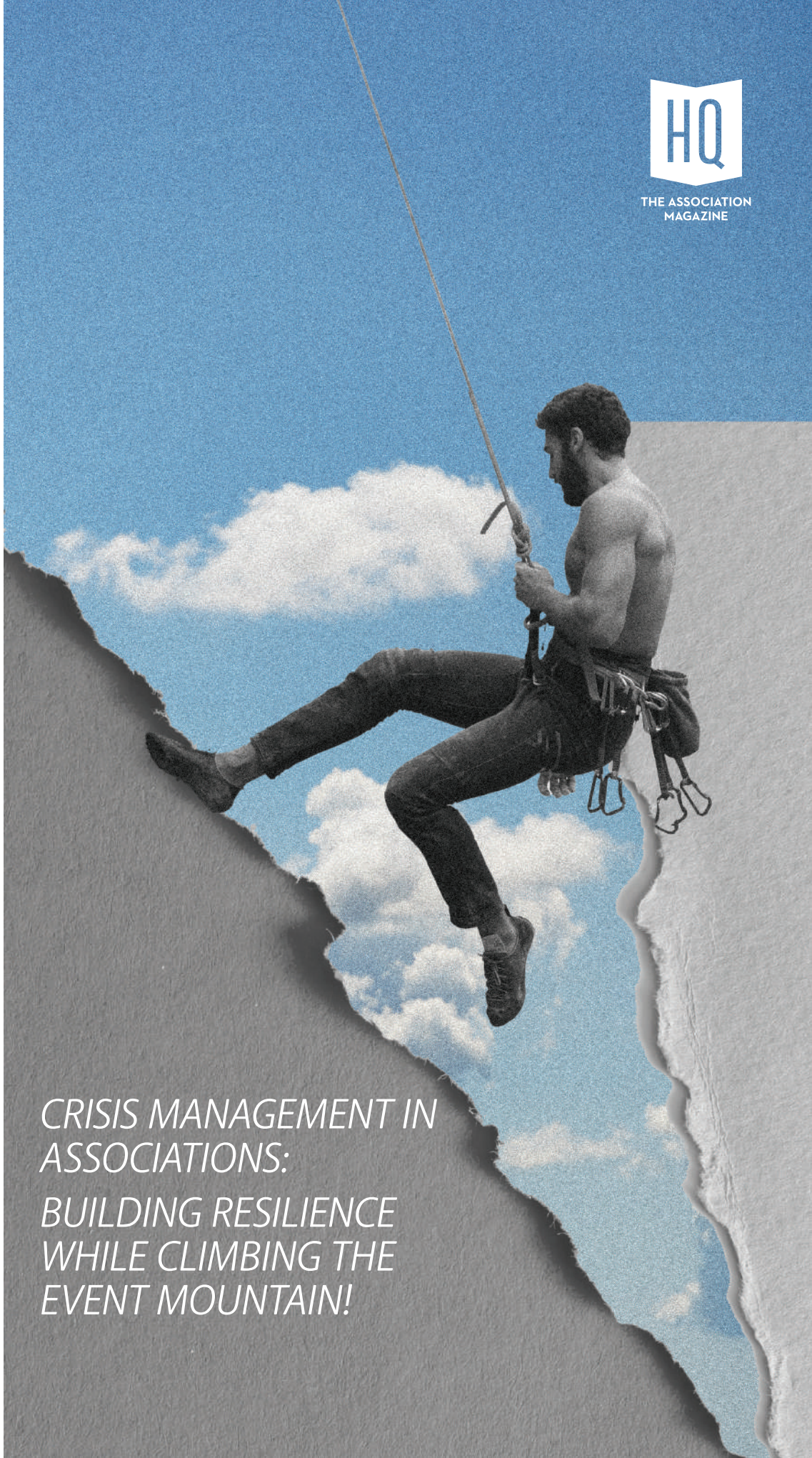


# Headquarters

MARCH 2025 #118 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



THE ASSOCIATION  
MAGAZINE



**Love Your Liver**  
The Social Work of EASL  
Congresses

**International Nightlife  
Association**  
Could Nightclubs Become a  
Thing of the Past?

**Invictus Games in Vancouver**  
Showcasing Inclusive &  
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## WHAT DOES RISK MANAGEMENT MEAN FOR HQ?

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

I have never approached risk management in a structured way. I am familiar with its theoretical foundations but, like so many of us in this industry, I have always had other fires to put out. Running a niche publishing company comes with its challenges. Still, they often feel like waves compared to the tides of uncertainty that associations and meeting planners must navigate daily. Their risks are bigger, more complex and often driven by forces far beyond their control.

Then what are the real risks for the publisher of a niche magazine? People will always read. They will always look for new trends to follow. They will always want to travel, not even a global pandemic changed that. And, perhaps most importantly, people will always want to meet. These cornerstones of the meetings industry seem almost unshakable.

However, I know a certain 'but' is hanging over us all. What if the niche we serve starts to shrink or disappear altogether? That would spell trouble for publishers like me. I have to adopt a more cautious mindset and think more deliberately about the risks to our business. It would be naive to believe that we are immune to risk. In today's saturated information landscape, we are constantly challenged to hold on to our readers, who compete for their attention with an ever-growing number of media competitors. We balance editorial integrity with embracing technologies that are reshaping content consumption. We belong to an industry where attention has become a scarce commodity, a resource that brands have fought over for years. The battle for relevance, visibility, and staying part of the conversation is relentless. These are very real risks, even for us operating in seemingly safe niches.

Today, you can insure yourself against virtually any disaster. But risk itself is evolving, especially as we enter one of the most volatile and unpredictable periods in modern history. The pace of change and the level of uncertainty are only increasing. We live in an era where wars no longer seem like distant threats, where technology companies no

longer confine themselves to innovation but actively shape political discourse. Global financial and political instability, threats to fundamental human rights and natural disasters fuelled by climate change are no longer isolated headlines. These risks affect our society, including the meetings industry and the niche publishing world.

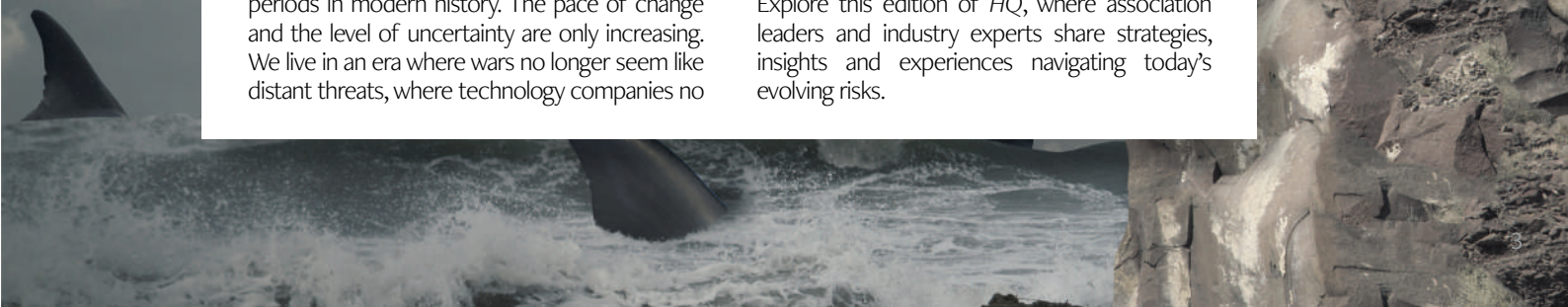


Risk management has evolved from a 'nice-to-have' to a necessary, though often resented, part of ensuring an organisation's survival and success. Our industry exists in, and is shaped by, this broader, turbulent landscape.

What about the threats posed by artificial intelligence? Could big data come to our rescue and help us map the unknown risks of tomorrow? I believe it could. Risk management is evolving from a necessary evil into an essential tool for survival and growth. Yet we should approach this technological revolution with caution. Artificial intelligence reflects the biases of its creators, reinforces assumptions in its data and, if unchecked, may worsen inequalities. As we embrace the potential of artificial intelligence to predict and mitigate risk, we must also remain vigilant in questioning its conclusions, understanding its limitations, and ensuring that human assessment always has the final say. In a world increasingly driven by algorithms, the greatest risk may be that we forget the value of critical thinking.

Time to embrace risk, not as a looming threat, but as a constant companion that can become a source of resilience and even opportunity. After all, every meeting, encounter and idea carries its own risk, and that is where progress begins.

Explore this edition of *HQ*, where association leaders and industry experts share strategies, insights and experiences navigating today's evolving risks.



**HQ** #118

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**THE ASSOCIATION  
 MAGAZINE**

**BUILDING BRIDGES  
 IN THE MEETINGS  
 INDUSTRY**

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Could Nightclubs  
 become a thing of  
 the past?



**EU CVB Network**

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 connections,  
 benchmarks and  
 exchanges



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A Live demonstration of inclusive event strategy



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Innovating for greater communities



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From passive participation to active legacy-building



**ESSA**

Dispelling the Myths of Accreditation







# Resilience in Times of Trade Crises: How to Act Strategically in a Multi-polar World!

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES, MAGAZINE MANAGER

Given the history of recent years with successive health, energy and military crises, few people in our sector predicted that 2025 would be a quiet walk in the park. Coming directly from a global pandemic and entering a technological revolution at the pace of two regional wars, international organisations and the business events sector realised that in order to establish building blocks for their members, clients and partners, they had to return to the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) mantra. With tariffs imposed by the newly-elected president of the United States, a new tension has flared up, threatening transatlantic trade relations with a bill that will be paid by consumers and the environment. **European Aluminium**, the voice of the entire European aluminium value chain, expressed its concern at the recent US announcement to impose a 25% tariff on all aluminium imports, in the voice of its **Director General, Paul Voss**: “Tariffs will increase costs in the US and distort trade flows around the world. Ultimately, they will disrupt the efficiency and integration of global markets at a time when stability is most needed.” At the same time, **Eurofer**, the **European Steel Association**, predicts a bleak future for the sector, aggravated by an escalating trade war in an industry already suffering from global overcapacity and deflation. “The US is the second largest export market for EU steel producers, accounting for 16% of total EU steel exports in 2024. The loss of a significant share of these exports cannot be compensated for by EU exports to other markets,” says the Association’s **President, Dr Henrik Adam**. Both associations fear that the inability to manage this unsettled period could sabotage green transition projects and accelerate the deindustrialisation of their industries.

Even in two business event markets as self-reliant as Europe and the US, tariffs can destabilise trade flows in supply chains, cost structures, supplier

relationships and strategic decision-making – such as the growing trend towards nearshoring or friend-shoring. As our own **Mark Levin** says, this climate of rising customs duties can have an impact on the meetings and events sector in terms of fluctuations in currency value, inflation, delays in supplies, as well as a sharp drop in attendance. For associations, managing these risks requires more than ever member engagement, loyalty and, sectoral advocacy, and a strategic PR approach. Diversifying supplier networks can mitigate risk exposure. Broadening participation models and membership fees can convince even more members and collaborators of your mission and core values. Finally, in times of divide and rule, it will be essential for the European association community to increase international co-operation, multilateralism and diplomatic representation of its peers on global stages. The efficient management of an association lies in the ability to anticipate, plan for and navigate crises. Whether it is cybersecurity, event safety, climate change or trade wars, solutions must be geared towards the producers, suppliers, partners and members you serve.

## “Where did everyone go tonight?”

According to a report by *CGA Neilson*, 65 nightclubs in the UK were shut down in just six months last year. In November, a non-profit representing Berlin’s club scene warned that half of the roughly 250 venues are at risk of closing by 2025. The situation of the night-time economy is dire across Europe, following a pandemic slump that has driven out its audiences and has lasted due to rising rents, gentrification and demographic changes. In this #118 issue, *HQ* caught up with the Vice-president of the **International Nightlife Association** to find out more about the state of the sector and how to find resilience in times of crisis.





# HO ESSENTIAL



# INTERVIEWS & STORIES



# “As **EASL’s mission** Evolves so Does the Way we use our **Events**”

Traditionally, health congresses have focused more on their communities of practice, peer-to-peer sharing and the professional networking of their target audience – such as general practitioners, medical experts and researchers – as a factor in mobilising international delegations. However, certain associations have changed this paradigm with a strong focus on local players, wider media exposure and a greater emphasis on public health. **EASL, the European Association for the Study of the Liver**, is one of them and has been realising this vision since its 2022 congress in London. As the **Home of European Hepatology**, they have guided their mission through four strategies: Education; Advocacy; Science; and Leadership.



**W**e unpack this ever-evolving array of activities, educational events, alliances and social partnerships with **Executive Director Ben Hainsworth** and **Public Health Programme Manager & Advocacy Coordinator Maraika Black**.

**First of all, tell me more about the perception of impact within EASL and what motivated you to go ahead with your own legacy projects.**

**Maraika Black:** The concept of Impact has become increasingly popular among event organisers and destinations. However, the seed has to come from the association by taking its passion, knowledge and mission to its event destinations. The EASL Impact Project ‘**Love Your Liver**’ began in 2022 and was the original idea of our executive director, Ben Hainsworth, who was very familiar with association events as a result of his 20 years with the **European Society of Cardiology**. The idea took shape on a very small scale with a partnership with the **British Liver Trust**, a UK organisation that provides free tests in a mobile screening clinic and had parked its lorry at our 2022 Congress. We also invited a local hepatologist to give a seminar to a group of 10-12 year olds at a school right next to the Congress Centre. When we released a summary report on these actions, it ended up receiving a lot of positive attention from the media, which helped us raise funds for the project as the industry found out what we were doing. At the Vienna Congress in 2023, we brought our own lorry and visited another school; in Milan in 2024, we also did our own screening and went to four different schools. From London to Milan, just two years apart, we have gone from around 159 people screened to 895 in one year. This is something we plan to continue in Amsterdam.





**Ben, what prompted this new conceptual and programmatic approach at your congresses?**

**Ben Hainsworth:** The congress’ value proposition has evolved organically; there has been no change in strategic direction. External circumstances, organisational agility, and a clear vision of what we want to achieve have allowed us, and even obliged us, to challenge the traditional perspective of what we should expect from our congress. Science, education and networking opportunities for Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) remain core to our onsite and online offer – but as EASL’s mission evolves so does the way we use our events. Policy and public health are becoming more central to all that we do. So our Congress naturally reflects that fact. You will find plenty of policy and public education for HCPs there, as well as concerted efforts to use the congress platform to engage local, regional and global policymakers, but also local and national populations, and patient groups. The latter – patient group and population engagement is delivered under the Umbrella ‘Love Your Liver’.

**In Bruges (on Impact Day 2024), legacy and impact were described as an umbilical cord for a new positive affirmation of associations. How have your members reacted to this turn of events?**

**MB:** From the EASL’s perspective, the congress is still deeply scientific due to the nature of its subjects and the needs of its members. In 2022, we were still in a testing phase, but over the years, participants have recognised and joined these projects. This year, in Amsterdam, people from our community in the Netherlands came up to me, offering to volunteer for the initiative. Similarly, I often approached members of our community living there and asked them to help me with the projects. As far as liver disease is concerned, 90% of cases in

Europe are preventable. Doctors and HCPs are increasingly aware of their ability to participate in public health policies and how this participation can lead to an evolution in the types of diseases they encounter. One of the facts we invariably revisit is the many emergency departments and hepatology clinics crowded with patients who do not need to be there. We could be preventing these cases by formulating more efficient health policies and releasing preventive information more frequently.

**Thus, this could set a standard in the way you manage patient care in smaller communities...**

**MB:** Yes, absolutely. We need changes in policies and in the way health systems work with comorbid diseases, such as diabetes, for example. Many studies show that the more people are informed, the more they follow preventive measures, leading them to make informed choices about the risks they run. If you look at alcohol-related liver disease, for example, one of the main priorities we are advocating to the European Parliament is to regulate the labelling on alcoholic drinks bottles.

**What were the criteria for selecting the host cities, and how did they make sense in the various stages of this cycle that began in 2022?**

**BH:** The venues and destinations for EASL Congress were, by and large, selected before the pandemic and will take us up to 2028. RFPs for 2029 and beyond will certainly include a request for financial and in-kind CVB support of ‘Love Your Liver’ as a necessary requirement. Beyond a few key activities, we will not dictate how this should be done, each destination has its own local and national ecosystem – we need to work within that.





**How have these awareness-raising and advocacy efforts with political players been clashing with the objections of profit, free market and consumer regulation, etc.?**

**MB:** In Europe, healthcare is not a competence of the Union but of each member state. As a result, there are different legislative frameworks in each country, even though healthcare systems are mostly subsidised and nationalised. I believe that the commercial determinants, such as corporate lobbyists, consultancies and law firms, are a major challenge for public health organisations. Our job is to hold politicians accountable for the policies they are adopting and make them see that our mission is to save lives. In this sense, we are making progress by seeing more and more public health organisations coming together and pooling resources and evidence for different areas. We are talking not only about alcohol, but also about steatotic liver disease, which is the build-up of fat in the liver. The challenges inherent in liver cancer or viral hepatitis, for example, require us to focus on completely different policies. Therefore, from EASL's point of view, it is incredibly complex to tackle each of these areas, as the diseases pose very different challenges.

**One of the things that many associations have been telling us is the lack of time, staff or resources to implement projects beyond the walls of the conference space. From your experience, how can these associations do more with less by combining advocacy, education and community building?**

**BH:** Our role as association leaders is to overcome barriers like stakeholder buy-in and scarcity of time and resources. Our experience at EASL is that this is a relatively easy sell for

all stakeholder groups. Everyone knows that there needs to be a paradigm shift in liver care (and beyond) away from expensive end-stage liver care and towards earlier prevention. The task of getting diverse stakeholder groups on board, including non-medical people, is that much easier because the content matter is more accessible and universal than much of what we work with – the target groups of children, teachers and the general public show immediate and genuine interest and enthusiasm.

Communication strategies need to be very deliberate and we must be very cautious not to alienate our core academic audiences. For this reason, we need to develop entirely new platforms, channels, formats and styles for local and global initiatives.

**What current partnerships do you have with other European associations?**

**MB:** We are part of a number of different formalised networks, in addition to the various organisations that make up our association. For instance, we have a patient synergy network where we work with eleven patient organisations associated with hepatology. We are also members of other associations, such as the **European Cancer Organisation** and the **Noncommunicable Disease Alliance**. Between these relationships, we frequently respond to EU or WHO consultations and produce white papers on policies and guidelines that we consider necessary. Finally, we are creating a European alliance of medical associations with WHO Europe that will advocate for better alcohol policies. This will happen this year.

# What's Killing the **Dancefloor**? Could **Nightclubs** Become a Thing of the **Past**?

The European nightlife scene is going through an unprecedented crisis that, if not addressed, could precipitate its demise. At least that's what **Michael Kill, Executive Director of the UK Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) and Vice-President of the International Nightlife Association (INA)**, tells us in this interview.

The reasons for this decline range from operational pressures and cultural shifts, to regulatory and licensing issues. INA has been focussing on a medium and long-term strategy, that encompasses aspects such as sustainability, education, worker welfare and cultural protection. By instance, they are working with the **WHO** on health programmes, such as hearing conservation, and have just been appointed to the **United Nations** as an advisory body.

Below is a conversation with Michael about the economic, cultural and legislative pressures that are threatening an industry that, like ours, bases its core business on interpersonal relationships and physical interactions.



## **What are the biggest challenges in representing your members?**

I think the hardest part in terms of representation is influencing or micromanaging national legislation from an international trade body. What we are doing is creating stronger environments, policies and ethics so that we can start to not only generate value, but also achieve some parity in terms of standards. Another of the main objectives we face is data – when we talk about our internal strategy or our work with the United Nations, what determines whether we have actually had an impact? That is why we have to start with measurables, analyse the data proposal, and then build a strategic direction that has short-, medium- and long-term objectives. We cannot be held accountable for our results if we cannot gauge where we stand, especially when modelling the early stages of our strategic position.

## **The news about the sector today are rather alarming, with several European nightclubs closing down in an unprecedented crisis. What do you think is the reason for this?**

I think there are a lot of misconceptions here. It is very easy for the media to blame GenZ for not wanting to get socially involved in a well-being proposal. According to a recent study we carried out with 2,500 respondents in the UK, 62% say they have changed their habits because of their financial situation. This lack of income will affect the frequency of

visits, time and expenditure, leading to a decline in the market. Some 72 festivals have closed this year in the UK and we are losing eight pubs a week.

In the UK in particular, we have some challenges with the night-time transport infrastructure and a number of security and policing issues. In addition, our licensing and planning system is very onerous – it is not conducive to growth or investment and is very risk averse. On the other hand, we also have companies that are seeing an increase of around 30 to 40% in operating costs since the pre-pandemic period, leading to the bankruptcy of many of them. By way of example, the increase in alcohol duty means that, from April, there will be an extra burden of between £30,000 and £80,000 on these clubs. Logically, part of this will be passed on to the consumer. The reason we have issued this warning (at the current rate, all the UK's major nightclubs will be extinct by 2029) is to draw the government's attention to the fragility of the sector and the fact that nightclubs are a British institution that needs to be protected.



*We have to understand the evolution of the club sector, to go beyond weekend events and become multifaceted.*



**The nightlife industry is not just about entertainment; it is about identity, community and economics. How have you pledged your commitment from the perspective of social legacy and giving back to the communities?**

As a trade organisation in the UK, we do not just look at clubs and festival bars, we look at the sector as an income system that sustains and operates various professional activities. One of the things we do every year at the NTIA is to present a report on the total revenue we get from the night-time economy. Last year, we generated £136 billion in revenue – that is more than the automotive, more than beauty and more than fashion industries in the UK – which corresponds to 2.04 million people employed, plus a huge amount of people coming through our doors. If you look at the supply chain, whether you are a contractor, a club owner or a drinks supplier, there is a lot of interdependence in the structure and delivery of what you do. Something we have been very clear on is that around £2.4 billion has been spent in the local economy, buying local projects, utilising services and developing those businesses. The impact on the local economy and workforce infrastructure is huge, whether it is hotels, transport, pubs, etc., and we have a far-reaching influence in areas such as foot-fall, catering and tourism. Therefore, we deserve a seat at the table, and we need to make sure we are not seen as a burdensome industry.

**In plain sight, your sector is also often mischaracterised by harassment, violence or substance abuse. How is INA reversing this situation by pushing safety, education and responsibility to the forefront?**

Ultimately, what we would like to achieve with INA is to raise the standards and benchmarks of our activities in order to feel the pulse of the industry and fight for it. As we know, there are a multitude of evolving standards in terms of safety, protocol, duty of care, safeguarding, which require us to move towards an accreditation phase. New medicines and drugs come out every day, so we have to understand and move forward with what that means over time. Whether it is harm reduction and drug testing, or duty of care and safeguarding, there is an evolving plate of requirements that are quite relevant from an accreditation perspective. However, the sector is becoming more professionalised and what we have to do is overcome these stereotypes in order to change the narrative. As a hub, we also need to move towards benchmarking and ensure the communication of some fantastic practices out there. In short, we want to be that conduit of standards and quality to make a difference and be accredited against it.

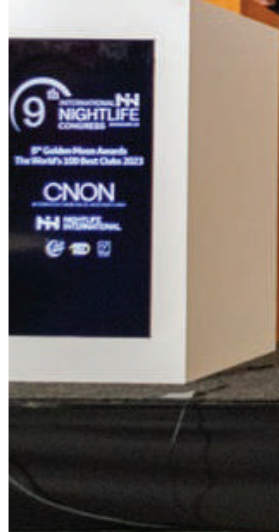
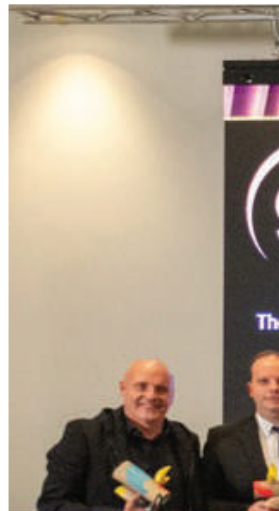


*We have to recognise what we have in hands in terms of ownership and licensing to build a greater value proposition.*

**What can the event and nightlife industries learn from their own difficulties and setbacks in recent times? How can both industries reinvent themselves as an alternative to digital devices and sedentary lifestyles?**

The most important thing is that the next innovations come about through our ability to liaise with different players and explore new avenues and new markets. We have to be multifaceted. We cannot limit ourselves to our target audiences, and so we need to be more innovative in order to appeal to new audiences, be it LGBTQ+, different genres of music, cultural creativity, urban culture, sneaker shows, etc. This means exploring new avenues and broadening the scope of our activities to find out who we are reaching in the community.

At the end of the day we always have to come back to the community. In the old days of UK raves, if someone got hurt or in trouble, the community used to come in and look after them. Nowadays, when something unusual happens, everyone pulls out their smartphones. When we talk about lack of security, sexual offences and drug abuse, what we lack is that sense of community that leads us to a larger movement. Our role is to reconcile the community with what we are doing, so that they can get actively involved and report high-risk situations. It is important to remember that we are the biggest gateway to youth culture, social education and community building in our member countries. We are the ones who can set a direction for the sector through influencers, artists, advocates and unlike trends.







On your website, you published a very interesting article about ‘redefining art through nightlife.’ How do you think art and technology will reshape the nightlife sector?

We have a long way to go when it comes to converging technology and art. There are no two ways about it. The truth is that you can have a great club with excellent staff in a top location, but without people you have nothing. The conjunction between physical and virtual realities is just around the corner. Aspects such as temperature, visual effects, robotics, AR and VR – all of these are beginning to play a more important role in recreational experiences. We see this in clubs like **Printworks**, **Drumsheds**, where their art installations are beyond incredible. It is how quickly we and the market can move that will dictate our understanding of these influences. The most relevant factors I see at the moment are innovations such as two-way streaming and monetisation of hybrid experiences. One of the challenges we have in the UK is the crossover between classic culture and counter-culture. For example, **Fabric** has been collaborating with institutions like the **Tate Gallery**, and British hip-hop has been permeating classical culture with theatre shows. The impact of these two worlds is influencing each other and there are some really interesting collaborations happening.







# Almería: The **Agricultural** Meeting Point with an Eye on **Society**

In a semi-arid, isolated and sparsely populated territory, an unexpected agrarian reform has transformed Almería into an European agricultural powerhouse. In May, **InfoAgro Exhibition** will serve as a flagship for this industry and a launch pad for tech companies and start-ups, as well as promoting social and labour integration of people with disabilities.



**A**lmería is an eminently agricultural area, so much so that 40% of the province's GDP is generated by the agri-food sector feeding more than 500 million Europeans every day. This south-eastern Spanish province has become the Mecca of intensive, organic agriculture and plasticulture in Europe with more than 33,000 hectares of greenhouse area. The use of greenhouses spread rapidly across the Almerian *Poniente*, as drip irrigation, artificial soil utilisation and hydroponics innovated agricultural practices. Overall, it exported a total of 3.8 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables in 2022, according to figures from the Regional Government of Andalusia, with a value of over 2.94 billion euros. During this period, the region also consolidated other fronts such as water saving, quality certification and biological pest control, in pursuit of its broader sustainability and innovation objectives. Conceived since its inception in 2015 as the epicentre for agro-business and placing the farmer at the heart of this activity, **InfoAgro**

**Exhibition**, the Intensive Agricultural Production and Auxiliary Agriculture Industry trade fair has shed light on the region's growth model by bringing together companies, producers, and other stakeholders under the same roof. "It is an event made by and for farmers, with which we aim to respond to the needs that agricultural producers may encounter in their daily work in the field. That is why we at the InfoAgro organisation are always on the side of rural producers, as they are the fundamental element without which the agricultural sector, and the entire economy that moves around it, such as the auxiliary industry, would not exist," says **Jesús García, InfoAgro Exhibition director**.

The event will be held at the **Palacio de Congresos de Aguadulce**, in Roquetas de Mar, from 21 to 23 May 2025, to showcase the latest advancements, ideas and innovative products in the sector, so as to promote a range

of viable solutions for farmers' needs. In this sense, both exhibitors and buyers will be able to find technology-based companies, start-ups and spin-offs, as well as universities, research centres and scientific technology parks relevant to the Smart Agro sector in the Start-up InfoAgro space. "At the 2025 tradeshow, we will have numerous exhibiting companies from the Smart Agro sub-sector, where Big Data, IoT, Artificial Intelligence and precision agriculture solutions are being developed, such as sensors and applications for informed decision-making, or companies with new technologies such as farm management, logistics or water management." Other companies related to food safety in the horticultural sector, as well as post-harvest technologies relevant to the bottling and packaging sector, will also be present. The organisation also expects turnover for this fifth edition of the exhibition to reach 18 million euros.

“ *Almería has more than 32,000 hectares of greenhouses distributed among 12,500 farms and 15,000 farming families, generating more than 110,000 jobs.* ”

In the midst of the transition from traditional agriculture to increasingly technologically advanced cultivation systems, InfoAgro Exhibition has created the **ViaSmart** label to highlight exhibitors' products and services with agricultural applications based on digital technologies. "Digitalisation and new technologies that make precision agriculture a reality in the sector are already here, which is why their presence at the exhibition is essential, given that Almería is one of the most technologically advanced agricultural areas on the planet. In addition, one of the principles of InfoAgro Exhibition is the transfer of knowledge in the form of the latest research, techniques and products, so that Almería's farmers can continue to be pioneers and world leaders in intensive agriculture," adds García. The tradeshow concept has slowly evolved to meet the needs of customers, exhibitors, participants and onlookers, incorporating a series of conferences and presentations into its



programme and diversifying the means of dissemination. Despite all this, the structural model has not changed much, since the agricultural sector was one of the few that did not stop during the pandemic. "It is true that the 2021 edition of InfoAgro Exhibition had to be cancelled due to the restrictions established by the Health Authorities as a result of COVID-19. However, the need for our exhibitors to meet again at the fair was palpable. One of the facets of our show is also that of a social event, serving as a meeting point for the sector over three days so that attendees can keep in close and regular contact," says García.

Finally, the exhibition organisers have renewed their agreement with the **Murgi Association of People with Disabilities** for another edition, in order to include people with disabilities in their workforce and raise awareness of their skills in the sector. "The work they will be doing during the show will be to help both exhibitors and professional visitors with car parking, an arduous task given that at events like this there is a large flow of people and vehicles." The aim of this international exhibition is to respond to employment opportunities not only for professionals working in the agricultural sector, but also for those who make up the socio-economic fabric of the area. As García explains, "This is especially important in cases where there may be problems of social and labour integration, solidarity and wealth generation. We are trying to make society aware that people with disabilities can also play important roles in business events like this." Finally, the exhibition

sector and industries such as agriculture can also play an important role in helping young talents explore new career and training opportunities. "There is a wide range of training available, both at the **University of Almería**, famous for its training programmes dedicated to the agricultural sector, and at the various agricultural schools in the area. In fact, a large percentage of young people entering the labour market end up working, directly or indirectly, in the agricultural sector. So much so that agricultural technicians get jobs even before they finish their studies, given the high demand in the area for this type of professional," concludes García. InfoAgro Exhibition collaborates with both the University of Almería and various agricultural schools, chartering buses so that students can visit the fair during its three-day duration, learn first-hand about the reality of the agricultural sector, and find out about the latest news in the sector at its conference series.





# EU CVB Network: “We are About Connections, Benchmarks and Exchanges!”

Among so many destination alliances and think tanks that bring together DMOs from all around the world, the **EU CVB Network** has stood the test of time by building trusting relationships with European associations. It all started in 2020 when a group of city convention bureaux decided to join forces to share knowledge, experiences and jointly promote their cities. All of these second-tier European cities, with the exception of the Slovenian capital, **Florence, Gothenburg, Ljubljana, Lyon, Porto, Rotterdam, Salzburg** and **Valencia** measure up in terms of size, capacity and knowledge centres. Last but not least, realising that they often competed for the same events, they asked themselves why not use these features to generate a positive impact on the eight cities and value for members and clients alike.



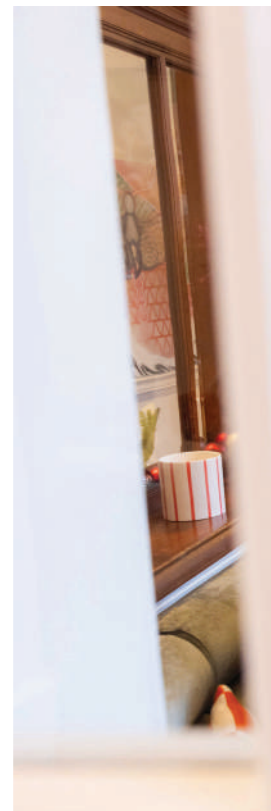
On the following pages, you will find our conversation with **Elisabeth Kassinits-Pfoess, Senior Marketing Manager at Salzburg Convention Bureau**, and **Manuel Ferrís, Head of the Valencia Convention Bureau** about, among other things, where competition ends and collaboration begins in this network.

## How do you think this cooperation network can play in favour of a medium-sized European city in such a competitive international market?

**Manuel Ferrís:** In my opinion, it is not just a question of size. When you think about the whole idea of the network and its international position, it makes sense because we were spending a lot of money doing isolated activities at the same time. Most of our cities have limited budgets compared to other big players in the market, so we have to use it wisely. Instead of organising seven or eight different marketing campaigns, we start with just one and focus on its value and exposure. In terms of costs, we can even improve our own planning by investing that budget in association round tables for all of us, rather than spending the same amount on a single visit to Brussels for B2B meetings. Within this collaborative mindset, Porto will give us a platform to present ourselves as a destinations and network during the ICCA 2025 Congress. It could be interesting for associations to discover a different city in countries represented in their membership, and to rotate their conferences among us.

## How has your destination capitalised on the business partnerships and different knowledge ecosystems of the EU CVB Network?

**Elisabeth Kassinits-Pfoess:** In Salzburg, our viewpoint goes in two directions. In the external view of the network, we try not only to link it to conferences, but also to offer a platform for central figures in our industry. For example, bridging the gap between a professor in Gothenburg and another in Salzburg to strengthen our knowledge transfer and generate new opportunities. During the pandemic, we held many online sessions and seminars with PCOs and European associations, which allowed us to benchmark safety and health protocols between us. On the internal side, I am increasingly convinced that our partners and venues are much more aware of the benefits of the network and the marketing campaigns and actions we have been running in their favour. Bringing in knowledge hubs and universities, as well as the main industrial players, makes it easier to support conferences in our cities. Thus, the value within the destination also grows.



“ *This one-stop-shop element is really interesting as a negotiating factor, as well as the crucial step in agreeing the best destination for an association.* ”

**How deep is this cooperation between you all? Have you ever recommended or even deferred embracing a conference in favour of another partner city?**

**MF:** Imagine that your city, for some fortuitous reason, cannot host a conference, but it can be transferred to another city in the network. Why not share it? Within the network, you can facilitate the search for local agents with the manager of the association you are collaborating with and, at the same time, return business to your members. At some point, this would also be rewarded between the cities involved. For example, when we were working on the **2024 European Poultry Conference** in Valencia, some other cities were considering bidding to host this conference in the future. So, Carlos Garcés Narro, President of the organising association, who is also an ambassador for Valencia, started acting as a representative for the other cities in the network too and introducing professionals from the cities to the right people, knowing how to draw up the bid proposal, etc.

**Can you give me an example within your network of a joint application that has had a major impact on your destinations? What have been the main success stories so far?**

**EKP:** We have not done any joint applications yet, but some associations have already approached us with their three-year RFP, sharing it among the eight destinations. Many of us have already included that in the bidding information, promoting the rest of the partners and linking them to local associations or city DMCs. What we witnessed, is that some cities bidding for the same event ended up winning it in different years. In this way, Valencia would have a specific congress in 2025, while Salzburg would host it in 2027. This is a great advantage for the association because it already has to explain all the details or prerogatives to each of us during the call for applications. That is also why we only accept one city per country and prefer to spread it across different regions of Europe. This is to encourage and facilitate this rotation between us.

“ *The good thing about this network is that when a destination has a good player in a specific topic, say sustainability, this has a positive impact on the whole network.* ”







### How have issues such as sustainability linked the network's management in a joint awareness of projects for the future?

**MF:** Sustainability is on top of the agenda for all of our destinations. Amongst our cities, we have top positions in the Global Destination Sustainability Index, European Green Capitals, Capitals of Smart Tourism, and ISO 20121-certified DMOs and venues, for example. Some also have strong impact and legacy frameworks in place. We all have a commitment to supporting conference organisers in developing more sustainable practices, and we inspire each other to improve. On the other hand, if we want to put this circular economy into practice, we have to incentivise investment. After all, if we want to invest in net-zero emission flights, we still have to get into aeroplanes, otherwise the airlines will go bankrupt. In Europe, sustainability is still a key factor and event planners remain very sensitive to these issues.

### How do you see the role of business events and association conferences within your destination's visitation goals?

**EKP:** Salzburg was already well known as a tourist city. However, we see an increasing annual percentage of events, especially scientific conferences. In that sense, I do not think we will return to online events. We are currently working on a major national project to score the financial value and the non-tangible impact of business events that have bypassed our industry. So, I am pleased to see the appetite for this

segment, even assuming that it will never be bigger than our leisure tourism segment. Knowing that our local sector

resonates abroad also helps us to sustain our added tourism value. We are known in the city for Mozart, for the film *Sound of Music*, for Red Bull, and all these brands and imageries also support us in creating a MICE storytelling.

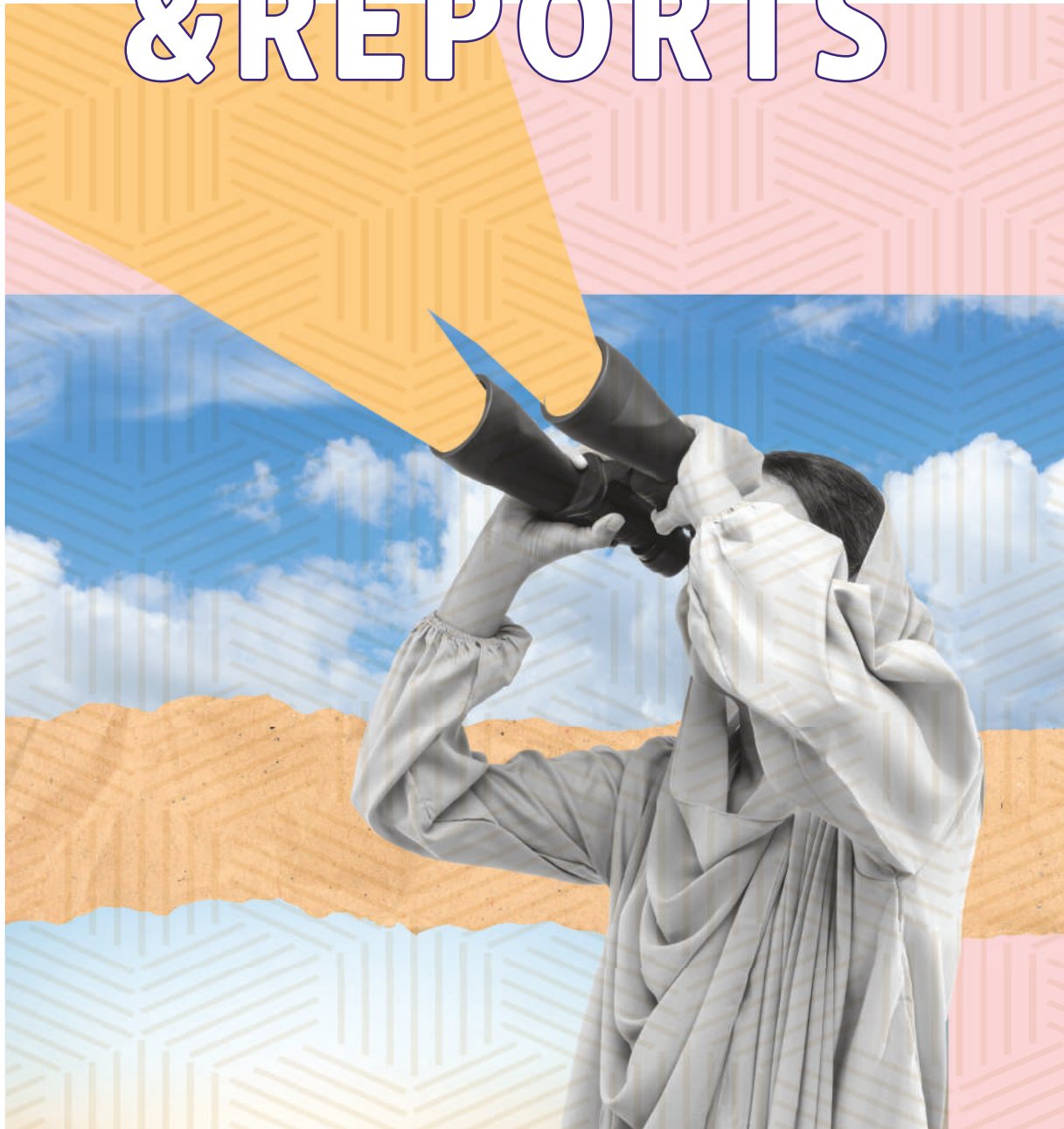
**MF:** For us in Valencia, it is quite the opposite. Valencia was known from the start as a business city and only later developed its tourist profile. Now, this ratio is more balanced due to the impact of leisure tourism. In Spain, it is very difficult to know precisely what the impact of the MICE industry is on our city. We have to make a more accurate assessment of the data we collect, cross-reference different sources, and this usually leads to a leap of faith. For example, within the total number of meetings and events, you have a percentage of regional and national events that have moved outside the city area. We are currently working with an external company to check these reports and benchmark indicators. When we asked for rounded figures, they estimated an annual impact of 500 million euros for the city of Valencia and more than 600,000 delegates a year, well above our initial projection. The economic impact – number of overnight stays, cost of the venue, delegate expenses – is easier to measure. What is more complicated, especially in cities that suffer from a certain phobia of tourism, is proving the positive social impact with tangible figures and data. We cannot ignore the fact that if politicians are responsible for these decisions, it is the citizens who elect them.

In the next four issues of *HQ* this year, we will profile these eight destinations by taking a close look at their events ecosystem. Don't miss out!



# HO DESTINATION

## INTERVIEWS & REPORTS





# Vancouver

## Invictus Games Showcase Inclusive & Accessible Events

JESÚS PARRADO REPORTS

A renowned destination for business events, *HQ* had already set foot on Canadian soil during the **BestCities 2022 Global Forum**, very much focused on sustainability and accessibility. The celebration of the **Invictus Games**, from 8 to 16 February 2025, provided the perfect backdrop to remind a select group of international associations and the media of the city's place on the global events scene. **Destination Vancouver** organised an ideal blend of urban energy, neuroscience excellence, and inclusivity. This fam trip showcased its top-tier conference venues, academic leadership at **University of British Columbia (UBC)**, and the inspiring spirit of the Invictus Games, highlighting why the city is a prime destination for global events.

The excitement about the Invictus Games was mounting long before we landed in Vancouver. At Amsterdam airport, groups of people wearing their teams' jerseys filled the terminal, spreading their energy and enthusiasm through lively conversations. As my first visit to Canada, it was an unexpected but fitting introduction to an event built on resilience and community.

Once in Vancouver, that energy turned into electricity in the air. The city was in full preparation mode, welcoming delegations from all over the world and fine-tuning the last details to host one of the most anticipated international events of the year. Our first night took place at the **Pan Pacific Vancouver**, a waterfront hotel perfectly connected to the **Vancouver Convention Centre (VCC)**.

As we explored Vancouver's venues, research institutions and cultural sites, the links between business, academia and sustainability became clear. From discussions with renowned academics from the UBC to surveying the city's ability to host a seamless international sporting event, this experience has reinforced why the Canadian city remains a strong contender for the world's most innovative conferences.

### A Science and Research Hub

As a key player in Vancouver's science and research ecosystem, we could not miss

a visit to the UBC. A strategic partner in attracting international conferences, our group discovered much more than impressive facilities on this visit.

The culminating point was a meeting with **Dr. Chris Honey**, an eminent neurosurgeon from **Vancouver General Hospital and Head of Neurosciences** at UBC. For our group, which included medical association executives from various disciplines, this first-hand interaction with one of Vancouver's prestigious ambassadors was a precious opportunity to understand how academic expertise and engagement has been directly influencing the selection of meeting destinations.

During our visit, Dr Honey gifted our group with copies of his book, *The Tenth Nerve*, which brings the complexity of neurosurgery to life through real-life cases that challenge the limits of modern medicine. As we explored UBC's robotic-assisted stroke recovery labs, the connection between cutting-edge research and conference appeal quickly became evident. For international medical and scientific associations, access to local pioneers like Dr Honey adds value.

Axes like UBC's research hubs thrive alongside venues like the VCC, allowing the city to balance large-scale event capabilities with convenient access and environmental responsibility. As **Claire Foster, Senior Business Development Manager** at the VCC, mentioned, the venue



was designed for impact and sustainability. The six-acre living roof, seawater heating system and zero-waste policies are more than symbolic gestures.

VCC's waterfront setting, with stunning views and 466,500 square feet of flexible event space, makes it an attractive and logistically adaptable venue. By embedding environmental responsibility into its operations, Vancouver ensures that organisations looking for ESG-aligned conference destinations find a reliable partner to offer responsible, carbon-neutral events.

### Blending Business and Culture

The impact of a destination extends beyond the conference rooms, shaping how participants connect with its geographical space. Vancouver perfectly integrates local culture and the raw nature of British Columbia to create lasting memories and meaningful experiences for the participants of any event.



event design. With the 2025 Invictus Games in Canada, the first international multi-sport event to fully integrate local First Nations hosts, Vancouver is positioning itself at the forefront of accessibility and cultural representation in event planning.

The following day, we watched a wheelchair basketball match between Ukraine's Unconquered Team and teams from the UK and Colombia. The game demonstrated skill and competitive spirit, reinforcing that accessibility in sports and events should be about removing barriers for everyone.

On my last day in Vancouver, I had the opportunity to get to know the city at my own pace, with the **Destination Vancouver Experience Pass** in hand. At **FlyOver Canada**, I was immersed in a flight simulation that showed off the country's vast landscapes. A walk across the **Capilano Suspension Bridge Park** offered a different perspective, where the dense rainforest at high altitude towered over the landscape and urban lifestyle of the Canadian city. The Vancouver Art Gallery added another cultural layer to the city's diverse narrative and identity, featuring works that showcased Canada's indigenous and contemporary artists. The Experience Pass invites delegates to enjoy this beautiful destination beyond the conference room, ensuring a deeper insight into the destination and the surrounding ecosystems in which they participate.

For conference planners, the Games served as a real-time case study of how event infrastructure, inclusivity and social impact can work together.

A visit to **Granville Island** revealed a different side of Vancouver's event potential. The island's public market, artisan workshops, and waterfront venues offer planners an authentic environment that is perfectly connected to the surrounding space. Over a lunchtime discussion, our group reflected on how Vancouver's mix of cultural spaces, waterfront dining, and local artisan markets could enhance delegate engagement and create more immersive event experiences.

The trip also underscored Vancouver's leadership in accessible and inclusive experiences, directly connecting to the Invictus Games' spirit. At **Grouse Mountain**, our group met representatives from **Vancouver Adaptive Snow Sports**, an organisation dedicated to making winter sports accessible to all. Seeing adaptive skiing in action gave the group a first-hand understanding of the transformative power of inclusive sports, reinforcing the conceptual impact of events like the Invictus Games.

Through these experiences, the city demonstrated that its infrastructure and its ability to imagine events go beyond the formal

agenda, encouraging delegates to deepen their relationship with partners, venues and local values.

### **A Live Demonstration of Vancouver's Inclusive Event Strategy**

The Opening Ceremony at **BC Place Stadium** was a powerful showcase of the city's ability to host high-profile international events with purpose. The ceremony featured a speech from **Prince Harry**, founder of the Invictus Games, emphasising the event's mission to empower wounded, injured, and sick service personnel through sport. He highlighted the participants' resilience, determination, and camaraderie, reinforcing the Games' focus on abilities rather than limitations. His words served as a powerful reminder of how competition and community can help veterans rebuild confidence, redefine their capabilities, and inspire audiences worldwide.

The emphasis on adaptive sport, mental health awareness and community building reflects a shift in the industry towards more inclusive



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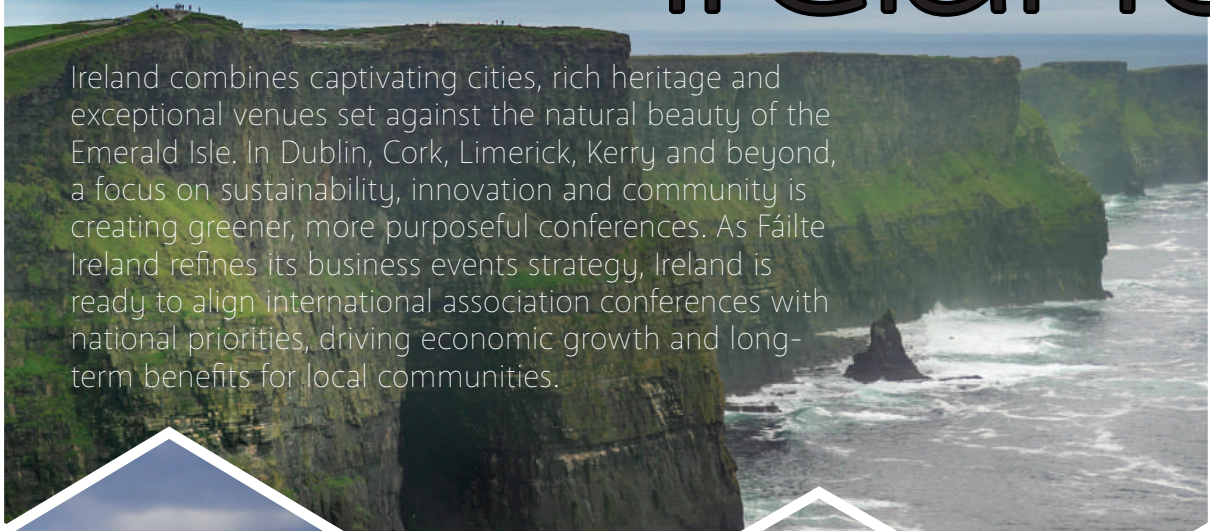


FRANKFURT 20-22 MAY 2025

# Explore Ireland

A destination report by  
Jesús Guerrero Chacón

Ireland combines captivating cities, rich heritage and exceptional venues set against the natural beauty of the Emerald Isle. In Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Kerry and beyond, a focus on sustainability, innovation and community is creating greener, more purposeful conferences. As Fáilte Ireland refines its business events strategy, Ireland is ready to align international association conferences with national priorities, driving economic growth and long-term benefits for local communities.





# BestCities

Global Forum  
2025 in Dublin

As international association delegates, meeting planners, destinations and other stakeholders prepared to land in Dublin for the **BestCities Global Forum 2025** and the 25th-anniversary celebration of the organisation, Storm Eowyn had other plans. One of the most severe weather events in recent years swept across Ireland, disrupting flights, halting transport, and forcing last-minute changes to travel plans. In response, **BestCities**, **Fáilte Ireland** (the National Tourism Development Authority), and the **Dublin Convention Bureau** worked swiftly behind the scenes, rebooking flights, arranging extended accommodation, and ensuring that delegates could travel safely while still experiencing the forum's programme.

The storm provided an unexpected yet fitting real-time test for the themes explored in this *HQ* edition on risk and crisis management. As extreme weather events become increasingly frequent, destinations and event organisers must be prepared to adapt swiftly. The forum became a live demonstration of how collaboration between industry stakeholders can ensure business events remain resilient in the face of sudden disruption. The emphasis on adaptability and partnership was at the core of the forum's theme, "**Creative Collaborations: Innovating for Greater Communities.**" Despite the initial challenges, the Global Forum stayed firmly on course, proving that agility and teamwork are key in safeguarding the success of international meetings. Over three days, association executives and media explored how technology is shaping the future of our industry and how associations can better prepare for evolving challenges.

The **Association Forum**, a BestCities' signature session, brought together leading figures in the sector, with discussions led by **Patrick Delaney, Managing Partner at SoolNua**, a global thought leader in the meetings industry and a perfect moderator to showcase Irish language and culture to attendees. Key themes included Risk Management, AI & Innovation, Sponsorship & Funding Models, Sustainability, and Impact Measurement.

## Artificial Intelligence: From Disruption to Integration

AI has already transformed how many associations operate, but what comes next for those who have embraced this technology, and what will happen to those who are still reluctant? **Mark Kelly, Founder of AI Ireland**, led a deep dive into how AI is shifting from a tool to an active partner in event management. His session, '**From Tools to Partners: How AI Agents are Revolutionising Business,**' explored real-world applications, from automated content summarisation to personalised networking assistants anticipating attendees' interests before they even arrive at an event.

In another session, '**Practical AI Tips to Escape Your Daily Grind,**' **Maryrose Lyons, Founder of the AI Institute**, provided hands-on strategies for working smarter with AI, introducing small language models, AI-powered knowledge bases, and time-saving digital tools that streamline daily operations.

Beyond functionality, the discussions tackled ethical concerns, including data security, algorithmic bias, and the balance between AI automation and human interaction. Delegates, including the media representatives, were encouraged to integrate AI thoughtfully, ensuring it enhances rather than replaces human connection within associations.



## Designing Events for Neurodivergent Attendees

Accessibility was another central theme, with **Adam Harris, CEO of As I Am** (Ireland's national autism charity), sharing Dublin's ambitious goal of becoming the world's first autism-friendly capital by 2027. His session explored how business events can be more inclusive, beyond physical accessibility, by considering sensory experiences, event navigation, and staff training.

Harris also previewed the **Autism Europe Congress 2025**, the first edition led by an autistic-run organisation. This milestone represents a significant shift in event design, placing accessibility at the core rather than treating it as an afterthought.

## Overcoming Barriers Beyond the Event Space

In “**No Limbs, No Limits**”, activist and journalist **Joanne O’Riordan**, one of the world’s few people born with tetra-amelia syndrome, delivered a compelling session on the need for universal design in cities, event venues, and public spaces. A passionate sports journalist and Paralympic commentator, O’Riordan highlighted how sports can open doors, challenge perceptions, and build a sense of belonging.

Her advocacy resonated with the themes explored by **Tom Parsons, CEO of the Gaelic Players Association (GPA)**. In his session, Parsons demonstrated how Gaelic sports foster deep-rooted community engagement, offering members a competitive arena and a lifelong network of mentorship, support, and identity.

Both sessions emphasised a common message: sports are more than just games. They are means to resilience, opportunities and inclusion. Both speakers showed how sport breaks down barriers, creates leadership opportunities, and instils pride and purpose.

This discussion on the power of sport as a tool for inclusion and resilience runs throughout this edition of *HQ*. For more on this theme, read our features on **ISAPA 2025 in Kerry, Ireland (page 32)**, and the **Invictus Games in Vancouver, Canada (page 34)**, where sports continue to shape communities and drive lasting impact.

This theme extended beyond the sessions themselves. Forum attendees participated in a community impact initiative with the **Solas Project**, a Dublin-based programme that empowers young people through education, sport, and mentorship.

## Sustainability and Regenerative Events

Sustainability remains at the forefront of association and destination priorities. **Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker at the Global Destination Sustainability Movement**, urged attendees to move beyond carbon neutrality and consider how events can create positive environmental and social impact. His session challenged associations to rethink their approach and embrace sustainability as an integral part of event strategy.

## ICCA Masterclass: Strengthening Impact Through Collaboration

Following the forum, the **ICCA Association Impact Masterclass** added another layer of strategic learning for international associations. Hosted in Dublin and supported by BestCities Global Alliance and the Dublin Convention Bureau, the masterclass convened 14 senior association executives and 16 destination partners to explore legacy-building, UN SDGs alignment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Co-led by **Genevieve Leclerc (MEET4IMPACT)** and **Gary Grimmer (GainingEdge)**, the masterclass focused on how associations can align their events with long-term impact strategies rather than viewing them as isolated experiences.



## Looking Ahead:

### Guadalajara Prepares for 2026

As the forum wrapped up, all eyes turned to the next host city: **Guadalajara, Mexico**, which will welcome **BestCities Global Forum 2026**. With its rich cultural heritage, growing meetings industry, and commitment to innovation, Guadalajara is set to showcase Latin America's influence in global business events.

Stay tuned for an upcoming *HQ* interview, where we will explore how Guadalajara is preparing for its turn in the spotlight and what international associations can expect from next year's edition.



# Dublin

## A City Reinvented for Business Events

Dublin's reputation as a world-class destination for business events has been steadily rising in recent years. Ranked 9<sup>th</sup> globally in the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** list, Dublin hosted 104 international meetings in 2023, solidifying its position among the top global conference destinations. Recognised as the **2024 European Capital of Smart Tourism**, the city has undergone a strategic transformation, driven by innovation, sustainability, and accessibility. While Ireland has long been known for its warm hospitality, Dublin's success lies in integrating that spirit of welcome into its business events strategy, creating a destination that thrives on community, collaboration, and meaningful engagement.

As the host city of the **BestCities Global Forum 2025** and the **ICCA Association Impact Masterclass**, Dublin provided a compelling live case study of how a destination can evolve to meet the changing needs of international associations, offering walkable event infrastructure, a citizen-first approach to tourism and business events, and a strong connection to local culture and heritage. Speaking from one of Dublin's newest business events venues, the **Dublin Royal Convention Centre**, **Sam Johnston, Manager of Dublin Convention Bureau**, welcomed delegates with an introduction to the city's evolving role in global business events. More than just a host city, Dublin has become a model for how destinations can reinvent themselves.



### A Smart Tourism Strategy

Speaking at the BestCities Global Forum, **Barry Rogers, Head of Dublin City Tourism Unit**, outlined the city's transformation as part of its 2024 European Capital of Smart Tourism title. Awarded to cities that excel in sustainability, accessibility, digital innovation, and cultural heritage, Dublin's recognition marked a turning point. The capital's initial bid in 2022 fell short of Bordeaux, with feedback from the European Commission highlighting gaps in sustainability and accessibility. Rather than seeing this as a setback, Dublin took it as an opportunity for strategic reinvention. Rogers explained how the city undertook a deep analysis of its priorities, defining the kind of destination it wanted to become, a process that has since led to remarkable progress. Dublin has positioned itself as a leader in inclusive, sustainable, and smart tourism: committing to becoming the world's first autism-friendly capital by 2027, signing the **Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism**, and embracing digital innovation through initiatives like an AI-powered itinerary tool that personalises visitor experiences.

These initiatives are about creating a better city for visitors, be they business travellers or tourists, without leaving the locals behind. Dublin's citizen-first model prioritises the community's well-being, ensuring that business events add value beyond the conference room and leave a tangible legacy in the capital.





### Dublin's Business Events Infrastructure & Delegate Experience

Before the Forum officially began, the Dublin Convention Bureau organised a site inspection of the **Convention Centre Dublin (CCD)**. Recognised as the world's first carbon-neutral convention centre and Ireland's world-class, purpose-built international conference venue, the CCD has played a defining role in Dublin's rise as a top-tier business events destination. Located in Spencer Dock, overlooking the River Liffey, the venue is designed with sustainability at its core, setting the benchmark for European green meetings. It has become the stage for high-profile international congresses, EU summits, and industry-defining events, reinforcing Dublin's status as a knowledge-driven host city. Its direct connection to Dublin Airport makes it a highly accessible choice for international events.

Meanwhile, the Dublin Royal Convention Centre represents the new wave of venue

development in the city. Unveiled in 2022, this modern conference space is integrated within a larger complex, including the 234-bedroom Radisson Blu hotel, allowing for seamless event experiences. However, events in Dublin go beyond formal venues like the CCD or the Royal Convention Centre. Over the course of the Forum, delegates experienced the city through its heritage, sports, and cultural landmarks, reinforcing how Dublin's event strategy is deeply intertwined with its identity. The social programme immersed attendees in Dublin's cultural and culinary scene, allowing delegates to sample local beers at the **Drury Buildings** and local cuisine at **Fire Restaurant**. Visits to **Trinity College's** Long Room Library offered a glimpse into Ireland's literary heritage, with the *Book of Kells*, a 9th-century illuminated manuscript, as the highlight. Meanwhile, the **EPIC Museum** (The Irish Emigration Museum) told the story of Irish emigrants who left an indelible mark on politics, science, and the arts worldwide. In **Dublin Castle**, delegates had the opportunity to explore the historic halls and learn about Irish

history before being treated to a traditional music performance.

At **Croke Park**, home of Gaelic sports, the media covering the forum gained insight into how these national sports are more than just a pastime; they are a way for Irish people to protect their national identity and engage with their community. Unlike most elite sports, Gaelic games remain amateur, with players deeply embedded in their local communities. This spirit of belonging and shared purpose is reflected in Ireland's business events culture, where collaboration and inclusivity define the industry's approach.

The Forum ended at one of Dublin's most recognisable landmarks, the **Guinness Storehouse**. As destinations around the world rethink their tourism and events strategies, Dublin provides a case study in resilience, reinvention and the power of community-driven hospitality.



# Cork

## A City for Business and Human Connections

Cork has long been a city that values connections between industry and academia, global business and local communities. As Ireland's second-largest city, it boasts a rich history alongside a bright present and future, driven by forward-thinking innovation. With a thriving life sciences sector, a growing technology hub, and a strong culture of sustainability and community involvement, Cork continues to strengthen its position as a leading destination for business and research.

At the **English Market**, which has been at the heart of Cork's community for centuries, I met **Evelyn O'Sullivan, Manager of the Cork Convention Bureau**. Over a coffee break, she described how the destination's business strengths, academic expertise and commitment to long-term event legacies create the right conditions for associations looking to make a lasting impact. As we discussed, it became clear that Cork's local small and medium-sized businesses and projects, as well as larger industry, academia, and cultural centres, are all working together to create unique experiences for international delegates.



### An Irish City Defined by Innovation and Industry

Cork has become a hub for some of the world's most influential companies, from Apple and Siemens to Amazon, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. Their European headquarters in the city have created an ecosystem where global business and cutting-edge innovation thrive. This concentration of industry expertise has made Cork a natural choice for hosting sector-focused conferences. The city's academic strength further enhances its appeal as a knowledge-based event destination. **University College Cork (UCC)**, a leader in research in various areas such as nanotechnology, food science and pharmaceuticals, plays a key role in attracting international scientific and medical congresses. In 2025, Cork will welcome 1,500 astrophysics and space research experts for the **European Astronomical Society's Annual Meeting**, demonstrating how the city's research credentials contribute to its growing profile in the global conference landscape.

The **Cork Ambassadors Programme**, led by the Cork Convention Bureau, is at the heart of

this collaboration between local business and academia with international meeting planners. This initiative engages local experts to promote the city as a destination, using their connections in the industry to secure international meetings that align with Cork's key sectors.

### Sustainability and Community Initiatives

As we walked through the **English Market**, Evelyn explained how Cork is aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030 and how conference venues, hotels, and businesses are integrating sustainability into their operations. She introduced me to one of the most innovative examples: the **Cork Rooftop Farm**, an urban farming project perched atop a city-centre building. This initiative supplies fresh, locally grown produce to Cork's kitchens, whether for home cooks, restaurants, hotels, or event catering, demonstrating how sustainability can be seamlessly woven into the delegate experience.

An evening stroll through the Victorian Quarter (VQ) with **Operation Director, Katherine**



**Fitzpatrick**, for the quarter, made it clear that Cork's commitment to sustainability is not just about the environment but also about revitalising its urban spaces and strengthening its business community. The VQ is a dynamic regeneration project that aims to position itself as Ireland's most vibrant, sustainable and well-connected district. Strategically located within walking distance of the city centre and railway station, the VQ benefits from strong transport links, making it an attractive location for residents and visitors. A Board of Directors leads the project, which comprises local business owners, from boutique hotels and restaurants to bars and a film festival, all working towards a shared vision of creating a thriving district that promotes independent business, culture, and sustainability.

Beyond the public realm improvements and destination development, the VQ is aiming to become Ireland's leading climate-neutral business district. The area has committed to net-zero targets and has partnered with **Munster Technological University's Clean Technology Centre** to help local businesses reduce carbon emissions and integrate green infrastructure.

The transformation of the VQ is also in line with Cork's broader strategy for community-centric business events. The district's growth fosters collaboration between local businesses, civic organisations and cultural institutions, making it a model for how urban regeneration and economic development can go hand in hand. Katherine described the VQ's long-term ambitions, from transforming the streets to creating a creative hub for local artists and performers, with the VQ at the heart of several initiatives. For business events looking to incorporate corporate social responsibility elements, Cork presents real opportunities to contribute to projects with a tangible impact. One of the most inspiring initiatives Katherine shared was **Sanctuary Runners**, a non-profit movement that started in Cork and has now expanded nationally. Supported by the **Cork Convention Bureau**, the initiative embodies its own 'City of Welcomes' ethos by bringing together Irish residents, international visitors, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees through community running events. By using sport as a tool for inclusion, Sanctuary Runners reinforces Cork's reputation as a city that values human connection. This commitment to social inclusion extends to the **Cork Migrant Centre**, based at **Nano Nagle Place**. More than a museum and heritage centre, it provides education and professional development programmes for



refugees and asylum seekers, offering pathways toward integration and employment.

### Evolving Business Events Infrastructure

Cork's venues balance heritage and modernity, offering spaces for intimate gatherings and large-scale conferences. Currently, the largest conference venues in the city are **Cork City Hall** and the **UCC**, both of which regularly host high-profile academic and industry events. The City Hall can accommodate up to 900 delegates, making it one of the city's premier conference venues. Meanwhile, the UCC provides state-of-the-art facilities in a prestigious academic environment. Looking ahead, Cork is preparing to welcome even larger conferences by developing a new convention centre, a project that will significantly expand the city's capacity for international events.

The hotel landscape is also evolving to meet the needs of international delegates, combining contemporary design with Cork's distinctive character. The **River Lee Hotel**, with its dedicated event spaces and riverside views, provides a

sophisticated venue for corporate gatherings, while **Moxy Cork** and **Residence Inn by Marriott** offer a modern and flexible approach to business travel.

Other properties, such as the **Imperial**, **Clayton** and **Maldron** hotels, offer convenient access to meeting spaces, further expanding the city's hospitality offering. The recently opened **Premier Inn Cork**, one of the largest hotels in the city, adds further capacity for large-scale events.

*"Different. Friendly. Proud. Cultural. Progressive. Quirky. Charming. These are some of the words frequently used by visitors to describe Cork, Ireland's compact second city, beautifully located on the southern coast between fertile farmlands and bountiful sea. A University City, with a centuries-old heritage of learning and progress at its core, and a love of food and the arts in its soul, Cork is a very special place which will certainly have your delegates talking long after your event is over. Come meet in Cork and get away from "business as usual".*

*Evelyn O'Sullivan, Manager of the Cork Convention Bureau*



# Limerick

Sports Culture  
Driving  
World-Class Events

Limerick is rethinking the way business and sport connect. At the heart of this approach is the **Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau**, the only convention bureau in Ireland to unite both sectors under one strategy, fostering collaboration between industry, academia and local government.

During *HQ's* visit, the bureau's **Business Development Executive, Danielle Devaney**, highlighted how this collaboration is transforming the region's events landscape. From the **University of Limerick (UL) Sport Campus** to the iconic **Thomond Park**, Limerick's ability to host world-class tournaments and conferences is driven by strategic investment, sustainability and strong community links. The region's global reputation will be further enhanced when Limerick hosts the **Ryder Cup 2027 at Adare Manor**, bringing the world's best golfers to Ireland for the iconic biennial contest between Europe and the United States.

## Collaboration for Global Events

*HQ* was on site for the official press launch of the **2025 Atlantic Youth Touch Cup** at the UL Sport, where over 700 athletes from Europe, the Americas, Africa, and China will compete in Ireland's largest-ever international Touch Rugby tournament. The competition, set for July 31 to August 3, 2025, is another major milestone for the city following the success of the **2023 Tag Rugby World Cup** in Limerick.

The press launch brought together key stakeholders including **John Moran, Mayor of Limerick**, **Brendan Foley, President of Munster Rugby**, **Michael Abromowitz, Director of the Federation of International Touch (FIT)**, and **Chris Simon, FIT's Chief Operating Officer**. Also present was **Karen Ronan, General Manager of the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau**, who emphasised the economic and reputational impact of hosting such an event in the region. "With hundreds of players, coaches, and supporters expected, local businesses will benefit from increased visitor numbers, especially in hospitality and tourism. We are proud to support the University of Limerick in

bringing another major European championship to the Shannon area," Karen said.

Limerick's ability to attract global events is no coincidence. The UL is home to Europe's largest all-weather sports facility, making it a premier destination for world and European championships in multiple disciplines. UL's state-of-the-art facilities, combined with the support of regional stakeholders including **Fáilte Ireland, Limerick City** and **County Council**, and the Bureau, ensure a perfect experience for event organisers.

Following our visit to UL, we headed to Thomond Park, home to Munster Rugby, which further amplifies Limerick's status as a sports-driven city. While best known for its rugby matches, the stadium has evolved into a multi-purpose venue capable of hosting gala dinners, corporate events, and conferences of up to 700 delegates. For organisers seeking a venue that inspires, few locations offer the same level of sporting legacy

and modern event infrastructure as Thomond Park.

## Sustainability and Vision

A strong commitment to sustainability defines Limerick's growth, with a focus on environmentally responsible events and urban regeneration. The **Strand Hotel** reflects this with its **Green Meetings Initiative**, supporting environmental goals through partnerships with organisations like **Hometree**. **Maria O'Gorman Skelly, Director of Sales and Marketing** at the Strand, explained: "For every conference with over 100 attendees, we plant a native Irish tree." This initiative aligns with broader sustainability efforts, including the Opera Square development, a landmark urban regeneration project reshaping Limerick's city centre. This project combines heritage restoration with cutting-edge green design, featuring energy-efficient buildings, carbon-neutral workspaces, and pedestrian-friendly public spaces. Initiatives like the **Sustainable Tourism Network**, which





hosted an event during my visit, further highlight the region’s dedication to creating impactful, future-focused strategies for tourism and events.

### Saint Mary’s Cathedral: A Unique Venue Rich in History

As part of our visit, we explored **Saint Mary’s Cathedral**, one of Ireland’s most remarkable venues. This 12th-century landmark offers something unique for business events: the opportunity to host gala dinners in a cathedral. Steeped in history, St Mary’s combines medieval grandeur with modern event facilities to create an unforgettable setting for high-profile gatherings. With a recent investment from Fáilte Ireland, the venue is enhancing its facilities to ensure it remains a top choice for exclusive events that combine heritage and atmosphere.



Beyond its historical and architectural significance, the cathedral celebrates the women who have shaped Irish history – from Catherine O’Brien, whose intricate stained glass windows adorn the building, to Lady Victoria Brady, a pioneering aviator who defied convention. Saint Mary’s stands as a tribute to women who paved the way and left a lasting impact. This legacy of strong, pioneering women continues to this day, such as Karen Ronan, whose recent recognition at the **Network Ireland Businesswoman of the Year Awards** highlights her commitment to diversity and inclusion in business events. Network Ireland Limerick, where she plays a leading role, supports women across sectors, from entrepreneurs to public leaders, through mentorship, networking, and professional development initiatives.



Limerick’s connection between heritage and innovation extends to **No. 1 Pery Square**, the boutique hotel I stayed in during my visit. Situated in the Georgian Quarter, this Michelin Key-awarded property blends historical architecture with modern luxury. The hotel’s farm-to-fork philosophy and commitment to sustainability reflect the city’s values, creating a unique experience for delegates and visitors alike.

“Limerick and the wider Shannon Region offer an exceptional blend of world-class facilities, rich heritage, and vibrant culture, making it a premier destination for international business and sports tourism. With state-of-the-art venues, seamless connectivity, and a welcoming community, the region provides the perfect backdrop for events that inspire, connect, and leave a lasting impact. At the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau, we are proud to support and promote this unique destination on the global stage.”

**Karen Ronan, General Manager Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau**



# Kerry

## Sustainability, Sports, and Business Events

Kerry has moved beyond its reputation as a scenic tourist retreat to become a leader in sustainable business events, inclusive sporting initiatives and world-class hospitality. During my recent visit, **Fiona O'Donoghue**, responsible for **Lead Conversion** at **Kerry Convention Bureau**, explained how the region is more than just about business and hosting conferences; it is about creating experiences that inspire, connect and leave a lasting impact. Whether in Killarney, Tralee or the smaller MICE ready destinations of Kenmare, Dingle and Sneem, Kerry's approach is defined by its ability to combine natural beauty with purposeful meeting programmes.

“Nestled on the edge of the Atlantic and serving as the gateway to Europe, Kerry welcomes event planners and attendees to a destination rich in culture, history, and modern vibrancy. Known for its warm hospitality and breathtaking landscapes, Kerry offers a retreat from the bustle of large cities, inspiring innovative thought and fostering meaningful connections.

Kerry's commitment to sustainability sets it apart as a premier location for association events. Ranked **#19 in the Global Destination Sustainability Index**, Kerry has maintained a Top 20 position since 2019, reflecting its ongoing dedication to sustainable practices that benefit both the environment and the business events sector.

In Kerry, event planners will find world-class venues and dedicated industry partners eager to collaborate. With a strong emphasis on community-led initiatives and environmental protection, Kerry ensures that every event is not just memorable, but impactful.”

**Becky Hargrove, Manager of the Kerry Convention Bureau**

### Killarney: A Destination Integrating Nature, Hospitality, and Sustainability

Surrounded by lakes and mountains and adjacent to Killarney National Park, Ireland's first established national park, Killarney has long understood the importance of preserving its natural environment. The **Killarney Coffee Cup Project** is a perfect example of this, making Killarney Ireland's first town to eliminate single-use coffee cups through a collaborative initiative between hotels, cafés, and local businesses. This project is part of a broader sustainability commitment led by **Kerry Convention Bureau**, **Kerry County Council** and **Kerry Tourism Industry Federation** ensuring that tourism and business events generate a lasting positive impact.

HQ's first stop in Killarney was the historic **Great Southern Killarney**, a landmark Victorian hotel overlooking the town's green spaces, and undergoing renovations to achieve five-star status by 2026. Located just steps from the train station, the hotel can even arrange private train charters with red-carpet arrivals for delegates. Its event centre, accommodating up to 1,000 attendees, is a favourite for association congresses and corporate meetings. One of its standout features is the flexibility of its conference centre, which will continue to offer meeting space rentals under a four-star classification, even as the hotel transitions to

five-star status. This unique model responds to the needs of specific associations and industries that face restrictions on hosting events in five-star properties due to budget constraints, ethical guidelines, or compliance with industry regulations.

Killarney's accommodation is second to none in Ireland and boasts the highest concentration of four and five-star hotels in the country. Our visit continued at the **Killarney Plaza Hotel & Spa**, which won **Ireland's Hotel Casual Dining Experience** at the **2025 Gold Medal Awards**. The hotel's **Tan Yard Restaurant**, ranked number one on TripAdvisor, and **Café du Parc** sourcing fresh ingredients from the hotel-owned **Killarney Urban Farm**.

The **Europe Hotel & Resort**, overlooking Lough Léin and Ireland's highest mountains, combines luxury, a world-class convention centre and sustainability with a private pier for networking cruises and farm-to-table dining from the property's own farm. The **Global Economic Summit** will return to this hotel in May 2025 for the second year running, bringing together 400 international leaders to discuss the future of trade, digital transformation, and sustainability. The **Brehon Hotel**, with its flexible meeting spaces and focus on wellness-driven hospitality, integrates sustainability into its operations as part of the **Fáilte Ireland Climate Action Programme**, designed to support businesses to







reduce costs, improve efficiency and lower their environmental impact.

One of the crown jewels of Killarney's event infrastructure is the **Killarney Convention Centre (KCC)**, Ireland's second largest and one of the most versatile conference and entertainment venues. With a capacity of over 2,500 guests, KCC hosts everything from international conferences and large-scale exhibitions to live performances and gala events. The venue's flexibility in event space configuration, advanced AV technology, and seamless integration with the **Gleneagle Hotel**, make it a go-to choice for event organisers seeking scale without sacrificing convenience.

Killarney is also home to unique event venues that provide an alternative to traditional conference settings. The **Killarney Brewing & Distilling Company** has quickly become a sought-after space for corporate groups, offering private whiskey and beer tastings, rooftop receptions with national park views, and full buyouts for large-scale events. Sustainability is again central to its operations, with spent grain from the brewing process repurposed for local farms. **Muckross Traditional Farms** provides an entirely different meeting experience, where groups can engage in heritage-based activities, from artisan crafts to farm-to-table dining in a historic farm or schoolhouse setting. These venues allow organisers to create highly curated programmes that balance business, sustainability, and cultural engagement.

### Tralee's Role in Driving Inclusion and Innovation in Events

While Killarney's event offering revolves around heritage, hospitality and nature, Tralee has taken a different route, positioning itself as a hub for research-driven conferences and inclusive sporting initiatives. The **Kerry Sports Academy at Munster Technological University (MTU)** plays a key role in advancing accessibility in sports. It will be the host venue for **ISAPA 2025, the International Symposium on Adapted Physical**



**Activity.** This event will bring over 600 delegates worldwide, including academics, policymakers, and athletes, to discuss the future of inclusion in sports. It will also feature the **World's Largest Disability Sports Exhibition**, showcasing adaptive sports technologies and rehabilitation tools. Under the leadership of **Catherine Carty, UNESCO Chair Manager at MTU**, the academy is a pioneer in using sport as a tool for social impact. *(Read HQ's exclusive interview with Catherine Carty and Becky Hargrove, on our website for more insights.)*

Another distinctive venue in Tralee is **Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre of Ireland**. With a 350-seat auditorium, it has hosted TEDx events, corporate launches, and cultural performances while maintaining its status as Ireland's only green-certified theatre. The venue's commitment to sustainable practices, including zero waste-to-landfill policies, makes it a compelling option for events that align with environmental and social responsibility goals.

Tralee's hospitality sector is also driving sustainability efforts, with several hotels setting new standards for ethical hospitality, environmental responsibility, and community engagement. The **Meadowlands Hotel** has made history as Kerry's first B Corp-certified hotel, a distinction that reflects its commitment to sustainable business practices, social impact, and responsible tourism.

The **Ashe Hotel**, a contemporary boutique property in the heart of Tralee, has also been recognised for its dedication to sustainability. A finalist in the **2024 Irish Accommodation Services Institute Awards** in the Sustainability category, it has earned multiple accolades, including **TripAdvisor Traveller's Choice** and a finalist spot in the **2024 Gold Medal Hotel Awards for Best Four-Star Hotel**. With a modern approach to business travel that integrates eco-conscious operations, The Ashe offers a balance of comfort and responsibility, making it a compelling choice for corporate delegates. The **Rose Hotel**, a Gold Level Member of **Fifty Shades Greener**, combines its five flexible meeting rooms with a strong community focus. Its **'Give It Back Club'** supports **Meals on Wheels Tralee** by donating recyclable plastics and cans, helping the charity benefit from Ireland's Deposit Return Scheme.

The **Ballygarry Estate Hotel & Spa**, where I was initially set to stay before Storm Eowyn forced a change of plans, exemplifies how family-run properties can lead the way in sustainable tourism. The hotel operates its own beekeeping initiative. It is developing a glamping retreat that seamlessly blends nature with hospitality and meeting spaces. It has also opened **The Pavilion**, an outdoor venue designed for wellness retreats and corporate gatherings. Through these initiatives, Ballygarry Estate continues to innovate while ensuring that sustainability remains at the core of its offering.



*The Kerry Convention Bureau, supported by Fáilte Ireland and Kerry County Council, plays a key role in promoting Kerry as a leading MICE destination.*





# London & Partners: “We are a social enterprise to support residents and local businesses”

In 2011, **London & Partners (L&P)** brought together three of the city's marketing organisations to broaden its scope of action and develop its events and meetings brand. Since then, the agency has added around £3.1 billion to London's economy, tens of thousands of jobs and more than 2,500 events, working across its various branches such as **Grow London**, **Opportunity London** and the **London Convention Bureau**. After our inspection visit in November last year, we caught up with **Barbara Jamison-Woods**, **Head of European Business Team**, and **Suzanne Singleton**, **Head of Associations and Citywide Bids**, for the following conversation:

**Since the merger, have you noticed a relationship between foreign investment and business development with the number of conferences and events organised?**

**Barbara Jamison-Woods:** The integration of our services under one roof was based on economic and efficiency issues, as we are partly funded by the Mayor of London through the **Greater London Authority (GLA)**. Whenever we renew our strategy, we have to consider the GLA's priorities and conceptions and then adapt them to our sectoral targets and global activity. In 2011, when we merged with other government-funded agencies, including foreign direct investment, the context was quite different from now, as we were living in a very risky macroeconomic environment due to the stock market crash. In the beginning, the commercial side pulled us more towards the intersection of technology with our core sectors, such as medtech, fintech or IT. Around that time, London was leading the way with many initiatives, tax incentives and growth in this area...

**Suzanne Singleton:** One example of curation that drew heavily on the strength of innovation and the tech world was undoubtedly **London Tech Week**, which has become

one of the biggest tech events in the world. This technology festival began as a small incubator event and has grown into a large-scale international technology conference, where the main speakers are government leaders and Heads of State.

**BJW:** We also analysed the main trends in gaming, e-sports, health and wellness in terms of business strategies for event sectors. Furthermore, we have supported small businesses that have been affected by e-commerce and the long-term impacts of the pandemic. Now, when we look at our different business sectors, we realise that sustainability is a thriving force for the whole world.

“ *Our measurement is based on the objectives of our foreign direct investment teams in terms of the industrial sectors we target.* ”





**In other words, the objectives are defined around the key sectors and then channelled into your event acquisition and association strategy in London.**

**BJW:** We see it as a three-year growth strategy. We look at our strengths and weaknesses, but also at local and global trends. I believe that L&P is very good at adapting to the unpredictable and then predicting where we should be in the long term. Looking at the European market and facing the challenges of Brexit, what we had to do from day one was collaborate with other international cities. If you look at what we did at London Tech Week, for example, this year we are partnering with **VivaTech** in Paris to reassure delegates of our global reach and privileged access to UK markets. London is an excellent gateway to the rest of Europe, with air and rail accessibility to make the most of the visitor journey. We are no longer just a marketing organisation as **VisitLondon**, but are now moving towards a social enterprise that supports residents and businesses primarily.

**How can the business events sector serve as a guiding thread for urban regeneration, legacy impacts and value creation?**

**BJW:** I think we were one of the first cities to demonstrate this with the legacy left by the **2012 Olympic Games**. Ken Livingstone, our Mayor at the time, realised the importance of this trickle-down approach by bringing in a major sporting event for regeneration purposes. That is why the Olympic Park was built in London's two poorest boroughs – Newham and Tower Hamlets – and many Olympic cities have followed our example since then. Just look at what Paris did in the northern area of the city for its last Games. I believe that through this event, we have managed to shift the city's image from that of a banking and insurance hub to that of a sports centre with global reach.

**SS:** There are several activations in terms of legacy impacts here. You would be surprised to see so many people volunteering for liver tests during the **EASL Congress** – (*Check out our interview with the association on page 8.*) in 2022. The combination of destination and association in this case was very fruitful for the various communities in London, such as **King's College**, where a lecture was given to medical students. This encourages various sectors to become more involved with destinations in a professional, scientific and social capacity.

**BJW:** Another example is the urban renewal and expansion of **Excel London** in Docklands, one of Europe's biggest investment projects. Interestingly, this also has a connection with the urban plan integrated into the Olympic Games and validates the city's long-term investment objectives. Our foreign investment team has kick-started that whole







regeneration project in East London, bringing together infrastructure, talent and major events.

### Are you satisfied with the city's supply chain or is there still room to grow?

**BJW:** London is huge, so I think it has room to grow. The trends we see more on the corporate side are towards specialised events taking place all over the city. Nowadays, brands are spreading out across several cities without the need to stick to a specific date or a defined audience. With the expansion of the **GreenTech Festival** from Berlin to London, we have taken on four events in different parts of the city on topics such as green finance or green mobility. What we are seeing more and more is the alignment of these sectors with specialised companies, mainly because delegates today are very focused on what they want from a conference standpoint. They may want to go to a conference just to attend specific parts of its programme. This is why festivals and major conferences are mobilising in a comprehensive and cyclical way. Another prominent example is **South by Southwest**, which will be held in June this year in Shoreditch as a design event campus.

### What services have international associations asked you for and what are you prioritising now during the bidding process?

**SS:** On the CVB side, it is essentially how I can get my event up and running in London. These issues have started to come up more since the UK left the European Union, with the bureaucracy and entry regulations that this entailed. We have tried to offer a bit of security for our clients, because nowadays anything that represents a small question mark is seen as a risk. Considering our track record, the proof is in the pudding. One example was the **2024 Congress of the European Society of Cardiology**, which welcomed around 26,500 delegates and

received the highest praise. We worked hard with the UK Visas and Immigration Office to deal with all the issues and facilitate the attendance, which had a very positive impact.

London is a city in constant transformation. We have opened a new railway line, event venues are multiplying and we have several developments in the pipeline. The main factor for event organisers is usually functional accessibility. When we get to the point of debriefing with the organisation, we know what channels we can open up and how to provide this kind of platform in our business ecosystem. So, for this type of project, we also call on other departments at L&P, which makes it easier for the organiser to manage their event functionally.

### Where does the city stand in the net-zero transition of its entire venue network and the event campus?

**SS:** I think we have come a long way in a short space of time. London is well ahead of the curve. There are various certification programmes that event professionals can apply for such as green transport, heating systems, waste and food reprocessing, etc. Besides, it comes from the top. We are aligned with the Mayor of London's pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030. The city now has low-carbon and car-free zones, as well as plenty of green spaces and pedestrianised areas. In fact, to feed the London experience, but also for the benefit of the people who live here, this agenda is very important and is making a difference. This also involves a great deal of investment on the part of the GLA and all the partners. All of this is driven by the city, but also by the client, and underpins many of these projects. You can see it in **Central Hall Westminster**, the way they are transitioning to vegetarian and sustainable menus to tackle food waste and food miles. Some of our venues have charitable status and therefore don't have much money to make radical changes. Others are investing heavily in everything that needs to be absolutely carbon neutral. So, there is a lot of collaboration there.



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# BESarawak: From Passive Participation to Active Legacy-building!



Opening a new page in its already long commitment to associative impacts, Sarawak organised an exclusive preview of the **'LEGACY360 - business events for a sustainable future'** forum, Southeast Asia's first national forum dedicated to education, advocacy and advancing business event legacies. *HQ* went to talk to the subject's enthusiast **Amelia Roziman, CEO of Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak)**, about development strategies, intelligent impact systems and their **'I AM LEGACY'** movement.

The first time we talked about the positive benefits of business events as levers for social change, Sarawak had established a series of key priority sectors for convention-led legacies under the **Sarawak 2030 Post-COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS)**. Over time, this economic and social development model has shifted slightly to **six core economic sectors** (Manufacturing; Agriculture; Tourism; Forestry; Mining; Services) and **seven enablers** (Renewable Energy; Digital Transformation; Innovation; Education & Human capital; Basic Infrastructure; Utilities, and Transport) in order to achieve such economic prosperity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability by 2030. The six main economic sectors are the main pillars to drive Sarawak's economic transformation, while the seven enablers support the transformation of the economic sectors by providing the necessary infrastructure, policies and resources.

For PCDS 2030 to be the driving force behind data collection and management, the strategy must be fully integrated into the business events sector. "We can use PCDS 2030 as the basis for a more structured approach to our data collection, management and analysis. Our aim is to align business events topics with the PCDS, providing us with a solid guide to our impact, such as sector growth and policy development," says Amelia Roziman.

Held on 13 January, 2025, the **LEGACY360** warm-up event convened a strategic platform to drive the Sarawak government's agendas, showing that business events stimulate meaningful thought leadership, strengthen regional and international collaboration and recommend vital policy alignments. At the LEGACY360 main forum, which will take place on 31 October, 2025, there will be sessions focused







on business events aligned with the PCDS, diving into their contributions, evidence and impact on Sarawak's key objectives. "What we aim to do with LEGACY360 is to broaden the conversation around business events as enablers of economic, social and environmental transformation. Event organisers and suppliers are now recognised as strategic partners in helping the government achieve the SDGs 2030," Roziman tells us. "It is not just about churning our positive experiences, but educating legacy creators who make an impact. We want to finally create long-term conversations about business events, facilitating national growth and helping all stakeholders understand the interdependent nature of this sector."

### The world's first intelligent impact management system for the event sector

One of the highlights of the event came in the shape of **AI.LEGACY**, an intelligent impact management system designed specifically to monitor, measure and report on the legacies of business events held in Sarawak. This world-first impact management system offers a revolutionary approach to corporate event legacy management, to guide event organisers in creating tangible and measurable results. Powered by AI, the system produces automated and simplified impact assessments with real-time insights that can be used as strong evidence to attract new revenue channels and validate activities for stakeholders. The system is scalable, adapted to events of all sizes, from small meetings to global conventions, and it was developed by BESarawak in cooperation with the **Universiti Malaysia Sarawak**.

"With AI-driven data extraction, organisers can monitor their impact in three dimensions: social, economic and environmental. It is specific to their sector and the scope they want to dive into, which provides a highly personalised reporting experience. The system is also integrated into the legacy plan, which means that organisers can access highly crucial information specific to their vision and activities," says Roziman. Although the system does not directly measure the success of stakeholder collaborations, it does offer database indicators and insights to evaluate the effectiveness of these same collaborations. Unlike traditional impact measurement tools, AI.LEGACY integrates advanced analytics and real-time data processing to guide organisers in creating measurable and purposeful outcomes for their events.

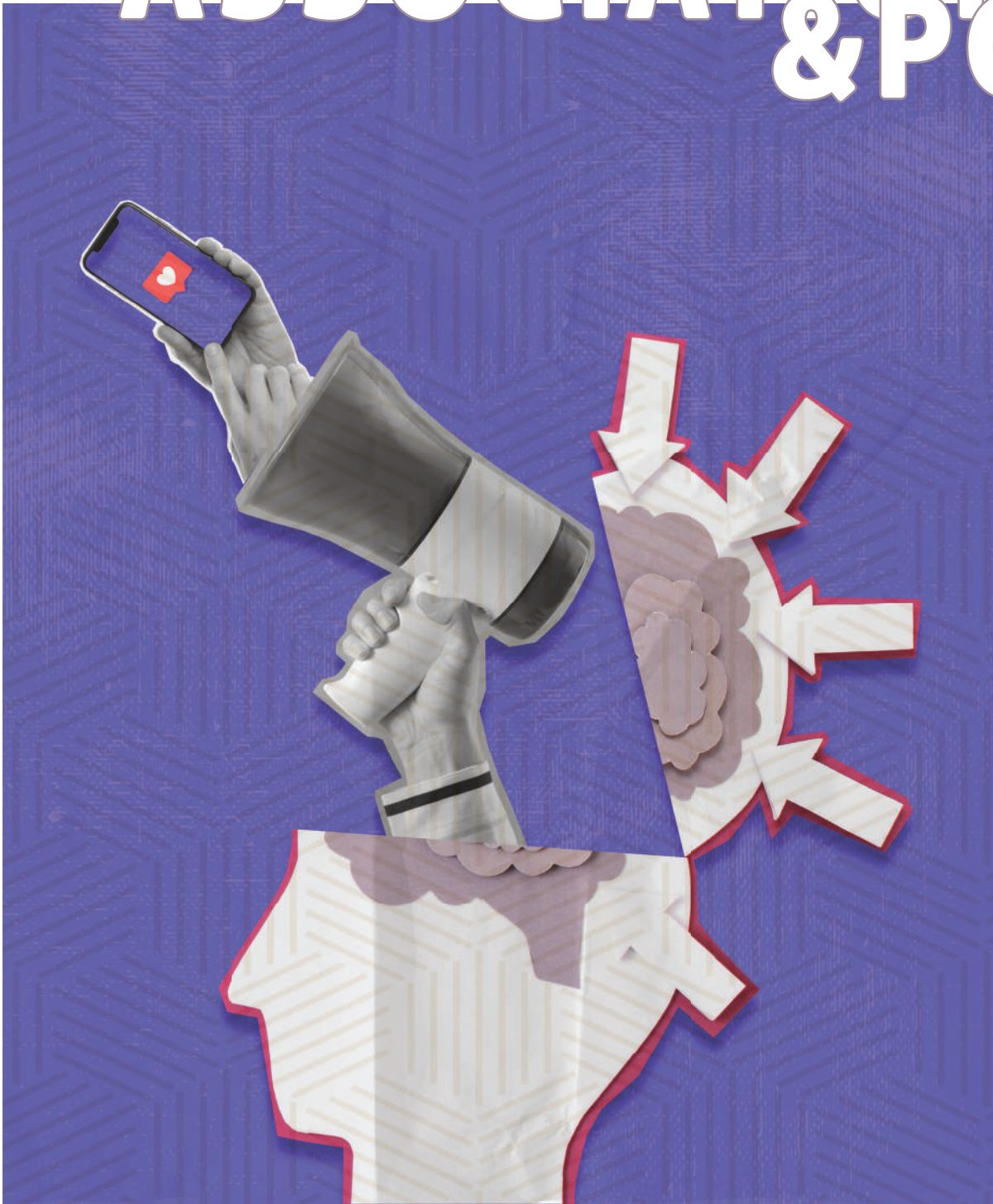
### I AM LEGACY: Driving Impact Together

During the event, BESarawak also presented the campaign's brand promise, '**Driving Impact Together**' embedded in the **Tribe Legacy Sarawak 2025**. The campaign unveiled a new movement, **I AM LEGACY**, which celebrates the power of individual actions and small-scale impacts to bring about meaningful change. "I AM LEGACY represents a fundamental shift from passive participation to active legacy building. This empowerment movement stresses that every individual, from organisers and participants to those behind the scenes, plays a key role in creating legacies that matter. Everyone has the power to shape the future, where our actions create a ripple effect and motivate others to participate in legacy-driven endeavours," Roziman explains. This vision fits into the Sarawak Tribe Legacy narrative, as the campaign aims to build a legacy together as a 'tribe' (community). Rather than showcasing and pushing only the positive outcomes of events, it positions everyone involved in the business events ecosystem, including local communities and leading institutes, as legacy builders. "This collective desire requires the active participation of individuals with the attitude that every action matters, every voice counts. We believe that legacy is not just at corporate events, but is created every day in the things we do in our own lives," Roziman argues.

Launched two years ago, the **Legacy Impact Master Action Plan (Legacy MAP) 2023-2025**, is a three-year course of action to define the relationship between business events and legacy impact and contribute to PCDS Sarawak's 2030 goals. "This is the third and final year of the MAP, and we have come full circle in our legacy journey. Years of research have led to a holistic and integrated ecosystem for legacy-based business events, with the introduction of the LEGACY360 forum (advocacy and knowledge sharing), the launch of AI.LEGACY (impact measurement and optimisation), followed by the **Borneo Inspires Legacy Awards** (celebration)." For Roziman, what began as a vision to define and shape the impact of business events has now evolved into an innovative reality. "As Malaysia and Borneo's only destination to focus on legacy-driven business events, we are definitely on course as the legacy capital. However, it is not just because we are the only destination doing this, it is because we are leading by example and driving accountability with data-backed initiatives and outcomes to become the legacy capital," concludes Roziman.



# HQ INSIGHTS ASSOCIATION & PCO



# Resilience and AI-agents



The ways in which associations can build resilience, is not very different than for other companies. It involves strong leadership, focus on engagement with members, financial stability and strategic partnerships. The one element that could be helpful in achieving all of these is technology, and more specifically the use of artificial intelligence (AI) agents. While still at early stages now, it could become a game-changer for many companies, including associations.

**AUTHOR: SVEN BOSSU, CEO, AIPC**

Many associations have gone through some type of crisis in recent years, often as a result of elements beyond their direct control such as pandemic, geopolitical or other sources of instability. In addition, we are living in a world which is rapidly changing on many fronts, from generational shifts to digitalisation. In such an environment, it is more important than ever that associations are resilient. Amongst other things, this involves the efficient and effective use of the limited resources associations have at their disposal.

The use of AI is definitely helpful. The vast majority of my colleagues already use different forms of AI – such as **Microsoft Copilot**, **ChatGPT** or IBM's **Watsonx** – for a wide range of tasks, including writing articles like this one. It saves a tremendous amount of time and while final checks are still required, the results are getting better by the day. However, this use of AI – called AI automation – is still very much based on the instructions given: you ask AI to go through a set of steps, with at least one step involving an interaction with a Large Language Model (LLM).

With a rapidly increasing number of applications already available, the next step is the use of AI agents. These agents leverage data to execute self-determined tasks aimed at achieving pre-set goals. The big difference is that the AI-agent will determine itself how to achieve a goal, it does not longer need instructions on the different steps to take. And because there is also an element of memory, it will continuously improve its performance.

Big players like IBM and Microsoft are already active in this area, along with about 600 start-ups, representing a market value of about 5 billion USD, which is expected to grow to 47 billion USD by 2030.

Now, what is in it for associations? Well, let's think about member engagement and communicating member benefits effectively, which is a challenge for 64% of associations worldwide – according to the *2024 Naylor Association Benchmarking Report*. Using an AI-agent like Claude Computer Use – which is just one of the many solutions out there – can be of massive help in achieving that goal. Using all the data sources at its disposal (both internal and external), the agent will create a strategy, define the steps to be taken, establish a planning, execute the tasks, track and report results and adapt in function of feedback received. So, it is not just about content creation; it is about establishing a strategy to achieve a predetermined goal and executing that strategy. One aspect which I found really interesting is the level of personalisation these platforms can achieve by combining all data available – from the internal CRM system to all types of information available via the internet – resulting in increased engagement.

There are a few factors to consider before jumping in. The technology is still at its early stage, so it might not have yet the full understanding of the field you work in or the goals you want to achieve. At a certain moment, it is also possible you will need to use different agents with different skills sets – similar to the use of employees with different skill sets – in which case you need to think about the use of a 'multi-agent'. Finally, cost is a key factor, including both licensing fees and the investment required to train staff.

The good news is that the technology is becoming more accessible, also for 'non-coding people' like myself, with easy-to-use browsers and apps, that allow us to explore the opportunities this technology can provide to become more resilient and more prepared for a rapidly changing environment.



# Dispelling the **Myths** of **Accreditation**

Accreditation in the events industry can sometimes be challenging to navigate – particularly if it becomes difficult to separate fact from fiction. But what is fact and what is fiction in the world of accreditation?

**AUTHOR: ANDREW HARRISON, DIRECTOR OF EVENT SUPPLIER AND SERVICES ASSOCIATION (ESSA)**

**W**hen I have asked event professionals their reasoning for not yet being an accredited supplier or service provider, I am often met with various reasons as to why they have not got around to it yet. Sometimes I hear they feel there are not enough benefits for them to do so, while others say they simply do not have the time or money.

The world of events can be tricky at times, and we are all busy people looking to ensure our business and money go further. That said, accreditation is there to help people do exactly that. Be it time, money, benefits or resources, the changes and advances in the world of accreditation has meant the barrier to entry could not be lower – and the benefits for doing so could not be greater.

## **Time**

Contrary to popular belief, the biggest investment into your business is rarely one of money, but of time. In our busy schedules, it is often a lack of this precious commodity that prevents us from undertaking new ventures.

When it comes to health and safety, time is naturally needed to ensure teams are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to work safely when operating at events – which is why accrediting bodies are important in helping you to be able to both assess and prove your technical competence when it comes to working on events.

And while there will always be some time commitment to achieve this effectively and safely, more streamlined processes and around-the-clock support means companies and individuals are able to become accredited quicker than ever before. Many of our own ESSA members for example have reported completing their health and safety accreditation in just three weeks, helping to more confidently and safely carry out their work on site.



*Contrary to popular belief, the biggest investment into your business is rarely one of money, but of time.*



## **Cost**

Whilst this commitment can come with some associated costs, when budgets are tighter than ever, businesses still naturally want to ensure a return on investment. And that is what becoming accredited should be viewed as: not simply a cost but an investment that yields substantial cost saving returns long term.

This is particularly relevant when we look at reducing accidents. Just last year, the average number of sick days a year in the UK per employee reached 7.8 – the highest in a decade. Add in the increased risk of accidents that comes with working on events, and this can be even higher for us in the events industry.

Sick days and days off due to accidents cost businesses on average £837 a year per



employee, not to mention any potentially hefty medical, legal or compensation expenses arising from any accident.

Safer working therefore means fewer disruptions and a more positive bottom line, better reinforced through undertaking a relevant health and safety accreditation.

### Resources

There is also a misconception when it comes to resources and accreditation and that is a demanding undertaking. While most accrediting bodies will require you to showcase your business's ability to provide safe working conditions for all, this does not need to be done from scratch.

Here at ESSA, for example, we provide companies with numerous templates and examples to help you with your application which outline clear steps and a framework to work through. Historical documentation is also not required, with our templates helping you to create new examples of evidence to showcase your commitment to health and safety.

### Benefits

Without question, the main priority for anyone looking to become accredited is knowing how it will benefit their business overall. Showcasing your commitment to health and safety and promoting safer working conditions are two great benefits that come with accreditation, yet it can also provide so much more when utilised to its full potential.

Not only is accreditation a way to improve your business's reputation, but being able to showcase your abilities through industry-recognised accreditation ensures your business stands out as a supplier of choice when it comes to events.

Our industry, much like the events themselves, is built on teamwork and collaboration, and that is something accreditation helps support too. Along with improved partnerships, becoming accredited allows you to become part of a wide community of event professionals, all with the goal of supporting one another and promoting best practice within the industry.

This misconception that accreditation is simply a nice-to-have means that many miss out on the benefits it brings as an individual, business and wider team.

Taking all of this into consideration, becoming accredited not only boosts your reputation and demonstrates your commitment to excellence, but it can also open doors, give you a competitive edge and, most importantly, it creates trust. With the support and resources available, companies of all sizes should feel empowered to take this step towards greater success.

“ *Sick days and days off due to accidents cost businesses on average £837 a year per employee, not to mention any potentially hefty medical, legal or compensation expenses arising from any accident.* ”





# How **City Destinations Alliance** Support **Members** in Turbulent Times

The tourism and meetings industries have long demonstrated resilience in the face of disruption. From pandemics and geopolitical conflicts to climate-induced natural disasters, the sector constantly adapts to an ever-evolving landscape. Resilience has become not just a buzzword but a fundamental requirement for survival and growth. For **City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA)**, nurturing this resilience is not just a mission – it is a commitment to empowering members to navigate uncertainty and thrive.

**T**hrough curated conferences, peer-learning platforms, and collaborative initiatives, CityDNA has positioned itself as a solid ally, equipping members with the tools and insights to manage crises effectively.

## Supporting Resilience Through Collaboration and Innovation

CityDNA's strategy for resilience-building rests on three pillars: knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and innovation. This philosophy is palpable during its carefully crafted conferences, where members engage in meaningful discussions that address pressing issues and challenges in urban tourism through, among others, a lens of crisis management and recovery.

Take, for example, the thought-provoking conversations at the October 2024 conference in Bruges. Under the banner **Let Pigs Fly: Defying the Gravity of Impossible in Urban Tourism**, participants explored how destinations can overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges delving into innovative governance models and strategies to turn crises into opportunities. Earlier that year, during the April conference in Bologna, the spotlight was on the critical role of transparency and data in combatting misinformation – a pillar of effective crisis management.

Looking ahead, CityDNA's upcoming 2025 Conference in Budapest **Beyond Boundaries: Driving Tourism's Business Transformation**, promises to continue this tradition. From rethinking the value of tourism in liveable cities to leveraging innovation in times of economic uncertainty, these discussions embody the forward-thinking engagement that defines CityDNA.

Beyond events, CityDNA extend its support to its members through its Intranet, a vital tool for peer support and knowledge exchange. The **Community Forum** on the Intranet is a dynamic space where members can engage and share insights on a wide range of topics. It enables

members to start discussions and reply to their European colleagues, developing a spirit of collaboration. Additionally, the Strategy Hub serves as a library of strategy documents from members, providing inspiration and guidance for those embarking on their own strategic processes. These platforms strengthen the alliance's role as a connector and enabler in times of need.

These thematic discussions, coupled with practical workshops and webinars, enable CityDNA members to exchange best practices and co-create solutions. This collaborative spirit has already proven to be instrumental in addressing crises, from climate-induced disruptions to geopolitical disturbances.

## Turning Challenges into Opportunities: Real-World Insights

CityDNA's commitment to resilience goes beyond theory. The following real-world examples illustrate the power of collective action and innovation:

### Climate Resilience – Athens and Rhodes

The summer of 2023 brought unprecedented challenges to Greece, with a record-breaking heatwave and devastating wildfires on the island of Rhodes. CityDNA's platforms became a lifeline for sharing crisis management strategies. Discussions at the CityDNA Conference in October 2023 highlighted the importance of pre-emptive planning, such as Athens' #CoolAthens initiative, which included real-time risk assessments and public cooling stations. These measures not only safeguarded residents and visitors but also set a benchmark for other destinations.

### Geopolitical Resilience – War in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has reshaped tourism across Europe, with neighbouring countries like Poland and the Baltic States experiencing sharp declines in visitor numbers. Sessions during CityDNA's Bologna conference highlighted adaptive

strategies, such as Lviv's pivot towards domestic tourism and its efforts to attract new visitor demographics, including volunteers and internally displaced people. These discussions showcased how proactive measures could soften the impacts of geopolitical instability.

### Tools for Resilience: Practical Resources for Members

CityDNA's commitment to supporting members extends beyond conferences. The Alliance provides practical tools, such as:

- **Data-Driven Insights:** CityDNA's peer-learning platforms facilitate the exchange of data on visitor behaviour and market trends, enabling members to make informed decisions during crises.
- **Sustainability and Resilience Training:** Workshops and webinars focus on building long-term resilience through sustainable practices, addressing both environmental and economic challenges.

CityDNA's role as a connector is also pivotal. By encouraging collaborations among destinations, industry partners, and governments, the Alliance ensures that its members are better equipped to handle the complexities of modern crises.

### A Call to Action: Investing in Resilience

While crises are inevitable, CityDNA has shown that preparation, adaptability, and collaboration can minimise their impact on European destinations.

As the tourism sector continues to face emerging challenges, from climate change to economic instability, the need for resilient destinations has never been more urgent. And for members of the meetings and tourism industries, the message is clear: resilience is a collective effort. Through platforms like CityDNA, destinations can not only withstand weather crises but also emerge stronger and more united.

By embracing innovation, leveraging collective knowledge, and prioritising sustainability, the tourism sector can transform its vulnerabilities into opportunities, ensuring a resilient and thriving future for all.

### City Destinations Alliance Upcoming Events of 2025

- CityDNA International Conference & General Assembly, Budapest, April 9-11, 2025
  - CityDNA CVB Café, Frankfurt, May 19, 2025
  - IMEX Policy Forum, Frankfurt, May 20, 2025
- Destinations Exchange Europe (former City Fair), London, June 2-3, 2025
- 14<sup>th</sup> CityDNA City Cards Expert Meeting, Gdansk, June 5-6, 2025
- 39<sup>th</sup> CityDNA Summer School, Luxembourg, August 25-29, 2025
- 20<sup>th</sup> TourMIS Workshop & International Seminar, Vienna, September 11-12, 2025
  - CityDNA Autumn Conference, Tórshavn, September 30-October 2, 2025
- CityDNA CVB Café, Barcelona, November 17, 2025
- 12<sup>th</sup> CityDNA Visitor Experience Expert Meeting, Vilnius, November 27-28, 2025

CITY  
DNA





## Some New **Challenges** for **Associations** and the **Hospitality Industry**

**A**ny association executive or meeting planner that has been around for more than a few years has addressed the issue of crisis management in one form or another. It might have been in the form of a medical crisis – someone was injured, or even died, at an association event. Perhaps the organisation’s President or Chief Staff Officer suddenly resigned or passed away. Maybe the hotel where your annual meeting was to be held had a fire or was heavily damaged in a hurricane or other natural disaster.

All of these are among common crises with which association executives and meeting planners have to contend. Their experience and training prepare them to deal with most of them in appropriate ways.

But things are changing constantly, and in the meeting environment of 2025 there are some critical issues that must be considered as you plan and carry out your organisation’s events, meetings, and other activities.

1. **There is a desire for higher levels of physical security.** People are concerned about things such as violence, terrorism, and large groups such as protestors in or near their event venue. These concerns are even higher if there are large number of spouses or children/families at your events.

✔ **What we can do:** Look over your meeting agendas and speaker materials. If any topics or discussions are going to be on issues that might spark heated discussions, make sure



someone is assigned to monitor the session. Ask your venue to tell you what their policy and preparedness is to deal with physical safety situations. Start your event with a brief safety presentation and any related reminders (exits, evacuation routes from meeting rooms, etc.) Know how to contact local law enforcement or other security services if needed. Get a list of other meetings in the hotel/facility, and determine if any of those events may be a target for protestors, etc. Ask the hotel what they are doing to control crowds and ensure the safety of your members if there is a problem that spills over from another event on their property.

2. The **Covid pandemic/crisis has changed people's concerns** when travelling and attending events and meetings. It is going to be a long time before the decision to physically participate in meetings is based strictly on programme content or location.

✔ **What we can do:** Have a clear policy/statement on what your organisation does to make your events safe. Work with your facility to identify local health laws and assure them you are in compliance. Be sure to have something on your registration form that clearly allows attendees to identify not just food allergies but also other health issues that they may need assistance with at your event. Have your 'event health policy' on your website and link to it your registration forms and registration confirmations.

3. **Economic uncertainty is worldwide**, not just in the U.S. or Europe. There are concerns about possible tariff wars. This could create situations where currency values fluctuate wildly during your event (I would classify that as an onsite crisis!). The cost of meetings is getting so high that attendance is affected on a regular basis. Supply chain delays can affect the delivery of meeting materials and exhibitor displays and equipment.

✔ **What we can do:** Try to work with your vendors to agree on a guaranteed currency exchange rate, or at least a cap on it. Backdate your ordering times for everything even further than you normally would, especially those last-minute shipments of meeting materials, awards, registration packets, etc. Try to be flexible with your attendees (especially your members) on cancellation policies. Try to offer more tiered registration options, with various packages at different rates.

4. There is growing **concern about cybersecurity at both the individual and professional levels**. Everyone wants a secure connection for their devices at your events. Many people want/need to be 'connected' constantly, safely and in an uninterrupted manner. They bring with them an expectation of service and security.

✔ **What we can do:** Be sure you include privacy and cybersecurity clauses in your meeting facilities contracts that identify what the facility's backup plan is for power outages and internet failures or cyber-attacks – this is especially critical if you are having a hybrid event, with attendees participating virtually. Have someone who is knowledgeable from a technical standpoint available to answer questions regarding internet and wire services, connection options, and other security-related questions. Have your cybersecurity measures in your meeting promotion materials.

5. **Environmental issues are everywhere** and getting more important. People, especially younger people, want to know

what our organisations are doing to deal with climate change and other environmental concerns such as air quality, water pollution, etc. Since this combination of concerns is often referred to as an 'environmental crisis,' there are expectations that even organisations not related directly to these concerns will be doing their part to help make the situation better.

✔ **What we can do.** If you have not already done so, adopt a policy on being an environmentally friendly organisation. Take advantage of every opportunity to tell your members and your stakeholders what actions you are taking to be a better community/world citizen. Highlight conservation actions that the organisation's staff is participating in, such as car-pooling, taking public transportation, using recyclable materials, being energy conscious, etc. Throughout your meetings and events, point out your reduction in usage of paper and other efforts you are making to lower your organisation's carbon footprint.

**Crisis management is a skill**, one that we can learn, and one that also requires us to use common sense and anticipation. Our members and customers come to our events ready to learn, meet new people, support their industry or profession, and enhance their careers or their businesses. Our job is to identify likely crisis points and deal with them in ways that are so effective that our attendees do not even realise there was a 'crisis.'



#### 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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# How **Kenes Group** Masters Risk Management

**AUTHOR: ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA -  
MEDIA & COMMUNICATION MANAGER AT KENES GROUP**



For six decades, **Kenes Group** has stood at the forefront of professional congress organisation, navigating uncertainty with resilience and strategic foresight. As the company celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is a testament to its ability to manage risk effectively, turning crises into opportunities and emerging stronger through challenges.

At the recent Kenes 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Leadership Summit 2025 held in Vienna, Austria, **Executive Chairman and Chief Vision Officer Dan Rivlin** highlighted risk management as the key factor to the group's long-standing success. Following, a recollection of his speech...

## The DNA of Crisis Management

“We must have crisis management from all kinds of wars, terrorist attacks, disasters, natural disasters. We used to say that if something happened around the world, we need to be alert. But our capabilities to face challenges like that – it is really legendary. Nothing less.” **Dan Rivlin, Kenes Group EC & CVO.**

From economic downturns to political unrest, Kenes Group has continuously adapted to shifting global landscapes. One of the tests of resilience that Rivlin recalled happened in 2000 when a sudden political crisis wiped out their business in just a week: “Back in the day, we were still using fax machine. When the fax finished, the paper was gone, and all the business was either moved or cancelled. We brought ourselves from those ashes, and we built this core PCO empire at that time,” Rivlin added.

In response, Kenes moved several meetings within a few months’ notice, securing alternative venues, handling cancellations, and managing complex logistics. Most importantly, communication played a crucial role. “In crisis management, it is not sufficient to act – communication





(two-way) is just as important, as stakeholders are anxious and seek information and reassurance.”

### Facing Natural and Political Disruptions

Kenes Group has also shown remarkable agility in managing external disruptions. In 2010, the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland led to a massive ash cloud, grounding flights across Europe. The company had 8,000 attendees at an event, many of whom were stranded. “We took everybody, including the team, and we got everyone out of the city. And with a small team, some of them are still here today with us, we stayed behind just to ensure everybody was back to safety. That is crisis management,” said Rivlin. Despite the disruption, Kenes continued the meeting until its conclusion while simultaneously arranging accommodation and transportation for those affected. “The fact that they had someone to talk to and that we continuously provided them with updates was crucial, as the situation was highly unstable.”

Similarly, Kenes had to react swiftly during one of the wars in the Middle East. A major congress scheduled to take place in Istanbul had to be relocated within two weeks. “We had to find a new location, secure hotel rooms, make announcements, and even stationed a team at the airport with a policy and a few reserved rooms in case someone missed the news and still travelled. Thankfully, nobody did.” The rapid response, along with clear and constant communication, ensured a seamless transition. “Naturally, our capability to move fast, find solutions, and calmly communicate is critical.”

### COVID-19: Transforming Crisis into Innovation

Perhaps the most defining test of recent years was the COVID-19 pandemic. When in-person meetings came to a halt, many organisations struggled. Kenes Group, however, saw an opportunity. Within three weeks, the company developed its own virtual meeting platform **VirtuOz**, ensuring continuity for clients. “Covid came and Covid was a curse, but in part for us, it was also a big blessing. In three weeks, together with a lot of people in the office, we were able to create a platform that today we can look at like the first plane. But it worked. And we had the first virtual meeting three weeks after the world shut all the doors.”

The real challenge, however, was not just the platform but managing all stakeholders – committees, boards, sponsors, and participants. “Nobody knew the magnitude of the crisis, so we initially planned to move meetings to different countries, postpone them to the second half of 2020, and negotiate with suppliers. But as the situation evolved, we had to continuously adapt. We learned how to operate TV studios and converted meetings into virtual formats while improving our platform based on real-time needs.” Kenes Group’s ability to evolve was reflected in the transformation of its virtual platform, which saw major developments from its early version in March 2020 to its refined version in 2022, and to the current educational platform **UNLOK Education**.

“We did not just sit there and wait for the government to help us, which they would not anyhow,” Rivlin noted. Instead, the company focused on communication, managing expectations, and keeping its own team motivated. “We attended countless board meetings, reassuring associations that we would guide them to safe harbour. Internally, we had to continue operations in a highly uncertain period while ensuring our staff remained confident.”

### Looking Ahead: A Future Built on Resilience

Kenes Group’s 60-year journey is a powerful example of how effective risk management can drive long-term success. Whether facing political turmoil, natural disasters, or a global pandemic, the company’s response has been marked by quick decision-making, strategic adaptability, and unwavering commitment to its clients and employees.

As Kenes Group looks to the future, its legacy of crisis management continues to be a guiding force. With decades of experience and an ability to embrace change, the company remains well-equipped to navigate whatever challenges lie ahead. “In crises, there are the three F’s – Flee, Freeze, or Fight. We chose to fight!” Rivlin concluded. “This company today is strong, it is ambitious, and it is capable. And we are all going to write the next chapter.”





# REWIND: HQ Takes a Closer Look at Cvent CONNECT Europe 2024

The eighth edition of **Cvent CONNECT Europe**, held from 5-7 November 2024, was the largest to date, bringing together 1,500 industry professionals onsite and thousands more virtually for three days of training, education, networking and hands-on technology experiences. Attendance for the flagship European customer and industry conference has continued to grow, with a 15% year-over-year increase, reinforcing the event's status as a key fixture on the MICE calendar.

## A Multi-Day Hybrid Experience

The three-day conference catered to UK and European event professionals, marketers and hospitality leaders, offering a dynamic event programme with over than 70 sessions – including training workshops, Product Roadmap Talks, panel discussions and roundtables. The agenda also included an invite-only **Open Forum** for leaders to convene, a **Partner Summit** for agency partners to connect and exclusive networking events.

Adding a touch of star power, **Oti Mabuse**, the multi-award-winning performer best known for her success on the UK show, *Strictly Come Dancing*, headlined as keynote speaker, while TV and radio presenter **Dermot O'Leary** took on the role of Master of Ceremonies.

Beyond sessions, attendees explored cutting-edge event technology in the Innovation Pavilion, participated in guided Tech Tours led by Cvent experts, and celebrated the industry's best at the annual **Cvent Excellence Awards**, which recognise trailblazers in events, hospitality and marketing.

## Conference Highlights

### Opening Keynote: 25 Years of Innovation

**Cvent's Founder and CEO, Reggie Aggarwal**, kicked off the conference with a keynote marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a quarter-century of innovation in the business events sector. He reflected on Cvent's journey, from a simple online event registration tool (before SaaS became an industry standard), to a global marketplace uniting the entire meetings and events ecosystem.

As the industry continues to evolve, Aggarwal highlighted *a better normal* for events, shaped by three defining trends:

**1. Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Rapid advancements in AI bring greater efficiency and enables planners, marketers and hoteliers to focus on creating more impactful experiences.



**2. Value and Impact:** With economic pressures top of mind, organisations are increasingly prioritising events with measurable ROI.

**3. The Resurgence of the Experience Economy:** The demand for meaningful in-person experiences is stronger than ever, with live events essential for reaching new audiences and building connections and community.

**Takeaway:** These trends signal a new era in which technology, efficiency and experiential impact are central to event success.

Following his keynote, Aggarwal joined Dermot O’Leary for a fireside chat, where he discussed Cvent’s commitment to the UK and European markets. He highlighted the importance of a tailored, localised approach, supported by Cvent’s 200-member local team and strategic engagement with regional technology leaders, as well as over 250 third-party partnerships across the region.

#### **Celebrity Keynote: From Pressure to Brilliance, Turning Challenges into Diamonds**

In an inspirational fireside chat, Oti Mabuse shared her remarkable journey – from challenging apartheid beginnings to becoming an eight-time South African Latin American Champion, TV talent judge and global performer. She spoke candidly about overcoming challenges, the power of resilience and self-belief, as well as embracing creativity – offering attendees a powerful lesson in perseverance and transformation.

#### **Associations: Dedicated Sessions with Expert Insights**

In addition to content streams designed for event planners, marketers and hospitality professionals, the 2024 edition of Cvent CONNECT Europe, for the first time, featured dedicated sessions for association professionals. These sessions tackled trending topics with insights from industry experts, covering everything from securing more sponsorship revenue to leveraging technology for enhanced engagement and boosting membership growth and retention.

#### **Product Roadmap: What’s Next for Cvent Customers?**

One of the most highly anticipated sessions at Cvent CONNECT Europe, the **Product Roadmap Talks**, showcased platform updates and upcoming innovations. Key announcements included Cvent Essentials – a game-changing

tool for high-volume, repeatable field marketing events – now in open beta phase. AI-driven personalisation and automation also took centre stage, reflecting Cvent’s growing investment in AI-powered solutions and strategic acquisitions aimed at expanding platform capabilities in trade show management, lead generation and event marketing – all designed to help customers improve efficiency and deliver more personalised, engaging experiences.

#### **Top Topics: Popular Sessions**

With over 70 sessions covering a wide range of industry insights, Cvent data revealed some of the most popular topics among attendees:

- AI in Events;
- Accessibility & Inclusive Event Design;
- Women in the Workplace;
- Professional Development & Career Growth;
- Best Practices for Large-Scale Events.

These sessions resonated with professionals eager to stay ahead of industry trends and best practices.

#### **Save the Date for 2025**

The next edition will take place on 15–16 October 2025 at **InterContinental London – The O2**. Pre-registration is now open, visit the Cvent CONNECT website and click “pre-register for Europe 2025” or search for Cvent CONNECT Europe 2025 to sign up.

“

*I keep coming back to Cvent CONNECT [Europe] because it is the place for event professionals to go. It’s great to stop and take the time to connect with other event professionals. In a forum like this, it’s just gold dust.” Sammy Connell, Head of Events at NASUWT*

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