

THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF ORGANISING AN ASSOCIATION EVENT

Case: Jyväskylä Booking

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Abstract <p>The commissioner of this thesis is Jyväskylä Booking, a unit of Jyväskylä Congress Centre Ltd. The aim was to give suggestions and development ideas for Jyväskylä Booking for the future in the field of organizing events for associations. As Jyväskylä Booking has started to provide event management and organizing services, these suggestions are to help them gain more customers and comprehensive service. This called for studying associations and their special characteristics as event organisers. The focus was on international association events mainly organized in the Jyväskylä region.</p> <p>The study was implemented as a qualitative study, in a theme interview form. Seven associations operating in Finland were individually interviewed with each interview lasting about one hour. The representatives of each association were given the main themes of the interview beforehand, and the interview itself was more conversational.</p> <p>The interviews were recorded and then analyzed at a later stage of the thesis process. The main issues discovered from the study were divided into operational and marketing issues. Operational issues suggested ways to develop the services and operations of Jyväskylä Booking to improve their event organizing competences. The marketing issues focused on recommendations for the marketing material of Jyväskylä Booking aimed for associations as potential customers.</p> <p>The thesis can be utilized by Jyväskylä Booking in their efforts to develop their operations in the recently commenced event organizing branch. However, it should be remembered that these recommendations for services and marketing development are solely based on the needs and demands of the potential customers the commercial aspects of which were not considered. The thesis can also be used by others when needing information on the buying behaviour of associations and event organising characteristics.</p>		
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Tiivistelmä <p>Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantaja oli Jyväskylä Booking, joka on Jyväskylän Kongressikeskuksen yksikkö. Tehtävänä oli antaa Jyväskylä Bookingille ideoita ja ehdotuksia sen kehitystyöhön tapahtuman järjestämisen saralla. Jyväskylä Booking on alkanut tarjota tapahtumien järjestämisen ja toteuttamisen palveluita, joten näiden ehdotuksien tavoitteena oli saada Jyväskylä Bookingille lisää asiakkaita sekä välineitä kokonaisvaltaisten palveluiden tarjoamiseen. Tämä vaati järjestöjen tutkintaa, sekä sen selvittämistä, mitkä ovat niiden erityisominaisuuksia tapahtumien järjestäjinä. Kohteena olivat kansainväliset järjestötapahtumat, jotka järjestetään Jyväskylän alueella.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena temahaastatteluna. Seitsemää Suomessa toimivaa järjestöä haastateltiin, ja jokainen haastattelu kesti noin tunnin ajan. Jokaiselle haastateltavalle lähetettiin haastatteluiden pääteemat etukäteen luettavaksi, mutta itse haastattelutilanne oli keskustelun omainen. Haastattelut nauhoitettiin ja analysoitiin opinnäytetyöprosessin myöhemmässä vaiheessa.</p> <p>Analysointitulokset jaettiin kahteen osaan: toiminnallisiin ja markkinointiin asioihin. Toiminnalliset ehdotukset käsittelivät Jyväskylä Bookingin operatiivisia puolia, jotta se voisi kehittää tapahtumajärjestämispalveluitaan. Markkinointia koskeva osa sisälsi ehdotuksia Jyväskylä Bookingille markkinointimateriaaleista, jotka voidaan kohdentaa järjestöille ja näin ollen potentiaalisille asiakkaille.</p> <p>Jyväskylä Booking voi hyödyntää tätä opinnäytetyötä tulevaisuudessa vasta aloittamallaan tapahtuman järjestämisen toimialalla. On kuitenkin muistettava, että nämä ehdotukset palveluiden ja markkinoinnin kehittämiseen pohjautuvat vain järjestöjen toiveisiin ja vaatimuksiin eikä kaikkia liiketoiminnallisia puolia ole huomioitu. Tätä opinnäytetyötä voivat hyödyntää muutkin, jotka etsivät tietoa järjestöjen ostokäyttäytymisestä sekä järjestötapahtumien</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) järjestöt, tapahtuma, kongressi, konferenssi, tapahtumanjärjestäminen, ei-kaupallinen järjestö, tapahtumanjärjestäjä yritys, tapahtumien johto		
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Topic Area and the Objectives of the Thesis

The bachelor's thesis was commissioned by Jyväskylä Booking. The topic arose from the operational changes currently taking place in the company.

The aim was to research the organisation of association events, which is a new line of business for the host company. The authors were to determine the needs and wants of associations when organising their events. As Jyväskylä Booking sees the associations as their potential clients in the future, it was essential to examine the associations more in-depth. The topic area was limited to non-profit organisations and international events organised in Finland.

The theory part of the thesis investigates conference management in general and introduces conference business in Finland and in Jyväskylä. In addition, the characteristics of the association segments are discussed at the end of the theory part. These sections are to familiarize the reader into the background of this topic and to give insight to the industry.

This thesis was conducted as qualitative research. Theme interviews were selected as the research method as the authors aimed at obtaining information, opinions and procedures of the research objects, the associations. Mere statistical data would have not served the goal of the thesis.

1.2 Thesis Commissioner: Jyväskylä Booking

Jyväskylä Booking is a booking center for Jyväskylä regional meeting and event services. The most important customer segments for Jyväskylä Booking are event-, congress-, and meeting clients in the Jyväskylä region. Customers can book accommodation, meeting facilities and additional services through Jyväskylä Booking. Jyväskylä Booking co-operates with several local tourism operators to be able to offer centralized booking services for their customers. (Front page, 2011)

Jyväskylä Booking provides accommodation and additional services primarily for congresses, meetings and fairs organised in Jyväskylä, whereas there are a few larger scale international events such as Neste Oil Rally Finland that employ Jyväskylä Booking.

From the beginning of the year 2011, Jyväskylä Booking opened a PCO service named Jyväskylä Congresses. Jyväskylä Congresses provides full service meeting and conference services for the client. (Front page, 2011)

Jyväskylä Booking is situated in the close to Jyväskylä Paviljonki. Jyväskylä Paviljonki is a fair and congress center in Jyväskylä. There are three different companies operating in Paviljonki : Jyväskylä Congress Centre Ltd, Jyväskylä Fair Ltd and the Keskimaa Group which is in charge of the Paviljonki restaurants. Jyväskylä Booking operates as a unit of Jyväskylä Congress Centre Ltd. (General information, 2011)

2 CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Definitions

Conference:

Participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation. As compared with a congress, a conference is normally smaller in scale and more select in character – features which tend to facilitate the exchange of information. The term “conference” carries no special connotation as to frequency. Though not inherently limited in time, conferences are usually of limited duration with specific objectives.

Congress:

Regular coming together on a representational basis of several hundreds – or even thousands – of individuals belonging to a single professional, cultural, religious or other group. A congress is often convened to discuss a particular subject. Contributions to the presentation and discussion of the subject matter come only from members of the organizing body. Frequency: usually established in advance and can be either multiannual or annual. Most international or world congresses are of the former type while national congresses are more frequently held annually. A congress will often last several days and have several simultaneous sessions.

Convention:

Two distinctive types of conventions:

1. *General and formal meeting of a legislative body, social or economic group in order to provide information on a particular situation and in order to deliberate and, consequently, establish consent on policies among the participants. Usually of limited duration with set objectives, but no determined frequency.*
2. *In the United States, the word “convention” is used to describe large, sometimes international but more usually national meetings of business circles, whether for discussion or commercial exhibitions or both.*
IAPCO (2000, p. 83-84)

2.2 History

The history of large gatherings, exhibitions and conventions dates back to the industrial revolution and to the need of merchants trading their goods and knowledge. The locations were remarkably different than nowadays (including churches and coffee shops) but the interest of these meetings was mostly in trade business. The first regular meetings for the trade business were established to attract people to town to trade items for money and goods. One of these merchant guild fairs has been organised by the Preston guild in the UK once every 20 years starting from the Middle Ages to the present day. (Shone 1998 p. 4-10)

In terms of bigger conventions, the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 is among the first ones held. It gathered together all the leaders of Europe to discuss the division of land in Europe after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. During the 19th century education became more important and universities grew in number and size and there was also the boom in the spa towns of UK. Both of these factors lead to large public spaces being built and the logistics and infrastructure of cities being developed with great speed. According to Rogers, Gartrell (1994) explains that in Northern America professional associations and also religious groups were being formed in numbers at the end of the 19th century and as annual meetings and gatherings across Northern America became more common, the city of Detroit nominated a person to promote Detroit as a city for meetings and established the first Convention Bureau in 1896. (Rogers, 2008 p.3-4)

During the 20th century the growth of the MICE industry has been steady and has increased over the recent years. The industry has become global and is seen as a way to develop tourism and bring economic wealth and status. Lawson (2000 p.11) lists some of the factors of this growth being high level of education and knowledge, people's free time and willingness to be active in associations, new economic wealth in the developing areas of the globe, developments in infrastructure and costs coming down due to the economics of scale.

Due to the success and growth of gatherings in all forms, the supply has had the opportunity to meet the demand. Services from many business areas have developed to accommodate the MICE industry and take advantage of the

people attracted by the meetings. These services include the venues, accommodation business, professional organizers, catering services, technical services for venues, convention bureaus, services offered for social activities and free time and the representation and promotional bodies at the international, governmental and municipal levels.

2.3 Event Management Process

Planning and executing an event is a lengthy process. For larger events it might take several years. Usually there has to be a designated person for the task of planning, an event or a conference manager, whose task is to unite all the different pieces together and to ensure the objectives of the event are reached. The objective can be economical, or for example, simply marketing of a business branch or product. The lead time, objectives and people involved in the planning all depend on the type of the event.

The figure presented here is the planning process for events management according to Shone and Parry (2004, p. 83). It is quite valid and adjustable for most types of events, also congresses and conferences.



(Shone and Parry, 2004, p. 83)

The first step is defining and clarifying objectives wished to reach by arranging the event. At this point there can be many ideas and proposals, which are then screened for feasibility and purpose. After setting these objectives, the first draft of the plan can be formulated.

At the first draft of the plan both external and internal environments have to be taken into consideration. The external environment includes researching on other events to avoid overlapping with similar events and competition of attendees. Furthermore, stakeholders and investors have to be thought out. The internal factors in this stage are the contents of the event and the resources, both monetary and human. Some practical decisions have to be made as well, such as setting dates, screening venues and finding suitable personnel for the planning and executing the event.

After the first outlines and resources are gathered, it is time for the systematic detailed planning. Shone and Parry (2004, p.83) have divided this part into three different sections: Financial, Operational and Marketing plans.

The financial plan includes the whole economical aspect of the event. A budget has to be determined to give outlines for the whole event and what are the limits in organizing this event. Depending on the main organization involved, the budget can be small, or for example, in corporate events, very flexible. Also possible sponsorships, governmental contributions and investors have to be decided and agreed. The cash flow in the event itself is a crucial part of the budget and the charges and income has to be calculated in advance. Those can often be the factor determining whether the event breaks even or not. (Shone and Parry, 2004, p.83)

The second part of the detailed plan is the Operational plan. This involves all the practical arrangements and usually a lot of co-operators. Finding the location and the venue is a key part which then affects the rest of the planning. Other operational elements are the staffing, logistics and technical equipment. More abstract issues which have to be carefully thought are health, safety and security at the event as well as the production schedule of the whole event with all the co-operators and parties involved. This should be planned out beforehand in order to make sure everything is prepared on time and all the details finally combine into an event. This is usually very much the responsibility of a professional congress organizer and requires experience of similar events. Moreover, an experienced PCO often has a plan b ready for everything, since an event is the sum of all different small elements which are linked together and there is room for error in all those parts.

The third part is the marketing plan. An event is not really an event if there are no attendees. Marketing of the event is important and the key is to find the right timing and channels. Researching the field of the event is a good way of finding larger audiences interested in the issue in question. A precise marketing plan also includes a marketing schedule which times the marketing activities and promotion through various channels. If a professional conference organizer is not hired, the task of marketing might be left with less

attention and it creates a greater possibility for the event to fail or gain monetary loss.

After the systematic detailed plan has been concluded, a reflection and discussion of the whole plan is recommended. It offers a chance to see the general view and ensures that all the parties involved understand the direction where the event is heading, the objective and how to reach there. In addition, some new ideas might come up and there is still time to adjust the plan accordingly.

Then it is time to start the arrangements and preparations for the event. Keeping up with the plan and the deadlines is necessary and ensuring the quality of the work is a key activity for the event organizer. Documenting the development, having meetings and always looking slightly ahead helps to solve any problems which might occur.

When the event date arrives and all the arrangements are made, the next step in the plan is the actual execution of the event. Here the task for the event organizer, professional or not, is to be on top of things happening at the moment, controlling the event and taking necessary actions to correct possible errors. This is the part where all the planning shows and if it is not thoroughly made it can cause plenty of last minute decisions and make the attendees' experience unpleasant. At the end, the success of most of the events is measured not only economically but by the experience of the attendees. Of course, there are things that can go wrong during the event despite the most thorough planning, but a comprehensive plan relieves the event organiser to go and resolve the problem as other things are already under control.

After the event, it is time for the divestment. There are still some monetary issues in billing all co-operators and fees and closing the budget. In addition, the total evaluation of the event is essential to detect whether objectives were reached and why or why not. Some feedback might be necessary for all the parties involved as well as documenting the final pieces of the event. The closedown will reveal if the event was a success and sometimes it determines future business and opportunities. If some issues were poorly handled, the

organiser is to take notes for the future and develop their activities. Every event is a learning experience for the organisers as well as the attendees.

2.4 Operators of the Conference Management Business

2.4.1 Buyers

There has been made a theoretical division of buyers in the conference organising business into a few different segments. According to Rogers (2008, p.34) there are two main groups of buyers: the corporate and the association type. In addition to the two main types, there is also the public sector which can in some cases be referred to as including to the association type and there is also a small niche of entrepreneurs who set up a conference in order to make profit out of the event.

The corporate buyer is a company gathering people, for example to, share knowledge, train staff, launch a product or to have annual meeting with the management. The event lasts in average from half a day to 1½ days and the company pays for the delegates' costs, since it is usually a work-related stay. The delegates and the organisers of a corporate event are more demanding for high-quality services and products. Hence, for the suppliers, the corporate event is more lucrative but also comes with a shorter lead time and the decision making process is quite immediate. (Rogers, 2008, p.34-38)

In comparison to the corporate buyer, the association segment is very different. Usually the delegates pay their costs themselves and associations have less money to spend on hospitality and amenities. There is also the need for a wide variety of accommodation and less expensive alternatives. Then again, the event tends to last longer (in average 3 days) and has a longer lead

time for planning. Association events are also greater in delegate numbers and spouses are more common to attend the event as well. (Rogers, 2008, p-40-44)

The public sector covers conferences organised by, for example, government departments, municipal and educational bodies and health services. This group of events is indeed often included in the association segment, but the difference in these events is usually that a public sector delegate normally does not pay the expenses for themselves. The public sector still has a fairly tight budget and is price-sensitive but the expectations of attendees are rising and booking higher quality accommodation seems to be the trend. (Rogers, 2008, p. 52)

The niche of the entrepreneurial buyer includes, for example, publishing houses, academic bodies and independent conference producers. They research and identify current topics which might be interesting for delegates and produce a conference around the topic to create profit and discussion. These events are organised with a high risk, but the daily delegate rate is so high that a successful conference will make profit. This segment has yet no typical characteristics but is evolving in the hectic environment of the modern day. (Rogers, 2008, p.53)

2.4.2 Suppliers

The suppliers in the conference organising business are an expanding and quite a flexible term since most of the suppliers do not work exclusively for conferences. However, to include most of the suppliers needed in the conference organising business, three groups are formed as follows: venues, agencies and intermediaries (Rogers, 2008, p.53-56) and other external services (Shone, 1998, p.55).

2.4.3 Venues

Several types of venues have started to get interested in hosting conferences. In addition, the conference organisers have a desire to look for something unusual or more related to the topic and theme of the conference. For the experience-seeking customer, there are many usual venues such as golf clubs, museums, theme parks and historical sites. For the scientific congresses and the whole public sector, academic and civic venues are the most common choice. All in all, hotels own the biggest market share of all venues in the conference business. According Rogers (2008, p.58) the British Association of Conference Destinations researched that 53% of all UK's conference venues are hotels. Many hotels have recognized the conference market as a great business and have trained dedicated staff, created conference service product packages and have made great investments to the equipment and design for conference organising. However, when it comes to large international conferences, the purpose-built conference centres still have the obvious advantage of experience and high quality along with the convenience of having all the services under one roof. Several hotels and conference centres also co-operate when there is a large conference coming to town by setting up the near-by hotel as the headquarters of the conference and producing the conference services for the large amount of delegates in the conference centre. (Rogers, 2008 p.56-58)

2.4.4 Agencies and Intermediaries

Agencies in the conference business are defined by Rogers (2008, p.60) as

-- a range of different organizations which are both suppliers and buyers. They undertake a buying role on behalf of their clients, who may be companies or associations. They act as intermediaries or "middlemen", and can be contracted to assist in the planning and running of a conference or similar event.

The most common agency working in the field of conference organizing is the Professional Conference Organizer (referred to as a PCO) which is a company helping the customer to plan and execute the conference. Typical services offered by a PCO are finding a suitable venue, delegate reservation and communication, accommodation booking, marketing, helping with the programme, preparation of contracts with other suppliers and preparation of budgets. Other similar, but more limited services offering companies are Venue Finding Agencies, Destination Management Companies and Exhibition Organizers. Moreover, the definition of most of the companies can be sometimes challenging and the definitions vary in different countries and cultures. (Rogers, 2008, p.19-20)

In addition to these companies dedicated to the conference business, also travel agencies have begun to expand their services and offer venue finding and programme planning. They also have great connections to local hotels and sometimes a settled clientele mostly from the corporate segment.

2.4.5 Other External Services

Especially in large conferences and high quality events, the attendees require more than only the venue and accommodation. Shone (1998) has gathered an extensive list of services commonly outsourced from the venue itself.

Accommodation services are the foremost service needed in addition to the conference venue. The conference does not have to last several days and be international for the delegates to have the need for accommodation.

Furthermore, catering is a service the conferences cannot be arranged without. Technical services are something that only the purpose-built conference centres tend to have to offer by themselves. Technical devices and aid is a specialty that the conference venues and organisers are eager to buy in. (p.55-58)

Accessibility and convenience are something that delegates, and therefore conference organizers, appreciate and for that often transport and guidance services are needed. These services can vary from a small bus with one local guide to a great range of VIP transport and long bus tours with multiple guides in the vehicles and at the destinations. There are also many other services that are needed to be provided but on a smaller scale, for example, translation services, photocopying and word processing, arrangements of the social programme, first aid medical services and entertainment services. All of these should be provided by a professional in order to keep the quality high during the whole event and for the delegates to feel comfortable. (Shone, 1998, p.58-60)

2.5 Bidding for Conferences

Large, regular international events are often put up for bidding. In the bidding process the destinations eager to host the event send bids for the organising association or organisation and the most suitable bid is chosen. This seems to be a very significant and remarkable opportunity for a destination or a sub-association to promote itself and receive attention as an event organizing host. If the competition for the event is high, the proposed bid has to be professional and inform all the best assets and enthusiasm that the possible host would have. According to Rogers (2008, p. 48), if the conference in question is large and significant, the national tourism organisations and convention bureaus are willing to help with preparing the bids as it is seen beneficial for the whole destination. The International Congress and Conference Association (ICCA) has prepared a step-by-step list of the stages there are at a thorough bidding process for an international association event.

- 1. Call for proposals/next "Open Year" communicated.*
- 2. Interest expressed (by either members or suppliers, depending on whether local members are required to be the formal bidders).*
- 3. Evaluate if bidders qualify to make a bid.*

4. *Bid manual/guidelines/rules made available to interested parties.*
5. *Bids created by local members/suppliers.*
6. *Bids submitted.*
7. *Site inspections (many associations conduct the short listing stage without visiting all candidates)*
8. *First round evaluations by association staff, volunteer leaders or consultants/contractors.*
9. *Shortlist decided and announced.*
10. *Detailed site inspections and negotiations.*
11. *Revised bids submitted.*
12. *Formal bid presentation.*
13. *Final shortlist or final selection.*
14. *Negotiations.*
15. *Decision made.*
16. *Decision announced.*
17. *Feedback to losing bidders.*
18. *Draw up and sign contract or letter of agreement.*

(International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010, p. 6)

ICCA also reminds that some associations may have longer lists of steps, and other may have shorter. Associations are also recommended to use a PCOs in helping with the bidding, as professionals are accustomed with the process (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making , 2010 p.6)

Moreover, both Rogers (2008 p. 47) and International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making publications (2010 p. 7) emphasize the importance of the teamwork and dedication of the organisation willing to bid and host events. A major part of the tasks involved with organising the event will be their responsibility and the devotion of the host will be necessary and under inspection already at the bidding phase.

2.6 Trends and Future Developments

For the business professionals trends and future developments are always important, because the forecasts determine their career and reveal some direction where the business is heading. For the students it shows whether

there is any future for that business and is it worth the time and effort of studying and working to be a professional one day.

As for most of the business areas, the past few years have been somewhat rough for the conference and meeting business. The economical crisis which hit most of the world in 2009 decreased the willingness and resources for travelling and the budgets for meetings and conferences were cut significantly. Some large events were either postponed or cancelled as price-sensitivity became important and it was also socially unaccepted to spend lavishly. The impact of the economical crisis depended also on the business branch, but the corporate sector which is obviously important for the MICE industry, was heavily affected. Davidson (2009) specified the practical consequences being even shorter leadtimes for events, the increase in demand for price-sensitive options in venues and hospitality and increased usage of one-day events to decrease the amount of overnight stays.

For the association and public sector Davidson (2009) saw a brighter prospect, since governmental meetings are required and the public discussion is continuous. During and after the economical crisis, virtual meetings became a current topic. According to Rogers (2008 p.311-312) Corbin Ball lists some assets of virtual meetings and web-conferences being the less time spent on travelling, lower costs, global access and possibility to completely record and archive the entire conference. The weaknesses, according to Ball, are the lack of interaction between participants and above all, humans are social creatures and it is natural for us to gather and exchanging of thoughts is more productive and inspiring when meeting face-to-face. (op. cit. p.311-312)

Being a global business, conference business is growing in geographical terms since some developing countries are becoming more stable and challenging the traditional leadership of the west. Rogers (2008, p.307) states: "Countries such as China and India are investing heavily in conference and business event facilities, and their own burgeoning economies will generate substantial demand for meeting space." Also Davidson (2009) brings out China, Middle East and South Africa as upcoming conference destinations. To prove the future of these countries, Davidson (2009) highlights the opening of the China National Convention Center in October 2009 and already there

were 173 events reserved for the year 2015 forecasting the total delegate amount of 320 000.

It seems there is no more an article about trends which does not cover environmental, sustainable and green issues. Eco-friendly business is no longer a future trend, it is a current topic and the development seems to be on-going. In addition, conferences face the challenges of sustainability, since global meetings often mean air travel and produce a large carbon footprint for each delegate. Fortunately, air travel provides its own means of compensating the ecological waste (e.g. extra fees) so the conference venues and organizers have been able to focus on the green side of things at the conference venue. Rogers (2008, p.313-318) explains that venues and organisers have developed their waste reduction and recycling plans as well as concentrating on the energy usage of the conference. For investors, the green aspects are important and the focus is on ecological projects.

The David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh promotes itself as the first green convention center. They opened officially in 2003 and have committed their building design, operations and organisation policies to green values. They remind that the success of green operations is teamwork of designers, planners, contractors and attendees. (David L. Lawrence Convention Center, 2009)

Thus, also other suppliers for conferences are required to offer ecological services and products. These qualities are also marketing assets that attract also the associations and corporations which emphasize the ecological aspects in their line of business.

3 CONFERENCE BUSINESS IN FINLAND

3.1 History

Finland has established its position as a respectable international conference destination. International association meetings attract yearly about 60 000 visitors to Finland, offering opportunities for people interested in same matter to network and share information. According to the Finland Convention Bureau which has been promoting the growth of international events in Finland already for 36 years, about 500 international meetings or events are held in Finland every year. Already over the past 20 years Finland has been ranked among the top 20 congress countries of the world the average ranking being the 15th. (Why Finland?, 2010)

Union of International Associations (UIA) defines international association events as international congresses with at least 250 participants who are from at least 5 different countries. At least 40 % of the attendees must be from outside the host country, and the duration of the congress must be at least 2 days. However, these characteristics do not need to be fulfilled if the congress has at least 50 delegates and is organised or sponsored by an international association accepted by UIA. UIA gathers yearly information and statistics on international association events and publishes lists of world's leading congress countries and cities. (Johtavat kongressimaat ja kaupungit 2009, 2009)

Most of the international congresses in Finland are organised in the fields of medical and natural sciences, technology and international technology. According to statistics by Finland Convention Bureau, 19,7 % of the international congresses held in Finland in 2010 were in the field of technology and information technology. The second largest field was economy,

manufacturing and communication with 17,1 % followed by social sciences, history and safety, natural sciences and mathematics, and medical sciences. (Kansainväliset kongressit 2010, 2011)

According to Finland Convention Bureau's press releases from the past 10 years, it can be concluded that the amount of international events held in Finland has been fluctuating yearly. In 2001, 183 international congresses were confirmed in Finland, attended by an estimated 50,000 delegates. (Finland expects nearly 50,000 congress visitors, 2001) Approximately same amount of delegates were expected to attend in 174 international conferences that were confirmed for the year 2003 in January. (Busy convention year brings eight large-scale congresses to Finland, 2003)

The record year for Finland this far has been 2006, when approximately 500 international association meetings and meetings related to the EU Presidency were held in the country. In 2006, the total amount of congress participants were about 86 000. According to the statistics of 2007, Finland was the only Nordic country to be ranked in the top ten for international association meetings. It can be seen that external factors such as political or governmental circumstances may have influence on the amount of international events. Variable situations in global economy, especially during the past few years, also affect the number of international congresses. (Helsinki and Finland among world's top congress destinations, 2007)

The latest statistics published by the Union of International Associations indicate that in year 2009, Finland hosted the total amount of 153 international association congresses, whereas the world's leading conference country was United States. The leading congress city in 2009 was Singapore. Finland was ranked 18th and Helsinki 20th in statistics for international association meetings in 2009. Finland's position fell by one place compared to the results of 2008. 72 of the 153 congresses Finland hosted were held in Helsinki (Finland remains one of the top 20 congress destinations in the world, 2010; Johtavat kongressimaat ja kaupungit, 2009).

3.2 Why Finland?

Finland has several strengths and assets as an international congress destination and that is the reason why it has year after year ranked among the top 20 congress destinations in the world.

Finland is easily accessible and has a central location for congress guests coming from all over the world. Good and regular flight connections from large airports in Europe and other parts of the world make Finland effortless to reach. In addition, there are functional ferry and railway connections from neighbouring countries to Finland.

In addition, Finland Convention Bureau lists the quality of the venues as an asset for Finland as a congress destination. Meeting venues in Finland represent international standards and are available in many different varieties such as purpose built congress centers, hotels, spas and cruise ships. Meeting venues of different scales are available in several different Finnish cities, not only in the capital region. Other cities such as Tampere, Jyväskylä and Turku can offer suitable venues for larger international congresses. Finland is known for well-functioning services and reliable suppliers which attracts international guests to the country. According to a Finland Convention Bureau's survey, 87 % of the respondents considered congress arrangements either good or very good. (Finland, 2010)

Finland is a safe country for organising international events. According to the Finland Convention Bureau's latest congress survey 90% of international congress attendees review Finland's safety as "good" or "very good". Safety being increasing concern for international congress organisers. Finland with its low crime rate is a good choice for destination. (Finland, 2010)

Finland being one of the world's leading nations in many fields of technology is a fact helping to attract more international meetings to the country and gives Finland a competitive edge as a congress destination. In addition to several fields of technology, Finland has gained reputation abroad due to famous

design and architecture which might attract international congress organisers to Finland.

Beautiful and unspoiled nature in Finland offers opportunities for social programs and activities. The exotic nature and Lapland is widely used in marketing Finland for international guests. Sustainability being a growing concern for international congress organisers is being taken into consideration in Finland. Finland Convention Bureau has acknowledged the fact that environmental responsibility is becoming an important competitive factor in the meeting industry, and published the first manual for responsible meetings in Finland in 2009. (First manual for responsible meetings published in Finland, 2009)

3.3 Operators in Conference Business in Finland

As the Conference Business in Finland has developed, also the number of operators in this field has increased. There are agencies and intermediaries in almost every location and city in Finland to assist the client in organising conferences. Naturally, most of the companies have at least their headquarters in Helsinki or the capital area, but they are also willing to perform in other cities as well. According the research of Kuosmanen and Tuomela (2008) conducted for the Finland Convention Bureau, in 2007, 25% of congresses held in Finland were organised with the help of a PCO company. 11% of the congresses were organized with the help of travel agencies, 6% with EMC's and 54% had used some other type of service. 73% of people who answered to the survey were familiar with the Finland Convention Bureau but only 23% has used its services. However, 83% were familiar with the local Convention bureau of their city and 42% has used its services.

Finland Convention Bureau (Professional Organisers, 2011) has listed some examples of such operators. The companies presented are to introduce the reader to the intermediaries market in Finland and give some examples of the competition in the business in Finland.

Professional Conference Organizers (PCO's) are the most common operators in Finland. Such companies are for example Confedent International Ltd. and Congrex / Blue & White Conferences. They offer a wide variety of services to organise a conference of any size. They are both part of a large international company that have their offices all around the world and are located in Helsinki.

In addition, Destination Management Companies (DMC's) are popular in Finland. Kuoni Destination Management offers their services to individuals and groups all around the world. It is a unit of the leisure travel company Kuoni Group and it co-operates with the global network of Destination Management Companies. Next Travel Ltd. is another kind of DMC in Finland: it handles all in-coming traffic to Finland. Next Travel is basically a travel agency but it has also expertise in conference organising and offers all services for conferences held in Finland.

For smaller groups and adventure-seeking customers there are also specialised Event Management Companies (EMC's) in Finland that offer memorable experiences in interesting locations or provide some other added value. Saaristomailma – The World of Islands and Safaris – The Lapland Connection are both companies that have realised the speciality of Finnish nature and exotic locations from a tourist point of view. Saaristomailma offers experiences for groups and individuals in the gulf of Finland and Safaris defines itself as “a full-service Incoming Agency / Destination & Event Management Company which operates in Lapland”.

Some of the agencies in Finland have found their own customer segment by specialising to a niche market in the event and conference business. Tapahtumantekijät and BSG Marketing / Eventgarden are companies offering overall event marketing. On the other hand, Management Events International organizes invitation-only events in Finland and Luovat Palvelut – Creative Services Finland differentiate themselves by providing only event production. (Professional Organisers, 2011)

In terms of more practical arrangements of the conference organising, some companies in Finland offer services to be purchased for the conferences. For

example Suomen Kongressiteknikka Oy offers equipment rentals, interpretation systems and all av-systems for congresses. Of course, if a conference is held in a purpose-built conference center, there might not be a need for some of these external services, but other venues might not offer these services themselves. Other kind of conference service, mostly offered though PCO's is Eventizer: software which enables registration services, invoicing, abstract handling, reporting etc. It is a software product designed and produced in Finland and the company is located in Jyväskylä. (Suppliers, 2011)

Of course, Finland has also non-profit organisations which are by some way or another involved in promoting or organising conferences. Educational institutions, mostly universities and universities of applied sciences are a part of the Finnish conference industry by organising events themselves, being a part of international networks which organises events and educating future professionals for the field of conference management. Another part of these organizations are the governmental and national tourism and travel promoters. For example, Finnish Tourism Board and Finland Promotion Board carry out developing work and promotion for the conference industry in Finland. The most visible parts to the public of these boards are the internet portals VisitFinland and thisisFinland.

There is also one trade association in Finland, working in the field of event business. MPI Finland is the Finnish chapter of Meeting Professionals International MPI which is a non-profit organisation promoting meetings industry all over the world and giving the professionals support, opportunities and networking possibilities. MPI, established in 1972 in the United States, has approximately 24 000 members including about 100 members in Finland. MPI Finland's vision is to actively promote the industry for it to become a success factor in various organisations. MPI Finland's mission is for MPI to become the world leading organisation having a heavy impact to the shape of the MICE industry. (MPI Suomi-Finland Ry, 2010)

One significant player in the field of international and domestic events in Finland is the Finland Convention Bureau. It is a national organisation which represents the whole industry in Finland. Finland Convention Bureau has also

sub-branched in Finland, the local convention bureaus of larger cities, e.g. Turku, Tampere and Jyväskylä. The local Convention Bureau's aims are to promote the region as an event location and support the local agencies and intermediaries in organising and attracting conferences to the region. (About us, 2011)

3.3.1 Finland Convention Bureau

Finland Convention Bureau is the only official national sales and marketing organisation for the convention industry and corporate events of Finland. It represents the meeting and convention industry and promotes the competitiveness of its members. FCB works in the fields of international sales, marketing and communication activities. The FCB has international co-operation through the memberships for example in International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), European Cities Marketing (ECM) and union of International Associations, Meeting Professional International (MPI) and The Society of Incentive & Travel Executives (SITE).

FCB has circa 100 members from all the sectors of the MICE industry in Finland, including

- venues
- congress organisers
- transportation providers
- hotels and restaurants
- companies offering specialised services
- cities, local and regional authorities
- travel destinations

Finland Convention Bureau was first established in 1974 from the initiative by the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce. The focus was first to attract international association meetings to the capital area but was later expanded to cover the

whole of Finland. FCB has also taken over the responsibility of developing the corporate travel sector from the Finnish Tourist Board. The activities of FCB are funded by membership fees, support from the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and through project sales.

Finland Convention Bureau's vision for 2015 is to promote the competitiveness of Finnish MICE industry in the best possible way, be an important co-operator, a unifying force and set the trends for other Bureaus alike.

As a part of the services Finland Convention Bureau offers, it assists the organising companies and associations in Finland to bid for larger international events. This way Finland has a greater chance in accomplishing to win the bid and acquiring the event to Finland. The Finland Convention Bureau has ready statistics, lists of reference events and surveys and promotional material of Finland, the locations and cities which can be included in the bid. With the experience of Finland Convention Bureau even smaller cities and companies might have a change to host an international conference since they can present themselves in a reliable and professional manner to the associations offering the events for bidding. (About us, 2011)

3.4 Conference Venues in Finland

Finland offers a wide variety of high quality venues - everything from a conference center for 10,000 people to an intimate log cabin meeting room for 20. Altogether Finland offers ten venues that can accommodate 1,000 to 10,000 persons, and the largest fixed meeting room has 4,400 seats. Helsinki alone offers around 80 hotels and 11,000 rooms among international chains and local design hotels. Finland's 14 congress cities offer unique settings for meetings small and large. (Finland, 2011)

Finland has also an on-going growth in congress centre and room capacities with development and building projects increasing the number facilities in the whole country. (Lindberg, 2007)

According to the research by Kuosmanen and Tuomela (2008) conducted for the Finland Convention Bureau, in 2007 44 % of congresses in Finland were organised in colleges and universities, 27 % in conference centres, 11 % in hotels and 18 % in other facilities. The biggest conferences by the amount of delegates were held in conference centres and most of the congresses under 250 delegates were held in universities.

There are several purpose-built Congress Centres in Finland, for example Taitotalo Congress Centre in Helsinki (housing 11 conference rooms and exhibition area of 300 square meter) and Levi Summit Conference and Exhibition Centre (housing 19 conference rooms). These Congress Centres offer usually at least one auditorium space with rising style seating and multiple flexible rooms for the delegates to separate into smaller groups for meetings and discussions. These rooms can often be also sold individually for smaller meetings alone. Furthermore, exhibition areas are important for the centres since most of the bigger scale conferences often include an exhibition or at least a poster showcase. Purpose-built conference centres offer usually also at least a part of the conference organising services themselves inside the centre. Hence, for some smaller or more modest meetings it is not even necessary to hire services from other as the centre can offer them to you. (Suppliers, 2011)

Hotels have realised the importance of conferences inside the hotels themselves rather than only accommodating conference delegates. When looking at the list of hotels offering conference sites from the Finland Convention Bureau's website (Suppliers, 2011), it is clear that only the larger hotel chains have had the interest and physical capability to start offering conference facilities. To mention a few, Radisson SAS, Sokos and Scandic are listed having hotels in many cities of Finland of course concentrated in the larger cities and naturally to the capital city area. The importance of conference related business is clear to these hotels, since many of them have even integrated it to their names, for example Conference Hotel Meripuisto in

Espoo and Majvik Meeting and Convention Hotel in Kirkkonummi. (Suppliers, 2011)

To achieve a more leisure-like feel to the conference, there are also resort venues for conferences. Turku Ruissalo Spa Hotel offers cabinets, meeting rooms and a lecture hall for conferences inside a wellness centre. Ruissalo Spa Hotel is a typical Finnish resort offering conference facilities by being a spa/wellness centre which offers conference rooms as a side business to draw more group reservations and regular clients.

When it comes to academic conferences and fields of special knowledge, universities and colleges and other academic venues play a significant part in offering venues for conferences and meetings. For example, the University of Tampere hosts multiple conferences, educational events and meetings during the academic year 2010-2011. Several of the events are international in terms of English language, international guest lecturers and organising associations (Coming Events, 2010). University of Helsinki, educating 65 000 students, has multiple events organised in their facilities, too. The Seeing, Hearing, Reading and Believing – Authorities in the Middle Ages Conference is a good example of an event organised in September 2010 in the University of Helsinki venue by various international associations of the specific field of interest (Glossa ry., 2010).

3.5 Conference Business in Jyväskylä

Jyväskylä region is among the most popular congress destinations in Finland after the metropolitan area and some other larger cities such as Tampere. Jyväskylä's advantages as a congress city are its location in the middle of the country, a popular multidisciplinary university and modern and versatile venues for meetings and congresses.

According to a reservation data published by Finland Convention Bureau the amount of international congresses in Jyväskylä in year 2010 was 44. The

amount of international congresses in Finland was 416, hence 11% were organised in Jyväskylä. (Kansainväliset kongressit 2010, 2011)

Jyväskylä promotes itself as the Human Technology city according to Jyväskylä Convention Bureau. Local educational establishments and businesses mainly focusing on technology and science give Jyväskylä a remarkable advantage in organising scientific conferences. (Jyväskylä – Human Technology city in the heart of Finland, 2010)

Significant factor in Jyväskylä as a congress destination is it's notable image as a city of sports research. Knowledge and expertise in the field of sports is available from many different sources. Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä is the only sports faculty in the country and other sport research institutes are located in the region.

- KIHU (Research Institute for Olympic Sports)
- LIKES (Foundation for Sport and Health Sciences)
- Sports Laboratory of the University of Jyväskylä

(Jyväskylä, city of sport, 2010)

Jyväskylä has many years' experience in organising international scale events. It is the second popular destination for fairs of all the cities in Finland and also a very important congress destination. The most well-known and largest event that has already been organised for more than fifty years in Jyväskylä region is Neste Oil Rally Finland. (Jyväskylä, city of international events, 2010)

Jyväskylä offers congress venues for many different purposes. The most well-known venue for different sizes of events is Jyväskylä Paviljonki, which is a full service congress and trade center situated in the center of Jyväskylä. In addition, the universities and many hotels and other hospitality establishments in the region provide suitable facilities for meetings and congresses.

At the moment, there are not many companies offering congress management services in the Jyväskylä region. One of the most long term operators in the industry, Confedent International Ltd –Jyväskylä Events closed recently. Jyväskylä Congresses, in turn, has started its operations in the congress and event management sector.

In the Jyväskylä region, nature, lakesides, culture and design are the main theme for the social programme activities. There are many companies in the region that organise activities and trips for congress guests and groups.

The city of Jyväskylä is constantly developing itself and the services the city has to offer to meet the needs of the event industry. The newest project is building a new Sokos Hotel in connection with the international congress and trade fair centre Jyväskylän Paviljonki. There will be direct access to the congress facilities from the hotel. The aim is to increase tourism income by attracting more meetings and events in Jyväskylä region. (New Sokos hotel to join congress centre in Jyväskylä, 2010)

3.5.1 Jyväskylä Convention Bureau

Jyväskylä Convention Bureau is a local convention bureau providing assistance in bringing international meetings and congresses to Jyväskylä. Their cost-free services include :

- *Assistance with conference and congress bids and marketing*
- *Dispatch of invitations and Jyväskylä marketing material*
- *Organization of familiarization visit*
- *Help with advance planning of congresses*
- *Investigation of conference and accommodation facilities and preliminary reservations*
- *Help with designing the social programme*

(Jyväskylä Convention Bureau, 2010)

Jyväskylä Convention Bureau networks with local companies and public organisations towards the same goal of increasing the number of international meetings in Jyväskylä. Their partners include the city of Jyväskylä, several educational institutes, hotels, suppliers of social programme and activity services, and expertise services in the field of event management and congress organising. (Jyväskylä Convention Bureau, 2010)

4 ASSOCIATION SEGMENT

4. 1 Types of Associations

Associations play an important role in the modern society. Most people belong to an association either because of their employment or their interest or hobby. Associations exist and operate to serve their members and to allow people interested in same matter to network and share information.

Associations come in many sizes and may operate both regionally, nationally and /or internationally. There are associations that operate professionally while others include relatively much voluntary work. (Rogers, 2003, p.33)

Almost in any case, meetings and events play a significant role in the operation of an association. Annual meetings and events gather large amount of the members of an association together and regular meetings are the most common event type among associations. Meetings are held to share knowledge and make decisions about future actions of the association.

Depending on the size and nature of the association, the types of organised event range from congresses and seminars to trade shows ,fairs and different new kinds of events originating from urgent matters of current interest.

There is a wide range of associations from various different professional and recreational fields. Most associations could be described as 'not-for-profit'

organisations as they do not exist to generate income. According to Rogers (2003, p.33) they could be categorised as follows:

- *professional or trade associations/ institutions (whose members join because of their employment);*
- *voluntary associations and societies (whose members join primarily to further an interest or hobby);*
- *charities;*
- *religious organizations;*
- *political parties;*
- *trade unions.*

(Rogers, 2003, p.33)

4.2 Special Characteristics of Association Events

4.2.1 Delegate Characteristics

Due to the 'not-for-profit' nature of the many associations, Rogers (2003, p.33) mentions that association events need to cover their costs, and if possible generate profit to support the association's future activities and to promote future conferences. Delegates are often required to pay for their own expenses to cover the cost of the conference. Delegates normally choose to attend the conference rather than are asked to attend by their employer which is often the case in corporate events. This might create challenges for the congress organiser. To make sure the delegates are willing to attend the conference, the organiser must keep the costs as low as possible and to be able to offer different accommodation options for different budgets.

However, Rogers (2003, p .33) emphasizes that association meetings and conferences are many times required to be run professionally because of their media coverage, especially in the case of large international association conferences. Compared to smaller corporate events, the number of delegates is often much higher in association events and hundreds of attendees

naturally attract more media attention. For that reason, also safety and security issues are a growing concern for associations that organise large events.

4.2.2 Location and Venue

Associations tend to follow several different patterns in staging their main annual conferences. National annual meetings and events are often planned well in advance, and many times rotate moving to different regions of the country. Rogers (2003, p.36) mentions that some associations want to be fair to their members around the country by changing the location of the event regularly. This is arranged in order to make it more effortless for the members to attend the event by being accessible to everybody alternately. However, due to their operation focusing on a certain geographical area, some associations are quite immobile, and choose the same destination year after year. In addition to this, there are certain associations that are willing to choose and try something different each year, and are not following a regular geographical pattern at all.

Venue choice is based on the number of delegates and the needs of the certain event. According to Rogers (2003, p.36) association conferences are often held in purpose-built conference or convention centres due to their large size and amount of attendees. Hotels are also popular venues, especially those that can cater for larger events and offer many services under one roof. Some associations stage their events in town halls and civic venues while others prefer universities and other academic venues.

4.2.3 Lead Time and Duration of Association Events

When organising an association event, it is important to allow sufficient lead time to plan, organise and promote the event. According to Rogers (2003, p.35) major association conferences have a relatively long lead time which can be often measured in years. International association conferences may require lead times of 5 years or more. The main reason is the limited choice of venues, especially if the number of delegates is several hundreds or thousands. It is essential for associations to be prepared to book for venues well in advance as some of the larger purpose-built conference centers have provisional reservations for more than ten years ahead.

The duration of association conferences is often measured in days excluding smaller events such as meetings and seminars. Major association conferences may last up to 3-4 days and often also include incentive elements such as social programmes and tours. The peak seasons are autumn and spring, as those are important times of the year for associations operations. Limited number of events might also take place in summer and winter seasons, again depending on the association's nature. (Rogers, 2003, p.36-37)

Several general characteristics apply among the association segment, but Rogers (2003, p. 34) reminds that there are some important differences between different types of associations. There are distinctive factors in expectations and budgets as the field of associations is that large and diverse.

4.3 Organisational Decision Making Process and Buying Behaviour

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, association buyers differ from corporate buyers in many different ways. One of the most important factor distinguishing

association buyers from corporate buyers is the budget and the fact that association buyers are employed by 'not-for-profit' organisations while corporate buyers are employed by 'for-profit' organisations.

The buygrid framework introduces a generic model for organisational buying behaviour. The authors consider applying the eight steps of the buygrid framework introduced by Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010, p.179-181) suitable because of the similarities between organisational and association buying behaviour in the basic process. Organisational buyers - as association buyers- do not buy products or services for personal consumption, but hospitality products to provide training, rewarding and lodging for their employees and members. The eight stages are:

- 1. Problem Recognition*
- 2. General Need Description*
- 3. Product Specification*
- 4. Supplier Search*
- 5. Proposal Solicitations*
- 6. Supplier Selection*
- 7. Order-Routine Specification*
- 8. Performance Review*

(Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2010, p.179-181)

The buying process begins with problem recognition. There is a need to buy a certain good or service. According to Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010, p.179) the problem recognition can occur because of internal or external stimuli. The association may for example create a need for a meeting because of a current issue.

The second step is a general need description. The buyer finds out the requirements of e.g. a meeting; what kind of facilities and services are needed to implement the meeting. The decision makers might seek assistance from others in defining the needs and requirements for the certain event.

Having decided the general requirements, the more specific requirements can be considered. For example the technical requirements such as video projector for the meeting facilities and the amount of hotel rooms can be considered. In this stage it is important that the salesperson is able to help the buyer and to answer their questions about the available services.

In the Supplier Search stage the buyer conducts a search to find out the available service providers. The buyer may seek for information from many different sources and visit potential venues.

After the supplier search the buyer invites the potential venues to submit proposals to tell what they have got to offer and to consider if the service is suitable for the buyer's budget.

The Supplier Selection is done as soon as the buyer has found a suitable choice and may have negotiated more about the services they offer. The buyer may then consider different suppliers and base the decision on the terms, conditions and the price of the services.

The Order Routine Specification includes the final order and formal contracts of the meeting. Both parties know the deadlines and guarantees for the contract.

After the purchase the buyer does a performance review. The buyer determines whether the service met their needs and if they are going to purchase from the same company again.

(Kotler et al., 2010, p.179-181)

4.4 Decision Makers and Influencers in the Association

Every association has their own practices about organising an event. In addition to this, all associations have their own practices about who makes the decisions due to very different natures of associations. According to International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making (2010) there

are also numerous different decision-influencers inside the associations, both formal and informal, who can play a significant role in the decision-making process. Rogers (2003, p. 34-35) also emphasizes that the association decision-making process is very different from the corporate sector because of the committee chosen by the membership is in a large role in the decision making process.

According to International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making (2010) the participants in the association decision making process include:

- *Single volunteer leader (eg President; Chairman).*
- *Single association executive (eg CEO; Secretary General).*
- *Full Board of Directors.*
- *Executive Board.*
- *Congress Committee (either a formal grouping or set up ad hoc to make a particular decision).*
- *Representatives of association sub-groups (or in the case of a federation, the constituent organisations' nominated representatives).*
- *National representatives.*
- *Official delegates at General Assembly.*
- *All members (eg via online referendum).*

Decision-influencers are:

- *Hired consultants.*
- *Core PCO (A PCO company hired to organise the association's meeting function over a multi-year period).*
- *Association Management Company.*
- *Sponsors.*
- *Business partners.*
- *Association staff (especially meetings dept).*
- *Past members of Board of Directors.*
- *Members who have recently hosted the association meeting.*
- *Respected senior figures related to the association.*
- *Association leaders from other international associations with similar size/profile of events (many association executives trust the views and experience of their peers with regard to recently used destinations/venues).*
- *Politicians.*
- *Celebrities.*
- *News media (negative stories especially relating to security issues can have a big influence).*
- *Other decision-influencers such as family, relatives, friends.*

(International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

4.5 Decision Making Criteria

Several factors influence associations' final decision making process when organising major international events. International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) has prepared a check-list for associations about which factors to consider in the decision-making process. It is also mentioned in the ICCA publication that the list is unlikely to include all the elements relevant to every individual association, but is a comprehensive list to get started in the process and to avoid omitting essential issues. The list provides important information for suppliers who wish to work in partnership with international associations. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

4.5.1 Logistical Criteria

The most important considerations in the logistical criteria are the choice of destination, date and timing related factors, main venue and the local suppliers. First of all ICCA recommends associations to check if the destination fits the association's rotation system and to select a date that does not clash with other international events in the region. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

International accessibility such as international air routes, connecting flights, rail connections, and even visa policies do affect the choice of the destination in the case of events that host international delegates. Local accessibility considerations include distance from airport and rail terminal to key hotels and venues. Distance between main venue, hotels and off site social venues must allow effective shifting from one place to another. The destination must be

able to offer clear public transportation information and options, and nowadays the importance of disabled-friendly infrastructure in the destination is highly appreciated. . (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

ICCA advises associations to clearly specify their needs and demands for the main venue. These often include capacity and size of the facilities, transformability of the facilities, quality and modernity of the venue, technical features and infrastructure and in-house support services that the venue can offer. The associations may have different requirements about privacy and safety and security on site, especially in the case of international events it is important to find out whether the main venue has multiple clients at the same time or if the facilities are in solo use of the association. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

Accommodation options and in specific the available hotel capacity do have influence in the destination choice. Associations check and confirm the contracts with the hotels about room-blocks that are already secured provisionally. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

ICCA also lists some local suppliers that are part of the logistical criteria. The association may need assistance from several suppliers in the destination. These may include for example local PCOs, security personnel providers, volunteer staff coordinators and VAT/tax consultants. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

4.5.2 Financial criteria

Major international congresses provide financial opportunities for non-profit organisations but can also be a great risk. Defining the objectives helps the associations to avoid unpleasant surprises. From the beginning of the

process, the associations determine who is the contracting party with the suppliers and who draws up the budget and is responsible of it. Numerous other financial considerations concerning additional charges are advised to be made in the early stages of the process.

In addition, ICCA lists PCOs,DMCs (destination management companies), delegate accommodation, transport, subventions and support to be areas that should be carefully considered from the financial point of view. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

4.5.3 Internal Association Objectives

The internal association objectives originate from within the association's values and mission. ICCA encourages suppliers that wish partnerships with international associations to invest in research about internal association objectives. Strategic objectives of a certain association have great influence in deciding where major events are held. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

Internal factors that suppliers need to be aware of include for example:

- The rotation pattern of associations' events
- Large local membership in the region
- Expertise and availability of the association's key subject area and local speakers in the area
- Opportunities to cooperate with other local, national or international associations in the same field

(International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

4.5.4 Political/ Emotional Criteria

In the ICCA publication it is also pointed out that there are other factors related to the decision making process, not only those that are based on factual evidence. The decision makers are human, and the social pressure, political and emotional factors are sometimes effecting the decision making process. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

Purely the attractiveness and tourist-friendliness of the destination may lead decision makers to choose the destination. In addition, cultural appeal and links to association's own history may feel important for the decision makers. Bidder related factors such as sympathy or respect for a certain bidder or destination, or a popular or politically important leader of the bid can lead associations in making decisions on false reasons. Decision makers may base their decisions on prejudices or personal experiences, or the decision may be made for political or friendship reasons. (International Association meetings: bidding and decision-making, 2010)

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS

5.1 Research Aims

The objective of the thesis is to clarify special characteristics of the association segment and to define the parts of the event management process where the characteristics can be applied. Hence, the results of the research are to refer to the following research questions:

- What are the special characteristics of an association as a buyer of conference management services?
- How to apply the special characteristics in the operational process of conference management? How can they be taken into consideration in marketing?

As the thesis is aimed for the host company Jyväskylä Booking to develop its operational part of arranging international association events and attracting new potential association customers it was essential to investigate the opinions of associations and their relations to events management. The questions asked during the interviews were based on six different themes: background information, initiatives for events and decision-making process, process of selecting the event location, utilization of event management companies, the contents, execution and venue of the event, and challenges & visions. The interview proceeded according to the natural event management process timeline. To read the exact interview questions, see Appendix 2.

5.2 Research Methods

Qualitative study was chosen as the research method of this thesis. From the beginning of the thesis process, it was clear for the authors that quantitative study is not the most suitable way to approach the subject matter. Also, the difficulty in contacting the associations who are the main source of information in this data collection process immediately limited the possibility of implementing a proper quantitative study.

According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2000, p.191) in an interview, the data collectors are in direct interaction with the research object. This was the main reason why interview was chosen as the data collection method. It was already thought in advance that all definitions might not be clear for the interviewees and direct conversation with the interviewees might give more

information and also help the interviewees in understanding the research issues. Hirsjärvi et al. (2000, p.192) also mention another asset in interviews, which was also a reason to choose the interview: interviews produce broader answers and the interviewees might give more information what the interviewers have anticipated beforehand.

The main research issue, event management process and the customer segment, inspired a theme interview. It is an interview form between a structured interview and an open interview (Hirsjärvi, et al., 2000, p.195). In a theme interview the main issues might be already given to the interviewee in advance but the actual questions and the order of the questions might vary slightly in each interview. It is also possible to use the theme interview in a quantitative way and analyse according to the interviewees' answers. (Hirsjärvi et al, 2000, p.195). The flexibility of a theme interview proved to be a suitable method for this research as the experiences of the interviewees were different and in some cases the structured interview method would not have been productive. In addition, some of the interviewees had thought of the themes given to them already before the interview and it made the interview more effortless and less time consuming. The interviews were recorded in order for the authors to have precise data and results at the analysis stage.

5.3 Interviewees

The interview was carried out for seven associations, which were chosen due to their experience in organising international association events, especially conferences in Finland. All of these associations arrange national events annually and internal events even more often. International events are organised in average every 2-5 years, but some are more active than others and organise multiple international events a year.

It was also relevant to find associations from various fields in order to examine the needs and wants of the whole association field and as mostly the factors

influencing an association event are related to the nature of the association itself. The target was to interview people who are either responsible for the events of the association or involved in the practical arrangements to receive as precise answers as possible. The associations interviewed were Keski-Suomen Liitto/Regional Council of Central Finland, Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain keskusliitto MTK r.y./The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners, Suomen Journalistiliitto/The Union of Journalists in Finland, Sulasol, Suomen Laulajain ja Soittajain liitto r.y./The Finnish Amateur Musicians' Association, Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu/Finnish Sports Federation, Suomen Transplantaationkirurginen yhdistys r.y./The Finnish Association of Transplant Surgeons and Suomen Voimisteluliitto/The Finnish Gymnastics Federation. As the structures of these associations are different, some interviews were executed as individual interviews, some couple interviews and one had three representatives of the association as interviewees. It has to be remembered that some replies of the interviewees may include also personal opinions. It proved to be challenging for the authors to find the individual members of the associations who are directly responsible of the association's events. Nevertheless, it was the aim to collect interviews from the members who would have the most detailed information of the association's event processes. Selection of the interviewees would be something to improve if the research would be replicated later on.

5.4 Interview Results

5.4.1 Initiative for Events and Decision Making Process

The associations get initiatives for organising events both internally and externally. Internal initiatives mainly originate from the operations and strategy of the association. All of the associations have also regular rotating events, at least administrative meetings. Occasionally arises a need to organise an event focusing on a current topic or in order for the association to promote

itself. For example, two of the associations mentioned that as they are trade unions, every now and then they have a need to organise an event around the topical themes of trusteeship. Associations receive also initiatives for events from co-operators, umbrella- and sub-associations and other external sources. There were difficulties for the interviewees determining the division between external and internal events since there is so much co-operation and joint efforts in organising events.

After the initiative, there are various ways of proceeding in the organising process. However, an organising committee is often created. The organising committee can be either an internal part of the association or formed especially for the particular event from all partners of the organising process. The event organising process depends on the size and the nature of the event. The associations interviewed have organised events with the participate number ranging from 3 delegates to 25 000 delegates, but the average amount of delegates in their international events is in hundreds. The duration of their events vary from half a day to a maximum of two weeks. In larger events, the process can be already settled but in small events the process is more informal and only the executive board approves the final decisions. Already in the early stage of planning large events the participation of the government and/or the municipality may be required.

According to the interviewees, the budget for association events is quite strict and set in the beginning of the event planning. Afterwards, there is only little room for flexibility. One of the interviewees explained the first three versions of the budget are often done based of the previous events, one optimistic, one realistic and one with a pessimistic scenario.

The lead time for the events of these associations is in average 2 years. There are exceptions: large events require up to 10 years of preparation but small meetings can be arranged in a couple of months.

5.4.2 Process of Selecting the Event Location

Three of the interviewed associations commented that the support of the municipality is an important factor when choosing the location. Due to the practical and operational reasons some of the associations are forced to organise the event on a certain part of the country, such as the metropolitan area. On the other hand, some events rotate across the country or are directly applied for a certain city. Again, the size and nature of the event set preliminary requirements whether the city can be considered suitable or not. Furthermore, two associations emphasized that their association's field of operations set requirements for facilities, as they might need for example concert sites or sporting venues.

Most of the associations agreed on having the following requirements for the event location: qualitative and quantitative accommodation possibilities, accessibility, facilities, environment and the supportive atmosphere of the city. Associations are willing to consider any location where these requirements are fulfilled. Two interviewees especially mentioned that even if some of the practical requirements are not fulfilled, a location can be taken into consideration if it has some other type of special added value to offer, for example exquisite environment. According to one interviewee, an event can be already applied to a certain destination, hence there is no longer a need to consider other locations.

5.4.3 Utilisation of Event Management Companies

Some of the interviewed associations had difficulties in understanding the concept of an event management company. Therefore, the answers were not sufficiently precise to be clearly interpreted. Three of the seven interviewees

had used the services of an event management company. Other three associations had used the services partially but in a smaller scale and one association had not used them at all.

In the cases where these companies had not been used, the main reasons were that services had been expensive, the associations had attempted to arrange the event themselves or they had already had previous negative experiences about the event management companies. However, each association would be willing to consider using the services in the future.

When the companies had been used the decision was based on recommendations of others or the location, word of mouth, marketing situations and simply because the limited selection of companies to choose from. Three of the associations had asked for bids from the companies, especially when organising larger events and particularly one association is obliged to ask for bids due to the regulations of the association. Nevertheless, not all the experiences were positive: three associations had had negative experiences, some of the reasons being disagreement between the company and the association and unclear division of tasks. Those who were satisfied with the services found the event organising process well-prepared and fluent.

Associations had purchased the following services: hotel bookings, registration, technical congress arrangements, abstract services, marketing and communication, program planning, exhibition services, interpretation, social programme, staffing and billing. Majority of the events where event management companies had been used, had also had at least one staff member from the event management company present during the event.

When discussing about the requirements for these companies, a few characteristics were greatly appreciated. The associations emphasized expertise, experience from the field, cost-effectivity and the understanding of the clients' needs and demands.

5.4.4 The Contents, Execution and Venue of the Event

The interviewees' association events include several types of activities: lectures, meetings, presentations, training, poster sessions, galas, dinners, city receptions, free time, social activity, pre- and post-programmes, group work, excursions and sports. Since the operations of associations are based on voluntary work, also these interviewees prefer having their own members as staff of the events. In some cases, hired staff is needed, especially for specific tasks that require professional skills such as technical assistance and interpretation services.

Some characteristics were emphasized in the venue selection process. Naturally, the facilities and amount of attendees were the key factors as well as accessibility of the venue. One interviewee organising for example professional sports events explained that these events have even specific minimum requirements regarding the venue and facilities, which are generated by the international association and are required for the event to be approved. These are rare occasions, but the requirements have to be then precisely fulfilled and demand flexibility and detailed work. The support and enthusiasm of the whole city was mentioned as a significant feature. One interviewed stressed the importance of hospitality and service contact. That said, these associations had used numerous services from the venue, such as technical services, interpretation, catering, photography and video recording, logistics, transportation, program planning and cloakroom services. There were a few services that had been occasionally lacking from the event venue, such as a technical advisor, wlan connection and an info desk.

Six of the associations replied having collected feedback from their events but two of them had not conducted feedback collection systematically in all of their events. The methods of feedback collection were either through internet software, e-mail or by filling a questionnaire. One interviewee specifically mentioned that feedback and data collection and processing are requisites for producing successful future events.

5.4.5 Challenges & Visions

The interviewees were requested to share their opinions on the challenging stages of the overall process of organising an event. According to the associations, co-operation, partners and staffing took a lot of effort as well as the commitment of the umbrella organisation to the event. Other challenging tasks were divisions of tasks, time management, marketing, organising accommodation and controlling the whole event process.

When discussing about Finland as a host for international association events, the responds of the interviewees were quite coherent. According to the interviewees, Finnish food, nature and four seasons should be emphasized for the foreigners. In addition, safety and security and general reliability were valued. The reputation and know-how in the field of congress organising were also mentioned as strengths of Finland.

6 DEVELOPMENT IDEAS

In the case of Jyväskylä Booking, the company has very little experience on organising association events. They are used to offering some individual services related to events organizing, but they have not had the total responsibility for an event yet. These issues dealt in this part are for Jyväskylä Booking to develop their operations in order to gain more clients and events to organise in the Jyväskylä region.

When discussing about the methods and ways of marketing with the interviewees, there were several different opinions. Marketing through e-mail has the benefit of being quite inexpensive and easily distributed but the e-mail has to be immediately interesting so that the receiver will store it for later use.

E-mail brochures also ensure that the information is up-to-date. Some interviewees preferred printed brochures by mail since they valued it more and they were likely to store quality brochures. The disadvantages of a printed brochure are the price and limited updating possibilities. Nowadays websites should be also informative and include more information than the brochure. It is possible to introduce facts, services and possibilities in detail at the websites. It is also highly recommended that the Jyväskylä Booking's website is of high quality since it directly affects to the image of the company and implies the quality level of their services.

The issues to develop or focus on are separated into two parts: operational and marketing considerations. Marketing is discussed separately since it is essential for Jyväskylä Booking to extend their client base and their marketing has to be directed to the associations in particular.

6.1 Operational Considerations

These features and development areas are intended for Jyväskylä Booking to improve their event organizing skills and to maximise the chance for a successful event. They have multiple individual services already in their competences, so not all possible individual event organising services are discussed.

From a customer's point of view, it is necessary for the company to present themselves from the start as professionals and experts in their own field. If the company is not already quite experienced, it is important to show that they have familiarised themselves with events and have knowledge about organising them. If they do have some experience and customers are able to see the results of their event organising skills, the customers are more willing to purchase the services and trust the company. Professionalism and knowledge can be also shown by asking the right questions and leading the organising process forward spontaneously. Often the customers wish to feel as the company is taking care of the process and customers are free to concentrate on something else.

There are also more practical operations to develop and present to the associations when discussing and marketing event management services. Especially according to the associations interviewed, it would be useful to assemble ready product packages for different kind of needs and events. Also in general, the tailoring of the product packages and combinations of services are essential for association events. The product packages should be aimed according to the type of the association or the event itself. They should diverse from a small and inexpensive package to a full range package for a large event.

In order to gain the full responsibility of organising an association event, there are a few services which Jyväskylä Booking should take into consideration as well. The interviews revealed the need for feedback collection and analysis, on-site info desk services, taking care of the technical and Internet services on the event site, marketing the event and providing volunteers or event staff. Informing the customers about the availability of these services through Jyväskylä Booking will create additional profit to the company as well as additional value to the association by being able to organise a comprehensive and successful event.

To ensure any disagreement and unnecessary friction between the company and customer an inclusive and precise contract has to be always signed with the customer. It acts as written proof for both parties and it can be referred to if any disagreement occurs. The agreement also indicates in advance the division of different tasks, hence it ensures all activities and perspectives are taken into consideration in the planning phase.

For many associations, the previous experience has proved that the support of the city is substantive, particularly in large events. The event of thousands of attendees requires also other services than simply the ones arranged at the event site. The visibility of the event around the city and for example, transport services for large number of people, may require concrete support from the city in terms of labour and official permits. Also financial aid for arranging some events in the city can be applied from the city and it is also traditional for the city to host a welcoming reception for the international guests. For Jyväskylä Booking, co-operation with Jyväskylä City could attract customers,

since it shows that not only the company, but the whole city welcomes the event to Jyväskylä.

6.2 Marketing Considerations

As one of the aims for Jyväskylä Booking is to attract and gain new customers, especially associations, in the field of event organizing, marketing material should be updated and addressed for them in particular. The following issues are suggestions to be used for the marketing material for potential customers.

First and foremost the marketing material should imply professionalism and reliable event organising skills that Jyväskylä Booking has. Any experience or reference events could be mentioned to indicate previous accomplishments. It is also possible that the association representative reading the material has attended the event and has positive connotations of the event and services which accentuates the positive image of company. The material should also suggest that by hiring Jyväskylä Booking the association gains value by purchasing a quality event from professionals with little responsibility and effort from themselves. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that although the image and attractiveness are significant in the marketing material, the customers need and look for facts, not only visions and appearance.

If Jyväskylä Booking would produce ready product packages for different types of events and associations, a few of these could be presented in the material to indicate the various options and consideration of various event types. The material should also have pricing information for the customer to evaluate whether they have the resources to use the company's services. It has to be noted, that although it can be assumed that indicating prices could have a negative impact to the customers, several of the interviewees had a preconception of the prices for event organisation services being high and

unfeasible. Consequently, giving correct information about the prices in the marketing material could in fact have a positive effect.

As it is an objective to receive international events to Jyväskylä, the marketing material should have also some implications to the larger perspective. It could be expressed by mentioning in the marketing material that Jyväskylä City support the events and co-operates with Jyväskylä Booking. Associations could also appreciate the promotion of Finland as a country in the marketing material.

7 DISCUSSION

In the beginning of the thesis process authors found it partially challenging to find relevant background information from literature. There is a large selection of literature concerning event management in general but it was challenging to focus on specific information related to the topic of the thesis. Finding information on the association segment proved to be difficult. It seemed as that the association segment has not been studied much and in the authors' opinion it might not be even feasible since the range of operations and associations is so extensive.

The thesis also combined information gathered from the associations and from theoretical literature. This kind of combination was challenging to find at least in the beginning of the thesis process.

In the research part, the interview method was found useful and served the purpose of the thesis. The results of the research gave quite satisfying but not completely comprehensive answers to the research questions set in the beginning of the process. In order to produce fully applicable development procedures to the operation process of conference management, it would have required more intensive co-operation with the host company. In this

thesis the results remained as suggestions for the host company to consider in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Haastattelukysymykset

Olemme 4. vuoden restonomiopiskelijoita Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulusta.

Tutkimme opinnäytetyötämme varten kansainvälisiä järjestötapauksia, sekä ylipäätään järjestöjä tapahtuma-asiakkaina. Tavoitteenamme on selvittää, miten kansainvälisiä järjestötapauksia Suomessa voisi kehittää, ja miten tapahtumajärjestäjäryitykset voisivat entistä paremmin palvella järjestöjä, jotka suunnittelevat suurien, kansainvälisten tapahtumien järjestämistä Suomessa.

Nauhoitamme haastattelun, jotta voimme helpommin palata siihen myöhemmin.

Opinnäytetyöstä tulee julkinen, saammeko käyttää nimeänne/ järjestön nimeä julkaisussa?

1. Taustatiedot

- Haluaisitteko kertoa lyhyesti omin sanoin järjestönne toiminnasta yleisesti.
- Kuinka usein järjestönne järjestää tapahtumia?
- Minkä kokoisia tapahtumat ovat? Kuinka suuri osa niistä kansainvälisiä?
- Kuinka paljon osallistujia?
- Minkä pituisia tapahtumanne yleisesti ovat?
- Järjestättekö tapahtumia säännöllisesti?
- Minkä tyyppisiä tapahtumanne ovat? (Kongressit, kokoukset, messut..)

2. Aloite tapahtuman järjestämiseen & päätöksenteko

- Mistä saatte aloitteen tapahtumaan?
Vanhat/ säännölliset tapahtumat?
Mistä idea uudenlaiseen tapahtumaan?
- Kuka alkaa kehittämään aihetta? Työryhmät?
- Miten prosessi tämän jälkeen etenee?
- Jos aloite ulkopuolelta, kuka päättää että lähdetään mukaan?
- Kuka järjestössä tekee päätökset suunnitteluvaiheessa?
- Budjetti? (Tiukka, suunniteltu? Voidaanko muuttaa myöhemmin?)
- Työryhmän jäsenet?
- Millaisella aikajänteellä tapahtuman suunnittelu etenee

3. Tapahtumapaikkakunnan valinta

- Kuka valitsee paikkakunnan?
- Miten valinta tapahtuu, miten päätös tehdään?
- Mitä ominaisuuksia etsitte tapahtumapaikkakunnalta:

Majoitusvaihtoehdot?

Palvelut?

Ympäristö`?

- Onko ”ehdoton- ei” –paikkoja?
- Kuvailisitteko ihannepaikkakunnan tapahtuman järjestämiseen?
- Mikä tähän mennessä paras? Missä kaikki toimi hyvin, miksi?

4. Tapahtumajärjestäjäyritysten hyödyntäminen

- Oletteko käyttäneet tapahtumajärjestäjäyrityksiä apunanne?

EI

- Miksi ette?
- Voisitteko jatkossa harkita?
- Minkälaista markkinointia haluaisitte saada, ja mitä kautta?
- Minkälaista tietoa siinä tulisi olla

KYLLÄ

- Miten teitte valinnan ja päädyitte kyseiseen yritykseen?
- Edellytykset?
- Kuka teki päätöksen?
- Kilpailutitteko yrityksiä?
- Koitteko tapahtumajärjestäjäyrityksen hyödylliseksi?
- Miksi/ miksi ette?
- Onko selkeä jako mitä te/ he hoitavat? Miten vastuu jakautuu, kuka tekee mitäkin?
- Mitä palveluita heiltä ostitte?
- Mitä ominaisuuksia arvostitte?
- Missä oli parantamisen varaa?
- Markkinointi: mitä kautta? sisältö?
- Olivatko tapahtumajärjestäjäyrityksen edustajat tapahtumapaikalla?

5. Tapahtumien sisältö ja toteutus sekä tapahtumapaikka

- Mitä tapahtumanne sisältävät? (vapaa-ajan ohjelma, pre&post, luennot, kokoukset, näyttelyt, mitä muuta?)

- Onko tapahtumissanne paljon työntekijöitä/vapaaehtoisia?
- Miten valitsitte tapahtumapaikan? (Messukeskus, urheiluhalli, hotelli ?)
- Mitä arvostatte paikassa? Tilat? Palvelut?
- Mitä palveluita olette tapahtumapaikalla käyttäneet? Onko ollut jotain mitä olette kaivanneet tapahtumapaikalle tai mikä ei siellä ole toiminut?
- Oletteko keränneet palautetta? Miten?

6. Haasteet ja visiot

- Mikä on ollut haastavinta, onko jokin osa-alue toista hankalampi?
- Ajatellen teidän alaanne, minkä koette olevan Suomen valtti maana tapahtumien saamisessa/järjestämisessä?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

We are 4th year facility management students from Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

For our bachelor's thesis we research international association events, and associations as event clients in general. Our goal is to investigate how international association events in Finland could be developed, and how PCOs could better serve associations that are planning to organise large, international events in Finland.

We are going to record the interview so that we later can refer to it precisely.

The bachelors thesis will be published online in the electronic database. Will you allow us to use your name/ association's name in the publication?

7. Background information

- Please could you briefly tell about your association in general
- How often does the association organise events?
- The size of the events. How many of them are international?
- How many delegates?
- What is the duration of the events?
- Does your associations you organise events regularly?
- What types of events does your association you organise?
(Congresses, meetings, fairs..)

8. Initiatives for events & decision making process

- Where does the initiatives for events originate?
Old/ regular events?
Where do the ideas for new events come from?
- Who begins to develop the event process? Organising committees ?
- How does the process proceed?
- If the initiative comes from outside, who makes to decision to proceed?
- In the planning phase, who is/are the decision maker(s)?
- Budget? (Strict/flexible?)
- Members of the committee?
- The lead time for events

9. Process of selecting the event location

- Who makes the decision about the location?
- How is the decision made?
- What features do you look for in an event location:

Accommodation options?

Services?

Environment?

- Are there any locations you could not consider?
- Please describe an ideal location for organising an event?
- Which has been the best location this far? Where did everything function well?

10. Utilization of event management companies

- Have you utilized event management companies to help you in the event organizing process?

NO

- Why not?
- Could you possibly consider in the future?
- What kind of marketing material would you like to receive and through which channel?
- What kind of information it should include?

YES

- How did you make the decision about the event management company?
- Prerequisites?
- Who made the decision?
- Did you ask for bids from companies?
- Did you find the event management company useful?
- Why/ Why not?
- Was there a clear division of tasks between the association and the event management company?
- What event management services did you purchase?
- What features did you appreciate?
- Was there room for improvement ?
- Marketing: through which channel? Contents?
- Were the representatives of the event management company present at the venue?

11. The contents, execution and the venue of the event

- What does your association's event include? (social programme, pre&post activities, lectures, meetings, exhibitions, what else?)
- Do your events require plenty of workers/ volunteers?
- How did you make the decision about the venue?(Congress/ fair center, sports hall, hotel?)
- What features do you appreciate in a venue? Facilities? Services?
- What kind of services have you used at the venue site? Has there been something you have been missing or something that did not work?
- Do you collect feedback about your events? How?

12. Challenges and visions

- Which have been the most challenging parts in event organising?
- Concerning your association's field, what do you think are the assets of Finland as event host country?