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The Meetings Industry – an overview and structure

The relationship between the meetings industry and tourism

Convention bureaus (convention and visitors bureaus, CBs) play a significant role in the development of the meetings industry, as they constitute the particular element which unites all the participants of the events market. They are marketing organisations or, in other words, destination marketing/management organisations, DMOs for short. Generally speaking, DMOs specialise in promoting the destination they represent in the scope of hosting events, support the event acquisition process and perform other functions, such as integrating the local meetings industry, preparing a common offer and developing it, conducting research concerning the position of the represented market, and undertaking educational initiatives. The key challenge convention bureaus face is achieving the best position for the destination as event venue.

The functioning of convention bureaus as specialised destination marketing organisations, strengthening the position of a given destination in the meetings industry with the use of marketing tools, is closely related to tourism and, more broadly, to the economy.

Meetings can be defined as a form of gathering, in one place at the same time, of a few or many persons for the purpose of discussing, exchanging ideas and experiences, presenting products, knowledge transfer, motivating (Celuch, 2015). The meetings industry is as an autonomous sector of economy associated with the organisation, promotion and management of meetings, including congresses, conferences, fairs, corporate event and incentive travel (Celuch 2014, p. 30). The wording of this definition shows no apparent relation between the meetings industry and tourism, yet such a connection does exist. First of all, taking the practical point of view, the

meetings industry is highly correlated with travel and movement, and services – denominated as tourism services – form a significant part of the product, in this case being a meeting (depending on its type). Taking as the reference point theoretical analysis, i.e. the attempt at defining and consequently, describing a phenomenon (which is continuously taking place in various studies on the subject), it is clear that the meetings and events organisations are part of the tourism industry. The reason for this being the above-mentioned travel aspects and the use of tourism services necessary to achieve the goal.

The meetings industry, when compared to tourism, is frequently categorised as a type of tourism (business tourism, business trips) by some researchers, but by others it is considered to be an autonomous sector, for which tourism services are among the tools used for the achievement of the main goal. These include education (knowledge), marketing and sales (product) and team and relations management (motivation) (Celuch, 2014, pp. 61-73).

The basis for the operation of the meetings industry is the organisation of meetings and events, their structuring, planning, promotion and evaluation in the context of the achievement of the goal set by the organiser (project owner) and assumptions of particular participants groups (stakeholders). The term ‘meetings industry’ propagated by international organisations within the industry and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)¹ seems to be a consensus between various considerations on the definition for the new economy sector. Nevertheless, the industry continues to use diverse terminology and both in theory as well as in everyday practice, the following expressions appear:

- ◆ Business tourism,
- ◆ Congress tourism,
- ◆ Motivation tourism,
- ◆ Business trips,
- ◆ Meetings market,

1 The definition developed as a joint effort of industry-related organisations was published in *Measuring the Economic Importance of the Meetings Industry Developing a Tourism Satellite Account Extension* – a study on the industry associated with meetings, which is a result of the cooperation between UNWTO and affiliated members, including Reed Travel Exhibitions, International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA) and Meeting Professionals International (MPI).

- ◆ MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, events/exhibitions),
- ◆ MEEC (meetings, expositions, events, conventions),
- ◆ Business events in Australia, and MC&IT meetings, conventions and incentive travel in Canada (Rogers, 2008, p. 15),
- ◆ Event and event-marketing industry.

It may be observed that the first four terms stress the role of tourism as the body of phenomena related to people's travelling; the next ones emphasise the meetings as the subject matter of the industry and indicate their basic types (as in the acronyms MICE, MEEC or MC&IT); and finally, the last one highlights not only the subject matter of the industry, but also its marketing purpose (Jaworowicz & Jaworowicz, 2016).

The phrase 'meetings and events industry' combines these approaches by focusing on the interdisciplinary essence of the domain, which may be identified with tourism, but not in its entire scope, as the events and their purposes are largely diversified and there may possibly be no connection with any kind of tourism-related services.

Tourism services embrace services offered to travellers, of which the most significant are the accommodation, gastronomy and transportation services (<http://www.stat.gov.pl>). The World Tourism Organisation also counts travel agencies or guides among this kind of services. These may be categorised into the basic services which meet the elementary needs of a tourist, i.e. transportation, accommodation or meals, and complementary services, which are related to the fulfilment of needs referred to as spiritual. (As far as the meetings industry is concerned, the scope of needs potentially satisfied by complementary tourism services seems to be considerably broader.)

Taking into account the nature of tourism services and considering travel for various purposes a fundamental part of the definition of tourism², it may be naturally assumed that business tourism (and consequently the meetings industry nowadays) concerning persons who travel for reasons related to their professional activity, is one of the oldest forms of tourism (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 15). Business travel is considered to be

2 Tourism embraces all the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside of their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (Gaworecki, 2010).