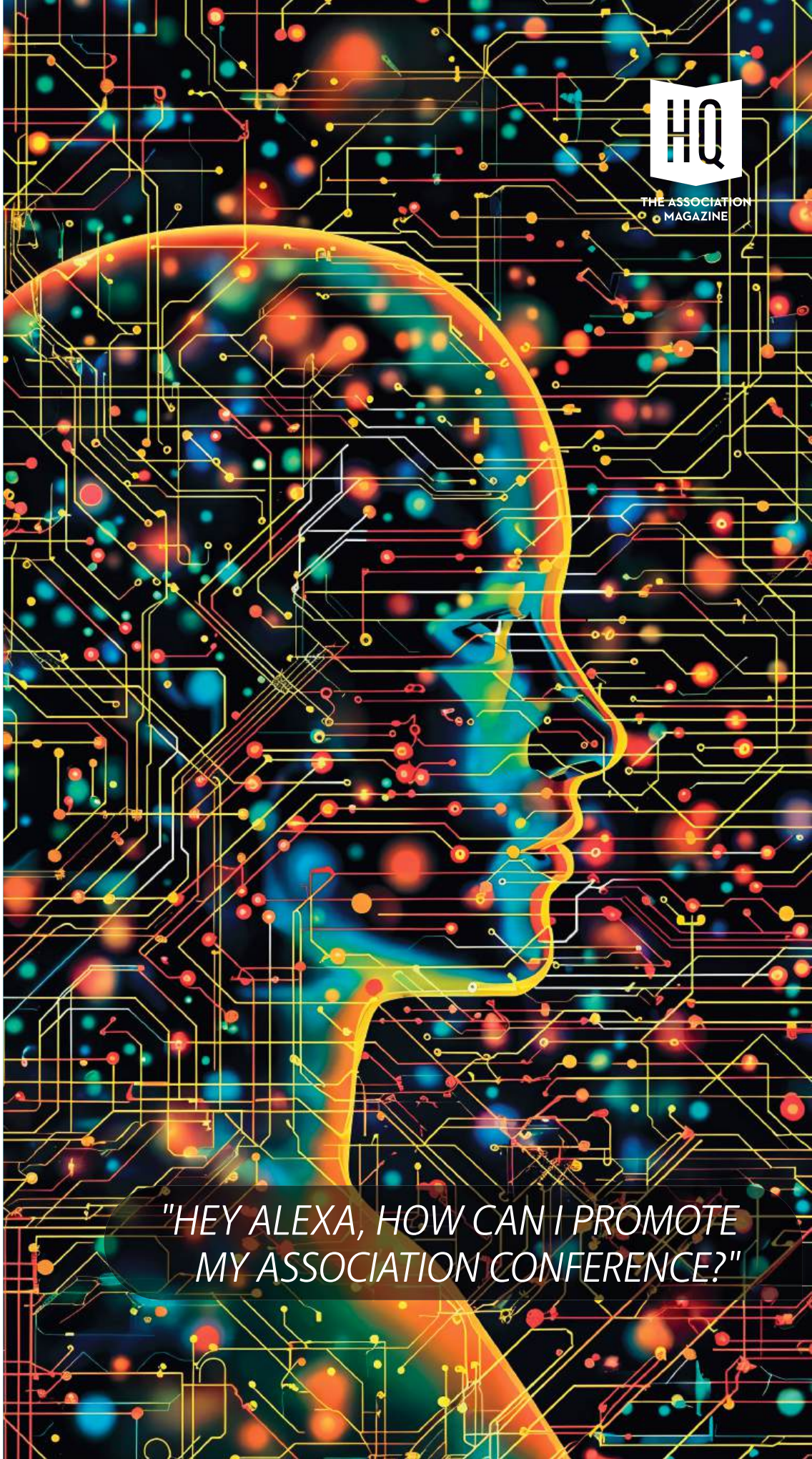
Headquarters

NOVEMBER 2024 #117 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



Veemal Gungadin (Gevme)
"With generative AI, attendees will have more time to network with personalised content"

Juliano Lissoni (MCI Group)
"What AI Technology is managing to do now is democratise our creative talent"

Prague Congress Centre
"A substantial investment in Technology adds to the premium nature of our brand"

Göteborg & Co
"Our digital twin project will make our city more accessible for everyone"

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Editor's Letter



HOW IS TECHNOLOGY RESHAPING OUR LIVES?

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

As I sat down to write this letter, I realised that I have only a limited knowledge of technology. Like many of us, I experience technology as it makes its way into and shapes my life. In this piece, I would like to share my thoughts on navigating this evolving landscape. I have no objections to technology; I accept the idea that "technology determines how our society evolves." It is a powerful force that cannot be stopped or fully controlled. However, this is not necessarily a problem, as people are using new technologies to do things better than before. It is this constant innovation that drives social evolution.

I know some of you disagree with this stance, and I understand why. But I stand by it. Technology has enabled us to achieve remarkable things, especially in recent years. It has allowed us to work and learn remotely, which was essential during the pandemic. It has also made communication more efficient, instantly connecting us with people across the globe.

The meetings industry has undergone a radical post-pandemic transformation. Technology has advanced at an incredible pace, and we are still feeling its effects. When I attend conferences, I see first-hand how automation and digital tools have changed the entire experience from start to end. Sound, visuals, interaction, and movement; everything has been transformed. All communication happens through devices we rely on daily. Technology is now an integral part of our lives.

But then I stop and think: is this all positive? Brandon Swenson from the **University of Arkansas Grantham** wrote a fascinating article on "*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of Technology.*" Reading his thoughts was eye-opening. He points out some of the 'bad' aspects, like how our hyperconnectivity makes it difficult for us to disconnect and relax. This constant state of engagement can lead to stress and exhaustion, making it harder to rest appropriately. And the 'ugly'? Swenson highlights issues like the spread of misinformation, the rise of cyberbullying, and the increase in online cyberattacks. These darker sides of cyberspace can trigger anxiety, depression, addiction, and other mental health problems.

At *HQ Magazine*, we provide a comprehensive overview of our position and future direction in this rapidly evolving world. We are undoubtedly moving towards a more connected and simplified future. However, with every step forward, there are inherent complexities and trade-offs. How we navigate this ongoing transformation will shape our industry and the world we live in. Dive into this edition for insights from our experts and explore the impact of tech on events and beyond.

HQ #117

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BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

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"AI itself will not replace you. But somebody using AI may/will. So, embrace change"



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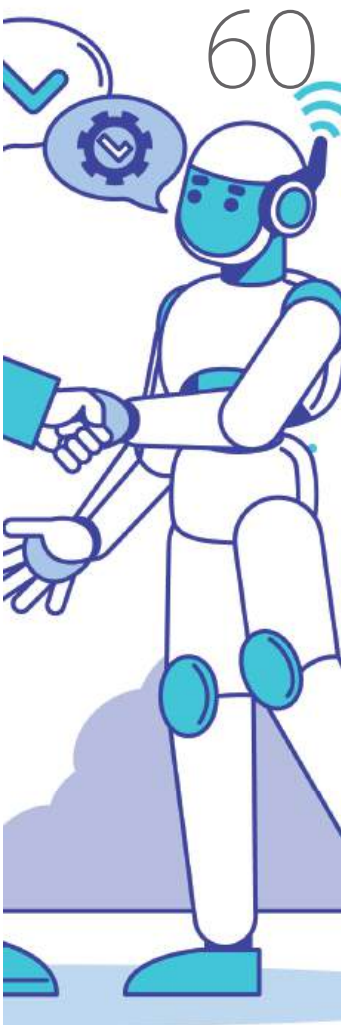
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Cvent
The Impact of AI on Modern Event Planning



ICCA
ICCA Latin America & Caribbean 2024



CityDNA
The Enduring Value of In-Person events



Gothenburg
A Digital Twin in Sync with the City!



2025: An Event Odyssey!

- **Interviewer**: HAL, you have an enormous responsibility on this mission, in many ways perhaps the greatest responsibility of any single mission element. You're the brain, and central nervous system of the ship, and your responsibilities include watching over the men in hibernation. Does this ever cause you any lack of confidence?
- **HAL**: Let me put it this way, Mr. Amor. The 9000 series is the most reliable computer ever made. No 9000 computer has ever made a mistake or distorted information. We are all, by any practical definition of the words, foolproof and incapable of error.

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES, MAGAZINE MANAGER

Up in the air and with my thoughts completely wrapped up in this magazine, I decided to revisit this timeless masterpiece by Stanley Kubrick. Inspired by several short stories by science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, '*2001: A Space Odyssey*' explores themes as controversial as they are topical, such as human evolution, technology, extra-terrestrial life and artificial intelligence in a gloomy and contemplative reassessment of the future of humanity. During the voyage to Jupiter to investigate an alien monolith, the plot takes a terrifying twist when the sentient supercomputer HAL 9000 refuses to obey the human crew (*'Sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that'*) encapsulating themes of control, trust and the potential dangers of artificial intelligence. Ultimately, the film leaves 'human error' hanging in the supercomputer's ambivalent lapses and suggests that there may be a danger of becoming too dependent on technology.

The reader may cynically think that this convoluted exercise is nothing more than a futuristic futility miles away from reality. However, I prefer to focus on the 'too dependent on technology' line to prove to you that, yes, there is already a (not so complex or sophisticated) Hal 9000 in our midst. They're called 'Siri' and 'Alexa', 'Microsoft' and 'Amazon,' and – as you can see from my conversation with technologist **Juliano Lissoni** – these apps and digital facilitators are already altering human intellectual structures in their interaction with the surrounding environment. This is also the conclusion of my colleague **Jesús Guerrero Chacón** when diagnosing automated content in destination promotion: "Relying on AI to create your destination marketing content without human supervision often results in generic, lifeless descriptions that lack the unique touch and personality of a human writer." The free handing over of our tasks and duties to a machine will not only make the storytelling of our cities indistinguishable from one another, it will also shrink our intellectual abilities, disrupting the human imprint that has defined the social engineering of our lives for millennia. After all, the human condition is predicated upon our ability to cohere as a unit to recognise that the success of the community supersedes the fleeting desires of the individual.

These same concerns permeate the book *'Nexus: A brief history of information networks, from the Stone Age to Artificial Intelligence'* by Yuval Noah Harari. "In the current embryonic phase of artificial intelligence, it is computers that decide who will have a housing credit contract, who will have a certain job and who will go to prison", writes Harari. "As this trend grows and accelerates, it will become progressively more difficult for us to understand our lives. Can we trust algorithms to make sensible decisions and create a better world?" In the meetings sector, the possibilities offered by generative AI, large databases and chat boxes are endless. They can unlock new professions and skills so that professionals can streamline a new productivity framework. "One of the areas definitely involves the attendees' experience at events. I feel that mass personalisation is where we shall see the most significant impact," predicts **Veemal Gungadin, CEO** of the event technology agency, **Gevme**. This apocalyptic pontificate on AI may inspire incredulity and omission in many, but Kubrick's film was only released in 1968... and more than 50 years later, the current reality does not seem so absurd and untimely as we enter a new (event) AI-driven era!



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Copenhagen Legacy Lab: Building Lasting Impact in The Meetings Industry



Gerda-Marie Rist, Head of the Copenhagen Legacy Lab, reflects on how the Lab has evolved since its launch in 2019, including key achievements, legacy processes from congresses and major events, and Copenhagen's new **All Inclusive** strategy to drive meaningful, long-term impact for the city and its partners.



In 2019, we explored the Legacy Lab project during the BestCities Forum in Copenhagen. Nearly five years later, what updates have you made to the legacy framework based on your work with associations and congresses?

Since the launch of **Copenhagen Legacy Lab** in 2019, we have executed 13 major legacy processes in close collaboration with the congress organisations. We have also conducted an extensive study on nine congresses together with **MeetDenmark**, which was published in 2023. This has provided us with a lot of experience, and we are continuously adjusting our method, tools, and templates according to our observations. In collaboration with consultants and a national economist, we have dug deeper into methods of measuring the output, outcomes, and impacts, which have strengthened the tools we had available.

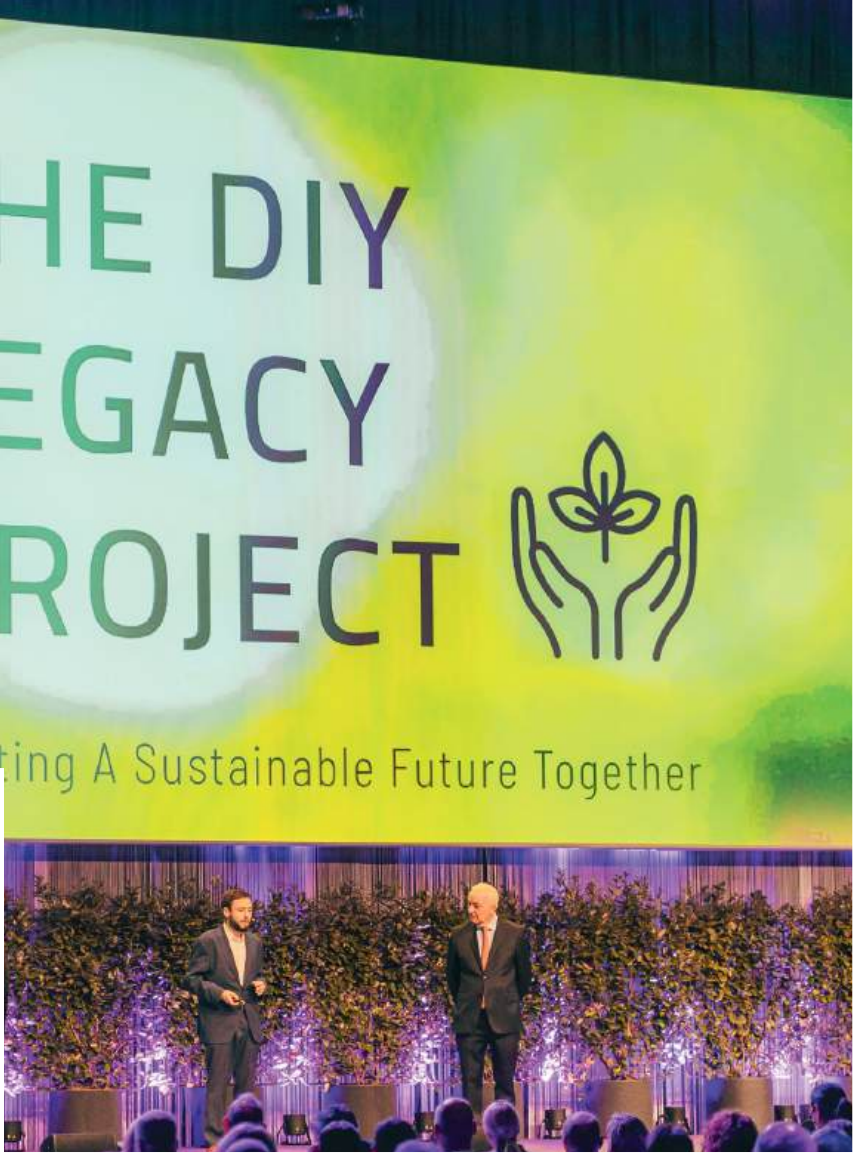
Recently, we have included major events (e.g., sports events) in our legacy framework and adjusted our congress model slightly to have one model that can accommodate both areas.

In our work, we acknowledge the importance of having a strategic framework that helps us work systematically and focused. Not two legacy processes are the same. We constantly adjust the process to fit the concrete case, as these can vary in scope, content, and execution. However, one very important factor, which we invariably put time and effort into, is to discuss 'the why'. Why are we engaged in this legacy initiative; what is the underlying problem, and which change do we want to see in the long run after the congress? Having this dialogue with the relevant stakeholders and allowing time for this phase of the process



is sometimes challenging but always time well spent. Also, it helps us to plan the evaluation phase properly and set up the right measuring parameters.

We are currently exploring whether and how AI can contribute to the early stages of our legacy process, identifying the right stakeholders and suggesting relevant legacy areas.



The Copenhagen Legacy Lab follows a strategic process aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Which sectors have shown the most significant potential legacies, and how has the local community benefited?

Our legacy initiatives focus on three of Copenhagen's prioritised strongholds: life science, green transition, and information and communications technology. While all sectors can benefit from working with a legacy process, we have seen the greatest impacts in health and green transition.

Within life science, the sector with most congresses coming to Copenhagen, typical focus areas for legacy have been patient involvement, talent attraction, and education. The patient days have been very well received, and several congresses are incorporating the concept of a patient day in their congress programme as a standard. For example, **the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition** held a Family Education Day at their congress in Copenhagen in 2022, where around 30 families were invited to meet the experts and obtain new knowledge about their child's disease, as well as exchange experiences with other affected families.

As an example from green transition, we were involved in developing the **'Copenhagen Lessons'** during the **International Union of Architects (UIA)** congress in 2023. These ten principles will create a common language to accelerate sustainable change in the built environment.



Another angle that has proven very valuable is our work with the associations to help them sharpen their impact and adjust their ways of working. The **Global DIY-Summit 2022** legacy activity focused on creating a more responsible and sustainable DIY industry, resulting in annual reporting of the external Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance initiatives from various manufacturers and retailers within the industry. We also worked with the **Nordic Blockchain Congress 2023** and facilitated the identification of four key challenges in this industry, and established four steering groups focusing on these issues.

For the 2024 ISA SUP and Paddleboard World Championship, Copenhagen Legacy Lab worked with Surf & SUP Danmark and 19 Danish tourist boards. What were the event's main objectives, and how was the strategic alignment realised?

Before the world championship, we analysed the link between stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) and outdoor tourism and found that Denmark had a large potential for developing SUP among tourists. We developed a national SUP universe in collaboration with **Surf & SUP Danmark, VisitDenmark**, and the 19 Danish tourist boards.

To further increase the engagement of the tourist boards, they were asked to be involved in a pre-tour hosted by Surf & SUP Danmark. Many of the boards welcomed the idea of having a tour to visit their region, and the early dialogue enabled us to match the tour plan directly to local and existing water sports events. Merging the pre-tour with local events was a clear win-win situation.

Following the successful WindEurope 2023 congress, the association will return to Copenhagen for its annual event in 2025, the 7th time it has chosen the city. Given Denmark's role as a pioneer in wind energy, this is an opportunity further to build legacies around innovation, energy, and sustainability. Has any pre-event planning been done, and what are the strategic objectives and potential impacts for both WindEurope and Copenhagen?

We have been fortunate to work with WindEurope for several years, which enables us to work consistently with legacy and build on our previous measures. WindEurope has focused on the involvement of school children and early talent attraction in Copenhagen and other locations, targeting the workforce gap within the wind industry, which will only increase with time. Denmark is among the leading countries in terms of the education of schoolchildren within the wind area. For example, **Copenhagen Municipality** has educated schoolchildren through the **Greater Copenhagen Living Lab in Energy & Water** public-private partnership for many years. With the upcoming legacy initiative for 2025, which we are currently working closely with WindEurope to prepare, we will be able to reach even more local families and children, and not least to inspire other countries to do the same.

Last year, you launched a risk assessment white paper to identify key threats in the sector, highlighting concerns such as travel restrictions, technological infrastructure, inflexible contracts, and regional instability. Has this influenced legacy building with your clients? And does the risk assessment play a role in your legacy methodology?

The risk project has not yet directly influenced our legacy methodology or our ability to collaborate with clients and stakeholders. However, it has helped us reflect on risks in our legacy processes and, not least, the long-term effects. Risks associated with pre- and during-event activities will typically be tied to resources, mandates, commitment, time and funding. More long-term risks can be sectoral changes, strategic priority adjustments, lack of funding, change of leadership, challenges in data and many more. With increased experience with legacy processes, we have become more skilled at risk mitigation.

The updated Copenhagen Sustainability Guide helps reduce CO_2 emissions and event resource consumption. Has the guide influenced your partners to consider event legacies, and is it changing the approach to your supply chain?

We are updating the *Copenhagen Sustainability Guide* to a more comprehensive tool, strongly aligned with our new strategy, '**Copenhagen All Inclusive**' and our commitments to Net Zero Carbon Events. From a legacy point of view, we hope that the inclusion in the guide will inspire associations to consider working strategically with impact/legacy together with us. Our ambition is for more associations to understand better the enormous potential their events can have economically, environmentally, and socially.

Among the various case studies you have worked on, have there been instances where the outcomes or impacts (social, environmental, educational, or economic) deviated from the original framework used to design and measure them? Were there any surprising legacies or impacts that were not foreseen? If so, does serendipity play a role in the legacy-building process?

A legacy process rarely results in a straightforward outcome easily defined by an easily measured KPI. We try to think the process through to the evaluation phase and to measure what we find most relevant, but often, we can add excellent outcomes as add-ons that we could not imagine from the start. For example, we recently worked with the **World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)** in connection with the **World News Media Congress 2024** in Copenhagen. By coincidence, we met a Danish journalist working with

news avoidance among Generation Z, and this ended up in a successful legacy initiative involving a workshop with 70 international students from the **Danish Folk School** in Elsinore and 12 congress delegates. The *resulting 'Copenhagen Criteria'*, **7 News Values** to guide the development of journalistic products for young generations, have been spread around the globe to inspire news editors to target young audiences in new ways. Enlightened democracies require various groups of people, including the young generations, to participate in political decisions and the news environment. So, while we can measure the spread of the News Values and how they are used to educate new journalists, etc., what is most important is that we are targeting a potential democratic problem with this legacy initiative.

What steps should the MICE industry take to promote better knowledge sharing and collaboration between destinations and associations? Are there any inspiring examples that have shaped Copenhagen's own legacy journey?

Showing concrete examples of how legacy has impacted our society makes it more tangible to understand, but a focused communication effort remains and is on our list of important wins for the years to come.

Our legacy road has been collaborative from the outset across Denmark and internationally. We chose early on to go 'open source' and to share research, case tools with the MICE industry – not only as an inspiration but also to support a transition in our industry. We strongly believe we can only succeed if we work together and share. Many steps have been taken already to secure this path. There are many excellent, inspirational examples of legacy and impact work that has been done, such as **JMIC/ICEBERG, BestCities, ICCA, IMEX, Meet4Impact, UTS/Business Events Sydney, JBEL** and so many destinations that have now created their own models for working with impact and legacy.

Wonderful Copenhagen recently launched its new strategy, All Inclusive, which moves from a narrow focus on revenue to a focus on broad, lasting impacts. With this, legacy is adopted as a strategic cornerstone of our organisation's way of working. I think this is highly motivating and sparks hope for the broad implementation of legacy, serving as a potential game changer for lasting impact across the globe.

Just a few weeks ago, **Copenhagen** won the **GDS-Movement Impact Award with #MEET4IMPACT** for its **Legacy Lab** programme

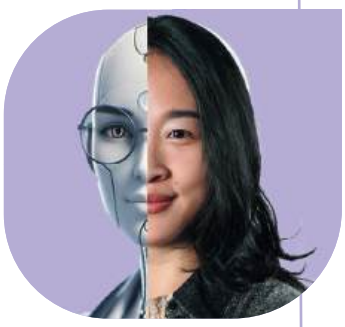


HQ ESSENTIAL

INTERVIEWS &STORIES



"Hey **Siri**, help me **Sell my Destination**!"



That sounds ridiculous, right? But trust me, it is not too far from the truth these days. It is impossible to ignore how AI is changing the meetings industry, sometimes for the better, but often with problematic consequences. Little did I know, when I enrolled in an AI-focused MBA at the end of 2022, just how big of an impact it would have on my view of the industry and on my role when I rejoined *HQ*. AI is now a part of every discussion at different in-person and online events, whether in panels, sessions, webinars, or courses, proving its rapid growth in every corner of the meetings industry. I have attended more AI-focused sessions at events than I can count, and I have come across an increasing number of AI-generated articles and marketing content. Let me tell you: some of this content is painfully easy to spot.

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN, DEPUTY EDITOR

AI Is Making Our Lives Much Easier, But at What Cost?

The impact of AI extends far beyond the meetings industry. It is a central topic in the discussions of global leaders and was a key focus at the recent **Latin America, the United States and Spain in the Global Economy Forum**, co-hosted by the **Spain-US Chamber of Commerce** and the Spanish newspaper *El País*. This high-profile event, held in New York at the end of September 2024, just before the **UN General Assembly** session, brought together influential business leaders, public authorities, financial analysts and academics to discuss critical issues such as artificial intelligence, innovation and the future dynamics of the global economy.

During the forum, **Pilar Manchón, Senior Director of Engineering and AI Research Strategy at Google**, made a statement that captures the broader risks associated with AI: "With AI, the biggest risk we face is human stupidity." Manchón pointed out that while the dangers of AI (such as privacy breaches, intellectual property theft, and the potential replacement of human workers) are well known, the real danger lies in how humans choose to use, or misuse, this powerful technology. In their view, the most significant risk is not the technology itself, but human error, laziness and lack of foresight.

The warning from experts like Manchón reminds us that while regulations are being developed in the US, the EU, and other regions of the world, the most immediate concern is to ensure that we and our team members are smart, cautious, and aware when adopting AI tools.

AI-generated content can be a fantastic time-saver, but there are significant downsides. Relying on AI to create your destination's marketing content without human oversight often results in lifeless, generic descriptions that lack the unique touch and personality of a human writer. Without human intervention, the content may be grammatically correct, but it fails to capture the essence of what makes your destination truly special. This is where the *passepartout* problem comes in: a generic description could be applied to any destination, missing the point of telling a distinctive story. Here's an example some of you may recognise:

[Insert your favourite destination, whether it is a first-tier, second-tier, third-tier, or a country-wide description] is a vibrant and dynamic destination, offering world-class facilities for meetings, conferences, and exhibitions. Conveniently located with excellent transport links to major international hubs, this destination boasts a wide range of accommodation options, from luxury hotels to budget-friendly choices, catering to both business and leisure travellers. With its rich cultural heritage and diverse attractions, **[insert destination]** provides delegates with a unique blend of business and leisure opportunities. From state-of-the-art convention centres to picturesque settings for incentive programmes, **[insert destination]** has everything you need to ensure a successful and memorable event.

Do we even know what country this amazing destination is in? This type of content is often filled with generic phrases such as 'thriving metropolis', 'unparalleled connectivity'. These terms sound impressive, but they are ultimately devoid of any real meaning. Buzzwords like 'innovation' and 'ecosystem' make the copy feel robotic, and the repetition of these overused descriptors leads to a bland, personality-less narrative that could apply anywhere. When marketing a destination, these clichés offer no personalisation, no local flavour and no storytelling. They lack the specificity that distinguishes one city from another, resulting in a lifeless narrative that fails to capture the destination's true identity. This undermines the destination's efforts to stand out and wastes valuable marketing budgets to create a unique and recognisable brand, ultimately diminishing the competitive edge they are working so hard to build.

We need to be realistic: AI is a tool. It is not a human. When you market your destination, venue or event, you are selling to people. People do not connect with bland, soulless copy that sounds like it could describe any city in the world. They want stories. They want emotion. They want a real 'taste' of the destination.

For marketing professionals, copywriters and the media, it is important to ensure that content remains unique and personal, so that marketing efforts can avoid the pitfalls of generic, AI-generated text. Not forgetting the ethical dimension: when using AI to create content, you need to consider the impact. The audience deserves content that reflects the true identity of a destination. And the truth is, AI cannot capture that; only a human can.

AI is a Tool, but Human Expertise is Essential

AI is incredibly useful, but only if it is used wisely. It is a tool to help you work smarter, not to do your work for you (at least not yet). Sure, it can handle routine tasks, provide inspiration or even generate rough drafts, but it should never replace your human touch. You are the expert; you know who the ambassadors of your destination are, the vibe on the streets, the true colours of the landscapes and the authentic taste of the local food. AI does not live in your destination, and it certainly cannot sell it with exact authenticity.

Let's clear up a common misconception: there is a big difference between grammar and spelling checkers like **Grammarly** and AI text generators like **ChatGPT** or **Copilot**.

Grammar and spelling checkers refine pre-written content, polishing it for grammatical correctness, punctuation and style. These tools improve what you have already written, which is particularly useful if you are not a native speaker.

AI text generators, on the other hand, create new content from scratch. They are based on vast amounts of data and generate responses based on pre-defined structures and phrases, which – if left unchecked – often result in repetitive, formulaic content. What you think is new has probably already been written and used by someone else. And it is not always easy to detect when these models make mistakes. For example, AI models often make mistakes with historical dates because they rely on patterns from vast, imperfect data and generate answers based on probability, without any real understanding or fact-checking. Unlike humans, who cross-check known dates, AI focuses on linguistic context, which can lead to inaccuracies, especially with specific details. Try asking it about historical moments with dates you know by heart, and you will often catch some obvious errors.

Grammar checkers help you maintain your voice, while AI-generated content often lacks originality and can sound like it has been copy-pasted from a thousand other sources.



Use AI, but do not get lost in it

AI is undeniably a game-changer. It can simplify your life, automate tedious tasks, and help you quickly generate ideas. But it cannot replace human insight, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

In destination marketing, you must inject your content with the local flavour, expertise, and storytelling that makes your destination stand out. Yes, use AI to assist you, but do not let it run the show. The real magic happens when AI is a tool that works alongside your human creativity, not instead of it.

As more and more people are trained in AI, the stereotypical, formulaic writing will only become more obvious. Just scroll through LinkedIn and see how many people are thrilled or excited about things happening in their lives, it all starts to sound the same. Over-excitement is often a symptom of AI-generated content, but that doesn't mean that everyone using these terms is necessarily relying on AI.

The use of AI by more and more people raises another question: as destinations embrace AI for various purposes, including content creation, are they considering the environmental impact of these technologies? Major companies, such as **Google** and **Microsoft**, have already seen a significant increase in their greenhouse gas emissions due to the energy requirements of AI-powered data centres. How much energy is your destination using while you are using AI, and do you measure this in your sustainability strategies, such as the **GDS - Index**? This is a conversation worth having, and an important aspect to consider as we embrace these technologies.

Read **Expoplatform**'s article in this edition for more insights on AI content generation and the importance of editorial oversight.

The New **Productivity** is **Creativity**

The last session of the **ICCA LATAM & Caribbean conference** held at the **Club Hemingway** private resort referred to the various innovative methods that DMOs have at their disposal in destination management. The author of this session was **Juliano Lissoni, Managing Director of MCI Group Canada**, who offered a roadmap for the best use of these tools in the events industry and an overview of current technology. Our **Magazine Manager, Manuel Fernandes**, caught up with him for a stimulating chat.

An economist with an MBA in Marketing and a Master in Science Administration, Juliano Lissoni has a significant background in business models, innovation and digital strategies. However, his real passion lies precisely in understanding the impact of these aspects on the creation of human connections and in design thinking as a catalyst for strategic innovation. Because, as he argues, "Technology on its own is still just technology," people still have to define the problem and the solutions and, basically, all the work planning that technology has to comply with. "What we are witnessing now is an astounding moment in human history, which is the arrival of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). It opens up immense fields of possibility for us to realise this augmented reality in the way we do things, from simple ways of communicating in written form to solving more complex problems in terms of productivity and creativity," he says.

Juliano's presentation in Santo Domingo focused precisely on these topics, analysing what is happening in the world of AI and where it is going, while also delving into specific issues related to the impact it could have on DMOs. What we are seeing today in our environment is that as the use of generative AI grows, so does the need for critical analysis and creative problem-solving. In other words, casting an extra eye over what is being done in the light of the results obtained with generative AI. "Productivity comes in many forms," he says. "Nowadays, you can use systems such as **Microsoft Copilot**, where you can pinpoint the data, select the highlights and create the minutes of a meeting, just by talking to the tool to turn them into automatic action plans." Another issue that organisers and DMOs deal with frequently is RFPs for clients. "With the use of AI, you can map out exactly the steps you need to take and automate a large part of the responses to that RFP, also adjusting the language of the client to that of your destination or service provider." This is something that will lead to exponential productivity gains, reducing work from several days to a few hours by delegating the processing of all documentation and operations to AI-driven data.There is also a new concept of productivity, called creativity. By instance, all those storytelling tasks that DMOs have to carry out to promote their destinations have been given a new boost called artificial creativity. "When they invited me to present that innovation session in Santo Domingo, I decided to do something different. I used two AI technologies – **Runway's Gen-3 Alpha** and **SunoAI** – to generate a promotional video from a prompt with allegorical photos of the city." This served to show that everyone can be a creator now, within this generation of influencers, new content creators and social media. "We experienced the first revolution with the long-tail context in the early 2000s when the means of production became cheap. With the arrival of the latest generation of mobile phones with super-powerful cameras, a whole new world became content creator," he says.



AI is adding another layer to this ability to create content with features that we couldn't do on our own before, as they were too time-consuming or too expensive. "You can now create special effects, you can reproduce fictional characters and direct a film like Star Wars using AI technologies. A DMO can now make use of a new multimedia universe, benefiting from state-of-the-art technology and in-depth detail, whether in video, audio, images or text. That is why I say that creativity is the new productivity." Considering that the need for a structured value chain is starting to disappear, the machine is not going to replace the ability we have to generate a concept, a creation, something that requires a lot of human input. At least that's what Juliano reckons: "We can adopt any technology we like, and if we put five different people in a room with the same application, we will get five different end products. Why is that? Because there is a human element and selection criteria in the way our brains organise these activities. What AI technology is managing to do now is democratise our creative talent."

Simply put, human beings are key to establishing a data analysis process, rationalising the information, imposing a direction on the content, and speeding up the work with

meetings. Then, we come to the second part of the problem, which is the deliberate handing over of these tasks to AI. "You cannot deny the existence of these technologies, but you cannot outsource their work either. One of the things I have seen most is the total handover of the creation of gigantic posts and publications to AI. This results in totally artificial (no pun intended) and insipid copycats without any language of their own." Hence, there is a threat of losing the ability to synthesise and replicate a summary of a session, a conference presentation, or the construction of a manifesto, because of large language models. "*Unwavering commitment*', *'our company's tapestry,'* these are all typical keywords of language models that people need to pay attention to. You still need your ability to analyse text, to co-create your outputs, with your dynamics and flair." In fact, if you take a look at the history of technological applications, you will realise that humans have lost much of the brain's ability to navigate. Why? "Because we have outsourced it to **GPS, Waze** and **Google Maps**. Today, we can no longer navigate spaces like generations before," answers Lissoni. The difference is that AI is now taking this context to a whole new level with so-called virtual assistants. "I discussed this point of customer experience in the presentation with the DMOs. When browsing websites, even if they are user-friendly, you have to click, you have to browse. That is going to end, because when you put a layer of generative AI on a website, you are going to start 'talking' to the website. You will start to get audio responses from a virtual Customer Assistant, who will answer all your questions about, for example, an event or a venue."

Does this mean that the days of site inspections and fam trips are over? "Not necessarily, because in your decision process you have to consider two levels of data, primary and secondary. If I want to shoot a film in India, I can have access in advance to all kinds of brochures and information about studios, production teams, extras, etc. But I'll never have an accurate perception if I don't see for myself, talk to local experts, contextualise the space and the reality around me." So, this fusion of theoretical data and practical experiences is what will give you insights and a basis for defining your blue-sky thinking and final decision. Instead, these hosted tours can be measured through analytical data to maximise the return on investment in terms of future investment and biddings. "We did this exercise with synthetic data in a simulation of 50 databases on events, consumers, trends, to create correlations on the type of events you should attract to your destination. By creating different levels of analysis such as profitability, visibility or the impact of previous events and meetings, you can determine through data-driven AI which sectors or targets are best suited to or needed in your city in different categories," concludes Lissoni.

Want to know more? Read the rest of this conversation on ***our website.***

EUsalt: A Far Greater Resource Than Just a Table Seasoning

The importance of salt in our lives is not limited to food and feed and the health sector, but is highly important in the chemical, transport, and energy industries. A strategic business for the European economy, the proper representation of the values and benefits of salt often clashes with misinformation and misinterpretations in its public perception. **EUsalt** was created in 1958 to represent European producers and educate them about the values and benefits of salt. Today, the association represents companies from 19 countries in Europe and other continents, and almost 90% of total salt production in Europe. We spoke to **Adriana Nosewicz, Managing Director** of **EUsalt**, about the socio-economic and environmental benefits of salt production, innovation and sustainability in the sector as well as the **#NoSalternative** communication campaign.



How did the #NoSalternative project came about? How was it imagined, and what goals did it aim to fulfil?

The idea of the #NoSalternative campaign was prepared in the last months of 2022, to educate and communicate the benefits of salt as well as the different uses in people's daily lives. Members decided to go for a more humoristic communication to create a more dynamic interaction between the industry, policymakers and stakeholders connected to the Brussels bubble. We were in touch with a communication agency in Brussels that produced the videos and helped promote them through social media platforms. The drafting and production process started in early 2023, when the EUsalt Board decided on the scripts, scenes and dynamics. The campaign ran from November 2023 to February 2024, with one video a week accompanied by a teaser trailer, with four million advertising impressions, a remarkable total of 118,693 interactions and over one million views.

How are you currently tackling the problem of misinformation and changing the wrong perception of salt through your actions and marketing campaigns?

Salt is a vital part of people's lives not only as a seasoning ingredient but also as a water treatment product, medicine, and chemical ingredient, as well as for road safety during winter. EUsalt is also working with the **Iodine Global Network** (**IGN**) and the **World Health Organization** (**WHO**) concerning the promotion of iodised salt and its integration into Europeans' diets. Iodine is essential for thyroid health, brain development, and overall well-being, and salt iodisation remains the main strategy to ensure adequate intake across the WHO European Region. EUsalt is proud to have contributed to the WHO and IGN report, '*Prevention and control of iodine deficiency in the WHO European Region*', highlighting the importance of salt iodisation in tackling non-communicable diseases.

How can the sector point the way to energy self-sufficiency and economic independence for Europe, while at the same time strengthening sustainability?

The salt industry is uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in Europe's path toward energy self-sufficiency and economic independence, all while bolstering sustainability. The recent developments about different sodium-ion batteries underscore the potential of this mineral to revolutionise energy storage. This presents a significant opportunity for Europe to reduce its reliance on imported raw materials and potentially bolster its domestic battery production capabilities. The salt industry can further contribute to Europe's energy independence by supporting the growth of renewable energy sources. Salt caverns can be utilised for energy storage, effectively addressing the intermittent nature of solar and wind power.

Innovative projects capturing essential raw materials have also been in place for several years. There are operations able to recapture essential minerals such as mineral from salt bittern, for example. Lastly, the exploitation of sea salt contributes to the development of biodiversity with fauna and flora specific to wetlands. The spatial organisation of the ponds and their different depths and salinity levels favour the development of a variety of micro-environments and microorganisms which are attractive to a wide range of bird and fish species. This kind of habitat for communities of salt-tolerant vegetation and aquatic invertebrates is rarely found in other types of environments.

What kind of relationship does your sector maintain with technology and the automation of work processes? How are your members innovating and paving the way for a more modern and up-to-date industry?

Automation has become a key driver of transformation in the salt sector. Modern salt works and production facilities increasingly use automated machinery to streamline operations, from mining and extraction to packaging and logistics. This reduces reliance on manual labour for repetitive and potentially hazardous tasks, ensuring greater safety for workers while improving productivity. Beyond automation, the salt industry is embracing innovation to promote sustainability and modernise production processes. European producers are investing in technologies that reduce the energy used in salt production. It is also worth mentioning that water treatment technologies that use salt are being refined to improve the efficiency of household appliances, reduce energy consumption, and extend appliance lifespans – supporting both environmental goals and consumer needs. These innovations enhance salt production's environmental sustainability and align with the European Union's broader climate goals. It is how the salt sector contributes to the **REUSE** principle.



How is EUsalt looking at a wide range of digital tools and technological resources and utilising them within its framework?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, EUsalt implemented webinars and online events to give the possibility to all members and stakeholders to join the policy discussions. In recent years, the association restarted the in-person meetings via its annual events, which normally occur once a year in a designated country depending on members' proposals. We found that this in-person approach better increases participation and networking opportunities among members and stakeholders. In terms of other tools, EUsalt will continue to explore digital communications, such as short videos and dynamic content.

What are the highlights regarding education and training proposals for your membership?

EUsalt offers different opportunities for members to take part in policy discussions and promotes active participation in events and these meetings. Our members can participate in Committee meetings depending on their area of production and interest, often accompanied by a talk or presentation by an expert or an external specialist on a specific topic. The **EUsalt Innovation Award**, for example, specifically aims to recognise EUsalt members' commitment and initiatives in the area of innovation by providing a platform to showcase best practice models for the industry. During the EUsalt's annual events, the membership and interested stakeholders can participate in a full-day conference where speakers from different backgrounds present their latest work and research. During this day, the members can also showcase their projects through the Innovation and Safety Awards, a competition designed to highlight innovative projects and initiatives carried out by EUsalt members. At the end of these days, participants are invited to a site visit of a mine or sea salt plant depending on the location.



"In the past, you could entertain your delegates with a good speaker – today you need to immerse them into an experience"



UNICEO® – the United Networks of International Corporate Event Organisers - recently announced that its next International Congress 2025 will be held in January in Abu Dhabi. The congress under the slogan 'Elevate yourself, your teams, your events' will allow marketing, communications and events decision-makers from leading international corporations and associations to discuss the latest trends, strategies and challenges in these areas of activity. We asked the organisation's **CEO, Laurent Fuchs**, how the 2025 conference will address the critical role of live communications, experiential marketing and hybrid experiences in today's corporate event strategies.

How is the status of the meetings and events industry as we speak, from a communication and marketing perspective?

First of all, from a corporate perspective, meetings and events can be managed by different departments – marketing, communication, human resources – depending on the organisation's strategic structure. Each company or association has its own unique vision for driving sales, marketing products, or engaging employees, which leads to diverse event strategies. Since events are at the heart of human connection in business, the situation reflects the complexity and evolution of our world, with stark contrasts in engagement techniques, technology adoption, and event formats. Within our portfolio of members, we see varying approaches: some teams are overwhelmed by internal requests for live events, while others have scaled back significantly post-COVID, moving to hybrid or fully digital formats. Despite these differences, the common thread that unites us is the fundamental human need to connect. The variations in demand across sectors or regions are not divisions, but reflections of local needs, each bringing its own energy and challenges to the table.

What are the most up-to-date trends in customer engagement? What are currently the umbrella topics in the MICE industry that PCOs and individual event planners cannot ignore?

Trends are always the signals of what people value. If today there are many trends regarding places or tech tools, engagement is the key for event success and agencies know this well. A long time ago, you could ask your delegates to be passive and entertain them with a good speaker. This is not possible today; you need to immerse them into an experience. Moreover, and especially after the pandemic, people are in search for a meaning. So, the engagement experience needs to be connected with a strong message that give them a true reason to be there and to accept the message you are communicating. Among the umbrella topics

with a strong meaning, we find sustainability, diversity, or the integration of technology not as a tool, but as a means to 'elevate' human connection. Every event designer today needs to understand that to remain relevant, the focus is on creating sustainable, purposeful, human-centric experiences.

What were the most obvious criteria and benefits that led you to Abu Dhabi for the next UNICEOS congress?

When we went there with some of our Advisory Board Members, we were truly amazed. The UAE capital is a city that bridges cultures, ideas, and possibilities. It offers not only world-class infrastructure for events but a sense of purpose – a commitment to the future, built on a remarkable journey from humble beginnings to a thriving cultural and economic hub. Their values and forward-looking vision aligns perfectly with ours and therefore made it an ideal destination for our 2025 congress.

> *"Peer-sharing is not a side effect – it's the driving force.*

What is the likelihood of holding a 100% live event today without neglecting the optimisation and advantages of the hybrid world?



In today's world, live events are more than just physical gatherings – they are emotional experiences, enhanced by both in-person and virtual touchpoints. For most of our members, technology has transformed how we interact without replacing the magic of face-to-face engagement. To them, virtual platforms and tech tools are enablers, extending the reach of events, improving measurement, communication, and engagement, and often reducing workload.

For some, technology is seen as the ultimate panacea of solutions, particularly for cost savings, as online events eliminate travel, accommodation, and catering expenses; for others, it is just a tool. This is an ongoing and never-ending debate. But the real question is: can we fully capture the richness of human experience without being live and in-person? Neuroscience tells us it is not possible. That is why hybrid events – an evolution of a format that actually already existed – have gained traction. They offer a balance, though they come with higher costs and resource demands.

How did you design this congress? What pace did your marcom leaders and strategists set to meet your different sectors?

Together with **Debora Piovesan, UNICEO Head of Events** and 45 Congress Advisory Committee Members, we have done our best to create 'The Congress everyone dreams of attending'. We are talking about a space where the heartbeat of the sector can be felt by participants. The objective was to listen to our members' deepest needs focused on human connection, innovation, and meaningful engagement. These are the pillars of many events, but what makes the difference at the UNICEO Congress is the fact that the participants are involved in creating ideas. Peer-sharing is not a side effect – it is the driving force. Every attendee is a contributor, shaping the experience in real-time and redefining what is possible in corporate communication and events. Ultimately, this is what live experiences are meant to be. They are not just about content delivery – they are about co-creation, connection, and shared purpose. The event becomes more than just a meeting; it becomes a catalyst for change.

> *"UNICEO® operates as a think tank and community of practice for corporate communications and events leaders across the world's leading associations.*

Finally, what are your main projects for the near future?

Our Community of Practice was founded on a simple yet powerful idea: bringing together peers who share a passion for corporate and association marketing and communication, and who oversee event strategy, believing in the irreplaceable value of in-person meetings and live communication. That is why we organise numerous events for members in cities like Paris, London, Frankfurt, Rome, Geneva, Budapest, and more, along with national Forums. At present, I have to say our busy agenda and limited means (we are a small association) are mainly focused on the 2025 congress that promises to be an unforgettable event.

"**AI** Itself Will not **Replace you**. But Somebody Using AI may/will."



Events are about to enter a dynamic multiverse of various platforms and tools, and organisers and participants are themselves navigating an omnichannel landscape. However, many professionals fear integrating these technologies will overwhelm them regarding their capabilities and understanding, while others sloppily place many of their responsibilities on generative AI. **Gevme** is an omnichannel event management platform designed to streamline events across all touchpoints, from continuous registration and website building to data-driven insights and AI-powered features. Responsible for the innovative **Sustainability Hub for Events**, a platform designed to plan sustainable events with actionable insights based on AI, this tech company has been ahead of the curve, collecting awards and championing this hybrid revolution. We spoke to **Veemal Gungadin, Founder & CEO of Gevme**, about this brave new world.



As the meetings industry evolves, what skills should professionals focus on developing to stay competitive in a tech-driven environment?

More than ever, it feels to me that sticking to the basics in terms of skills is what we can and should do. The rate of technological change is accelerating. Less than two years ago, it was crazy to think that you could write a personalised birthday song in less than a minute. Or craft a concise, professional email reply within a few minutes. This is already normal for many. While technology will continue changing, now is the time when we should double down on what sets us apart from any technology or AI out there. First of all, when dealing with new AI systems, more than ever, it is important to question the output that you get. Treat new AI tech being deployed as a colleague presenting you a piece of work, by critically analysing it. Secondly, having a mindset of adapting to change will give you the willingness to move beyond the *status quo*. Lastly, once you have a growth mindset, you will continuously learn. And learning, these days, does not necessarily have to be within formal courses. For example, one of the skills you need to have today is "prompt engineering". You can easily learn this on YouTube and many other platforms for free. But this is a skill that gets outdated rapidly with new techniques coming around.

What are some common challenges meeting planners face when integrating new technologies, and how can they overcome them?

Integration of new technologies typically happens on a small scale, where only a handful of people are involved in the initiative. When this small group is aligned and have an early adopter mindset, then things move pretty fast. Most of the time, the challenges come when a larger group is involved, and some *status quo* needs to be broken. By default, most people do not like change. And meeting planners are busy people. They already have their hands full of tactical things to juggle. New technologies may burden many, and we then find resistance to change.

So, whenever a new technology is being integrated, start small. Identify one champion or a small group of early adopters who will be excited to work on the project and who will want it to succeed. Dream big, but start small. Get a small success first and then build on it. Spread it to more projects/events and eventually work towards changing the whole organisational mindset.

How can technology, particularly AI, enhance the efficiency of meeting planners and improve the overall attendee experience?

We live through times that are very similar to when the Internet was just new. Just imagine the early 2000s when there were big promises about how the Internet would revolutionise our lives – how we communicate with each other, how we buy

things, how we learn, how we work, etc. These all seemed farfetched for many back then. But, I would venture to say that almost everything that was predicted that the Internet would do has already happened within two decades. We are at around the same juncture now with Generative AI. This is a branch of AI that has caught the world's imagination regarding costs and the forms in which this technology can be adopted and integrated into various processes. As such, almost every industry is and will be impacted.

One of the areas definitely involves the attendees' experience at events. I feel that mass personalisation is where we shall see the most significant impact. When you attend an event today, it is up to you to absorb and make sense of all the content. Some may resonate with you, while some will not. But now, imagine that you have AI that can capture all the content and personalise the insights for you. So that you can now see the trends that will impact your career or your company, this is mass personalisation, and the tech to make it happen is already here. We shall see a broader deployment of this.

This means that attendees will have more time to spend networking, knowing that the content will be personalised.

What would you say to meetings industry professionals who are still hesitant to embrace technology and AI, believing it may not be essential for their work?

Think back to the 2000s. Many people thought the Internet was irrelevant. Go back further; you will find people who said that a computer was dumb and they did not see any value in it. So, do you want to be that person 'fighting against' tech & AI? It is clear that the adoption of tech & AI only accelerates yearly. AI itself will not replace you. But somebody using AI may/will. So, embrace change.

With the increasing reliance on technology and AI, what best practices should organisations follow to ensure the safe use of these tools and prevent data breaches?

The good news for organisations within the meetings industry is that cybersecurity has already been one of the top concerns over the past years. Laws like GDPR in Europe have already made it expensive for organisations that suffer data breaches. As such, there are already systems and people in place to check the security requirements of software before deploying any new technology. I think this needs to continue. There is, to some extent, a sense of euphoria around AI currently, but we all need to stay sane. IT departments need to be pragmatic and continue asking fundamental questions about data security and privacy around any system that will be adopted. Questions such as, how is my organisational data going to be safeguarded? Will my data be used for AI training purposes? What data privacy processes and certifications are in place?



HQ DESTINATION INTERVIEWS &EVENTS



AIME 2025 Set to be a **Blockbuster**



The **Asia Pacific Incentives and Meeting Event** (**AIME**) returns to the **Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre** (**MCEC**) from 10 to 12 February 2025.

AIME is the number one event for the business events community in Asia Pacific. It brings together international and local event planners to connect them with the best destinations, venues, and event suppliers from around the world.

AIME 2025 will be the fourth event delivered by **Event Director Silke Calder** and her team from **Talk2 Media and Events**, which manages the show on behalf of the **Melbourne Convention Bureau** (**MCB**).

Calder says AIME 2025 is set to be a blockbuster: "We have expanded our footprint at our MCEC home to 15,000 sqm over 10 bays to accommodate more than 600 exhibitors, 650 hosted buyers and the 20,000 meetings that are set to take place on the showfloor next February," she says.

This builds on 2024's exceptional growth and cements AIME as the leading event for the international business events community in the Asia Pacific region.

New zones first introduced to the 2024 showfloor, including **The Boutique** and **DMC Network**, have been significantly boosted with 250% more exhibitors in the DMC Network zone and 28 exhibitors in The Boutique attending AIME 2025.

"Whether it is wineries, distilleries, or intimate, design-led luxury venues, these bespoke and highly customisable experiences are in high demand and will feature prominently on the showfloor in 2025," Calder says.

In 2025, for the first time the global exhibitions association **UFI** will hold its **2025 Asia-Pacific Conference** following AIME at MCEC.

Calder says the team is thrilled to have UFI delegates in Melbourne the same week as AIME 2025.

"The senior-level attendees from large global organisations will be a welcome addition to our event, and we will be working with UFI to make sure that they feel welcome at AIME," she says.

AIME is held at the first convention centre in the world to have a **six-star Green Star** rating (MCEC). With a 32-year legacy, AIME and its partners are committed to sustainability at all levels, from cultural to environmental.

Calder says that, in 2025, AIME, in partnership with sustainability-focused event management provider **NatureBoss**, will plant a tree for every attendee at AIME:

"This means more than 4,500 trees will be planted following AIME and augments measures initiated at the 2024 show and continuing in 2025, which include reduction of print collateral, merchandise and signage coupled with a dedicated focus on reducing waste, promoting eco-friendly exhibitor practices, and showcasing sustainable event solutions," she says.

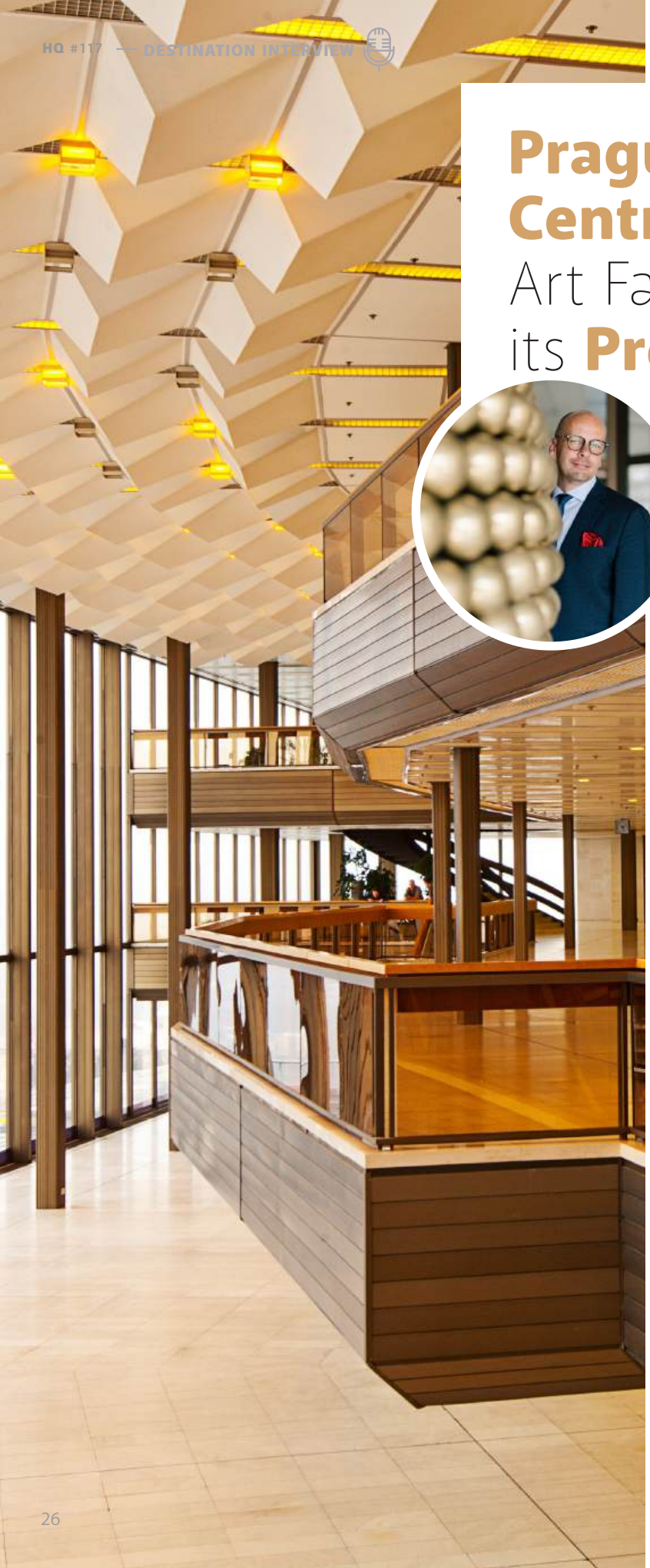
The Knowledge Program theme for 2025, "**We Matter!**" will highlight and celebrate the global business events industry as a powerful catalyst for economic growth.

Hosted and curated by **BEAM Founder El Kwang**, the Knowledge Program launches AIME with keynote speakers from AIME's speaker bureau partners, along with industry business leaders and professionals who will address 1,600 global event professionals attending the first day of AIME 2025.

"And the AIME Welcome Event is always a great opportunity for our industry to come together to catch up with friends and colleagues from around the world – it is always a fantastic night," Calder says.

AIME 2025 will run from 10-12 February 2025 at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre. For more information or to register to attend AIME

*visit: **aime.com.au***



Prague Congress Centre's State-of-the-Art Facilities Reinforce its Premium Status

"Technology is one of the trend-setting factors determining the future of the MICE industry," says **Roman Sovják, Sales and Marketing Director of the Prague Congress Centre** (PCC). In this interview, he sheds light on how the centre managed to get to its pre-pandemic business figures and how the company coped with the energy crisis. Technological and engineering innovations are key to maintaining PCC's premium position, as is the unique *Genius loci* that helps create the unique moments visitors take away from the centre.

Prague has become the sixth most attractive congress destination in the world. How does this affect your business?

Prague is a beautiful destination with a rich history and romantic charm. It is one of the safest cities in the world, with excellent infrastructure and great accessibility. With a public transport system rated one of the best in the world, you can get everywhere in minutes. For example, you can reach the city centre in ten minutes from the Prague Congress Centre. The city's position as a university hub also gives it intellectual prestige. It is no wonder that Prague has achieved such an excellent ranking in the **ICCA** rankings and ranks in the top 5 in Europe. Naturally, this brings more opportunities for us as well; we are reaching out to prestigious clients and successfully expanding our services internationally, attesting to the premium nature of our brand and the high standard of service we can provide for our clients. I believe that PCC is also actively contributing to the congress attractiveness of Prague, whether through its innovative approach, modern facilities or excellent approach to sustainability.

Sustainability is a priority, not just in the MICE industry. What role does it play at PCC?

Sustainability is a natural part of our daily operations. We are mindful of the carbon footprint we leave behind and actively succeeding in reducing it. That is why we invest

in green solutions and have completely transformed our energy management, from a massive photovoltaic rooftop power plant to heating the halls with waste heat from the kitchen, to establishing sustainable concepts in catering, etc. However, we also incorporate sustainability into our cooperation with suppliers or partners. For example, our cooperation with the **Prague Convention Bureau** has motivated congress delegates to use public transport, which is practically right next to the entrance of the building. If certain conditions are met, visitors to the centre can also use public transport free of charge.

The Prague Congress Centre is an iconic building of the city, but like many neo-functionalist buildings, it was not designed to be energy-efficient. Given its enormous size, how did you deal with that?

Our building is truly iconic, and the generous budgets allocated to art at the time of its construction make it unique in design. The building was designed to showcase its time and the capital, so everything associated with the PCC is grandiose. We benefit from our size and versatility – we offer 70 halls and lounges with a capacity of up to 10,000 participants, making us one of the most flexible venues in Prague. However, energy efficiency was not on the table just a few years ago. Therefore, in 2015 we started to apply energy saving measures using the Energy Performance Contract (EPC) method. Until then, the costs of electricity, gas and water amounted to almost €2,9 million annually. We have invested €5,3 million in the EPC project, with a projected return on investment of under 10 years. In the end, the investment was recouped within five-and-a-half years. In the first few years we saved €1,4 million a year, now it is already at €2 million. Not to mention the fact that being ahead of the curve in the energy transition during the recent energy crisis literally saved us.

It is not only through cost savings that you are thriving. Your business results for 2023 were positive. How do you look at the future of the centre?

In the last two years, we have held a greater number of scientific, medical and technological conferences, which has positively impacted our business results. We have already surpassed the pre-pandemic numbers, and PCC attendance has increased by 30,000 to 230,000 visitors in 2022. Revenue increased by 15%, allowing us to invest in the centre's development. We implemented self-check-in kiosks with badge printing and invested heavily in audiovisual technology. For example, we purchased a giant 20x8-metre frame projection screen, which provides 100% visibility for all 2,766 spectators in the Congress Hall, even on the balconies, thanks to its overall





height of 30 metres, and a variable LED wall accompanying the projection screen. Event organisers can present virtually any multimedia content with video directing supporting up to 8K for large screen projection. Our technological innovations include LED MESH backdrops for stunning stage effects and LED posters that effectively replace traditional roll-ups or smaller digital displays. Technology is one of the drivers that will determine the future direction of the convention and event industry. Substantial investment and a focus on cutting-edge engineering and technology are key to our future. That is why we also strive to stay one step ahead in this area.

What impact do investments in the latest technology have on the participants and organisers of large events themselves?

With the growing demand for face-to-face meetings and renewed corporate investment, it is also crucial to enhance the experience and emotions of visitors. This can also be effectively achieved through modern technology. Attendees seek innovative and interactive experiences that appeal to them and create unforgettable memories. Our state-of-the-art equipment can take any event to the next level. As does our superior service. After all, creating unique moments is our speciality, which is also appreciated by exceptional business partners such as the **Czech Olympic Committee** or the organisers of well-being events **Happiness at Work**. Of course, technology adds to the premium nature of our brand, but it also contributes to building a strong community that grows around us. As a result, the largest marketing community in the country, **#HolkyzMarketingu**, comes back to us repeatedly.

How important is the role of your artistic value in events?

Crucial. In our interiors, you will find works by world-famous artists, especially glassmakers who were considered masters of the field in their day and who inspired the world – from Stanislav Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtová and their sculpture Woman with a Dove, to František Vízner's chandeliers in the lounges. The originality and unique backdrops of our premises increase the attractiveness of events and, together with panoramic views of romantic Prague, create an inspiring and pleasant environment for visitors. Our *genius loci* gives us a competitive edge, encourages creativity and helps to give our events a hallmark of memorability. After all, it is not for nothing that we are also a popular location for filmmakers, fashion photoshoots or commercials. Most recently this year, our space was used by the filmmakers for the sci-fi film *Spaceman of Bohemia* (Johan Renck, 2024) starring Adam Sandler, who used the timeless design of the so-called "Star Trek room" for some scenes.

How important is community building to PCC?

The seeds of friendships and professional collaborations are formed in our event spaces, and we are delighted to be a part of them. We also strive to build relationships and communities in the non-profit sphere. We support various charitable projects and events, both financially and non-financially, by providing our space to non-profit organisations. This has been the case for many years, for example, with the **Jedlička Institute**, which helps children and young people with physical disabilities integrate into everyday life, or the **No Foot No Stress** initiative, a foundation for people who have lost their limbs. We are also members of the **Corporate Social Responsibility Association**, which, in cooperation with *Forbes* magazine, announces the ESG ranking of companies. I am proud that the 2025 ranking will take place at the Prague Congress Centre, where sustainability is not just a sexy claim but a real value that we constantly push to a new level.

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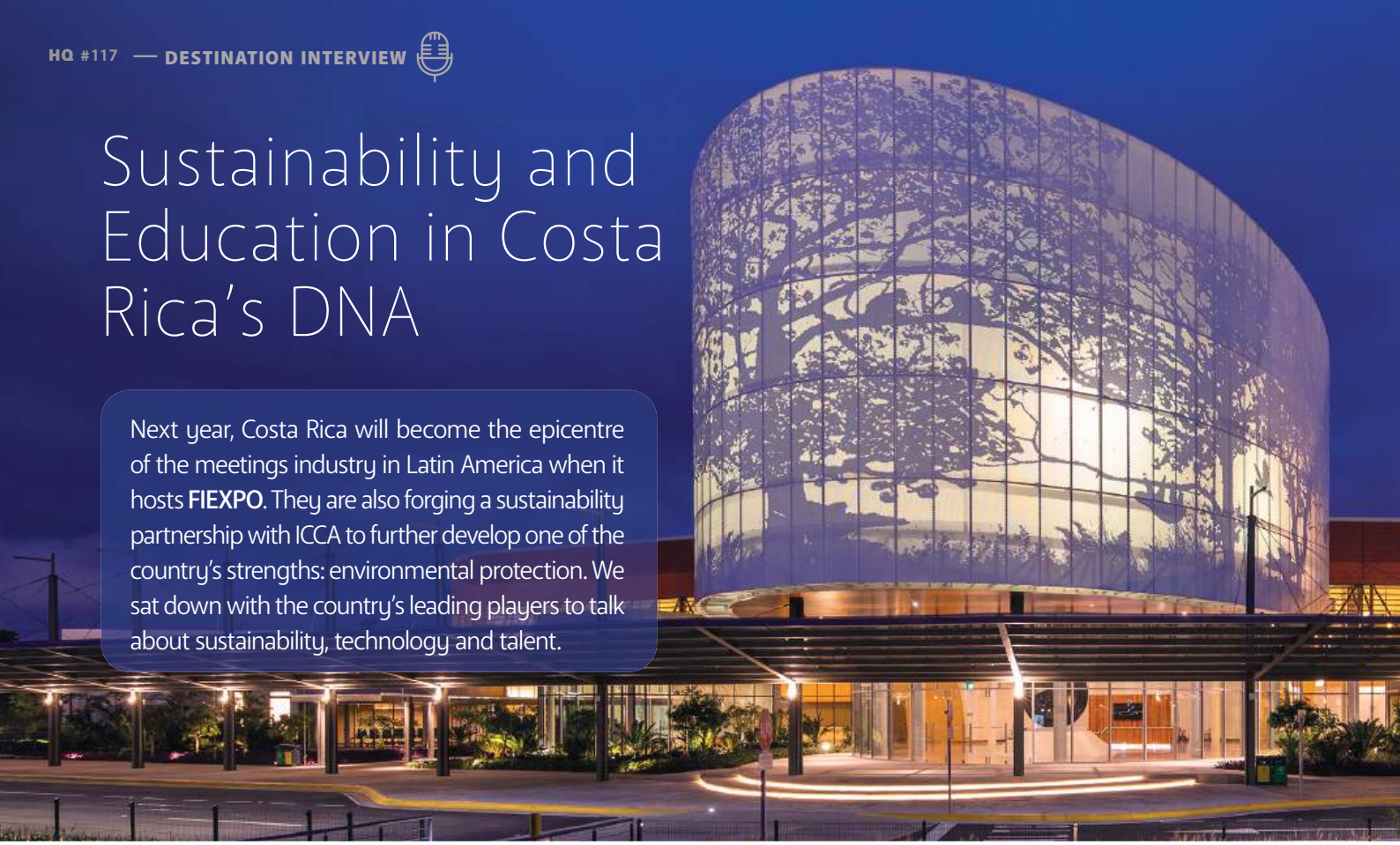
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Sustainability and Education in Costa Rica's DNA



Next year, Costa Rica will become the epicentre of the meetings industry in Latin America when it hosts **FIEXPO**. They are also forging a sustainability partnership with ICCA to further develop one of the country's strengths: environmental protection. We sat down with the country's leading players to talk about sustainability, technology and talent.

Costa Rica will host FIEXPO LATIN AMERICA for the next three years, taking over from neighbouring Panama as the host of the most important tradeshow in the region. FIEXPO is the place par excellence where destinations and suppliers connect with buyers in LATAM and establish links with political decision-makers to guarantee economic, intercultural and social benefits for all. Enjoying a convenient central location that places it halfway to this annual meeting, Costa Rica has collected several accolades and upgrades in terms of infrastructure, connectivity, local support and education. With a robust hotel complex that comprises a total of 50,500 rooms and the construction of a new convention centre with capacity for meetings of up to 3,000 people, Costa Rica has taken a key step towards becoming a beacon destination for meetings and incentive travel in Latin America. "We have been working on a strategy for over ten years with our value chain, based on the pillars of service, quality and professionalisation to be competitive on a cost-benefit basis. In other words, we cannot sleep on the returns the country gets from its forests and parks. The experience has to be greater than the destination alone," told us **Tatiana Orozco, Executive Director of Costa Rica Convention Bureau**, during the ICCA LATAM & Caribbean Chapter. This commitment to sustainability is not new. Almost two decades ago, Costa Rica defined a tourism model rooted in its environmental and forest heritage, guiding tourism infrastructure and a supply chain based on balancing social, economic and environmental development – ultimately giving rise to the **MICE Forest** project.

> *"If you carry out a sustainability action without looking at its real impact, you're walking a fine line towards greenwashing.*
> *— Álvaro Rojas*

Costa Rica is the only country to meet all five of the **United Nations Development Programme's** criteria for measuring environmental sustainability and ranks third in the Americas on the **Environmental Performance Index**. The nation has twice been ranked as the country with the best performance in environmental sustainability by the **New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index**. Moreover, Costa Rica has around 6% of the world's biodiversity – the country with the highest density of species per area in the world – and is a global leader in environmental protection with investment policies in renewable energies. "In 1995, Costa Rica was experiencing a huge deforestation problem and our political decision-makers decided to take drastic measures. Today, we have more than 26% of our territory protected and we are at around 99% in clean energy generation. It has been a strategy that has evolved, and although it's true that we started from the environmental side, today we have a very solid strategy

with the other two social and economic pillars. We also want to leave an impact on a global level, as we are committed to making every event we host carbon neutral," she adds.

At the same time, the convention bureau also sees the sector as a viable alternative for tackling the problem of talent drain, which is one of the key challenges facing Latin America. "What is happening right now is that new generations are not going to put money before their mental health, their personal development and their own professional experiences. We can resolve this issue with specific conferences to encourage young people to take part and understand the importance of this segment, because we have to sell the destination to them too." The sustainability factor has given the country a competitive edge, but the number of multinationals the country is home to has also enabled them to realise another outpouring of knowledge. "42% of our events are in the medical industry, because all the microchips for medical components and devices that are manufactured in the world come from Costa Rica. We are almost an intermediate assembly platform for medtech. Other sectors that we prioritise are technology and education," says Orozco.

> ***The meetings industry is a transformative industry, an industry of change, of talent attraction, of knowledge spill-over... and it also generates tourism.***
>
> ***— Tatiana Orozco***

Costa Rica's Meeting House

Costa Rica has always enjoyed leading status in ecotourism, adventure, leisure and even wellness, but in the meetings industry its journey is only in the beginning. At least that is what **Álvaro Rojas, General Manager of the Costa Rica Convention Centre (CRCC)** shared with us: "We built our strategy just seven years ago and the first change we had to make was to realise that this industry worked in a totally different way to others.. With a series of consultants and advisors, and also using the example of other sister destinations in the Americas, we were able to readjust the strategy and focus on something that generates value." Opened six years ago, the CRCC is a landmark in the country's sustainable design with car parking areas interspersed with endemic tropical plantations and extensive biological ditches for rainwater management – critical considerations that led to its **LEED Gold certification**. "Our visitors' perspective on sustainability generates a lot of value for our local event network. By instance, what impact does your event have on CO_2 emissions? This requires a technique, a calculator, audited and certified results to know how to offset carbon emissions from a corporate governance perspective," he adds. The centre has its own post-operational methodology called **Carbon Clear Events by Heroica**, which has been used to calculate and mitigate this carbon burden: "We are currently measuring all the excess carbon we produced in 2023 with the help of our carbon calculator, in order to generate positive compensation with the State of Costa Rica through a foundation called **FONAFIFO**."

In Latin America, around 20% of the types of events being held this year were not even brought up before the pandemic: "We are talking about blockchain, the Internet Of Things, cryptography, and a whole series of new topics. Specifically, the issue of semiconductors is fundamental for the Costa Rican government because we are the hub in a nearshoring to bring semiconductors to the United States." According to Álvaro, this has created a very interesting opportunity for the local meetings industry, "The meetings industry has a very dynamic and adaptable belt for attracting local talent, because in six months we can change our academic and technological agenda. Therefore, the Costa Rican government now relies on the meetings industry to support its entire global strategy, such as semiconductors."



Gothenburg: A Digital Twin in Sync With the City!



At every meeting, lessons are learned, and new ideas ermerge that influence the very direction of a city. Gothenburg uses meetings and public events as tools for sustainable destination development. In line with this a new digital visitors guide is being developed. We spoke to these local experts about the recipe and preparation of a plan to build a modern, impactful destination.

Gothenburg is not just any city; it is an open innovation environment. It is one of Sweden's main industrial regions and an important knowledge centre, boasting the highest R&D intensity in Sweden. Gothenburg is also recognised as a leader in innovation in Europe and is ranked among the top global science and technology clusters in terms of patents and publications per capita. Together with a long tradition of public and private partnerships, these elements provide a solid basis for the city's sectoral approach to bidding for events and meetings. "The **City of Gothenburg's Meetings Action Plan 2024-2026** governs the way the destination works with business event activities, and aims to support the strategic objectives of the **Destination Development Programme 2023-2030**," says **Annika Hallman, Head of Meetings/Convention Bureau at Göteborg & Co**. These include an attractive year-round offer, the strengthening of business and academia in the destination, consistent delivery on world-class sustainability, and added value for residents.

For many years, Gothenburg has honed meetings and professional events as tools for sustainable destination development, collaborating with dedicated stakeholders to drive change. "We have noticed that sustainability has become increasingly integrated into RFPs, and we suspect this will intensify with the upcoming EU directives. Associations may need to align themselves with the sustainability standards of their corporate partners, influencing venue selection and event practices." The convention bureau has collaborated with the city's universities for almost 40 years, and these local champions have always been essential to its success as a meetings destination. "We also work closely with





the regional economic development agency and directly with R&D-intensive companies in the region, such as **AstraZeneca** and **Volvo Cars**. Together, we identify strategical meetings in key sectors and development areas, using these events as springboards to meet the city's needs, such as talent attraction, investments, and skills development."

Gothenburg is taking a historic leap forward in its development, where hotel capacity has increased by 30% (3,600 rooms) in five years, and massive investments have been made in infrastructure. "We have been distributing data-driven knowledge to strengthen the competitiveness of the hotel sector." On the other hand, digitalised solutions are now a natural part of our business, even if face-to-face meetings are preferred. "Delegates today need to feel that a physical meeting is meaningful, creating clear added value for their organisations," says Hallman. Increasingly, associations also want to leave a positive impact or legacy on the destination, a point not lost on Göteborg & Co: "Our inclusive structure, **Gothenburg Way to Legacy**, promotes involvement at all levels of our stakeholders, pushing associations and local partners in a positive direction. The aim is to benefit both the association and the destination." This impact programme consists of a Method, a Toolbox, and Community Support, and has provided a solid basis and an excellent starting point for their joint work. "Our bidding strategy for meetings in strong sectors and key development areas remains unchanged. This approach has been key to our success, leveraging collaboration between academia, the private sector, and the public sector," Hallman adds. Their impact areas depend on the association's vision and objectives and the city's priorities. "It all starts with strategic bids, and the impact can be economic, social, or environmental. Our legacy efforts are geared towards the main sectors and areas of development. By clearly defining and demonstrating how meetings can be used to create positive social impact, policymakers have gained a better understanding of their value." At the DMO, there is a group dedicated to impact strategy: **the Head of Sustainability, representatives from the Convention Bureau, the public events department, the Trade and Industry Group,** and **the destination development department.**

The Digital Twin – Combining new technologies with social challenges

Gothenburg is a global frontrunner in sustainability with continous top-positions in the **Global Destination Sustainability Index**. In 2021, *Lonely Planet* named Gothenburg the world's best sustainable city stay. The city's holistic approach to sustainable development integrates environmental, social, and economic perspectives into decision-making, planning and execution. "Sharing best practices allows us to evaluate a visionary and long-term development process, where new technologies, the circular economy and social innovation have crucial roles to play," says **Fredrik Lundgren Project Manager, Association and Corporate Meetings**, at **Göteborg & Co**. In terms of innovation, digital transformation and urban development, sustainability is a strong catalyst for Gothenburg in the development of solutions for companies and society. "One example is our digital twin project which aims to make the destination more accessible for everyone." Events also serve as ideal platforms for testing and deploying sustainable solutions: "By setting high standards and requirements for suppliers, we can stimulate demand for sustainable actions and influence positively the delegate behaviour," he adds.

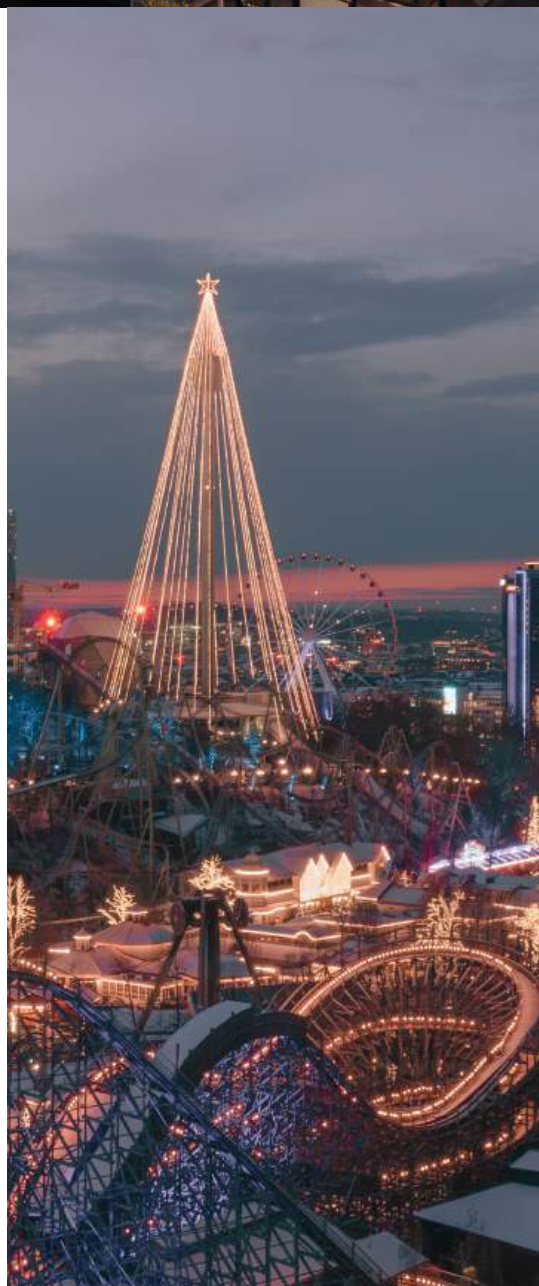
Gothenburg has long wanted a digital representation of its meetings ecosystem. Since 2017, the city and its planning office have developed an 800-square-kilometre digital twin of Gothenburg, comprising a comprehensive data warehouse with various meeting facilities, landmarks, and hotels. This development was built parametrically using geographic data and building information modelling, creating an excellent basis for digital tools and experiences now and in the future. As it includes several levels of sensitive data, only selected parts are accessible in the virtual representation of Gothenburg. "Since the digital visitor's guide is based on Gothenburg's digital twin, we can show the essence of the city in just 10-15 minutes. When developing digital site visits, we will focus on a specific area called the events district, a one-and-a-half square kilometre zone with arenas, venues, meeting facilities, hotels, and restaurants. With this guide, the city will also reach target groups that otherwise would not have been able to see the city. Our destination would like to emotionally connect these people to the city in a very efficient and time-saving way, as well as demonstrate its walkability," says Lundgren.



Visitors will be directed to a digital environment where they can explore various hotels, facilities, restaurants, entertainment, and attractions with the help of a virtual concierge. It is also possible to choose different times of day and different seasons. As well as being a perfect tool for the organisers, the CVB's aim was to increase accessibility for disabled visitors and avoid unnecessary carbon emissions. "This idea arose from the question 'how can Gothenburg take the next step towards sustainability and increased accessibility?' There is still a lot of development work ahead, and the plan is to have a test version ready by the beginning of 2025 and a full version ready by the end of the following year. Some of the developments will take place in collaboration with various partners as part of an EU project," he tells us.

During the pandemic, the need for hybrid solutions became especially evident, prompting all of Gothenburg's main venues to reassess their physical and technical capacities. In response, Göteborg & Co launched a comprehensive project that included a survey aimed to understand how venues evaluate their offerings and assess readiness to meet demand in terms of capacity, personnel, and technology. "The survey highlighted the remarkable adaptability of our venues. More than half of them had already implemented hybrid meeting solutions, and most other venues had clear plans to adapt their business models to meet the changing demands. Some venues utilised the months of stringent restrictions to develop new concepts and reach new audiences, while others focused on improving the appeal of their facilities. Additionally, we observed a strong openness and eagerness to learn more about hybrid solutions and emerging technologies resulting in an educational initiative," says Lundgren.

Some venues were convinced that the pandemic would act as a catalyst for changes in meeting behaviour, as more people chose to explore alternative formats, increasing smaller meetings where only key participants met in person. "This made us realise the importance of integrating digital solutions at every stage. It was a natural step, as our company was already leading several digital initiatives and Proof of Concepts, testing our capabilities and opportunities as a destination management organisation. We partnered with technology companies and major attractions to explore how to understand our visitors better." At the same time, the annual delegate surveys – carried out at various congresses and conferences – showed a high level of satisfaction: "Over 90% of delegates were satisfied with the meeting venues, technological reliability and the quality of the services. Likewise, almost all delegates consider Gothenburg to be a sustainable meeting destination," Lundgren concludes.



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Night View of Seoul
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Kim Jiho

SOUTH KOREA

Tech-Driven Present & Future for International Events

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN REPORTS

South Korea is not just embracing the future of event planning but creating and deploying it today. On a recent fam trip led by the **Korea Tourism Organization** (KTO), *HQ* joined top international associations to explore how this tech-driven nation is reimagining the global meetings landscape. From AI-powered event spaces to immersive digital experiences, South Korea is making innovation a pillar of its broader business events strategy. Coming back after the challenges of the pandemic, it was clear that the country's commitment to excellence is stronger than ever.

Upon landing at Incheon International Airport, it was immediately apparent that the country has invested heavily in MICE infrastructure. The country's commitment to ensuring a seamless journey for congress delegates was evident from arrival. The **MICE Concierge** service, run by the **Korea MICE Association** at the terminal, provides comprehensive support for delegates and organisers. During our journey, we also passed through Gimpo and Busan's Gimhae International Airports, which reflect South Korea's top-tier connectivity, offering convenient and efficient travel between cities by air and high-speed train.



Seoul

The capital and beating heart of South Korea, Seoul is a world-class destination for international meetings, combining modern infrastructure and cultural richness. Our first stop was **COEX Convention & Exhibition Center** (*picture right*), the city's leading convention and exhibition centre. During our visit, preparations were underway for the **Korean Congress of Radiology 2024** and the **K-Hospital+Health Tech Fair**, hosted by the **Korean Hospital Association** and organised by the **Future Medical Industry Council** and **Messe Esang**, the largest exhibition organiser in Korea. Both events showcased COEX's capacity for medical and scientific gatherings, with cutting-edge technology such as AI-assisted simultaneous interpretation and multi-purpose use of meeting rooms and exhibition halls. The COEX area will also be enhanced as a global hub for innovation by the **Global Business Complex, Hyundai**'s new convention space currently under construction. The complex will showcase the future mobility industry and ensure it is an environmentally friendly location in Seoul. COEX also continues to innovate with the upcoming expansion of **COEX Magok**. Scheduled to open in November 2024, the new venue is part of the **Magok District MICE complex** development plan. It will be strategically located near Gimpo Airport, making it more accessible to international delegates.

Another outstanding venue we visited was **Some Sevit (Floating Island Convention)** on the Han River. This unique venue combines natural beauty with modern event facilities. More than just a picturesque location, it offers a variety of event spaces, making it ideal for smaller conferences and exhibitions, receptions, and gala dinners.

Seoul's commitment to MICE is also evident in its **Unique Venues Programme**, run by the KTO. One such venue is **Korea House**, an authentic Hanok-style building that is a peaceful retreat in the middle of the bustling city. It is a popular venue for VIP meetings, with its traditional architecture providing a backdrop that blends cultural heritage with modern business needs. During our visit, we explored its unique meeting rooms, catering to high-level meetings seeking a more intimate, refined setting.

Adding to the business focus of our trip was an exclusive lunch with **Professor Sanghoon Lee, PhD**, a leading AI researcher at **Yonsei University – College of Engineering**. Professor Lee's work in AI applications, from image and video quality assessment to human avatar modelling, illustrates the crucial role of local ambassadors in attracting high-profile events to Seoul. He shared his vision of Seoul's technology-driven future as a global innovation hub partnering with university research.

Our stay at **Grand Walkerhill Seoul** was a luxurious introduction to the city thanks to its breathtaking views, and the exclusive visit to **Aston House** stood out. Tucked away in a private garden overlooking the Han River, Aston House offers unparalleled exclusivity and welcomes only the most high-profile guests, including world leaders. Under the management of Grand Walkerhill,



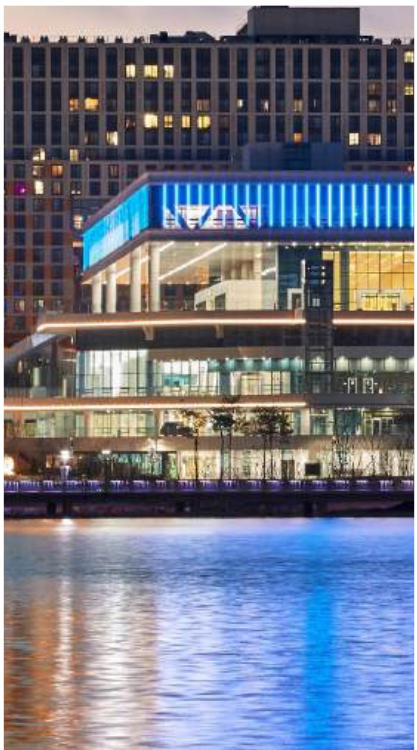


it is a hidden gem for VIP receptions and post-conference private events in Walkerhill Seoul's many meeting rooms, combining natural beauty with the best in service.

We also explored **Signiel Seoul** in the famous **Lotte World Tower**, Korea's tallest building. Aiming for a 6-star rating, Signiel features world-class luxury with breathtaking panoramic city views. Our visit also included a tour of **Seoul Sky,** the observatory located on the upper floors of the tower, an unforgettable experience for delegates wishing to appreciate the vastness of the entire metropolis.

The city's trendier side was displayed in **Seongsu-dong**, a district full of industrial-chic cafes, boutiques and cultural hotspots. Known as the 'Brooklyn of Seoul', Seongsu-dong is where young professionals and visitors can enjoy a diverse food scene, explore art galleries or unwind after a busy day of meetings. It is the perfect destination for delegates who wish to experience Seoul's more alternative and creative side.





Suwon

Just an hour outside of Seoul, Suwon is one of the key cities in Gyeonggi Province. Known worldwide as the home of **Samsung**'s headquarters, Suwon is a destination for international tech events and has a growing reputation for hosting high-level meetings.

At the heart of the city's MICE offering is the **Suwon Convention Center (SCC)** *(picture below on the left)*, which opened in 2019. The centre features a variety of adaptable meeting spaces equipped with the latest technology to accommodate everything from mid-sized conferences to intimate business gatherings. The rooftop terrace is ideal for outdoor receptions and events overlooking the peaceful Gwanggyo Lake Park. The SCC is part of a larger MICE complex that includes the **Aqua Planet Aquarium** – a unique venue aiming to position itself for private events. Whether for dinner or a cocktail reception, a tranquil 'under the lake' setting provides an unforgettable backdrop for networking or special gatherings.

Samsung's influence in Suwon is unmistakable. The city hosted the **2023 Samsung AI Forum**, which attracted over 1,200 delegates and will continue to host the **Annual Shareholders General Meeting** at the SCC. For event attendees, the **Samsung Innovation Museum** provides a fascinating look at the technology industry's past, present and future, allowing visitors to engage with cutting-edge innovations. In 2024, Suwon will further cement its status as a tech hub when it hosts the **IEEE World Haptics Conference 2025** and the **20th Intelligent Transport System Asia-Pacific Forum 2025.**

Suwon is also rich in history, and the UNESCO-listed **Hwaseong Fortress** (*pictured above*), dating back to the 18th century, provides a stunning contrast to the city's tech landscape, offering a unique cultural venue for smaller events or delegate tours. We stayed at the **Novotel Ambassador Suwon**, which is conveniently connected to the city's central station and offers easy access to Seoul and Busan, as well as modern meeting spaces and proximity to the city's MICE venues.

Busan

During our visit, Busan was alive with the excitement of the **29th Busan International Film Festival**. Held annually in early October, the festival is a prime example of how Busan attracts visitors for cultural and business events, making it a serious player in the MICE and cultural sectors.

A key stop for us was **BEXCO (Busan Exhibition and Convention Center)**, a pillar of the city's MICE infrastructure capable of hosting large-scale international events. During our visit, preparations were well underway for the upcoming **Busan Finance Week 2024**, and they were already hosting **2024 COBE Baby Fair** and the **Busan Coffee Show**, both of which were open to the general public. This demonstrated the flexibility and efficiency of the signage, branding, and crowd management to guide visitors to each event.

BPEX (Busan Port International Exhibition & Convention Centre) was equally impressive. Located close to the bustling port area. This venue has been vital for events related to the maritime industry, such as the annual **Busan International Port Conference**, held in partnership with the **Port Authority**. The integration of waterfront views, a sky garden and development plans for a marina and opera house by 2030 make BPEX an outstanding option for international associations and companies seeking a unique, multi-functional venue with a distinct maritime flair.

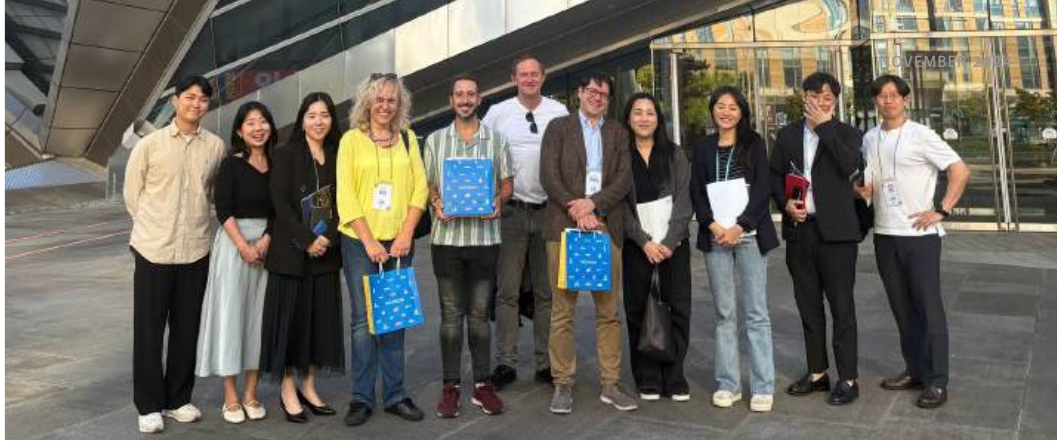
Beyond the business world, the **ARTE Museum**, which opened in July 2024, is an immersive digital art experience that showcases the eternal nature through multi-sensory media art installations. Playing with light, sound and interactive technology, it transforms ordinary spaces into captivating landscapes of wind, water and digital flora and fauna. It also turns the Musée d'Orsay collection into media art, making it the perfect venue for events that combine creativity and technology. This is the place to be for planners looking to wow their delegates with something creative and out-of-the-box.

Busan is also a destination for food lovers. We enjoyed local delicacies at **Chilam Manjang** restaurant, famous for its eel dishes and a must for any seafood lover. Busan's culinary landscape is evolving with the *Michelin Guide Busan 2024* launch, further cementing the city's reputation as a gastronomic hotspot. For a more casual experience, visitors can enjoy the lively street food scene at the **Haeundae Traditional Market**, just off Haeundae Beach. The **Grand Josun Busan**, just steps from the beach, also offers a range of meeting spaces and stunning coastal views.



Haeundae Beach in Busan
©Busan Tourism Organization





Incheon

China Town was the starting point of our visit to Incheon, where we were immersed in the city's rich history. This area offers a fascinating glimpse into the heritage of the Chinese settlers who arrived at the opening of Incheon Port in 1883. The colourful streets, historic landmarks and traditional Chinese cuisine add a unique cultural layer to this port city. Today, Incheon remains a central city hub, home to Korea's busiest international airport and a rising destination for MICE planners. Incheon International Airport is the first point of contact for many international visitors and perfectly connects to the country's meeting infrastructure.

Songdo ConvensiA was our next venue, easily accessible from the airport and Seoul. This eco-friendly, state-of-the-art convention centre is the host venue of the **Korea MICE Expo**, confirming its status as a go-to space for hosting events internationally. Its LEED-certified design and ultra-modern facilities offer planners flexible meeting spaces, including a virtual studio and video conferencing rooms. The venue's proximity to major transport hubs enhances its appeal for events requiring seamless connectivity.

One of the highlights of our visit to Incheon was the **INSPIRE Entertainment Resort** (*pictured left*), which blends technology and nature to create immersive, high-tech experiences. Opened earlier in 2024, INSPIRE is a five-star resort with venues designed for large-scale events. The INSPIRE Arena, with a capacity of up to 15,000 people, has already hosted international artists like Maroon 5, showcasing its versatility for high-profile entertainment events. The resort's meeting rooms offer a blend of luxury and functionality for corporate gatherings. Recently, **Ferrari** chose INSPIRE to launch a new car in Asia, taking advantage of the venue's advanced, technology-led branding options and flexible spaces to create a standout event.

During our visit, the ballroom was being prepared for the **K-Link Festival**, a major celebration of K-pop and K-culture in partnership with KTO. This further highlights the resort's adaptability to host various events with cultural and international appeal.

Support Programmes

South Korea's commitment to events and international tourism is undeniable. As part of **Visit Korea Year 2023-24**, the **Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism** and **KTO** lead ten major projects, including the **100 K-Culture Tourism Events programme**. This initiative covers culture, arts, sports and food, with the support of KTO's 32 overseas offices, which promote significant exhibitions and festivals worldwide. With this momentum set to continue in the coming years, KTO is ready to help planners bring their events to life and ensure success in Korea.

- **KTO Convention Support Programme** provides tailored financial and in-kind assistance, including venue discounts and customised tours and their support can be combined with support from the hosting city CVB.
- Organisers in Suwon can access support through the **Suwon MICE Housing Bureau, Gyeonggi Tourism Organization**, and **KTO**.
- **Seoul, Busan** and **Incheon** offer comprehensive support systems, ensuring successful events with options from waterfront venues to high-tech spaces.

Korea Tourism Organization

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ICCA Latin America & Caribbean summit 2024

MANUEL FERNANDES REPORTS

From 10 to 13 September, the **Marriott Santo Domingo Piantini** was dressed in ICCA-green to host another **Latin American & Caribbean (LAC) summit** on the latest trends shaping the future of the meetings industry in the region and around the world. *HQ* was there to measure the pulse of MICE activity in LATAM.



In the lively city of Santo Domingo, 30 international associations, destination managers, convention centres, hotels, agencies and technology companies gathered once again for a dynamic programme of sessions, talks and workshops essential to the various aspects of the industry. Innovation, sustainability, technology and event marketing were the topics of conversation at a summit that focused mainly on education and industrial advocacy. LAC is projected to become a giant on the global stage with more than 650 million people, 81% in urban areas, 67% aged between 15 and 64, and 50% of the world's biodiversity with an incalculable cultural and historical heritage. It also has enormous potential to drive solutions such as decarbonisation, sustainable industrial production, powershoring and food scarcity as a centrepiece in the formulation of public policies. However, for the region to realise its full potential, it will need to focus on greater participation in global value chains, ensure proper alignment in international markets, and look at business events as more than short-term returns. "We are seeing a great demand from international associations for a region that comprises 17 countries all eager to host global meetings. We are now in the Caribbean which has great infrastructure, certified DMCs, and quality trained professionals ready to meet the needs of the entire value chain. We are open for business!" says **Andrés Escandón, Regional Director ICCA Latin America and the Caribbean**.

After the official opening with all the summit's organising partners – **SDQ Santo Domingo MICE, Santo Domingo Hotel Association, Dominican Republic Tourism Organisation and Turenlances** – Escandón insisted on this drift: business events account for 25% of all global tourism, which in turn is responsible for 10% of the world's GDP and the creation of one in ten jobs. The evolution of international association congresses has been growing steadily since 1963 and their impact is felt on many different levels – economic, cultural, scientific, academic, social, etc. The presentation by **Eugenia Powell, Director of Business Development at PROMTUR Panama**, was based on the repercussions of these impacts and the virtuous circle between tourism, investment and knowledge development. "As part of our strategy, we are considering allying ourselves with certain associations that represent the sectors we want to prioritise in a double sense - generating business from meetings and national projects for social and community growth," she said to *HQ*. This resulted in PROMTUR inviting these associations to leave a social plan in the country. Eugenia gave the example of **ALAD (*Asociación Latinoamericana de Diabetes*)**, which responded to the country's need to combat obesity, sedentary lifestyles and poor eating habits. "We sat down with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Presidency, the Chancellery and the Tourism Authority, and discussed the tailor-made social contribution plan so that funding could be allocated to this association." Another example given was the famous Panama Canal and one of the country's most valuable resources, water. Due to climate change, the natural reservoirs that supplied the canal were drying up as the water level dropped dramatically. So PROMTUR, together with the various stakeholders, entered the market to bid for a major event that could contribute with technology, innovations or a new methodology to help them out of this situation. It was in this context that the **2023 Sustainability Research & Innovation Congress** was born, the world's largest transdisciplinary event bringing together the global sustainability community.





During the conference-lunch **Jacqueline Mora, Technical Vice-Minister of the Dominican Ministry of Tourism**, introduced the advantages of big data and analytics to leverage the LATAM meetings industry, from the use of social medial, travel planning and hotel segmentation, to name a few. "We were born as a leisure, family and sun destination, but over the years the country has also turned to sports tourism, entertainment and, above all, the meetings sector. The MICE segment is very important for balancing the scales in the low seasons and maintaining continued visitation. That's why we have put together a solid marketing strategy in terms of hotel capacity, contacts with international organisations and a new convention centre," she told *HQ*. This conference centre, part of an even larger urban restructuring project that will include new public spaces, museums and heritage restoration, the renovation of the riverside area and a further five kilometres of streets, will be located in the western part of the city, will be advised by **IFEMA** and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.



The round table with the three convention speakers brought different perspectives on business events as economic accelerators and impact generators. **Maria Oriani, MICE Manager at PROCOLOMBIA**, reaffirmed the country's policy of sectoral matchmaking for international investments, celebrated in its '**Six Tourist Regions strategy**' (*check out our HQ #113.*) **Tatiana Orozco, Executive Director of the Costa Rica Convention Bureau**, doubled-down on the importance of multiplying positive effects around the MICE industry by shooting for specific targets such as sustainability and talent retention (*check out our story in this issue.*) **Denisse Mac Cobin, Director of the Lima Convention Bureau**, emphasised professional development, training and the quality of services for a greater international presence, citing the concrete example of the **Meeting Professionals International Club Peru**. Afterward, there was also room for an innovation tracker on sustainability and technology with **Álvaro Roja, General Manager of the Costa Rica Convention Centre**, and **Santiago González, Development and Project Director at FIEXPO Exhibitions Group**. The **Net-Zero Carbon Initiative**, the digital solutions of the ICCA Hackathon, digital transformations with the first glimpses of AI tools, and Costa Rica's recent sustainability partnership with ICCA, were some of the avenues the conversation took. "There is a question of visibility, business relevance and general understanding of how to raise this issue of sustainability in Latin America. It is still very difficult to find a sponsor or sustainability provider for a business event to be held in the region," says Santiago. "If you have a weak strategy and a strong culture, the culture will improve the strategy, but if you have a great strategy and a poor culture, the culture will eat the strategy for breakfast. When we talk about technology today, we really need to strengthen a collective culture. If you take all these tools and put them into an organisation, not everyone is going to manage and apply them in the same way." Rojas concluded.

Antwerp

A Cosmopolitan Time-travelling Machine!

MANUEL FERNANDES REPORTS

Last year, we wrote a story about Antwerp, describing it as a fully integrated 'venue' heading towards a prosperous future. Putting the city to the test, the local convention bureau invited us last month on a Media tour lift the veil on the exceptional landmarks and strategic clusters of a (de facto) all-around MICE city.

There are cities that appear to have more than first meets the eye. As soon as you arrive at the sublime 1905 'Railway Cathedral' – widely considered one of the most beautiful train stations in the world – everything seems overwhelming and grandiose. Antwerp is certainly no stranger to *Headquarters Magazine*, but every time we visit it, we come away with a different side, historical facts we did not know or even innovations we never related to. As one of the managers of the **Antwerp Convention Bureau** confided, "There are wonders hidden behind these walls that are unnoticeable to passers-by on the street." Many of these wonders began to be crafted from the 16th century onwards when Antwerp became the centre of the entire international economy – serving as a cargo port for all European powers during the Age of Exploration – and its bourse, the home of merchants from all nations.



> *86% of the world's rough diamonds are traded in Antwerp.*

This period of prosperity also influenced literature, sciences, geography, and painting, of which Peter Paul Rubens, the city's patron, and Pieter Bruegel were prime examples. In the overwhelming **Plantin-Moretus Museum**, a 16th-century printing house, all this treasure trove of knowledge has been preserved with printed records (such as the first modern atlas or an original second edition of the Bible), engravings and tapestries that make it a Wikipedia of ancient times. From the richest and most



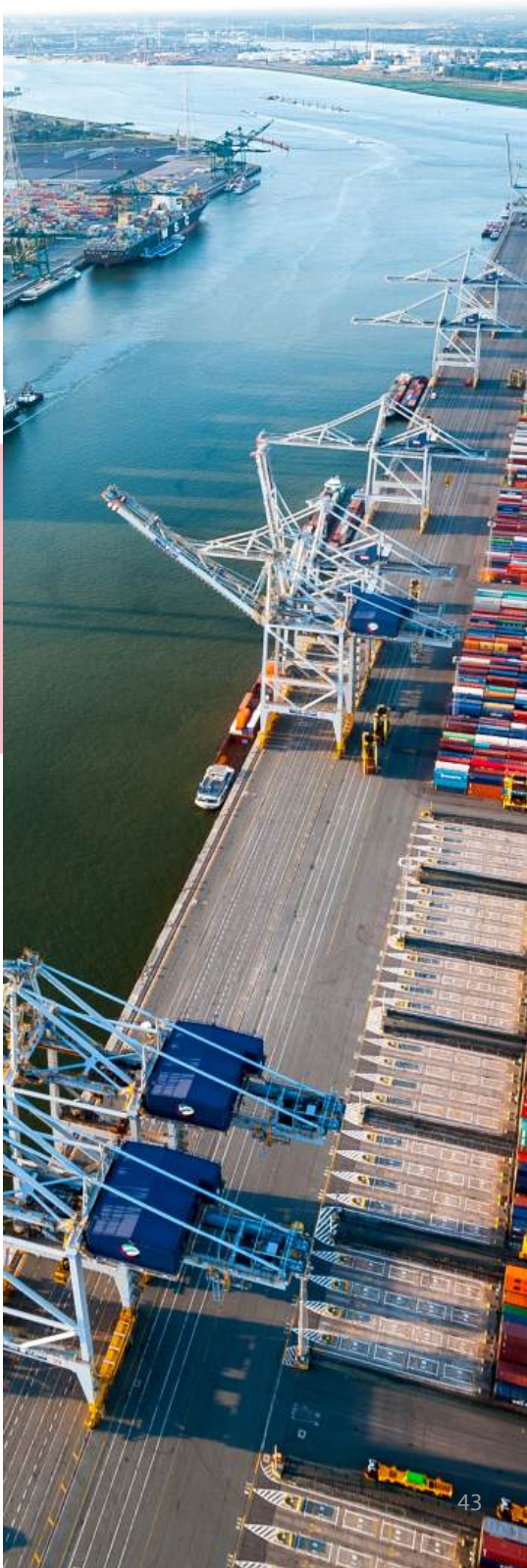




sophisticated city of its time, Antwerp went through ups and downs, sustaining invasions, sieges, pillages, and religious persecutions, passing from hand to hand in a borderless, troubled Europe. This resistance and vision also moulded the character of a city that, consecrated to the world for its commerce and entrepreneurship, began to morph into multiple belts during its modern period. For instance, its MICE vocation took shape with the **Antwerp International Exposition of 1894**, the **World Gymnastics Championships of 1903** and the **1920 Summer Olympics**. Today, Antwerp is a port harbour, a trade centre, an academic campus, a fashion academy, a logistical hub and an open-air museum with several venues and hotels for meetings and events.

> *Antwerp has a very diverse population and is home to 168 different nationalities.*

These facets are revealed as we walk through the narrow alleys of the meandering old town with its Baroque monuments, Gothic churches and manor houses, and move away to the harbour docks with the futuristic diamond-shaped **Port House** and the post-modern **Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)**. For starters, the **Bourse at Antwerp** built in 1531, and considered the mother of all stock exchanges for its architectural and founding value, is today a multi-storey fairground with its main square accommodating up to 1,600 people, plus ten multi-purpose rooms for conferences and networking. Storing the archives of the city's many institutions and associations, the **FelixArchief** exudes this passage of time in an impressive 19th-century warehouse north of Antwerp – also used for exhibitions and talks nowadays. Right next to the River Scheldt, the MAS represents this timeless connection between Antwerp and the world through multiple perspectives and disciplines. The Tetris-shaped tower museum places Europe's second largest port as the protagonist of a multicultural documentary that presents a different exhibition on each floor. On the ninth floor of the building floats the **One Eighty**, a space with two event rooms ideal for meetings, presentations and small congresses – Room One has a capacity for 24 people, while Room Eighty can accommodate larger groups of up to 100 people. Back in the centre, we explored the elegance and sophistication of a unique hotel. Restored from a 15th-century monastery, the **Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp** is a delight for the senses, with its lush design, three (yes, that is right) Michelin-starred restaurants and





> *The Port of Antwerp is the largest storage facility for cocoa and coffee beans in the world.*

an apothecary shop. Surrounded by this Eden, the hotel also has 14 multifunctional meeting rooms, including a chapel, an auditorium and a ballroom. Finally, it would be a waste to leave without visiting Belgium's finest chocolate museum, the **Chocolate Nation**. Honouring the tradition of the best and oldest Belgian chocolatiers, these galleries trace the path from cocoa plantations to factory production in Belgium. In addition, Chocolate Nation offers several exciting spaces for team-building activities, workshops or group dinners.

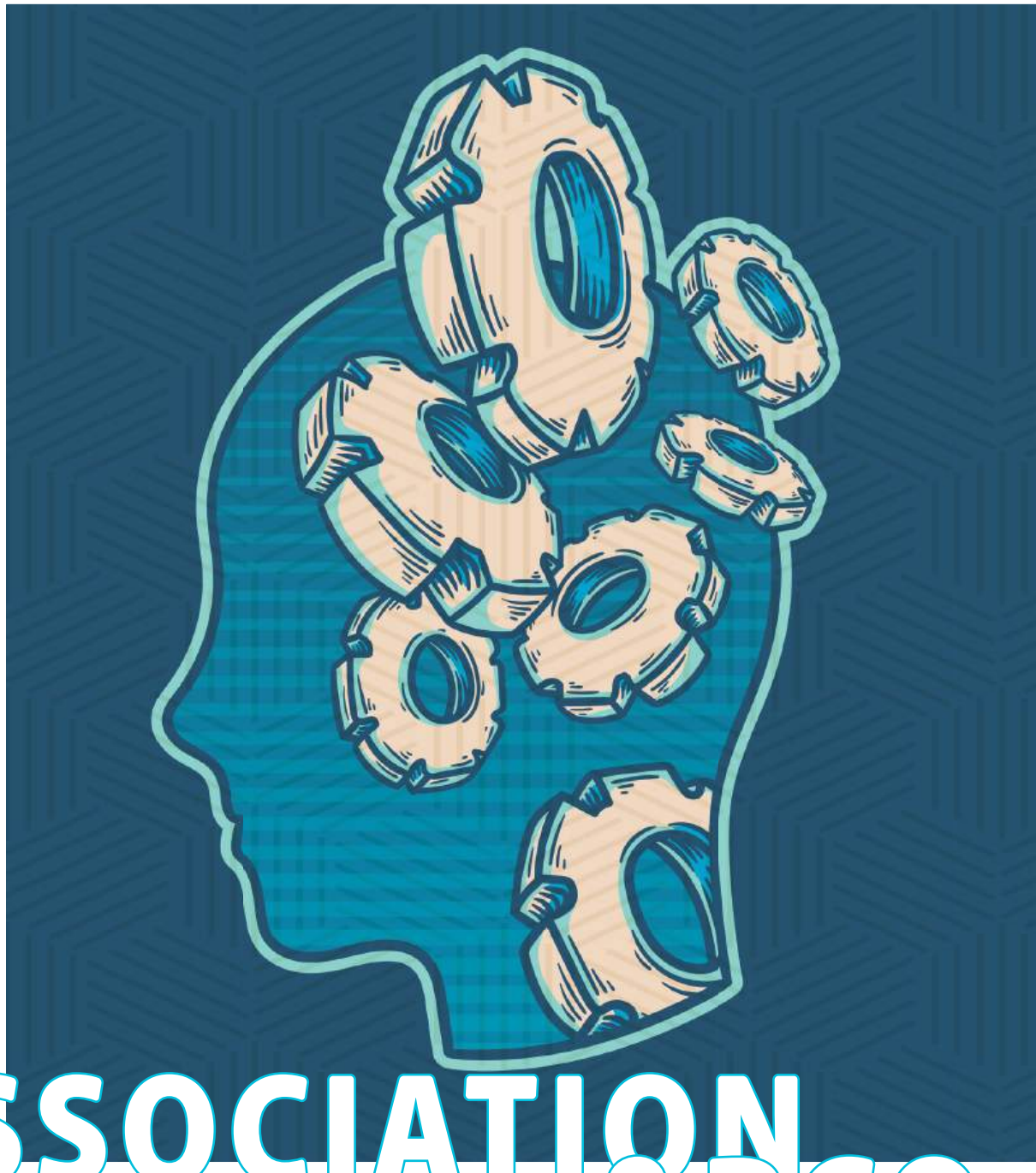
A Room with a ZOO and an 18th-Century State Room

The reputation of **A Room with a ZOO** is well known in the industry, but only by taking the first steps inside can you do the place justice. Just a few metres from the central station, the 11,000 m² venue adjacent to Antwerp Zoo is an ode to biology, nature conservation, and accessibility. When we visited, the **63rd International Spinal Cord Society Annual Scientific Meeting** was taking place on its premises, bringing together leading experts and clinicians in spinal cord care, rehabilitation and research. With around 40 participants in wheelchairs and others with reduced mobility, accessibility was of paramount importance for the course of these days. However, Antwerp was up to the challenge, as **Susan Hayden, director of Association Services Ltd** and organiser of the congress, told us: "During my 20-year PCO career, I had never crossed paths with Room with a ZOO, so when we first visited the location, I just fell in love with it immediately. It is a fantastic, accessible location, which was the number one priority for this event." She continues, "But also, when we walked around the city, everyone was very accommodating and listened to our questions. There was a lot of support from the city, introductions to networks and hospitals and institutions."

> *The Antwerp chemical cluster is known as the "Chemical Port of Europe" and is the second-largest in the world.*

Speaking of major congresses, Antwerp is set to host the **World Tunnel Congress** in 2027, highlighting the country's growing influence in the global tunnelling and underground construction sector. Gathered in the sumptuous rococo-style showroom, **De Hofkamer**, we had the opportunity to hear from **Johan Mignon**, **President of the Belgium Tunnel Association**, how the tunnelling imbued in the **Oosterweel Link** project could improve access to the city and the port, alleviate congestion on the ring road and reduce passenger traffic in the larger urban area. "There are numerous examples of tunnelling and underground infrastructure in Belgium that provided us with the know-how and arguments needed to win this tender. The Oosterweel project, with its various tunnel complexes, was certainly an asset in our bid. We want the congress not only to contribute ideas for the revitalisation of our public areas, but also to take them in a sustainable direction with attention to the environment."

HQ INSIGHTS



ASSOCIATION &PCO

Nipperbout at the ESCRS 2024 Conference: Raising **Silent Influencers**

The **European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons (ESCRS)** partnered this year with the event service provider **Nipperbout** to offer a dedicated crèche during its annual conference. We asked the British agency how conference-goers can reconcile their work with parental duties during their annual event.



The ESCRS held its annual conference at **FIRA Barcelona** last September, attracting around 15,000 delegates from over 120 countries. Founded in 1991, the ESCRS aims to promote teaching and research in the fields of implant and refractive surgery as well as the study and wider practice of ophthalmology. With more than 7,000 members from 130 countries around the world, the organisation brings together many renowned ophthalmologists and researchers who, with their scientific presentations, roundtable discussions and workshops, are forced to spend a lot of time on site. Not surprisingly, the demands of the profession mean that many of these delegates are away from their families for a long time. For this year's event, the Society announced a curious partnership with **Nipperbout**, a bespoke childcare provider for events, to offer a new on-site crèche service. The introduction of the crèche resulted from a direct response to delegate feedback and knowledge gained at past conferences via an inclusion survey carried out by the organisation.

At a time when diversity and inclusion are extremely important topics in the MICE industry, Nipperbout's range of services appears to cover some of the gaps in the association sector by moving into the areas of well-being, safety and alternative care. "I was an actress in my past life and, like many working parents, faced the challenge of balancing my career with looking after my daughter. It became clear that there was not much support for parents like me. After doing a few gigs at events, a fellow actress and I thought it would be a fun project to create something to meet this need," says **Janthea Brigden, the agency's CEO**. After their first steps in running a crèche at a company party, they were spotted by an event organiser who invited them to his 'ride and drive' family events at **Millbrook Proving Ground**, one of the largest vehicle testing centres in Europe. "From that one event, things started to grow and before we knew it, we were running crèches for brands like **Peugeot, Ford** and **Chrysler**. We realised that there was a real need for this service, so we expanded to exhibitions such as the **Ideal Home Show, Motor Show, Boat Show** and **Caravan Show**," she adds.

> *"Children can become 'silent influencers' and encourage parents to return to the event in subsequent years.*

The first Nipperbout conference was commissioned in 1994 for the **National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers**, an association that has worked with them for more than 30 years. "We offer a range of bespoke services to meet different event needs, including full-time childcare at conferences, congress services, a more compact and adjusted version called **Nipperbout Lite**, chaperone services for older children aged eight and up, and a mix of play and learning with **Edutainment** creative workshops and stay-and-play sessions." Considering the dizzying pace of working lives, rising family expenses and participation in children's growth, this will be an increasingly standard feature in the coming years, according to Janthea: "I believe the real driver behind this change is the growing understanding and importance of attachment theory, especially for children up to the age of five, which focuses on the need for a secure bond between parent and child for healthy mental development. More parents and organisations are recognising that time together during these formative years is paramount."



In this regard, the pandemic lockdown and the rise of home-schooling have only intensified this need. “Many children have faced anxiety about returning to school, and parents are keener to keep their children close. In my experience, children who attend our crèches tend to be more confident and sociable because their parents allow them to take new experiences in a safe environment,” she says. However, it is still very rare to find events that offer childcare – less than 10% estimates Janthea – as the events industry continues to be largely unaware of the benefits this brings. The UK and Europe are leading the way in encouraging these types of services, while the US is still lagging behind. “I believe that as more women take on leadership roles, particularly in fields like medicine, engineering and science, there will be a stronger push for inclusion measures like these.”

> *“We follow a simple but effective rule: if a child attends mainstream school, we will take them.*

This sense of security not only enhances the event experience, but also brings other unexpected paybacks. Children often form positive associations with the host organisation, leading to continued engagement with its subjects and topics as they grow older. “They can become ‘silent influencers’ and encourage parents to return to the event in subsequent years.” Therefore, it is not just about keeping them entertained, but about giving them a sense of belonging and showing them the opportunities that exist in the industry/sector in which their parents are involved. “I have seen this first-hand with children who came to our crèches years ago at teaching conferences and returned as delegates now working in these areas. Exposure to these worlds creates a career-long relationship,” Janthea says. This influence can also be felt in the events industry, serving as a golden opportunity to forge interactions and possibly encourage a career within the industry. “At events for charities or organisations such as **REACH**, which focuses on upper limb differences, we have taken children to meet role models in their field.”

For children with special needs such as neurodiversity or sensory processing, Nipperbout discusses their needs with parents and teachers in advance, carrying out a risk assessment to determine whether or not they can accommodate the child safely. “We do not have a purpose-built area, so we have to be attentive to the child’s needs. We request quiet rooms and sensory toys for children who may need extra support for example. Being away from home during multi-day conferences can be stressful and confusing, so creating security and belonging is fundamental in an unfamiliar environment.” Lastly, a recommendation: “I would advise all organisers to pay close attention to their crèche provider’s insurance schedule and the level of coverage they provide as not all policies are created equal.”



My name is Data. Lieutenant Commander Data.



The increased use of data is fundamentally changing the way we meet. For associations, AI offers new opportunities to increase the value offered to members in terms of networking, education and knowledge sharing. It can even enable the implementation of a new business model. Key success factors are to be clear on the challenge addressed and the quality of the data used.

AUTHOR: SVEN BOSSU, CEO, AIPC

Associations worldwide are facing similar challenges. According to the *2024 Naylor* report, the top 5 challenges are:

- Generating non-dues revenues
- Communicating member benefits effectively
- Engaging young professionals
- Understanding member needs
- Combating information overload/cutting through the clutter

Addressing any single one of these will require a profound understanding of your members' needs. This will allow you to come up with an offer that addresses both the members' needs and the challenges faced by your association. The question to answer is straightforward: What problem do we want to fix? Here, it is important to keep in mind that you cannot address all the problems – you will need to make a choice.

Doing so will require high-quality data. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Commander Data is a fictional character in Star Trek – so not of any practical use. So, once you define the problem you want to address, you will need to determine the data you need, map it with the data you have, and devise an action plan to address the data gap. Fortunately, there is really good technology available to do so at very reasonable prices.

The next step is to define the business model. Basically, there is a choice between a linear model and a platform model. A linear model is something all associations do: they develop products and services that are then monetised. A classic example would be an educational offering. A platform model is very different: this is about a business model (not a technology infrastructure) that focuses on helping facilitate interactions across many participants.

Only once all this is addressed and defined can you start thinking about the actual technology kit you will use.

Let me make all of the above a bit more tangible by giving an example. One of the key challenges a vast majority of the **AIPC** members face is attracting and retaining talent. We know this as a result of the research we do on a yearly basis with an external partner. We also know that our current linear model cannot address this problem.

Fortunately, we have a talent programme at AIPC (**FutureShapers**), and the participants came up with a possible solution: a platform which creates a bridge between convention centres and (upcoming) talent (you might call it a Tinder for convention centres). This is a typical example of a platform model whereby a high number of convention centres try to connect with professionals worldwide. While its purpose aligns with the mission of AIPC, it is a type of model we have never done before. However, we believe it addresses a real need and will bring value – not only to the AIPC community but potentially to a larger part of the event industry.

So now we are collecting and documenting the data requirements, as having clear standards will be crucial. Which data fields are required when posting an open position? How many characters? What tags allow for easy searching? The same is true for resumes posted, staff exchange programme options, etc. Getting this right will provide the foundation for an amazing gathering place.

Once this is done, we can move to the next step: collecting the data and making the flywheel turn. As always, we will start with a small group of members joining the movement, and if all goes well, this group will grow into a movement due to its success and visibility.

Discovering this new way of engaging with our community is both exciting and challenging and I am sure it is the way to go for many associations.

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CONVENTION ASSOCIATION BUREAU

Empowering **Healthcare Professionals' Interpersonal Skills** Through **AI-Powered Simulation Training**

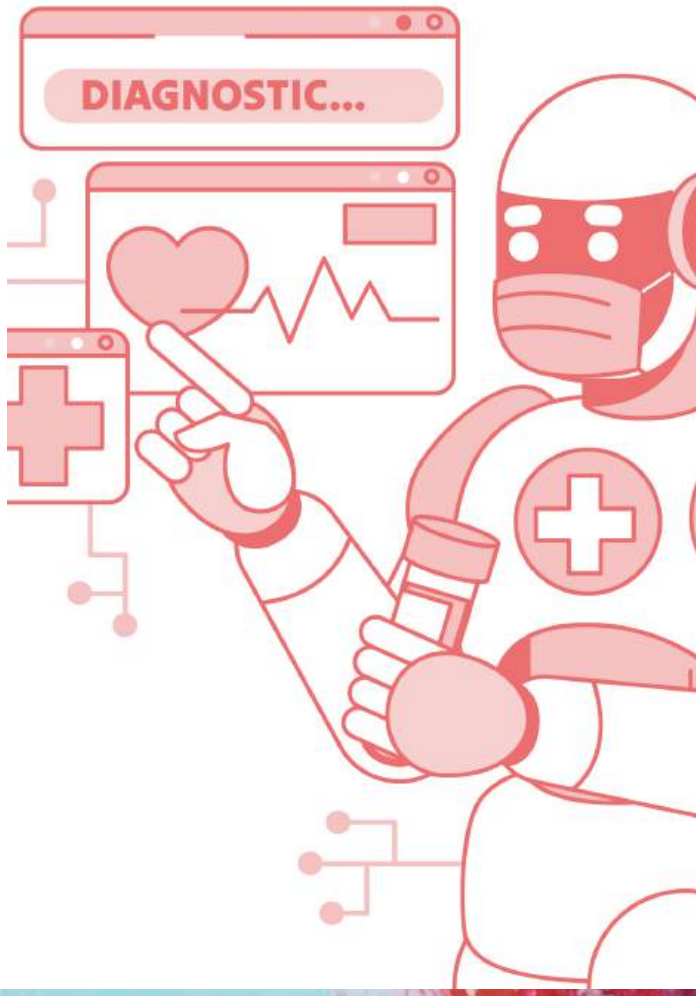
AUTHOR: ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA, KENES GROUP MEDIA & COMMUNICATION MANAGER



In today's fast-paced healthcare environment, the need for continuous learning is more critical than ever. For healthcare professionals, mastering interpersonal skills, particularly in sensitive areas such as weight management, is a vital component of patient care. **UNLOK Education**, the cutting-edge platform developed by Kenes Group, is redefining medical education through AI-powered simulation courses on emotional intelligence offered for free.

AI and the Future of Sensitive Conversations

One of the most innovative courses on the UNLOK platform is the ***AI-Powered Simulation Training: Mastering Sensitive Discussions on Weight Management*** designed for the Kenes-initiated **Advanced Technologies & Treatments for Diabetes (ATTD)** community. This 15-minute, online training provides a novel way for healthcare practitioners to hone their skills in managing difficult conversations, particularly around lifestyle changes and weight management with patients diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.



A unique feature of the course is its integration of **emotional recognition AI and generative AI**. The platform allows participants to engage in a pre-recorded, simulated video call with a virtual patient (an actress), where the AI analyses both the content and delivery of the conversation. The aim is to reflect how the healthcare professional's language and tone may be perceived, offering constructive feedback for self-reflection and improvement.

As **Online Education Specialist Nuria Fernandez**, who spearheaded the project at **Kenes Group**, puts it: "We saw the potential to use emotional recognition AI to help healthcare professionals handle conversations with their patients more sensitively and without judgment". By doing so, UNLOK addresses one of the most challenging aspects of patient care, building trust and rapport through empathetic communication.

AI-Powered Training: A New Frontier in Medical Education

The *'Reality Check'* module, designed in collaboration with the company **Make Real**, specialised in immersive learning experiences, integrates emotional recognition and generative AI to offer a simulation where healthcare professionals can practice delicate patient interactions. Participants engage in simulated video consultations using their device's camera and microphone, receiving real-time feedback on their tone, language, and overall approach, thanks to AI technology. The feedback acts like a mirror, offering insights into how they are perceived by patients, and allowing them to adjust their communication style and reflect on their interpersonal skills.

According to feedback collected from users, the session has been praised for its interactive, human-centric approach to weight management conversations. A post-session survey captured one participant's reflection: "Loved that this was an interactive session! I also appreciate being able to interact with participants internationally through the UNLOK Education." This is a testament to how the platform not only fosters interpersonal skills but also provides a global context for collaboration and learning.

The short course is more than just a training tool; it's a self-reflective exercise. The AI not only critiques the technical aspects of the conversation but also evaluates subtle emotional cues. This personalised feedback is key to building confidence and honing the soft skills necessary for successful patient interaction. "We see the value of supporting healthcare professionals in strengthening their interpersonal skills and rapport with patients, and we are looking forward to implementing this technology for different scenarios within the various UNLOK Education communities", added Fernandez.

Bridging Technology and Human-Centric Care

The future of medical education is digital, and the AI-powered solutions offered by UNLOK are a testament to this shift. The platform equips healthcare professionals with the technical knowledge collected from several Kenes Group's conferences, while also addressing the human aspect of care – how to communicate difficult news with empathy, professionalism, and respect – through fully online educational initiatives.

With AI's growing role in healthcare, platforms like UNLOK ensure that professionals are not just technically adept but also emotionally intelligent, a skill that is becoming increasingly important in modern medical practice.

UNLOK Education's collaboration with ATTD sets a new standard for continuous medical education. Moreover, UNLOK fosters a global learning community by connecting healthcare practitioners across borders, allowing them to practice and exchange insights in a collaborative setting.

The platform's modules are tailored to address specific clinical challenges, combining theoretical knowledge with practical, hands-on simulations. By providing continuous feedback and fostering self-reflection, UNLOK equips healthcare professionals with the tools to improve their patient interactions and deliver more compassionate care. This forward-thinking approach to medical education is transforming how professionals engage in lifelong learning, ensuring they stay at the forefront of both medical advancements and human-centric care.

The Team Behind UNLOK Education

The integration of AI in medical training heralds a new era of professional development, where technology enhances technical and interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, behind the technology, there is a team of 15 experienced, talented, and forward-thinking professionals who are part of the Kenes Group Digital Team, spanning from continuing education services, partnerships and grants, digital and online education specialists, marketing, and more.

In the particular case of the ***AI-Powered Simulation Training: Mastering Sensitive Discussions on Weight Management***, the team found the perfect partner company Make Real during Europe's leading showcase **Learning Technologies**, held this past April in London. The ideation and production process involved members of the ATTD committee, specialists from Kenes Group and Make Real, and a professional actress directed by the team, all based in different locations around the world.

UNLOK Education technological platform was developed by the Kenes Group IT Team as a continuation of the **VirtuOz** platform which hosted all the PCO's virtual meetings during the pandemic. UNLOK was granted the **IAPCO Driving Excellence Innovation Award 2022** and its evolution continues to provide 365-day, interdisciplinary education for healthcare professionals of all socioeconomic circumstances.

KENES GROUP



AI is Already Giving Us a **Glimpse of the Future** for **Associations** and **Meetings**

The association and hospitality specialities have always been receptive to using recent technologies to improve the member and/or guest experiences. In the association field, the adoption of electronic communications replaced the old system of direct mailing and printed newsletters, magazines, and technical documents. It also has replaced the necessity of in-person participation to receive value with the option of virtual participation.

In the hospitality field, social media and websites have replaced telemarketing and glossy brochures. Technology has also replaced the need for in-person site visits for meeting planners by allowing for virtual (real-time) property and destination tours.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is going to make those major shifts in organisation management and organisation culture seem like small adjustments by comparison. Here are just a few examples of how AI is already changing opportunities and challenges, for both associations and the hospitality industry, worldwide:

1. Creating Unique Experiences

For several years, associations have promoted the opportunity for conference attendees to personalise and customise their meeting experience. By using association-provided apps, attendees can create unique schedules, map their path from one event to the next, arrange meetings with friends or vendors, and make reservations at local restaurants and entertainment venues.

AI is taking these activities to another level. By mining the information associations already have on member preferences and tendencies, AI can begin each attendee's conference experience by creating a 'suggested' meeting programme that is customised in numerous ways. It can even recommend networking activities to enhance the attendee's ability to meet new people with similar interests.

Hotels, conference centres, and other venues have adopted conveniences such as online check-in and registration, keyless (app) room entry, one-tap checkout procedures, and even summoning elevators to specific floors.

AI will/can allow venues to recommend which exhibitors each attendee might want to visit, give details on what each exhibitor will have at its booth, and even map out the suggested order in which to visit these exhibitors. This helps attendees avoid aimlessly walking the show floor by prioritising their schedule.

2. Enhancing Customer Service

Anyone who has been in the association or hospitality field for any length of time has experienced some feedback from members/guests regarding the shortcomings of staff in customer service at a venue or event. Not every staffer can answer every question from everyone, of course, but that leads to frustration for the customer.

AI already allows attendees and guests to have a personal assistant accompany them on their smartphones throughout their stay. This assistant can even anticipate the next step on the person's 'journey' at your meeting and remind them of what they need to bring, how to get there, what the appropriate attire is going to be, etc. It can also answer questions quickly and accurately.

From an event management perspective, AI can track attendee preferences, traffic flow, long waits at food venues (and even bathrooms), and where seats are available at assemblies and entertainment events.

3. Creating More Inclusive Activities

AI allows members and guests to participate in meetings in their native languages via translation and can provide real-time transcription of the proceedings.

4. Controlling Costs and Increasing Productivity

AI also allows organisations to reduce staff time (and costs) to provide repetitive services such as billing, inventory control, maintenance costs (through anticipatory cleaning, restocking, repairing, etc.), and regular communications.

Don't forget the Human Factor in All This

Just a quick word of caution regarding AI's advancements in the association management and hospitality fields. Numerous studies estimate that AI is likely to displace as many as 300 million jobs (globally) in the next five years. On the brighter side, AI will also create as many as 75-100 million new jobs globally over the same period.

These statistics about AI's expected growth and impact need to be considered carefully, because:

- There is no guarantee (*far from it!*) that each of the 100 million new AI-created jobs will go to one of those 300 million displaced workers. They would have to be retrained and hired by (*perhaps*) different companies or institutions (*maybe located in other countries*). It is not an equation of one job created for one job replaced.
- Many of those displaced workers in our industries are likely to be long-term, valued employees in smaller, independent businesses and not-for-profit organisations. What will happen to them? Yes, associations, hotels, convention and visitors' bureaus, and their aligned suppliers will save a lot of money by replacing workers doing repetitive jobs (accounting, customer service, billing, invoicing, maintenance work, etc.), but is the cost savings going to be worth breaking up a successful, close-knit team that has worked together for years?
- Let us not forget that the same AI technology that can save lives, protect workers and property, increase efficiency, and increase productivity is also being developed and used for nefarious purposes. The 'rules' for AI are just in the formative stages, and those who would use AI for illegal purposes always seem to get ahead of the honest people and organisations who are taking advantage of innovative technologies to improve things.

It seems that association management and hospitality industry leaders understand what AI's tremendous potential can be to enhance our member and customer experiences. However, as with any innovative technology, it will take some time to analyse its long-term effects on our organisations.



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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The Enduring Value of **In-Person** Events:

How Associations Like **CityDNA** Are Harnessing Their Power

In the wake of the global pandemic, the meetings and business events landscape underwent a profound shift, with virtual and hybrid formats becoming the new norm. However, while online meetings offered convenience and the opportunity to reach remote audiences, they often fell short in delivering the rich, interactive experiences that in-person gatherings excel at. Since 2022, **City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA)** has fully embraced the return of 100% in-person events, reaffirming the value of human connectivity, trust and business interactions for its members.

Reclaiming the Community Feeling

During the pandemic, CityDNA, like many organisations, transitioned to virtual formats. While these online meetings provided continuity, something vital was missing: the organic networking moments and spontaneous interactions that defined CityDNA's events. "We returned to in-person events because we missed that community feeling. It is more than just the learning – it is about creating relationships and shared experiences that simply cannot be replicated online," explains **Barbara Jamison-Woods, President of CityDNA.**

Since returning to in-person events, the alliance has noticed a renewed sense of engagement and innovation among attendees. The concrete benefits of networking, the ease of collaboration, and the opportunity to showcase destinations first-hand have become central pillars of CityDNA's event strategy.

The Power of CityDNA Events: Real-World Examples

CityDNA offers a diverse range of events tailored to different segments of the industry, from high-level discussions to specialised knowledge-sharing platforms. Each serves as a reminder of why face-to-face meetings are irreplaceable:

- **CityDNA CEO Meeting** – This two-day meeting brings together CEOs for open, peer-group discussions. These sessions allow city tourism leaders to share their most pressing challenges and opportunities, fostering valuable collaboration in an environment of trust and respect.

- **CityDNA International Conference & General Assembly** – Over three days, professionals from tourist boards, convention bureaux, and city marketing organisations gather for learning and networking. One of the key benefits of this conference is the chance for attendees to connect during breaks and informal events – the 'corridor conversations' that spark new ideas and collaborations.

- **CityDNA Summer School** – For nearly four decades, this four-day programme has provided emerging professionals with intensive learning experiences. In-person workshops and discussions allow participants to dive deep into the industry's intricacies, building personal and business connections that continue beyond the event.

- **CityDNA CVB Cafés** —These sessions, held during **IMEX** and **IBTM** trade shows, offer a unique chance for CVB professionals to connect through workshops and networking sessions and enhance their presence at the trade show.

- **CityDNA Expert Meetings**: These 1.5-day meetings are focused on specific areas of city tourism. The City Cards Expert Meeting in June helps city card product managers share best practices and enhance their offerings. The Visitor Experience Expert Meeting in November brings together TIC managers to discuss and improve visitor services.

In each of these events, networking and face-to-face interactions are not an extra – they are a pillar of the experience.

Real Stories from CityDNA Members

Pablo Ortega Novillo, Catalonia TIC Network Promotion Manager, describes the CityDNA conferences as "joining a sort of 'mutual help group.'" The open and collaborative environment fosters meaningful connections, allowing attendees to share knowledge and advice. "In a single conversation with **Mari Somero** from Helsinki, I learned enough to set up our mobile information staff in Barcelona for the summer season."

He adds, "At CityDNA conferences, you can sit next to someone and exchange ideas without realising they might be the CEO of a major European city DMO. No one cares

about your job title before engaging in conversation – we are all professionals in the tourism industry, and that is what makes these events so special."

Similarly, **Made Pandis-Raie, Business Tourism Project Manager at Visit Tallinn**, highlights the networking opportunities offered by CityDNA's CVB Cafés: "After our last CVB Café in Frankfurt, I really felt like I had attended a support-group meeting. These gatherings provide invaluable connections, allowing us to share challenges and solutions with colleagues who understand our specific context."

For **Erika Valente, Business Developer at Destination Florence Convention Bureau**, the CityDNA Summer School and conferences have been transformative experiences. "I attended my first CityDNA event at the Summer School in Turin in 2022. It was a completely immersive experience, opening new horizons for me. In every CityDNA event I have attended since, I have met brilliant colleagues, many of whom have become friends."

Melissa Clauzing, Product Manager at amsterdam&partners, underscores the importance of in-person CityDNA Expert Meetings: "As a City Card product manager, you can sometimes feel a bit alone when you have problems. But at these City Cards Expert Meetings, we discuss and find solutions together. Having seen people face-to-face, it is much easier to stay in contact throughout the year."

Overcoming the Challenges

While some members requested hybrid options for practical or sustainable reasons, CityDNA made the decision to stay fully in-person. This decision was driven by the unique opportunity these events provide to showcase the hosting cities. As Barbara Jamison-Woods notes, "Our member cities invest in hosting to highlight their destinations, and a hybrid event simply cannot offer the same immersive experience."

Additionally, the logistical and financial demands of hybrid events were a consideration. The costs associated with technology and production for high-quality hybrid events often outweigh the benefits, and CityDNA prioritised delivering excellent in-person experiences that maximise both value and impact.

Renewed Demand for In-Person Events

Interestingly, since returning to 100% in-person events, CityDNA has noticed a rise in attendance. "Our events are more popular than ever before," says the CityDNA's President. "It seems that people now understand the fragility of our industry and are eager to reconnect in person, knowing that the future can change unexpectedly."

Attendance at the **International and Autumn Conferences** has grown by around 20%, showcasing the enduring appeal of face-to-face interaction. Notably, a significant and stable proportion of potential members consistently participates in these events, reflecting their interest in the network. The connections made, the ideas exchanged, and the experiences shared at these events create a foundation for future collaboration and innovation.

Looking Ahead

As City Destinations Alliance continues to evolve and grow, the commitment to in-person events remains strong. The return to face-to-face gatherings has reminded us all of the power of human connection – something no digital platform can replace. Associations like CityDNA will continue to harness this power, ensuring that in-person meetings remain a foundation of the industry.



Are **Hybrid Meetings** Irrelevant?

The **Continued Growth** of **In-person Events**

During the pandemic the hybrid format seemed like the perfect solution – attendees could be present without leaving their homes. Now that we are closing in on 2024, however, the meeting landscape has changed yet again: While hybrid models offer valuable flexibility, there has been a clear shift back toward in-person meetings, especially when the event goals align more effectively with face-to-face interaction. Indeed, in-person meetings are back and better than ever.

In this article, partners of the **World PCO Alliance** discuss the popularity, status, and perceived value of in-person meetings.



In-person attendance is strong – if the conditions are right: perhaps it is not a surprise that many people are eager to attend a meeting physically. **Kitty Wong of K&A International Co., Ltd**. has noticed an average attendance increase of at least 10% in her registration numbers. **Ricardo Pizzuti of Ega Worldwide congresses & events** has made a similar observation, noting that registration numbers are similar to, if not higher than, pre-pandemic figures. For him, the reason is obvious. "Our instinct is to move, in every sense. Socialising, discovering and exploring are consistent aspects of human nature."

Wong seems to agree, stating that it is not a struggle to attract in-person attendance. "People in Taiwan want to get out and attend meetings and exhibitions. Believe it or not, I have had to occasionally shut down registration!"

While high attendance numbers seem to be a trend, **André Vietor of Bco Congresos**, has noticed a range in attendance numbers post-pandemic, and finds that selling the in-person format is not always easy. "Many people have become accustomed to the convenience and flexibility of virtual meetings, where time and location constraints are minimal," he says. "Nevertheless, professionals who want or even need to attend meetings because of mandatory continuing education actually prefer to meet in person, but they need to be selective. In my experience, a large number of professionals pick only one in-person meeting per year but may consider attending additional meetings online if this option exists."



Stephen Noble of The Conference Company points out certain factors that can affect in-person registrations. "Virtual options are useful when accessibility is challenging whether that on account of distance, cost, time, family commitments or a concern about the environmental impact of travel."

Given these challenges, **Ksenija Polla of Talley Management Group Inc**. has found that many people opt for virtual participation if they can access the same content online. "For some, attending virtually helps them avoid the uncertainty and hassle associated with travel," she says.

Thania Carrera of T&C Group adds some other factors that can influence: "Attendance at in-person events largely depends on whether the destination, venue, or hotel offers interactive activities," she says. "Events have become more tech-focused and are increasingly leveraging the interactive possibilities offered by technology, which makes attending these events more attractive."

In-person meetings offer things hybrid meetings do not: Given the key role that conferences play in connecting people, the opportunities for that to happen face-to-face far outweigh online options. The social benefits of attending events are extremely difficult to create in a virtual setting. In-person meetings often have a distinct advantage in fostering deeper connections and engagement, leading many to transition away from hybrid formats in favour of fully in-person events. When the in-person meeting is the only place where attendees can achieve their objectives – whether through networking, hands-on experiences, or direct engagement – many are still willing to travel and attend.

These interactive opportunities are not exclusive to attendees. Sponsors and exhibitors have struggled to replicate the in-person dynamic in virtual settings, which is vital for optimising the investments made in such events. Says Noble, "They have shown increasing reluctance to be involved in virtual events other than possibly sponsoring apps."

Beyond the opportunities for interaction between attendees, Pizzuti recommends that conference organisers embellish the social programme. "Adding more live experiences, such as shows and live performances, effectively reinforces the social element of an in-person event," he says. "Allocating more budget for unforgettable dinners and parties is just as important as providing great presentations."

Steps to ensure your in-person meeting offers added value

All the World PCO Alliance partners emphasised the importance of communicating the clear benefits of in-person attendance and the fundamental step is to refocus on the event's underlying objectives.

1. Reassess the Event's Purpose: Clearly define and communicate the 'WHY' behind the event. When attendees understand the value they will gain, they are more likely to prioritise attending in person. Ultimately, the decision to physically attend an event is always driven by the same question: What's in it for me? This is a question all associations should be able to answer regarding stakeholder satisfaction. Attendees need a clear understanding of what they will get and take away from an in-person meeting, which requires a well-conducted communication strategy by associations.

2. Redesign the Event Experience: The pandemic has changed many people's habits and introduced new meeting formats. Hosts need to assess their current programme model and determine whether it enhances the value of attending an event in person or whether it could be easily replicated online. Says Vietor, "Associations are challenged to create an appealing meeting programme and to deliver a unique on-site experience that attendees would not otherwise enjoy."

Essentially, programmes should be developed focusing on the benefits of being in-person. This will be directly linked to understanding and segmenting the current and potential audiences. Says Noble, "Focus on designing events that promote collaboration, engagement, and intentional connections. Integrating new event technologies, AI-driven experiences, and creative, experiential design can elevate the experience for attendees, making in-person events more compelling."

The overall quality of a conference programme is critical. Organisers should aim to deliver relevant, compelling content that offers tangible value. Incorporate cutting-edge topics such as advancements in technology and AI, showcasing their practical applications and future trends. Engaging speakers, expert panels, and actionable insights related to these innovations will make the content more relevant and ensure that in-person attendance feels like a worthy investment, keeping attendees at the forefront of industry developments.

To build on the perceived value of attending in-person events, associations can focus on creating experiences that virtual formats cannot fully replicate: meaningful networking, hands-on workshops, and immersive environments that foster creativity and collaboration. Personal interactions, exclusive content, and real-time engagement with experts can provide a sense of connection and learning that is difficult to achieve online. Adding interactive elements like live Q&A sessions, breakout discussions, and team-based activities can elevate the sense of community and make the in-person experience more impactful.

Nancy Tan of ACEDaytons: Direct suggests integrating exclusive perks. "Offer in-person-only benefits like early access to content, special workshops, or behind-the-scenes tours. And don't forget comfort and convenience. Ensure a smooth, enjoyable experience with comfortable seating, quality catering, and easy logistics for travel or accommodations."

Wong urges event organisers to get creative with event design, especially when considering younger participants. "The young ones are more curious," she says. "They like something different from the old school style." Some examples of creative meeting design that Wong has incorporated include using more relaxed lighting in meeting rooms and moving some activities outdoors, when weather permits.

3. Reimagine Event Impact: Regarding sustainability, associations need to demonstrate their commitment and that the event has the least possible environmental impact. This factor may prevent some people from attending a meeting in person.

Event impact also goes beyond the environmental context. Organisers should also consider an event's positive social and economic impact. "If attendees recognise that their presence contributes to local growth, creates awareness, furthers knowledge exchange, or influences policy, they will see themselves as key stakeholders in the event's success," says Polla. "This can turn them into passionate advocates for future events."

Tan suggests that organisers consider integrating opportunities for attendees to contribute to the local community, like partnering with local organisations, supporting social causes, or incorporating community engagement activities. By fostering a sense of purpose and community contribution, in-person attendance is more meaningful and rewarding.

Vietor agrees: "Legacy programmes may have a positive impact and encourage people from the local community or the host country to attend in person since there is a sense of commitment and the longing to be part of it."

Do not write off virtual meetings altogether:

The flexibility of virtual meetings is invaluable, allowing broader participation from those who may have constraints due to location, health, or other commitments. The hybrid model also caters to different preferences, promoting inclusivity and making events more accessible and resilient.

Some events may particularly reap rewards from the hybrid model. Rizzuti points out that scientific events usually require hybrid attendance, due to the nature of the event itself. "Enhancing knowledge is something you can do from your home office. On the other hand, conventions and multi-day meetings are, in my opinion, great opportunities to meet new people, shake hands, and share experiences with colleagues/clients/suppliers that reinforce and facilitate relationships and collaboration."



Noble also feels that virtual events can still be relevant, but not necessarily in the sense of a synchronous model, i.e. participation by both in-person and online audiences in real-time. “Extending reach, providing content, and sustainable practices are key priorities for event hosts, so an online option should not be removed,” he says. “Hosts could consider developing smaller virtual-only events in addition to their key in-person event, either utilising content from in-person events, or creating new sessions online that can provide further educational opportunities.”

Polla agrees. “Hybrid models do not have to mean simultaneous live streaming; they can also include asynchronous elements, where content is recorded and made available online after the event. Some even consider digital content delivered at in-person events to be part of the hybrid experience.”

Having stated the continued benefits of virtual meetings, the World PCO Alliance partners acknowledge the challenges in creating hybrid events, namely associated costs and technical complexities. Running a hybrid event synchronously to the in-person event often means you are essentially organising two simultaneous experiences, each with its own set of logistical and production demands. Some organisations may find that maintaining a hybrid model stretches their resources too thin.

The return on investment comes in the form of increased engagement, wider reach, and the ability to adapt to unpredictable circumstances may be enough to justify an organisation’s investment in the format. Hybrid events remain an important tool for organisations aiming to reach a broader audience or ensure inclusivity for those unable to attend in person.

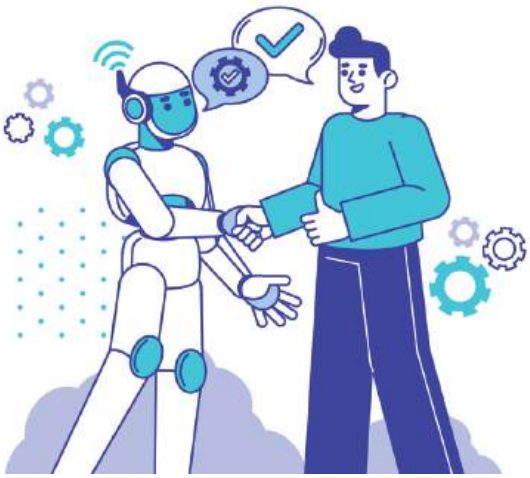
Ultimately, events are all about bringing people together and celebrating interactions and learning opportunities. When examining the continued relevance of hybrid events, associations are urged to go back to basics — determine the fundamental purpose of an event and its added value for attendees. From there, associations can then decide whether hybrid events make sense for them.

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The **Impact of AI** on Modern **Event Planning**



Cvent, a leading provider of tech solutions for meetings, events, and hospitality management, emphasises the importance for meeting planners and associations to stay up-to-date with technological developments and AI possibilities. These advancements can automate tasks, enhance time efficiency, and optimise event planning processes. This year's IMEX Knowledge Programme featured a diverse range of sessions led by various speakers and suppliers, all focused on the power of technology and AI. During the event, *HQ* caught up with **Nick Tinker**, **Senior Manager** at **Cvent**, to explore the opportunities and challenges that AI presents to the events industry, as well as the importance of upskilling in technology and AI.



What do you think are the current trends in AI for event professionals?

That is an interesting question, and a big one to start with. The biggest challenge we face is whether people are actually using AI. In general, we talk a lot about AI, but mainly in terms of generative AI like ChatGPT, which is probably the most accessible form of AI at the moment. However, not everyone in the events industry is using it effectively yet, or is aware of other different uses for the tools they might be using. Many are still learning how to run events effectively, let alone use advanced technology.

One big trend is using AI to save time and increase productivity. For example, our AI Writing Assistant helps event planners quickly create content for sessions, emails and websites, significantly reducing the time spent on these tasks. Another area where AI is making an impact is the RFP process for booking venues. AI can streamline this process, making it faster and more efficient for both planners and venues.

How important is it for the industry to upskill and learn how to use AI tools effectively?

Upskilling is key. Knowing how to prompt AI tools like ChatGPT is a skill in itself. Event professionals need to learn how to use the right prompts to get the results they want. At Cvent, for example, we are integrating these tools into our data and analytics processes. Collecting and presenting data to prove the value of events to the C-suite is a time-consuming task. AI can help collect and analyse this data, but you need to know how to use it effectively.

It is also important to verify the information generated by AI tools. Planners should not blindly trust the output, but check its relevance and accuracy. Some companies are reluctant to use generative AI because of security concerns. At Cvent, we use our own AI tools built on secure platforms like Azure, ensuring we have control over the data while training our teams on how to use these tools effectively.

Do you think organisations should develop their own AI tools for better security and control?

Whether they should or should not depends on their specific needs and resources. However, many organisations, especially smaller ones, can benefit greatly from using AI tools. These tools can save time and increase productivity. Larger companies may face more regulation and bureaucracy, but as long as teams are trained on how to use these tools effectively, they can be very beneficial. It is also important for companies to have protocols and policies in place for the proper use of AI to mitigate risk and ensure consistency.

How can Cvent help companies use AI to personalise their events?

Cvent has made great strides in integrating AI into our platform. Our AI Writing Assistant already helps planners create high-quality content quickly. We also have a matchmaking tool that uses AI to connect attendees with similar interests, increasing networking opportunities. Personalisation is the future of events. Imagine having an event wrap-up that provides personalised data and analytics about how you interacted with the event, just like Spotify does with music every year. This kind of detailed insight can help planners understand their most engaged attendees and improve future events. Cvent is focused on these data and analytics tools to help planners prove the value of their events to the C-suite and continually improve the attendee experience.

The transformative potential of AI in the meetings industry is undeniable. Upskilling association executives and meeting planners and integrating AI tools for advanced analytics will make event planning more efficient and personalised, ensuring that event professionals can fully leverage AI's capabilities while maintaining data security and accuracy. Cvent is at the forefront of this technological revolution, paving the way for the future of event management.

Stay Tuned for More AI Innovations from Cvent

Event: **Cvent CONNECT Europe**, November 5 - 7

For those looking to dive deeper into AI for event planning, Cvent offers several resources:

- Cvent AI-Powered Translators
- Cvent AI Writing Assistant (including a Learning Centre)
- Discussion Panels with Event Experts on AI for Events

These resources can help your team discover how AI can revolutionise event planning and marketing through these initiatives, providing valuable insights and practical applications for the industry.

How to Apply **Large Language Models** to **Event Content Operations?**

ExpoPlatform experts have been looking into the potential of large language models (LLMs) for some time, having recently released the first two chapters of an e-book on the topic. The result of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to LLMs for Events* will be an in-depth overview of how they can be applied in our industry. Next, we can go into some potential areas and concerns to consider.

LLMs have revolutionised the field of artificial intelligence – and are now emerging as an exciting opportunity for event professionals. This technology is a type of AI algorithm that uses deep learning techniques and massively large data sets to understand, summarise, generate and predict new content.

Event professionals can use LLMs to generate marketing materials such as website copy, social media posts and email campaigns. They can also assist in creating event descriptions, speaker biographies and presentation outlines. But LLMs offer more than just content creation – they can also be used to answer questions about this material.

LLMs can power chatbots to answer attendee questions, provide event information and offer support before, during and after the event. This can free up human staff for more complex tasks – a key issue facing event professionals at the height of show time. Before events, LLMs can help with tasks like scheduling, vendor selection and budget management. They can even suggest potential event themes or topics based on current trends.

Data analysis and insights are another area in which LLMs can help organisers after a show. They can pore over event feedback, surveys, and social media to identify trends, understand attendee preferences, and improve future events.

To begin using LLMs, event professionals need to consider several areas and experiment to become familiar with the technology. Experimenting with free tools like **GPT4** or **Google Colab** will help them gain hands-on experience, which will help them with future applications. Start with well-defined use cases where LLMs can provide clear benefits, such as automating repetitive tasks or generating content variations.

However, there are some important considerations for event professionals when dealing with these exciting opportunities. The first is data privacy and security – it is crucial to ensure compliance with data privacy regulations and protect sensitive event information. Event professionals must also be aware of potential biases in LLM outputs and take steps to mitigate them, ensuring fair and inclusive event experiences for all attendees.

Another key thing to remember is the importance of human oversight in reviewing anything produced by this technology. While LLMs can automate tasks, a real editorial process remains essential to review outputs, ensure accuracy and address any unforeseen issues – as well as improve whatever has been produced.

For example, this article – a piece of content for *HQ Magazine* – has been written by the content editor of ExpoPlatform. However, the writing process involves feeding information into a tool from **Google NotebookLM**. This LLM was given the first two chapters of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to LLMs* for Events and asked to provide some key areas the technology could start to be used in our industry. It provided a good base of content that the writer could work around, add to, edit and improve. Impressively, it took less than 30 seconds to review almost 90 pages of material to come up with the answers.

Make sure to note that the above are just a few potential applications and the possibilities for using LLMs in the events industry are constantly expanding. Event professionals who embrace these opportunities will be well-positioned to create more efficient, engaging and impactful productions.

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