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**BUSINESS
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REPORT**

#22, SEP-OCT 2025

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FOR THE BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY



the

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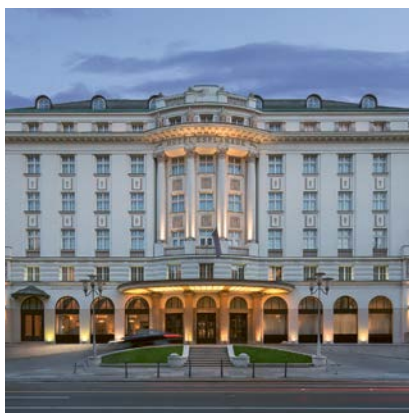
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Let's Meet in Zagreb

Zagreb, the lovely capital of Croatia, is a charming historic Central European city featuring a distinctive Mediterranean way of life. It is conveniently accessible by road and air from all parts of Europe and beyond. Moreover, the busy international Franjo Tuđman Airport is only a 25-minute ride from the city centre.

Walkable and motivating

The rich culture and history, legends and tales, the old and the contemporary are all on display as you stroll down the streets of Zagreb and are immersed in numerous inspiring incentive activities. The city is conveniently compact, so most of the hotels, venues and sightseeing points are within walking distance.

Venues for every occasion

The venues range from some of the most beautiful historic buildings in the romantic city core to the local heritage and international business hotels downtown. Hospitable, friendly and safe Zagreb is commonly a preferred host destination selected by many international associations and corporate clients for organising their congresses, conferences, scientific meetings, incentives and various other activities and events.

Green all over

In addition to traditional venues, Zagreb also boasts a plethora of elegant urban parks, forests, lakes and green areas, making it Europe's second greenest capital city. The green areas are ideal outdoor spaces for holding sports events, picnicks, concerts,

shows and much more. As the city is situated on the slopes of Mt. Medvednica, the green lungs of the city, one can also take a cable car to reach the peak, Sljeme, or visit the medieval fortress of Medvedgrad for an interactive educational incentive.

Gastronomy matters

Zagreb offers a great variety of gastronomic experiences ranging from typical local and seasonal to international dishes. They can be enjoyed in restaurants, but also in small vendors offering street food during numerous festivals all year round. Featuring daily fresh and seasonal local produce, the centrally located picturesque Dolac food market is one of most visited attractions in the city.



Around Zagreb

The Zagreb surroundings includes unspoilt nature with tranquil landscapes, romantic medieval castles and legends, wine roads, spas, hiking and cycling trails and more. Less than a two-hour drive is the Adriatic coast, ideal for an unforgettable incentive or a pre or a post tour. In the vicinity is also the world-famous Plitvice Lakes National Park included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Whenever you plan your next event, think about Zagreb – the safe and vibrant Central European metropolis with Mediterranean flair, where a captivating city atmosphere and making business make a perfect match.

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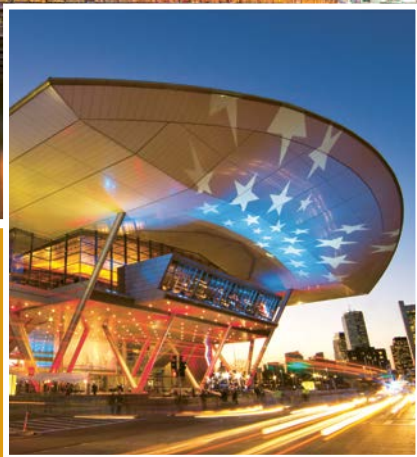
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AI

THE UNKNOWN CONTINENT

AS AI ACCELERATES, new skills become crucial. The digital accelerator often depends on your digital skills – productivity between the workplace and home, collaboration and online meetings. Create, share and distribute. All in digital tools that are updated several times a year. Keeping up is a challenge.

Across sectors, AI agents are unlocking new levels of efficiency and intelligence in business events. In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, AI is no longer just a supporting tool in the corporate world, it is becoming a central driver of transformation. AI is like an unknown continent we have recently discovered, rather than a technology we have slowly invented.

Agentic AI systems enable AI agents to be more advanced, moving beyond predefined workflows to dynamically plan, make complex decisions, and learn from their environment. To coexist with AI, think of it as the difference between a specific tool (the AI agent) and the overall engineering philosophy that allows that tool to work independently and intelligently to achieve a larger objective (agentic AI).

For forward-thinking leaders, agentic AI is not just a tool, it is a

strategic imperative reshaping the competitive landscape. AI agents advance the executive agenda from basic automation to autonomous operations, executing complex workflows, adapting in real-time, and supporting high-value decision making. AI agents are redefining personalisation within business events, offering tailored agendas, session recommendations, and networking matches based on attendee data, interests and behaviours.

Previously, this level of customisation was attainable at scale. Now, AI-driven engines deliver hyper-personalised content and networking opportunities, empowering each attendee while driving higher engagement and conversion. Platforms leveraging AI agents have demonstrated that attendees who receive tailored recommendations participate more actively and report greater satisfaction, resulting in a better return on investment for organisers and sponsors.

The most exciting development is not just what AI agents can do individually, but how they can collaborate. Business events systems are complex, involving venue staff, speakers, sponsors, exhibitors and attendees. Multi-agent AI systems

can coordinate across the stakeholder group, sharing data and intelligence to ensure that every component of the event is aligned toward a seamless experience.

Far from replacing human creativity, AI agents are enhancing it, freeing you and your team from administrative overload so they can focus on delivering transformative content and experiences. AI agents are no longer a futuristic vision. They are here and actively redefining how, for example, events are planned, executed, and experienced. By marrying intelligent automation with human ingenuity, they are unlocking a new standard of efficiency, agility, and intelligence in the global business events industry. This hybrid environment will be the governance challenge for tomorrow's leaders.

AI presents great opportunities, but also raises questions of responsibility and safety. With an AI policy, you set a clear framework for how AI is used legally, ethically and smartly. The opportunities of this new ecosystem are exciting and enormous, and so is the disruption.



PHOTO Magnus Malmberg

Swedish-Indonesian **ATTI SOENARSO** has worked as a journalist for close to 40 years. She has worked for Scandinavia's largest daily newspaper, was TV4's first travel editor, has written for many Swedish travel magazines and has had several international clients. She has travelled the length and breadth of the world and written about destinations, people and meetings.



DOTS
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What Futurists DO FOR A LIVING

TEXT

Scott Steinberg

WHEN PEOPLE ASK what exactly futurists do for a living, they're often expecting an eye-rolling response, given that most imagine us as corporate versions of the tarot-card-reading psychics that you see on late-night TV. But while most assume that it's a keynote speaker and a futurologist's job to predict the future, that's an inaccurate assessment. Instead, it's our job to study the state of the market, society, and geopolitics to identify emerging trends that clients should be aware of – then challenge partners to consider the potential impact of these trends on their business. That requires us to exercise a bit of anthropology, sociology and pedagogy. Still, more than anything else, it requires that we employ the ability to spot, analyse and capitalise on patterns that define the past, present, and future to come.

In truth, whether preparing a keynote speech for executives or consulting on what the coming years of economic and geopolitical upheaval will bring, it's essential to remember the following: In today's highly interconnected and interdependent world, you cannot examine single points of data in isolation. That's because in an age where new technologies and trends are just a click or call away, what impacts individuals in one area of the world can quickly ripple and affect those in others. Moreover, current events and unexpected happenings can cause butterfly effects that reverberate in ways both predictable and unforeseen across markets and industries. By way of illustration, look at the Covid-19 pandemic, and its impact on nations, small businesses and supply chains around the globe, and the way in which subsequent

effects cascaded to impact territories worldwide.

In effect, future-proofing a business and planning for tomorrow now revolves around understanding the countless interconnected threads that shape our world, guiding decision makers through uncertainty, and creating conditions that allow future possibilities to thrive. It is precisely why, together with my colleague **Aric Dromi Jankov**, we've

It isn't about finding ways to codify what's worked and what hasn't from a commercial perspective. Instead, it's about finding clarity in an increasingly complex and fast-moving world. It's about stepping back and observing how each decision, no matter how small, affects a larger tapestry – and learning from it to build solutions that are more adaptable, flexible, and capable of evolving as the world changes around them.

our world together, and understanding what we can learn from them to improve upon going forward. When you peel back the tapestry of history and time, you can similarly begin to see patterns emerge across organisations, cultural movements, and even entire civilisations and learn what levers you can pull to better adapt in turn and create a more promising future.

The idea behind *The Shape of the Future* and the new design thinking model it introduces is simple, yet profound: Whether you're talking about companies, teams, or even the shape of commerce across entire nations, to truly prepare for the future, we need to understand not just individual pieces of a puzzle. Instead, we need to understand how each component interacts and works in tandem to form the entirety of the puzzle itself. We must examine our environment from every angle, weaving together history, present circumstances, and future possibilities into a coherent narrative – and then learn how to write new chapters most effectively. This 360-degree perspective enables us to anticipate change more effectively, and to proactively plan for it, rather than simply reacting to it.

Again, consider the way towns have traditionally been built. Historically, city planning has focused on addressing tangible, immediate concerns, such as providing housing, transportation, and infrastructure. That tends to result in cities that have changed and evolved haphazardly over time, offering a layering of new towns, structures, and spaces on top of old, and not always in ways that produce satisfying results. One need only attempt to walk through the warrens of Paris' and London's older districts to discover how new construction, new roadways, and new amenities were often added on the

“Flexibility is the essence of future-proofing ... build solutions that are more adaptable, flexible, and capable of evolving as the world changes”

developed an entirely new philosophy and approach to strategic planning and design, outlined in our latest book, *The Shape of the Future: How to Design for Disruption, Plan for Uncertainty, and Adapt to Whatever Tomorrow Brings*.

Specifically, in the book, we articulate a new way of seeing the world at large and the competitive landscape that businesses inhabit not as isolated components, but rather as intricate, ever-evolving systems that intertwine and change over time. When you start to see the world through such a lens, you begin to see the patterns that separate successful companies, leaders, and strategies over time, and how to leverage what's come before to design more timely solutions that are better crafted to meet tomorrow's trends and expectations.

In practice, systems thinking is at the heart of what we do. Looking to the past and present as sources of reference is therefore essential.

Imagine standing at the centre of a bustling city intersection, watching hundreds of cars navigate the space simultaneously. At first, the traffic's rhythm seems chaotic. But zoom out far enough, and patterns begin to emerge. From stoplights to traffic signals to the flow of pedestrians and commerce, you start to see structure, order, and interconnectedness in what initially appeared random. And you might also begin to note how even the most advanced metropolises were constructed, laid out, and plotted through the art of urban planning to meet yesterday's needs, often retroactively having to adapt as inhabitants' living scenarios and needs changed over time. Once you begin to see these patterns, you can learn how to adjust them or create more effective ones that better serve future requirements and needs. Systems thinking is precisely this – a practice of actively stepping back to recognise the rhythm and patterns that hold

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fly, and not always with maximum efficiency or results.

However, if tomorrow's city planners were to apply a systems thinking approach to urban planning, the possibility of designing more effectively and productively would expand. Suddenly, we're discussing the design of city grids and the introduction of structures, streets, and amenities in ways that promote positive environmental impacts, greater social equity,

future. When **Henry Ford** famously said, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses," he highlighted a fundamental challenge that futurists and business strategists of all stripes face. People often imagine the future as a linear progression from the present. Systems thinking, however, acknowledges complexity and non-linear change, for example, that technology may fundamentally and radically

one grounded in historical reference points, is the concept of graceful degradation – designing systems that can continue to function, even partially, under severe stress. This idea comes alive when we look at today's most resilient organisations. Take Toyota's response to the devastating 2011 earthquake in Japan. Unlike competitors who struggled for months, Toyota had embedded flexibility and redundancy into its production methods and supply chains, allowing the company to bounce back within weeks. The firm's systems weren't built to resist disruption; instead, they were built to adapt and grow stronger because of it. In practice, it's not the "strongest" organisations and individuals that thrive, it's the most adaptable. Those who purposefully design for growth and change understand a fundamental truth: that flexibility is the essence of future-proofing.

The Shape of the Future introduces a design-thinking approach and strategic model that teaches us to embrace such systemic resilience. It's about understanding that everything (economies, societies, technologies, and so on) is interconnected and therefore vulnerable to change. When futurists adopt this perspective, they can better anticipate disruptions, avoid unintended consequences, and foster innovations that strengthen entire systems rather than just individual parts.

This philosophy isn't purely theoretical either. We've seen it transform companies, cities, and entire communities. Take Amazon's extraordinary capacity for innovation. Rather than strictly predicting what might happen next, Amazon built adaptive capabilities into its core capabilities. The company constantly experiments, learns rapidly, and pivots fluidly, leveraging each new technology and

“Future-proofing a business and planning for tomorrow now revolves around understanding the countless interconnected threads that shape our world”

enhanced economic sustainability, improved technological integration, and more efficient governance. Doing so would effectively allow them to plan for living spaces and gathering areas that address not only the needs of today's citizens but also those of future generations. It would enable them to better plan for the needs of any future generations of the population. What we're suggesting is that each element of a design shouldn't be viewed in isolation, instead, each should be considered in ways that influence and shape the other, creating a more dynamic and resilient fabric.

Contemplating the world through the lens of systems thinking is especially powerful because it pushes us to consider things beyond the immediate present. In effect, we're not just looking at what's happening now, but also considering historical patterns and their implications for the

reshape the lives and needs of tomorrow's citizens in ways we can scarcely imagine, and allows us to plan for the future in ways that recognise opportunities invisible to conventional thinking.

Why does this matter? Real innovation and meaningful change rarely come from making minor, incremental adjustments. Instead, they arise from understanding complex relationships and recognising leverage points where minor shifts in strategy or approach can produce profound, systemic transformations. *The Shape of the Future* introduces this philosophy, encouraging leaders to adopt more flexible, adaptable, modular, and resilient strategies and mindsets that are better equipped to withstand unexpected disruptions and thrive in the face of change.

Note that one of the most powerful principles of systems thinking that we embrace as futurists, and

“Systems thinking reminds us that the future isn’t merely something that happens to us, it’s something that we can actively work to craft and shape every single day”

market it pioneers to provide a platform for growth and future opportunities. In other words, the business routinely reinvents itself, includes room for growth, and embraces practices central to the systems thinking approach we advocate for.

To think systematically, futurists must become both historians and visionaries simultaneously. They must understand why things worked or failed in the past, see clearly what’s happening today, and imagine vividly what might occur tomorrow. This multi-temporal skillset is not just beneficial, but quite essential for surviving and thriving in an increasingly fast-changing and unpredictable world.

People and organisations both often fear uncertainty, craving predictable outcomes. But systems thinking, as we present it, is a celebration of uncertainty. It acknowledges that no future is entirely predictable. Yet, it equips us with the mindset and tools to proactively plan for tomorrow today and navigate complexity and ambiguity effectively in turn.

So why do we, as futurists, insist on seeing the world through a systems-based lens? Because it ultimately empowers us to offer clarity where others see chaos.

Because it enables decision makers to make choices rooted in a deeper understanding. And, perhaps most importantly, because systems thinking reminds us that the future isn’t merely something that happens to us, it’s something that we can actively work to craft and shape every single day.

Through the book, we’ve articulated a philosophy for strategic planning and design that guides us toward building more resilient and adaptable organisations, strategies and futures. By embracing this holistic view, we unlock the potential to transform challenges into opportunities, confusion into clarity, and uncertainty into hope.

Tips for thinking like a futurist:

- **Map out interconnections before making decisions** Before implementing changes in a strategy, business or marketing campaign, identify how each decision will ripple through different departments, stakeholders, and processes. Ask “What else will this affect?” to avoid unintended consequences.
- **Build graceful degradation into your systems** Design plans, strategies, and operations that can

continue to function as a whole even when individual parts fail. Create redundancies and flexible processes that allow your organisation to adapt quickly during disruptions rather than break down entirely in the face of change.

- **Adopt a 360-degree perspective** When facing challenges, examine them from multiple angles: Historical patterns, current circumstances, and future implications. This multi-temporal view helps you anticipate change rather than react to it.
- **Identify leverage points for maximum impact** Look for minor changes that can create disproportionately large systemic improvements. Focus on areas where minor shifts in process, culture, or strategy can transform entire operations.
- **Experiment constantly and pivot fluidly** Build adaptive capabilities into your organisation’s core. Create safe spaces for testing new approaches, learning rapidly from results, and adjusting course based on what you discover about your system’s behaviour.



How Augmented Analytics CAN REVOLUTIONISE THE BUSINESS EVENT INDUSTRY

AUGMENTED ANALYTICS, powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, is transforming the business event industry by automating data analysis, enhancing personalisation, and enabling smarter, faster decision making. Here's how this technology is revolutionising events worldwide:

- **Automated, real-time insights** Augmented analytics automates the heavy lifting of data analysis, instantly processing vast volumes of complex event data. It allows event organisers to receive immediate, actionable insights, such as spikes in attendee engagement or drops in session participation, enabling them to act on opportunities or address issues in real-time rather than after the event concludes. The rapid feedback loop enables more agile event management and enhances attendee experiences.
- **Enhanced personalisation and engagement** By analysing attendee preferences, behaviours, and feedback, augmented analytics enables hyper-personalisation. Event platforms can recommend sessions, networking opportunities, and content tailored to individual interests, significantly increasing attendee satisfaction and engagement. For example, events like *SXSW* have used AI-driven analytics to create customised agendas, resulting in higher retention and positive feedback.
- **Streamlined planning and resource allocation** Augmented analytics accelerates data preparation by integrating information from multiple sources, such as registration systems, social media, and onsite sensors, allowing for faster and more accurate planning. AI-driven tools can optimise scheduling, resource allocation, and venue selection by forecasting attendance and engagement, minimising conflicts, and ensuring efficient use of staff and equipment.
- **Improved decision making and ROI measurement** With deeper, unbiased insights into attendee behaviour and event performance, organisers can make more informed strategic decisions. Augmented analytics uncovers hidden patterns and trends that might otherwise go unnoticed, helping to optimise marketing campaigns, content delivery, and sponsorship models for maximum return on investment (ROI). Post-event analysis is also enhanced, providing clear recommendations for future improvements.
- **Increased data literacy and reduced analytical bias** Natural language capabilities in augmented analytics tools make data insights accessible to non-technical users, fostering a data-driven culture across event teams. By automating analysis, these systems reduce human bias, ensuring that decisions are based on statistically significant findings rather than assumptions or incomplete data.
- **Improved security, sustainability, and accessibility** AI-powered analytics can enhance event security through real-time crowd monitoring and threat detection, while also supporting sustainability by optimising resource use and reducing waste. Additionally, features like real-time content summarisation and multi-language

support make events more accessible and inclusive.

Augmented analytics is not just a technological upgrade, it is a fundamental shift in how the event industry operates. By delivering faster, deeper, and more actionable insights, it empowers organisers to create more innovative, more engaging, and more successful events than ever before.

Business intelligence (BI) is reshaping the competitive landscape of global events by enabling organisa-

streamlining workflows and reducing manual effort. It leads to more agile event planning and cost-effective execution, making organisations more resilient and adaptable.

- **Personalised attendee experiences** Business intelligence platforms integrate data from various sources, including attendee interactions, preferences, and global market research, to tailor event content and networking opportunities. Superior personalisation enhances attendee satisfaction

organisations respond more swiftly to emerging challenges or opportunities.

- **Entry barriers rise** Those investing in BI capabilities create higher standards for operational excellence and audience insights, making it more difficult for organisations relying on manual processes or outdated systems to compete effectively.
- **New opportunities and partnerships** Business intelligence facilitates the identification of global trends and potential partners, allowing event organisers to expand their market reach and forge strategic alliances critical for long-term growth.

“Business intelligence is transforming global events from intuition-based planning to a sophisticated, data-driven industry”

In summary, business intelligence is transforming global events from intuition-based planning to a sophisticated, data-driven industry, where competitive advantage is determined by how effectively organisations harness, interpret, and respond to data.

tions to use data-driven insights for faster, more intelligent decision making, predictive forecasting, personalised experiences, and operational efficiency. Essential impacts include:

- **Proactive market positioning** BI tools, increasingly powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, allow event organisers to monitor competitor activities, analyse market trends, and forecast audience behaviours. This foresight enables organisations to anticipate market shifts and act more quickly than their competitors, securing prime venues, sponsors, and speakers.
- **Operational optimisation and cost reduction** Advanced analytics automate data preparation and operational reporting, and fosters loyalty, giving organisers a competitive edge in attracting recurring participants.
- **Real-time competitive analysis** Integrated BI systems enable real-time monitoring of performance metrics, attendee feedback, and market conditions across different regions. Organisations can quickly adapt event strategies, marketing, and logistics to retain relevance in a changing landscape.
- **Data democratisation and collaboration** Business intelligence is becoming more accessible, empowering teams at all organisational levels to contribute insights and facilitate cross-functional collaboration. As data-driven decision making becomes embedded in company culture,

The Impact of Business Intelligence ON GLOBAL BUSINESS EVENTS

IMAGE: iStock.com/Vitalii Gulenok

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE (BI) in the context of the global business event industry refers to the systematic gathering, analysis, and strategic use of event-generated data to drive smarter decisions for event organisers, marketers, sponsors, and participants. Its implications span multiple domains and represent a transformative shift in how events are planned, executed, and evaluated.

Key Areas Impacted by BI in Global Events

- **Deeper audience insights** Events generate rich, real-world behavioural data, including session attendance, engagement patterns, attendee movement, and interactions with content and sponsors. When integrated into BI platforms, this data reveals what audiences truly care about, helping organisers refine topics, content, and formats for future events.
- **Enhanced sales and lead management** BI enables event professionals to identify high-intent leads based on engagement metrics (for example: booth visits, time spent in product demonstrations), allowing for targeted and personalised follow-up and increased conversion rates. Sales teams can prioritise efforts and optimise their outreach according to genuine attendee interest.
- **More innovative, data-driven event strategy** Incorporating business intelligence enables optimisation of event formats, sponsorship packages, and logistical planning. Predictive analytics and trend reports would allow organisers to anticipate shifts in audience behaviour and industry trends, thereby improving the return on investment (ROI) for events and sponsors.
- **Competitive edge and operational efficiency** Business intelligence tools help event organisations compare event performance across regions, access actionable reports and forecasts, and stay ahead of competition by identifying emerging market trends and opportunities faster than those relying on manual or fragmented analysis.
- **Personalisation and improved attendee experience** Leveraging data analytics and, increasingly, AI, enables event managers to tailor experiences for individuals, with personalised session recommendations, networking, and targeted notifications, leading to higher satisfaction and engagement.
- **Global opportunities and partnerships** Access to databases with global event and association data (such as ICCA BI) enables organisers to identify relevant

partnerships, benchmark similar events, and expand their reach by analysing patterns across geographies and demographics.

Practical Benefits

- Real-time data collection for on-the-spot decision making and responsiveness to attendee needs.
- Automated reporting and dashboards that reduce manual effort and free staff for more strategic tasks.
- Forecasting and trend detection that inform proactive strategies, from marketing content to logistics adjustments.
- Enhanced learning and knowledge exchange platforms which foster continual industry improvement.

Conclusion

Business intelligence transforms the global business event industry from intuition-based planning to a highly strategic, data-driven discipline. Event stakeholders harness BI for actionable insights, elevated customer engagement, operational excellence, and sustained growth, making business intelligence a fundamental ingredient of long-term success in the rapidly evolving global event sector.



The Maharashtra Convention Bureau Creates LONG-TERM VALUE FOR INDIA

THE MAHARASHTRA Convention Bureau (MCB) is India's first state-led initiative dedicated to supporting global conventions, exhibitions, and business events. Based in India's financial capital, Mumbai, the convention bureau will serve as a catalyst to attract and facilitate international events, building upon the state's global reputation as a business and tourism hub.

The initiative aligns with the key focus of the Maharashtra Tourism Policy 2024, which highlights the growing importance of business events and aims to accelerate the growth of the visitor economy across the state.

Now, Maharashtra is ready to take the lead as India's foremost economic hub, contributing close to 15 per cent of the country's GDP. The formation of the convention bureau is a strategic step towards expanding the country's intellectual capital by attracting delegates, professionals, and experts from around the world to promote

knowledge sharing, innovation, and industry collaboration. Its formation is a significant step in this direction, leveraging world-class infrastructure, a thriving economy, and a robust service ecosystem to establish the state as a top destination for high-impact international events. Its dynamic cities, including the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Pune, Nashik, and Nagpur, will be at the core of this movement, creating a network of interconnected locations that offer a diverse mix of venues, accommodations, and seamless transportation, all equipped to support events of every scale.

"The establishment of the Maharashtra Convention Bureau marks a transformative moment for our state's economic and cultural landscape. Maharashtra has long been a leader in industry, education, and innovation. With the new convention bureau, we are unlocking the full potential of the business events industry to amplify that leadership

on a global stage. Through strategic investment in meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions, we are creating a powerful platform for innovation, collaboration, and intellectual exchange,” says **Shri Indranil Naik**, Minister of State for Tourism.

“Furthermore, this initiative will serve as a catalyst across key sectors, from tourism and hospitality to higher education, manufacturing, and

rise on the world stage. As Maharashtra Convention Bureau charts the direction for the state’s business events sector, Mumbai emerges as a key contributor.

The city’s infrastructure, from world-class venues like the Jio World Convention Centre (JWCC) to hospitality giants such as Hyatt, Marriott, The Taj Hotels, and The Oberoi Hotels, along with Asia’s award-win-

Baccalaureate Congress (2026), Icann Annual Conference (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), International Olympiad on Astronomy & Astrophysics (2025), Asian Seed Congress (2025), and the UIA International Forum of Architects (2027), which will all be hosted at the Jio World Convention Centre.

Mumbai has also recently bid for the prestigious *International Astronautical Congress* in 2028. Such large-scale international events generate significant economic impact for the city, state, and country.

Maharashtra Convention Bureau highlights the following key goals:

- **Position Maharashtra as a leading global business event destination** Emphasise the bureau’s role in making the state, especially cities like Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, and Nagpur, attractive for major international meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions.
- **Catalyse international business events** Showcase how the convention bureau aims to attract, facilitate, and support high-profile conventions and exhibitions by leveraging Maharashtra’s infrastructure, connectivity, and robust service ecosystem.
- **Drive economic growth and investment** Highlight the convention bureau’s focus on increasing business events to stimulate local economies, generate employment, and drive investments into allied sectors such as hospitality, transportation and event management.
- **Promote knowledge sharing and innovation** Illustrate the goal of expanding the state’s intellectual

“The formation of the convention bureau is a strategic step towards expanding the country’s intellectual capital”

infrastructure. It will attract global thinkers, investors, and changemakers to Maharashtra, generating new opportunities for our youth, our entrepreneurs, and our communities. As Minister of State, I am proud to support this visionary step forward that will elevate Maharashtra as a premier destination not just for business, but for bold ideas and inclusive growth.”

Maharashtra Convention Bureau will play an instrumental role in promoting the state for business events by working closely with international event organisers, offering administrative assistance, and providing resources to ensure the success and impact of events. Additionally, the convention bureau will collaborate with key stakeholders, including hotels, venues, and service providers, to ease the planning process and enhance the overall experience.

The opening of the convention bureau comes on the heels of India’s G20 Presidency and its growing prominence in hosting global events, which have accentuated the country’s

ning Mumbai International Airport, has been a pivotal force in driving this transformation.

Mumbai has already showcased its prowess by hosting global events like the *21st World Congress of Accountants 2022*, the *G20 Sessions 2023*, the *141st International Olympic Committee Session 2023*, and the *Miss World Grand Finale 2024* at the Jio World Convention Centre.

“The establishment of the convention bureau is a watershed moment for our nation, state and Mumbai city’s global aspirations. This initiative reflects the growing importance of business events in our economic landscape and reinforces our commitment to promoting Maharashtra as a premier destination for international conventions,” says **Shi Atul Patne**, IAS, Principal Secretary Tourism.

The continued efforts are poised to bring marquee international events from across geographies. Through strategic outreach and persistent efforts, Mumbai city has successfully secured future convention such as the *International*



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“This initiative will attract global thinkers, investors, and changemakers to Maharashtra, generating new opportunities”

capital by drawing global delegates, professionals, and experts to foster knowledge exchange, innovation, and collaboration across industries.

■ **Foster strategic partnerships**

Efforts are being made to coordinate with hotels, venues, and service providers for seamless event planning, making Maharashtra a one-stop solution for global event organisers.

■ **Boost Maharashtra's global profile and reputation**

Emphasise the aspiration to make Maharashtra synonymous with excellence in international business events, building on past successes and hosting future marquee events.

■ **Encourage sustainability and responsible business events**

Highlight the emphasis on promoting responsible and sustainable practices within business and event meetings, setting benchmarks for other states to follow.

These goals collectively position the Maharashtra Convention Bureau as a visionary driver of economic development, international collaboration, and industry leadership in India's burgeoning business events sector.

A state-led convention bureau offers a range of economic benefits for Maharashtra:

■ **Boosts the business events industry**

By attracting international conventions, exhibitions, and business events, the convention bureau drives a surge in high-value business travellers, raising hotel occupancy, increasing spending at local restaurants, and encouraging the use of transport and supporting services.

■ **Accelerates the visitor economy**

Global business events promote longer stays, repeat visits, and higher per capita expenditures by delegates, which directly increases revenue across the tourism value chain, including hospitality, event management, and local attractions.

■ **Catalyses investment and infrastructure development**

The demand for world-class venues, accommodation, and services encourages investment in new hotels, convention centres, and public infrastructure, which have long-term benefits for the state economy and create jobs.

■ **Drives knowledge-based economic gains**

International gatherings in Maharashtra facilitate knowledge transfer and professional collaboration, fostering innovation and long-term partnership opportunities for local entrepreneurs, startups, and industry clusters.

■ **Diversifies economic base**

A thriving business events industry strengthens sectors beyond tourism, including education, manufacturing, technology, and the creative economy, thereby broadening Maharashtra's economic foundation.

■ **Enhances global reputation**

Successfully hosting important global events elevates Maharashtra's brand on the international stage, attracting further foreign investment, trade delegations, and business opportunities.

■ **Creates jobs and supports local communities**

The increased flow of business delegates and event organisers generates direct and indirect employment across hotels, transport, catering, media, and logistics, fuelling inclusive growth for communities statewide.



What to Expect FROM SCIENCE PARKS AND INCUBATORS UNTIL 2029

SCIENCE PARKS and business incubators are vital components in promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth globally. In 2025, their influence is evident in regions spanning Europe, Asia, North America, and Africa. They serve as organised innovation spaces, bringing together businesses, academia, public institutions, and entrepreneurs to drive sustainable growth, technological advancement, and industrial transformation.

Science parks are dedicated hubs that support the growth of technology-driven businesses. Managed by professional organisations, they typically offer physical infrastructure, business support, and foster close links with universities and research organisations. Examples such as the Ideon Science Park and Sahlgrenska Science Park in Sweden demonstrate the pivotal role these parks play in

nurturing business-academic partnerships, especially in deep tech and life sciences.

Key features include:

- Collaboration with universities and research entities for knowledge transfer.
- Support for regional competitiveness and industrial upgrading.
- Platforms, for large and small companies alike, to innovate with access to shared resources.

Science parks are often driven by collaboration between government and universities, ensuring funding for research and development and boosting the local innovation ecosystem. This model enables regions like Gothenburg, Sweden, to become thriving hubs for health and technology innovation, attracting international attention and talent.

Business incubators are organisations that aim to support the creation and growth of startups, typically at their early stages. They provide entrepreneurs with resources such as mentoring, office space, funding opportunities, and access to networks. Incubators minimise risks for new businesses and accelerate their growth trajectory. Notable global trends include:

- Expansion of the incubator market to a projected €30.5 billion by 2029, growing at a 7.5 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR).
- Emphasis on sustainability, green startups, and digital transformation.
- Rise of virtual incubation, where support and resources are offered remotely.

Incubators complement science parks but differ structurally. While parks are more network-oriented, incubators function as formal organisations with structured relationships between the incubator and the incubatee.

Geographic Impact and Recent Trends

- **Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America** These regions see the highest density of science parks dedicated to advanced technology, biotech, and digital transformation.
- **Africa** Initiatives like Konza Technopolis and IASP's Africa division are leveraging demographic advantages to foster inclusive innovation and sustainable growth.
- **Startup ecosystem shifts** 2025's landscape shows incubators working hand in hand with accelerators, with AI-driven entrepreneurship and sustainability-focused programs on the rise.

The value chain and complementarity Science parks and incubators don't just substitute for the lack of entrepreneurial support – they complement other components such as venture capital, accelerators, and government programs. The synergy creates value by enhancing learning, resource acquisition, and absorptive capacity for resident firms, ultimately leading to the development of more robust innovation ecosystems.

In 2025, science parks and incubators will continue to be essential drivers of global innovation and economic development. They offer distinct but complementary models for supporting emerging enterprises, catalysing knowledge transfer, and embodying the collaborative spirit between academia, industry, and government. Their ongoing evolution, marked by digitalisation, a focus on sustainability, and international networking, positions them as key actors in shaping the future of the world's entrepreneurial and research landscapes.

Key market trends driving incubator growth to 2029 Business incubator growth worldwide is fueled by several transformative trends expected to sustain strong momentum through 2029:

1 Surge in startups and entrepreneurial activity The increasing number of startups and entrepreneurs is directly boosting the demand for incubator programs. Lower barriers to entry, wide availability of digital tools, and accessible venture capital make it easier for new businesses to launch.

In December 2024 alone, the United States saw 457,544 new business applications, representing a 1.5 per cent month-on-month increase. New company startups reached 28,834, up 2.6 per cent from the previous month, underscoring tremendous entrepreneurial energy.

2 Higher venture capital investment Escalated levels of venture funding and entrepreneurial funds create more opportunities for incubators to help startups turn ideas into scalable businesses, offering not just funding but also mentorship, access to resources, and networking support.

Comparing Science Parks and Incubators

Feature	Science parks	Business incubators
Focus	Company growth in knowledge-intensive sectors	Accelerating new ventures and startups
Structure	Often informal networks, place-based	Formal organisations (with membership, hierarchy)
Partnerships	Universities, governments, corporates	Investors, mentors, entrepreneurial networks
Typical residents	Mix of startups, scale-ups, corporate R&D	Early-stage startups and founders
Location	Fixed physical ecosystems	Can be physical or virtual
Main contribution	Regional economic development	Startup creation and survival

“Incubators minimise risks for new businesses, and accelerate their growth trajectory”

3 Technological advancements and virtual incubation The adoption of advanced technology, including AI, machine learning, and blockchain, is intensely enhancing how incubators operate, especially in remote or virtual programs. Digital transformation has lowered geographic barriers, making virtual incubation and remote mentorship new standards in the industry.

4 Sustainability and green startups Incubators are increasingly prioritising startups tackling climate change, renewable energy, waste management, and other sustainability challenges. Dedicated sustainability tracks and green tech mentorship are becoming central to many programs.

5 Data-driven, AI-powered selection and support AI tools automate startup assessment and mentoring, helping incubators choose high-potential businesses and deliver personalised support efficiently. AI also enhances operational efficiency for both incubators and their client startups.

6 Diversity, inclusion, and social impact Programs are focusing on underrepresented founders, including women, minorities, and social enterprises, recognising the importance of diverse perspectives and inclusive growth.

7 Corporate partnerships and sector-specific incubators Large corporations are partnering with incubators to foster innovation in targeted industries, such as fintech, healthcare, agritech, and deep tech, resulting in highly specialised and industry-specific programs.

8 Collaborative and flexible atmospheres Modern incubators are evolving into synergistic, collaborative workspaces that emphasise networking, peer support, and flexible program structures. North America leads the market in terms of size. At the same time, the Asia-Pacific region is poised for the fastest growth during the forecast period, reflecting the expansion of entrepreneurship ecosystems in both areas.

Incubator market growth to 2029 will be propelled by the interplay of surging entrepreneurial activity, technology adoption, sustainability focus, diversity and inclusion initiatives, corporate engagement, and the global expansion of virtual programs. These combined trends are reshaping the support ecosystem for startups, making it more dynamic, inclusive, and impactful than ever.



Airport Biometric Service: GLOBAL MARKET SET FOR EXPLOSIVE GROWTH THROUGH 2037

THE AIRPORT biometric service market is undergoing a transformative surge, with projections indicating it will surpass a 19 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) by 2037. This robust expansion underscores the airport sector's shift towards advanced security protocols, operational efficiency, and seamless passenger experiences backed by biometric technologies.

Market size and growth outlook

Recent industry analyses highlight remarkable momentum in the global airport biometric service market:

- The market was valued at approximately €22 billion in 2023.
- It is forecast to reach at least €111 billion by 2033, growing at a CAGR of about 17.3 per cent from 2024

to 2033, with other projections approaching similar exponential growth rates through 2037.

- The pace is expected to sustain or accelerate, with select segments (such as contactless modalities and facial recognition) driving much of the anticipated 19 per cent plus Compound Annual Growth Rate through 2037.

Key growth drivers

- **Rising security demands** The proliferation of biometric systems is closely tied to the need for stringent security checks, faster and more accurate identity verification, and prevention of fraudulent activities. Governments and regulatory bodies have begun mandating the adoption of

biometrics to enhance airport and border security.

- **Contactless travel and passenger convenience** The pandemic accelerated global interest in contactless biometric authentication. Airports are rapidly deploying facial and iris recognition, touchless fingerprint and palm scanning, and automated e-gates to minimise physical touchpoints and reduce waiting times.
- **Smart airport and automation initiatives** Investments in intelligent airport infrastructures, featuring self-service biometric kiosks and integrated digital identity platforms, enable airports to handle growing passenger volumes without compromising throughput or safety.

“Governments and regulatory bodies have begun mandating the adoption of biometrics to enhance airport and border security”

- **Governmental and airline adoption** Initiatives such as the deployment of biometric self-boarding by major airlines and large-scale biometric projects (for example, at Zayed International Airport or by Delta Air Lines in US airports) testify to rising institutional commitment.

Market segmentation and technology trends

- **Facial recognition** Projected to command 46.1 per cent market share by 2035–2037, with rapid adoption for seamless check-in, security, and boarding.
- **Contactless devices** Fastest-growing segment with strong hygiene and efficiency advantages.

Geographic insights

- **North America** Remains the dominant region, accounting for more than 63 per cent of projected market share by 2037 due to rapid adoption, high security investment, and robust regulatory frameworks.
- **Asia-Pacific** Anticipated to witness the fastest growth, propelled by soaring air traffic, infrastructure modernisation, and active

government sponsorship of innovative travel solutions.

- **Europe** Progressing with sophisticated deployments, especially in major airports, partnering with global technology vendors for integrated biometrics.

Challenges in adoption

- **Data privacy and security** In regions like Europe, stringent data protection regulations (for example, GDPR) impose rigorous demands on how biometric data is collected, processed, and stored. These laws aim to protect individual privacy, but can lead to slower or more complex implementation if organisations are not fully prepared to meet compliance standards.
- **Passenger acceptance** Despite growing technological maturity, there is a persistent degree of public scepticism and resistance in some regions regarding biometric data use, often rooted in concerns about surveillance, discriminatory biases, or fear of data breaches. Passenger education, transparency about data usage, and strong security assurances will remain essential to drive widespread

acceptance and trust in biometric airport solutions.

The combined effect of these geographic and regulatory dynamics will shape the pace of adoption and the effectiveness of biometric security solutions worldwide in airports.

Future prospects

The market's fast pace indicates:

- Continuous rollouts of new biometric-enabled services worldwide.
- Strategic partnerships between technology vendors, governments, and airport operators.
- Ongoing enhancements in accuracy, speed, and user experience, ultimately transforming the airport journey into a more secure, frictionless, and digitally integrated process.

For stakeholders in aviation, travel technology, and security, the next decade will present immense opportunities as airport biometric service becomes central to the global aviation ecosystem.



BOTSWANA

Political Support for Business Events as Part of the Economic Transformation

TEXT

Rob Cotter

SINCE THE FOUNDING of the modern state of Botswana in 1966 and the significant discovery of a diamond mine by De Beers the following year, the country's economic growth and stability have rested on one key pillar: the diamond industry. Mining the precious stone over the course of more than half a century had come to account for a quarter of Botswana's GDP, a third of tax revenues and around eighty per cent of exports by sales value. The bounty of this sector also helped deliver the nation's modern infrastructure and generate significant employment opportunities, elevating Botswana into the same upper-middle-income bracket as its neighbour, South Africa.

In recent years, however, things have undergone significant changes. The once-strong demand for the glistering gem has been in a precipitous decline worldwide, and lab-grown diamonds have further suppressed its value. Botswana understands it must embark on a journey of diversifying its economy, just as the once economically oil-dependent Arab states have

been making huge strides in doing so. Among the new opportunities it seeks to mine for its future economic success, one where it sees scope for significant growth is its fledgling meetings industry.

"Botswana has strong potential to become a premier destination for the business events industry in Africa," says **Keitumetse Setlang**, Chief Executive Officer of the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO). "There is political support for business events as part of the economic transformation and tourism diversification agenda, and the sector is embedded in strategies like the National Tourism Policy and Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (ERTP). With a stable political environment, a sound regulatory framework, and a growing commitment to economic diversification, the country is well-positioned to attract regional and international conferences, exhibitions, and incentive events."

Geographically, Botswana stretches over an area equivalent to that of France but with a population

of just 2.4 million – ten per cent of whom live in the capital city of Gaborone. To better help position the country as a business event destination, the land-locked African nation has extracted meetings from broader economic and tourism strategies to give it a more bespoke, standalone focus.

Botswana's business event strategy is structured around six core pillars to attract and retain business events.

such as the Gaborone International Conference Centre, which has a capacity of 1,800 delegates, and the Royal Aria Convention Centre, with a capacity of 1,600 delegates. There is a third conference facility on the University of Botswana campus in the city, as well as a network of several smaller conference centres spread throughout the city. While these venues have, until now, principally served domestic meeting demand,

issues constraining Botswana from being a more popular choice for meetings, a crucial one being the need for proper knowledge of the country.

“Common perceptions include a lack of awareness about infrastructure capacity, logistical convenience, and event delivery standards. To address this, we're enhancing Botswana's digital presence and content in business events directories, strengthening testimonials and case studies from successfully hosted events, and encouraging familiarisation trips and strategic media partnerships.”

Alongside boosting Botswana's profile to a broader audience, Botswana Tourism Organisation has also been taking action to weave together the tapestry of the country's meeting industry agents by identifying key growth sectors and engaging associations aligned with them.

The sectors central to Botswana's association and conference landscape include mining and energy, tourism, conservation and the environment, health and medical research, education and academic research, finance and economic development, information and communications technology, innovation, and the digital economy.

“These sectors align with Botswana's strategic development priorities and consistently attract regional collaboration, policy dialogues and knowledge exchange platforms. BTO has begun mapping local and regional associations aligned with priority sectors, developing engagement toolkits and bid support mechanisms, and participating in association-driven expos and networking forums.

“BTO is also working to strengthen its engagement with universities, hospitals, companies and small, medium, and micro enterprises, especially through multi-sectoral committees and targeted business tourism campaigns. Business events are critical

“Legacy is also fundamental for us ... We aim to host events that yield lasting benefits in terms of policy influence and knowledge transfer”

These are infrastructure development, destination marketing and branding, strategic partnerships, policy and incentives, capacity building, and product diversification.

“The goal of these pillars is to upgrade and expand conference venues, hotels, and connectivity infrastructure, and to position Botswana as an authentic and sustainable business event destination. Furthermore, to leverage regional bodies, global associations, and the private sector, and to create enabling frameworks and incentives to support bid wins and event hosting. Also, to develop skilled professionals and service providers to support world-class business events delivery, but also to blend business events with leisure, culture, and conservation experiences.”

Concentrated predominantly in Gaborone, the current meeting infrastructure includes some established and high-quality venues,

there is a recognition that expanding infrastructure to properly enhance the sector for a more regional and global market will be just one of a suite of challenges to address.

“Our main challenges are a limited purpose-built conference infrastructure, air access constraints and an immature business event ecosystem. Gaborone lacks a large-scale, modern convention centre that can host global congresses, and there are few direct international flights, which limits Botswana's accessibility for global delegates. There is also a shortage of experienced local event organisers, logistics providers and skilled technical staff,” says Keitumetse Setlang.

With a large-scale modern convention centre and improved air accessibility on the medium- to longer-term strategic horizon, Botswana Tourism Organisation has been focused on tackling some of the more immediate

“The vision is to position Botswana as a leading African destination for sustainable, high-impact business events”

for the economy at large, as the sector drives high-value tourism, stimulates job creation, and supports skills transfer.”

While the direct and indirect economic benefits of a well-developed meeting industry have been extensively recorded, much of today’s conversation is on its sustainability and legacy impacts, areas that are also entirely on Botswana’s radar as it forges ahead to attain its ambitions.

Sustainability is a core tenet of Botswana’s tourism brand. Current efforts include encouraging eco-certified venues and promoting green event standards, advocating for the use of local suppliers and community-based tourism for event activities, and designing bid documents to highlight Botswana’s conservation leadership and low-impact tourism model. These sustainability credentials are communicated directly to organisers, and embedded in Botswana’s business events value proposition.

“Legacy is also fundamental for us. We aim to host events that yield lasting benefits in terms of policy influence and knowledge transfer, such as those held through think tanks or policy forums. Or skills development and entrepreneurship, like training workshops for local suppliers, community

empowerment, such as sourcing from small, medium and micro enterprises and community-based organisations, and destination branding and long-term return visitation.”

Long-term returns are a key intention for Botswana’s meeting industry development. With that in mind, several additional areas remain for the tourism organisation to address, ensuring their offer is comprehensive and enduring for potential future clients, as well as identifying the best channel for engaging with them.

“Key questions are: how can we build a sustainable and competitive business events ecosystem that supports job creation and economic diversification, what institutional frameworks and investment models will accelerate infrastructure development and capacity building, and how can we strengthen our bid-winning capability to secure regional and international events.

“A dedicated convention bureau is under consideration, which will focus exclusively on promoting, bidding for, and coordinating business events. It will enable more agile, industry-driven engagement with global and continental associations.”

With much work already underway, and more in the pipeline, the

Botswana Tourism Organisation is confident about the future of the country’s meetings industry and clear on how it wants to be perceived in the near future.

“The vision is to position Botswana as a leading African destination for sustainable, high-impact business events that combine exceptional infrastructure, cultural authenticity, and natural beauty. Gaborone will be home to a state-of-the-art convention centre, while cities like Maun, Kasane, and Francistown will offer niche, destination-driven events. The sector will support thousands of jobs, drive cross-border collaboration, and position Botswana as a top choice for high-level summits, knowledge forums, and incentive travel globally.”

The country’s aspiration is to be recognised for hosting world-class events that contribute to knowledge creation, investment attraction and regional integration, supported by an agile ecosystem and professional delivery standards.

“By 2030, Botswana will be a recognised leader in sustainable, experience-rich business events in Africa.”



Concerns That the Meetings Industry CANNOT ATTRACT YOUNGER PEOPLE MAY BE EXAGGERATED

ACCORDING TO Ray Bloom, Chairman of the Imex Group, this year's *Policy Forum* at Imex Frankfurt was a success. The *Policy Forum* is about trying to understand the future of the business events industry and bringing together leaders from around the world to shape that future together.

"The question many people are asking is *How do we get young people into the industry?* What emerged from this year's forum was a clear concern among many older individuals who have been in the industry for a long time and are worried about who will succeed them. There was an interesting discussion about whether they were concerned because of the digital age we live in, people working from home several days a week, the growing number of digital nomads, all of that was discussed, and they were concerned," says Ray Bloom.

Professor **Greg Clark**, global urbanist and advisor, was the key figure behind the forum. He believes that there will be an even greater need for professional meetings in the future than we have today: "It led me to participate in the *Future Leaders Forum*, which had about 80 participants, many from Germany, but there was also a group of 20 people from the US and other countries. They were totally committed to the future and opportunities of the industry, and I was able to tell them something that I believe will happen. It's not just that there will be jobs for them in the future, and that they will want to meet and get to know each other, not only at meetings, but also that the jobs they will get in leadership positions in the future will have a higher status, probably sooner than ever before.

“Buyers are very engaged in all aspects of the exhibition”

“I found it very interesting how what I heard at our *Policy Forum* one day connected with what I saw with my own eyes among the future leaders the next day. I think it’s exciting to see this, and what it really means is that people working in the industry need encouragement, because these young people are out there, and you only need to look at the exhibition hall in Frankfurt to see that. I sit on the *Policy Forum* and hear this. I have noticed the increasing number of young people attending our trade fair, and that there are even younger ones enrolling in various courses. The concern that the meetings industry cannot attract younger people is exaggerated,” says Greg Clark.

Carina Bauer, CEO of Imex Group: “This was our biggest *Imex Frankfurt* to date in terms of exhibition space, with almost 3,000 exhibitors. We have returned to approximately the same level as before the pandemic. Over 13,000 participants from all over the world are here, and well over 4,000 buyers. In fact, the number of buyers is almost 4,500. The majority of these are, of course, hosted buyers, but almost 1,000 participating buyers in addition to this have also come to the fair.”

In terms of invited buyers, *Imex Frankfurt* are seeing an increase of around seven per cent in hosted buyers for the actual week compared to last year’s show.

“We are also seeing a ten per cent increase in the number of individual meetings they have had, which really demonstrates the strength of buyers’ businesses and also their overall interest and engagement with our exhibitors and with the show. In terms of the total number of meetings, over 67,000 prebooked meetings have taken place,” says Carina Bauer.

“One of the newer metrics is about buyers’ favourites among exhibitors, sessions, and products via the app. We have seen a 30 per cent increase in usage there. What this really shows us once again is that buyers are very interested and that they also understand our systems better as we optimise them, hopefully making them more user-friendly than ever before.

“Admittedly, it’s only a brief insight into what our buyers are interested in and which sessions they are interested in, but it will really help us make improvements for the future on the exhibition floor and also within the education program. It also shows that our buyers are very engaged in all aspects of the

exhibition, which is also what we hear anecdotally on the show floor. It’s always essential for us to get data that supports the anecdotal messages we see,” Carina Bauer concludes.

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- Additional 2% cancellation attrition within 14 days of arrival



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€20K plus – Pick 3

- Upgraded tea and coffee break
- 50,000 Radisson Rewards Points
- Accommodation upgrade (5 rooms)
- Breakfast break
- Complimentary car parking (5 spaces), upon availability
- Complimentary candy / Healthy Snack (1 serving)
- Additional 2% cancellation attrition within 14 days of arrival
- Locally inspired surprise benefit

Large Meetings

€40K plus – Pick 4

- Upgraded tea and coffee break
- Accommodation upgrade (7 rooms)
- 1 Break-out room or Organisers Office
- 100,000 Radisson Rewards Points
- Complimentary car parking (5 spaces), upon availability
- Complimentary drinks reception
- Additional 2% cancellation attrition within 14 days of arrival
- Locally inspired surprise benefit
- Site inspection: accommodation for up to 2 rooms complimentary

Extra Large Meetings

€65K plus – Pick 5

- Upgraded tea and coffee break
- Accommodation upgrade (10 rooms)
- 1 Break-out room or Organisers Office
- 150,000 Radisson Rewards Points
- Complimentary car parking (5 spaces), upon availability
- Complimentary drinks reception
- Additional 2% cancellation attrition within 14 days of arrival
- Locally inspired surprise benefit
- Site inspection: accommodation for up to 2 rooms complimentary



The UAE Continues to Strengthen ITS GLOBAL ECONOMIC STANDING

THE UAE CABINET has been reviewing national and international projects and developments since April, including the national tax system, sports strategy, industrial economy, tree-planting scheme and other key initiatives, according to *Arabian Business*.

Sheikh **Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, who chaired the UAE Cabinet meeting in Abu Dhabi, comments: “We approved the restructuring of the Emirates Council for Balanced Development. The council’s goal is to develop impactful projects that ensure balanced growth across all parts of the country.”

The Cabinet also reviewed the outcomes of the *Make it in the Emirates* forum from last year and approved the objectives for its upcoming 2025 edition. The forum has emerged as a key national platform to attract industrial investments, stimulate local production, and boost the competitiveness of products made in the UAE.

The business event has hosted over 13,000 visitors and participants across its editions, featuring over 200 specialised panels and

workshops that have unveiled high-value investment opportunities, announced manufacturing and supply agreements, and provided innovative financing solutions.

“We also discussed the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology’s preparations for hosting the *Make it in the Emirates* forum. The event strengthens our industrial sector by offering purchase opportunities, investment prospects, financing solutions, and partnerships worth AED 160 billion (€36.8 billion).”

The Cabinet also approved the launch of the Global Alliance for Energy Efficiency. This initiative aligns with the UAE Consensus announced at *COP28* and aims to double the annual energy efficiency rate by 2030.

Furthermore, the UAE Cabinet reviewed updates to the national campaign Plant the Emirates, a key initiative aimed at expanding green areas and promoting environmental awareness across the country.

Since April, a total of 459,698 trees have been planted in collaboration with strategic partners. The campaign also distributed 593,246 seedlings and scattered over 6.5 million seeds

across natural habitats. The campaign witnessed strong youth and community engagement, involving over 5,000 students and 8,257 volunteers.

During the meeting, Sheikh Mohammed announced that the Cabinet had approved the launch of the Energy Efficiency Global Alliance, which was announced during the UAE's hosting of *COP28*. The alliance aims to foster international cooperation, share expertise, and develop global policies to double energy effi-

IMD World Competitiveness Report 2023. It ranked second globally in the Index of Combating Tax Evasion, fourth in the Consumption Tax Rate, and fifth in the Efficiency of Tax Policy.

Sheikh Mohammed comments: "We discussed the progress of the UAE's tax system, which supports financial sustainability and strengthens our global competitiveness. The UAE ranks fifth globally in tax policy efficiency and second in combating

Creative Industries. Key initiatives included the launch of the Emirates Culture and Creativity Medal, the National Culture and Creativity Grant Program, and the National Framework for Cultural Activities in Schools.

The UAE Cabinet approved the adoption of the Public Benefit Entities Classification Guide. This decision is based on the Federal Decree-Law governing public benefit institutions. It reflects the best international practices and standards while also taking into account the unique characteristics of the UAE's institutional environment.

The guide defines the scope of public benefit activities covered under the law, which includes social, cultural, scientific, educational, professional, creative, artistic, recreational, and environmental fields.

"We also approved 44 international agreements in economic, developmental, and governmental fields, and we authorised the start of negotiations for investment protection and promotion agreements with 30 countries worldwide," says Sheikh Mohammed. "The UAE will continue to build economic and investment ties with friendly and sisterly nations, maintaining its open economic approach that has solidified its position as a global economic hub connecting East and West."

During the meeting, the UAE Cabinet also approved the launch of the country's first integrated regulatory intelligence ecosystem within the government. This new legislation and laws development system, which is the first of its kind globally, is based on the most advanced artificial intelligence approaches and solutions, marking a global first in smart governance.

"The National Sports Strategy aims to elevate the sports sector's contribution to society, health, and national identity"

ciency across all sectors by 2030.

"We reviewed the results of the plant campaign, which we launched at the start of the season, as well as the outcomes of the National Sports Strategy and the annual report on money laundering and terrorism financing risks in the UAE."

During the session, the Cabinet reviewed the latest updates and the progress made on developing the UAE's tax system. The UAE continues to strengthen its global economic standing by building an integrated, competitive, and transparent tax ecosystem that facilitates tax compliance and supports the achievement of financial sustainability and development goals.

The country's tax system has made significant progress in recent years, encompassing legislative, technical, and procedural aspects, locally and globally. The country achieved leading results in global competitiveness indicators, according to the

tax evasion, according to the annual report by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Switzerland.

"The tax system is a key part of our economic foundation for the future. Its efficiency reflects the strength of our competitive economy, and the tax culture we've built is a recent step we've successfully taken. I extend my thanks and appreciation to the team contributing to the UAE's financial sustainability through a world-class tax system."

The Cabinet also reviewed the results of implementing the National Sports Strategy, which aims to elevate the sports sector's contribution to society, health, and national identity. Among the key outcomes was the successful launch of the National University Games Project, involving 1,767 students.

On the cultural front, the Cabinet reviewed progress in implementing the National Strategy for Cultural and

A photograph of a rowing team on Concept 2 rowers. The focus is on a male rower in the foreground who is wearing a black athletic shirt and has a prosthetic left leg. He is smiling and exerting effort. Behind him, other team members are visible, some wearing yellow shirts. The background shows a blurred crowd of spectators.

CREATING A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

LVIV. UKRAINE

UNBROKEN

The idea of creating the UNBROKEN rehabilitation center has its genesis when medical professionals attended a meeting in Lviv in April 2022 to discuss how they can help people injured in the war.

One hospital in Lviv has now been transformed into a modern rehabilitation center, creating a huge community of professionals to support those in dire need of help. This is just one example of how meetings can create a legacy and change the future.

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The Holistic Approach OF ANTWERP

ANTWERP, Belgium's good-looking second city in the region of Flanders, grew wealthy on the profits of its port, trading since the 16th century in diamonds, priceless works of art and the spices and spoils of assorted empires.

Today, Antwerp is one of Europe's most dynamic cities for meetings, incentives, conferences, and events, offering a blend of historical grandeur, modern infrastructure, and cosmopolitan vibrancy. The Antwerp Convention Bureau provides comprehensive support, from venue selection to local partnerships, ensuring smooth event planning and execution. The city has a population of approximately 562,000, and the Metropolitan Area is estimated to have around 1.2 million people.

The city's key sectors include its world-class port, the largest integrated chemical cluster in Europe, and a global diamond industry centred in its Diamond District. The town also has emerging strengths in digital innovation, sustainable energy transition, and healthcare, along with a notable presence in fashion and retail.

In the European health innovation landscape, Antwerp distinguishes itself not just through the presence of

renowned institutions or the quality of its healthcare infrastructure, but through its ability to enable innovation structurally. The city's health and life sciences cluster transforms healthcare through an interconnected ecosystem of data, research, industry, and care provision. Antwerp's strength lies in coordination. Its dense but highly active network of research institutions, clinical centres, startups, and innovation platforms operate within an environment that favours collaboration. It makes the destination a hub for scientific advancement and a testbed for real-world health solutions.

Antwerp's long history as a centre for trade and innovation has cultivated a culture of experimentation and adaptation. This culture equips the city with the agility to navigate modern challenges. The Antwerp entrepreneurs' ability to evolve allows them to address pressing global issues like climate change, energy transitions, pandemics, digitisation, and mobility. Antwerp's innovation landscape is characterised by The Beacon, a technology institute connecting digital innovators to solve the challenges of the Belgian cities, ports and industries. It fosters

collaboration among over a hundred companies and research institutes.

The port, the second-largest in Europe, plays a vital role in world commerce, trading 86 per cent of the world's rough diamonds and storing half the world's shipped coffee beans. The harbour is also home to the second-largest petrochemical cluster. Now powered by a vast array of wind turbines.

The city serves as a central hub for international trade and commerce. Some of the biggest companies include Atlas Copco, Nike, Cummins, The Coca-Cola Company, BMW Group, L'Oréal, Procter & Gamble, and the Lego Group. If their meeting planners need to organise a business event, they have a range of options to choose from.

Antwerp boasts that the whole town is your venue, which is hardly surprising given its incredible event infrastructure, from legendary heritage sites to state-of-the-art conference centres. The city's leading conference venue, A Room with a Zoo, integrates one of Europe's oldest zoos with world-class facilities and memorable settings. It is a living historic part of the venue with a rich legacy and its own award-winning science

and research centre. The original and protected 19th-century architecture provides a peaceful backdrop to events. The Queen Elizabeth Hall accommodates up to 2,000 delegates, the Marble Hall accommodates up to 350, the Darwin Hall accommodates up to 320, and the Gorilla Rooms accommodate up to 500 people.

Profits from the congresses and events taking place at A Room with a Zoo support animal welfare, education and awareness building. The Antwerp Zoo Society plays a leading

The architectural diversity, from medieval guildhalls to cutting-edge contemporary buildings, creates inspiring environments for business events. The compact size of Antwerp allows organisers to create citywide experiences, seamlessly integrating different venues, hotels, and social programs. The holistic approach enables events to tap into the city's heritage, vibrant arts scene, and culinary offerings, while connecting with the locals. In short, Antwerp is a likeable and walkable city.

revolutionised mapmaking by gathering maps in a uniform format and style, making geographical knowledge more accessible and systematic. Christophe Plantin was a renowned printer, publisher, and bookseller who established the Plantin Press, Europe's largest and most advanced printing house. He was central in Antwerp's humanist circles and published many scholarly, scientific, and religious works.

The Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp is an institution that combines the legacies of two of the city's most influential Renaissance figures. The museum is the only museum in the world inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its role in the history of printing and publishing. Christophe Plantin established his printing press in Antwerp in 1555, becoming the largest and most influential printing house of its time, renowned for the quality and breadth of its publications.

The museum holds around 25,000 early printed books, and over 600 manuscripts, including significant works such as:

- *The Biblia Polyglotta* (1568–1573)
- *The Cruydt-Boeck (Herbals)* by **Rembert Dodoens**
- An anatomical book by **Andreas Vesalius**
- *The Tenth* (1585), **Simon Stevin's** book of decimal fractions
- A rare copy of the Gutenberg *Bible*

The museum also holds a copy of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the first modern atlas, by **Abraham Ortelius**, which is a highlight of the museum's collection. The exhibition also features portraits and drawings by **Peter Paul Rubens**, a close friend of the Moretus family, as well as other works from the Antwerp School.

You cannot visit Antwerp without tasting the Belgian chocolate.

“Antwerp is Belgium’s long-standing fashion capital, and also home to one of the world’s leading fashion academies”

role on the world stage in terms of scientific research and conservation, creating partnerships between meetings and conservation that directly tie into the business events industry to make it more sustainable.

Other majestic backdrops for business events are historical locations such as the 16th-century Handelsbeurs, the world's first purpose-built stock exchange, the Imperial Meir Palace, and the Antwerp City Hall.

Modern industrial spaces, including converted warehouses like the Felix Pakhuis and trendy lofts in the former harbour district, cater to creative and large-scale gatherings alongside specialised venues such as the 7,000-seat, 24-screen Kinopolis Antwerp, the contemporary Blue Point Antwerpen, which is ideal for high-tech meetings. The Royal Yacht Club and the Fashion Museum Antwerp add further versatility.

Antwerp is home to the University of Antwerp, the third-largest university in Flanders. Around 50,000 students have forged a reputation as an unlikely rival to Paris in the fashion world, alongside Milan. Today, Antwerp is Belgium's long-standing fashion capital, and also home to one of the world's leading fashion academies.

However, let us not forget the past: **Abraham Ortelius** (1527–1598) and **Christophe Plantin** (1520–1589) were two of the most influential figures in the intellectual and publishing life of 16th-century Antwerp. Their collaboration and friendship played a pivotal role in cartography, printing, and the dissemination of human knowledge during the Renaissance.

Abraham Ortelius was a Flemish cartographer recognised as the creator of the first modern atlas, published in 1570. His work





“The compact size of Antwerp allows organisers to create citywide experiences, seamlessly integrating different venues”

At Chocolate Nation, you have 14 thematic rooms, submerging you in the wondrous world of Belgian chocolate. Starting in the jungle between the cocoa trees, you follow the cocoa to Antwerp's port. A gigantic fantasy machine showcases the process of making chocolate and explains the origin of its velvety smooth taste. Every visitor gets an insight into the traditions surrounding the sweet gold and will learn what makes Belgian chocolate special and why Belgians are so proud of it.

Today, most visitors arrive in Antwerp by train. You can get from Brussels Airport-Zaventem by train in 44 minutes on average, with the fastest journeys taking only 30 minutes. Antwerpen-Centraal railway station is an eye-catching masterpiece of Art Nouveau architecture, a style that is extensively represented throughout the city.

The character of the city also reveals itself through food. There are many places to go for a culinary treat in a stunning setting. You can find a galaxy of Michelin-starred restaurants, but don't forget the local dishes like, for example, a steaming pot of mussels with a bucket of fries and a small bowl of mayonnaise. By the way, fries are an integral part of Belgium's gastronomic heritage and Belgian

fries are often called the world's finest. Traditionally, they are sold in a paper cone or a cardboard tray with a large dollop of sauce on top.

A hideaway in historic Antwerp is the Botanic Sanctuary, which was once a monastery. Today, it is a top-class hotel with 108 rooms spread across five historic buildings, each with its own story to tell: Sint-Jons, Monasterium, Sint-Elisabeth, Alnetum, and the Filips van Marnix House. The sanctuary also has Hertog Jan, a two-star Michelin restaurant, or savour the art of culinary elegance at one-star restaurant Fine Fleur. Within the storied walls of the sanctuary, there is a congress centre with 14 different meeting rooms for up to 350 persons. Also, there is a health spa and a botanical garden that master the art of tranquillity and wellbeing.

The city of Antwerp is welcoming several international congresses on different topics in the next few months, for example:

- **Asset Performance Conference 2025** 4–5 November. Europe's leading conference on digital transformation in Maintenance and Asset Management.
- **8th International Conference on Microbiome Engineering** 1–3 December. This event brings together scientists across the quickly growing field of microbiome engineering.
- **ESF Europe 2026: Energy & Sustainability Forum** 24–26 February, 2026. The forum is established as the only event dedicated to downstream decarbonisation and sustainability.
- **10th EuChemS Chemistry Congress (ECC10)** 12–16 July, 2026. The congress allows the attendees to listen to and interact with some of the most celebrated researchers in the world.
- **Annual Summit 2025: Uncharted Waters** 21–22 October. After Tokyo, the Global Maritime Forum will share knowledge and insights in Antwerp.
- **SNOMED CT Expo** 23–24 October. Unites clinical terminology SMEs from around the world.



Record-Breaking Congress Year FOR HELSINKI EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTRE

THE SIX INTERNATIONAL congresses hosted by Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre brought over 25,000 delegates to Finland's capital during the first half of the year. The income and employment impact of the congresses amounts to more than €50 million. The goal of the Helsinki Tourism Advisory Board is to double the tourism revenue generated by foreign visitors and significantly increase employment in the sector in the city by 2030.

Finland's reputation as a valued Nordic country for hosting international congresses, and Helsinki's recognition as a sought-after destination city among congress participants, is also reflected in the busy congress year at the convention centre. During the first half of the year, six international congresses drew over 25,000 participants to the destination, resulting in an economic impact of more than €50 million.

"International congresses and corporate events offer enormous growth potential for boosting the tourism industry and economic growth in our city and throughout Finland. According to the Helsinki Convention Bureau, a congress participant spends an average of €2,000 in the host country. Congresses generate income and jobs for the hotel and restaurant sector, passenger transport, retail, and other service companies," says **Laura Tarkka**, Chair of the Helsinki Tourism Advisory Board and COO of Scandic Hotel Finland and Europe.

The income and employment impacts of congresses extend well into the long term. Research by the convention bureau shows that most congress delegates are first-time visitors to Finland, and a significant proportion consider returning for leisure travel.

"Our goal is to double the tourism revenue generated by visitors in Helsinki by 2030. At the same time, the number of employed people is estimated to increase by nearly 50 per cent," Laura Tarkka says.

The Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre is growing in tandem with the capital and will make significant investments in the coming years to support the growth driven by international congresses and corporate events.

"We are aiming for strong growth and want to set an example for Finnish businesses through our investments. The new Messukeskus Arena is a €6 million investment that will be inaugurated at the *Nordic Business Forum* at the end of September. The future event space Solar is a €20 million construction project scheduled for completion in autumn 2027," says **Anni Vepsäläinen**, CEO of Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre.

The expo and convention centre's congress year continues during the autumn, when the *European Paediatric Rheumatology Congress PRES* will bring around 1,000 international visitors, generating approximately two million euros in economic and employment impact.

Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre's international congresses in 2025

- **EENA Conference & Exhibition** 7–11 April, 730 participants
- **ESPGHAN Annual Meeting of the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition** 14–17 May, 5,800 participants
- **European Stroke Organisation Conference – ESOC** 21–23 May, 4,200 participants
- **EAPC World Congress of the European Association for Palliative Care** 29–31 May, 2,000 participants
- **International Council of Nurses – ICN Congress** 9–13 June, 7,000 participants
- **EAN Congress of the European Academy of Neurology** 21–24 June, 8,000 delegates
- **PREs European Paediatric Rheumatology Congress** 17–20 September, 1,000 participants

In addition to the expo and convention centre, The Finnish Fair Corporation Group includes the trade fair organiser Expomark Oy and the AV technology company SVV Oy. In 2024, the group's revenue was 58.4 million euro. The economic impact of Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre on the surrounding area was 245 million euro, and its employment impact was 3,335 person-years.



Abu Dhabi Accelerates Its Efforts TO BUILD A GLOBAL TECH HUB

PHOTO: iStock.com/Hai Diep

ABU DHABI'S state-backed startup ecosystem, Hub71, sharpens its focus on artificial intelligence and prepares to expand into the healthcare sector. The emirate accelerates its efforts to build a global tech hub which can attract entrepreneurs, capital and talent from around the world. Since its launch in 2019, Hub71 has grown into the fastest-expanding startup ecosystem in the Middle East, positioning itself as the Gulf's answer to Silicon Valley.

Peter Abou Hachem, Head of Growth and Strategy at Hub71, said

in an interview with *Arabian Business* that artificial intelligence is the organisation's sharpest bet, having recently accepted 13 new AI startups, bringing them to around 50. The aim is to leverage Abu Dhabi's strong infrastructure base in compute, energy and sovereign investments to help create the next "Open AI" out of the emirate. The companies come from around 40 countries.

The AI strategy is designed to cut across industries rather than focus on a single vertical. Peter Abou Hachem argues that artificial intelligence is

a horizontal technology set to affect every aspect of life, from business to financial services and logistics. The sector has already shown tangible results in areas such as drug discovery and genomics. Additionally, healthcare and the life sciences are thriving intersections for AI, with startups utilising AI models to accelerate research and development in pharmaceuticals.

In line with Abu Dhabi government priorities, following AI, healthcare, climate tech, and digital assets, Hub71 will establish its next

“Hub71 has grown into the fastest-expanding startup ecosystem in the Middle East, positioning itself as the Gulf’s answer to Silicon Valley”

dedicated vertical, as the logic behind the clusters is to align with Abu Dhabi’s wider priorities.

Furthermore, Peter Abou Hachem resonates whenever you see the emirate building out infrastructure in a sector, whether it is food security or water. Abu Dhabi builds the startup ecosystem to match because startups will not come unless investors, customers, and a regulatory framework are already in place.

The approach reflects the emirate’s broader economic diversification plan. Abu Dhabi has invested heavily in research institutes, biotechnology, and healthcare infrastructure, making the city attractive for specialist talent through lifestyle incentives and residency schemes. For Hub71, the task is to convert those assets into a magnet for founders who can scale globally with the capital.

Hub71 is benefiting from global transformations. Inflexible regulations in traditional startup centres such as Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and the United States have prompted some investors and companies to look for alternatives.

Peter Abou Hachem specifies the example of blockchain and crypto firms, which migrated to Abu Dhabi in recent years after regulators in other markets cracked down. That shift

helped Abu Dhabi establish itself as a leading jurisdiction for digital assets. Today, the same dynamic is now at play across technology more broadly. For example, the UK, once a magnet for entrepreneurs, has seen an outflow of wealth and talent as tax and political changes weigh on sentiment. Abu Dhabi has been able to capture a portion of that pipeline.

Geopolitical factors matter, but it is also about quality, notes Peter Abou Hachem. Singapore, the US, UK and Hong Kong are still where the best-in-class startups are, and that is where Hub71’s efforts are focused. The fact that Abu Dhabi has a clear and strict regulatory environment, thanks to Abu Dhabi’s International Financial Centre, makes the emirate an attractive spot for founders and funds alike.

To reduce reliance on geopolitical impacts, Hub71 has established cross-border programmes with over 12 countries, ensuring a steady deal flow from leading ecosystems. The startup is plugged into hubs and investors worldwide, which gives the hub first access to the best companies.

Six years after its launch, Hub71 now counts more than 370 startups in its community, which have generated AED 4.5 billion (€1 billion) in revenue and attracted billions in funding.

Over 150 partners, ranging from venture capital firms to corporates and government entities, support the platform.

The model is designed to replicate the organic growth of Silicon Valley, where ecosystems are formed by bringing together the right people rather than focusing solely on scale. Hub71’s acceptance rate for new entrants remains low by design, with an emphasis on quality companies that can scale into billion-dollar businesses.

Peter Abou Hachem says their ecosystem grew in value by almost 30 per cent last year. Now, it’s about patience and maturity helping startups expand globally and produce multi-billion-dollar outcomes from Abu Dhabi.

The effort is part of the UAE capital’s long-term push to diversify away from hydrocarbons and create jobs in knowledge-based industries. By aligning its clusters with government-backed sectors such as healthcare, AI, climate, and digital assets, Hub71 is betting that Abu Dhabi can offer the infrastructure and capital that founders need, as well as the global connectivity that keeps them there.



LINK

A New Acronym Is Born

LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE

TEXT

Gary Grimmer

OVER THE YEARS, it has been common to hear association leaders, meeting planners, and people from convention bureaux, venues, and PCOs say that collectively, we were not an industry; we were all part of an ecosystem. In my view, that's true, and it's a major weakness. After all, if we can't even define ourselves as a coherent industry, we also lack cohesion. This all makes it much more challenging to communicate what we do and why it's important.

An industry by many names has no name The challenge in defining our industry was always that there were numerous disparate moving parts, different types of organisations with widely varying priorities, motivations, and perspectives. We weren't really part of the "meetings industry"

because that mostly referred to the supply side. Corporations and associations held meetings, but these meetings were considered one of their activities, not their primary purpose. In reality, they were global customers in the meetings industry, which was essentially local.

So, were we the "convention industry?" Well, what about corporate meetings, conferences and exhibitions? The "MICE industry" was always at best a supply-side concept; associations and corporations weren't part of it, they were users of it, and it was always primarily about tourism.

For a long time, many have been referring to the "Business events industry." I have a historical perspective on the origins of that because I was chairing a meeting in Sydney over

20 years ago, where we decided that name should refer to our industry, and thus was born the Business Events Council of Australia (BECA), which is now part of the Australian Business Events Association (ABEA). However, in retrospect, that expression is problematic as well. All types of gatherings can be considered events, but not all events are business-related, unless, again, you are looking at it from a supplier's perspective.

relatively modest incremental impact on tourism.

Over the past few decades, a movement has emerged to better define the actual value of meetings and events. The concepts of 'beyond tourism impacts' and 'legacies' took hold as a way to frame the broader value of the 'industry.' The Iceberg was established as a communication platform to build understanding and support for the industry by communicating a broader and more meaningful value proposition. The message is

how could we possibly expect people who aren't in our industry to understand what it's all about or how important it is?

High tech is a good example of how an industry can effectively be framed. People around the world recognise that technology has a significant impact on their daily lives. That industry has an acronym everyone knows: IT. Governments worldwide are focused on developing their IT industries.

Like IT, we want governments to prioritise our industry as a means to achieve their objectives. Since our industry can have a positive impact on the work of any government ministry, we want all ministers to take an interest. We want them to understand that building the strength of their city, state or nation in our industry is key to their global trade and intellectual engagement. We need them to realise that our industry is an essential part of achieving their future visions. In fact, our industry can even help them build their IT industry among many others. But then we say we're in the meetings industry, and they understandably want us to speak with their Tourism Minister.

If we had a meaningful name for our industry, it would need to be relevant to all the moving parts, compelling, and easy to remember and understand. It needs to be something governments at all levels could relate to and include in their policy statements. Ideally, it would be something that trips off the tongue. However, before suggesting a possible solution, I need to introduce a concept that is highly relevant to both governments and our industry, as well as to this question.

The quadruple helix An AI search will provide you with information

“The quadruple helix is a model that seeks to link the four key engines of innovation”

What is the value proposition? In the past, the question over how to refer to our industry has been more driven by people from the supply side. Destination promoters and suppliers have long sought to define and communicate the 'industry' and its value proposition, in the hope of securing the government support they need at the local level to achieve success. Traditionally, that value proposition was about attracting people to the destination who left money behind, essentially linking the benefit to tourism. That too was a weak position for a couple of reasons. First, in many places, tourism was not a star player in the local economy. Second, even if it was a star player, tourism was just a piece of a much bigger pie and therefore in the end just a small piece of a small piece of a pie. Ultimately, using that logic, meetings were only important because they had a

inevitably complicated. Meetings and events can be transformative for all kinds of communities, from professional to local, regional, and national. The transformation can be economic, social and environmental.

That it is not just about meetings per se, but also about knowledge exchange, building global networks, advancing science and medicine and, well, actually every field of endeavour under the sun.

Nobody knows what to think about us, but they are definitely thinking about IT While we can frame the messaging in a way that communicates all of that clearly and concisely, there is still no consensus on how we even refer to our industry. Our industry is astonishingly important, comprising a diverse mix of stakeholders who can't agree on its name. If we don't know what to call our own industry,

“The Link industry – where all stakeholders share an interest in Leveraging International Networks and Knowledge”

about the *quadruple helix*. In short, it's a model that relates to economics, public policy, and innovation. The quadruple helix is an extension of the triple helix model, which is based on the theory that collaboration between government, academia, and industry is the most efficient way to drive innovation. The quadruple helix introduces civil society, including professional and trade associations, as a fourth critical element. It recognises that innovation also requires a response to societal needs, values and real-world challenges.

The government provides policy and investment, corporations offer business know-how, strategic acumen and investment, universities provide research, analysis, and theoretical frameworks, and associations offer international perspectives, expertise, applied knowledge and insights on global best practices. The quadruple helix is a match made in heaven. It actually defines what our industry is all about and is aligned with the modern thinking of progressive governments.

Could we be the Link industry?

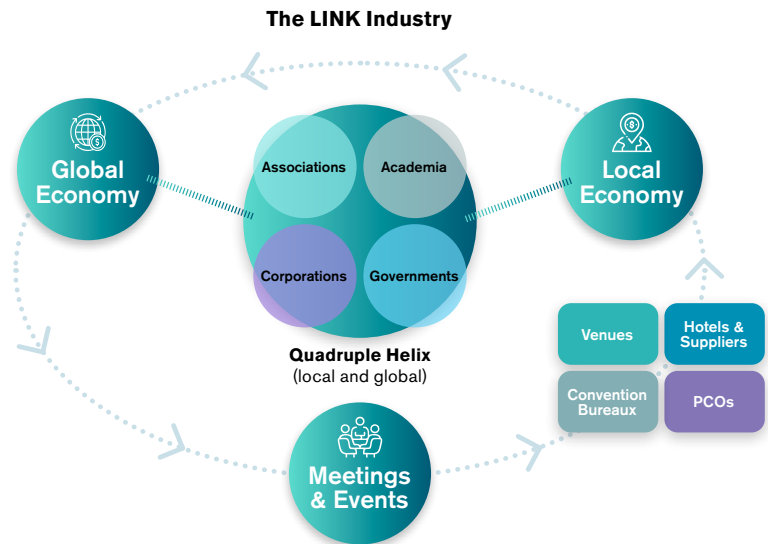
Link is an interesting word. It can be a noun, as in a *link* or *nexus* between

people or things. It can be a verb, meaning *to connect things*. The quadruple helix is a model that seeks to link the four key engines of innovation. Our industry is all about connections at every level.

One of the everyday things about our 'industry' is that it's all about linking people and innovation. Our industry is fundamentally about collaboration and coordination. Associations aim to link their members through shared knowledge and networks. Corporations seek to link with the innovation and markets that associations and exhibitions offer.

Academia is seeking research connections and links to other parts of the academic ecosystem as a path to scholarly innovation and grant opportunities.

Governments pursue policies that are strengthened by their links to the helix, and our industry can connect their local helix to global ones. Destination promoters aim to link their hospitality suppliers and event planners. By doing so, these events also provide links for local civil society, academia, corporations and government to access global knowledge and networks for building local



“Few would disagree with the premise that actually getting people together is the most powerful way to leverage global networks and accessing global knowledge”

capacities, trade, and achieving social progress.

Leveraging International Networks and Knowledge (LINK) *Link* might also be used as a meaningful and powerful acronym. Ultimately, building networks and knowledge is the fundamental purpose of our industry. Leveraging those networks and that knowledge is where meetings and events play a crucial role.

Indeed, innovation is possible in a closed system. However, history has shown that collaboration across borders is a powerful accelerator of innovation. Yes, people can create things in their own labs. But, likely many of the tools, methods, background knowledge and theories that enabled them to discover or invent new things came from outside their own labs.

Doctors and scientists have been leveraging knowledge, insights, and revelations from the scientific community long before any of them attended university. They continue to leverage throughout their careers through collaborative efforts and participation in societies. Leveraging communities of interest and corporate sponsorship is the lifeblood of *associations*. *Their members*, in turn, leverage the associations for

knowledge and networks. *Corporations* may be charitable, but in most instances, they sponsor association activities because they can leverage them for commercial gain. *Universities and R&D facilities* are leveraging meetings to develop research links or to connect to funders.

Governments are increasingly recognising that hosting meetings and events is a powerful and high-value strategy for fostering global trade and intellectual engagement. Leveraging a global helix instead of just operating in a local one offers pathways to new talent, investment, sector development, exports, social and environmental policy improvements, improved health and public welfare ... and the list goes on.

Yes, there are other means of leveraging global networks and accessing global knowledge. Still, few would disagree with the premise that actually getting people together is the most powerful way to do that. But meetings are not the industry. Meetings are a platform, albeit the most efficient one, utilised by the Link industry.

The Link industry uses meetings to leverage global communities, bringing them together to power its engine room. Hosting these meetings is an opportunistic strategy for local

communities to capitalise on that leverage. It is essentially a way of leveraging other people's successful leveraging efforts. When you think about it, that's a truly powerful concept.

Here is where the destination promoters come in. Convention bureaux and their industry partners, including venues, PCOs, hotels, and service providers, are the supply chain partners that enable a local stake in the Link industry. They are the conduit through which regional and global Link industries connect and are essential to the growth and success of the Link industry.

So, when you think about it, every player in our industry is linking and leveraging international networks and knowledge, which fundamentally drives it.

The Iceberg is currently transitioning from being primarily a communications platform to becoming a support mechanism for building a global movement that has “one message, many voices.” Developing a simple, compelling and memorable way to refer to our industry would simplify that challenge enormously. That could be the “Link industry” or something similar.

The background of the entire poster is a blurred image of a crowd of people at an event, overlaid with a network of golden lines and circular nodes, suggesting a digital or technological theme. Large, semi-transparent blue and red circles are also present. The text is white, providing high contrast against the darker background.

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PHOTO Sara Appelgren

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A Political Lack of Imagination and Creativity

WITH REGARDS TO IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES

IF A COUNTRY creates a strategy for events and major sports championships, only to never actually implement it, this inverted power move could indicate any and all of several problems:

- It may demonstrate a lack of political will or decisiveness, indicating that there is insufficient political support, commitment, or determination to move into the implementation phase, even if a framework or strategy exists.
- It could stem from insufficient resources or funding. A common obstacle is that while a strategy exists on paper, difficulties in securing national, regional, or local government support mean that projects remain at the planning stage. Major championships often require government commitments and guarantees to be realised.
- It may signal that the strategy was mostly about cosmetics rather than any genuine desire for change. Putting a strategy in place, even with no intention of implementing it, can be a way for a country to appear progressive or internationally oriented, short term, without really being prepared to take the actual steps and make the necessary investments.
- It could also indicate a lack of cooperation between actors. Strategy work emphasises the importance of collaboration among sports, broad tourism (including meetings and events), and politics. Failure to implement the strategy may indicate a lack of coordination and consensus among the concerned actors.
- And finally, it may be a failure to adapt to real world conditions. In some cases, the strategy may have been developed without sufficient analysis of the actual prospects, or perhaps it may not be possible to adapt the existing plans to changing conditions or external factors.

In practice, the failed implementation leads to the country losing influence, credibility, and opportunities to shape developments in the field. This relegates the country to the sidelines while other, more proactive, nations take the lead and raise their profiles through major events. Lofty ambitions with no follow through may also lead to disenchantment within the event and sports sectors and all affected business communities.

Suppose a country has some of the world's most prestigious prizes – such as Sweden, which established the Nobel Prize well over a hundred years

ago – yet systematically fails to link them to the fact that almost no Nobel Prizes in history have been awarded to laureates that has not been involved in, or at least been a delegate to, international conferences for knowledge building, networking, and research. In such a case, this might indicate a severe lack of imagination, creativity, and a failure to understand how things are interconnected – despite it being abundantly clear.

Do the most prominent event cities around the world really have a more advanced understanding of the importance of conferences for the world's development? Or is it simply a matter of culture and attitudes, which should, at least in theory, be easier to adjust? Yet, so many politicians do not understand, and do not want to learn, or cannot, dare not, or can't be bothered to learn. As such, it's not terribly surprising that we haven't made further progress. It is high time for imagination about what could be achieved to take more space in all discussions about our collective future – and, even more importantly, in discussion about the future of our children and grandchildren.

Perhaps it is time for global university degrees in how to utilise and apply our imagination more effectively? Dare to dream.

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