



## JMIC Case Study Program

### CONFERENCES: CATALYSTS FOR THRIVING ECONOMIES

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### Abstract

**Type of Meeting:** Twelve international conferences held between 2014 and 2015 were studied as one group.

**Size of Meeting:** The number of attendees varied from 60 to 6,081 delegates. The largest was the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress in 2014.

**Geographical Location of Meeting:** All conferences were held in Sydney, Australia.

**Industry Sector:** The case study was multi-sector in nature: four cultural, three medical, three technology and two environmental conferences were researched.

**Methodological Approach:** Primary and secondary data sources were utilised, and data were obtained through a survey questionnaire designed to assess respondent demographics and key social legacy questions. Quantitative results were supplemented by interview findings from primary and secondary data collection.

**Key Benefits Realised:** This case study outlines the innovation, collaboration and sector development gained as a result of the conferences studied.

**Main Beneficiaries:** A wide range of stakeholders, ranging from individual delegates to the broader community.

**Relevance/Implications/Lessons Learnt (if applicable):** Results from this study revealed that business events mobilise interactions and collaborations that form the foundation of innovation, economic development and societal change—all catalysts for a thriving economy and a prosperous community. The benefits identified in this study accrued to all sectors and a wide range of stakeholders, from individual delegates to the broader community. This case study demonstrates that there are significant legacies that surpass in value the initial tourism expenditure.

**Future Research (if applicable):** There are significant differences between the experiences and outcomes of international conferences for various sectors and stakeholder groups. More research is

required to understand (a) the full impact of conference attendance over the career of a delegate and the resulting outcomes of their conference attendance throughout their lifetime, and (b) reasons for the differences and the way these differences can be leveraged by interested parties, particularly for long-term or cumulative benefits. This and previous studies highlight that early career delegates are most likely to benefit from attending a business event, but many of the respondents are in their mid- to late careers. Further research is required to understand how to increase attendance in the early career delegate segment. As benefits are realised over the short, medium and long term, longitudinal studies are needed to collect observations on: (a) networking to stimulate new ideas and approaches to innovation; (b) initiation and establishment of international research collaborations; (c) showcasing research, implications for the profile of local individuals and their associations; and (d) improving sector knowledge, gathering expertise, providing professional development opportunities and establishing mentoring networks.

*Key words:* Legacy, Collaboration, Networking, Knowledge, Trust, Business Events

## **1 Introduction**

### *1.1 Case study focus*

How can conferences, especially international ones, be considered catalysts for thriving economies? What can happen at such events to energise or reboot the professional or business environments that support them? These environments need more than just financial resources to thrive; they often call for unique opportunities to showcase, construct, and brainstorm new ideas, strategies and technologies. Face-to-face communication and live presentations at such events can create a special impetus for developing new professional relationships and research collaborations that survive well past the closing ceremony.

Business Events Sydney (BESydney) has commissioned the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Business School's researchers to conduct a number of studies of business events held over the past 8 years in Sydney between 2009 and 2017. By *business events*, we mean "association conventions, corporate and government meetings, exhibitions, and incentive travel reward programs" (The Business Events Industry Strategy Group, 2008: i). It has already been recognized that business events attract high yield visitors in terms of expenditure and further, that the benefits derived from business events extend beyond the tourism contribution. However, the legacy of these non-tourism benefits has not been fully examined (Foley, Schlenker, Edwards & Lewis-Smith, 2013).

This case study draws on the most recent UTS study to understand more about the benefits and legacies of 12 events held over 2014 and 2015 (Edwards, Foley & Hergesell, 2016). Each of these events was secured for Sydney with the assistance of BESydney. This case study examines the broader legacies, which are derived from holding, and participating in, international conferences.

## 1.2 *Research context*

Historically, the evaluation of business events has traditionally focused on economic impact despite the fact that the objectives of events are varied, wide-reaching and rarely focused solely on profit maximisation or revenue generation (Pickernell, O'Sullivan, Senyard & Keast, 2009). Even so, these events are well established in the public-sector mentality as being valuable investments in the social as well as economic development of a location (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis & Mules., 2000; Dwyer, Jago and Forsyth, 2015; Dwyer, 2015), though the exact details of the social development role may be unclear (Business Events Council of Australia, 2010). With regard to the economic impact, it has been documented that visitors to business events have higher daily expenditures compared to all other tourists (Foley, Edwards, Hergesell & Schlenker, 2014b) resulting in the widely held view of the

business event delegate as the most desirable visitor in the world (Business Events Council of Australia, 2010).

The implicit connection between the tourism industry and business events has led to governments, convention bureaux and other stakeholders determining business events' value by directly measurable, economic impacts that relate, almost exclusively, to tourism metrics. The merit of business events has often been measured, for example, by visitor numbers, daily expenditure and nights spent away. As a result, there is a strong understanding of the direct expenditure of business events in terms of tourism spend (Foley et al., 2014b).

Additionally, there is a growing understanding that the value of business events extends well beyond expenditure benefits and that a business event should not be measured merely by its direct financial contribution (Dwyer et al., 2000). In fact, a number of studies have pointed to a lack of recognition for events' wider benefits (Carlsen, Getz & Soutar, 2001; Wood, 2009; Foley et al., 2013). As such, there is a clear need to evaluate events in more sophisticated ways that take us beyond the traditional economic impact measures (Pickernell et al., 2009; Dwyer et al., 2015).

Evaluating business events without taking account of these benefits seriously underestimates the value to delegates of attending business events and the legacies that they generate. Thus, a change in mindset is required to incorporate co-created value such that the full value of business events is captured. As Vargo and Lusch (2011) stated, "The global, networked economy becomes more pervasive and its nature more compelling, it is (or should be) becoming increasingly clear that we rely on one another through the voluntary exchange of applied skills and competences" (p. 181).

### *1.3 Groundbreaking Australian research on business event legacies*

Previous research (The Business Events Industry Strategy Group, 2008; Business Events Council of Australia, 2009, 2010; Jago & Deery, 2010; Teulan, 2010) has identified the sorts of opportunities that business events can provide. The opportunities identified include knowledge expansion, community “outcomes,” innovation and collaborative projects, international relations, trade opportunities, networking opportunities, education, and enhanced business to business relationships. Similarly, a number of industry reports (The Business Events Industry Strategy Group, 2008; Jago & Deery, 2010; Teulan, 2010) have offered evidenced-based examples of the economic benefits that business events can bring. However, until the recent work by UTS, no peer-reviewed, academic literature has been published examining non-economic legacies.

A pioneering Australian study to address this issue for business events directly and in detail was conducted in 2010 by UTS. Conferences were drawn from BESydney’s list of bid wins and were selected on the basis of two criteria. First, selection was made on the basis of the year in which the conference was held in order to compare and contrast the timeline effect of “legacy” delivery. Hence, conferences held in each year between 2007 and 2010 were selected. Second, conferences were drawn from a cross section of industry sector types to permit analysis of a reasonable breadth of business event contributions across different industry sectors. Data for the case studies were collected using in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis (Foley, Schlenker, Edwards & Hayllar, 2010). Through the analysis, six core themes emerged which reflect the benefits and outcomes that can arise from a business event: (a) knowledge expansion, (b) networking, (c) relationships and collaboration, (d) fundraising and future research capacity, (e) raising awareness and profiling, and (f) showcasing and destination reputation (Foley, Schlenker & Edwards, 2011; Foley et al., 2013).

Within these core themes, it was argued that there were more than 45 possible benefits, including the exchange of ideas, professional reputation, relationship bonds, resource ties, and much more. Application of new techniques and technologies, improved skills, and relocation to the conference destination to live and work can be considered tangible benefits. The 2010 study provided baseline evidence that confirmed the benefits derived from business events do extend beyond the tourism contribution (Foley et al., 2013).

#### *1.4 Most recent work*

This case study builds on this previous work by incorporating recent research conducted by UTS with support from BESydney (Edwards et al., 2016). The following sections introduce the methodology for the 2015 study, the type and nature of the delegates surveyed, benefits realised as outlined in the survey, discussion of the results with reference to previous studies, and interviews conducted in 2016 with delegates and stakeholders. Suggestions for future research and key concluding points appear at the end.

## **2 Methodology**

### *2.1 Data collection instrument*

The *Conferences: Catalysts for Thriving Economies* project (Edwards et al., 2016) was designed to examine a range of demographics, the tourism aspects of business event travel, and legacy outcomes of business events. The survey questionnaire incorporated questions regarding respondent demographics as well as key legacy questions.

The most significant social legacy items were identified from an analysis of previous beyond-tourism-benefit studies (Edwards, Foley & Schlenker, 2011; Foley et al., 2013). Qualtrics, an online survey program, was used to administer the delegate questionnaire. On behalf of BESydney and UTS, the

conference organisers distributed the survey to their database of delegates for each selected event. An e-mail inviting participation in the survey was distributed to business event attendees.

Given the breadth of the study, the research team was mindful that the questionnaire survey could not be too long. Therefore, all 45 legacy questions that were used in previous beyond tourism benefit (BTB) studies could not be used in this study. To condense the questionnaire a factor analysis was undertaken of the responses from previous BTB studies. Factor analysis reduces a large number of variables into a smaller set of variables. Secondly, it identifies the relationship between the variables, grouping them into relatively homogenous dimensions (factors). The most significant of these dimensions can be incorporated into a survey. . Thirteen legacy items representing four legacy dimensions were included in the survey (see Table 3). They represent a reduced set of from the 45 possible legacies. The questionnaire survey also sought respondents' overall satisfaction with service and functional aspects of their visit to Sydney.

Additionally, four 10-15 minute phone and four email interviews were conducted over several weeks (October and November 2016) with a selection of stakeholders from four of these conferences who were willing to comment on longer-term legacies from the viewpoint of one to two years post the survey period. Interviewees included three organizers; Professor William Ledger, University of New South Wales (medical sector); Dr Hal Lee, Bragg Institute, Nuclear Science & Technology and Landmark Infrastructure Site, NSW (technology sector) and Dr Irina Verenikina, University of Wollongong (cultural sector) who were all interviewed over the phone. Two researchers Dr Ian Lilley, University of Queensland (environment sector) and Dr Celmara Pocock, University of Southern Queensland (environment sector) and one practitioner delegate, Robin Aitken, Area Manager, Sydney, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (environment sector) were interviewed by email. Two staff from BESydney, Iain Stuart and Inga Davison, were interviewed by phone and by email, respectively. Comments from the interview transcripts and emails were used in this case study to

enhance the understanding of the survey results and to also provide some new perspectives.

**Table 1: The dimensionality of legacy**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Legacy items</b>
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Techniques</li> <li>• Technologies</li> </ul>
Collaboration Sector development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported the development of global research and business collaboration</li> <li>• Developed the knowledge and capabilities of early career delegates in Sydney</li> <li>• Developed professional practices that have enhanced outcomes for the community in Sydney</li> <li>• Improved the overall skills and ability of the sector in Sydney</li> <li>• Enabled the local sector to showcase their expertise to a global audience</li> <li>• Raised the international profile of Sydney</li> </ul>
Attract global talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like to live and work/study in Sydney</li> <li>• I have applied for a position to work/study in Sydney</li> <li>• I know others who have relocated to Sydney</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Due to the nature of the survey, not all respondents answered every question. The number of respondents answering each question is marked as “*n* = XXX” in the graph or table accompanying that question.

Due to small sample sizes for some conferences the decision was made to enhance the findings by grouping the conferences according to industry sector (Table 1, column 3). Using independent samples *t* tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA), legacy questions were analysed for any significant differences in terms of age, gender, delegate type, and place of origin. Statistical significance is based on SPSS-calculated independent samples *t* scores or ANOVA calculations. In statistical terms, differences termed “significant” are considered unlikely to have been caused by chance alone. Unless otherwise stated, differences are noted at the  $p < .01$  level.

## 2.3 Sample description

### 2.3.1 Conferences studied

This case study incorporates data collected from 12 conferences (see Table 1) held in Sydney, New South Wales between 2014 and 2015.

**Table 2: Business events surveyed, dates held and industry sector**

Conference	Held	Number of Attendees	Industry Sector
World Harp Congress (WHC)	Jul 2014	604	Music/Cultural
World Congress on Mild Approaches in Assisted Reproduction (ISMAAR)	Sep 2014	168	Medical
Polarised Neutrons in Condense Matter Investigations (PNCMI)	Sep 2014	60	Technology
4 <sup>th</sup> International Congress of International Society for Cultural and Activity Research (ISCAR)	Oct 2014	342	Cultural
World Green Infrastructure Congress (WGIC)	Oct 2014	371	Environment
Congress of the International Society for Burn Injuries (ISBI)	Oct 2014	903	Medical
International Conference on Walking and Liveable Communities (Walk21)	Oct 2014	502	Cultural
Communicating the Museum (CTM)	Nov 2014	265	Cultural
IUCN World Parks Congress (IUCN)	Nov 2014	6081	Environment
5 <sup>th</sup> INS/ASSBI Pacific Rim Conference (PRC)	Jul 2015	672	Medical
IEEE Multi-Conference on Systems and Control (MSC)	Sep 2015	317	Technology
World Hydrogen Technologies Convention (WHTC)	Oct 2015	320	Technology

The responses were grouped by industry sector (Table 3).

**Table 3: Number of useable responses by industry sector represented**

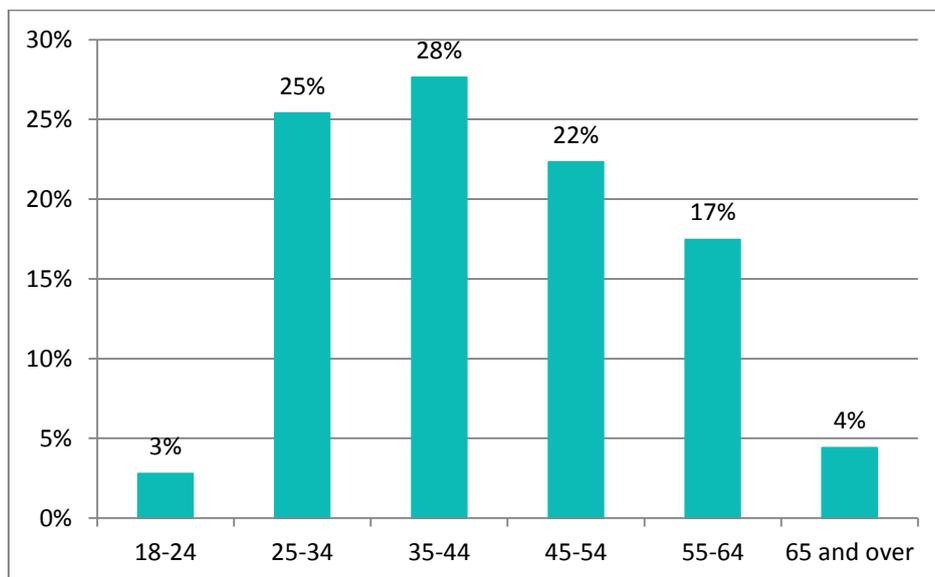
Industry Sector	No of useable responses
Cultural	233
Environment	613
Medical	164
Technology	100

### 2.3.2 Sample demographics

The data sample studied from the 2015 survey included respondents with completed surveys only ( $n = 1110$ ). Fifty six percent of respondents were female. Significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) in gender

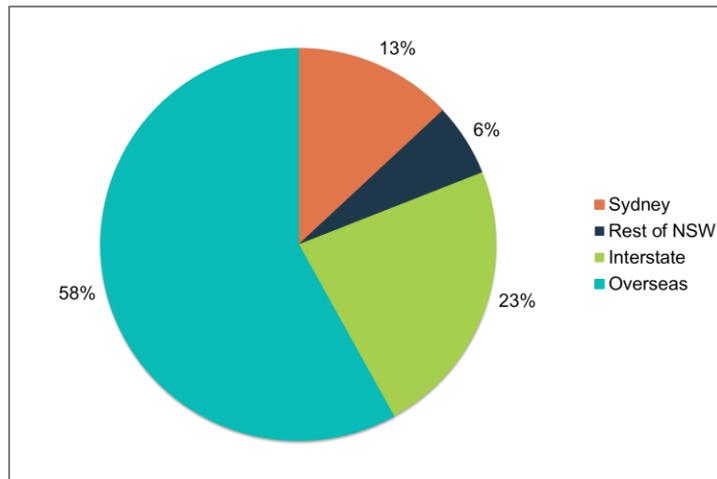
were noted between events which seems to be related to the respective conference focus: with the majority of World Harp Congress respondents being female (93%), and Multi-conference on Systems and Control respondents being male (92%).

The majority of attendees (75%) were aged between 25 and 54 years (see Figure 1). Significant differences in age were noted by event ( $p < .001$ ) with World Harp Congress having a significantly higher proportion of young respondents (up to 24 years of age) and older respondents (55–64 years of age). Significant differences are also noted by gender across all conferences with females tending to be younger and males tending to be older.



**Figure 1: Respondents by age ( $n=1110$ )**

It was found that more than half of the respondents were international attendees (58%) followed by interstate attendees (23%) (Figure 2). Of all international respondents, 96% came to Sydney because of the conference, staying an average of 4.6 days beyond the conference duration. Seventy-nine per cent of international respondents intend to visit Sydney again.



**Figure 2: Respondents by origin (n=1110)**

Sydney and interstate respondents were more likely to be female (64% and 65%, respectively). Meanwhile, international respondents were more likely to be male (52% of respondents). The largest source of interstate respondents was from Victoria (38%), followed by Queensland (21%).

Practitioner delegates comprised 54% all respondents followed by academic delegates (33%).

There were also significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) by age and gender, with exhibitors and academic delegates on average younger than practitioner delegates, and academic delegates more likely to be male.

Whilst there was a fairly even gender split between male and female respondents overall, this was where similarities ended. Domestic respondents were more likely to be female, younger, and the majority had visited Sydney previously. International respondents, by contrast, were more likely to be male, older, and travelled from North America or Europe to Sydney.

### 3 Benefits Realised

The results of the 2015 quantitative work (Edwards et al., 2016) will be outlined with regard to the four main areas of legacy: Innovation, collaboration, sector development and the attraction of global talent.

#### 3.1 Results of 2015 study

##### 3.1.1 Innovation

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that the conference exposed them to new ideas and knowledge (see Figure 3).

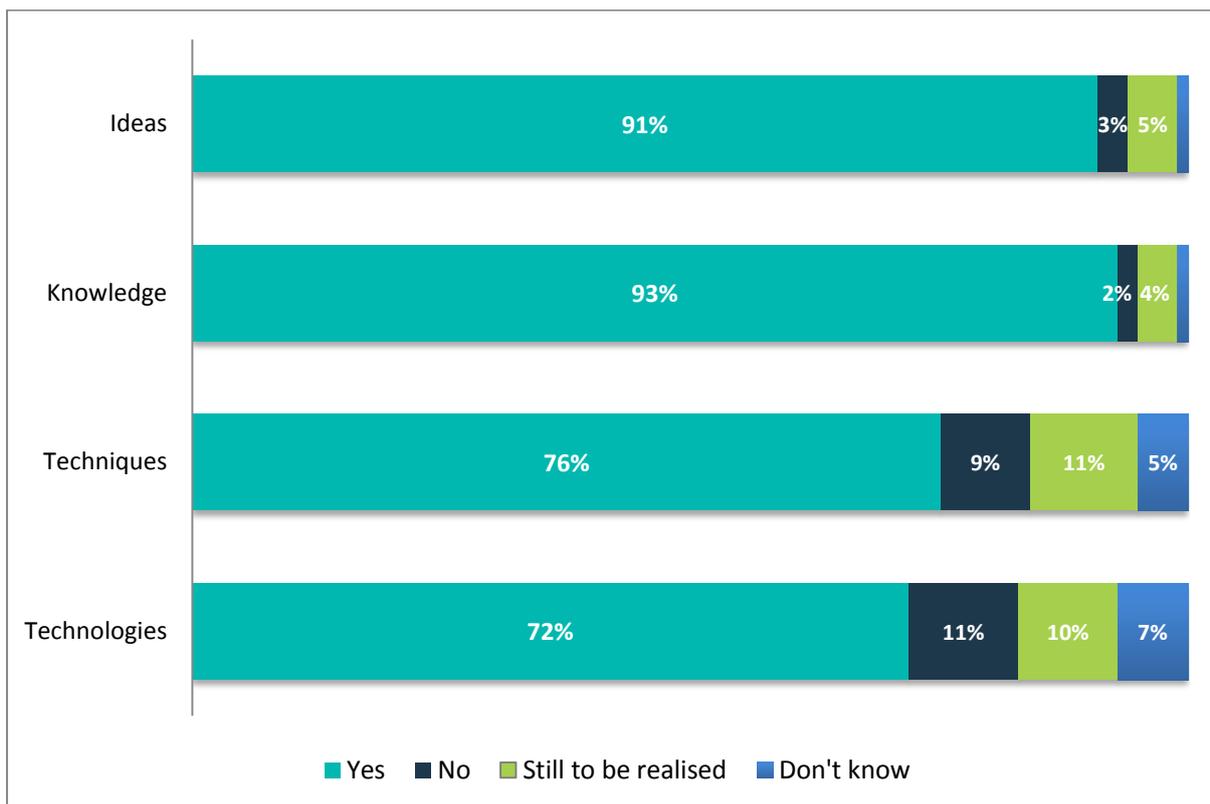


Figure 3: Delegates exposed to new and innovative practices and knowledge (n = 1160)

However, significant differences were noted across the four innovation items (see Figure 3) regarding exposure to new and innovative ideas, knowledge, techniques and technologies:

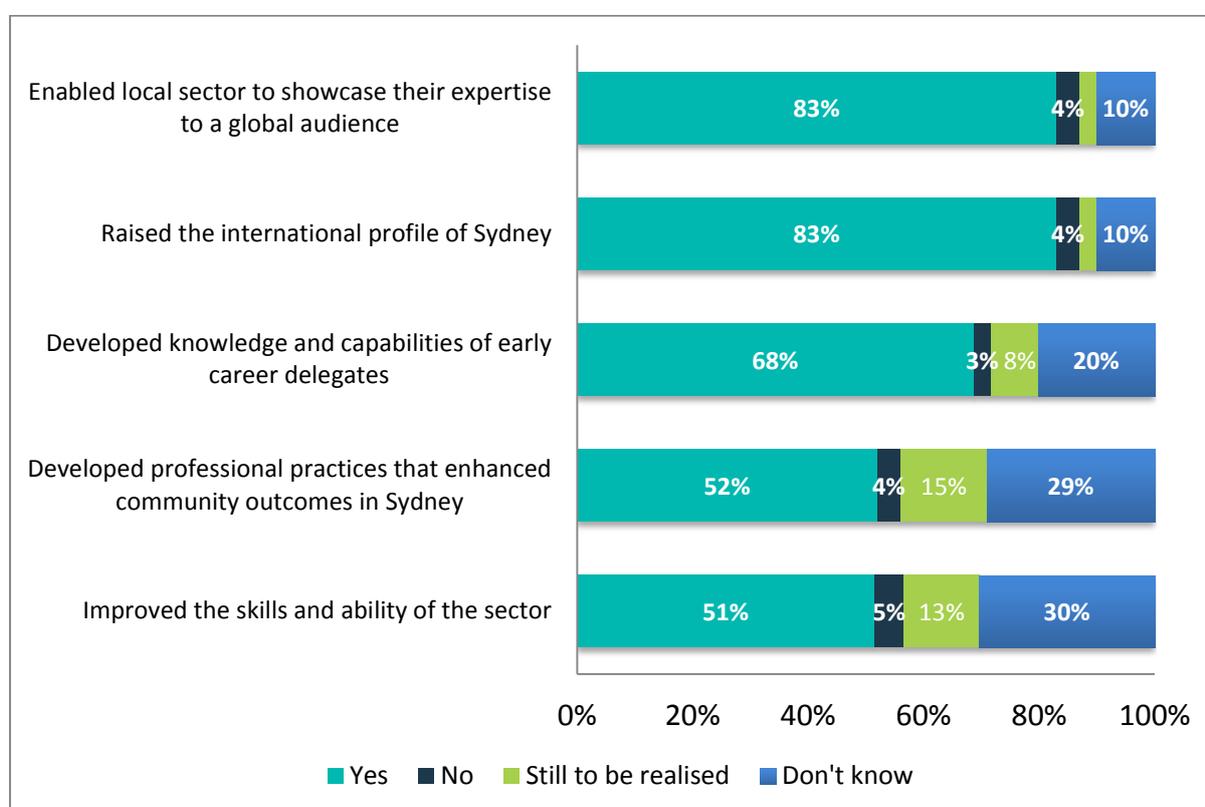
1. *Ideas*: Only the age group between 40 and 44 years were less likely to agree.
2. *Knowledge*: Respondents aged between 55 and 59 were less likely to agree. Meanwhile, those aged 50 to 54 years consider the benefit was still to be realised and those aged 30 to 34 were more likely to be unsure as to the benefit occurring. Respondents from the technology sector were more likely to agree that the benefits are still to be realised, while their counterparts from the medical sector were confident that benefits were realised. Respondents from the cultural sector, particularly the music delegates, were the most unsure.
3. *Techniques*: The cultural sector respondents were less likely to agree. Among those, European respondents were most likely to disagree and feel unsure, while respondents from Asia were more likely to feel that benefits were still to be realised.
4. *Technologies*: Respondents from the environment sector were less likely to agree, while those from the cultural sector were more likely to disagree and be unsure about this benefit. Academic respondents were more likely to disagree; however, exhibitor respondents were more likely to be unsure. Respondents from Europe were the most likely to disagree or are unsure of all the international attendees.

### 3.1.2 Collaboration

Seventy-six per cent agreed that the conference supported the development of global research and business collaborations. Thirteen per cent of respondents thought these benefits were still to be realised, suggesting that a longer timeframe may be required to establish such collaborations. The only significant difference noted was respondents from the music part of the cultural sector, who were more likely to disagree and more likely to not know.

### 3.1.3 Sector development

The majority of respondents (83%) agreed that the conference enabled the local sector to showcase its expertise to a global audience, raising the international profile of Sydney (see Figure 4). This was supported by all the event organiser interviewees who stated that they had received positive feedback from their members about the conference's location in Sydney (W. Ledger, I. Verenikina & H. Lee, personal communication, October 2016).



**Figure 4: Sector development (n = 1387)**

Significant differences were noted on the following items regarding:

1. *Knowledge and capabilities of early career delegates in Sydney*: Respondents from the environment sector were more likely to agree that this benefit is still to be realised, while respondents from the medical sector were less likely to agree that the benefits are still to be

realised. Those aged 25 to 29 years were more likely to disagree that this occurred and consider it a benefit that is still to be realised while respondents aged 30 to 34 consider it a benefit still to be realised.

2. *Professional practices that enhanced outcomes for the community in Sydney:* Asian respondents were more likely to agree, and less likely to respond, that they did not know, while respondents from Europe were more likely to respond with the latter answer. Meanwhile, the medical sector respondents were more likely to agree and consider the benefits to be realised at the time of the conference.
3. *Overall skills and ability of the local sector:* Music and medical sector respondents were more likely to agree than those from the technology and environment sectors. Meanwhile, respondents from Asia were less likely to respond “did not know”, and those from Europe were less likely to agree and more likely to respond that they did not know.

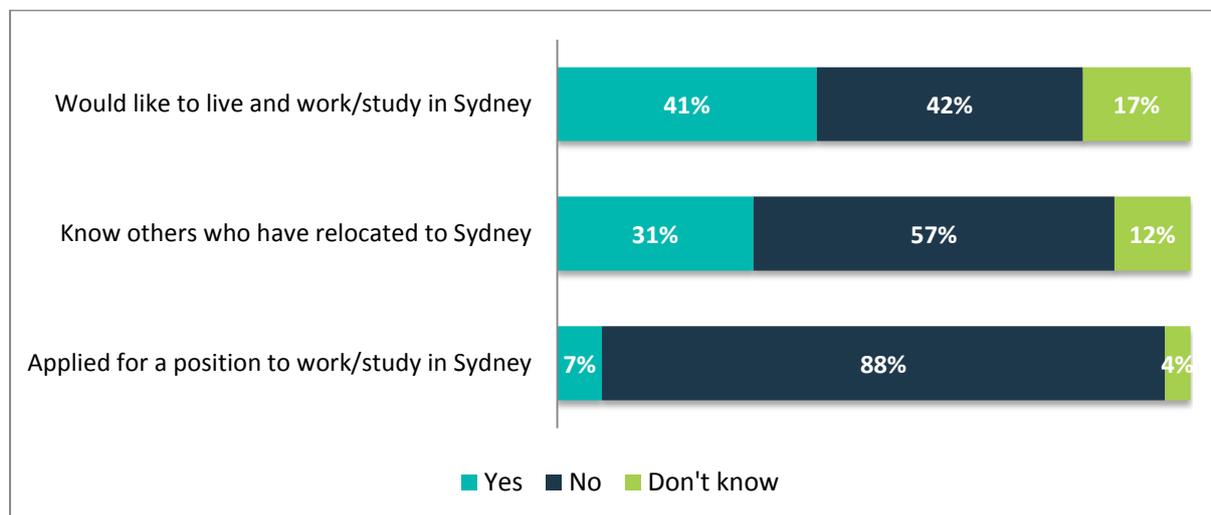
It was also found that the conferences surveyed allowed:

1. *The local sector to showcase their expertise to a global audience:* Most European respondents agreed with this, while those from NZ/Oceania and some from Europe were more likely to not to know. Of the different sectors, respondents from the technology sector were more likely to agree than the others that the benefit is still to be realised.
2. *The international profile of Sydney to be enhanced:* Respondents from the technology sector are more likely to believe this benefit is still to be realised, and from the cultural sector the music respondents were more likely to not know. A significant difference was found in the study of age groups with early career academics 25 to 29 more likely to consider this benefit is still to be realised, while those aged 40 to 44 more likely to be unsure.

### 3.1.4 Attracting global talent

Figure 5 demonstrates that conferences held in Sydney serve as an attractor for global talent, with 7% stating that they had applied for a position to work/study in Sydney as a result of attending the conference, and 41% stating that they would like to live and work/study in Sydney.

Of the respondents who said they had applied for a position to work/study in Sydney as a result of the conference, those aged between 18 to 24 years and 30 to 34 years were more likely to agree, while respondents aged between 50 to 54 and 60 to 64 were less likely to agree.

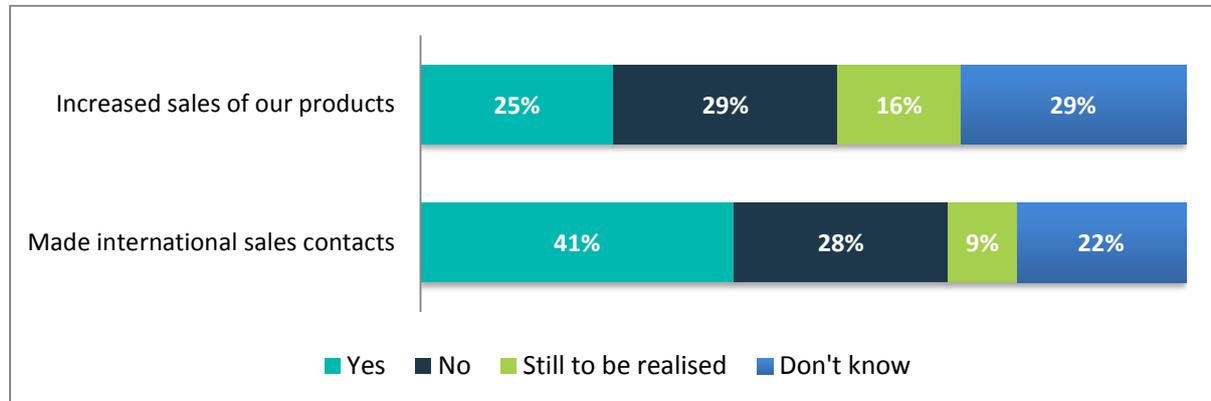


**Figure 5: Attracting global talent (n = 1090)**

Significant differences by age were noted in relation to the impact of the conference on delegates wanting or having applied to live, work and/or study in Sydney (items 1 and 3). Respondents aged between 60-64 years were less likely to agree with the statements. Respondents aged between 30 and 34 years were more likely to agree with the statements.

### 3.1.5 Benefits gained by exhibitors

A quarter of exhibitors said that they increased sales and 41% made international sales contacts (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Exhibitor benefits (n = 54)**

## 4 Discussion

Section 4 discusses these results incorporating data from the interviews undertaken with event organisers and delegates from the cultural, medical, technology and environment sectors that hosted the 12 conferences.

### 4.1 Key legacies

Aligning with other research the findings suggest the career stage of the delegate is important to legacy outcomes (Mata, Latham & Ransome, 2010; Edwards et al., 2011). For example early- and mid-career researchers are more likely to be stimulated by new ideas and knowledge than later career researchers. It can also suggest that conference attendance is an important step to career development (Vega & Connell, 2007).

An interesting distinction emerged between types of conferences. Delegates from the technology sector were more likely than medical delegates to think that there were benefits to be realised well

beyond the time of the conference. This result may indicate that innovation in the medical sector is more immediate and tangible in its application than is possible or practicable for the technology sector. Previous research on medical sector conferences has found that “experimental research findings are important to the [medical] practitioner due to their greater relevance for long range applicability to practice” (Clickner, Martin, Newton & Yablon, 1998: 12) as well as their application for practice (Christiaens, Abegglen & Rowley, 2008). Additionally, delegates attending music conferences reported the enhancement of skills and capability in the sector as clear conference outcomes. This suggests that music conferences also have a strong orientation to practice.

There are other benefits being experienced by the music and cultural conferences that, as yet, may not have been captured in full value research. Such benefits may include quality of life enhancements, the distribution of cultural ideas, and effect on the extra-aesthetic environment in which cultural activities are performed and received. Further research is required to investigate these sorts of distinctions.

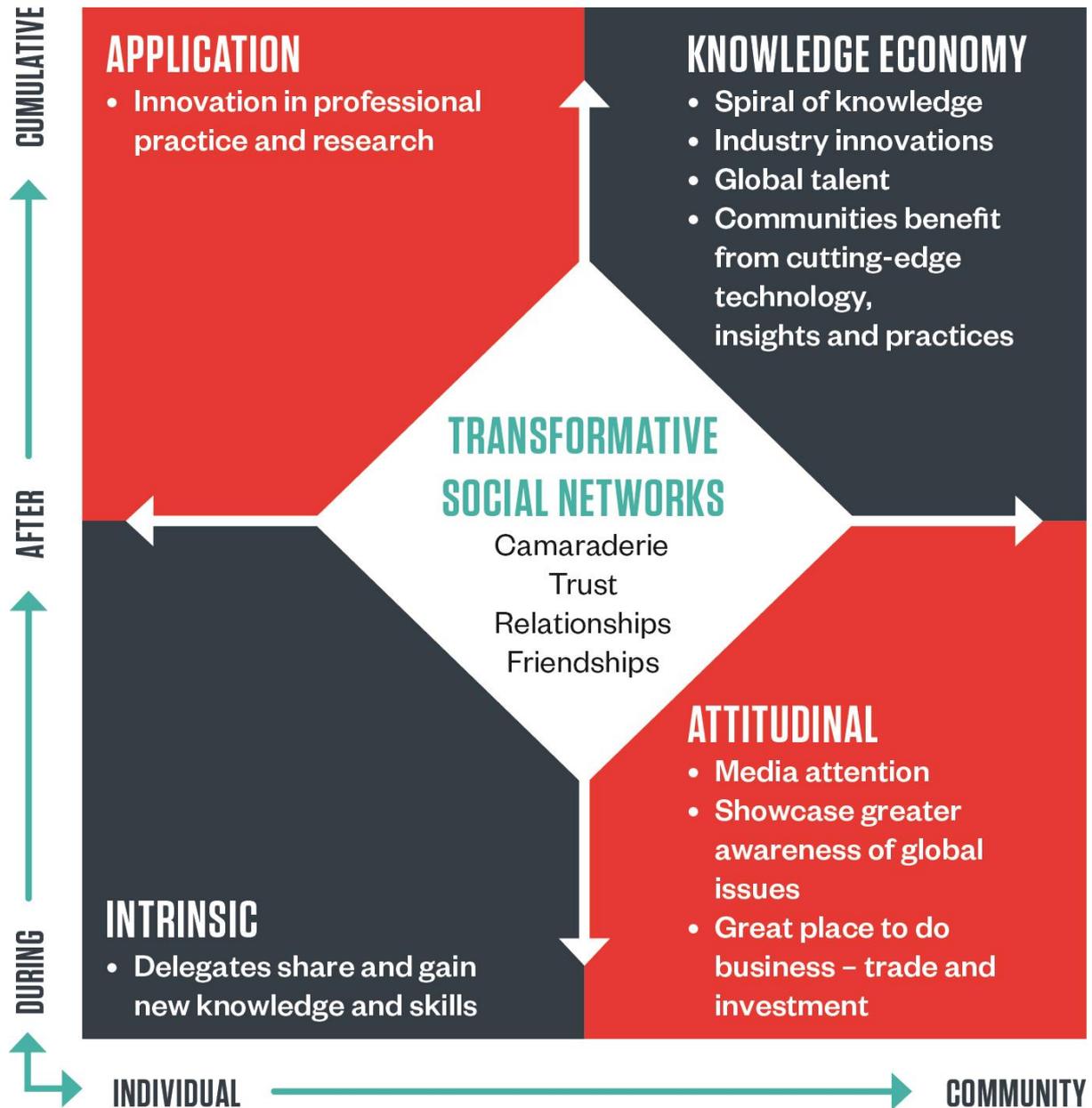
It appears certain that the benefits derived from business events are cumulative, occurring not only during the conference but also before and after the event. The findings continue to support previous studies (Foley et al., 2013; Foley et al., 2014b) that found that some of the most significant social outcomes from international conferences have culminated years after the event was held.

In addition, the benefits identified accrued to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, ranging from individual delegates to the broader community. Delegates gained new knowledge, technological expertise, and increased their professional networks. Additionally, exhibitors/businesses increased sales and networks, local communities now have practitioners who have better knowledge and

technology to use in their practices, Sydney and New South Wales have revitalised industry sectors and local retailers benefit from the business tourists spend.

#### *4.2 Benefits by timeframe for stakeholder groups*

Diagram 1 presents a model that reflects the benefits realised from international conferences in this and previous studies (Edwards et al., 2011; Foley et al., 2011; Foley et al., 2013; Foley et al., 2014b) in terms of the timeframe in which they are realised, and the stakeholder groups impacted—from individuals to communities. The diagram is based on that presented in Edwards et al. (2016).



**Diagram 1: Business events – long-term catalysts for thriving economies (Edwards et al., 2016: 2)**

Individuals can build social capital directly as event participants that are part of transformative social networks, which are active and accessible during business events. Delegates rely on meeting old contacts and getting to know new introductions through networking, formal presentations, and other activities during the event and immediately afterward. It helps if there is time and space at the event for this to happen naturally, or it can happen sometimes as a result of a special initiative, as in

conducting research at the event itself (I. Lilley, personal communication, October 2016). The recent study's respondents mostly agreed (76%) that their research and business collaborations were supported by the conference experience. Some sectors may require a longer time to build trust than others, however (H. Lee, personal communication, October 2016), while other factors may be in play such as conflicting individual research timelines (C. Pocock, personal communication, October 2016).

For instance, the 3rd Asia Pacific Regional International Solar Energy Society Conference (ISES 2008) was held in Sydney in 2008. The conference facilitated networking and collaboration opportunities through lectures and breakout discussions where people were encouraged to expand on particular ideas. The organiser stated "we specifically focused on structuring the conference so that people could discuss and build on their ideas. 80% is networking and 20% is the paper" (cited in Foley, Schlenker, Edwards & Hayllar, 2010: 16).

Communities can build social capital directly and indirectly from the benefits of transformative social networks that mobilize interactions and collaborations at conferences. These interactions and collaborations produce the benefits of innovation, economic development and societal change. Business events have a role in developing strong communities that are prepared for positive changes and resilient against negative changes. Conferences can drive societal change, for instance, by allowing a focus on sharing knowledge and agenda setting for medium to long-term strategic advocacy as in the case of the IUCN Parks Congress, which only meets every 10 years. Its most recent agenda (set at the Sydney congress) was consequently titled "The Promise of Sydney."

### 4.3 *During the event*

#### 4.3.1 Intrinsic

Holding international business events can provide a range of opportunities to break the ice and set up research collaborations with new synergies. Progress can be made on even the most complex research problems, when multiple and varied inputs are possible. During the 2010 study, delegates indicated that they gained new ideas and information to take back to improve practice in their own countries, as well as an increased appreciation for belonging to a global community of people working towards the same sorts of goals. One delegate stated, “I don’t feel so alone now in what I do” (Foley et al., 2010: 23). In the 2015 study, 91% of respondents agreed that their event exposed them to new ideas and 93% to new knowledge. Among those, the older participants over 40 were less likely to agree. Knowledge and capabilities were more likely to be developed as a result of the event by younger delegates, particularly those 25 to 29 years of age.

Even so, many more senior participants have received a boost from attending an international event. Dr Irina Verenikina noted that Australian delegates of all ages found the conference valuable as a way to create discourse between the two largest regional groups in the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research, namely Eastern Europe and Australasia. She observed that situating the event in Sydney in 2014 created both intra-national and international linkages as key legacies: “It was really important that it impacted on our community to unite us more and . . . also those people who came from overseas who were famous [in this area] talked to some [local] researchers” (I. Verenikina, personal communication, October, 2016). The latter led to establishing new research collaborations and knowledge sharing.

Robin Aitken (personal communication, October 2016), an area manager and long-time employee in the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, observed that her experience of the IUCN

Parks Congress 2014 challenged her notions of practice by showing her some examples of different ways of conducting parks management from other countries, particularly Russia. Like Verenikina, she also felt that attending her event gave her a shot of enthusiasm by being in close contact with so many like-minded peers.

The effect was also borne out in the technology sector where the placement of events meant a lot to researchers' morale and work. Professor Susan Scott noted that the 2007 international conference she hosted on general relativity occurred during

The long period while we were trying to actually achieve first detection (of cosmic gravitational waves). It was like, halfway through a 20-year period. So things were getting pretty glum a little bit, you know, we knew we were still deep in it, it was hard to get funding, it was hard to get interest, because you know there was a bit of a disbelief, we weren't ever going to do it. And so those conferences really helped keep the fire going in the middle of that two-decade period. Because we interested government, we interested the community, we interested students, and industry, and all of those things kept that spark going for the following 10 years. So it was a very pivotal part of what we were doing here in Australia. (Scott cited in BESydney, 2014a)

#### 4.3.2 Attitudinal

Showcasing research is often not an end in itself for successful business events. Many stakeholders associated with those events hope that long-term legacies go beyond the immediate "wow" factor of highlighting local discoveries. The Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining is a premier annual conference that brings together researchers and practitioners from data mining, knowledge discovery, data analytics and big data. Organisers and speakers include representatives from Microsoft, Visa, LinkedIn, Google, Facebook, Amazon and academics from Stanford, Cornell and MIT. KDD 2015 was the first Australian edition of KDD, and was its second time in the Asia Pacific region. In previous years, this meeting has been held in Beijing, China (2012), Chicago, USA (2013) and New York City, USA (2014; Association for

Computing Machinery, 2016). Minister for Trade, Tourism and Major Events, the Hon. Stuart Ayres MP observed that expectations for the impact of the event went well beyond revealing local achievements, and noted that hosting this conference in Sydney provided an opportunity to both showcase Australia's strong capability in this sector and to offer the ideal environment for international guests to develop new channels of communication with local talent in the data industry.

The 2015 study showed that most participants (83%) were both positive that their event enabled the local sector to showcase their expertise to an international audience and that it raised the international profile of Sydney. Most European participants agreed with this statement and 10% of the technology sector thought this benefit was still to be realised. It became evident from the interviews with participants from the technology sector that some benefits need time to accumulate after the event before local expertise becomes fully appreciated on the international scene.

For instance, Dr Hal Lee, an event organiser for the Polarised Neutrons in Condensed Matter Investigations Conference in 2014, saw this event as being important in the process of Australia's becoming recognized as a leading research node in this field. In his interview, Lee described a series of follow-up invitations, return visits and closer collaborations, which have led to local researchers gradually being held in higher esteem by the international physics community.

There were two main outcomes as an immediate result of this conference: First was increased opportunities to collaborate with other researchers from Japan and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, and second was the opportunity to establish new connections with European colleagues, particularly at newly opened research facilities with a similar intent. In regard to the latter, the event provided a space or "corridor" for delegates "to present latest developments and also find out what

other people are doing” (H. Lee, personal communication, October 2016). However, none of this would have happened if these overseas delegates had not witnessed local research firsthand and had the opportunity to talk to Australian experts at the 2014 event. It is also likely that another similar event could be held in Australia again further enhancing this reputation, due to the positive impression gained by overseas organisers of the professionalism and smooth running of the Sydney event (H. Lee, personal communication, October 2016).

The 2015 study also found that medical sector respondents were the most likely to agree that their events developed medical practices that enhanced sector and community outcomes by being held in Sydney. Conference organiser, Professor William Ledger also stated in a recent interview that his event’s success was aided by the location and affordability for both Chinese delegates and local junior colleagues. He noted that from his point of view the greatest legacy was “the links built with China and they (ISMAAR) keep talking about the meeting held in Sydney as the best one held so far” (W. Ledger, personal communication, 2016).

Sydney has also hosted a number of notable international medical events in the past, for instance, the International AIDS Society conference in 2007. The 2007 conference was considered important in raising awareness among international delegates of the research and scientific excellence of those working in the Australian HIV sector. Having over 1,000 Australian and New Zealand delegates at the conference provided a good local presence, and contributed to the reputation of the Australian HIV sector’s becoming known “as leaders in this area.” At the conference “people are looking at this country and what we do and saying ‘wow, they’ve got these key people, they’ve got this key research happening . . . certainly it would put us on the map for this sort of work” (Organiser cited in Foley et al., 2010: 11).

More recently, Professor Michael Boyer observed that the 2013 World Conference for Lung Cancer has:

led to great opportunities for [local delegates, and particularly younger delegates] to travel to the laboratories and clinical units of some of the people they met at the conference, it's cemented relationships that have become strong research collaborations, and those things have driven the kind of research we do here in Sydney at Lifehouse, as well as right across Australia. (Boyer cited in BESydney, 2014b)

#### 4.4 *After/Cumulative*

##### 4.4.1 Application

Innovation and application in many sectors can require individuals to take a long-term and strategic view of pursuing partnerships overseas well after the event has finished. It is likely that the total benefit is far more than that which comes immediately after attending the conference as people convert their knowledge and networking into new opportunities,

When people go home after a conference and they have had a good experience and made good memories and networks they continue discussions with other researchers they met here. Our university has licensed products in many countries, so the conference facilitated business links that strengthen commercialisation opportunities in the future. (ANZSES interview in Foley et al., 2010: 16)

In the recent study, a number of questions had some participants answering "still to be realised" due to the timeframe, and the interviewees outlined a number of possible reasons (e.g., building trust, need for incremental progress and funding cycles). For instance, some interviewees who had set up research collaborations as a result of their 2014 conferences are only now receiving funding towards their research projects (H. Lee & W. Ledger, personal communication, October 2016). Rob Gilchrist, an Australian researching assisted reproduction who attended the 2014 ISMAAR conference only recently received a large private grant to work with research collaborators in China whom he met at the conference (W. Ledger, personal communication, October 2016).

In the longer term, there are sometimes instances when business events can also be viewed chronologically as reference points in time for a change of paradigm. For instance, the 22nd International Congress of the Transplantation Society was held in Sydney in 2008 during which “much of the scientific debate in Sydney centred on bioengineering and how to construct organs, rather than transplant them. We may well find that in a decade’s time the Sydney meeting will be the turning point in this field” (organiser cited in Foley et al., 2010: 5). Given the long lead time in moving from scientific discussion and debate to the development of new techniques, technologies and practices in this field, it is likely that there are many other benefits yet to be realised out of this congress. Even so it could be considered the point in time when the balance tipped towards a new approach.

#### 4.4.2 Knowledge economy

The spiral of knowledge that flows out of a particular event is one that is worthwhile tracking over a longer period. No one has all the knowledge, and therefore solutions are produced by “the interactions of people each of whom possesses only partial knowledge” (Hayek, 1945: 530). Professor Susan Scott has articulated this sentiment in relation to hosting the General Relativity International Conference in 2011, stating

We brought together the sort of, theory side of the community and the gravitational waves side, and we really need that interaction. We need the expertise from both of those sides to be passed between one group and the other, and it really made it start to happen. So that was a very pivotal time for us to have those conferences. (Scott cited in BESydney, 2014a)

Professor Michael Boyer has also observed that hosting the World Conference on Lung Cancer has shown him more about how his area medical expertise progresses through event hosting and attendance. He has noted that,

It has made me all sorts of contacts that I wouldn’t have otherwise made, it’s resulted in me getting to travel to places and meet people, talk to people, and actually become aware of

how important conferences – and the whole organisation that goes around them – are in the advancement of medicine. (Boyer cited in BESydney, 2014b)

Finally, attracting global talent as a benefit of a conference requires a longer perspective to measure adequately. This is because people may not be able to obtain a job immediately after a conference or to move straight away. It could also be something that burns away in the back of their minds until the time is right and the opportunity arises. As such, results indicate that this is an outcome, but one that it is more difficult to document over the short term.

#### *4.5 Enablers and barriers*

The scale and focus of an event can enable the possibility of establishing focused research agendas. It became apparent from the interviews that larger events may be better for a broad appreciation of expertise and ideas and therefore useful for a high number of short encounters with peers. Meanwhile, some smaller events, particularly technical and medical ones, can afford to be highly focused, as most delegates have the requisite level of knowledge or expertise. For example, Dr Hal Lee from the Polarised Neutrons in Condensed Matter Investigations Conference in 2014 made the point that detailed research agendas can be developed during and after such conferences, particularly if these events have attracted enough key researchers from that area by their design, affordability and location (H. Lee, personal communication, October 2016).

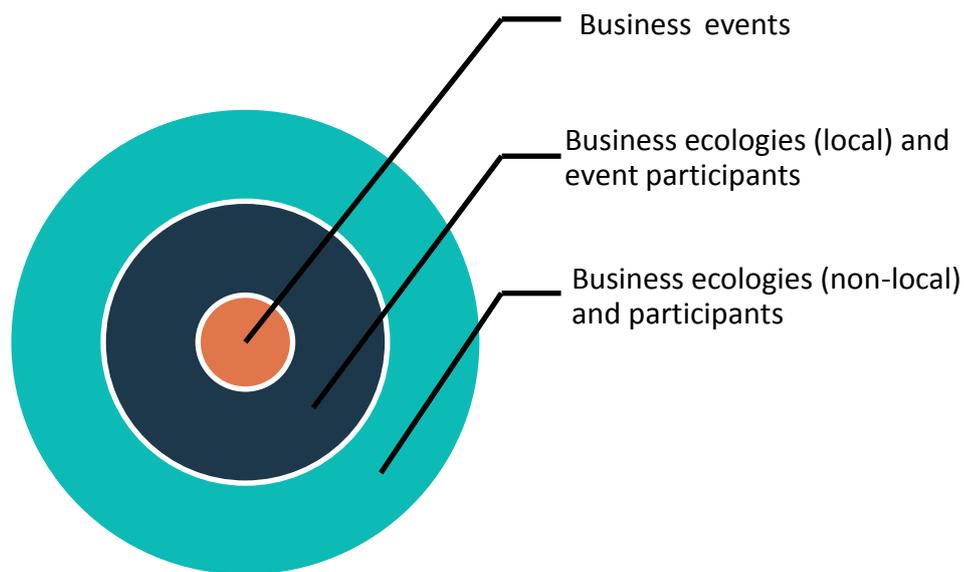
Longer-term barriers to accumulated benefits are more nebulous and difficult to define at this stage. However, some examples might include: a breaking of trust by falling out of communication for some reason (e.g., lost contact details, conflicting timelines for research); and difficulties with funding (particularly to meet again face-to-face, as in the cultural sector). Future research on these aspects could bring greater clarity and provide information on how to avoid such difficulties as part

of the conference design. Of these, the first would be the easiest to avoid by event organisers ensuring full contact lists are available to all delegates.

#### 4.6 *Glocalism and events*

Like many other types of events, it is not only participants who support business events. A glocal business ecology (the process of combining the global and the local resources in holding unique events) is operating in the background of international conferences. The local and non-local business environments that comprise this ecology provide direct and indirect support through combining existing international and local organisational resources (see Diagram 2). The events themselves are glocal agents that allow for a unique construction of place, people and experiences. While globalism highlights the universality of worldwide cultural or corporate processes, glocalisation emphasizes the particularization of product, service and theme of a local culture (Matusitz, 2010). The latter is crucial in the development of a knowledge economy that draws on both global and local resources simultaneously and that can be tracked by way of documenting certain influential themed business events' legacies.

The rise in professionalism in event management and use of social media are providing a new foundation for greater experiments in *event glocalism* where, for instance, both local and international business ecologies can get a boost through supporting the same international conference (Thornton, 2000). The more successful the event is, the healthier the local business ecology becomes (for all stakeholders public, private and nongovernmental organisations) and the better that is for creating a positive impact and relationship between the local and global business ecologies (see Diagram 2).



**Diagram 2: Glocalism and business events (based on du Cros & Jolliffe, 2014: 147)**

Pittman and McLaughlin (2012) argue that face-to-face conferences are more effective than digital events at building “global collaborations, economic partnerships and social and cultural capital that can help sustain international relationships, professional conference groups and partner tourism entities in a digital age” (p. 4). Most interviewees also agreed they benefitted from this contact. In terms of the glocal nature of this contact, Professor John Mattick of the Garvan Institute of Medical Research observed: “We find that conferences are extraordinarily valuable in terms of our ability to network with individuals, because it brings the world to us and brings us to the world at the same time” (Mattick cited in BESydney, 2016).

To facilitate these outcomes, business event organisers and participants need widespread glocal support from business, industry, governments and education sectors, which provide financial support to the individuals who travel to different regions for the opportunity to meet with other professionals at conferences. By the same token, innovative business event organisers and promoters are also needed to ensure that the place, people and experiences are optimal for delegates.

#### 4.6.1 Glocalism, successful events and highly targeted destination marketing

BESydney is a new-look version of an older more generic destination marketing organisation. Whilst having a fairly straightforward mission to assist Australian professional associations in the bidding for lucrative business events to be held in the city, it is also required to deal with a broad range of stakeholders' needs and clients' aspirations for their events. This mission requires an outlook that is a tight combination of local and global in order to appreciate what will be successful in this respect. Not only that, the organisation found that carefully documenting research with the assistance of UTS on lessons learned and legacies accumulated has given it a growing competitive edge in its dealings with clients (I. Stuart, personal communication, October 2016).

More than one interviewee expressed praise for BESydney's assistance in tendering for conferences and providing support regarding operation. The ISMAA organiser, Professor William Ledger (personal communication, October 2016), observed that based in part on the good impression given by their 2014 Sydney conference, they were able to secure the 2021 Federation of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians—a much larger medical event attracting over 7,000 delegates. More specialized destination marketing organisations of this kind could be the way of the future for global cities in focusing desired legacy-producing conferences.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

Previous studies of business event legacies have mainly concentrated on tourist expenditures and business networking benefits. As such, broader legacies have barely been considered and certainly not with reference to a broad range of sectors. There has also been little reference to timeframes for delivering such benefits, and the distinction between immediate and cumulative benefits, depending on the sector, or how an event might be considered pivotal in generating change. This case study is

the result of research going back almost 10 years. It has employed a range of research methods to uncover new insights over this time on these matters.

Overwhelmingly, respondents in this study indicated that attending these conferences enabled them to gain new ideas and knowledge, increased global research and business collaborations and enabled the local sector to showcase their expertise to a global audience, raising Sydney's international profile. Innovation comes from new ideas and knowledge, and academics and practitioners are aware that no one in isolation has the wisdom to create the innovations that are required to compete globally and empower the spiral of knowledge in their sector.

Business events also assist delegates to translate their knowledge into practice and policy change. Such international conferences in Sydney are the lifeblood of industry innovation both locally and globally in the various sectors they represent. Face-to-face interactions at these events are key to building transformative social networks, which have trust, friendship and camaraderie as their foundation.

International conferences reduce physical distance, sometimes a barrier to building trust for collaboration. This enables value co-creation that drives innovation and business transformation, increases sales and networks and provides local communities with practitioners who have enhanced knowledge and technology to use in their practices. In these ways business events have revitalised industry sectors in Sydney and the greater New South Wales area.

Findings from this study demonstrate that holding successful business events in an Australian context can play a crucial role in contributing to advancing Australia's National Innovation Science Agenda. It is essential for governments to transition from valuing business events for their expenditure outputs to recognising them as transformative social network spaces.

## 5.2 *Future research*

The global relationships, established as a result of these events, for building long-term legacies are an aspect that is rarely examined and future studies of the kind described here can contribute greatly to filling this gap. Accordingly, as well as continuing to monitor event value co-creation, further work is needed to investigate barriers to cumulative legacies and how event design or delivery could aid in enhancing long-term outcomes. There are significant differences between the experiences and outcomes of international conferences for various stakeholder groups, which may have implications for event organisers, national and international associations, exhibitors and sponsors, convention bureaus and their partners, governments and other stakeholders. More research is required to understand the reasons for the differences and the way these differences can be leveraged by interested parties.

The full potential of building sector capacity and enhancing individual professional capacities are more likely to be realised over a longer term timeframe. Thus a longitudinal study is needed that would collect observations on: (a) networking to stimulate new ideas and approaches to innovation; (b) initiation and establishment of international research collaborations; (c) showcasing research, implications for the profile of local individuals and their associations; and (d) improving sector knowledge, gathering expertise, providing professional development opportunities and establishing mentoring networks.

Finally, this and previous studies highlight that early career delegates are most likely to benefit from attending a business event where they can meet the leaders in their field, establish mentoring networks and research collaborations, and showcase their emerging research whilst those in their mid- to late careers can benefit from younger delegates' fresh outlook and maintain networks with global colleagues. Further research is needed to understand the full impact of conference attendance

over a delegate's career and the resulting outcomes of conference attendance throughout their lifetime.

There are many benefits possible for conferences such as those listed above. Some groups are better able to generate and access them than others. Cognisant of the range of benefits delivered through attendance at business events, conference organisers interviewed noted that they try to provide sponsorship to underprivileged groups or build some measure of affordability into the conference design. These endeavours are admirable as greater diversity can only lead to greater opportunities for discovery and innovation. It is not surprising that for a long time conferences have been "perceived as scientifically credible land-marks, anchors, or summaries of current knowledge" (Ferguson, 1993), which provide focused attention on complex societal problems.

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## Appendix: List of Interviewees (October / November 2016)

Interviewee name	Affiliation(s)	Role	Sector
Robin Aitken	Area Manager, Sydney, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	Delegate	Environment Sector
Inga Davison	BESydney	BESydney staff	-
Professor William Ledger	University of New South Wales	Organizer	Medical Sector
Dr Hal Lee	Bragg Institute, Nuclear Science & Technology and Landmark Infrastructure Site, NSW	Organizer	Technology Sector
Dr Ian Lilley	University of Queensland	Delegate	Environment Sector
Dr Celmara Pocock	University of Southern Queensland	Delegate	Environment Sector
Ian Stuart	BESydney	BESydney staff	-
Dr Irina Verenikina	University of Wollongong	Organizer	Cultural Sector