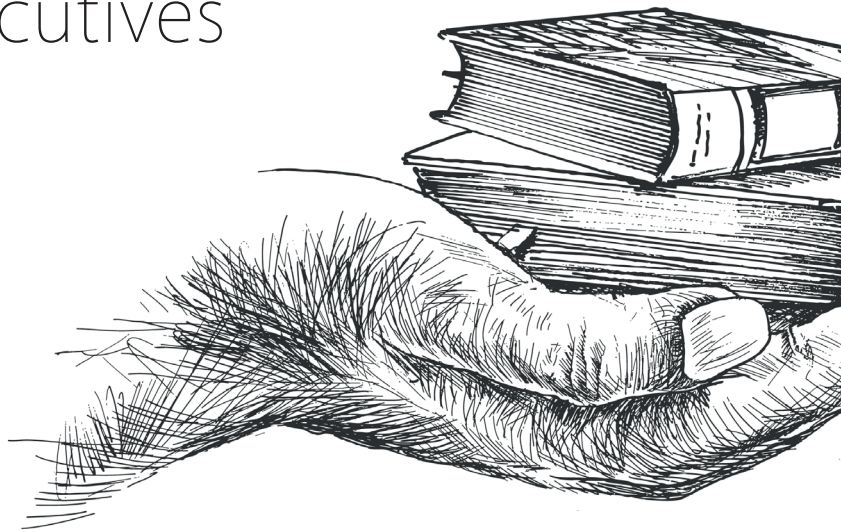
As a hub for international and European associations, Brussels is a centre for diverse educational opportunities and, as some of our readers will recall – as we have covered in past editions of *HQ* – the **Executive Master in International Association Management** (at the **Solvay Brussels School**, part of the renowned **Solvay Lifelong Learning**) is an essential resource for advancing the skills of association executives to the next level. Solvay's tailor-made programme for association executives really stands out for its curriculum. This course isn't just an academic pathway; it's a comprehensive toolkit for success in the world of association management. It equips learners with essential managerial skills, from strategy and marketing to

communications, budget management, and governance.

The programme is designed to reflect the unique and ever-changing challenges the association sector faces. This executive master's programme has been developed in partnership with leading organisations such as **AcForum**, the **Federation of European and International Associations**, the **European Society of Association Executives (ESAE)** (see interview in page 10), the **Union of International Associations**, **visit.brussels**, **Visit Flanders**, and **Wonderful Copenhagen**.

Brussels excels as a leading city for learning opportunities for association executives and influential events such as the **European Association Summit**, a cornerstone alongside its prestigious academic programmes. You may also recall our articles in past issues of *HQ* about this event conceived by **visit.brussels** and **ESAE**, this summit is an unrivalled forum for networking and knowledge exchange, where participants immerse themselves in the latest industry trends, engage in stimulating discussions, and forge connections across various sectors. These gatherings foster pioneering ideas and collaborations that shape the future of associations.

Marking a new era for the European Association Summit, **ESAE** is taking over its organisation from **visit.brussels**. This strategic transition coincides with the launch of **The Association Place** (see page 51), a new initiative by **visit.brussels**. **ESAE**, a founding partner of the Summit,





is committed to maintaining its excellent reputation and ensuring it continues to be a comprehensive platform for association professionals across Europe. The upcoming edition, scheduled for 22nd May 2024, will be a milestone, especially with ESAE's prestigious **Association Awards Ceremony**, opening a new age of knowledge exchange and advancement in association management.

ESAE's dedication to lifelong learning extends beyond the events. Their **Leadership Circle**, aimed at top Association Executives like Director Generals, Secretary Generals, and CEOs, offers an unparalleled platform for networking, sharing best practices, and discussing industry trends. Additionally, their **Knowledge Library** and their **communities** demonstrate their commitment.

In today's digital era, the landscape of learning and professional development extends far beyond associations and traditional classrooms. Online platforms have also emerged as pivotal resources for continuous learning and skill enhancement for the open public. The **Lifelong Learning Platform** (by the **European Civil Society for Education**) is a prime example, offering extensive resources for association executives and citizens who shouldn't be left out. Their vision is meant to ensure equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship. This platform provides access to various courses and materials and fosters community engagement, enabling professionals to share experiences and learn from each other.

Another significant initiative is the **European Digital Education Hub**. This hub acts as a gateway to digital upskilling, in line with the broader European ambition to improve workforce skills in the digital age. It presents a wealth of online courses, webinars, and interactive tools catering to the diverse needs of European professionals.

Highlighting specific projects in different fields, the **Artificial Intelligence Skills Alliance** and **Better Health and Well-being** demonstrate Europe's commitment to advancing skills in specialised areas. Supported by the **European**

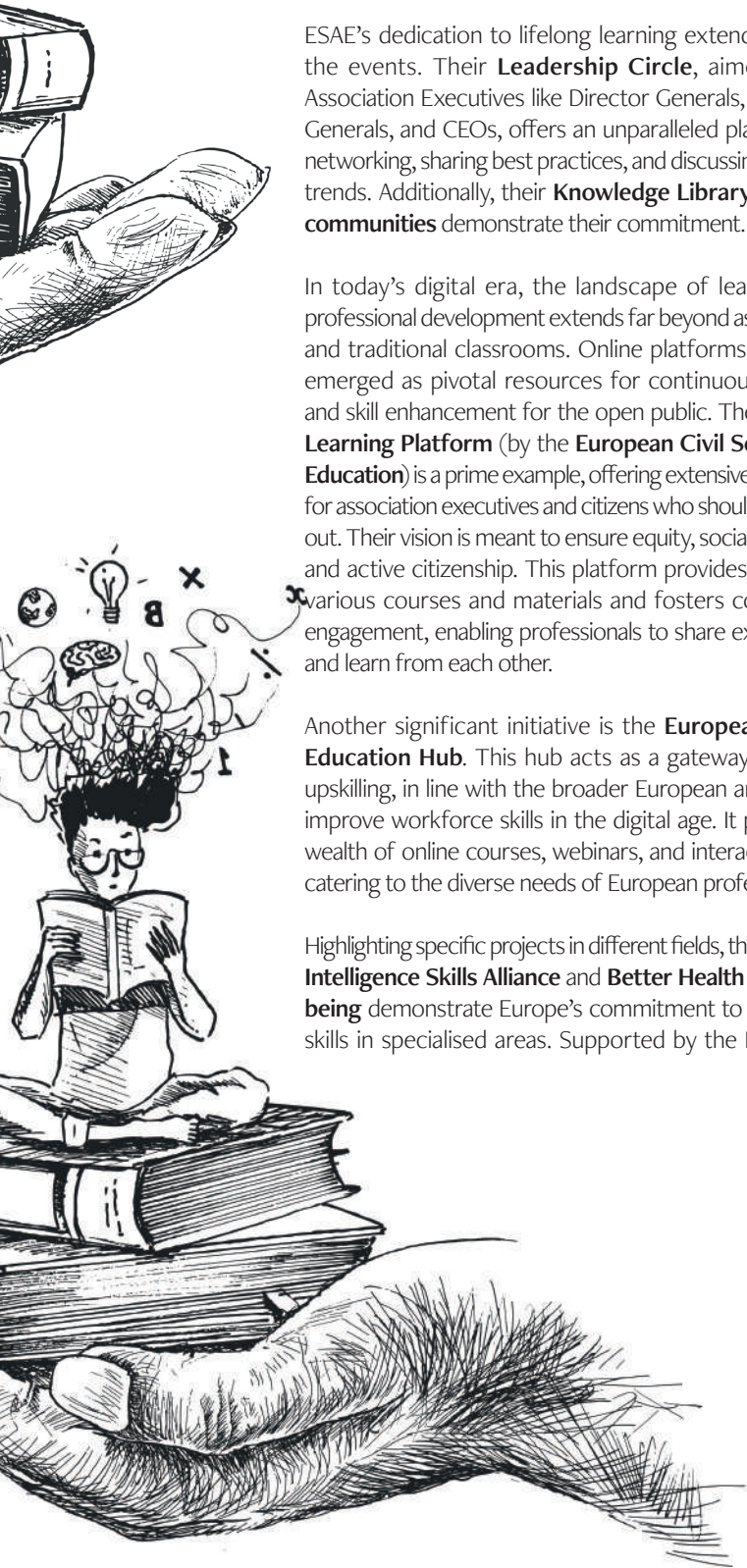
**DIGITAL SME Alliance** and the **European Health Management Association**, respectively, these projects focus on upskilling in artificial intelligence and healthcare sectors, to mention a few. They offer targeted training and resources and provide platforms for collaboration and innovation, reflecting the dynamic nature of these fields.

These online learning opportunities and initiatives aren't just educational resources but integral parts of a broader movement towards a knowledge-based, future-ready European workforce. They represent the European Union's commitment to ensuring its professionals, including association executives, are well-equipped to navigate and lead in an increasingly digital world.

For association executives, these opportunities are much more than personal growth opportunities; they significantly contribute to their organisation's resilience and adaptability in a rapidly evolving world. The impact of lifelong learning and upskilling initiatives in Brussels illustrates how dedicated efforts in professional development can lead to substantial achievements for individuals and their organisations, and real-world transformations, leading to the development of new initiatives for the associations' goals and significantly impacting European policy-making in the different fields.

In a context where change is becoming a more important factor than ever before, the capacity to continuously learn and adapt is not only an advantage, but a necessity. Looking to the not-too-distant future, and as the first reports already suggest, the need to adapt to the unpredictable changes that artificial intelligence is bringing to all professional fields will make such upskilling programmes a must for associations. The lifelong learning landscape will continue to expand and integrate innovative technologies and practices. The role of face-to-face events and training programmes, online platforms and industry partnerships will become increasingly essential in developing a workforce ready for the present/future. For Brussels-based association leaders and their global counterparts, the journey of learning and adaptation is ongoing, promising a future where skills, knowledge and innovation converge to foster a more agile and resilient professional community.

Would you like to share with us information about other training opportunities for association executives in Brussels or online? Contact our content team: [press@meetingmediagroup.com](mailto:press@meetingmediagroup.com)



The **European Association Summit**, the centrepiece of association management in Brussels, will be organised by one of the founding associations in 2024. The **European Society of Association Executives** is ready to take over the event and one of the Board members explained to us how they plan to do it, in this short interview.

“

*Our aim is to make a summit by association professionals for association professionals, promoting collaboration and innovation within the association sector through peer-to-peer exchange.*



# ESAE Takes the Reins of the European Association Summit 2024

After 11 successful years of organising the **European Association Summit (EAS)** and bringing together association professionals from across Europe, **visit. brussels** has announced a strategic shift, following the recent opening of its exciting new initiative, **the Association Place** (see page 51).

Focusing its efforts on supporting the community of international associations, the Belgian capital's DMO has opened its doors to the **European Society of Association Executives (ESAE)**, to shape the future of the event, drive its evolution, and take on its organisation from now on. ESAE was one of the four founding partners who established EAS and supported the development of the summit throughout its history, sharing the objective of monitoring the challenges of association management and advancing the discussion on the most pressing issues in this community.

As an organisation that brings together professionals from all types of European associations, and with the mission of promoting excellence in their leadership through the exchange of knowledge and best practices, ESAE is committed to developing the legacy left by previous editions, planning to organise future editions of the EAS from the second quarter of 2024. The 12<sup>th</sup> edition will be designed by and for association professionals, focusing on co-creation, community meetings and the macro-trends and needs that matter most to their peers.

Here's a preview of the 2024 Forum in a conversation with **Martina De Sole, ESAE Board Member** responsible for the communities of practice:

### **What led ESAE to organise the European Association Summit?**

The success of ESAE's event and Awards on 15 June 2023 highlighted the need for a larger gathering for our community. When visit.brussels approached the founding partners of the summit to take over its organisation, we saw this as a natural continuation of our offering. We deeply appreciate their trust in us, with the summit being a crucial platform for professionals to connect, collaborate and drive progress within the association community. Organising it aligns perfectly with ESAE's value of fostering the professionalisation of association management.

### **How are the ESAE Communities of Practice contributing to the organisation of the European Association Summit?**

Our communities consist of association professionals who regularly get together to discuss shared challenges, exchange best practices, and explore innovative solutions on their respective topics of interest. Their active involvement has been pivotal in shaping the content and agenda for ESAE's main programme of activities, and it couldn't be different for the EAS. Besides other high-level panel sessions, the summit will include seven sessions that are fully designed by volunteers based on the expertise and insights shared during community meetings.

### **What added value can ESAE bring to the summit?**

Being an association of association executives has enabled our community to craft a programme that meets the challenges and needs faced by association professionals. Our aim is to make a summit by association professionals for association professionals, promoting collaboration and innovation within the association sector through peer-to-peer exchange.

### **What will be the main topic of the European Association Summit in 2024?**

The primary focus will be finding a balance between responsible stewardship and innovative leadership for association executives. This is also the overarching theme of ESAE's 2024 programme of activities. Discussions and initiatives will also address pressing issues for associations, such as the upcoming EU elections and the role that associations have to play in the European civil society. The goal is to foster collaboration, co-creation, and peer-to-peer exchange. The summit will also celebrate outstanding achievements through ESAE's Awards programme, highlighting projects and initiatives that demonstrate excellence and innovation in the association community for everyone to be inspired by.

### **Speaking of the Awards, what are the criteria for the European Association Awards, and how will they highlight the best models in the association industry?**

The Awards are more than just recognition; they are meant to celebrate outstanding projects in impact, digital communication, event transformation, and diversity and inclusion, reflecting on innovation and dedication that can inspire us in our own daily jobs. A jury of volunteers will evaluate projects based on their transferability, impact, and innovation, in consideration of association size and resources. Recognising excellence by sharing case studies among peers amplifies their visibility and that of their associations, encouraging deeper engagement and knowledge exchange within the industry. The Awards ceremony is an opportunity to honour the contributions of team members who often work behind the scenes and to learn from their solutions, reinforcing the broader association community.

### **Can you give us some practical details that attendees should know about the European Association Summit?**

The Summit will take place on May 22 in the amazing **The Merode** in Brussels, offering a one-day experience. Attendees can enjoy discounts, the early bird registration opened on February 22<sup>th</sup>. We are looking forward to seeing you there!

*The next edition of the EAS is planned to include the ESAE's Association Awards Ceremony, following the success of the inaugural event in June 2023. The ESAE Board and Co-Chairs of the ESAE Communities of Practice are working together to develop a programme which is relevant for Association executives and professionals as well as the community at large, including ESAE partners.*

# Brightelm:

## Evolve Conference & Industry Partnerships



**Brightelm** is an event agency based in the UK providing support across all aspects of events for association and membership bodies. In February, they held the **Evolve Conference** with a diverse and informative programme covering emerging technologies, sustainable event planning, advanced marketing strategies and much more. The agency's managing director told us about the many partnerships they forged for the event.

Association events specialists Brightelm debuted **Evolve**, a unique conference specifically designed to share best practice processes and innovative approaches used to empower event organisers to face the tough times ahead. This one-day conference took place on 9th February at the **Queen Elizabeth II Centre** in London with the aim of equipping all those involved in running events with the knowledge, tools and inspiration needed by delegates representing different sectors. The fundamentals of the programme were a combination of learning, training and discussion, but with an emphasis on creating meaningful connections. Featuring a diverse programme of facilitators and speakers, the innovative agenda was designed for three levels of association professionals: leaders, managers and beginners.

“Those responsible for organising events for associations must have broad shoulders. They report to CEOs and Boards and are challenged in many ways, not least because they operate in three sectors: the trade or subject their organisation represents, the association industry and the events industry. Many feel isolated and find it difficult to find colleagues who share the same challenges. This is a community in its own right, and few others are bringing it together in a truly meaningful way,” **Rob Eveleigh, founder and managing director of Brightelm**, tells us. Originally initiated by Rob and later joined by other experienced industry leaders, the event was designed to empower participants with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the changing landscape of the events industry. The programme featured a comprehensive agenda covering a wide range of topics such as emerging technologies, attendee experiences, sustainable and green events, data analytics to drive event ROI, event marketing in the digital age, inclusive and diverse events, and best practices in event logistics and operations. But as Rob says, it went well beyond that: “What the ‘events industry’ thinks versus the reality of priorities for associations are often different. Sustainability is a common theme in events industry conferences, but the specific challenge for associations will be helping delegates obtain a slice of their employer’s carbon budget in order to attend their event. On the other hand, many associations want to use technology better but struggle to identify suppliers which can help them. ‘Integration’ and ‘user experience’ are the buzzwords around these conversations at the moment, but there don’t seem to be any event tech suppliers, currently, that are doing both really well. I think this will evolve quickly over the next few years, and we will start to see some improvements.”

Topics were covered through interactive experiential workshops, panel discussions, keynote presentations and innovative facilitated networking sessions, and attendees had the opportunity to interact with other event organisers, share ideas and establish meaningful connections that will enhance their professional growth. “Commercial sales (sponsorship, exhibition, advertising) is always on the

agenda, but the specifics about how to increase revenue against a trend of seemingly shrinking budgets and data-based marketing decisions,” he added.

### *Partnerships and Sponsors*

In order to raise awareness of the Evolve conference among event teams, Brightelm also announced two further partnerships – **Memcom** and **the attendee experience co (atex)**. “When I founded the agency, I chose to work exclusively with associations because I wanted to help bring about positive change, and I get to do that through the work we do in events. Brightelm is more of an event agency for associations; we offer similar services to PCOs but tend to work on a service-by-service basis with our clients. Our conversations with clients tend to start with ‘How can we best help you?’ rather than ‘We’ll run your conference for you!’”

With the integration of Memcom’s extensive leadership network for the association sector, the conference brought even more impact, promoting high-level discussions and providing networking for new and emerging leaders in the professional association sector. “The values of Memcom are to collaborate, innovate and impact change in society, which sit nicely alongside Brightelm’s values of ‘Meetings with Purpose’. Memcom also has specific strengths in recruitment in the membership sector and will be onsite offering career support to attendees,” Eveleigh clarified.

**Julian Smith, Memcom’s Executive Director of Partnerships**, expressed enthusiasm about the collaboration for this conference: “This partnership exemplifies our commitment to providing membership professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in their careers. At Memcom, our recruitment activities centre on helping the industry gain access to talent, and we remain committed to helping individuals develop their skills to become leaders of the future.”

The partnership with atex, a pioneer in content solutions, offered attendees a content experience focused on innovation and future vision, with cutting-edge strategies and technologies for association management and engagement. “Associations and events are inextricably linked organisms, which is why most employ their own events teams with unique skillsets. For many organisations, events are their lifeblood, and the best way to interact with, and prove purpose for, their members. Our collaboration with atex aligns perfectly with this vision, as they bring their expertise in content innovation to the forefront, enhancing the overall conference experience,” said Eveleigh. “Our mission at atex is to change the world of how we gather, and we see the Evolve Conference as a pivotal opportunity to contribute to shaping the future of the association events industry,” expressed **Samme Allen** (pictured with Rob on the left page), **CEO of atex**.

# Funding **Small-scale Women-led Projects** in Developing Countries

Among a list of impressive nominees, the **Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW)** emerged as the winner of last year's **Incredible Impacts Programme** of the year, promoted by **ICCA** and **BestCities Global Alliance**, raising the bar for the sector over the last 12 months and driving real change through passion, education and creativity.

The ACWW was founded in 1929 with the aim of bringing together rural women and their global organisations, addressing the challenges they face as a result of the isolation of their communities, discrimination against women and their lack of participation in political processes. Today, ACWW members span 82 countries and, since 1947, have passed more than 180 policy resolutions by popular vote – the key concept behind each of which is the empowerment of rural women in all their diversity.

HQ got in touch with **Tish Collins, Executive Director of the ACWW**, to discuss the context and results of its Women's Empowerment Summit in Mongolia, which gave rise to this award, and the impacts of climate change, social conflicts, and lack of legislation on the protection and support of disadvantaged women.

## What were the implications of winning the Incredible Impacts Programme 2023, and how will this recognition impact ACWW's future initiatives?

It was a great honour and privilege to be invited to present the work of the ACWW to the **ICCA Congress 2023** in Bangkok. The audience of conference and convention specialists, most of whom had never previously heard of ACWW, listened attentively to the story of our Women's Empowerment Summit in Khovd, Mongolia. This summit was a development for ACWW in that it linked projects and advocacy work to help build capacity for our local member society, the NGO **Sain Tus Development Bridge**. Having convention industry validation and recognition for the sustainability and impact of the summit in Khovd helps spur us on to undertake more such summits tailored to local women's needs and contribute towards our aims of empowerment for rural women and their communities.

## How did this first edition of the summit align with ACWW's mission and vision, and how will the lessons learnt inform future legacy projects and initiatives?

Although women in rural and isolated communities are crucial to their families and the societies around them, they suffer the worst impacts of violence, climate change and conflict – they are not heard in legislation and remain unprotected and unsupported. The ACWW exists to change that. Currently, domestic violence affects 50% of rural women in Mongolia.

To address this problem, we launched our Women's Empowerment Summit initiative in Khovd, Mongolia, in August 2023, with our long-standing local partner, Sain Tus Development Bridge. We received seed funding from the UNESCO's Participation Programme, and policy support from Police Scotland.

This first summit involved 323 nomadic herdswomen, from 16 Indigenous ethnic groups, as well as five men. All the women are survivors of domestic violence and living in the most fragile of circumstances. With temperatures reaching -50° in February 2023, the death of herds and the impact of climate had further weakened these communities, and this was a critical opportunity to bring them together, working in the common language of Mongolian. Our objective was to support these women in building their resilience and capacity, with Indigenous women participating as community leaders, sharing knowledge, learning from each other, and developing their advocacy skills. We also wanted to build the capacity of Sain Tus to deliver their annual programmes.

The programme expanded on the impact of a previous domestic violence project, enabling women from nomadic communities to participate. Starting with a harvest festival and continuing with two and a half days of training workshops, presentations, small group work, and data collection surveys, the summit was tailored to the specific needs of participants, whilst aligning with ACWW's strategic focus on Indigenous communities, women's health, community transformation,





grassroots projects and advocacy, and meet our commitment to numerous of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### How does the ACWW plan to sustain the positive consequences of the summit in the communities it has reached?

To assess long-term impact, we will be holding three-month review meetings with local partners to reflect on success and elements that need further attention, measure improvements in access to services as an outcome of activities, and which challenges participants continue to face. We would love to follow this initial summit with a further event, extending to 300-500 nomadic herdswomen from Indigenous communities, allowing us to assess and compare the living situation for rural and remote women in Mongolia with a particular focus on domestic violence, income generation, and the impact of climate change. Our feedback has already identified the desire for further training around financial empowerment, independence, and human rights.

Feedback also requested training sessions for 300 men from the same communities aimed at empowering them to recognise and change their harmful behaviours. ACWW would also seek to strengthen the direct interface between survivors and local policy-makers. Both of these initiatives are in line with recommendations and input from UNESCO on transforming mentalities and achieving long-term change in communities. Pollution levels exacerbated by climate change are adversely affecting Indigenous women, and health issues are becoming acute. We would like to build in the opportunity for professional medical checks for the participating women, with signposting to relevant follow-up care.

### How did the collaboration with UNESCO and local organisations in Mongolia contribute to the development and implementation of the Women's Empowerment Summit?

Following the summit, the UK National Commission for UNESCO is partnering with ACWW on further projects in rural communities. We have already started planning a similar event in Papua New Guinea, adapted to local needs and reinforced by the lessons learned at the Khovd Summit. Overall, feedback shows

that participants are now better prepared to facilitate the ongoing sharing of knowledge and good practices between different ethnic groups; build capacity in their own communities for planning future events and activities; and create additional networks and strengthen existing ones of mutually supportive local women's groups.

Alongside the political interventions, the participants in this summit also identified the need to teach the younger generations how to sew traditional clothes and learn traditional songs and dances, which have been registered with UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of urgent safeguarding. We would like to include these elements, but additional sources of funding would be needed based on current realities.

### What were the main factors that led to the selection of Mongolia, and how did the local context contribute to the success of the summit?

The ACWW has been funding small-scale women-led projects in developing countries around the world since 1977, and these have run parallel to our advocacy efforts that began more than 90 years ago. The ACWW had previously funded a fruit and vegetable growing project with Sain Tus, with successful and sustainable results of increased nutrition and income generation. After that, we were able to fund a project centred on income generation for local women, around the transformation of animal skins into felt slippers and leather boots. When the request for funding for a project focused on supporting survivors of domestic and gender-based violence was accepted, the concept for this summit was developed to take the scope and results much further and support Sain Tus in developing its own organisational capacity.

Sain Tus is a hub for nomadic women from 16 remote Indigenous communities in the far west of Mongolia, and allows them to come together in one place to build trust, share knowledge and learn from each other. Influencing authority agencies such as the police, and presenting them with an alternative, as advocated by Police Scotland, was also a key element of their success.



# Cost of Living Impact Survey: Associations Increased Salaries while Organisers Saw Event Costs Rise in 2023!

**The Eastside Rooms**, a leading modern venue in the heart of Birmingham, surveyed 125 event professionals from around the world in October 2023 to identify the challenges and changes they face due to the current economic context.



This survey on the impact of the cost of living revealed that 83% of organisers have seen an increase in event costs over the last year, with 45% describing it as significant. When broken down, associations/non-profits are feeling the influence most significantly, with 88% of them registering an increase, compared to 73% of companies. According to the study, 37% of associations and 30% of organising companies have also increased the salaries of their professionals and teams.

Specifically:

- 28% of non-profits (NPOs) increased staff salaries, while a further 9% increased freelance/consultant fees;
- 25% of companies increased staff salaries, while another 5% increased freelance/consultant fees.

In fact, the two different sides of the industry are trying to mitigate the financial challenges in various ways. Associations/NPOs and companies have had to look for different strategies to balance the budget, from cutting back on catering and audio-visuals to increasing registration fees. 48% of organisers increased registration fees in 2023, while 51% of associations/NPOs reduced catering expenses in an effort to combat economic challenges and price increases. This compares to just 25% of companies, who see the biggest opportunity to make savings in reducing delegate numbers – 28%.

However, along with the impact on organisers, the research also explored differences observed in professionals' behaviour. The report showed that 24% of organisers are offering flexible working arrangements to meet the needs of their teams. Another stark difference between the two sides of the market is changes in AV/production costs, where 35% of associations/NPOs are reducing spending compared to just 20% of corporates.

During the survey, participants were asked what type of organisation they worked for – these were combined into two groups as follows: 80 associations/NPOs, 40 corporates and five industry suppliers. *HQ* spoke to **Leanne Bladen, Director of Sales and Marketing at The Eastside Rooms**, about these new client and organiser trends and their current needs:

**How are the rising costs of events affecting their quality and scale? Are organisers cutting costs at the moment or finding innovative ways to maintain standards?**

Associations/NPOs are reducing catering costs at their events, twice as much as corporates who see here a great opportunity to make savings by reducing the number of delegates. Another notable difference between the two sides of the market is the changes in production/AV costs, where both sides are reducing spending. This denotes two priority options for short-term cost containment. Another point where we see a significant change between associations in this survey is the amount charged for registration, with again an



*It is clear the industry continues to evolve through the current economic challenges faced by both associations/NPOs and corporates. Staff are the lifeblood of our industry, so it is a real positive that they are, on the whole, being looked after.*





increase almost twice as high as companies. It should be noted that 23% of associations/NPOs are increasing registration fees by more than 10%. One area where the two sectors align is event frequency, with both associations/NPOs (29%) and companies (25%) reducing the frequency with which they hold meetings and conferences. This may be circumstantial or continue throughout this year until economic stabilisation. However, it will be a reality that will accompany the life of many associations during this first half of the year, I believe.

**Do you think technology is playing a role in helping organisations manage costs more effectively in the face of these challenges?**

I am noticing that most conferences are now investing in technology, such as apps to help with delegate registration and data gathering, such as dietary requirements, selection of their breakout sessions, etc. This then helps the organisers understand catering and space requirements. Once these are established, they can save money by making the best choices based on the needs of the delegates, rather than using guesswork. Such information also helps organisers understand delegate arrival times, allowing them to understand catering requirements at an incredibly detailed level.

**Based on the survey results, what advice would you give to event professionals facing these economic challenges?**

Just to try and be as organised as possible, which can be difficult as delegates are registering later and later for events, often due to cost restraints in their own businesses. It's always best to contract for as close to the true delegate number as organisers believe are attending but to keep the lines of communication open with the venue. Often, we find organisers contract for perhaps 100 people less than are due to arrive, as registration is slow, but in the last week, they call up and increase numbers. This can be very difficult for a venue to manage due to stock ordering deadlines. Therefore, if an organiser truly does feel numbers could increase last minute, it's sensible not to contract the highest number but to instead keep talking to the venue to avoid a last-minute shock – or even worse, inability to source enough ingredients!

**Are there any plans to continue this survey in the future, with a larger sample size or extended reach in the UK, Europe and other global regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ongoing economic impact?**

Yes, we intend to run the survey again after a year to be able to measure the change amongst the responses and see what difference 12 months makes. The survey was already global, with 69% of the respondents from the UK, 19% from Europe and the remaining 12% from the rest of the world. However, we hope to grow these numbers as the survey matures.

ABPCO's geographic focus is quite resolute, aiming to respond to and bring together the British PCO community. One of their strategic objectives is actually "to ensure the UK meetings industry is able to compete on the world stage through collaboration with other UK associations and national bodies."

## A **Member-centred Policy** Infusing Commitment to Association Conferencing



The **Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO)** is celebrating 2023 as a year of achievement and growth, enjoying a 13% increase in PCO membership and bringing the total to 155 – a significant step towards its goal of 200 members by 2027. This growth in subscribers, sponsorships and partnerships in its events portfolio led to an increase in revenues to £137K. ABPCO is not only a specialist authority in the process of organising events and meetings, it is also a membership association with an ecumenical vision and service to its partners and members. This makes it particularly close to the perspectives, desires and challenges of both sides – the event industry and association community.

In terms of strategic partnerships and collaborations, ABPCO has expanded its external voice, collaborating with **Memcom, Elevate, VisitBritain, Business of Events, the Diversity Alliance**, among others. For instance, the Memcom partnership (the UK's leading organisation for professional bodies, trade associations and other membership organisations) will see experts from each organisation sharing knowledge and best practices through speaking opportunities and providing content on each other's communication channels. This content will include sponsors, mutual discount fees, case studies, personal development topics and topical advice. In addition, the development and launch of sessions at universities have also led to academic partnerships aimed at attracting early-career individuals to the sector.

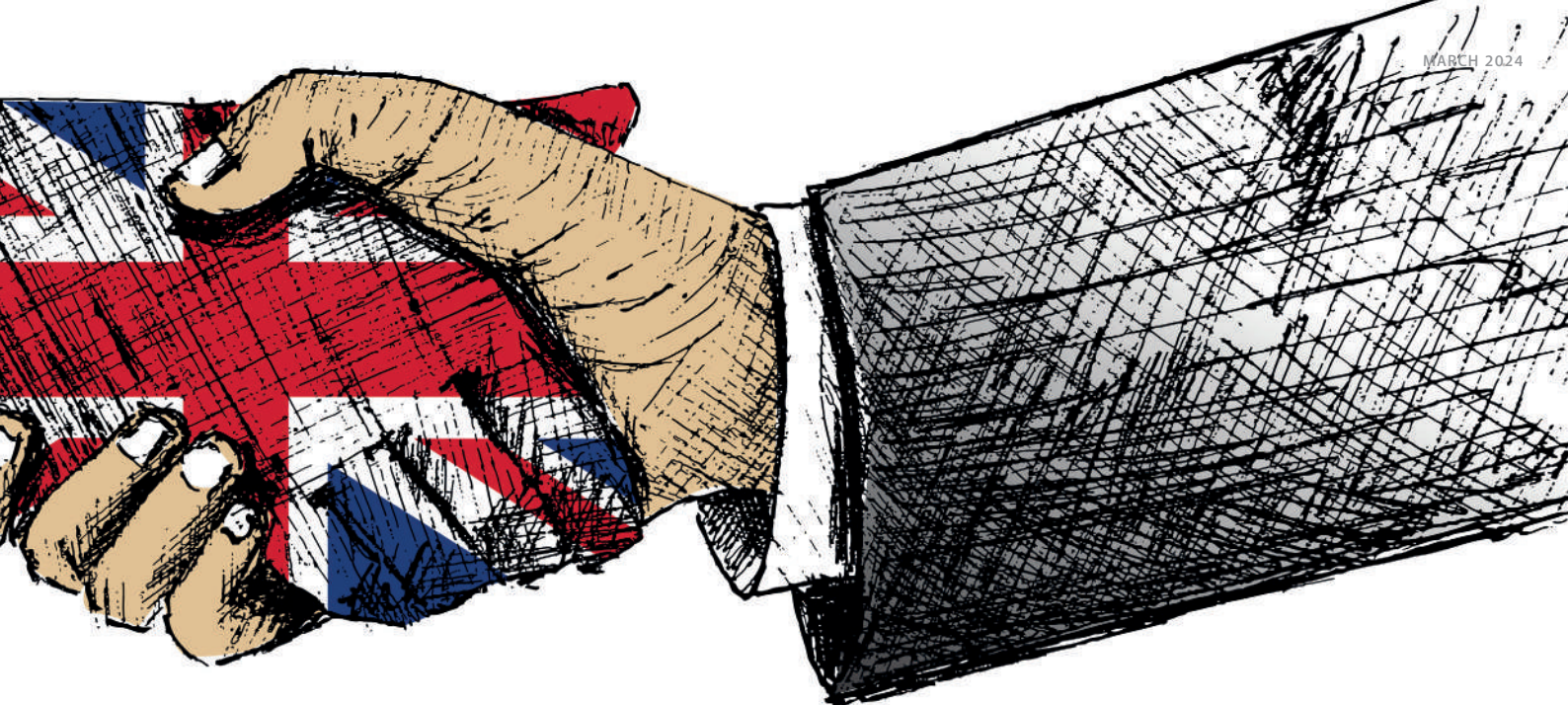
ABPCO successfully hosted nearly 20 events, providing excellent opportunities for learning, networking and sharing best practices. Demonstrating a focus on sustainability

and EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), they have resumed their efforts on environmental, social and governance criteria to ensure that the association remains at the forefront of these essential industry issues. We spoke to **Heather Lishman, ABPCO's Association Director**, about this whole journey and the responsibility it places on its members and partners:

**In 2024, and with all the changes and trends that have cascaded over the last three years, what are associations looking for and asking of PCOs for their conferences? How do you plan and map out an association event with so many paradigm shifts?**

The organisation of association events is an ever-evolving landscape, influenced by technological developments and a growing emphasis on sustainability and legacy, all of which are challenged by economic instability and changing attendee expectations. To successfully host events in this dynamic environment, organisers must adopt best practices that leverage technology, prioritise personalisation, evaluate event formats, incorporate sustainable practices and maintain effective communication throughout the process. It sounds like a lot for event teams, who are often already understaffed and under pressure, but these are vital areas to consider, and the significant value they add makes them worth the extra time and focus.

**How do you see the concept of partnerships and cooperation for the growth and consolidation of your own organisation? Tell me about your current partnerships.**



At ABPCO we choose our partnerships wisely. We need to invest time and resources to make them work, for us and, of course, for our members. We are proud to say that we have cultivated valuable partnerships with partners in the events industry that help us enhance our offering to members and ensure our commitment to providing our members with top-notch information and solutions. These collaborations enable us to stay at the forefront of the industry and help us to maximise the ‘voice’ of the professional conference organisers.

**How has ABPCO managed this transition of megatrends among its members and what kind of training and support does it offer its subscribers? What importance do you attach to education and training in your pyramid of priorities?**

ABPCO is always looking for ways to help and support our members. Our values are excellence, learning and belonging, therefore, education is paramount. We have virtual meetings and events covering various topics suggested by our members, and at our **Excellence Awards** in December, we had a panel of experts discussing AI and how it impacts and supports the role of a PCO. We also highlight relevant education at other industry events, such as **International Confex**, **The Meetings Show** and **Event Tech Live**, and work with these shows to highlight information for our members.

**Do you think that what the events industry thinks or imposes as dominant topics doesn't necessarily translate into the functional reality and desires of associations? Or are we all on the same train of thought?**

We are all on different journeys, but I believe we are heading in the same direction. We believe in bringing all our members together to discuss the best way forward. In some cases, the association will take the lead. In other cases, a PCO will take the lead; on other occasions, the venue or destination will be the lead. The most important thing is to start the conversation and it's amazing the positive impact it can make.

**In this global age of MICE, where everyone has the same CBDs, venues and infrastructure, what makes one destination stand out from another?**

I think this is where the collaboration comes in – so that the destination has a ‘voice’ that is supported by the venues and other stakeholders. In the UK, we have amazing research universities that can be ‘tapped into’ to add colour and context to events, as well as our rich history and language that is spoken by many countries across the world.

**Finally, many event professionals and even DMCs argue that we need to move from an era of content-only to an era of experiences. Does this also apply to PCOs, or do you have a different approach?**

I think a blend of these is a key requirement for an association conference. These conferences need content – they are the meeting of minds, and a place for breakthroughs that can change the world. However, if we can mix in unforgettable experiences, such as legacy projects that make an immediate difference, and give delegates a real reason to network and feel part of a community, then it leads to the greater good for all stakeholders.

# HO DESTINATION INTERVIEWS



# &EVENTS



# Hong Kong: A Super Connector for the Greater Bay Area!



Last November in Barcelona, the **Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB)** announced that the city would be taking home the organisation of its first MICE trade fair, **IBTM Asia Pacific**, which will be held in the spring of 2025 in Hong Kong (HK). That's why we sat down with **Kenneth Wong, General Manager, MICE & Cruise Division, Hong Kong Tourism Board**, on the premises of Fira Barcelona for a brief presentation of the destination and its strong arguments for attracting this leading tradeshow.

The event aims to attract more than 1,500 travel and MICE professionals from Mainland China, Southeast Asia, India, Japan, South Korea and other markets in the region, as well as long-haul markets. IBTM Asia Pacific 2025 will not only provide an ideal platform for travel agents from around the world, hotels, MICE venues, airlines and other industry players to explore business opportunities, but will also aim to consolidate HK's position as the world's meeting point in the region. There are still some commercial arrangements underway to define the exhibition venue for this mega-event between detailed discussions and site inspections, although the organisation is seriously considering one of HK's two flagship exhibition centres, **AsiaWorld-Expo**. The major convention and exhibition centre is undergoing an expansion plan and will build a 20,000-seat super-arena that will effectively double its capacity.

"We are very focused on the hospitality of the delegates, whether they are VIP buyers, exhibitors or just visitors in general," Kenneth Wong told us. "It wasn't a question of

price because the government has guaranteed substantial support for the event's rental, but rather the availability of the venue and the fact that, in recent years, AsiaWorld-Expo has shown organisers many success stories. The centre is right next to the airport, and we're expecting major developments around a project called **SkyCity** that will open in phases over the next few years." Comprising offices, hotel, retail, dining and entertainment facilities, SkyCity, will transform the Hong Kong International Airport into a complete all-around MICE cluster. The airport will begin to have a runway system, which will substantially increase capacity in the long term. Surrounding the airport will be a shopping, dining and entertainment complex called **11 SKIES**, which will be the largest retailtainment complex in HK when completed. It will also have around 800 shops and retailers, 120 different catering concepts, hotels, eight entertainment attractions and three Grade A office towers to complement convention and delegate stays.

The recovery of MICE tourism in HK is based on two parameters: Overnight stays by MICE visitors, which have



already reached around 70% of the pre-pandemic levels, representing 1,300,000 overnight visitor stays and also, the number of major events that the city has won over the past ten months in 2023. “We have won or maintained around 60 major events with more than 400 people, representing a total attendance of 330,000 (non-HK of 210,000). These 60 events will be held in 2023, and, so there is a strong business momentum returning to Hong Kong.” There are some solid foundations for this to happen: connectivity, good business and R&D ecosystems and centrality. At the beginning of last year, the government allocated 200 million HK dollars (around 12 million euros) to be used by the HKTb over two years for the recovery of the MICE business. Based on this amount, different types of schemes and packages have been developed for event organisers and all kinds of conventions in key areas such as innovation and technology, aviation and finance. “We will use the funding to attract mega-events such as IBTM, and fairs such as **Jewellery & Gem World Expo Hong Kong** or **Asia Fruit Logistica**. So, we have some money earmarked for mega-shows and conventions,” says Wong.

Agents and operators are another relevant area for this MICE revamp. Based on their database, a large part of HK business comes from small meetings, seminars and also incentive groups. That’s why, when going through the supply chain, the planner, the hotel, and the DMC are three key partners for personalising the financing schemes available. “When a travel agent in Thailand – which is a very important source market for us – tries to sell HK, for example, they will have hotel and DMC contacts at their disposal. The hotels, once they have the support, can offer

a more attractive hotel package and room benefits. The DMC could offer free excursions and attraction packages. They will, therefore, make our proposal much stronger.” As far as agents are concerned, the offer will be made by invitation, as there are many MICE agents around the world, so the Tourism Board will try to establish partnerships with some specialists in the region, especially in Hong Kong. “At the moment, we’re concentrating more on Mainland China and also the Asia-Pacific market, but of course, it will also be available to European agents.” Another strategy that comes from funding is to attract international media conferences to HK: “In 2024, we hosted the **4<sup>th</sup> annual Technology for Change Asia** organised by *The Economist*. We wanted to follow this path to leverage HK’s position around prestigious events, serving as a stage for high-profile speakers.”

However, the privileged position in the **Greater Bay Area (GBA)** and its influence through various clients in Asia also stand out. This is the southern part of China, covering eleven cities, mainly Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong province. The cities in the GBA will collaborate to build a cohesive city cluster, aiming to promote the free flow of talent, logistics, capital and other production factors within the region, thereby enhancing the economic efficiency, openness, and internationalisation of the **Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area**. “We are arguably the most international city in this area, so we can play the role of a superconnector for the GBA, playing the role of a MICE hub for international organisers and associations. This super metropolitan area is already made up of over 86 million people and is very strong in technological innovation, finance, commerce and manufacturing industry,



representing a diversified economic portfolio,” says Wong. Furthermore, the area is well connected with the entire Chinese associational community, which numbers ten thousand across the country, and is the headquarters for several Fortune 500 companies, such as the world’s leading battery manufacturer Amperex Technology Limited, or the multinational technology conglomerate Tencent.

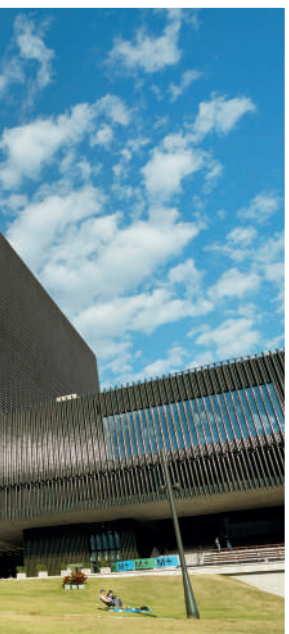
“This represents a great opportunity for international organisers to bring their conventions and exhibitions or even forge long-standing cooperations here. If they want to take advantage of this strategy to expand their business, their membership or participation in events, HK can serve as a breeding ground for innovation, business and people, and IBTM is a clear example of this. HK is the super-connector, but if you expand this thinking to other areas like innovation technology or medical conferences, they represent huge opportunities for the entire region.” On the other hand, GBA associations also want to expand and go global, reaching out to their international counterparts. Associations specialising in AI or robotics, for example, when participating in HK innovation and technology fairs, can easily meet with international organisers or associations and benefit from this exchange of knowledge and commercial networking. Regarding the circulation of all these visitors within the Greater Bay Area, – for Kenneth Wong – it will depend on which segment you are looking at – conventions or incentives. “If you look at incentives, I think it will work perfectly because incentive groups of 100 people will be able to opt for multi-city destinations. We are working closely with Shenzhen and Guangzhou to build some incentive products together. Recently, the Chinese government announced a visa-free policy for six European countries, so if we can take advantage of this opportunity, this would facilitate the acquisition of these incentive packages from operators.” The aim is that HK can be the arrival hub to then connect all other cities and areas – the city has a high-speed rail system to Shenzhen and Guangzhou, and there are plans to build another bridge to Macau, which will be the longest sea crossing bridge in the world.

However, Hong Kong’s reputation as a fast-paced, urban “business” destination hides a number of hidden treasures and tourist alternatives that could open up a new leisure market after the pandemic. This will be a new stage in promoting the city, especially to incentive groups, highlighting HK’s nature. “We have beautiful hiking trails, a beautiful fringe of islands, surrounded by fascinating beaches. HK is very compact, but full of attractive offers that can include a helicopter tour of the city centre, mountains, beaches, rivers and secluded beaches.” The business district is only a small part of HK, but there are many neighbourhood areas to explore and interact with

local people. In the centre, a neighbourhood programme called **Old Town Central** has been created, full of authentic traditional experiences that can be found among local cafés, grocery stores, playgrounds and art galleries. Another traditional and typical neighbourhood is called Sham Shui Po, with many local designer incubators and different clothing shops. Some of them even specialise in selling patents, accessories and leather workshops so you can create your own bracelet or wallet. Another aspect we relate to HK is food. At Sham Shui Po, they serve all kinds of local, familiar, and cheap delicacies.

Another aspect that visitors emphasise when commenting on HK is art and culture. We can talk about **Hollywood Road** and all the art galleries and museums, but in 2020, a huge new art neighbourhood called the **West Kowloon Cultural District** opened. “It’s over 40 hectares of space with about 20 hectares of open space. The location is right at the top of the western side of Kowloon where you can see the International Finance Centre, the convention centre and the entire skyline from the far west to the far east.” There are two very important museums in this area: one is called **M+ the Museum of Contemporary Visual Culture** (*bottom left side*), and the other is the **Hong Kong Palace Museum** (*centre left side*). Both can work as creative spaces for MICE events. “In 2023, the **Tatler Gen.T Summit**, a leading event organised in the region brought together Asia’s most influential entrepreneurs, live and in person at the iconic M+ Museum. The Palace Museum has some interesting exhibitions and is also open as a venue for incentive groups and conventions. Both can easily be converted into meeting venues and, while at the same time displaying very interesting artistic and cultural experiences for delegates,” Wong concluded.

“ *Leisure attractions and event facilities, along with the evergreen environment and the Greater Bay Area, make me think that HK has never been as attractive as it is today as a MICE destination. This gives us confidence in driving even more growth in the MICE business in the future.* ”





# Colombia: Towards a Sectoral Matchmaking Direction!

**ProColombia** is the organisation responsible for promoting tourism, meetings and events, focusing its work on foreign investment and exports from Colombia to consolidate the country's image in these sectors. Through its network of offices, it offers comprehensive support and advice to associations to facilitate the design and implementation of their internationalisation strategy. The last time we caught up with them, we talked about megadiverse events, the global promotion of their tourism products and sustainability goals – which were also the focus of the brand's promotional campaign, **Colombia, the country of beauty**. This time, at **IBTM** in Barcelona, we spoke to **Gilberto Salcedo Ribero, Vice President of Tourism** at ProColombia, about the importance of the MICE sector for the country's economic development, regional and geographical diversity for the elevation of its key sectors, and the journey as a LATAM hub for hybrid events.

**Given that Colombia is one of the world's great guardians of biodiversity and has adopted a very strong position as an agent of change, what conclusions could be drawn from your roadmap for sustainable tourism? What do sustainable travel and green events mean for your country?**

As part of our strategy, we quickly realised that sustainability isn't a passing trend, but a demand from different clients and stakeholders. So, right now, if we look at some of **Expedia's** figures, we see that many searches are related to sustainability experiences which shows us the importance of these kinds of activities. This way, Colombia can show the world how it is growing based on these principles of environmental protection and the sustainability of its resources. According to **ForwardKeys**, Colombia is currently the second fastest-growing country in terms of international tourist arrivals. Therefore, I believe that our sustainability strategy has worked and is keeping pace with this trend, not only in terms of visitor numbers and spending but also in finding new tourist profiles. That's the central part, but if we talk about events and congresses that are directly linked to these kinds of demands, the logic holds.

If we can find venues, hotels and suppliers around this sustainability journey, we'll be able to attract more and more visitors and revenue from an environmentally responsible perspective. We are doing this not only with the leisure segment but also in MICE.



**The eighth edition of the Colombia 2023 Investment Summit served as a showcase to position 12 Colombian regions as foreign investment destinations. Do you believe that the global MICE industry and the arrival of association events can leverage more investment in regions and communities?**

Absolutely. In terms of investment, these kinds of events are absolutely unmissable opportunities. Let's consider conventions that focus on any kind of specialisation in different sectors or industries that we are trying to attract. Obviously, we'll have decision-makers, local operators and professionals who can advocate for a corresponding economic activity in Colombia. At ProColombia, we're also



Teatro Adolfo Mejía, Cartagena



Plaza Mayor, Medellín





working on synergies between the vice-presidencies of tourism and investment. There's a perfect match between the events we want to promote and the investment strategy of this department.

**ProColombia has also been promoting the development of its destinations through the Six Tourist Regions strategy, offering niche products aimed at high-end visitors to stimulate foreign exchange and economic growth without tourist saturation. Can you explain more about the content and details of this strategy?**

We've been trying to establish a new way of promoting the country with this programme for the past two years. The main objective of this strategy is to reorganise our tourist offering while simultaneously breaking down the political boundaries that exist here. The visitor will be able to discover what each region offers from border to border by paying attention to the diversity of the country. By organising our supply according to the demand in the various markets, we can identify the main tourist products in each region – from leisure and adventure to the MICE and business sectors – and align them with our visitors' preferences. For example, the main offerings of the Colombian Caribbean are sun, beach, nautical activities and maritime conventions, while in the Colombian Amazon, we highlight outdoor activities, adventures and an immense heritage of biodiversity and wildlife, which are ideal for conferences related to nature and life sciences. To promote these regions effectively, it is essential to understand their unique characteristics and match them with the interests and prospects of potential visitors. For example, in Barranquilla, we have specific sectors that we want to prioritise, while in Bogotá, there will undoubtedly be other options. Each market must find an answer for each Colombian destination. To provide an example, if we talk about the health sector, perhaps the most important medical centre in our territory is in Medellín. Therefore, we will try to connect the dots, attracting markets and delegates to events that are part of this strategy.

**Your management has also taken on the sector's transformation through innovation and new technologies to consolidate the global MICE offer. Given that attracting hybrid events is a strategic pillar of the association events sector, how does Colombia intend to position itself at this level?**

After the pandemic, we've all realised that technology has to be a driving force in holding events. We're now more willing to acquire the knowledge to create various event formats. Why? Because technology allows us to amplify what is happening at different congresses and exhibitions. However, it is important to note that technology cannot replace networking, which is essential for building and maintaining human connections. By combining face-to-face interactions with the knowledge amplified by technology, we'll create events that reach a wider audience and are more comprehensive. This allows us to better showcase our destination.

**The Pacific Alliance is seen as a key factor in the country's economic reactivation and regional integration in Latin America. On the other hand, the promotion of Barranquilla and the Atlantic is also crucial to the tourism strategy that has been developed this year. What growth lever does the sea play for your internationalisation strategy, economic development and regional partnerships?**

Colombia is the only South American country with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. We live mainly off the productive activities of the oceans. Of course, we want to continue to develop greater economic activity around shipbuilding, fishing, and maritime industries on our coasts, but it is not just that. The sea is a valuable asset that can enhance tourist activities and themed conferences. Our strategic advantage on the continent is due to this fact.



# Seville: A Warm Walk Through Time in Southern Europe!

Over the course of its more than 3,000 years, Seville has witnessed the crossing of multiple civilisations, religions and nations, all of which have imprinted their cultural heritage on the city's fingers. All of this means that Seville breathes history, a history that is often the ideal storytelling for hosting a major event, weaving webs of knowledge and inspiration for associations and scientific societies.

Capital of the Andalusia region, Seville is one of Spain's most emblematic postcards, known for its *flamenco*, religious festivals and nightlife. Built by the Romans, this Spanish city holds some treasures from the past, with several basilicas, palaces and historical monuments, such as the Cathedral of *Santa María de la Sé*, the largest Gothic church in the world where Christopher Columbus is buried. The very charm of the small streets and popular neighbourhoods also make the Spanish city one of the most visited in the country, with the typical sound of Spanish guitars chanting around every corner and *tapas* and *tortillas* on the counters of every café. For more than 3,000 years, Seville has welcomed multiple civilisations such as Tartessians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, all of them leaving their cultural imprint in the form of legacy. Monuments, traditions, music, and gastronomy are recognisable in numerous daily events in the city. These footprints are part of the unique experiences that Seville is capable of offering, and the city's narrative around MICE that carry us to a modernised city with bold architecture, influential urbanism and several high-profile congresses.

It's true that an opportunity can arise from every threat or risk, and that's exactly what happened to Seville during and after the pandemic. "Of the 40 new hotel and event venue projects planned before the pandemic, none was cancelled. They all went ahead in a rampant force that currently distinguishes Seville as a destination for hosting congresses and conferences. A reborn and reinvented destination that has returned with more strength and

projection than ever," says **Manuel Macías, Director of the SCCB – Seville Congress & Convention Bureau**. In Seville, the consumer trend is being marked by the new design of the destination, with higher quality hotels and an international projection that is attracting a more selective and demanding clientele with high quality standards. This has favoured luxury tourism or a greater demand for quality products because "value for money" in all services has become extremely competitive with other competing destinations of the same size.

On the other hand, Seville's vocation as a MICE destination is unequivocal and is growing considerably every year, according to all the statistics. This year, growth in the meetings and events sector will increase by 30% compared to 2019, which was the best year in its history. Seville registered more than 3,5 million visitors in 2022, and this year, it's expected to reach 4 million. "We don't have the exact number of participants in meetings and events, but it's estimated to be over 600,000. At the SCCB, we manage 315 meetings and events for our member companies, providing a volume of more than 200 million euros." Macías also said that what associations are most looking for when they hold congresses and conferences in Seville are professional services to match spaces suited to the profile and size of their meetings. "It's clear that the charisma of the destination also





plays a big part in the bids we submit to attract congresses to Seville.” Factors such as monumentality, history, gastronomy, standard of living, climate and hospitality, and unique hotel spaces, are key factors, as are the facilities for liaising with companies and institutions related to the scientific or professional segment managed by the association.

Given that the city has already found a sweet spot in terms of accommodation in the diversity and quality of its venues, the local convention bureau’s priority for 2024 centres on improving air connectivity. To this end, Seville airport has invested over 100 million euros in the last two years in modernising and improving facilities, adding 42,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new terminals. “This remarkable commitment, together with the international promotion of the destination, will bring new international routes that will improve our destination, achieving the proposed objectives,” adds Macías. Seville was also recently named **Smart City of Europe** by the European Union, and is home to the **Spanish Space Agency**, which, together with the **Aerospace Park** and the **Cartuja Technology and Science Park**, make the city a new research and technology centre in southern Europe. Logically, this situation is permeable to local industries and services, which translates into new behaviours and education in new technologies on the part of the local MICE sector. “In fact, some of the most modern spaces in Europe are found in Seville, like **Fibes and Cartuja Center Cite**, something that influences the constant modernisation of our hotels and their spaces and businesses.”

Within the three sections of CSR, community participation is the most recent vector of involvement in the equation of sustainability and legacy in Seville society. Today, practically all the companies associated with the SCCB are committed to sustainability. One fact that confirms this is that the congress centre and **Garantía Cámara** have launched a safety and sustainability certification for events called **Safe and Sustainable F&B**, which is available to all companies and guarantees event organisers a tangible commitment to sustainability. “Little by little, we’re also making NGOs and deprived neighbourhoods aware of the importance of being connected to the benefits that our industry leaves behind in the city – among hotels, venues, providers – and in its less visible areas.” The list of major events that are increasingly choosing Seville has the SCCB very optimistic: “We could mention many, but due to its international media impact, I would highlight the celebration of the **Latin Grammys**. Soon, we’ll also have the **European Congress of Neurology** or the **World Sleep Congress**, for example.” In this regard, scientific events, organised by the destination’s scientific societies and PCOs have had a major impact. “Professional events such as **BEA World, m&i forum, MPI’S EMEC, MCE South Europe**, and **Iberian Mice Forums**, held in Seville, mark and educate our professionals in a very positive way, projecting us professionally in a differentiated way,” concludes Macías.



# Poland Convention Bureau Teams Up to Showcase their Event Destinations

Seven Polish convention bureaux have announced a strategic collaboration with Conferli, a cutting-edge platform designed to boost the digital promotion of destinations for meetings, congresses and conferences. As part of this partnership, we spoke to **Jaroslaw Marciuk, Chief Marketing Specialist at the Polish Convention Bureau**, about this new way of endorsing the different profiles of their cities and the new opportunity it represents for the Polish MICE sector and for conferences organised by international associations.

Based on data, feedback at major tradeshow and surveys, it is clear that Poland's stature in the meetings industry is growing – coincidentally, HQ had already realised this in its 2021 special destination report, which you can consult on our website. The **Polish Tourism Organisation – Polish Convention Bureau** is a member of important meetings industry associations, including the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** and the **Union of International Associations (UIA)**, and in the latest annual global reports on MICE destinations, the country has been steadily climbing the ranks in both the ICCA and UIA rankings. As a destination, the country has consistently attracted a multitude of association events, offering participants the opportunity to get to know the different destinations directly. Events such as the **ICCA Congress 2022** in Krakow, the **UFI European Conference 2022** in Poznan, **Routes Europe 2023** in Lodz and the upcoming **Velo-city 2025** provide just such an opportunity.

“Our initial strategy in partnering with Conferli was driven by the desire to enhance the visibility of Polish destinations within the MICE industry by leveraging advanced technology and innovative platforms. We aimed to position our cities as attractive destinations for meetings, incentives, and conferences on a global scale,” says Jaroslaw Marciuk. This collaboration also highlights the prestigious recognition earned

by six out of the seven participating convention bureaux, as they have been endorsed as **“Recommended Convention Bureau for 2023-2024”** under the Polish Tourism Organisation Recommendation Programme for CVBs, PCOs, and ITCs. This endorsement signifies their commitment to meeting high-quality criteria and underscores their dedication to providing exceptional services to meeting planners throughout the event planning and execution process.

The Poland Convention Bureau's critical assumption was that by utilising Conferli's match-making platform, they could effectively showcase the unique attributes and offerings of each destination to a wider audience of event planners and associations. “Ultimately, we seek to achieve increased awareness and consideration of Polish destinations among event organisers, leading to a higher volume of conferences and events hosted in our country.” Furthermore, their goal is also to support international event planners by improving the convenience and efficiency of researching key facts about Polish destinations, and facilitating easy comparison with other MICE destinations. “Time and effectiveness played a factor in this regard,” adds Marciuk.



Left: Poznan Old Town; Right: Wrocław





Krakow local specialties



Polish Convention Bureaux on Conferli include:

- Gdansk Convention Bureau
- Krakow Convention Bureau
- Lubelskie Convention Bureau
- Łódź Convention Bureau
- Poznań Convention Bureau
- Warsaw Convention Bureau
- Wrocław Convention Bureau

In fact, promoting a country with diverse destinations poses unique challenges compared to marketing smaller, more homogeneous countries. Poland's partnership with Conferli was influenced by this complexity and the need for a platform that could effectively highlight the diverse experiences available in Poland's various congress cities. "Conferli provides a comprehensive solution that allows us to present the specificities, venues, experiences and attractions of each destination, thus enabling us to promote our different destinations on an equal footing. By taking advantage of Conferli's platform, we aim to ensure that our destinations receive adequate exposure and consideration from event planners, regardless of their size or popularity – including first-, second- and third-tier cities."

Given the evolving landscape of the MICE industry, associations are changing their approach to seek out new, well-connected and competitively priced destinations that offer diverse experiences to their delegates. To meet these evolving needs, they are also adapting to the new opportunities presented

by AI and other digital technologies, particularly in terms of data analysis and research. "While we recognise that nothing can replace the importance of relationships between people, fostered during fam trips and site inspections, for example, these new digital tools serve to create desire and facilitate the discovery of new opportunities," Marciuk claims. "Regarding the role of matchmaking platforms as a digital alternative to traditional inspection methods, it is clear that virtual solutions and functionalities such as AI have the potential to significantly broaden destination marketing options and customer interactions."

The efficiency and accessibility offered by platforms such as Conferli align with the preferences of modern event organisers and are proving effective in facilitating connections between destinations and associations. This eliminates the frustration and inefficiency of traditional search methods and allows associations to make informed decisions. Through the RFP system, association meeting organisers can establish a direct link with convention bureaux, simplifying the process of selecting the destination for their next meetings. "We are very pleased with the new stage of cooperation with these seven Polish convention bureaux. Our platform offers integrated solutions that allow for the effective presentation of cities and establishing partnerships. During discussions in the Benelux countries and at trade fairs, we observe a growing interest in Poland as a venue for organising international events, so I hope that our cooperation will bring tangible benefits to our Polish partners," says **Nienke van der Malen, CEO of Conferli.**



# São Paulo: To Lead and not to be Led!

The main financial and corporate centre in Latin America, São Paulo is the most populous city in Brazil, the American continent, the Portuguese-speaking world and the entire southern hemisphere, and the fifth most populous in the world, with a metropolitan area of around 21 million inhabitants. As such, it is also Brazil's economic engine, responsible for around 10% of the country's GDP, and a major base for multinational offices, as well as hosting the country's main events, be they leisure, entertainment, business events or MICE. **Visit São Paulo** is a brand of the **25 de Janeiro Foundation**, which also runs the **São Paulo Convention & Visitors Bureau**. It is a non-profit organisation, maintained by the private sector, which aims to boost the economy by attracting national and international events, training professionals and promoting the destination. The city of São Paulo has successfully hosted many important events in different sectors, such as the **RD SUMMIT 2023**, the largest marketing, sales and innovation event in Latin America with 20,000 visitors. For 2024, the goal is to increase this number outside of the fixed calendar for the coming years, prospecting 50 national and international biddings. The destination is a powerhouse when it comes to entertainment, sports, corporate and academic events. São Paulo stands out in the areas of finance, health, education, agribusiness and engineering.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the city has faced the same challenges as the world's major capitals, leading to a halt in the events and travel market to make way for the fight against the disease, especially in terms of prevention. According to pre-pandemic data, the sector was responsible for attracting around seven million tourists a year and the recovery, which began in 2021, has brought both lessons learned and the after-effects of the crisis. Lessons, because if the format of trade shows and congresses had been undergoing a digital transformation, the years 2020 and 2021 accelerated the

**Visit São Paulo** directly promotes tourism in the destination, both by attracting and supporting major events and micro and medium-sized meetings, which generate wealth, jobs and business for both large companies and local businesses. But for this Brazilian juggernaut, it all starts with the MICE business. Thus, the development of the other segments ends up passing through MICE and evolving in a unified or independent way.

copan toalha



process, introducing technologies in full, such as hybrid participation and the metaverse, which are still present today; after-effects, since a whole financial issue remained unresolved. After all, there were practically two years of zero activity, including cancellations and refunds.

“In Brazil, thanks to the hard work of entities and associations that represent many companies in different sectors, various measures were taken to make the recovery sustainable, so that commitments could be met and new business generated. São Paulo has followed and strengthened this movement, and today has a busy calendar of events, high economic flow, hotels with high occupancy rates and event spaces with a busy agenda,” says **Toni Sando, Executive President of the São Paulo Convention & Visitor Bureau** (pictured above). “In this megalopolis, half of the 15 million annual visitors are motivated by business and events, with the capacity to expand due to its large structure of accommodation facilities, convention centres, exhibition pavilions, transport, road access and, above all, three well-located airports with national and international flights. “São Paulo is in a privileged position for tourism, events and travel. As mentioned above, there is a busy calendar of events, whether for entertainment and leisure, with major festivals such as **The Town, Primavera Sound, Lollapalooza, Formula 1, Carnival and Street Carnival, LGBTQIA+ Pride Parade**, or for business, congresses, symposia and conventions.”

In addition, there is a wide range of cultural, artistic and gastronomic activities to choose from, with restaurants run by world-renowned chefs, museums with outstanding exhibitions, shopping malls, iconic shopping streets, nightlife, historic and modern architecture, etc. As far as the state of São Paulo is concerned, there are other variants of ecotourism, adventure, religious, health and beach tourism, among others, for complementary incentives to major events. “This way, when the communication strategy is prepared, it is possible to segment the public and unify the visitor’s experience, who may come motivated by one theme, but end up enjoying others.” The competition between destinations to attract events includes various factors for the committee’s decision-making, such as location, language, currency, infrastructure, price, public support, sponsors, the event’s market, and, according to Toni, tourism policy changes from destination to destination: “We need to understand the need for each prospective event to liaise with interested agents when making its proposal, and for the public authorities to do their part in supporting the attraction of the event.”

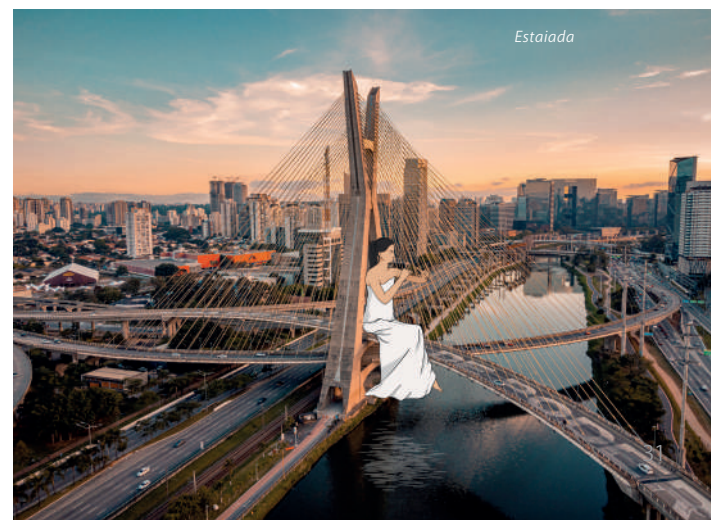
Diversity is one of São Paulo’s main assets as a plural, multicultural

and global destination, and its hospitality stems from this combination. “São Paulo is home to diverse cultures and styles, the result of its history whose essential chapters for Brazil were written by different people. This diversity is represented by the different types of cuisine, religions, cultures, neighbourhoods, as well as multinationals from all over the world,” recaps Sando. The path to becoming a Smart City is being taken by all cities that wish to remain relevant in the events and travel sectors. “In this regard, Visit São Paulo has innovated by implementing **Lina** on its website, an AI virtual travel agent to help users with all their questions and needs related to São Paulo. She is constantly being updated to provide information on tourism in the city and help you plan an all-round good trip,” adds Sando. Environmental, Social, and Governance rating is also a key element for sustainable tourism, keeping the destination viable all year round, with a smart way to organise modern events, accessible tourist attractions and respect for the surrounding environment. “We see facilities such as hotels and convention centres taking legal and certified routes to green sustainability. In the case of Visit São Paulo, travellers are compensated through the purchase of carbon credits, as well as compensation for proprietary events.”

São Paulo’s main vocation is MICE, which is essential for the sector’s prosperity. However, other sectors have great potential for boosting the economy through tourism, whether with MICE travellers or visitors with other motivations. For decades, Visit São Paulo has been feeding an intellectual event agenda, which, together with reports from sectorial organisations, such as accommodation providers and airlines, public authorities at municipal, state and federal levels, makes it possible to carry out a predictive study of trends, as well as being decision-making material for executives in the tourism and events sector. “It is possible to predict trends, as well as generate business for companies and professionals who use the data for information and knowledge management,” concludes the bureau’s head.

#### Events in the pipeline:

- *XV International Congress of Uro-Oncology 2024*
- *International Society for Quality in Health Care Conference 2025*
- *IWA World Water Congress 2030*



# Business Events Perth's Strategy for Community-Driven Event Legacies



In an insightful conversation with **Gareth Martin, CEO of Business Events Perth (BE Perth)**, our **Magazine Manager Manuel Fernandes** introduces *HQ* readers to BE Perth's innovative strategies that put Western Australia (WA) on the global business events map. Highlighting BE Perth's commitment to sustainability, the sector's evolution in the wake of the pandemic and Perth's assertive steps towards inclusivity and diversity, *HQ* explores how Perth is moving beyond hosting events to fostering lasting legacies involving First Nations communities and showcasing Perth's unique blend of cultural richness.

**P**erth is committed to its core objective of securing national and international business events for Western Australia, providing an important platform for a variety of positive economic, social and cultural outcomes now and in the future.

"We continue to recognise the enormous positive contribution that business events can make to our city and State, bringing together people from around the world and from all walks of life to learn, share, experience, and ultimately build better and stronger communities," says Martin, "Alongside our mission, we're proud to be involved in socially responsible collaborations that promote engagement, environmental sustainability and economic development for our local community. Supporting these programmes encourages an immediate impact and a lasting community legacy that we want the business tourism industry and visiting delegates to share."

With an eye on the future, BE Perth places significant emphasis on attracting and nurturing young talent within the event sector. The **Aspire Awards** programme initially created 25 years ago and now renowned across Australia, stands out as a testament to this commitment, offering young professionals a gateway to the international arena and seeding the potential for future events in WA. Martin shares: "Our

investment in the professional development of our team and our engagement in initiatives like **Women in Tourism and Hospitality Western Australia** underscores our dedication to cultivating a dynamic and competent workforce. We also encourage our team members to assume leadership roles in industry associations, such as the **Australian Business Events Association** and the **ICCA Future Leaders Council**, promoting professional development and industry engagement."

We should not forget the efforts of recent years due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Perth is adapting to a new era of business events in the region and re-evaluating event planning, with a marked shift towards hybrid formats that combine face-to-face and virtual participation. Martin points to the agility and innovation required to navigate this changing landscape, emphasising the importance of flexible planning, digital engagement and the strategic realignment of marketing efforts to meet the evolving demands of the broader association sector, as well as PCOs and event planners. "The fluctuating demand for physical presence at events has often resulted in attendance levels exceeding





Photo Credit: Scarborough beach, Western Australia, Tourism WA



expectations, and the reconnection of air links has become critical to revitalising face-to-face attendance, a trend particularly evident in WA,” highlights Martin.

When it comes to new and innovative strategies, BE Perth has identified and embraced the importance of partnering with local organisations that embrace diversity, equity and inclusion as the essence of a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere. “Our collaborations, such as those with **Gondwana Link** and **Short Back and Sidewalks**, reflect our commitment to creating events as diverse and rich as our local communities.”

A landmark event in Perth’s calendar, the **World Indigenous Tourism Summit 2023**, hosted in partnership with the **World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA)** , the **Western**

**Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC)** and **Tourism Western Australia (TWA)**, exemplifies BE Perth’s commitment to celebrating Indigenous cultures. The summit served as a platform for global dialogue on Indigenous tourism and underscored the meticulous planning and cultural sensitivity involved in hosting such a significant gathering. “This event was a profound opportunity to honour Indigenous traditions and promote sustainable tourism practices,” reflects Martin, highlighting the harmony between Indigenous values and modern event hospitality.



The summit effectively harnessed opportunities for Indigenous Peoples in tourism and provided a global stage for the exchange of ideas and collaboration. The event exceeded expectations, attracting 630 delegates – well over the 350 expected – demonstrating the worldwide interest and support for Indigenous tourism. The diversity of attendees, including nearly 100 international guests, 200 from around Australia and 330 from within Western Australia, underlined the importance of the summit and the logistical expertise required to cater for such a wide range of participants.

The summit also provided a platform for WAITOC, a founding partner of the WINTA Alliance, to showcase these principles in **Whadjuk Noongar Country**, further supported by the Western Australian Government and TWA's commitment to developing a sustainable and resilient tourism industry as outlined in the **Jina Plan: Western Australian Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2021-2025**.

“The Jina Plan is a comprehensive strategy from the Western Australian Government through TWA and multiple departments aimed at advancing Aboriginal tourism in WA. It outlines significant goals and milestones for economic development, cultural preservation, and reconciliation. The World Indigenous Tourism Summit allowed WA to share its progress with an international audience, reinforcing the State's commitment to these goals. This plan emphasises cooperation with Indigenous communities, investment in infrastructure, and cultural preservation to create a thriving Indigenous tourism sector,” explains Martin.

“BE Perth respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional Custodians of WA. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal West Australians, pay our respects to elders past and present and proudly honour their continued

connection to land, culture and community. Beyond our work to secure important conferences across all sectors, including towards First Nation's representation, such as the 2023 World Indigenous Tourism Summit, and **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Summit** (July 2023), we are honoured to work in partnership with businesses such as **Nani Creative** and **Ngwarle Untye Art** and incorporate Aboriginal and first nations people's culture into events that we plan and promote, thereby creating an immersive experience for our clients and visitors. These activities include a Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremonies, Aboriginal-led and run walking tours of the city, **Dale Tilbrook's** consultancy on incorporating food elements into event menus, local artist contributions to event branding and art and cultural exhibitions, to name a few,” adds Martin.

BE Perth's and WA's strategic vision is evident in securing the **World Travel and Tourism Council Summit 2024** as the global authority on the economic and social contribution of travel, tourism and trade. It promotes the sustainable and inclusive growth of the sector. Hosting the summit will position WA as a leader in travel, tourism and trade, with the event previously attracting high-profile attendees such as former **US President Barack Obama**, **French President Emmanuel Macron**, previous UN Leader **Ban Ki-moon** and environmental activist **Bear Grylls**.

The **World Environmental Education Congress 2026** has been announced to Perth on the February 20<sup>th</sup> – These achievements position WA as a key player in the global

tourism and environment debate and demonstrate BE Perth's expertise in driving the international conference and exhibition sector forward, creating jobs and economic wealth in urban and regional communities. "Hosting such prestigious events is consistent with our aim to stimulate economic growth, promote environmental awareness and showcase WA's unique cultural landscape," Martin concluded.

### Successful partnerships with local stakeholders in Perth

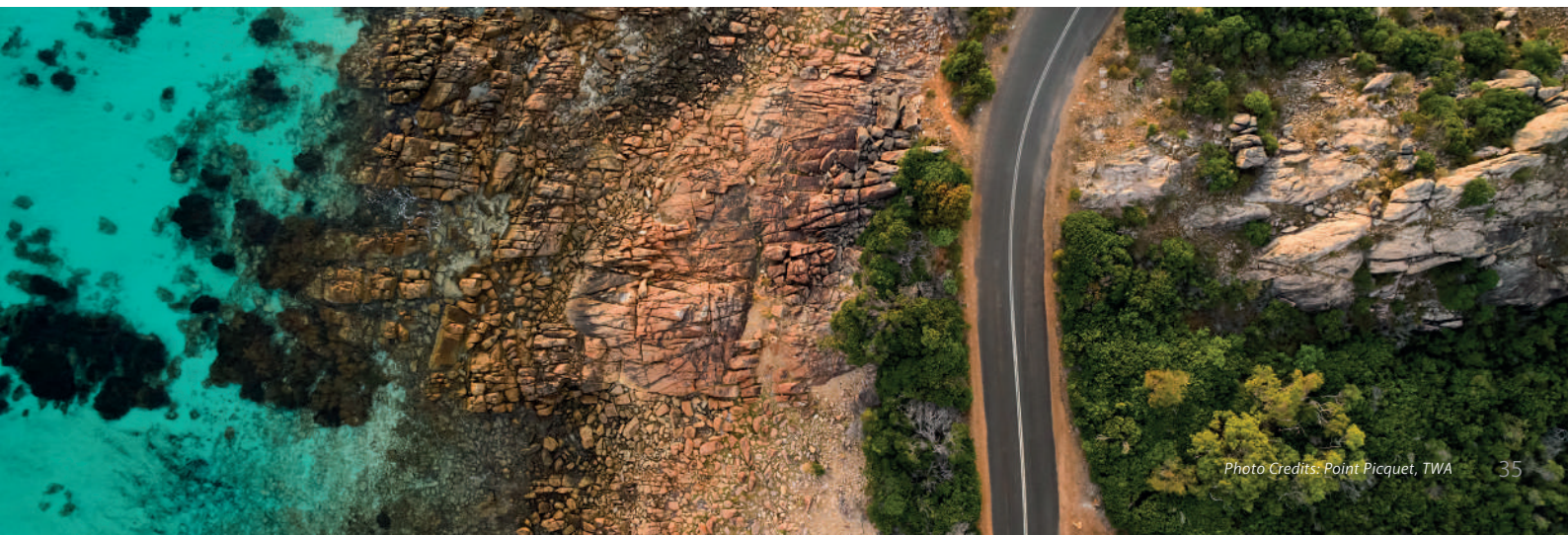
**1. Gondwana Link Ltd**, based in South West Australia since 2002, is a leading conservation organisation and registered charity in Australia at the forefront of ecosystem restoration efforts. As one of the 'Founding 50' for the **United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030**, it's the only Australian organisation contributing to this global initiative. The organisation focuses on reconnecting and restoring ecosystems across South West Australia, from lush wet forests to arid inland forests, enhancing biodiversity and supporting native species such as the Carnaby's cockatoo. Their efforts extend to partnering with local communities for ecological restoration, including sensitive fire management and First Nations' land management, highlighting broad environmental impact across the country. BE Perth has been an active supporter of Gondwana Link's mission, contributing over A\$150,000 in 2023. This funding supports planting native flora for every business delegate visiting WA, symbolising a commitment to a sustainable, connected ecosystem and First Nations community engagement, connecting over 30,000 delegates to the state.

**2. Short Back and Sidewalks**, a Perth-based charity operating since 2015 and expanding across Australia, aims to promote inclusivity and support for homeless people through free haircuts and grooming services. This initiative enhances the dignity of those it serves and strengthens community bonds. It is facilitated by an all-volunteer team that has provided over 6,900 haircuts and contributed significantly to positive community engagement. BE Perth

supported this cause by donating a barber chair for a new service **at St Barts Outreach and Accommodation**, enabling the charity to provide over 500 haircuts last year. This gesture underlines its commitment to building a more inclusive community and improving the well-being of its most vulnerable members.

**3. Nani Creative**, an Aboriginal-led creative agency based in Perth, specialises in storytelling, cultural exchange, space creation and brand development. It is committed to including young First Nations people in the creative sector, providing them opportunities to influence and innovate within the industry. In collaboration with BE Perth, Nani Creative founders Kevin and Leigh have developed a unique piece of artwork that reimagines the essence of WA. The artwork, which celebrates the region's indigenous biodiversity and the enduring stewardship of its Aboriginal communities, adorns a range of media, including bespoke accessories, exhibition displays and digital prints. This partnership showcases Nani Creative's exceptional design capabilities and furthers its mission to promote and showcase emerging First Nations talent in the creative arts.

**4. Ngwarle Untye Art**, founded by talented Perth-based artist, storyteller and owner **Cora Peltherre Lynch**, offers a unique blend of traditional, contemporary and wearable art. Cora's creations are deeply rooted in Aboriginal culture, drawing inspiration from Dreamtime stories, traditional lore and the deep connection Aboriginal people have to their land and heritage. In a notable collaboration, Cora in partnership with BE Perth designed shoes to be worn as part of BE Perth's corporate wardrobe. Cora's '**We are Many**' artwork has been incorporated into trade shoes or sneakers as corporate wear. The bespoke design, displayed at trade shows, site visits and as gifts to key clients, celebrates the country as a communal space for gathering and bonding and symbolises its potential as a prime location for major business events. This partnership highlights Cora's artistic excellence and promotes the rich cultural narrative of Australia's Indigenous heritage.





# AIME 2024:

## The Epicenter of Global Meetings and Events

The **Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event (AIME)** is the flagship trade event for the global meetings and events industry in the Asia Pacific region.

**H**eld at the **Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC)** from 19-21 February, this year's AIME 33 countries represented at the show floor, 16,000 meetings took place over the three-day trade show. AIME 2024 welcomed 4,000 visitors, more than 570 exhibitors. In total 22,000 badges scanned and 89,500+ connections were made!

AIME is the leading trade event for the meetings and events industry in the Asia Pacific region, and AIME 2024 welcomed 63% more exhibitors than in 2023, cementing its position as the premier event for the international business events community in the region. More than \$200 million in business is expected to be generated at AIME 2024.

The event is owned by **Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB)** and managed by **Talk2 Media & Events**, which has run the show for the past six years. This is the third show delivered by **AIME Event Director Silke Calder** and her team.

For the first time at AIME, there was a dedicated zone for the world's boutique experience makers. The Boutique showcased more than 20 operators offering bespoke and highly customisable experiences. Another new zone for 2024, the DMC Network brought together Destination Management Companies from all over the world.

An official press conference launched on the Knowledge Program Monday at AIME's showfloor was supported by **Steve Dimopoulos MP, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; Matt Pearce, CEO Talk2Media and Events; and Julia Swanson, CEO, Melbourne Convention Bureau** (*first photo on the top*).

Minister Dimopoulos (*second on the right*) spoke of AIME being the first of the 'big four' trade shows on the international business events 2024 calendar and the foremost business event trade show in the

Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, Minister Dimopoulos also acknowledged the unneglectable economic and social impact which meetings industry has generated in Victoria.

**Talk2Media and Events CEO Matt Pearce** announced that AIME had joined the **Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative**, a global collaboration led by the Joint Meetings Industry Council – where more than 600 organisations and events have established measurable outcomes for the events industry to minimise its impact on climate change. AI Meeting Matching system based on participants' behavior has been implemented in the meeting matching and selecting process for the show.

MCB announced the launch of its **First Peoples Engagement Guide**, tailored specifically to the business events industry. The valuable resource is aimed at assisting event planners in creating culturally enriched business events and fostering positive social impact. "We are also proud to announce the launch of MCB's First Peoples Engagement Guide. Melbourne and Victoria boast thousands of years of Aboriginal culture, providing a profound backdrop to enrich delegate experiences and make a meaningful contribution to a business event's programme." added Julia Swanson, CEO of MCB.

The trade show continued over three days at MCEC, with AIME's Knowledge Program the launchpad for the global events industry to come together. More than 1,000 people registered to attend Knowledge Program sessions held at The Plenary at MCEC.

AIME's 2024 Knowledge Program is themed "**The 4Ps of GLOCALISATION**" (**People, Planet, Purpose, and Profit**), with two keynote speakers: award-winning marketing executive Lisa Ronson (supported by Saxton Speakers Bureau) and bestselling author, TV host and founder of the 100 Things movement Sebastian Terry (supported by ICMI).





Curated by **El Kwang** and **BEAM** with the support of an Advisory Committee consisting of eight industry leaders from the APAC region, the programme draws inspiration from the AIME global community’s wish of harmonising the symbiotic relationship between global insights with local nuances.

The Knowledge Programme commenced with a networking lunch presented by the future **Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre** which is planned to open in 2026.

The welcome event was held at **Grazeland** in Melbourne’s inner west. More than 1,700 people experienced the AIME Neon Carnival, an outdoor food playground that was transformed into a neon carnival for one night only, exclusively for attendees of the AIME Welcome Event.

While talking about succeeding in winning 200 more exhibitors comparing to last year, *HQ* asked Matt Pearce about the plan for the future. “We have to be very careful on growth. Growth is something we aspire to maintain, but it got to be a sustainable growth. We are looking very carefully on what we are doing and where we are heading to, parts of that is driven by getting the right buyers. Therefore, we are looking at starting to evaluate the hosted buyer programme a bit earlier next year, and ensure we get the right matches for our clients.”

“The meetings have been incredibly satisfying and I can’t wait to welcoming everyone back to Melbourne for AIME 2025!” Concluded Silk Calder.

*All photos courtesy of AIME*





# BestCities Global Forum: Intertwining Purpose and Connections in Melbourne!

The Melbourne Global Forum underlined the fact that face-to-face meetings are key to cultivating meaningful connections, while purposeful associations were also high on the agenda for the entire delegation that travelled to Australia. Destination leaders, association professionals and industry players were the recipients of a number of workshops, presentations and practical experiences that once again emphasised the importance of face-to-face learning and collaboration at the heart of association work.

*AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES, HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER*

## What?

For several years now, BestCities has provided a stage of excellence to sustain an industry-thought dialogue between international associations with great social responsibility and cutting-edge destinations with an ambitious, forward-looking vision. To recap, the **BestCities Global Alliance** consists of 13 carefully selected top MICE destinations that set a high standard in organising association conferences. Continuous and mutual learning is therefore one of the clear advantages of this membership, which usually leads to the Global Forum. The annual Global Forum is the meeting point for this ongoing process, attended by authorities from the alliance's member cities, international associations executives, trade media and speakers. "Meeting the Challenge: Creating Connections with Purpose" was the theme behind this 2024 Australian chapter and the five different sessions we witnessed not only did justice to these challenges but also demonstrated how these connections can lead to a greater good for associations.

## Why?

In what was my fourth meeting in a row between the cities that make up the alliance, this year's Melbourne forum had the ability to continue the discussion left by the other chapters while swerving into the world of associations again... by creating connections with purpose. In fact, of all the editions I've attended, I dare say this was the one that prompted the most discussions and fireside chats on the most pressing issues for associations. In Copenhagen, we put the promotion of event legacies at the centre of the table by measuring the impacts of its Legacy Lab; in Madrid, we took this concept to a hands-on approach in designing strong RFPs that was enshrined in the "Madrid Challenge" – integrating impact and sustainability into the day-to-day

planning of conferences; in Vancouver, the scope of the issue was deepened with the *Conference Legacy Impact Study* that the Canadian city used with practical cases of sustainability. This time, and with an industry ready and fired up for the usual business dynamics, Melbourne set out to recreate purposeful meetings that would facilitate peer-to-peer connections and strategic partnerships (*the main topic of this magazine*). It was a light but assertive edition in which the associations were often able to choose the direction of the conversation, and in which the programme followed a logical sequence of topics which, although they had been dissected by other conferences, had room to breathe in Melbourne with a high level of participation from everyone.

## Where?

Designed to close each calendar year in December, **Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB)** opted to host this Forum in January 2024, so that it would coincide with the tennis Grand Slam, **Australian Open**, among other activities. This was an excellent opportunity to showcase the city's potential as a host for sporting mega-events beyond the well-known ones such as transport, technology and health, and to enjoy other summer activities in the Southern Hemisphere. "The curated programme at Global Forum Melbourne was designed to cultivate a community where mutual learning drives the success of business events. The Global Forum was a terrific opportunity to also showcase how our city's exciting events calendar, state-of-the-art infrastructure and world-class supply chain can enhance conference and meeting offerings," said **Julia Swanson, CEO of MCB**. Throughout the four-day programme, the working sessions included many of the places Melbourne is known for: the **Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre**, one of the largest and most modern event spaces in the





southern hemisphere, was the starting point for the welcome reception at the Lume, and also for the first day's sessions; the imposing **Marvel Stadium**, refurbished to the tune of AUD\$ 225 million and capable of hosting sporting events, concerts and congresses, served as the stage for the afternoon sessions, the **Cargo Hall** by Showtime Event Group – a former docking shed reimaged with a reference to its maritime past – extended the second day's programme at South Wharf. The last round of the event took place at the **Aerial**, just a few steps from the convention and hotel area.

### How?

Demographer and social analyst **Mark McCrindle**, founder of the McCrindle agency – recognised worldwide for coining the name of the first generation born in the 21st century, Generation Alpha – cut the ribbons with a fresh perspective on the five main trends transforming the association landscape. Between changing demographics, human-centred technology, economic volatility, virtuous consumerism and redefined work, McCrindle sought to explain that the concept of change, while inevitable, must be guided by the measurable pointers of the future and not by an unshakeable need to do something “unprecedented” for the sake of it. *Purpose Drives People; People Build Communities; Communities Change the World* – this is how Social Impact Leader, **Natalie Simmons**, introduced the UN Sustainable Development Goals and ESG frameworks to a greater understanding of design thinking for meetings and global problem solving. For Natalie, in today's world we must incorporate purpose into all our operations and strategy to prepare businesses for the future and become a profitable force for good. For

example, brands that have a clear, purpose-driven strategy outperform their competitors by 134%,

and this is not a coincidence. In the second day's sessions, **Olena Lima**, founder and consultant at Member Boat, explained how the transition from a traditional to a digital world can help association professionals deliver an exceptional member experience. Through tools such as CRM, Digital Marketing, Marketing Automation and AI, Olena pointed out that good data most often makes good marketing, and that segmenting your membership while collecting reliable behavioural data can positively map your member's journey with you. In one of the highlights of the programme, **Belinda Moore**, association expert and researcher stole the show with a fantastic presentation outlining how to thrive through change to unleash the Power of Strategic Planning. According to her, associations do not exist to recruit or retain financial members, they exist to make a positive impact on those they serve. The association is just one tool that can be used to achieve your purpose and the strategic plan is the roadmap for your journey to make this happen. Among factors transforming the operational landscape of associations and issues dominating association planning, the author focused on the positive impacts that associations should instill in those they serve. Finally, the Dutch meeting designer, **Mike van der Vijver**, discussed the added value of well-thought-out and designed programmes for meetings and events at the end of the Forum.

Regarding the carbon footprint, the approximately 149 tons of emissions generated by flights, use of transport, catering, venues and other sources of the event were offset thanks to a partnership with **Trees4Events**. In addition, Forum delegates also helped raise \$2,500 for **OzHarvest**, a food charity



“ *The key characteristic of a leader is foresight. The reason they can lead is that they see things not just as they are, but as they will be.* ”



# Antwerp:

## When the City is Your Venue!

The **Antwerp Convention Bureau** officially launched its commercial offer for international events at last November's IBTM Barcelona, where it highlighted its extensive portfolio of renovated venues, unique cultural experiences in Flanders, and a team aligned with positive impacts for its local community and long-term legacies for its clients. We caught up with them for this story.

Once the most powerful business centre in the world, Antwerp today breathes cosmopolitanism and vitality, being the global axis of the diamond trade, a world-famous fashion district and boasting the second-largest port in Europe with more than 60 thousand ships per year. However, its treasured and proactive local MICE industry also wants to call the shots. Since opening its doors a year ago, the **Antwerp Convention Bureau (ACB)** has already generated significant new conferences and exhibitions, including more than 20 major events (each with more than 500 people) over the next three years, which will see more than 21,000 people visit the city. Moving forward, this team will focus on positioning Antwerp as a premier international destination for conventions, meetings, and events looking for a city that perfectly balances intimacy with world-leading event infrastructure. In addition to proactively marketing the city, the ACB team will also support association and corporate organisers throughout the lifecycle of any event they bring to the Belgian city. And after a year of incredible success in developing relationships with local partners, stakeholders and potential clients, *HQ* went through all these steps with **Tadeja Pivc Coudyser, CEO of the Convention Bureau** (pictured

*on the right*): “Basically, what started to happen is that events became more and more important for Antwerp. With the expansion of our venue portfolio with **Flanders Meeting & Convention Center Antwerp (FMCCA) – A Room with a Zoo, Handelsbeurs Antwerp, and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts**, we now have great assets to attract meeting organisers from various sectors and geographies around a vast collection of venues of different sizes and shapes, which increases the appetite for our destination.”

Held in January 2024, **IAPCO EDGE Europe** was perhaps the clearest test of the city's new brand, summed up in the phrase “The city is your venue”. This seminar perfectly illustrated Antwerp's intimate size, flexibility and welcoming mentality that turns the entire city... into a venue. From the welcome reception in the **Radisson Blu's Diamond Room** to educational sessions at the (FMCCA) – A Room with a Zoo, and an immersive day at the **Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp**, the event highlighted the celebration of a city-wide experience, embodying the essence of a holistic approach where each part of the event was integrated into the different facets and heritage of Antwerp. For instance,





the (FMCCA) – A Room with a Zoo is the only convention centre in the world with its own zoo serving as both a conference venue and a philharmonic theatre with top-notch acoustics. The original, protected 19th-century architecture provides a tranquil setting for events with an integrated heritage, adjacent to the *Belle Époque* international station and with links to the European railway network. A historical heritage site with its monumental classical-style halls, this venue has produced a rich legacy through the **Antwerp ZOO Society** with its own award-winning science and research centre. In this sense, the profits from its congresses and events immediately support nature conservation efforts through animal protection, education and awareness-raising.

This partnership between meetings and conservation is in line with the industry's desire to become more sustainable, but according to Pivc Coudyser, the association's sustainable efforts have yet to be realised: "In my career, I've only had a couple of RFPs where the associations asked for sustainable and ecological venues. We all try to do it because we love our city and want to pivot responsibly while generating as little impact as possible, but unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be on the list of priorities for organisers. I think destinations and venues are taking a step forward by trying to integrate a robust set of sustainable products and services into their bidding process. Many hotels already have responsible suppliers on the outskirts of the city and quick links to the middleman, but if an association reaches out to a destination without asking for it, it is going to cost more. The change already exists in Antwerp, but it should be required in the RFP."

### The paradigm has shifted

The major post-pandemic change for Antwerp was actually

bringing together strong and diverse support from different sectors and players on its Board of Directors to reinforce the unity and purpose of its ecosystem. They now have the **Antwerp Hotel Association**, which represents the entire hotel sector, the two biggest players in conventions and exhibitions, **Antwerp Expo** and (FMCCA) – A Room with a Zoo, and **Voka – Antwerp Waasland Chamber of Commerce**, which joined this new chapter to pivot Antwerp in the international market. "We really want to strengthen our approach to congresses, meetings and trade shows in our city, doing so in a way that connects institutions, R&D centres and partners such as **Visit Antwerp**, **Visit Flanders**, universities and business innovation hubs. I've always believed that getting conferences is about bringing knowledge to the city and spreading it through our key players and partners." The city has therefore chosen five industrial clusters to attract strategic conferences, namely in the areas of life sciences and health, food and nutrition, solution-orientated engineering and technology, and smart logistics and sustainable materials, resources and chemistry.

The northern region of Belgium has been committed to developing the overall impact of its events for several years. To support associations in achieving these goals, the VisitFlanders Convention Bureau has launched a new event legacy plan in partnership with **#Meet4Impact** to provide fundamental principles, methodology and a practical roadmap on how to incorporate them into the planning. "If you are familiar with Visit Flanders, you will no doubt have come across the extensive work being done around impact and legacy. It is a large network of different teams and cities, working together with the same vision and towards the same goals. We are working on current and future bids to define the strategic priorities for the future." The circular economy is also very important to their Board, which has invested heavily in this area. That's why all these fields are interconnected:



“In the area of health, for example, we have the **Antwerp Institute of Tropical Medicine**, or the **Vaccinopolis** vaccine research centre on the Drie Eiken Campus, which opened its doors two years ago. For marine science students, we also have the **Maritime Academy**. Meetings and events are all about people, connections and business, and when delegates arrive in the city, we want them to feel welcome and perfectly in tune with their SDGs.”

### The Potential for a Legacy – The 10<sup>th</sup> EuChemS Chemistry Congress

The **EuChemS Chemistry Congress** is a major biannual chemistry conference where chemists from all parts of Europe and beyond come together to present and discuss the latest achievements in cutting-edge chemical sciences. As we saw previously, this scientific area converges directly with one of Antwerp’s strategic sectors, and so it was with joy that they learned that the EuChemS Executive Board had chosen the offer from the **Royal Flemish Chemical Society (KVCV)** to organise their 10<sup>th</sup> edition in the Flemish city. “EuChemS organises several chemistry meetings around Europe, and for us, this is a very important association to collaborate with. We started working on this bid in 2020 together with KVCV, which already has its own objectives as increasing the number of its members, raising awareness about chemistry, and making the Society even bigger,” **Dominique Jansen, Lead Research at ACB** and responsible for this bid, tells us.

Antwerp houses a significant chemical cluster in Europe, extending over the borders into the Netherlands and Nordrhein-Westfalen in Germany. The chemical companies in these three regions are strongly interconnected and inspire innovative solutions for the global challenges of tomorrow. Besides, the area also hosts an important pharma and life sciences industry that provides opportunities for thousands of chemists who graduated from universities in the region. “As a convention bureau, you can push as hard as you want for a conference of this kind, but if there is no mutual interest from the local partner, it will most likely not happen. For us, this is a really interesting association both in terms of business and partnership, as it benefits both parties – this is the sweet spot you need to find, especially if you want to develop legacies,” adds Jansen. While this pool of players is not static and may vary depending on the city’s professional trends, there is a good idea of where they stand on a national, regional and local level. “You have to work on it all the time, socialise and promote your convention plan with them. We are now building a network of ambassadors to have a strong local network that can better advocate for the city as a convention destination in its main industrial clusters,” she concludes.



# HQ INSIGHTS



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# Tapping into the **Value of Universities** for Event Marketing Efforts

When it comes to promoting an event, many professional conference organisers (PCOs) think about the predictable tools — sponsors, general publicity, social media and other traditional methods. Yet there is one key player that is sometimes undervalued — universities.

It is known that for many association congresses, in particular scientific meetings, a great number of attendees are from academia. As a result, they are already likely to promote the event to their own internal staff and students to attend as delegates.

Yet beyond this obvious step, universities can be leveraged in other ways to serve as ambassadors for an event. Partners of the **World PCO Alliance** share their thoughts on reconsidering the potential of universities in enhancing an event's appeal.

*AN ARTICLE FROM WORLD PCO ALLIANCE*



## 1. Remember the Value of a University or Research Centre

Quite often, the instigator of the bid to host a conference is within a university or research centre. They are critical partners in starting the bid process, and the academic standing of the staff and university lend weight to the success of the bid. For this reason alone, **Noel Mitchell of Keynote PCO** says, “These institutions are valued and essential.”

## 2. A University’s Essence Is Its Knowledge Base

More than anything, universities represent research and knowledge in specialised areas, and it is this very expertise that can attract conferences and events. “Rather than focusing on marketing, highlight the knowledge offered by an institution’s faculty or researchers,” says **Sumate Sudasna from CDM Thailand**. “That alone will add enormous ammunition in attracting interest and participation in a conference.”

**Nancy Tan from Singapore’s ACE:Dayton’s Direct** agrees: “A university’s value stems from its expertise and reputation within specific fields. This will attract active participation and contribute to an event’s promotional efforts.”

## 3. Universities Reflect Destination Unity

When evaluating a destination’s appeal, one of the key factors is demonstrating collaboration between the private and public sectors, and universities can add tremendous credence in this regard. **André Vietor, from Bco Congressos**, says, “The ability to showcase the power of a unified destination is already the first step in getting the meeting confirmed, because associations like to connect to all local stakeholders; not only for promotional purposes but for creating awareness within the local community or for designing legacy programmes, for example.”

## 4. Universities Serve as a Valuable Bridge Between Academia and Industry

To expand on the point above, universities can provide other opportunities for collaboration. Emerging professionals, for example, can benefit tremendously from conference’s learning opportunities while also providing industry representatives the chance to connect with future leaders in a given field.

This private-public sector networking can expand even further. As Nancy Tan explains, “Our clients collaborate

with the private sector to have their young professionals act as local ambassadors for invited speakers. This unique approach facilitates networking and provides emerging professionals with the invaluable opportunity to engage with experts in their respective fields.”

And lastly, let’s not forget the added credibility that university experts stand to gain from their exposure as event speakers.

## There Is More to Be Done

While universities play a critical role in establishing an event’s value and marketability, there are some important things to consider:

- **Universities Need to Embrace a “Conference Culture”**

The stronger a university’s policy in backing conference bids, the greater its success in attracting an event. The university president and department Heads can set a precedent in encouraging staff to seek conferences to host. And, Noel Mitchell adds, “As professional conference organisers, we should also be reaching out to the Conference Office or other commercial centres within a university for partnership.”

Universities benefit from this “conference culture.” **Jean-Paul de Lavison from JPdL International** says, “By encouraging faculty members and researchers to participate actively in hosting events and being involved in various committees, they are also promoting the university itself.”

- **Universities Should Think Big — But Also Small**

While big conferences are always an obvious target and a nice opportunity to collaborate with the private sector, universities shouldn’t forget about small projects that often have long-term potential.

Looking ahead and considering the ever-changing landscape of events and connectivity, universities will continue to play a critical role in the success of international events. And if they are challenged – both from within and from outside players – their value can push the boundaries of what a successful conference can offer attendees and society at large.



# Navigating the Changing Landscape of **Association Leadership** and **Partnership Development**

BY ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA, MARCOM MANAGER AT KENES GROUP

In the dynamic world of association management, staying relevant and effective requires a keen understanding of evolving trends in leadership development and strategic partnerships. As the traditional landscape of associations undergoes a profound transformation, association executives are challenged to redefine success and embrace new approaches to skill development and learning opportunities. In this article, we delve into the importance of leadership and partnership developments, exploring what defines the success of an association and how associations can benefit from strong partnerships amid rapid change.

At **Kenes Group**, we manage the operations of over 20 medical, scientific, and professional associations, with nearly 60,000 members altogether. **Our Associate Vice President of Association Management, Louise Gorringe** (pictured right below), shared her insights at the recent **Kenes Leadership Summit** in Athens, highlighting some key trends impacting the future of the association sector, based on *The States of the Organisations 2023* report by **McKinsey & Company**.

## **Navigating Uncertainty: Insights from the McKinsey Report**

The McKinsey Report on the State of Organisations 2023 highlights key trends impacting organisations globally. From increasing speed and strengthening resilience to closing the capability chasm, organisations are grappling with a rapidly evolving landscape.

Associations, with their unique environment characterised by mission-driven objectives and volunteer engagement, must heed these insights and adapt accordingly. Emphasising agility, resilience, and efficiency will be critical for associations to thrive amidst uncertainty.

## **Embracing Change: The Evolving Face of Volunteerism**

The traditional roles within associations are undergoing a significant shift, with younger generations showing less interest in long-term commitments and heavy-loaded volunteering roles. Nevertheless, professionals from several fields still feel a strong calling to give back to their community. By offering more flexible and digestible ways for individuals to contribute, associations can address these challenges.

Adaptability is key: short-term working groups, task forces, and leveraging AI tools to streamline tasks for those involved are emerging as effective solutions to engage volunteers in meaningful ways.

It's not about the size of the commitment or monetary rewards; it's about aligning the association's interests and its members' capabilities with a clear sense of purpose, while providing avenues for individuals to make a tangible impact in their field of passion.

## Unlocking Potential through Strategic Partnerships

Associations often face resource constraints, including limited finances and workforce. However, by forging strategic partnerships with external organisations, associations can leverage complementary strengths to achieve shared goals.

These partnerships extend beyond traditional boundaries, opening doors to new opportunities and enhancing the capabilities of the association. Whether through industry grants, collaborative projects, or knowledge-sharing initiatives, partnerships play a crucial role in driving innovation and advancing the mission of the association.

## Empowering Adaptive Leadership

In the face of change, adaptive leadership becomes paramount. Associations must foster a culture of continuous learning and empower individuals to drive initiatives forward.

Clear objectives, streamlined decision-making processes, and a focus on evidence-based practices are essential for navigating the complexities of associations. By embracing technology, nurturing talent pipelines, and seeking strong and diverse partnerships, associations can position themselves for long-term success.

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of associations presents both challenges and opportunities for executives and leaders. By prioritising skill development, embracing adaptive leadership practices, and forging strategic partnerships, associations can navigate uncertainty and drive meaningful impact within their respective industries.

As the role of associations continues to evolve, embracing change and fostering a culture of innovation will be essential for success in the years to come.



*It's not about the size of the commitment or monetary rewards; it's about aligning the association's interests and its members' capabilities with a clear sense of purpose, while providing avenues for individuals to make a tangible impact in their field of passion.*



# Partnerships Provide More Than Opportunities: They Provide **Skill Development** for Achieving Goals

In the last issue's column, I talked about the need to develop a **Leadership Succession Plan** in our organisations, and in the hospitality industry at large. I noted that we need to identify, recruit, train, and recognise employees (and volunteers) in ways that encourage them to move into leadership roles in the workplace and in the industry.

In this issue, I want to continue that theme by talking about the need to **build partnerships** in this effort to develop the next generation of leaders. Here are some of the reasons why these partnerships are so important:

## 1. Attacking the problem

The hospitality industry, like many others, is going through huge changes. In this volatile environment, organisations of all types face the critical challenge of bridging the skills gap these changes have created. As changing work environments and emerging technologies continue to affect working and learning, companies and organisations are focusing increasingly on people with extremely specific skills. The problem is the demand for these new skills is greater than the availability of appropriately trained workers and prospective employees. Forming new, strategic industry partnerships can create added resources to overcome some of these challenges.

## 2. Developing a generation of workers with new skill sets

It has been said that “building a future-ready workforce begins with upskilling.” I think that is a great term – upskilling. We have to provide opportunities for employees to learn advanced skills that align with industry needs. This not only creates future career opportunities, but it also helps ensure success for the companies and organisations involved.



### 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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**3. Creating strategic partnerships does not just add new business opportunities – it *multiplies* them**

Many hospitality businesses and organisations, especially smaller ones, struggle to start or maintain workforce development programmes. That is why creating industry partnerships not only helps determine the key skills needed to be successful in the industry, it also can identify (or create) training and employment strategies that meet the shared needs of the partners.

**4. Implementation via partnerships can be done more quickly**

By collaborating with industry partners, organisations can swiftly address talent gaps. These partnerships allow businesses to tap into growth opportunities, drive transformation, and expand their market presence.

Once you have determined the companies/ organisations with which you wish to partner, you need to create a culture that is viewed as win-win by all of the participants. Here are a few things you can do to raise the chances of having a mutually successful partnership:

**1. Identify partnerships that start with outcome-related goals**

- Develop partnerships to implement your intended skills development efforts with those businesses or industries whose mission is compatible with your organisation’s mission;
- Make sure partners are given ample opportunity to share ideas on what skills, competencies, and experience are going to be most needed.

**2. Move beyond the traditional ways of hiring/recruiting workers and volunteers**

- Highlight the need to attract workers and leaders

with needed skills, rather than just a long history of employment or involvement;

- Doing skills-based hiring (or recruitment) will allow new workers/leaders to have a better chance for success and creates a better chance they will recommend your company/organisation to others.

**3. Improve recruitment, hiring, and retention practices**

- Streamline recruitment processes to attract skilled candidates;
- Enhance retention by offering continuous learning opportunities.

**4. Activate employers to make jobs better**

- Share best practices within sectors to enhance the quality of work done within the partnership (sometimes private sector practices can be used in non-profit organisations, and vice versa);
- Empower workers/volunteers to feel comfortable sharing their opinions on ways to improve operations.

Industry partnerships can play a pivotal role in closing the skills gap. By collaborating, we in the hospitality field can create a talent pipeline that meets industry needs, supports worker/volunteer advancement, and enhances the financial status of all the partners involved. We should encourage partnerships as the best way to develop a more skilled and resilient workforce.

To be successful, industry partnerships will require top-level commitment, shared goals, and a long-term commitment to making a difference. By working together, we can build a stronger, more agile, and more technologically capable workforce to deal with the challenges and opportunities ahead in 2024 – and well beyond!

# Breaking the Rules of Mathematics

When AIPC and the Convention Centers of Canada (CCC) decided to join forces and co-create a venue-specific training for the Canadian community of convention centres, the objectives were multiple: value creation, increased reach, sustainability and the testing of a new format which could be rolled out in other continents. All the boxes were ticked, but more importantly, it demonstrated how much can be achieved by working together.

AUTHORS: **SVEN BOSSU**, CEO AIPC & **BARRY SMITH**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CCC

The global community of convention centres is facing a number of challenges, and it will not come as a surprise that resources are top of the list. Attracting and retaining talent has never been as difficult as it is today. Therefore, it's very important to foster the talent we have, amongst others, by providing them with high-value professional education, taking into account some of the key values of the upcoming leadership: sustainability, inclusiveness, challenge and a sense of purpose.

However, creating a tailored training for Canadian convention centres isn't that straightforward. The variety in terms of size, service offering, and features of the Canadian venues is only paralleled by the variety of landscapes you can find in the world's second-largest country. And it's exactly at this point that AIPC and CCC broke the rules of mathematics, demonstrating that  $1 + 1 =$  a lot more than 2.

The unique insights into the Canadian venue landscape, provided by the CCC leadership, combined with the global perspectives provided by AIPC, allowed the creation of a programme which was a cocktail of lectures, workshops, games and networking, all focusing on bringing the participants to the next level of convention centre management. The attendance level was higher than expected, and so was the level of engagement of both the participants and the "teachers". We were delighted with the outcome.

So, was this a walk in the park? No. We don't think co-creation can ever be, especially if you're trying to create a programme with the ambition to be inspirational for upcoming leaders. That's why we would like to share three key lessons learned for anybody trying to co-create an educational programme:

- First of all, agree from the start to disagree. Some of the most fabulous inventions have found their origin in the combination of very different points of view. Disagreement is something to embrace and treasure

– within a framework and a sense of timing, because the programme needs to be delivered.

- Secondly, be very clear on who's doing what. When you're doing something by yourself, you're the only one to blame. When you're on a journey together, you might be tempted – in the very exceptional case something actually does go wrong – to start finger-pointing. We found it very useful to agree as soon as possible on each other's qualities and to stick to a division of roles which mirrored this determination. One additional point of attention: there might be qualities needed that are not readily available – just make sure the list of qualities of the parties involved matches the list of qualities needed.
- Thirdly, share the creative experience. Both of us have a certain experience when it comes to building educational programmes and both feel very strongly about involving other people in the creation process, preferably people who can bring a touch of "wasabi" to the mix. Listening to people outside our natural bubble is always enriching, but it's even more so in a creative process. Inspiration might come from unexpected sources, from artists to architects. It's just a matter of keeping your mind open.

Both of us had great fun delivering this unique programme and both of us had to put in a lot more work than we ever thought. But as they say at L'Oréal: You're worth it.



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# A **New Shelter** for the Association Community in **Brussels**

Brussels boasts an exceptional associative ecosystem, a hotbed of intellectual activity and an incubator of knowledge unrivalled in the world. **The Association Place** will provide a platform for meetings that promote debates, synergies and exchanges of knowledge between the association community.

**T**he Association Place is the gathering place for the international and European associations community in Brussels, powered by the **Convention & Association Bureau of visit.brussels**. Located in the heart of the European Quarter, the venue offers a unique and inviting setting for the association community to come together. A dedicated space that is all about fostering connections and collaboration, the Association Place is Brussels' premier first-stop shop for the international association community, where you can find an overview of the tailored services offered to associations already based in Brussels and those thinking of making the city their home.

The Association Place is conceived as a community house, an exclusive retreat dedicated to its affiliates and partners from the international association community. The venue sets out to become the place to meet, network and animate one of the strongest association-centred ecosystems in the world. Brussels embraces associations like no other! Hosting more than 2,400 international associations, this sector is of strategic importance for the number one association city in the world. Being based here offers unparalleled advantages that propel associations to the forefront.

The new space will offer opportunities to engage with the international association community, provided they align with their specific needs and goals. It's the initial touchpoint for associations based abroad and is the main gateway for both its Brussels-based and visiting members to become an integral part of the thriving community of professionals. All surplus revenue generated by its activities will be reinvested in The Association Place project and its related community.

The venue's annual calendar is packed with activities organised by the community and for the community.

Networking is the hallmark of this unique initiative – from sectoral round tables and awareness-raising meetings to political debates and networking sessions, they bring the association community together to exchange best practices, explore new opportunities and enrich collective knowledge.

Here's a summary of the various activities and possibilities that Association Place offers:

## **Association Connect cycle**

visit.brussels has introduced **Association Connect**, a monthly networking series tailored for association professionals, available only to subscribers and partners. These events cover essential topics like branding, influence, networking strategies, well-being, and time management. With a focus on active participation and limited to 35 participants, the format includes power breakfasts and tea-time meetings for effective learning in a fun and engaging environment.

## **“TAP for Good” side events**

The “TAP for Good” side events provide a unique opportunity to step outside The Association Place and actively contribute to the community. These side events include monthly volunteer days aligned with international days, offering a platform for association professionals to engage in philanthropic endeavours and make a positive impact. They also foster a sense of social responsibility, enriching professional networks while making a tangible impact.

*Join The Association Place and become part of this vibrant community of association professionals in Brussels, through the website: [www.visit.brussels](http://www.visit.brussels)*



# A Closer Look at **Five Key Trends** Shaping Events In **2024**

*Insights from Cvent's Annual Industry Forecast*

Meetings, events, and hospitality technology provider Cvent recently presented its annual Event Trends Forecast webinar, offering valuable insights into the key trends shaping events in 2024. In this column, we take a closer look at five of the discussed trends and the actionable tips to help planners stay ahead of the curve and deliver events that make a lasting impact.

## *The Five Trends*

### **1. AI takes centre stage**

AI has taken the industry by storm. The rise of generative AI tools like ChatGPT has made it easier to craft event content and brainstorm new ideas.

**TIP:** Successful event professionals will continue experimenting with AI tools to automate tasks and simplify processes. However, it's important to remember that AI is an assistive tool, not a replacement for human expertise. For best-practice, prioritise data security and always fact-check the information provided.

### **2. Rise of the Event Technologist**

The rise and adoption of technology in the industry has led to a new role: the Event Technologist. This role combines event planning expertise with a deep understanding of the technology ecosystem, making it a highly specialised position. Keeping up with the latest tech advancements and being able to analyse event data will be highly sought-after skills.

**TIP:** Take a proactive approach to your development and consider upskilling in areas such as AI, data analysis, and automation to pave the way for ongoing career success. Access structured learning through relevant industry training and certifications or explore free resources such as e-books and guides to enhance your knowledge. Many accredited industry bodies and event specialists offer these resources.

### **3. Sustainability and DE&I Top of Mind**

Sustainability and DE&I are top priorities in 2024. As events are an extension of your organisation's brand, it's important to

ensure they reflect your commitment to these core values.

**TIP:** Create greener events by selecting sustainable venues and suppliers, reducing single-use plastics, and utilising event tech to swap printed collateral like agendas and venue maps for mobile event app solutions. Accessibility is a fundamental aspect of responsible and inclusive event planning. By prioritising accessibility in both the in-person and online environments, you can create a more welcoming, inclusive experience for all participants.

### **4. Reimagining engagement**

Attendees expect more from their events. They crave immersive experiences, top-notch content and meaningful connections. Therefore, planners need to craft tailored content and provide clear takeaways that resonate.

**TIP:** Design exciting breakout sessions and keep the conversation going post-event with on-demand content. Additionally, don't forget about your attendees' wellbeing: provide breaks, self-care activities and spaces that are mindful of their comfort.

### **5. Virtual events are here to stay**

While the value of face-to-face interaction will never diminish, there are times when going virtual is a necessary aspect of your event programme. Thus, virtual experiences are here to stay. According to Cvent's latest annual *Planner Sourcing Report Europe edition*, 24% of planners are already planning virtual events for 2024, while 41% are considering hybrid formats.

**TIP:** Successful event strategies will blend the best of both worlds to meet attendees where they are, whether in-person or online. Having tech that can support all event formats will be an important strategic investment.





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# Shaping **Tomorrow's Event Leaders** and Elevating Experiences: **The CityDNA Legacy**

In the ever-evolving landscape of event management, the importance of education cannot be overstated. It serves as the foundation for individuals aiming to forge successful careers in the meetings industry. An example illustrating the transformative impact of such education is the **City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA) Summer School**, which has been shaping the future leaders of the meetings industry for nearly 4 decades.

## **Nurturing Tomorrow's Event Leaders is key to the future of the industry**

With a legacy dating back to 1987 and the participation of over 2,100 students over the years, the CityDNA Summer School has solidified its status as a cornerstone for those aspiring to board on a fulfilling career in the meetings industry.

The event is specifically designed for newcomers across diverse sectors, including DMOs, CVBs, hotels, airlines, DMCS and PCOs. Its mission is to provide the essential foundations for a successful start in the field.

The programme's adaptability to current trends and challenges makes it a standout educational platform. The programme is a balanced mix of theoretical sessions, hands-on workshops, interactive discussions, group projects, and networking opportunities, offering a complete learning experience. Students gain insights into fundamental aspects

while exploring contemporary topics such as sustainability, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**Petra Stušek, President of City Destinations Alliance** and an alumna of the CityDNA Summer School, highlights how the curriculum, enriched with cutting-edge European best practices, equips students with a comprehensive framework to excel in the meetings industry.

**Dennis Speet, Director of the Amsterdam Convention Bureau** and Course Director of the CityDNA Summer School since 2023, expresses pride in leading the prestigious event. His enthusiasm reflects the commitment to developing an inspiring programme filled with innovative insights, enhancing industry knowledge, and fostering a strong network among participants.

With various sessions and workshops about sustainability, EDI, legacy, social media & storytelling, clients, research,

ambassadors programme, wellbeing, how to win a bid, fam trips, site inspection and much more, the faculty of experts, comprising professionals from various sectors of the meetings industry, generously volunteer their time to create a rich and dynamic learning environment. Their dedication, combined with a diverse group of participants, results in a collaborative atmosphere where theory and hands-on experiences merge.

The CityDNA Summer School continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the meetings industry's landscape. Armed with newfound expertise, networks, and the tools necessary for success, participants are well-prepared to excel in this dynamic and rewarding field. The upcoming editions hold the promise of furthering this legacy of excellence in event management education, offering invaluable insights to the next generation of event professionals.

If you are a meetings industry professional willing to share your expertise with newcomers in the industry, feel free to contact the City Destinations Alliance's Head Office, and you may become a proud faculty member in the years to come!

### Elevating Event Experiences with City Destinations Alliance's Conferences

In the realm of tourism conferences, where content reigns supreme, the significance of the attendee experience often takes a back seat. However, CityDNA is rewriting the narrative by placing the emphasis on creating a family-like and friendly atmosphere, thereby transforming their conferences into unforgettable experiences that go beyond simple informational sessions.

While the allure of compelling content cannot be overstated, CityDNA recognises the pivotal role that attendee experience plays in fostering long-lasting connections and securing repeat participation. In a landscape saturated with numerous tourism conferences, standing out is not easy. CityDNA's unique approach, blending professional networking opportunities with a welcoming ambiance, ensures that attendees not only gain valuable insights but also form meaningful relationships that extend beyond the conference walls.

At the heart of CityDNA's success is its commitment to cultivating a sense of community. CityDNA prioritises creating an environment that feels like a close-knit family, where participants not only engage with industry leaders but also with each other on a personal level. This family-like atmosphere gives a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose, making attendees feel not just like spectators, but active contributors to a larger conversation.

Networking opportunities are strategically woven into the fabric of CityDNA conferences, recognising that these connections are often as valuable as the content itself. The diversity of participants, ranging from senior professionals to emerging talents, from TIC professionals to CEOs passing by marketeers and data specialists, adds a dynamic layer to the conference experience. Attendees find themselves among a diverse range of perspectives, creating an atmosphere favourable to innovation and collaboration.

CityDNA's commitment to an inclusive and friendly atmosphere has become a hallmark of its conferences. Attendees not only absorb industry insights but also leave with a sense of having been part of something more significant than a simple industry event. This distinctive balance of professionalism and warmth positions CityDNA conferences as more than just learning opportunities – they are transformative experiences that resonate long after the event concludes. Among these, we can cite the **Festival of Failures** presented during the 2019 Conference in Edinburgh, where brave survivors of epic disasters in event management shared their unfortunate experiences and the valuable lessons they gained from them. We can also mention the Conference in Sofia in 2023, where two experts discussed the growing significance of generative AI and ChatGPT in the travel and tourism industry. Many people in attendance just knew it existed but didn't know much more. In these eye-opening sessions about how NLP systems work and with very tangible examples of how ChatGPT can become an integrated part of destination marketers and tourism professionals, they invited the room to (re)think just how they have been using and approaching these new tools in their everyday work and everyday lives.

In a competitive landscape where the tourism industry offers more than enough conferences, CityDNA stands out by prioritising the human element. By recognising that attendees are not just seeking information but an immersive and enriching experience, CityDNA ensures that its conferences become an annual "pilgrimage" for industry professionals. Attendees are not only drawn by the quality of content but are seduced by the prospect of reuniting with a community that feels like a second family. In the world of tourism conferences, where memories and connections matter, City Destinations Alliance is redefining success by focusing on the event experience.

*The next CityDNA International Conference & General Assembly will be held in Bologna, on April 23-26, 2024.*

*The next CityDNA Summer School will be held in Brno, on August 27-31, 2024.*

*More information can be found on [citydestinationsalliance.eu](https://citydestinationsalliance.eu).*

We're on  
your side.  
Let's go!

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changed?**  
**Is your board  
pushing for  
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**Date:** Monday,  
May 13

**Association Focus**  
Sheraton Frankfurt  
Airport Hotel and  
Conference Center  
**12pm to 5pm**

**Association Social**  
The Marriott  
**5:30pm to 7:30pm**

  
**FRANKFURT 14-16 MAY 2024**