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Future Challenges of the Convention Bureau

Funding and governance

The operation of convention bureaus as specific destination marketing organisations faces numerous challenges. These are associated with the formal aspect of managing such an office, establishing it in particular structures, budgeting, presenting a return on investment, as well as substantive aspect of the operations. The meetings industry is constantly changing and developing, and organisations whose work is related to this sector must be tremendously dynamic and ready to find solutions and proposals in response to the changing reality.

In order to define the challenges related to the financing of convention bureaus' operations and managing these organisations, what needs to be indicated first is the lack of cooperation between entrepreneurs representing local business and institutions responsible for particular components of the local tourist product (including offers for event organisation). The effect of the cooperation between these two groups of stakeholders should be a coherent offer, updated on an ongoing basis and adjusted to the changing trends in the meetings industry and to the expectations of potential organisers in the procurement process. The phenomena which result most frequent recently and which should be paid heed to by the convention bureau leaders are:

- ◆ Building engagement of the event participants and concentrating on the experiences and emotions evoked by a given event;
- ◆ Changing the form of even classical types of events (for instance, festivalisation of conferences or trade fairs);

- ◆ Using new technologies in the entire process of event realisation (also in communication with the organisers);
- ◆ Searching for individual approaches;
- ◆ Focusing on relaxation (wellness and spa); and
- ◆ Combining business with recreation (*bleisure*).

The role of the leader

The role of convention bureau leader is to take all these factors into account in the management process and to find the best ways to use the expectations, e.g. those related to trends, to build the competitive advantage of the destination they represent.

The role of the leader is to prepare the strategies for event acquisition and to manage the portfolio of events acquired for the destinations. Their effects and influence on the destination may be both positive and negative. The aim is to limit the costs and maximise the benefits, which in consequence will have the greatest impact on the destination at the financial and social levels, or from the perspective of its growth. In this aspect, what is of tremendous importance is sustainable development and the phenomenon of tourist overload, which is suffered by many popular touristic destinations.

Entrepreneurs and investment

The event venue is selected, to a large extent, by entrepreneurs. If the promotion is efficient, they may even commence business activity in a given destination. Creating the image of the destination as a business-friendly place which is worth investing in, may lead to not only a higher number of events, but also an inflow of investors, including foreign investors. To achieve such effects it is necessary for the entrepreneurs and their organisations to devise a systemic cooperation with institutions responsible for the development of the destination, including convention bureaus. Lack of such cooperation not only poses a challenge to the destination marketing bureau, but also limits the possibilities for development of the destination. Moreover, the cooperation model with engages the business, administrative and scientific partners has a great influence on the economic growth in a given location, especially from the perspective of searching for and supporting innovations and implementing innovative solutions.

Challenges posed by the meetings industry

The challenges faced by convention bureaus include also all the problems which generally are related to the meetings industry. This means that issues connected with the quality of meetings, the way in which they are organised or budget cuts directly or indirectly affect convention bureaus operations. Clients' expectations concerning professional meetings are soaring, especially in the scope of the use of new technologies, with budgets frozen at the previous levels or even with decreased budgets. There is no one who would not compete to obtain financing: organisers, exhibitors, sponsors and participants. Meetings planners would naturally wish to keep their profits at the highest level possible, with the assumption that the economy remains in a good condition, but the suppliers of the meetings components also increase the prices for their services. Yet a challenge for all of them is to maintain the enterprises of associations' interest in holding meetings (including attracting sponsors) as well as keeping a high attendance ratio.

Funding and finance

A difficult task which needs to be fulfilled for the successful operation of a convention bureau is combining functionalities which theoretically seem incompatible – most bureaus are private-public organisations of not-for-profit nature which spend public funds and must prove that their operations bring benefits for the destination. Meanwhile, apart from the competition between the destinations and being involved in frequently burdensome combats to acquire an event, it is the case that the bureaus must struggle with regulations which preclude convention bureaus employees from participating in domestic or international meetings or becoming a member of industry-related organisation.

As it has already been mentioned, most convention bureaus are not-for-profit organisations and their operations are based on a combination of financing sources.

A key source of financing is membership fees. Firms and institutions chip in so that a convention bureau may operate, and the amount of fees depends on the rules adopted. It may be the case that, for instance, for hotels the reference point is the number of hotel rooms and sometimes it is a given amount assigned to particular categories of members.