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## International Events: the impact of the conference location

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### Abstract

The event industry is one of the most rapidly developing types of business, not only in terms of the financial revenue that it generates, but also in terms of the destination's development that hosts the event. The destination is one of the most important factors that shapes the decision making process of potential participants, regarding their participation in conferences. Therefore, conference organizers should invest on the evaluation criteria that advance the dynamic of the location. This leads to the employment of a communication strategy, based on the dynamic of the conference location. The paper presents the evaluation criteria as derived from the literature review and evaluated by participants. The outcomes of the research demonstrates the significance of each evaluation criterion and extension of the factor of "Conference Location". A dynamic Simulation Model is further demonstrated in an attempt to help conference organizers to appropriately allocate the resources on this factor.

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Events, Conference Location, Communication Strategy, Dynamic Simulation Modeling

### 1. Location, location and location

The interest in the value of academic conferences is steadily growing in the last years, according to the statistics of the ICCA [1]. The majority of cities already has the infrastructure and necessary facilities to host events of this caliber. [2].

The convention industry is a global industry with high competitiveness. However, the amount of research conducted is inconsistent with the rapid development of the industry, reducing in this way its dynamic [3-4]. Therefore, despite the increased performance of the sector, scientific conferences remains a less researched area, in terms of employing an integrated communication approach. Insufficient attention has been paid either in

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developing an understanding of communication strategies adopted by conferences, either in the assessment of the degree to which they are successful [5].

Table 1.1: Conference Statistics 2001 – 2010 (source: ICCA, 2011).

Year	Events (Meetings)
2001	5,262
2002	6,090
2003	6,294
2004	7,524
2005	7,825
2006	8,549
2007	9,036
2008	9,610
2009	9,225
2010	9,120

Lee and Back (2005) [6] report the results of the survey of 137 scientific articles, published in the most famous journals of the convention industry for the period from 1990 to 2003. A recent research in 144 scientific articles in this sector for the period 2000-2009, shows a faint, almost imperceptible, difference in the amount of publications [7]. Traditionally, the research focuses on the economic and social impacts that conferences offer in destinations [8-10]. Based on the review of a 14 year old season, Lee and Back (2005) [6] conclude that researchers mainly focus on the choice of conference location, destination marketing and economic impact.

The factor of the conference location is of paramount importance for the successful organization of scientific conferences. In their research, the Borghans, Romans and Sauermann (2010) [11] argue that the factor of the conference location is the second most important factor, which is able to shape the decision making process of potential delegates, regarding their participation in conferences. The literature review reveals multiple criteria regarding the significance and complexity of conference's location [12-19]:

- E Destination with infrastructure, able to meet the needs of both the conference organizers (convention center), and the needs of participants in terms of accommodation and facilities.
- E Destination with historical and cultural heritage, able to increase the interest of participants and by extension the levels of participation.
- E Destination with appropriate weather conditions that allows the smooth run of conferences.
- E Destination with adequate availability of travel services, able to meet the needs of visitors in terms of nourishment and entertainment.
- E Destination, able to offer a variety of transportation modes so that it can be easily approached.
- E Safe destination, free of high terrorism, theft and injuries.
- E Calm environment that ensures the smooth running of conferences, without interference or disturbance from the local community.

- E Destination with the adequate health conditions, free from infectious diseases and non-potable water.
- E Destination to serve using the international language, to better serve the participants inside and outside the conference venue.

Prior to the organization of a conference, the market research is particularly important in order the conference's location to meet the necessary needs, as stated above. Creating and maintaining a competitive advantage may have its roots in the selection of a remarkable destination. The selection process is an opportunity for the redevelopment of the events location in a way more integrated into the local character [20].

The above criteria are the main variables for evaluating the factor of the conference location for the development of academic conferences. The purpose of this research is to reflect the perception of the target group, regarding the evaluation criteria that better meet the needs of participants with respect to the conference's location. Based on this purpose, the evaluation criteria, as shown on table 1.2, will be deeply explored. The outcomes of this research will allow conference organizers to choose their destination based on the prioritization of the evaluation criteria, set by the target group. The evaluation criteria are able to influence the decision making process of potential delegates, regarding their participation since the more the factor of "Conference Location" is satisfied, the higher the levels of participation. Based on the outcomes of the survey, the organizing committee of conferences will be able to develop the communication strategy by highlighting the evaluation criteria of the factor "Conference Location" in order to attract more delegates.

Table 1.2: Evaluation criteria of "Conference Location"

Conference Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E Infrastructure</li> <li>E Means of Transport</li> <li>E Security</li> <li>E Hygiene</li> <li>E Use of International Language</li> </ul>
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## 2. Methodology

In the present research 123 academics and students participated, a number sufficient enough to meet the needs of the research. The sample consists of active scientists who have participated in more than two international conferences so that they are experienced in the conference system. This condition enables them to evaluate the significance of the location, based on experiential learning. A small percentage of the statistical sample consists of PhD candidates and postgraduate students, in order to reflect the perceptions of potential scientists.

In order to measure the attitude of potential conferences' participants regarding the factor of "Conference Location", quantitative research was adopted. This technique is employed in an attempt to provide the results on how the dynamics of variable "Conference Location" is perceived by experienced delegates. The entire statistical sample was approached with the help of internet. Questionnaires, based on the five-point Likert Scale, were sent to scientists in the English language since this research is focused on international academic conferences.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Infrastructure

The evaluation criterion of Infrastructure is very important, according to the majority of respondents. It includes accommodation, catering and entertainment services that exist in a destination. In addition, the ability of a destination to offer sightseeing is included in this criterion. The theoretical framework has identified the need of participants to combine their scientific activity with relaxation. Therefore, this criterion has a high positive response of 74% (measurement scale 4 & 5). The percentage of those who maintain a neutral stance amounts to 21.1% of the sample. This suggests that only a small proportion of scientists are not directly affected by the location.

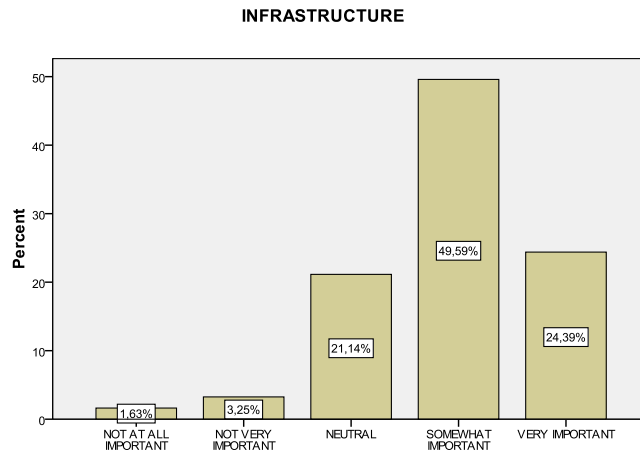


Figure 1: Infrastructure

#### 3.2. Means of Transport

The criterion “Means of transport” is related to the ease of access to and from the destination in which the conference is to be held.

The vast majority of the sample characterizes as very important the existence of transportation modes to and from the destination that the conference is to be held. With a high percentage of 87.8% (measurement scale 4 & 5), respondents consider their transportation options as one of the major criteria, which directly influences the assessment of this variable. The measurement scales of 1, 2 and 3 retain very low rates, indicating the great importance of this criterion.

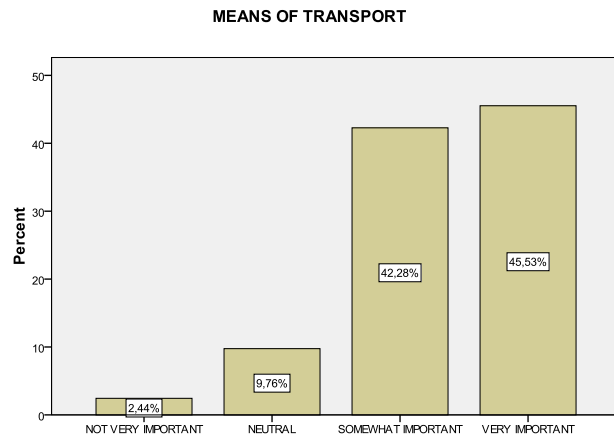


Figure 2: Means of Transport

### 3.3. Security

The evaluation criterion of security is being studied due to the fact that participants may visit destinations that have never been before.

The criterion of security is one of the elements that seem to have a great impact on participants reaction. At a rate of 77.2% (measurement scale 4 & 5), the sample places the criterion of security high in their evaluation list, regarding the performance of the factor “Conference Location”.

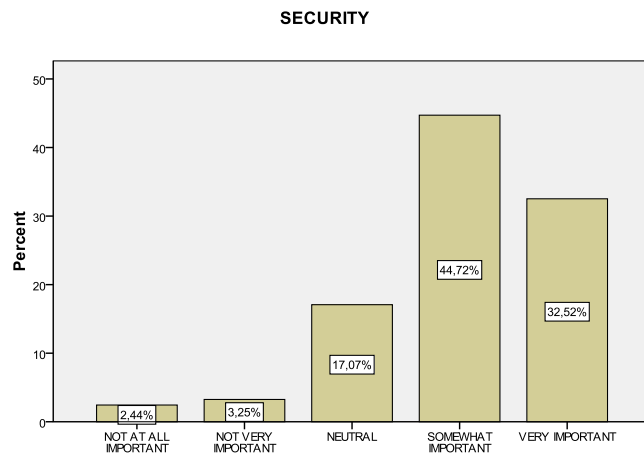


Figure 3: Security

### 3.4. Safety/Hygiene

The evaluation criterion of hygiene is an important evaluation criterion, a fact that the 87% of the sample agrees on (measurement scale 4 & 5). The sample evaluate rigorously the ability to attend conferences that are held in destinations free from bad hygiene, infectious diseases and poor cleanliness.

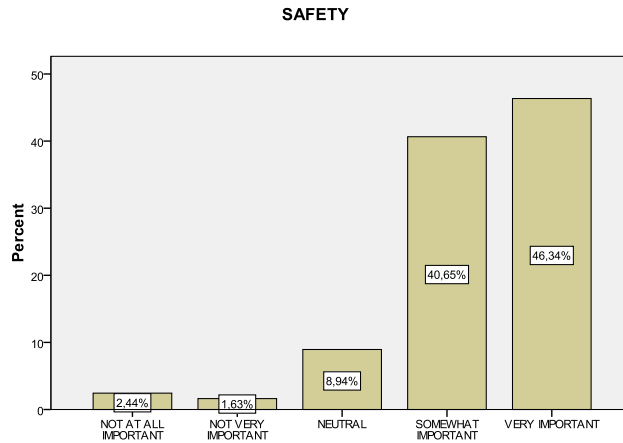


Figure 4: Safety/Hygiene

### 3.5. Use of International Language

English is the official language in situations characterized by high multiculturalism.

Due to their global impact, academic conferences usually attract scientists from different countries. Therefore, there is an argent need to adopt a united code of communication among participants. This fact is recognized by 83.7% (measurement scale 4 & 5) of the sample. It is an important criterion for the evaluation of the factor of “Conference Location”, and hence for the decision making process for participation in international academic conferences. According to this result, the conferences have to be conducted in English so that it can be accessible by the majority of the scientific community. The percentage of those who maintain a neutral stance does not exceed the 11.4% and attracts mainly scientists who participate in local or national conferences.

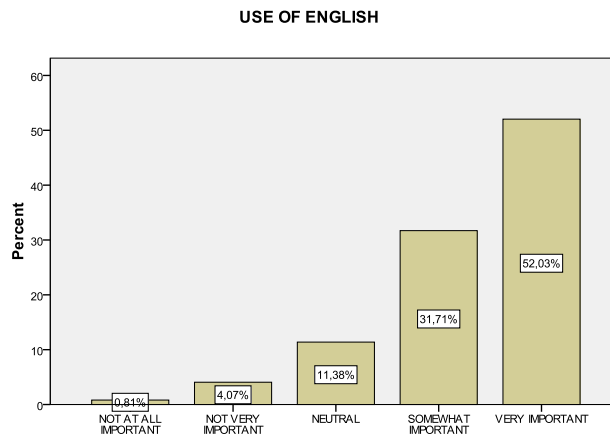


Figure 5: Use of International Language

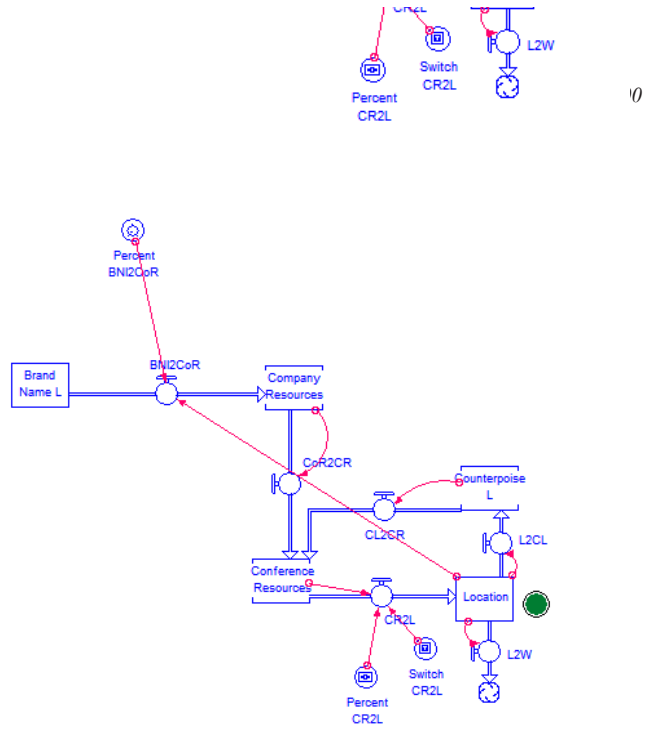


Figure 6: Dynamic Simulation Model

#### 4. Dynamic Simulation Model

A great percentage of management disciplines tend to integrate Dynamic Simulation Model in order to conduct research through simulation. Many scientific researchers have carried out further core research in Computational Methods, which are able to be incorporated in Dynamic Models in order to predict managerial actions [21-35]. In this way, the accomplishment of conclusions is enabled without expending financial resources.

The end result of the research can be integrated into a Dynamic Simulation Model, intending to indicate the way the conference's resources should be allocated regarding the factor of "Conference Location". The model is addressed to event companies in order to manage resources effectively and lead to customer's satisfaction regarding the factor of "Conference Location". The model has been constructed with the aid of ad hoc software, iThink. In figure 6, the entire picture of the model is presented.

As the research reveals, the factor of "Conference Location" strongly influences the shape of the conference's levels of participation. The research findings revealed specific evaluation criteria of this variable, such as the criterion of "Infrastructure", able to provide high levels of customers satisfaction. The significance is very high and therefore the organizing committee needs to allocate the resources appropriately in order to successfully meet the expectations of participants.

The tank "Company Resources" transfers resources to the tank "Conference Resources" in order to organize a specific academic conference. These resources are not limited to financial, but include all forms of resources, such as technology resources or human resources. All resources are put into action so as to organize successfully an academic conference.

The "Location" tank receives resources that aim to satisfy the evaluation criteria, as they have been set by the target group. The tank is considered full when it reaches a specific percentage of resources. This percentage is determined by the perception of the sample, which evaluated with 5 the communication dynamic of the factor "Conference Location".

The tank "Conference Resources" sends resources to the "Location" tank. This movement of resources can be interpreted as the effort of the organizing committee to find an appropriate location that meets the evaluation criteria. Once the location is determined, then the organizing committee puts into action the communication strategy, based on this factor, in order to attract participants.

The focal point of the entire system is the mechanism "Switch CR2L", which determines the level of resources to be transferred to the tank «Location». This mechanism turns off once the resources in the tank "Location" fulfill the specified satisfaction percentage. The amount of the resources to be transferred from the tank "Conference Resources" to the "Location" tank is determined by the rate of interest that the participants have on this factor. That is to say that the average percentage of the sample attitude towards the dynamics of the variable "Location" is the decisive factor for the release of resources.

The amount of the transferred resources have a significant impact on the entire circuit. A minimum transfer of resources does not guarantee the satisfaction of the evaluation criteria. Respectively, a maximum transfer of resources highlights the waste of resources, resulting in the dysfunction of this factor. For this reason, the mechanism "Counterpoise L" exists, based on which the unused resources of the "Location" tank return in the main tank of "Conference Resources".

The remaining resources in the tank "Location" determine the amount of resources to be transferred from the central tank "Brand Name L", depending on the percentage that has been set by the mechanism "Percent BNI2CoR". The more the resources transferred to the main tank "Company Resources", the higher the levels of participants' satisfaction. This indicates that the communicative dynamic of the factor "Conference Location" has been successfully employed and attracted potential conference delegates. The green button demonstrates the success of the system to appropriately use the resources. The factor of "Location" has been fulfilled and there is no waste of resources. The only waste of resources is apparent from the tank of "Location" with the mechanism "L2W". This mechanism guarantees that the communication strategies may not have a 100% success, a fact that



leads to the loss of resources. The mechanism “L2W” has been inserted in order to cover potential losses of resources, given the intensity of the negotiations activities.

## 5. Conclusion

The research demonstrates the significance of the factor “Conference Location” and its impact on participants perceptions. This factor is fulfilled when the evaluation criteria are further fulfilled. Due to this fact, conference organizers have to place great interest on the destination that will host an event and communicate it successfully to potential delegates. A communication strategy based on the pillars of the factor “Conference Location” is able to increase the levels of participants satisfaction and by extension the levels of participation. Based on the outcomes of the research, a “dynamic model” was constructed in order to simulate in computer basis the allocation of the company’s resources. The Dynamic Simulation Model manages to illustrate the appropriate allocation of resources that conferences organizers have at their disposal. It enables managers to track periodically and evaluate the performance of the factor “Conference Location” so as to maintain high levels of participants satisfaction.

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