



ATLAS SIG Business Tourism conference


Business Tourism and The New Normal

**Amsterdam, The Netherlands
November 15-17, 2023**

Abstract Book



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Contents

Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
Keynote Speakers	4
Dušan Borovcanin	4
Adem Braco Suljic	4
Willy Cortus	5
Amber Herrewijn.....	5
Jade Krul	6
Biosketches	7
Abstracts.....	11
Association meeting planners' perceptions of Bleisure as an element of their conferences.....	11
Rob Davidson	11
Bregje Frens	11
The attendee decision-making process and return on investment for attending academic conferences	12
Rob Davidson	12
Joan McLatchie	12
Origin of the events: human cooperation	13
Daniel Delmás Martín	13
María Sánchez de Mora Vidal	13
Transformative Event Design: Exploring the Role of Transformative Experience Facilitators ...	14
Nieke Dieteren	14
The Delivery of a Quality, Value-Driven Irish Experience to the Business Tourist Market.....	15
Lorraine Dunne.....	15
Business Tourism in World Heritage Cities: a response towards sustainability	15
Siliva María López Ruiz.....	15
The Future of the MICE Sector: The Innovative Role of Virtual Reality and the Metaverse	16
Gloria Minoia	16
How can business events drive sustainable innovation? Lessons from Service Design	17
Chiara Orefice	17
Laura Caprioli	17
Erasmus Bleisure. How and Why Spanish Teachers extend their Trips	18
Maria Sánchez de Mora Vidal	18
Akane Sánchez de Mora Vidal	18
Daniel Delmás Martín	18
María Pallarés Renau.....	18

Introduction

A message from Rob Davidson, Visiting Fellow at the University of Greenwich and Managing Director of MICE Knowledge. (www.miceknowledge.com)

On behalf of the ATLAS Business Tourism Special Interest Group, it is my great pleasure to invite you to the 2023 ATLAS Business Tourism conference from 15 to 17 November 2023 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where our hosts will be MBO College Centrum, located in the historic heart of the city.

The ATLAS Business Tourism conference is an annual event, operating under the auspices of ATLAS, The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (www.atlas-euro.org) Since 2004, it has become the most important international annual forum for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of best practice in teaching and researching this subject. The theme of this year's conference will be:

Business Tourism and The New Normal

In 2023, our world continues in a state of turbulence and transformation, shaken by the impacts of the global Covid pandemic and the consequences of an illegal war in Europe, as well as rapid and far-reaching changes in the technological, economic, demographic and social aspects of our lives.

Even as we enter a period of recovery from the most extreme impacts of the pandemic, business tourism has not returned to the pre-pandemic normal. Hybrid business events are a key characteristic of the New Normal. And business tourism destinations, venues and meeting planners are now obliged, more than ever, to demonstrate the value of the face-to-face experience in business events. Sustainability and the social legacy of business events have assumed greater significance. And the distinction between business tourism and leisure travel is fading as witnessed by the rise of 'Bleisure' worldwide.

Who should participate in the conference?

- Anyone teaching Meetings and Business Events (conferences, exhibitions, incentive travel)
- Anyone involved in research connected to these subjects
- Anyone studying these subjects
- Anyone working in the Meetings and Business Events industry who wishes to learn more about current education and research activities for this sector
- Anyone working in the Meetings and Business Events industry who wishes to communicate their views to educators and researchers specialising in this field.

Keynote Speakers



Dušan Borovcanin

Dr. Dušan Borovcanin is the CEO of the Serbia Convention Bureau (Tourism Organisation of Serbia) and the Vice dean at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Singidunum University in Belgrade. In 2022 he was elected as the visiting professor at the University of Strasbourg, EM Business School in France. He served as a project manager in the bid dossier preparation of the successful EXPO 2027 Belgrade candidacy. Dusan received "The meeting star" award as the most influential destination representative by Kongress Magazine in 2021 and most influential individual in 2022. As a professor, he is currently serving

as a member of the editorial board for the SCOPUS-indexed journal "Academica Turistica – Tourism and Innovation journal" and "International Journal of Business Events and Legacies". His professional background includes working for some of the largest hotel chains and a regional hotel management company. He speaks fluently French, English, and Italian. Dusan is passionate about education and research, tourism and business events industry and sports. He is a proud marathon finisher and a recreational tennis player.



Adem Braco Suljic

Based in Zagreb, Croatia, Adem Braco Suljic has spent his entire life immersed in the world of Business Events. Starting as a helping hand at his father's company during his studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he has been actively involved in every aspect of the international MICE industry. His roles quickly developed from basic to executive ones. He has organised and managed meetings with over 20,000 participants, taken part in the development of different meeting infrastructure projects on three continents, and has been deeply involved in technology for the meetings industry.

Since 2016 Braco's main focus has been with MICE Destination Marketing as well as on the development of a specific implementation method of sustainability processes in MICE destinations and special venues. He is eager to learn and adopt new knowledge and practices and to share his experience with colleagues and the business events community. He is a frequent speaker at industry events and enthusiastic about improvement and progress in the MICE sector. Barco is fluent in English and Spanish and is the proud father of two. In his free time, he is passionate about sailing and gastronomy.



Willy Cortus

After having worked as a Data Researcher for an association in the meetings industry (International Congress and Convention Association -ICCA-) for many years, Willy moved to 'the other side' and started in 2021 as an Account Manager at the Amsterdam Convention Bureau, supporting associations and their events. Now, as Data Analyst Congresses, she is back to her beloved research and is currently mapping the main ecosystems in the city. Other tasks are proactively connecting with associations and meeting planners who organize conferences that could strengthen these ecosystems, finding the right method for event evaluations and for measuring event impact.



Amber Herrewijn

Amber Herrewijn teaches Event Management in the Master's program International Leisure, Tourism & Events Management at NHLStenden University. Following the design-based philosophy of her university, Amber cooperates with local festivals to work on innovative prototype developments. Her interest in circularity & sustainability leads to collaborative research on nudging visitors towards sustainable behaviour. She is a capacity builder and researcher of the newly launched EU project BEFuture which aims to connect change makers in the MICE industry who can lift the industry towards a sustainable and digital future.



Jade Krul

- EVENT SPECIALIST
- BUSINESS RELATIONS
- STRATEGY AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Enthusiasm abounds within Jade, she always has an eye on the bigger picture and her main goal is making sure our clients expectations are surpassed. Her 20 years' experience in the hospitality and event industry embodies the innovative beating heart of EVE-events. She is still every bit as involved in the running of this company today as she was in running her own restaurant; pouring her creativity and attention to detail into every event she produces.

Biosketches

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Dr. Dusan Borovcanin is the CEO of the Serbia Convention Bureau (Tourism Organisation of Serbia) and the Vice dean at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Singidunum University in Belgrade. In 2022 he was elected as the visiting professor at the University of Strasbourg, EM Business School in France. He served as a project manager in the bid dossier preparation of the successful EXPO 2027 Belgrade candidacy. Dusan received "The meeting star" award as the most influential destination representative by Kongress Magazine in 2021 and most influential individual in 2022. As a professor, he is currently serving as a member of the editorial board for the SCOPUS-indexed journal "Academica Turistica - Tourism and Innovation journal" and "International Journal of Business Events and Legacies". His professional background includes working for some of the largest hotel chains and a regional hotel management company. He speaks fluently French, English, and Italian. Dusan is passionate about education and research, tourism and business events industry and sports. He is a proud marathon finisher and a recreational tennis player.

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Based in Zagreb, Croatia, Adem Braco Suljic has spent his entire life immersed in the world of Business Events. Starting as a helping hand at his father's company during his studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he has been actively involved in every aspect of the international MICE industry. His roles quickly developed from basic to executive ones. He has organised and managed meetings with over 20,000 participants, taken part in the development of different meeting infrastructure projects on three continents, and has been deeply involved in technology for the meetings industry. Since 2016 Braco's main focus has been with MICE Destination Marketing as well as on the development of a specific implementation method of sustainability processes in MICE destinations and special venues. He is eager to learn and adopt new knowledge and practices and to share his experience with colleagues and the business events community. He is a frequent speaker at industry events and enthusiastic about improvement and progress in the MICE sector. Braco is fluent in English and Spanish and is the proud father of two. In his free time, he is passionate about sailing and gastronomy.

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After having worked as a Data Researcher for an association in the meetings industry (International Congress and Convention Association -ICCA-) for many years, Willy moved to 'the other side' and started in 2021 as an Account Manager at the Amsterdam Convention Bureau, supporting associations and their events. Now, as Data Analyst Congresses, she is back to her beloved research and is currently mapping the main ecosystems in the city. Other tasks are proactively connecting with associations and meeting planners who organize conferences that could strengthen these ecosystems, finding the right method for event evaluations and for measuring event impact.

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Dr Rob Davidson is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Greenwich, London the Managing Director of MICE Knowledge, a consultancy specialising in research, education and training services for the business tourism industry: Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conferences and Exhibitions. His main areas of expertise are conferences and incentive travel, and he has written seven books on these themes. He is regularly invited to speak at international conferences on themes linked to business events, in particular to present the results of his ongoing research into conference industry trends.

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Lorraine Dunne is currently completing her PhD studies at TU Dublin in the area of Business Tourism. She is a lecturer at Dundalk Institute and lecturers in Tourism, Event & Hospitality Management within the Business Studies School. She has an honours degree in Hospitality Management from The University of Ulster, Jordanstown and an MBA from Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT). Lorraine has also completed a Masters in Learning and Teaching (MALT). She is a member of the Tourism Research Group at Dundalk Institute and works closely with industry association bodies in the tourism and conference business in Ireland.

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Amber Herrewijn teaches Event Management in the Master's program International Leisure, Tourism & Events Management at NHLStenden University. Following the design-based philosophy of her university, Amber cooperates with local festivals to work on innovative prototype developments. Her interest in circularity & sustainability leads to collaborative research on nudging visitors towards sustainable behaviour. She is a capacity builder and researcher of the newly launched EU project BEFuture which aims to connect change makers in the MICE industry who can lift the industry towards a sustainable and digital future.'

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Enthusiasm abounds within Jade, she always have an eye for the bigger picture and her main goal is making sure clients expectations are surpassed. Her 20+ years' experience in the hospitality and event industry embodies the innovative beating heart of EVE-events. She is still every bit as involved in the running of the company today as she was in running her own restaurant; pouring her creativity and attention to detail into every event she produces.

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Chiara Orefice is Senior Lecturer in Events at the University of Westminster in London, where she takes part in the delivery of postgraduate and undergraduate courses and research supervision. She is also involved in programme management, and looks after student employability and international exchanges. Before becoming an academic, Chiara lived in several countries in Europe and Asia working in the private sector first, and then in research and in conference management with the United Nations and the European Science Foundation. Her research interests are on the role of events as platforms for stakeholder value co-creation, event strategy and design.

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Abstracts

Association meeting planners' perceptions of Bleisure as an element of their conferences

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Traditionally, business tourism and leisure tourism have been considered as two different - or even contradictory - forms of visitation. But it has become clear that business tourism and leisure tourism are closely interconnected. Business visitors to our cities can create leisure tourism:

- When they extend their business trips for a day or more to engage in leisure activities.
- When they come accompanied by spouses or partners who spend their time in leisure activities in the destination.
- When they participate in leisure elements of the business event, such as excursions to local places of interest.
- When they are inspired to return to the destination with their friends or families for leisure purposes - or encourage others to do so.

A Bleisure ('business + leisure') visitor is someone who adds extra days to their business trip to include free, personal time for leisure activities such as sightseeing, sports, entertainment, or simply relaxation, thus extending their business visit into a holiday experience. The concept of Bleisure is not new. But since the passing of the most severe phase of the Covid pandemic, the Bleisure market has been expanding rapidly in all world regions. Conference participants and other business visitors are travelling again, and a growing number of them are choosing to spend extra days to enjoy the cultural, natural, and gastronomic attractions of their destinations. According to a recent report from Switzerland-based consultants EHL Insights, 'The 10 trends that are shaping the hospitality industry in 2022', the top trend for 2022 was Bleisure travellers. In the past few years, research into the Bleisure phenomenon has expanded rapidly, as evidenced by the growing number of professional reports and white papers on this topic (BSGH, 2014; Expedia, 2016; CWT, 2016; Economist, 2019). Academic interest in this topic is also gradually growing, and the concept has been investigated in an expanding number of recent publications (Aydın and Özgürel, 2021; Pinho and Marques, 2021; Davidson and Kesar, 2022). Various authors have investigated the 'pull' factors of different destinations in terms of their degree of attractiveness as places for spending Bleisure days. But until now, the attitudes towards Bleisure of those who are responsible for the planning, marketing and execution of professional association conferences have remained relatively unexplored and unknown. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to review the range of attitudes held by association conference planners towards the opportunities offered by Bleisure; the degree to which they encourage participants to spend extra time in the conference destination; the measures they use; and the extent to which they take into account the leisure attractions of cities when selecting destinations for their events. The online survey revealed a wide range of approaches to the issue of Bleisure among conference organisers, from active encouragement to apathy and a conviction that this was not relevant to the role of those planning the conferences of professional associations.

The attendee decision-making process and return on investment for attending academic conferences

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Compared with the body of research into the decision-making process of meeting planners in terms of site selection, studies of the decision-making process of attendees in terms of their motivations and choices of which conferences to attend are far fewer (Mair, 2012). This is nowhere more evident than in the case of academic (also known as 'scientific') conferences attended by university lecturers and researchers. Indeed, academic conferences have received far less attention in the business tourism literature than association and corporate meetings – despite the key role that they play in the professional development of academic staff at all levels.

Potential conference attendees usually have a range of academic conferences in their field to choose from. Attendance is however often restricted by constraints such as time and money. This results in academics having to choose between conferences. Attendance may depend on the perceived value of the conference (Lewis and Kerr, 2012). Very few researchers have investigated academics' motivations / rationale for attending academic conferences. However, Edelheim et al. (2017) have listed them as:

- Keeping up with changes in my profession
- Hearing speakers who are respected experts in the field
- Developing new professional relationships through networking, and
- Learning new skills

In recent years, the decision-making process has become more complex at a time when many academic conferences are now offered on a hybrid basis, opening up the possibility of virtual attendance. In addition, with universities under more financial pressure to economise, many are being more and more thrifty with funding attendance at meetings, with some often only providing funding for attendance if the potential participant has a presentation.

This paper examines the decision-making process of academic staff teaching at Scottish universities, to provide insights into their principal motivations for participating in conferences as well as the barriers and constraints they currently face to attending. An online questionnaire was used, and the snowball technique for reaching a wide sample of respondents was employed.

Origin of the events: human cooperation

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If the discipline of event organization aims to solidify itself, it needs to understand its origins. This is an exercise that brings us closer to providing a historical context that will elucidate how it emerged, why it did, as well as the influences and factors it was equipped with. This will lead us to its fundamental principles and basics, without which we cannot apply it effectively. We will also contextualize the discipline, which will help us understand its importance in society, by examining the problems it addresses. Ultimately, we want to inspire other researchers to tackle new issues and challenges, as well as seek intersections with other fields to foster innovation. In essence, this is the objective of this article: the quest for clues and data that will enable us to establish the origins of event organization.

With this purpose in mind, we have opted for a methodology based on the hypothetico-deductive method. This is the most significant scientific philosophy of our time, offering two essential perspectives. Firstly, it takes us from theories to facts. To achieve this, we have formulated three research questions to which we have provided answers based on a literature review and the utilization of secondary sources. Secondly, the hypothetico-deductive method allows us to formulate new questions and inquiries that open up new avenues of research. Our initial hypothesis was human socialization. After a literature review from psychological and sociological perspectives, we discarded it. The subsequent hypothesis led us to human cooperation. This, along with the so-called cognitive revolution experienced by humans, as well as the development of symbolic language, are the milestones in the evolution of Homo sapiens that enabled the birth of event organization as we understand it today.

The phenomenon of human cooperation led humans not only to develop language but to live in groups. It is in this context that events emerged as a necessary tool. Living in groups, humans needed a way to create a common narrative that would keep them united, providing meaning to their lives. Event organization became the communication tool that allowed them to recount this official narrative that many individuals adhere to in order to be part of this societal group. This occurs with governments, religions, businesses, and all areas of human activity.

In conclusion, this research traces the origins of events, explaining why we use them, and opens a line of investigation that will allow us to continue improving their usage and effectiveness.

Transformative Event Design: Exploring the Role of Transformative Experience Facilitators

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In the fifth wave of the experience economy, experiences are evolving into intentionally designed triggers for human transformation. Given the rapid recovery of the meetings industry according to Covid-19, with its global market value increasing from US\$1.27 billion in 2023 to an estimated US\$1.78 trillion in 2030 (Global MICE Industry Size 2030, 2023), and the goal of connecting professionals in an enhanced face-to-face environment (MICE Market Size, Share & Growth Analysis Report, 2030, n.d.) the MICE industry is becoming an increasingly popular vehicle for orchestrating memorable and transformative experiences (TEs). However, previous literature on experience design in the travel and tourism market, including MICE, has been mainly consumer-focused and has only partially focused on event and festival design (Frissen et al., 2016; Neuhofer et al., 2020, 2021; Wu et al., 2020), as well as experience facilitators in tourism (Parsons et al., 2019; Soulard et al., 2019) and hospitality contexts (Neuhofer & Gharibyan, 2021). The role and competencies of transformative experience facilitators (TEFs) in the contemporary meetings industry, including transformative events aimed at triggering human transformation, have not yet been explored. This is noteworthy in that TEFs play a critical role in mediating co-created experiences with consumers while also guiding and triggering human transformation (Soulard et al., 2019; Teoh et al., 2021). This study therefore seeks to explore the role and competencies of TEFs in contemporary transformative events. An interpretive qualitative research design - guided by a conceptual framework rooted in the literature (Parsons et al., 2019; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Weiler & Black, 2015) - was used to conduct a thematic template analysis including 31 in-depth interviews with TEFs from a range of transformative events, including experiential and event designers, educators, professors, life coaches and consultants. This resulted in the 'Framework of Transformative Experience Facilitators', which identifies seven roles and nine competence categories required for TEFs to lead and facilitate participant transcendence at contemporary transformative events. This study provides a practice-based reference for MICE practitioners and other professionals by offering a framework for the role and competencies of TEFs; guidance for event designers in the recruitment process of experience facilitating personnel, thus offering quality assurance; and guidelines for educators in training the professionals of the future with essential skills in the age of human transformation. Furthermore, as a pioneer of transformative experiential education in an ever-growing meetings industry, the study opens a new avenue of future research in the field of event and transformational design.

The Delivery of a Quality, Value-Driven Irish Experience to the Business Tourist Market

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This research will provide an analysis of the current business tourism product which is offered to business tourists travelling to Ireland. The selling of the business tourism product is intricate and needs to encompass many component parts, both tangible and intangible. One of the key contributing factors in successfully selling to the business tourism market is the destination itself. Alongside this, many other factors will be considered and the idea of creating an experiential product is essential. The Experience Economy, identified by Pine & Gilmore initially in 1999, will be considered in relation to the current business tourism offering with a view to developing a true quality, value-driven experiential business tourism product which will include important elements of technological development while also taking into consideration the European Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). By considering the delivery of the overall business tourism experience, an authentic, unique and sustainable Irish business tourism product can be delivered to targeted international markets.

This mixed method study will comprise firstly of a review of secondary literature in the area of tourism services marketing, destination marketing and branding and business tourism. This will consist of reviewing both published books and relevant book chapters and also a review of relevant published journal articles. The sample for the primary research will consist of Destination Management Organisations (DMO's) and Professional Conference Organisers (PCO's) in Ireland and also Fáilte Ireland and Meet in Ireland to investigate their role in the attraction of business tourism to Ireland. This research will be carried out by interviewing all participants. The findings of this research will provide clear empirical information to the suppliers of the business tourism product and to government bodies responsible for the attraction of business tourism to Ireland, to enable them to compete at a higher level for business tourism at an international level. It will also provide findings of a gap in literature in the application of a marketing module to the business tourism product.

Business Tourism in World Heritage Cities: a response towards sustainability

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The World Heritage Cities recognized by UNESCO are magnet destinations for tourist activity derived from this distinction. Their sustainability can be compromised since they contain an extensive cultural heritage that in some cities causes a large displacement of tourists, which translates into problems such as: over tourism, gentrification, environmental pollution, among the main ones. The majority of tourists who visit these cities are excursionists, that is, travelers who do not spend the night in the city as they are expensive cities in their accommodation and foodservices. The organizations responsible for managing the destination brand could be exacerbating this problem with inadequate management. Although these are destinations that promote cultural tourism, the objective of this research seeks to answer if business tourism can represent an alternative to diversify the tourist offer in World Heritage Cities that are leaders in

the business industry, or on the contrary, they exacerbate existing problems, and if their brand efforts have focused on attracting this type of tourism as a strategy for diversification. Four case studies are selected from World Heritage Cities that are leaders in business worldwide tourism, two in Europe: Amsterdam and Vienna, and two in Latin America: Lima and Cartagena de Indias. Based on the review of tourism yearbooks and management plans, and news, a thematic and comparative analysis is carried out between the two regions to identify the opportunities of business tourism in the sustainable development of World Heritage Humanity Cities. Keywords: sustainable development, marketing, overtourism, business tourism.

The Future of the MICE Sector: The Innovative Role of Virtual Reality and the Metaverse

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In an era defined by relentless technological progress, the MICE sector finds itself standing at the forefront of a sweeping transformation, poised to redefine the very essence of how businesses convene, engage, and thrive.

Within the pages of this research, I unveil a remarkable tapestry of revelations—an unparalleled fusion of possibilities emerging from the marriage of virtual reality and the Metaverse within the MICE landscape. A sector traditionally grounded in physical interactions and in-person encounters is now witnessing a digital metamorphosis of unparalleled proportions. This transformation is destined to reshape its very identity and future in profound ways.

As we dive deep into the intricate web of emerging technologies within the MICE sector, it becomes abundantly clear that virtual reality has already begun a revolution in event design and participation. The advent of virtual and hybrid events, fuelled by VR technology, has proven its capacity to craft immersive, globally accessible experiences. However, this is merely the prologue to a broader narrative—the Metaverse emerges as the natural evolution of this technological renaissance. With its potential to conjure interactive, boundless virtual realms, the Metaverse redefines how events are conceived, hosted, and attended.

Nonetheless, this transformation is not devoid of challenges. Embracing this evolution demands vision and daring from enterprises, for the embrace of virtual reality and Metaverse technologies transcends the present—it is a decision that will etch the MICE industry's future. Contemplations on emerging opportunities and hurdles emerge from rigorous research, extensive literature analysis, and dialogues with industry luminaries, among them, the esteemed Dr Rob Davidson. The journey ahead grapples with complexities like data protection, cost management, and navigating the labyrinthine contours of the Metaverse.

It is undeniably clear that these concepts constitute a palpable shift—one destined to sculpt the MICE sector's destiny. Yet, intriguingly, even amid the fervour for these groundbreaking technologies, it is fundamental to underline that the human element remains irreplaceable. The innate human need for socialisation and interaction remains an elemental force within the MICE industry. As the sector progresses, it must strike a delicate equilibrium between the potential of virtual reality and the Metaverse and the irreplaceable human connections at their core.

In the grand tapestry of the MICE sector's evolution, the adoption of virtual reality and Metaverse technologies hinges upon companies' willingness to embrace change and seize emerging opportunities. The choice is unequivocal: to embrace innovation wholeheartedly and become active participants in this transformation or to risk languishing in the confines of tradition, thereby forsaking the vast possibilities of an augmented virtual world. This decision

could impact their capacity to remain competitive in an ever-evolving business landscape sculpted by nascent technologies.

In conclusion, this research explores how virtual reality and the Metaverse are reshaping the MICE industry, offering transformative opportunities. However, their adoption requires careful consideration by companies, as their impact reaches beyond technology, impacting competitiveness and sustainability. The MICE sector faces a pivotal choice: embrace innovation or risk fading into obscurity in a rapidly changing era.

How can business events drive sustainable innovation? Lessons from Service Design

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This presentation aims at introducing a piece of ongoing research on the role that events play in fostering innovation in the new normal, with sustainability at their core. The study does not focus on how events themselves can be sustainable, but on how they can become places and spaces for identifying and experimenting with new forms of sustainable business. A multi-disciplinary approach is adopted, which combines key concepts around prototyping derived from Service Design research with a process-based view of sustainability. The starting point to understand how events can become prototyping opportunities for innovation is to consider them as catalysts of temporary ecosystems of stakeholders. These stakeholders jointly define and co-create sustainable innovation opportunities, which are specific to them and materialise over time and beyond the event itself (Orefice & Nyarko, 2023). When viewed as an ongoing process of value cocreation, sustainability not only transcends organisational boundaries to situate itself in an ecosystem of stakeholders, but it is constantly developing through complex interactions (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). This implies that it is not solely the responsibility of event organisers or hosts, but it is influenced by multiple actors, which in turn are shaped by their social belongings (Edvardsson et al., 2011). Therefore, to understand how events can contribute to sustainable innovation, we need to consider the role they play in the ecosystem that provides the context where stakeholders negotiate values and agree on a common agenda. According to Service Design literature, a prototype is not only the template resulting from an innovative product/service design process, but rather an evolving object that binds different stakeholders together supporting participation and communication (Sanders & Stappers, 2014). Schrage (2013, p. 23) sees prototypes as a 'space, place and medium where value is negotiated and exchanged' and the driving force of the innovation process. Several features of events as prototypes, derived from institutional structuring literature (Schüßler & Sydow, 2013) will be proposed during the session, with the aim to explore them together with colleagues and industry partners in attendance. A case study of a business event that embeds prototyping characteristics will be presented.

Erasmus Bleisure. How and Why Spanish Teachers extend their Trips

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Erasmus scholarships play a vital role in European mobility, offering students and educators a unique opportunity for exchange programs with peers from different nations. These exchanges broaden horizons, share knowledge, and foster deep cultural immersion, going beyond mere travel. This professional endeavor allows educators from secondary schools and universities to exchange best practices.

Simultaneously, during these academic and professional journeys, a noticeable trend emerges among participants – the extension of their stays for leisure purposes. This growing trend, commonly known as "Bleisure" tourism, underscores the fusion of business and leisure travel experiences.

This study thoroughly examines the prevailing patterns of Bleisure tourism, with a specific focus on a unique group of travelers: Spanish educators who actively engage in this form of experiential blending. Employing a careful combination of quantitative research methodologies, such as surveys, and qualitative approaches, including focus groups and in-depth interviews, our objective is to describe the defining characteristics that distinguish this particular subset of travelers.

Our research encompasses participants from two distinct academic strata: university and high school teachers, embarked on these journeys in the past three years, including the post-pandemic era.

A total of 330 individuals participated in the survey, with the majority being secondary school teachers. We conducted one focus group and seven in-depth interviews.

Preliminary results reveal a strong influence of the local community in planning activities outside of working hours. Also there is a high motivation for travel related to gastronomy, a high rate of repeat travel, and the creation of an ambassador effect on the participant have been observed. In-depth interviews and the focus group revealed that 100% of the participants engaged in leisure tourism activities during their Erasmus journeys. On several occasions, participants extended their stays before or after the official program, and in cases where such an extension was not possible, it was also admitted that leisure activities, such as city visits, gastronomy, and shopping, were undertaken outside of work hours.

The majority of survey respondents expressed their desire to return to the Erasmus destination with family and friends. However, nearly 90% of those surveyed indicated that they embarked on the Erasmus journey either alone or accompanied by work colleagues.

Furthermore, there is a significant predominance of English as the working language, with 93% of respondents indicating proficiency in English as their professional language, followed by 27% in French. Only 4% of the participants stated they do not speak any language other than their native tongue.

It is imperative to acknowledge that English stands as the predominant language employed within the professional realm of these exchanges. Furthermore, it is discernible that the proficiency in this language frequently diverges from the qualifications attained.

Demographically, nearly 75% of the sample falls within the 40 to 60 years age range, with nearly 70% being women. In terms of destinations, almost 28% of the participants have undertaken mobility experiences in Italy, followed by Finland, Germany, and Portugal. In conclusion, it's important to note that this study represents an initial exploration of the Spanish Bleisure tourist profile.