Headquarters

NOVEMBER 2025 #122 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

HQ
THE ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



Next stop: Mumbai & Jio World Convention Centre
Meet in India's Business Events & Knowledge Capital

Business Events Montréal
A Global Gateway for Knowledge-Driven Associations

EUCEN
How Lifelong Learning Can Overcome AI and Academic Pressures

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Editor's Notes

Education. Education. Education.

Author: Jesús Guerrero Chacón, HQ's Deputy Editor

I recently watched *Ellas en la Ciudad* (Women in the City), a Spanish documentary about working-class women in Seville, the capital of Andalusia, who fought for access to education, healthcare and public services in the 1970s because urban planners ignored their neighbourhood. They demanded schools and learnt together in community centres doubling as classrooms. Their collective efforts transformed their neighbourhood, showing how community action can drive social change.

The story spoke to me deeply, as it was similar to my own family's experience in the same region and period. One of my grandmothers never learned to read and signed documents with her fingerprint. My grandfather's sister joined an adult school to learn to write and manage household accounts. For families like mine, sending a child to university has traditionally been seen as a symbol of progress and dignity. However, today, despite higher levels of education, many young graduates face precarious work and low wages, highlighting that the social elevator of education no longer runs as it should. This is not only an economic issue, but also reflects society's perception of the value of education and how quickly trust erodes. Universities, research centres and scientists are under increasing pressure as politics, ideology, and business interests compete to influence knowledge. In Spain, scandals involving falsified degrees by national and regional Members of Parliament led to resignations and hasty updates to public profiles and CVs. Elsewhere, underfunding, politicised curricula and interference in academic freedom threaten universities' role as guardians of truth and critical thought. When education and science become battlegrounds for control rather than understanding, their social purpose is weakened.

Accessible, high-quality public universities and a culture of lifelong learning remain reliable drivers of social mobility and democratic resilience, provided we protect their integrity and keep them open to all. Across our sector, we see that knowledge drives social change and events act as catalysts. This *HQ* edition highlights destinations linking universities, science and society, from Catalonia's leadership in European science events to cities that use knowledge to transform local communities. In Montréal, four universities anchor a network where institutes and associations collaborate to host policy-shaping congresses. **Business Events Montréal's Knowledge Collective** connects organisers with researchers so that conference programmes reflect real science, not slogans.

In Medellín, education and inclusion are key elements of a city-wide transformation. Projects such as **Constelaciones** demonstrate how tourism, events and community initiatives can turn resilience into opportunity. There, I met Luz Dary Álvarez, who runs community tours in memory of families previously affected by exclusion, and Leidy Resmon, who found the confidence to study again and learn English by guiding visitors, rediscovering her passion for music in the process. Their stories, like those of women in *Ellas en la Ciudad*, show that social change happens when education, opportunity and empowerment come together.

This conviction runs through our recent association interviews. **AGE Platform Europe** emphasised the importance of intergenerational learning for inclusion, while the **European Association for the Education of Adults** described lifelong learning as a democratic act. In this issue, **eucen** defends the role of universities as pillars of trust and civic responsibility.

A shared idea emerges across their work: when associations and events nurture the link between knowledge and society, they help to shape fairer, more informed communities and change lives.



HQ #122

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INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATIONS



A **Purpose** Beyond **Tourism**: How **Business Events** Are Driving **Global Travel**

Author: Manuel Fernandes, HQ Magazine Manager



A quiet shift is transforming the global travel scene, not in resorts or luxury hideaways, but in conference halls, convention centres, and auditoriums. These are the spaces where people come together not to take a break from the world, but to rethink and reshape it. This year's **World Economic Forum (WEF)** report, *Travel and Tourism at a Turning Point*, offers a telling snapshot of this transformation. Several tourism segments – such as live events – are expanding well above industry averages. **Sports tourism**, including both spectators and participants, reached $609 billion (approx. €575 billion) in 2023 and is projected to exceed €1.56 trillion by 2032, driven by social media and digital engagement. **Ecotourism** is also booming, with 14% CAGR expected to push it to €699 billion by 2032, fuelled by outdoor and sustainable travel. Meanwhile, **wellness tourism** continues its rise (8% CAGR), as travellers seek holistic, health-focused experiences.

But it is the **business events** sector that is stealing the spotlight. According to the report, the market is expected to grow by nearly 9% a year through the end of the decade, edging close to €920 billion in global value. This growth story is about more than just numbers. Business events have become the connective tissue of modern economies – the spaces where innovation circulates, where research meets investment, and where industries find their next leap forward. From medical congresses in Vienna to climate summits in Singapore, these gatherings are determining agendas that have a longer-lasting impact than the events themselves.

The case study on Rwanda presented in this report is an excellent example of this strategic transformation. Under the leadership of the **Rwanda Development Board**, the country has invested heavily in infrastructure, branding and public-private partnerships to attract international events. This commitment has positioned Kigali as one of Africa's leading destinations, boosting revenue, employment and global visibility *(check out our interview with the Rwanda Convention Bureau on HQ #104)*. The study also highlights how the Rwandan model integrates sustainability and local development, demonstrating how the meetings sector can generate lasting economic and social impact when aligned with national policies.

However, the path ahead is not without friction. The first challenge is sustainability, or rather, the industry's reckoning with it. As events multiply, so do their footprints – emissions, waste, resource use, etc. The WEF warns that reducing impact will not be enough. The future will belong to organisers and destinations that adopt regenerative practices, creating net-positive outcomes for the communities and ecosystems that host them. Then comes the human factor. Across continents, event organisers face a talent shortage. The pandemic hollowed out workforces, and now, as the sector regains momentum, the race is on to rebuild skills in logistics, tech integration, and event design. Without investment in people, the industry's momentum risks becoming a mirage.

Technology, too, sits at the heart of this shift. AI and data analytics promise unprecedented precision, from matchmaking participants to tracking carbon impacts, but they also bring complexity, cost, and ethical questions. As one industry expert recently told me: "we can automate the logistics, but not the purpose." Long a powerhouse of global conferencing, Europe's reputation still holds its ground thanks to its infrastructure, connectivity, and policy frameworks, as evidenced by the **2024 ICCA rankings**. Yet the continent now faces rising competition from Asia and the Middle East, regions investing heavily in smart venues and modern ecosystems. Europe's next challenge will be to remain relevant by embracing digitalisation and embedding purpose at the core of its event design.

Ultimately, what the WEF report reminds us is that business events are no longer peripheral to tourism, they are central to how we exchange ideas, accelerate change, and build trust in an uncertain world. If travel tells us where we have been, events tell us where we are going.



Bandra-Worli Sea Link connecting BKC and South Mumbai

Global Associations Look to Mumbai

Expanding Associations' Reach in India's Knowledge Capital

Across the international meetings industry, associations are increasingly turning their attention to India. With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, a fast-growing economy, and a network of dynamic research hubs, the country represents both a vast membership opportunity and a platform for thought leadership.

For global organisations seeking to expand their reach in Asia, Mumbai offers a distinctive combination of influence, infrastructure, and intellectual capital. The opening of the **Jio World Convention Centre (JWCC)** in March 2022 gave the city a state-of-the-art venue capable of hosting major congresses. The subsequent announcement of the **Maharashtra Convention Bureau (MCB)** in May 2025 has added a strategic framework to attract and support international organisers. Together, they position Mumbai as India's business events capital, offering associations a base from which to engage local experts, build networks, and deliver legacies with lasting impact.

Attracting the Global Associations

Announced at IMEX Frankfurt 2025, the Maharashtra Convention Bureau offers a structural support system for associations considering India. By launching India's first state-led bureau, the government of Maharashtra shows that it recognises the importance of association meetings and their potential for long-term value generation. The bureau's mission is to promote the state of Maharashtra, particularly highlighting the potential of the capital city Mumbai and other key cities like Pune, Nashik and Nagpur as compelling global hubs for business events, and provides international organisers with a one-stop solution including administrative guidance, coordination with government agencies, venues, and local partners. This creates a clear and reliable pathway for associations entering new markets.

Building Membership and Networks

Mumbai is uniquely placed to help associations grow their presence in India and South Asia. It is home to a concentration of organisations that naturally align with the priorities of international federations.

Mumbai's academic and research institutions amplify this advantage. **IIT Bombay** provides one of the strongest engineering and computer science talent pipelines in Asia. The **Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)** is globally respected for breakthroughs in physics and mathematics. The **University of Mumbai**, with more than 700 affiliated colleges, ensures a broad academic reach across disciplines.

This ecosystem enables associations to achieve more than just hosting a successful event; it allows them to establish a long-term engagement strategy. By recruiting local academicians as speakers, engaging professionals as delegates or establishing regional chapters, associations can draw on a vast pool of talent and increase their presence in South Asia.

In recent years, Mumbai has staged high-profile events across finance, science, culture, and sport, showcasing both its infrastructure and its networks.



Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai

These case studies illustrate the diversity of events Mumbai can accommodate. Whether convening global policy discussions, scientific congresses, or creative industry showcases, the city demonstrates its ability to deliver results that extend well beyond the event days.

Jio World Convention Centre: A Catalyst for Associations

At the heart of Mumbai's business events infrastructure is the Jio World Convention Centre (JWCC), a venue conceived with international associations in mind. Its scale and flexibility make it possible to host large congresses, while its hybrid-ready technology ensures global reach. Associations planning rotational meetings can rely on infrastructure that supports plenary sessions, parallel tracks, exhibitions, and networking all within one integrated complex.

What distinguishes JWCC, however, is its location within the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Mumbai's central business district. Here, multinational headquarters, consulates, and financial institutions create a setting that is already familiar to international delegates. It is housed within a mixed-use precinct that also includes a multi-disciplinary cultural centre, a luxury retail complex and diverse dining experiences that reflect Maharashtra's culinary traditions. High-end hotels within walking distance make it a self-contained district that offers a seamless experience to a discerning audience.

Over the past few years, the JWCC has hosted several globally significant events, including the **World Congress of Accountants**, the **G20 Summit Meetings**, the **International Olympic Committee's 2023** Session, the **Miss World Grand Finale 2024**, the **11th Indian Association Congress**, the **WAVES Summit 2025**, and the annual **Global Fintech Fest**.

Its growing popularity as a preferred international venue is reflected in the forthcoming line-up, which includes the **Asian Seed Congress 2025**, the **International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) Asia-Pacific Regional Congress 2025**, the **Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) 2026**, **WordCamp Asia 2026,** the **International Baccalaureate Global Conference 2026**, the **35th International Congress on Occupational Health 2027**, the **UIA International Architecture Forum 2027**, and the **SICOT Orthopaedic World Congress 2030**.

Beyond business, Mumbai adds value through its heritage and culture. The city's Victorian Gothic and Art Deco ensembles and the Elephanta Caves are UNESCO World Heritage sites, while Maharashtra's Ajanta and Ellora cave sites and the Western Ghats make every congress both professionally rewarding and culturally memorable.

The combination of a state-backed convention bureau, a premium convention centre, and a city with global economic and intellectual reach makes Mumbai a strong contender for international associations planning their next event in Asia. Maharashtra offers organisers seeking to grow membership, strengthen networks and establish a meaningful legacy – both the strategy and the resources – to achieve their goals.

To explore how Mumbai and JWCC can be the perfect destination for your next association event,

visit **www.jioworldconventioncentre.com**

scan the QR code



Montréal's Knowledge Ecosystem as a Platform for Global Associations

Montréal, one of Canada's largest cities, has earned its position as a leading destination for international associations. A unique combination of scientific excellence, an engaged academic and scientific community, inclusive culture and genuine local support is the key to its appeal. In 2024, Montréal hosted 539 business events, welcoming 874,000 delegates and visitors and generating CAD 395 million (approx. €270 million) in economic impact, establishing itself as one of the country's strongest meeting hubs. **Business Events Montréal**'s proposition to associations is clear: established expertise in life sciences, aerospace, and clean energy, in addition to fast-growing sectors like AI, fintech, and engineering. Conferences benefit from a solid intellectual base and a culture of experimentation, supported by universities, industry and international organisations.

Knowledge Capital and Catalysts for Change

Montréal's appeal to associations begins with its wealth of knowledge. The city's four major universities – **McGill University, Université de Montréal, Concordia University** and **Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)** – anchor a research ecosystem that attracts CAD 1.8 billion (approx. €1.2 billion) in annual funding and educates almost 188,000 students, 40,000 of whom are international. This concentration of talent feeds directly into conferences, providing programme committees with speakers, moderators and volunteers from a range of disciplines.

The city's well-established sectors are an immediate draw. In the life sciences sector, for example, Montréal's hospitals and research centres are world leaders in neurosciences, oncology, cardiology and public health. The **Montréal Neurological Institute** and the **McGill University Health Centre** exemplify the city's global role in research and care, which is also reflected in its conference calendar. In July 2025, the **STI & HIV World Congress** brought more than 1,500 delegates to the Palais des congrès, while the **International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research** attracted over 5,000 specialists in May. Another pillar is the aerospace sector, with companies such as **Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney Canada** and **Canadian Aviation Electronics** employing over 60,000 people and generating CAD 15 billion (approx. €10 billion) in annual sales. Québec's almost fully renewable power grid supports activity in clean energy and sustainable mobility, with research clusters focusing on batteries, electrified transport and low-carbon innovation.

Montréal's position as home to nearly 70 international organisations adds weight to these foundations. The city is home to six **United Nations** offices, including the **International Civil Aviation Organization**, the **Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity**, the **UNESCO Institute for Statistics**, and the **World Anti-Doping Agency**. In 2025, **UN-Habitat** opened its Canada office in Montréal in recognition of the city's bilingual research environment and concentration of international organisations. For associations, this provides direct access to policymakers and regulators in sectors ranging from aviation to biodiversity.

This proximity has already produced global outcomes. In 2022, Montréal hosted the **UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15)** after just five months of preparation, a major feat for any destination. Over 18,000 delegates attended the event, which produced the landmark *Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework*. This agreement committed nations to protecting at least 30% of land and freshwater by 2030. The event and its outcomes showed that Montréal excels in managing large-scale logistics and can encourage discussions that influence international policy. The model established at COP15 has proven relevant to associations of all sizes. In 2024, the **3rd Joint Congress on Evolutionary Biology** brought together more than 2,000 delegates, while **IEEE Quantum Week**, a global conference of the **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers**, convened 1,500 specialists in computing and quantum technologies.

Events show how Montréal can support both high-level summits and academic gatherings, which connect associations more systematically with local expertise. **The Knowledge Collective**, launched by Business Events Montréal and the **Palais des congrès de Montréal** in 2024, links organisers to researchers, institutes and industry clusters. This joint initative brings together leaders from key economic sectors who provide local leadership for bids and help align congress programmes with current research priorities. Incubators and research chairs reinforce this approach. Montréal's economic clusters strengthen this academic ecosystem: **Montréal InVivo** connects life sciences and health technology organisations; **Aéro Montréal** links aerospace manufacturers and research centres; **Numana** drives collaboration in digital technology; and **Propulsion Québec** leads research and innovation in electric and smart transportation. Together, they provide associations with direct access to organised networks of expertise across multiple sectors.

New hubs are also reshaping Montréal's profile. AI has become the most visible, with the **Québec Artificial Intelligence Institute Mila** and the **Institute for Data Valorisation** attracting investment from **Google**, **Microsoft** and **Meta**. In July 2025, Canada's leading AI company **Cohere** opened a new office at Mila to build on local expertise in large language models and applied AI. The city also hosted the **International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence** and the **World Summit AI Americas** in 2025, bringing thousands of delegates and leading researchers. Another of the city's defining strengths is engineering, supported by more than 17,000 university students and top-ranked institutions such as **McGill University, École Polytechnique de Montréal** and



École de technologie supérieure. The presence of national and provincial associations, including the **Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum**, as well as the **Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec**, underscores the city's expertise in this field. Finance has joined this list of emerging strengths, with the **Station Fintech** hub and the **Sustainable Finance Summit** placing Montréal among the North American leaders in digital and climate-aligned investment.

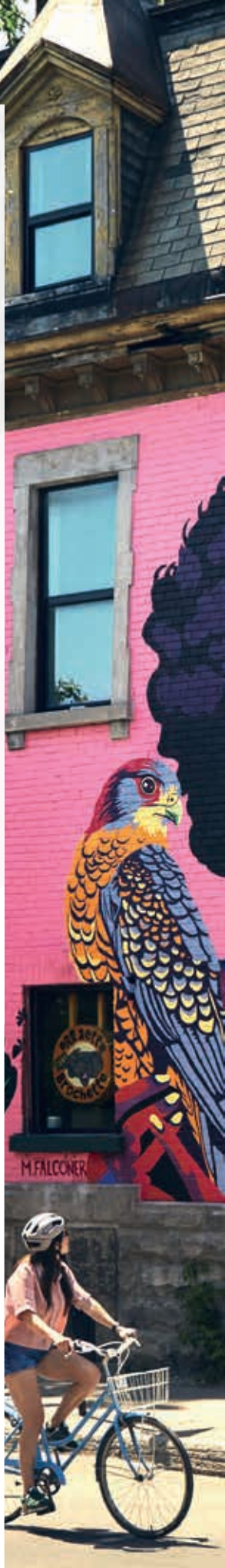
For associations, the collaboration between established sectors and fast-growing clusters creates opportunities for multidisciplinary agendas. It means that events held in Montréal can tap into local communities that are already involved in global debates, whether that is AI, sustainable finance or biodiversity. The combination of knowledge capital, institutional presence and innovation platforms grants the city credibility rooted in daily reality.

Human Capital: A City Defined by Openness

Montréal's reputation as a global meetings city is sustained not only by rankings but by the people who shape the visitor experience. The **Union of International Associations (UIA)** has ranked the city first in the Americas for international association meetings for eight consecutive years, and the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** has named it North America's top city for international association meetings for nine years in a row. These achievements are matched by a strong civic attitude: the latest *Montréal Resident Sentiment Index* found that 84% of citizens were proud to welcome visitors, and 71% supported tourism growth. This civic culture is visible in the city's daily life. Montréal is officially bilingual, with French and English used side by side, and more than 80 languages spoken across its neighbourhoods. Over 120 cultural communities contribute to a civic fabric where diversity is normalised, from signage and services to markets and festivals. For delegates, the result is a setting where community support and cultural diversity are part of the city's normal rhythm.

Inclusiveness also has practical dimensions for business events. Business Events Montréal has produced guidelines that help organisers plan for LGBTQ+ inclusion, accessibility and gender representation. The city is home to **Fierté Montréal**, one of the largest Pride festivals in the Francophone world, and its LGBTQ+ Village has long been a space where community organisations work with international partners. Women leaders across business, science and culture are prominent in civic life, offering associations access to diverse speakers and role models. These women driving progress across sectors show how inclusivity is embedded in professional as well as social life. Indigenous communities contribute to Montréal's cultural and intellectual landscape, particularly in relation to environmental stewardship and the arts, and are increasingly involved in event programming. Venues and hotels have also introduced standards to welcome delegates with disabilities, including accessible entrances, wayfinding, and adapted services, and they are increasingly offering gender-neutral washrooms.









For delegates, Montréal offers an environment where safety and accessibility are both recognised and practised. Independent rankings have named it the safest major city in North America for three consecutive years, with particular recognition for women travelling alone and LGBTQ+ visitors. Policies are matched by practical measures: venues implement accessibility standards, staff receive training, and inclusion guidelines are widely applied. The city's compact and walkable downtown makes it straightforward to move between hotels, meeting spaces and cultural districts, reducing logistical stress for organisers and participants alike. Taken together, community support, eco-responsible initiatives, infrastructure quality and targeted incentives provide associations with a reliable and well-rounded setting for international meetings.

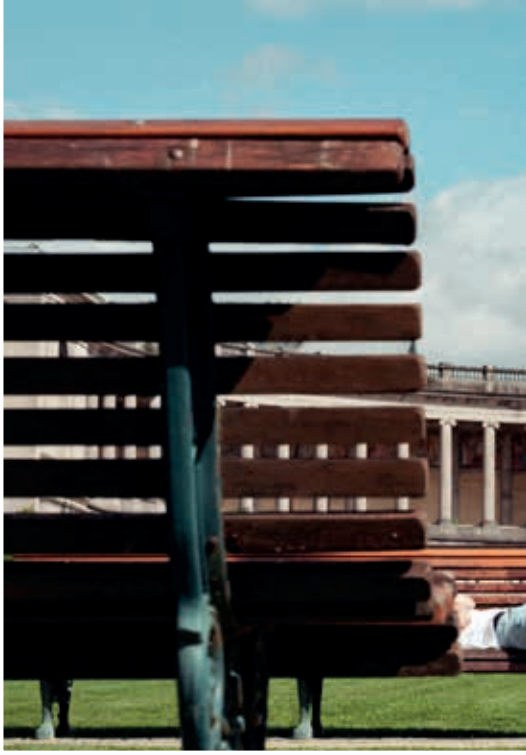
The city's openness and innovative spirit extends to environmental commitments too, reflecting this same interaction between institutions and residents. Montréal is once again among the Top 3 destination leaders in North America in the *Global Destination Sustainability Index*, supported by tangible initiatives. The Palais des congrès de Montréal operates as a carbon-neutral venue certified under the **BOMA BEST** certification, offering organisers waste-sorting systems, carbon-accounting tools and partnerships for donation and reuse. Québec's electricity grid, more than 99% renewable, provides a reliable source of clean energy for events. The world's largest rooftop greenhouse, located in the city, supplies local caterers with fresh produce and acts as a visible example of sustainable urban practice that delegates can experience first-hand.

Sustainability efforts are reinforced by infrastructure that is both accessible and efficient. Montréal–Trudeau International Airport connects the city to more than 150 destinations and is only 32 kilometres from downtown. The Palais des congrès sits within the Underground City, a pedestrian network that links hotels, restaurants and shops over 33 kilometres. With more than 36,000 rooms across Greater Montréal, including 16,000 downtown, delegates can move between venues and cultural districts with ease. The compact layout brings the city's diversity, hospitality and cultural life into direct contact with international meetings.

Financial and institutional support completes this framework with a provincial and federal fund to support international conferences. Business Events Montréal adds its own financial assistance as well as useful tools, attendance-building resources and introductions to local ambassadors. The cost competitiveness of the Canadian dollar and streamlined customs facilitation allow organisers to focus resources on content and delegate engagement.

The city's near-term calendar highlights its appeal to international organisations. Confirmed bookings extend through to 2028, with global meetings in engineering, seismology, and life sciences already secured. These events build on Montréal's existing knowledge ecosystems while opening doors to new fields. At the heart of this success is a strong sense of community and collaboration. Montréal's academic, institutional and business networks share a common vision focused on the well-being of delegates, partners and the wider ecosystem connected to international meetings. Business Events Montréal plays a key role in fostering these relationships, ensuring that every event benefits from coordinated local support and shared purpose. Together, knowledge and human capital make Montréal a destination where associations can meet with confidence and make a lasting impact.

Step Onto The **Stage** Where **Global Conversations Happen**



Keen to be part of the world's most significant discussions? Let your voice be heard in Brussels. The Belgian capital is a hub for politics, science, business and culture with a truly international outlook. Choosing Brussels means tapping into one of the world's most influential ecosystems. With a full calendar of high-profile and emerging events, Brussels continues to grow as one of the world's top congress cities. And the future looks bright: new hotels, striking venues and a strong commitment to smart tourism are setting the tone for 2030.

Brussels, A Decision-Making Hub

Brussels is the place where global policies take shape. Three of the EU's main institutions, **NATO** and thousands of international associations call Brussels home. This draws a community of over 30,000 professionals working in policy, advocacy and communication.

It is also one of the world's most diverse cities, with more than 180 nationalities and a remarkable pool of multilingual talent. That diversity fuels its open-minded spirit. It is this combination that helps Brussels consolidate its position as a top global congress destination. Flagship conferences return year after year – some like **International Symposium on Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine (ISICEM)** and **Computers, Privacy and Data Protection (CDPD)** have done so since the 1980s – building on decades of trust and shared success.

This success is part of a broader story. In 2024, Brussels recorded almost ten million overnight stays, its highest number ever. According to **Patrick Bontinck, CEO of visit.brussels**, "Brussels clearly has a unique, cosmopolitan profile. When it comes to art, culture, gastronomy and nightlife, there's always something happening."

In short, tourism growth is powering Brussels' next chapter with new projects preparing the city for 2030.

What's Next For Brussels

Brussels is shaping a practical, people-first future for business events. Shortlisted for the **2026 European Capital of Smart Tourism**, the city shows how innovation and tradition can evolve hand in hand.



Heritage and culture remain the city's main draw. The **Wiertz Museum** (2026), the **Museum of Ixelles** (2026), the **Jewish Museum of Belgium** (2028) and the emblematic **Chinese Pavillion** (2028) are set to reopen. A new **MIMA** concept will add a creative pulse to the European Quarter. *Le Chat*, the besuited cartoon cat that exemplifies Belgium's quirky sense of humour will be getting his own museum in 2029. One of the most anticipated openings is **KANAL–Centre Pompidou**, set for November 2026. The new cultural landmark is set to attract audiences from across Europe. In addition, this 40,000 m² hub for contemporary art will also offer the chance to host events.

Getting to Brussels will soon be easier than ever. New night-train links added coach services between European cities and more direct air routes are widening access. A major airport transformation (2026–2032) will further improve connectivity.







The hotel scene is evolving fast, especially in the high-end sector. **The Standard, Cardo Brussels** and **Corinthia Grand Astoria** have already raised the bar in terms of comfort and design. Boutique newcomers like **Faubourg21** combine five-star luxury with a warm, homely feel. The reopening of the historic **Hotel Métropole** (2027) and the expansion of **DoubleTree by Hilton** (2026) will further boost the four-star offer. Meanwhile, **Cloud One Brussels** (2026 and 2027) and a second **MIX spa hotel** (2028) will add even more variety in the city centre. Overall, Brussels' hospitality sector will see a surge of 1,300 new rooms with a clear shift toward experience-driven hospitality.

But capacity is only half the story. What truly defines Brussels is its character. The **Brussels Special Venues** network unites 60 of the capital's distinctive locations, offering over 500 rooms in settings that range from historic ballrooms to reimagined industrial spaces. In Brussels, you can host a symposium in the world's largest **Art Deco church**, a gala among dinosaurs or a product launch inside the **Atomium**. No idea is too wild.

Sustainability ties it all together. Nearly half of Brussels' hotels are now **Green Key-certified**. More venues are embracing eco-labels, circular design and green mobility. Digital tools such as the **Brussels Smart City Card** connect transport, culture and local services in one place.

Brussels is also simplifying event planning with a tool for faster venue matches. Start planning with the **RFP Event Planner** by visit.brussels and let local teams advise you every step of the way. It is all part of a smarter, more connected city that works for people.

Stay informed about the latest openings, venues and event news from Brussels. Subscribe to the visit.brussels Meetings & Events newsletter via the QR code below.



Prague Congress Centre at sunset

Prague Congress Centre: an Icon Of International Meetings

Prague, the heart of Europe and the fifth most sought-after MICE destination in the world, hosted 5,100 events last year. The most significant ones take place at the **Prague Congress Centre** (PCC), an icon of Prague's congress industry with unique views of the romantic city and top-notch facilities for even the most prestigious events.



St. Nicholas Church, a baroque landmark in Prague's Malá Strana district

Events are a catalyst for long-term changes that transform cities and society as a whole. They bring new ideas, promote innovation and strengthen international knowledge sharing and research projects. This is confirmed by **Lenka Žlebková, PCC CEO**: "Every international congress in Prague means thousands of new contacts between experts, opening the way to new friendships and collaborations and leading to important advances in science and research. Congresses also shape the image of Prague as an attractive and innovative city. I am proud that we at the PCC are part of this."

Prague: An Exceptional Congress Destination

In 2024, Prague cemented its place among the world's absolute best, ranking 5th in the **ICCA** rankings. It dominates the European continent, where it ranks higher than Paris, London and Madrid. Its success is based not only on its professional facilities and competitiveness, but also on the atmosphere that makes every event an exceptional experience. The romantic historic city centre, listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, diverse cultural and gastronomic offerings and a high level of security rank it among the destinations with the highest 'delegate experience'. Its accessibility is also an advantage – Václav Havel Airport is only 30 minutes from the city centre, visitors have access to an extensive public transport network, and there is a wide range of hotel accommodation, including the **Holiday Inn Prague**.

Prague Congress Centre: A Prague Icon With A 45-Year Tradition And A Global Reputation

The PCC, which will celebrate its 45th anniversary next year, is the leading MICE venue in Prague and the country. Its reputation is also confirmed by the prestigious events that have taken place at the centre under extraordinary security



Sustainability at Prague Congress Centre: fountains cut plastic use



Sustainability at Prague Congress Centre: escalators boost energy efficiency and hygiene

measures – from the annual meeting of the **International Monetary Fund and the World Bank 2000** to the **NATO summit 2002** and the **Parliamentary Summit of the Crimean Platform 2023**. "However, we also host less formal events aimed at education and networking. An example is the recent **ICCA Workshop**, which connects associations with organisers and host destinations. It is precisely such meetings that prove that our role goes far beyond simply renting out space. Whether it is this year's ICCA workshop, the **27th World Road Congress 2023** or the NATO summit, all these events have one thing in common – we can offer top-class, inspiring facilities and maximum security," says Žlebková.

Participants Of The ICCA Workshop At The Prague Congress Centre

The PCC offers its visitors 70 halls and lounges with a capacity of up to 10,000 participants, unique brutalist architecture, unforgettable interior design and panoramic views of **Prague Castle** and the historic city centre. The immediate vicinity of the four-star Holiday Inn Prague hotel provides guests with comfortable facilities with more than a thousand parking spaces and charging hubs for electric cars. Thanks to its location directly on the metro line, you can be in the city centre within ten minutes. Top-notch AV services, LED walls, streaming solutions for hybrid events and complete 5G network coverage help to make your event perfect.

Last year alone, a quarter of a million visitors passed through the PCC as part of 203 events – benefiting hotels, restaurants, taxi services, cultural institutions and retailers. "The events we host have the potential to take not only our centre but also the entire city a step further. Every crown invested in a congress returns many times over to Prague and its residents – not only economically, but also in terms of the city's image and prestige," says Žlebková, explaining the positive effect of events on the city. Thanks to major events such as the 27th World Road Congress, which attracted more than 40 ministerial delegations and over 4,000 delegates from 121 countries, the city is perceived as a modern metropolis where business meets innovation and culture. And the PCC plays a key role in this.

The Connection Between PCC And Prague: A Sustainable Event And An Unforgettable Experience

The PCC offers sustainable venues and green solutions, which are one of the most important selection criteria in the MICE industry today. Zero waste events combine digital tools instead of printed materials and local catering with an emphasis on seasonality and waste minimisation. "We offer our clients facilities that allow any event to take place with the least possible impact on the environment. It is not just a label, but concrete steps – whether it is energy savings, the use of local resources, or a zero-waste approach," emphasises Žlebková.

Thanks to the **2016 Energy Performance Contracting (EPC) project**, it will save over €10 million and reduce CO_2 emissions by 83,000 tonnes – equivalent to 1,740 hot-air balloons. Since 2023, the PCC has been measuring the carbon footprint of its events, installing 7,000 m² of photovoltaics and purchasing green energy to achieve zero emissions. The centre continues to invest in 2025: new, more economical escalators with ionisation technology ensure a higher standard of hygiene; drinking fountains save on plastic packaging; and drones wash the monumental building with a glass surface area of 4,000 m², saving significant time, money and energy.

Part of the ESG philosophy is also caring for the surrounding area. This is symbolised, for example, by the Crossroads mural on the centre's façade, which was created in collaboration with the residents of Prague 4 and became part of the **ART District Vyšehrad project**. PCC thus cultivates not only its internal environment, but also develops public space, just as Prague's international attractiveness strengthens the importance of the PCC. "Prague and the PCC work in harmony, which gives events a unique dimension. Every organiser and their guests can see for themselves that this combination provides a space for inspiring meetings between world leaders from a wide range of fields and creates moments that are not easily forgotten," Žlebková concludes.

Turn your event into an unforgettable experience – Discover the spirit of Prague and the PCC – watch our story come alive.

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Experience Meets **Conferencing** at This **UNESCO Heritage City**

In a world where event impact goes far beyond the venue walls, Bruges stands out as a destination where purpose, place and innovation come together. With its compact size, historic buildings and forward-looking mindset, the city offers an ideal setting for international conferences that aim to inspire, connect and leave a lasting legacy.

For several years now, Bruges has been strongly committed to attracting multi-day international conferences with a link to the city's economic growth sectors. Conferences with a positive social impact is an international trend that Bruges is embracing in their tourism policy and support from their congress operation as well.

The Belgium city is easily and quickly accessible by train. Once you arrive, all venues, hotels and attractions are only a stone's throw away. This is not only sustainable, but also cost-effective.

Bruges is a UNESCO World Heritage city where heritage and innovation embrace each other. This dynamic is reflected in the city's offering of **Flanders Heritage Venues**, state-of-the-art conference centres, international knowledge institutions and expertise in mechatronics, ICT, healthcare, the port, tourism and culture, gastronomy and cycling.

Bruges Surprises With Both Modern And Historical Heritage Sites

In Bruges, every conference or corporate event is a total experience. A conference in a state-of-the-art convention centre can be combined with an exclusive dinner in a historic building. If you are looking for a heritage location or a venue with a unique impact, the Flanders Heritage Venues BMCC, **Concertgebouw Brugge, La Brugeoise**, the **Provincial Palace** and **Madeleine in Bruges** put the city on the map as an inspiring and high-quality MICE destination. They were screened by **Tourism Flanders** on a number of criteria, such as sustainability, accessibility, experience and digitisation.

The ultra-modern **Bruges Meeting & Convention Centre (BMCC)** is the first conference centre in Flanders to receive the M+ accessibility label from Tourism Flanders. The label guarantees that the venue is easily accessible for all conference visitors. In addition, BMCC also has the Green Key sustainability label. Its many facilities include an exhibition area of 4,423 m² and a divisible plenary hall for 516 people.

The Concert Hall of **Concertgebouw Brugge** can accommodate 1,289 conference delegates and is world-renowned for its exceptional acoustics. And why not have dinner on stage with a live orchestra?

Following extensive renovation, the neo-Gothic **Provincial Palace** was also awarded the M-label. It provides a beautiful historical setting for seminars, dinners and receptions. The maximum capacity of the Provincial Council Chamber is 220 people, based on the three-chair principle.

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important criterion when considering a conference destination. No less than 12 MICE locations hold the **Green Key label**: Novotel, Martin's Brugge, Martin's Relais, Crowne Plaza Brugge, Eco Fevery Hotel, Relais et Chateaux Hotel Heritage, NH Brugge, Radisson Blu Brugge, Ibis Styles Zeebrugge, BMCC, Royal Swans B&B and Concertgebouw Brugge.

What Is The Added Value Of The Visit Bruges Convention Bureau?

The **Visit Bruges Convention Bureau** has 30 years of experience and represents the entire Bruges sector. The team assists conference organisers in establishing the right contacts, preparing bid books, requesting quotations and supervising site visits. A single point of contact, impartial advice and thorough knowledge of what is on offer. The team ensures the perfect match.

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Catalonia at the Forefront of **European Science** and **Technology Events**

In Catalonia, conferences do not just happen – they transform lives through science. From Barcelona's cutting-edge technology to the charm of coastal venues, this is where progress, innovation and lifestyle meet. With global companies, cutting-edge research and world-class infrastructure, events here make a lasting impact, serving as a launchpad for legacies.

Catalonia has emerged as one of Europe's foremost hubs for research, innovation, and international congresses. It is a place where talent, science, and technology converge to shape the future. With prestigious universities, globally recognised research centres, and cutting-edge technology parks, the region offers a solid ecosystem that attracts knowledge, investment, and high-impact events.

At the centre of this dynamic environment is Barcelona, a global benchmark in business events and innovation. The city ranks fourth worldwide for the number of international congresses hosted and is recognised as Southern Europe's leading start-up ecosystem. Its thriving business network blends creativity with competitiveness, drawing consistent foreign investment. According to the *Global Cities Investment Monitor 2024*, Barcelona is ranked as the second city in the world, and the first in Europe, for R&D investment. This leadership is reflected in the fact that 75% of the world's most innovative companies – among them **Amazon, AstraZeneca** and **Microsoft** – are present in the region.

This scientific leadership is underpinned by world-class infrastructure such as the **ALBA Synchrotron**, the **MareNostrum 5 supercomputer**, the **Barcelona Biomedical Research Park**, and the **Institute of Photonic Sciences**. Together with universities and scientific parks across the region, these facilities ensure that every congress held in Catalonia connects seamlessly with its thriving research and business community. As a result, events hosted here deliver far more than discussions; they generate partnerships, create opportunities, and expand knowledge.

What truly sets Catalonia apart is the legacy its congresses leave behind. Events are designed not only to exchange ideas but also to foster collaboration, attract global talent, and develop solutions with direct societal impact. Increasingly, international associations are prioritising destinations where their events can leave this kind of meaningful footprint, and Catalonia consistently delivers on that promise. The region also boasts an extensive and diverse network of venues, adaptable to a wide range of professional needs. Large-scale facilities such as the **Barcelona International Convention Centre (CCIB)** and **PortAventura Business & Events** coexist with unique spaces such as **La Llotja** de Lleida or the **Girona Conference Centre**. Strategic initiatives, including the ongoing expansion of **Fira de Barcelona**, further reinforce Catalonia's capacity to host next-generation global congresses and exhibitions.

Beyond its professional infrastructure, Catalonia offers an unmatched visitor experience. Its cities and regions – including Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, Tarragona, Reus, Sitges and Lloret de Mar – along with destinations such as the Costa Brava, Costa Daurada, Maresme, Baix Llobregat, La Garrotxa and the Val d'Aran, combine Mediterranean lifestyle with excellence in services. Attendees enjoy world-renowned gastronomy, rich cultural heritage, a mild climate, and a welcoming atmosphere, creating the perfect balance between professional engagement and personal enjoyment.

Catalonia is far more than a destination. It is a catalyst for innovation and collaboration. With the support of the **Catalunya Convention Bureau** and its regional partners, every event becomes a success story that creates value, fosters collaboration, and leaves a lasting legacy.

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Universities Building Pathways, Protecting Trust



Europe's universities face pressure to adapt, from the rise of AI to threats against academic freedom and the spread of degree mills. At the same time, they remain central to trust, knowledge, and lifelong learning. **eucen**, the **European University Continuing Education Network**, is the continent's largest association dedicated to university lifelong learning. **President Pascal Paschoud**, discusses opportunities, vulnerabilities, and collaboration ahead of eucen's **2025 Autumn Seminar** in Barcelona and the **56th Annual Conference** in Cagliari in 2026.

You lead eucen as President while also directing the lifelong learning centre at UNIL-EPFL, the joint continuing education hub of the University of Lausanne and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. How does your roles influence your approach to university lifelong learning in Europe?

This dual role is a privilege, as it connects the local realities of university lifelong learning in Switzerland with the wider opportunities and challenges we face across Europe. At UNIL-EPFL, I am closely involved in the daily running of lifelong learning: designing programmes, supporting teachers and learners, and encouraging collaboration between a comprehensive university and a technical university. I also contribute to discussions at the national level. This hands-on experience constantly reminds me of both the potential and the complexity of putting lifelong learning into practice.

At eucen, I can take these insights into a broader European conversation, where we work to shape policy on University Lifelong Learning. I see how the **European Commission**, through initiatives like the **Union of Skills**, is building a framework at EU level, and I observe how challenges may differ from one country to another, as well as the creative solutions our members develop. For me, this dialogue between the local and the European levels is vital, as it ensures eucen's work stays rooted in university life while bringing new perspectives back to my institution.



Cagliari, Sardegna, will host eucen's 56th Annual Conference in 2026

eucen's 55th Annual Conference in Lille and the upcoming Autumn Seminar address lifelong learning from very different angles – one on strategic ecosystems, the other on AI. How do these events help universities exchange ideas and respond to fast-changing contexts?

Our conference and seminar complement each other. The conferences give space for research and strategic reflection, while the Autumn Seminars focus more on practice and immediate challenges for lifelong learning professionals. For example, the Annual Conference in Lille explored lifelong learning as part of wider strategic ecosystems: how universities connect to other stakeholders to contribute to economic development, sustainability, and digitalisation. It was a chance to reflect on higher education's role in society, and then to see how that vision takes shape inside universities.

This year's Autumn seminar in Barcelona is a deep dive into AI, addressing immediate opportunities, risks, responsibilities, and concrete university examples.

Together, they form a continuum: from long-term vision to more short-term challenges. In both, the real strength lies in peer exchange. Universities learn best from one another, and eucen provides a trusted space where institutions can share openly, test ideas, and help shape the future of education collectively.

The Autumn Seminar on 'University Lifelong Learning in the Age of AI' comes at a time of rapid disruption. How can universities support staff and students in using AI responsibly, and what priorities does eucen see for embedding it in higher education?

AI is reshaping higher education, and universities must engage thoughtfully, supporting teachers to integrate it, helping students use it critically, and building ethical frameworks for fairness and academic integrity. Adoption must be transparent and equitable, avoiding new divides between learners or institutions.

At eucen, we believe AI should enhance, not replace, learning, and we share practices that balance innovation with responsibility. We see three main priorities: embedding AI responsibly in teaching, learning, administration, and research; ensuring equity of access so that lifelong learning stays inclusive; and keeping education student-centred.

As a network, our role is to nurture dialogue, share good practices, and champion approaches that combine innovation with responsibility.

In our previous issue, Dearbháil Lawless of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) described adult learning as a democratic act. How does eucen's partnership with EAEA help build a more inclusive and coherent European lifelong learning space?

Our partnership with EAEA is effective because we share the same values: equity, inclusion, and the belief that learning is a democratic right, while bringing complementary strengths. EAEA works closely with adult education providers rooted in communities, while eucen represents universities. By working together, we show policymakers that lifelong learning is an ecosystem, and that it only works when all sectors are connected.

Universities have a special responsibility in this ecosystem. They are often public institutions with strong credibility, and they must act as open, civic actors, not closed ivory towers. That means creating pathways between formal, non-formal, and informal learning, recognising prior learning, and giving adults real opportunities to access higher education throughout their lives. The power of lifelong learning pathways is that they enable learners to keep building their knowledge and skills, progressing from lower levels of education to higher ones. Strong foundations through adult education can open the door to university, which makes these connections absolutely crucial.

Building a coherent European lifelong learning space is not about competition between sectors. It is about connection, ensuring that community learning and campus-based learning reinforce each other, so that every learner can find their place.

Scandals over false degrees, alongside political interference and the rise of degree mills, have undermined trust in higher education worldwide. How can universities defend academic integrity and ensure credential legitimacy, and what role can networks like eucen play in this effort?

Scandals remind us that trust is the cornerstone of education. When integrity is shaken by fake degrees, interference, or shortcuts, universities and democracy also lose credibility.

Public universities must safeguard that trust through rigorous quality assurance, transparent credentialing, and independence to uphold academic freedom.

Yet universities cannot do this alone. Networks like eucen are essential: we offer a platform to exchange good practices, we advocate at European level for policies that protect institutional independence, and we amplify the collective voice of universities so it is stronger than any single institution.

In today's climate of doubt and misinformation, universities must remain custodians of credibility, and networks like eucen can stand beside them to make that possible.

What do you see as the main opportunity, and greatest vulnerability, for university lifelong learning in Europe?

The green, digital and demographic transitions open major opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, and universities are well positioned to respond. EU policies on skills, microcredentials, and the European Education Area also give us a real chance to make lifelong learning a core mission of universities. For learners, this means new pathways into higher education, greater access for those with fewer qualifications, and the chance to continue studies at any stage.

Vulnerabilities are real: universities risk moving too slowly and losing relevance to more agile private providers, and losing relevance if they fail to adapt. Funding remains fragile, many institutions still treat lifelong learning as peripheral, and without proper support, inequalities could deepen.

This is a decisive moment. Europe's universities can make lifelong learning a true pillar of their mission, but it requires urgency and commitment. If they hesitate, others will fill the gap, and equity, quality, and trust may be the first casualties.



Associations Conference London: **Governance** and **Leadership** for Purpose-Driven Associations

The **Associations Conference London 2025** took place on 1 October at **Cavendish Venues** in London for its second edition. Around 100 senior executive leaders gathered at this one-day event to address topics related to association management and governance in the non-profit sector.

The forum, organised by **Governology** – an advisory firm supporting associations and charities – focused on structure, legal status, leadership, and advocacy within membership organisations and professional bodies. Featuring CEOs from organisations such as the **European Consortium for Political Research** and the **Federation of Small Businesses**, the programme included case studies, panel discussions, and open forums on topics like board operations, member responsibilities, and aligning governance with strategy. A key highlight was the launch of the *2025 Associations Board Survey*, comparing governance structures in the UK and Australia. In the aftermath of the conference, we tried to get into the mind of **John Peacock, Founder** and **Director of Governology**, challenging him with a few questions.

How can associations reinvent their events to respond simultaneously to challenges such as digitalisation, sustainability, generational inclusion and economic pressure?

Associations around the world are getting stronger and building reserves due to their nature of not distributing dividends to members. They are improving their governance through nine or fewer directors on the Board and practical, modern statutes. Moreover, associations are developing practical and relevant strategic plans, implemented by qualified CEOs who respect the board's oversight role. From this foundation, associations can hold events with serious content, led by respected practitioners, at an affordable registration fee. Professional content producers for associations will continue to deliver relevant conferences that will adapt to any current trends or influences.

Do you think associations are paying more attention to their public exposure and how the wider society view them from an advocacy perspective?

Conference delegates care about the destination for its desirability, convenience, and cost; however, unless an association is under particular scrutiny, the general public will not be aware of this. Most associations advocate for their cause appropriately, but it is unlikely that this advocacy will be linked to an event destination. Sensible associations will choose responsible destinations rather than a controversial or purely leisure-oriented city.

How do you assess the progress of associations in incorporating AI technologies into their operations and services, while addressing ethical challenges related to transparency, data protection, and responsible use?

Artificial Intelligence is the latest technology and methodology available to associations. From an association governance perspective, it is a valid concern that the privacy of a board meeting could be compromised by requesting an AI tool to record the meeting and produce draft minutes. We do not know where such raw information is being stored and who can access it. It will take a few years before the ethical considerations of AI on associations have settled.





> *Sensible associations will choose responsible destinations rather than a purely leisure-oriented city.*

How are associations rethinking their training and continuing education models in a scenario of accelerated commercial transformation and growing competition from digital platforms?

Whilst associations have access to Artificial Intelligence tools, so does everyone else. This means there will be more competition. However, associations have the opportunity to promote their credibility, reliability, and honesty compared to questionable sources and fake news. Associations should continue to charge appropriate fees, as they require revenue for their operations and to build reserves. In addition, professional credentials will continue to be sought after, as they are offered by associations with a verifiable track record, perhaps spanning decades or centuries.

How are associations reshaping (or should they be reshaping) the delegate experience in 2025, beyond traditional programming?

Content delivered by respected and knowledgeable practitioners remains the core attribute of an association conference. As conferences, by definition, target multiple attendees, the event needs to be designed for the majority and cannot have sessions specifically designed for a particular individual. Having developed content for conferences for 36 years, I believe the core tenet of events has remained the same. However, technology and presentation style knowledge have evolved enormously, offering organisers a wider range of tools to deliver better quality events.

How are traditional funding and fundraising models putting pressure on association governance in 2025?

Associations need to diversify their sources of income, noting that income does not necessarily translate into profit. As associations are membership bodies, only a minority depend on public or private funding. Income is usually generated from subscriptions, event registrations, product or service sales, and sponsorship by suppliers. Associations need to build up equity so that occasionally ambitious projects do not lead to the association's collapse in the event of unexpected financial loss. One of the foundations of good governance is financial vigilance and a healthy level of financial reserves.

How are associations adapting their participation models and event organisation in light of the effects of geopolitical instability and the retreat of globalisation?

Governology works extensively with associations in the UK, where some existing organisations were formed in 1155. Associations exist for long-term perpetual purposes, whereas elected political leaders in a democracy typically remain in office for up to ten years. National associations and global federations need to keep their strategies aligned and make adjustments. Any current global instability is insignificant compared to the recent shutdown of the global events industry by Covid or what would happen if there were a major war.

"What Makes the **Difference** is our Ability to Combine **Technology** With the **Human Touch**"



Celebrating 50 years of activity, the **OIC Group** marks this milestone with a renewed institutional image, a bold international outlook and the opening of its new office in Brussels. These changes reflect the Group's determination to strengthen its global footprint, diversify services beyond congress organisation, and position itself as a long-term partner for scientific associations and medical societies.

At the centre of this new chapter stands **Irene Serio**, who has just taken up the position of **CEO** while continuing in her role as **President**. In this interview, we explore how OIC is adapting to a rapidly evolving events industry, from technological innovation and hybrid formats to sustainability and association management.

On the occasion of your 50th anniversary, how will your new leadership redefine OIC Group's strategic priorities?

Stepping now also into the role of CEO carries a renewed sense of responsibility – protecting our heritage while guiding the Group into a new chapter. We want to consolidate OIC's position as a trusted partner for scientific and medical communities worldwide, while opening new areas and embracing innovation. At the same time, we are determined to weave sustainability, equity and inclusiveness into everything we do, because the true value of events lies in the legacy they leave behind.

People are our greatest strength, and that vision is what makes the difference. OIC has grown through the passion and commitment of extraordinary professionals, and we will continue to build on that. Looking ahead, my role is to nurture curiosity and ensure our projects create platforms that connect science, institutions and society. In this sense, my leadership is about remaining faithful to the values that have guided OIC for 50 years, while opening ourselves to new perspectives and opportunities to shape the future of our industry.

How will the new Brussels headquarters align with OIC's strategy aimed at the European association community, and your ambitions for international expansion?

Brussels has always been a strategic crossroads for us. For years, we have been present through our people working locally and through a close dialogue with institutions, partners and stakeholders. Opening a new branch this autumn is, therefore, the natural consolidation of a path we had already undertaken. Being in the heart of Europe allows us to strengthen our support to the many scientific societies, associations and organisations that look to Brussels as their centre of gravity. It also enables us to be closer to decision-making processes, and act as a bridge between the medical-scientific world and the European institutional context.

In terms of internationalisation, our new image positions OIC as a European player with a global outlook. It signals our ability to operate in a highly competitive, international context while bringing the values that have always defined us – precision, reliability, care for detail, and a strong sense of partnership. With this rebranding, we are amplifying our story, giving it the language and the visibility it needs to grow in the European and global arena.

What are the OIC Group's strategic priorities today in terms of investment in new business lines and revenue streams?

Our identity remains deeply connected to Florence and to Italy. But since the very beginning we have been working side by side with international scientific societies and associations. Many of these collaborations have lasted for over 20 years, allowing us to manage large-scale congresses all over the world, and to compete with global players long before 'internationalisation' became a trend. Today, we are strengthening our global footprint by innovating and diversifying our business lines, not only through PCO activity, but also through association



> *We aspire to be a partner that brings vision, responsibility and humanity to the heart of every project.*

management, medical communication, corporate events, and innovative services to our clients. This diversification is a way to create resilience and offer integrated responses to the increasingly complex demands of the healthcare and scientific sectors. Competing internationally means keeping the values that distinguish us – the reason why we can stand out. Our roots in Florence have taught us the importance of culture, creativity and hospitality, and this is what makes OIC unique and competitive among much larger players.

How has the OIC Group adapted its technological structure and delivery models to respond to a new digital reality for associations?

Investing in technology is the way we have been navigating an industry that has changed profoundly in recent years. Today, event organisation is also about designing digital ecosystems capable of creating engagement and delivering measurable value. At OIC Group, we have strengthened our technological infrastructure by fully digitalising our internal systems and the way we interact with clients and attendees. This has allowed us to integrate workflows, streamline processes, and ensure a seamless experience across all stages of a project. We invested in tools for data collection and analysis to better understand audiences and optimise engagement; and we adopted immersive solutions to enhance participant experience.

At the same time, we focused on our people, helping them blend technical skills with creativity. What makes the difference is our ability to combine technology with the human touch; the relationships and care that have always been part of our DNA. Because in the end, technology only makes sense when it supports human intelligence and empathy, turning complexity into something usable and valuable.

In a context where associations face growing challenges in terms of governance, how has OIC been evolving its value proposition in this area?

Working with scientific associations and medical societies has always been one of the most meaningful parts of our job. It is about being there for them, helping them grow, adapt and stay relevant in a healthcare world that changes so quickly. What makes the difference is the trust that builds over time. Many of these relationships have lasted decades, and that continuity allows us to really understand their needs and anticipate the challenges ahead. We support them in governance, communication and member engagement, areas that are becoming more and more decisive for their future. This is why I do not see OIC simply as an event organiser in this field. Our role is to be a long-term partner, who stands by associations through transitions, brings in expertise and sensitivity, and helps turn their vision into something concrete.

How does your leadership envision the future of congresses and conferences in the next five to ten years? What role does OIC aspire to play in this future scenario?

The future of our industry will not simply be about bigger congresses or more advanced technologies; it will be about meaning. Events will increasingly be asked to justify their relevance, to prove their impact, and to leave something behind than just the meeting itself. We feel part of this transformation. We are carbon neutral; we integrate CSR into our daily work; and we encourage our clients to translate sustainability into real action – whether that means reducing environmental impact, promoting inclusion, or supporting social projects worldwide.

Primarily, we remain convinced that people are the true driving force. The curiosity of younger generations, the experience of our 'sages', the diversity of voices and perspectives – this is what gives value to what we do. Technology and sustainability are essentials, but without people, they are empty. Looking ahead, we want OIC Group to be recognised for shaping experiences that leave legacies.





Nordic MICE Summit 2026 Shaping Tomorrow's Experiences in Copenhagen

From 4 to 6 June 2026, Danish DMC **Congress Consulting Management Group (CCMG)** will host a highly-curated event at **Hotel Ottilia** in Copenhagen's Carlsberg district. The **Nordic MICE Summit** will bring together around 40 suppliers and 40 buyers in an intimate and compact setting, featuring a programme centred on sustainability, innovation and human connection. **Lonni Gulliksen**, **CEO/Managing Director of CCMG**, describes the event as a place to build 'meaningful and lasting connections' while showcasing best operational practices.

At its heart, the Summit prioritises quality over quantity: suppliers – from destinations and hotels to venues and DMCs – will take part in pre-booked, one-to-one speed meetings so they can "directly engage with Nordic and European MICE Buyers." That format reduces noise and accelerates productive conversations, allowing sellers to present focused offers and buyers to assess fit quickly and efficiently. The emphasis on structured encounters is intentional: "it turns a tight programme into an engine for genuinely actionable leads," she says.

At a time when global demand for MICE is once again expanding, the Summit doubles as a laboratory for event design. Recent editions have foregrounded sustainability, environmental responsibility and social impact, positioning content and showcases around practical standards. As Gulliksen observes, "in the last two editions, the summit's themes have always included sustainability, environmental and social responsibility." Presentations and site showcases put pioneering venues and regenerated neighbourhoods, such as Hotel Ottilia and Carslberg, in the spotlight, showing how place-based storytelling can be a commercial advantage.

More than rhetoric, sustainability is operational. Organisers "explicitly commit to reducing the Summit's environmental footprint and [use] the Summit venue (or host) as a 'living case study' of sustainable operations." That means the chosen host is asked to demonstrate measured practices – waste management, low-carbon catering, energy optimisation and local procurement – so delegates can see sustainable choices in action. The effect is twofold: "credibility for the Summit and practical templates suppliers can replicate."

Networking activities are intended to cement trust and create long-term partnerships. The Summit's 'workshop/summit' formula combines curated social events with learning sessions so that formal meetings are reinforced by informal rapport. Building those human connections is strategic:

cross-border partnerships often begin over a coffee in a social programme and end in co-bids or joint service offers. As Gulliksen puts it, "the event is as much about building trust as building business, even if it is still unclear how many relationships-built turn into booked events."

Branding and visibility are obvious outcomes for participating destinations, as associations are once again booking larger in-person congresses. The Summit gives smaller or newly renovated venues a platform to be seen by decision-makers; case studies and destination experiences become tangible proof points in later RFP processes. Gulliksen notes the long-term benefit: involvement in the Summit lets destinations "position the Nordic region as a hub for high-quality, sustainable MICE events," and that reputational credit translates into enquiries and invitees long after the final drink.

Learning is embedded throughout the programme. Sessions combine trend watching with hands-on examples: by instance, delegates will explore how districts, architecture and culture can be woven into meeting design and guest experience. The Summit's curated content emphasises replicable solutions – how to package a neighbourhood, how to integrate local suppliers, and how to embed sustainability in the guest journey. These concrete takeaways, Gulliksen says, "are what delegates can bring back and implement at home."

Practical outcomes reported from past editions reinforce the Summit's value: destinations and suppliers commonly cite increased enquiries, new buyer contacts and a strengthened pipeline resulting from high-quality meetings. Buyers benefit, too, because the setting reduces search costs and enables side-by-side comparisons of destinations' eco-friendly credentials and product depth. DMOs across the Nordics have doubled down on targeted events marketing, virtual buyer workshops and quality positioning to protect demand. The combined effect is measurable: "more targeted leads and a shorter path from first contact to procurement," she adds.

Another strand is the Summit's role as an advocacy and policy forum. By gathering practitioners, policymakers and community stakeholders, the event helps articulate the wider social value of meetings – knowledge transfer, local impact and urban activation – not just immediate visitor spending. The Summit therefore becomes a vehicle to promote supportive public policy, from streamlined licensing to incentives for green event infrastructure. "Events leave behind expertise, knowledge benchmarks, and training that strengthen local industries, while the inclusion of schools and marginalised communities in their programmes helps promote cohesion and opportunities for social integration," Gulliksen states.

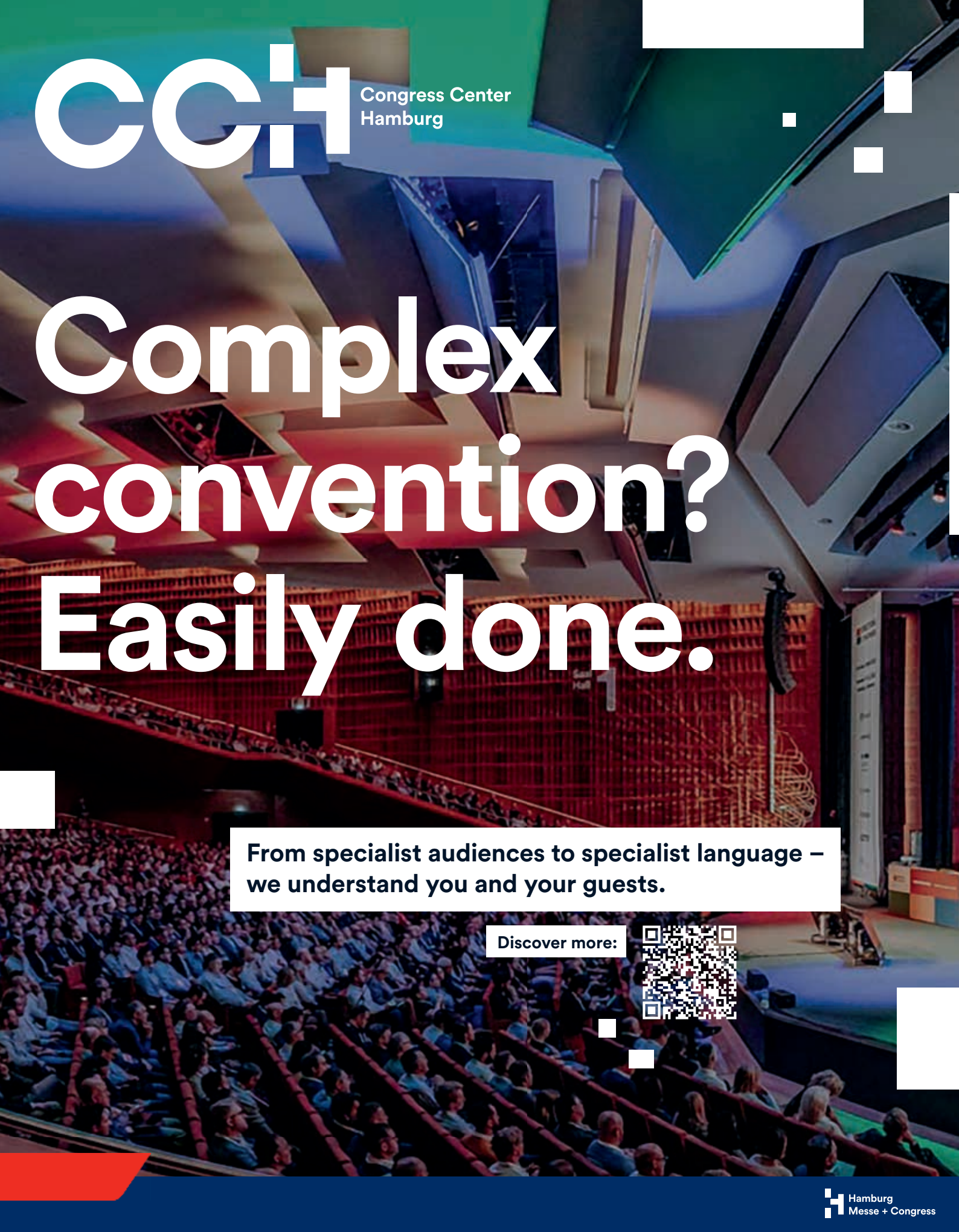
From Social Purpose to Economic Value

The economic logic is straightforward: a compact, well-curated summit converges purchasing power in a short window, creating direct bookings for hotels, logistics and local suppliers. Gulliksen is forthright about the local benefit: "Events of this scale can leave a real footprint, not just socially but economically." Beyond immediate spend, the Summit's post-tour to Helsingborg extends impact regionally by exposing buyers to cross-border product collaborations.

The Summit's format also encourages destinations to be proactive. Gulliksen's advice is clear and actionable: "bring new products and services (hotel, venue, partners) to show; develop a sharp sustainability or innovation story; have representatives who can answer buyer questions in depth." That approach – preparing concise evidence and case studies – maximises the ROI of the trip and ensures that suppliers convert visibility into business. Besides, she says, "better yield management and transparency in surcharges are needed, with clearer contractual clauses that reduce disputes and preserve margins."

For suppliers, the Summit model reduces wasteful selling activity and raises conversion rates. With fewer but better matches, sellers avoid scattergun approaches and can focus on depth. Buyers, in turn, access verified partners with demonstrable sustainability practices; the combination raises willingness to pay for quality and lowers the risk of procurement mismatches. This is the economic payoff that justifies the Summit's selective scale. All in all, the Nordic example shows that "sustainability equals economic strategy, not just compliance," reinforcing the idea that it can become a durable competitive advantage. Especially now that inflation is a reality, and "many venues are implementing dynamic pricing, add-on charging, and minimum spend policies to protect margins."

Finally, the Summit leaves reputational legacies. Participating destinations enhance their positioning among buyers and media, while suppliers gain credibility that converts into longer-term contracts. As Gulliksen summarises, the Nordic MICE Summit offers a compact but powerful platform where "value on both sides" is created – buyers discover reliable partners, and suppliers justify their investment through leads and contracts that often materialise after the event. However, "hybrid is still expected; digital participation remains a baseline expectation as organisers now look for 'in-room impact' combined with digital reach. Venues that packaged hybrid services win higher-margin bookings," she concludes.


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Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre: Impactful Conferences and Collaborations That Matter!



Kuala Lumpur's (KL) strength lies in its ability to offer global standards – infrastructure, easy communication, competitive prices and easy connectivity – with local warmth. Add to this Malaysia's rich cultural diversity, and you have a unique and attractive proposition in your convention centre. We spoke to **John Burke, General Manager at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (the Centre)** about their recent performance.



The Centre recently announced the acquisition of six major international conferences in the first half of the year, including the **Global Health Security Conference, Energy Tech Summit Asia**, and the **85th FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences**. These conferences, covering the fields of aviation, global health security, evidence-based guidelines, clean energy technology, and women's health, are expected to attract more than 6,150 delegates in 2026 and 2027, generating an estimated economic impact of €15.6 million for Malaysia. They not only bring together global experts and thought leaders but also reinforce Malaysia's reputation as a dynamic host nation for knowledge-rich, high-impact conferences. "We know that the true value of international conferences lies not just in delegate numbers but in the knowledge exchange and economic ripple effect they create. That is why we focus on sectors that are strategically important to the nation which include medical and health sciences, pharmaceuticals, banking and finance, and engineering and construction," says Burke.

KL's intrinsic features all play a big part in this: its global connectivity, cultural diversity, English business proficiency, excellent infrastructure and mature supply chain, combined with an undeniable cost-effectiveness, are all plus factors that really resonate with international organisers. Another key point of these bids is their alignment with Malaysia's priorities set out in the **National New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP 2030)**, a strategic initiative launched by the Malaysian government to transform the country's industrial economy by 2030. "While the NIMP 2030 provides a strong framework, we apply very targeted criteria when evaluating opportunities. Scale is a key factor – we tend to focus on conferences of at least 500 delegates and above, as they generate significant impact for the nation. We also assess how the event will contribute to trade, research and industrial collaboration in long-term partnerships. At its core, we intentionally seek out events that align with Malaysia's growth sectors and can create legacies that extend far beyond the meeting rooms," he says.

> *"Our focus is to position KL and the Centre as the natural meeting place for global leaders in sectors where Malaysia has expertise and aspirations.*

Association conferences are a key pillar of Malaysia's tourism strategy, attracting 'high-value visitors', delegates who stay longer, spend more and actively seek cultural immersion. "These are not just passing tourists; they are explorers, often extending their trips for leisure or returning with their families. This aligns perfectly with the growing global trend of bleisure, where business and leisure blend seamlessly." At the same time, the Centre works closely with DMCs, hotels, and cultural partners to co-create bespoke packages, from wellness retreats to family travel extensions. At the national level, these collaborations extend to government bodies such as **MyCEB, Tourism Malaysia**, and the **Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture**, combining KL's strengths to position international events as gateways to discover Malaysia. "Airlines and travel partners also play a vital role in incorporating business events into their marketing, making the trip seamless for attendees." Locally, the **KLCC Business Events Alliance** is a key asset, linking the Centre with hotels, transportation providers and retailers, in a single collaborative framework. "Furthermore, our partnership with **URBANICE Malaysia** demonstrates our commitment to sustainability, ensuring that KL presents itself as a conscious destination," Burke adds.



At the heart of this cooperation is **KLCC Connects**, an initiative launched by the Centre in April, aimed at consolidating sustainability actions and community partnerships under a unified, future-oriented platform. "KLCC Connects is an ongoing journey that reflects our belief that business success and corporate responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Our sustainability credentials and CSR initiatives are closely aligned with the global drive towards carbon neutrality and inclusion. This makes us not only relevant but also attractive to organisers, many of whom now consider sustainability a non-negotiable criterion," says Burke. As a result, events such as **ASEAN Sustainable Urban Tourism**, **Smart City KL Expo**, and **Sustainability Environment Asia** march through their doors. Nevertheless, economic challenges continue to be a constant for associations, struggling with increased travel costs, inflation, sponsorships and membership fees. "We understand the financial pressures associations are under. Our response has always been to remain flexible and client-centric – not a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, we tailor our packages to the specific needs of each event, ensuring organisers receive maximum value to their objectives."

> *"Our role is to be a trusted partner, taking care of operational complexities so that organisers can focus on what truly matters – delivering impactful content and experiences.*

In February, the Centre organised a competition in collaboration with **Charterhouse School Malaysia**, to encourage students to come up with business solutions for the local F&B industry, challenging their entrepreneurial skills, strategic planning and problem-solving abilities. For Burke, attracting this new batch of professionals is critical: "Working with younger generations involves both unlearning and learning. They are the future consumers, with their own drivers, digital habits and expectations. By engaging with them, we can get insights into emerging behaviours, digital revenue streams and marketing strategies that have real-time repercussions." At the same time, these initiatives also promote the events and hospitality sector, which is often not one of their main career options. "Venue management requires a broad mix of expertise, from facilities and catering to sales, marketing and event management. By exposing young people to this world, we are cultivating the next generation of talent. It is about securing the future of our industry," Burke says.

This year, Malaysia hosted the **ASEAN Meetings** for the third consecutive time, the region's highest-level intergovernmental meeting, requiring rigorous preparation in protocol, safety and participant security. Another important milestone was the **9th United Nations World Urban Forum** in 2018, where for five days, the world converged in KL to discuss the future of sustainable urban development. Other high-profile events that attracted thousands of delegates worldwide included the **17th World Chinese Entrepreneur Convention**, the **21st World Congress of the International Association of Applied Linguistics**, and the **9th Session of the World Urban Forum**. "Looking ahead, the six international conferences recently secured will not only enhance Malaysia's global profile, but also create significant legacies for our industries and communities," concludes Burke.

A New Era to **Meet, Connect** and **Accelerate** in **Luxembourg**!



Luxembourg City © LMIH - Sabino Parente

From 1 November, **Bettina Bunge** will be the new **Managing Director/CEO** of the **Luxembourg Convention Bureau (LCB)**, as announced in May at **IMEX Frankfurt**. Bettina will be responsible for the global marketing of the Grand Duchy, leading all international promotion in the business events sector. This will include strengthening partnerships, implementing digital transformation, sustainability and repositioning a new identity for the LCB.

Recognised as a destination marketing expert for her work in several German cities, Bunge has been **Managing Director of Tourismus-Agentur Schleswig-Holstein** since November 2017. With her arrival, Luxembourg will take on a new strategic identity for its Convention Bureau, under the slogan **'Meet. Connect. Accelerate.'** We spoke with her about the impact, visibility and industry goals of Luxembourg under her leadership.



How will your previous experiences help you shape Luxembourg's profile for business events?

My career path has taken me through Hamburg, Dresden, and Schleswig-Holstein – each destination with its own distinct character. These experiences taught me how to craft compelling narratives that resonate internationally, while staying true to local identity. Luxembourg is still a relatively undiscovered gem in the meetings industry, but it offers a wealth of advantages such as excellent connectivity, a multicultural population, a forward-thinking business ecosystem, and a human scale that fosters proximity, agility, and personalised service. Notably, it was recently ranked the 7th safest country in the world by **HelloSafe**.

In each of my previous roles, I focused on building bridges between local assets and global expectations. I developed strategies that emphasised authenticity, innovation, and long-term partnerships. These are exactly the qualities I see in Luxembourg, and I believe they can be amplified to attract international conferences and association meetings. Moreover, my international network of contacts across the business events industry will be instrumental in raising awareness of the country's potential.

What will be the cornerstones and priorities during your term?

Our strategy is built around three key pillars: seamless connectivity and accessibility; sustainability and responsible innovation; technological transformation and AI. Luxembourg's central location in Europe, combined with its excellent transport infrastructure and compact geography, offers a unique advantage for business events. Another major advantage is that all public transportation in Luxembourg is free, making it even easier for attendees to move between venues, hotels, and city attractions.

Secondly, we are committed to positioning Luxembourg at the forefront of sustainable event management. Through our **Green Business Events** label, we promote environmentally friendly practices, encourage the use of sustainable venues and support responsible planning. This initiative reflects our broader commitment to environmental management towards more conscious events. Lastly, as a research partner of the **Future Meeting Space Innovation Alliance**, LCB is deeply involved in how global megatrends are reshaping the business events landscape. Topics such as New Work, demographic changes, and AI are actively influencing how events are designed and experienced. Our involvement allows us to anticipate emerging trends, assess their impact, and develop actionable strategies to be tested in real-world scenarios.









How is your new slogan 'Meet. Connect. Accelerate' aiming to reflect a turning point in Luxembourg's strategy?

What we presented at IMEX Frankfurt does not represent a departure from our past efforts, but rather a strategic evolution. The establishment of the LCB, the structuring of our events ecosystem and our first international successes have all been important milestones. But now we are gearing up to accelerate Luxembourg's rise as a global hub for business events.

This next phase is guided by our **Business Events 2030** vision. It is about positioning Luxembourg as a go-to destination for innovative, sustainable and high-value business events, enhancing our international visibility, and showcasing Luxembourg's unique strengths – its accessibility, sectoral excellence, and human-centred approach. Our new framework, 'Meet. Connect. Accelerate.', reflects this momentum, signaling a dynamic, connected, and impact-driven approach where every meeting is an opportunity.

> *"As a catalyst of our ecosystem, the Luxembourg Convention Bureau plays a pivotal role in connecting actors, amplifying synergies, and positioning the country as a forward-thinking event hub.*

At IMEX, the LCB announced a national business events observatory to track the country's MICE performance. How will this resource support your biddings and business acquisition?

The creation of a national observatory represents an alignment of our ambitions with the evolving needs of our stakeholders. By collecting data on conferences, exhibitions and visitor behaviour, we will gain a clearer, evidence-based understanding of our performance in the international market. This will enable us to move from intuition to an informed strategy – refining how we attract, bid for and deliver high-impact events.

For our stakeholders the observatory will ensure that business events contribute to their broader economic and social goals. It will also help us identify which sectors benefit most from knowledge exchange, and how events can support innovation, talent and sustainable development. In



Bettina Bunge with Minister Delegate for Tourism Eric Thill at IMEX 2025

practical terms, this will sharpen our bidding processes by targeting events aligned with our strategic priorities, such as finance, space, sustainability and digital innovation, and develop compelling, data-backed value propositions.

Luxembourg recently hosted the CityDNA Summer School and the ICCASkills Training Seminar. How can the destination turn these industry events into benefits for its own ecosystem?

Having previously served as Vice-President – Meeting Industry at CityDNA, I have always had a personal connection to the Summer School. It is a unique platform that brings together seasoned professionals and emerging talent. Participating in leading industry events meets our strategic vision. These initiatives not only enhance Luxembourg's international visibility, but also position it as a forward-looking knowledge hub where meetings are actively shaped. These events create valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange, professional development and networking among local stakeholders, students and industry professionals. They also allow us to bring global best practices to Luxembourg, while showcasing our expertise and innovative mindset worldwide.

What does event legacy mean in Luxembourg?

For us, legacy is about ensuring that each event contributes to the country's long-term ambitions – strengthening our innovation ecosystem, supporting inclusive growth and fostering a more sustainable future. Legacy and social impact are not just desirable outcomes – they are essential components of every event held here. And, we are uniquely positioned to bring together institutions, companies and research centres around shared goals that extend far beyond the event itself.

Through close collaboration with partners like **Luxinnovation G.I.E.** and research institutions such as the **Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology (LIST)**, we are able to connect international associations with the right local expertise in key sectors. This ensures that events held in Luxembourg leave behind real and measurable benefits, whether in scientific advancement, technological innovation or environmental solutions.



Grand Hôtel Dieu © Tristan Deschamps

Lyon: Crafting Connections in France's Capital of Innovation

Lyon has made a name for itself as one of Europe's top conference destinations, combining location, scientific excellence and a strong commitment to sustainability. With a tradition of hospitality, a diverse range of venues and a robust innovation incubator, the city has been making waves as a stage for association events, while also standing out for its collaborative approach to urban development.

Capital of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, Lyon is a city that preserves a typically French art of living, combined with a centuries-old tradition of hospitality. As early as the 15th century, it became an important European trading hub due to its strategic location at the crossroads between northern and southern Europe. Its central geographical position is a major advantage for bringing together European participants, with optimised travel times thanks to high-speed TGV rail links and air service via Saint-Exupéry Airport. Lyon's reputation as a tourist destination is built on its gastronomy and its architectural heritage, which spans 2,000 years of history and is listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. "As a medium-sized city, everything is within walking distance. The city offers several venues for hosting events of different sizes. The **Lyon Convention Centre** stands out for its location between the Parc de la Tête d'Or and the Rhône River in the 6th arrondissement. It is a state-of-the-art facility, certified by the **ISO 20121** standard for sustainable event management," says **Valérie Ducaud,** *(pictured above)*, **Convention Bureau Director at Onlylyon Tourism & Conventions.**

Lyon is also one of France's leading cities in the conference and events sector. With a diversified economy across several competitive clusters, a strong industrial base, and a high concentration of research centres, hospitals, universities and biotech companies, it has many assets that favour these sectors. "To attract association events, cities need to have local members," she says. "Lyon is fertile ground in scientific and economic terms, which has enabled us to maintain second place for years on the **ICCA** ranking in France. Our priority sectors enable us to create synergies with the university and boost our businesses. This is a great asset for creating scientific and medical content at a conference." One of the innovation hubs is **Lyonbiopôle**, specialised in life sciences and biotechnology, which plays a particularly strong role in the field of association-led conferences. It accounts for more than half of the congresses organised in the region. "This sector has received special attention, as association events also serve to highlight advances in research, providing an opportunity to make certain content more accessible and share data with the general public to improve their quality of life," adds Ducaud.

In terms of urban transformation, major events required the expansion of **Lyon Part-Dieu** railway station, completed in 2025 to accommodate more passengers. The renovation of the airport with the creation of a new terminal, as well as the opening of new high-end hotels, were also part of this development. "We work with 150 local partners, including major event venues such as the **Cité Centre de Congrès**, the **Eurexpo Exhibition Centre**, the **Halle Tony Garnier**, universities, hotels, PCOs, restaurants and transport providers." The hotel offering in metropolitan Lyon in 2024 was about 19,200 hotel rooms with the number of overnights reaching almost 9.56 million in the metropolitan area. In 2023, the city of Lyon hosted around 220 events, an increase of 4.8% compared to the previous year. "We have developed a tool that allows us to launch hotel room tenders for large events. The tool compiles offers from each hotel, categorising them by type for a specific event quickly and efficiently. We also carried out a qualitative study with industry stakeholders

(clients, hotels, venues) to better understand the purchasing behaviour of event attendees, as well as their expectations regarding the growing bleisure trend," adds Ducaud.

The Lyon Metropolitan Area was the first French metropolitan authority to develop a sustainable tourism development plan, based on collaborative work that began in 2020 with their partners. "This development plan, which runs until 2026, sets out the strategic priorities for establishing Lyon's position as a leading destination for responsible tourism in four main areas: strengthening a resilient and balanced destination; supporting tourism-related employment; accelerating the transition to more environmentally responsible practices; and ensuring inclusive, participatory and respectful tourism in both the leisure and business segments." Onlylyon Tourism & Conventions has supported this transition by financing 80% of eco-certification costs for hotels to help them adopt more sustainable practices. As a result, the DMO achieved the ISO 20121 certification in 2021, as did its main event venues. "Our Bureau has also created a guide to help organisers plan events with a positive impact here," explains Ducaud. Thus, Lyon has risen to 8th place worldwide in the **GDS-Index 2025** – the highest-ranked city in France this year.

In this regard, the role that business events and association conferences play in the visitor influx to the French city is critical. Lyon is less affected by seasonality compared to destinations more focused on leisure tourism – between 15 and 20% of event participants stay longer in the region. "As a major economic hub focused on finance, life sciences, and chemicals, 65% of daily hotel rates come from business travellers. Lyon has the second largest capacity in France, after Paris, both in terms of venue size and hotel capacity," she says. In September 2024, the city hosted the **47th WorldSkills International Competition**, whose mission was to showcase a wide range of professions through a contest aimed at participants under the age of 26 from around the world. "WorldSkills was a perfect case of an event that left its mark on our team and destination, as part of a national and local strategy. It was an opportunity to raise awareness among young people in the region and to give them a concrete overview of the career opportunities available in this sector as well." Welcoming 1,500 competitors from 70 countries, WorldSkills Lyon was much more than a tournament, leaving a lasting and tangible legacy by supporting long-term projects and initiatives.

Widely dissected by *HQ*, the **EU CVB Network** brings together a group of second-tier European cities based on a common foundation: destinations that were hosting the same conferences just a few years apart. "Why should we not share our knowledge and best practices about conferences between us?" asks Ducaud. Today, the alliance offers associations an eclectic portfolio of destinations, each offering bespoke services and a wealth of shared expertise. "The Network is a great example of cooperation based on trust, sharing experiences and case studies. This will help us improve conference organisation, to the benefit of both member-cities and associations," she concludes.



Musée des Confluences © Quentin Lafont

Collaboration as a **Superpower**: **Gothenburg**'s Successful Playbook for **Events**



Hönö island © Peter Kvarnström

In an era when associations weigh purpose as heavily as programme, Gothenburg has sharpened a clear proposition through collaboration, a knowledge-driven economy, and a bold sustainability agenda. In this conversation, **Ulrika Scoliège, Senior Project Manager, Association Meetings at Göteborg & Co**, outlines how the city converts conferences into talent pipelines and innovation showcases – from EVS38 to EAIE and beyond.



Gothenburg's status as the largest non-capital in the Nordics is rooted in its strong infrastructure and welcoming spirit. Major conferences gravitate towards the **Swedish Exhibition & Congress Centre and its Gothia Towers**, praised for their scale and 'all-under-one-roof' concept. With 15,000 bedrooms and several new conference hotels across the port city, organisers find convenience, proximity and character here. "As a second-tier city, we have perhaps always had to try a little harder," Scoliège notes, pointing to awards such as **IAPCO Driving Excellence Award** that confirm Gothenburg's edge. Venues beyond the main congress centre also enrich the offer. **World of Volvo**, opened in 2024, combines sustainable architecture with immersive exhibitions. **Liseberg** amusement park, **Universeum** national science centre, and inspiring venues such as **Kooperativet** or **Kajskjul 8** provide memorable backdrops for receptions and networking. As Scoliège points out, these options reflect Gothenburg's personality: "innovative, authentic and welcoming."

Gothenburg consistently ranks among the top cities in the **Global Destination Sustainability Index**. Recently, the **United Nations** designated Gothenburg as the new host city for its **Sustainable Lifestyle Hub**. This milestone strengthens the city's global leadership in sustainability and supports the UN's mission to drive innovation toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Scoliège stresses: "The city offers every opportunity to make a meeting more sustainable." Sustainability will become ever more central to RFPs; however, the degree of emphasis has varied markedly between associations and within the final venue selection. "Destinations with strong environmental policies, third-party certifications, and sustainable infrastructure will be more attractive," Scoliège predicts. Gothenburg's proactive stance – from its Green City Zone to circular solutions – positions it as a frontrunner in this evolving landscape. "Our holistic approach to sustainable development integrates environmental, societal, and economic perspectives in decision-making, planning and execution," she says. This is reinforced by the **Destination Development Programme 2023–2030** and a dedicated **Action Plan for Meetings**, ensuring environmental, social and economic goals translate into daily practice. "Collaboration is Gothenburg's superpower," Scoliège states. The city's triple helix approach – academia, industry and public sector working hand in hand – allows associations to connect with key players in research and innovation. This culture of openness enables Gothenburg to compete with larger capitals while offering organisers genuine access to expertise and networks.

Furthermore, Gothenburg's knowledge ecosystem underpins a strategic approach, where universities, science parks, and multinational R&D centres create a fertile environment for knowledge-led resources. The **2025 European Innovation Scoreboard** placed West Sweden as the country's top performer in business R&D expenditure, collaboration between SMEs and life-long learning. "Meetings play a vital role in spreading knowledge, attracting talent, and supporting skills development," Scoliège explains. Therefore, events are not just stand-alone occasions but catalysts for research, skills transfer and urban transformation. The city deliberately seeks events in areas aligned with its strengths, including electromobility, life sciences, ICT and logistics. Gothenburg

hosted the **International Electric Vehicle Symposium & Exhibition (EVS38)** in 2025, showcasing its world-class automotive cluster and commitment to climate neutrality by 2030. "EVS38 was a unique opportunity for Gothenburg to display its leadership in electromobility," says Scoliège. Similarly, **Nordic Life Science Days** brought international decision-makers in biotech, pharma, and medtech, around a thriving local cluster anchored by companies like **AstraZeneca**, and institutions like **Sahlgrenska University Hospital**.

Data-driven decision-making is another pillar of Gothenburg's success *(check our Gothenburg digital twin story on HQ #117.)* The **Destination Barometer**, resident and visitor surveys, and a municipal-level **Tourism Satellite Account** allow precise tracking of impacts and trends in social output, financial surplus, export value and employment. "Göteborg & Co has a data-driven and systematic approach to guide its work across all areas of tourism and destination development," Scoliège emphasises. By aligning campaign timing and market focus with evidence, the city remains agile and transparent. Residents' perspectives are also part of the equation. Regular surveys show broad acceptance of tourism, a vital factor in sustaining political support. This feedback loop helps identify challenges such as congestion while reinforcing positive effects like job creation and multicultural vibrancy. "It demonstrates Gothenburg's commitment to balancing resident wellbeing with visitor economy growth."

Legacy and impact are central to Gothenburg's meetings and public events philosophy. "Our approach, the **Gothenburg Way to Legacy**, is an inclusive framework that fosters engagement at all levels," Scoliège explains. "There is a strong local understanding of the role meetings can play in driving social change." Local and international organisers are encouraged to maximise the impact of their events, helping to address societal challenges and leave lasting value for the city. For EVS38, a Gothenburg Way to Legacy project focused on fostering innovation, attracting expertise, creating jobs, and positioning the region as leaders in electromobility and the transition to a sustainable transport system. Likewise, during the **Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS)**, Gothenburg launched an initiative focused on supporting people with spinal cord injuries getting back to work. Following a workshop involving various local stakeholders, a gap related to vocational rehabilitation was identified and subsequently included as an active topic in the conference programme for the first time. The congress also led to the production of an accessibility film, now used across local businesses to improve wheelchair access. "The goal is to benefit both the association and the destination," says Scoliège. "This dual focus strengthens the city's competitiveness while delivering tangible benefits to residents."

2025 also highlighted Gothenburg's ability to attract long-awaited international events. The city hosted the **European Association for International Education (EAIE)**, welcoming over 7,000 delegates. For Scoliège, the congress was not just a logistical success but a symbolic one: "Working with such a committed organisation was not only a privilege but also a true exchange of knowledge." EAIE's values of sustainability and international collaboration resonated strongly with the city's vision. Partnerships extend beyond the local ecosystem. The **EU CVB Network**, founded by like-minded destinations, has amplified Gothenburg's international profile. By sharing best practices and presenting a united front, members gain greater visibility and influence. For Scoliège, these collaborations enhance competitiveness and trust: "Although we often compete for the same association events, we make each other stronger by sharing experiences."

PS: As Gothenburg Convention Bureau approaches its 40th anniversary next year, the city will proudly open the year by hosting the **AC Forum Annual Meeting** – a true honour and a strategically significant milestone for the entire destination.



Innerstaden Göteborg

Paris Legacy EducTour: How to Find the Right Local Partner for Your Event?

MANUEL FERNANDES REPORTS



HQ has already been to Paris for conferences, site inspections and ahead of the Olympics... but in early September, the **Paris je t'aime Convention Bureau** took on some real-life impact stories that the city is driving forward. In the following lines, you will meet some of the finest local partners and institutes who are making remarkable strides in areas such as transportation, social inclusion, and healthcare.

Paris je t'aime organised its first Legacy Eductour, mapping out a network of cohesive partners with value propositions to drive social change. For this two-day site inspection, a select group of associations had the chance to learn about Paris's best practices in areas as diverse as accessibility, inclusion, technology, and health. Home to around 2.1 million inhabitants, this historical tour took us to the various corners of the city, from the Porte de Versailles (home to **Paris Expo**, France's largest exhibition centre) to the vicinities of Saint-Denis (site of the **Olympic Village**), highlighting the ecosystems and strongholds that organisations can count on. On the Brussels-Paris route, the easiest way to travel is still by train with **Eurostar**. The company connects the French capital to cities such as London and Amsterdam, forming a metropolitan network which we recently covered on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.



Inclusion, Innovation & Care

It all began on Thursday morning, September 11, upon arrival at Gare du Nord, with breakfast at **Café Joyeux** – which we soon realised was no ordinary place. The social responsibility agenda has been gaining ground in major European cities, urging businesses and entrepreneurs to adopt fairer and more inclusive practices for people with mental and cognitive disabilities. Born with the ambition of giving them a real, paid and rewarding job, Joyeux is the first family of café-restaurants and coffee-brand to promote the professional inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. From there, we headed to the south to visit the medtech advances being made at **Assistance publique – Hôpitaux de Paris (AP-HP). PRIM3D** is a 3D printing platform which offers a shared service for engineering, prototyping and production of customised parts with specific expertise in healthcare. At the former Broussais Hospital facilities, we were able to see first-hand the anatomical replicas, prostheses and ultra-realistic simulators that are turning a new page in medical treatment, research and education.

From there, we were off to **Pullman Paris Montparnasse**, one of the city's largest hotels, with over 6,000 m² of meeting space, 50 modular rooms, and a 750 m² Grand Ballroom, all equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Also noteworthy are the Grand Studio, ideal for conferences and dinners, the innovative C2 Immersive, perfect for hybrid events, and the Green Floor, with 800 m² of outdoor areas. Part of the Maine-Montparnasse complex, the hotel has 957 elegant rooms, a rooftop with panoramic views, several restaurants, and a modern fitness centre. Next up, if you are part of a medical association in the field of oncology, the following institution may be the right partner for your conference. The **Paris Committee** of the French **League Against Cancer** offers a range of care services for patients and their loved ones, ranging from psychosocial support, adapted physical activities to financial assistance and back-to-work support. We visited their new pioneering social lab designed to serve the most vulnerable patients and combat cancer-related inequalities, while raising awareness of risk factors and promoting screening: **La Maison**.

Later, it was time to check in at the **Paris Marriott Rive Gauche** with its first-class amenities on four complementary floors. The hotel has 757 rooms, a conference centre, and 33 event rooms, the largest of which – Scène ABC – can accommodate up to 2,000





people. In the basement, we were able to take a closer look at **Moir**, an interactive maze for immersive gatherings combining adaptable spaces, holographic intervention and creative technologies for teambuilding and laid-back meetings. Dinner was served on the rooftop of the **Hotel EKLO** near Paris Expo Porte de Versailles. This eco-friendly hotel boasts 304 rooms – to both business and leisure travellers – three meeting rooms and the **French Kiss** restaurant on the top floor with an outdoor area that can be privatised.

Medtech & Accessibility

On the following morning, Friday, September 12, the discussions held over the previous two days were confirmed, this time in a more formal setting. For Paris, this local impact journey reached its peak after the 2024 Olympic Games, in venues such as the **Grand Palais** and neighboring departments like **Seine-Saint-Denis** (*check out the report on HQ #114*). In light of these legacy achievements, our delegation was invited to a roundtable at the **Hôtel de Ville**, the city hall. Besides addressing their carbon footprint and strategic scientific synergies, Paris je t'aime also unwrapped the **Cleo Impact**, a state-of-the-art calculator available to event organisers to assess their social and environmental spillovers. One of these transformations resulting from the post-Olympic legacy was the **H4 Hotel Wyndham Paris Pleyel Resort**. The Pleyel tower offers 697 rooms spread over 40 floors, four restaurants, a swimming pool and a gym, all with a unique panoramic view of Paris. In the parallel building, there is a 10,000 m² modular conference centre with a maximum capacity for 2,600 people, and 16 meeting rooms, including a 1,180 m² plenary room with an 8-metre ceiling.

At the intersection of health and technology, we stumbled upon a world-class centre for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the Quartier Saint-Lambert. **PariSanté Campus** is a French hotbed of digital health, designed to stimulate the production of health big data, AI activations, e-health training, and high-impact economic and social solutions. With the presence of institutions such as **Inserm, Inria** and **Health Data Hub**, the campus is a key intellectual partner for French research and development in *santé numérique*. As such, it features workrooms and auditoriums that can be used for symposiums, scientific meetings, workshops or hackathons. We ended this visit by witnessing the progress of the **Grand Paris Express**, a mega-project on accessibility. La **Fabrique du Métro**, in Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine, has become a space for mediation and public awareness of this ambitious plan, which aims to expand mobility in the Île-de-France region, improve connections between the suburbs and central Paris, and thus alleviate the heavy passenger traffic that affects a large number of residents. La **Fabrique** houses full scale mock-ups, life-size installations, and immersive projections so that visitors can gain an in-depth understanding of the technical aspects of this engineering marvel – under construction are four new automatic lines, 68 new stations and the extension of metro line 14.



Bahrain's Hospitality and Ambition Shine at ICCA Middle East Summit

JESÚS PARRADO REPORTS



"Welcome to Bahrain, Jesús." The customs officer's greeting, delivered in perfect Spanish, was a small moment that set the tone for the days ahead, a welcome that reflected the spirit I would encounter throughout the trip.

Held in Bahrain for the first time, the **ICCA Middle East Summit** gathered association leaders and regional stakeholders to discuss the future of meetings in the Gulf and beyond. Taking place at **Exhibition World Bahrain** (EWB), the programme combined high-level insights with local engagement.

The event was officially opened by **Anju Gomes, ICCA's Senior Regional Director for the Middle East**, and **Dutch moderator Robert Daverschot**, who kept the audience engaged with live polls and discussions. **Khalid Al Zadjali, Chair of the ICCA Middle East Chapter** and **Director of the Oman Convention Bureau**, emphasised the growing popularity of the host destination: "Bahrain stands as a beacon of resilience and innovation in the global meetings industry. This forum marks a pivotal step in shaping the future of tourism and business events in the Middle East".

According to **ICCA Deputy Chair Sumaira Isaacs**, the Middle East still accounts for only one to two per cent of the global convention market. Membership growth across the region and sustained investment in infrastructure, nevertheless, point to a clear determination to expand its role. For Bahrain, hosting the Summit served as a deliberate step in strengthening its MICE positioning. "Business events are at the very heart of our **Tourism Strategy 2022–2026**, one of its seven key pillars for economic diversification," said **Sara Ahmed Buhiji, CEO of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority** and **Chairperson of Exhibition World Bahrain**. "Perhaps our greatest strength is not just the facilities, it is the Kingdom's strategic location at the heart of the Arabian Gulf, our culture of hospitality, and our collaborative approach to working with organisers."

One of the Summit's thematic highlights was the keynote by consultant **Dolores Semeraro** on '*Smart Tourism: Advanced Technologies to Future-Proof the Industry of People*'. She explored how artificial intelligence, big data, and human-centred design can reshape visitor experience, citing case studies such as **Emirates**' AI-powered services and **VisitScotland**'s predictive itinerary tools.

Her message directly aligned with Bahrain's broader technological ambitions. The Kingdom launched its **National Artificial Intelligence Policy** in July 2025, establishing one of the Gulf's most comprehensive national AI frameworks and providing a roadmap for the ethical deployment of AI across government and society. Bahrain's commitment to this cause is further demonstrated by its hosting of various sector-specific conferences, Bahrain will host the **2026 IEEE 10th International Conference on Engineering Technologies and Applied Sciences (ICETAS)**, organised by the **University of Technology Bahrain** and themed '*Paradigm Shifts in Industry 4.0: Transforming Economy, Technology, and Efficiency*'. Against this backdrop, the Summit's focus on AI in destination marketing took on particular significance. "Showcasing how AI can transform destination positioning, delegate engagement, and data-driven decision-making sends a powerful message that we are forward-looking, innovative, and ready to lead the conversation," said Sara Buhiji.

Exhibition World Bahrain: A Regional Landmark

The site inspection at EWB highlighted a venue conceived to compete with the largest international convention centres. With 19 adaptable meeting rooms, high-capacity halls, and the country's largest kitchen, EWB has already positioned itself as a flagship facility for the region.

The venue was named World's Leading New Exhibition and Convention Centre 2023 and Middle East's Leading Large-Scale Wedding Venue 2024 at the **World Travel Awards** (WTA). That trajectory has now led the WTA to select Bahrain for its first-ever ceremony in the Kingdom, with the Grand Final Gala Ceremony scheduled in December 2025 at EWB, an occasion set to convene leaders from across global travel and tourism.

In the meetings industry, the EWB will host the **93rd UFI Global Congress** in 2026, again the first time the event takes place in the Kingdom. The congress is expected to bring together more than 1,500 exhibition and business







events professionals worldwide for keynotes, workshops, and strategic forums.

Alan Pryor, General Manager of EWB, described the venue as more than a building: "This is a space where ideas and innovation come together. We are proud to host events that not only showcase Bahrain's infrastructure but also its people".

The venue's adaptability was a particular highlight, making it equally suited to small gatherings and large-scale events. For visiting media representatives, the focus was on both scale and the seamless integration of hospitality services, which was reinforced by the warmth of the staff who accompanied the inspection.

Discovering Bahrain: Culture, Tradition and Modernity

Beyond the sessions, our fam trip offered insights into how Bahrain balances long-standing traditions with contemporary development. The delegates were guided through **Showaiter**'s artisanal sweet makers, where trays of halwa, a spiced, dense dessert made with nuts and aromatic ingredients, showcased the country's culinary heritage. At the dhow shipyard, craftsmen worked on wooden vessels, recalling Bahrain's long maritime tradition. Fishermen explained their bread-based bait for fish cages, while a pearl-opening demonstration offered a glimpse into the Kingdom's historic pearling culture.

At the bustling fish market, the mingling of locals and expatriates underscored Bahrain's social diversity, a mix of local traditions and international influences. The visit to the **Bahrain International Circuit**, home of Formula 1, introduced a different angle to the programme, with high-speed karting for delegates at a venue that symbolises Bahrain's global sporting profile.

Cultural visits deepened the sense of continuity between heritage and hospitality. The Al-Fateh Grand Mosque, the National Museum, the Pearling Path, the Manama souq, and the Bahrain Fort each revealed layers of history. Even modern landmarks such as Avenues Mall demonstrated how Bahrain integrates international standards with a uniquely local welcome.

Hospitality as Competitive Advantage

What was evident throughout was not only the coordination, but also the personalised approach. Everyone, from the customs officers to the venue staff and guides, was committed to making visitors feel included, whether it was in the souqs or cafés or during everyday encounters.

"The Middle East is evolving into a powerhouse for business events, and collaboration across borders is key," said **ICCA's CEO Dr. Senthil Gopinath**. "This forum is a testament to the region's shared commitment to sustainability, innovation, and cultural authenticity".

In Bahrain, authenticity and hospitality go hand in hand. The fact that locals and expatriates work side by side shows the country's openness, which strengthens its MICE offering. Strategically located between Europe, Africa, and Asia, Bahrain is accessible, but it is the cultural readiness to welcome that may prove its strongest advantage.

By the time I left Bahrain, I confirmed that the initial welcome I received at the airport was more than just routine courtesy; it was an early indication of the consistent hospitality that defined my entire visit. They captured a philosophy that defines the Kingdom's role in the meetings industry, prioritising connection, shared learning, and collaboration – all grounded in a culture of genuine hospitality.

ICCA

Innovation and **Legacy** at the **ICCA Latin American and Caribbean Summit**

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN REPORTS



The 17th edition of the **ICCA Latin American and Caribbean Summit** in Medellín brought association leaders, bureaux and industry experts together for four days of business workshops, collaborative labs and policy dialogue. Designed as a curated platform for knowledge exchange and deal-making, the summit also led to the conception of several key initiatives with global reach. The newly launched **Global Cities Future Forum** and **ICCA Congress Lab** are set to be rolled out in other ICCA regions, ensuring that the legacy of the Medellín edition extends beyond Latin America and the Caribbean.

ICCA curated this year's summit with a focus on innovation, bringing together international associations, identified as potential partners for the region, to match them with member destinations through highly targeted business workshops and connection spaces. The programme opened with a rooftop welcome cocktail at **Hotel Binn**, where ICCA, the **Greater Medellín Convention Bureau** (MCB) and **ProColombia** formally addressed participants. The evening also served as an activation moment, with ICCA members asked to meet two pre-matched associations, ensuring networking began with purpose

New meeting formats were introduced, with itinerant sessions staged across three emblematic venues: the Forum of the **Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (UPB)**, **Ruta N** and **Parque Explora**. Each setting was chosen for its symbolic connection to innovation, research or science learning, so that the space itself became part of the content. UPB offered a university-based, zero-waste certified environment; Ruta N placed digital transformation sessions in the city's innovation district; and Parque Explora provided a science setting that underlined public engagement. An evening site inspection at **Plaza Mayor**, the city's main convention and exhibition centre, preceded a Comuna 13-inspired dinner.

The event's redesigned format replaced traditional lectures with interactive spaces. Business workshop rounds allowed ICCA members to rotate through short, pre-scheduled meetings with associations. Participants explored tools and strategies across four ICCA Labs: lead and congress generation, digital transformation and AI, association executives and community-building. Their focus on data, skills and collaboration reflected Medellín's positioning as a smart and resilient destination. "Medellín is a reference model for global cities that use international events as tools for investment attraction, knowledge creation and the development of innovation ecosystems," said **Andrés Escandón, ICCA's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean.**

In the Digital Transformation Lab, **Juliano Lissoni, Managing Director at MCI Canada** (*check out our interview with him on HQ #117*), highlighted how AI is redefining marketing, bidding and delegate engagement. "AI is changing workflows across strategy, marketing and operations," he said. "The task is to decompose roles, analyse risks and opportunities, and then experiment with measurable pilots."

His examples, from AI-assisted bid processes to personalised delegate recommendations, underlined the need for professionals to master data literacy and ethical AI use to remain competitive.

One concrete outcome was the creation of the **ICCA Congress Lab**, launched during the Lead and Congress Generation Lab facilitated by **Juan José García, Global Chief Sales and Marketing Officer at BCO Congresos**. Designed as an incubator, the Congress Lab will support destinations in developing entirely new congress concepts using ICCA's Business Intelligence platform as the foundation.

The Association Executives Lab highlighted Medellín's meetings strategy, built on four pillars: business, health, leisure and medical tourism, supported by connectivity, venue capacity and university partnerships.

Ana María Mejía, Acting Secretary for Tourism and Entertainment of Medellín, stressed collaboration: "Our strategy aligns city, academia and industry so that events translate into skills, knowledge and responsible growth. Medellín is committed to innovation and sustainability across its venues and experiences."

ProColombia, the government agency promoting international tourism and business events, presented Colombia's collective positioning as a meetings destination. At its core is the **National Network of Convention Bureaux**, a unique model in Latin America that unites 11 bureaux.





Andrés Escandón (left), Dr Senthil Gopinath (centre), Federico Gutiérrez (right)



Juliana Cardona Quirós

This framework underpins ProColombia's **Ambassador Programme**, which engages academics and professionals to secure targeted events. These ambassadors help attract meetings in science, health and innovation, using intellectual capital to strengthen bids and align events with long-term priorities. "We do not measure success by event or delegate numbers alone," said **Ana María Ortiz Pinilla, ProColombia's Meetings Industry Adviser**. "We look for legacy in knowledge, public policy and community benefit, supported by ambassador programmes that connect associations with local expertise."

The Launch Of The Global Cities Future Forum

A defining moment of this year's Summit was the launch of the debut edition of the **Global Cities Future Forum Latin America** at Parque Explora. Conceived in Medellín, this new platform brought together political leaders, local and international ICCA members, association executives and meetings industry professionals to discuss opportunities and challenges for cities. The Forum explored how events can stimulate investment, increase global visibility, encourage innovation and attract talent. It will now be a regular feature at ICCA's other regional summits, ensuring that the model piloted in Colombia is replicated worldwide.

For **Medellín's Mayor Federico Gutiérrez**, the focus was on the wider impact of attracting the right kind of events. "We welcome events that create value for the city through jobs, investment and opportunity. Business events strengthen our economy, benefit our communities and protect the environment, and this administration will continue to support them as drivers of sustainable development."

ICCA's CEO Dr. Senthil Gopinath emphasised that the organisation's role goes beyond simply bringing members together. "ICCA is committed to spreading Medellín's message of innovation and transformation around the world. It is not only our role to support meetings, but also to ensure that they generate knowledge and connect with long-term development projects."

Taking a broader industry perspective, **Óscar Cerezales, Global President at MCI Group**, claimed that the real opportunity lies in how destinations incorporate events into their overarching economic and knowledge ecosystems. He highlighted Medellín's industry clusters and its network of universities as assets that convention bureaux can leverage in future bids. "Events are strategic platforms for economic development and social impact. Medellín demonstrates that this is not just theory, but practice, showing how other cities in the region can use meetings to accelerate transformation".

Medellín's return as host allowed ICCA to pilot new formats focused on co-creation, data literacy and event diplomacy, while also spotlighting the city's policy-led transformation, which will be explored in the coming pages of this edition, where Medellín's story as an economic and social catalyst takes centre stage.

Juliana Cardona Quirós, Executive Director of the MCB, captures Medellín's transformation and ambitions: "We were delighted to welcome the ICCA Summit back to our city after 13 years. The Summit was a chance not only to strengthen ties with fellow members and buyers but also to demonstrate how Medellín has transformed into a destination that creates opportunities and memorable experiences. We work for the city and the wider region, and our goal is that every visitor leaves inspired to return and to share Medellín's story with the world."

Medellín's Strategy for **Urban** and **Social Transformation**

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN REPORTS



The **ICCA Summit** in Medellín revealed more than venues; it showcased the city's transformation, told through communities reclaiming hope, creating opportunity, and turning resilience into legacy. Over two decades, Medellín has rewritten its narrative from violence to innovation, from division to inclusion. Today, international events, sustainable tourism and social projects converge to empower communities and position the city as both a leading meetings hub and a living case study in how innovation can reshape a metropolis.

Empowering Communities, Reshaping Medellín

My introduction to Medellín began in Santa Elena, a rural district sitting on the city's eastern hills. **Manuela Álvarez** from the **Greater Medellín Convention & Visitors Bureau** (CVB) took me to Parque Arví, a remarkable ecological reserve and cultural hub where biodiversity and tradition converge. The CVB's mission extends beyond Medellín to the wider Antioquia region, integrating nature and local heritage. Alongside the bureau, Medellín's **Secretariat of Tourism and Entertainment** plays a key role in shaping the visitor experience and promoting sustainable, culturally rooted tourism. At the park, local guides lead visitors through forests and archeological paths, while teaching reforestation, composting and the use of medicinal plants. At Santa Elena, the *silletero* heritage (flower carriers who parade elaborate floral arrangements called *silletas*) is preserved and transformed into livelihoods through tourism and events. These *silletas*, showcased during the Summit, remain a living symbol of Medellín's identity. Under an hour from the centre, the park's metro cable shows how public investment connects urban and rural Antioquia, a fitting start to the city's story of inclusion. Public transport connected Santa Elena to the city and gave its communities a renewed sense of belonging.

The **Parque Arví Corporation** was created through a public–private partnership that includes **Empresas Públicas de Medellín** (EPM), whose environmental work focuses on water conservation and the protection of ecosystems and local communities. For example, the park works with local women's associations to cater for visiting groups, while training guides in heritage, environmental education and gastronomy, including dishes like the *fiambre* I sampled, a traditional Antioquian picnic of meats, vegetables and rice wrapped in banana leaves. Their programmes create jobs and empower communities, valuable resources for meeting planners.

Events at the **Cultural and Environmental Centre** directly contribute to conservation and local development, creating legacies with a positive impact in the wider community.

A visit organised by Manuela and **Santiago Acevedo** from the CVB to **Comuna 3**, in Manrique, showed me how Medellín's transformation is deeply tied to its public transport system, which reconnected communities long divided by violence. The network connected the city centre with the hills, giving young people access to a wider range of universities and career options, and allowing residents of wealthier neighbourhoods to visit areas that had previously been stigmatised.

Named for the way families form a greater narrative of resilience, like stars in constellations, the Constelaciones project has become Medellín's largest macro-mural, covering 500 houses and 30 large murals. Unlike Comuna 13, now internationally recognised, Comuna 3 represents change in progress. It is a collective artwork that transforms the urban landscape by honouring memory and offering hope, with the support of the **Medellín Town Hall**, EPM and the bureau's legacy initiatives. **Luz Dary Álvarez**, founder of the tour operator **Escarabajo Azul**, explained that Constelaciones is more than painted façades; it is the living memory of families who endured exclusion and violence. Her tours are built on three pillars, Art, Memory and Hope, and show how communities reclaim space, dignity and opportunities by sharing their own stories.

One of our guides that day was **Leidy Resmon**, who led the tour alongside Luz Dary. Originally focused on her own small business, she found new horizons when she began guiding visitors through the neighbourhood. Tourism gave her the confidence to reconnect with her passion for music, to sing again at events, and to pursue English lessons while working towards becoming a certified professional tour guide. Her story shows how tourism and business events open doors to personal and professional development.


Manrique, Constelaciones



Silleta showcased during the ICCA Summit

Constelaciones shows how institutions and communities can collaborate on a shared model of transformation. EPM, working alongside volunteers and local organisations, runs free English lessons for adults and children, opens computer rooms with internet access for those without connections at home, and provides helplines to support families. Local women maintain the neighbourhood's urban gardens, which not only green the public spaces but also educate residents on sustainability. Life has changed, from the district's first café to visitors tasting fresh arepas at the local bakery. Murals embed local stories and memories into this new urban landscape. With a second phase already planned, the project will bring new murals, new businesses and new opportunities, expanding the reach of transformation and improving lives in Comuna 3, ensuring responsible tourism and events leave tangible legacies. Social strategies also come through in initiatives like **Parcero**, a programme designed to prevent youth violence by offering education, psychosocial support and career pathways to those most at risk of exclusion. Together with projects like **Constelaciones**, it shows how Medellín links prevention, culture and opportunity to shape a more inclusive future.

A Region Prepared for Global Events

Medellín's meeting infrastructure was on full display during the Summit, with sessions held at **Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Ruta N, Parque Explora** and **Plaza Mayor**. The social programme showed how Medellín blends infrastructure with cultural settings, each curated to highlight the city's versatility. An evening reception at **Museo El Castillo**, a Gothic-style landmark surrounded by gardens, highlighted how heritage can provide an alternative setting for meetings. A visit to **Jardín Botánico**, near Parque Explora, added another layer to the city's appeal: this botanical garden is filled with orchids and native plants, serving as an event venue, while connecting with local biodiversity. Lunch at **Plácido**, held inside Colombia's first stone gallery and workshop, offered a setting where gastronomy, art and craftsmanship blended into a local experience, followed by a coffee tasting exploring how Colombian coffee culture combines tradition and innovation.

To show another side of Medellín, we visited Provenza, a neighbourhood now symbolic of the city's cosmopolitan vibe. The Summit brought delegates to experience Provenza's nightlife at **Teatro Victoria**, reaffirming its status as Medellín's entertainment hub.

By day, Provenza offered a different flavour: a contemporary lunch at **Belisario**, where Colombian dishes and drinks were given a modern twist. The day concluded with a site inspection at the 5-star **Marriott Medellín hotel**. With flexible meeting spaces and luxury accommodation, the hotel confirmed Medellín's readiness for international groups.

Medellín and Antioquia embrace both their past and their present. While community projects speak of resilience, memory and inclusion, the region's infrastructure reflects sophistication and a global outlook, as well as a vibrant urban energy. This unique combination is what makes it such a compelling destination, a place where events can engage with both purpose and context.

HQ INSIGHTS

Tech, Associations & PCOs





How **Event Tech Collaboration** is at the Heart of **IMEX Innovation**

The strength of tech innovation is increasingly held within the close collaboration of the organiser and provider. **IMEX** and **ExpoPlatform** illustrate how that teamwork has helped to deliver elevated experiences over three years, leading to a renewed partnership with progress at its heart.

IMEX has extended its partnership with ExpoPlatform as the official event tech provider for another three years. The announcement comes after the two companies successfully collaborated on a total of six events across **IMEX America** and **IMEX Frankfurt**. Both serve as places for exhibitors to showcase their products, services and destinations to a global audience of event professionals, buyers and decision-makers.

This agreement makes it the official partner for the group and its major shows in Frankfurt and Las Vegas until the end of 2028. The 2025 edition of IMEX Frankfurt saw 13,335 total participants and 67,000 meetings booked.

"Our partnership with ExpoPlatform is a key part of our strategic focus on enhancing the show experience. New features added to the app – including free lead scanning – and a more intuitive web platform have all helped to support connections between buyers and exhibitors as well as remove friction points across both of our shows," says **Carina Bauer, CEO of IMEX Group**.

"IMEX continues to set the standard for world-class events, not only through their global showcases but also by driving innovation and positive change in our industry. Long-term partnerships like this are where real impact happens – they allow us to evolve together, deliver smarter solutions and keep raising the bar for event experiences. We are excited to keep building with IMEX and to empower planners with the tools they need to create even more valuable connections," add **Tanya Pinchuk, CEO of ExpoPlatform**.

IMEX Frankfurt first partnered with ExpoPlatform for the 2023 edition and launched an all-new online platform with enhanced capabilities to drive buyer-exhibitor connections. Over three years, this close collaboration and continued innovation have shaped one of the most digitally advanced experiences in the global meetings and events industry, and helped to elevate the customer experience.

The partnership between the IMEX and ExpoPlatform teams has involved close collaboration to ensure the digital offerings are best suited to the needs of the shows and participants. A wide range of custom tools and features have since been developed to enhance the platform's value and boost business growth across the German and US-based events.

"Over the past three years, our partnership with ExpoPlatform has enabled us to work in close alignment, challenge each other constructively, and co-create a solution that delivers a great experience for our exhibitors and attendees. With a rich dataset now at our fingertips, we are now able to work together to unlock new insights into how people interact both within the platform and at our shows – insights that will fuel smarter decisions and more personalised experiences," says **Gary Coombs, COO of IMEX**. "As we look ahead, we are excited to explore how AI can further enhance the in-person journey and continue to push the boundaries of what is possible in event tech. There are many exciting developments on the horizon, and I look forward to continuing this great partnership."

"Over the last three years, we have built powerful digital solutions together that enhanced the quality of in-person experiences. Now, we are taking it further. This next phase is about smarter data, seamless integrations and technology that supports better results as well as effectively leveraging the ever-evolving AI technologies," concludes **Mykyta Fastovets, CTO of ExpoPlatform**.

Economic Upheaval and Uncertainty Challenges Everyone in the Meetings Industry

Author: Mark Levin, CAE

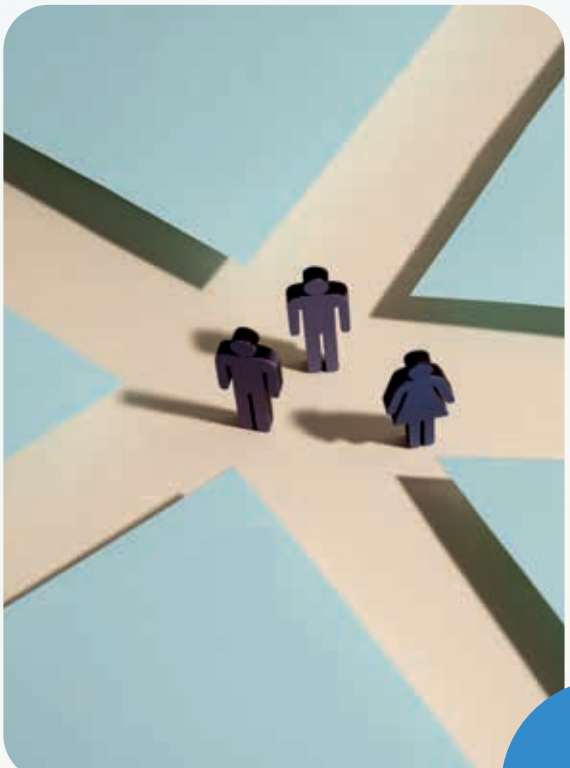


Change is always a two-edged sword for associations and not-for-profit entities. On the one hand, change always provides opportunities for the leadership of these organisations to create new values for their members, customers, and stakeholders. Change also challenges us to open our minds to new methodologies, recent technologies, and new communications tools that can move our organisations to a higher level of performance.

On the other hand, because of the unique volunteer leadership structure of associations, change almost always means resistance to reorganising and abandoning traditions. Plus, change always means spending more money.

In 2025, perhaps as never before, organisations worldwide are faced with economic and sustainability challenges that will test their ability to not only deal with changes but, indeed, their ability to survive.

Here are some of those most critical challenges, and some suggestions for dealing with them.



1. Membership and dues revenue are declining

This has been an ongoing trend as things such as time constraints, social media options, and competing organisations have given potential (and current) members many alternative options for participation. In some countries, people in many industries and professions are facing uncertain employment futures, so they are reluctant to make an investment of money (and time) in their trade or professional organisation. Since members and membership dues are a vital part of most organisations' financial well-being, this is a huge problem.

How to deal with it:

a. **Re-evaluate your non-dues income streams** – Are some of them undervalued? Can technology provide new services which can generate income?

b. **Look at your dues structure** – When was the last time it was adjusted? Can you justify a dues increase (through enhanced value, not just needing more income)?

c. **Reach out to your corporate and institutional stakeholders** – Create opportunities for partnerships and sponsorships.

2. The cost of everything is going up – fast!

There is no need to go into any detail here (it will only get me in trouble with my hospitality services partners). However, I cannot resist mentioning a few: transportation, salaries and benefits, cyber security, and other technology must-haves, meeting room and sleeping rates, meeting food prices, audio-visual charges, 'resort fees,' etc. I know some of these costs are passed on to attendees and service users, but we have to think about pricing ourselves out of some of the important non-dues sources of revenue.



How to deal with it:

a. **Offer more engagement opportunities online** – Learn how to structure these events to provide as much relationship building as possible (not just meet-up or networking);

b. **Negotiate from more strength** by packaging multiple activities with a/v providers, transportation companies, hotel chains, exhibition management companies, etc.;

c. Again, **reach out to your sponsors, donors, etc.**, and try to establish long-term giving or sponsorship agreement.

3. Stakeholder expectations will keep going up too

Associations and nonprofits do not always have the luxury of telling their members, sponsors, clients, and donors: "We have to raise our prices (dues, fees, etc.) because everyone else is doing it. You understand, don't you?"

No, not all of them will understand. Not all of them will be getting pay raises. Not all of them will have increases in their travel or meeting budgets. Not all of them work for companies or institutions which have unlimited funds to support their membership in your group or to stay at your facility.

Yes, they are probably willing to pay more, but we have to be able to explain to them either what extra value they are getting for the extra fees, or what products, programmes, or services will be improved through those raised fees. "Everyone is raising prices" does not answer those questions.

How to deal with it:

a. **Get to better understand your members'/clients' expectations** – When everyone lives in a world where each call or click on a smart phone allows the caller to know your name, contact information, buying preferences, income bracket, and probably the names of all your children, they expect their association or destination to have that information, too. Update your data gathering capabilities and customise each member or customer experience, just as Google or Amazon does. Of course, you do not have the resources those companies have but gather enough information (within the guidelines of privacy laws) to let members feel that you know who they are!

b. **Trust is a big deal** – Spend time building it with your stakeholders. Since our stakeholders have an ever-growing list of alternatives for membership and participation, you need to make your organisation stand out. One way to do that is by building trust with them. Remember, all things being equal, people want to do business with people (or organisations) they know and trust. They can get to know you from your website or a virtual education programme. They will get to trust you if you create above-expectation experiences for them. That means everything from your meetings to your communications to the way you handle their concerns.

Managing economic challenges is not always about just being within budget or dealing with rising prices. Sometimes it is about creating a basis for long-term support for your organisation, from all of your stakeholders. Be flexible, be understanding, be trust-worthy, and those stakeholders will be your partners through it all.

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 non-profit 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.



Learning, Sharing, and Growing Together: Inside the CityDNA CVB Expert Meeting

Across Europe, Convention Bureaux are facing a fast-changing landscape, marked by rising client expectations, the need for new partnerships, and growing societal and environmental responsibility. Yet, despite being at the heart of destination development and event strategy, there are few opportunities designed specifically for them to pause, connect, and reflect on how they operate and evolve.

That is why **City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA)** has launched the **1st CVB Expert Meeting**: a new event designed by and for professionals working in Convention Bureaux. Co-created within the **CityDNA CVB Knowledge Group**, this event offers a unique environment for exchange and peer learning, a place to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and co-create better ways of working together.

The first edition will take place in Graz, Austria, on 20-21 January 2026, hosted by **Graz Convention Bureau**. Compact, participatory, and community-driven, this new format is set to become an essential platform for Europe's CVB professionals.

"The CVB Expert Meeting truly embodies the CityDNA spirit: learning with and from each other," says **Barbara Jamison-Woods, CityDNA President**. "Our community thrives on collaboration, and this new meeting is a concrete example of how we turn peer learning into action. It is not about theory, but about sharing what works, what does not, and how we can collectively raise the bar for our destinations."

A New Space for CVB Professionals

The CVB Expert Meeting fills a long-identified gap within the European meetings industry: a space entirely dedicated to the professional growth and exchange of CVB teams. While CityDNA's large-scale conferences and Expert Meetings already bring together hundreds of destination professionals every year, this new event focuses specifically on the needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by Convention Bureaux.

Designed as an intimate and interactive forum, it blends strategic reflection with hands-on exchange. Participants can expect a programme that encourages active participation rather than passive listening: from discussions on evolving business models and client relations to conversations about leadership, data use, sustainability, and advocacy. Every element is built around one principle: learning through dialogue.

"As CVBs, we all face similar questions: about how to measure our impact, how to position our cities, and how to create meaningful value for our stakeholders," says **Jurgen Moors,** from **Maastricht Convention Bureau** and **Chair of the CityDNA CVB Knowledge Group**. "The CVB Expert Meeting gives us a safe and trusted environment to talk about these realities, to challenge each other, and to grow together as a professional community."

Graz: A City That Embodies Collaboration

Hosting the inaugural edition, Graz is more than just a beautiful backdrop, it perfectly reflects the meeting's spirit. Austria's second-largest city is known for its strong collaborative

culture, creative energy, and forward-thinking approach to sustainability. Its compact scale encourages proximity and dialogue, creating the ideal conditions for exchange.

The city's hosting team will ensure that learning continues well beyond the meeting room, with networking dinners and informal moments designed to strengthen personal and professional connections. These relaxed exchanges are a hallmark of CityDNA events, where collaboration often starts around the table before growing into long-term partnerships.

"We are thrilled to welcome the first CityDNA CVB Expert Meeting to Graz," says **Lisa Legat** from the Graz Convention Bureau and member of the CityDNA CVB Knowledge Group. "Our city is a perfect setting for meaningful conversations — creative, human-scale, and open to new ideas. This meeting is not just an event; it is the beginning of a shared journey to elevate what CVBs can achieve together."

Learning That Leads to Action

True to the CityDNA philosophy, the CVB Expert Meeting is not a one-way transfer of knowledge. Instead, it is a peer-to-peer learning experience where participants exchange insights, share cases, and translate ideas into action. Each session helps CVB professionals reflect on their own strategies and take away tangible ideas they can adapt locally.

This approach echoes CityDNA's broader mission to strengthen capacity building and collective intelligence across Europe's destination community. From the CVB Café to annual conferences, the network's initiatives all share the belief that learning together drives progress. The CVB Expert Meeting is a natural extension of that philosophy, focused on the meetings industry's specific needs.

"When we designed this format, we wanted it to feel relevant, personal, and useful," explains Jurgen Moors. "It is about moving from inspiration to implementation. We want participants to leave Graz not only with new ideas but with the confidence to act."

Setting the Tone for What Comes Next

When participants gather in Graz this January, they will not just be attending an event, they will be shaping a new reference point for CVB collaboration in Europe. The connections and ideas born there will fuel future editions and strengthen a culture of shared learning across the continent.

"This first Expert Meeting is a starting point," says Lisa Legat. "It is about coming together with curiosity, courage, and collaboration. If every participant leaves Graz with one new idea or partnership, we have achieved our goal."

Compact in format yet ambitious in purpose, the CityDNA CVB Expert Meeting reflects what makes the Alliance's community unique: generosity, authenticity, and a collective drive to grow. In a time when the meetings industry is redefining its role, initiatives like this remind us that progress begins with people learning, sharing, and growing together.



Global Challenges and Association Advocacy in Events



Behind every successful event lies an industry that often goes unseen, yet advocacy brings our impact into focus. **Andrew Harrison, CEO** of the **Event Supplier and Services Association (ESSA)** and **Director** of the **Event Industry Alliance (EIA)**, explores the importance of association advocacy for the event and exhibitions industry.

Advocacy has always been at the heart of what associations do. In its simplest form, it means standing up for a cause, interest or community, helping to influence public opinion, political decision-making and ultimately policy. For ESSA and for our work alongside the EIA, it is central to how we protect, promote and progress the business events and exhibitions industry in the UK and on the global stage.

The Need for Recognition

So how exactly do we do that? It starts with our work alongside public affairs specialists as we shape strategy, build relationships and ultimately speak the language of government to help our industry receive the recognition it deserves.

Historically, our industry has flourished without the need for government intervention, and until the pandemic, we were rarely on the radar of policymakers. COVID-19 changed all of that, starkly exposing how absent we were from government thinking. The two-year shutdown left us fighting to explain who we are and why we matter.

Even today, moving the needle remains one of our toughest challenges. Ministers and civil servants recognise the evidence we present, but progress can sometimes be slowed by shifting political priorities and ongoing ministerial changes in the UK. While this can delay momentum, our commitment remains firm, and we will continue to champion the cause and push for lasting change.

The Importance of Clarity

When you have been advocating government for our industry as long as I have, you learn a thing or two about how to better get your voice heard. One of those lessons is the importance of clarity.

As an industry, we are now much better at defining our 'asks' and backing them up with evidence. Our economic impact studies and annual reports give us credibility, allowing us to demonstrate not just who we are but also what we contribute to jobs, growth and communities across the UK.

At the top of our agenda is the creation of a government national strategy for business events. Other industries benefit from government-led strategies that align sectoral growth with national priorities. We believe our sector deserves the same. With it, the UK could strengthen its position as a global centre for business events – the world's meeting place – while driving skills, jobs and local economic growth.

Engaging parliament is another vital strand of our advocacy. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Events (APPG) is one of the few channels where MPs and peers come together to discuss our industry. These groups can sometimes feel fragile, with current political instability often meaning reshuffles which disrupts progress, but they remain important platforms for making our case and influencing future policy.

Everyone Has a Voice

ESSA and the EIA may provide a voice at a national level, but real advocacy is a collective effort. We regularly ask our members to write to their MPs, share our reports or invite politicians to come and see their businesses first-hand, with us then able to help facilitate and support.

Responses can be slow, sometimes disheartening, but persistence does pay off. Every email, letter and invitation helps reinforce our collective message, and when MPs hear it from multiple constituents, it really does make an impact. We can provide a voice, but it is the help and support from everyone in the industry that will amplify it.

A Global Perspective

Advocacy also extends beyond our borders. The UK is already home to nine of the world's 20 largest organisers and is recognised internationally for its venues, suppliers and expertise. Nonetheless, post-Brexit, our members face new challenges in working across Europe. Issues around visas, paperwork and the movement of equipment have created unnecessary barriers.

We are working with the government and partner industries to push for mutual recognition agreements that make it easier for skilled professionals to operate abroad. This work is slow and often complex, but it is vital to ensuring our members remain competitive on the world stage. At the same time, we continue to promote the UK as a destination and as a global hub for business events.

Advocacy is not glamorous. It is often frustrating and requires persistence. ESSA and the EIA will continue to lead this work because it is essential for our industry's future, but lasting change requires a united effort. Every member has a role to play in making our voice louder and harder to ignore, and by doing so, together, we can secure the recognition our industry deserves and position the UK at the forefront of global business events.





Global Association Leaders on Building Financial Resilience



Author: Martin Boyle IAPCO, CEO

Associations of all sizes and areas of expertise are navigating a perfect storm of economic pressures. Inflation, geopolitical tensions, and sluggish global growth are driving up operating costs while revenues remain uncertain.

IAPCO has contacted leaders that share accreditation of both IAPCO and the **Association Management Company Institute** (AMCI), and that provide strategic guidance and support to their association clients globally. They have confirmed that association leaders cite rising expenses and inflation as their top concerns, prompting tighter budgets and diversification beyond dues into certifications, sponsorships, hybrid events, and digital products.

The following perspectives, gathered from IAPCO and AMCI-accredited leaders working across diverse markets, outline key strategies associations are using to adapt and grow under financial pressure.

Juliano Lissoni, **Managing Director at MCI Canada**, states that resilience now depends on broadening income streams while keeping member value at the core. The deeper challenge lies, however, in conventional operating models that slow progress.

Global surveys show that 72% of association leaders see adopting and integrating new technology as a major challenge, and only 16% consider themselves 'digitally advanced.' The costs of this lag are steep: inefficiency, wasted staff time, and poor member experiences. The *Association Engagement Index 2024* reinforces this reality: while 66% of members regularly access content, only 29% actively participate in association life. Just 24% rate their association as excellent at meeting their needs, and only 20% say it is easy to find relevant programmes. Outdated systems and limited personalisation are directly eroding loyalty and deeper involvement.

The way forward is already emerging: digital transformation powered by AI. Some associations worldwide are already embedding AI into their operations, creating measurable gains in efficiency, personalisation, and revenue generation. Tools like **JadeAI** now handle routine inquiries around the clock. Predictive analytics identify members at risk of lapsing, while recommendation engines match events and resources to individual interests. AI-driven

credentialing platforms scale education programmes, and data monetisation is becoming a viable revenue stream. Importantly, associations that adopt AI responsibly, with clear policies on ethics, transparency, and privacy, are not just cutting costs. They are reimagining how to deliver value, grow communities, and secure long-term sustainability.

Michael Kern, **Executive Director at Dekon Group** shares that, "In uncertain times, financial sustainability is not about deeper cutting spending; it is about planning smarter and building year-round value with sponsors as true partners." Michael suggests that associations need to move beyond 'logo cemeteries' in their publications, and instead offer outcome bundles that fund real work. Education series, skills badges, toolkits, small, time-boxed test projects, are keywords here. When clear success measures are set (i.e. reach, skills gained, adoption, access) and leaders stick strictly to content independence and data privacy, you can gain multi-year agreements with industry partners, ideally indexed for inflation, to smooth costs and protect core programmes.

This approach works across the different association types, whether medical, NGO, or technical, if and when offers match mission outcomes. In addition, a steady, year-round cadence (virtual sessions, on-demand learning, field notes) that keeps value flowing between annual events is key.

A recent association project demonstrated successful outcomes through long-term investment in AI, machine learning, and advanced imaging. The association built practical learning tracks and small pilot grants, co-funded by sponsors and aimed at real-world adoption. The result? Record attendance at their annual conference helped by choosing a destination with strong local ecosystems. The sponsors finance clear outcomes and members feel the impact. Revenue holds steady and the mission gets perfectly served too!

Dr. Ahmed El Shal, **Chairman of ICOM** shared that in the Gulf Region, where economic realities evolve faster than forecasts, financial sustainability for associations demands more than cost efficiency, it calls for innovation, collaboration, and shared purpose. At ICOM Group, evidence has shown from working across Africa, the Gulf, the Middle East, and European markets that resilience grows when associations build alliances that extend beyond traditional models.

Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) have become a cornerstone for sustainable impact in emerging markets. By aligning governments, associations, and PCOs, PPPs enable the creation of long-term value chains that strengthen the knowledge economy and event legacies. These models diversify revenue through hybrid portfolios that include digital projects and members' career networks, while protecting associations against inflation, market volatility, and operational risks.

Louise Gorringe, **AVP Associations Management**, and **Iva Popova**, **MarCom Manager**, at **Kenes Group** added that: "when the economy is unstable, the instinct may be to retrench. Yet for associations, resilience comes not from retreat but from reimagining how value is created and delivered."

A clear shift is underway: sponsors are looking beyond visibility at flagship events and seeking sustained, meaningful interaction with professional communities. Associations that embrace year-round engagement, blending live events with digital platforms, online communities, and repurposed congress content, can expand reach, deepen relationships, and unlock new income streams.

Funding models are also evolving. By aligning educational content with industry priorities while remaining true to mission, values, and independence from bias, associations can attract support through grants or unrestricted funding. While binding multi-year sponsorships remain rare due to annual budgeting cycles, frameworks that provide continuity and strategic alignment significantly reduce financial uncertainty.

Resilience is also reinforced by broadening the base of support. Associations that diversify geographically and ensure representative governance are better positioned to withstand instability and make balanced, long-term decisions. Strong governance and clear financial policies, including reserves strategies, cash flow management, and decision-making frameworks, further enable associations to advance their mission even in volatile times.

Louise and Iva conclude: "Ultimately, financial sustainability is not about repeating past models but about reimagining how value is created and delivered for members, partners, and society at large."



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Finance is Fun

Authors: Eric Manganel (pictured below), COO, SwissTech Convention Center, and Sven Bossu (pictured above), CEO, AIPC





For a long time, finance was not considered the most exciting domain. That perception is shifting rapidly: successive shocks – the pandemic, surging inflation and recent geopolitical turmoil – have made robust financial management essential. At the same time, a growing suite of tools now makes it far easier to mine, analyse and act on the data needed to steer organisations through uncertainty.

Within any organisation, there is one person who does not like surprises: the Chief Financial Officer. Unfortunately, that very person has had their share of them over the last years. There was the pandemic, the energy crisis followed by high level of inflation, and more recently geopolitical tensions. All of these have had a considerable and non-predictable impact on budgets. As a result of these circumstances, organisations need to be extremely flexible in order to keep the bottom-line figures black.

A key element required for doing so, is having the correct and up-to-date data available, which allows to take decisions in a knowledgeable way. Fortunately, there is a growing suite of tools easily available for doing so. In the case of a convention centre, mining data for financial purposes actually allows for two things: financial management at the level of the venue but also providing organisers with the information to make their event the most cost-effective possible.

Located on Europe's most cosmopolitan technical university campus, the **SwissTech Convention Center** quickly understood the power of data and the benefits data mining could bring. The challenge consisted of defining the right questions to be asked. As events are a people business, the approach taken was to first create full transparency at organisational level on the use of human resources, which consisted of two parts: a detailed job description, allowing to be 100% clear on who does what, and monitoring of the time spent on the different tasks. This approach allows to spot the areas which are resource intensive and check whether efficiency increases can be put in place. At the same time, it ensures that there is no waste by having multiple people doing the same things (or in the worst-case scenario: nobody doing a specific task, because everyone thought somebody else was in charge). Furthermore, data analysis revealed that the efforts invested into similar size events varied significantly. Thus, creating a standard amount of time to deliver a specific event size. Knowing this enables a transparent discussion with the client as to what the cost of the event would be within the defined scope.

This methodology of allocating the right type and number of resources on identified tasks not only enables a smooth planning of resources allocated to events, but also ensures that the element of resources is integrated to the event pricing. This in turn allows transparency on the resources' rate of return on any given event and thus a better optimisation of the margins. The customer is also informed of the resources that are assigned to their event. This enables a climate of trust and alignment on delivering the event between the customer and the venue.

One of the lessons learned in putting this in place is not to underestimate the effort it will take as leaders to explain why you want to do this. Research done by **Gartner** demonstrated that leaders need to communicate four steps: the market context, the organisational goals, the business strategy and the strategy-aligned employee behaviours. Doing so successfully can increase the willingness to change at employee level by 73%.

Once put in place, the next step is to use these data to guide event organisers in becoming more cost efficient. An obvious, but sometimes underestimated, way of doing so is to reduce the number of 'touchpoints', which can be defined as each time an organiser and a venue interact. These interactions can vary from a review of a contract clause to a change of floorplan and anything in between. The important thing is that each touchpoint represents an amount of time (and therefore budget) on both sides. Decreasing the number of touchpoints – hence increasing the efficiency in the relationship – is a real win-win and will enhance the overall experience.

There are different ways of doing so (not all secrets will be disclosed in this article), but the overall goal is about creating a better experience for all parties involved. AI will definitely be part of this future, alongside a better use of all the tools and platforms already in place. The end goal is freeing up time to focus on what is really important: delivering the unique experiences every delegate wants. And that is what makes finance fun.



Kenes Group at 60: A **Legacy** of Empowering Knowledge and a **Future** Shaped by **Innovation**

Few organisations in the meetings industry can look back on six decades of continuous growth, resilience, and innovation. In 2025, **Kenes Group** marks 60 years. Since 1965, it has evolved into a global leader in Professional Congress Organisation (PCO) and Association Management Company (AMC), driven by a mission to empower knowledge through world-class events and communities.

From Vision to Global Reach

What began as a small initiative has become a global enterprise with over 360 professionals in 15 offices. Kenes has organised thousands of events, bringing together millions of healthcare professionals, scientists, and thought leaders. Its ability to connect people, share knowledge, and foster collaboration has supported medical breakthroughs and shaped entire fields of research.

This success reflects a culture of trust, expertise, and adaptability, enabling Kenes to navigate recessions, natural disasters, and a pandemic. Its embrace of technology and sustainable practices has further defined it as an industry innovator.

The Power of People

People have always been at the centre of Kenes Group's journey, a value reflected earlier this year in Vienna, where over 300 team members gathered for the **60th Anniversary and Leadership Summit.**

The event blended strategy with celebration, showing how the organisation's future is being shaped collectively. Topics included generative AI, sustainability, DEI, and the challenges of attracting and retaining next-generation talent. "The Kenes Leadership Summit is a vital platform for aligning our strategies and fostering collaboration among our partners," noted **CEO Ori Lahav**.

Honouring the Past, Embracing the Future

The anniversary was also a moment to honour founder **Gideon Rivlin**, whose vision for a knowledge-driven company still guides the business. His son, **Executive Chairman and Chief Vision Officer, Dan Rivlin**, captured this spirit in Vienna: "We believe in the ability to make a change in the world, we believe in people, and that is part of what brings us forward. The family feeling and the bonding were carved by hours and hours of hard work. This spirit is embedded in our DNA."

The company's long-standing collaboration with Vienna has led to hosting major European medical congresses, including the **European Academy of Paediatric Societies** and the **World Psychiatric Association**.

A New Look for a New Era

To mark its anniversary, Kenes unveiled a refreshed brand identity that blends legacy with future ambition. The redesign, nearly a year in the making, retains the iconic red and 'swoosh' while introducing a modern logo. More than visual, it reaffirms the company's strategic role as an industry pioneer.

As CEO Ori Lahav explains: "Our new branding is a statement of both legacy and innovation. It is a tribute to the image that has accompanied countless event teams for decades and a fresh start for what we expect will be more decades to come – empowering knowledge with our leadership."

While anniversaries prompt reflection, Kenes remains firmly future-focused. It continues investing in new markets, products, and technologies, with emphasis on AI, digital learning, and sustainable solutions. Its goal is not just to remain a trusted partner but to set new standards for how knowledge is exchanged.

As Rivlin emphasised, "Our story is far from over. The next chapter will be written by the same values that have guided us for six decades: excellence, innovation, and a deep belief in the power of people to make a difference."

For Kenes, turning 60 is not a conclusion but a launchpad; a chance to honour its legacy while embracing new opportunities in the global meetings landscape.

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