

Headquarters

SEPTEMBER 2022 #106 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

European Cyber Security Organisation

Investments, Cooperation and a Public-Private Partnership for Cybersecurity

Paratus

Forging a cyber pact between convention centres

Daegu, Korea

Convention strategies for local development

European Tourism Futures Institute

Forward thinking scenarios in the post-pandemic era

Prague Congress Centre (Cover Story)

A critical infrastructure for meetings in the Czech capital

HQ
THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE



CYBERSECURITY & DATA:
THREATS, TIPS & OPPORTUNITIES



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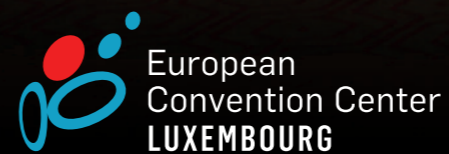
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THE INVISIBLE HIGHWAY

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

I know a few worlds but not well enough the cyber one. Frankly, I haven't put much effort into learning about something that is almost invisible and also touches so many angles. Perhaps it was a coincidence, but yesterday I read in the morning paper that a boy next door to me had received a four-year prison sentence for cybercrime. Indeed, cyberspace was closer to my doorstep than I thought. So, I too could become a victim of a built world full of highways for information flows. My search began with this feeling: What does this mean and where does it come from?

The word "cyber" comes from the Greek word "kubernētēs" meaning helmsman, governor, pilot or rudder. In the cyber domain, a (cyber) system can be a computer network or a human body. Cybernetics is about communication and how information circulates in a system. So far, this is the best definition I have found. And that is due to the help of a journalist who is a language historian and has written a good story about the cyber preposition – which entered common parlance around the 1990s. His name is Ewoud Sanders, who has also researched the origins of "cyber".

He wrote: "The wave of cyber words now inundating us dates back to an invention by the American science fiction writer, William Gibson. In 1982, in a short story entitled 'Omni', Gibson cast the word cyberspace for an imaginary, interactive world created by computers. In 1984, he used it again, this time in the book 'Neuromancer', which became a bestseller. Interestingly, Gibson was unaware that the fantasy he described of spatially separated individuals interacting through computers, had already been realised by then. Also of great interest to this story is the name of the American mathematician Norbert Wiener. In 1948, he wrote a book entitled 'Cybernetics'. Meanwhile, more than 200 words have emerged with cyber in it, but the growth has now slowed down."

And now I only hope, dear reader, that my limited knowledge has given you the motivation and drive to read even more about "Cyber". Especially after coming face to face in the next few pages of our HQ #106 about how this cyber world has also been invading the meetings industry.

Knocking on the Door of the Digital World!

AUTHOR: MANUEL A. FERNANDES, HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER

One of the great pleasures in editing a magazine like HQ – with rotating themes starting from a broader base towards the more specific needs of associations – is that it consigns us to a position of ignorance and humility that proves extremely rewarding when we emerge later from certain topics. Most of the initial notions we had about the arc of cybersecurity and data protection in the events industry could be perfectly dismantled at the close of the editorship of this September's edition. That's why we went back to the classroom, did our homework, and went to talk to some experts.

For this edition of HQ #106 we have brought together four interviews to cover the different angles of the subject: **Luigi Rebuffi, secretary-general of ECSO**, explained the general motivation for hacker attacks and why certain countries need to reinforce investment in this sector; **cyber-security expert Robert McClure**, spoke of the importance of a cyber safety net in convention centres and the unstoppable force of data in various businesses; **tech entrepreneur Ohad Twig** reveals how his scale-up company is pushing the boundaries of trade shows with the help of metaverse, reinforcement learning, and real-time physical data; finally, **Stefan Hartman, researcher of future scenarios of tourism** leaves some clues on strategic urban planning in the technological age, and points out alternative paths for event destinations based on data management.

Cybersecurity is a topic that increasingly transcends the user domain confined to code languages and intricate software, and as such, it has come under the eye of decision-makers while being very present in

the boardrooms of different organisations. They have become much more vulnerable to threats from hackers because everyday information and digital technology are now closely linked, while the attacks themselves are cloaked in their own unpredictability and sophistication.

Cyber risk incidents can have operational, financial, reputational and strategic consequences for that organisation, and are particularly severe when it operates on critical infrastructure – prompting its leaders and CISOs to improve existing measures, turning the tables in favour of cybersecurity and risk mitigation strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for wider and faster change as companies' IT capabilities have advanced at a rapid pace, so more than ever, organisations must embrace a culture of digital resilience and trust grounded in the training of their teams. The digitalisation of work has only stretched the fuse.

The proliferation of big data, on the other hand, is a subject where our interviewees are divided on the current monetisation – simply having information is not enough to use it effectively – but who agree on its incredible potential and competitive edge for global destinations to transform the fortunes of their businesses, events and communities. Cities, event planners and MICE agents need access to tools that allow them to draw actionable conclusions from data that could benefit not only visitors, but also local residents.

Don't miss all these stories and the different points of view of our contributors.



HQ


#106

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**THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE**

*BUILDING BRIDGES
IN THE MEETINGS
INDUSTRY*

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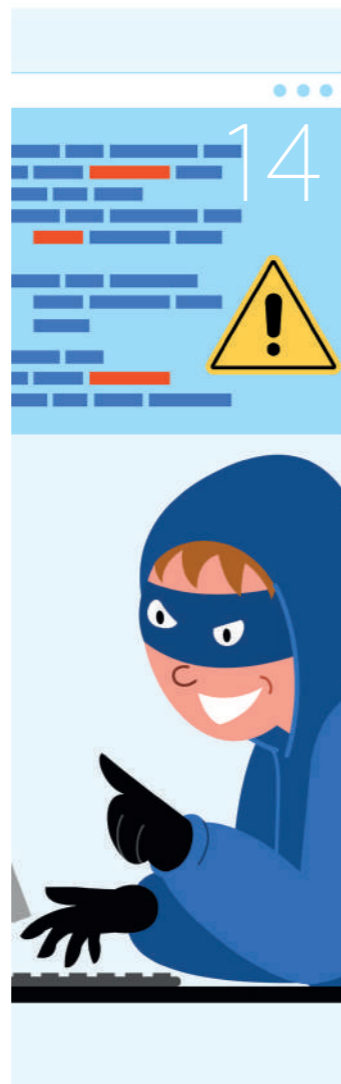
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ECSCO
"The European Digital Single Market is a constantly moving target"



Paratus
"Data will be a key construct in designing business strategies for Convention Centres"



BoothGuru
"We are exploring ways to help buyers with real-time physical intent data"



Quito
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HO **ESSENTIAL** INTERVIEW



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“The digital market is **an open competition** on a global scale”



Cybersecurity has emerged as a hot topic in the MICE industry since the pandemic, with many of these events migrating to the digital space raising questions about intellectual property, data protection and cybercrime. **European Cyber Security Organisation (ECSO)** is today the only European public-private organisation that focuses on cyber security and accounts for a wide range of projects where the priorities are to connect, support and act on the European landscape. We sat down with **Luigi Rebuffi, Secretary General and founder of ECSO**, to talk about investments, cooperation with the European Commission and the implementation of a Public-Private Partnership for cybersecurity.

Drawing on your experience and expertise, where do we stand on the discussion and public resolution of a unitary cybersecurity network?

There is not one because cybersecurity is still managed at national level. It is an internal security issue for each member state, so countries are entitled to that legal sovereignty, challenging sometimes EU common regulations. National laws correspond to each country's legacy and political interests, which explains the different speeds and approaches to the same objectives. However, there are no major differences at European parliamentary level between the different political parties. We are working on it with high expectations since we created ECSO in 2016, and when we look back things are moving forward. We have produced a lot of legislation that has been passed in the last few years, like the NS2 regulation, and soon with the cyber resilience act and the digital operational resilience act on the financial side. This was structured from a legislative point of view from the European Commission's (EC) ongoing strategy which has undergone several evolutions since its inception in 2013. The EC really recognises that the sector is evolving rapidly, hence these frequent updates to the ongoing strategy.

What is really missing to bring all these member states together around a unitary consensus on cybersecurity?

A political commitment always follows a political understanding of needs. The fact is that we are still relatively far from a public and private commitment to investment. We have good technologies, good skills, but the broad understanding of the need to protect digital transformation is still a long way off. If we don't invest in cybersecurity, we will always be dependent on third countries. It's not just about what the EC calls capacity building or hardware, it's also about skills. One of the tasks of our **Cybersecurity contractual Public Private Partnership (cPPP)** from the beginning was to suggest to the EC priorities for investment in research. We have soon recognised that it is not only about research, but also about investment in building solutions, in providing critical infrastructure with good protection, in supporting start-ups with investment funds, etc. Now, one of the most relevant topics is how to support the growth of digital skills in cyberspace. Unfortunately, investment in education and training in this area remains low.

“ *A single European cybersecurity is still very far from being a reality.* ”



How far are we to reach the milestone of a European Digital Single Market and what are we missing to get there?

For me a European Digital Single Market is a constantly moving target, just like IT or cyberspace. It is something that has to be cyclically adjusted as it is very difficult to set a 10-year bar with continuous innovations and market swings. The targets also change intrinsically with each country's definitions, market rules, the global environment, and at breakneck speed. The European Digital Single Market is made up of legislation, policies, skills and capabilities that are dynamic rather than static concepts. This market is growing but towards something that is unpredictable to outline. What we can say is that this space has to rely on the right investment of strategists, global citizen action and well-trained professionals.

What is the key priority for building a European public-private programme on cybersecurity?

The concept of sovereignty is quite difficult to express in this context, strategic autonomy is much better because it matches certain views closer to the capacity of the private sector. It is basically about reducing dependence on non-European solutions. If China, for example, blocks chip exports to Europe we are in a world of trouble. This means that there has to be an industrial renewal in Europe for the production of digital materials, such as chips or semi-electric conductors. We should look at cybersecurity as we look at planning for the sixth generation of the mobile telecommunications system, avoiding the problems we had with 5G. Anticipating the next phase of cloud storage, for example. We have to target what is strategic and see what can be done in Europe, and in cooperation with our allies. The digital market is open to competition on a global scale. A competition that plays its own political game that is increasingly relevant in economic terms. Europe has to take its stand, we cannot wait only for external solutions.

What are the real threats in today's cybersecurity landscape?

Certain threats like ransomware or DDoS are very active today. However, I would say that one of the biggest threats is also fake news. Maybe in certain countries this is on the borderline of cybersecurity, but it accounts for several internal security issues and is heavily played at the political level. It can compromise a country's security

network and therefore it is a de facto IT-linked security issue. It's something you can see every day from all sides weaponising the public discourse. The European Parliament here is particularly sensitive when it comes to elections but it is much broader than that, it greatly influences the reading of reality and public discourse across populations. Even when we talk about quantum computing or the metaverse – are they really safe? Or clouds that can evolve into edge cloud by connecting to a centralised cloud system. There will always be new technologies on our doorstep and we have to know how to react from a security perspective.

“ *For me a European Digital Single Market is a constantly moving target* ”

What main campaigns and activities do you have scheduled for the remaining of the year?

The EC is developing for a (cybersecurity) centre of competence in Bucharest and we will contribute to the creation of that community. We are developing a marketplace especially targeted at European SMEs to leverage their products, services and capabilities. We are also working on the development of the CISO network, and will organise an event in Brussels at the end of October dedicated to the European CISO. On the other hand, we continue our mentorship for women with the Women4Cyber foundation, designed on two platforms: one in academia and one for the labour market. We have another initiative called Youth4Cyber aimed at children and youngsters who could progress to a potential career in cybersecurity. In terms of certification standards, we continue to cooperate with the European Agency for Cyber Security (ENISA) to define cyber certification approaches. As for investment, we await the results of a study by the European Investment Bank to analyse the construction of a fund dedicated to start-up and scale-up companies; we're also supporting the development of the DIGITAL Europe programme between the EC and member countries and as regions. In education, we can also highlight another project with ENISA on different profiles that will come out in September. Lastly, we are starting a deeper discussion on space with the European Space Agency.

“Digitalisation cannot advance unless it goes hand in hand with cybersecurity”

The **Benelux Cyber Summit** will return to Amsterdam on 11-12 October 2022, bringing together 100+ executives and leaders, policy makers and practitioners to discuss the pressing challenges of cybersecurity. The 2022 agenda is intended not only to shape discussions to support these advances, but also to provide practical insights to help security leaders address common security challenges. We went to speak to the organisers, QG Media, through the voice of the **Head of Conference Production, Cecilia Limonta**, in order to explain to us the rationale and objectives of this meeting.

QG Media is an international provider of cutting-edge B2B conferencing and digital content for technology leaders with a primary focus on cybersecurity. What is your annual event plan on this matter? Is the Benelux Cyber Summit just one piece of the puzzle?

Our Benelux Cyber Summit is a CPD certified IT security conference, uniting more than 100 senior security leaders from Benelux’s public and private sectors. It is part of our Cyber Series: a portfolio of 6 regional cyber security events – **Benelux Cyber Security Summit, DACHsec, FranSec, ItaliaSec, Nordic Cyber Security Summit** and **UKsec**. Through these summits, delegates are invited to engage in peer-to-peer knowledge exchange to benchmark their digital maturity across emerging themes such as, data protection strategy and security, digital transformation aligned with cybersecurity, securing multi-cloud migrations and many more.

This summit is titled “Cyber Security to Empower the New Digital Ecosystem” and one of the key topics will be “balancing the business drive for digitalisation with cyber security needs”. How will we see these two aspects reflected and brought together in the agenda of the event? Are they two sides of the same coin?

Definitely two sides of the same coin. Digitalisation cannot advance unless it goes hand in hand with cybersecurity. More than ever before, companies must embrace a culture of digital resilience and trust as cybersecurity becomes a key component of digital transformation. The conference agenda explores this theme through a mix of panel discussions, case studies and roundtables where delegates too are encouraged to contribute.

Associations are responsible for producing huge amounts of information and data, mediating

“

Cybersecurity is a shared responsibility and the association community also plays a role in this. If cyber threats are not adequately addressed, it is not just the association community that is at risk, but also all of its partners

industries, certifying professionals and often dealing with major policy issues. What level of risk could the association community be exposed to if it does not properly address these cyber threats?

Cybersecurity is a shared responsibility and the association community also plays a role in this. If cyber threats are not adequately addressed, it is not just the association community that is at risk, but also all of its partners – in light of the fact that every organisation is part of multiple other organisations’ ecosystems. As such, it is paramount that cybersecurity be integrated into every organisation’s objectives and risks, regardless of its size.

Cybersecurity is often discussed using technical or military jargon, leading to a loss of understanding on the part of officials and the general public. Is it vital to your meeting that security professionals explain this cybersecurity environment in more accessible language? Does communication need to be improved for a more democratic dialogue?

The summit is specifically designed for senior cybersecurity professionals, so within the two conference days technical jargon can be used freely. What is important is that senior cybersecurity leaders learn how to speak the business lingo when interacting with the Board. This is when the challenge

of cybersecurity really needs to be communicated in a more accessible language, to ultimately warrant more investment and budget allocation towards it.

Most of the news we hear these days about cyber-attacks target large corporations and business organisations, however, the threat also looms over small businesses, conference venues, event agencies and a whole network of stakeholders in an industry like MICE. What is your assessment of the events industry’s awareness, readiness and seriousness about cyber-attacks and data theft?

GDPR definitely pushed the event industry to increase its awareness of data protection and adopt more measures to keep data secure, which is a great thing. But as with any other industry, there is of course room for improvement when it comes to achieving higher levels of cybersecurity maturity. Basic cybersecurity training for employees should be provided across the board: employees are often regarded as the weakest link, but, if empowered through knowledge, they can become an organisation’s strongest asset for protecting against cybersecurity threats. Let’s all invest in that!



“The issue we keep coming back to is that we are a **human interface with technology**”

We are facing today the biggest spiraling cost crisis in a generation, and as a result, convention centres will have to rethink their spending volume and protect themselves from external threats. Cyberspace plays a major role in this matter and the digitalisation of services has only increased the risks of cyber-attacks. They can be aimed at causing political chaos in a campaign or leaking confidential information; in either case there is a constant stream of risk happening throughout the lifecycle of the event – from registering attendees to sharing data. At the last AIPC conference in Budapest we met **Robert McClure, managing director of the cybersecurity company Paratus**, who recently started an interesting security project with AIPC. Find out below:

What risks does cyber crime pose to our entire event ecosystem?

The two big priorities are IoT and data security. During the pandemic, many people had to work from home relying on digital communication. However, where we really started to see a zenith point was in IoT as it would allow you to manage the space without human convention – opening air lines or ducts, controlling temperature, locking doors or windows. Things like these should start to make their way into the industry. These IoT sensors will serve both as a service for their customers and to save internal costs. Regarding data, not all Convention Centres (CCs) take the same stance on the issue, but all regularly handle a large amount of it. Normally, when an attendee registers for the event, the organisation collects more than fifteen pieces of personally identifiable information (PII). This is the stuff

that hackers love, as it gives them the ability to replicate personal information online. For example, on the dark web, a Facebook account full of PII is more valued than a PayPal account full of cash. There is a risk in managing this data that, if not done properly, can carry a high risk for delegates and organisers alike.

Please tell us about what you are doing together with AIPC to safeguard CCs in this regard.

For establishments the size of CCs, there are several risks that are often not known. In terms of footfall, they have roughly the same usage as an airport. However, we are now entering a realm where CCs are increasingly immersing themselves in digital. Whether this is due to a ground event using the venue as a digital twin, or by scattering a wider audience for reasons of a particular outbreak, flight issues, etc. What we decided with AIPC was to hold a wake-up call for all these threats to each of its members. We called this the **AIPC cyber act** – an inbox where AIPC affiliates could submit completely anonymous information around a recent attack that could compromise those centres’ events. Unlike many companies, CCs can map their working processes because they are physically connected to one location. The key point of this action was to design a data sheet that would compare attacks with the same characteristics by analysing the same attack patterns in two different CCs. Like if some hacker interferes with the AC system by putting an unbearable cost on site. This could begin to provide some answers to the puzzle, as it could lead to surveying cyber details



that no consultant, industry, or government currently holds. Certainly, this cyber conversation will stand firm as many of these attacks will continue to go unnoticed.

“ *I will go further by saying that data will be a key construct in designing business strategies for CCs in the coming years* ”

What options would you recommend to counteract these types of threats and prevent their spread?

They can go back to their own security review ports; review their investment in cyber resilience; a more emphatic training for staff; enforce terms and conditions on cybersecurity; prevent the use of personal devices causing harm to the event. These are small things we can do in a very straightforward way. That’s where this cyber act came from: an entirely free system to understand the collective risk of all AIPC members. Once we have a broader understanding of this data, we will be able to determine whether or not a geographical area had a higher incidence in that period. For example, if a CC in Frankfurt was the target of an attack we can begin to trace a series of patterns from one event to another. Another important issue is the presence of several different teams when setting up an event. Usually the event organiser brings in a third party staff, often ending up with hundreds of people in that space. So, if an attack occurs at an event where does the responsibility lie – with the centre or the organiser? At the AIPC conference, we warned of the need for a cyber liability form, emphasising cyber awareness for employers and calling for cyber insurance for attendees. This would be able to shift liability from the space holder to the event organiser.

Do you think that, in the near future, venue managers will change the structure of their facilities in line with these new cybersecurity strategies?

Absolutely. Often, cyber-attacks happen at the very moment when events are taking place. One of the major issues raised at the last AIPC congress was that cybersecurity is still something that is little discussed. People don’t associate cyberspace with physical access in a venue, but they also find it too complicated and solvable enough with a simple Android system. To move to a next stage, we need to determine the current cyber capability within their centres in order to create relevant policy. We will have to take some centres that are leading this work, keep them at that level and use them as a showcase for smaller entities. Creating a basis for an AIPC cyber level or an industry standard, where we can build up those policies and procedures. We need to have a better understanding of the cyber world we live in, just as we understand climate change and sustainability. The internet is reinventing itself at a frantic pace with 5G and the IoT, and the expansion of internet-connected devices is projected to be over 5 billion a year. We can already check out the success and monetisation that companies, institutions, entities created when they took their first steps with technology. I believe this is where AIPC is bringing a real breakthrough – in integrating technology with services and safeguarding them.

What strategies do hackers often use to breach security systems? By the way, what does exactly “breach” means in this context?

It’s a combination of many things. When overhauling a car, you need to check tire pressure, engine oil, electrical system, etc. – it’s a bit the same thing with cybersecurity. Keep your staff aware of these dangers and learn about the latest cybersecurity threats. Also, make sure your system updates with backups in place. If you have a ransomware attack, you can use the latest





On the dark web, a Facebook account full of Personally Identifiable Information is more valued than a PayPal account full of cash

customer loyalty. That's why, more than ever, everyone is looking for data to create a competitive advantage. This could help prepare a shuttle bus to the hotel where an association is staying, for example. I will go further by saying that data will be a key construct in designing business strategies for CCs in the coming years.

backup without catastrophic losses. Just to give you an idea, a breach could be an email from someone wanting to organise a party at your CC with a link that contains the event's specifications. If you're on the sales team, the first thing you're likely to do is to click, right? Well, that event proposal can trigger a breach by opening a malicious system – spear phishing. In another metaphor, if an organised group of people starts clicking on a URL at the same time, it could bring that domain down, leading to a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack – it could block the website of a political rally, for example. These are the most basic, but of course there are more advanced ones that can be operated via smartphones or social networks. The issue we keep coming back to is that we are a human interface with technology. So what is expected of a human interface if there is no investment in it?

We often say in our industry that content is king; however, can we claim now that data is the true “cyber king”?

I think data has been the “king of this jungle” for a long time. GDPR, for example, is a striking case where data is considered both an asset and a liability. Data is already playing a massive element in our lives, even if it is relatively discrete at the moment. The main interaction that data will play will primarily be in two areas: social media and shopping. In this way, a supermarket may provide you with a customer card and depending on the products you buy regularly, you will get discounts according to your shopping history. Cumulatively, the new generation of data will expose the consumer to even more detailed information. On the other hand, Facebook already directs you to pages and videos according to your browsing pattern, and even if you don't follow a certain page, the system can take you to it to monetise ads. Now, the earliest forms of data were obviously binary in nature – yes or no – but the complexity of what we are seeing, leads us to believe that computers could now rely on emotions. For these computers to work, you need to deposit huge amounts of data so that they can forge response equations. For a CC, data can lead to better use of space: to understand consumer trends and meet



“The **metaverse** would not replace the physical space, it would just **add another layer**”



At the last IMEX Frankfurt we were challenged by our next guest with a fascinating experience that turned out to be a multi-sensory epiphany. **Ohad Twig, CEO and co-founder of Booth Guru**, guided us through a fascinating parallel universe in which a visitor could comfortably and seamlessly make contact with an exhibition stand in two distinct spaces: the reality and the metaverse. We pulled out the VR headset and agreed to a brief chat about this tech start-up's entry into the MICE market, the potential for virtual growth in the industry and how they intend to disrupt its normal operation with new business solutions.

What was the thought process that led to this business gap for the MICE industry and how did Booth Guru fill it?

Initially, we came from the opposite side. We brought the technology base and then started to investigate the needs and pains of the market. We understood two things from talking to event organisers during the pandemic: firstly, that virtual events were not delivering the full value promised; and secondly, that although the industry had turned digital, they were still curious to implement real-time AI. We have tried to address these two findings by developing the first ever convention centre in the metaverse. Our motivation was to connect the two spaces – the physical and the metaverse – trying to monetise them by pulling AI models, and thus getting real-time recommendations. Also, we wanted to manage both spaces simultaneously so that they were 100% transparent and interactive, all powered by one big foundation which is AI. Say you are an avatar in the metaverse and I am the physical visitor – we can connect in real time even though we are both in two different spaces.

How difficult is it to predict people's behaviour at a tradeshow or conference?

The way to predict behaviours in a Netflix account, for example, is easier and more convenient than in this industry. All you have to do is bring a common machine learning with lots of data, and if a certain group of people behave exactly the same way we'll get the same kind of recommendations. But this industry is much more individual-oriented, which is why we not only deploy machine or deep learning, but also a cutting-edge AI that we call reinforcement learning. It works by obtaining real-time feedback that enables us to modify all our forecasts. It's not just about monitoring each panel of exhibitors, but all the activities of the participants. Like, for example, how much time they spent at that specific stand or workshop. Moreover, a normal exhibitor is *a priori* not aware that the answers may be as relevant to what they are looking for. Our recommendations are not only for visitors, as we can also provide a personalised journey. An optimised path for each visitor but also an immediate matching tool for each scanned visitor with the booth staff. In this way, we can provide effective and practical recommendations for event organisers.

Do you think your company was a step ahead of the curve in delivering this hybrid matchmaking platform?

I cannot dictate the future, and I want to remain humble about my understanding of this industry as we have only been here for 4 years. I believe that physical events will be here to stay for a long time, even though they may be less than today. Similarly, the future points to smartphones starting to become obsolete within six years and giving way to other types of devices, such as VR glasses. When our potential customer sees that the metaverse is here in many verticals such as mental health, education or travel, they will realise that this virtual world could help them in their own industry. I believe it won't be more than a year before we get more evidence that metaverse is definitely a must-have feature. By the time we are ready to fully adopt it, technology products will be much more advanced and closer to suppliers' needs. Although we will continue to intervene in the physical space, our development focus is undoubtedly on the metaverse.

“ *...this industry is much more individual-oriented, which is why we not only deploy machine or deep learning, but also a cutting-edge AI that we call reinforcement learning.* ”

There are advantages such as user immersion and multiple layers of experience, but many also say that this technology is still under development and interaction is intimidating. Do the advantages outweigh the adversity?

The metaverse is still in a development process, it is true. That's why we are now putting more emphasis on connecting the physical space in terms of monetisation without any related physical devices inside the convention centre – this is part of our secret sauce. No logistics, no hardware, no technical issues and best value for money – we do it by software only which is way more complicated. If we go back to our development stages, the first part was about exploring the physical events, learning how to monetise the resources, refining the models and delivering the results. In other words, guiding visitors through the stands they could attend in the space with suggestions for roundtables, educational

sessions, workshops, networking events, etc. We would connect the physical space and at the same time continue to develop the metaverse in terms of AI, content, and the boundaries of the convention centre itself. Within the original project, we would be in a year practically ready to adopt the metaverse technology. However, the idea is that the metaverse would not replace the physical space, it would just add another layer. We just want to increase market share.

Do you have people on your team with social science backgrounds – such as psychology or sociology – to help you refine the final product?

That's a very good question, and the answer is yes. We have our Head of Digital who has a PHD in the area of digital interaction on the social side. Events are social places and social interactions in this field are crucial. The driving force behind the process is how to preserve that human element within the metaverse. How to protect the physical and virtual pairing when the gap must be bridged by technology. How to replicate in a digital universe the physical distance between two avatars, instinctive reactions, non-verbal communication, is something that goes into the minute detail of what we are doing here. We need to be patient, test new experiences and techniques and analyse what technological advances will bring. Rushing all these steps can compromise all the work in development. We believe that much more content and technical AI deployment in the metaverse should happen. I can tell you that we are now working with a group of researchers from Europe and Israel in this area to improve social engagement and participation in the metaverse. This can only happen fully if we are able to increase engagement in participation through the use of deep technology.

Do you consider that many of the conditions are in place to move towards virtual tradeshows and exhibitions, but agents and mediators are showing some resistance?

After the pandemic, all our potential clients were much more open to adopting new technologies. They now know that technology services like ours are here to help them run a more qualified event. Clients understand that if they do not adapt their services with new technology, there will be a competitive disadvantage when trying to chase their annual results. The general idea is that any person, according to their own preferences and criteria, manifests different behaviour and this can be tracked. There is

a disruption that the pandemic has accentuated in the MICE industry but which – I must stress this point – was not born out of it. Everyone now has a sense of urgency in adopting new technologies.

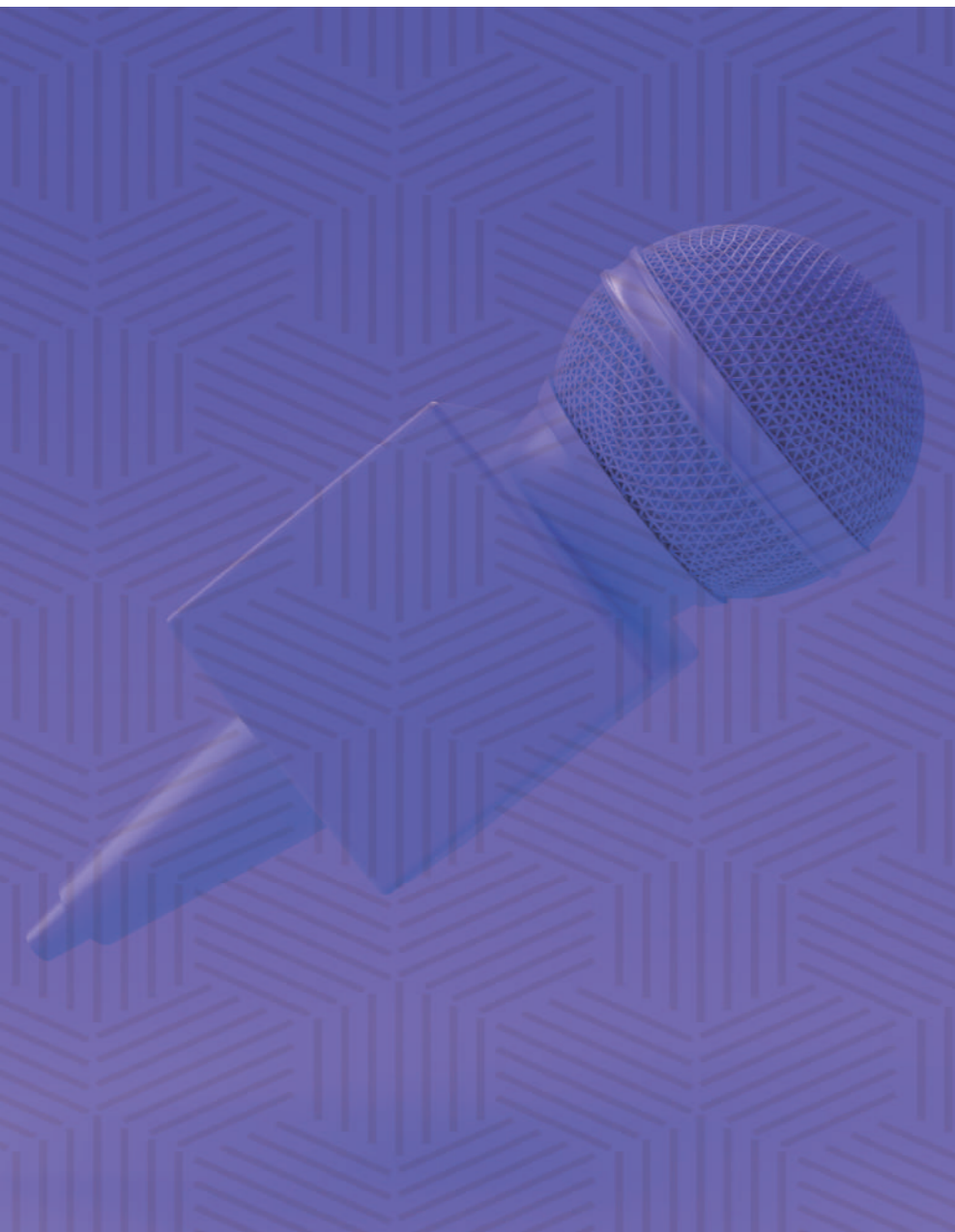
What are your internal data storage policies and how can they benefit the success of the event in a way that a classic event does not allow?

We are exploring ways to help buyers with real-time physical intent data. Intent data will be the future of big data and will be critical for any professional who wants to increase their sales in the future. We are working as GDPR processors, but we intend to become data controllers further down the line. We have a core objective in our services to our clients: to provide them with value. If they allow me to collect more relevant data and information so that I can contribute to a more holistic service, so much the better. I believe this is a win-win situation for both parties. I also think that these kind of GDPR regulations are a blessing, and obviously we will comply with all the rules and regulations, but if we are able to capture more authorised data, the solutions will be exponentially better. On top of that, before data is shared it must be owned and authorised by its owner first.

“ *I believe it won't be more than a year before we get more evidence that metaverse is definitely a must-have feature. By the time we are ready to fully adopt it, technology products will be much more advanced and closer to suppliers' needs.* ”



HO DESTINATION & VENUES



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Quito, a Rising Star from the Andes Mountains

When the plane touched down at the Mariscal Sucre Quito International Airport, rising more than 2,800m above sea level, Quito, the capital of Ecuador, was already beginning to reveal its charm. Situated between the peaks of the Andes, it is the second highest official capital in the world. Quito offers abundant cultural activities in all its districts, as well as event facilities for international delegates. In May, the city hosted the **FIEXPO Workshop and a Technical Visit** where over 50 delegates from home and abroad gathered to experience this unique

AUTHOR: VIVIAN XU, HQ MANAGING DIRECTOR

Quito Metropolitan Convention Centre

As one of the most avant-garde convention centres in Latin America, the **Quito Metropolitan Convention Centre (CCMQ)** plays a key role in hosting large congresses and events. Opened in 2019, the CCMQ is divided over two floors and offers two large exhibition halls and a multi-functional auditorium. In total, this venue can accommodate up to 10,000 delegates. With two foyers offering the panoramic view of the greens and mountains, the CCMQ impresses with its grandeur as an ideal venue for large events and was therefore the venue chosen for the opening ceremony of the FIEXPO Workshop. What is also worth mentioning is the implementation of environmentally friendly technologies throughout the building. The convention centre has successfully acquired a Leadership in **Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certificate** for reducing green gas emissions and using less water and energy.

Unique venues

Quito's historic centre was listed by UNESCO as one of the first World Cultural Heritage Sites in 1978. The **Church and Convent of San Ignacio de Loyola de la Compañía de Jesús de Quito**, also known among the Ecuadorian people simply as La Compañía, is the

most ornate Catholic church in the Old City. The façade of its main temple is entirely carved from volcanic stone and the interior is fully covered with gold sheets. Consequently, the church is also named as the "Golden Ember" by Father Bernardo Recio, a travelling Jesuit, and Pope John Paul II presided a mass here in 1985 during his visit. This magnificent church is available for events, and during the FIEXPO workshop, hosted the closing ceremony concluded with a euphonious opera performance.

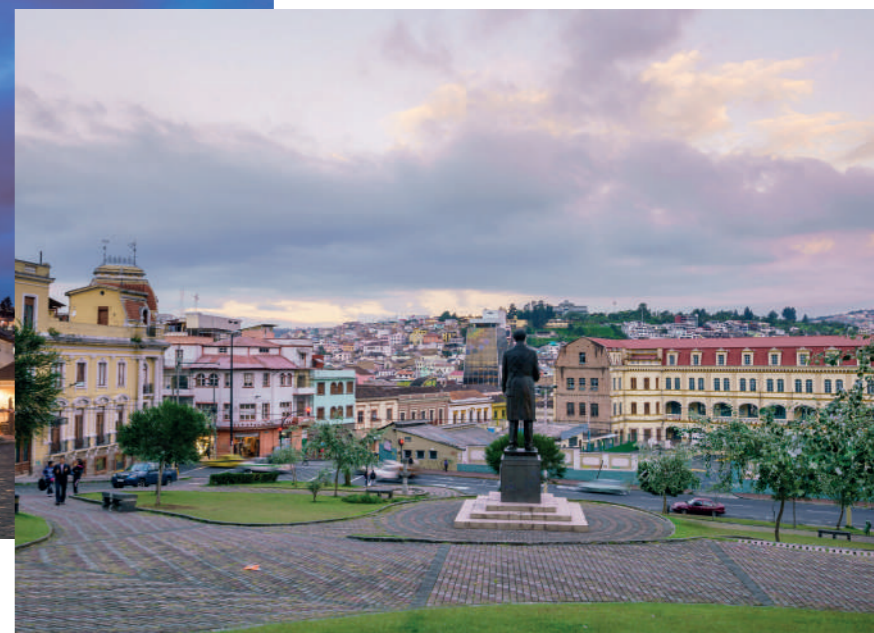
Located in the province of Pichincha, a 45-minute drive from Quito, we find the **Ciudad Mitad del Mundo** (Middle of the World City) – a world-famous monument that highlights the exact location of the Equator line. The City is a tiny village-looking complex, consisting of commercial shops selling local artisanal souvenirs, restaurants, cafes, as well as museums. The most important attraction is the 30-metre-high Latitude Zero monument. This complex is an ideal venue for outdoor team building activities as well as outdoor events. To that note, the group of FIEXPO Workshop delegates were divided into seven groups challenged to complete a treasure hunt game where the unique equatorial phenomenon – balancing an egg on a nail – is witnessed and practised. That was a blast!

Hotels

In the centre of the Old Town, we were introduced to true Ecuadorian hospitality – **Casa Gangotena**. A magnificent maison that used to be owned by the Gangotena family and has now been transformed into a five-star hotel. Providing world-class service, it is the most luxurious hotel in the city. With its palm-filled courtyard and a rooftop overlooking the Basilica and Convent of San Francisco (*featured below*), the hotel provides intimate meeting spaces for exclusive events.



Ten minutes away from Casa Gangotena is another historic building – **The Hotel Plaza Grande**. With over five centuries of history, this hotel was the city's first luxury hotel. A five-storey building boasting fifteen guest rooms, two restaurants, and an event hall fitted with a terrace overlooking the Presidential Palace of Carondelet, as well as other church domes of the Old Town. The event hall can accommodate up to 120 guests.



Another hotel that will enhance your experience in Quito, is the **JW Marriott Hotel Quito**. The hotel consists of 257 guest rooms and 11 meeting rooms, providing a total meeting space of nearly 1,622m². Decorated in tropical botanical style, **Botanica by Bistro Latino** is one of the best dining spaces in town and can be accessed directly from the lobby. It also hosted the welcome reception for the FIEXPO Workshop.

Between the Old Town and Plaza Foch, lies the **Hilton Colon Hotel Quito** home to a local craft market. The hotel includes pillarless ballrooms, outdoor terraces and different meeting rooms with natural lights. With a total event space of 2,856m², the hotel can host up to 2,500 people.



Two Brand New Exhibition Centres Welcome You in 2022!

Opening in late 2022, Exhibition World Bahrain is set to become the catalyst for economic growth, socio-development and job creation, generating a long-term legacy for the Kingdom of Bahrain. Strasbourg also wanted to set an example of a city where business travel and MICE activity are fully compatible with an eco-friendly approach, with a brand-new Exhibition Centre extending the city's events offering.

Exhibition World Bahrain

Often referred to as the “Pearl of the Arabian Seas”, Bahrain is a destination that intrigues, excites and leaves lasting impressions and memorable experiences by housing multiple forts, museums, local *souqs* and art museums. The kingdom was the first Gulf-wide destination to host international events such as the Formula 1 Gulf Air Grand Prix, Jewellery Arabia, Bahrain Food Festival, Bahrain International Air Show, Spring of Culture, Manama Dialogue, to name a few. These characteristics make Bahrain an ideal country to host international events and required a new exhibition space that will debut very soon.

Launched globally at the latest IMEX Frankfurt, **Exhibition World Bahrain (EWB)** is a stunning piece of architecture that blends a fascinating Arab concept in its design, with natural light shining through elegant Mashrabiya details throughout. Strategically located within Bahrain's new dynamic event district, the EWB is located adjacent to the Bahrain International Circuit, Al Dana Amphitheater and Bahrain International Sports Precinct (under construction) and features a wide range of attractions and dining experiences, close to 18,000 hotel rooms and easy access to the new Bahrain International Airport.

The newly unveiled brand identity captures the essence of Bahrain's authentic spirit and warm Arabian hospitality, carried into an innovative, flexible and adaptable space that can accommodate everything from large conventions and exhibitions to meetings and gala events. With 95,000sqm of exhibition space, a Grand Hall to seat capacity from 400-4,000, 95 meeting rooms, 14 organiser's offices, 3 Majlis, supported by 25 restaurants, cafes and retail outlets, EWB will be the place to meet, connect share ideas and create memorable experiences.

According to **Dr. Nasser Qaedi, CEO of Bahrain Tourism & Exhibitions Authority (BTEA)**, the brand identity of the new EWB in Sakhir, which is set to become the largest exhibition & convention centre in the Global Cooperation Council region, is a key element in the authority's work to promote it regionally and internationally: “this exceptional achievement is planned to attract business tourism in the region and is considered a key pillar in implementing the ambitious objectives of Bahrain Tourism Strategy 2022-2026.”

This new convention centre will be managed by **ASM Global**, the world's leading event and venue strategy management company, connecting people through the power of the live experience. **General Manager of EWB, Dr. Debbie Kristiansen** said, “We are committed to

mentoring and developing an amazing team of talented, passionate Bahrainis, and our recent dedicated two-day recruitment drive, resulting in more than 500 Bahrainis applying for roles within EWB, is testament to that commitment and long-term legacy for their country.”

Strasbourg Exhibition Centre

In the heart of the European institutions, 7 minutes from downtown and connected to the *Palais de la Musique et des Congrès*, the **Strasbourg Exhibition Centre** in Wacken opened its doors on 2 September 2022, and offers ideal conditions to host landmark events – allowing space sharing with the convention centre and thus hosting several events at the same time. The two (convention and exhibition) centres together form a unique event complex in France, allowing organisers to host large-scale events with the possibility of associating an exhibition with a congress, the bidding of major structuring events for the territory, and the support of growing events, whether organised by Strasbourg Events or by third party organisers.

Designed by Japanese architect **Kengo Kuma**, the new exhibition centre aims to be aesthetic and urban by integrating perfectly into its surroundings – covering 22,000 m² of area with various sustainable features, using wood from the local Vosges forest as structural pillars capable of capturing 1,700 tonnes of carbon emissions. In compliance with the requirements of the Strasbourg Eurometropolis Climate Plan, this venue is designed to be economical and ecological, with rainwater recovery, photovoltaic panels (soon to house 5,000 m² on its

roof), natural ventilation, and an eco-friendly heating and cooling system.

With its 4 modular and multifunctional halls, the new *Parc des Expositions* is suitable for a multitude of professional and public events – trade fairs, congresses, conventions, gala dinners, sports events, etc. – as well as an open-air exhibition space, a terrace with panoramic views over the city, a nave measuring about 10 meters of right foot, 900 parking spaces, and a 17m high nave open to the outside. A 75,000m² event complex marvel!

This project represents an investment of around 200 million euros, part of the region's plan to establish Strasbourg as a European destination of reference for the global MICE industry. “The competition in which we evolve is national, European and international. We need this equipment to pick up, bring people in, and introduce as many people as possible into our territory,” said **Christophe Caillaud-Joos, general manager of Strasbourg Events**, part of the **GL Events Group** that manages the centre.

“The new exhibition centre fulfils the ambitions of a city that has established itself as one of the main destinations for business events. Not only because of the presence of European institutions, but also because of several economic centres of excellence: we are talking about technologies of the future and a large medical research centre with more than 60 laboratories, supported by 60,000 students in our universities,” says **Mireille Dartus, director from Strasbourg Convention Bureau**.





Daegu

A Pioneering Convening Hub

To keep up with the post-pandemic challenge, the Korean city of Daegu envisioned a new business events district targeting the Daegu 5+1 Growth Industries with a collection of infrastructure that has been catering to all MICE hosting angles.

Sometimes overshadowed by the glittering capital – Seoul, Daegu, South Korea’s third largest urban agglomeration – has been banking heavily on economic development underpinned by business events. After the establishment of the **Daegu Convention and Visitors Bureau (DaeguCVB)** in 2003, Daegu became the first city with a dedicated convention bureau and has since written a huge story under the global spotlight as a specialist in hosting outstanding international conferences. Recognised by the UIA as one of the top 10 cities for hosting international conferences in Asia, the city has collected consecutive successes evidenced by the **2013 World Energy Conference**, the **2015 World Water Forum**, the **2019 IBRO World Neuroscience Congress**, and the **2022 World Gas Conference**.

Daegu’s new MICE district is home to **EXCO**, the region’s premier convention centre and the Kyungpook University, a pillar of training and talent creation for the region’s MICE industry, in addition to other services such as integrated lodging, shopping malls, and cultural service platforms. “When the city got approval from the central government, we wanted to achieve active cooperation between event organisers, participants, and local business people to leverage conventions as a strategy for developing local industries. Conventions in Daegu needed to become business-oriented conventions,” says **Charlie Bae, CEO of DaeguCVB**. The figure of the “Daegu Ambassador” contributed greatly to this – an advisor profile that helps to facilitate the development of conferences in the city, creating greater synergy

between companies and the MICE community. “We have appointed some professors and experts who work in international conventions, and thanks to their assistance and participation, we have managed to attract a large number of conventions, such as **SIGGRAPH Asia 2022**, the **International Congress of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics 2024**, or the **World Congress of Biomaterials 2024**.”

During the 1960s up to the 1980s, Daegu used to be the economic engine of Korea, especially recognised for its textile and machinery industries. On the leap to modernity, this first-class business city offers a glimpse into its current economy with an industrial complex focused on **water, energy, future vehicles, medical, robotics industries** and – plus (+) one – **smart city industry**. “We tried to attract conventions in these new industries to be held in Daegu and contribute to the development of the 5+1. Similarly, the facilities and human networks of these industries have contributed to attract more conventions to Daegu,” says Bae. From 1 July 2022, the city government will spearhead a new package of priority industries: Robotics, Healthcare, Semi-conductors, Urban Air Mobility, ABB (Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Blockchain), and the Daegu CVB’s convention strategy will recalibrate its focus on the aforementioned industries.



“We are not sure if business events could be considered political actors in our ecosystem, but they have definitely brought about substantial changes that should not be ignored

In the convention industry, the direct expenses of attendees are often mentioned as benefits, however, compared to the tourism industry, this turnover is much smaller. Urged to comment on this, Charlie Bae notes that “beyond the economic impact, we emphasise the medium and long-term positive benefits of our conventions.” For a relatively lesser-known city like Daegu in the international community, high-profile conventions help to boost its profile and brand image on the global map. “Participants at CME 2013 were world leaders not only in the energy field – such as the CEO of Royal Dutch Shell, then the world’s largest company by sales revenue, and the CEO of Saudi Aramco, the largest company by total assets – but also in whole other industries.” More than 3,000 industry leaders came to Daegu to participate in this mega congress that led to the expansion of EXCO, the capture of other major conventions, and the designation of the energy industry as one of the 5+1 new growth drivers.

“Each convention needs a different approach. For example, when we hosted the 2022 World Gas Conference, we thought of a plan to develop the hydrogen industry after its outcome,” Bae tells us. At the 2015 WWF, ten heads of state such as the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Egyptian President, and more than 100 ministers and deputy ministers attended the conference along with more than 5,000 foreign participants. After its holding, the Forum managed to attract the central government’s **Korea Water Cluster project**, the **Korean Water Technology Certification Institute**, Lotte Chemical and 35 other water companies. And if these examples weren’t enough, the 2019 IBRO

World Neuroscience Congress has propelled the city to position itself at the top of brain research, securing a €9.5 million national government budget for research projects, infrastructure, and a domino effect to secure related conventions such as the **World Congress for Neuro-Rehabilitation 2026** and the **Federation of Asian and Oceanic Physiological Societies Congress 2023**.

Furthermore, with the **Open Innovation Digital Open Lab** project, Daegu will be premised on the development of innovative devices through the convergence of new ICT technologies and with different industries. With a budget of KRW 11.9 billion, the project aims to build a local foundation to support innovative devices based on data, 5G network and artificial intelligence. “We’ve noticed the changes in requests from hosts and convention attendees. A lot of effort has been put into establishing infrastructure like online studio, XR studio and meeting rooms optimised for hybrid conventions.” In addition, **Daegu Virtual MICE Town**, based on Metaverse technology, is helping to increase the immersion and interest of both online and offline visitors.

For sustainable conventions, Daegu CVB obtained ISO 20121 certificate several years ago and there are discussions about ESG initiatives in the Korean MICE industry. “While we recognise the importance and need for sustainable conventions, we are still in the early stages of implementing the initiatives due to lack of budget and manpower, among other things that have worsened since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic,” concludes Bae.



Prague Congress Centre: Unique in Many Ways!

The Prague Congress Centre (PCC) is not just a building, but a renowned institution with a long history and prosperous for the Czech Republic. The venue's long-term vision is to remain among the top ten congress centres in Europe and to be a gateway for large-scale events in the country.

Since the date of its foundation, the PCC has undergone significant changes until it reached its final form as a tradeshow and congress centre of excellence. With great attention to sustainability and environmental responsibility, they have been successful in demonstrating smart long-term energy-saving projects. Most importantly, the PCC has hosted several prestigious international events, such as the **World Bank** and **IMF summits**, the **NATO summit** and, most recently, the **Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU** – which will run throughout the second half of this year. A modern venue to inspire scientific, medical, commercial and political meetings, the PCC has kept pace with technological, ecological and socially responsible innovations to host large-scale international events for the betterment of society.

The COVID-19 pandemic broke out just a few weeks after the appointment of **Lenka Žlebková** as **CEO** of the congress centre. Her role immediately changed from business development manager to crisis manager, responsible for large savings and new sources of income. “Most of the planned events, including international congresses, were cancelled and, like all players in the European MICE industry, we were forced to quickly look for new solutions. If there was anything positive about the pandemic, it was the acceleration of the digitalisation process within the industry.” According to the CEO, it was clear to everyone the need to adapt

to new conditions and flexible solutions for clients. “I believe the requirement for constant innovation and rapid implementation of new features is here to stay for the long term. Without innovation, we wouldn't be able to move our business forward.”

On the savings side, Lenka did not want to introduce only cuts and redundancies but wanted to keep the core team together, knowing how difficult it is to find such experienced professionals. On the revenue side, PCC was able to quickly develop a fully hybrid conferencing solution. At the same time, the board used this period to deepen renovation and reconstruction works that would not have been possible in normal operations. “The pandemic also presented us with an opportunity as we offered a new type of hotel services that were necessary under the circumstances. In retrospect, I am quite proud of the way the team managed this crisis period,” says Žlebková.

The pandemic has certainly brought about a great development in technology and demand for continuous improvement. PCC entered the 21st century modernisation path several years ago with the implementation of new technologies, cutting-edge solutions and, more recently, environmentally



“I believe that in the future, hybrid conferences and congresses will become the global standard, and we are technologically at the top for hosting these events.”

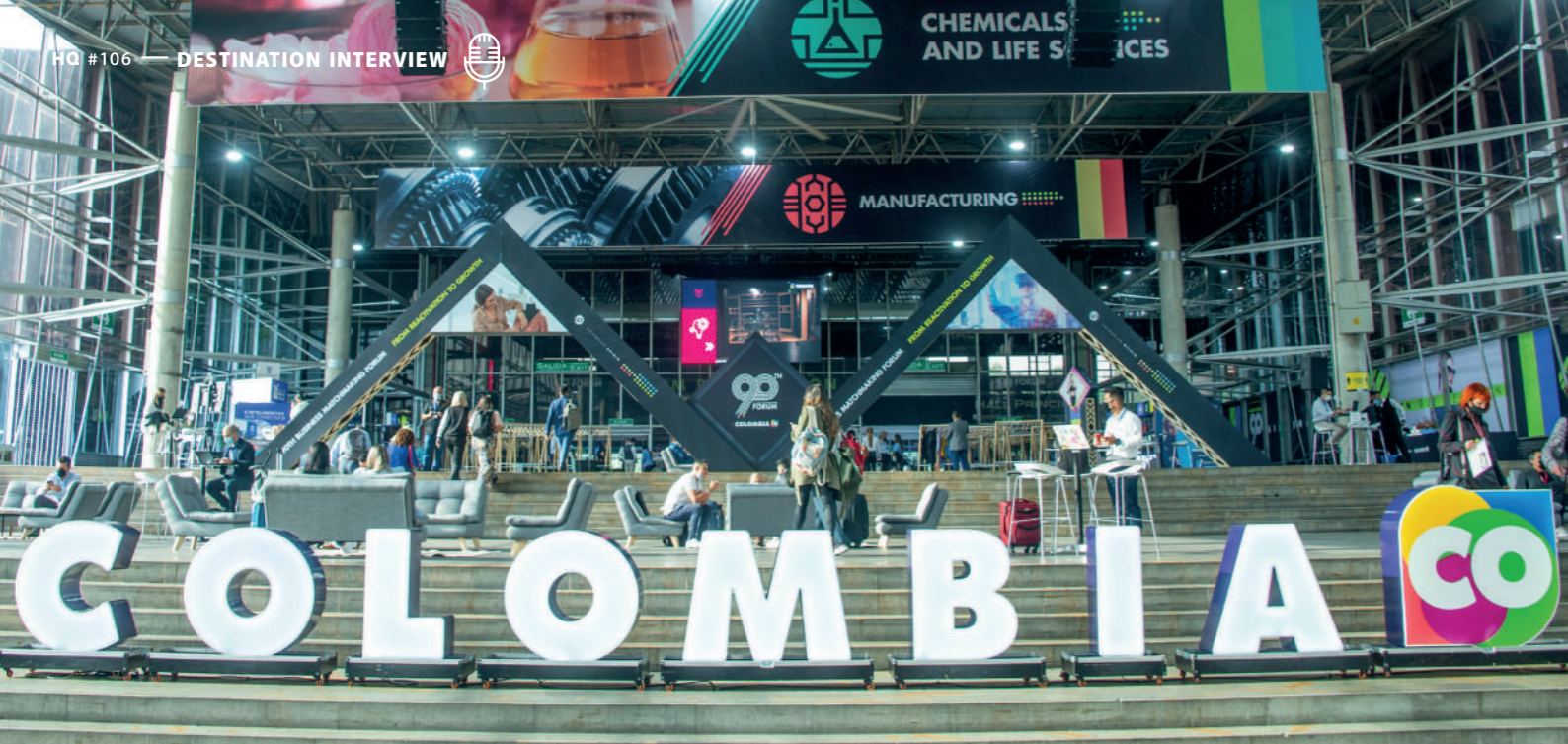
sustainable events. “An interesting project within this framework is also the **Vyšehrad Art District**, whose aim is to connect and cooperate with businesses, cultural and educational institutions in the vicinity of Vyšehrad for the purpose of organising events that combine entertainment, culture and community connection.” However, Lenka doesn't think this will change traditional delegate meeting habits much. “I am quite sceptical about any demand for purely digital conferences apart from the IT segment. They were a great success at the beginning of the pandemic, but in the end, professionals and scientists felt the need to meet in person again,” she says.

Hybrid events could be held at the centre long before the pandemic as a fringe option for organisers, but are now available as a standard service for most international conferences. “In cooperation with our AV partner, we are able to offer various forms of hybrid meetings right up to an online TV studio.” International congresses are about continuous learning and experience for their hosts, and that principle drives the venue towards new technologies. “We use them now in areas where we wouldn't have thought of it a few years ago. For example, our convention centre is constantly developing smart technologies to help increase its energy efficiency, and in the near future we are expected to own the largest photovoltaic plant in Prague. You have to be prepared to innovate constantly – technology in areas like cybersecurity or audiovisual is a never-ending battle against time,” Žlebková adds.

PCC has also become a baseline for community building

in Prague. During the pandemic, their premises were converted into a Metropolitan Vaccination Centre and within a year, over 100,000 people were vaccinated there. And just when they expected a boom in international conventions, war broke out in Ukraine with the space hosting the registration centre for tens of thousands of war refugees. Thanks to these developments, Lenka is convinced that the centre “is a vital part of the critical infrastructure of the capital Prague and the local community recognises our institutional role.” Not to mention the sustainability projects that the PCC has been involved in.

“All our decisions already have sustainability in mind. Initially it was a challenge for me to convince colleagues that sustainability had to be taken into account, but with the context of global changes, rising energy prices and also the demands of customers, everyone is starting now to understand it.” Since 2016, when various energy-saving measures were implemented as part of the centre's modernisation, energy costs have been reduced by around €850K per year. As part of the sustainability project, the central boiler room is now equipped with 4 new boilers and the new CHP unit can generate a large surplus of electricity and heat capable of keeping the venue running in the event of an energy collapse. The reconstructed AC is controlled by dozens of CO₂ sensors distributed throughout the building and the speed of the fans only increases depending on the amount of CO₂ in the exhaust air. LED luminaires have replaced the old fluorescent lamps, allowing smooth dimming, and this is only a small part of the savings they generate in their sustainability scheme.



Colombia: Megadiverse Events in South America

Colombia has clearly become a major destination for green investments, with specific policies to attract events and a boom in sustainability. On the occasion of its 30th anniversary, **PROCOLOMBIA** has reinforced this position with a strong commitment to the event sector in Colombia and many global investors in the MICE industry.

Colombia is increasingly promoting itself as an awe-inspiring setting for bold, innovative and exciting events on any scale, and as an alternative to European and North American destinations. The country is one of the gateways to the South American continent, and its strategic location has encouraged the return of international events and conventions after the long-lasting pandemic. Its impressive biodiversity, the friendliness of the people and its magic of the unique locations have made the country an immersive and unforgettable venue for business meetings, whether you're organising a conference, summit, expo, or once-in-a-lifetime team-building session.

Colombian officials are well aware of the treasure they possess as the second most biodiverse country in the world per square kilometre, home to over 50,000 species of plants and animals and 10% of the Amazon. "Our country represents a true world powerhouse of life, and our aim is to promote it and work towards the protection and conservation of its natural and cultural wealth," **Jose Puyana, Regional Director for Europe** at PROCOLOMBIA – the country's promoter of international

tourism and events – tells us. The tourism offer is thus ready to welcome various profiles of travellers interested in nature, adventure and cultural heritage, but also in luxury experiences and corporate events. A wealth of possibilities that drives the strategy's focus on diversity and sustainability. "We pride ourselves in being one of the few countries in the world with a clear roadmap on sustainable tourism, and that is exactly the kind of traveller we want to attract in this new post-pandemic world – one interested in exploring our massive diversity in terms of landscapes, cultures, history, but who also values the need of protecting these treasures for many generations to come."

Colombia is made up of six different touristic regions – almost like six countries bundled into one – which offer particular experiences to each traveller. Consequently, this strategy seeks a responsible and intelligent way to generate influx of visitors to remote destinations, extended stays, and (ideally) repetition. "Since the pandemic, we have



been working relentlessly with suppliers in Colombia to adjust our tourism offer and adapt it to this new profile. Our next meeting forum called **Colombia Nature Travel Mart**, to be held in September in our coffee region, will allow British tour operators to see these features for themselves," says Puyana.

The meetings industry is one of the segments that has gained momentum to promote Colombia internationally. This industry generates over USD \$2.45 billion in the country every year, representing 22.8% of total income generated by international tourism. PROCOLOMBIA was recently able to present its MICE offering for international players at IMEX, which generated a revenue of around USD \$6 million for Colombian suppliers, a blueprint that will cover other key tradeshows such as IBTM and The Meetings Show. "Our pitch is working well, and we are very pleased with the feedback we have seen from the industry. According to ICCA, some of our top destinations such as Bogota, Medellin, and Cartagena were among the top 10 cities in the world for the number of events held in 2019. Fifty-three large-scale convention spaces with state-of-the-art technology are also available for professionals wishing to host events at competitive rates," Puyana adds. In the latest **ICCA Destination Performance Index 2021**, Colombia sits in the 31st position only behind Brazil in the South American ranking and ahead of countries such as Argentina, Thailand or South Africa.

On the other hand, the country is very well positioned as an emerging player in Latin America in terms of energy transition, renewables and clean energy. In almost 70% of the cases, the energy consumed by an average person in Colombia does not produce any greenhouse gas emissions. There is a clear mandate from the authorities to make the most of the country's potential in terms of wind and solar radiation with several projects for offshore generation and green hydrogen. So, has the country seized this opportunity to bring international green conferences? "Yes, we see Colombia as a leading destination in the Americas for conferences around the future of the energy transition. Key partners, such as our Ministry of Energy, Colombia's Renewable Energy Association, our lead Business Association, and the Colombian Chamber of Energy, have been conducting international events to socialise the advantages and opportunities offered by non-conventional renewable energy sources in Colombia. We have also seen a significant growth led by companies in this segment, a trend we welcome enthusiastically," Puyana clarifies.

For PROCOLOMBIA, the MICE industry has not only generated key sources of revenue but has also connected strategic sectors of the economy with the rest of the world, transferring knowledge inwards and projecting the

country's image. Colombian suppliers have started working quickly to strengthen their offering for hybrid events after the radical transformations in the event format. However, recent months have shown a rapid and significant growth in face-to-face meetings in Colombia: "In the twelve months to June 2022, we were able to attract a total of 595 events. These are 119 conventions, 195 incentive trips, 101 congresses, 29 sporting events and 67 events in other formats. This shows that the industry is recovering and that Colombia has demonstrated significant resilience and ability to adapt to new expectations." Just by looking at the map, it is not difficult to see why Colombia has also ambitions to become a leading association hub in the Americas. With a privileged position and easy connectivity to virtually every major city in the region, its 17 free trade agreements allow any business to pull the strings to markets in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. "These conditions attract the attention of event organisers, but also of companies worldwide that wish to find a centre in the region," Puyana highlights. "Reason why PROCOLOMBIA has been working for the last 30 years to promote the country as an ideal destination for foreign direct investment as well as an export platform and a reliable supplier of goods and services to the world."



In the latest ICCA Destination Performance Index 2021, Colombia sits in the 31st position only behind Brazil in the South American ranking and ahead of countries such as Argentina, Thailand or South Africa.

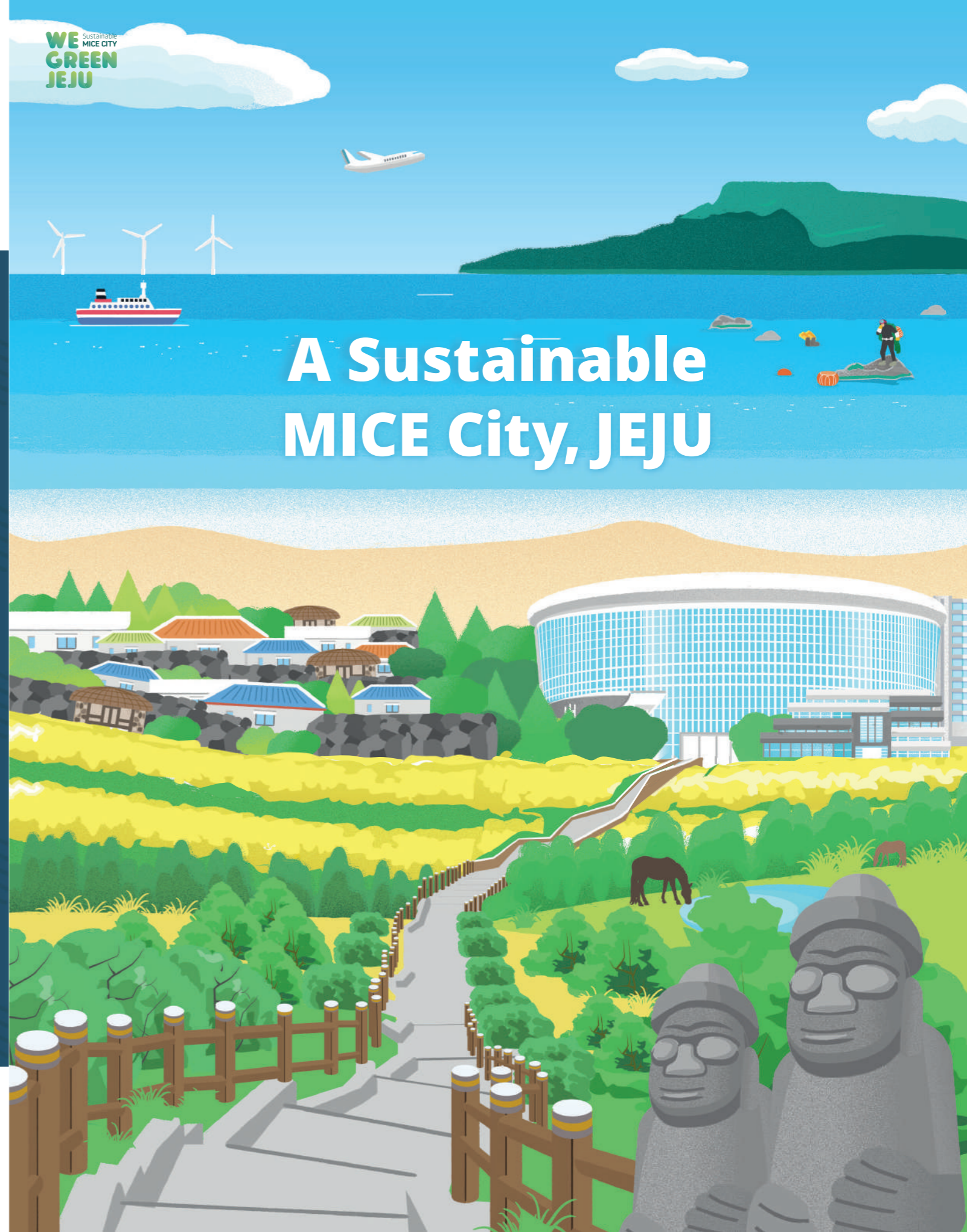
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MICE City, JEJU



Sooner or later, you will be faced with the question of what you are doing for us in your community

“Companies will no longer be managed solely in terms of economic impacts”

How to cope with uncertainties, opportunities and trends in the post-pandemic era? Painting images with future-oriented scenarios and planning roadmaps for sustainable growth are inseparable from the most resilient organisations. That’s the motto of the **European Tourism Futures Institute**, a specialised centre in future research and destination planning for companies, leisure and tourism. We spoke to the **Head of Department, Stefan Hartman**, about forward thinking scenarios and what the pandemic has laid bare for meetings and events.



What picture do you paint of the future of tourism and business travel in these first steps of recovery?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we did a scenario study trying to understand what the key drivers of change were. At that time, we thought about the impact it would have on businesses, whether there would be a long-term recession and what consumers would do. So we created a framework with a business as usual scenario. On the one hand, we had unusual businesses that were rethinking themselves with consumers behaving very differently. On the other hand, we had businesses without major changes in consumer behavior, but pioneers in sustainable actions. We saw that during the pandemic, some businesses remained stationary without major disruption and changes in thinking. Within the first two months, companies, particularly event companies,

were already fading – due to reckless investments, very small profit margins, sometimes with little financial capital. And the first companies that went bankrupt were event organisations. The mentality of going back to the old ways is still very dominant, because that is where the multi-year contracts, the business contacts and the long-standing projects are. Even from the consumer’s point of view, the old routines still influence a lot of the decision-making.

What trends and new behaviours will be adopted to revive activity around the MICE industry?

I think the most important one is consumer behaviour. After these two years, many people will return to business travel intensively, but others will be more selective in their choices. Today, we see several examples of offline concepts

being transposed to online-like webinars. Some larger companies recognise that digitalisation is an effective way forward and will try to diversify their services and outsource them. There are great examples of individuals who have started their own online event agencies capitalising on new business opportunities. They now can compete with larger convention centres because they replicate some smaller conferences with new online resources. Even many of these convention centres are creating in-house studios equipped with high-end technology to diversify their portfolio. Between the spectrum of people who want to travel and others who don’t, these new companies have to strengthen their delivery across the board. If you travel to a business event, the experience will need to be completely efficient from now on. Participants will come to value human interaction and the overall experience of the event more, as the outcome of these actions can now be complemented by virtual meetings. Three years ago it seemed unrealistic to hold an online conference, but today it is part of the everyday life of organisations.

Do you think that the role of consumers could overlap that of citizens? Are we willing to make sacrifices to rebuild an events industry more in line with today’s world?

We have to take a closer look at traveller behaviour in this post-pandemic period. The hotels are sold out, the planes are full again and the destinations are overcrowded just a year after the vaccination started. Consumers also demonstrate a need or desire to get back to business as usual. We need to meet again and this somehow goes against the idea of building back better. I always thought the post-pandemic drop in travel was a myth. If we don’t change consumer behaviour and the way the industry works, we will be back to seeing over-tourism in the blink of an eye. This will no longer be tolerated by citizens – in Amsterdam, for example, over 30000 citizens used a public petition to ask for a maximum number of tourists per year. The same thing will happen to convention centres, because it will be quite difficult to accept events that do not comply with CSR regulations from a government point of view. A convention centre of the future will be more strategic in

matching its events with the local business profile. This impact will be within reach of civil society that has become more discerning and demanding.

Did sustainability have a real weight in changing mentalities here?

It’s in line with sustainability but it’s more of a liability issue, as the industry will have to take greater responsibility for the city and its inhabitants. Companies will no longer be managed solely in terms of economic impacts, as social and environmental impacts will now have a greater say. This is a totally different proposition from what we have seen before – changing the perspective of impact. It is a matter of time, it seems to me, before we welcome a public perspective on regulation that specifies and reorganises the way we admit and bid for events. We will see differences there in where the industry is regulated and perhaps this will create a geographical shift towards larger events. The Netherlands does not host the Olympic Games because of its regulations, for example, because the concepts of impact and investment are intertwined. This frame also influences the image of a destination. When people start questioning this need, I think the logic behind the events industry will also change. Destinations that intervene earlier will be better prepared and have a greater advantage. This will perhaps change the very model of cities, neighbourhoods and urban reforms, as it will be in everyone’s interest to follow a common path with government legislation.

How do you see strategic urban planning and tourism destination governance based on data management?

The data-driven policy used today is not good enough. Most destinations only position themselves in tourism around the number of visitors and direct impacts. A company can be at the forefront of decisions by obtaining as much information as possible about direct and indirect impacts, even before governments enact a series of regulations. I see there’s a need for data, but especially economic data – a new layer of profit margins, expenses, etc. I’m involved in some data projects where we monitor businesses, visitors and residents collecting elements about the added value and citizens’ perspective on the visitor’s economy. Looking at the results, I conclude that there are great discussions about balance of interests, tourism spillover, community management policies – something like the “doughnut economics”, an alternative business model focused on balancing the needs of people and the planet far beyond mere implementation of GDP. Data offers a different way of looking at performance targets by taking into account the industry’s contribution within the place where it operates. Sooner or later, you will be faced with the question of what you are doing for us in your community.

Cybersecurity is Also a **BIG Issue** for Associations

The information we control about our organisations, and our members, is information that is highly valued by those who would use it for their own gain. As always, we should make our associations models of good organisational management and be vigilant in protecting our information.

Too often those of us in the not-for-profit sector think that trends that affect our members' businesses do not necessarily apply to our business - the association business. We must remember that "not-for-profit" is the status given to us by a government agency, it is not a business management philosophy. We have the same challenges that our members, or our members' employers, have on a day-to-day basis as they strive to be successful. Not-for-profit organisations still need to be managed in a business-like manner

We have a product to sell, and while our product may not be a manufactured product or a scientific product, we still must produce that product at a prominent level for our customers/members. We use the term programmes instead of products but in fact we are producing value every day for our members.

We need to be skilled at marketing, fiscal management, meeting planning, communications, social media, human resource development, accounting, and inventory control. If you think those skills seem like the ones your members need to have to be successful in their businesses or professions, then you are right, they are the same. We may use different terminologies for some of these same skills within the not-for-profit community, but that does not stop us from having the responsibility to use these skills to provide service to our members.

That is why it concerns me when we do not realise that one of the biggest issues in the private sector - **cybersecurity** - is also a big issue for our associations, Chambers of Commerce, and other membership-based organisations. In associations, we retain information about our members and other key stakeholders that is valued by those who would steal that information and use it for illegal purposes.

We have members' names, addresses, cell phone numbers, credit card numbers and security information, spouses or significant other names, and contact information, spending histories, checking account numbers, passport numbers, passwords, and other items that make those intent on identity theft looking closely at how they can get that information from us.



In many cases, we do not have the financial ability to obtain the levels of cybersecurity that many of our member companies and member employee companies must attain to protect all the information that they gather. That makes associations even bigger targets than some of these other private sector institutions.

When members join our organisations, renew their memberships purchase educational programmes and publications, or engage in other association related transactions, they put their trust in our cybersecurity systems. In today's world, that trust is based, in part, on what cybersecurity levels exist in their places of employment. When engaging in association activities, they are frequently required to ascertain the security levels we (associations) have in protecting their information before they will give it to us or accept communications from us.

Here are some basic things all of us need to be doing to assure our members and stakeholders that the security of their electronic data and online identities are as safe with us as they are with all the other entities with which they do business and conduct communications:

- **Upgrade your staff's cybersecurity awareness** - Provide training to anyone accessing your IT environment to prevent the number one cause of cybersecurity attacks: *Phishing* (when an attacker sends a fraudulent message designed to trick a person into revealing sensitive information or to deploy malicious software on the victim's infrastructure, like ransomware). Humans continue to be the weakest link. You need to go beyond training and make them **aware** so that it will **become part of the security culture**.
- **Back up your data daily** - The best way to recover from a ransomware attack is to have backups ready to use when you are held hostage. You must ensure the backup is dependable.
- **Limit the number of people who can install software** - Too many cooks spoil the broth. You need to trust that people are doing the right thing when installing and updating software.

- **Use a reputable antivirus software** - AV is one step that will lower your chances of being attacked with ransomware.
- **Security monitoring of your network must be in place** - You **MUST** be aware of what is happening in your network and performing 24x7x365 monitoring, which will help ensure you are actively looking for the bad guys.
- **Who has access to what and why must be understood** - A proper identity and access management programme allows you to provide access to your critical applications by only those who should have it.
- **Use two-factor authentication** - Gone are the days of just a single password. Having two forms, such as a password and a biometric, to access your network is required to provide added assurance.

These measures might seem overly simplistic to an IT specialist, but what about the rest of our association staffers (and perhaps key volunteers)? Do they understand the need for enhanced cybersecurity? Are they familiar with the technology and terminology that level of security entails? Are they willing to take training and adhere to organisational cybersecurity guidelines?

The information we control about our organisations, and our members, is information that is highly valued by those who would use it for their own gain. As always, we should make our associations models of good organisational management and be vigilant in protecting our information.



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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Tourism in Transit: City Destinations Alliance's upcoming Autumn Conference is coming!

Tel Aviv will host the next **City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference** on October 19-22, 2022. It will be the first Conference organised under the new name of the association formerly known as European Cities Marketing (see HQ Magazine #104 - page 46&47).

The world is facing hyperinflation, global recession, war in Europe and rising geopolitical tensions. At the same time, people are navigating new technology with the metaverse and searching for the right platform to embark on the high speed for the net zero journey. The "Tourism in Transit" Conference will help answer questions that concern every tourism organisation: Are DMOs and CVBs on track towards a meaningful transition for positive impact and contribution? Have they transitioned alongside the landscape in which they navigate? What are the new partnerships that will fuel the destination's futures?

The leisure and business tourism industry has been in transit for the past years – on the move, but not always with a clear view of its objectives. New roadblocks and barriers are constantly shifting routes and challenging

navigation. Now, the industry is hoping to soon pass the end station of the COVID express, yet asking what connections were missed on the way to "Build Back Better" that left everyone with the new inconvenient truth of travel and so-called *Airmageddon* (aka flight delays and cancellations).

During the 3-day event in the non-stop city of Tel Aviv, participants will learn from the work of other destinations, help bridge the most challenging Disconnections, or think big on explorative questioning.

The programme is specifically curated for leisure and business tourism professionals. Registrations are open until October 10 at <https://citydestinationsalliance.eu/>



CityDNA Benchmarking Report 2021-22

COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt the tourism industry in 2021, although to a lesser extent than in 2020. CityDNA Benchmarking Report determined that the cities included in the report achieved an average growth rate of 36.7%, which is opposite from the previous year's rate of -60.9%.

The 18th edition of the City Destinations Alliance Benchmarking Report includes 117 European cities and features key figures as well as non-tangible KPIs for the year 2021.

This 36.7% growth rate is due to recovery in total bed nights experienced in 103 out of 117 analysed cities. The top three cities in terms of total bed nights in 2021 were London, Paris, and Istanbul.

Among the top 15 performers, the most notable increases were recorded in Istanbul (87.8%), Madrid (101.5%) and Barcelona (55.1%), which led to an improvement in their rankings from 2020: Istanbul moved from being ranked 4th to 3rd, Madrid from 10th to 5th, and Barcelona from 14th to 9th!

A heterogeneous recovery of Europe's main source markets

The UK (-26.1%), Russia (-41.3%), China (-37.8), and Japan (-68.5%) continued to record decreases, whereas the remaining top five source markets had increases, anywhere from 10.4% (Germany) to 58.4% (the USA).

City Tourism is on the recovery path

The past year has shown positive average annual growth rates in international bed nights in both the CityDNA Report cities (31.5%) and the EU 27 nations and UK (12.3%). Cities increased more than other regions (34.3% versus 11.4%) in terms of total bed night volumes, which highlights the importance of city destinations in European tourism.

"These results demonstrate that in spite of the immense impact of the pandemic over the past two years, European city tourism is on the recovery path. Taking into account the performance in pre-pandemic (2019) and pandemic (2020 and 2021) years, cities are now able

to set more realistic targets for recovery of tourism not only in the current year but also in the medium-term. This is where the CityDNA Report comes in!" comments **Magnus Hessbo, Chair of the CityDNA Research & Insights Knowledge Group.**

Further analyses revealed that the average growth rate of bed capacity for CityDNA Report cities gained momentum with an increase of 12.0% in 2021. Regarding the bed occupancy, the benchmark average in 2021 was 26.4%, in comparison to 21.3% in 2020.

A growing concern about the impact of DMOs' sustainability strategies and reputation

CityDNA Benchmarking Report also unfolds a new chapter on estimation of transport-related CO₂ emissions caused by city tourism, in cooperation with **Modul University Vienna**. In addition, upon inspection of CO₂ emissions caused by tourists travelling to/from the city, average nominal value for total CO₂ in 2021 was at 207,616 tons of CO₂, which was heavily skewed by Madrid, Lisbon, and Amsterdam.

"The choice of destinations is influenced by tourism and non-tourism external factors: geopolitics, climate, health context, social environment and "ghost" ambassadors fueling a positive or negative image of the city and often escaping usual DMOs' "radars". This now forms another new chapter of our CityDNA Report, thanks to the social listening-based standard methodology developed by TCI Research. It is essential to track not only quantitative figures but also the reputation "at large" of cities. Cities are melting pots for our society; they are our home and also the gateway to other cities and regions. The majority of people feel emotionally connected to their city and they are proud of what makes it unique." concludes **Petra Stuček, CityDNA President.**

CityDNA Benchmarking Report is available on the organisation's website

F1 Speed, but no Teams in the Paddock

AUTHOR: SVEN BOSSU, AIPC CEO



Coming out of the pandemic, the overall expectation was that business would come back gradually, allowing the convention centre teams to get back up to speed in a controlled way. Well, that did not happen. With Tesla-like acceleration, agendas were filled up with events, leaving little breathing space and putting pressure on teams. In an environment where it is difficult to find staff, this comes with specific challenges.

On July 22nd, **GL Events Group** presented its results for the first half of the year. With over 50 venues worldwide, the results can be considered as a good indicator of what is happening in the world of convention centres. The results were impressive: Q2 2022 revenue levels outperform comparable periods in 2018 and 2019, and increased by 150% compared to 2021. In terms of number of events organised, GL is at 87% compared to 2019. At the same time, not all types of events are recovering in the same way. While corporate events are booming, international congresses and exhibitions are lagging somewhat behind. Geographically, China does not show the same signs of recovery as the other regions. But this is clearly not a gradual recovery – it is a big jump.

Other big jumps can be seen in the labor market. The August figures of the US Bureau of Labour Statistics confirm that the big resignation is still ongoing in the leisure and hospitality industry: 9% (1,3 million persons) of its workforce changed jobs. And looking at the profiles most at risk for leaving, persons with a 5/10-year tenure are the most vulnerable with women quitting at a higher rate.

Finding staff has become extremely difficult. 60% of AIPC members say recruiting and retaining suitable

employees is extremely/very challenging – and it's hardest to find mid-level managers. 56% of members have launched special HR initiatives to attract staff.

This contrast between high market demand and loss/lack of staff is increasingly leading to opportunity costs, as some convention centres simply need to refuse business, either to a lack of availability but also because the lack of staff does not allow to meet the service levels required.

Unfortunately, there is no magic solution for this challenge. On top, the event industry is not the only one facing lack of staff and having difficulties in retaining talent. However, the event industry does offer a number of advantages, which are important for a new generation of professionals. When asked what would make them leave their job, Gen Z and Millennials will not give salary as top driver. Instead, the following aspects are in the top 5 (next to work-life balance and risk of burn out): lack of purpose, lack of challenge and lack of learning opportunities. These are typically things which the event industry is actually great at.

Personally, I believe that the same level of effort which has been put into sustainability on an event industry level – via the Zero Carbon Events Initiative – should be put in making our industry attractive for upcoming talent. Especially because we will need those talents to achieve our ambitions when it comes to sustainability, the integration of new technology or delivering the next level of delegate experiences. Definitely something to discuss during the upcoming industry events.

About AIPC

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



How to Unlock the Power of Attendee Data Across the Event Lifecycle

AUTHOR: FELICIA ASIEDU, SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER AT CVENT EUROPE

The relationship between attendee data and events is powerful in today's digital landscape where virtual, in-person and hybrid events can thrive. Event data enables planners to gain deep insights into attendee behaviours and patterns. With these insights, you can create targeted messaging, strategically enhance the event experience, prioritise leads, improve future events and measure ROI.

However, despite events providing some of the most valuable intel at multiple stages (pre, during and post) only 29% of senior planners and marketers capture data at more than one part of the event journey – according to The New Event Marketing Opportunity Special Report, an independent study conducted by Atomik Research (and commissioned by Cvent), which surveyed more than 2,000 respondents from the UK, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. By not doubling down on their efforts to capture data at all stages of the event lifecycle, planners are missing a huge opportunity to capitalise on the benefits of these deep insights. But before you start collecting more attendee insights, it's important to understand the different types of data you can capture and **WHY** each is useful. So, here's a brief summary to get you started and to help you unlock the power of data across the event lifecycle:

Pre-event

The key data elements you want to capture here are demographic, firmographic, behavioural and, if possible, psychographic information that enable you to segment your audience. You can capture this data through registration questions, marketing campaigns, surveys and session interest/enrolment.

WHY: Segmenting your audience based on interests and demographics will allow you to deliver relevant, personalised content and experiences. Campaign data helps you measure interest and learn which campaign strategies and messages are most effective.

During the event

There are two groups of data to capture: the first has to do with attendance including elements like event check-in and app logins as well as session data like attendance, duration and feedback. The second group of data is related to engagement elements such as polling responses, questions submitted, chat engagement, social posts, booth visits, lead capture and appointments.

WHY: Attendance and session data provide critical information about what's resonating with your audience. Engagement data lets you know which activities your attendees are interested in and what topics they engage with most. When event attendee data is combined with their touchpoints from your other marketing channels you get a more complete attendee profile; enabling hyper-personalisation at scale.

Post-event

This stage can include survey responses, engagement scores, event cost, revenue and ultimately, event ROI.

WHY: By analysing this data you can understand what worked well and what areas could be improved and leverage these insights to create more impactful events.

As event programmes expand to accommodate more audiences and formats, technology plays a central role in enabling organisations to efficiently track the attendee journey and deliver high levels of engagement. Because the volume of data collected at events can be daunting, you should work with a technology partner that can provide digital engagement tools and a fully integrated solution to support planning, marketing communications, event and attendee data capture whilst delivering robust reporting.





Employee Education on Cybersecurity in Times of Home Office

As a worldwide leading Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) and Association Management Company (AMC), Kenes Group handles a large amount of data; this could be personal information from association members or congress delegates as well as internal documents that need to be exchanged with care. The company's IT department oversees the data protection and cybersecurity compliance required for the successful operations of the organisation.

Security starts from within

The IT team at Kenes Group is constantly delivering information security educational sessions to employees worldwide to raise awareness and educate personnel about the importance of protecting the company's data and how to do so.

These sessions cover topics such as impersonation and how to identify fake emails, theft of login details, malicious software (malware) and, more specifically, ransomware, which increased greatly during the COVID pandemic with the increase in working from home.

Benny Barak, DevOps Manager at Kenes Group who leads these sessions, explains that "ransomware encrypts the company files and in exchange for them requests a cryptocurrency transfer that can amount up to USD 100m; in 70% of the cases, files are not sent back even after the payment has been made". This is considered the biggest cyber threat to any organisation today.

In addition to the educational sessions, it is also a must for all employees to use multifactor authentication (MFA), to notify the IT team of any suspicious activity, and to back up all files in the different cloud services that the company has set up.

Protecting partners, protecting data

As part of the efforts to build and sustain trust from association partners, Kenes Group has well-established procedures for data protection that

are in line with the company's overall best-in-breed approach to software development. This means that the IT experts are constantly analysing and reviewing the market to acquire, implement and integrate the best software available, in this case, to manage their information.

Furthermore, Kenes Group implements measures for data disclosure, data segregation and data storage control such as:

- Compulsory use of a wholly owned private network for all data transfers.
- VPN encryption for remote access, transport, and communication of personal data.
- Prohibition on the use of portable devices for data transfer.
- Creation of a chronological log of all personal data transfers.
- Restricted access to personal data stored for different purposes, according to the functions performed by the personnel.
- Logical segregation between IT systems and those of the other data controllers, processors, or customers.
- Segregation of IT production and testing environments.
- Pseudonymisation of personal data.

- Segregation of special categories of personal data from identifying/contact data, and segregated data storage.
- SSO, SSL encryption, backup, and disaster recovery measures.
- Periodic penetration testing.

According to **Uzi Drori, CIO at Kenes Group**, "we have a strong focus on cybersecurity these days, considering that a lot of our employees worldwide work from home most of the time and we have less control over the used networks, for example. Our IT team is permanently developing ways of ensuring that our information and that of our partners is in the best hands, which are those of a well-educated company regarding data protection."

Key takeaways to protect your organisation's data

As you might also be working from home and facing similar cybersecurity risks at your company or association, here are some learnings that you can implement to protect your information:

- Set up multifactor authentication for all your software;
- Don't open attachments from an unknown source;
- Ensure that your antivirus is always up to date;
- Back up your files in a secured cloud platform.

Alongside implementing the measures mentioned above, and others recommended by your IT experts, consider the educational aspect to be the number one strength of your cybersecurity strategy. Every member of your team is not necessarily aware of the risks, so make sure that you provide up-to-date knowledge for them to take an active part in the protection of your data.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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