

# 3

# Collaboration, Partnerships and Sustainable Development

*The meetings industry needs to legitimize its role in society. This can longer be handled by bed nights or other crude economic indicators. The narrative of the meetings industry must speak to a better world.*

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It is widely accepted that collaborating with other goods and service providers (for example, hotels, tour operators, food and beverage suppliers, local chambers of commerce) within a destination enhances the bidding capacity and likely success of a business event. It is also becoming increasingly clear that collaborative relationships formed with government and not-for-profit organisations (for example, charities, universities, professional associations) during the planning and execution of an event can deliver mutually beneficial outcomes for all. Finally, there is growing awareness that business events can reduce impacts and make positive contributions toward sustainability via:

- Reducing waste (through processes and product choice);
- Using local suppliers;
- Reducing carbon footprint (offering virtual options, offsetting emissions);
- Partnering with worthwhile social or environmental groups or causes (charities, environmental protection groups etc.).

The case study in this chapter relates to many of these concepts; in particular, detailing the ways in which event organisers can create important legacies for a second-tier city.

The case study is an integration of two reports, both of which investigated legacy outcomes from the 55th International Conference and Convention Association (ICCA) Congress in Kuching, Malaysia in 2016. The first (Mohamed Nor, 2017) was conducted on behalf of the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau soon after the conclusion of the congress. The second (Gaining Edge, 2020) was produced four years post event, to evaluate long-term legacy impacts.

The original bid to host this important business event was designed to support former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's goal of seeing Malaysia recognised as a developed economy by 2020. Organisers planned from the outset that the conference, which is the peak event for international association meetings professionals across the globe, would not only stimulate the local economy in Kuching, but also showcase Malaysia to the industry. Attracting business events to the destination was considered a crucial step toward becoming a fully developed economy, and legacies around upskilling and educating Malaysian business event professionals were planned and delivered upon.

In our theoretical consideration, therefore, we first discuss the concepts of inter-organisational collaboration, stakeholder relations and sustainable practices in relation to the direct delivery of business events. Later in the chapter, however, the discussion moves to a deeper level where we consider whether the business events industry is positioned (and equipped) to make even greater contributions to the search for solutions to the important issues facing our world. Specifically, we look at the capacity for business events and the business events industry to become integral drivers of global collaboration and cross-sector partnerships on a larger scale than they currently are. We consider how facilitation of such partnerships might enable the business events industry to not only make an important contribution towards achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Agenda, but to strengthen the authority, resilience and sustainability of the industry itself.

### Case study: Business event legacies for developing nations – ICCA Congress, Malaysia

<b>Business event</b>	55th International Conference and Convention Association Congress 2016
<b>Location</b>	Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching
<b>Purpose</b>	Annual event to network, inform and share knowledge
<b>Primary legacy</b>	Development of Malaysia's business events industry
<b>Additional legacies</b>	Greater links and advocacy with government; education opportunities for the industry; social development (CSR initiatives); raised profile of Malaysia and Kuching as a business event destination
<b>Summary quote</b>	"Without the ICCA congress we wouldn't have a platform to initiate the government advocacy program"
<b>Lessons learned</b>	Collaboration can benefit the development of an industry sector.

This case study was adapted from two sources: Mohamed Nor, (2017) and Gaining Edge (2020).

## Introduction

This case study investigates the benefits to Malaysia of hosting the 55th ICCA Congress in 2016. Successfully hosting a coveted international conference such as this – particularly one organised for meeting industry professionals – was seen as an important step toward developing Malaysia's business events industry, and in turn moving the country toward developed nation status.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 stakeholders from 12 organisations involved in delivery of the congress. Both research projects were conducted following completion of the business event and neither were components of the original congress planning. However, the approach was purposeful, with participants selected because they were 'information rich', leading to a greater understanding of why legacies were realised. The approach facilitated exploration rather than a measure of something (Edwards *et al.*, 2017).

## Background

In 1991 (then) Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad launched Wawasan 2020 (also known as Vision 2020), declaring the "ultimate objective" was to create a "Malaysia that is a fully developed country by 2020 ... in our own mould" (Mohamad, 1997).

At that time the goal was seen to be bold and ambitious, so specific strategies were put in place to give the country the best possible chance of success. Of those strategies, establishing Malaysia as a viable business event destination and developing the infrastructure, services and skills needed to support a meetings and events industry was considered highly important. General tourism was already a key economic driver for Malaysia (see Table 3.1) but the business event sector had significant potential for growth. To achieve that growth, targets were set, including:

- Growing business tourism arrivals from 5% to 8% of overall tourist arrivals by year 2020;
- Targeting more international business events;
- Establishing Malaysia as a leading business tourism destination.

(Permandu, 2014)

Malaysia's decision to bid was integral to the strategy. The International Congress and Convention Centre Association (ICCA) is the peak body for international association meetings. With headquarters in Amsterdam, it has more than 1000 members in more than 90 countries, and with unrivalled data, communication channels and business development opportunities, represents specialists in the international meetings sector (ICCA, 2016).