THE IMPORTANCE OF LEAVING A LEGACY

There was a time when the meetings industry was viewed as solely based on what delegates and organisers would spend during an event. It was an easy thing to measure: people would fly in, rent event space, book accommodation, go to restaurants, commute by taxis… that gave a pretty good picture of the financial impact of business events in a particular destination/venue. Those days are over. The focus has clearly shifted to the value of what these events actually achieve for organisers, participants and host communities and the legacy that they leave.

Words Cécile Koch

DIFFICULT TO GRASP

There are many ways in which events can leave a legacy. If you want to demonstrate the kind of broader “output” values that are associated with meetings, congresses or conventions, you have to think in broad terms and look at the economic, business, professional, academic and community benefits that such events create. If those are a bit more difficult to grasp sometimes, that also places the meetings industry as a whole at the very centre of the global economy and the related scientific, professional, academic, business and social advancements it helps achieve.

But how exactly to appreciate the legacy that association events can leave? That is exactly what the ‘Value of Meetings Case Study Project’ conducted by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and commissioned by the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) is set to do. As President Joachim König explains: “JMIC has embarked on a project to identify and document a series of representative events that illustrate those broader economic, academic, business and professional achievements of global meetings, conventions and exhibitions. It will consist of two key components: first, an academic one consisting of a team of university researchers who can provide the academic rigor we need to enhance credibility of the results and help advise organisers on best practices for value measurement, and secondly, a vehicle that can make the most of the very compelling ‘stories’ that arise from the project – events that illustrate benefits in ways that the readers and, most importantly, our key audiences – can understand and relate to.”

The latest progress of the Case Study programme can be reviewed on a website called The Iceberg (www.the-iceberg.org), which provides a communications platform for the advancement of the industry value proposition. The scope of the case studies is indeed quite wide: think about knowledge expansion, relationship building, collaboration, the attraction of global talent, the improvement of education, or fundraising and investment, among many, many other fields of endeavours. And the name ‘The Iceberg’ is particularly relevant: the spending impact of delegates and planners in a destination is literally the tip of the iceberg. There is a hidden value of meetings, which are considered today to be their real purpose.
ESSENTIAL TO KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

But JMIC is not the only one who jumped on the legacy board. Some destinations and other industry organisations are also trying to look beyond the mere financial impact of association events. After all, they are all about facilitating the kinds of exchanges that are essential to knowledge transfer, innovation, collaboration and advancement that make the world a better place. You can read on page 44 and 47 some case studies that Boardroom put together, with the help of the Glasgow and Business Events Sydney for instance.

In this regard, Dubai Business Events and the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) hosted in December a Global Forum on a range of relevant topics such as advancing the purpose of international association meetings through long-term legacy development, improving the benefits of association meetings to the host community and creating strategic partnerships with destinations. The event was attended by 35 international association executives, including representatives from the International Political Science Association, the World Autism Organisation, the International Menopause Society, the World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation and the International Academy of Periodontology.

Steen Jakobsen, Director of Dubai Business Events, said: “This inaugural forum reflected where we are headed as an industry. The importance of legacy is becoming a driving factor, not only for destinations, but for associations and the meetings they host. The Forum provided an ideal platform to share knowledge on legacy creation.”

Convention centres around the world also play a great role in the matter. Geoff Dongahy, CEO of International Convention Centre Sydney, argues: “International conventions centres, like ICC Sydney, positively influence a city’s reputation. Often in partnership with destination marketing bureaus, they are critical in promoting the capability or the intellectual capital of the city and its desirability as a destination globally. Just as importantly, they impact on the visitor’s experience of that city – is it modern and flexible? Does it value quality, collaboration and innovation? It can foster and promote these qualities in a myriad of ways, however, the power of the convention centre’s connections will drive how successful it can be in contributing to collaboration and innovation.”

In conclusion, one can say that the myriad of associations that count meetings and conventions amongst their key organizational responsibilities are here to leave a tangible legacy in a world that’s constantly changing and evolving.

Thanks Silke Schlinnertz

That’s what our Advisory Board has been set up for. So that Boardroom stays on top of its game regarding trends and hot topics, we constantly consult our members and ask for their opinion. And to be fair, it’s Silke Schlinnertz, from Euroheat & Power, who had the idea to make legacy the red thread of this first issue. As she said: “As we move along our own daily paths, there is always a risk of losing focus on the bigger picture. There is more to our work than maximizing revenue! All of our activities, including our events, should be meaningful and make a lasting impact! When Euroheat & Power leaves a congress destination, we hope that we have contributed to better understanding, growth, inspiration, innovation and opportunities for everyone; the city, venue, partners, attendees... not just another event but something that mattered to the people involved! At the end of the day, legacy matters and not only in the workplace.”