



## **Bleisure in Helsinki**

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## Abstract

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<p>Bleisure has been around for some time now, but it has not been so deeply studied as other forms of tourism. This thesis attempts to understand bleisure in Helsinki specific to international congresses and from what has already been written about it. The outcome of the research conducted would discover new marketing strategies that could be used by Helsinki and its stakeholders to better attract international delegates to stay longer in Helsinki. A blend of qualitative and quantitative methods was used throughout the research.</p> <p>This was done through researching Helsinki as a congress destination and competition destinations, conducting interviews with experts in the field of MICE travel, benchmarking different congress destination marketing, and surveying international delegates at congress events.</p> <p>The target group for this thesis is international delegates that attend congresses in Helsinki. The survey was answered by fifty congress attendees from four different congresses. Though there were Finnish people that answered the survey, some insight was revealed from the results of the survey.</p> <p>Findings on the results for the survey will be discussed and have visual representation of the division of answers. Benchmarking from three congresses is presented and the differences that were found from them.</p> <p>Suggestions for those that this research can benefit will be explained as well as how this research could be continued. This thesis' time constraints, narrow focus, and lack of resources will not lead to any new discoveries or insights, but it has been educational and can teach those who are not familiar with bleisure.</p> <p>Conclusion will be discussed and suggestions on what should have been done differently, as well as what could be done in the future to continue such research. A self-reflection of what the author has learned.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Business leisure travel, Bleisure travel, tourism.

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## 1 Introduction

The idea for this thesis was presented by Leena Lassila, of Helsinki Partners. Helsinki Partners is a city marketing, investment and talent attraction company owned by the City of Helsinki. (Helsinki Partners, 2022) Leena Lassila is the director of the Visitor Attraction team in Helsinki Partners. Visitor Attraction is comprised of two teams, Congress & Travel Trade. Congress works with meetings & congresses and Travel Trade works to promote Helsinki as a travel destination to tour operators. The Congress team is also known as Helsinki Convention Bureau.

Leena Lassila proposed the thesis topic as an opportunity to further research delegates of international meetings & congresses. Since Helsinki Partners is owned by the city of Helsinki, the more congresses that come to Helsinki and the more people they bring also brings in more money to the city. Hotels, transportation services, convention venues, and several other organizations are supported by these events. Increases in tourism supports the growth of hotels, restaurants, and other forms of entertainment, which creates more jobs and the growth of the city. Helsingin tekijät is an organization that works with companies and organizations that want to be a part of the Helsinki brand and work together to develop Helsinki as a smart and sustainable destination, and to be involved in growing Helsinki in international recognition and image. (Helsingin Tekijät 2022, 2) This network of local businesses as well as those that do not belong to that group would benefit from better understanding these foreign congress attendees, catering to their more focused needs, market more effectively to them, and so on. Helsinki Convention Bureau can support congress organizers and business event professionals in the bidding process, in selecting the best facilities, partners and service providers, as well as in promoting their events. (Helsinki Partners, 2022) While the Helsinki Convention Bureau works with helping congresses start in Helsinki, they do not have much contact with them after that. Helsinki Convention Bureau focuses on getting international or European congresses.

The current typical process of how congresses are organized are; these congresses will either have their own professional congress organizer, or they can choose a professional congress organizer to help them with a variety of needs. This can be from handling accommodation to logistics and financial management. They can also arrangement any activities for the delegates outside of the professional congress, such as tours, concerts, or trips.

The main objective of this thesis is to research and better understand international attendees of congresses. The outcome of this research would uncover new strategies to market to the congress attendees that would benefit company partners. In this research, a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. The most efficient way to speak with them was to attend the

congresses they visited. A qualitative survey was created for the visitors to answer, thus helping us further our understanding of them. The main questions are:

1. How many foreign attendees of international congresses extend their stay while in Helsinki?
2. What would it take to get those that don't extend their stay to do so?

Having these delegates extend their stay in Helsinki would bring in more money to the city. They would spend more on hotels, eating out at restaurants, joining in entertainment the city has to offer. The more business these organizations receive, the more they are invested in, and services can be improved. This brings in more money into those businesses, opens new employment opportunities, and creates more growth for the city.

There is a considerable amount of room for this growth to occur. One of the main challenges of this growth is marketing to the international delegates. However, there are codes of ethics that prevent these types of events from being marketed to for any other reason besides the advancement of health care. This code of ethics is called the PhRMA Code on Interactions with Health Care Professionals. Due to the PhRMA Code, created by The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, international congresses that focus on the healthcare or scientific industry have strict standards about advertising any sort of leisure either at the events or to the attendees. This code is "... to reinforce our intention that our interactions with healthcare professionals are professional ex-changes designed to benefit patients and to enhance the practice of medicine". (PhRMA, 2021, 2)

This took effect on July 1, 2002. It means that a scientific congress can offer information about the city destination if it does not promote leisure in any way. For example, a congress organizer can have a link on their website that would lead guests to MyHelsinki.fi, a website that offers information on anything from scenic walking routes and other activities to fill the day to newest hotels and restaurants to visit. They are not however, allowed to post any articles from MyHelsinki.fi that would promote leisure. This makes marketing leisure to congress delegates much more difficult.

This thesis focuses on international congresses. The Union of International Associations define international as "... the involvement of at least three countries on an equal footing, to the possible exclusion of bilateral international bodies and those in which a particular country is dominant. Indications of "internationality" include distribution of board members, location of congresses, rotation of secretariat, source of finance, and membership." (UIA, 2022, 10) This means that congresses that only involve Finland or just one other country, such as Sweden, it would not be an

international event. However, an event that includes the Nordic countries, which would include Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark would be considered an international congress.

International delegates are the target group for this thesis. Even though domestic tourism is important to the economy, it is not the focus of Helsinki Partners. Helsinki Partners invests in international businesses, talent, and visitors coming from outside of Finland. Bleisure is the focus subject instead of business travel and leisure travel because of the opportunity these international delegates must combine the two.

## 2 Bleisure

Bleisure is a term used when discussing business leisure travel. The term bluxury has also been known to explain business leisure travel, but neither term is well known by anyone who does not specifically work in or study the industry. The meaning of bleisure is the practice of combining business travel and leisure travel into one trip. (Expedia Group, 2018, 3) Business turn into bleisure if the businessperson adds leisure extensions to their business trip, brings along friends or family members on the trip, is involved with extra social events or takes excursions on the trip, or returns to the location for leisure purposes. (Brookes-Sykes, Davidson, Doheny & Mainprice, 2005, 2)

While extending a business trip to include leisure is the most common method of bleisure travel, there are other ways to include it. The idea of an office job, where one comes in and sits at a desk in-front of their computer has been changing for some time. While Covid-19 restricted the ability to travel, working from home helped people realize that an office was no longer a necessity to get work done. Since Covid-19 is becoming less of an issue for most of the world, the bleisure market and been expanding as people want to experience more on their travels. (Davidson & Kesar, 2022, 3)

According to Expedia (2018, 7-34) The most common career fields of bleisure travellers are, technology/IT, manufacturing, finance, healthcare, and education. Many travellers will spend the same amount or more on a bleisure trip. Certain factors may influence the decision to add leisure to a business trip, such as the if the destination is known for its entertainment, how close the business to the weekend will the business end, and the amount of personal costs needed.

### 2.1 Categories and motivations

Tourism is a broad term and can be broken down into several categories. The same can be said for bleisure travel as well. Four main categories of bleisure travellers are experiential learners, escapers, working vacationers, altruistic knowledge sharers, and research-active trailblazers. (Lichy & McLeay, 2018, 14-19) These categories created a broad and clear view of different types of bleisure travellers. Davidson and Kesar discuss the ways that individuals can introduce leisure into a work trip. Extending their business trips for a day or more to engage in leisure activities, when they come accompanied by spouses or partners who spend their time in leisure activities in the destination, when they participate in leisure elements of the business event, such as excursions to locals places of interest, or when they are inspired to return to the destination with their friends or families for leisure purposes – or encourage others to do so. (Davidson & Kesar,

2022, 3) One discusses how bleisure trips are taken and the other explains the motivations of introducing leisure into a business trip.

The next article discusses the push and pull factors of bleisure tourism, luxury tourism, and bluxury tourism. (Shi, Yi, Shi & Satta, 2022, 35) It was briefly mentioned by Lichy & McLeay, but this article goes into deeper detail. They discuss different psychological and physical push factors like improving and developing oneself and giving the body rest and relaxation. They include pull factors of the destinations that are tangible like restaurants and hotels as well as the intangible like the exchange rate of currency or a safe and secure environment. (Shi, Yi, Shi & Satta, 2022, 40)

## **2.2 Marketing to bleisure travellers**

After understanding the categories and motivations of bleisure travellers, next is to discuss how these travellers are marketed to and the bleisure tourism experience chain model. (Jin, Yoon-Kyung, Byong-Kook & Soon-Hong, 2020, 303) The bleisure tourism experience chain model is split into three sections, pre-event, during event, and post-event. The middle stage, “during event”, is essential to business tourism because, in addition to the transportation, business travellers’ most economically substantial activities occur in this stage. (Jin, Yoon-Kyung & al. 2020, 304) Most bleisure travellers take a business trip at least every two to three months, with those trips tending to last between two to three nights. (Expedia Group, 2018, 7) This gives a narrow window for businesses to influence those business travellers to introduce leisure to their trip.

The Destination Management Organizations, DMO for short, were less likely to invest abundant resources in developing ancillary programs like outdoor team-building activities. (Jin, Yoon-Kyung & al. 2020, 306) It also relates to Davidson’s and Kesar’s findings that sixty-six out of eighty-seven conventions bureaus never run campaigns to promote opportunities for business visitors to prolong their stay in a destination. (2022, 12)

## **2.3 Work and well-being**

Most articles and blogs focus on the positive impacts on bleisure on an environment. (Goodwings 2021; Doyle 2022; Adecco Group 2022) How it can boost economy and further develop skills and knowledge of everyone involved. In some cases, multiple workplaces, irregular work hours, and increased workload bring new requirements and challenges for travellers. (Tian & Honggang, 2020, 4) Tian and Honggang’s research also focused on the negative impacts on business tourism on a traveller. They mention that jobs requiring frequent trips tend to have greater demand and more difficult challenges and this can cause stress and put people under pressure. Not only the effect the travel itself has an impact on the traveller, but the effect being away from their home could have on relationships is also discussed.



## 2.4 Congresses

Ranking	City	Meetings	Global %
1	Singapore	1,041	7.9
2	Brussels	854	6.5
3	Seoul	547	4.2
4	Paris	381	2.9
5	Vienna	296	2.3
6	Bangkok	279	2.1
7	Tokyo	255	1.9
8	London	206	1.6
9	Lisbon	195	1.5
10	Madrid	193	1.5
11	Berlin	187	1.4
12	Helsinki	179	1.4
13	Geneva	176	1.3
14	Barcelona	149	1.1
15	Copenhagen	132	1.0
16	Stockholm	130	1.0
17	Busan	128	1.0
18	Montréal QC	125	1.0
19	Amsterdam	119	0.9
20	Sydney NSW	102	0.8
21	Oslo	99	0.8
22	New York NY	92	0.7
23	Abu Dhabi	83	0.6
24	Jeju	80	0.6
25	Rome	75	0.6

Figure 1 The image shows the top 25 cities hosting international association meetings in 2019 (adapted from UIA International Meetings Statistics Report 2022, 24)

As you can see in figure 1, Nordic countries, to be so small compared to other major destinations, fair extremely well in attracting congresses. Helsinki hosted more congresses than Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Oslo. Granted, the list does only count Type A congresses.

Please see Appendix 1.

This could mean that the numbers shown in the image above could be higher for all countries. Nonetheless, Helsinki is no doubt successful in attracting congresses. The reason that 2019 is included in this study is to help prove that Helsinki is indeed one of the most attractive destinations for congresses. Since Covid-19 has had an enormous global impact and tourism sector was virtually frozen for two years. Many congresses and meetings were cancelled entirely or moved online due to Covid-19 and the numbers of physical congresses dropped dramatically. Simply put, the more congresses Helsinki hosts, the more hotel rooms are booked, and more money comes into the city.

## 2.5 Tourism

Table 1 Guests by night by reporting country, nationality and time (adapted from Nordic Statistics 2023)

		2019	Percentage	2020	Percentage	2021	Percentage
Denmark	Total	21 037 168	19 %	11 690 061	18 %	15 063 521	19 %
Finland	Total	18 449 824	17 %	10 521 600	16 %	13 070 464	17 %
Norway	Total	25 024 305	23 %	14 726 373	23 %	16 381 880	21 %
Sweden	Total	46 427 917	42 %	26 985 699	42 %	34 588 060	44 %
		110 939 214	100 %	63 923 733	100 %	79 103 925	100 %

Table 1 shows the number of booked rooms per year for the entire country. Some countries count different types of accommodation, and the data was gathered from many different sources so the exact numbers could vary somewhat. The guests were not able to be singled to all international foreigners, so the numbers include domestic tourism which could also have an effect. Besides these factors, the data shows that among the Nordic countries, Finland does not receive as many tourists than the rest.

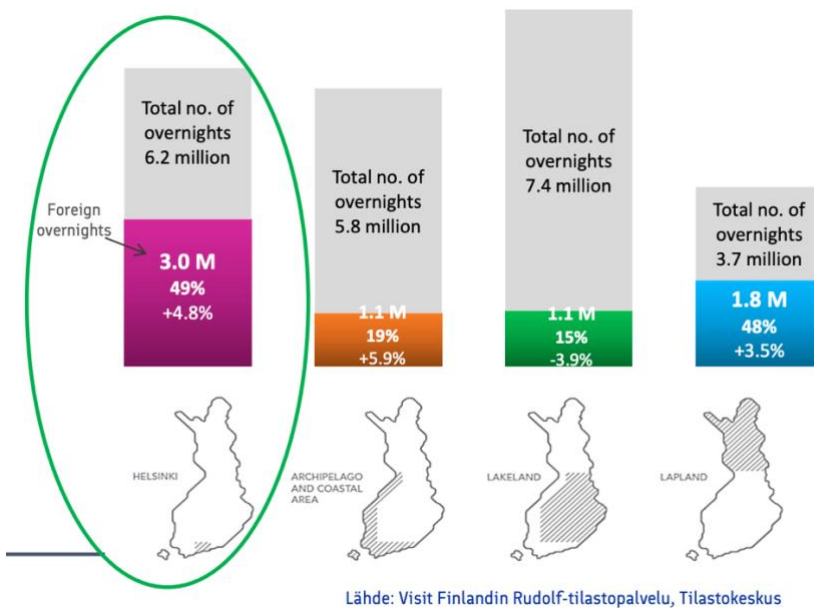


Figure 2 Domestic and foreign overnights throughout Finland (adapted from Visit Finland 2019, 3)

When taking a closer look at how overnight stays are shown by region in Finland for the year of 2019 from figure 2, less than half of the overnights in the Helsinki capital region are from foreign visitors.

### 3 Methodology

This thesis has been gathered using a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods. As qualitative research focuses on people and events in terms of *kinds* of characteristics and actions, whereas quantitative research focuses on people and events in terms of *amounts and frequencies* of characteristics and actions. (Thomas, 2003, 33) Qualitative methods like interviews were used to understand the organization of congresses. Quantitative methods like survey were used to find out the numerical data of congresses. The main method used to search for congresses was visiting the websites of congress venues in Helsinki. There, they have calendars of published events happening on their premises. Once appropriate congresses were found, either the congress organizer or the venue management would be emailed for permission to attend the congress and survey delegates. In all cases, both the congress organizer and venue management were consulted about the permission. Due to Covid-19 still being an issue and postponing or halting many events and this research starting in July of 2022, there were not many congresses to choose from.

#### 3.1 Expert Interviews

After reading a considerable amount on the subject and becoming more familiar with bleisure, it was time to speak with professionals that deal either directly or indirectly with it. Information needed to be gathered about congresses from two different perspectives. As stated by Thomas in the previous, the *kinds* of characteristics and action, meaning qualitative methods were needed. Leena Lassila gave the contact information for both interviewees. These two individuals have a considerable amount of experience on bleisure and would give valuable insight into different parts of it. Both interviews were unintentionally conducted differently. The first interview was unstructured, due to being unprepared for the interview. Gillham states the challenge of unstructured interviews over the phone is maintaining attention and not becoming distracted by physically writing down answers. (2005, 105) Still, notes were taken in place or recording the first interview. The second interview was semi-structured interview. This was because even though congresses were a familiar subject, the interviewee would be able to give new perspective and help deepen the understanding of congresses. (Wilson, 2013)

##### 3.1.1 Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 is an expert on MICE knowledge and is a world leader in bleisure research and shared their expertise on congresses from an international perspective. MICE is an acronym for Meetings, Incentive trips, Congresses, and Exhibitions and is commonly understood as a sector of travel. They were introduced to by Leena Lassila. Since the idea and concept of bleisure travel was

something new, it was best to learn more about it from an expert. The interview with Interviewee 1 was a non-structured interview held over Zoom. The interview was held over Zoom due to Interviewee 1 not living in Finland. The scheduled date of the interview was forgotten and therefore not enough time was given to prepare a proper list of questions for a structured interview. For the same reason, the interview was not recorded or saved in any format. Notes were written on paper to record bits and pieces of the conversation. The interview lasted for approximately thirty to forty minutes.

In the interview, Interviewee 1 mentioned that city, convention bureau, and convention venues need to continuously communicate to each other to improve relationships and further succeed and grow. Data such as tourism statistics and numbers should be shared and knowledge on the latest trends in MICE understandings. Convention venues should continue to improve services and keep updated on the successful techniques to win congresses.

### **3.1.2 Interviewee 2**

Interviewee 2's contact information was given from Leena Lassila as well. They are a congress and events manager for Confedent International, a professional congress organizing company based in Helsinki, Finland, giving their expertise on congresses from the national perspective. Professional congress organizer is usually also seen as PCO. Interviewee 2 has been with the company for over 20 years and is an expert on organizing different sizes of congresses, including international. A structured interview was conducted with them, and their answers were recorded as notes. It was a structured interview in that the questions were all predetermined and asked in the order that they appeared on the page. This was better planned because of how Interviewee 2's interview was so poorly recorded. It took place in Scandic Marina Congress Center and they were interviewed in-person. The interview lasted for approximately forty-five minutes.

Interviewee 2 mentioned that congresses stay somewhat connected, especially those that are closely related, as in two scientific communities that have the same general area of focus. This communication can include experiences with destinations or professional congress organizers and that can influence the decisions of other congresses when considering Helsinki as a destination or which PCO would help them. When asked about what Helsinki has that attracts congresses, they answered first safety. Finland has a low crime rate and has won the happiest country in the world award numerous times. This feeling of safety in a big city is a large influence when congress organizations are selecting destinations.

Trustworthiness is another trait Interviewee 2 mentioned. Corruption levels are quite low compared to other countries in the world and when creating deals with convention venues and bureaus, there

are never hidden costs and guests appreciate that what's promised is given. The size of the city makes it very easy to get travel through is very attractive. Also, Finland's clean air and undisturbed and close-by nature are often admired and commented on by international delegates.

Scientific congresses are the most common type of congress that Confedent International handles. When asked about planned activities outside of the congress program, Interviewee 2 stated that the demand for such activities has been dropping. International delegates are getting better at organizing for themselves when it comes to trips and do not rely as much on professional congress organizers to schedule them. They explained that a specific number of people need to attend activities and when too few people sign up, they get cancelled close to the date it would happen. This means giving out refunds to those that did sign up. It has happened so much for Confedent International that they rarely plan such activities anymore.

### **3.2 Surveys**

Though qualitative research methods, focusing on the *kind* as mentioned previously, would give deep and valuable insight from congress delegates, quantitative research methods, focusing on the *number and frequency* suited the situation in which congress delegates are available for questioning. The usual day of a congress includes three breaks, two fifteen-minute breaks for coffee and snacks and one forty-five to an hour-long lunch break. One of the purposes of these events is networking and delegates may have colleagues they have not seen since the previous congress, so they want to talk with themselves and catch up or share information. This can make approaching them with a survey quite difficult, as it is taking the little time, they must spend with a stranger who does not share the same interest in the congress. According to Richards, surveys can provide a useful means of studying activities and monitoring trends over time. (2010, 28)

The first version of the survey contained over twenty questions. This was presented to Leena Lassila and Aino Mellais, Senior Advisor on the Travel Trade team at Helsinki Partners, and together we created a short ten question survey. The length of the survey would not only shorten the amount of time it took to answer the survey, but also allow more delegates to be surveyed. The survey was created with Google Forms and the delegates answered the survey via a tablet provided by Helsinki Partners. Though the survey does not have many questions, the questions were able to give a fair amount of information on the delegate.

A copy of the survey was attached the greeting email sent out to everyone. It was made clear that while Helsinki Partners was the commissioner of this thesis, they were not giving any type of help or special treatment to any congress that agreed to their delegates to be interviewed. This was to

be individual research, not carried out by Helsinki Partners. Four congresses agreed to let their delegates be interviewed. Those congresses were:

1.The Nordic Fertility Society - NFS 2022

2.Nordic Tourism Seminar

3.The International Symposium on Empirical Software Engineering and Measurement – ESEM 2022

4.Wood Building Forum: Nordic

Since the aim of this study is to research international delegates attending congresses in Helsinki, there was little need to interview Finnish nationals at the congress. The data collected will show that several Finns did fill out the survey, this was incidental because the delegates were not asked if they reside in Finland before being asked to fill out the survey. However, no one from Helsinki filled out the survey.

Please see appendix 2

Since this survey was given out at four different congresses, it was important to ask the delegates about their careers. If the survey received enough answers, it would give a good idea if any career fields were more prone to allowing employees to extend business trips. The questions of when delegates arrive and leave Helsinki are for seeing if they stay long-er than the congress lasts. Some delegates may arrive in Helsinki before the congress or stay after. Others might travel to another city like Rovaniemi, seeing as much of Finland as they can while they're visiting.

While question seven may seem like it gives no concrete answer to a simple question, it is still vital to ask. The amount of information a tourist needs before visiting a destination differs from person to person. Some people prefer to research a destination for weeks before leaving and others might do a quick google search a few days before leaving. When it comes to congresses, the location, while important, might not be the deciding factor in whether a delegate attends. The amount of information congress organizers give about the location also varies immensely.

Overall, fifty individuals answered the survey. The only process that was used when selecting delegates to fill out the survey was attempting to keep the gender count equal. The delegates were approached at random if they were not in the middle of a conversation or otherwise busy. The survey was in a Google Form format, that they answered on a tablet device. The device was property of Helsinki Partners. Once they completed the survey and pressed submit, the page was

refreshed and ready for the next delegate to fill out. All delegates were approached during the breaks of the congresses, making sure to interrupt as little as possible.

Answers from the Nordic Fertility Society congress were collected on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August from 11:30 am to 2:50 pm. Answers from the Nordic Tourism Seminar were collected on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The answers from ESEIW22 were collected on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September from 10:30am to 2:00pm. Answers from the Wood Building Forum: Nordic were collected on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September from 10:30am to 1:00pm.

### 3.3 Benchmarking

To create a successful benchmark, the first step is to evaluate one's own product or service, identify weaknesses, then find similar competitors that excel in those weaknesses and adjust to a similar model to increase those weaknesses. (Cheney, 1998) Self-reflection and being able to recognize one's weaknesses is an important skill to possess. In this research, benchmarking is not being used in its most traditional definition. Instead of evaluating one's own weakness like Cheney mentioned, this benchmark looked at three different congresses to evaluate if any excelled in promoting Helsinki. The weakness is known, but which, if any congresses that have that weakness was not yet known and needed to be found. The findings of the benchmarking were not presented to the congresses, encouraging any to change their workflow.

Three different congresses were studied for marketing that was on their event website. Each were different sizes and had different themes. The first congress to be mentioned is the Nordic Fertility Society, the second is the International Society for Trenchless Technology, and the third is the International Society for Transgenic Technologies. Two scientific congresses with one having members all over the world and the other focusing on Nordic countries. The other is a business-oriented congress with members from many different countries.

Table 2 A breakdown of data from three congresses (adapted from information gathered from ICCA database)

Congress	Date	Duration	Congress Type	Venue	Focus	Attendees	Outside Activity	Location
Nordic Fertility Society - NFS 2022	18.08 - 20.08	2	D	Scandic Marina Congress Center	Medical	450	Get together party	Wanha Satama
International Society for Transgenic Technology - TT2022	17.09 - 20.09	3	C	Scandic Marina Congress Center	Medical	250	x	x
International Society for Trenchless Technology - No-Dig Helsinki 2022	3.10 - 5.10	3	C	Messukeskus	B2B	200	Tour, dinner, reception, dinner	Tallinn, Kulosaari Casino, City Hall & Restaurant Põrssi

### 3.4 Collecting Data

The Nordic Fertility Society congress was held from the 18th to the 20th of August. Inter-viewing was done on the 19th, as suggested by Riikka Louhivuori, as most of the delegates would have

shown up by the 2nd day of the congress. Since most every congress follows the same time schedule, two short breaks and one longer break, usually at lunch. The best time to approach the delegates was during these breaks. Since the survey was created using Google Forms, a tablet was used for the delegates to answer on. Once they were done answering the questions and submitted the survey, the page was refreshed to a new and unanswered survey and the next delegate was approached. Due to a misunderstanding, the first coffee break of NFS 2022 was missed.

The Nordic Tourism Seminar was held on the 30th of August. Since it was only a one-day event, there was no other choice but to attend on that day. The congress contained the same break schedules, and the same approach was used for delegates. ESEM 2022 was held from the 19th to the 23rd of September. It was attended on the 23rd. Due to being near the end of the congress, many delegates had already left. There had also been an out-break of Covid-19 at the congress earlier that week. Precautions were taken to keep a distance from delegates and not as much time was spent there to collect answers.

The Wood Building Forum: Nordic was held on the 29th and 30th of September. The congress was attended on the 30th. Surveying was ended after the lunch break for two reasons. The first being that fifty replies had been achieved overall and the second reason is because so many of the delegates who attended the congress were from Helsinki or the surrounding cities of Espoo and Vantaa. These locations were far too close for the delegates to be asked about extending business trips.



## 4 Findings

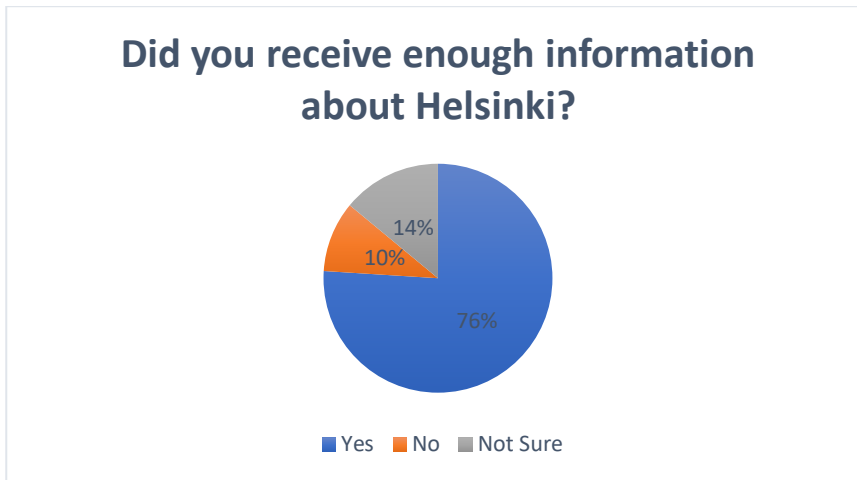


Figure 3 Pie chart showing answers for the question from the survey

A total of fifty individuals answered the survey. Most interviewees were from Scandinavian and Nordic regions, fourteen of which were from Finland. As shown in figure 3, thirty-eight interviewees felt that they had received enough information about Helsinki while booking their trip. Five individuals said no, and seven were not sure if they had or had not received enough information.

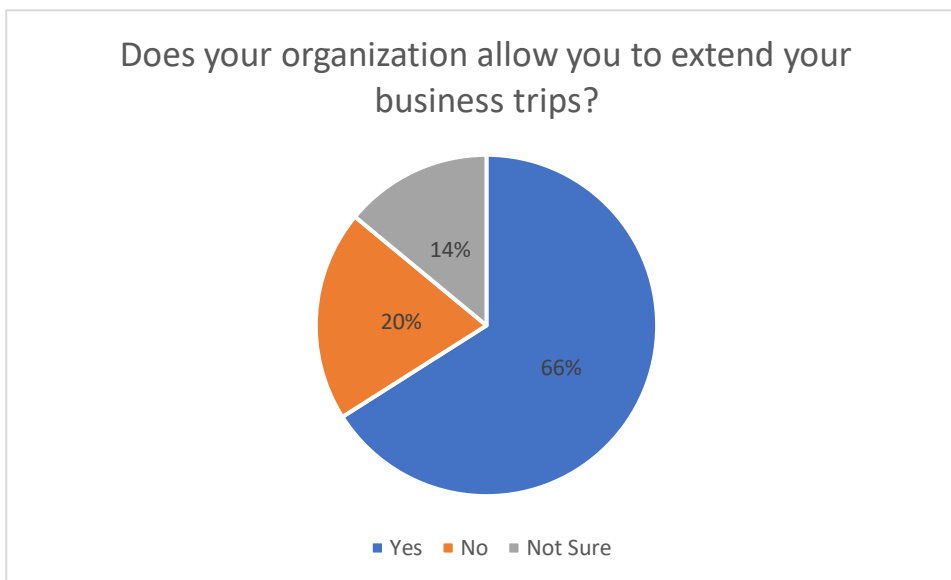


Figure 4 Pie chart of how people answered about extending their business trips

Of the fifty individuals that answered, thirty-three answered that their organization allows them to extend business trips. Ten people responded that they are not allowed, and seven of them were not sure. (Figure 4)

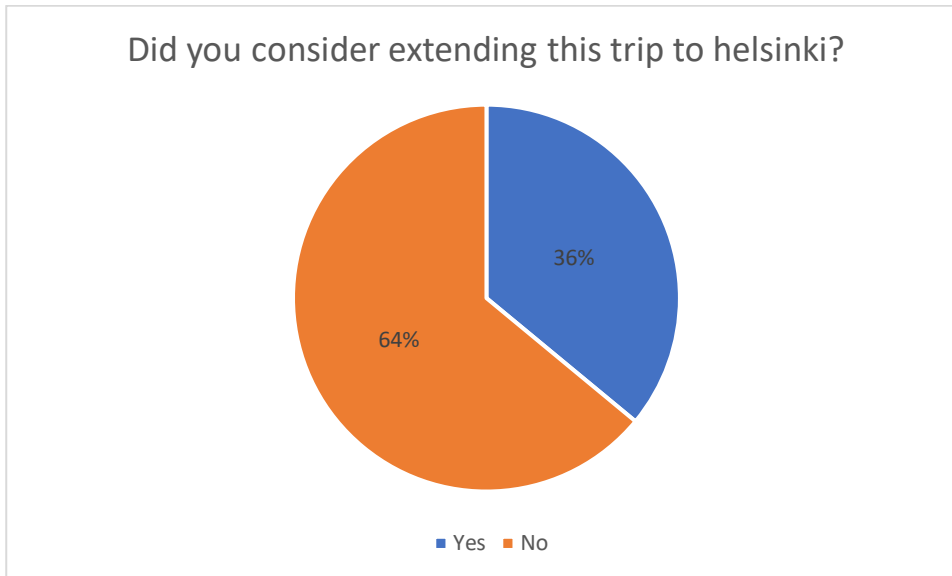


Figure 5 Responses to the question asking if they considered extending their trip

Most responses to whether they considered extending their stay in Helsinki answered no with thirty-two responses. Eighteen of the responders said they did consider extending their trip. (Figure 5) Forty-two said they would consider returning to Helsinki later with family or friends. Sixteen responded with a maybe and no one answered with no as seen below in figure 6.

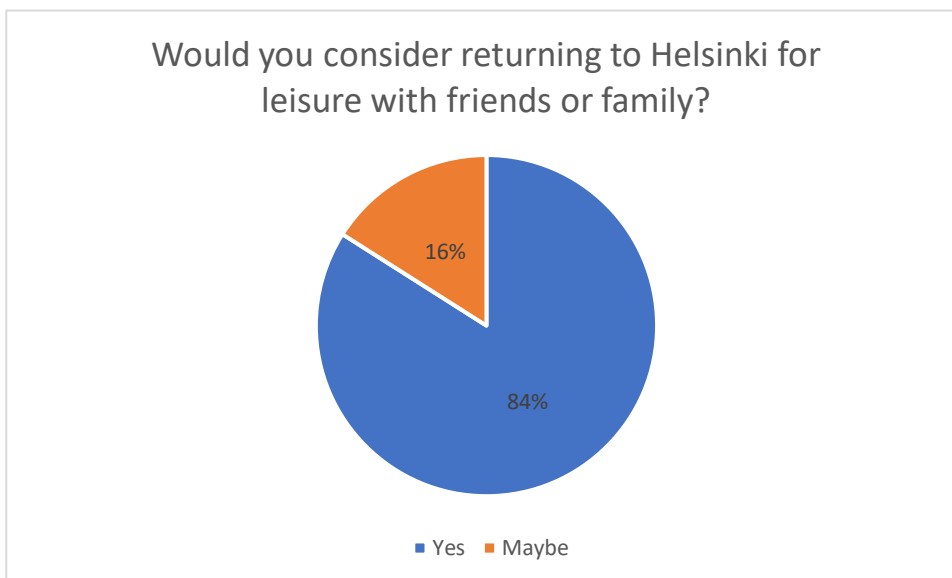


Figure 6 Answers from the question about returning to Helsinki

Though each congress brought in people from different career fields, no single congress had vastly different responses from the others. The only exception is that individuals from Nordic and Scandinavian regions did not consider extending their stay more than the others. Five delegates

arrived more than one day before their event started. Eight delegates left in the days after the event, three of which stayed longer than one day after it ended.

More interviewees would have been needed to gather any valid correlations within the data. It is too difficult to say a certain age range can extend their business trips more than another age range or being able to show that a one career field has more freedom to travel than the other career field.

Findings from benchmarking the three congresses are the following, please see table 2. The Nordic Fertility Society had the most attendees according to the data available. The International Society for Transgenic Technology had the second largest number of attendees, follow by the International Society for Trenchless Technology. The attendance for NFS 2022 was given by the professional congress organizer of that congress and the attendance for the other congresses were taken from the ICCA Association Database. Information from that database is not always the most up-to-date and it is possible that the attendance for TT2022 and No-Dig Helsinki 2022 was larger than reported. More accurate data was not available.

No-Dig Helsinki 2022 had to largest number of activities outside of the congress occur. These activities were counted as being held outside of the regular congress program and happened in a different location from where the congress was held. No-Dig Helsinki 2022 not only held two separate dinners during the congress, but also planned a daytrip to Tallinn, Estonia before the congress officially began. NFS 2022 planned only one event outside of the regular schedule of the congress. TT2022, though it lasted the same number of days as No-Dig Helsinki 2022, had no extra activities or dinners outside of the regular congress schedule, despite being under the same PhRMA Code as NFS 2022.

## 5 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to study and better understand bleisure in Helsinki among international delegates attending congresses and perhaps revealing more effective marketing strategies. One of the research questions was to find out how many international delegates extend their stay while attending a congress in Helsinki. The answer, according to the findings is not many. There were many limitations to this study that increase the unreliability of the findings. These will lead to suggestions for further research in the future which will be discussed in this chapter.

The first issue with the findings is that most of the delegates that answered the survey were from Finland and this thesis was supposed to focus on international delegates. More could have been done to prevent Finnish citizens from answering the questions, such as making sure before the delegates answered the survey that they were not from Finland. This was not foreseen as a possible problem when conducting the research. Fifty-one percent of domestic business trips are bleisure trips and fifty-two percent of international business trips are bleisure trips. (Expedia Group, 2018, 12) So, while Finnish citizens may be just as likely to turn their business trip to Helsinki into a bleisure trip, that is not the target group of this thesis.

As mentioned in the findings, there were not enough answers to build a large amount of data from. Attending four congresses for this survey was not enough and too few people were asked to fill out the survey at those attended congresses. Due to the time this study began and the deadline for this thesis, and obligations to Helsinki Partners, there were few chances to attend congresses. This study began in June, halfway through the year and already missing several congresses that had occurred. The deadline for this thesis was a personal one, and there was no chance to attend more congresses after September 2022. Lastly, the Finland Convention Bureau asks congresses to answer their own delegate survey. Its purpose is to constantly improve congress services in Finland, according to the survey. (FCB, 2022) The Finland Convention Bureau asks each congress to apply a link to the survey on the event website to be answered at the end of the congress. Helsinki Convention Bureau wanted to help further and personally attend those congresses that agreed to ask delegates face-to-face to fill out the survey. This meant that there were some congresses that the FCB survey was more needed for instead of the thesis survey and Leena Lassila decided that either one or the other could be given at an event, not both.

Though this limited the number of congresses that could be surveyed for this specific study, it could prove to be incredibly helpful in future studies. If a city gathers enough responses from this delegate survey, the results are shared with the city. Given that the delegate survey from the Finland Convention Bureau is so extensive, it provides information that this research's survey

never could. Helsinki Partners should dedicate time and resources to reviewing this data and continue to study how to improve their services and gain more insight.

Bleisure is constantly growing. From 2016 to 2018, bleisure trips increased from forty-three percent to sixty percent. (Expedia Group, 2018, 6) Even though Covid-19 virtually stopped international travel, with business beginning to continue as usual, the lack of being able to travel and the new and more flexible working arrangements that so many organizations have introduced has increased the will for people to travel. The relaxing of travel restrictions, that accumulation of latent demand for travel and tourism now finds its realisation partly through the trend of turning congresses trips into short leisure breaks and even longer holidays. (Davidson & Kesar, 2022, 4) Their article contains ways to promote bleisure from research they have already conducted. Bleisure is not something that should be ignored, but studied and understood more, because it won't be disappearing.

## **5.1 Suggestions**

A deeper study should be conducted with more people to conduct interviews to unearth more data. The average American International traveller is forty-four years of age, earns over 200,000 annually, plans to take 3.8 holidays during the next twelve months, and plans to spend an average of 20,990 dollars on those holidays. (Bosselaar 2022, 9) It should be researched further if this is true among other international travellers and are those that visit Helsinki for an international congress also that type of traveller. Or, if foreign delegates do not fit that description of the average Finnish visitor, is that why they do not extend their stay and turn their business trips into leisure trips?

Qualitative interviews should have been conducted along with the survey, to gather more data. This would have proven difficult however, since international delegates are already so busy during the congress, and it would be inconvenient for them to be asked outside of the congress. One possible solution to this would be working together with the FCB delegate survey. Include additional questions that pertain to bleisure to gain valuable insight, for example. Seventy-one out of eighty-eight convention bureaus have not conducted any research on the impact of bleisure in their destination and sixty-six out of eighty-seven never run special campaigns to promote bleisure. (Davidson & Kesar, 2022, 12) This leaves a tremendous amount of room to further study bleisure.

Because of the PhRMA Code, advertising leisure on congress websites is forbidden, as well as advertising on the premises where the congress is held while it is ongoing. This creates a large setback of encouraging bleisure for delegates while they are planning their trip to Helsinki. Cooperation between the city and businesses inside the city could be improved to work together

and encourage bleisure. When a large amount of congress delegates fly into Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, the digital ads could be more specific to attract those groups with events going on at the time in the city or major attractions.

Hotel operators could work more closely with the city convention bureau to offer discounts for longer stays or run campaigns for nearby businesses like restaurants. Helsinki already has events called Helsingin Tekijät, which is a gathering of local businesses, employees of the city of Helsinki marketing department, and other types of guests. They discuss the current situation in the city as well as looking for what is coming. Perhaps bleisure could be discussed more at these occasions. The more companies that are affected by congresses work together, the more they stand to benefit from that cooperation.

## **5.2 Self-reflection**

The author had no experience in tourism before this research began. He had briefly heard of bleisure, and MICE was still a small rodent. He had never visited a congress before or knew anything about convention bureaus. The entire process has been a valuable learning experience. Congresses or virtually any kind exist to cater to the interest of professionals all around the world.

Professionals in tourism have a contagious passion for their work and seem to stick with it for decades. The knowledge that they gave, both from a regional and international standpoint have been incredibly helpful to the author. The author learned about the different organizations that keep track and help not just congress organizations, but convention bureaus and professional congress organizers network with one another. He was introduced to a local network that relies in Helsinki Partners to give insights on what is coming to Helsinki and how Helsinki Partners relies on that network to work together and ensure that international visitors enjoy their experience in Helsinki. Hotels, restaurants, congress venues, transport services from air, sea, and land and many other entities are all stakeholders in this field.

The author, working with Helsinki Partners got to see the amount of work it can take to get a congress to come to Helsinki. Connecting the congress with similar groups of interest in and around Helsinki, or from all over Finland in some cases, to help cover costs, create valuable experiences, help network, or organize demonstrations. It can take years of working with a congress before they decide on coming to Helsinki. That decision can be based on cost, rotation of how the congress usually moves from location to location, or many other factors that could affect the decision.

The author wishes he could have had more time and resources to research bleisure and has learned of just how important it is to the city of Helsinki. It is something that should be continued to

be studied. Besides being introduced to the world of congresses, researching for, and writing this thesis has been helpful. The author has not been used to backing up what he writes about with peer reviewed literature. The strict methods required to write this thesis has also been a lot to learn.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. UIA criteria for categorizing congresses into types

Type A congress must meet the following criteria:

- The congress must have a clear link to an international association included in the UIA database. The source of the Yearbook International Organizations.
- The congress can be linked to either an international non-governmental organization or an intergovernmental organization.
- The congress is eligible for inclusion regardless of its location. A congress series can be held always in the same location or rotate according to a pattern between locations or change locations randomly.
- The congress is eligible for inclusion regardless of its participant numbers.

Type B congresses must meet the following criteria:

- The congress does not qualify for Type A but is nonetheless considered to be of significant international associative character.
- The congress lasts at least for three days.
- The congress has either a concurrent exhibition or at least 300 participants.
- At least 40 percent of the congress' participants are from countries other than the host country and at least five nationalities are represented.

Type C must meet the following criteria:

- The congress does not qualify for Type A but is nonetheless considered to be of significant international associative character.
- The congress lasts at least two days.
- The congress has either a concurrent exhibition or at least 250 participants.

**Appendix 2. Interview with Interviewee 2**

How do you promote Helsinki outside of events?

Why does Helsinki excel in attracting congresses compared to Stockholm and Copenhagen?

What are some areas that you would like to see improved in your industry?

What changes have you seen since the beginning of the pandemic?

What are some of the important points in the after reports made for clients?

Are there any differences between client groups? (medical, business, industrial)

What are the differences in group sizes when it comes to activities?

Do you have return clients, differences?

What kind of people come to these events? (working age and employed, retirees, students, etc.)

What's the best way for me to get in touch with congress guests?

**Appendix 3. Survey questions for congress attendees**

Age

Gender

Country of origin

Job title

When did you arrive in Helsinki?

When are you leaving Helsinki?

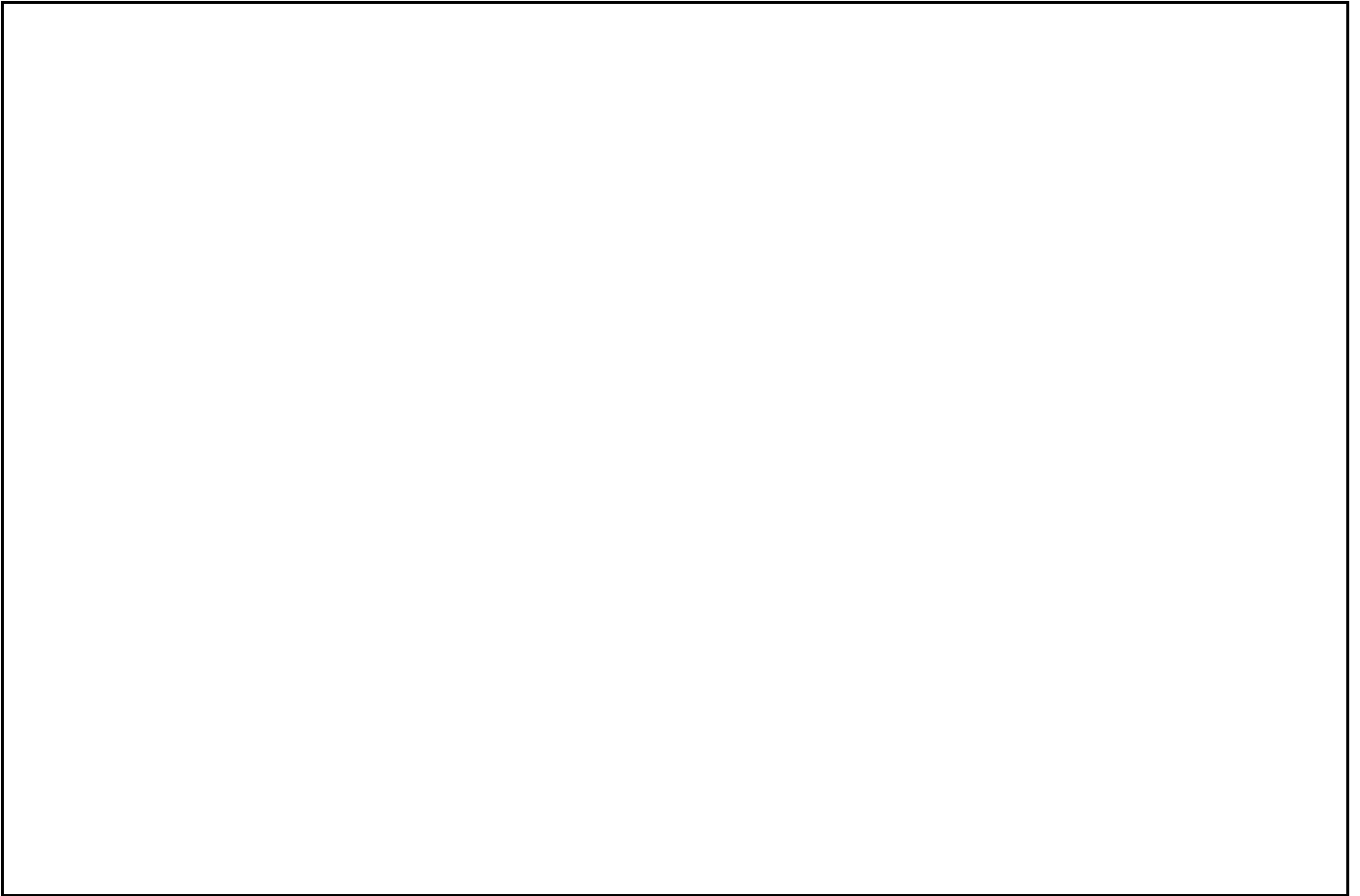
Did you receive enough information about Helsinki while booking your trip?

Does your organization allow you to extend your business trips?

Did you consider extending this trip to Helsinki?

Would you consider returning to Helsinki for leisure with friends or family?

**Appendix 4. Results from delegate survey**



**Appendix 5. The greeting text and link to Finland Convention Bureau's delegate survey**

Congress delegates are very important visitors to Finland. To improve our services, we would highly appreciate your views and comments on Finland as a congress destination.

Finland Convention Bureau, operating within Visit Finland, conducts this continuous survey. Finland Convention Bureau is responsible for promoting Finland for meetings, congresses, and business events.

Thank you very much for your time and valuable feedback!

<https://ecv.microsoft.com/ME8udCKb9x>