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The Rejuvenation of mature destinations: Developing a Destination Viability Model for Association Conference tourism

James Cassar

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Abstract

As tourist destinations evolve, they reach a point of maturity and potentially decline, whereby rejuvenation becomes desirable. While various strategies may be utilised to achieve rejuvenation, this research identifies diversification as the most appropriate. Diversification requires identifying an ideal tourism sector that can be added to a destination's portfolio. Having analysed the benefits and consequences of conference tourism, it was identified as a highly plausible direction. Its benefits have led to increased interest in identifying how destinations can improve their conference tourism product and remain attractive in a highly competitive market. However, understanding the conference site-selection process and what induces it, proves to be challenging due to the numerous stakeholders involved and the many factors influencing the decision.

This study focuses on the association conference tourism market due to its additional benefits over its corporate counterpart (larger number of attendees, higher total expenditure and more resilience to shocks). Previous research has analysed stakeholders' perspectives in a fragmented manner, covering limited perspectives within each study. Therefore there is the need for a holistic study encompassing all stakeholders' views. Contemporary factors influencing conference site-selection were also under-explored in current academic research. This study sought to identify the factors required by a destination to be competitive. Contemporary factors influencing the needs of delegates – the conferences' end consumer – were initially examined. A questionnaire of association conference delegates was undertaken to explore the importance of contemporary factors and identified new elements in relation to technology, networking spaces, hygiene requirements, destination and its region's safety level, conference and accommodation facilities expectations and leisure and climate. Subsequently, a Delphi study was used to examine the perspectives of different conference stakeholders including delegates, associations, conference centres, conference bureaus, accommodation venues, academic experts and industry experts. This revealed the different

opinions of each with new factors emerging in the different rounds until a consensus was achieved.

The study identifies how expectations related to traditionally important factors have changed, and reveals newly emergent trends that are shaping the conference tourism sector. These include factors related to technology, greening, accommodation, conference facilities, networking, safety and conference experience. The study distinguished entry-level essential factors, without which a destination cannot become a conference host; and a second set of factors that boost a destination's competitiveness. From these findings, an Association Conference Destination Viability Model was developed, outlining the crucial factors which influence the conference site-selection process. The same findings were presented in a different format as a Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit, intended for destinations and conference practitioners. The Model and Toolkit successfully outline how conference decision factors have changed in recent times, updating the body of knowledge and offering the holistic perspective that was previously missing in the literature. Furthermore, they also assist mature destinations to understand the prerequisites needed to become successful conference destinations, and making diversification possible. This guidance can be equally utilised by other destinations and stakeholders that are interested in the association conference market or are seeking to improve their conference tourism offer.

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Declaration

I certify that all the work contained in this thesis is my own. The thesis does not contain material that has been submitted previously unless it is cited according to the ethics procedures and guidelines. The content of this thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. Partial results have been previously presented in seminars.

James Cassar

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

It is natural that at some point the tourism product of many destinations reaches a stage of maturity and possible decline (Plog 1973; Butler 1980), as has been demonstrated with many other products (Levitt 1965; Vernon 1966; Lehu 2004). At this point the destination's evolution reaches a watershed, whereby it may either decline or rejuvenate (Hovinen 1981; Russell and Fulkner 2004; Royle 2009). It is arguably much more desirable to turn this situation round and rejuvenate the destination than allowing degeneration and further decline (Farsari et al. 2007; Solomon 2015). Therefore destinations seek to implement measures as a response (Agarwal 2002; Cooper 2006). Nonetheless, this may be challenging as employing the right strategy and addressing the relevant concerns are essential to rejuvenate successfully. Destinations are required to gain the support of all the local stakeholders in developing their marketing and development strategies (Aydin and Aksoz 2020) towards a viable direction. Reviving the destination also requires renovation and upgrading of its infrastructure (Müller et al. 2010; Baidal et al. 2013), which extends to beautifying the environment and upkeeping its natural resources (Farsari et al. 2007; Hernández et al. 2015). Destinations are also required to address tourism numbers, adhering to the maximum capacity as dictated by the destination's physical, social and environmental conditions (Kallis and Coccossis 2004). Numerous strategies may be employed to address these preconditions; however this research identifies diversification as the most adapt to address these requirements, and analyses it.

Selecting the right tourism sector to add to the destination's diversification portfolio is crucial. This research critically evaluates conference tourism as the potential tourism sector that may be utilised by a destination to successfully rejuvenate. The benefits of conference tourism have been widely researched and analysing them could identify whether these suffice to address the challenges of a mature destination. Research has outlined economic benefits through high tourist expenditure (Campiranon and Arcodia 2008; Ransley 2012, Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017) and its multiplier effects (Lee et al. 2013), as well as the

potential of conference centres to act as centrepieces within a declining area (Whitfield 2005; Yilmaz and Gunay 2012; Parkinson 2020), attracting additional investment to that place (Clark 2006). The sector's compatibility with leisure tourism (Priporas 2005; Pechlaner et al. 2007; Hanly 2011) allows destinations to utilise conference tourism to enhance their leisure tourism product through synergy and sharing of resources (Kellerman 2010; Weidenfeld et al. 2011; Benur and Bramwell 2015; Konar and Hussain 2018). Furthermore, complementarity contributes to the mitigation of seasonality issues (Buhalis 2000; Girod 2009; Horváth 2011; Kettunen 2012; Donaldson 2013; Rogers and Beverley 2013) and increasing tourism employment (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Donaldson 2013). Finally, conference tourism also contributes towards the enhancement of the destination's image (Getz and Page 2016; Konar and Hussain 2018; Crouch et al. 2019).

The corporate and non-corporate markets can be identified within the conference tourism sector, that are distinguished on the basis of their initiator (International Congress and Convention Association [ICCA] 2020a), as illustrated in Figure 1. The government and association sectors are classified within the non-corporate market (ICCA 2020a) but have at times been regarded as discrete groups (Girod 2009; Rogers 2013; Mair et al. 2018). This study is concerned with the association conference market, which is also part of the non-corporate sector. The reason is multi-fold and includes the fact that association conferences are more difficult to cancel and less vulnerable to economic recessions, since the by-laws of the associations state their necessity (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Rogers 2013; Holloway and Humphreys 2020) and act as a source of revenue, rather than a cost, for the association itself (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Mair and Thompson 2009; Rogers 2013).
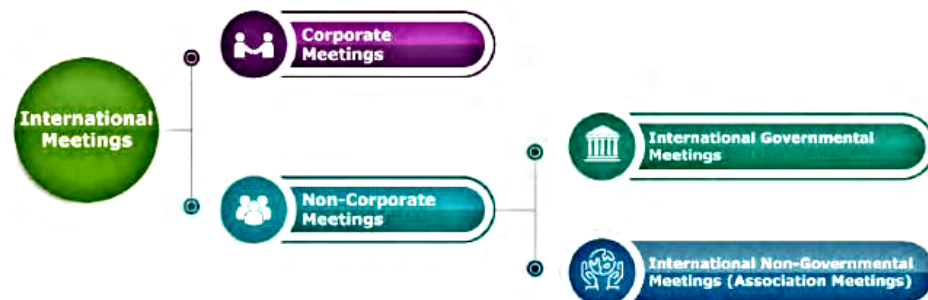
Figure 1. The main segmentation in the international meeting market (from ICCA 2020a, p. 10)

A central feature of association conferences is that they are larger in delegate sizes than corporate conferences (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Davidson and Rogers 2006; Rogers 2013), frequently hosting medium to large (over 250 delegates) conferences (Donaldson 2013), attracting hundreds, if not thousands, of delegates (Holloway and Humphreys 2020). The duration of association conferences varies and has been estimated to be 3-5 days in the case of international associations (Rogers 2013). Holloway and Humphreys (2020) argue that association conferences can last for several days or even a week in the case of the larger international associations, while ICCA (2018b) set the average to 3.65 days. Associations usually include pre- and post-tours (Donaldson 2013), which are extensions to the main conference period, and during which the discussions would not include any items planned for the conference period. An element of leisure is usually strongly present. Delegate attendance to association meetings is frequently voluntary, contrasting with the corporate sectors (Mair 2014). Delegates choose to attend the association conference, mostly because they have an individual rather than corporate membership (Hiller 1995; Mair and Thompson 2009; Rogers 2013).

A trend of increasing association conferences and of further potential future increase has also been identified (ICCA 2018b). This is because association conferences are largely driven by advances in these fields; the unprecedented levels of discovery and innovation that are the hallmarks of recent decades are creating entirely new associations and conferences, which are in turn stimulating further advances, new business opportunities, and fresh insights. (Turner 2019; ICCA 2020a).

Conferences are a source of income to the association rather than a source of expense as in the case of corporate conferences, since attendees are charged and frequently required to either contribute to their attendance or finance it entirely (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Mair and Thompson 2009). Consequently, association organisers aim at keeping their costs low while maximising attendance to increase the association's profit margin (Rogers 2013). In fact, unlike corporate conferences, delegates' partners are encouraged to attend association conferences, and parallel programmes are often planned for them (Holloway and Humphreys 2020). Furthermore, lead times are much longer than in the case of corporate conferences (Girod 2009), as decisions are taken by numerous decision-makers and are dependent on the frequency of board meetings (Weber and Chon 2002). Unlike the corporate

conference market, several decision makers and decision-influencers weigh in on the conference decisions (UIA 2018; ICCA 2019b) making the process complex and lengthy. More research into the process has been identified as necessary in order to help understand the decision-making process better.

As destinations acknowledge the benefits of conference tourism, competition grows strong, potentially making this sector one of the most competitive within the tourism industry (Morla and Ladkin 2007; DiPietro et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2010b; Hussain et al. 2014). New host destinations are constantly emerging, while interest in previously unused destinations increases (Boo et al. 2008; Davidson 2014; CWT Meetings and Events 2019) as emerging destinations challenge the established ones (Weber and Ladkin 2005). Interest in identifying the factors that may lead to successfully attract association conference tourism increases due to such competition, but understanding the decision-making process and what effects it, is difficult due to the numerous stakeholders involved and the many factors influencing the decision. Research has focused on studying limited stakeholders' perspectives (or on just one stakeholder). These include conference planners (Clark and McCleary 1995; Clark et al. 1998; Baloglu and Love 2005; Severt et al. 2007; Ariffin et al. 2008; Ryan et al. 2008; Mair 2010; Hayat et al. 2014), associations and organisations (Nelson and Rys 2000; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Kim et al. 2010b; Yoo and Chon 2010; Whitfield et al. 2012; Mair et al. 2018), associations and conference planners (Crouch and Louviere 2004; Kang et al. 2005), delegates (Mair and Thompson 2009; Tanford et al. 2012; Ramirez et al. 2013; Han and Hwang 2017), suppliers and academics (Yoo and Chon 2008) and industry professionals (Yoo and Zhao 2010). On the other hand Weber and Ladkin (2003; 2005) studied multiple stakeholders' views but had different aims and did not include the delegate's perspective, while Crouch and Ritchie (1998) reviewed the literature on the topic. A study which reflects all the different stakeholders' perspectives, outlining the contemporary factors that are required to become a successful conference destination was lacking.

1.2 Association conference statistics and statistical challenges

Prior to exploring association conference-related statistics, several challenges that limit data collection need to be identified, as these lead to the risk that the true value of conferences is underestimated or overestimated (Lee 2006; Lee et al. 2013). First, a lack of universal definitions, as will be discussed in section 1.3, inevitably leads to confusion in both data collection and data comparability (Hughes 1988; Carlsen 1995; Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Weber and Chon 2002; Mair 2014; Hussain et al. 2014). This situation is also a cause and effect of the lack of a universal framework of measurement (Johnson 1999; Lee 2006; Davidson and Rogers 2006). Several destinations have not been able to establish a centralised data source, meaning that individual institutions carry out data collection according to their own interests and following their own criteria (Yoo and Weber 2005). When international statistical standards exist, the data collected would scarcely satisfy them (Pechlaner et al. 2007). Conference-related data made available is taken from meeting and conference venues or individual organisers and would suffer from limitations. Most stakeholders find it challenging to collect accurate data due to technical problems such as a lack of pre-registrants' attendance and the large numbers of accompanying partners, supporting staff, as well as unregistered attendees (Zelinksy 1994).

Data inaccuracies or incompleteness may also be intentional as stakeholders might be reluctant to share information in a highly competitive and fragmented sector (Carlsen 1995; Dwyer 2002; Weber and Chon 2002; Lee et al 2013). Therefore, while the most ideal agency to carry out data collection would be the government (Zelinksy 1994), this still creates the challenge of international comparison since governments are mostly concerned with conferences held within their political boundaries. Consequently, no single source aggregates all the various meeting and conference sector's key performance indicators exists (KPIs) (Pearlman 2008). On a global level the two main sources of data are the statistics provided by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and the Union of International Associations (UIA).

The current study refers to conference-related data provided by the ICCA and the UIA. The former is a global community for the meetings industry with the aim of improving its members' competitive advantage in the meetings and conference industry (ICCA 2013; ICCA 2018a). In fact, the ICCA database does not aim to include all meetings but is considered a sales and marketing resource for members to search for association meetings that might potentially come to their destination (ICCA 2019a). On the other hand the UIA is a research and documentation centre – it is non-profit, independent and non-governmental – aiming to provide up-to-date and reliable information on meetings and activities of international associations, as well as to support and facilitate their work through the provision of training and networking opportunities (UIA 2019a). The UIA statistics include three meeting types, described as *Type A, B* and *C*. This study refers to *Type A* statistics, which include meetings by UIA members that may be linked to an international non-governmental or intergovernmental organisation and can be either a one-off or part of a regular or irregular series. These may follow a destination rotation or may be repeatedly hosted at the same destination and can have any numbers of delegates (UIA 2020). On the other hand, ICCA statistics include meetings that are organised regularly (thus excluding one-offs), rotate between a minimum of three countries and attract at least 50 participants (ICCA 2020a). Therefore, the data collections are based on different criteria (ICCA 2018a) and not comparable with each other.

The UIA Association Survey (UIA 2020) shows that most meetings in their database and hosted in 2019 (48.3%) had 101-500 delegates, while 27.3% hosted less than 100 delegates and 12.1% hosted between 501-1000 delegates. The most frequent durations for each conference was 3 days (26.3%) and 4 days (19.8%) (UIA 2020). Globally, according to UIA (2020), approximately 12,500 association meetings (within UIA's database) were held in 2019. Latest available statistics by the UIA on the other hand shows that in 2018, Singapore was the top international host country followed by the Republic of Korea and Belgium respectively hosting 1,177, 854 and 849 meetings (UIA 2019b). Utilising a different data set, ICCA (2020a) in their statistics indicated that the top three destinations for the year 2019 were the USA, Germany and France with 934, 714 and 595 meetings respectively. The most popular city destinations in 2019 were Paris, Lisbon and Berlin, with 237, 190 and 176 meetings respectively (ICCA 2020a). ICCA (2018b)'s Modern History of International Association Meetings report also showed a decrease in average participants in the past 50

years. This had been counteracted by an exponential increase in the number of organised association meetings , meaning that despite the delegate numbers per meeting is less, the total number of estimated participants calculated over all annual meetings has grown from just 2 million in the period 1963-1967 to almost 25 million in 2013-2017 (ICCA 2018b). A previously exponential growth trend of the sector had transcended into a steady but more mature growth pattern between 2013 and 2017 (ICCA 2018b), with 2019 figures reconfirming this trend. In 2019 an all-time high number of meetings were hosted globally, setting a new record of 13,254 meetings: 317 more than the previous year (ICCA 2020a). Nonetheless, it is expected that after 2019 the association conference market will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic (ICCA 2020a).

1.3 Terminology

This section addresses the terminology utilised in this study. In literature, the terms *meetings and conference sector* or the *meetings industry* generally indicate a range of activities. The terms have been used to include activities such as meetings, conferences, exhibitions (MC Media Group International 2017), seminars (Compiranon and Arcodia 2007), conventions, symposia, workshops, congresses, trade shows, expositions and special events (Choi and Boger 2002). A universal narrower definition of the terms *meeting* and *conference* is absent in the literature, as these activities are heterogeneous (Mohammadi and Mohamed 2010). Utilising the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO) 2020's online terminology dictionary, a meeting is defined as a

> "general term indicating the coming together of a number of people in one place, to confer or carry out a particular activity" that may be on an ad hoc frequency or according to a set pattern"

This definition has also been utilised and referred to by numerous other industry sources (MC Media Group International 2017; Right Events Ltd 2017; Sustain Europe 2020; ICCA 2020b). More specific definitions of *meeting* that have been utilised within academic and trade literature (Roger 2013; Convention Industry Council 2011 cited in Mair 2014) provide criteria that define a meeting. These can be summarised as a gathering taking place out of

office (whereby rental of a meeting venue is required), with a duration of at least four hours and including at least 10 participants. Therefore, the main criterion that distinguishes a meeting from a conference, congress or convention seems to be the number of attendees involved (Whitfield 2005).

Conference is a term frequently utilised to describe a meeting that has the scope of exchanging ideas (Shone 1998; Arcodia and Robb 2000), acting as a participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation (International Association of Professional of Professional Congress Organisers [IAPCO] 2020). Like meetings, they are also held outside of the office and in hired premises, usually lasting at least six hours (Spiller and Ladkin 2000, EVCOM 2012). The UK Events Market Trends Survey (EVCOM 2012) claims conferences involve 15 or more participants. In terms of size, the term *conference* is at times used to describe a meeting that is smaller than a convention or a congress (Hiller 1995; IAPCO 2020). Nonetheless, the absence of a universal threshold that determines whether a gathering should be defined as a conference, convention or congress (Hiller 1995) has prompted Mair (2014) to suggest that there is no accepted definition of conference, arguing that if the meaning described by the *Collins English Dictionary*; "A large meeting for consultation, exchange of information or discussion…" is accepted, then the term *conference* can have the same meaning as *convention* and *congress*.

Congresses are full-membership meetings where information is given (Oppermann 1996). They can be multiannual or annual and will often last several days and include simultaneous sessions (IAPCO 2020). The main differences between a congress and a conference when adopting this definition therefore seem to be the increased duration of the congress and its limited interactivity between participants. On the other hand, the term congress is widely used in America (Opperman 2016; Mair 2014), Australia and Asia, to describe the annual membership meetings that most associations hold (Spiller and Ladkin 2000). For the term *convention*, the definition by IAPCO (2020) suggests a meeting with set objectives and a limited duration, but no determined frequency. Nonetheless, others consider convention as a geographically bound term, whereby it refers to the congress in continental Europe (Campiranon and Arcodia 2008). Hiller (1995), on the other hand, describes conventions as being larger than conferences.

Aksu et al. (2013) also put forward the 'virtual meeting'. This may be defined as a gathering which is supported by a software programme and allows participants to exchange information without any location and time limitations (Kozak et al. 2015). The emergence of this type of meeting is in line with the increased importance of the virtual experience economy, as industries such as esports and gaming present their conference experience in an entirely digital environment and accessed online (Turner 2019). With the right technology interface, physical meetings may also have enhanced online participation with amplified experience (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). This study shall refer to the virtual conference only when it is a part of a physical conference. Even though the situation related to COVID-19 has motivated a shift towards virtual meetings (Detwiler 2020; Maddox 2020), it is argued that face-to-face meetings remain important and will be instrumental in the global post-pandemic recovery (ICCA 2020a).

Having explored the different meeting types and definitions, it becomes clear that universal definitions are non-existent in literature (Mair 2014). As this study is concerned with meetings of a larger scale and international nature, the term *meeting* will be utilised to refer to larger-scale, international gatherings. The terms *conventions* and *congresses* shall be considered indistinguishable from the term *conference*, which will be used to represent all meeting types. The definitions will therefore be considered to be a geographical variation of each other, whereby the term *conference* would be used in the United Kingdom, the term *convention* in the USA, and the term *congress* in Europe (Swarbrooke and Horner 2001), all of which refer to large scale meetings (Carlsen 1995; Rogers 2003; Kim et al. 2010b; Mair 2014).

Therefore, this study shall consider meetings and conferences to incorporate within them the whole group of activities, namely: meetings, conferences, congresses and conventions. Consequently, the term *meetings sector* or *conference sector* shall both be referring to conferences and meetings. The term *sector* shall be preferred over the term *industry*, as meetings and conferences are considered a sector within the tourism industry and not an independent industry (Whitfield 2005). Furthermore, the term *meetings tourism* or *conference tourism* shall also be utilised to highlight the international element of the meetings and conferences referred to.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The choice of the research topic and its underlying aim and objectives stem from a variety of sources. These include, amongst all, the researcher's own interests, the level of interest shown by the industry, destinations and stakeholders in the topic and the potential to contribute to academic knowledge (Creswell 2013). Being based in Malta, a mature tourism destination that is seeking to improve its tourism offer by investing in different tourism sectors such as conference tourism, motivated the author to identify how mature destinations can revive their tourism offer. Research within the field of association conference tourism was preferred for several reasons. The author's interest stems from day-to-day operations within conference tourism as a professional conference organiser for eleven years. Having organised over twenty-seven international association conferences, and assisted in many others, it was acknowledged that the author's experience could also contribute to the research. Interest was furthered by the author's academic background in the topic; as a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta focusing on events and conference tourism. These reasons motivated the author to undertake this research, aiming to contribute to the body of knowledge through its findings.

The topic was also considered important to both industry and academia. This interest, stemming from the sector's benefits, is reflected in the academic literature and industry reports covering the topic. Potential to contribute to knowledge was identified both in the academic and industrial fields. A gap within academic knowledge was recognised in relation to studies that outline the contemporary factors influencing conference decision-making. Up-to-date knowledge is essential within this sector, due to its brisk pace. This gap became evident when reviewing and comparing academic literature and industry reports. The main limitation within academic literature could be overcome by carrying out a study that reflects all the stakeholders' perspectives, therefore allowing the study to identify contemporary factors that influence decision-making, that are derived from the experience, and reflecting a consensus between all the stakeholders. Similarly, this knowledge would be of interest to the industry due to the highly competitive market, whereby destinations and industry practitioners seek information that allows them to address the requirements to become

successful conference destinations and providing them with a competitive edge within the market.

Therefore strong interest of destinations to attract conference tourism, together with the researcher's personal interest in the topic and the acknowledgement that further research could improve the understanding of the selection process, and consequently the destination's competitive position, were the primary motivating reasons for the choice of topic. It was also acknowledged that this information would help guide mature destinations in improving their potential, which was the researcher's main intended target audience. Creswell (2013) identifies these motivations as ideal when undertaking a research. Consequently, the motivations behind the study also influenced the study's main aim.

1.5 The Research Aim and objectives

The study's aim is to assist mature destinations in particular and any destination in general in becoming successful association conference destinations by identifying the factors that are important to achieve such success. The study set to overcome gaps in knowledge as the contemporary factors to be presented within the study would, for the first time, cover the perspectives of all the conference tourism stakeholders and reflect their consensus. This knowledge is invaluable to mature destinations, and any other destinations interested in conference tourism, for several reasons. Firstly, a destination is made aware of the requirements to become a successful conference destination by identifying those important factors that it lacks. Secondly, the study acts as a guideline offering recommendations to the destination for the development of its conference tourism product. It guides a destination to focus its energy on the motivating factors that are considered most important and on eliminating the negative factors that prove to be the strongest barriers. Furthermore, guidance is given by showing which factors allow a destination to enter the conference market, and which factors are then required to improve the destinations' competitive edge, and to what extent they can help in this endeavour. The study also seeks to act as guidance to practitioners, offering a practical guide targeted for the industry.

The study's aim shaped the structure of its research objectives. Each objective acts as the foundation to the one succeeding it, until the required knowledge is uncovered and the

final model and toolkit are developed. This study's five objectives, and their related research questions, are:

1. To critically review the potential of conference tourism in contributing to a mature destination's rejuvenation.
   a. Can mature tourism destinations rejuvenate?
   b. What are the causes and characteristics of tourism destination decline?
   c. What are the preconditions for a mature tourism destination to successfully rejuvenate and which is the most ideal strategy to do so?
   d. Does conference tourism satisfy the requirements for a destination to successfully rejuvenate?

2. To critically examine and evaluate the factors influencing association conference tourism decision-making.
   a. What is the decision-making process involved in selecting a destination?
   b. Which are the main players involved in the process?
   c. Which are the site-related factors that add value to a conference destination?

3. To critically examine and evaluate the different stakeholders' perspectives on contemporary factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.
   a. Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer?
   b. Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are considered important by all the stakeholders?

4. To develop an *Association Conference Destination Viability Model* that can be utilised to identify which characteristics are required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism.

5. To develop a *Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit* for destinations to enable the evaluation and improvement of their positioning in the association conference tourism market.

The study's aims and objectives, together with their related research questions, shall be discussed further in section 5.2, and referred to in each chapter. The study's structure is now outlined.

1.6 The research's structure

This research comprises of eight chapters. This section provides a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter 1 outlines the research background and the rational for undertaking the study. It also sets out the aim and objectives of this study.

Chapter 2 analyses mature tourism destination characteristics and explores rejuvenation strategies that mature destinations can adopt to their tourism positioning. It addresses the first three questions pertaining to the study's first objective.

Chapter 3 explains why the study focused on association conference tourism and critically evaluates the benefits and risks for a destination to diversify into conference tourism. This confirms the potential of conference tourism in satisfy the requirements for a destination to successfully rejuvenate and addresses the first objective's final research question.

Chapter 4 is the final chapter that reviews academic literature and industry reports. It critically analyses the decision-making process for both the conference organisers and the conference delegates in the association conference market. Furthermore, it identifies and evaluates which site-related factors add value to a destination's conference tourism offer, addressing the second objective. Having evaluated the current academic literature on the topic, the gaps in knowledge are also identified.

Chapter 5 explores the methodology adopted by this study. The study's aims and objectives are explained at the outset of the chapter. The research approach, research phases and research methods implemented are then explained. Finally, the primary research methods and how they were carried out are discussed.

Chapter 6 outlines the findings of the two primary studies carried out as part of this research, followed by an analysis of the data collected. This addresses the third research objective of

the study, that is concerned with outlining and understanding the contemporary factors that influence conference tourism decision-making.

Chapter 7 presents the results discussed in chapter 6 within the newly developed Association Conference Destination Viability Model (ACDVM), followed by an explanation of the factors that constitute the model. This addresses the fourth research objective of the study. Furthermore, the fifth and final objective of the study is also tackled in this chapter, as the Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit (CCDT) is presented, outlining the study's primary findings for industry practitioners.

Chapter 8 details the conclusions and findings of this research and proposes recommendations for future research on destination's competitiveness in relation to association conference tourism.

Chapter 2: Mature tourism destinations and rejuvenation

2.1 Introduction

Most mature tourist destinations seek ways rejuvenate their tourism product to avoid or counteract decline. The first objective of this study is: *To critically review the potential of conference tourism in contributing to a mature destination's rejuvenation.* This objective is tackled by answering the following research questions:

1. Can mature tourism destinations rejuvenate?
2. What are the causes and characteristics of tourism destination decline?
3. What are the preconditions for a mature tourism destination to successfully rejuvenate and which is the most ideal strategy to do so?
4. Does conference tourism satisfy the requirements for a destination to successfully rejuvenate?

This chapter focuses on the first three research questions. Firstly, it seeks to understand whether a mature destination may rejuvenate to improve its situation. This leads to exploring the characteristics of a mature tourism destination, followed by an evaluation of the preconditions for its rejuvenation. The ideal strategy for rejuvenation is also identified.

At the outset of this chapter, different responses to destination decline are reviewed including models relating to products, brands and urban areas. This is done to confirm that rejuvenation may counteract decline. The characteristics of a mature destination are then identified, followed by the preconditions and challenges for rejuvenation. A set of rejuvenation strategies are subsequently identified and explored, whereby diversification is considered as the most ideal. This allows for the study to address the final research question of the first objective, by understanding whether conference tourism satisfies the requirements required by a mature destination to successfully rejuvenate. This is discussed in the next chapter where diversification literature is applied to the conference tourism industry.

2.2 Rejuvenation models and strategies

A review of responses and rejuvenation strategies from the wider literature is necessary to understand how mature tourism destinations react to a decline in attractiveness and visitation. A tourism destination was considered to share similarities with products, brands and spatial areas so as to understand what potential a destination possesses to counteract a decline. Different rejuvenation strategies related to these different sectors are explored in Section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

2.2.1 Product and brand rejuvenation

Brand and product decline have been widely debated in literature. It has been acknowledged that a brand or product may grow old and die if not managed well (Lehu 2004), whereby it has also been claimed that "death is inevitable" (Ewing et al. 2009, p. 332). Conversely, Power and Pattwell (2015, p. 203) have argued that professional practice, legal systems and applied academic research have shown the brand to be "immortal". The present study supports the latter view, acknowledging that products and brands may be rejuvenated (Lazer et al. 1984). When a product brand reaches saturation and moves into its initial stages of decline, this can be compared to going into a "coma", but as pointed out above, unlike biological organisms, brands do not die. This ultimately means that the possibility of revival from near death is always possible (Mazur 2004; Thomas and Kohli 2009). Therefore, the concept of rejuvenation gains increased interest and is identified as an important alternative to decline.

This has been clearly shown by its application to models such as the classical Product Life Cycle (PLC) Model. Several authors (Forrester 1958; Patton 1959; Levitt 1965; Cox 1967; Polli and Cook 1969) have promoted the PLC concept, which is illustrated in Figure 2. Vernon (1966) developed the model into its international dimension (Cao and Folan 2012). The model shows how a product is destined to mature and decline. The PLC proposes an introductory stage, a growing phase, a maturity phase and eventually, a decline phase. The initial stages are characterised by a lack of standardisation, which is then substituted by priority to economies of scale and standardisation in the later stages (Vernon 1966). The

duration of each stage depends on demand, production costs and revenues. Low production costs and a high demand will ensure a longer product life. Conversely, with higher production costs and lower demand the product will reach its decline stage quicker (Mulder 2012). Nonetheless, the addition of an alternative course of action in the final phase shows the inclusion of a possible renewal stage (Stephen 2013), as shown in Figure 3. This strengthens the idea held by this study, that brands and products may in fact avoid decline by rejuvenating. Furthermore, the PLC ignores the fact that a brand would leave behind valuable aura and thus would never disappear completely (Powers and Patwell 2015). This aura may help a declining product to rejuvenate at a later stage.
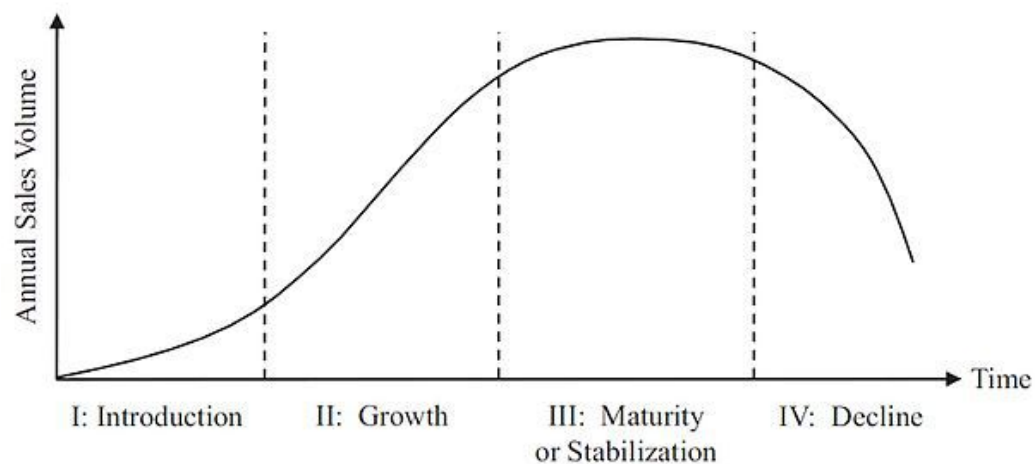
Figure 2. The Product Life Cycle Model (Levitt 1965, p.2)
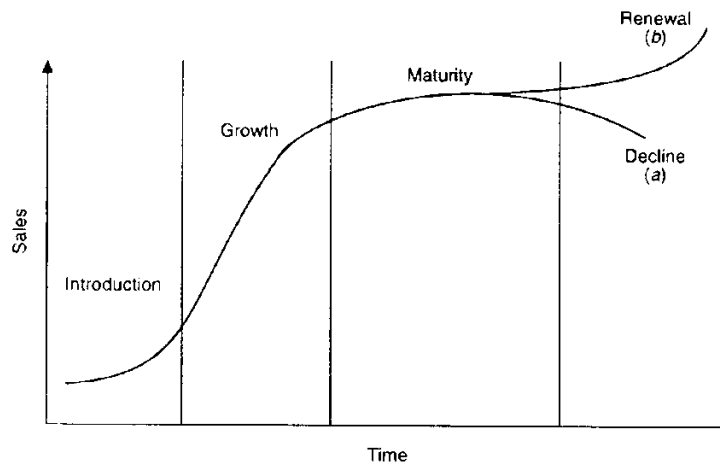
Figure 3. The Updated Product Life Cycle Model, including a renewal stage (Stephen 2013)

Different rejuvenation strategies have been evaluated in the literature. Ansoff (1948) had proposed a product-market model based on four main strategies aimed at developing and rejuvenating a company's situation. Strategies are shown to differ depending on whether the market or product or both are modified, and have been applied to later models (such as Lazer et al. 1984) and shall be discussed in this section. The strategies include:

1. Market penetration: an effort to improve sales without moving away from the original product's intended job, by increasing volume of sales or finding new customers for their present product.
2. Market development: when the product is modified to attract new markets.
3. Product development strategy: when the product's characteristics are changed to improve the product's performance within its market.
4. Diversification: the departure from both the present product line and product market.

Lazer et al. (1984) also proposed a four-approach model to rejuvenating an abandoned or declining product. This is illustrated in Figure 4 below. According to the model, firms may choose to offer the same product or a modified version of it and may target the previous and present market of the product or decide to target a new market that has not been exposed to the product yet. This model is composed of four combinations.

Abandoned/Declining Product

	Unmodified	Modified
Previous/ Present Users	Recapture	Redesign
New/ Different Users	Refocus	Recast

Figure 4. Approaches to product rejuvenation (Lazer et al. 1984, p.22)

The four rejuvenating approaches to decline proposed by Lazer at al. (1984) include:

1. *Recapture*. This strategy minimizes costs by avoiding manufacturing modifications and marketing a product that has already been marketed previously. This is most suitable when a product was initially abandoned because the company did not have the resources to sustain the required marketing campaigns.

2. *Redesign*. This strategy attempts at marketing a modified version of a product which is declining or has been abandoned. Over time, the same market situation may change, and it may be possible to regenerate interest in previous users after product modifications are carried out. This is like the product development strategy by Ansoff (1948).

3. *Refocus*. This strategy aims at marketing a declining product to a new or peripheral market. The objective is to capitalize on product characteristics that might appeal to those who have not yet experienced the product, even though they might be familiar with the name. Endorsements by prior users who may enjoy credibility within the new market may be an asset. This strategy is comparable to Ansoff (1948)'s market development strategy.

4. *Recast*. This strategy aims at marketing a modified declining product to a new market. This requires both product and market adjustment but previous experience with the past product and market provides a basis for the re-launching. This may also be utilized by changing from a domestic to a foreign market.

Ansoff (1948)'s diversification and Lazer et al.'s (1984) recast strategy, thus require most change. In company terms, diversification is associated with a change in the characteristics of a company's product line and/or market (Ansoff 1948). Ansoff (1948) distinguishes three different forms of diversification, depending on the reason for its implementation. *Vertical diversification* occurs when branching out into the production of components of the original product. In this case, focus remains on the current business domain and do not explore other markets or production methods (Lysek 2019). *Horizontal diversification* occurs when new products are introduced that are not part of the production of the original product but lie within the company's knowledge and experience (Ansoff 1958). Thus, companies create new markets using new or unrelated products but based on existing customers (Farooq 2019). This helps to increase the coverage of a product's market by producing new products within the same market. An example could include the introduction of Mac-Book Air by Apple, which evolved out of the ordinary PC by reducing weight for thin, light and fashion (Wu and Ma 2018). *Lateral diversification* occurs when procuring new products that are not related to the company's current production line and do not fall under the company's original expertise and production experience. Such strategy aims to stabilise the sales of the company by broadening the product portfolio and/or targeting different markets (Ansoff 1948). Nokia, for example, diversified into different businesses over the years, from forestry, cable, rubber and electrical power, to machine engineering, chemicals, light bulbs, capacitors, electronics, radio, television and mobile phones (Lysek 2019).

Diversification is backed by the Resource Based Perspective (RBP) (Penrose 2009), which claims that the incentive to expand and diversify exists until no resources are left idle. A major motivation of diversification is, therefore, the maximisation of resources that ensures optimum return. Such resources also include skills available that, like other resources, can often be used across industries (Neffke and Henning 2013). In rejuvenating through diversification, previously unutilised resources are used to attract new markets (Agarwal 2002; Claver-Cortés et al. 2007) or to develop new products (Farmaki 2012). Another theory focusing on improvement based on changes is the restructuring theory, which outlines the process of reorganisation of an institution, structure or production (Martin 1989) in reaction to changing consumption patterns and increased competitive conditions (Agarwal 2002). Coles and Shaw (2006) argued that restructuring does not only require

investment but may include the need to exit or cut ties with the older product (Medina-Muñoz et al. 2016).

Agarwal (2002) identified two main types of product rejuvenation approaches stemming from the restructuring theory. Product reorganisation strategies include investment and technical change, centralisation and product specialisation, that is, a change in the way the product is produced. Product transformation strategies are concerned with a change to the product itself (Agarwal 2006). Each approach leads to several strategies that are listed in Table 1 below and which shall be revisited in section 2.6.

Form	Strategy	Description
Product reorganisation	Investment and technical change	Introduction of new facilities and attractions
	Centralisation	Centralising resources for example by creating a marketing alliance between different destinations
	Product specialisation	Specialising in a product niche
Product transformation	Service product quality improvement	Improvement in service offered by increased training
	Environmental quality improvement	Beautification of land, preservation, redesign, restoration of historical sites.
	Repositioning	Re-alignment and strengthening of the image of a destination away from its traditional image
	Diversification	Development of unused resources to attract new markets
	Collaboration	Joint public and private sector ventures
	Adaptation	Adapting to changing markets and future trends

Table 1. Structural thesis strategies that may be applied to destinations (adapted from Agarwal 2002)

Finally, the concept of brand revival has also been discussed in several case studies, such as Cooper et al. (2015),who suggest that brands, like products, progress through a cycle that includes the founding and prosperous period, followed by a period of corporate brand crises and a corporate heritage brand recovery period, or rejuvenation. The case study of the brands *Tiffany and Co.* and *Burberry* suggested a three-stepped revival process. Cooper et al (2015)'s brand rejuvenation model puts more importance on rejuvenating through the

revival of the original core and heritage values of the product rather than through changing the brand to adapt or attract a new market. Cooper et al. (2015, p. 449)'s revival process involves:

1. Regaining the corporate brand's vision, often with the help of new brand leadership.
2. Reconnecting the corporate brand with its core values, which are anchored in the heritage values.
3. Rebuilding appropriate brand capabilities, completing the three-stage corporate heritage brand recovery process.

This section has explored how products and brands risk declining or dying. The following section (2.2.2) explores similar rejuvenation strategies applied to physical locations, showing how such strategies may also be utilised by destinations. This forms the context for the following section, where the decline and rejuvenation of tourism destinations is discussed, as the various rejuvenating strategies used for brands, products and locations are applied to tourism destinations.

2.2.2 Urban regeneration

Rejuvenation is an important aspect of the life cycle of urban areas. The term "regeneration" has been mostly utilised, similar to products and brands, when an intervening action is required to confront urban decline and improve possible market failures (Tsimperis 2015). Urban regeneration has gained interest in the marketing of cities, being considered an intrinsic part of a destination's successful brand (Prilenska 2012; Nagaynay and Lee 2020). This is even more so due to increased competition among tourism destinations caused by globalisation; as residential as well as tourism destinations beyond regional or national level become accessible (Smith 2002; McCarthy 2007). Furthermore, spatial alteration is an influential factor on both the perceived and the real destination attractiveness (Robson 2000).

Roberts (2000) identifies five key themes requiring improvement to achieve a successful urban regeneration. These are related to the relationship between physical and social conditions; the need for constant physical replacement; economic success at the base of prosperity and quality of life; the efficient use of urban land; and the recognition of the

importance of dominant social conventions and political opinions on urban policy. Roberts defines urban regeneration as:

> "Comprehensive and integrated vision and action which seeks to bring out a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change" (Roberts 2000, p.17).

Roberts traces the evolution of regeneration, through the stages of reconstruction, revitalisation, renewal, redevelopment and regeneration. Contemporary regeneration strategy features a partnership between the public and private sectors. Conversely, Lang (2005) proposes a regeneration model based on the notion that the urban environment incorporates a mix of the physical, environmental, social and economic. This agrees with the vision proposed by the U.K.'s Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which stated that urban regeneration refers not only to physical buildings but also to the environmental, social and economic well-being of a region, and thus being also associated with quality of life (ODPM 2001; Chiu et al. 2019).

Colantonio et al. (2009) distinguish six approaches to urban regeneration projects. The property-led physical approach is a mixed-use scheme, developed to have multiplier effects in the local economy. The business-driven approach focuses on regeneration to serve potential markets and is done mostly through business investments. This approach highlights the importance of 'underserved markets' as important centres for regeneration. The urban form and design approach focuses on sustainable urban development, while the cultural industries approach utilises the cultural and creative media industries. Culture-led urban regeneration has become a recognized means for cities to gain global competitiveness as well as improve their cityscape and urban economic performance (Evans 2005; Miles and Paddison 2005). Furthermore, the health and well-being approach focuses on the role that well-designed spaces may have on standard of living and health (Barton et al. 2003). Finally, the community-based development approach focuses on the importance of local communities' input in decision making and the development of social capital (Colantonio et al. 2009).

Even though elements from every approach are essential in the success of a regeneration process, this study is concerned with business-driven regeneration approaches.

This requires collaboration between government and the business community (Darchen 2013). One model of business-led urban regeneration is known as Business Improvement Districts (BID): public-private partnerships in which property and business owners in a selected area agree to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing of the area's commercial district (Ward 2007). Hoyt (2003) argues that even though the term BID might not be widespread, the model is commonplace in practice. Other derivations of the term may include Special improvement districts, Public improvement districts, Neighbourhood improvement districts, Municipal improvement districts and Downtown improvement districts.

BIDs have successfully leveraged private funding in cities to catalyse urban regeneration, and when well-managed, contribute to increased property value, improved local relater's sales and decreased commercial vacancy rates (World Bank Group 2015). Hoyt (2005) has argued that a BID model is essential to attract investment and visitors, and improve the experiences of pedestrians. Better design and pedestrian experience would in turn lead to an increased attraction of higher-end retail activities and new residents (Darchen 2013). Funding for the BID improvements is generated from tax assessments on properties within the BID area (Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007), even though variations related to who pays the contribution and how this is calculated exist (Hoyt 2003). Dubben and Williams (2009) also refer to Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs), as partnerships between the private and public sectors. PFIs encourage capital investments into public projects, transferring the risks to the private sector when possible. Furthermore, the European Union has also become increasingly important in financially supporting regeneration projects (Tsimperis 2015).

The role of the BIDs has been to maintain the 'business climate' of city centres (Wood and Ward 2007). This means they are concerned with issues such as cleanliness, aesthetics of public areas, security, providing a variety of available activities, effective transportation, and an improved image to potential consumers (Mallett 1994; Ward 2007). Mitchell and Staeheli (2006) argued that even though BIDs vary, they all produce a similar set of services. General strategies of BIDs as outlined by Mitchell (1999; 2001) are found in Table 2.

Infrastructural focus	Objective	Examples
Physical	Capital improvement	Lighting, street furniture
	Economic development	Business incentives
	Maintenance	Rubbish collection, graffiti removal
Promotional	Consumer marketing	Organisation and advertising events, production and distribution of maps and information sheets
	Policy advocacy	Lobbying with government or other BIDs
Surveillance	Public space regulation	Regulate traffic flow, regulating sidewalk selling
	Security	Security guards, CCTVs, ambassadors

Table 2. General strategies employed by BIDs (Mitchell 1999; 2001)

Since the BID is mostly concerned with business interests it might not satisfy all the requirements for sustainable long-term regeneration (Darchen 2013). Furthermore, a designated area must have existing property owners who consider it worthwhile to dedicate additional funds to invest in their district, and having a public infrastructure that does not required major upgrades. Otherwise, the risk of a BID not offering sufficient value makes it unappealing to investors (World Bank Group 2015). BIDs have also been applied specifically to tourism, whereby they are defined as *Tourism Business Improvement Districts* (TBID) intended to support the development of the tourism sector within a destination rather than a cluster of businesses sharing a common trading environment (Visit England 2011). For a TBID to develop, the local governing body and most of the tourism suppliers have to agree on the level of fees to be collected and whether to apply a unified marketing strategy (Oates 2015).

Having identified how geographical areas, products and brands decline and may be revived, section 2.3 focuses on tourism destinations. Like locations, products and brands, tourism destinations may also decline. The process of rejuvenating a mature tourism destination may consider brand rejuvenation, product rejuvenation as well as urban regeneration models and strategies.

2.3 Destination evolution models

Traditional destination evolution models have focused on linear development, suggesting an eventual point where the destination reaches decline. Plog (1973) proposed that the popularity of destinations initially rises but then, at a certain point, falls in a significant way, forming an evolution trajectory that is graphically comparable to a Bell-Shaped curve (see Figure 5). The model indicates how, as more visitors are attracted to the destination, the novelty effect starts wearing off and the increase in tourism infrastructure and services make the destination less distinctive. This destination thus attracts the risk-averse segment, while becoming less appealing to the influential type of tourist, indicating that the destination has reached its maturity stage (Plog 1973; Foster 2000; Plog 2001; Weaver 2011). This model promotes the idea that a destination progresses linearly through its life stages and is thus destined to decline as its final stage. A destination may control its decline only by planning to ensure it maintains its attractiveness. This is similar to the argument proposed by Lehu (2004) in relation to marketing products, whereby one day products have to grow old and die if their management is not appropriate. This also gives the impression that even though a life cycle may be extended, it will inevitably end in death, especially once the final stages are reached.
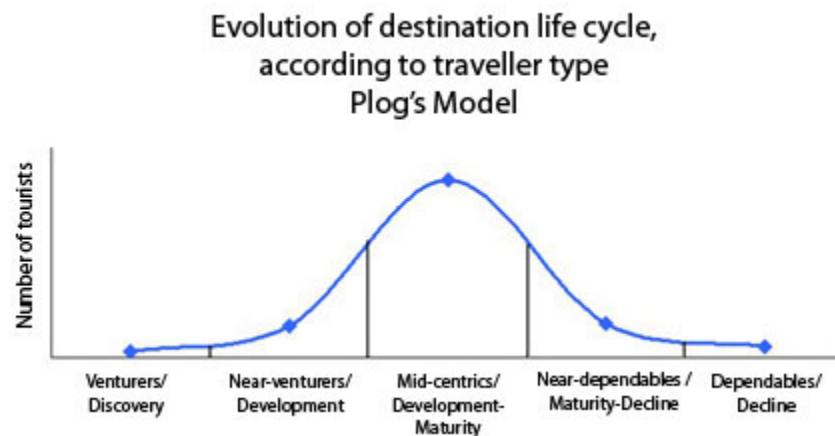
Figure 5. Evolution of destination life cycle according to traveller type: Plog's Model (Plog 2001, p. 16)

Nonetheless, the present study focuses on the possibility of rejuvenation, which is absent in Plog's model. The idea that a destination can rejuvenate rather than decline was given more prominence in other models. One example is the tourism model developed by Butler (1980) and adapted from the PLC (Butler 2005). The PLC, as described above, proposes an introductory stage, a growing phase, a maturity phase and eventually, a decline phase. Like Plog's model, the product is initially desired but is eventually abandoned as it becomes out-dated (Avlonitis 1990). Destinations act like products and thus undergo a similar evolutionary process or lifecycle as they develop and modify themselves to appeal to their specific markets (Butler 2006; 2014). The stages in Butler's (1980) model, defined as the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), are very similar to the ones in Vernon's PLC. The destination moves through stages defined as exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, and stagnation. When it reaches the stages of consolidation and stagnation it has arrived at the point of maturity and is now seen as out-dated. This constitutes a watershed; the destination has two possibilities – it may either decline or rejuvenate itself (Hovinen 1981; Russell and Fulkner 2004; Royle 2009).

Special importance is given to the final stages of the TALC model; an examination of which may aid in understanding how destinations may react to their potential decline. The introduction of a new stage succeeding saturation has also been included whereby a destination has the option of revival rather than forced decline (Cooper 2006; Agarwal 2006). Agarwal (2006) incorporates the restructuring thesis (see section 2.2.1), with the TALC model. Even though these are separate constructs, they are both concerned with decline and responses to it. Agarwal (2002) argues that both are based on the premise that decline shall continue unless measures are taken. Agarwal (2006) suggested the addition of a new stage; 'reorientation', to the TALC cycle, following the stagnation stage. The reorientation stage incorporates efforts to revive and renew the destination's tourism industry whereby, unlike in the TALC model, decline is not taken for granted. The transition from stagnation to post-stagnation is deferred every time the destination embarks on a reorientation exercise (Agarwal 1994). The TALC model, with the addition of the Agarwal's re-orientation stage is illustrated in Figure 6.
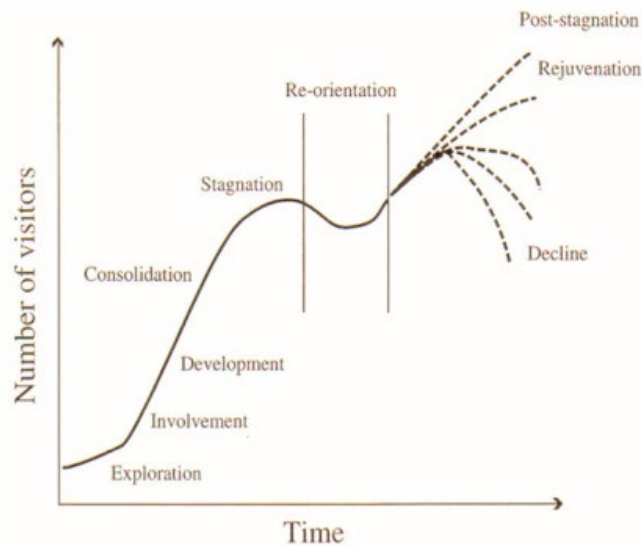
Figure 6. Updated Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (Agarwal 2006 in Butler 2011, p. 12)

Baum (1998) suggested the introduction of 'partial reinvention' or 'complete reinvention'. In the latter case, like Agarwal's (2006) 'reorientation' stage, the destination would need to reinvent itself by changing its tourism offering and its target market. Baum (2005) argues that though this stage may be a subset of Butler's rejuvenation stage, it may be more useful to understand it as a process of complete exit and re-entry into tourism. This constitutes a complete detachment from the initial tourism cycle of a destination, and the creation of a new cycle offering a different tourism product and targeting a completely different market. This may be an ideal way forward if the traditional tourism market appears to be in irreversible decline. While complete reinvention may be classified as a re-start, partial reinvention may be compared to the 'recast' strategy proposed by Lazer at al. (1984). Baum (1998) also introduces Handy's (1994) sigmoid curves as a final stage of the TALC, shown in Figure 7.

S-curves represent product life cycles, as a product evolves through market development, to growth, maturity, and decline (Levitt 1965; Yoo 2010). The Sigmoid curves show the evolution of the new tourism products that are launched to revive a tourism destination. S-curves are often utilised to describe the origin and evolution of innovations (Lysek 2019). Garcia and Calantone (2002, p.121-122) claim that an S-curve model describes how:

"Product performance moves along an s-curve until [technical] limitations cause research effort, time, and/or resource inefficiencies to result in diminishing returns. New innovations replace the old [technology] and a new s-curve is initiated".
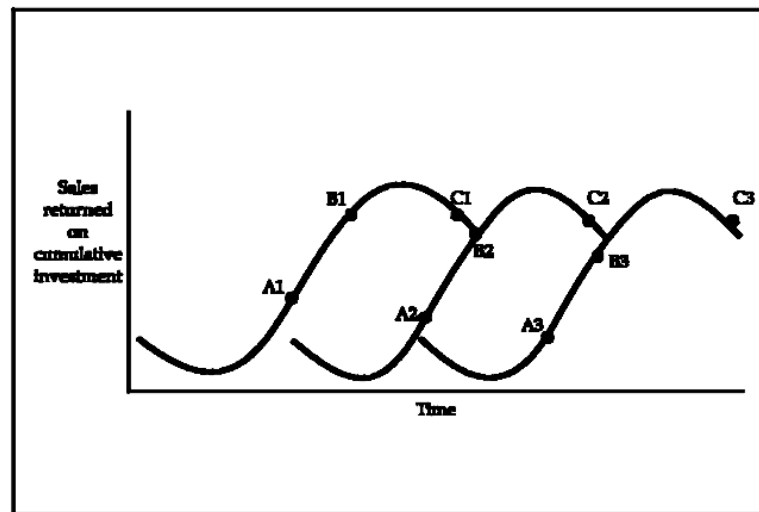
Figure 7. Handy's Sigmoid curves (Baum 1998, p. 172)

S-curves thus show how a new product overlaps an older one and eventually replaces it (Lysek 2019). As Figure 7 showseach tourism product now has its own lifecycle. A destination may simultaneously compete on the tourism market by proposing various product offerings, thus utilising a diversification strategy as described above. Nonetheless, in the case of tourism, the introduction (or marketing) of a new product aiming at attracting visitors may also increase visitation at the declined product. A case in point was the introduction of the Red Stone Park in China, that attracted visitors to the declining Danxia Mountain, who frequently decided to visit both attractions (Bao and Zhang 2006). The introduction of a new product may trigger spatial benefits (discussed in section 2.6.3.1). Both reorientation and diversification aim at re-introducing the destination's uniqueness and product competitiveness, for example by developing sub products that are unique to the destination (Agarwal 2002).

Another, more radical, alternative to decline proposed by Baum (1998) argues that the destination may opt out of tourism altogether. Unlike what Butler suggests in TALC, this may be a conscious decision rather than an automatic repercussion of decline (Baum 2005). Baum (2005) therefore suggests an 'exit stage' within the TALC model whereby the

destination community and those responsible for marketing the destination's image would no longer view it as a tourism destination. Public sector resources are diverted towards other commercial priorities.

Linear models, especially the TALC, have been subject to several criticisms. Their deterministic nature seems to indicate that every destination is bound to decline. The model assumes that a destination's evolution follows a biological configuration involving birth, growth, decline and death (Faulkner and Russell 1997). Because of the deterministic progression, the models assume that no changes or rejuvenation can occur before the destination has reached the final stages (Faulkner and Russell 1997). The reality is more complex on the micro-scale, whereby there can be various multilevel cycles within the cycle itself (Solomon 2015). Butler's (1980) model does not accommodate unpredictable factors that may lead to unplanned for innovation or decay within each stage, which means that the model ignores important agents such as entrepreneurs (Russell and Faulkner 2004; Farrell and Twinning-Ward 2004). The tourism product is in fact imbued with the inputs and involvement of many businesses that are continuously entering and exiting the market (McKercher 1999). An example was the introduction of, and strategies managed by, the Business Improvement Districts, that are mostly made up of businesses. Sanz-Ibáñez and Clavé (2014) also note that the model is descriptive and proposes no solutions to issues that arise, also claiming that the model cannot predict a future that is by its nature unforeseeable. Furthermore, while the model assumes that all the tourism-related elements within a destination are at the same lifecycle stage, different elements may in fact be within a different stage of their own lifecycle (Whitfield 2010; Chapman and Light 2016;) and may thus require differential management or rejuvenation interventions.

The chaos and complexity model was proposed by McKercher (1999), seeing tourism as a complicated and unstable activity, following a non-linear progression (see Figure 8). The chaos theory is concerned with disorganised and unmanageable systems while the complexity theory deals with systems that have numerous interlinked agents, and although hard to predict, they do have a structure which allows improvement (Axelrod and Cohen 1999). A system is considered complex if its parts interact in a nonlinear manner (Baggio 2008). Furthermore, Baggio (2008) distinguishes between a system that is 'complicated' and a system that is 'complex'. A complicated system can be broken down

into sub-elements and understood by analysing each one of them (Ottino 2004), while a complex system can only be understood as a whole, independently of its component parts. The element of chaos is evident in Figure 8, whereby different sub-elements can be seen influencing each other, increasing the number of variables that impact on the tourism product at a destination.
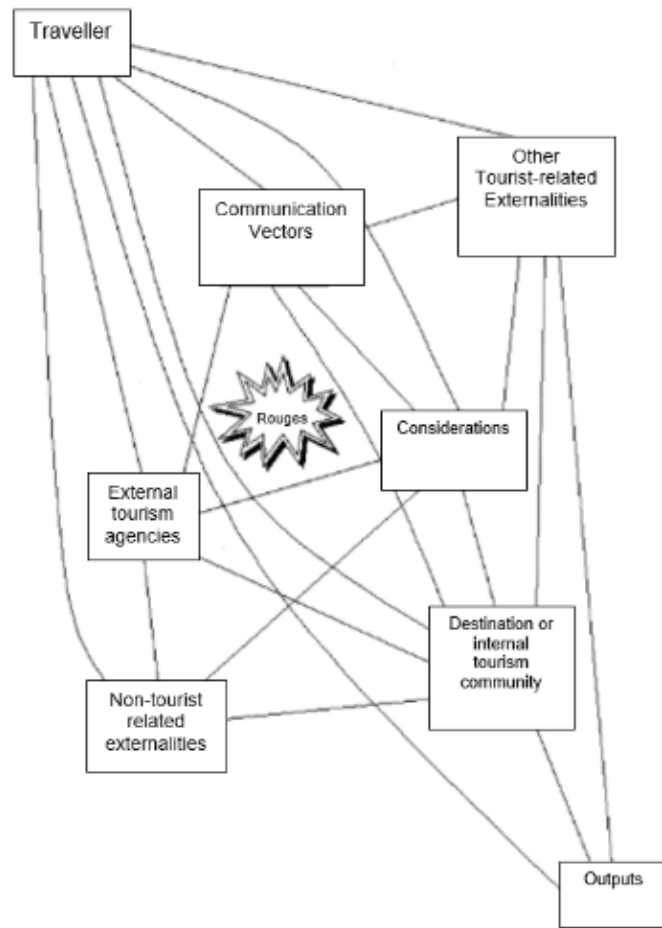
Figure 8. A chaos model of tourism (McKercher 1999, p. 430)

Russell and Faulkner (1998; 2004) claim that chaos and complexity act as companions, while Baggio and Sainaghi (2011) classify chaos theory as part of the wider 'complexity science' category. Unlike linear models, chaos and complexity models propose a chaotic development pattern of bifurcations, defined as a sudden change in the system that leads to a long-term change (Zahra and Ryan 2006). The system is constantly in an 'edge of chaos' state, and thus always on the verge of collapsing into a rapidly changing state of dynamic evolution (Russell and Faulkner 1999). The 'edge of chaos' represents the most favourable conditions for entrepreneurial activities (Russell 2006a). Waldrop (1993)

compares the situation to a heap of sand piled on a table that could collapse at any time, which is synonymous with the 'butterfly effect' or the Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions (SDIC) (Russell and Faulkner 1999; McKercher 1999). SDIC occurs where a small change triggers a large change in the system (Baggio and Sainaghi 2011). This effect explains how "seemingly similar destination areas can evolve in completely different manners and explains the unpredictable nature of tourism development, since slight changes may lead to big consequences (McKercher, 1999, p. 429). One implication is that it is essentially impossible to formulate long term predictions about the behaviour of a dynamic system (Baggio 2008). Panayotis (2008) applied this effect to the subprime mortgage crises in the United States in 2008, whereby high-risk loans made to the Americans were starting to influence the wider real estate market, including the hotel industry. This led to real estate hedge funds in the United Kingdom cancelling their public offering on the stock exchange due to wariness among stakeholders, and the Royal Bank of Scotland (a big owner of hotel properties) postponed the sale of assets as buyers involved no longer had the means.

On the other hand, a paradoxical characteristic affecting the system is the 'lock-in effect', that occurs when a change or an entrepreneur's initiative establishes a strong network of mutually reinforcing relationships that endure even after the conditions leading to such relations disappear. At a tourism destination, the lock-in effect might be identified in the continuing concentration of tourist accommodation capacity and attractions around a location, which was originally advantaged by its access to rail transport. Over time, rail transport might become less relevant to bring in tourists, but the original location might retain its dominance owing to "agglomeration effects" (Russell and Faulkner, 1999, p. 415).

Unlike linear models, this model places considerable importance on the actions of individual entrepreneurs. The system is characterised by long periods of equilibrium, interrupted by bursts of evolutionary change. Different events that occur and the individual decisions made in response to these events change the destination (Haywood 2006). This is when entrepreneurs spot opportunities and utilise their creativity to bring about innovation (Russell and Faulkner 1999; 2004; Russell 2006b). This calls for increased engagement with the business community in any strategic decisions. It also proposes that rejuvenation processes may be triggered by small changes or interventions.

However, chaos theories are difficult to quantify or measure as well as being reactive. The course of a destination may only be determined in hindsight, as no pattern exists (Scott 2003; Zahra and Ryan 2006). Some destinations have been proven to have deviated from the chaos theory's framework by developing institutions and strategically initiating change to avoid decline and continue to grow in the long term (Saarinen and Kask 2008; Claver-Cortes et al. 2007). A destination may prove to be resilient as it employs a flexible method of change management. This allows a system to be unstable and chaotic but is still resilient (Benson and Garmestani 2011). Thus, a combination of both the TALC and chaos model is preferred, as it produces a more realistic, holistic and complex framework (Russell and Faulkner 2004).

In Butler's (1980) TALC model, like the chaos model (McKercher 1999), each phase enters a period of instability driven by shifts in relations between the stakeholders of the destination and tourists. Change will both occur and lead the destination to progress to the next stage, or be impeded and lead to decline. The most crucial point for a destination, according to Butler is the stagnation stage, where a bifurcation point leading to decline or rejuvenation is presented. The combination of Butler's model with chaos theory results in a cyclical model whereby each stage within the lifecycle of the touristic destination follows a lifecycle of its own, depending on entrepreneurial triggers (Whitfield 2009a), while each element may also have its own life cycle, such as the case of games arcades discussed by Chapman and Light (2016). While Butler (1980) acknowledges the importance of entrepreneurs only in the involvement stage, Russell and Faulkner (2004) combine both models and give due consideration to the entrepreneurship element and propose its presence in all the stages. The combined model is illustrated in Figure 9.
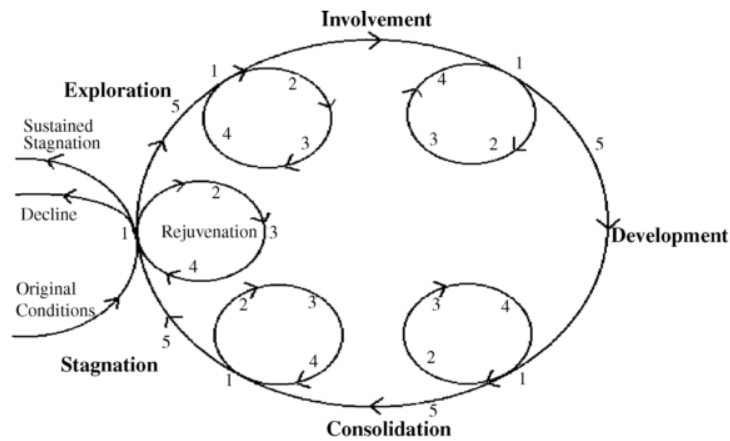
1. Triggering circumstances, disequilibrium; 2. Deregulated chaos; 3. Positive feedback, self healing-enablers;
4. Transition to a new phase that reflects the old; 5. Regulated chaos renewed tenuous conditional equilibrium

Figure 9. The combined model composed from the chaos model and Butler's model (Russell and Faulkner 2004, p. 563)

The importance of destination resilience has also been explored. Resilience refers to the intrinsic ability of objects, places and people to absorb and recover from external stressors (Amore et al. 2018). In the case of destinations resilience emerges from the main features of tourist supply and demand (Hall 2018). Holling (1986; 2001) proposed the Adaptive Cycle, which acts as a loop whereby a destination progresses through four stages. In this model, the importance of destruction and reorganisation within the system dynamics emerges (Gunderson et al. 1995). This also brings in the concept of resilience, whereby the system oscillates through the loop or cycle, gaining increased resilience as it reorganises itself every time (Holladay 2018). A destination progresses through the stages of *exploitation* or rapid growth, to *conservation*; whereby a slow trending shift is evident as the destination accumulates capital, followed by the *release* stage; wherein the elements of the system become too tightly connected and fragile, thus exposing them to possible *creative destruction*, which occurs with a sudden dismantling of the system resulting from unexpected shock (Holladay 2018).

The model by Holling (1986; 2001) was applied to the TALC model by Butler (1980), producing an integrated model aimed at identifying the intersection between destination resilience and sustainable tourism development. In its initial stages the destination course is similar to that of the TALC model. This study is mostly concerned with the final stages after a destination reaches maturity, where the major changes from the TALC

model appear. Holladay (2018) shows how, in the integrated model, a destination progresses into a state of surprise, whereby it rebalances its components into a reorganised state. It proceeds to renewal and re-emerges for a potential new system to develop. This is related to the rejuvenation stage in the TALC and the reorganization stage in the Adaptive Cycle. The destination progresses to an escape stage and finally to a regeneration stage whereby a new system emerges (Holladay). This model proposes that a destination is resilient to changes, and that once it reaches an undesirable stage, it may rejuvenate. Holladay (2018) argues that regeneration can occur prior to a destination reaching its final stages, through earlier intervention . This is the ideal scenario, whereby destination managers would include introducing controllable perturbations at earlier stages to prevent a large collapse (Walker and Salt 2012).

Defining the evolutionary cycles of destinations is challenging. Their different circumstances, characteristics and geographical realities, are factors that cannot be grouped into homogenous descriptions and forecasted (Sampol and Peters 2009). It is unlikely that one theory can exclusively explain the development of destinations because each destination follows a different path to maturity (Prosser 1995; Sampol and Peters 2009). Nonetheless, by exploring the various destination development models, it becomes evident that destinations are bound to reach points of potential decline for different reasons. The different theories and models converge in showing that a destination has the potential to re-affirm itself in the tourism market after reaching a point of decline, and various courses of action are possible. After identifying the development paths taken by products, brands and locations, and exploring different destination development models, the possibility of rejuvenation has been confirmed. This answers the first research question, confirming that rejuvenation is possible for mature destinations. The next section (2.4) addresses the second research question by identifying the causes and characteristics of a tourism destination's decline.

2.4 Destination decline

Recognising the symptoms of destination decline at an early stage has been shown to be strongly beneficial in countering decline in a more pro-active and effective manner (Twining-Ward and Baum 1998; Manente and Pechlaner 2006; Kozak and Martin 2012).

This may not be an easy task, since even though destinations might be already declining or under threat of doing so, this might not be evident as they might still be profitable (Manente and Pechlaner 2006).

To answer the second research question, an evaluation of the causes and characteristics of mature destination decline is required. The identification of these characteristics is also required prior to proceeding to the next research question, whereby the prerequisites to rejuvenation will be explored. It is essential to understand the mature destination's characteristics because a prerequisite towards regenerating such a destination requires analysing its current characteristics and situation (Roberts 2000). This knowledge helps to identify the challenges the destination needs to overcome when attempting to satisfy the requirements of rejuvenation. Section 2.4.1 discusses indicators and symptoms of decline while section 2.4.2 evaluates the typical characteristics of mature destinations.

2.4.1 Indicators of destination decline

A destination in a state of maturity may be considered equivalent to being in the stagnation stages put forward in the TALC model (Hovinen 1981). Butler (2012) argues that decline may be measured in a number of ways, including elements such as: visitor numbers; perceived quality of the destination; visitor's experience; income from tourism expenditure; investment in tourism amenities and infrastructure; and, tourism-related employment. Various reasons exist that may lead to decline, and these mostly stem from the destination's maturity which results in a state of saturation. A common indicator of maturity and the potential beginning of decline occurs when visitor numbers reach a plateau and then start declining, registering surplus bed capacity (Agarwal 2002; Kozak and Martin 2012). Even though every mature destination is characterised by specific features (Butler 2012), there are common indicators that a destination has indeed reached maturity. Whilst visitor numbers may be the most mentioned indicator, some authors (Butler 1980, Cooper 1990, Haywood 1986; Morgan 1991; Ioannides 2002; Faulkner and Tideswell 2005; Manente and Pechlaner 2006; Wilde and Cox 2008; Diedrich and García-Buades 2009; Chapman and Speake 2011; Kozak and Martin 2012; Butler 2012; Romão et al. 2013; Santos et al. 2014; Medina- Muñoz et al. 2016; Matečić and Perninić Lewis 2019; Aydin and Aksoz 2020; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020) have identified other factors which underline the destination's maturity stage. The

causes and characteristics of maturity are interlinked (Agarwal 2002) and will thus be discussed collectively in section 2.4.2. Furthermore, the factors are outlined in Table 3.

Area of destination performance	Indicators
1. Changing markets	- Decrease in total visitors - Increase in low status, low spend visitors - Dependence on long-holiday markets - Dependence on few source markets - Decrease in visitors' length of stay - Type of visitor increasingly mass tourist - Low proportion of first-time visitors - Highly seasonal - Homogenous offering - Decrease in market share compared to competitors
2. Emerging destinations	- Competition from newer and cheaper destinations - Emergence of competition with similar tourism product - Destination well established but not popular
3. Infrastructure	- Lack of maintenance and modernisation of existing infrastructure - Decrease in service quality - Newer properties being built on the periphery of the original tourist area only - The image of the destination is not popular anymore - Diversification into niches to maintain numbers - Big number of man-made attractions, outnumbering natural attractions
4. Business performance	- Decline in profit of tourism-related businesses - Lack of confidence in the tourism business community - Lack of professional and experienced staff - Difficulty in creating a shared vision on destination's development - Loss of economic vitality - Difficulty assuring sustainable tourism
5. Social and environmental carrying capacity	- Social, cultural and environmental impacts due to the tourism involvement over the years - Local opposition to tourism
6. Institutional environment	- Demands for increased operational efficiency and entrepreneurial activity - Short term planning and lack of strategic thinking - Difficulty in getting all shareholders to cooperate - Shortage of research data and market information

Table 3: Indicators of a destination's maturity state (adapted from Butler 1980; Haywood 1986; Cooper 1990; Morgan 1991; Ioannides 2002; Faulkner and Tideswell 2005; Manente and Pechlaner 2006; Wilde and Cox 2008;Diedrich and García- Buades 2009; Chapman and Speake 2011; Kozak and Martin 2012; Butler 2012; Romão et al. 2013; Santos et al. 2014; Medina-Muñoz et al. 2016; Matečić and Perninić Lewis 2019; Aydin and Ozan 2020; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020)

2.4.2 Causes and characteristics of decline

Stagnation, and eventual decline, is brought about by various related factors. A destination in decline may be defined as "a destination with a certain tradition in providing tourism but characterized by one or more negative trends" (Manente and Pechlaner 2006, p. 235). These trends may be triggered by internal or external factors; internal factors are related to the destination itself while external factors are triggered by non-destination-related influences (Manente and Pechlaner 2006; Gale 2007; Aydin and Aksoz 2020). Decline is not a natural phase of the destination's lifecycle but is a result of the interaction of external forces and internal problems (Solomon 2015). Furthermore, different conditions apply to different destinations. This section identifies the major factors leading to decline, as well as their consequences, to identify the negative characteristics of a mature destination that need to be considered when implementing a rejuvenation strategy.

A common issue of mature destinations is excessive number of visitors that may put a destination at risk of decline (Brooker and Burgess 2008; Wilde and Cox 2008). The threshold of what constitutes an 'excessive' number is difficult to determine. While mass tourism may be an indication that the destination might be nearing its carrying capacity, it is not easy to determine whether this has been surpassed. Carrying capacity is not only related to visitor numbers but constitutes three dimensions – the environmental (ecological and physical), social (cultural and psychological), and economic, that are all interconnected and important for establishing limits of tourism (Coccossis 2002), and which shall be discussed later in this section. Samora-Arvela et al. (2020) claims the capacity is defined in terms of economic, social, environmental and physical parameters. Therefore, while carrying capacity is generally interpreted as the largest number of tourists an economy can fit on a size of land (Marsiglio 2017), it is unlikely that the physical constraint is reached as the other factors are likely to limit the number of tourists to a lower level (Rey-Maquieira et al. 2004). Consequently, we usually establish 'desired conditions' as the threshold rather than an actual maximum visitors limit (Kallis and Coccossis 2004).

In some destinations, mass tourism is a key indicator that a destination has fully developed in its life cycle but the determined carrying capacity based on the acceptable environmental and socio-cultural capacities is what distinguishes sustainable mass tourism

(SMT) from unsustainable mass tourism (UMT) (Simeoni et al. 2019). UMT is triggered by the consequence of continued development whereby the carrying capacity is exceeded (Rodríguez et al. 2008; Baidal et al. 2013), the consequences of which are examined in this section. Entrepreneurs and policy makers need to be alert to signs and symptoms that may indicate potential decline. SMT on the other hand defeats the common perception that looks at mass tourism as an inevitable cause of a destination's decline (Weaver 2000). The idea that mass tourism is intrinsically bad and should be avoided in rejuvenation strategies is rejected.

Mass tourism promotes a large-scale tourism product that is strongly associated with the destination's characteristics (Vainikka 2013; Benur and Bramwell 2015). The product is sold at a fixed price to mass customers in a packaged and standardised form (Robinson and Novelli 2005). Being overly developed and large-scale, the destination would have attracted large franchise chains, leading to a standardised, clichéd product that may be found in similar locations (Ioannides 2002). Competition therefore becomes price based as no unique elements within the package remain (Torres 2002). This product is becoming decreasingly attractive, as modern tourists do not want to be identified as part of the masses and are no longer satisfied with inflexible all-inclusive packages (Richards 2006; Brandão et al. 2019). This is a situation that, for example, the Mediterranean coast has suffered from (Brandão et al. 2019). It is therefore necessary when discussing rejuvenation strategies that an element of uniqueness is given due consideration to avoid price-wars that degrade both the profit and the level of the tourism product, in order to offer tourists a memorable eyepiece (Romão 2013; Brandão et al. 2019; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020). This is discussed in section 2.6.

According to McElroy's (2002) penetration index (based on three variables: per capita visitor spending, daily visitor density per 1,000 population, and number of hotel rooms per square kilometer) mature destinations are characterised by high impacts. The main consequences are potentially irreversible environmental, economic and socio-cultural problems (Knowles and Curtis 1999; Cuccia and Rizzo 2011; Farmaki 2012; Hernández-Martín et al. 2015; Drius et al. 2019; Brandão et al. 2019). The mass tourist, described as the 'lead' type of tourist, is characteristically less interested in respecting the destination's culture (Kozak and Martín 2012), and is less interested in interacting with local people, and causes damage to the positive attributes of that destination (Royle 2009). Deterioration of

public amenities, coastal areas and other natural resources have been blamed on overcrowding and over-use of these resources (Aguiló et al. 2005; Cuccia and Rizzo 2011). Natural resources have suffered through aesthetic and noise pollution, loss of biodiversity, problems with waste and residual water, damage to archaeological sites, scarcity of water and energy (Bianchi 2004) and development of roads impacting on the scenery (Rodríguez et al. 2008). Increased traffic congestion is also common (Gooroochrun and Sinclair 2005; McCartney 2019).

Examples of destinations that have suffered from overcrowding are the Balearic Islands (Aguiló et al. 2003) and the Canary Islands (Bianchi 2004; Rodríguez et al. 2008), while a number of sites and cities suffering from overcrowding include Maya Beach in Thailand, Venice in Italy and Machu Picchu in Peru (Bahagijo 2020). In the case of Venice, 24 million visitors travel to the city of 50,000 inhabitants annually (Squires 2018). This has led the city to introduce a tourist tax in May 2019, aimed to deter mass tourism that is having pronounced environmental, historical and social impacts (McCartney 2019). Queensland in New Zealand, with its population of 40,000, has also cited a strain on its infrastructure while attempting to cope with 3 million tourists (Janic 2019). Similarly, Macau, the most densely populated location in the world (IMF 2018) with 640,000 inhabitants in 12 square miles, received 35.8 million visitors in 2018 (McCartney 2019). Even though the economy may be benefiting (Zadel et al. 2018) environmental and socio-cultural impacts may be negative (Drius et al. 2019; Brandão et al. 2019) and require action to reduce tourist numbers.

This situation has led to the coining of terms such as 'overtourism' and 'tourismphobia', characterised by negative attitudes towards the consequences of having too many tourists (UNWTO 2018). Such pressures may also cause dissatisfaction amongst locals and tourists alike (Cuccia and Rizzo 2011), while the reusing and recycling of areas for tourism facilities may lead to direct conflict with local people (Royle 2009). This situation may easily occur in destinations such as Macau, with a resident to visitor ratio of 1:60, where impact studies have warned of pending and rising negative effects on the community resulting from mass tourism (McCartney and Lei 2016; Dioko and So 2017). The increasingly negative perception of the local community may also act as an indicator of destination decline (Diedrich and García-Buades 2009). This also results in a negative impact on the resident's attitudes to tourism; consequently the nature of the destination may

change, becoming less attractive to tourists (Butler, 1999; Giannoni and Maupertuis 2007; Marsiglio 2017). Any rejuvenation strategies that seek to employ strategies attracting mass tourism need to strictly adhere to a maximum impact as dictated by the 'desired conditions' (Kallis and Coccossis 2004) that ensure no repercussion on the environment or economy, but also avoid any social problems for the local population.

Mature destinations frequently suffer from a past lack of long-term planning and use of spur of the moment ad hoc strategies (Dann and Potter 1997; Knowles and Curtis 1999). This did not only hinder potential additional success in the past but has led to several consequences that became apparent at a later stage. In the case of the Balearic Islands , a lack of territorial planning and haphazard urban development led to increased risk of over-development and thus over-use of resources (Aguiló et al. 2003). This issue is also related to deterioration and lack of maintenance and modernisation of facilities (Chapman and Speake 2011; Santos et al 2014) that affect the quality of the visitor's experience (Manning et al. 2002; Ioannides 2002). In fact, the modernisation and maintenance of infrastructure as well as investment in environment improvements is a precondition for the success of rejuvenation (Hernández et al. 2015).The inertia of entrenched management practices acts as a further barrier due, due to a focus on past practices that might have been successful, and the inability to adapt to the changing environment (Faulkner 2002; Solomon 2015).

A destination regeneration strategy would be essential, and might require drastic action or management, depending on the destination's situation. The areas might be split into improvement districts, such as the BIDs model discussed in section 2.2.2. Being managed by local business in partnership with the local governing authorities, the governing body has personal interest in the area. This also means they are concerned with issues such as cleanliness, aesthetics, security, making available a variety of activities, effective transportation, and an improved image to potential consumers (Mallett 1994; Ward 2007). The formation of BIDs or similar structures may also help to counteract the lack of agreement between diverse stakeholders, another typical problem in mature destinations. This issue hinders coordination or implementation of policies at a moment where the introduction of such policies is vital (Butler 2012). Coordinated and swift action is necessary for mature destinations suffering a decline in visitors to improve their tourism product. Policies may include increasing the tourism offerings (Kotler et al. 1996; Apostolopoulos

and Sönmez 2000) or transitioning into a sustainable mass tourism model (Weaver 2000), both of which require planning and coordination. Nonetheless, it can be challenging to coordinate different stakeholders in the tourism industry, due to differing perspectives and interests (Markwick 2000; Needham and Rollins 2005; Rodríguez et al. 2008).

Declining visitor numbers may be attributed to the decrease in attractiveness of the tourism product offering of a mature destination as the tourism market shifts to alternative destinations (Butler 2012). A destination's offering might have been interesting to that market in the past, but this does not automatically mean that it can satisfy evolving consumer preferences (Knowles and Curtis 1999; Dwyer and Kim 2003; Butler 2012; Baidal et al. 2013). It is thus necessary to understand that the updating and developing of the tourism product is a continuous process and is necessary to maintain competitiveness (Clarke 2000). This reality links to the necessity of being knowledgeable about the desires of tourists through constant market research (Twining-Ward and Baum 1998). It must be acknowledged that consumption trends have changed in favour of more individualistic and specialised holidays, which have triggered a decrease in the traditional and standardised sun and sea mass tourism packages (Agarwal 2002; Aguiló et al. 2005; Brandão et al. 2019). Other changes in tourism trends include an increase in holidays per year and a decrease in length of stay (Aguiló et al. 2003). These trends motivate destinations to move away from their traditional tourism offer and aim at specific products that are more attractive to tourists. As discussed below, this supports rejuvenation through diversification that allows a number of individual interests to be satisfied by one destination. This argument is not accepted universally, as there are several mass tourism resorts that have retained their popularity notwithstanding the increase in more individual-oriented tourism demands (Curtis 1997). The importance of individual and the specific interests needs to be kept in consideration when producing a new tourism offering that aims at attracting customers (tourists).

Newly developed competing destinations may be another cause behind the decline of mature destinations (Perles Ribes et al. 2012). Increased competition between similar destinations and demand flexibility has led many classic destinations to be replaced (Mussalam and Tajeddini 2016; da Silva et al. 2018). The Mediterranean coastal 'sun and sea' destinations are a clear example, whereby their market-share has been in decline due to the emergence of competing new beach destinations (Agarwal and Shaw 2007; Brandão et

al. 2019). These destinations are increasingly attracting larger numbers of northern European tourists who are shifting to these new exotic places that also guarantee sunshine (Rawcliffe 2009). The problem for mature destinations has increased drastically with the internationalisation and globalisation of tourism, as previously inaccessible and undeveloped places have now become potential competing tourism destinations (Agarwal 2002). This has been further facilitated by the introduction of low-cost airlines, that not only allow visitors to access new destinations, but have opened the possibility of travelling among visitors with lower disposable income (Bieger and Wittmer 2006; Baidal et al. 2013). Low cost airlines do not, however, necessarily constitute a new market for a destination (Saladié et al. 2014; Clavé et al. 2015). Moreover, new competing destinations also have the advantage of being more attractive since remote destinations are more fashionable (Aguiló et al. 2003). Such considerations imply that, like new products, new destinations enjoy an advantage of receiving more publicity for the simple reason that they are new (Butler 2012). This shows the importance for a mature destination to project a fresh, modern and innovative image that would thus allow it to compete with newer destinations. On the other hand, a mature destination may resort to nostalgic interests (Powers and Pattwell 2015) to diversify from the modern destinations and benefit from a competitive advantage.

As mature destinations become less attractive (Romão et al. 2013; da Silva et al 2018) they are at the mercy of powerful intermediaries while competing destinations take over the market share (Brandão et al. 2019). These intermediaries include airlines and multinational hotel groups (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Robinson and Novelli 2005) as well as social media channels (Creevey and Mehta 2015), online rating schemes (Casaló et al. 2015) and internet search engines (Morosan 2015). Such agents and operators link tourism supply and demand, giving them great sales influence (Budeanu 2005; da Silva et al 2018) through their persuasion knowledge (Kim and Marshall 2016). Creating destination loyalty, which is important for destinations, is not the aim of intermediaries, as they promote destinations that offer them the best profit margins (Knowles and Curtis 1999). Destinations are compelled to offer intermediaries profit margins that are bigger than those offered by competing destinations, by subsidies and price-reduction strategies (Aguiló et al. 2003; Santos et al. 2014; Clavé et al. 2015). Furthermore, intermediaries such as package providers, aim at directing tourist expenditure at locations that give them the best commission rates. This restricts the tourist power and expenditure (Wang et al. 2016).

In the case of low-cost carriers (LCC) for example, advantageous landing fees and handling charges and local government subsidies are prioritised over the attractiveness of a destination when exploring new routes or retaining traditional ones (Clavé et al. 2015). In the case of the scoring systems of booking sites such as Booking.com, it was found that listed hotels' scores are positively skewed so that it ensures that as many partnering hotels as possible (advertising on the site) have a score within the medium to high quality range. This affects a traveller's choice as it is very difficult for an average internet user to objectively judge a hotel (Mellinas et al. 2015). This bias is a strategic profit move since Booking.com's profits policy is based on revenue-sharing of accommodation fees with accommodation structures listed on their site (booking.com 2020), and thus dependent on the quality of its 'partnering' hotels or accommodation outlets to sell as much as possible. Furthermore, in the case of internet searches, search engines also sell the increased probability that information related to destinations will be found by potential travellers (Abou Nabout and Skiera, 2012). These cases increase the pressure on a declining mature destination to increasingly spend on commissions to intermediaries as they attempt to be beneficially promoted. In rejuvenating itself, a destination should ensure that it has strong unique selling points (USPs) that attract customers rather than because of intermediaries and suppliers. Nonetheless, the importance of intermediaries and marketing platforms still needs to be acknowledged, as these may still be able to influence the destination's image to potential tourists from their platforms (Butler 2012).

Mature destinations are also at high risk because their tourism product offering is frequently not diversified enough. The dependence on one tourism product, coupled with the deterioration of the same product, exposes mature destinations to the threat of being replaceable by substitutes (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Kozak et al. 2010). This may be an expected consequence of aiming to achieve standardisation while putting a priority on reducing production costs. This calls for diversification, whereby a number of sub-products are launched during the rejuvenation process so that the destination is not dependent on one main type of tourism offering. With reference to Ansoff (1948) (see section 2.1), lateral diversification is the most appropriate strategy, whereby completely different tourism products are offered to allow a broad destination portfolio. To a lesser extent, horizontal diversification may also help stabilise the destination's portfolio by providing various sub-tourism products that are related to each other. This reduces the need of dependency on

intermediaries as a decline in success of one sub-product does not automatically call for help from intermediaries but may be counteracted by increased success in another sub product.

Tourism businesses in mature destinations would also start to suffer from reduced profit levels as the need for investment increases while the price of the product does not increase proportionately. This leads to a situation where the cost-benefit ratio decreases (Aguiló et al. 2003) because of a strong reliance on intermediaries that push profit margins down. Furthermore, while disasters and crises have a negative effect , these may have harsher consequences if met by a reluctance to change facilities and services, as frequently occurs in mature destinations (Butler 2012). The effects of crises are shown to be more persistent in mature destinations than in emerging destinations, automatically reducing the possibility of investment during periods of economic growth following crises (Perles Ribes and Ramón Rodríguez 2013). In such cases, diversification would allow a mitigation of the risk of the whole tourism product portfolio being affected by a disaster.

Another main characteristic of mature destinations and a reason for decreased business performance is seasonality. Seasonality refers to the fluctuation of demand and supply of the tourism product along the year (Butler 1994; Alshuqaiqi and Omar 2019). A typical example is the case of sun and sea tourism that inevitably attracts tourists in the warmer months and along the coasts (Garín-Muñoz and Montero-Martín 2006; Benur and Bramwell 2015; e Silva et al. 2018; Ferrante et al. 2018; Brandão et al. 2019). This is a condition from the receiving destination which limits its tourism and could thus be defined as a pull factor problem (Corluka 2017). On the other hand, sun and sea does not inevitably lead to seasonality. One example that challenges this seasonality assumption is the case of Tenerife, which is strongly characterised by the sun and sea product but has an all-year-round tourism inflow (Rodríguez et al. 2008). Nonetheless, climate remains a main cause of seasonality, together with other reasons motivated by institutional causes including religious, social and cultural factors such as school holiday schedules and the scheduling of urban public and private services supply (Cuccia and Rizzo 2011).

Cuccia and Rizzo (2011) outline several economic effects in terms of private and social costs pertaining to seasonality. The social costs have already been discussed in relation to exceeding the destination's carrying capacity, while private costs are costs absorbed by all the agents involved, including the producers, consumers and workers (Cuccia and Rizzo

2011). The producer yields a lower return on capital invested due to a high level of underexploited capacity and fixed costs in the low season, which translates into higher prices for all products and services in the peak season (Farsari et al. 2007; Lee et al. 2008). The surplus accommodation and unutilised infrastructure capacity during the lower season also represent a loss of revenue (Alshuqaiqi and Omar 2019), making investment risks higher and less attractive (Farsari et al. 2007; Trajkov et al. 2016). Conversely, resources are over-utilised in the high season, adding pressure on infrastructure, such as the transportation system (Lee et al. 2008). Improving the tourism product beyond the peak season is challenging, as facilities are dimensioned specifically for the peak season, making them look neglected and under-used, and therefore inadequate during the off-peak months (Figini and Vici 2012).Canavan (2015) identifies the negative outcomes of decline during low season, in the case of the Isle of Man, with closed shops and tourist facilities, degraded town centres, reduced investment, natural, cultural and built landscape damage, loss of historic buildings and a sense of peripherality due to reduced interest.

The lack of tourists during off-peak and shoulder months inevitably means that workers have precarious jobs which include long periods of unemployment (Cuccia and Rizzo 2011). This leads to an increased proportion of expatriate labour where migrant workers fulfil the requirements for semi-skilled labour (Wall and Mathieson 2006; Janta et al. 2011; Nash et al. 2014). Migrants are motivated to work by the ease of access to the available jobs and entry barriers to other types of employment, as well as their language barrier and willingness to learn and improve the host language (Janta and Ladkin 2009; Janta et al. 2011). On the other hand seasonality reduces the chance of employing skilled staff forcing employers to engage unskilled staff that potentially lack motivation and knowledge of the tourist culture and therefore cannot provide a professional service (Farsari et al. 2007; Bentz et al. 2013; Gregoric 2014). A discrepancy in wages may also apply between peak and the other seasons (Reddy 2008; Trajkov et al. 2016). The sporadic increase in demand for labour during peak season also results in high recruitment costs for employers in the industry (Annisius 2014).

Seasonality may be counteracted by a reorientation strategy whereby the tourism product is not dependent on specific climatic conditions. On the other hand, a better strategy may be diversification, as the planned inclusion of various tourism offerings may help to

mitigate seasonality if each product offering aims at attracting customers during different times of the year. These are discussed in section 2.6.2 and 2.6.3. This section has discussed the main causes and consequences of decline in mature destinations, answering the first objective's second research question: what are the causes and characteristics of tourism destination decline? This knowledge provides understanding for the motivation behind a destination's decision to rejuvenate. More importantly, this section has highlighted the handicaps that a mature destination would need to overcome to successfully rejuvenate. The discussion now turns to the various strategies that may help a destination to rejuvenate itself, keeping in mind the various models discussed earlier as well as the various barriers that are present at the destination, discussed in this section, but reference to other possible responses shall first be explored.

2.5 Responses to decline

Several responses to the threat of tourism decline will be explored while the broader literature related to the product, brand and geographical regeneration discussed in the previous sections shall be considered. Prior to identifying the different responses, it is important to mention that a common initial response to potential decline in a destination may be lack of action (Butler 2012).

In many cases destinations act only when the signs of decline become evident (Twining-Ward and Baum 1998). Such lack of action may be traced to obliviousness towards the reality that the traditional market of a destination is changing and there may still be confidence in the products that had been successful in the past (Faulkner 2002; Schmalleger et al. 2011). Lack of action inevitably leads to the destination's increased decline unless special circumstances (such as a new discovery) come about that benefit the destination and rejuvenate it (Kozak and Martin 2012). Baum (1998) proposes that lack of action may also be a planned strategy whereby the destination seeks to exit from the tourism market and invest in other commercial sectors.

Nonetheless, having identified the negative characteristics of a mature destination in section 2.4, it is expected that destinations prefer to take action to turn this situation round and rejuvenate instead of allowing degeneration and further decline (Farsari et al. 2007;

Solomon 2015). Rather than leave the destination's destiny to chance, several counter measures may be implemented (Agarwal 2002; Cooper 2006). These include strategic measures that target prices, and the quantity or quality of the tourism market (Hepburn 2006); finding a new or supplementary market; modifying the image and product of a destination; catering for a specific niche (Butler 2012); or reorienting attractions and repositioning the destination (Agarwal 2002). A destination therefore may develop a new tourist product, or aim at attracting new markets to generate a higher demand and thus rejuvenate (Chapman and Light 2016). These strategies show that it is quite important to detect the phase where decline is imminent as early as possible so that measures are thought out and discussed with policy makers. The following section focuses on rejuvenation.

2.6. Rejuvenation

This section identifies the preconditions that need to be satisfied to achieve rejuvenation successfully. This is linked to the first objective's third research question: What are the preconditions for a mature tourism destination to successfully rejuvenate and which is the most ideal strategy to do so? The preconditions to successfully rejuvenate shall be evaluated in section 2.6.1, while sections 2.6.2 and 2.6.3 shall identify the most ideal strategy. The following sections, 2.6.3.1 and 2.6.3.2 respectively, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of diversification, that this study identifies as the most ideal rejuvenation strategy. The general rejuvenation literature and different rejuvenation types shall first be explored.

Baum (1998) suggests that a destination may resort to 'complete reinvention', whereby it would exit the tourism market and re-enter it with a completely new product, targeting different segments. Product and brand rejuvenation literature has identified several advantages of regeneration rather than re-entering the market. Lazer et al. (1984) mention the reduced development time and costs, the availability of present cooperation trade channels and the possible capitalisation of past experiences in production and marketing. A valuable aura, which may be reused, is also left behind by a brand, even if in decline (Powers and Patwell 2015). Just like reviving a brand, reviving a destination will benefit from

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previous consumer awareness that is already been present; avoiding the financial expenses as well as the waiting time to rebuild it (Fast Company 2011).

There are several forms which rejuvenation can take. Agarwal (2002) has proposed utilising the restructuring thesis to explain destination rejuvenation strategies. As discussed in section 2.2.1, a number of strategies related to the restructuring thesis have been utilised as rejuvenation strategies for service industries (Urry 1987) and further applied to rejuvenating destinations (Agarwal 1997; 2002; Aydin and Aksoz 2020). Globalisation and increased competition have in fact motivated destinations to apply restructuring theories to the service sectors within the tourism industry over the last two decades (Solomon 2015).

While the life cycle evidently identifies problems to be addressed in the stagnation stage, the restructuring approach presents strategies that help to overcome such challenges (Rodríguez et al. 2008). Two approaches emerging from the restructuring theory are *product reorganisation* – whereby a change occurs in the way the product is produced – and *product transformation, involving* a change to the product itself (Agarwal 2002). Speaking of reorganisation strategies does not imply a product change but a reorganisation to boost the destination's attractiveness to visitors. Product transformation includes a modification or a change in the current tourism offer. The strategies, listed in Table 1 include investment and technical change, centralisation and product specialisation. Weiermair (2004, p. 7) uses the term "process innovation" rather than product reorganisation. This involves a change in the way the product is produced, and as opposed to product innovation, it is harder to imitate by competitors (Weiermair et al. 2002 in Weiermair 2004). This might not apply for tourism destinations as the production process may not be hidden from competitors. This discussion will focus mostly on product innovation strategies.

Saracco et al. (2015) underline three motivators that promote the innovation of products and which the present study identifies to be akin to the reasons behind a destination's decision to rejuvenate.

1. *The ability to diversify the destination's portfolio.* As mentioned in section 2.2.1, this is linked to the identification of the potential of a destination and related to the utilisation of unused resources in the creation of new tourism products (Singh et al. 2010; Lim and Won 2020). Therefore, the development of previously unutilised

natural and cultural resources are identified as possible elements that may lead to attracting new markets (Agarwal 2002; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020) or the development of new niche tourism products (Farmaki 2012).

2. *The competition within similar sector of products*. Threats stimulate the need to innovate and in the case of tourism destinations, such threats arise from new or rebranded competing destinations (Vernon 1979; Ioannides 1998; Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Ioannides 2002; Kozak et al. 2010; Kozak and Martin 2012; Simeoni et al. 2019). A destination becomes more vulnerable to competition in its stage of decline and competition augments the mature destination's natural deterioration (Perles Ribes et al. 2012). A main objective behind rejuvenation would be to increase competitiveness through uniqueness (Farsari et al. 2007; Lim and Won 2020; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020).

3. *The ability to produce innovation by simple methods through adapting already developed technologies*. This could be done through novelty (whereby an item, though already present, has not yet been experienced by an agent) or through innovation (whereby an item is developed for the first time and therefore had never been experienced). Novelty may be achieved more easily when destinations successfully develop a tourism product or attraction that already exists in another place. The adaptation of such a product captures the novelty effect and creates a different experience in the new location different to that from where it had been taken. Novel tourism products are usually brought forward through the introduction of new niches (Samora-Arvela et al. 2020).

These factors are similar to those identified by Weiermair (2004) that motivate innovation, affect the pace and level of innovation in tourism:

1. *Supply and supply-related determinants*. This is related to new available technology that may lead to new skills, materials, services and forms of organisation.

2. *Demand drivers*. This is related to the consumers' changing wants and needs.

3. *The level and pace of competition*. This is related to the maturity of markets and slowing of demand, creating industry rivalry and competition. This has been increased by globalisation and deregulation.

It is evident that product innovation is utilised to counteract competition and change in market demands. Product innovation or product transformation strategies have been highlighted by Agarwal (2002) as a set of restructuring strategies that may help rejuvenate a destination. These strategies are listed in Table 1 and include service and environmental quality enhancement – considered part of the preconditions for successful rejuvenation, collaboration, adaptation, repositioning and diversification. While collaboration between various sectors as well as the ability to adapt to the market changes are considered as essential, they also form part of the reorientation and diversification strategies. The preconditions for rejuvenation shall now be discussed.

2.6.1 Preconditions for rejuvenation

A destination needs to satisfy several prerequisites before it can successfully rejuvenate (Simeoni et al. 2019). Schmalleger et al. (2011) identify two main preconditions. The first is for a destination to be both able and willing to recognise decline. The second is the ability to gain support from all stakeholders in developing new innovative marketing and development strategies (Aydin and Aksoz 2020). The personal qualities, skills, abilities and characteristics of key stakeholders are important indicators of whether a destination has the potential to rejuvenate successfully (Weizenegger 2006; Aydin and Aksoz 2020). This may prove challenging because of the complex relationships among the many tourism stakeholders who hold divergent points of view. Difficulties in agreeing on a mutually beneficial direction for the destination may thus emerge (Schmalleger 2011). Ladkin and Bertramini (2002) outlined the challenges that hindered collaboration between the private and the public sector. These were linked to the public sector's lack of funding to undertake most project planning, their lack of decision-making power and the shortage of trained people to lead collaborations. Private stakeholders acknowledged other barriers such as the multiplicity of public agencies involved in decision-making, which slowed down the process; their short-term objectives due to political agendas and therefore an absence of a

long-term strategy; their poor information about tourism policies; and the absence of a single organisation to lead collaborative planning efforts.

A motivator for rejuvenation may also be a threat within the product market which, in the case of tourism destinations, mostly arise from newly competing destinations and changes in the tastes and expectations of tourists (Vernon 1979; Chapman and Speake 2011; Lim and Won 2020). Gale (2007) holds that competition-related threats and market changes may be defined as external threats, while internal threats include an unattractive destination image due, for example, to the lack of investment. This threat is also common in mature destinations. One may argue that changes in market taste may at times be positive if the destination rises to the opportunity to offer a tourism product that satisfies the new tastes (Butler 2012).

A critical aspect for a successful rejuvenation is continual renovation and upgrading, as well as the introduction of higher-category establishments in order to improve the destination's image (Farsari et al. 2007; Baidal et al. 2013). These may include the improvement of the local infrastructure (Aguiló et al. 2005; Müller et al. 2010) and other projects such as traffic management (Dodds 2007) and tourism complementing facilities (Farsari et al. 2007). Nonetheless, the improvement of the whole destination is required, and not only tourism-related facilities, as tourists rate a destination based on their holistic experience (Martín-Santana et al. 2017).

Policies since 1994 in the Balearics, for example, had followed this direction of upgrading, whereby legislation did not allow further conversion of hotels into apartments and forced obsolete hotels to be removed or renovated (Aguiló et al. 2005). Development of new hotels of less than three stars was also prohibited to improve accommodation quality, and the destination's image (Aguiló et al. 2005). Nonetheless, higher-standard accommodation may lead to higher accommodation prices, possibly reducing tourists' disposable income for complementary services (Hernández-Martín et al. 2015).

Beautifying the environment and the good state of natural and public resources is also necessary for successful destination upgrading (Farsari et al. 2007; Hernández-Martín et al. 2015). Upgrading may at times be achieved by conservation, rather than development (Dodds 2007). Investment in natural and public resources shows the commitment of the

destination towards its rejuvenation strategy. This tends to attract more private innovation, and investors that detect a stronger potential in the destination, both due to the level of commitment by the authorities as well as because of the improved environment (Aguiló et al. 2005). However, large funds are required for this to occur. The initial financial burden is usually shouldered by the public sector through general taxation (Hernández-Martín et al. 2015), as the government invests substantial funds in capital improvements (Brooker and Burgess 2008). This may raise controversies however, as it will be unfair that profits gained indirectly or directly through the upgrading of the destination are mostly appropriated by the private firms and not by the taxpayer (Copeland 1991). The situation may be even more unfair when such profits and benefits leak out of the destination to large international organisations and chains through their local branches at the destination (Nash et al. 2014).

Tourism taxation may emerge as a fairer alternative as this ensures that the tourist, who is benefiting the most from the investment, contributes to its funding (Gooroochurn and Sinclair 2005; McCartney 2019). The main challenge is that since most mature destinations are trapped in a price war with other competing mature destinations (Kozak and Martin 2012), tourism firms risk having to absorb the main taxation burden themselves, in order not to be outcompeted through cheaper prices by rival destinations. This further reduces private revenue for such firms, limiting any funds that could have been dedicated for renovation and upgrading purposes (Sheng and Tsui 2009). A compromise may be reached where the initial financial investment made by the public sector on public and natural resources used for tourism will later be refunded through tourism taxation. Tourism taxation should be introduced at the time when the destination starts to benefit from the increased inflow of tourists, and the profitability of private firms increases (Hernández-Martín et al. 2015). Another option that has been used successfully in area regeneration and discussed in section 2.2.2 is to apply the Business Improvement District (BID) model to tourism destinations.

The cause of recurring decay of a mature destination, related to visitor numbers exceeding carrying capacity, needs to be addressed before rejuvenation strategies can be successful, which requires reducing the number of visitors to adhere to a maximum as dictated by the 'desired conditions' (Kallis and Coccossis 2004). Tourist taxation may help manage and deter increasing numbers of mass tourists (McCartney 2019). Another typical strategy is to introduce a moratorium with the aim of controlling accommodation capacity

through suspending development of further accommodation facilities (Hernández-Martín et al. 2015). It may include exceptions such as allowing high-standard hotel accommodation (Chapman and Speake 2011) with the aim of upgrading the destination's image. However, this strategy has proven unsuccessful on several occasions such as in the Canary Islands, whereby the regulation's true primary motive was to protect the interest of established firms by blocking potential competition (Villar Rojas 2009). In the case of Cyprus the moratorium also failed due to the slack control on building permits before the moratorium was in place, the lack of central planning, particular strategies pushed by tour operators, political lobbying, and clientelism (Sharpley 2003). In fact decision makers have at times increased inequalities when using such regulations to favour firms rather than to strive towards achieving a sustainable tourism model (Bianchi 2004).

Fundamental changes in the management and marketing approaches of the destination's tourism product are also required. The destination must recognise that past strategies, however successful, are not automatically applicable for present and future realities (Faulkner 2002). This requires a collective effort as well as coordination and management among all stakeholders (Carson and Jacobson 2005; Schmalleger 2011; Santos et al. 2014; Simeoni et al 2019) which has proven difficult to achieve (Ladkin and Bertramini 2002) and particularly challenging in mature destinations (Russell and Faulkner 1998; Faulkner 2002; Carson and Jacobson 2005; Schmalleger 2011; Santos et al. 2014).

A collective effort is required to build a fresh and strong brand for the rejuvenated destination; and achieving a brand is closely tied to the improvement of the destination image (Jayswal 2008). It is imperative to distinguish the destination from competitors to develop a successful brand, since several destinations have similar geographical and cultural contexts and tend to offer similar attractions (Hall 1999; Matečić and Lewis 2018; Aydin and Aksoz 2020). The travel industry's biggest brands are the destinations themselves, although it is a challenge to create a clear image for a destination. The reasons for this include: the destination's multidimensionality; the diverse interests of stakeholders; the political decision making and bias; the need to strike a balance between public opinion and brand theory; the challenge in creating brand loyalty due to lack of visitor data; and the incessant need for funding (Pike 2005). Some branding strategies have recreated the national identity of a destination from its heritage factors, paradoxically utilising them to develop a fresh brand

(Hall 1999). This relates to Cooper et al.'s (2015) brand revival model that proposes reviving the brand's original values to rejuvenate the brand.

It is evident that the restructuring strategies proposed by Agarwal (2002) need to be included and to work in synergy, and no strategy may be exclusively successful. These strategies are identified within the preconditions for successful rejuvenation (see Table 4). The discussion now focuses on reorientation and repositioning and later to diversification, due to increased use of these two theories in the rejuvenation of products and brands.

Preconditions for rejuvenation	Corresponding strategy
Build a fresh brand (Jayswal 2008)	Repositioning
Beautifying the environment (Farsari et al. 2007; Hernández-Martín et al. 2015)	Environmental quality improvement
Ability to gain the support of relevant stakeholders including public and private (Schmalleger et al. 2011; Martini and Buffa 2015)	Collaboration
Continual renovation and upgrading (Baidal et al. 2013; Farsari et al. 2007)	Service product quality improvement; Environmental quality improvement
Adhere to a maximum as dictated by the 'desired conditions' (Kallis and Coccossis 2004)	Environmental quality improvement; Service product quality improvement
Changes in the management and marketing approaches to accommodate new markets (Faulkner 2002)	Adaptation
Distinguish from competitors (Hall 1999)	Diversification; Repositioning

Table 4. The preconditions for a successful destination rejuvenation

2.6.2 The Repositioning strategy

When a destination reaches maturity, it seeks to maintain visitor stability. To do so it needs to reinvent itself, possibly using a repositioning strategy (Kozak and Martin 2012). Reorienting or repositioning is defined as rethinking and consolidating the destination's image (Claver-Cortés et al. 2007). It is more than merely promoting an image since it also involves the considerations of pricing, distribution and the nature of the product itself; that

is, the core around which all repositioning strategies revolve (Knowles and Kurtis 1999). Repositioning occurs when the expected benefit for a firm in the projected situation is greater than the benefit within the current situation (Wang and Shaver 2013). Repositioning is not necessarily a reaction to decline. A dominant firm may decide to relocate itself to cover the market of other, less powerful firms due to opportunities arising from changing customer trends (de Figueiredo and Silverman 2007), technological innovation (George and Waldfogel 2006) or the relaxation of government regulations (Wang and Shaver 2013).

Repositioning may also be a chosen strategy in response to decline (de Figueiredo and Silverman 2007). It is motivated by factors that reduce the attractiveness of the current firm or destination's situation. This may be related to the movement of a competitor into the same market or by a change in consumers' tastes (Wang and Shaver 2013). Repositioning allows a destination to attract a desired market niche (Claver-Cortés et al. 2007) and to distinguish its offering from its rivals, thus gaining (or regaining) a competitive advantage (Knowles and Curtis 1999). The extent to which repositioning needs to occur is related to the gap in price and quality with competitors (Vogel 2008).

Mill and Morrison (2013) identify two destination positioning strategies. In *Objective positioning* a destination attempts to customise its services or products to the needs of a selected target market. *Subjective positioning* is concerned with forming, reinforcing or changing the potential visitor's image without altering the physical characteristics of the services or products. A strong relationship is believed to exist between a destination's positive image and tourism growth (Morakabati et al. 2014). A destination's image receives extensive attention in the field of tourism research because of the belief that the success or failure of destinations depends on their image in the minds of potential visitors, and the effectiveness of image management by destinations' marketers (Abd El Jalil, 2010). Subjective positioning, though surpassing substantial investment, may be difficult to achieve since a tourist, as customer would experience the destination. The perceived image of a destination can change significantly both while travelling and after the travel experience , with effects on the level of satisfaction and the likelihood of recommending the destination, or making repeat visits (Kim et al. 2009; Yilmaz et al. 2009).The desired image might thus be difficult to sustain without physical alterations, and tourists may interfere in the marketing process through rating the destination online (Casaló et al. 2015) or commenting on social

media (Creevey and Mehta 2015), both of which are highly valued by other potential customers. Furthermore, such efforts become useless whenever a destination is plagued by negative circumstances, such as violence, war and terror (Nielsen 2001; Beirman, 2003; Walters & Mair, 2012).

Repositioning may be less attractive in certain situations. It is hindered when a high opportunity cost is attached to the current position, related to previous position-specific investments. Firms or destinations with tourism product offerings having stronger histories are also less likely to reposition (Wang and Shaver 2013). Furthermore, a disadvantage of competition-driven repositioning is that the new projected position is not identified and planned from the outset. This leaves a destination or a firm with fewer alternative locations for its repositioning strategy (Greve 1995). The concentration of customers' preference further reduces the viable options as there is a bigger risk that other competitors would have established themselves at the ideal market location (Loertscher and Muehlheusser 2011). Market options that are not already taken by dominant competitors might be less customer abundant and thus motivation to reposition within them might be low (Wang and Shaver 2013).

The strategies outlined pose a risk to a destination. This is because the repositioning strategy may be copied, especially when a beneficial position is identified by bigger competitors. In fact undiversified destinations suffer from a high risk of being replicable by other destinations (Ioannides 1998; Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Ioannides 2002; Kozak et al. 2010; Schmallegger et al. 2011; Kozak and Martin 2012; Lim and Won 2020). This would make the destination uncompetitive and require further rejuvenation. Thus, another strategy – diversification – that allows a destination to expand its product offering is preferred.

2.6.3 The diversification strategy

Diversification has been identified as the strategy that contributes most benefits to a destination, since it facilitates many of the other strategies listed in Table 4. Instead, poor implementation may lead to associated risks (Samora-Arvela et al. 2020), and thus an analysis is required to confirm whether diversification should be proposed as the best

rejuvenating tool, and under which conditions. Having identified the preconditions for rejuvenation in section 2.6.1, this section focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of the diversification strategy. This addresses the second part of the third research question of the study's first objective which seeks to identify the ideal rejuvenation strategy that mature destinations should adopt.

Product diversification has been discussed in section 2.2.1 and is a strategy of choice when existing products or services stop yielding profits (Farmaki 2012). It may also be utilised as a reaction strategy to rejuvenate a mature destination (Twinning-Ward and Baum 1998; Weidenfeld 2018) and is usually associated with a change in the characteristics of a company's product line and/or market (Ansoff 1948). This strategy is preferred as it allows a destination to diversify its product, thus being more stable (Weidenfeld 2018) by not 'putting all the eggs in one basket'. Previously unutilised natural and cultural resources are also used to attract new markets (Agarwal 2002; Claver-Cortés et al. 2007) or to develop new tourism niches (Farmaki 2012; Samora-Arvela et al. 2020), adding value to the whole tourism product (Rugman 2008). This is in parallel with the RBP (Penrose 2009), which is based on the incentive to expand and diversify, leaving no resource idle, ensuring an optimum return. Such resources may include skills available thatcan often be used across industries (Neffke and Henning 2013). Utilising the available resources to their optimum helps improve a destination's level of competitiveness (Reisinger et al. 2019).

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, Ansoff (1948) identifies three types of diversification strategies that are preferred according to the motives behind the choice to diversify. Table 5 presents a description of the motives and potential benefits derived from each.

Diversification type	Description	Objective	Benefits
Vertical	Branching out into the production of components of the original product	Contribute to the current product line	Transfer of existing resources (Coad and Guenther 2013)
Horizontal	New products are introduced which are not components of the current product but lie within the company's knowledge area and experience.	• Improve coverage of the market • Increase sales	• Increased market power (Singh et al. 2010) • Synergies across different activities (Karna et al. 2014) • Transfer of existing resources (Coad and Guenther 2013) • Economies of Scope (Singh et al. 2010)
Lateral	Procuring new products that are neither related to the current production line nor to the company's current experience.	• Stabilise sales • Broaden the knowledge and technological base	Reduced risk in performance and increased security (Farmaki 2012; Neffke and Henning 2013)

Table 5. The three types of diversification strategies and their potential benefits in tourism (adapted from Ansoff 1948)

The lateral and horizontal strategies are identified as being most adequate for rejuvenation purposes. The lateral diversification strategy allows a destination to become more secure by broadening its portfolio thus reducing the risk of failed performance (Farmaki 2012; Lim and Won 2020). This occurs as unrelated products are produced. This strategy is frequently considered the riskiest type of diversification (Weidenfeld 2018) and is frequently implemented by the private sector (Bayus 2011; Evans 2015). An example is the tourism product in the Middle Eastern countries, that has veered away from its initial heritage base towards a more hedonic, sand and sea based tourism (Morakabati 2013). Benefits may be gained from offering different products, such as the synergy of different services, that contribute to the destination's attractiveness (Karna et al. 2014). Lien and Li (2013) underline how family businesses use this strategy to facilitate intergenerational succession, avoiding the situation where their business branches compete against each other in the same market. This may also be applied to tourism, as developing various niche products in the same destination have the advantage of attracting different markets, avoiding

the situation whereby different product offerings compete against each other which leads one product to exclude another and prevent all products from being mutually beneficial (Lien and Li 2013).

Horizontal diversification may also be useful in destination rejuvenation. This occurs when an organisation enters complementary or competing markets that would also appeal to its customers. For example, airline companies and hotels work together in a corresponding manner to achieve common objectives, thus developing different products to their current ones likely to appeal to their customers (Bayus 2011; Evans 2015). It allows a destination to increase its market power (Singh et al. 2010) though the reduction in risk may not be as strong as with lateral strategies, since the diversification would be restrained to within the same product offering. Several benefits related to this strategy also include synergy between various activities (Karna et al. 2014), economies of scope (Singh et al. 2010) and the potential to utilise already existing resources for the creation of new product offerings (Coad and Guenther 2013). Finally, vertical diversification is the least relevant in rejuvenation strategies as it is based on supporting the current product, which in the case of a mature destination would be declining and unviable.

Another classification of diversification distinguishes the expansion over space from the expansion of the offering. Expansion over space is defined as *geographical diversification* (Singh et al 2010; Karna et al. 2014). The application of geographical diversification to tourism destinations may not be straightforward. Diversifying to geographic markets outside the destination region may be considered as diversification if the destination used to attract domestic visitors. Additionally, a destination may add to its target market destinations. The potential of further expansion from the traditional and into new markets signifies that this type of diversification classification may still be relevant (Singh et al 2010; Karna et al. 2014). Furthermore, geographical diversification may also include the addition of new and different tourism products in new regions within the destination (Weidenfeld 2018). For example, in Kenya, tourism developed around highly specialised enclaves including sea, sex and sun, safari tourism, and urban tourism with business and conference tourism in the capital, Nairobi. As a result, the Kenyan Tourism Strategic Plan (2008–2012) had recommended developing new and different types of tourism offers in other regions, such as in Lake Victoria (Hidalgo et al. 2001; Kibicho 2009; Rotich et al.

2012). This process led to regions differentiating themselves from others within the country. Similarly, destinations may diversify their coastal areas by improving links with attractions in nearby urban areas (Brandão et al. 2019).

Classified under market diversification, the motives behind geographical diversification resemble those for product diversification. First, it includes the maturity of the domestic market (Namiki 1988), which is also true for mature tourism destinations where the tourism product becomes less attractive. The second is increased competition within the domestic market (Robinson and Pearce 1984). This cannot be applied directly to tourism, but it may still be understood as competing destinations that attract the same traditional market thus being forced to promote themselves in new markets (Ioannides 1998: Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Ioannides 2002). Third, the availability of potential opportunities in foreign markets (Zacharakis 1997) is also applicable to tourism, as diversification occurs when private entrepreneurs identify a potential market segment and create a tourist product (Novelli and Benson 2005).

Bramwell (2004) also proposes two types of tourism product diversification strategies, distinguished on the basis of the amount of change and investment required at the destination. One strategy requires the development of new, large-scale tourism products with the intention to diversify into higher spending markets. This may be similar to repositioning, as the new tourism product serves to upgrade the image of a destination. This diversification strategy has been criticised for its lack of sustainability, considering large projects as placing pressure on existing natural resources, *vis a vis* mass tourism (Farmaki 2012). Conference tourism may be one such strategy, as well as golf tourism, yacht tourism and casino tourism (Bramwell 2004).

A second diversification strategy identified by Bramwell (2004) is concerned with 'alternative' tourism products that are initially provided on a small scale and may draw on unique destination features rather than large changes and investment. These may draw on the destination's resources such as culture or ecology (Bramwell 2004; Benur and Bramwell 2015). An example is Mallorca where eco-tourism has attracted a different market sector that tends to be more affluent with a higher spend per capita (Royle 2009) and a similar increased interest for active tourism in Romania (Moraru 2011). Being small scale, these tourism niches require less infrastructure and investment and are thus usually considered to

support a destination's sustainability. However, there is no consensus on this, as counter arguments claim that sustainability is very much dependent on the local circumstances of a destination, and thus one cannot claim that these niches will be sustainable in the case of all destinations (Panakera et al. 2011). Some niches may still require investment, such as in the case of Las Vegas which has added diversification to its main tourism product by introducing events, festivals and other attractions, intensifying its uniqueness as a destination (Lam and Crossley 2014; Lim and Won 2020). The main aims of diversification strategies should not only be concerned with economic sustainability, which does not always guarantee sustainable development (Dodds 2007).

Benur and Bramwell (2015) suggest a classification based on how the diversification process should develop, distinguishing between two types.. *Parallel diversification* occurs when the primary tourism products at a destination are developed separately from each other and attract different customers. They do not share costs and do not find ways to collaborate to reduce risks. This type of diversification may occur due to unplanned development, but it may also be a deliberate strategy where it is more feasible to develop into distinctive areas. In fact, this strategy is usually concerned with non-complementary and dissimilar tourism products (Weidenfeld et al. 2011), similar to Ansoff's (1948) lateral diversification strategy described in section 2.2.1. Parallel diversification provides several benefits such as more security against shocks than a portfolio of related activities (Neffke and Henning 2013), since unrelated activities would not suffer from the same repercussions if a change in the market occurs, and thus it is highly unlikely that such a change would affect the whole range of product offerings of a destination. These may include crises, emergence of competitive destinations with a similar offering and changes in market tastes.

Conversely, *integrative diversification* occurs when a destination's tourism products complement each other and are packaged together through cooperation between the business suppliers involved (Benur and Bramwell 2015). This process is related more to the horizontal type of diversification identified by Ansoff (1948) as it depends on tourism products with related features. This type of diversification may include combining existing products, developing new products, modifying existing products or a combination of these. This strategy is more common than unrelated diversification (Fan and Lang 2000; Lien and Klein 2009).

Weidenfeld (2018) identifies sectorial diversification strategies, distinguishing between the intra-industry diversification and the inter-industry diversification strategies. The former relates to the creation of new sub-sectors within the tourism industry itself, for example heritage tourism diversified into dark tourism, which has then diversified further as post-war tourism (Pieris 2014). Other tourism sub-sectors may also diversify into new ones, for example the hospitality industry diversifies into self-catering accommodation (Weidenfeld 2018), with the rise of self-catering through booking platforms such as AirB&B and other platforms (Krolikowska-Adamczyk and Kennell 2016). They may evolve from a combination of existing products, new products or modification of existing products, or from a combination of these (Benur and Bramwell 2015). Conversely, inter-industry diversification operates across different economic activities within different industry sectors, where tourism products mix with other industries (Weidenfeld 2018). Inter-industry diversification from gambling into events, festivals, high-end food activities, sports venues and other non-gambling attractions, has helped Las Vegas remain relevant when its main specialised sector was hit by negative macroeconomic conditions (Lim and Won 2020).

Diversifying into conference tourism – the focus of this study – may be classified as either the integrative development strategy, or the inter-industry diversification strategy, depending on the context of the destination where it develops. Thus, conference tourism may grow in a parallel way if the destination is spreading into several niches that are unrelated to conference tourism. Conversely, conference tourism may easily be developed alongside other niches as it has been proven that it may make use of common resources and may also be diversified. In the case of Bramwell's (2004) diversification strategies, conference tourism is mostly classified under the investment-intensive niche. Even though it may make use of current structures, several specific facilities are required. Nonetheless, the utilisation of dormant resources may also be considered; for example the regeneration of a historical building for conferences. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter four. The advantages and disadvantages related to diversification strategies will now be discussed.

2.6.3.1 Advantages of diversification

Several advantages related to diversification have been identified. Acting as motivators for destinations to seek diversification strategies towards rejuvenating their tourism product. A main aim of diversification is to increase the destination's market power. Diversification helps by allowing a destination to attract various (and potentially new) sections of the market (Coad and Guenther 2013). The market power perspective claims that wider diversification allows the employment of market power across a larger number of fields, independently of the type of diversification strategy used (Neffke and Henning 2013). This may be related to the fact that the destination's appeal may increase as it now targets an expanded range of tourism segments and thus benefits from an increased visibility in the market (Swarbrooke 2002; Singh et al. 2010). The product offer is also improved, as it now presents a range of experiences and activities that may be used to create a marketing mix of attractions (Weidenfeld et al. 2011). Increased products might attract different types of tourists who may not otherwise decide to visit (Moraru 2011). This also allows more flexibility in responding to changes in the tourism market related to tastes and demands. The various offerings increase the destination's customised products providing more potential to meet visitors' individual interests, thus making diversification desirable (Benur and Bramwell 2015).

Having a wider portfolio has various related advantages. Firstly, the destination gains from a 'portfolio effect', allowing for a spread of the overall financial risk among the different business activities (Coad and Guenther 2013). This reduces the threat of being hard hit due to macroeconomic shocks, cases in point being highly specialised tourism destinations such as Las Vegas, Orlando and Hawaii (Lim and Won 2020), and in the case of most sun and sea destinations that depend on a tourism offer that is the least differentiated worldwide (Samora-Arvela 2020). The risk is also decreased when one successful tourism product may support the less profitable products by subsidising them from excess revenue giving more security to the destination (George and Kabir 2012). The increased portfolio of products also reduces the danger of total failure due to the increased likelihood that at least one sector will survive in case of decline (White et al. 2013). This is comparable to Handy's Sigmoid curves introduced by Baum (1998) in the final stages of Butler's (1980) model whereby each tourism product has a lifecycle of its own. The destination may simultaneously

compete with several different products on the tourism market. The benefits of having a wider portfolio become clear when considering the consequences of a destination that does not diversify, which leads to high dependence on a limited range of vulnerable products (Bramwell 2004; Morakabati et al. 2014). This was the case for Las Vegas during the early recovery period after the Great Recession of 2008, whereby the destination's diversification strategy was motivated by the evolving demand of middle-income visitors from Southern California (Kwon et al. 2019) which helped the destination survive the recession. Lack of diversification also hinders the destination's chance of customizing tourism experiences and products for tourists' individual tastes, while putting the destination at a further disadvantage amongst competitors that have a more diverse offer (Benur and Bramwell 2015). Increased attractions and facilities also increase the potential for collaboration, making it easier for holistic management of operations (Fyall et al. 2001). This allows the use of yet another rejuvenation strategy – collaboration –referred to above (Agarwal 2002), whereby participants benefit from joint ventures and cooperation.

It has been shown that successful destinations often provide diversified tourism products for visitors (Lim and Won 2020). This study will later propose how conference tourism may act as one such niche in developing a destination's competitive advantage. On the other hand, the uniqueness of niches has decreased as globalisation has increased product homogeneity across destinations (Robinson and Novelli 2005). The offer of diverse tourism products expands a destination's tourism offer to allow it to attract new markets while strengthening the existing ones. As the destination becomes more resistant to shocks, it reduces its dependence on easily substitutable resources and decreases its dependence on intermediaries (Farsari et al. 2007). The disadvantages related to dependence on intermediaries have been discussed in section 2.4.2

Diversification may also utilise niche marketing strategies to change the image and perception of quality of a destination (Gronau and Kagermeier 2013). This constitutes the benefits of a reorientation strategy and may be achieved by attracting more high-spend tourists, focusing on the value and not the scale of tourism (Sharpley 2003). It automatically enhances the destination's image, which is directly related to the type of client it attracts. Novelli (2005) claims that niche tourism appeals to smaller and more specialised markets as it is more individual-oriented. The sophisticated tourist is attracted less by ordinary tourism

activities (Robinson and Novelli 2005) and seeks niche products (Misiko 2013). Conversely Bramwell (2004) argues that some niche products may in fact attract larger numbers of tourists, which induces consequences such as the need to develop large-scale amenities. Niche tourism does not necessarily need to replace mass tourism to improve a destination's image (Bramwell 2004); it may improve the image of a destination by collaborating with the mass tourism product, as shall be discussed later.

Diversification strategies have also been beneficial in reducing seasonality effects through developing complimentary products that increase visitor inflow during the low season (Claver-Cortés et al. 2007; Gronau and Kagermeier 2013; Brandão et al. 2019). This eliminates seasonality-related problems (see section 2.4.2) and helps to increase revenue by extending the period of inflow (Buhalis 2001). In the case of Cyprus, for example, the development of a rural tourism niche helped in the mitigation of seasonality typically associated with the sun and sea product (Sharpley 2002). This also applies for countries such as Malta (Theuma 2004; Chapman and Speake 2011), the Balearic Islands (Aguiló et al. 2003) and the Greek Islands (Priporas 2005). Benur and Bramwell (2015) give an example of the development of a niche product that made use of the same resources on which the mass-tourism product was based. This testifies to the benefits of the horizontal diversification strategy proposed by Ansoff (1948) and discussed above. An indoor water sport niche was developed to complement beach tourism destinations to allow attractions that are not confined to the peak season (Benur and Bramwell 2015). Diversification has also helped winter destinations: St Anton (in the Alps) enhanced its portfolio by including conference tourism in the summer and low-season periods (Müller et al 2010). However, some destinations may only be able to offer products that attract tourists within a certain season and these should thus consolidate that product (Farsari et al. 2007).

Several benefits related specifically to integrative diversification, as described above, also exist. The integrative product package may benefit the destination by allowing it to offer touristic complementary and compatible experiences (Schmallegger 2011). Compatibility may be defined as, "the degree to which two businesses interchange customers" (Weidenfeld et al. 2010, p 2). It can be identified when two adjacent businesses affect each other positively, such as by increased number of visitors and volume of sales (Hunt and Crompton 2008). The new combination of different tourism products would also

generate innovation (Rønningen and Lien 2014; Brandão et al. 2019). A destination may also benefit from a synergy when compatible attractions collaborate. Synergy improves the destination's effectiveness to a level that is greater than the sum of the individual experiences that constitute it. The relationships increase the value of joint production or consumption of tourism services and products (Brunori and Rossi 2000; Weidenfeld et al. 2011). This also demonstrates that diversification may lead to a situation where the benefits of the collaboration strategy are also tapped into. Furthermore, diversifying into a related tourism product contributes to shaping of a coherent destination image, familiarity, identity and expertise (Weidenfeld 2018).

Firms that create complementary services or products cannot be regarded as competitors. This is because they all contribute to the final product and thus require each other (Bernini 2009). On the other hand, one cannot argue that they cooperate due to the nature of the business industry. The relationship in such situations has been defined as one of cooperative competition (Buhalis 2006; Wand and Krakover 2008) or as 'coopetition' (Bengtsson and Kock 2000; Butler and Weidenfeld 2012). This situation arises as on the one hand there is hostility due to conflicting interests in gaining as much of the business once the visitors are at the destination, while on the other hand there is the need to cooperate to achieve a common goal (Poarch 2018), that of attracting visitors to the destination in the first place. Cooperation leads to the creation of a 'bigger pie', while competition is inevitably involved in the process of dividing it (Wang and Krakover 2008).

The potential for joint marketing is another benefit of complementary products (Benur and Bramwell 2015). Thus the possibility exists of marketing a tourism product as a bundle of services including accommodation, attractions, and transportation, which are often purchased and assessed by consumers as a service value chain (Fyall et al. 2001; Grangsjo 2003; Michael 2007; Zehrer and Raich 2010). Several studies have analysed how core products and services are augmented by additional services that improve the perception of its benefits and buyer value (Levitt 1980; Lovelock 1992; Lovelock 1996). The packaging and promoting of products that already exist may be enough to create an innovative bundle that is perceived as a new product altogether by the market (Benur and Bramwell 2015). In rural areas for example, the combination of the natural and cultural values as a unique

mixture of attractions contributes to a potential competitive advantage, such as the case of the North Caucasus Federal District, in Southern Russia (Trukhachev 2015).

Destinations may also add new tourism products to their portfolio (see section 2.3) by developing new products that relate to the destination's already existent products such as diversifying beach tourism to include water sports. These may also be bundled to traditional products and marketed as new products. Diversification may also lead to spatial synergy. Like product synergy, this allows tourism products in the same destinations or regions to form spatial clusters (Benur and Bramwell 2015). Spatial proximity and synergy of attractions increase the probability that tourists are attracted to a site after they visit another site in spatial proximity (Hunt and Crompton 2008; Weidenfeld et al. 2011). The cluster approach allows knowledge transfer through cooperation, which helps foster economic growth and tourism innovation (Novelli et al. 2006). Coastal destinations that are physically proximate to large and important urban areas are able to enhance their product offer by creating links with nearby cities and extending their products (Brandão et al. 2019).

At a local level, cooperation is usually based on informal and personal relationships (Weidenfeld et al. 2011) while at larger scales formal agreements and collaboration initiatives such as marketing groups and policy formation are usually created (Butler and Weidenfeld 2012). Gibson and Hardman (1998) define this as a spin-off benefit that allows the generating of an increased aggregated number of visitors. Some clusters may also lead to a multiplier effect, thus

"accelerating opportunities for new forms of economic wealth by creating demand for a host of complementary activities which in turn generate their own effects" (Michael 2003, p. 137).

The presence of several complementary activities is especially important since tourists look for multiple attractions before deciding on a destination (Robinson and Gammon 2004). With the enhanced utility from 'love of variety' in a destination, tourists are willing to pay more for the diversified tourism product (Lim and Won 2020). Therefore, destinations should work for a broad-ranging experience product, which implies that more collaboration between different agents is required to guarantee a pleasant and positive experience (Smith et al. 2015; Martín-Santana et al. 2017). Using wine tourism as an

example, a number of authors show that wine tourists consider complementing aspects within the surrounding area including outdoor recreational facilities, regional heritage and cultural sites, dining, lodging and wine-related events (Hall and Macionis 1998; Cambourne et al. 2000; Getz and Brown 2006; Bruwer and Alant 2009; Bruwer and Lesschaeve 2012). This has made popular wine regions successful, such as the Champagne region in France, which offers a 'bundle of benefits' including heritage buildings, historical sites, restaurants and attractive landscapes together with the wine-related activities (Charters and Ali-Knight 2002). Similarly, clustering of different tourism firms is ensuring that wine tourism in Cape Town (South Africa) offers a variety of experiences to its visitors (Booyens 2019).

Cooperation between complementary suppliers may also lead to several other benefits. Cooperation is recognised as an important determinant of the success and competitiveness of a tourism destination (Baggio 2011). These include cross-selling, shared buying groups and the setting up of mutually beneficial associations (Benur and Bramwell 2015), as well as the creation of a highly diversified network which promotes greater visibility (Jesus and Franco 2016). Associations may be both informal and formal, including partnerships (Bramwell and Lane, 2000), networks (Baggio and Cooper 2010; Zehrer and Raich 2010), consortia and alliances (Garnham 1996) aimed to deliver the tourism product (Fyall and Garrod 2005; Baggio and Cooper 2010). Product diversification may also provide benefits related to economies of scope (Greffe 1994; Farmaki 2012) whereby it is less costly to combine two or more product lines than to produce them separately (Panzar and Willig 1981), and economies of scale that may lead to the formation of collaboration mechanisms (Cohen and Morisson 2005). This, together with cooperation, helps reduce the risks and overcome the growth of complexity, fragmentation and turbulence as tourism develops (Fyall and Garrod 2005; Zehrer and Raich 2010; Weidenfeld et al. 2011). Furthermore, Lade (2010) argues that cooperation is also perceived as a way to increase businesses' competitive position, including incorporating measures to improve productivity, new product development, building relationships with local suppliers, cooperation with similar businesses and participating in local tourism destinations. Diversifying into additional marketing initiatives may also allow bundling with attractions from other destinations. Cooperation among various destinations in this case may help create a differentiated unified marketing campaign (Müller et al. 2010), such as the "Best of Alps" (Pechlaner 1999) with the aggregation of various destinations in the Alpine regions.

Nonetheless, if attractions are unable to identify and collect information on compatibility and complementarity, employing cooperative strategies may be difficult and could forcee them into competition (Hunt and Crompton 2008). Tourism businesses that try to maximize their own interests do not participate in collective actions; different self-interests lead to businesses competing against each other to best fulfil their self-interests (Wang and Krakover 2008). Ma et al. (2009) argue that competition in these cases is still common, especially when similar products with potential to substitute each other are clustered together. However, if the potential of positive externalities is recognised, motivation to cooperate may be higher (Fyall et al. 2001).

Conversely, the bundling of similar tourism niche products also has disadvantages. Visitors might be attracted more to destinations that offer dissimilar products (Lue et al. 1996), as these tourists are enticed by the wider range of experiences on offer. Indeed, a destination is more likely to attract and satisfy a wider segment of the market when varied products are offered (Weidenfeld et al. 2010). A destination diversifying into similar products may still be more prone to failure than one with different product offers (Neffke and Henning 2013). It might be suggested that an element of lateral diversification should be included to increase the product offering's level of stability. The risks related to implementing a diversification strategy are considered below.

2.6.3.2 Diversification risks

Although diversification strategies have been widely applied, poor tourism diversification represents a threat to the resilience of a place (Samora-Arvela et al. 2020), due to the possibility of several emerging risks (Farmaki 2012). Some authors have argued that diversification is beneficial up to an optimal point (Singh et al. 2010; Lien and Li 2013). The diversification-performance graphical relationship may be presented as an inverted U-shaped curve (Karna et al. 2014). At low levels, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, but as levels of diversification increase the marginal benefits decline and costs increased (Palich et al. 2000; Lien and Li 2013). At the optimal point, resources reach saturation and stop producing return (Tallman and Li 1996), leading to an overall detrimental effect on performance (Markides 1992).

Diversification is also very costly as the high investment required is split into, and applied to, several segments (Glaesser 2003). Funding required to sustain several products could have been invested in one promising product, ensuring a better return. Increased diversification raises costs due to internal governance expenses (Jones and Hill 1988), increased information processing requirements (Grant et al. 1988) and increased bureaucracy (Nayyar 1992). Therefore, focusing on one or few markets may be more conducive to sustained competitive advantage than embarking on an extensive diversification strategy (Webster 1986). Conversely, George and Kabir (2012) argue that more diversified groups can benefit further from their resources than less diversified groups, but admit that this requires substantial amounts of resources. Therefore, unless a destination has a strong resource base, diversification may lead to the overstretching of its financial resources, time and skills (Bacher 2005). Diversification should thus occur gradually (Coad and Guenther 2013). Further expansion should only be initiated after other niches are consolidated, allowing resources to be released incrementally and reutilised for further expansion. If diversification occurs out of the core area of a firm, managerial resources might also be detracted, resulting in lower performance (Chi 1994; Karna et al. 2014). This is known as the Penrose effect (Penrose 2009) and may also be applied to destinations. When a destination diversifies into new niche markets that are not associated with its traditional market, it might need to develop the proper infrastructure. This may require a large amount of resources.

Baidal et al. (2013) warn that diversification targeting new markets should not be pursued if the destination is already strongly associated with other tourism segments. This was the case of his study of Benidorm, perceived as a middle-class destination in the 1950-60s. The town failed to attract more up-market segments, as its tourism product was perceived as strongly related to middle-class requirements and tastes. Similar outcomes resulted in the cases of Malta and Calviá, where, although the target was the up-market segment, most tourists still came for sun, sea and sand (Dodds 2007). Ioannides and Holcomb (2001) argue that destinations should nurture their traditional product rather than diversify from it. By using the example of Rimini's diversification to cultural tourism, Figini and Vici (2012) concluded that the well-known summer and leisure destination would find it very difficult to change its image into a cultural city. Considerable investment, which

needs to be regular and continuous, is required to change the image (Candela et al. 2010). Yiu et al. (2005) disagree, claiming that several conglomerates that have diversified into unrelated sectors still managed to operate successfully, serving as an indication that every case needs to be considered separately since several factors determine the possible outcome of diversification. Diversification has been shown to fail if a destination does not identify the areas and markets that provide the best potential for its diversification, and unless they stimulate innovation rather than replication and imitation (Weidenfeld 2018), like in Antalya, where diversification among small hotels failed, resulting in imitation of luxury hotels rather than innovation (Erkuş-Öztürk 2016).

The diverse portfolio of tourist products indicates several benefits. Conversely, it may result in a confused image of the destination (Farmaki 2012; Benur and Bramwell 2015). The task of creating a strong and coherent brand becomes quite challenging for a destination that is composed of a multitude of offerings (Glaesser 2003; Hall 1999). This risks portraying an image of a destination that detracts from what it desires to portray (Tasci and Kozak 2006). Another risk is associated to the wide application of diversification strategies across numerous mature destinations, with the aim of rejuvenation (Farmaki 2012), as diversifying in similar ways, they risk offering yet another standard product similar to that of destinations (Bianchi 2004). This would defeat the purpose behind diversification strategies as shared overuse of a niche risks developing it into yet another common tourism product without offering any benefits of diversity to the destination (Agarwal 2006). Nautical tourism in Croatia is an example (Hall 2004). Some destinations discovered the benefit of such a tourism product and developed it, but they were still replaceable by competitors offering the same tourism product.

2.7. Summary

This chapter concludes that the diversification strategy is one of the most valid rejuvenation strategies. Even though there is a need for caution when making generalisations , as each mature destination's situation requires a tailor-made course of action, it has been shown that diversification incorporates most of the benefits derived from the other transformation strategies. Both the service product quality improvement and environmental quality improvement strategies are pre-conditions for rejuvenation, and thus catered for when

carrying out a diversification strategy. The repositioning strategy may also be utilised as part of diversification, as it may be achieved using the various niches involved in diversification. The collaboration strategy is increasingly possible when diversifying, as the potential for collaboration through the increase in similar and dissimilar services increases as stakeholders identify the benefits from cooperation. Finally, diversification satisfies the requirements of the adaptation strategy as well. Higher adaptation is achieved through the variety of product offerings, leading to increased chance of satisfying changing markets and tastes. In fact, diversification is the only strategy that creates stability through having a diversified offering that is more able to adapt to shocks and market changes.

Several further points related to the disadvantages of diversification also need to be considered. First it is necessary that a destination assesses the level of resources at its disposal before adopting a rejuvenation strategy. Diversification requires resources to be spread over different products risking running out unless the destination has the required amount of resources available. If resources are limited it might be smarter to diversify horizontally as this allows resources to be shared between new activities. Second, it has been shown that diversification may be beneficial up to an optimum point. Therefore, it is necessary for a destination to plan and identify the optimum diversification point. This may not be easy when diversification is being employed as a reaction to decline, and time would be of essence. Third, if the mature destination is strongly connected to a traditional market it has been shown that diversifying into new markets may occur. This might thus also call for horizontal diversification, whereby the traditional attractions and characteristics would still play a part, but the destination's tourism offering does not depend only on the main traditional product.

Furthermore, diversification may produce a confused image of the destination. This is countered by planning and by taking an integrative approach to diversification development. This avoids the new product offerings being unrelated and not collaborative, thus making it difficult to produce a unified destination brand. Finally, competing destinations may diversify into similar product offerings. So it is necessary that destinations utilise their unique resources in the product offerings they develop to reduce the chance for a competing destination copying their products. Innovative tourism product offerings also allow a destination to stand out and be most sought.

This chapter addresses the first three research questions within the study's first objective. It firstly identified the possibility of tourism destinations to rejuvenate by comparing it to products, brands and locations, and confirming that the latter have been shown to be able to successfully rejuvenate. This was furthermore confirmed by exploring destination lifecycle models that also showed how rejuvenation is a possibility for destinations in decline. Second, the study identified the causes and characteristics of decline. This served to understand in which difficult situation destinations are prior to understanding what is required out of them to be able to rejuvenate. The preconditions to rejuvenate were then critically evaluated, while also considering and referring to the mature destinations' challenges previously identified. Finally, diversification was recognised and selected as the most ideal strategy that a mature destination should follow.

The following chapter will evaluate whether conference tourism may be utilised within the diversification strategy of a maturing destination. This shall serve to answer the fourth and last research question from this study's first objective: *Does conference tourism satisfy the requirements for a destination to successfully rejuvenate?*

Chapter 3: Conference tourism as a mature destination's rejuvenation strategy

3.1 Introduction

Having identified the requirements for a mature destination to successfully rejuvenate, this chapter examines the fourth research question of the study's first objective. This requires a critical evaluation of conference tourism as a potential sector that may be utilised to rejuvenate successfully through diversification. The study shall specifically focus on the association conferences sector (see section 1.1). In order to confirm if the sector offers a worthy diversification, it is expected to satisfy both the preconditions required for successful rejuvenation, as well as bring the benefits of diversification to the destination. These factors, discussed in sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.3.1 respectively, are summarised in Table 6.

Preconditions required for rejuvenation	Benefits related to general diversification strategies
1. Willingness to recognize decline	1. Increased market power
2. Ability to gain support of stakeholders	2. Improved product offer
3. Continual renovation and upgrading	3. Wider portfolio
4. Beautifying of the environment	4. Increase potential for collaboration
5. Adhere to maximum tourism intake according to 'desired conditions'	5. Gain a competitive advantage
6. Build a fresh strong brand	6. Decrease dependence on intermediaries
7. Distinguish the destination from competitors	7. Change image and perception
	8. Reduce seasonality
	9. Benefit from synergies between attractions
	10. Potential for joint marketing

Table 6. The preconditions for rejuvenation and the benefits related to diversification expected from conference tourism

This section seeks to identify if and how conference tourism as a diversification tool may contribute to a mature destination's successful rejuvenation. The benefits and risks of diversifying to conference tourism are outlined and discussed, as well as corroborated with the preconditions of rejuvenation and the list of desired benefits. This aims at understanding whether they satisfy the prerequisites for successful rejuvenation as initially discussed, and if they cover all or most of the positive outcomes expected by the destination from a diversification strategy.

3.2 Benefits of diversifying into conference tourism

In order to identify the potential of the conference tourism sector, its benefits and risks shall be evaluated and compared. This shall allow the study to understand whether a destination stands to gain or lose if this tourism sector is chosen for diversification. An evaluation of the sector's benefits will be carried out in the next section.

3.2.1 Increased revenue and demand for goods and services

As expected, several preconditions for successful rejuvenation such as *continual renovation and upgrading* and *beautifying of the environment* require strong financial backing. Conference tourism may assist in providing such funding (Whitfield 2005). Conference tourists are amongst the highest-spending visitors (Davidson 2003; Pechlaner et al. 2007; Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017). Girod (2009) claims that conference tourists spend between two and four times more than the average leisure tourist, while others put the figure at three times as much (Campiranon and Arcodia 2008; Ransley 2012). Horváth (2011) points out that in the case of Hungary, average conference tourist expenditure went up to between six and eight times the spend of the average leisure tourist. International conference delegates have been shown to spend an average of £1,021 per stay in the United Kingdom (VisitBritain 2017). An estimated £20 billion of direct delegate expenditure was generated in the UK alone in 2018 (Fullard 2019; M&it 2019). Furthermore, Derek Sharp claimed that in 2019 meetings and events worldwide generated an estimated £645 billion ($840 billion) (CWT Meetings and Events 2019), and the expenditure within the sector was planned to increase in all the different regions in 2020 (American Express Meetings and Events 2019).

Conference tourism provides higher income per inbound tourist to the hosting destination than the average leisure tourist. It is therefore considered a higher generator of revenue than any other tourism sector (Greaves 1998; VisitBritain 2017) and researchers from both industry and academia have confirmed that this sector is a key contributor to regional and national economies (Kumar et al. 2014). This includes other sources of expenditure at the host destinations, over and above the already high amounts described above. These include expenditure and investment in the conference carried out by the host, as well as potential exhibitors or sponsors (Kim et al. 2003), augmenting the inflow of income if the organising host is foreign. The construction of the required conference facilities also generates income for the locality if such construction is being funded from outside the local area (Hodur and Leistritz 2006) and may thus help in generating foreign exchange earnings (Davidson and Rogers 2006).

Furthermore, revenue from conference tourism should not be calculated at face value as the inflow of expenditure triggers a multiplier effect that may bring additional income to the local hospitality industry (Fenich 2001; Henderson 2007; Lee et al. 2013). The multiplier effect is defined as

> "the ratio of the change in the economy's level output, income employment or government revenue to the change in the final demand that brought it about" (Vanhove 2011, p. 239).

Boost to the destination economy include economic impact from the income, employment, value-added tax and import and output related to the conference (Kim et al 2010a). The value of the induced effects may be bigger than the value of the direct expenditure, as direct impact is the first-round effect of visitor spending, and the impact of this injection of new seed money causes a ripple effect that has an indirect and an induced impact (Kim et al. 2010a; Vanhove 2011; Kumar et al. 2014). Direct sales may account for only one-third of the total income while the remaining two-thirds comes from secondary impacts (Grado et al. 1998). Using the case study of Ireland in 2007, Hanly (2011) identified the primary conference expenditure estimates to be combined with sector multipliers to determine direct, indirect and induced effects across a range of monetary aggregates. Total direct conference spending of £118 million (€131 million) generated £212 million (€235 million) in output, £40 million (€45 million) in income, £91 million (€101 million) in value added, £47 million (€52.0 million) in imports and £8 million (€9 million) in product taxes.

Kim et al. (2010a) identify three types of economic multiplier effects that need to be considered. The *first-round effect* is the delegates' spending, the impact of which causes a ripple effect that has an indirect and induced impact. The *indirect impact* is the tourists' initial expenditure being recirculated through its re-spending (Hodur and Leistritz 2006). The *induced impact* is a further ripple-down effect caused by employees of businesses affected by the tourists' expenditure spending some of their salaries on other local businesses. Vanhove (2011) argues that a *tertiary effect* also exists. This includes flows of currency that is not initially spent by the delegate at the destination but is spent at a later stage in order to purchase objects back home that are related to the recently visited destination. This may come from the motivation that arises out of the trip to the destination.

The income generated from conference tourism is beneficial to a range of local industries since the turnover tends to be broadly distributed across the host destination (Kim et al. 2003; Bernini 2009). The delegate's expenditure spreads out on all conference-complementing activities at the destination. First, conference travellers are a key market for airline passenger revenues (Tsui et al. 2018), as they usually pay full fares and are less susceptible to seasonal fluctuations (Lu and Peeta 2009). Other delegate expenditure includes accommodation, food and beverage, souvenirs, shopping outlets, local transportation fees and leisure (Grado et al. 1998; Kim et al. 2003; Bernini 2009; Horváth 2011; Lee et al 2013; VisitBritain 2017; Konar and Hussain 2018; Government of India 2019). Cafés and restaurants close to the conference venue benefit the most, as well as other businesses such as bakeries, and other enterprises that may offer evening programmes for nearby conference delegates such as wineries for wine-tasting events (Horváth 2011). This increased demand also creates opportunity for labour, needed to produce the additional goods and services required (Hanly 2012). A further indirect economic benefit of conference tourism is the increased potential of economic trade since a causal relationship has been shown to exist. Furthermore conference tourism acts as an input for a destination's increased business with the delegates' country of origin (Poole 2009; Santana-Gallego et al. 2016; Tsui and Fung 2016; Tan and Tsui 2017; Konar and Hussain 2018), such as Australia (Kulendran and Wilson 2000), China (Shan and Wilson 2001), Singapore (Khan et al. 2005) and Hong Kong (Tsui and Fung 2016).

The government also gains through conference-related spending. Tax revenues are an indicator of the economic impact of the conference tourism sector on a destination (Yen 2016), with governments benefiting directly through taxes on income from employment and taxes on profits, and indirectly through taxes and duties on goods and services supplied to delegates such as VAT (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Rogers and Davidson 2015). These include income from taxes on products and on production, income tax, employee's NIC, employer's NIC and corporation tax (Li et al. 2013). From such economic benefits that impact stakeholders and trickle down to the host community, the economic value of conference tourism may be appreciated. Conference tourism is therefore well placed as a significant component of an economic development strategy intended to contribute to the rejuvenation of a destination (Dragićević et al. 2012).

However, quantifying the economic benefits from conference tourism may be challenging due to the lack of a systematic measuring framework and record keeping (Johnson 1999; Lee 2006; Davidson and Rogers 2006). Some authors (Braun 1992; Pechlaner et al. 2007; Konar and Husssain 2018) claim that the benefits of conference tourism are underestimated. Others believe that the economic impact has been inflated due to multiple counting caused using inappropriate economic models (Cibinskiene 2012). If data remains limited and exclusive, the industry's worth will continue to be underestimated or overestimated (Lee et al. 2013). Nonetheless, it is known that conference tourists spend more per capita and this increases revenue required for embellishments and improvement projects needed for rejuvenation. These may also help improve the destination's image and branding. On the other hand, non-economic benefits also exist, and are discussed below.

3.2.2 Improved infrastructure and embellishment

A destination may benefit in various ways from conference tourism. A characteristic of a mature destination is the deterioration and lack of maintenance and modernisation of its infrastructure and environment (Chapman and Speake 2011; Santos et al 2014). Embarking on conference tourism may halt this process. Many destinations have based their regeneration programmes on the construction of new conference centres (Rogers and Davidson 2015). The development of such centres can reverse the processes of deterioration by acting as a centrepiece in a declined area (Whitfield 2005). The development of a

conference centre acts as a physical manifestation of local economic development initiatives (Yilmaz and Gunay 2012) and attracts increased investment in supporting facilities and services without which the sector may fail (Clark 2006).

The authorities are therefore compelled to enhance the area further with necessary facilities and the required embellishment so as to enhance the investment in the conference centre which include the development of an improved accommodation offer (Medina-Muñoz et al. 2016) and restaurants, retail shops and entertainment (Petersen 2004). More generic upgrades involve improved water and sewage systems, roads, electricity supply, telephone and public transport networks (Davidson and Rogers 2006). Overall, conference tourism contributes to urban renewal (Alananzeh 2019). The development of the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham acted as a prompt to regenerate the area, acting as a catalyst for the development of complimentary activities such as retail, hotels and leisure attractions (Whitfield 2007). The same can be said for the Edinburgh International Centre (Rogers and Davidson 2015). Other destinations have included conference centres as the centrepieces of their regeneration projects, such as Blackpool (Lancashire Business View 2018; Parkinson 2020). Investing in the total conference tourism product also benefits the leisure tourist as well as the local resident (Mohammadi and Mohamed 2010).

3.2.3 Consolidation of the total tourism product through synergy

Butler (1980) indicated that visitor numbers and revenue would traditionally start to decline when a destination reaches maturity. Diversifying into conference tourism may be utilised to support and *consolidate the main destination's tourism product*. This may be done as conference tourism is closely linked to leisure tourism (Priporas 2005; Pechlaner et al. 2007; Hanly 2011). Diversification into conference tourism may thus be classified as a horizontal diversification (Ansoff 1948). This allows an integrative approach to diversification as conference tourism complements - and may thus be packaged with - leisure tourism (Benur and Bramwell 2015) since delegates usually also enjoy leisure, acting as a catalyser for short-break leisure tourism (Haven-Tang et al. 2007; Marais et al. 2017). This may lead to synergy – the provision of several different services that contribute together to the full attraction of the destination (Karna 2014). If attractions are geographically close, spatial clustering is also

possible, leading to a *spatial synergy*. The attractions' proximity increases the probability that tourists feel enticed to visit a nearby site following a visit to the first site (Hunt and Crompton 2008; Weidenfeld et al. 2011; Benur and Bramwell 2015). A case in point is the use of the destination's entertainment facilities by delegates attending a conference (Bradley et al. 2002; Priporas 2005), or conversely, conference tourism infrastructures being utilised by leisure tourists (Kellerman 2010; Konar and Hussain 2018). Conference tourism will also support and accelerate the establishment of other service structures, creating more business opportunities (Alananzeh 2019). Two complementary tourism sectors may engage in *marketing synergy* with the common goal of attracting visitors (Wang and Krakover 2008). Synergy may also occur indirectly in the marketing of a destination with conference tourism helping to attract leisure tourism and vice-versa (Kulendran and Wilson 2000; Kulendran and Witt 2003). This may occur via complex interrelationships between the two tourist types (Kellerman 2010) as the leisure tourist may return to a destination for business purposes or the other way around (Davidson and Cope 2003). In one survey, over a third of conference delegates reported being 'very likely' return to the conference area for a holiday (VisitBritain 2017).

By strengthening the conference tourism sector, the total tourism product would also be consolidated as demand for leisure tourism attractions increases (Priporas 2005; Pechlaner et al. 2007; Hanly 2011). This occurs as such activities are consumed by more conference tourists who have a high spending potential and seek leisure facilities (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Bernini 2009; Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Hanly 2011), although such demand may sometimes be overestimated (Whitfield 2009b). On a general note, however, delegates usually engage in leisure activities during official social programmes or by extending their stay at the host destination (Marques and Santos 2016; VisitBritain 2017), which is often pre-planned (Donaldson 2013). These extend the main conference period, to involve a strong element of leisure. Delegates are usually interested in a range of leisure activities such as food and restaurants, special events, bars, theatres and nightclubs (Hiller 1995; Simpson and Wilkerson 1997; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007). Furthermore, delegates may also be accompanied by guests who engage in several activities during the conference period such as enjoying local culture, sightseeing or shopping (Davidson 2003). It is calculated that 70% of conference attendees combine business and leisure (Lee 2007).

It is agreed that conference tourism complements leisure tourism, the traditional tourism market of mature tourism destinations. This allows a destination to benefit from the advantages of horizontal diversification (Ansoff 1948) as well as integrative diversification development (Benur and Bramwell 2015). These include consolidating and strengthening the market, improving the product offer (for both the conference tourist as well as the leisure tourist), widening the destination's portfolio and providing the opportunity for collaboration between the various stakeholders, which may also extend into joint marketing since the distinction between the conference tourist market and the leisure tourist market has become progressively blurred (Kellerman 2010; Park and Boo 2010).

3.2.4 Reduced seasonality and increased employment

Seasonality is another negative feature for a mature destination (discussed in section 2.4.2), which may be counteracted by conference tourism There is debate on whether conference tourism is itself a year-round or a seasonal industry. While some authors (Girod 2009; Donaldson 2013) claim that conference tourism is not seasonal, other researchers argue that it does not occur during holidays and summer months, while it is mostly popular during spring and autumn (Buhalis 2000; Priporas 2005; Horváth 2011; Kettunen 2012; Rogers and Beverley 2013). The present study thus refers to statistics presented by the UIA in its Association Survey to identify whether conference tourism may truly help to reduce seasonality. For clarity, such statistics are illustrated in Figure 10.
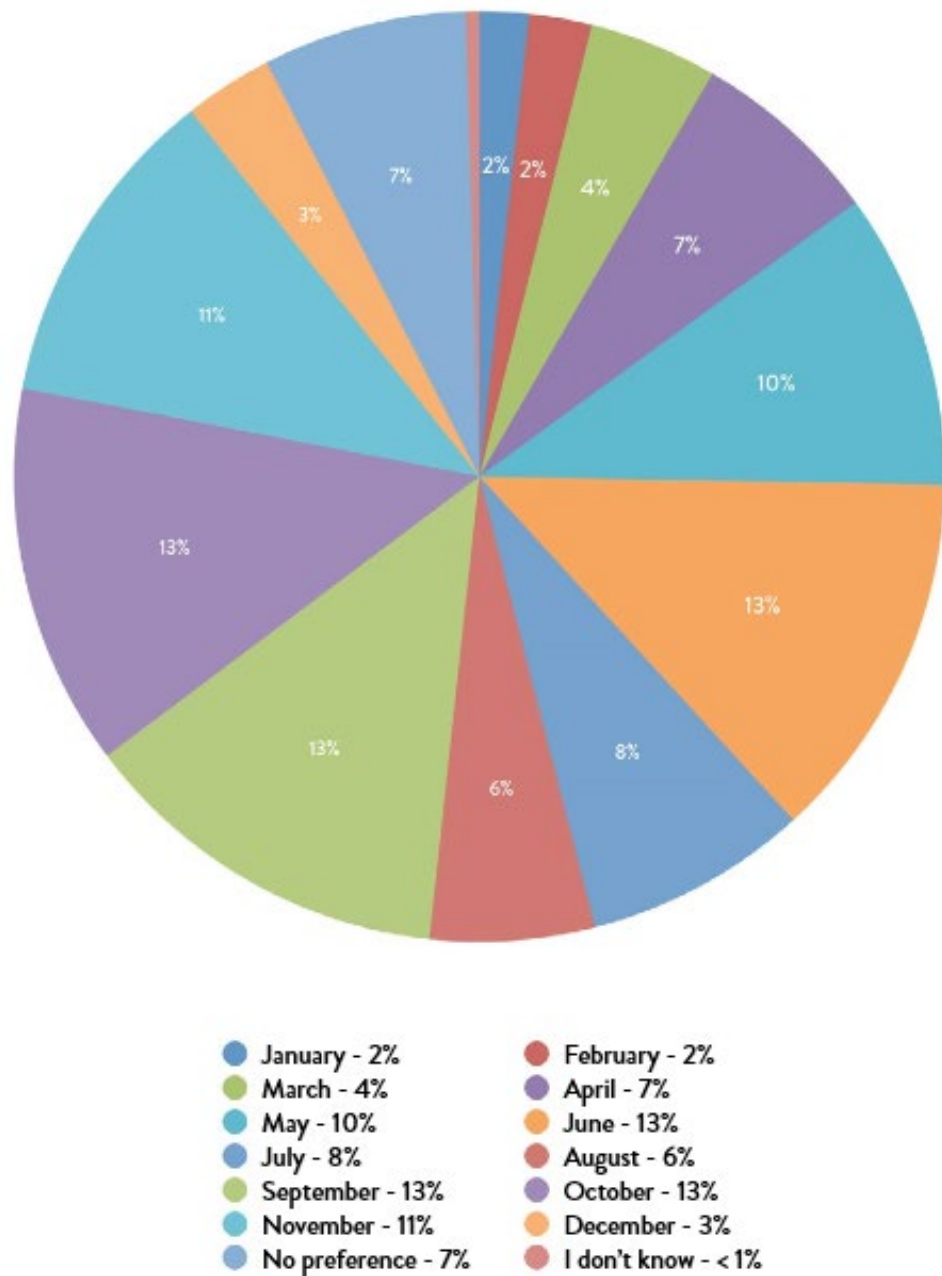
Figure 10: The preferred time of the year for associations' largest meeting (UIA 2018, p. 7)

The UIA (2018) survey shows that the most popular months amongst associations for their largest conferences in the past years were June, September and October, followed by November, May, July, April, August, March and December (UIA 2018). While clear peaks and troughs may be identified, with January-February having only a small fraction of the conferences, conference tourism appears to be strong during periods where traditional leisure tourism would be low. Conference tourism may thus complement leisure tourism by increasing inflow in the shoulder months, thus *increasing the length of the tourism season*.

This guarantees a tourism balance during the off-peak season thus reducing the "peak through" seasonality patterns (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Manaf and Ibrahim 2008; Bernini 2009; Marais et al. 2017; Alananzeh 2019). Davidson and Cope (2003) hold that conference tourism is not only complementary to leisure tourism in terms of months of the year; but it occurs mostly during mid-week (Monday to Thursday) complementing short-break and leisure daytrip markets.

By significantly extending the tourism season, conferences increase employment at a destination, especially of full-time workers (Davidson and Rogers 2006; Donaldson 2013; Marais et al. 2017). Employment is also offered through the development of new conference facilities themselves. These jobs may be directly or indirectly related to the sector and provide both skilled and unskilled work opportunities (Janarius 1991 in Whitfield 2007). The employment provided by this industry is described as "attractive, appealing and challenging" (McCabe 2012, p.122). All conference tourism employment types have shown growth, with full-time employment increasing at the largest rate since 2016 (MPI 2020). This may help reverse the trend at the mature destination where only unskilled workers are willing to work in the tourism sector (Gregoric 2014). The introduction of conference tourism benefits the mature destination both through the protection of employment by reducing seasonality, as also by generating new employment opportunities. This is essential in the process of destination rejuvenation (Whitfield 2007).

3.2.5 Image enhancement

New destinations generally enjoy most publicity simply because they are new (Butler 2012); mature destinations, therefore, require exposure to compete. Conference centres are a tool for repositioning mature destinations or those suffering decline, and a catalyst to urban regeneration (Bradley et al. 2002; Henderson 2007). Furthermore, hosting conferences may help reverse a negative promotion trend, as conference tourism may act as a *destination's image enhancer*. Firstly, it does so by acting as a base for business contacts (Alananzeh 2019). International conferences may also significantly provide benefits such as reputation and positive image development (Getz and Page 2016; Konar and Hussain 2018; Crouch et al. 2019). The destination's attractiveness is improved through the opportunity to showcase

its ability to project a sense of enthusiasm, community, pride and cohesiveness (Mackellar 2006; Lee 2006; Chiu and Ananzeh 2012). Meetings provide the opportunity to promote the destination on an international level, by attracting desired media coverage leading to higher visibility (BBC 2000; Hanly 2011; JMIC 2019) boosting the destination's image. Higher attractiveness ratings are allocated to destinations about which more information is available (Boo et al. 2008). The delegates themselves may also act as ambassadors by promoting the destination among friends and colleagues. Word-of-mouth promotion has been proven to be one of the strongest predictors for attracting future clients (Severt et al. 2007). Delegates themselves may repeatedly return to the host location if it addresses their expectations, also bringing family members and friends, or deciding to open a business there (Choi and Boger 2002; Davidson 2003; Davidson and Cope 2003; Priporas 2005; Hanly 2011). However, Henderson (2007) notes that with free media exposure there is also the danger of negative publicity if things go wrong. This may occur if a large scale and/or high-level conference is not as successful as expected.

Image may also be improved by the typical 'client' buying the product; the tourist type visiting the country. The conference tourist may be considered a higher-level customer, comparable to what Zeithaml et al. (2001) describe as the 'gold' or 'platinum' customer tier level. The customer hierarchy, described in Table 7, shows how the conference tourist shares characteristics with the higher tier levels mostly due to having stronger spending power and lack of price sensitivity (Davidson 2003; Pechlaner et al 2007; Girod 2009; Ransley 2012; Campiranon and Arcodia 2008; Horváth 2011). Conversely, loyalty is mostly related to the association or company organizing the conference and not to the host destination.

These characteristics contrast with the typical mature destination's type of tourist, the mass tourist who is highly price sensitive and attracted to a standardised and packaged product (Torres 2002; Ioannides 2002; Robinson and Novelli 2005), while being less interested in respecting the destination's culture (Kozak and Martin 2012) and more prone to cause damage to the positive attributes of the destination (Royle 2009). The mass tourist is thus comparable to Zeithaml et al.'s (2001) 'iron' and 'lead' type of customer. The conference tourist may help a destination move away from dependence on mass tourism, thus improving its image. This too allows a destination to reduce its volume by moving away

from mass tourism based on large numbers to utilize the available capacity. Nonetheless, several risks are associated with the conference tourism sector and need to be considered.

Customer tier level in (Ziethemal et al. 2001)	Characteristics of customers (Ziethemal et al. 2001)	Characteristics of tourists (in literature)	Associated tourist type
Platinum	• Company's most profitable customers • Heavy users of the product • Not overly price sensitive • Willing to invest in and try new offerings • Committed to the firm	• Higher spenders (Davidson 2003; Pechlaner et al 2007; Girod 2009; Ransley 2012; Campiranon and Arcodia 2008; Horváth 2011) • Price inelastic (Tsui et al. 2018). • Users of broad number of services at host destination (Bernini 2009; Kim et al. 2003)	Conference tourist
Gold	• Profitability levels less than platinum customer • Not as loyal to the firm • Heavy users in the product category but might minimize risk by working with multiple vendors		
Iron	• Provide volume needed to utilize the firm's capacity • Spending levels, loyalty, and profitability not substantial enough for special treatment	• Large-scale, high volumes (Vainikka 2013; Benur and Bramwell 2015) • Purchase holiday at fixed price in a packaged and standardised form (Robinson and Novelli 2005) • Less respectful of the destination's culture (Kozak and Martin 2012) • Causes damage to the positive attributes of host destination (Royle 2009)	Mass tourist
Lead	• Costing the company money as they demand more attention than they are due • Low spending and profitability • Sometimes problem customers; complaining about the firm to others and tying up the firm's resources		

Table 7. Comparison between the conference tourist and the mass tourist *vis-à-vis* Zeithaml et al.'s (2001) customer hierarchy

3.3 Risks of diversifying into conference tourism

Diversifying into conference tourism also has a downside. This section seeks to identify the risks in order to provide a holistic view of the benefits *vis-à-vis* the consequences of diversifying. Finally, the question of whether a mature destination's diversification into conference tourism is a desirable strategy is examined.

3.3.1 Uncertainty of conference tourism demand

The main risk connected with an investment towards diversification is the absence of any guarantee that demand will increase to meet the supply (Yang and Gu 2011). The conference market has been at times described as "mature" in terms of a product cycle (Clark 2006). The ICCA (2018b) show how Europe, for example, has consistently attracted the highest number of meetings per region, but has declined in its market share from 71.8% in 1963-1967 to 53.6% in 2013-2017. This is due to competition, which is likely to intensify as emerging alternatives challenge mature conference destinations (Weber and Ladkin 2005). Both emerging and established destinations suffer from competition, and even established conference destinations struggle to find new markets and develop innovative offers to counteract the natural desire of conference organisers to try something new, and the appeal surrounding new venues and destinations (Weber and Ladkin 2003). Increased development of conference facilities has in fact not always automatically led to an increase in conference tourism. Sanders (2004) indicates that following the economic boom of the 1990s, numerous conference centres were developed, leading to a situation whereby the supply of conference centres exceeded demand (Turkel 2002).

In the case of Macau for example, meeting and conference numbers are steadily declining. Further investment, that is not necessarily financial, may be required, such as the creation or improvement of links with international associations and association chapters that hold regular international meetings, as well as the establishment and related networking needed from convention bureaus (Dioko and Whitfield 2015). Furthermore, expectations have become so high among conference delegates, who anticipate a personalised and unique experience, that costs involved to attract and satisfy such expectations are high while budgets

might be flat (American Express Meetings and Events 2019), increasing the pressure on the destination to support via subventions (see section 4.3.8). Destinations that are still in the process of entering the market should consider their decision well in this regard, as their competitors may already have experience, connections with key international stakeholders and the required finance to be competitive in the sector (Clark 2006). Furthermore, a list of characteristics that require investment is required, and these are mostly outlined in Section 4.4.

3.3.2 Sensitivity to global economic situation

Even though some literature suggests that conference tourism is relatively resilient to economic crises (Marques and Santos 2016), it is frequently highlighted that the conference tourism sector fluctuates according to global economic situations (Yang and Gu 2011; Borodako et al. 2011; Hayat et al. 2014; American Express Meetings and Events 2018). Economic recessions seem to affect both the corporate and the association conference market but the corporate market is the most affected, even though both markets have experienced a decrease in attendance after recessions (Hayat et al. 2014) and are hit harder than leisure travel (Guizzardi and Mazzocchi 2010). The corporate sector quickly reduces conference budgets after an economic downturn such as after the 2008 recession (Duffy 2010). Economic instability has in fact been identified as a top decision-driver in conference tourism (American Express Meetings and Events 2018).

The effects of an economic recession also include a business trip of shorter duration and an increased price sensitivity, implying a search for lower prices and focusing instead on national meetings or video conferencing as opposed to international ones (Borodako et al. 2011). This may thus mean that destinations that have invested heavily in the industry may still be less attractive due to the increased price sensitivity of the market. On the other hand, an opportunity arises for second tier cities as they become more popular (Rompf et al. 2008; Hayat et al. 2014). Conference planners' demand for destinations beyond the key regional hubs are in fact increasing (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Second-tier cities are areas that include suburbs of major cities and smaller cities. These differ from 'first-tier' cities in the hotel room inventory, size of convention centre and citywide hotel rack rates

(Ariffin et al. 2008). Increased demand may be related to less costs and the search for innovative locations.

Yang et al. (2017) claim that risk and tourism (including leisure tourism) are intrinsically connected, and thus instability does not only impact the conference tourism sector. Nonetheless, while associations also cancel or postpone their conferences, this decrease is usually much milder than that of corporations since association conferences are considered a source of revenue and are obligatory by the association's by-laws (see section 1.1). However, they still suffer from lower delegate numbers during this time as delegates are unwilling to pay the related costs to attend (Spiller 2002).

3.3.3 Sensitivity to threats/ external shocks

The sector is highly sensitive to threats related to political insecurity, health, natural disasters and terrorism (Crouch and Weber 2002; BCD Travel 2019). It has been shown that the main reasons why conference itineraries change is related to risks, such as security threats (48%), country risk ratings (38%), natural disasters and extreme weather events (36%) (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). During the SARS outbreak in 2003, for example, hotels indicated that many international conferences were cancelled (Kim et al. 2005). A similar reaction related to the more recent COVID-19 pandemic, whereby most conferences were cancelled, postponed or turned into virtual events (when possible) (Detwiler 2020). These include the American Association of Geographers, British Sociological Association, International Association for Media and Communications Research and the Geo Connect Asia amongst others (SAGE publishing 2020). Most major conferences had already been cancelled or postponed around the world by 29th February 2020, as the COVID-19 virus was still not considered a pandemic (Shriber 2020; Timsit 2020). The general direction taken for conferences around the world was in fact to cancel, with around 260 conferences being cancelled in Europe alone by 5th March 2020 (Masunga and Hussain 2020; Maddox 2020). Some governments, such as Saudi Arabia, introduced measures requiring the cancellation and postponement of conferences in order to limit the spread of the virus (OECD 2020). This is also related to conferences being classified as mass gathering and the suggested restrictions related to such events by organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) (WHO 2020a). Furthermore, in areas where Covid-19-related restrictions were

lifted, such as China (as at 11th May 2020), conference demand was still slowest to recover due to the lack of international tourists (McKinsey & Company 2020).

Uncertainty about a country's political future also leads to a downturn and has at times been considered more damaging than economic crises (Okumus et al. 2005) as the political environment influences conference tourism (Whitfield et al. 2012; Almubarak 2018). The UK and its then future relation with the European Union in 2020, for example, created uncertainty for conferences and travellers (UIA 2018). Instability also stems from the uncertainty of currency fluctuations. In the UK case, when the pound suffered devaluation, the destination become more attractive (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Instability between the UK and the EU due to Brexit acted as a barrier to delegate attendance, as UK delegates stepped back from attending EU related or funded conferences, due to the uncertainty of the effects of Brexit at the time (Davidson and Turner 2017). Similar cancellations and rescheduling occurred because of political unrest in Hong Kong, whereby while demand still existed, meetings were postponed if the protests occurred (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Uncertainty, such as the Hong Kong protests, create safety and security threats become a priority to conference organisers which would not be willing to compromise upon (Singh 2019).

Conference tourism is also sensitive to threats of terrorism (Baytok et al. 2010; Mair et al. 2016). These impact on any events scheduled at the effected destination (Meeting Media Group 2015): the well-known 11th September attacks in 2001 had a highly negative impact on conference tourism (Campiranon and Arcodia 2007; Park and Boo 2010; Borodako et al. 2011). A similar situation resulted from the Paris terrorist attacks of 13th November 2015. Mass cancellations for stays followed the attack, resulting in the cancellation of major conferences such as the Conference and Trade shows for Mayors. Another postponed event included *Le Congrès et le Salon des Maires* (AMF 2015), even though the French Meeting Industry Council (UNIMEV) issued a press release stating that it was essential that meetings continue to be held (UNIMEV 2015). Consequences were harsh for the destination. While Paris had been the top city hosting association conferences, its ranking fell after the attacks, and only regained first place in 2018 (ICCA 2019a). Brussels suffered a similar fate during the March 2016 bomb blasts. A plastic-recycling industry conference of 1,500 delegates (which had already been pushed back after the Paris attacks)

had to be cancelled for security reasons (Chow 2016). Another identical case was the cancellation in January 2016 of the International Maritime Conference SMM Istanbul, expecting 2,600 participants from 40 different countries, following the terrorist attacks at the host destination . Such cancellation in Istanbul at the time, contradicted the Istanbul Convention and Visitors Bureau's statement that meetings and conferences would continue as normal in the city (meetpie.com 2016), and affected the city's ranking for association conferences. From being in the top ten European countries in 2014 and 2015, Istanbul ranked 40th in 2016. Due to the lead time association conferences, and the continuous attacks and instability occurring in Istanbul, the city's ranking fell further to 133rd, with just 20 conferences hosted, in 2017. The city only started a slow recovery in 2018, climbing to rank 84th, and then to 44th place in 2019. (ICCA 2015; ICCA 2016; ICCA 2017; ICCA 2018b; ICCA 2019a; ICCA 2020a).

While governments and authorities have the financial incentive to protect tourism in general and the conference tourism sector in particular by enforcing security (Beck 2015), coming at a high cost (Henderson 2007), it is clear that threats make conference tourism very fragile. The importance placed on these issues is likely to continue to increase, as new crises and disasters arise (Kang et al. 2005).

3.3.4 The building of conference facilities

Even though the economic benefits are frequently highlighted, conference sector costs are rarely explored. Such costs are related to both the initial investment in developing the infrastructure, and to its maintenance (Davidson and Rogers 2006). While existing leisure tourism infrastructure, several specialist conference facilities are still required and need to be developed (Davidson and Cope 2003). A prerequisite to attract conferences is to invest heavily in innovative venues with integrated facilities and spread over large areas (Henderson 2007; Baytok 2010). The purpose-built conference venue is the most popular facility requested for association conferences (UIA 2018).Emerging destinations may in fact suffer from a scarcity of financial resources necessary for the development of the services needed (Omerzel 2011; Alananzeh et al. 2019).

Costs to develop and maintain a conference venue may vary drastically. This includes basic costs such as plates, glasses, cups, napkins etc. used by delegates and which are usually very high (Park and Boo 2010), as well as additional venue refurbishments required from time to time (Whitfield 2007). It is thus essential that destinations see potential conference revenue *vis-à-vis* related costs (Whitfield 2005). Like in the case of the Convention Centre Dublin (CDD), public funding is usually required for the development of conference-related facilities; which comes at a substantial opportunity cost (Getz 2007; Horváth 2011). Furthermore, attracting conferences by developing a conference complex that includes all the conference-related facilities, reduces the importance of the destination-related attributes (Whitfield et al. 2012) as delegates do not need to leave the venue since all delegate-related-services can be found within.

Other issues related to the construction of conference centres include the pressure on the environment, loss of heritage areas and disturbance to residents (Howie 2003; Bramwell 2003). Furthermore, the risk exists that the venue may be underutilised after it has opened, and this may provoke complaints that scarce resources could have been better utilised (Henderson 2007). This risk is also linked to an overestimation of conferences demand that may be purposely overstated by policymakers and interested parties (Morgan and Condliffe 2007) or genuinely inflated (Sanders 2004; Morgan and Condliffe 2007) for reasons discussed in section 3.4.5.

Conference venues require strong private sector investment to succeed (Oxford Brooks University 2019). A successful case is Ireland, where the development of the CCD was deemed necessary to have a specialised facility which increased the potential number of conferences at the destination (Hanly 2011; 2012). It was co-funded by the private sector and the government through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (Taylor 2015), costing £342 million (€380 million) (Bruceshaw 2010). Nonetheless, it generated £46 million (€51 million) for the Irish economy in 2016 (Brennan 2017); it has since hosted over 1,850 events and won 43 industry awards (McGann 2019).

3.3.5 Possible limitations to economic and employment contribution

While conference tourism has been shown to contribute to a destination's economy (see section 3.2.1), insufficient knowledge exists on the distribution patterns of such contribution (Bernini 2009). The geographical sphere of influence of conference tourism may be too small to benefit the destination's peripheral regions as direct expenditure is frequently high in the main areas, but significantly lower in the periphery. Delegates are often limited in accessing peripheral areas, relying mostly on facilities and services available at the centre of the destination, and usually located close to the conference centres (Whitfield 2007). Furthermore, most of the profits gained from the spending of conference delegates are appropriated by hotel owners and transport companies. Frequently these are not local, thus the income generated at the host destination does not remain there creating an unfair situation because most investment in the production of a holistic conference product would have been financed through local public, taxpayer, funds (Horváth 2011), a situation known as 'leakage' (Dwyer 2002).

Furthermore, while a decreased seasonality may lead to an increased standard in tourism-related jobs, the conference sector is subject to constant movement and turnover of staff (Mohd Adros and Wee 2019). This may prevent professional expertise and skills being retained, resulting in the frequent employment of inexperienced and unskilled new staff (McCabe 2012). This can be considered a common challenge within the whole tourism industry (Baum 2018).The discussion on increased employment through the employment multiplier generated from increased inflow of income may also prove problematic (Dwyer 2002) as they tend to exaggerate the amount of employment generated (Dwyer et al. 2000).

3.3.6 Environmental impacts

As discussed in section 2.6.1, the successful rejuvenation of a destination depends on several prerequisites, including renovation and upgrading through improving and maintaining both the environment and the infrastructure to high standards (Baidal et al. 2013). Though

conferences act as a motivation to upgrade the destination (section 3.2.2), they may also have a detrimental effect on this sector.

The repercussions related to the development of conference facilities are inevitable (Rogers 2003). Attracting large numbers of delegates has its consequences, such as createing an increased population density for the conference period leading to a number of negative effects (Davidson and Cope 2003). These are similar to the repercussions suffered by mature destinations when the carrying capacity is exceeded (see section 2.4.2). Conference tourism is, in this sense, worse than leisure tourism, since it is limited to a specific space (Park and Boo 2010). Impacts include increased energy use, congestion and traffic jams, water, leakages, pollution, waste, carbon footprint, damage to heritage and noise pollution (Bowdin et al. 2006; Horváth 2011; Zamzuri et al. 2011; Donaldson 2013). Air travel (the most frequent mode of travel for conference delegates) is also very polluting. It is a fast-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions and a contributor to climate change, which has more negative impact than ground travel (Davidson and Cope 2003; Davidson and Rogers 2006). The conference industry is considered responsible for the highest level of per trip greenhouse emissions of any tourism sector, due to the longer air travel distance involved (US Environmental Protection Agency 2000; Park and Boo 2010), in addition to the greenhouse emissions from people traveling to and from the conference and the waste generation from the use of plates, napkins, cups or glasses, and paper (Meeting Strategies Worldwide 2006).

Counterarguments indicate that conference delegates tend to use public transportation more than the leisure tourist (Rogers 2013). The conference organisers may also help reduce transport-related problems by providing shuttle buses, which is possible as most delegates require travelling between similar points at the same time (Zamzuri et al. 2011; Marais et al. 2017). Conference tourism is at times considered a lower impact tourism type (Locke 2010) as planners are increasingly interested in eco-friendly venues and sustainable practices (Turner 2019). Furthermore, accommodation venues have also focused on technical fixes in their major energy and resource operation sectors such as energy, water and waste consumption management (International Tourism Partnership 2020). Green practices will be discussed in section 4.3.11.

3.3.7 Social impacts

Conference tourism may also result in social impacts such as criminality in areas where there is a concentration of frequent conference delegates (Getz 2007) and the avoidance of the destination by other tourists who may be worried about disruption or overcrowding when highly publicised major conferences and meetings are scheduled (Henderson 2007). Several other consequences are related to the local community's loss of access to its own amenities (Bowdin et al. 2006) due to security precautions, especially in the case of large conferences that required city or nationwide security. One classic example is the case of the Genoa G8 Summit of July 2001 (Davidson and Cope 2003) when the city was turned into a secure zone with the deployment of surface-to-air missiles, sharpshooters and 18,000 police officers. The city was ringed with concrete barriers and wire fences, resulting in the residents living under siege conditions or leaving their hometown for the duration of the event. Another less extreme but similarly inconvenient example is the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Malta in November 2015. Local people were prevented from using a number of main roads, which were closed to allow delegates to travel safely and quickly from their accommodation to the meeting venues (Times of Malta 2015). Residents in the immediate environs of the conference venues were practically locked in their homes. On other occasions, conferences may lead to violence and incidents such as in the case of the demonstration during the European People's Party congress in Dublin in March 2014, which turned violent and a Gardaí was injured (Kelly 2014). Such cases put the local community at risk.

3.4 Summary

Even though several consequences of conference tourism have been identified, it is believed that most of them may be managed and contained. Decreased demand in certain regions leading to possible over-supply of conference centres and terrorism or economic recession may be counteracted by adapting the conference-facilities and complementing facilities' pricing to the lower budgets of the conference planners at that point in time (Borodako 2011). In terms of health hazards, while conference tourism is impacted, it is an inevitable

consequence of tourism in general (OECD 2020) and will therefore influence other tourism niches and products. Environmental issues may be contained by proposing facilities that adhere to green credentials and codes (Park and Boo 2010) (see section 4.3.11)while social impacts may be counteracted by situating the convention centres at a reasonable distance from the local community and taking the necessary safety measures.

The benefits of conference tourism were also identified. Further to the economic benefits, the introduction of the conference tourism market and facilities strengthens and improves the destination's leisure product offer, such as when both markets work in synergy. The new product offer (conference tourism) increases the market power of the destination and widens its portfolio, reducing the prospect of failure, and indirectly makes it more stable and less dependent on intermediaries. This chapter has also confirmed that conference tourism has the potential of reducing seasonality. By looking at past trends in conference tourism it emerges that the increase in the conference tourism market would allow a destination to augment its tourist intake during the shoulder months of leisure tourism. Finally, investment in conference centres, a history of successful high-level events, as well as the bigger number of higher tier customers (conference tourists) also gives a much-needed boost to the image of a mature destination.

After considering benefits versus consequences, it seems evident s that the benefits outweigh the consequences, with a destination standing to gain from diversifying into conference tourism. Such benefits are also required to satisfy the preconditions to successful rejuvenation. This answers the fourth research question and satisfies the first research objective; to critically review the potential of conference tourism in helping to rejuvenate mature tourism destinations.

Nonetheless, as is the case in many tourism realities, different destinations have different characteristics, and therefore some might be better positioned than others to succeed. It is suggested that host destinations understand that they are expected to possess or invest in certain attributes that are valued by both conference organisers and participants (Hayat 2014). This leads to the second objective of the study, that of examining and evaluating the influences on association conference tourism decision-making. This will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Conference decision-making

4.1 Introduction

As destinations acknowledge the benefits of conference tourism, competition between them grows stronger, potentially making this sector one of the most competitive within the tourism industry (Morla and Ladkin 2007; DiPietro et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2010b; Hussain et al. 2014). New potential host destinations are continuously emerging, while planners are increasingly interested in previously unused destinations (Boo et al. 2008; Davidson 2014; CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Therefore, emerging conference destinations compete and challenge mature ones (Weber and Ladkin 2005), which need to constantly re-invent their offer and venues to remain relevant (Weber and Ladkin 2003). Furthermore, for many international associations, the success or otherwise of their annual conference is potentially the most important activity the association undertakes (Ardani 2015) and the choice of a good conference location has the potential to significantly advance the fortunes of that association (Crouch et al. 2019). The conference destination is therefore considered to be a critical factor in determining the success of the conference and the number of delegates attending (Fenich 2001; Boo et al. 2008).

This chapter sets out to address the study's second objective; *to critically examine and evaluate the factors influencing association conference tourism decision-making*. To critically explore such influences, several steps were considered necessary. Firstly, the decision-making process is explored and discussed in the next section. This is followed by the identification of the main stakeholders in the process of decision-making. Finally, destination-related attributes that influence the decision are also thoroughly evaluated. Factors influencing the decision are shown to be both destination-specific and non-destination related. By answering this objective, the study comes a step closer to understanding the decision-making process and will gather enough knowledge to answer the remaining objectives of the study, which necessitated the carrying out primary research.

4.2 The decision-making process

4.2.1 The association market

The site-selection process for association conferences is long and complex (Clark and McCleary 1995; Baloglu and Love 2005). Understanding the decision process is important for both the organiser and the supplier as these must become aware of how to promote themselves to potential clients (Comas and Moscardo 2005; Filipović 2012). Three key decision makers are identified in the decision-making process: the organising association, the host destination and the potential delegate (Opperman and Chon 1997). The factors influencing the delegates' decision to attend shall be discussed at a later stage. The association undergoes a process of decision making when choosing its preferred site for its next conference.

4.2.2 Decision-making models

One of the first models of site-selection developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998) proposed a five-step conceptual model. This was later updated by Fawzy and Samra (2008), who adapted concepts from three organisational buyer behaviour models; Robinson et al (1976), Sheth (1973) and Webster and Wind (1972), to the conference site decision-making model. Both models are outlined in Table 8. Fawzy and Samra (2008) increased emphasis on the conditions leading to the decision, adding two stages which include the recognition of the need to hold a meeting and the formation of the committee within the organisation that is in charge of the decision-making process. Furthermore, Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) initial 'pre-planning stage' is broken down into three specific stages in Fawzy and Samra (2008), which are the recognition of the general requirements of the conference, the recognition of the services required and the identification of whether the organisation of such a conference is a repeat or a modified repeat of a similar past event.

Crouch and Ritchie		Fawzy and Samra	
Stage	Description	Stage	Description
		Anticipation or recognition of a problem	Meetings and conferences can be a waste of time and resources or a very useful tool (Friedman 2011). This depends on whether they are needed or not. Consideration is required before deciding if the conference is necessary. They are frequently called for if a problem is anticipated or recognized, and thus a discussion is needed.
		Formation of a buying centre	Organisations are different from consumers as the purchasing decisions are usually made by a group or committee, rather than by an individual (Clark and McCleary 1995). The buying centre is usually a group of five to eight people participating in the site decision making process (Kang et al. 2005).
Preplanning	This is done before the location is selected. It involves identifying the ideal dates and the allocated budget. This stage is affected by a number of antecedent factors such as new staff members in decision-making, past experiences at recent conferences, policies and environmental conditions.	General need description	The buying centre establishes the requirement of the conference in detail.
		Product specification	The specific products needed to satisfy the needs of the conference are identified.
		Identifying the type of buy class	This step involves identifying whether the services, goods and location chosen shall be utilised for the first time ever (new task), have been previously used but modifications are required (modified rebuy) or were already used and thus a repeated buy without any changes is required (straight rebuy). In the latter case, the process is quicker, and the next step might be skipped.
Analysis and recommendation of potential sites	Information about potential destinations is collected and site-visits occur in order to inspect facilities and obtain more information. In larger associations a bidding process may be required, whereby the potential	Site-selection analysis and recommendation	Suitable destination options are chosen based on the criteria required. These are shortlisted and presented to the buyer centre. The shortlisted destinations are asked to present proposals before the final decision is made.

	locations send delegations to submit a bid for the business.		
Selection decision	This decision is usually taken by associations' executive or board of directors based on the selection committee's suggestions.	Site-selection decision and order routine specification	The site is selected. An agreement, specifying what is expected from all parties is drawn.
The conference	The conference is held	The conference	The conference is held
Post-conference evaluation	The pros and cons of the conference are evaluated in hint sight, and thus the current site becomes an antecedent condition for subsequent conferences.	Performance preview	This identifies whether the meeting site has satisfied the needs of the association. The current site becomes an antecedent condition for subsequent conferences.

Table 8. A comparison of the site-selection processes as proposed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998) and modified by Fawzy and Samra (2008)

The ICCA (2019b) also identified the stages in the decision-making process, while acknowledging that they might vary slightly from one association to another. It only includes the process from the point whereby the request for destination bids is launched to the moment when the decision is taken. It identifies 18 stages in total, which are summarised in Table 9 below.

The ICCA (2019b) thus expands the academic models by identifying further stages within the traditional stages proposed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998) and Fawzy and Samra (2008) related to consultation, analyses, and recommendation of options. An added stage in the over-all process is included as a preliminary shortlist, whereby several destinations are removed from the set of alternatives prior to proceeding to the process of analysing, selecting and visiting potential conference destination options. At this stage, the destinations or offers that do not satisfy the minimum requirements (described as logistical criteria) are eliminated. The other alternatives are then scrutinised further by the decision-makers. The ICCA (2019b) model provides an update that reveals the most common contemporary decision-making process. The model is directed towards helping industry practitioners. Nonetheless, ICCA (2019b) also highlights that, even though in the minority of cases, association decisions may

be centrally-driven and by-pass an open bidding process. In this case, associations would contact destinations, suppliers and conference organisers directly to bid for the conference.

Stage	Description
1	Call for proposals for the next "open year" (year for which the destination has not yet been selected)
2	Interest expressed by either members or suppliers. This depends on whether local members are required to be the formal bidders
3	Evaluation of expressions of interest to confirm whether they qualify to bid.
4	Once the bidders are confirmed, the bid manual/guidelines/rules are made available to interested parties.
5	Bids are created by local members/ suppliers.
6	Bids are submitted
7	Site inspections occur. Most associations conduct the short-listing stage without visiting all candidates.
8	First round of evaluations is carried out by association staff, volunteer leaders or consultants/ contractors.
9	A shortlist is decided and announced.
10	Detailed site inspections are carried out at shortlisted destinations and negotiations initiated.
11	Revised bids are submitted.
12	The bidders are required to present their bids formally.
13	A final shortlist or final selection is carried out.
14	Negotiations
15	The destination on conference destination is made.
16	The decision is announced.
17	Feedback is given to losing bidders
18	The contract or letter of agreement is drawn up and signed.

Table 9. Association site-selection decision-making process (adapted from ICCA 2019b)

This section has helped answer the first research question of this study's second objective, which is concerned with identifying the decision-making process when selecting a conference destination. The models indicate what a long and complex process decision-making is. This is further complicated by internal and external factors that influence the process and final decisions, and which need to be understood to gain a holistic understanding of the way the process is affected. These factors shall be discussed now.

4.2.3 Factors influencing the conference destination decision-making

The decision process (see section 4.2.2) is influenced by several factors, including those that are internal to the association, and thus related to the association's characteristics and requirements, and factors that are external and unrelated to the association. Several internal characteristics influence the logistical criteria whether to select a destination or otherwise for a conference. The nature of the association will automatically create pre-conditions which the destination has to satisfy as it will determine the type of conference required and its characteristics (Rogers 2013). These will in turn influence the decision requiring a destination that fits within the association's rotation patterns, with the facilities available at ideal and acceptable dates by the association (and that do not clash with other international or local events) (ICCA 2019b). The size and finances of the association will also influence their needs for facilities and accommodation at the destination (Bernini 2009). Thus, as each association has a range of important internal objectives which influence its decision, bidders who invest in research to understand these factors will be in a better position to attract the association. A list of internal association factors that influence the decision process have been identified and listed in Table 10.

Association factor	Description
Nature	The nature of the association will influence the decision. These include association size, finances and type of conference required.
Rotation patterns	The requirement to locate the next association meeting in a specific region or continent.
Presidency	Some associations require that the conference location is linked to the country of origin of the association's president or other key office holders.
Membership potential	A decision may be based on membership growth potential at a destination or based on the destination that is of interest to build the association's local chapter's network at the destination.
Membership	The decisions may be influenced into choosing a location whereby the membership base is biggest, or where the association has a strong local chapter.
Local audience	The association's products, services or content may be of specific interest to a destination, thus increasing chances of bigger local audiences.
Knowledge transfer	Association aims to transfer knowledge to underdeveloped regions.
Raise awareness	Association may have interest to raise public relation awareness with a specific government or target public.
Specific challenges	The association may prefer a destination that suffers from a specific challenge that the association addresses.
Business opportunities	The association may be attracted to destinations which may offer high business opportunities for the association and its members, depending on their line of business or interest.
Expertise	A destination may offer strong research or expertise in the association's key subject areas. This also increases the possibility of strong local speakers.
Site inspection opportunities	The destination may offer site inspection opportunities related to the association's field of interest, making it more attractive.
Collaboration	An opportunity to collaborate with other national or international associations within related fields may influence the decision.
Association sponsors	The decision may be influence by the requirement to meet the strategic business needs of the association's sponsors or partners at specific destinations.
Competition	A decision may be motivated by the need to respond to competition from other associations or private sector events.

Table 10. Internal association factors influencing conference decision making (adapted from Bernini 2009; UIA 2018; ICCA 2019b)

The characteristics of the association members or delegates may also be considered as a pre-condition to satisfy and is based on the association's line of specialisation. These needs cannot be side-lined as the organiser is interested in having the highest attendance

possible to maximise profit (Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011). Additionally, the characteristics of, and dynamics between, the individuals that are part of the decision process is also important. In the case of associations, the individuals who form the 'buyer centre' as described by Fawzy and Samra (2008) are usually the board of the organisation. This group has the greatest weight on the choice of the host location (Kang et al. 2005; Donaldson 2013) (discussed in the next section). Past experiences at a destination are also influential. This may help a destination to be included within a possible set of preferred alternatives. This is defined as the initial group of options out of which the conference destination is later chosen (Clark and McCleary 1995; Clark et al. 1998; Choi and Boger 2002). Other factors may include a good relationship with salespeople of a conference facility at a destination that is as important as other qualities of the destination (Nikolich and Sparks 1995; Lee and Hiemstra 2001). The association's relation with the bidders (local chapter of the association) could also influence the way the decision-makers consider the bid. This relationship could be influenced by past elements (sympathy due to having bid in the past and lost), bidder facing strong challenges and thus requiring support, bidders being very active members of the associations or having a popular or politically important leader, having government or a well-known figure supporting it (ICCA 2019b).

As can be clearly identified, the local chapter's effort and relationship with the decision makers also heavily influences the conference-destination decision. A local chapter's pro-activity in bidding or lobbying for a destination can help attract the association conference (Getz 2004; ICCA 2019b). As a local chapter increases its effort towards attracting its association's international meetings to its home country, the destination becomes increasingly exposed to the buyer centre of the association. ICCA reports (ICCA 2015; ICCA 2019b) have shown how the local chapter of the international organisation is usually the motivator that attracts a meeting to a specific destination. It is estimated that around two-thirds of major international association conferences involve a system whereby local association chapters bid to host the conference (ICCA 2019b). This is opposed to chapters where members are not willing to commit to the responsibility of hosting the conference at their home destination, and do not therefore lobby for it. Other factors such as the preference to choose the president's hometown or being located as close as possible to where association members live also affect the decision (Simpson and Wilkerson 1997).

External factors, which are not related to the association, but influences its decision, are also important. These include the global economic situations and possible recessions (Yang and Gu 2011; Borodako et al. 2011; Hayat et al. 2014) which are identified as a top decision-driver in conference tourism (American Express Meetings and Events 2018) thus exerting a strong influence on the available budgets at the disposal of an organising association. This also affects the disposable income of potential attendees and may thus result in lower attendance (Duffy 2010; Hayat et al. 2014). The sector is no less sensitive to threats or uncertainties related to political insecurity, health risks, natural disasters and terrorism (Crouch and Weber 2002; BCD Travel 2019). The associations are increasingly cautious in their decisions when uncertainty exists, and destinations are frequently removed from the list of possible host destination options for a period after they have been affected by adverse circumstances (meetpie.com 2016). The external factors were discussed in detail in sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3. Other important factors related to the destination, important for both the association and the delegate, will be discussed in section 4.3. The next section explores the dynamics between the decision makers.

4.3 The main decision makers

This section tackles the second research question of the study's second objective: *Which are the main players involved in the [decision-making] process?* Identifying the main decision-making stakeholders is considered necessary for a holistic understanding of the decision process itself. Several stakeholders are identified in the literature when discussing the decision-making process. Var et al. (1985) identify the three key role players in conference tourism as the conference agency, the conference planner and the delegate. Opperman and Chon (1997) defined the three main players as the host location, associations and potential attendees, while Jago and Deery (2005) argue that the potential attendees, conference centres, conference bureaus and the local governmental organisations are key players. The greatest weight in deciding on a conference location falls on the board of the organisation or association holding the conference (Kang et al. 2005; Donaldson 2013). Nonetheless, the decision-makers vary enormously from association to association, while a wide range of both formal and informal decision-influencers may also play a significant role in the process

(ICCA 2019b). Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 shall discuss the buyer centre, as an association's decision-making body, and the conference delegate, as the end consumer, considered to be the two most important stakeholders.

4.3.1 - The buyer centre

As discussed in section 4.2 the site-selection process for association conferences is long and complex (Clark and McCleary 1995; Baloglu and Love 2005). Each association would have developed a unique decision-making methodology regarding their main conferences (ICCA 2019b); different decision structures therefore exist. Frequently, within an organising association, several members are selected to form a committee that would oversee discussing and selecting the ideal conference host location (Clark and McCleary 1995; Kang et al. 2005). This committee is referred to as the *buyer centre* in Fawzy and Samra's model (2008) (see Table 9).

According to UIA (2018) 54% of the associations create this council or committee meeting during which the decision of the host destination is taken (UIA 2018). When members are selected to sit on a board, they will be able to influence the decision-making process. Furthermore, the UIA (2018) identify how 22% of the associations decide on their conference destination via the general assembly, while another 19% have an executive officer. The ICCA (2019b) identify other possible decision makers, as presented in Table 12.

Within the decision-making group itself, members' level of influence varies. This depends on how much power each committee member wields (Kang et al. 2005). Frequently it is the chairperson, president or major association player who commands the biggest sphere of influence within the committee (Clark et al. 1998). This information is important for the destinations to obtain approval by a committee and would thus need to know who to address and the ideal individual with whom to build a working relationship. Identifying the right person is not always straight-forward though. Influence in the decision-making process within the buyer centre varies as it stems from different forms of power that each participant may have. Kohli's (1989) classification of power may be applied to the conference destination decision-making process. The various types of powers and the way they have

been applied to conference destination decision-making are listed and explained in Table 11, showing the complex dynamics of power within the buyer centre. The importance of relationships with decision makers is evident and this trend has in fact surpassed the practice of bidding.

Power Type	Description
Reward	The member has the power to bestow a reward, overtly or subtly, to other decision makers.
Coercive	The member has the power to punish overtly or subtly, to other decision makers
Referent	The member is highly regarded for attractive personal qualities.
Legitimate	The member is in a better hierarchical position than other decision makers
Expert	The member possesses personal knowledge that may influence other decision makers to trust his views.
Information	The member possesses information that is provided or withheld from the other decision makers to influence their decision.
Departmental	The member's association within a particular department or unit may put the member in a better perceived ranking over the other decision makers.

Table 11: Kohli's (1989) classification of power, applied to the conference destination decision-making process by Clark et al. (1998, p.85)

Further to the different decision-making bodies that have been discussed (listed in Table 12), the ICCA (2019b) also identifies a wide range of decision-influencers. While these are not formally part of the decision-making process, their perspective is still effective. Two type of decision influencers are identified – formal and informal. While the formal is possibly engaged to assist or may directly and actively influence the decision-makers, the informal influencers may do so passively or indirectly (also listed in Table 12).

Decision-makers	Decision-influencers (includes all decision-makers plus the following)
Single volunteer leader (e.g. President; Chairman)	Hired consultants
Single association executive (e.g. CEO; Secretary General)	Association leaders from other international associations with similar size/profile of events
Full Board of Directors	Association Management Company
Executive Board	Sponsors
Congress Committee (either a formal grouping or set-up ad hoc to make a particular decision)	Business Partners
Representatives of association sub-groups (or in the case of a federation, the constituent organisations' nominated representatives)	Members who have recently hosted the association meeting
National representatives	Association staff
Official delegates at General Assembly	Respected senior figures related to the association
All members (e.g. via online referendum)	Core PCO
	Politicians
	Celebrities
	News Media
	Other decision-influencers such as family, relatives, friends.

Table 12. Conference decision-makers and decision-influencers (ICCA 2019b, p. 9)

Even though the conference destination decision is taken by the association organising the conference, the association delegate is also considered a major stakeholder in the decision.

4.3.2 - The delegate

While corporate conference delegates are not given the option of attending a conference event, as it is a requirement of their job, potential association conference delegates choose whether to attend a conference or not (Tanford et al. 2012). The delegate in this case becomes the end client for the conference (Jago and Deery 2005). The success of a conference is often measured by meeting or exceeding the attendance forecasts (Ramirez et al. 2013), and this generates vital revenue for the association (ICCA 2019b). Therefore, the main aim of the association conference organiser is to maximise the attendance. Understanding that different

delegates have different characteristics is thus an essential first step. This leads to the motivating factors in stimulating delegates to attend, which becomes more challenging to satisfy as delegates increasingly expect personalised experiences at conferences (Turner 2019). Only when different visit behaviours are understood can the association act accordingly by applying the right strategies to increase delegate attendance, putting the organiser at an advantage (Severt et al. 2007; Boo et al. 2008; Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011).

Ramirez et al. (2013) argue that there are three main driver categories in participation decision-making: the positive outcomes of attending a conference (known as motivators); the facilitating and inhibiting factors that may affect the decisions; and the influence of others on the delegates. Several motivators and inhibitors for attendance have been identified and explored in literature (Ramirez et al. 2013; Mair et al. 2018). Motivators may be categorised into push motivators – reasons why the potential delegates are pressured to attend the conference and pull motivators – reasons why potential delegates are attracted to attend.

Networking, both formal and informal, is identified as an important motivating factor (Mair et al. 2018). Face-to-face networking thus remains a strong motivator to attend conferences (Mair et al. 2018). Delegates also consider the conference's social programme as important (Opperman and Chon 1997), which enhances the networking opportunity further (Foley et al. 2014). Networking is considered an important contribution to career advancement and has been highlighted as an important benefit for delegates (Mair and Frew 2018). Other personal motivating factors to attend conferences include gaining educational knowledge, visiting relatives or friends and career enhancement (Opperman and Chon 1997; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Jago and Deery 2005; Severt et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2007; Mair and Frew 2018). Furthermore, delegates are attracted to listening to prestigious speakers (Mair et al. 2018) and the opportunity to present knowledge to other delegates (Severt et al. 2007). Delegates' involvement in the association or its board or local chapters, as well as possible pressure to represent an institution constitute additional push motivators to attend (Lee and Back 2007).

On the other hand, facilitators and inhibitors are factors that help or hinder the delegate's decision to attend. Facilitating factors may include the ability to receive funding

for attendance, short travel distance and the time availability (Opperman and Chon 1997; Jarumaneerat et al. 2007), while the opposite acts as attendance inhibitors. Cost is a major expected inhibiting factor in association conferences since delegates are required to fund their attendance (Ngamsom and Beck 2000; Mair and Thompson 2009; Ramirez et al. 2013). Financial issues involve the delegate's income, travel cost, conference fee (Witt et al. 1995), accommodation costs or a combination of these (Yoo and Zhao 2010). Other factors that may influence decision-making are the health of the individual, past experiences, the programme contents, convenience, and travel ability (Opperman1995; Opperman and Chon 1997; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Jarumaneerat et al. 2007; Severt et al. 2007; Lee and Back 2007; Mair and Thompson 2009). Time constraints are becoming increasingly important as delegates understand that attending a conference comes at an opportunity cost of missing out on other potential trips or staying at home (Mair et al. 2018). Furthermore, Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) stress, the importance of threats or safety issues act as barriers to attendance, as discussed in section 3.3.3 and further explored in the next section.

Like conference destination decision-makers, delegates are influenced by decision-influencers, over and above the situational constraints discussed above. People may influence the decision, just as in the case of leisure travel decision making (Sparks and Pan 2008). Families and spouses have a stronger influence on delegates. This is especially true if the potential delegate is married and/or is frequently away on business travel (Ngamsom and Beck 2000; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001). Managers and colleagues may also have the same effect on the decision making (Lee and Back 2007), whereby pressure related to expected representation may push a delegate to attend. The destination itself has also been considered a very important pull motivator, as well as a barrier to attendance. This shall be discussed in the next section.

As the delegate is the consumer of the conference, the decision-making process becomes essentially like the models of consumer decision-making. According to these models, consumers pass through five stages in order to purchase the best item to satisfy their need, and this process has been adapted to the leisure tourist's decision-making process. In the latter case, however, there is the need of an additional stage (Yoo and Zhao 2010).

Mair and Thompson (2009) on the other hand argued that delegates' decision process to attend a conference was like the leisure tourist's decision-making process. This similarity

stemmed from the fact that both types of tourism are voluntary but contained some distinctions. The five-stage decision making process model proposed by Mair and Thompson (2009) is outlined in Figure 11. Several distinctions from leisure travel are also noticeable and outlined by Mair and Thompson (2009).

1. In the first stage, the *motivational stage*, the potential delegate is stimulated by a receipt of an invitation to participate in a conference. This is distinguished from the leisure tourist who may be motivated by a much wider range of stimuli to decide to travel. According to Opperman and Chon (1997) this is the "need to travel" stage.

2. The second stage, *information search stage,* also differs from leisure tourism model. In the case of conference tourism most information would have already been sent over to the delegate together with the invitation. If not, most of the information would be available on the hosting association's website and thus the information search is much narrower.

3. The *evaluation for alternatives* stage is usually concerned with deciding whether the delegate will go to the conference or not. Several factors acting as motivators, facilitators and inhibitors, influence the decision in this stage. The delegate evaluates these vis-à-vis each other to make the final decision to attend. This is also influenced by other competing interesting conferences, since association members may hold multiple memberships and may thus be invited to several different conferences (Opperman and Chon 1997).

4. The last two stages, on the other hand, are very similar to those in the leisure decision process. This stage occurs when the delegate finally decides to attend.

5. The final stage occurs after the final attendance decision is made and is defined as *post-decision behaviour*. The decision will thus affect the delegate (or potential delegate)'s future behaviour *vis-à-vis* his experience of attending or not attending the conference. This will affect future conference attendance decision making.

Association Mailing Word of Mouth Advertising Other sources of information → **AWARENESS OF CONFERENCE (MOTIVATION)** — *If no*

INFORMATION SEARCH → **Local Tourist Information National Tourist Information Conference Organiser Internet**

EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Personal/ Professional Development Networking Opportunities Location

Cost

Health and Security Time and Convenience

Feeds back to future decision-making

ATTENDANCE DECISION

Attend the conference — Do not attend the conference

POST DECISION BEHAVIOUR

Figure 11: The association conference attendance decision-making process (Mair and Thompson 2009, p.408)

Once the decision is taken, satisfaction or dissatisfaction will influence the delegates' future decisions. Organisers need to focus on ensuring that delegates value their conference experience (Halim and Mokhtar 2016) as unique and captivating (Wei et al. 2017) so that they may assess the facilities and evaluate their intentions to attend the conference once again (Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017). This is important both for the conference organiser as well as for the destination (Comas and Moscardo 2005; Zhang et al. 2007; Boo et al. 2008). The delegates expect a compelling experience (Gilmore 2015), requiring an immersive conference experience, rather than additions to the main traditional conference product (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). The priority and investment have in fact shifted towards providing such experience *(American Express Meetings and Events 2019). One trend

stemming from this need is *festivalisation*. Conferences are moving away from being discussions in one room, to an experience with different 'stages', themes and content options. The delegates may choose the experience they want to be part of, by choosing from multiple stages. This allows the experience to be personalised, as delegates can choose their own agenda (Turner 2019). The setup also allows a more participatory environment, which is becoming much more important than the traditional passive conference environment, where delegates used to be considered more an audience than participants (Ball 2012; CWT Meetings and Events 2019).

The organiser does not only face the challenge to satisfy the delegates' expectations, but also aims to motivate them to extend their stay for as long as possible. This increases income for both organiser and host destination (Braun 1992). Frequently associations offer delegates the opportunity to extend their stay by applying for pre- or post-conference tours. These are usually more leisure oriented than the actual conference period (Donaldson 2013). Several factors influence the delegate's decision whether to stay longer at a destination. These are related to the delegate's characteristics, to the conference's characteristics and to the destination's characteristics. Davidson (2003) mentions several characteristics that need to be kept in mind when influencing delegates to extend their stay, listed and explained in Table 13.

Destinations are thus interested in both attracting as well as satisfying the needs of delegates, as this promotes repeated business (Wan 2011). Attendee satisfaction is essential for the wellbeing of delegates, profits to hotels and to facilities hosting the conference. Increased satisfaction contributes to the stability of the destination as a conference location (Severt et al. 2007).

Factors	Variables
Delegate characteristics	*Foreign/ native* Foreign delegates are more prone to extend their stay if they are in another country. Non-residents also spend 85% more time than residents (Grado et al. 1998).
	Self-funding/ sponsored If the employer sponsors the delegate's trip, the latter may be more likely to spend his personal income on extending the visit.
	Familiar/ unfamiliar with the destination Being unfamiliar with the destination would motivate the delegate to extend the visit to explore it.
	Accompanied/unaccompanied A delegate travelling alone might feel the need to return to his or her spouse or family.
	Single/in a relationship A delegate with no spouse would not feel the pressure to return back home.
Conference characteristics	*Type of meeting* The meeting may be an association or a corporate meeting. In the former type, members attend voluntarily and thus might be more interested in the host location from the start. In the latter type the bulk of the expenses might be paid for by the employer.
	Length of convention The stay is normally prolonged when events are lasting up to three days, while longer events would lead participants to remain for the exact period required (Pechlaner et al. 2007).
	Timing in terms of days of the week A conference held during mid-week might discourage delegates to take days off work to extend their stay.
	Timing in terms of month of the year Certain months might be more motivating to the attendees to extend their stay
	Timing in terms of proximity to a major event held at the host destination Delegates may be more interested in extending their stay if a major event would be held at the host destination close to the conference dates.
	Amount of excursions already present in the official convention programme The more the number of excursions during the official programme, the less the need to extend the stay to view the host destination.
	Inclusion of a guest programme in the convention
Destination characteristics	*Destination image and perceived level of expensiveness and security*
	Distance from delegates' places of residence
	Ease of accessibility around the destination
	Level of tourism information provided by visitor and local tourist stakeholders

Table 13. Elements affecting the delegate's motivation to extend their stay before/after a conference (adapted from Davidson 2003, p. 32-37)

This section thus identifies and explores the association and the delegate as key stakeholders in the decision-making process. This contributes to answering the second objective's second research question: *Which are the main players involved in the [decision making] process?* It also contributes to understanding the different influences that have an impact on the destination decision. Nonetheless, other stakeholders have been identified in literature and listed in this study, but since they are not covered in past literature a knowledge gap has been identified. In order to understand their perspective, further research will be required. Furthermore, the location or destination is also identified as key determinant in attracting attendees and motivating them to extend their stay (Yoo and Zhao 2010; Mair et al. 2018). Therefore, the site-selection factors in attracting delegates shall now be discussed, aiming to answer the third and final research question for the study's second objective: *What are the site-related attributes that add value to a conference destination?*

4.4 Conference site-related attributes

Site-selection factors are defined as, "all those elements of a non-home place that draw discretionary travellers away from their homes" (Lew 1987, p.554). Several factors may push or pull organisations and delegates towards a destination. The conference destination is very important for the association, as their annual conference plays a massively significant role in the life of the organisation. It is possibly the only time all members meet, and a source of vital revenue, a channel for positive PR and membership growth, as well as a platform to launch new initiatives (ICCA 2019b). Pressure to choose the right destination is high.

Host destinations are expected to possess certain attributes that are valued by both meeting planners and participants (Hayat et al. 2014). This may not be easy to achieve, as site-related attractiveness is subjective. Different groups of people rate conference cities in different ways (Boo et al. 2008). The perception of site attributes also varies between that of potential attendees and that of conference planners (Para and Kachniewska 2014). Nonetheless, due to the increase in competition, destinations strive to identify and develop their competitive advantages (Hudson et al. 2004). As much knowledge as possible is thus necessary for the destination manager to understand whether the destination has the right

potential to succeed in this sector, and if in the affirmative, to identify the right strategy to make it as successful as possible.

4.4.1- Specialised Facilities

The availability of the right conference facilities is essential in selecting a destination to host a conference (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Bernini 2009; Oral and Whitfield 2010; Huo 2014). During decision-making, having a specialised conference facility is a prerequisite for the consideration of a destination as a realistic alternative. The specialised conference centre is in fact shown to be the most popular type of facility utilised by associations for their conferences (UIA 2018). The conference centre needs to be of a high standard and be equipped to offer a range of meeting facilities as may be required (Bradley et al. 2002; Ying 2017). Available facility size is another crucial aspect as no conference can be held at a location that does not have the required space available (Fenich 2001; Leask and Hood 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Choi and Boger 2002; Priporas 2005; Lee and Min 2013; Marques and Santos 2016; Cró and Martins 2018). Planners for larger associations have greater need for facility space, with large associations being compelled to host their conferences only at destinations with the right-sized facilities (Zelinsky 1994; Choi and Boger 2002).

The physical design and layout of a conference centre may also facilitate or hinder the hosting of a conference. Flexibility is essential since conference organisers are increasingly required to provide concurrent sessions of different size and layout, addressing delegates' increased need for a personalised experience (MPI 2020). Design and layout are also related to necessary factors such as décor, ambiance, lighting, signage, temperature control, aesthetics equipment and employee uniforms (Crouch and Weber 2002). The organisers will look for venues that are desirable, with architectural features and opportunity for physical interaction (CWT Meetings and Events 2019) and that fit the theme of their event (Whitfield 2009b). The possibility of delivering a unique experience is what influences 62% of the conference organisers in choosing their venues (MPI 2020).

More complex facilities are becoming popular. Such facilities do not just offer a meeting space but address all delegate-related required services and products at the

destination (Whitfield and Dioko 2012; Donaldson 2013). Conference facilities would be integrated with accommodation facilities, food and beverages, retailers, shopping malls, entertainment areas and transportation hubs (Hung et al. 2011; Wan 2011). On the other hand, this also relates to increased costs of constructing and maintaining such facilities. At this point the economic benefits of conference tourism may be questioned (Bradley et al. 2002). Further expenses may also include refurbishment or extension costs (Whitfield 2007). Both initial and maintenance costs mean an increase in the venue hire price, which is required to provide a decent return on investment. However, this may deter prospective clients from hiring the venue (Leask and Hood 2001) as the cost of available conference facilities has to be attractive (Lee and Min 2013).

Technology at the conference facilities is also a necessity that has become increasingly apparent in literature (Crouch et al. 2019). This includes the availability of audio-visual and production set-ups, which help organisers avoid the costs and challenges of outsourcing (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Another basic but essential requirement is a free and fast Wi-Fi connection. The IBTM Trend Watch Report 2019 agues

> "You can't have a delegate walk off the 4G connected, free Wi-Fi enabled world, where news, sport and entertainment are all free, and expect them to walk into a venue with poor connectivity, which holds a surcharge" (Turner 2019, p.9).

Furthermore, integrated technology should also be available in order to increase comfort levels. For example, with the increased use of 5G, connections become quicker and smarter thus allowing the improved use of technology facilities for better comfort, such as having attendees crowdsourcing the room temperature or music they want to hear (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Technology will be discussed in section 4.4.11.

4.4.2- Accommodation

Availability and standard of accommodation is a further requirement (Opperman and Chon 1997, Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; Bernini 2009). One characteristic of accommodation is room supply – the number of rooms that are bookable for the conference delegates. The number of rooms dedicated for one

conference delegation is usually around half of the total hotel capacity (Simpson and Wilkerson 1997), which might change when the accommodation facilities are dedicated only for conference delegates in an integrated venue. Crouch et al. (2019) note that conference organisers place a premium on being able to accommodate all, or as many delegates as possible, at the same site as the conference facility. Unwillingly they have moved away from major-tier cities whenever accommodation or conference space did not satisfy the demand, even though this usually increases travel time (American Express Meetings and Events 2019).

Hotelier's feedback given in the *2020 Global Meetings ad Events Forecast,* show that mid-tier accommodation is the most preferred (American Express Meetings and Events 2019), while Crouch et al. (2019) suggested four-star hotels are the most sought after, though they remark that the sharing-economy (such as Airbnb) will potentially become more important in the future. Security, service, cleanliness and location *vis-à-vis* the conference venue are also considered important accommodation characteristics (Crouch and Weber 2002; Choi and Boger 2002; Cheung et al. 2013), together with accommodation prices (Kozak et al. 2015). Cheaper hotel rates are favoured as these boost the destination's competitiveness (Becken and Gnoth 2004; Tsai et al. 2006). Nonetheless, the relationship between price and ability to attract conferences has been shown to be dependent on the value being offered and not just on the price in isolation. The greater the price-value ratio the more the destination is competitive in attracting conferences (Dioko and Whitfield 2015). Accommodation venues should understand the conference planner's preferences in order to successfully attract and host conference groups (Kozak et al. 2015).

Both the conference and accommodation venues, as well as the destination in general, are expected to respect sustainability. Trends Watch 2019 in fact claim that the trend of ensuring 'sustainability in meetings' has become so universal that it may be considered to have developed into a way of life (Turner 2019). The use of codes of conduct and eco labels are mostly welcome by planners and delegates (Park and Boo 2010) and become influential in the choices of venues and destinations. This will be discussed in section 4.4.12.

4.4.3- Transportation accessibility

Destination accessibility is related to several transportation-related factors that influence the incoming delegates' travelling conditions. Ease of accessibility to the host destination is a facilitating factor in delegate attendance (Park et al 2014; Ying 2017). The opposite is also true – the lack of accessibility acts as a barrier, inhibiting delegates from participating in a conference at a destination (Opperman and Chon 1997; Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Mair and Thompson 2009, Horváth 2011). Another facet of accessibility that impacts a destination's attractiveness is the costs incurred to travel to the destination (Crouch and Weber 2002; Kim et al. 2005; Ghazali and Ghani 2015). The most common mode of travelling for conference delegates is air transport (Turner 2019) making frequency and convenience of flight times important (Fenich 2001). The availability of proper infrastructure for alternatives modes of transport to access the destination may, however, also increase its attractiveness. These may include railway and road transportation (Jayswal 2008; DiPietro et al. 2008), which become increasingly important as flight costs are forecast to increase (BCD Travel 2019) and attractiveness reduced to increase sustainable practices and corporate social responsibility by organisers and delegates *(*American Express Meetings and Events 2019*)*.These are reflected in comments such as,

> "we consider that flying is a major contributor to Climate Change and actively discourage it" (UIA 2018, p.21).

Proximity to markets helps to make a destination more accessible. Indeed, a location's competitiveness decreases significantly when a greater proportion of the conference delegates need to travel further distances (Loukissas 1982). This decrease in competitiveness is mostly evident when the required flying time exceeds 2.5 hours (Donaldson 2013), when factoring in that time is valuable and limited for conference delegates (Weber and Ladkin 2005) making travelling time a considered cost in itself (Zhang et al. 2007). Travel time is also increased when barriers to accessibility, such as travel formalities, exist (Crouch and Weber 2002). Literature shows how Visa application issues act as a barrier (Zhang et al. 2007; Marais et al. 2017; Cró and Martins 2018; Tsui et al. 2018), with associations considering a cumbersome Visa process as an obstacle for delegates to participate in their conferences (UIA 2018). Whenever barriers to entry are erected,

conference tourism is reduced. This is also picked up in industry reports, such as the IBTM Trends Watch Report 2017, whereby the association conference market was retaliating against the US by avoiding conferences there, due to the confusion and hostility at the US borders that had undermined the idea that the destination was a welcome meeting place (Davidson and Turner 2017).

When delegates arrive at the destination ease of accessibility within the destination is also important (Buhalis 2000; Fenich 2001; Ghazali and Ghani 2015), while congested cities are less attractive to conference delegates (Fenich 2001). Better accessibility may be achieved through better mass transit transportation facilities, such as an efficient metro structure, together with increased parking facilities (Petersen 2004; Priporas 2005).A variety of public transportation is also important (Iwamoto et al. 2017), and is attractive especially if it offers green alternatives (see section 4.4.12).

4.4.4- Costs

Associations are becoming increasingly concerned with costs as 24% of associations claimed that their main concern is reduced funding and financing (UIA 2018). This is mostly due to reduced attendance if the total conference costs are too high; the costs to attend a conference have always been considered important (Tanford et al. 2012; Ying 2017; Skinner 2017). This is especially relevant to association conference delegates who are typically expected to contribute to their attendance or finance it completely (Mair and Thompson 2009; Ramirez et al. 2013). Costs are *intervening opportunities*, acting as a barrier to attendance (Opperman and Chon 1997). This cost factor is composed of four main attributes: transport expenses, accommodation expenses, food and beverage expenses, and commodity prices (Filipović 2012). Zhang et al. (2007), add the time cost to the traditional monetary cost within what they define as the *total cost factor* of attending a conference. German Convention Bureau (2013) claims that mobility and travel expenses are set to rise while Tanford et al. 2012 claim that discounting these costs may help improve conference attendance. Alternatively, local authorities may subsidise or assist organisers with costs (Park et al. 2014).

Discussing accommodation costs, Crouch and Louviere (2004) argue that quantity and quality are not as significant as the rates of the room; where the host location's attractiveness decreases as room rates increase. In general, cost are a negative predictor of attendance at a conference (Mair and Thompson 2009; Tanford 2012). However, Dioko and Whitfield (2015) disagree, as they show how a higher average accommodation cost is in fact associated with an increased number of conferences, highlighting that cost should not be considered as an automatic inhibitor. They suggest that when value is high, costs would not act as a barrier. This is in line with findings in the case study on Gen Y in Asia, which show that young consumers are less price sensitive and willing to pay for higher quality (Leask et al. 2017). Similar findings were published in the report by CWT Meetings and Events (2019), indicating that focus has now moved to creating value for delegates, which is more important than cost.

4.4.5- Total conference product

Building conference centres rarely suffices to create a successful conference destination and a total conference (or convention) product is required (Clark 2006). As a minimum, the development of a hotel and catering industry needs to accompany the development of conference tourism (Marques and Santos 2016) and include a concentration of quality hotel rooms, restaurants, retail shops and entertainment (Buhalis 2000; Petersen 2004). Other, more generic, structural improvements including better water and sewage systems, motorways, electricity supply, telephone and public transport networks, are also required for conference tourism (Davidson and Rogers 2006). Integrated conference venues aim to offer these services within one venue (see section 4.4.1) (Whitfield and Dioko 2012; Donaldson 2013). Specialised human resources are also required, in order to provide general tourist services, as well as to offer more specialised services such as organising conferences and contributing to an increase in visitor satisfaction levels (Marques and Santos 2016). This includes conference staff as an integral part of the venues' offer, and who should be trained and motivated (Weber and Ladkin 2003).

4.4.6- Destination's image/reputation

Travellers' choice depends on the favourableness of their image of that destination (Leisen 2001). Similarly, association decision-makers are prone to take decisions based on perceptions and prejudices (ICCA 2019b). The destination's image and positioning are thus important factors when competing in the conference tourism market (Zhang et al. 2007; Girod 2009; Marques and Santos 2016). Destinations associated with the arts, cultural heritage or business in general possess an image that is attractive to both conference delegates and organisers (Bernini 2009). A link with prosperity also helps to make the destination more attractive (Fenich 2001). Furthermore, associations may also give preference to destinations that are known for strong research or expertise in the association's key subject area and/or possess local site inspection opportunities within the subject fields (ICCA 2019b).

A history of hosting conferences further improves a destination's attractiveness through the opportunity to showcase several qualities such as the ability to project a sense of enthusiasm, community, pride and cohesiveness (Mackellar 2006; Lee 2006; Chiu and Ananzeh 2012). Meetings provide the opportunity to promote the destination on an international level (Hanly 2011). The increased promotion to the host destination boosts the destination's image further, it being shown that people give higher ratings on attractiveness to destinations about which they have prior information (Boo et al. 2008) Furthermore, placing high in statistics such as those by ICCA act as proof of the destination's ideal positioning to attract conferences (Voyages Afriq 2020).

Delegates themselves also act as ambassadors by promoting the destinations with friends and colleagues through word-of-mouth (Severt et al. 2007) or electronic word of mouth (eWOM) online, considered to be the most influential inform media among consumers (Huete-Alocer 2017). This is proven to happen when delegates experience a high level of satisfaction and perception of high service quality, which are both likely to reinforce the delegates' intentions of attending the conference again and engaging in positive word-of-mouth with friends and family (Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017).

Nonetheless, established destinations are required to promote more their USPs, as authentic experiences are becoming progressively important. Innovative destinations are sought after as conference planners and associations are becoming more adventurous with new destination choices (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). "Fringe" destinations are thus entering the competitive market aiming to carve a share from more traditional destinations (Szamosi et al. 2012).

4.4.7- Climate

Delegates seek destinations with desirable climates (Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007 Park et al. 2014), preferring moderate temperatures and humidity, as well as sunlight. They may be affected by monthly high and low temperatures, wind speeds, humidity, darkness, clear days and days with precipitation (Fenich 2001). A favourable climate may also give a competitive advantage such as in the case of Qatar, that benefits from warm climate during the winter months, allowing the destination to attract conference tourism during the months from October to April (Gregorić 2014). Conversely, destination with non-desirable climate and weather may try to overcome this challenge by proposing extra incentives for planners to hold their conferences there, even during the bad season. In the case of Orlando, for example, the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) offers hurricane insurance. This covers the conferences being held at the destination during the bad weather period, thus putting the planner's mind at rest (Hayat et al. 2014). Nonetheless recent literature has also shown that climate is at times considered less important than most other destination characteristics (Papadopoulos et al. 2014).

4.4.8- Local support and CVBs

Some destinations may offer additional incentives to planners to attract more conferences. Incentives may come from the availability of local resources including already-active tourism and conference industries, recreational enterprises, universities and associative agencies and a local network for conference firms, service enterprisers and public institutions (Bernini 2009). The hospitality of the host community, which includes both their friendliness and their tolerance towards different type of delegates, is essential to allow international

delegations to feel comfortable at a destination (Crouch and Weber 2002; Jago and Deery 2005; Zhang et al. 2007). Organising a conference at a destination may also gain benefit from the support of that destination's association chapter. This may be decisive in attracting a conference as a strongly supportive local chapter acts as a motivator and attracts conferences to the destination they represent (ICCA 2015).

Furthermore, local financial support is frequently a motivator for associations. The possibility of subventions is becoming increasingly attractive as UIA (2018) shows how associations are becoming more and more concerned about reduced funding or finance (24%) and other obstacles to delegate participation, which also include budget reduction (27%). This is due to the delegate becoming increasingly price sensitive (Mair 2014), meaning a competitive edge is important to attract delegates. Different subventions can be offered. Istanbul, for example, offers discounts on venue costs, sponsored city receptions, a contribution to the marketing and public relations of the conference, the provision of both digital and printed brochures for conference material, and discounted or complimentary air fare ticket (Čad 2017). This support is increasingly required as air and hotel prices increased (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Conversely, while subventions are big motivators, it must be noted that financial incentives have been shown to be unsustainable in the longer term (Dioko and Whitfield 2015).

Support from the destination may also be given by the local Conference Visitor Bureau (CVB). This is a non-profit or governmental institution that represents a destination and aids in the community's long-term development through its tourism and marketing strategy (Baytok et al. 2010). CVBs may develop at any geographical level, including at a country, region or city level (Rogers and Davidson 2015). Larger geographical areas may also be covered by a convention bureau, such as in the case of the European Convention Bureau that promotes several European member countries (Euro-Congrès 2018). The development of CVBs is important as the various local stakeholders could only provide fragmented marketing of their single services. Furthermore, no other single agency can control and deliver a combination of tourism products and services portfolio at a destination (Bramwell and Lane 2000; Prideaux and Cooper 2002). The term *Destination Marketing Organisations* (DMOs) is at times used interchangeably with CVBs since the primary role of the organisation is that of destination marketing (Wang 2008). However, different roles

and responsibilities of CVBs have been identified through academic and industry literature. All of these contribute to the development, strengthening and support of conference tourism at destinations (Wang 2008; Marques and Santos 2016). These have been listed and explained in Table 14.

CVB Role	Description	Sources
Destination marketer	Promoting the tourism products of the destination and the destination itself to potential visitors.	Bramwell and Lane 2000; Weber 2001; Prideaux and Cooper 2002; Priporas 2005; Crouch and Louviere 2004. Wang and Krakover 2008; Baytok et al. 2010
Destination image or brand developer	Develop a brand promoting a holistic image of the destination aiming at attracting the conference market.	Hall 2016.
Industry coordinator	Coordinate the various stakeholders in the industry and reducing fragmentation.	Wang and Krakover 2008; Rogers and Davidson 2015; Convention Bureau Italy 2020.
Advocate and facilitator of tourism projects	Raise local awareness of the tourism business and its impacts. Provide leadership for the local tourism industry.	Wang 2008; Heath and Wall 1992; Laws 1995.
Economic driver	Generate direct and indirect income and employment.	Morrison et al. 1998; Getz 2004.
Quasi-public or public representative	Act as a semi-government institution. May at times also be part of a government institution for increased effectiveness.	MacLaurin and Leong 2000; Wang 2008.
Builder of community pride	Improve quality of life and act as the 'flag carrier' for residents and visitors.	Morrison et al. 1998.
Partnership and alliances builder	Enhance cooperation within the destination and with other CVBs or foreign agencies.	Rogers and Davidson 2015; Marques and Santos 2016; ICPB 2018; Convention Bureau Italy 2020
Destination product developer	Develop the destination to offer all services as a total conference service provider.	DiPietro et al. 2008; Wang 2008.
Represent a destination and its stakeholders	Act as the only institution that can represent all stakeholders since individual businesses would focus mostly on their own benefits.	Wang and Krakover 2008; Baytok et al. 2010;
One-stop-shop for planners	Provides all information required by conference planners presenting both their product and the destination. This includes help with accommodation, site-selection, transportation and any local service.	Weber 2001; Comas and Moscardo 2005; Vienna Convention Bureau 2016; Newcastle Gateshead 2020.
Human resources support	Responsible for training and support local planners by providing human resources such as on-site registration staffing and information providers at conferences.	Weber 2001; Marques and Santos 2016.
Data collection authority	Acts as an unbiased and systematic data collector of the conference sector providing industry statistics that may be used to improve the destination's market position.	Iwamoto et al. 2017; MacLaurin and Leong 2000; ICPB 2016.
Facilitate and produce events	Bids directly or produces events itself especially to fill low demand periods. Facilitates communication between potential clients and local suppliers.	Getz 2004; Getz et al. 1998; VCB 2016; Weber 2001.
Official Liaison agent	Provide guidance and feedback to the central government regarding the conference tourism sector.	ICPB 2018.
Quality assurance agent	Monitors the services level and events-standards being offered at the destination.	Malta Tourism Authority 2020a; Convention Bureau Italy 2020

Table 14. The various roles of Convention and Visitor Bureaus

As shown in Table 14, several responsibilities of CVBs have been identified. The traditional role remains destination marketing. This may be done by adopting various strategies such as the provision of familiarization visits and participation in international exhibitions to promote the area as a conference destination (Priporas 2005; Baytok et al. 2010). As destinations increasingly invest in conference tourism, increased marketing efforts are important to target the right market segments (Dioko and Whitfield 2015; Fenich 2016).

Even though marketing may be considered to have an umbrella role, the other roles listed in Table 14 are also essential to ultimately market a destination successfully. The CVB also aims at creating an attractive *destination brand* as an ideal conference destination. This is necessary as a better destination image is becoming increasingly important, with potential delegates being progressively involved in different associations (Mair and Thompson 2009).

It must also *coordinate the stakeholders* within the industry, which may include tourist boards and private entities such as conference venues, hotels, professional conference organisers (PCOs), destination management companies (DMCs) and other related service providers (CBI 2016). CVBs are dependent on other businesses and organisations to implement their vision for the destination, thus unity is of utmost importance (Wang and Krakover 2008). The CVB also ensures the coordination of local suppliers to develop a shared direction and to allow a unified marketing strategy (Rogers and Davidson 2015). CVBs are responsible for *facilitating tourism projects* by raising local awareness and providing leadership (Heath and Wall 1992; Laws 1995; Wang 2008). CVBs act as *economic drivers* through the conferences they attract. Economic benefits are derived by aiming at maximising economic impacts, filling beds and increasing tourist numbers. Attempts are also made to reduce seasonality problems (Morrison et al. 1998; Getz 2004).

While CVBs are usually non-profit organisations that act as a *semi-government institution* through its close collaboration with the central government, there are cases whereby the CVB is formed and is part of a governmental institution. One example is the Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB), one wing of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB 2020). This structure may be beneficial as only the government has the power to implement certain policies that may help promote the site as a conference destination,

such as attracting international companies through tax incentives (MacLaurin and Leong 2000). This is also important for the *creation of partnerships* and synergies (Marques and Santos 2016). At times CVBs representing different destinations partner up. For example CVBs of adjacent areas may join together to promote one region, such as in the case of the French Riviera Convention Bureau working with the Antibes, Cannes and Nice to promote the Côte d'Azur as a conference destination (Rogers and Davidson 2015). The CVB is also concerned with *developing the total conference product*, as defined in section 44.5, without which the destination would not be properly equipped to handle most conferences (DiPietro et al. 2008).

Being a non-profit or governmental institution, the CVB has no personal interest and thus is the only institution that can *represent a destination* without being biased (Wang and Krakover 2008; Baytok et al. 2010). The CVB also acts as a *one-stop shop* for DMCs and PCOs, attempting to make the process of gathering information and preparing a bid for a conference at the destination more convenient and faster (Weber 2001; Comas and Moscardo 2005; Vienna Convention Bureau 2016; Newcastle Gateshead 2020). Furthermore CVBs support the industry through the *provision and training of human resources* (Weber 2001; Marques and Santos 2016) and by *collecting data* to provide market statistics (MacLaurin and Leong 2000). It also provides official information to potential delegates and visitors (Iwamoto et al. 2017), and is concerned with ensuring that the level of services being offered by the local companies are up to standard in order to *uphold the reputation of the destination* (Convention Bureau Italy 2020; Malta Tourism Authority 2020). In the case of Malta, for example, a quality seal exists to ensure that DMCs satisfy certain criteria before beginning to market their destination abroad.

Nonetheless, CVBs seem to be disconnected from the association conference market, as 34%of associations have claimed that they are not familiar with the services offered by the CVB, while another 16%indicate they are aware of what a CVB could offer but have never consulted one (UIA 2018). Thus CVBs should aim at penetrating the association conference market more, in order to possibly facilitate more international conferences.

4.4.9 - Availability of Leisure

The provision of leisure-related facilities and activities at the destination also helps conference tourism to succeed as conference delegates seek leisure facilities (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Bernini 2009; Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Hanly 2011; Marais et al. 2017).It is known that human-made resources such as leisure attractions help to add to the variety of services and experiences at a destination, helping its competitiveness (Reisinger et al. 2019). The importance of leisure is highlighted in the results of the study by Park and Boo (2010), whereby only 5.6% of delegates did not attend the conference with leisure in mind. The delegates may engage in leisure activities during official social programmes or by extending their stay at the host destination. Association conferences usually include pre- and post-conference periods (Donaldson 2013) during which an element of leisure is usually strongly present. Delegates are generally interested in a range of leisure activities including food and restaurants, access to special events, bars, theatres and nightclubs (Hiller 1995; Simpson and Wilkerson 1997; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007) and local cultural experiences (Park and Boo 2010).Furthermore, delegates may be accompanied by guests who engage in activities during the conference period such as enjoying local culture, sightseeing or shopping (Davidson 2003).

4.4.10- Security and stability

Safety and security are an important factor in the choice of location (Nelson and Rys 2000; Fenich 2001; Choi and Boger 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; CWT Meetings and Events 2019) and identified as one of the major trends in conferences (Turner 2019). Threats (discussed in section 3.3.3) include political issues and fears related to beliefs or sexual preferences (Zelinsky 1994), which tend to be on the increase. For example, populist and right-wing politicians around the world disrupt diplomatic traditions that generally helped to defuse past international disputes. These emerging and existing realities could threaten travellers targeted because of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation (BCD Travel 2019). Other destination risks may include strikes, natural disasters and boycotts at the destination (Crouch and Weber 2002) as well as health risks (BCD Travel 2019) such as COVID-19, which would strongly influence conference tourism as shown in section 3.3.3.

Threats of terrorism are also highly important. Incidents such as those in Nairobi (Kenya), and Sri Lanka, in 2019, are evidence that terror attacks may at times target conference travellers (BCD Travel 2019). Conference organisers are very risk averse, and major threats such as terrorism at a destination removes that place from the list of possible options for a period of time, until the act is forgotten (Baytok et al. 2010; Avraham 2015;). Several examples have been discussed in section 3.3.3, which indicate that destinations have taken long to recover from terror attacks.

Unless a destination is perceived to be a safe and secure, conference organisers shall be avoidant. The perception of personal insecurity can contribute to substantial travel anxiety which constitutes a stronger barrier to travel to the destination than the actual safety risk itself (Bassil et al. 2019).The use of public diplomacy as a means of marketing has been shown as having limited effect in counteracting this perception (Taylor 2006). Negative characteristics dominate the perception of the destination, making it unattractive (Avraham 2015). A bigger risk exists when frequent crises occur, relegating the destination or a whole geographical area to an unattractive conference option. The Middle East has, for example, been perceived as dangerous, violent and prone to terrorism (Al-Mahadin and Burns, 2007). Repeated terrorism incidents may alter tourists' intentions to travel to the destination, impacting its image (Alvarez and Campo 2014; Bassil et al. 2019). When such an impression exists, each incident enforces the negative image of the whole region, even if crises occur in one confined area of the country (Sonmez 1998; Taylor 2006). Studying Islamic countries, Neumayer and Plümper (2016) have confirmed that fatal incidents there affect Western tourism to Islamic destinations beyond the specific zone involved in the incident. This influences travel to the destination negatively for at least a year. Such "spill over effects" may be the result of media bias or the lack of geographical knowledge of potential clients (Taylor 2006). The image of a destination is also negatively impacted when its citizens are involved in negative events in other countries, such as Islamic citizens involved in the 9/11 attacks. This left a negative effect on Arab countries as they were blamed for the crises, and these struggled for a decade to recover (Al-Hamarneh 2013).

Overcoming perception is increasingly important, especially if prejudice is affecting negatively the destination, as decision-makers, being human beings, base themselves on perceptions when selecting a destination (ICCA 2019b). Accurate and up-to-date positive

information and advice from official sources at the destination may help to comprehend the potential exposure of a conference (CWT Meetings and Events 2019), and a destination should thus strive to offer clear information to reduce prejudice.

4.4.11- Technology

The availability of technology at the destination and venues is a desired element by both conference organisers and delegates. Technology satisfies delegates' expectations as more and more centennials (Gen Z) become delegates, having always lived within a digital environment (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). The most basic technology and an essential feature in conferences is the availability of Wi-Fi (Fenich et al. 2014, Hussain et al. 2014) as industry reports indicate this as a top priority, quoting the importance of providing enough Wi-Fi bandwidth to meet attendee's needs (Palmer 2018). The importance of Wi-Fi is linked directly to the young generation's immersive online experience and dependence on online social interaction (Nusair et al. 2013). This dependence on internet has also influenced the expectations of delegates who seek very fast response time to their requests, a result of their familiarity with on-line information and online booking services, along with the easier and quicker communication media facilities (Weber and Ladkin 2005). This can also be related to the increased popularity of instant gratification by younger generations (Fountain and Charters 2010). Faster broadband speeds and increased reliable mobile network, brought about by 5G, is also expected to accelerate the use of most technologies. This adds to the 'digital ubiquity' in conference experiences, as delegates' expectations of digital integration increases (Turner 2019). The UIA (2018) indicated how 16% of the associations already did live streaming, 6% carried out live online reporting from the conference and 21% considered virtual participation, all of which requires supporting technology.

Delegates want innovative tools that give them more visibility, real-time data and feedback. Neuhofer et al. (2012) suggest that technology impacted experience altogether, and introduced the concept of 'Technology Enhanced Destination Experiences'. This relates to how technology such as mobile technologies and social media platforms does not only co-create experiences in the physical space but also co-creates virtual experiences which may apply before, during or after the visitor's trip to a destination. With the introduction of smart phones, every conference attendee embraced a paperless existence taking over laptops,

notebooks and paperwork. This led to the increased popularity of mobile apps that gave delegates access to agendas, programme information and electronic note taking from their phone (Keller 2019). Mobile apps continue to develop and industry reports now show that mobile apps such as *Whatsapp* are being used to communicate with conference attendees (BCD Meeting and Event 2017) and considered as a "must have" (American Express Meetings and Events 2018). Event apps used from phones have made strong enhancements to incorporate a full delegate experience such as polling, surveys, contact exchange, and one-to-one meetings (Keller 2019). Social media is also being utilised in a multitude of ways, such as for communication amongst delegates and for marketing conferences (Destinations International 2017), delegate engagement (Davidson and Turner 2017) and for use in case of emergencies and crises during conferences (BCD Meetings and Events 2017). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram have helped to improve networking opportunities, enhance brand awareness and foster interest (Keller 2019), with social media prominence becoming one of the most important characteristics in destination marketing (Destinations International 2017).

CWT Meetings and Events (2019) however claim that the potential of using technology to boost engagement, networking and overall experience during conference is still mostly untapped. Artificial intelligence is set to be integrated in events, for example via chat bots, and may possibly become the most important technology integration in conferences as it does not require download or storage space (Turner 2019). Augmented reality may also be used to share details with delegates, for example sharing the recipe or provenance of each item of food at the conference (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Technology tools become essential to empower delegates, as younger generations expect to be active and co-create their experience rather than passively consume experiences (Benckendorff and Moscardo 2010). The functionality of apps and technology discussed in this section allow conference planners to empower delegates.

While integrating technology in the conference remains primarily the responsibility of the conference organiser, a supporting system at the conference venues and destination is required. This also increases the need and concern for digital safety, such as digital breaches (Turner 2019). Conference organisers are increasingly responsible for a safe process for data collection, storage and protection, which has now become a must (BCD Meetings and Events

2017). Furthermore, increased dependence and use of technology can also pose a risk to physical conferences, as virtual conferences are becoming increasingly popular as a replacement to traditional ones, especially following the Covid-19 outbreak (Palmer 2020).

4.4.12- Greening and sustainability

Sustainability and social responsibly are growing in importance (American Express Meetings and Events 2019; CWT Meetings and Events 2019) and should now be considered a way of life rather than a trend (Turner 2019). Concern regarding the conference sector's impact on the environment and its demands in terms of natural resources, water and energy has been on the increase (Mair and Jago 2010; Whitfield and Dioko 2012). The GMIC (Green Meeting Industry Council) was in fact formed in 2003 to improve meeting management practices by promoting sustainable strategies (ICCA 2018a). Sustainable demands by environmentally conscious delegates have increased (Whitfield et al. 2014) and triggered the need to introduce green practices in the conference sector (Han and Hwang 2017). Delegates are also being educated on how they can reduce their own environmental impact (Lee et al. 2013). This has been reflected in the criteria used by associations and conference organisers when choosing their conference destinations (Turner 2019), as sustainable development has become an important quality factor and criterion in such a selection (German Convention Bureau 2013).

"Greening" has been discussed and considered important in conference tourism (Mair and Jago 2010; Whitfield and Dioko 2012). Technologies that reduce cost and impact on the environment are on the increase (Lee et al. 2013). Green venues are becoming more important, with certification based on their achieved level of sustainability contributing to a competitive edge in being chosen by organisers (Park and Boo 2010; Turner 2019). Different green measures at conference centres have been adopted, including green roofs, solar panels, sustainable green functions, greener transportation alternatives, and the use of environmentally friendly products (Doyle 2010). Other green characteristics at the venues include linen re-use policy, energy and water saving devices (for example low-flow plumbing fixtures) and reusable serving utensils and food containers (meetingsnet.com 2009). A number of policies association with "green" conference organisation include presenting green policies and practices, providing a central location to limit transportation

needs, offering alternative transportation (e.g. light rail, train), using electronic marketing, registration and handouts, using double-sided printing for all meeting-related materials, purchasing recyclable products, strategically placing recycling bins in-house, selecting buffet style menus, donating leftovers to a food bank, using bulk dispensers for all food and beverages, and buying food from local vendors who use locally grown products (Lee et al. 2013).

Following green practices also contributes towards a crucial advantage in the competition among event venues and destinations (German Convention Bureau 2013) as it acts as a differentiating tool in distinguishing a green conference from conventional non-green alternatives (Henderson 2011). Therefore effort to reduce environmental deterioration and implement green practices is considered one way of how to attract and maintain pro-environmental delegates (Han 2014), acting as a key to the green market (Ranacher and Pröbstl-Haider 2014). Several other benefits derive from hosting green meetings including image improvement, reduced costs and raising awareness for environmental issues (UNEP 2009; Gecker 2009). Green practices add value to products, such as conferences, making them more marketable and attractive (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006). Nonetheless, barriers to introduce green practices have also been identified. Organising green meetings may be time consuming and possibly lead to an increase in costs (Ranacher and Pröbstl-Haider 2014). Furthermore, return on the investment in green practices may be difficult to measure in the short-term (Bird et al. 2007) and hard to quantify in financial terms (Kang et al. 2012). Lack of information and sustainability-weariness also act as barriers (Aase 2011).

Sustainability should remain a motivator to implement environmental measures and the introduction of certification facilitates its control (Vernon et al. 2003). Eco certification for green meetings is one suggested way forward as it is a popular tool to promote sustainability by providing an audit procedure for facilities and services in terms of specific standards, rewarding compliant service-providers and conference planners with a logo that may be used to improve their marketability and attractiveness (Honey and Stewart 2002). For this to succeed, it is necessary that consumers such as delegates believe in the credibility of the ecolabels, while service-providers such as venues and conference organisers need to have confidence that the ecolabel will result in increased sales (Toth 2002).

4.5 Summary

As conference tourism has been utilised successfully as part of rejuvenation strategies (Agarwal 2002; Oral and Whitfield 2010; Müller et al 2010), it becomes evident that mature destinations stand to benefit from advantages that generally outweigh the negative consequences. Mitigation or avoidance of consequences is also possible when long-term planning is carried out. On the other hand, as destinations acknowledge the benefits of conference tourism, competition to host conferences increases (DiPietro et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2010b; Hussain et al. 2014). An understanding of the factors affecting the site-selection process was required to compete on the conference market. (Filipović 2012). This was in line with the second objective of this study: *To critically examine and evaluate the influence on association conference tourism decision-making.*

To gain a holistic understanding of the influences on decision making, three research questions were identified and tackled in this chapter. Therefore:

1. What is the decision-making process involved in selecting a destination?
2. Which are the main players involved in the process?
3. Which are the site-related attributes that add value to a conference destination?

This chapter has identified and evaluated the process followed by associations when selecting a potential conference destination, which is complex and influenced by several antecedent factors. The dynamics of power within the buying centre also affect the decisions taken (Kang et al. 2005).

A number of stakeholders have also been identified – the delegate, the association, the conference agency, the conference planner, the host location and local government, the conference centres, and conference bureaus (Var et al. 1985; Opperman and Chon 1997; Jago and Deery 2005). This chapter focused on the association and the delegate as the stakeholders that are considered most important and are most focussed upon in literature. Furthermore, the factors influencing both the association and the delegates' decisions were identified and explored, including both internal and external factors in the case of the association, and the motivators and barriers for the delegates. These are non-destination

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related and may be difficult to control or manipulate as they are outside of the control of the destination. Nonetheless, a list of destination-related factors and characteristics have also been shown to influence the decision and include *specialised facilities*, *accommodation*, *accessibility*, *costs*, *total convention product*, *the destination's image*, *climate*, *local support*, *availability of leisure*, *safety and security, availability of technology* and *sustainability*. This allows a destination to understand what investment is necessary in order to give itself an advantage in the conference market.

Nonetheless, several gaps in knowledge have been identified, and might compromise the validity of the current outcomes. Lack of updated academic literature relating to the delegates' needs has been found. Even though the delegate's choice to attend a conference has been widely researched in academic literature, most studies are not recent enough and seem to lack several contemporary elements that influence delegates' decisions. This gap has been verified when comparing academic literature to industry reports, which this study has referred to as to partially bridge the current gaps. Nonetheless, having critically evaluated the current academic literature on the subject, and having evaluated the industry reports, this study shall carry out primary research in order to update the academic body of knowledge, ensuring that contemporary factors are better covered. This shall allow the study to gain an understanding of the contemporary delegate's needs.

Furthermore, even though literature has given most importance to associations and delegates, a lack of academic literature could be clearly identified in terms of the other stakeholders in the process. While their perspectives have been included in some studies, no study has been carried out whereby all the stakeholder's perspectives are considered. This gap in knowledge underlines the need for research on how all the stakeholders' different perspectives on contemporary factors may converge, thus identifying the factors that are important to all, rather than to some stakeholders. Only such a study could claim to propose a holistic perspective of the decision-making process.

Tackling these gaps in knowledge is considered essential to truly understand how a mature destination can succeed in the conference tourism market. The third, fourth and fifth objectives of this study aim at tackling this research gap by employing primary research. These research methods will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research process undertaken by this study. Having reviewed the literature and outlined the gap in knowledge in section 4.5, the need to carry out primary research was identified as required to address the aim and objectives of the study. Following the aim and objectives, this chapter explains the methodology adopted, as well as the research phases and the research design followed. The two main data collection methods – the delegates' questionnaire and the stakeholders' Delphi study – will finally be analysed.

5.2 The Aim and objectives of the study

The study's aim is to assist mature destinations in improving their association conference tourism product, identifying and examining the crucial characteristics required to become successful in attracting the association conference market. The study set to overcome gaps in the knowledge, as the list of motivating and inhibiting factors would, for the first time, reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders involved in conference tourism. The knowledge generated by this study would then be presented as an Association Conference Destination Viability Model (ACDVM) and as a Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit (CCDT), aimed for practitioners. Apart from updating and adding to the body of knowledge, these instruments are invaluable to mature destinations, and other destinations interested in conference tourism for several reasons. Firstly, a destination is made aware of necessary requirements to become a successful conference destination by identifying important factors which it currently lacks. Secondly, they guide a destination to focus its energy on the motivating factors that are considered most important and on eliminating the negative factors that prove to be the strongest barriers. Furthermore, guidance is given by showing which factors allow a destination to enter the conference market, and which factors are then important (and to what extent) in improving the destinations' competitive edge.

Five objectives related to this main aim were outlined, each of which was composed of several research questions. These are:

1. **To critically review the potential of conference tourism in contributing to a mature destination's rejuvenation.**

This objective was tackled by answering the following research questions:

a. Can mature tourism destinations rejuvenate?
b. What are the causes and characteristics of tourism destination decline?
c. What are the preconditions for a mature tourism destination to successfully rejuvenate and which is the most ideal strategy to do so?
d. Does conference tourism satisfy the requirements for a destination to successfully rejuvenate?

This objective was addressed in chapters 2 and 3 by utilising secondary data from the literature review.

2. To critically examine and evaluate the factors influencing association conference tourism decision-making.

This objective was tackled by answering the following research questions:

a. What is the decision-making process involved in selecting a destination?
b. Which are the main players involved in the process?
c. Which are the site-related factors that add value to a conference destination?

This objective was addressed in chapter 4, by evaluating academic literature and industry reports. As conference decision-making literature is analysed, the gaps in knowledge were identified in order to understand which additional knowledge is required to satisfy the next research objective. Therefore, carrying out primary research was considered necessary.

3. To critically examine and evaluate the different stakeholders' perspectives on contemporary factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.

This objective was addressed by primary research, which shall be discussed in this chapter. Their results shall be presented in chapter 6. The objective was tackled by answering the following research questions:

a. Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer?
b. Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are considered important by all the stakeholders?

While using the literature as the foundation, this objective sought to identify the contemporary factors influencing conference delegates' decision for conference attendance. This involved updating the knowledge by detecting what is influencing the delegates' decision-making, considered as the end-customers of conferences. This need emerged from the ascertaining that several factors were missing in the literature when compared to industry reports. This required primary research.

Successively, all stakeholders were to be consulted in order to develop a holistic opinion on a comprehensive checklist of requirements needed for a mature destination to successfully attract conferences. This required a second primary research to address the knowledge gap identified in literature. The opinions of all the site-selection stakeholders were evaluated to understand which factors may be of a higher importance. This made the study unique in that it was the first study to research the perspectives of all the stakeholders about conference destination selection, therefore offering a holistic view on this topic. The degree of importance of each factor was evaluated in comparison to the other factors within the proposed list, in order to understand which are the most influential. The possibility of having some factors substituted by alternatives in certain sites was also evaluated.

This objective sought to support the primary research using knowledge from academic literature, together with knowledge from industry reports and the researcher's personal experience as a conference organiser. This allowed the identification of contemporary factors that are studied in terms of importance. Primary research was required to both update literature on the contemporary factors that influence the delegates' decision, as well as identifying an all-encompassing perspective of all stakeholders on site-selection, which was lacking.

4. To develop an *Association Conference Destination Viability Model* that can be utilised to identify which characteristics are required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism.

This objective sought to apply the results from the second and third objectives into a model, by listing and explaining the main set of motivating and inhibiting factors influencing decision-making. The model also updated the body of knowledge on association conference decision-making, outlining which factors are necessary for a destination to be considered a conference destination, and which factors give a destination the competitive edge to become successful in the association conference market. This will be presented in chapter 6.

5. To develop a *Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit* for destinations to enable the evaluation and improvement of their positioning in the association conference tourism market.

The planning of the research design is shaped by the researcher's theoretical framework – what is referred to as a *paradigm* (Bogdan and Biklen 1998; Mertens 2005; Morgan 2007). Before explaining which research methods and methodology were adopted and why, the choice of the paradigm adopted will be explained. The discussion on methodology and methods chosen shall follow in the succeeding sections, being an effect of the chosen paradigm.

5.3 Research approach

The planning of the research design is shaped by the researcher's theoretical framework – what is referred to as a *paradigm* (Bogdan and Biklen 1998; Mertens 2005; Morgan 2007). Before explaining which research methods and methodology were adopted and why, the choice of the paradigm adopted will be explained. The discussion on methodology and methods chosen shall follow in the succeeding sections, being an effect of the chosen paradigm.

5.3.1 Paradigms

The term 'paradigm' refers to

"a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan and Biklen 1998, p.22).

Paradigms establish the way of considering reality for the group that shares them (McGregor and Murnane 2010; Kankam 2019). Although various definitions exist, all converge in the awareness that paradigms offer a shared belief system to which particular disciplines adhere (Kuhn 1962; Slevitch 2011). Paradigms direct the way knowledge is defined, collected and interpreted (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006), and shape the intent, motivation and expectations of a research project.

Several philosophical assumptions require attention when discussing paradigms. These include ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba and Lincoln 2005; Taylor and Medina 2013). Ontology is defined as the study of reality, describing what entities exist or can be said to be exist. Therefore, it defines what can be real (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Mertens 2007; Creswell 2007). Epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge or the process of knowledge (Slevitch 2011). This describes the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known (Mertens 2007; Creswell 2007). Paradigms are determined by ontological positions as they describe what can be said to exist (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Sale et al. 2002). The ontological position establishes the epistemology. Epistemological assumptions in turn direct the way in which such assumptions can be investigated (the methodology). Each methodology establishes its methods according to its principles (Creswell 2007; Kankam 2019).

5.3.2 The Choice of Paradigm

There are two dominant paradigm philosophies: Positivism and Interpretivism (Edirisingha 2012). The Positivist paradigm, also referred to as the 'scientific method' or 'science research' (Mertens 2005) believes that research should be scientific and focus on understanding the world well enough to control and predict it. This is possible as this paradigm considers the world to be deterministic, operating by laws of cause and effect (Krauss 2005). Through its deterministic philosophy, positivism seeks to identify causes and patterns, and find causal relationships between components. The goal of positivism is to make generalisations that are context and time-free. This is considered possible as human actions are also governed by causes that precede behaviour. Effects can be determined through causal relations (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Creswell 2003; Aliyu et al. 2014). Positivist ontology believes that a single objective reality exists and is independent of

observers' perspectives or values (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Healy and Perry 2000; Aliyu et al. 2014).

Research should quantitatively measure independent facts about reality (Healy and Perry 2000). Anything which cannot be objectively observed and measured is not considered to be knowledge (Trochim and Donnelly 2001). Positivism demands that researchers separate themselves from the phenomena under study to ensure they remain emotionally neutral. This allows the distinction between reality and feeling or judgement (Healy and Perry 2000; Carson et al. 2001; Edirisingha 2012). Facts are established by taking a phenomenon apart and examining its component parts (Krauss 2005). Positivism adopts deductive reasoning, whereby theories are formulated prior to the initiation of the research and are tested and modified throughout the research. This allows the theory to be revised to improve its predictability of reality; which is the aim of positivism (Krauss 2005).The current study seeks to identify how factors within the conference industry influence conference decision-making. This introduces a desired element of predictability, which closely resembles the aim of positivism, and the need to incorporate this approach. Nonetheless, elements from interpretivism were also considered important for this research.

Interpretivism suggests reality is socially constructed. Meaning lies in experience and not in external elements since individuals screen, translate, alter or reject information, shaping their personal knowledge and constructing their meanings of the world (Lythcott and Duschl 1990; Carson et al. 2001; Mertens 2005; Cohen and Crabtree 2006; Kankam 2019). In terms of ontology and epistemology, interpretivism proposes a reality that is multiple and relative (Aliyu et al. 2014). No single external reality exists over and above the subjective experience and there is no point in establishing an external validity or objective reality (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Trochim and Donnelly 2001). Generalisation is not possible as everyone is unique and research focuses on capturing the different perceptions and interpretations of a phenomenon, constituting the different realities that exist (Creswell 2003).

Research is concerned with understanding and explaining the meanings in human behaviour. This includes the understanding of motives, meanings, beliefs and subjective experiences which are inevitably time- and context-dependent (Neuman 2000; Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Predicting human behaviour is not important (Black 2006). The researcher is

also considered a unique individual and thus inevitably affects the research through his/her own perceptions and values (Trochim and Donnelly 2001). Throughout the researcher's interaction with the research subjects, the research inquiry changes the perceptions of both the researcher and the participant (Coll and Chapman 2000; Cousins 2002). The interpretivist tradition adopts an inductive research method whereby the researcher remains open to new knowledge through the study (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Creswell 2003). Qualitative data collection methods and analysis are considered more suitable for interpretivist research (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006). This approach was of relevance to this study since several decision-makers and variable situations were shown to affect the conference destination choice. Understanding how the various stakeholders perceive the different destination motivators and inhibitors was necessary to bridge the current gap in literature. This is in line with interpretivist philosophy, accepting that individuals construct their own perspective of conference destinations. Such decisions are affected by context and time and the understanding and interpretation of why, how and when perceptions change is important. This calls for in-depth and subjective qualitative data and analysis.

The relevance of elements pertaining to both main approaches led to exploring another theoretical framework – Pragmatism. Pragmatic research draws assumptions from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Creswell 2009). This philosophy argues that the researcher should prioritise his research questions over any ontological or epistemological guidelines and adopt the method or methods that best answer the research questions (Marshall 1996; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Saunders et al. 2012; Hamlin 2015). It is described as a practical and applied research philosophy, supporting mixed or multiple methods of social science inquiry and basing itself on the needs of the researcher (Maxcy 2003; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Guthrie (2010, p.45) concluded that the pragmatic paradigm enables researchers to

"combine methodologies even within the same project as it enables us to use those research techniques which suit the research problem at hand"

Therefore, even though research procedures or methods may be traditionally linked to a paradigm, in pragmatism this link is neither considered necessary nor compulsory (Howe 1988; 1992). Pragmatism allows research to make use of both qualitative and quantitative data (Tran 2016).

The Pragmatic approach provided the solution to satisfy all the objectives of the study by utilising the best tools required in each case (Biesta 2010). Both the positivist element of predictability and the interpretivist element of understanding were considered necessary to develop the ACDVM (Association Conference Destination Viability Model) and CCDT (Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit) that this study sought to propose. This was considered more important than philosophical loyalty. Furthermore, flexibility in design data collection and analysis of research is also recommended to gain deep understanding and valid representation of the participants' viewpoints (Sidani and Sechrest 1996), and this was also required in this study.

Figure 12 shows how the characteristics of the pragmatic philosophy are relevant to this research which adopts the *intersubjectivity* approach. Complete objectivity and subjectivity are both dismissed. As explained above, both the objectivity that allows predictability and the subjectivity required to understand different stakeholders' perspectives are considered necessary. Furthermore, abductive reasoning is employed in this study, which moves between induction and deduction by first converting the initial observations related to factors influencing conference tourism from past research into theories, and then testing the validity through primary research. This is in line with the claim by Morgan (2007) that one of its most common uses of abduction in pragmatic reasoning is to develop a method of inquiry that evaluates the results of prior inductions through their ability to predict future behaviour.

Furthermore, the idea of *transferability* of results is considered important for this study. This may be defined as the middle-ground between being both contextual and generalised (Creswell 2009), whereby findings are applied to other contexts (Burns and Lester 2005). The aim of the study is to propose a model that can be applied to as many mature destinations as possible, while accepting the fact that tourism research cannot be generalised to apply to every possible mature destination. From a pragmatic approach, an important question is the extent to which we can take the things that we learn with one type of method in one specific setting and make the most appropriate use of that knowledge in other circumstances. The following discussion will focus on the preferred methodology and methods chosen for this study that are also a result of the preferred paradigm adopted.

**A Pragmatic Alternative to the Key Issues in
Social Science Research Methodology**

	Qualitative Approach	Quantitative Approach	Pragmatic Approach
Connection of theory and data	Induction	Deduction	Abduction
Relationship to research process	Subjectivity	Objectivity	Intersubjectivity
Inference from data	Context	Generality	Transferability

Figure 12. A Pragmatic Alternative to the Key Issues in Social Science Research Methodology (Morgan 2007, p. 71)

5.4 Research methodology

Having adopted a pragmatic approach, the choice of embracing both qualitative and quantitative methodology, as required by this study, was possible. The methodology is the theoretical and philosophical system that structures the way research is conducted by setting the principles regulating scientific investigation and thereby establishing the choice of research methods used (Guba 1990; Slevitch 2011). Research methods on the other hand are a set of tools, techniques and strategies that are used to collect data (Smith and Heshusius 1986). Since quantitative and qualitative methodologies were considered necessary, both will be discussed.

5.4.1 The quantitative methodological approach

The quantitative approach stems from the positivist paradigm. It is concerned with objective research that is time-free, context-free and value-free since reality exists independently from human perception and only one ultimate truth exists (Nagel 1986; Sale et al. 2002; Slevitch 2011). The goal of the quantitative study is to develop generalisations that contribute to theory, enabling the researcher to predict, explain and understand a phenomenon (Abawi 2008). This element of prediction is what made quantitative methodology attractive. Several strengths and weaknesses related to adopting a quantitative methodology have been summarised and explained in Table 15 below.

Quantitative methodology -Strengths
Greater reliability. This allows consistent results (ACAPS 2012; Choy 2014).
Quicker to administer quantitative methods to larger numbers. This is mostly due to the data type collected, being mostly numerical (Yauch and Steudel 2003; Choy 2014; Ragab and Arisha 2018).
Responses can be easily tabulated and analysed since they are closed ended (Choy 2014).
Easier to compare between organisations or groups. Hard data allows easier summarisation and increased precision, as well as easier comparisons (Yauch and Steudel 2003; Abawi 2008).
Easier to determine extent of agreement or disagreement (Yauch and Steudel 2003; Choy 2014). This strength was particularly important in this study when identifying the factors that were considered important in attracting or hindering conference tourism, and on which the final proposed framework shall be based.
Results can be generalised as samples are normally considered representative (Queirós et al. 2017; Ragab and Arisha 2018).
More systematically developed in the social sciences. It adopts structured procedures and formal instruments for data collection (Queirós et al. 2017).
Determines relationships between variables and outcomes (Rutberg and Boukidis 2018; Ragab and Arisha 2018), such as was required in this study when identifying how factors influence decision-making.
Hard data allows easier summarisation of data and increased precision (Abawi 2008)
Results are predictive, explanatory and confirmatory (Williams 2007), which was necessary to develop the study's final model.
Quantitative methodology -Weaknesses
Characteristics and context cannot be understood through numbers. Numerical data and statistics cannot explain characteristics, perceptions and beliefs of participants in a meaningful way (Dudwick et al. 2006; Choy 2014; Ragab and Arisha 2018).
Requires large samples since larger samples reduce the margin of error. This leads to large-scale research and automatically a need for a larger number of resources (Marshall 1996; St-Pierre 2001; Dudwick et al. 2006; Chetty 2016).
Results are not in-depth. This limits the understanding of an issue and how to solve it (Abawi 2008; Sukamolson 2010; ACAPS 2012; Choy 2014). This was a main concern for this study, since it aimed to understand why and how the current decision patterns exist in order to propose a way forward to increase a destination's chances of attracting conference tourism.
Difficult to control environment and ensuring total objectivity during data collection (Baxter and Jack 2008).
Responses are rarely completely value and time independent. Since the environment cannot be completely controlled in social research, time and values may influence data collection and hinder responses that are completely value free as advocated for (Baxter and Jack 2008).
Interpretation of hard data is subject to qualitative judgement. Therefore data and details are lost when translating soft to hard data, leading to stronger qualitative judgement. Since numbers cannot be interpreted without understanding the underlying assumptions, interpretation becomes dependent on the researcher's subjective viewpoint (Atieno 2009).
Data analysis in quantitative studies also requires extensive statistical analysis, which may be a challenge for researchers with non-statistical background (Chetty 2016).
Quantitative research methods involve structured close ended questions. This results in limited outcomes, meaning results cannot always represent the actual occurring, in a generalised form. The respondents have limited options of responses that are based on the selection made by the researcher (Chetty 2016; Ragab and Arisha 2018).

Table15. Strengths and weaknesses of quantitative methodology

5.4.2 The qualitative methodological approach

Qualitative methodology stems from the interpretivism paradigm (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006). The qualitative approach is concerned with studying the empirical world from the perspective of the subject as the only source of his/her reality (Guba 1990). The goal of qualitative research is to understand the various individuals and their viewpoints of a phenomenon (Benoliel 1985; Duffy 1987; Henwood and Pidgeon 1993; Abawi 2008). This makes context-free generalisations impossible (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004), a point relevant to this research. Considering the various stakeholders in conference tourism, studying the different viewpoints based on their experiences not only important, but essential. This was because the plan of this study was to develop a model that provided a holistic view of decision-making related to the association conference sector, and which could be achieved only if the researcher gained access to what was each stakeholder's perspective behind such opinion. This required in-depth information that is synonymous with qualitative methods (Abawi 2008). The strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative approach were also identified and listed. These can be found in Table 16.

Qualitative methodology - Strengths
Qualitative research allows the collection of data in groups that may yield information that would not otherwise emerge as respondents may help each other to remember phenomena through group interaction (Dudwick et al. 2006).
Can investigate behaviours, beliefs and assumptions through richer and more in-depth soft data (Yauch and Steudel 2003; Abawi 2008; Choy 2014).
Participants can raise new issues that would not have been thought of by the researcher and can generate new ways of seeing existing data. This leads to potentially new relevant information (Yauch and Steudel 2003; Atieno 2009; Anderson 2010; Choy 2014). It was important in this research to generate new knowledge to develop the *ACDVM*. It is, in fact, suggested that the creation of new frameworks always requires a researcher to work qualitatively (Atieno 2009).
Provides richer and wider data, and therefore a deeper understanding (Guest et al. 2013; Queirós et al. 2017; Ragab and Arisha 2018). Qualitative data allows the researcher to understand the reasons behind responses (Atieno 2009). This was necessary, as understanding the beliefs and perspectives of stakeholders, and how and why these may change, was important in this study to identify how destinations can best attract them.
Findings cannot be generalised but can be transferable to other settings (Anderson 2010). The model developed by this study could be applied to other mature destinations, as was planned.
Since the researcher directs the interviews towards topics of interest in real time without following a rigid pre-set list of questions, it is easier to explore emerging areas of interest. Topics that might not have been already discovered in past studies may emerge from participants' responses (Anderson 2010) This was valuable to ensure that the model included all points that stakeholders consider important and that might not have been covered in previous studies.
Less expensive and time consuming to achieve in-depth results (Chetty 2016).
Greater validity; observes in more detail (Williams 2007; Ragab and Arisha 2018).
Qualitative methodology -Weaknesses
Difficult and time consuming to collect and analyse qualitative data (Choy 2014).
Skilled interviewers are required. Research quality is heavily dependent on the researcher's skills. It is very easy for the unskilled researchers to bias the responses of the respondents. This challenge was mitigated in the present research as the researcher had previous experience in data collection (Anderson 2010; Choy 2014).
Categorisation of data needs to be done by the researcher and may lead to bias (ACAPS 2012).
Analysis and interpretation of soft data is time and labour consuming (Choy 2014).
No objectively verifiable results (Choy 2014).
Researcher may bias responses (Ragab and Arisha 2018).
Results cannot be generalised. Soft data is still at times considered as inadequate to provide answers and generate changes (Carr 1994; Ragab and Arisha 2018).
Results are not objectively verifiable and require a labour-intensive analysis (ACAPS 2012). This was mitigated by using quantitative methods that collected data from larger samples.
Important areas of research might not be covered as they might go unnoticed due to the lack of pre-set questions (Yauch and Steudel 2003). If respondents have limited personal experience and knowledge about a characteristic, it is automatically excluded from the results. The researcher might not notice gaps in data collected. This problem was mitigated by employing quantitative data-collection methods prior to carrying out a qualitative study, which could act as a guideline to ensure that no important topics are skipped.

Table 16. Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative methodology

By identifying and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative approaches in isolation from each other, and the needs of this research, a mixed methods approach was considered.

5.4.3 The Mixed Methods approach

A mixed methods approach refers to different methodologies being used in studying the same phenomenon (Jick 1979; Denzin 2015). This approach is at times considered a distinctive research approach from the traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches (Hussein 2015; Bryman 2006). This method has been defined in various ways, including *multi-methods* (Brannen 1992), *multi-strategy* (Bryman 2004), *mixed methods* (Creswell 2003; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003) and *mixed methodology* (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998) research.

In this study, mixed methods research was not considered a substitute for qualitative and quantitative approaches but a combination of both. Choy (2014) argues that a complementary approach between the qualitative and quantitative approaches for the same research topic provides better results than using only one isolated methodology. This strategy allowed the research to benefit from strengths of both methods identified in the previous sections. Furthermore, while all methods are individually flawed, mixing methods mitigated the limitation of any method (McGrath 1982; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Bryman 2006; Goertz and Mahoney 2012; Hussein 2015; Turner et al. 2015; Akimowicz et al. 2018). This also helped produce a more valid result (Jick 1979; Scandura and Williams 2000; Polit and Beck 2014; Rutberg and Bouikidis 2018) and increased accuracy and understanding of the phenomenon studied (Hussein 2015). Several other positive outcomes resulting from mixing of methods, together with their relevance to this research are outlined and discussed in Table 17.

Mixed methods general benefits		Relevance to this study
Triangulation	Creating greater validity.	Data gathered from different methods (stemming from both qualitative and quantitative research) increased results' validity in this research.
Offset	Combining the research methods allows the researcher to offset the weaknesses of both methods by drawing on the strengths of both.	One of the main reasons for triangulation. By using the different methods, one method would compensate for the limitations of another.
Credibility	Employing both approaches may enhance the integrity of findings.	Utilising various methods and data sources enhanced the study's credibility as it is backed by more than one method.
Completeness / Expansion	A more comprehensive account of the area of enquiry can be brought together.	The area under study was tackled from the point of view of different decision makers, thus providing a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study.
Different research questions	Different methods can answer different research questions.	While most methods were focused on satisfying objectives number two and three, each method focused on a different objective (see Table 18).
Unexpected results	When one method generates surprising results, the other method may be used to understand it.	Since successive stages of data collection were carried out, this allowed the researcher to explore any unexpected phenomenon that emerged from the research in the successive stages of data collection.
Development	Utilise the results from one method to develop the other method.	The data gathered from the delegates' questionnaire allowed the researcher to construct the right questions for the final qualitative study.
Explanation	One method helps explain the findings of the other.	The discussion with the experts within the final qualitative study helped to explain, clarify and illustrate the results that came out of the questionnaires with the delegates and the associations.
Illustration	The use of qualitative data to illustrate quantitative finding.	
Diversity of views	Combining researchers' and participants' perspectives through quantitative and qualitative research respectively, and uncovering relationships between variables through quantitative research while also revealing meanings among research participants through qualitative research.	Qualitative research (carried out in the final stage) was used to reveal meanings behind results produced from the quantitative data collection.
Corroboration	Assess the credibility of one method's results by the results of another method.	By double-checking the results of one method with another, corroboration was beneficial to this research. This was possible since the different methods were concerned with similar questions.
Sampling	One approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases.	Some delegates and association members that responded and were helpful in the initial delegates' and associations' questionnaires were selected to be included in the final sample for the qualitative study.

Table 17. Justification for a mixed methods approach (adapted from Greene et al. 1989; Creswell 2003; Bryman 2006; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; 2008)

Even though the challenges related to triangulation were considered minimal, it was still important to identify them. Since the method required the use of more than one method of data collection, it is a more time-consuming process (Jick 1979). Consequently, the study is more difficult to replicate, though still possible. Nonetheless, the strengths outweighed the weaknesses and the use of triangulation was considered justified. The research design will be presented in the next section, together with an explanation of which method was employed to address the research's objectives (see discussed in section 5.2). The data collection methods employed by this research will then be evaluated in the following sections.

5.4.4 Research phases

Once it was decided that the study should adopt a mixed-method methodology the way the study's objectives would shape the research phases was identified. These are explained in Table 18. Each phase acted as a foundation for the successive phases and was designed according to the study's objectives. While secondary research satisfied some objectives, primary research was necessary to satisfy the rest. The type of primary method required is also included. By satisfying the five objectives, the aim of the research was achieved.

Research objectives	Methods adopted
Objective 1: To critically review the potential of conference tourism in contributing to a mature destination's rejuvenation.	This objective was satisfied through secondary data obtained from the literature review whereby the characteristics of mature destinations and preconditions to rejuvenate were evaluated. The potential diversification of conference tourism as a sector for mature tourism destinations was explored. This was addressed in chapter 2 and 3.
Objective 2: To critically examine and evaluate the factors influencing association conference tourism decision-making.	Secondary research was also utilised for this objective. The main stakeholders in the decision-making process were identified, while the decision-making process of the associations (buyer centre) and delegates was evaluated. Furthermore, the study also identified the site-related factors that make destinations attractive for association conference tourism. Both academic literature and industry reports were reviewed. This objective was addressed in chapter 4.

Objective 3: To critically examine and evaluate different stakeholders' perspectives on contemporary factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.	This objective sought to update factors influencing the delegate's decision and to evaluate the holistic perspective stemming from all the association conference stakeholders. Primary research was required to address this objective. A quantitative study for the association delegate, as the end consumer of conferences, was considered necessary. The preference of using a quantitative method was due to the need for preference ranking and measurement of the extent of agreement and disagreement with the factors proposed. While academic studies focusing on the delegates existed, they lacked the inclusion of contemporary factors that were identified as important when reviewing industry reports. This method will be discussed in section 5.6.1.The study also sought to examine and evaluate the perspectives of all the conference tourism stakeholders, providing a holistic perspective of the decision-making process and the factors that influence it. This was lacking in academic literature, and therefore makes this study unique. A second method studying all stakeholders was considered necessary. Data gathered from the association delegates' questionnaire was used to ensure the topics and factors being discussed were contemporary. Consensus between all stakeholders on which set of factors could be considered important was sought. Subjectivity, discussion and understanding required a qualitative method to come up with a collective response vis-à-vis the important factors that compose the ACDVM and CCDT.
Objective 4: To develop an *Association Conference Destination Viability Model* that can be utilised to identify which characteristics are required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism.	The results stemming from the third objective acted as the foundation of the model developed by this study. This model included contemporary factors that are crucial for all the stakeholders during conference destination site-selection, as well as internal association factors, external factors and other influences on the decision-making process. It also distinguished between factors that are essential for the destination to become shortlisted as a possible destination to host the conference, and factors which are then necessary to contribute to a competitive edge once the destination is shortlisted.
Objective 5: To develop a *Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit* for destinations to enable the evaluation and improvement of their positioning in the association conference tourism market.	A toolkit was developed utilising the same data of the ACDVM. The CCDT was in fact a re-modelling of the knowledge presented by the model, and was presented in a more visual manner to appeal to, and to better guide, practitioners.

Table 18. Methods adopted to satisfy the study's research objectives

The study's objectives shaped the primary research design, which addressed the third objective of this study and subsequently acted as foundation for the fourth and fifth objectives.

5.4.5 Research Design

Having identified the overall phases of the study, it was necessary to outline the primary research design. Since both quantitative and qualitative methods were required, various mixed methods research designs were explored. These are derived from Clark and Ivankova (2016) and illustrated in Figure 13 below.
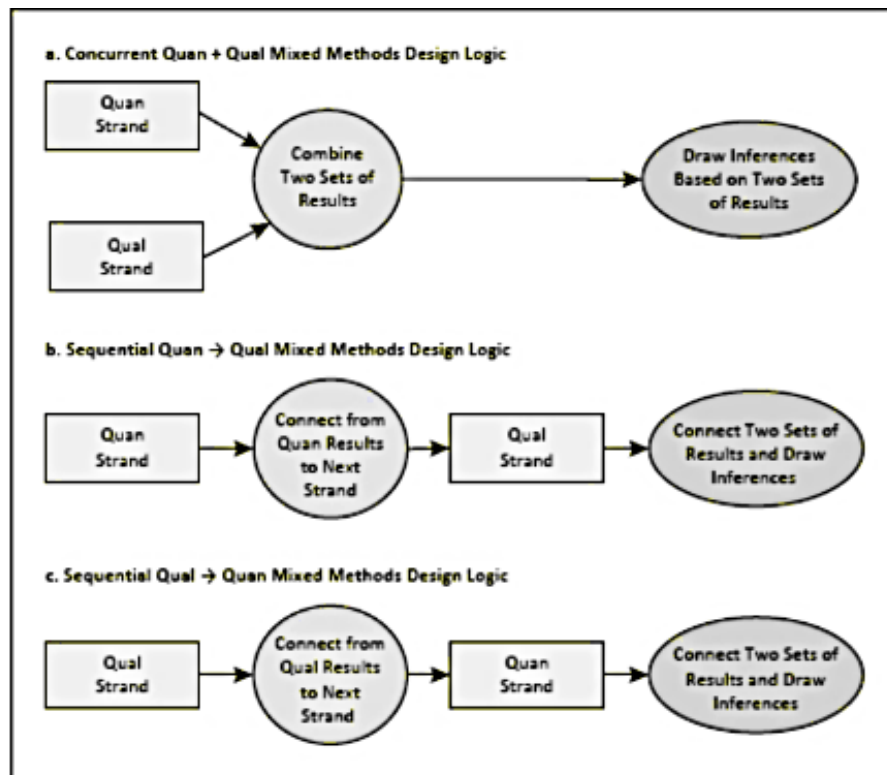
Figure 13. Three Mixed Methods Design Logics (from Clark and Ivankova 2016, p. 118)

A quantitative method was considered appropriate to study the conference delegates' perspective since hard data was most apt to rank the factors' importance and allow comparison between groups. Furthermore, a second and qualitative method was needed to aid understanding of the quantitative data gained from the previous round of data collection, and to study the feedback of all the stakeholders on the factors required to attract conference tourism. Consequently, a sequential research design similar to Clark and Ivankova (2016)'s *Sequential Quan-Qual Mixed Methods Design Logic* was of most relevance to this research

and was therefore adopted. Its application to this study's research design is illustrated in Figure 14 below. This research design was preferred as it allowed one research method to build upon, follow up, and test the results of the preceding research method. The first data collection method was therefore utilised to evaluate (and update) results of prior studies, and act as the foundation of the second data collection.

Figure 14. This study's research design

5.5. Research methods

Having identified the ideal methodological approaches to gather the required data to satisfy the research objectives, the best research tools needed to be identified. The first data collection aimed at updating knowledge on the factors that influence the delegates' conference attendance choice, while the second data collection verified these factors by corroborating them with all the stakeholders. One quantitative method followed by one qualitative method (as outlined in Figure 14) were considered most adapt for this research, and several methods were explored.

5.5.1 Choosing the quantitative method

Several survey types were explored in order to identify which would be most suitable to explore the delegates' perspective (addressing the first part of the third objective). These include in-person questionnaires or structured interviews (Bryman 2015), telephone questionnaires, omnibus surveys, mail questionnaires, central location intercept surveys (Sukamolson 2010) and web questionnaires (Jones et al. 2016). Due to the need to engage many respondents, telephone interviews, mail questionnaires, email/web questionnaires and in-person questionnaires carried out in a central location were further explored as the preferred survey-type options to study the delegates' perspectives. Table 19 lists the main features of these preferred options and explains why they were dismissed.

Telephone interviews	
Strengths	*Weaknesses*
Presence of interviewer allows clarification sand motivates participants (Jones et al. 2016).	Response rates far lower than in-person questionnaires (Weeks et al. 1983; Shanks et al. 1983).
Relatively low cost (Holbrook et al. 2003).	Low willingness to answer sensitive questions and questions related to socially undesired behaviour (de Leeuw 1993; Perkins and Sanson-Fisher 1998).
Possibility of a quick turnaround time (Holbrook et al. 2003).	Respondents have preference for extreme categories compared to face-to-face respondents (de Leeuw 1993; Perkins and Sanson-Fisher 1998).
Possibility to supervise interviews and assure standardisation (Holbrook et al. 2003).	Resource-intensive and does not allow any visual aids (Jones et al. 2013; Tourangeau 2014).
Response rates higher than mailed questionnaires (de Leeuw 1993; Perkins and Sanson-Fisher 1998.)	When done by random digit dialling or cold calling, respondents less cooperative and engaged, and more likely to express dissatisfaction at the length of the interview than in face-to-face interviews (Holbrook et al. 2003).
Rate of missing responses less than mailed questionnaires (McHorney et al. 1994; Brøgger et al. 2002).	Respondents more likely to be suspicious about the interview and project themselves in a socially desirable way (Holbrook et al. 2003).

Reasons for not adopting telephone interviews:
- Lack of telephone contact numbers available - highly impractical, time consuming and resource-intensive to cold-call random telephone lines and ask participants if they had ever participated in an international conference.
- Length of questionnaire would also have caused dissatisfaction to respondents over the telephone.
- Researcher would not be knowledgeable of the most convenient time to call potential participants.

Mail Questionnaires	
Strengths	*Weaknesses*
May be carried out across widely dispersed samples (Fowler 2013).	Require extensive follow ups due to the low rate of initial response (Sukamolson, 2010).
Allows respondents time to answer and return it at their convenience (Fowler 2013).	Audience require writing skills (Sukamolson, 2010).
Individuals prefer to complete paper questionnaire and mail back rather than fill in a survey online (Messer and Dillman 2011).	Individuals tend to self-select themselves to participate, thus making sample biased (Sukamolson, 2010).
If address is correct, questionnaire will arrive directly to the respondent without the need of the researcher contacting them and setting an appointment. (Fowler 2013).	Costs may be misleading. Postal costs, clerical time and printing may turn out to be higher than calculated. Follow ups by telephone may also be required, thus their cost would be incurred as well (Fowler 2013).
Cost per return mail survey less than for a personal interview (Fowler 2013).	

Reasons for not adopting mail questionnaires:
- Lack of addresses available - highly impractical, time consuming and resource-intensive to send a mail questionnaire on a random basis, aiming to reach out to conference delegates.
- Would be further complicated and expensive due to international mail's high risk of undelivered mail not being returned to sender. Researcher would end up unsure as to whether questionnaires were delivered.
- Mail questionnaire to a large number of respondents is time-consuming.

Email/Web Questionnaires	
Strengths	*Weaknesses*
May be carried out across widely dispersed samples (Fowler 2013).	The costs for follow ups, when done by phone, need to be considered (Fowler 2013).
Non-expensive and has the potential of high speed of returned response (Jones et al. 2016).	Issues due to internet accessibility problems may affect representativeness.
Participants allowed to keep themselves anonymous (Sukamolson, 2010).	Lower response rates and items non-response may be related to lack of an interviewer (Shin et al. 2012; Atkeson et al. 2014; Houle et al. 2016).
Practical as requires no interviewer time (Jones et al. 2016).	
Unlike mail, in case of incorrect address, researcher would be immediately notified, thus allowing the email to be re-sent at no extra cost (Fowler 2013).	
Reasons for not adopting email questionnaires: • Lack of email addresses available or contact over web - highly impractical, time consuming and resource-intensive to send an e-mail questionnaire on a random basis, aiming to reach out to conference delegates.	

Table 19. Quantitative data-collection method alternatives considered in this study

Having explored major alternatives, the lack of pre-existing contact with potential conference delegates hindered the possibility of locating and contacting possible participants directly. Self-administered questionnaires carried out at central locations were thus preferred as they overcome the main challenge of identifying and locating possible participants. In central location (or exit) interviews, participants are recruited in a public or accessible area immediately after their experience with a business or event (Validity Research 2015). Interviewers are stationed at a point frequented by individuals from the target audience. Potential participants are approached and screened to ensure that they fall within the required target population, and finally qualified respondents are asked to participate in the study. If individuals accept, they are then interviewed (Atkin and Freimuth 2001; Sukamolson 2010).

Employing this method was necessary to gain access to a hard-to-reach target audience, such as in this case, and was considered to be both cost and time effective (Atkin and Freimuth 2001; Sukamolson, 2010). As data collection was planned during conferences, most intercepts would be delegates and would therefore qualify for the survey, easily meeting quotas. This removed the delay of reaching the right respondents, that are encountered in phone or mail surveys (Validity Research 2015). Data collection was carried out through questionnaires, whereby the interviewers briefed potential participants about the

study. They also made themselves available throughout the process, but the participants completed the questionnaires themselves.

Using self-administered questionnaires leads to various benefits, such as ease of asking longer questions and the possibility of having respondents answer the questions directly, improving validity. Having the interviewer available also allows for any clarifications (Fowler 2013). This comes at the expense of increased time and monetary costs (in the case of research assistants) but was deemed necessary in this study. The way this method was carried out is explained in section 5.6.1. On the other hand, consequences of utilising this method included the fact that interviews needed to be short and therefore perceptions could not be studied in detail. Probing was also challenging, while sensitive issues could not be dealt with. Furthermore, samples were restricted to individuals present at the location where the data was collected (Sukamolson 2010). Nonetheless, the challenges had been considered prior to data collection, and it had been decided that they would not hinder the objective of the research.

5.5.2 Choosing the qualitative method

A second research method to study the perspectives of all the association conference stakeholders was required to tackle the third research objective of the study. This objective required to utilise and further explore the factors that emerged as important from the delegates' questionnaire. Due to the subjectivity and in-depth nature required, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate. Different methods were explored including personal interviews, focus groups and Delphi studies. The main characteristics, together with the reasons why the personal interviews and focus groups were dismissed can be found in Table 20. A discussion on the chosen method will then follow.

Interviews
Characteristics   • Unstructured or semi-structured form (Blandford 2013).   • Allow researcher to create a rapport with the respondents, becoming a research instrument (Legard et al. 2003; Fowler 2013).   • Researcher's role influences the outcome of the study (Charmaz 2006).   • Rapport allows interview to last longer. Conversely, increased length might mean that tiredness and impatience may affect the quality of the responses (De Vaus 2013).   • Face to face contact means that interview runs less risk of becoming boring (De Vaus 2013).   • Responses of participants may be affected by the observable characteristics of the interviewer as well as by the fact that anonymity is not possible (De Vaus 2013).
Reasons for not adopting interviews: • The study did not have any research assistants that were geographically close to the sample to carry out the interview in person (Fowler 2013).   • Since this research aimed to include stakeholders from different locations around the world, personal interviews would become too time-consuming and resource-intensive.
Focus Groups

Characteristics
     • Purpose of focus groups is to collect detailed data.
     • Follow a semi-structured plan.
     • Interviewer takes the role of facilitator, allowing discussions between members to occur (Krueger and Casey 2009; Morgan 2010).
     • one-time meeting between participants who have a common experience but do not know each other.
     • Members would ideally be knowledgeable about the topic.
     • Main aim of focus groups is to capitalise on the interaction between participants whereby the researcher is able to gather data related to beliefs and perspectives as well as identifying new sub-topics related to the topic of study (Carey and Asbury 2016).
     • Data from a group of people is extracted much quicker and at a less cost than in the case of personal interviews (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014).
     • Information is increased since respondents may react to or build on responses of others, creating a synergistic effect through the group setting. Data or ideas that would not be possible to uncover in single interviews would come out in focus groups (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014).
     • Stakeholders can be interviewed all together, making process more time-effective (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014).
     • Availability of a researcher allows direct interaction with the respondents, providing opportunities to clarify, follow up and probe (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014).

Reasons for not adopting focus groups:
     • Since study aimed to have an international sample, in-person focus groups were not possible.
     • Since this research aimed at consulting the group more than once, online focus groups were considered impractical as they require all participants to be present online at the same time. Identifying a common free time for all participants would be impractical and challenging, due to each participant's busy schedule.
     • Difficult to gather all participants at the same time due to different time zones.

Table 20. Qualitative data-collection method alternatives considered in this study

Several reasons led to the adoption of a Delphi study in order to tackle the second part of the third research objective; *which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are considered important by all the stakeholders?*. The study aimed to utilise the knowledge

generated as foundation for the ACDVM and CCDT. The key purpose of a Delphi study is the collection of informed judgement on best-practice guidelines, (Ziglio 1995; Beddoe et al. 2015), understanding the views of diverse stakeholders (Beddoe et al. 2015) and setting priorities or reaching consensus where none existed before (Keeney et al. 2011). Therefore, at the outset, the method's purpose was in line with the objective that required all opinions to be evaluated and a representative perspective to emerge (and be used to develop the study's model and toolkit). This method also allowed the researcher to discuss the findings of the previous quantitative survey carried out to the delegates, by including them within the topics for discussion with the Delphi panel. Feedback on this information was then to be used to create the final statements leading to the formulation of the ACDVM and CCDT.

A main strength of the Delphi approach is that participants can be interviewed individually, thus facilitating indirect dialogue and group 'conversation' between experts from various geographical locations while preserving anonymity (Linstone and Turoff 1975; Ziglio 1995; Toronto 2017). Furthermore, through anonymity the effects of power relationships within the group are mitigated and situation of group domination by one participant or group of participants is removed (Hsu and Sandford 2007; Fletcher and Marchildon 2014). This avoids the risk of participants being unduly influenced by those deemed to be superior or more expert than themselves (Keeney et al. 2006) and allows free expression of opinion (Weber and Ladkin 2003).

Participants in a Delphi study need to be knowledgeable about the topic (Beddoe et al. 2015) but should not only stem from academic backgrounds as this would limit the views to a narrow group (West 2010a). Each participant should also be an expert in their field, to enable them to judge and comment on the topics and factors (Weber and Ladkin 2003). This was also in line with this objective as it required the selection of different stakeholders (thus knowledgeable in their different areas of specialisation pertaining to conference tourism) including non-academic experts. This increased diversity in the Delphi panel carried out in this study is expected to have led to improved outcomes (West 2010a; 2010b).

The Delphi method was also considered ideal for this study since it provided a time and cost-effective method to gather data from a group of participants without the need to meet or ensure that all the participants are available at the same time. Due to the need of diversity, stakeholders were geographically spread across different countries. This made in-

person data collection challenging, and the Delphi study attractive (McPherson et al. 2018). In fact, by utilising e-platforms, Delphi methods also became increasingly affordable (Brady 2015), while utilising emails to communicate with participants made data collection time-efficient (McPherson et al. 2018). It was also the only method that allows an opinion representative of the different participants to emerge automatically, since it requires participants to share their feedback based on the whole group's average opinion (Yousuf 2007). By turning experts' opinions into a group consensus (McPherson 2018), this reduced bias as the researcher's interpretation of what was discussed to formulate the final proposals was not required. Finally, it was identified as a technique that has been previously adopted in tourism, hospitality and conference tourism, to predict and forecast changes (for example Lloyd et al. 2000), to tackle particular challenges (for example Green et al. 1990; Garrod and Fyall 2000), as well as to identify trends that improve a destination's competitiveness in conference tourism (Weber and Ladkin 2003; 2005).

Nonetheless, several challenges related to the use of this method were also identified and their mitigation sought. The approach has been criticised for its potential to pressure participants for a consensus (Fletcher and Marchildon 2014), which may occur by experts becoming hesitant to share a view that differs from that of most of the other experts (Keeney et al. 2006). While keeping this in consideration, reaching a consensus was necessary for this research as the outcomes were required to develop the final instruments. By allowing anonymity, it was expected that peer pressure would be reduced (Weber and Ladkin 2003). Furthermore, unless consensus was readily available during data collection, the only alternative would be for the researcher to outline the main points of consensus himself, risking biasing the outcomes. Nonetheless the researcher could still bias the research if the presentation of the group response at each stage was not accurate and if the summarising skills are poor. The researcher in this case had previous data collection experience.

Another concern was that, when carrying out Delphi studies, a risk of ignoring disagreement exists. This might lead to a situation where disagreeing participants would drop out of the study and thus an artificial consensus would be generated (Linstone and Turoff 1975). Therefore, care was taken to ensure that disagreements were not ignored during the study. The method also required time and commitment, which could result in possible attrition from the study if participants do not remain engaged (McPherson et al.

2018). Motivation to answer and ensure that the participants did not drop out of the study was therefore required. The implementation of the Delphi method is explained in Section 5.6.2.

5.6 Data collection

Once the ideal research design and research methods were identified, the data collection could commence. A timeline for the study, reflecting the research design adopted as discussed in section 5.4.4 and 5.4.5, is presented in Figure 15 below.
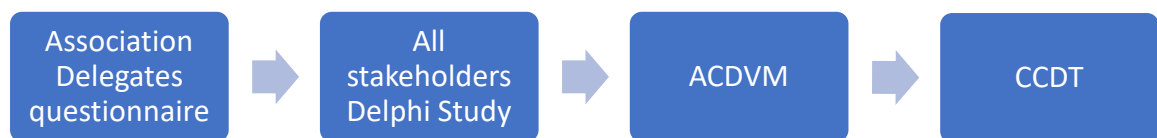
Figure 15. Primary research timeline

The chosen methods of data collection and the way they were carried out will now be explored in more detail.

5.6.1 The Association Delegates - questionnaire

5.6.1.1. Questionnaire aim

The questionnaire sought to address the first research question of this study's third objective: *Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer?* Therefore, it sought to identify the factors that influence the association delegate's choice of attending a conference and identify which are a priority. The study aimed to update the current body of academic knowledge by identifying how contemporary factors feature into the list. The perspective of the association delegate influences the decisions taken by the association when selecting a destination. In fact, since association delegates attend a conference on a voluntary basis (Ramirez et al. 2013), they can be considered end clients of the conference. To understand the factors that influence the delegates' decision, the study aimed to identify important motivators and

barriers and preference-rank them. A quantitative method was considered ideal due to the statistical outcome required.

Though the delegates' perspective had been studied previously (Var et al. 1985; Witt et al. 1995; Opperman and Chon 1997; Severt et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2007; Yoo and Chon 2008; Mair and Thompson 2009; Tanford et al. 2012; Ramirez et al. 2013; Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017; Kim and Malek 2017; Mair et al. 2018), a lack of focus on contemporary factors was identified. This was evident during secondary research when comparing industry reports and academic studies. Contemporary factors listed in industry reports were included in the list of factors to be tested in this primary research. Furthermore, the researcher's first-hand experience as a conference organiser also contributed to identify further possible factors that were thus added to the questionnaire.

5.6.1.2 Questionnaire design and language

As discussed in section 5.5.1, the self-administered questionnaire was the preferred method since data collection was required to be physically carried out at intercept locations during conferences. This required a data collection method that could be carried out in a short timeframe and in a busy environment (data collection is discussed in section 5.6.1.5). The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was split into three main sections to help participants distinguish the different aims of each section. *Section A* focused on the factors that influence the delegates' decision to attend a conference at a destination presenting 144 factors. This was further split into two sub-sections; *Section A1* listed the motivating factors (82 factors), while *Section A2* listed the inhibiting factors (62 factors) to conference attendance. *Section B* was concerned with open questions. This section was initially planned to potentially gather additional information but was later excluded from the results as it was agreed that it was too focused on Malta as a destination and was therefore less relevant to the study. *Section C* sought to gather background and demographic information about participants.

Questions were kept as short as possible to improve respondents' comprehension (Dillman 2000; Fink 2003; Holbrook et al. 2006) with sentences kept to a recommended 20 words (Oppenheim 1992). The English language was utilised since the questionnaires were carried out at English-speaking conferences. Each group of questions concerning the same

topic were preceded by a medium length introduction as suggested in literature (Blair et al. 1977; Andrews 1984). Furthermore, any complex concepts of motivators and inhibitors to conference attendance were broken down into specific factors to reduce the cognitive load on respondents (Martin 2002; White et al. 2005). Such factors were extracted from academic literature, industry reports and first-hand experience of the researcher as a conference organiser.

Rating scales were used to rank factors by importance. While various rating scales were considered – such as Tannebaum's 7-point-scale and Thurstone's 11-point-scale – the Likert scale using 5 points was preferred (1= not important to 5= very important). This is because it was considered to give the necessary range of options without compromising clarity with excessive choice. Larger scales were avoided since each added point needs to be interpreted by the participant, increasing the chance of inconsistency over time or across individuals (Krosnick and Presser 2010). A mid-point option was also included, to ensure that respondents who genuinely felt neutral would not be forced to pick a positive or a negative side of the scale, resulting in inaccurate measurement. Response scales without a middle point have in fact been shown to result in a lower validity and higher random error variance (Saris and Gallhofer 2007). In relation to rating the chosen measuring scale, several suggestions advanced by Krosnick and Presser (2010) were taken into consideration. The measures taken include:

1. It was ensured that the points offered on the 5-point scale covered the entire measurement continuum.
2. The points were set from 'not important' to 'very important'.
3. The meanings for each scale point were kept simple and straightforward to avoid any misinterpretation and keep the measurement as standard as possible.
4. Verbal description of each point was made available, as numerical labels may lead to different respondent interpretations and ultimately scores (Schwarz and Hippler 1991).
5. No two points of the scale had the same or similar meaning, in order to avoid confusion.

This structure aimed at economising on the time spent on filling the questionnaire since it was expected that participants would be limited in time and the environment would be busy.

5.6.1.3 Pilot study

A pilot study should always be carried out when a new questionnaire is developed (Kazi and Khalid 2012). In this case the pilot study was undertaken using 15 individuals with previous experience as conference delegates. Participants were chosen through convenience sampling, drawing on the author's network of contacts who have attended international conferences. Participants were individuals living in Malta, and thus were geographically accessible to the researcher. This was necessary in order to conduct the pilot study within a short timeframe, since data collection needed to be carried out during the conferences themselves that had fixed dates and short lead time from the finalisation of the questionnaire draft. In fact four weeks were left to undertake the pilot study before the commencement of the first conference where data collection was to be held.

The researcher's presence while respondents completed the pilot questionnaire was considered important. This allowed discussions and the identification of possible issues. Several 'technical' terms such as *downtime* were replaced by alternatives that are easier to understand. Other minor typing mistakes were also noted and modified. Finally, it was suggested that for practical reasons, the physical questionnaire should be printed on one folded A3 sheet rather than four separate A4 sheets. This suggestion was helpful as delegates would find it easier and quicker if the questionnaire flowed smoothly from one sheet to the next, rather than having four different sheets. This would have made the questionnaire look longer and could have resulted in fewer participants completing the questionnaire. The final questionnaire layout is presented in Appendix 1.

5.6.1.4 Sampling and the choice of Malta

Respondents needed to satisfy one specific characteristic – having experience as a conference delegate. Due to the specific requirements, non-probability sampling was identified as the only practical sampling technique (Gantz 2015), allowing the researcher to reach the target population quickly (Trochim 2006). The convenience sampling technique was employed by this study, whereby participants were selected based on their accessibility

(Etikan 2016; Jager et al. 2017). Convenience sampling is a kind of non-probability or non-random sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer (Dörnyei 2007).

Convenience sampling has been shown to be the most popular type of sampling (Jager et al. 2017) and has also been previously employed in similar other research studying delegates' perception. Previous studies concerned with association delegates chose samples that were either available online (Mair 2010), were members of an community or association accessible to the researcher (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Yoo and Zhao 2010; Mair et al. 2018), or had attended a specific conference of which the organiser had accepted to email delegates with the researcher's questions (Bauer et al. 2008; Ramirez et al. 2013). Other studies had carried out research at specific conferences, events, or conference venues using the attendees as a sampling frame (Severt et al. 2007; Ryan et al. 2008; Mair and Thompson 2009; Whitfield and Dioko 2012; Tanford et al. 2012). The main advantage of this sampling method is that the questionnaire is handed to the correct target audience directly, minimizing distribution time and wastage of resources (Battaglia 2008; Whitfield and Dioko 2012). Nonetheless, the principal weakness is that data was collected from a limited number of association conferences which limits the generalizability of the findings (Whitfield and Dioko 2012) and should not be taken to be representative of the whole population (Mackey and Gass 2015). This did not hinder the final aim of this study, since generalisability would not have been possible due to the use of the second primary qualitative research (discussed in section 5.6.2) anyway. Furthermore, the aim was to achieve transferability, rather than generalisability, as it had been accepted that the model could not be applied to all mature destinations when the pragmatic approach was adopted, and as discussion in section 5.3.2.

Malta is the researcher's country of residence, therefore, association conferences held at the destination and that were geographically and logistically accessible to the researcher were identified. Malta was chosen as a suitable location to conduct the delegate questionnaires for this study as it is a mature tourist destination that is seeking to diversify into conference tourism. In addition, the researcher's professional connections within the Maltese association conference sector enabled access to delegates.

Malta is an archipelago in the Mediterranean Sea (Croes et al. 2018), which includes the islands of Malta, Gozo, Comino and the uninhabited islands of Cominotto and Filfla (Chapman and Speake 2011). Malta has an approximate population of half a million inhabitants, spread over 316 km² (Malta Tourism Authority 2020b). According to the Malta Tourism Authority (2020b), the Maltese Islands attracted over 2.75 million inbound tourists in 2019, an increase of 5.2% over the previous year. Malta started to develop as an international tourism destination from the 1950s, as the British military and naval presence, which Malta previously depended on, declined (Chapman and Speake 2011). The Malta Government Tourism Board was launched in 1958, with the Maltese government actively aiding and investing in the tourism industry (Chapman and Speake 2011). Mass tourism attractions such as the sun and sea, supported by mass tourism infrastructure such as large-scale hotels and resorts, were characteristic of Malta's tourism development (Bramwell 2003).

Attard (2018) observes that Malta's tourism product development has followed Butler's (1980) model of evolution (refer to Figure 6, page 45). Malta's tourism industry was experiencing a high level of growth between 1965 and 1969, with visitor numbers increasing from 48,000 to 186,000, hotel numbers increasing from 38 to 101 and an additional 2000 jobs within the hospitality sector being created (Lockhart 1997a). In the 1970s, dependence on the British tourism market and high seasonality led to extreme consequences during peak tourist months, including shortage of water supply and sewage disposal problems (Attard 2018). By the start of the 1980s, incoming tourists reached 730.000 (National Tourism Organisation Malta, 1981, cited in Lockhart, 1997a). Nonetheless, dependence on the British market was increasing (Oglethorpe 1984; Lockhart 1997b), and by 1980 British tourists accounted for 76% out of the total arrivals (Bull and Weed 1999). By the mid-1980s, Malta was suffering from competition with other mass-tourism resorts in the Mediterranean (such as Spain), which offered a similar but cheaper holiday solution to the British market, due to lower air fares from the United Kingdom, and which presented a challenge to Malta since it was highly dependent on the British, mass market tourist.

From 1987 onwards, the Maltese government undertook several infrastructural improvements relating to road resurfacing, telecommunications technologies, water supply

and desalination projects and proposed a plan for a new airport terminal (Chapman and Speake 2011). This was coupled with a re-classification exercise for all hotels, and planning permission being granted only for the construction of 4 - or 5-star level hotels. Further investment included the introduction of an Institute of Tourism Studies (in 1992) to help train and subsequently elevate the level of service within the hospitality sector (Chapman and Speake 2011).

Nonetheless, even though in 1992 Malta's number of incoming tourists surpassed the 1 million mark (Lockhart 1997b), Attard (2018) considers the period between the mid-1990s through to the mid-2000s to have been synonymous with Malta's stagnation stage. The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) was therefore established in 1999 as the Government pushed towards a shift in the islands' tourism product. This would reduce dependence on the mass tourism product, related to sun and sea, to a more segmented tourism offer, which including different tourism niches. Malta's international tourism product went through a re-orientation process in the early 2000s as it attempted to reposition its offering (Attard 2018; Croes et al. 2018). In fact, in Malta's 2002-4 Strategic Plan, Malta focused on diversification and improved tourist satisfaction rather than growth. Several other tourism strategies and polices were undertaken, which focused on quality tourism as a driver for rejuvenation (Bramwell 2007). These were also in line with a Carrying Capacity Assessment for Tourism which was carried out in Malta in the late 1990s, and which had indicated the need to focus more on upgraded service and quality of accommodation, increase spend per tourist capita and the improvement of the existing tourism product (Ministry of Tourism, 2001, cited in Dodds, 2007). Furthermore, this study guided Malta's tourism strategies in response to growing concerns about physical and social impacts by mass tourism, focusing on diversification and reducing seasonality, while increasing tourist satisfaction and improved image of Malta in terms of value for money (Chapman and Speake 2011). Morgan (2005) claimed that similarly, most second-generation resorts attempted to extend their tourism season, increasingly attracting quality tourism and thus target niche markets such as golf, nature, culture and sports, while also planning to attract business, meetings and conference tourism. Thus, Malta's tourism regeneration plan was based on other strategies already operating in Mediterranean mass-tourism coastal resorts (Ioannides and Holcomb 2003; Chapman and Speake 2011).

Malta's tourism strategies since 1989 were successful in several ways. Diversification was enabled (Lockhart 1997a; 1997b), seasonality was partially offset (Marwick 1999) and several high-quality products such as luxury hotels, marinas, sports tourism attractions (Bull and Weed 1999; Marwick 2000) and heritage and cultural sites such as the Three cities (Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua), Valletta and Mdina were successfully developed or improved (Chapman and Speake 2011). Having a significant number of heritage attractions, thanks to its various layers of history and cultural influences (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2005; 2017), all of which are within easy travel distance, offered an opportunity for Malta as part of its diversification efforts (Ebejer and Tunbridge 2020). The repositioning of Malta into niche or special interest tourism markets was furthered by the introduction of low-cost airlines in 2006, which increased Malta's connectivity, as well as the Arab Spring events, which helped Malta to gain a larger share of tourists due to its main competitors in North African becoming less attractive (Attard 2018). The introduction of low-cost airlines also contributed to an increase in younger, more affluent and more independent tourists to Malta (Smith 2009).

Malta has also managed to appreciably reduce its dependence on the British tourist market (Attard 2018), but the destination continues to rely on key generating markets such as Britain itself (24% of total visitors), Italy (14%), France (9%) and Germany (7%) (MTA 2020). Figures presented by the MTA (2020) signpost several indicators that are characteristic of mature destinations, and which are listed and discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 2.4.2. These include a seasonal pattern in incoming tourist numbers, and a decrease in tourist expenditure per capita per night between 2017 and 2019 (MTA 2020). Furthermore, Malta's dependence on leisure tourism remains high, indicated as 85.3% in 2017, an increase from 83.7% in 2010 (Attard 2018).

Aware of this reality, Malta's National Tourism Policy 2015-2020, had clearly reconfirmed their commitment to manage visitor numbers sustainably, raise the level of quality tourism and reduce seasonality (Ministry for Tourism 2015), highlighting the need to address the traditional consequences associated with a mature tourism product. Furthermore, considering the dependence on leisure tourism, further effort to achieve diversification from this main offer was also considered to be important. The strategy aimed at decreasing the country's dependence on the 'summer sun' segment and increase the

market share for other tourism products including conference tourism (Ministry for Tourism 2015). The effort relating to attracting conference tourism was reaffirmed in the Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 (MTA 2021), whereby the strategy outlined a plan to develop a National Convention and Events Centre to make Malta even more attractive for different conference delegate types and audience sizes, improving its conference tourism market and reducing the destination's seasonal challenges. Therefore, Malta's situation as a mature destination attempting to diversify its product into conference tourism to rejuvenate, combined with the researcher's connections as a Professional Conference Organiser, made Malta an ideal destination for data collection. Furthermore, Malta has been defined as reflecting the classic Mediterranean tourism experience closely (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2005) and thus lessons learned from Malta can be applied to other (mature) destinations.

Consent to carry out data collection during the conferences was requested and secured from five conferences located in Malta. This was possible due to the researcher's assistance given to the associations as a conference planner. The conferences to which access was granted were a Medical conference (approximately 1000 participants), a Law conference (approximately 400 delegates), a Leadership conference (around 150 delegates), a Valletta 2018 (European Capital for Culture) international seminar (30 delegates), and a Political conference (250 delegates). All were scheduled for March and April 2016, except for the Valletta 2018 conference (held in November 2016) and the Political conference (held in March 2017). The data collection schedule had to adapt to the conferences' dates. All conferences were hosted in different conference venues around Malta.

These conferences were identified as the sampling frame of this phase of the study. Any delegates were considered eligible if they confirmed they had attended at least one other conference prior to the one where data collection was undertaken. This ensured participants would be experienced delegates. Delegates were approached and participation was on a voluntary basis.

5.6.1.5 Data collection

Data collection was therefore carried out at the conference, following the timeline outlined in Table 21 below. The self-administered questionnaires were undertaken at intercept

locations within the conference venues. These locations were agreed with the conference organisers and included the accommodation venue lobby and the conference hall foyer. A research team composed of the researcher and graduate students, with experience in research, disseminated the questionnaires. Stations were set up at these locations, where the research team was located for the whole duration of the conference as it attempted to gather as many responses as possible throughout the conference, accepting all valid responses received. Finally, a total of 275 usable responses was collected from the five rounds of data collections; one at each conference.

Activity	Timeline
Submission of ethics checklist to the Bournemouth University Ethics Board.	February 2016
Approval of the ethics checklist	7th March 2016
Delegates' questionnaire pilot study, and amendments carried out	8th – 20th March 2016
Data collection at Medical Conference	End March 2016
Data collection at Law Conference	End March 2016
Data collection at Leadership Conference	Mid-April 2016
Data collection at Valletta '18 Seminar	November 2016
Data collection at Political Conference	March 2017

Table 21. Association Delegates' Questionnaire data collection timeline

While the questionnaire was self-administered, the research assistants gave a brief introduction about the study to potential respondents and made themselves available throughout the process. Prior to the filling in of the questionnaires potential participants were also asked a screening question to confirm that they had an experience of being a delegate in at least one other previous conference. This ensured participants would be able to answer basing themselves on various experiences as a delegate, rather than basing their answers only on the conference where the questionnaires were being carried out. Having the interviewer available allowed the participants to ask any questions they might have had (Fowler 2013), and made it easier for participants to return their completed questionnaires later if required (Whitfield and Dioko 2012) since the points where the interviewers were stationed were fixed for the duration of the conference and were removed only at the end of each conference.

5.6.1.6 Questionnaire data analysis

Data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Analysis of the various factors involved providing descriptive statistics for the various scaled items to compare the relative importance of the various factors. While acknowledging the basic assumptions against treating Likert scale data as interval data, the researcher was also aware that it was acceptable and common practice to treat Likert scale findings as interval data to allow the use of parametric tests (Ferguson and Cox 1993; Burns and Grove 1997; Rattray and Jones 2007; Bowling 2014; Polgar and Thomas 2019) since the Likert scale has defining characteristics that include a declarative statement, a number of response categories that have distinct cut-off points and assume linearity and equal intervals between them (Pearse 2011). This facilitates the statistical processing of interval type data and the use of parametric tests (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999).

It was also acknowledged that that the application of parametric techniques on this data had resulted in many fruitful and meaningful findings in past studies (Stevens 1946; Knapp 1990). Therefore this study adopted the position of Lord (1953), who stated that a meaningful statistical analysis is more important than following statistical assumptions, and included parametric techniques that could improve the data analysis. This followed many other studies that could be considered to have 'violated' basic statistical assumptions as it was useful for the research (Wu and Leung 2017). These also included most past studies on the same topic as this study (Nelson and Rys 2000; Severt et al. 2007, Bauer et al. 2008, Whitfield and Dioko 2012 and Mair et al. 2018). These all focused on delegate attendance at conferences and utilised Likert scale data, while still including measures such as mean averages and standard deviation (SD) to help analyse the data. Treating Likert scale data as interval data was therefore also necessary in order to allow comparison with past studies.

Due to the large number of factors, factor analysis was also necessary and helped further the insight into the main factors that influence conference tourism attendance, thus contributing to the findings. As discussed above, while basic statistical assumptions may not recommend parametric tests for analysing Likert Scale data, this technique has traditionally provided considerable insight into the characteristics of various tourism market segments, and therefore, this study followed a well-established trend within tourism research and

utilised this method for data reduction. This was also in line with similar studies that utilised Factor Analysis techniques and Principal Component Analysis when analysing Likert scale data, in order to increase their understanding of delegates' conference attendance decision-making (Yoo and Chon 2008; Mair and Thompson 2009; Mair 2010; Tanford et al. 2012).

Factor Analysis tests were carried out on the topmost important motivators and barriers (mean ≥ 4) in order to examine the structure of the top factors affecting conference attendance decision making. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX) and Kaiser Normalization was employed. This analysis has been previously utilised in similar studies to test factor structure and reduce data (Mair and Thompson 2009; Mair 2010; Malek et al. 2011). By channelling the factors into principle factors, the research aimed to single out the few most important areas that deserve to be prioritised. The Factor Analysis was carried out separately for the most important motivator and barrier factors. For the motivator factors, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy showed a value of 0.660 which was considered adequate (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996). Similarly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy for the barriers was also considered adequate, showing a value of 0.775 (see section 6.2.2).

5.6.1.7 Ethical issues

Ethical considerations were given their due importance throughout the planning and data collection process. All the delegates were aged 18 or over. Participation was on a voluntary basis and participants could refuse to participate, after being given a brief overview of the research. Nonetheless, any delegates that requested to leave while in the process of filling in the questionnaire or requested to return the questionnaire at a later stage, could do so. Delegates who participated were also kept anonymous, and no details that could reveal their identity were requested, unless they were personally willing to provide their email address for further consultation (required in the second primary research).

The questionnaire followed and satisfied the Bournemouth University Ethics Checklist (see Appendix 2). The permission necessary from the conference organisers was also requested and confirmed before the research commenced at the conferences (see Appendix 3). In turn, the conference organisers (associations) informed their delegates of

the researchers' presence and the nature of the research. Finally, the interception points were also carefully chosen not to interrupt any meetings or delegates from working and were held in public locations within the conference venues.

5.6.1.8 Limitations of the association delegates' questionnaire

Several limitations were encountered when carrying out the delegates' questionnaire. The questionnaire length did not allow in-depth research. This was a result of the long list of factors included within the questionnaire that made it time-taxing for respondents to complete *Section A*. Consequently, some respondents did not fill in *Section B* that was qualitative in nature and required the respondents to give their opinions. This issue was not noted during the pilot study since participants of the pilot study were Maltese, who could not fill in this section as it was intended for foreigners travelling to Malta. Since *Section B* only aimed at collecting additional data about Malta' characteristics as a conference destination to be possibly used at a later stage, omission of data from this section did not hinder the data analysis since all necessary information was covered in *Section A*. Very few issues with the completion of *Section A* and *Section C* (demographics) were encountered. Whenever data was omitted from any of these two sections, the questionnaire was not included for analyses.

A further limitation included the fact that data was collected at conferences being held only in Malta. While it is understood that a risk existed that delegates who attend a conference in Malta might be biased in favour of characteristics that attracted them to Malta as a destination, this was not considered a problem. This is because: first, delegates were very diverse demographically and local delegates were not handed questionnaires. This did not affect the sampling numbers as local delegates totalled only around 50 delegates. Furthermore, participants were required to confirm their previous experience as delegates, most of whom confirmed their attendance at many other conferences at different destinations, thus not being tied to Malta as a destination in any way. Delegates who had not experienced any other conference as delegates were not invited to participate. Finally, having carried out physical questionnaires, all data needed to be inputted manually, which was time consuming.

5.6.2 All stakeholders' perspective – Delphi Study

5.6.2.1 Aim of the Delphi Study

This second research instrument addressed the second part of the study's third research objective and as discussed in section 5.2: *Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are considered important by all the stakeholders?* The Delphi study therefore sought to use the data collected from the delegates' questionnaire as its foundation and achieve a collective consensus on the set of factors that would be considered crucial by all stakeholders. The stakeholders in the conference destination site-selection process had been identified to be delegates, associations, conference centres, conference bureaus, academic experts and industry consultants. Including the delegates again within this study group was considered important to ensure their perspective would be reflected along with that of all the other stakeholders in the final consensus.

The Delphi study also provided the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of each factor, via several open-ended questions. This allowed an understanding of the stakeholders' opinions related to how a destination may improve its position and how each important factor may be broken down into components. Added emphasis was given to interesting factors emerging from the delegates' questionnaire, in order to understand the reasons and trends behind them. Altogether, the set of factors that all stakeholders considered important, as well as their level of importance, would act as the foundations of the ACDVM (Association Conference Destination Viability Model) (objective 4) and the CCDT (Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit) (objective 5).

5.6.2.2. Research tool

The reasons behind the selection of the Delphi study for this second primary research have been discussed in section 5.5.2. Delphi participants, referred to as Delphi panellists (Yong et al. 1989; Hasson et al. 2000; Keeney et al. 2001; Garrod and Fyall 2005; Sobaih et al. 2012), were interviewed individually via email, facilitating indirect dialogue and group 'conversation' while preserving anonymity (Linstone and Turoff 1975; Ziglio 1995).

Participants could answer their questions within a given time frame, making it practical for them to answer in their free time and independently from their geographical location.

Typically, a Delphi study includes a minimum of two rounds of questionnaires (Fletcher and Marchildon 2014). The first round is described as an exploration stage, in which the topic for discussion is fully explored through open-ended questions (Hsu and Standford 2007; McPherson et al. 2018). The foundations for the themes of the open-ended questions in the first round are derived from prior research (McPherson et al. 2018). In this study, the gaps in the literature review and the results of the delegate questionnaire guided the themes used. Each subsequent round was part of the evaluation phase, whereby the results of the previous round are utilised to formulate another set of questions (Ziglio 1995). In each round, participants revised their answers considering the group members' previous responses. The range of answers decreased in every round, until the group's opinion converged into consensus or near-consensus (Wathen et al. 2012; Fletcher and Marchildon 2014; McPherson et al. 2018). This results in a set of factors that are confirmed in terms of importance by the panellists themselves and on which they agree.

The application of the Delphi study's research process to this research is outlined in Table 22. This shows how the multiple iterations developed the consensus sought (Keeney et al. 2011), with the first round concerned with generating a large amount of data on the subject area (McPherson et al. 2018) by utilising a series of open ended questions developed from literature and from data used in the delegate questionnaire (Green et al. 1999). The second round focused on confirming the accuracy of the factors derived from the first round and the process was repeated until consensus was reached (Wathen et al. 2012; Fletcher and Marchildon 2014 McPherson et al. 2018). In this study consensus was achieved in the third round.

Nonetheless, as with all surveys, pilot testing with a small group of individuals should precede implementation (Hasson et al. 2000). A pilot study was carried out prior to the first round of questions. Since the first round included only open-ended questions, participants in the pilot study were required to be experts in the topic in order to be able to answer the questions at length. Three international participants were selected, based on their previous experience as an academic expert, an industry consultant and an experienced

association member. These were part of the researcher's network. After the pilot study was carried out, minor changes to the wording of the questions were done.

Activity	Timeline	Description
Ethics committee approval	November 2018	Approval for the research to commence was granted by the Bournemouth University Ethics Board
Panel recruitment	November 2018 – February 2019	The experts were contacted and recruited. Each panelist was required to accept the invitation to participate, after reviewing a participant information sheet and signing a participant agreement form.
Pilot study	February 2019	Pilot study carried out prior to first round and any amendments required were undertaken.
Round one (Question & answer) Qualitative open-ended questions.	March- April 2019	Open-ended questions focused on the main areas of interest of the study mostly derived from the results of the delegates' questionnaire. These included *destination, venue and accommodation, delegates' demands and needs, memorable experience, safety, technology* and *conference future.* Once results were collected, these were analysed to proceed to the second round.
Round two (Question & answer) Quantitative survey	May – June 2019	Factors considered important were included in this round. A second questionnaire, this time closed-ended, was proposed to the panellists. This aimed to rank-order and establish priorities among the factors derived from the first round. Once results were collected, these were analysed to proceed to the third round.
Round three (Question & answer)	July 2019	The expert's opinions on the factors and their rankings were proposed. The second round results including the ratings of each factor were sent to panellists. Panellists were asked to revise their judgement vis-à-vis the panel's general opinion (which was shown as the average score next to the ranking they allocated to each factor).
Return of round three.	August 2019	Consensus on the important factors is analyzed and returned to panelists.
Development of the ACDVM and the CDC Toolkit.		

Table 22. The Delphi study data collection timeline

5.6.2.3. Choosing the Delphi panel

Delphi studies make use of individuals who have knowledge of the topic being investigated (McKenna 1994; Hasson et al. 2000). Recruitment of experts for a Delphi study may be challenging, especially due to the need to respond to the Delphi's multiple rounds which is time-consuming (McPherson et al. 2018). The number of panellists in a Delphi study usually ranges between 15 and 20 members (Ludwig 1997) but is dependent on the design (Yousuf 2007). Nonetheless, the quality of the panellists (and their level of expertise) is considered of much more importance than the quantity (Weber and Ladkin 2003; Puig and Adams 2018). This study aimed to have three representatives from each sector – delegates, associations, conference centres, conference bureaus, academic experts and industry consultants. The reason for having three panellists representing the same stakeholder in conference tourism was to limit the chances some cohorts would become unrepresented due to dropouts, while others would become over-represented if their representatives remained in the study (Garrod and Fyall 2005). Attrition was expected to be high due to the number of rounds the participants were required to answer (McPherson et al. 2018). The study aimed for 18 participants, with a reserve pool of another 6 participants (one for each sector), thus aiming to start with 24 to improve the chances of a larger number of participants completing the last round.

Due to the level of experience and expertise required, panellists were chosen through purposive sampling (Dudovskiy 2016) whereby choice was dependent on the researcher's judgement (Kerlinger 1986) and willingness of the decision-maker to participate. Purposive sampling focuses on recruiting participants with characteristics that are better able to assist with the relevant research (Etikan 2016), therefore being experts in the subject. The theoretical sampling variation of purposive sampling was identified as ideal, whereby the sampling aimed at generating and developing new data (Dudovskiy 2016) which would then be used to develop the final model and toolkit.

The compiling of suitable candidates required the consultation of industry reports and academic literature, in order to add to the researcher's personal knowledge of experts in conference tourism. This recruitment technique had been carried out in similar studies by

Weber and Ladkin (2003; 2005) and helped to minimise the risk that the researcher exercises a wrong judgement on the respondents' reliability and competence (Tongco 2007). The recognised experts were contacted via email, creating first-contact and informing them of the aim of the research and the reasons why they were chosen to participate (see Appendix 4). This was advisable as it also allowed to identify which potential participants were not interested in participating, while securing the ones that confirmed their interest directly to the researcher (Hsu and Sandford 2007). This was also needed in order to furnish interested candidates with a participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and to sign a participant agreement form (Appendix 6) prior to sending the first round of questions.

The confirmed panellists were also asked if they could assist the researcher to recruit other experts. The majority were willing to indicate possible participants as well as to communicate with them directly prior to the researcher's invitation to participate in the study. This constituted a snowballing technique, which is a chain-referral method where initial participants recruit others from their social network (Valerio et al. 2016). Both purposive sampling and snowballing have been used to recruit hard-to-reach subjects (Magnani et al. 2005; Staniford et al. 2011) and they have also been utilised to identify experts for Delphi studies (Janati et al. 2018), such as in this study. As expected, this greatly reduced the chance of non-responses or declines (Hsu and Sandford 2007).

On the other hand, since no specific level of expertise was required for the delegates except for experience, these were selected at random from those who had given their contact details for further consultation (an option that was available in the delegate questionnaire). A reserved group of participants were asked if they were willing to participate if the initial possible participants identified by the research would reject or ignore the invitation to participate, or if they did not respond to the first round of questions. Any potential participants that were unsure or unwilling to participate in the research were replaced by the experts within the reserve pool, ensuring that the participants' team had the number of people initially aimed for.

5.6.2.4. The data collection process

The panel at the start of the first round comprised of 22 experts since 2 interested experts out of the initial pool of 24 did not return the participation forms and were therefore excluded.

Table 23 shows the confirmed panellists at the start of the study and indicates whenever a dropout occurred. The stakeholders they represented are also outlined. Following the first round of questions, 5 participants dropped out while the final (third) round was completed by a total of 14 participants. Participants originated from different continents including Asia, Europe, North America and Australia and originated from Spain, Sweden, Scotland, Brussels, China, Japan, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Poland, United States, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Australia. The experts signed an agreement to remain unanimous, which was essential to avoid direct confrontation between the panellists, which it is one of the main benefits of the Delphi method (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004; Paré et al. 2013).

Stakeholder	Consented to participate	Participation Round 1	Participation Round 2	Participation Round 3
Delegate	Y	Y	Y	Y
Delegate	Y	Y	Y	Y
Delegate	Y	Y	Y	Y
Delegate	Y	Y	N	N
Association	Y	Y	Y	Y
Association	Y	Y	Y	Y
Association	Y	Y	Y	N
Association	Y	Y	Y	N
Conference centre	Y	Y	Y	Y
Conference centre	Y	Y	Y	Y
Conference centre	Y	Y	Y	N
Conference centre	Y	Y	N	N
Academic expert	Y	Y	Y	Y
Academic Expert	Y	Y	Y	Y
Academic Expert	Y	Y	Y	Y
Academic Expert	Y	N	N	N
Industry professional	Y	Y	Y	Y
Industry professional	Y	Y	Y	Y
Industry professional	Y	Y	Y	N
Industry professional	Y	N	N	N
Conference Bureau	Y	Y	Y	Y
Conference Bureau	Y	Y	Y	Y
Conference Bureau	Y	Y	N	N
Conference Bureau	Y	Y	Y	N

Table 23. Confirmed Delphi panellists and withdrawal in each round of questions

Communication with the panellists was carried out by email. While email was the only practical method identified to communicate with the participants, it also had the added

benefit of allowing the participants to answer even when travelling (Hsu and Sandford 2007). Although Delbecq et al. (1975) suggested giving a two-week deadline to Delphi participants, this study allowed a 10-day deadline with the intention of following up immediately after such deadline, and aim at securing a reply within two weeks, allowing for an added third week as a buffer. Follow-ups were sent out according to schedule as most participants did not follow the pre-agreed deadlines.   This allowed the researcher to speed up the process of data collection as much as possible (Hsu and Sandford 2007). Nonetheless, as is shown in Table 21, each Delphi round took around two months to complete. This can be broken down in around a month to receive the responses and another month to analyse and prepare the successive round to be sent out.

The initial round of the Delphi process included open-ended questions that aimed to solicit specific information from the participants about conference decision-making. This acted as the foundation of the successive rounds (Custer et al. 1999). Through the analysis of the results of the first round, qualitative data was converted into a more structured instrument to serve as the second-round questionnaire (Hsu and Sandford 2007). The first-round questionnaire included seven open-ended questions, centred on seven main areas of interest (see Appendix 7). These areas were identified from the first research method – the delegates' questionnaire, the literature and industry reports and included *destination, venue and accommodation, delegates' demands and needs, memorable experience, safety, technology* and *conference future.* The Delphi panellists were given the option to suggest other areas as well. After collecting and analysing the data from the first round of questions, the second round of questions was drafted.

The second round of the Delphi study (see Appendix 8) aimed at rank-ordering to establish priorities among the factors proposed (Hsu and Sandford 2007). Two main type of factors were identified, based on the data analysis of the first round and previous academic literature. Therefore, two lists were presented: a list of essential factors required for a successful conference destination (first section of the survey) and a list of factors that can help a destination to be more competitive in the conference tourism market (second section of the survey). The panel was required to rate factors according to importance and to state the rationale behind their decisions, as suggested in the literature (Jacobs 1997).

The first section proposed a list of factors that have conventionally been important. Panellists were required to confirm whether they agreed that the factors were essentials. A choice of 'Yes' or 'No' determined whether the panellists wished to include or exclude the factors from the list. Panellists were also given the opportunity to explain the rationale behind their decision and to add other factors to this list. These factors were recognised as the yardstick by which associations compare their destination options at the initial stages of the destination choice process. Destinations that lack the essential factors are eliminated from the list of alternatives, while those that possess them have much higher chances of being shortlisted for the next stage.

In the second section of the survey, a list of factors that can help a destination be more competitive in the conference tourism market was proposed to the panellists, who were required to rank them in terms of importance. As in the Delegate questionnaire, a 5-point Likert scale was preferred (1= not important and 5= very important) so as to give the necessary range of options without compromising clarity due to excessive choice. Larger scales were avoided since each added point needs to be interpreted by the participant, increasing the chance of inconsistency over time or across individuals (Krosnick and Presser 2010). A mid-point option was also included, to ensure that respondents who genuinely felt neutral would not be forced to pick a positive or a negative side of the scale, causing inaccurate measurement. The ranking allotted to each factor was analysed by the researcher. In the third round, the panellists received a very similar questionnaire (Appendix 9) including the factors within both lists and the average ratings based on the ratings allotted by the whole panel, together with a reminder of the rating given by the panellist himself/herself in the previous round. They were asked to revise their judgement vis-à-vis the panel's general opinion, if they felt they needed to do so (Hsu and Sandford 2007).

After receiving the answers from the third round of the Delphi study, it was confirmed that as the results had not changed enough from the previous round, no further rounds were required. Modrak and Bosun (2014) argue that the Delphi questionnaire should be filled at least twice, and iterations should continue until it can obtain no new ideas or results. Thangaratinam and Redman (2005) put this to three rounds, if the first round is open-ended (such as in this study). Three rounds are in fact often sufficient to collect the needed information and reach consensus in most cases (Brooks 1979; Ludwig 1997; Custer et al.

1999; Kim and Yeo 2018). This is also in line with Green et al. (1999), who identified three rounds as sufficient and held that any extra stages would risk incurring diminishing returns of increased convergence against declining response rates due to increased respondent fatigue, a view that is also supported by others (Kaynak and Macauley 1984; Walker and Selfe 1996; McPherson et al. 2018).

5.6.2.5 Analysis and achieving consensus

The analysis of Delphi data is centred on the concept of consensus (Puig and Adams 2018; Kim and Yeo 2018). Nonetheless, when the first round of a Delphi study involves open-ended questions, such as in this study, it may produce large amounts of data (Procter and Hunt 1994; Keeney et al. 2001). Content analysis is therefore required, and this frequently involves the use of software to help track the various definitions and justifications involved (Garrod and Fyall 2005; McPherson et al. 2018). This study used N-VIVO 12 to carry out content analysis and frequency counts of factors in the panellists' responses. This helped identify factors that would be included in the second round.

The quantitative data obtained in the second round was analysed using descriptive statistics. This is in line with other studies, as measures of central tendency including means, medians, and modes are often used to describe the data collected (Hasson et al., 2000; McPherson et al. 2018; Puig and Adams 2018). The factors' mean and SD results of the second round where included in the survey of this study's third round, in order to help build consensus by allowing panellists to update their ranking. This is standard practice in Delphi studies, whereby nominal data is provided to the panellists who are free to review and reflect on the results as they resubmit their opinions (McPherson et al. 2018).

The main aim of the Delphi study was in fact to reach a consensus on the factors that would then be included in the final model. However, no universal agreement on what consensus in studies using Delphi exists (Keeney et al. 2006). A congruence of 51% can be considered consensus (Loughlin and Moore 1979), while a 100% consensus has been often considered impossible (Keeney et al 2006; McPherson et al. 2018). Consequently, the description utilised by McPherson et al. (2018, p.405) was adopted: "consensus: a general agreement; the judgement arrived at by most of those concerned".

After reviewing different mechanisms adopted by Delphi studies, a mechanism to confirm whether consensus has been reached was put in place. In the case of the first section requesting a confirmation of *the essentials list,* consensus on the inclusion or exclusion of a factor was decided on the basis of whether a percentage of the panellists' ranking fell within a prescribed range (Yes/ No) (Miller 2006). In this case, a minimum of 70% was required for consensus (Green 1982). Any factor that scored 70% or more in the third round would be considered important and included (or excluded, depending on whether consensus was in favour or against) in the final model.

Similarly, achieving consensus in the second section requesting the ranking of *factors that can help a destination be more competitive* in the conference tourism market also required 70% of the votes to fall within a prescribed range (Miller 2006). In this case the prescribed range was within *important* (4 on the Likert scale) or *very important* (5 on the Likert scale) range on the five-point scale. This method was adapted by previous studies such as Green (1982) whereby 70% falling within the three or higher ranking in his four-point Likert-scale would classify as consensus. Similarly, Bisson et al. (2010) required 70% of the ratings to fall within 7 or above on a nine-point scale.

A second indicator for convergence has also frequently been utilised. Green (1982) required a median score of 3.25 or higher on a four-point scale while Bisson et al. (2010) require a mean of 7 on a nine-point scale to confirm consensus on importance.   The use of the median was preferred (Hill and Fowles 1975; Jacobs 1997). A counter-argument however suggests that, since the Delphi process has a tendency to motivate convergence, which might lead to polarisation into two or more points rather than just one single point, the median might be misleading in determining consensus (Ludwig 1994), suggesting the mode as the ideal indicator of consensus. This study set a minimum score of 4 (out of a maximum ranking of 5) for both median and mode as a requirement in order to achieve consensus on a factor's importance. These were additional requirements to achieving a score of 70% within the *important* and *very important* brackets mentioned above. Consensus on the factor's importance would also automatically lead to its inclusion in the final model, as panellists were advised at the outset of the study.

5.6.2.6. Ethical issues

Ethical principles require that studies using the Delphi method undergo appropriate review by an institutional review board (Creswell and Poth 2018). This Delphi study followed the Bournemouth University Ethics Checklist and was approved by the Ethics Board prior to commencing the study (see Appendix 10). Ethical considerations were also given their due importance throughout the planning and data collection process. While the researcher had to communicate with potential panellists in order to request their participation, this was only done when potential panellists had their contact details publicly available online or on social media. No private contact details were requested at any point prior to confirmation of participation. Whenever contact details were not publicly available, the expert was not contacted.

Once contacted the potential panellists were informed of the study's aims as well as the structure of the Delphi study, explaining the length of the process. This was necessary in order to ensure that prior to accepting, participants were fully aware of the commitment required. If participants accepted to participate, they were requested to review a participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and sign a participant agreement form (Appendix 6). Any expert that did not reply to the initial request to participate was sent a follow-up just once, after allowing at least two weeks. Furthermore, any panellists that were not able to continue with their participation in the study for any reason, could withdraw. This can be seen in Table 22. The panellists' identities were always kept anonymous, and no details that could reveal their identity were exposed.

5.6.2.7. Limitations

The recruitment of participants was challenging due to their geographical dispersion and the lack of an existing relationship with the researcher. This also led to a delay in starting the first round. The challenge was overcome by direct contact and follow-up, whereby the researcher contacted potential participants and explained the study as well as the reason why

their participation would benefit the study. The participant group was aware of both the study's aims and expectations prior to agreeing to participate.

Snowballing also helped the recruitment process. Nonetheless, the limitations of such chain technique were acknowledged, mainly being the unknown probability of a subject being selected, leading to a lack of generalisable results (Acharya et al. 2013; Gantz 2015). This did not constitute a problem since the study did not seek to achieve generalisability but transferability; whereby the final model would be applied to other similar contexts (Burns and Lester 2005). Furthermore, referral was rarely used during the recruiting process as the researcher aimed to ensure anonymity as much as possible, ensuring participants were not aware of who the rest of the panel were.

The high risk of panellists' withdrawal between rounds was another challenge (McPherson et al. 2018). It was not only important to achieve a high response rate in the initial round, but equally important to maintain such response throughout the following rounds (Hsu and Sandford 2007). This study had pre-empted this challenge by confirming three representatives for each sector rather than just one, and by including an additional reserve pool of six participants in case of withdrawals during the first round. Both strategies proved to be necessary, as participants from the reserved pool were included within the research after response rate was low from some sectors. Having four panellists representing the same sector also proved to be necessary as some sectors had higher drop-out rates than others during the successive rounds. Nonetheless, no sector ended being unrepresented thanks to the precautions taken.

The data collection was a lengthy process. The method was time-consuming by its own nature as the sequential questionnaire method takes weeks to be completed (Ludwig 1994; Keeney et al. 2001). In this study the whole Delphi study process took approximately 10 months from recruitment stage to consensus. An effort to accelerate this process was done via telephone follow-ups when required, as suggested in the literature (Hsu and Sandford 2007), as well as via LinkedIn messages whenever the only method to reach a participant was via social media. This helped decrease the length of the process, and in so doing, also helped reduce the risk of panellist attrition (McPherson et al. 2018).

5.7 Terminology utilised

Before presenting the results and analysis of the delegates' questionnaire and the Delphi study, it was deemed necessary to clarify the terminology used since no single universal term could be identified to refer to attributes or factors influencing decision-making, which both data collection methods sought to explore. Relevant literature has shown different authors using diverse terminology. Hayat et al. (2014) utilised the term 'attributes' to refer to such characteristics, while Whitfield and Dioko (2012) used 'factors' and 'attributes' interchangeably. Certain authors (Witt et al. 1995; Clark and McCleary 1995) preferred the term 'variables', while others chose the term 'factors' (Mair et al. 2018). Yoo and Chon (2008) use 'factors' and 'variables' interchangeably, while Kim et al. (2010) adopted 'choice factors' when grouping together related attributes. The present study adopts all mentioned terms to refer to the same item; attributes that influence the delegates' decision to attend a conference (when discussing the delegates' questionnaire results) and attributes that stakeholders feel are important to attract conference tourism (when discussing the Delphi study's results). Hence, while the term 'factor' is preferred, the other terms – 'variable', 'attribute' or 'characteristics' – are at times similarly used interchangeably in reference to the same items.

The term 'factor' is used, both when an attribute influenced a decision positively or negatively. This is what has been referred to as 'facilitating' and 'inhibiting' factors in Ramirez et al. (2013). Mair et al. (2018) distinguish 'push' from 'pull' motivations, based on whether a delegate is motivated to attend through necessity (push) or opportunity (pull). In the present study, motivators and barriers to delegates are also referred to, and are part of, the list of factors influencing decisions. A factor considered to be positive is referred to as a 'motivating factor' or 'motivator', while those factors considered to be negative, feature as 'barrier factors', 'inhibiting factors' or 'barriers'. As factors are split into motivators and barriers within the delegates' questionnaire, so also are these denoted when presenting its results.

These factors are grouped together based on relatedness within the questionnaire and are initially presented in the same groupings in the discussion of the results. These groupings, which were carried out when developing the questionnaire, are collectively referred to as 'groups', and are not grouped in any scientific manner. Nonetheless, as discussed in section

5.6.1.6, the study employs a Principal Component Analysis to examine the most important factors in the delegates' questionnaire, and the term 'Principal Factors' is adopted to refer to the grouping of related factors or attributes that emerged from the PCA.

A grouping exercise of related factors or attributes that emerge as important from the delegates' questionnaire is carried out throughout Section 6.2, aiming to identify groupings of related factors that are most important, and which are referred to as 'themes'. These themes, of which seven are identified, have been utilised to guide the main areas (themes) of discussion of the first round of the Delphi study. Each theme is discussed in detail with all the different stakeholders during the Delphi study's first round, and used to ensure that no important theme or topic is left out. Qualitative data is collected with reference to each theme, from which further factors are identified as important. This made it possible to identify a list of factors or attributes that have been confirmed as important by all the stakeholders. Such factors or attributes were then utilised as the foundation of the ACDVM and the CCDT.

5.8 Summary

This chapter outlined and discussed the aim and objectives of this study, identifying the methods utilised to address each of the five objectives. The objectives that have been addressed through secondary literature in the past chapters (chapters 2-4) and the objectives that required the use of primary research were distinguished. As discussed in section 4.5, several gaps in knowledge had been identified, and the third objective mainly addressed these gaps. This objective was important as it acted as the foundation for the fourth and fifth objectives. The third objective aimed t*o critically examine and evaluate different stakeholders' perspectives on contemporary factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.*

The two main research questions that this objective was concerned with – *contemporary factors that influence the delegates' conference attendance decision* and *the contemporary factors that are considered important by all stakeholders* – required the use

of primary research. This is because literature on the impact of contemporary factors influencing delegates' decision was lacking or outdated, when compared to industry reports. Furthermore, a holistic perspective that covers all stakeholders' opinions was also missing in the literature, except for a few studies that had examined the different conference tourism stakeholders' opinions to identify trends in conference tourism and compare between two destinations (Weber and Ladkin 2003; 2005).

In order to carry out primary research, different research approaches were evaluated, identifying the pragmatic approach as the most adequate for this study. This approach allowed the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods; both of which were considered necessary to address different research questions. Different methods pertaining to each methodology were explored and analysed, finally adopting the questionnaire to undertake data collection amongst delegates, and the Delphi study to understand the perspective of all the stakeholders. The data collection process and the challenges related to each method were also discussed in this chapter. Each primary method addressed one of the two research questions of the study's third objective. The results for each research question will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Results and Analysis

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the data gathered from the delegates' questionnaire and the Delphi study will be presented and analysed. As discussed in chapter 5, conducting primary research was necessary to bridge the gap in the required knowledge to address the third research objective;

To critically examine and evaluate different stakeholders' perspectives on factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.

This objective was tackled by answering the following research questions:

- Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer?
- Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are considered important by all the stakeholders?

The Delegates' questionnaire aimed at generating the required contemporary data to answer the third objective's first research question, while the second research question required the opinions of all the stakeholders and was addressed through the data from the Delphi study. Having satisfied these objectives, the analysis of the data also served as the foundation to address the fourth and fifth objectives, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The data from the delegates' questionnaire is first presented and analysed, guiding the research on contemporary topics that require further attention. This acts as the foundation of the Delphi study, whereby the topics and related factors are examined in-depth. The next section shall explore the data gathered from the quantitative delegates' questionnaire.

6.2 The Delegates' questionnaire

6.2.1 Respondents' demographic profile and characteristics

As discussed in section 5.6.1.4, data collection was undertaken at six association conferences Participants originated from 72 different countries, with most respondents coming from Germany (7.1%) followed by China (4.7%). The gender split was relatively equal (Female 55.1%; Male 43.8%). The respondent group was predominantly within the 22-35 age cohort (58.1%), with most participants possessing a college level education (53.9%) or a graduate degree (26.4%) (see Tables A1-A4 in Appendix 11).

Most of the delegates (42.8%) claimed that they learned about the conference from their local association branch. The second most popular method of communication (38.8%) was through an email sent to the association mailing list. This shows that most of the delegates received a direct invitation or communication, confirming that the associations already have in place a direct communication network with branches and members. This is common for association conferences, whereby associations are close to their network of members. This was also in line with Mair and Thompson (2009)'s argument that, in case of conference tourism most information is sent directly to the potential delegate and therefore the information search is limited. Nonetheless, the importance of other sources should not be underestimated, as 33% of participants claimed to have found information on the conference they were attending from social media (full results summarised in Tables A5-A14, Appendix 11).

In terms of travelling behaviour, the majority of the respondents claimed to travel once to twice a year for conferences (39%), with 37.4% indicating that they travelled for conferences at any time of the year, while 33.6% showed a preference to travelling during spring (see Tables A15 and A16 respectively in Appendix 11). This is in line with trends in association conference tourism which increase during the months of May and June, only to decline during July and August and reach a peak again in September and October (Figure 10). Nonetheless, in this study the high incidence of delegate travel in spring might also be related to the two biggest association conferences at which the questionnaire was undertaken

(The Medical conference and the Law conference) holding their major annual conference in spring.

Furthermore, 40.1% of the delegates claimed to spend two to three days at a destination before or after a conference (see Table A17; Appendix 11). The main reason for extending their stay was sightseeing (33.8%) (Table A18; Appendix 11). This corresponds with Donaldson (2013) who argued that associations frequently offer the opportunity to their conference delegates to extend their stay by applying for pre-conference or post-conference tours that are usually leisure oriented.

The next section will examine the delegates' opinions in relation to the motivators and barriers to conference attendance.

6.2.2 Delegates' questionnaire results

Further to the background questions and demographics of the delegates, the questionnaire also included a mix of 144 conventional and contemporary motivators and barriers to conference attendance. Delegates ranked each factor in terms of its importance and allowing the study to distinguish the more important from the less important factors. The list of motivating and barrier factors to conference attendance, ranked in order of importance (according to their mean score of importance) are presented in the Appendix 11 (Table A19 and A20 respectively).

The mean score of the motivator factors ranged between 4.45 and 2.44 on a five-point Likert scale. The scores of the barrier factors ranged between a mean value of 4.51 and 1.90. Only 16 out of 82 motivators got a mean score lower than 3 (half-way though the Likert scale). Similarly, for the barriers, most factors scored an average that is higher than the mid-point of the Likert scale, with just 13 out of 62 barriers scoring less. This shows that delegates considered most of the factors in the questionnaire to be important. This result was expected since the proposed factors were selected based on the assumption that they were considered important, or because they were identified as important in past studies.

In the study by Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) the motivator means ranged from 4.22 to 2.32 while the barrier means ranged from 4.29 to 1.76. In another study whereby perceived

importance and perceived performance were compared, Whitfield et al. (2014)'s mean ratings for factors ranged from 4.30 to 2.73, thus having even higher mean scores while the mean score of the motivator factors in Mair et al. (2018)'s study ranged from 4.36 to 2.64, and the barriers' mean scores ranged between 3.82 to 1.97.

Due to the large number of factors, variable computation was carried out in order to group factors togethers and rank the group by its mean score, making them easier to present. At this stage, the factors were grouped in the same way they were listed in within the questionnaire itself and are presented in Table 24 and 25 below.

Motivating factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career-related factors mean	268	3.83	.58
Conference factors mean	269	3.72	.60
Technology factors mean	267	3.62	.82
Personal factors mean	269	3.42	.85
Conference venue-related factors mean	269	3.37	.88
Accommodation-related factors mean	269	3.36	.78
Destination factors mean	269	3.24	.74
Green credentials mean	267	2.99	1.05

Table 24. Mean ranking of motivators (presented as per grouping within questionnaire)

Barrier factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conference barriers mean	267	3.71	.69
Accommodation barriers mean	269	3.36	.70
Destination barriers mean	269	3.27	.64
Accessibility barriers mean	264	3.14	1.02
Personal barriers mean	263	3.12	.74

Table 25. Mean ranking of barrier factors (presented as per grouping within questionnaire)

Career-related factors (M= 3.83, SD = .58) was considered the most important group of motivating factors, followed by conference-related factors (M= 3.72, SD= .60) and technology-related factors (M=3.62, SD= .82). The green credentials-related motivating factors were considered the least important (M= 2.99, SD = 1.05). Nonetheless, each individual factor's mean may vary from the mean of the group it forms part of. This is the case within the green credentials group of factors for example, as is shown by the high value of standard deviation (SD) that is over 1. The higher SD (1.04764) of the factors within this group suggests that while green credentials have little value for some delegates, they are still quite desirable for others (Tanford and Montgomery 2015). In terms of the factors

constituting barriers to attendance, the conference barrier factors were considered the most important (M=3.71, SD = 0.69), followed by accommodation-related barriers (M=3.36, SD = .70) and destination-related barriers (M=3.27, SD= .64). The personal barriers were considered the least important. Responses for each individual factor varied the most within the accessibility, having an SD value >1, with a SD of <1 in all other groups.

The most important individual factors (Mean ≥ 4) were also identified and ranked in Table 26, and the least important factors (Mean ≤2.5) were also included. The SD value >1 in the case of all the least important factors shows that even though the average score is low, opinions amongst the delegates were varied. Several specific principal factors could be identified when listing the most important factors. The study therefore aimed at channelling the factors so that the most important factors (or principal factors), that deserve to be prioritised, could be identified. Having identified the individual most important factors, Factor Analysis was carried out in order to avoid the bias that could potentially influence the grouping of the factors.

Most important motivating factors (Mean ≥ 4)			Strongest barrier factors (Mean ≥ 4)		
Motivator	**Mean**	**SD**	**Barrier**	**Mean**	**SD**
Fast Wi-Fi	4.43	.90	Lack of Wi-Fi availability at conference venue	4.51	.83
Topic of personal interest	4.36	.76	Slow Wi-Fi connection at conference venue	4.34	.93
Develop new skill	4.34	.78	Sanitation at destination	4.28	.89
Clean accommodation	4.32	.78	Sanitation problems at accommodation	4.22	.97
Interesting conference programme	4.29	.77	Lack of Wi-Fi availability at accommodation	4.17	1.01
Power supply availability for devices	4.23	1.00	Safety at the destination	4.17	.96
Networking opportunity	4.22	.85	High accommodation cost	4.17	.95
Opportunity to work across cultures	4.22	.88	Terrorism threat at the destination	4.00	1.19
Education improvement	4.18	.84			
Socialise and making new friends	4.05	.96			
Least important motivating factors (Mean ≤2.5)			Weakest barrier factors (Mean ≤2.5)		
Motivator	**Mean**		**Barrier**	**Mean**	
Activities for partners or family	2.46	1.23	Loneliness during the conference stay	2.40	1.36
Gain from currency exchange rate.	2.45	1.30	Jet lag	2.39	1.19
			Different time zones	2.10	1.12
			Afraid of flying	1.91	1.21

Table 26. Most and least important motivators and barriers

Factor Analysis tests were carried out on the topmost important motivator and barrier factors (mean ≥ 4) in order to examine the structure of the top factors affecting conference attendance decision making. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX) and Kaiser Normalization was employed. The Factor Analysis was carried out separately for the motivators and the barriers. All factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were considered significant and retained (Kaiser 1974). For the motivator factors, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy showed a value of (.660) (Table 27) which was considered adequate (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996). In order to obtain theoretically meaningful factors, only the higher loading factors (from 0.59 upward) were considered when grouping the factors. This indicated a strong correlation between the factors and their principal factor . Due to the strong loading, interpretation of factors was easier, and four main components were identified, which explained 66.589% of total variance (see Table A21 in Appendix 11). These included *personal development*, *conference factor*, *technology* and *socialising.* Each category included at least one highly ranked motivator factor. These are presented in Table 28.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.660
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	503.640
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

Table 27. KMO and Bartlett's Test – Motivating factors

Factors	Principal Factors (Motivators)			
	Personal development	Conference-related	Technology-related	Socialising
Interesting conference programme		.811		
Topic of personal interest		.830		
Develop new skills	.814			
Education improvement	.760			
Socialise and making new friends				.770
Fast Wi-Fi availability in general			.869	
Power supply availability for devices in general			.853	

Table 28. Factor Analysis Results for Motivators

A similar process was carried out for factors that constituted a barrier to attendance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy showed a value of (.775) which was also considered adequate (Table 29). The groups were easily distinguishable and a loading of 0.59 was considered adequate. No factors were removed. The principal factors identified were *technology*, *safety*, *hygiene* and *cost* and are shown in Table 30. These explained 82.474% of total variance (see Table A22 in Appendix 11).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.775
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	885.827
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

Table 29. KMO and Bartlett's Test – Barrier factors

Factors	Principal Factors (Barriers)			
	Technology	**Safety**	**Hygiene level**	**Cost**
Lack of Wi-Fi availability at accommodation	.790			
Sanitation problems at accommodation			.909	
Lack of Wi-Fi availability at conference venue	.861			
Slow Wi-Fi connection at conference venue	.889			
Terrorism threat at the destination		.885		
Safety at the destination		.894		
Sanitation at destination			.592	
High accommodation cost				.997

Table 30. Factor Analysis Results for Barrier factors

In the next section a discussion on the factors and the identification of themes that would shape the Delphi study will follow.

6.2.3 Discussion

Having presented and ranked the motivating and inhibiting factors to conference attendance, as well as grouped factors together utilising different methods, this section seeks to identify the most important themes, under which the factors considered to be most important, can be classified. These will act as the foundation of the study's second data collection method – the Delphi study.   Results are also compared to previous studies to understand if this study's results have re-confirmed the importance of traditional factors and if previously unidentified factors have emerged. Since the questionnaire was purely quantitative, the aim was to identify the themes according to their importance and did not aim to understand the opinions of the delegates.

6.2.3.1 Technology

While the technology-related factors ranked third most important as a group (see Table 24), it is clear to identify several individual technology-related factors that lead in terms of means

ranking in both the motivator and the barrier factor lists (see table 26). Wi-Fi is one such case, with the factor *fast Wi-Fi available in general* (M= 4.45), ranking at the top of both the motivators and barriers lists, making it an extremely important expectation. Lack of Wi-Fi and related issues are also a strong deterrent to conference participation. The high score of factors such as *lack of Wi-Fi availability at the conference venue* (M= 4.51), *slow Wi-Fi connection at the conference venue* (M= 4.35) are proof of the delegates Wi-Fi-related expectations at the conference venue. Nonetheless, high Wi-Fi expectations at the accommodation were also shown to exist, with the factor *lack of Wi-Fi availability at the accommodation* (M=4.20) ranking high. It confirms similar findings that indicate high Wi-Fi expectations at accommodation and conference venues (Girod 2009), and the dissatisfaction resulting from Wi-Fi -related issues (Hussain et al. 2014). The findings are also in line with industry reports that show Wi-Fi as a top priority, and the importance of providing enough Wi-Fi bandwidth to meet attendee's needs (Palmer 2018).

Another technology-related motivator that ranked high was *power supply availability for devices* (M= 4.25), with 82.9% of the participants rating it important or very important. The factor's barrier counterpart also ranked high, with 74.8% considering it important or very important. It is also in line with industry reports such as Meetings and Conventions 2030, who refer to power supplies as a requirement of the modern delegate. It is suggested that the trend might change, and its importance may be less by 2030 (German Convention Bureau 2013). This will be discussed further in the Delphi study.

The study also explored how other technology-related factors influenced the delegates' attendance decisions. Delegates felt that *access to conference agenda/ schedule from delegate's device* (M= 3.96) was an important motivator to conference attendance, as 75.5% of delegates considered it important or very important. Once again, there was no record of this specific factor in literature, even though reference to the importance of available information was frequently mentioned. Nonetheless, the adoption of apps was often listed in industry reports and will be discussed later in this section. Delegates were also concerned with lack of access to social media. *Ban on access to social media* (M= 3.62) was considered an important (or very important) barrier to attendance by 59.8% of participants, proving the importance of social media. A ban on social media could result if the conference is held at a destination where such bans exist, such as China, whereby

companies such as Facebook, Google and Dropbox are not able to operate (Leskin 2019). Organisers need to keep in mind the importance for delegates to stay online and provide for a lift on the ban or offer possible alternatives. This is especially true for the younger delegates who are dependent on online social interaction (Nusair et al. 2013). Social media is in fact used in a multitude of ways, such as for delegate engagement (Davidson and Turner 2017), in case of emergencies and crises during conferences (BCD Meetings and Events 2017) and to increase the market reach within the travel market (Destinations International 2019). As video becomes the new currency of destination marketing and storytelling (Destinations International 2019), social media increased in importance as it is the main platform for uploading videos that are shared for marketing purposes.

Surprisingly, several other technology-related factors were ranked as relatively low in importance. The motivators *remote check-in at accommodation* (M= 2.78) and *remote climate control at accommodation* (M= 2.71), as well as the barrier *lack of apps to communicate requests* (M= 2.73) all ranked low. The disinterest in apps by the participants goes against the general trend reflected in the industry reports. Nonetheless, industry reports do show that mobile apps such as *Whatsapp* are increasingly being used to communicate with conference attendees (BCD Meeting and Event 2017) and considered as a "must have" (American Express Meetings and Events 2018), indicating that mobile apps might be replacing the custom-made conference apps, as the introduction of smart phones made mobile apps accessible to all delegates (Keller 2019).

Technology was identified as a theme that required further study and discussion in order to distinguish between technology that is important and technology that is less attractive. This will also help confirm whether technology is still a driving force of change or else has become just another of the important conference pillars (Oates 2017). This is discussed in section 6.3.6.

6.2.3.2 Time and work constraints

Time and work constraints were identified as important by delegates. Unlike corporate delegates (that attend such conferences as part of their jobs), association delegates are required to find extra time to attend conferences, which are undertaken only during their

available free time. Factors such as *problem taking time away from work* (M=3.77)*, conference too long to stay away* (M= 3.66); *not possible to delegate work back home* (M= 3.51), *backlog of work to tackle on return* (M=3.38) confirmed that delegates' time was limited and restricted by their work. Delegates also ranked the challenges related to having a *conference advertised too late to fit into schedule* (M= 3.88) and having an *inflexible conference agenda (not possible to attend only one day of the conference)* (M= 3.58) as important. This confirms that, as expected, availability of time is an underlying influence that facilitates or hinders delegates' attendance (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001).

Underlying time constraints influenced the participants' perspectives on different factors, making it increasingly difficult to attend conferences that are too long, inflexible or announced at short notice. Time constraints influencing the delegates' decision to attend a conference has appeared in several studies (Oppermann 1996; Comas and Moscardo 2005; Ramirez et al. 2013) indicating how delegates have time constraints due to other commitments and work. This suggests the need for added flexibility in terms of attendance duration; indeed Weber and Ladkin (2005) argued that delegates' time constraints would result in shorter conference durations. Delegates also expected to be informed of the conference in advance, in order to make the necessary arrangements (Ramirez et al. 2013).

Delegates were also concerned with an *environment not suitable to work at accommodation* (M=3.89). The situation can be improved with the provision of the right tools, such as technology for delegates to remain connected and productive while away from their workplace. Exploring different avenues how conference and accommodation venues can facilitate connectivity and an environment conducive to work during the conference stay was considered important and will therefore be discussed in the Delphi study. This becomes increasingly important with the risk of decreased physical attendance, exacerbated by the forecasted increase in virtual attendance. Industry reports concur on the increased importance of the virtual conference trend (BCD Meetings and Events 2017) that was expected to grow at a faster rate than physical conferences (Meeting Professionals International 2017) prior to the occurrence of Covid'19 in 2020, which has further accelerated the trend of virtual conferencing (Palmer 2020) due to social distancing measures. Nonetheless, while transition of knowledge could have occurred virtually for the

past decades, physical attendees look forward to benefiting from their experience of attendance (Davidson and Turner 2017), as shall be discussed in sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4.

6.2.3.3 Career and educational benefits

Career-related factors ranked amongst the top 15 motivators for attendance. These included *develop new skills* (M= 4.34); *opportunity to work across culture* (M= 4.20); *education improvement* (M= 4.18); *career enhancement* (M= 4.00) and *develop international reputation* (M= 3.93). The specific factor *career enhancement* itself was considered highly important by delegates, with 80.7% considering it an important or very important motivator, indicating that many delegates attend conferences to increase their career prospects. Compared to similar studies, career enhancement is incorporated in other career-related factors, but not listed specifically. Nonetheless, the outcome is the same. In the case of educational benefits and improvement, for example, such factors have been consistently confirmed as high conference attendance motivators in numerous other studies (Ngamson and Beck 2000; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Jago and Deery 2005; Zhang et al. 2007; Severt et al. 2007; Bauer et al. 2008; Mair and Thompson 2009; Yoo and Chon 2008; 2010). In a similar (albeit qualitative) study, the authors in fact claimed that "it would seem educational benefits appear to be the main motivator to attendees" (Ramirez et al. 2013 p. 172). Industry reports have shown how specific delegate profiles are described as 'knowledge seekers', and constantly seek opportunities to learn and improve their career prospects (American Express Meetings and Events 2018).

The choice of speakers has also been considered important, as confirmed by 61.7% to the factor *high reputation of speakers* (M= 3.63). This factor has been referred to in past studies, highlighting how it can improve the educational element (Witt et al. 1995). Furthermore, reference has been made to the potential of a speaker determining which conference a delegate chooses to attend, when alternative conference options exist (Mair and Thompson 2009). High reputation speakers add to the networking value that is also considered of high importance to delegates (Ramirez et al. 2013) (see section 6.3.3.5). Due to the high importance given to personal factors, a theme related to the delegates' personal

needs was included in the Delphi study to examine this further. Networking, another personal benefit, will now be discussed.

6.2.3.4 Networking and socialising

The factor *networking opportunity* (M= 4.21) was ranked as the seventh highest out of the 82 motivators with 83.9% of delegates considering it important or very important. This is yet another factor considered to improve the career prospects of possible attendees and showed how the opportunity to meet people that can improve the delegates' (professional) situation will heighten the chances of attendance. Another factor; *socialising and making new friends* (M= 4.04) was considered important or very important by 80.9% of the delegates. The opportunity to network, within and outside the official conference programme has been frequently listed as significantly important in many studies (Oppermann and Chon 1997; Ngamson and Beck 2000; Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Jago and Deery 2005;. Lee and Back 2007; Severt et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2007; Yoo and Chon 2008; Mair and Thompson 2009; Yoo and Chon 2010; Yoo and Zhao 2010; Ramirez et al. 2013). While this study confirms that the importance of networking has been retained, it also identified some delegate expectations in relation to this factor.

The conference and accommodation venues were expected to facilitate networking. The factors *networking spaces at accommodation venue* and *networking spaces at conference venue* (M= 3.60 and M= 3.59 respectively) ranked high in the motivator lists, confirming this expectation. While academic studies did not focus on these expectations that facilitate networking, industry reports have discussed the importance of suitably equipped meeting locations for networking (German Convention Bureau 2013), the fact that networking is shaping the layout of the conference sessions (BCD Meeting and Events Trend Report 2017) and the pressure on conference venues to offer more collaborative and networking spaces outside of meeting rooms and making use of adjacent spaces for increased networking (IACC 2020).

The preference of physical networking and its association with higher performance and productivity (Yoo and Chon 2008; Mair et al. 2018) makes physical conferences irreplaceable. Given that networking opportunities are significant predictors of future

conference attendance (Mair and Thompson 2009; Ramirez et al. 2013), they are one strong argument in favour of physical conferences. Meeting in-person has in fact been shown to be very beneficial, for example by facilitating long-term relationships, allowing the creation of stronger relationships and facilitating discussions with people from different language and cultural backgrounds (Harvard Business Review 2016). Meeting physically also offers the possibility of pre- and post-networking (unofficial socialising), which virtual meetings do not provide (Venuesworld 2019). In fact, virtual meetings lack many benefits of in-person conferences that are related to networking (Woolston 2020). This is important for the survival of physical conferences in a time when virtual conferences are becoming attractive (especially due to the COVID-19 situation). The networking-related factors shall therefore be explored further in the Delphi study.

6.2.3.5 Conference content and programme

Factors related to conference content also rated high in importance. The topic of the conference was considered very important, with the factor *topic of personal interest* (M= 4.35) ranking second in the list of factors motivating attendance to conferences, with 91% considering it as important or very important. Another 88% of the delegates considered the factor *interesting conference programme* (M= 4.28) as important or very important. Interest in the topic indicates that delegates evaluate the official conference offering before deciding to attend. This was an expected result especially for association conferences, since membership within the association itself would be related to common interests. It was therefore expected that the interests of the association would strongly influence the conference topic (Rogers 2013). This finding reconfirmed those of similar studies (Jago and Deery 2005; Mair 2010; Yoo and Zhao 2010; Tanford et al. 2012). The mean score of this factor in this study was M=4.35, which is very close to the mean score of 4.43 for the same factor in the study by Yoo and Zhao (2010).

While the study highlights the importance of the conference programme, its quantitative nature does not allow further in-depth discussion. Expectations related to the conference programme have increased, with programmes tailor-made to the delegate's preferences (Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011) becoming the norm. This is in line with industry

reports that showed how contemporary expectations include the attendees having control over what activities they opt for (BCD Meeting and Events 2017), putting high importance on a personalised experience (Turner 2019; MPI 2020). Therefore, this was considered one of the themes to be discussed in the Delphi study.

6.2.3.6 Costs and funding

The questionnaire's responses show that the importance of cost has not declined. *High accommodation costs* were considered the strongest cost-related inhibitor by the delegates (M= 4.19), with 83.8% considering them important and very important. *High travel expenses to destination* (M= 3.97) was also seen as important/very important by 73.8%, while *conference registration costs* (M= 3.95) was indicated as important/very important by 72.5%. This was expected in the association conference market, with delegates being required to finance their attendance completely or partially (Mair and Thompson 2009; Ramirez et al. 2013). Costs have been considered a barrier to attendance by several other studies (Witt et al. 1995; Opperman and Chon 1997; Zhang et al. 2007).

Delegates felt that having *travel expenses covered* would motivate them to attend (M= 3.80), with 66.5% considering this important or very important. *Discounted accommodation cost* (M= 3.39) and *discounted air fares* (M=3.31) on the other hand were considered less important. This could be because discounts were not as effective as total funding, and therefore it was resolved that further research would need to be carried out in the research study. This would also cover claims by other studies showing that costs might not act as an attendance barrier if value is high (Dioko and Whitfield 2015). Furthermore, this would allow further in-depth research on how delegates' individual characteristics may influence the attendance decision based on costs (as shown for example in Witt et al. 1995; Yoo and Chon 2008), which this study could not determine mainly due to a homogenous sample population (professionals).

6.2.3.7 Cleanliness

Cleanliness and hygiene have been listed in past studies (Ngamsom and Beck 2000; Dwyer and Kim 2003; Wan 2011), and frequently considered to be an underlying delegate expectation, not usually classifying as a motivator to attendance (Jago and Deery 2005). It has been regarded as the most widely expected attribute in studies such as the one by Whitfield (2005), but it becomes important once related problems arise and dissatisfaction is created (Jago and Deery 2005; Yoo and Zhao 2010).

Factors related to cleanliness were included in this study and delegates considered these to be quite important. *Clean accommodation* was considered the 4th most important motivator (M= 4.32) with 88.8% considering it either important or very important. Besides, *sanitation at the destination* (M= 4.29) and *sanitation problems at accommodation* (M= 4.23) ranked 3rd and 4th respectively amongst the attendance inhibitors. This indicated the increased importance of hygiene, already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has surely led to this factor's higher importance in future. In fact, hygiene certifications have been introduced in different destinations in response to Covid-19 concerns (Palmer and Grimaldi 2020). This topic was also planned to be discussed in the Delphi study, as part of the themes emerging, and even due to the fact that it also emerged as a principal factor from the Principal Component Analysis (section 6.2.2).

6.2.3.8 Destination safety

The data collected from the questionnaire showed that safety is a top inhibiting factor. The factor *safety at destination* (M= 4.18) ranked 7th out of 62 attendance inhibitors, with 83.1% consideringthis to be important or very important. The more-specific factor *terrorism threat at the destination* (M= 4.00) ranked 8th place with 76% indicating it to be important or very important. Furthermore, *terrorism in neighbouring country* (M= 3.66) also ranked relatively high amongst the inhibiting factors as 61.9% saw this as important or very important when deciding whether to attend a conference.

Safety has been a conventionally important factor in past studies (Choi and Boger 2002; Priporas 2005; Tranford et al. 2012; Donaldson 2013) and reaffirmed in industry reports (Davison and Turner 2017). It is claimed that its importance is on the increase due to the consequences of natural disasters and human-related attacks and was the only area where conference planners were seeing their budgets increasing (Palmer 2018). The factors specific to terrorism in a destination or in neighbouring countries were found to be of particular importance in this study when compared to past research. These strengthened the general literature findings whereby terrorism acts dominate the perception of the destination, and make it unattractive for a period of time, (Baytok et al. 2010; Avraham 2015) (see section 4.4.10).Furthermore, this study's results reconfirm that terrorism has a wide geographical effect (discussed in section 4.4.10) in terms of image (Al-Mahadin and Burns, 2007), unlike other general instability (the factor *instability in neighbouring countries* ranked much lower in importance).

While this study confirmed the importance of safety, further research was considered necessary. Its increasing importance and high ranking motivated the creation of a theme dedicated specifically to safety in the Delphi study. Furthermore, it was identified as one of the overarching principal factors in the Principal Component Analysis, leading to an understanding of how the negative image can be counteracted as well as the strength of an act of terror or instability on a whole region. This becomes increasingly important when understanding how the current situation can be improved, with industry reports showing that only 46% of planners have contingencies for natural disasters, 45% for active shooters and 40% for bomb threats (Meeting Professionals International 2017). For destinations, being considered safe is a must, as safety and security are progressively being considered a brand differentiator by conference delegates (Destinations International 2017), and safety and security have become top considerations for conference destination selection (Destinations International 2019).

6.2.3.9. Accommodation venue

Delegates considered several accommodation-related factors to be important motivators and inhibitors to conference attendance. These included the factors *high service quality*

accommodation venue (M= 3.96), *clean accommodation* and having *three-star accommodation or higher* (M= 3.57). Other factors also included technology factors such as *quick response customer care service at accommodation venue* (M= 3.44) and *remote climate control via apps* (which scored relatively low, M= .71). *Poor customer care service at accommodation* (M= 3.44) was considered a barrier together with *inconvenient meal times at accommodation* (M= 3.39), a concern that could be a result of missing the meals provided due to the busy (and possibly inflexible) conference agenda.

Accessibility, another dimension of the accommodation, was highlighted as important. The factor *fully accessible accommodation venue* (M= 3.77) and its counterpart *accessibility around whole accommodation venue* (M= 3.44) were considered important but were not amongst the most important factors. Nonetheless, the SD of both factors shows a high value (1.07 and 1.08 respectively), signifying a wide range of answers. This could be related to a high interest in accessibility only when required, while other delegates might not be considerate of the importance of such factors since they do not face accessibility challenges. Considering the length of time delegates spend at the accommodation venue and the number of accommodation-related factors that were thought important, it was decided to study these factors in more depth in the Delphi study. Similarly, the conference venue was identified as another area that required discussion.

6.2.3.10 Conference venue

Like the accommodation venue, several expectations relating to the conference venue were also highlighted as important. Accessibility was once again considered important, both as a motivator (*conference venue fully accessible*, M= 3.61) and inhibitor (*lack of accessibility around whole conference venue*, M=3.52). Comfort was also expected from delegates, such as *climate control during conference* (M= 3.45) and its barrier counterpart *lack of climate control at conference venue* (M= 3.38). While climate at the destination has previously been explored (Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007), climate at the conference venue itself has not been discussed, highlighting the topic for further discussion. Lighting was also considered important, as *lack of suitable lighting at conference venue* (M= 3.62) constituted a conference attendance inhibitor.

These expectations show how conference centres need to be in control of their environment. It has been shown in other studies that décor, ambiance, lighting, signage, temperature control, aesthetics equipment and employee uniforms, all make a difference when choosing a conference destination (Crouch and Weber 2002), as organisers search for venues that fit the theme of their event (Whitfield 2009b), thus advantaging more flexible venues. This has also been shown to be a requirement to switch effectively from one set-up to another, with industry reports revealing how the majority of operators claim that flexible non-traditional meeting room furniture are the biggest trends in meeting venue development and design (IACC 2018) and fixed seating is less attractive as delegates expect to be able to switch from large to smaller group activities (German Convention Bureau 2013). Venue operators are now alerted to these requirements, considering that the importance of the availability of flexible meeting spaces and adjacent space for socialisation and networking will be on the rise in the coming years (IACC 2020).

Furthermore, most delegates (66%) considered a universal conference venue accreditation system as beneficial. Having identified the lack of a universal accreditation system to rate conference venues, this finding confirmed that introducing such an accreditation system would be beneficial, especially when considering the importance of the right conference venues to attract conferences (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Bernini 2009). In fact, while this rating system exists for accommodation venues, there is no universal accreditation system for conference facilities, making it difficult to compare different conference venues according to universal standards. The results related to this question are presented in Table A23 in Appendix 11.

While several conference venue-related factors have indicated the need for flexibility, both the conference venue and the accommodation venue were considered important themes for further discussion in the Delphi study.

6.2.3.11 Leisure facilities

In terms of the importance of leisure tourism, this study tends to contradict previous research. Delegates did not give much importance to leisure facilities at the accommodation with just 42% seeing the *lack of leisure facilities at accommodation* (M= 3.12) as important or very

important, thus ranking low on the barrier list. The sentiment of the delegates was reconfirmed with a similarly low ranking of its motivator counterpart *leisure facilities available at accommodation venue* (M= 3.17), considered to be important or very important by only 46.3% of respondents. Furthermore, *entertainment facilities available close to accommodation or conference venue* (M= 3.19) were also allotted low importance.

Leisure has been considered an important element of conference tourism (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Bernini 2009; Hanly 2011 Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Marais et al. 2017), especially for delegates who fit within specific profiles (American Express Meetings and Events 2018). The questionnaire's results show that the factor *combine business with leisure* (M= 3.68), on the other hand, was deemed more important, as 66.1% considering it important or very important.

Several conclusions may be drawn from such results, which nonetheless deserve to be studied and clarified further. First, delegates may engage in leisure activities by extending their stay at the host destination, making the availability of leisure facilities during the official conference period unimportant. Association conferences usually include pre- and post-conference periods (Donaldson 2013), and a large proportion of the participants in this study (section 6.1) confirmed that they usually do travel earlier or stay later at the destination. Second, the conferences where this research was carried out did not allow partners to travel with the delegates. Guests accompanying delegates might increase the interest to engage in leisure activities during the conference period (Davidson 2003). Third, having a very busy official programme might not allow delegates to engage in leisure activities, and therefore their interest may be low. Finally, since delegates did indicate that they give importance to mixing leisure with business, delegates might be moving away from defining entertainment as leisure and become increasingly interested in other leisure activities such as local attractions (cultural and historic; discussed in section 6.2.3.15). Leisure will also be discussed in the Delphi study (section 7.2.4).

6.2.3.12 Proximity to conference facility

The importance given to proximity between accommodation venue and conference facility was highlighted twice in this study. *Short distance to conference facility from*

accommodation (M= 3.90) was considered important or very important by 73.5% of the participants. The *conference venue located within accommodation* (M= 3.59) was also an important motivator with 62% considering it important or very important. These results confirm the increased importance of the total conference product (Clark 2006), which can also be addressed by integrated conference venues providing the total conference product within one complex (Whitfield et al. 2012; Donaldson 2013) (discussed in section 4.4.5). The questionnaire's results confirmed that these specialised conference venues can motivate attendance. This finding has also been presented in previous studies (Ryan et al. 2008) and will be discussed in more detail in the Delphi study.

6.2.3.13 Personal reasons

Delegates' personal reasons also dictated conference attendance. *Health problems* (M= 3.71) was considered important or very important by 66.4% of the delegates. Analysing the factor's SD Value (1.25) shows that even though the mean score was relatively high, there was a spread in the scoring given by participants. This is possibly related to the difference in opinion between delegates with specific health problems and others who are not affected by any health issues. This could also explain the different ranking of the same factor in other studies which has not been consistent (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Yoo and Chon 2008; Mair 2018) and could be related to the health condition of the sample involved. In fact, conference attendance has been regarded as a physically challenging activity, especially combined with preparing presentations and long-haul travel (Opperman and Chon 1995).

Family obligations (M= 3.67) were also important, ranked by 66.2% as important or very important. Like health issues, the factor's SD value (1.24) showed that results were spread out, possibly due to the same reason, and its score could be related to the sample's demographics. Other studies (Lee and Back 2007; Yoo and Zhao 2010) have shown how family obligations can act as a barrier to attendance. This could be related to unexpected family incidents such as sickness of a family member, special occasions and conflicting holidays, that all act as inhibitors (Oppermann and Chon 1997). Due to the possible different reaction of delegates based on their personal situations, personal factors will be discussed in more detail in the Delphi study.

6.2.3.14 Association-related factors

Several factors that the delegates considered important were directly related to the association hosting the conference. This shows the influence of the association on its members and their decision to attend conferences it organises. Delegates were interested in getting involved and contributing to the association, as they felt that to *influence organisation's future direction* (M= 3.97) and *participate in association/ board elections* (M= 3.57) were important factors.

Delegates were also motivated by the positive past experiences of attending other conferences organised by the same association. *Positive past experiences of attending a conference by the same association* (M=3.92) showed the delegates' loyalty towards their association. In some situations, pressure to attend came from the association itself. Delegates indicated that their local association chapters put pressure on them to be present at their annual conference (*pressure to represent your institution*; M= 3.57) while claims related to the fact that they *needed to be present at the AGM* (M= 3.32) or were *asked to be chair, moderator or helper* (M= 3.31) ranked lower, showing that delegates voluntarily attended the conference.

These factors have not been listed in past studies, therefore this study's result could be showing the extent to which delegates have a personal attachment and interest / loyalty in the association. This allows an association to be flexible in the choice of destination, making the association a main target for destinations interested in attracting conference tourism.

6.2.3.15 Destination-related attractions

Few factors relating directly to the destination ranked in the top half of the factor lists. Delegates were mostly motivated to *see cultural and historic attractions at destination* (M= 3.62). In fact, 33.8% of the delegates in this study had claimed that they seek to do sightseeing pre- or post- conference, as is discussed in section 6.2. Visiting the destination for the first time was also attractive (*first time visiting destination*; M=3.59). The USPs of

the destination were therefore important assets as delegates look forward to new experiences. These expectations will be discussed further in order to understand how to make a destination more attractive.

Transport accessibility was also considered important, including *convenient local transport at destination* (M= 3.57) and *no barrier to enter destination* (M=3.44). Delegates in fact considered *travelling barriers* (M=3.50) an important inhibitor to attendance. This study's results reconfirmed the importance of destination accessibility that has been considered important for conference attendance in previous studies (Opperman and Chon 1997; Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Mair and Thompson 2009; Horváth 2011). Industry reports also concur, showing how delegates may react against excessive border control and issues (Davidson and Turner 2017).

This study dismissed the conventional claim that climate at the destination is important. The factor *climate at destination* (M= 3.13) ranked quite low amongst the motivating factors , scoring only 47.5% for important or very important. Scores varied widely for this factor (range=4, SD= 1.28), showing different opinions. Nonetheless, this result contrasts with the high importance given to ambience control inside the conference venue and could indicate that since delegates spend much more time inside the conference centre, climate inside is their main concern. This may also be the reason why other destination-related factors proposed to participants in this study were not considered important, contradicting previous research, and may relate to Yoo and Zhao's (2010) claim that the increasingly tight schedules at conferences inhibit delegates from spending time at the destination.

6.2.3.16 Pre-conference factors

As section 4.2.2 covered stages of the delegate's decision-making process, the importance of ease of access to information related to the conference was highlighted. Including the factor in the questionnaire confirmed that *lack of online information available about the conference* (M= 3.96) constituted an obstacle to attendance according to 76.8% who saw this as important or very important. Online information has been deemed an essential second stage in the conference decision making process for delegates (Mair and Thompson 2009),

while availability of prior information has been shown to lead to higher ratings on attractiveness (Boo et al. 2008). The need for available online information has also increased in importance amongst travelling trends (Destinations International 2019). This will be discussed further in the Delphi study.

Most delegates (55%) see a complicated booking system as an important or very important inhibitor to attendance. Having identified this, the study will seek to understand how these two information and registration factors can help attract delegates. On the other hand, these factors have been shown to be important in other studies (Ryan et al. 2008) and can be linked to the expectations related to automated and fast booking systems in general (Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017). This can be done through mobile apps that are increasingly being used with conference attendees (BCD Meeting and Events - What's Trending Report 2017) and considered as a "must have" (American Express Meetings and Events 2018).

6.2.3.17 Environmental-related factors

The results of this study seemed to indicate that environmental-related factors were not a priority when attending a conference. Respondents were equally split in opinion on the topic of green destinations, as 51.4% claimed that it made a difference to them if the conference was held in a green destination (Table A24, Appendix 11). Nonetheless, the environmental-related factors proposed to delegates in this study ranked low both as motivators and barriers. These included *conference environmental-friendly activities* (M= 3.09), *environmentally-friendly transport* (M= 3.07), *freebies and merchandise environment-friendly* (M= 2.94), *only recyclable items utilised during conference (*M= 2.91), *venue/ accommodation eco certified* (M= 2.91) and its counterpart in the inhibitors list; *conference venue not eco-certified* (M= 2.74).

Nonetheless, this result might not contradict pro-environmental statements such as the one by Han (2014), who stated that green practices may provide a competitive advantage for conference organisers. In fact, it is noted that for some factors a significant minority of respondents still considered them to be important or very important. Conference environmentally friendly activities were considered as important or very important by 43.5% of the delegates, while 40.9% thought environmentally friendly transport to be important or

very important. 36.5% of the delegates declared that having the venue and accommodation eco-certified was important or very important. Furthermore, the SD values for all environmental-related factors are shown to be >1, indicating a variety in responses to these factors. This is confirmed by the range value (4), which is also high (see Table A25 Appendix 11). This suggests that green environmental practices may still attract pro-environmental delegates who have a strong opinion about the topic.

On the other hand, unless pro-environment incentives have a negative effect on factors that are considered more important by delegates during conference attendance decision making (such as increased costs for delegates), it would not be regarded as a negative in itself. While "greening" has been discussed and considered important in conference tourism (Mair and Jago 2010; Whitfield and Dioko 2011; Whitfield and Dioko 2012), little research exists on delegates' behaviours *vis-à-vis* the environment (Han and Hwang 2017). Green measures may in fact help in cost saving and cost elimination, by introducing measures such as replacing water bottles and eliminating paper forms and badges (Palmer 2018). While agreement on the benefits of green meetings by delegates exist, increased dissemination of eco-related information is still required. Ranacher and Pröbstl-Haider (2014) show that while 99% of the delegates in their study considered environmental efforts as positive, only 39% knew prior to arrival that the conference they were attending was eco-certified. Just like in this study, while delegates are in general agreement that eco-friendly measures are positive, to date they are not sufficiently interested in them.

Since the data in this study could only present but not explain the option about greening, and due to the fast-paced changes happening after data collection, further discussion was considered necessary. This interest was coupled with the predictions that green measures and sustainable development would become important quality factors in choosing conference locations and a crucial competitive advantage (Henderson 2011; German Convention Bureau 2013). This topic will therefore be explored in more detail in the Delphi study.

6.2.4. Themes identified for the Delphi Study

Having presented and analysed the different factors and their importance and having compared them to previous studies and current industry reports, the delegates' questionnaire addressed the first research question of the study's third objective. This was related to: *identifying the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer*. This knowledge was, however, also required to address the second research question of this objective whereby themes that required further research, for different reasons, were identified. The themes would determine the choice of questions asked to the panellists in the Delphi study, aiming to have an in-depth discussion on the topic that covers all stakeholders of conference tourism. This knowledge would allow the research to develop the Association Conference Destination Viability Model (ACDVM) (objective 4) and the Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit (CCDT) (objective 5).

The destination was identified to be the first topic that required further discussion. While the questionnaire has indicated the limited importance of several destination-related factors, the reasons behind this could not be explored. Factors omitted from this research could also emerge, while an understanding of the reason why delegates gave more importance to factors related to the conference and accommodation venue than the destination-related ones could be looked into.

Therefore, the second theme would focus on the conference and accommodation venues. The conference venue and meeting spaces, together with the increased need for flexibility in room layouts, furniture and ambience require further exploration.   These are also related to the delegate-expected functions such as climate control and lighting at the conference venue, as well as the expectations of proximity (or possibly integration) between the conference and the accommodation venue. Therefore the accommodation venue was also included within the same theme, since the two can be integrated, and also because several accommodation-related expectations, such as service quality and accessibility expectations, have emerged as important from the questionnaire's results. Furthermore, this theme was also expected to cover the issue of hygiene, which was noted as increasingly important and was also identified as a main factor in the PCA.

While the contemporary delegates' needs had been identified, a more in-depth discussion was required to develop the model and toolkit. By creating a theme dedicated to the demands and needs of the delegates, the Delphi study could explore the reasons behind several factors that appear as important in the questionnaire, especially the themes emerging from the PCA; the delegate's personal development expectations, conference related factors influencing delegates, socialising opportunities and costs. These themes included factors such as the importance of work and time constraints or how conference agendas can be tailor-made for delegate lifestyles. The way technology could contribute towards having flexible and interactive agendas, in terms of topic sessions that delegates choose to participate for, also tied into this theme. This would also reflect the ideal marketing strategy to attract delegates, ensuring that the delegate's conference experience is positive and unique (non-replaceable). Expectations related to education were also likely to emerge. The stakeholders' perspective on what can contribute to improve delegates' engagement is increasingly important. The discussion was also expected to extend to networking as another main factor, together with costs. Further discussion would explore the competitive edge physical conferences may have over virtual conferences in areas pertaining to education, career and networking of delegates.

Furthermore, the increased expectations related to conference experience and therefore programme flexibility, engagement and a memorable experience were flagged as an area of importance in the questionnaire. Consequently, the need to understand what satisfies or exceeds the delegates' expectations in terms of conference experience becomes important and a topic requiring further exploration, especially considering how emerging literature points towards the increased importance of individual experiences.

Special attention needs to be given to destination safety and security, which emerged as very strong barriers to conference attendance and yet another main theme in the PCA. Increased understanding of how terrorist actions, which have been identified as highly important, influenced the destination and attendance choice was important. This discussion would also extend to the importance of spill over effects of terrorism acts on a region, and the extent this influences the stakeholders' perspective of a destination in that region. While the questionnaire highlighted the importance of terrorism, the extent various other hazards and risks influence the stakeholders' perspective deserved further study.

Technology also merited further research and discussion, being identified as an overarching factor in the PCA, both as a motivator and barrier. While fast Wi-Fi was confirmed as a requisite, the need for power supplies identified in the questionnaire and the reason behind this merited discussion. The way conference technology and apps could be used to improve the conference rather than for the sake of 'being innovative' also needed to be explored. This could demonstrate the extent to which conference technology might be considered an innovation or whether it has become an essential and fixed pillar in conference tourism.

Finally, a theme dedicated to the future of conferences was important. This sought to identify and examine the risks and opportunities related to the industry. This theme also encompassed topics related to costings, which have emerged as an ever-important factors, and eco-related factors.

Using the questionnaire results as the foundation to develop the themes for discussion in the Delphi study, the next section will analyse the opinions of the stakeholders in the conference tourism industry. This extends the discussion on the factors' importance to conference tourism to all the stakeholders rather than just to the delegates. Yet, delegates were also represented to ensure that a holistic discussion could develop. The Delphi study results will now be presented and discussed.

6.3 The Delphi study – First Round

The Delphi study yielded both qualitative and quantitative results. As discussed in chapter 5, the initial round of the Delphi study made use of seven open questions in order gain a wide view of the panellists' opinions, which were representative of the conference tourism's main stakeholders. The questions reflected the seven main themes discussed in section 6.2.4, that were identified as important after comparing the results of the questionnaire with trends in related literature and industry reports (see Appendix 7).

Due to the qualitative nature of the first round, several factors emerged from the responses to each question and were compared to the delegates' questionnaire's results. A list of important factors was outlined from the discussion and included in the second round

of the Delphi study. These factors were separated into two lists. One group were considered *essential factors* while the other included those considered *factors important to gain a competitive advantage*. The former included factors seen as entry requirements for a destination to be deemed as an option when choosing conference locations. The second set of factors would help a destination gain a competitive edge over other destinations. The researcher distinguished the factors based on the comments of the panellists, frequency of reference and importance in the delegates' questionnaire. The panellists were subsequently invited to add or remove factors from each list. The next section will present the discussion on the seven main themes identified as main drivers for conference.

6.3.1 Characteristics of a successful conference destination

The responses in relation to the requirements of a destination to successfully attract conference tourism were based on several factors, which will now be discussed.

6.3.1.1 Accessibility

The Delphi panellists' responses converged on the importance of accessibility. This factor was frequently mentioned, and two main types were distinguished: accessibility of the destination and accessibility within the conference destination itself. International accessibility to a country hosting a conference was considered necessary by all the stakeholders who saw this as one of the first factors that delegates would think about, and this would also influence the association's opinion on site-selection. A comment by a panellist representing the industry experts summarises this thus: "one of the first questions both an organiser and a delegate asks is 'how do I get there?'" Panellists referred to airports regularly, indicating that the availability of both domestic and international low-cost carriers is important. Direct flights from the delegates' home countries to the conference destination were also considered central, as this was a convenient transport option to participants. The general arguments were that:

"unless an airport, or any other international transport hub, is well-connected, the ease of travel into the country will not be satisfactory enough" (association)

Furthermore, a delegate explained that travelling to a destination would ideally "not take longer than 2-3 hours", which was considered an optimum timeframe. Airports were at times deemed inconvenient, as a conference venue representative remarked that: "we received complaints on long queues at airports", and the security system was claimed to be "inefficient" at times (delegate). In fact, the option of travelling to a destination by alternative transport modes was also seen as attractive. Rail, road and sea transport modes were alternatives that stakeholders saw as facilitating a destination's accessibility. Delegates also voiced their concern on visa complications and lack of assistance in this case, while the rest of the panellists frequently referred to the importance of an easy visa application process. A conference bureau representative claimed that information on the application procedure and timeframes related to getting a visa approved would be attractive. In fact, an association representative remarked that when procedures are simple to follow, it is very helpful to them since

"delegates frequently refer all visa application issues to us, as the conference organiser … frequently we get involved in the process".

A link between international and national accessibility was frequently referred to. The airport or any other port through which foreign delegates enter the destination requires a high level of connectivity with the rest of the destination's attractions, and especially with the accommodation venue. Delegates and associations alike argued that a destination has the "right level of local accessibility" when its local transport nodes are connected, ideally directly, to all the locations that require access during a conference. Travelling to the conference venue, accommodation venue and any other place of interest needed to be "efficient", which required it to be "direct, short and pleasant" as the panellists put it. Panellists also confirmed the importance of local connectivity as delegates require easy access to interesting sites when at the destination, including historic sites and attractions, rural areas of interest and entertainment sites. A delegate representative claimed that "taxi apps such as UBER have become a necessity wherever I travel". In fact associations confirmed that one of the characteristics they seek at a destination is the availability of a

trusted taxi service, which is usually addressed when "… international taxi apps, that delegates recognise and trust, are available". This makes the destination more marketable to potential delegates. This point reconfirmed the importance given to accessibility-related factors in the delegates' questionnaire and showed that other stakeholders were also aware of their importance.

6.3.1.2 Destination's commitment to conference tourism

Stakeholders noted how the level of commitment of a destination to succeed in conference tourism, may determine its level of success in the industry. This requires the creation of a policy. Local destination authorities and their assistance were frequently mentioned by the panellists. The representatives of associations, conference venues and conference bureaus were the most vocal about this need to be endorsed by such authorities. The organising associations considered assistance in terms of promotion, funding and facilitation to find ideal networks of suppliers as appealing when selecting a conference destination. On the other hand, the conference bureaus and conference venues considered help and funds to market the destination better to potential groups to be more important. They also referred to professional bidding assistance, provided by the relevant authorities. This would push up their sales but indirectly would also benefit the destination itself. Conference bureaus also considered funding as important, and suggested how the organisation of programmes for ambassadors, possibly including celebrities, would help in marketing the destination. Similarly, conference venues felt they needed

> "funds and any resources possible (that may include guidance) to bid for
> major conferences, that would in turn raise the profile of the destination."

As the other stakeholders argued, conference venues also stressed that this help would be mutually beneficial for themselves as well as for the destination. Furthermore, there was a general agreement among the panellist that long term investment is necessary. This was embodied in the statement by a conference bureau:

"long term investment in the destination and conference facilities is required to ensure the destination stays relevant and can compete against emerging destinations".

This can only be coordinated and sustained by the destination's pertinent authorities, as panellists remarked that "[it] cannot be sustained by a single venue, bureau or supplier". Local suppliers also required a "neutral" leader in order to ensure that collaboration occurs, without which panellists acknowledged no improvements could be made. This required an overarching approach and an unbiased guidance that could only be provided by authorities. Other mechanisms that the panellists referred to and that could be used to aid the conference tourism suppliers included "reduced tax in investment" (conference venue) and "tax rebates structure" (industry expert).

Furthermore, this projects a destination image of preparedness to host conferences and conference tourism. Associations admitted that "destinations that are known to be successful in conference tourism are the first to be proposed". This emerges from the destination's commitment to brand itself as a conference destination and a conferences host, which act as a promotional tool to draw more conferences. The panellists frequently referred to the competitive advantage of any destination that is "tried and tested" in terms of conference tourism. Reference was made to the importance of using the media to promote a destination's achievements (industry expert) while an association admitted that information about a destination that is available online would probably influence the perception of that destination. A delegate representative remarked that the image of a destination will help attract further conference tourism when it shows clearly that the right level of service quality has been provided to the past conferences it hosted. Conversely, this also means that past negative incidents would automatically influence the destination's image negatively.

6.3.1.3 The destination's local community and industry

While local authority support was important, the panellists also referred to the importance of the local business community and organisations. A strong industry or academic presence

related to the conference's main topic areas would make a destination more attractive to an association. Conference bureaus argued that:

> "if the local industry and/or academic knowledge was relevant to the potential conference's topic or association, the destination would become more of a natural choice".

The associations' responses were similar, stating that:

> "[strong industry or academic presence on a subject area] automatically puts the destination on top of the list of options that would naturally attract delegates interested in a specific subject area"

Another factor that associations showed to be important was the influence of their local association chapters. which have lobbying power on the association's conference site-selection. Local chapters usually use the destination's strength in subject area (or industry) and any local authorities' incentives in order to increase lobbying on the decision makers. This was summarised in a comment by an association representative:

> "Strong local organisations that are linked to the association holding the conference and are based at the destination help attract conferences to the destination. This element is usually related to the local authority's willingness to invest more in a sector that is particularly strong at the destination as they understand the long-term legacies that a conference can have on a destination and its industry, beyond the expenditure of the attendees."

Finally, the host community was also important especially to the associations and the delegates. This relates to respect towards delegates' diversity (see section 6.3.3.4). Destinations with a history of past incidents in this regard were usually removed from the list of alternatives, as associations claimed that "they did not want to convey a message that the destination would not be welcoming to any of our members".

6.3.1.4 General and cultural characteristics

The Delphi panel admitted that decision-makers also consider several destination characteristics that are not directly related to the conference or its topic but make the destination more attractive. These included the destination's general beauty, its natural or architectural features, as well as cultural, academic, geographic and touristic elements as well as its climate and general weather conditions. These were mostly important for the panellists representing delegates, as they stressed the importance of a nice destination where delegates can spend pre- and post- conference time, as they considered the trip to be an opportunity to view the destination.

All the panellists referred to the importance of a destination to exploit its USPs in attracting conference tourism, which related to "culture and rich history, if providing a competitive advantage", "good food" and "weather". It was argued that after all, conference tourism is like general tourism, whereby unique attractions are what makes a destination stand out from competition. A conference bureau representative explained how:

> "delegates are what drives the sales and what influences destination-choice…
> therefore delegates need to be attracted by the features of a destination".

Another factor that was mentioned was the possibility of delegates visiting nearby destinations, referred to by delegate representatives as "other countries that are attractive and easily accessible". This would help the association package their pre- and post-tours, while offering delegates the opportunity to travel to another destination before or after the conference, improving the destination's conference offer.

6.3.1.5 Total conference product

An industry expert remarked how all the features of a destination may help attract tourism, but in order to attract conference tourism conference infrastructure is then required. In fact,

> "the lower level requires a conference destination to have the basic logistical
> requirements needed to host a meeting: hotels, venue and access".

While access has been discussed in section 6.3.1.1, and the other facilities will be discussed in section 6.3.2, a list of requirements have been listed by the panel. These can be placed under the umbrella term *Total Conference Product* as described in literature (see section 4.4.5). This could culminate in having an integrated venue with all the facilities within it (Donaldson 2013; Whitfield et al. 2012). Panellists in fact referred to integrated venues as "safest option" (association) and the "most convenient" (delegate). Furthermore, the conference venues were aware that:

"if an integrated venue is developed, there are bigger chances that this would have been done with all the requirement in mind [therefore] there is a bigger chance that clients would be satisfied"

The panellists' responses included a range of hotels (large number of hotel rooms), modern conference venues, restaurants, shopping areas, special interest and nightlife venues and the possibility of complimentary activities for the delegates and any accompanying persons. Furthermore, several comments exposed the panel's expectations that a destination was required to have a bundle of 'basic' facilities:

"the physical infrastructure needed includes transport links, choice of accommodation, purpose-built conference centre, retail and a night-time economy" (association)

… as well as "event suppliers, transport providers etc. to cater for conference requirements" (convention bureau).

Section 6.3.2 will refer to the venue requirements in more detail. Nonetheless, statements from the panellists clearly indicated that expectations for an integrated venue were high. Alternatively, proximity between all facilities would be essential. The panellists' responses were similar to responses found in literature, whereby all delegate-related required services and products at the destination would be offered together (Whitfield et al. 2012; Donaldson 2013;) with the integration of accommodation facilities, food and beverages, retailers, shopping malls, entertainment areas and transportation hubs (Hung et al. 2011; Wan 2011). This was reflected in a comment by a delegate clearly laying out this expectation:

"Good eating and drinking facilities on-site are important for many, including attractions such as night life and good in-house entertainers – singers, bands etc … and accommodation within the conference centre is always a plus as it also keeps most delegates on site."

Accessibility is therefore a pre-requisite for a destination to have the conference product, unless the destination has the option of an integrated venue. The discussion showed how the more connected the facilities, the more attractive the area is for stakeholders. The general opinion, mostly voiced by the delegate and association representatives, was that having the right facilities spread all over a destination was not good enough to satisfy expectations, since this would not be convenient. Facilities need to be within easy reach from the conference and accommodation venues to be satisfactory.

6.3.1.6 Leisure facilities

Due to the low level of importance leisure facilities had attained in the delegates' questionnaire, opinions from the Delphi panel were required. Panellists considered it

"important to have a selection of leisure offerings such as restaurants, attractions, and tours/museum available to enhance a conference delegates' stay".

Nonetheless, a conference bureau representative stated that "demand for leisure depends on the associations being hosted", while an association representative admitted that its delegates are "more interested in business and work opportunities than in time off and leisure", possibly because they were professionals.

Leisure activities were, however, still expected to be part of the destination's conference tourism offer, (see section 6.3.1.4). Reference was made to complementary activities such as skiing and hiking allowing "the bundling of attractive social programmes for delegates and partners" (industry expert). The bundling of leisure within the conference programme was mentioned by industry experts and academics within the panel, as well as the delegates themselves. This also included sightseeing and attractive spots that are

appealing to delegates, and "could improve the marketing potential of a venue and its area" (association).

Proximity to the conference and accommodation venue was mentioned again. Associations admitted that one reason was because "delegates regularly skip sessions and look for nearby places". Delegates were clearly highly sensitive to distance, between conference and accommodation venues but also to leisure facilities. As "conference days become always longer and longer", delegates claimed that

> "local bars and pubs close to the conference and accommodation venues should have long opening hours"

This would be beneficial both for the delegates and for local business.

6.3.1.7 Destination-related factors

Having analysed the discussion and arguments brought forward by the panellists on the first theme, several factors were considered important for the second round. These included ease of accessibility to the destination, ease of accessibility at the destination, the visa process, proximity to other interesting destinations, the total conference product at the destination, cultural heritage at the destination, a strong element of traditions, leisure facilities, the destination's climate, the destination's policy and assistance in conference tourism and the destination authority's availability of funding for retained investment in the sector and for subventions, as well as its reputation in terms of hosting conferences, and its image of service quality and in terms of general attractiveness such as weather. Furthermore, the destination's reputation in research on specific topics was also attractive to associations within the same field. The second theme relating to the conference and accommodation venue will now be discussed.

6.3.2 Conference and accommodation venues

Conference and accommodation venues have been considered important as they are the places where delegates spend most of their time. Several related factors have been extracted from the discussions on this theme.

6.3.2.1 Range of venue options within proximity

Having referred to Total Conference Product in section 6.3.1.5, the expectation for a range of venue options within a given area was expected. Associations considered the flexibility in choosing the conference and accommodation venues to be essential when selecting a destination. This could only be possible if "different conference and accommodation venues are available at one destination" (association). With reference to accommodation, similar feedback was given. Associations stated that conference and accommodation venues, needed to satisfy a set of "basic requirements". These included capacity, size (to allow for their set-up) and costs. This was also important in order to address the theme required by the association, and fit within different delegate budgets:

> "… [accommodation should] range in size, type and standard in order to fit
> different budgets. These should range from budget to luxury rooms and
> consideration to guests needing accessible space as well as being within a
> good distance of the main conference venue".

Similarly, a choice of conference venues was also considered important by the associations when choosing a destination. An association argued that:

> "Options in terms of conference venues was also important, so that both the
> organising association or their planner would have a range of options (and
> prices) to choose from, ensuring that it would be easier to find the right fit.
> Authentic local venues are attractive, while different sizes are required for
> different potential conferences".

6.3.2.2 Conference venue flexibility and facilities

The expectation of flexibility was also extended to within the venues themselves. In terms of conference venues, the panellists argued that they should also have "the ability to change rooms into different workshop styles" (association) and the "availability of dividing walls which are sound-proof" (association). Furthermore, other requirements included:

> "...excellent comfortable, spaces for plenary sessions, breakout meetings, schmoozing, informal/private chats and possibly exhibitions and displays." (academic)

Responses received by representatives of the conference venues themselves show that they were aware of this expectation. They argued that conference venues should provide suitable capacity and flexibility for conferences in their target market. For example, large international associations need big capacity plenary and flexible breakout spaces, smaller conferences might need less space. Conference venues also needed to be planned with other requirements in mind, such as flexibility and access for exhibitors and production, which included:

> "roof access for production and vehicle access to trade halls, meaning pillar-free halls and squarish layouts" (industry expert).

Other expectations related to facilities included the availability of "break out rooms that are serene, quiet and conducive to work" (association). "Smoking areas" were also considered important by the delegates and associations, together with "mothers' rooms", "companion restrooms", "equipment for simultaneous translation" and "modern audio-visual systems", all of which would be required for the delegates. These requirements were flagged by the associations, who had experienced their need from delegates' past demands. The representatives of the conference venues were aware of these requirements and in fact suggested that they are frequently requested by associations when conducting site visits prior to conferences.

6.3.2.3 Range of accommodation options

Similarly, the panel expected that a range of accommodation options would be made available at a destination. Association representatives stressed the importance of different hotel options, being of different standards. They stated that these would be expected to be able to "accommodate different age groups and have the capacity of hosting large number of guests". Having the option of "four star and budget, national or international branded hotels" (association) was also mentioned, and reference was made to the possibility of delegates benefitting from loyalty rewards at certain accommodation chains (delegate).Most importantly, panellists expected self-catering apartments to be available, and to be regulated to ensure the quality. In fact another association representative stated that "we prefer self-catering accommodation as it works out cheaper for our delegates". An industry expert remarked that:

> "for accommodation, changing requirements are also related to different generations, and the sharing economy - Airbnb has become a favoured accommodation choice, offering an opportunity to get more insights into the destination and connect with locals compared to the standard accommodation choices. These need to be regulated".

Furthermore, "typically local" accommodation would be attractive to certain profiles of delegates. This would improve the destination's attractiveness and enhance the conference experience by offering the opportunity to experience 'authentic' accommodation. Finally, even though different types of accommodation were discussed, the Delphi panel's opinion converged on the importance of ensuring that all options fall within a minimum level of quality that is expected by the associations and their delegates. These required "high accommodation standard" (academic) and "[good] customer care at accommodation" (delegate), offering "easy booking systems" (delegate). Associations also referred to the importance of safe bookings prior to arrival.

6.3.2.4 Comfort and technology

Expectations related to venues were high for all panellists, especially in terms of comfort. The conference venue required to have complete control of its environment, including amplification, room shape, temperature, natural lighting and humidity. Conference venue representatives remarked that even though associations and delegates have increased expectations, these could not always be addressed if "the venue would not have been planned with these requirements in mind" even though "[they] always try to accommodate the client".

Furthermore, seating was very important due to the length of time delegates would be required to sit as comfortable seating and chairs catering for different seating positions were required. These requests were not new to the conference venue representatives, who also referred to them since they were aware of complaints related to uncomfortable seating. Seating and comfort were required inside the meeting rooms but also outside, as panellists explained how the delegates would need to "continuously keep up to date" (association) with their work. This required areas that would help them concentrate.

Comfort also tied into technology requirements, which were considered essential to the panel. At the most basic level of technology, the availability of free, high speed Wi-Fi, both at the conference venue and at the accommodation was considered very important. The term "Wi-Fi" was referred to numerous times by each panellist and was the most mentioned factor. Panellists also described the reasons behind their dependence on Wi-Fi. An industry expert stated that, "Wi-Fi, or bandwidth is critical these days as attendees bring multiple devices" while delegates need to "communicate with colleagues back home as well as with their family" (delegate). Panellists explained that some delegates can travel to the conference only if they are able to handle work-related requests remotely during the conference. If this is not possible, a delegate stated that he would

> "find it very challenging to get approval from work to take a week of time off
> to travel due to the nature of his job".

This has also been shown in section 6.2.3.2, as delegates had expressed their concern of travelling due to work constraints.

Wi-Fi was also necessary to support the conference itself and the engagement that delegates expected. Conference venues explained how "sessions that heavily draw on delegate interaction are facilitated by Wi-Fi", while association representatives also remarked that Wi-Fi is needed for "event reporting" and "live streaming of the conference sessions". Reference was also made to the need for "technology-driven spaces including digital signage and built-in screens and projectors" (association). Associations and conference venues agreed that these technology items are very basic, and do not impress clients, but are a source of disappointment if they are not available. Finally, "updated equipment for simultaneous translation" (conference centre) was also important, and panellists argued that even though these might not be requested when one common language is available, they may lead to a lot of problems if not available when requested. Associations noted that it might be challenging at times to secure a translator for some languages, while a conference venue representative stated that though technology expectations are common, these require investment and possible external funding, and might also increase the venue rental prices to compensate.

6.3.2.5 Venue staff and level of assistance

Several panellists remarked that the staff and the assistance they provide can influence the level of satisfaction of any delegates. Staff and conference venues going the extra mile was appreciated by the associations. In fact, comments related to support from the venue staff such as:

> "provision of offices for the association on site would make the association's life easier while in the middle of organising a conference and helps build a relation for [possible] future collaboration" (association)

Associations argued that this distinguishes normal service from good service, while conference venues admitted that the level of training given to their staff can have a big influence on the way they handle association requests and the overall conference experience.

Associations also mentioned other types of help such as "marketing the conference, including help with designing and creating marketing material". This extra mile makes a venue attractive for associations choosing a destination. The staff's level of professionalism, especially the sales team was also indicated as important when choosing between different venues. An association commented that:

> "Conference venues require a professional team that can sell the venue and are knowledgeable enough to understand what clients (event organisers ,associations, and their delegates) require prior to the conference, attract them to the venue, and are also able to successfully deliver on the day."

This sentiment was also shared by delegates, who remarked that "staff should be knowledgeable enough to help" and "trained to handle customer complaints", Staff were also expected to "understand different languages" (conference bureau). Associations in fact added that it was important to have staff that can speak at least the main language used at the conference, as otherwise communication cannot occur. This also applied to any subcontracted conference suppliers and was considered a requirement when a conference organiser is selecting the suppliers prior to the conference. Finally, the responses showed the importance of staff that can smile, since as one panellist representing delegates noted, "you would be amazed by how many people forget the basics".

6.3.2.6 Green credentials

Green credentials were identified as influential with frequent reference to the fact that "sustainable practices and green meetings credentials are becoming all the more important" by conference centres. The panellists, mostly representing associations, conference venues and conference bureaus remarked that green credentials were still not given their due importance in certain association conferences, and these depended on the profile of the members of that association. In fact, a delegate representative argued that they would not attend a conference that clearly has no respect towards the environment and have also commented and complained in the past when this happened. This is in line with the discussion in section 6.2.3.17, whereby "green delegates" usually have strong opinions on environmental practices, even though they might not always be in a majority.

In fact, green credentials and their importance was mostly raised by associations, the conference venues and the conference bureaus. The delegates did not seem to be very concerned about the matter, except for one representative who, on the contrary, was very vocal about it. Associations also remarked that they were aware that by organising conferences they were "increasing the carbon footprint" but had not yet found an alternative to it, except in the case when other modes were available instead of air travel. This confirmed that associations and conference organisers were willing to switch to more environmentally friendly parties, but this is still yet not always possible. This also showed the gap between most delegates, who might not have considered green credentials as important, and the other stakeholders, who were more conscious.

6.3.2.7 Unique selling points

The Delphi panel identified the importance of USPs even at the accommodation and conference venues, which improve the venues' competitive edge and automatically helps a destination attract more conferences. An association stated they considered

> "a cultural venue… not only more attractive but might also be the right location where the organisers can hold the opening ceremony or gala of the conference, for example."

This showed an agreement between the importance that delegates (in the questionnaire) gave to cultural and historic attractions (section 6.2.3.15) and the other stakeholders' application of culture and history to venues. This also showed that associations were aware of their delegates' preferences. The association representative argued that anything that can help increase the number of delegates by being more attractive "is a plus to us when choosing a destination", since they measure success of a conference by the number of attendees. Therefore, USPs help the venues stand out when compared to other alternatives.

6.3.2.8 Accommodation and conference venue-related factors

The factors emerging from this theme included the proximity between venues, integrated conference venues, the conference venue facilities and its level of comfort, the conference venue's capacity and its flexibility, the venue's in-built technology, Wi-Fi, the importance of a wide range of accommodation options, the removal of language barriers, trained staff and their ability to communicate and green credentials. There was also close resemblance between what all the stakeholders considered important and the factors that were rated as important by the delegates in the questionnaire. This is evident from the factors that were repeatedly mentioned by the Delphi panel. It was only in the case of green credentials that most stakeholders showed more concern than the delegates in the questionnaire. The next section will list and examine the difference delegate demands according to the Delphi panel.

6.3.3 Conference delegates' demands

While the theme was the focus of the delegates' questionnaire, this question sought to understand the perspective of all the stakeholders *vis-à-vis* what they felt delegates would require. This would allow the research to identify points of convergence and divergence in perspectives.

6.3.3.1 The welcoming experience

First impressions were considered important by the Delphi panel. Delegates felt that "the conference experience started immediately upon arrival at a destination", and this automatically set expectations for the conference organiser. In fact, associations were aware of this as was shown in the following comment by an association representative:

> "A 'delegate welcome experience' would be appreciated by delegates. This includes banners, flags and possibly a meet-and-greet service at the airport".

Furthermore, delegates referred to the importance of feeling comfortable at the destination. Associations claimed that information packs right upon arrival were considered helpful,

making sure delegates immediately received useful information to make them feel at ease. A delegate representative suggested that information should be given to the delegates prior to arrival, rather than upon arrival, but also stated that "…this should not be too early as information gets lost until it is required". This was in line with the importance delegates gave to accessible information about the conference and destination in advance. Having information provides clear guidance to delegates to know what they need to do upon arrival at the destination. Panellists also referred to the importance of general destination information to be available to the delegates from official sources, which could be trusted. This could either be sent directly to the registered delegates or made available on the official conference website, and would allow delegates to plan in terms of duration of their stay, travelling and any other activities they might be interested in.

6.3.3.2 Understanding the delegates' expectations

As hosts, the associations, conference venues and conference bureaus highlighted the importance of understanding expectations of all delegates. This should be done prior to the conference itself and is a key for success. Associations were aware it was their responsibility to research on the destination and provide the information regarding the delegate group and their members' demographics during preparations. They were also expected to communicate with the destination's convention bureaus and request suggestions and consultation with conference venue management and staff on past experiences at the venue. This would allow them to cater for the requirements of their members prior to arrival. From their end, delegates confirmed that they expected their needs to be understood and communicated by the association to all relevant suppliers.

Conference centres highlighted the importance of receiving the right information from the association itself, as the event organiser. This is necessary since the conference venues would have had no previous experience hosting the conference group, while on the other hand…

"… the organisers [or associations hosting the conference] are aware of the delegate group's previous experiences (also from past post-mortem

exercises). Once these expectations are explained to us and understood, we should always aim be to exceed them."

Associations in fact noted how information and feedback from delegates was essential for the success of their future conferences. Thus "holding a post-mortem and discussing feedback" was essential and "has to be done soon after the conference" (association). This allows associations to provide the next destination and its venues with the right information to plan.

6.3.3.3 Smooth experience

Delegate representatives stressed the importance of a smooth experience, and "expect the organisers to guide them throughout the whole experience". This requires planning and a wide coverage of signage, clear instructions and the "availability to communicate and handle issues".

Furthermore, delegates also expected "ease of accessibility during the pre-conference registration" and "having a clearly defined point of contact that is consistent and easy to communicate with … [and this] … also applies for customer care issues." The importance of customer care was already outlined by the delegates in the delegates' questionnaire, who considered it a barrier to attend if the service would not be up to standard. Associations remarked that customer care could be achieved by means of conference apps (discussed in section 6.3.6). Nonetheless, this is in turn dependent on the technology infrastructure such as Wi-Fi at the venue and destination.

The expectations were also referred to by the conference venue representatives, and stated that these might look like basic requirements but would need professional people to handle them, stating that: "the services of a PCO are to be sought by the association". Conversely, associations, claimed that "PCOs are very helpful, but their price may not always be affordable".

6.3.3.4 Cater for diverse needs and diversity

Responses especially from the panellists representing delegates also showed the importance of catering for and respecting delegates' diversity, which included cultural, national and religious diversity. This would be reflected in the community's respect towards different delegate cohorts, especially the venue staff.

This also implicated that venues and destination were required to ensure that these could cater for all accessibility requirements, "physical, sensory, visual, cognitive [and] multiple disabilities" (association), so that everyone was able to participate at a conference and to travel around the destination and within the accommodation venue. This is in line with the findings of the delegates' questionnaire, whereby delegates highlighted the need for the venues to be accessible. While the conference bureau representatives were aware of this, they remarked that some venues might be more challenging than others to ensure accessibility because of their characteristics. On the other hand, the conference venues were aware of these requirements as a representative argued that "accessibility was one of the principal priorities when developing a conference centre". Challenges arose, however, when the conference venue had been developed out of a historical or older type building, in which case accessibility restrictions could not be planned for beforehand. Associations commented that they are finding lack of accessibility at venues to be less of a problem recently, since regulations at most destinations clearly state that these need to be fully accessible to operate. But they commented that

> "a list of accessible cultural venues for the traditional opening night or conference gala night would help our search for a unique, yet accessible venue" (association).

Catering was also especially important, and expectations for "a range of catering options, respecting cultural diversity and dietary requirements" were high. Associations were also aware that their members were becoming more health-conscious, stating that "healthy food options are not an option anymore, but an expectation". This shift towards healthy food was indicated by conference venues, stating that they had adapted to it even though "related costs are frequently higher". Finally, an association representative claimed

that great coffee "really matters", and a conference venue representative concurred, stating that:

> "you should never underestimate the negative feedback that may result from substandard coffee during a conference".

This factor had never been singled out in previous studies, but results showed that it should not be taken for granted. Therefore, it was also added to the second round.

6.3.3.5 Delegates' engagement and contribution

Delegates argued that they expected both an interesting and an engaging conference. Reference was made to having "great moderators and speakers that make the sessions sound more interesting" (delegate). Speakers were an important part of the conference, as an industry expert suggested, to ensure having the top speakers on a topic in order to benefit from being a leading conference on that subject. Competition is harsh and unless the speakers are reputable, delegates will not feel it worth their time and money to travel to listen to them. Having high-level speakers and moderators would also give the delegates the opportunity to meet them during formal and informal networking sessions. This is, an association remarked, a marketing point within itself.

Panellists were also aware of the need for engagement. This required "delegates to be part of the conference and not just an audience". This denotes the need for delegates to be contributors to knowledge within the conference and allowing them to have meaningful discussions. Delegates in fact expected to be able to "contribute to the conference programme contents and being active during sessions and side events". An association panellist remarked that delegates' satisfaction of a conference frequently related to how the experience has affected the delegate directly: "The conference's value for the individual delegate is measured by what s/he has achieved".

6.3.3.6 Networking

Gaining personal individual benefit from networking, was also frequently mentioned by all the Delphi panel, who confirmed their awareness that delegates consider networking and socialising highly important. This was in line with the findings of the delegates' questionnaire. An industry expert remarked:

> "To make connections within a specific industry is important for the delegates' career and conferences provide the opportunity for such connections".

This reflected the interest shown by delegates in the questionnaire. Networking in fact helps delegates "enhance their career and personal opportunities" (academic), while providing the opportunity to meet new key people they would not have the opportunity to meet otherwise. And this is precisely what is expected from the conference outcome. In order to achieve this, conference venues were aware that "networking space is important", while an academic representative noted that this space should be available for both "formal and informal" networking, for delegates to "achieve their networking potential easier". Associations were also aware that they were expected to "plan for specific timeslots dedicated to networking during the conference programme". This ties with the availability of time for non-conference related activities as delegates expected "the availability of leisure activities and available time for it"; but this was also because it allowed them to

> "network informally outside of the conference structure, which is sometimes random but more beneficial than official networking" (delegate).

This statement also confirmed that networking is one of the main reasons why physical conferences remain attractive, even though virtual conferences are popular. Networking should be facilitated by providing the right environment and schedule for it, as it does not just benefit delegates but also the conference tourism sector in general by keeping it attractive.

6.3.3.7 Delegate demands and needs

This round enabled the researcher to delve deeper into the delegates' expectations, from a wider viewpoint. This allowed to corroborate the importance of certain topics such as the expectation for information to be available, respective diversity by ensuring accessibility that caters for all, as well as a diversified catering offer including good quality coffee and the focus on facilitating both formal and informal networking at and outside of the conference venue. This sector re-confirmed the importance of factors that emerged from the delegates' questionnaire while providing a deeper understanding. For example, while it was known that good moderators and speakers were important for the delegates, the panel explained how the right moderators can contribute to empower the delegates and offer an immersive experience, which has become a very significant expectation. Similarly, networking has been confirmed to be not only beneficial to delegates but also a pillar of physical conferencing.

6.3.4 Memorable experience

6.3.4.1. A unique experience

The Delphi panel argued that for a conference to be successful, it needs to have a long-lasting impact on the delegates attending. This can be achieved only by a meaningful experience that is unique. Delegates remarked that they would be satisfied it they "experience something that cannot be experienced unless attending the conference". This uniqueness makes the conference experience unforgettable. Different panellists suggested a unique experience could be achieved by "attention to detail and the overall destination experience" (conference bureau) and "having a wow factor" (association). The wow-factor could be a surprise appearance, the use of an unexpected venue, and anything that a delegate would not be expecting that makes it difficult to re-experience again, making it memorable. Associations remarked that destinations could identify unique venues and offer them to conference organisers as a way of marketing the destination itself. Conference bureaus also referred to this point, as a representative suggested that relevant authorities could create

specific licenses to cultural venues and possibly cover insurance costs for events to happen there.

Associations also stated that a memorable experience related to uniqueness of the experience and could be achieved by using the destination's USPs and linking them with the conference's uniqueness. This constitutes an irreplaceable experience. Different stakeholders' representatives also referred to the importance of utilising the destination's uniqueness. It is thus a requirement for a conference to be a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience, offering attendees something they cannot easily experience outside of the conference attendance. Finally, a conference venue representative remarked that a possible authentic tangible gift with a high symbolic meaning help seal the experience for delegates. This could act as a token of gratitude to delegates for visiting the destination but would also "be appreciated since it had a high symbolic meaning" of the destination.

6.3.4.2 An immersive experience

Another dimension of the conference experience mentioned by the panellists related to its level of immersiveness. Associations argued that:

> "The conference organiser should aim to achieve a high-level absorption of the delegates into the conference experience, as this will dictate whether an experience is considered memorable by the delegate."

This was also referred to through an industry expert's comment which underlined the term *festivalisation* (see section 4.3.2). Applying this phenomenon to conferences would allow conference organisers to address the various expectations of different delegate profiles. Delegates can choose what they are interested in.

6.3.4.3 Ensuring the basics are in place

While efforts towards the exceptional are important, panellists frequently referred to ensuring that the basic requirements are catered for to ensure a smooth experience (see section 6.3.3.3), which also contributes to the experience being memorable. Associations,

for example, referred to having an organised conference with the provision of all the infrastructure required and good quality networking events. The "perfect balance between content sessions, leisure time and networking slots" was also mentioned by an industry expert, as a balance that contributes to the ideal experience. Delegates referred to sharing the experience with both old and new friends as a strong contributor to a memorable experience.

6.3.4.4 The experience-expectation factor

The importance of reaching or exceeding the delegates' expectation in terms of conference experience strongly emerged. It requires the offering of a unique memorable experience to achieve this, and it also depends on using USPs of the conference destination to make it irreplaceable, including innovative venues and the immersive experience and possibly offering a destination-related gift. Nonetheless, it also showed that the conference has to be well planned even in its basic logistics requirements, thus leading to a smooth experience and a positive delegates' experience.

6.3.5 Measures required to ensure safety for delegates

Safety has been considered highly influential as a barrier to conference attendance, and has also been regularly listed as an important factor in literature and industry reports (Choi and Boger 2002; Priporas 2005; Tanford et al. 2012; Donaldson 2013; CWT Meetings and Events 2019; Turner 2019). It was also one of the main barrier factors emerging from the PCA carried out on the delegates' questionnaire's topmost barriers, indicating the strong influence that safety has on delegates' decision making. A theme was thus dedicated to safety, requesting the Delphi panel to suggest measures contributing to safety for the conference delegates. Several specific safety-related factors were mentioned by panellists.

6.3.5.1 Clear safety information

The availability of information related to safety and guidance was one of the expectations that the panellists regularly referred to. For reliability, this should be provided by official sources. "Clear security information in their welcome pack" (association), and "signage, escape routes and safety routines" (delegate) were considered important. Delegate representatives were also concerned about "safety outside the venue" and argued official statistics on criminality can help them understand the real risks. They also expected guidance to achieve peace of mind, such as advice on where to go and where to avoid if alone, what not to say or do publicly in locations where there are strict rules and sensitivities, what they are not allowed to carry and local enforcement methods and attitudes. These would help delegates feel prepared since they are in an unfamiliar destination and might therefore lack basic knowledge and know-how. Information should also include what to beware of, such as

> "pickpockets, scammers (including unlicensed taxis), druggies, mobile phone/ laptop thieves, and what to do in an emergency."

6.3.5.2 Safety precautions

Risk assessments were an important part of providing a safe environment. All conference venue representatives mentioned this is a requirement for any professional venue and organiser. This includes knowledge about speakers and their profile, knowledge on the delegates – which authorities could assist in vetting prior to arrival, the risks across the city and the possible risks related to the conference itself. A venue representative stated that

> "all conferences are expected to complete risk assessments and method statements where they are bringing in any external suppliers or equipment".

Associations (conference organisers), conference bureaus, conference venues and industry experts were all very conscious about the importance of safety precautions in general. These included medical precautions such as "an ambulance or medical representatives on site"

(conference venue), "medical equipment at conference venues and hotels such as defibrillators and first aid kits" (association) and "medical insurance" (conference bureau).. An industry expert remarked that some requirements for safety may be difficult to satisfy if the venues would not have planned for them during the design stage of the venue itself. This includes design to allow for quick secure perimeter in the case of an island site during protests, avoidance of dark corridors and small corners that might be hidden from sight.

Furthermore, the training of conference venue staff was once again referred to, this time in terms of health and safety. Knowledge should include at least "basic medical training" to

> "security training … to spot suspicious behaviour and [know] how to react in
> the circumstances."

Associations remarked that they requested confirmation about this prior to booking a venue. Conference venues were aware of this requirement, with one comment stating "we are responsible to train our staff for any emergency, they will be the first on site after an accident". They also pointed out the importance of good communication with local law enforcement. As a representative of conference venues stated:

> "Developing and maintaining a strong relation with local law enforcement [is
> important]. Such relationships can help assist with threat assessments of events based
> on intel gathered and shared."

This becomes a vital point when a situation escalates, and immediate help is required from outside the venue, as associations also expected 'fast response' in cases of emergency.

6.3.5.3 Destination and venue security

Constant reference was made to security at the conference itself in order to safeguard from unknown or unwanted visitors that could pose a risk to the delegates. This was linked to fears of terrorism that were frequently mentioned by the panel. While the use of a "professional security firm" (association) was repeatedly mentioned, conference venues

stated that access should be constantly monitored and felt the they were mostly responsible for this, carrying out bag checks and offering locked cloakrooms to support delegate safety."

The need to ensure only delegates are inside the venue was frequently indicated, especially by the associations (who organise the conferences). This requires strict monitoring of security and name badges, making it easier to identify if "the right people are in the places they should be" (academic). Requirements of safety escalated to "police and armed forces" (industry experts), "physical barriers" (industry expert), "vetting of delegates and all staff and suppliers in an island site environment" (conference venue), "sniffer dogs" and "airport style security" (association) for serious cases, especially possible terrorist threats. This also included

> "no vehicles [to be] allowed on site or all registration numbers must be submitted to venue before being allowed on site" (delegate)

Reference to similar measures showed the agreement of all panellists on the importance of safety. The Delphi panel acknowledged that without creating a safe environment or a perception of one, a destination would not be able to attract conference tourism. An industry expert remarked that "destinations need to utilise media to promote their high level of safety" and should also invest in projecting an image of safety. A visible high level of security throughout the whole destination could contribute to put delegates' mind at rest (association), especially following a recent safety attack. Nonetheless, in case of a terrorist attack, an association representative stated that

> "it would take time to consider hosting a conference at any destination that has been victim of any attack. The feeling of safety at the place has to return first".

Therefore, any case of instability, such as terrorism, would make associations very concerned for the safety of their members, as well as strong negative press in case anything happens. Associations confirmed that they avoided any location that is at risk or was close to other locations at risk.

6.3.5.4 Safety factors

Safety and the required precautions were confirmed as highly important for the panellists, as their main areas of interest on this subject included security information and precautions, staff training, the local enforcement authorities, and the destination's general level of safety and its image. Acknowledging that safety at the destination was an important factor for all stakeholders reconfirmed the results of the delegates' questionnaire.

6.3.6 Technology use to enhance conference experience

Technology has been shown to be an emerging theme in the delegates' questionnaire, and therefore this question aimed to understand the way it influences conference tourism. The Delphi panellists suggested several new technologies that are being applied to the conference industry.

6.3.6.1 Badge technology and facial recognition

Badge technology was mentioned by associations and industry experts to enhance the conference experience. Badge technology enables the tracking of individual behaviour of each delegate and this makes it possible to "adapt programmes and venues accordingly" (associations). An association panellist remarked that its benefit is that it allows the conference organiser to offer tailor-made schedules for each delegate, by preparing different options and allowing the technology to suggest the different options to delegates basing itself on their actions. Conversely, a delegate representative while referring to its benefits, remarked that it might constitute a privacy issue to some delegates, since they would be constantly tracked. A conference venue representative also suggested increase use of facial recognition which can assist in conference registration and improve safety at check points.

This would offer the smooth registration experience expected but could once again constitute "data protection issues to some delegates". Therefore, while increased knowledge on each delegate helps a conference organiser to control the environment as well as

personalise activities, the panel highlighted that this comes at the cost of the delegate's privacy.

6.3.6.2 Conference apps and social media

Conference apps were also mentioned, especially by the associations. These range from interactive programmes, whereby the delegates are given options to choose their sessions and then reminded on the time and guided to take the best route to get to the session, to mobile apps used for customer care. A conference venue representative explained how conference apps used for customer care allow "requests … to be handled instantly by bots or by a customer care team". This improves the response time but may not always be accurate. Conference venues felt that "if the app has been tested and its automation and bots function well", this would be of great relief to the venue that requires to have trained staff constantly available and aware of all solutions for all problems. Trained staff are important because in case of problems, they would need to handle the malfunctions quickly in order to avoid complaints. A conference venue representative also suggested the use of robots for basic services, such as cleaning and serving. The panel agreed on technology's possible contribution to improving delegates' customer care, which, as evident from the delegates' questionnaire, was important for them.

Delegates referred to the possible use of social media for the same aims. Delegate representatives argued that if the conference organiser makes good use of social media, it might be a more user friendly and cheaper solution "… since most delegates are already on social media anyway". The associations' feedback on social media was similar, stating that different social media platforms can have different uses, which include marketing, voting, chatting (and creating niche groups of interest), making reservations for tours for the social programme. Social media platforms allowed the organisers to communicate and reach out to the delegates (and potential delegates) "before, during and after the conference". Social media can assist or even replace conference apps, since its "functions are similar". This is in line with the associations' perspective, which deemed social media attractive as it is "readily available and free to use. It costs much less than custom-made apps but can have similar functions".

Delegates also expected to see increased use of VR sets during conferences, in order to help audiences immerse themselves in what the speaker is saying. This would "help the audience immerse itself completely". Associations also referred to virtual reality and augmented reality, as one representative claimed that they had done some experiments using this technology. This required collaboration from the conference venue and would need equipment rental to be "well priced", if not available at the venue.

6.3.6.3 Technology necessities

Other technology requirements were considered necessities by panellists. These included "power devices …[for] mobile phones, tablets and laptops" (delegates). They were also expected to be available and "abundant", making it easy to access one. A delegate's remark took this expectation further, claiming that if the venue does not provide them, then the planner "needs to find a sponsor for it and offer portable ones". This reconfirms the importance of this factor, which might be considered a small detail, but emerged as highly influential in the delegates' questionnaire.

Ways of enhancing the conference sessions' experience were also suggested. These ranged from electronic signage, in-built screens and projectors to "dimmable lighting, that is becoming increasingly expected in order to control the light levels", according to the conference venues themselves. Academic experts also mentioned software that helps increase interaction during sessions, which was considered important in section 6.3.3.5. Basic tools such as *prezi* and *slido* were mentioned, but an industry expert panellist pushed this further by suggesting the use of "virtual and augmented reality to enhance the delegate's experience" (association). This showed that

"conference organisers who do not utilise up-to-date technology may become stale and offer substandard experience to delegates that are increasingly becoming dependent on the latest technology" (industry expert).

Nonetheless, with increased use of technology, the panellists felt that dependence on it increased as well. The main concern especially for associations and conference venues was that this required specialised skills. This made it essential to have technicians constantly

available since "so many items can (and do) go wrong and can negatively affect the conference experience". Furthermore services such as Wi-Fi (see section 6.3.2.4) or Bluetooth beacons, which allow data transfer between devices, are also necessary to operate (conference venue). Finally, an industry expert advised against "allowing technology to take over communication", since "physical interaction is always appreciated and sometimes more efficient". Physical interaction has been referred to as a motivator in the questionnaire and in literature, as well as a main factor that promotes physical conferences (discussed in section 6.3.3.6). Balance was therefore considered important.

6.3.6.4 Technology-related factors

The Delphi study confirmed the importance and dependence on technology. The availability of technology at the venue, that might have to be hybrid at times, apps, conference-related software, Bluetooth low-energy beacons, social media, badge technology, VR sets and robots, were considered effective to improve the conference experience. This also required trained staff to handle any problems that might arise, and basic technology necessities such as Wi-Fi and power devices without which technology cannot function. These factors were therefore included in the second round of the Delphi study, in order to rank in terms of importance.

6.3.7 The future risks and opportunities for the conference industry

The final question focused on the opportunities and risks of conference tourism. This allowed the researcher to explore the direction the sector is taking, and the benefits or consequences related to this. This also allowed a better understanding of how the different stakeholders are reacting to such forecasted changes.

6.3.7.1 Opportunities

6.3.7.1.1 Rotation system

International conferences are frequently organised on a rotation system. A conference bureau representative claimed that this rotation offers the opportunity to different destinations to host conferences. An association representative also explained that the rotation system is beneficial to the conferences themselves, as it increases the attractiveness of attending the conference as "each conference is an opportunity to travel to a new country."

This also gives the opportunity to new destinations to compete in this market, and offer something new, as each destination has "its different selling points that organisers seek to vary year after year" (conference bureau). Hosting a conference gives the destination further opportunity to prove themselves and therefore attract more conferences in the future.

6.3.7.1.2 Improved technology

If utilised well, new technology can enhance the experience of conference delegates, making conferences more attractive and interesting. Furthermore, technology improved the chances of growth of conference tourism. First, panellists suggested that technology has improved the conference destination searches, helping delegates feel safer by accessing information prior to arriving at a destination, helping them understand what to expect. It has also allowed a destination to promote itself and its attractions. Improved travel technology has also made international travelling more convenient. Delegates and associations alike commented that this has opened new destination options and increased the effectiveness of travel towards conventional conference destinations. This also increased delegate numbers and gave emerging destinations the opportunity to market and host conferences as well.

6.3.7.1.3 Recognition of conference benefits

The panellists remarked that as destinations are becoming more aware of conference benefits, the sector is more attractive. Conference bureaus and associations stated that awareness of conference benefits beyond the economic value is also increasing.

"Conferences improve the destination's profile, and destinations are investing in venues, conferences services and placing more importance on the strategic approach to bidding and supporting conferences" (conference bureau)

This awareness has led to increased investment by destinations as well as to collaborations between them. Conference bureau representatives mentioned how "different cities are now collaborating to attract conferences". They remarked that this collaboration is frequently led by the city's conference tourism authorities and is possible since, as another conference bureau representative stated, "benefits are large and can be split".

6.3.7.1.4 Increased number of conferences

Other opportunities arising from change have also been identified. Panellists argued that change always gives rise to new industries. This "increases the need for conferences targeting these new niches" (industry expert). This claim is supported by an argument from an association representative that, "within each field new sub-areas are being formed, each of which needs a conference for its community". Other planned-for change may also lead to new opportunities. These include sudden success with local conferences that grow and become international. Finally, a conference venue panellist explained how possible problems for a destination, may open opportunities to another. He gave the example of Ireland, as with the "United Kingdom's Brexit issue … Ireland became the only EU conference destination which is English Speaking". This puts it in a better competitive position in the conference market.

6.3.7.1.5 The retained importance of the human element

Finally, the human element remains a driving force in the need for conferences. An industry expert claimed that to the contrary of what might be assumed, the increased technology may make "face-to-face communication increasingly attractive, in an age of automated and digital communication", while according to an association representative, "Face-to-face

communication is also perceived as a must by some organisations and associations", as human interaction is vital within their field.

6.3.7.2 Risks

6.3.7.2.1 Sensitivity to instability

The Delphi panellists were also aware of some risks that conferences may be facing. Industry expert representatives argued that since conference tourism is highly sensitive to any instability, especially security, "any risks will have an effect on conference organisation and attendance". Associations resonated this claim, arguing that delegates would always want to avoid any risks. This makes the market volatile.

In terms of economic instability, the panellists showed their awareness about conferences and travel being the first to be hit and "reduced or removed" (academic). This situation may be exacerbated by the "lack of a proper strategy to attract and host conferences" that conference bureaus have referred to in relation to some destinations. This makes it challenging for a destination to attract conference tourism, especially during or after situations of instability. In order to succeed, panellists argued a unified strategy is required and this might also be dependent on the funds available to be invested in the conference tourism product. Conference venues claimed that unless the whole product is sustained by the right amount of investment, competing in the conference tourism market for the long term is not sustainable for a destination.

6.3.7.2.2 Increased competition from online conferences

While technology has been beneficial to conference tourism it is also considered a main threat to the future of physical conferences. Technology may be competitor to conference tourism, by acting as a possible substitute in certain cases. A conference venue representative argued that "the risk [of conferences] becoming less relevant to their industry due to technology" exists. An academic representative added that this could be a result of increased online webinars that are "more convenient, time-wise and cost-wise". Delegates also agreed with the possible risk, as they "increasingly benefit from 'online presence' at a conference, through live streaming for example".

Reference to this was also made by the associations since, "[online presence] makes travelling and taking time-off more difficult to justify". This situation is coupled by the increased costs of travel to physical conferences. Associations were aware that delegates have expectations for their paid fees. "A main issue is price! Or, more importantly, value for money" (association).

The Delphi study was carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore the responses do not directly reflect the influence of the pandemic, but the current situation has increased the threat of online conferences, as identified by the Delphi panel. As the panellists suggested, as a cheaper solution (virtual conferences) becomes widespread, conference organisers and delegates become more aware of the costs related to organising a physical conference. Nonetheless, one of the main reasons behind selecting the association market was because association conferences are less prone to cancel (Holloway and Humphreys 2020) as they act as a source of revenue to the associations organising them (Mair and Thompson 2009; Rogers 2013).

6.3.7.2.3 Increased competition from new destinations

The panellists also highlighted the increased number of alternatives available when selecting a conference destination. A conference venue representative remarked that,

> "even though investment is continuous, competing destinations and venues are always on the increase. So after investment is made, you still do not manage to attract more conferences"

Competition was strongest from emerging destinations. This also came from "second and third tier" (convention bureau) destinations or cities. These latter destinations were usually able to offer better pricing than the established destinations. A representative from a conference centre stated that "new destinations are willing to reduce their price, even if it comes at the cost of quality". This made it difficult for destinations to compete and keep high standards. Associations agreed that some destinations and/or venues (both accommodation and conference venues) were "substandard". In fact an association representative remarked that:

"… a lot of offers are received but at the initial stages a number of bids are removed as they would not satisfy our basic requirements… [and sometimes] they would be of a low standard".

Associations therefore showed that they shortlist destinations before deciding which option they prefer. Other stakeholders were aware of this, as a conference bureau noted that "[they] push [their] venues to be shortlisted", but competition after being shortlisted is still strong.

6.3.7.2.4 Increased costs

The Delphi panel was concerned with the constant increase in costs to organise a conference. Delegates were aware that if "conference costs increase, so do conference participation fees", and they confirmed this would make them less attractive. Associations were also concerned about the increase in supplier costs, which would make it impossible for them to charge the usual registration fees, even though they were aware that increased registration costs would mean less attendance. The associations admitted that they were already in a similar situation and were attempting to mitigate this by offering subsidies Furthermore, they were not able to increase the conference fees much further due to association by-laws, and without financial support they

"risk to offer sub-standard conference offerings due to restricted budgets, making them unattractive for future delegates".

Subventions are once again linked to local support, but as an industry expert highlighted, not every destination might be happy to support conference tourism maybe due to the consequences of overtourism produced by conference tourism such as the impacts on the natural and the social environment. Furthermore, a conference bureau representative pointed out that subventions might not be a long-term solution to attract conferences, unless the destination "has unlimited resources". Nonetheless, associations admitted that subventions were very attractive for them, and influenced the shortlisting process. This is because financial help allowed them to attract more delegates by decreasing costs. This was in line with the findings of the delegates' questionnaire, whereby delegates confirmed that while lack of funding was a main barrier, having less expenses would act as a motivator to attend (section 6.2.3.6). Associations also admitted that they considered their conferences as

"one of the main sources of income, if not the main one". Therefore, to generate profit, they required low prices. A conference venue representative stated that associations would frequently push down prices in order to increase their profit margins.

6.3.8 Factors extracted from the First Round

After analysing the qualitative data from the first round of the Delphi and consulting the results of the delegates' questionnaire, a list of 66 factors was produced (presented in Appendix 12). Out of the list of factors identified, two main type of factors were subsequently outlined, based on frequency of reference in the first round, the scores of the delegates' questionnaire and reference to literature and industry reports. The factors were separated into two lists: an essentials list including factors considered to be pre-requisites to conference tourism, and without which a destination's chances to classify as an alternative to host a conference would be very low; and a second list containing factors that can help a destination to be more competitive in the conference tourism market. The two lists were split into sections in the second round of the Delphi study (presented in Appendix 8) and will now be outlined.

6.3.9 Delphi Study Results – Rounds Two and Three

The Delphi's second round (see Appendix 8) requested the panellists to rate factors according to importance. Subsequently, in the third round a revised questionnaire (see Appendix 9) was sent to the panellists, which included the items and ratings summarised by the researcher from the previous round and they were asked to revise their judgement from the second round *vis-à-vis* the panel's general opinion, if they felt such a need (Hsu and Sandford 2007).

The results of the second and third round will be presented together since no factors were removed between rounds, while any changes in the importance attached to particular factors from one round to another will be documented in a table for ease of comparison. Nonetheless, the third round's questions and results followed closely those of the second round. So much so that at the third round, it was confirmed that the results had not changed enough from the previous round to warrant a further round. The study was therefore finalised

in order to avoid diminishing returns (Kaynak and Macauley 1984; Green et al. 1990; Walker and Selfe 1996).

Section 6.3.9.1 will present the results related to the essential factors list, showing which factors were confirmed by the Delphi panel and which were finally removed from the list. Similarly, section 6.3.9.2 will tackle the second list of factors; presenting factors that contribute to a competitive edge in association conference tourism, showing how the ranking evolved from one round to the next, leading to the final list of factors approved by all the stakeholders. The factors panellists felt were less important and agreed not to include in the model are discussed in section 6.3.9.3.

6.3.9.1 Essential factors

The factors included in the list of essential factors were the ones referred to frequently in the first round and scoring highly in the delegates' questionnaire. Most were also identified by various academic studies. Nonetheless, panellists were required to confirm whether they concurred that the proposed factors should be considered essential for successful conference tourism at a destination. They were also given the opportunity to comment on whether they would remove or add factors to this list. Consensus on the inclusion or exclusion of a factor was decided according to if a percentage of the panellists' ranking fell within a minimum of 70% by the final round of the study as discussed in section 5.6.2.5. The results are presented in Table 31.

Factor	Round 2		Round 3		Consensus (≥70%)	Added to model
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree		
Ease of accessibility to destination including international airport, frequent direct flights and short travel time (and reasonable price) to destination.	100	0	100	0	Yes	Yes
Ease of accessibility at the destination including good public transportation at low cost.	73	27	73	27	Yes	Yes
Conference and accommodation venues are located close to each other.	100	0	100	0	Yes	Yes
Overall costs for conference organisers to organise the conference at the destination (conference venue, transportation, social and gala activities)	73	27	73	27	Yes	Yes
Allocated networking opportunities during conference programme (formal and informal networking).	73	27	73	27	Yes	Yes
Climate at the destination.	27	73	27	73	Yes	No
Total conference tourism product including hotels, conference venues, conference equipment rental suppliers, retail outlets, restaurants and social activities within easy access of each other and of high standard available.	100	0	100	0	Yes	Yes
The provision of leisure facilities for social programmes for both delegates and accompanying partners within easy access of conference and accommodation venues.	80	20	80	20	Yes	Yes
High food hygiene standard.	93	7	93	7	Yes	Yes
Conference venue must provide comfortable seating, natural lighting, climate control, good sound acoustics and sound-proofing.	93	7	93	7	Yes	Yes
Free, high speed Wi-Fi.	93	7	93	7	Yes	Yes
Sufficient capacity of halls and venue space for large and small conferences, as well as plentiful accommodation in close proximity.	100	0	100	0	Yes	Yes
Staff that constantly smile; are knowledgeable about the venues and able to handle complaints.	67	33	93 (+26%)	7	Yes (after second round)	Yes
Cost of living at the destination (accommodation, food and travelling at destination).	53	47	64 (+11%)	36	No (after second round)	No
Conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as separate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender neutral bathrooms.	47	53	50 (+3%)	50	No (after second round)	No
Professional moderators and renowned speakers	47	53	43 (+4%)	57	No (after second round)	No

Table 31. Essential factors for conference tourism, confirmed by the Delphi panel.

As Table 31 shows, consensus was reached on most of the proposed factors within the essential factors list. The panellists also reached consensus on removing the factor *climate at the destination* from the list of essentials. This was also reflected in the comments sections, where panellists could comment on their decision to approve/reject a factor as essential. A frequent comment was that "climate is much less important than all the other factors" (association), while most panellists remarked that it is a personal preference or too subjective to classify as an essential.

Another three factors; *cost of living at the destination*; *conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as separate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender neutral bathrooms* and *professional moderators and renowned speakers* were also excluded from the list of essential factors since consensus was not reached on their inclusion. Panellists were asked to reconsider their opinion vis-à-vis the other panellists' opinions in the third round, with agreement level increasing for the factors *cost of living at the destination* (+ 11%) and for *conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as separate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender neutral bathrooms* (+ 3%), but not enough to confirm consensus (≥70%). Consensus on the factor *professional moderators and renowned speakers* diminished in the third round (-4%).

The results were also reflected in the comments where panellists were asked if they would remove any of the factors from the essentials' list and why. Panellists commented that they would remove the professional moderators and renowned speakers as they generally prefer to bring in 'who we need/want' as moderators and speakers, which are not necessarily professional speakers or important personalities. Furthermore, while mother's room, smoking area and gender-neutral bathroom were considered a nice idea, comments showed that they were not a must and would not deter individuals from attending the conference, which would classify them as non-essentials. Finally, panellists frequently commented on cost of living as a subjective factor, as this depends on the delegate's income situation and there cannot be a standard 'reasonable cost'. That was the reason behind its removal as an essential, even though cost related factors were then shown to be important in the second list of factors (contributing to a competitive edge), discussed in section 6.3.9.2.

Most of the panellists' feedback to the questions *Would you add any other factors as an all-time important factor? And why?* was that the factors in the list were enough.

Nonetheless, individual suggestions included cultural attractions, specialist event professionals and technology infrastructure. Since this feedback was not frequent, the factors were not added to the essential list, especially since all the factors suggested were already included in the second list that was proposed to the panel in the second section of the survey.

6.3.9.2 Factors contributing to a competitive edge in conference tourism

The second section of the survey constituted the list of factors that the panellists were required to score according to their level of contribution to a destination's competitive edge in conference tourism. As discussed in section 6.3.9, the results are presented together. Confirmation of a factor's importance and its inclusion in the ACDVM and CCDT was based on several criteria (see section 5.6.2.5).

Consensus on whether the factor should be confirmed and therefore included in the ACDVM and CCDT was achieved on 21 factors, which are presented in Table 32. These factors will be discussed in the next chapter when presenting the ACDVM and CCDT. Conversely, consensus was not reached on the other 29 factors and were consequently excluded from the list and not added to the final model. Consensus was reached to exclude (rather than include) the factor *Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning* from the final model. Results for each factor including the percentage responses, the median, the mode and a confirmation of whether all the requirements were met for the factor to be added or not to the final model are presented in Appendix 13.

Factors	Importance (% imp & v. imp)
Wide range of accommodation available from 3 to 5-star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options in different styles and including authentic local accommodation options.	100.00
Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences)	92.9
Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, conference bureau, foreign affairs ministry).	92.9
Destination has image of being safe.	92.9
Accessibility to accommodate all delegate needs (catering for physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc.).	85.7
Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use.	85.6
Proximity and ease of access from conference venue to other attractive spots for visitation.	78.7
No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations	78.6
A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc.)	78.6
Purpose built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within one venue space).	78.6
Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily).	78.6
Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly.	78.6
Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences.	78.6
Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality.	78.6
An easy VISA application process.	78.6
Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service.	71.5
Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics).	71.5
Relevant authorities' policy *vis-à-vis* conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement.	71.4
Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients.	71.4
Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language, example English).	71.4
Good quality coffee.	71.4

Table 32. Factors contributing to a competitive edge - confirmed by panel via consensus

6.3.9.3 Factors removed from the ACDVM and CCDT

All factors included in round two and three have been discussed in section 6.3, with reference to the Delphi panellists' responses to the first round of questions, which yielded qualitative data. Most of the same factors have also emerged in the delegates' questionnaire results and were therefore analysed in section 6.2. To avoid repetition, this section shall identify the

factors that have been removed from their respective lists and will not be included in the ACDVM and CCDT. The confirmed factors will be discussed together with the finalised model and toolkit in chapter 7.

Several factors were not included in the final model since consensus was not reached or the median and mode were too low. Discounts on transport and retail have been removed from the list due to this reason. While Tanford at el (2012) had claimed that discounting costs may help improve conference attendance, the delegates' questionnaire had already disagreed on the importance of discounts given, showing that unless costs are fully covered, the influence of offering discounts was weak. The results of the Delphi study confirm that panellists felt discounts do not guarantee a competitive advantage to a destination. This did not exclude the need for funding and possible coverage of costs to delegates, as the need for subventions was still considered important and was a factor included in the final model. This result seems to confirm the priorities in terms of costs that were presented in the discussion on the results of the delegates' questionnaire.

Panellists also felt that an immediate welcome experience and information upon arrival would not constitute a competitive advantage to a destination. While the availability of information has been frequently considered important to delegates, the exclusion of this factor does not go against the general trend. This is because the Delphi results indicate that availability of information and instructions remain highly important, and that these should be made available to the delegates online prior to arrival rather than upon arrival (see sections 6.2.3.16 and 6.3.3.1). This argument is supported by consensus on including the factor relating to making information available to delegates prior to the conference in the researcher's destination model.

Contrary to some panellists' opinion on the importance of a destination's reputation in terms of academic knowledge and industry presence on topics interesting to the associations, the Delphi panel did not reach a consensus on including this factor in the model, even though the majority (64.3%) conceded it was important or very important. This factor had been previously considered to help a destination attract specific conferences (ICCA 2019b). Similarly, there was no agreement on the effectiveness of a destination's general level of attractiveness. Panellists agreed that it was the destination's image and reputation in terms of hosting successful conferences that actually contributes to a destination's

competitive edge in the conference market. This finding is in line with numerous studies (Mackellar 2006; Lee 2006; Chiu and Ananzeh 2012).

Another result that contradicts previous research related to the importance of climate. There was consensus that this factor should not be considered as essential for a destination to host conferences, while the weather-related factor was not considered to provide a competitive edge to a destination and was also removed. This result is further strengthened by the findings of the delegates' questionnaire regarding climate and discussed in section 6.2.3.15. Therefore this study's findings differ from the general argument on the importance of climate in attracting conferences to a destination (Fenich 2001, Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; Gregorić 2014), though it is not the first time that its importance has been questioned (Papadopoulos et al. 2014).

Panellists also dismissed most entertainment-related factors in contributing to a destination's conference tourism offer over competition. The Delphi panel agreed that availability of some leisure facilities at a destination was essential for the conference social programme, accepting that the need for leisure needs to be catered for, but showed that once the basic leisure is available, additional options will not improve the destination's competitiveness in terms of conference tourism. They dismissed the importance of the other entertainment-related factors, including in-house entertainment or close to the main attractions, traditional local entertainment and even the need for pre- and post-conference tours. The opinion on whether the pre- and post-conference tours would contribute to a competitive advantage was neutral for most of the panellists (64.3%).   General trends in literature show that leisure is sought by delegates (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Bernini 2009; Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Hanly 2011; Marais et al. 2017), but the results of the Delphi study are more in line with the ones in the delegates' questionnaire, which showed that while leisure availability is important, leisure-related factors are becoming less influential in the delegates' decision to attend a conference (discussed in section 6.2.3.11).

The Delphi panel's decisions on technology-related factors did not confirm the increased dependence on new technology at conferences. While consensus was reached on the inclusion of free, high speed Wi-Fi as an essential factor (confirming the results of the delegates' questionnaire), panellists did not agree that any other technology factor would increase the competitiveness of a destination or conference. Badge technology, VR sets and

Bluetooth beacons for the transition of information were considered the least significant, with only a small minority of the panel (14.3%) considering them as important or very important (7.1% and 35.7% respectively).

Half the panel considered software to allow interaction and voting in real time (50% important/very important) and conference apps (50% important/very important) to be important, but this fell short of a consensus on their need. Similarly, while most of the panellists confirmed power supplies were important (57.2%), consensus that it contributes to a competitive advantage was not reached, thus dropping the factor from the final list. This opinion contrasts with the findings of the delegates' questionnaire, whereby social media, apps and power suppliers ranked high (see section 6.2.3.1). The importance of technology signalled in the questionnaire might be related to the respondents' younger age brackets, but considered unnecessary to the experts in the Delphi study who are used to basic levels of technology. The Delphi's study results also dismissed the high technology expectations referred to by industry reports. Nonetheless, indication that technology is more important to the younger generations is clear even in the reports, which argue that younger generations have never lived without digital technology (CWT Meetings and Events 2019), while developments in technology are automatically increasing expectations (Turner 2019). This does not apply to Wi-Fi, since as shown in section 6.2.3.1, this was considered a necessity across all ages, and its confirmation as an essential by the Delphi panel was in line with past research (Turner 2019).

The Delphi panel agreed that a destination's safety image was very important to attract conference tourism, and a decision influencing factor. This is in line with previous academic research and industry reports (Fenich 2001; Choi and Boger 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Nonetheless, several safety-related factors were dismissed as non-important. These included dedicated areas for demonstrations and protestors, visible security around the whole destination and getting help from the destination to vet conference delegates. On the other hand while half the panellists considered availability of factual crime rate data at a destination and heavy security checks at the conference (including sniffer dogs, bag searchers etc.) to be important or very important, a consensus was not reached on the contribution of these two factors to a destination's competitive advantage. These results show that the panel did not considered

extra safety measures to improve a destination's chances, even though the measure's importance were not challenged. The image of safety remained very important, while the measures may not necessarily help a destination to achieve the image it wants to portray. This is in line with the discussion on the importance of media and how it can influence a destination's image (in section 4.4.6).This indicates that perception is increasingly important, especially if it prejudices negatively the destination, as decision-makers, being human beings, base themselves on perceptions when selecting a destination (ICCA 2019b).

The same trend appeared in the results relating to a memorable experience. Consensus was reached on the importance of a memorable conference experience, offering a competitive advantage. Still, no agreement was reached as most panellists' opinion on this factor was neutral (64.3%). Furthermore, while most panellists (57.2%) admitted a strong element of local tradition and culture to provide a unique experience was important or very important, there was still no agreement to include the factor in the ACDVM and the CCDT.

The panel also considered having a professional conference organiser (PCO) to be unnecessary, with some comments stating that most associations were able to plan the conference themselves thanks to the experience they had gained from past conferences. Tangible gifts with a symbolic meaning were also considered of low importance according to half the panel (50%). Both factors were removed from the list.

6.4 Summary

The primary research presented in this chapter was necessary to satisfy the third research objective of this study. The first research question of this objective was concerned with outlining *which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that influence the delegates' attendance at a conference, as the end consumer?* This was addressed by the delegates' questionnaire and discussed in section 6.2. By addressing this research question, the body of knowledge was updated as the emerging contemporary factors influencing the delegates' decision-making were identified.

The second primary research method (the Delphi study) tackled the second question of the third research objective: *Which are the contemporary motivators and barriers that are*

considered important by all the stakeholders? This addressed the need to identify facto*r*s that different conference tourism stakeholders agreed would influence conference site-selection. It was also the first study to involve all the stakeholders in identifying these factors. By tapping into the expertise and experience of all the different stakeholders involved in the process, and successively achieving consensus, this study offered a holistic perspective on which destination factors influence conference destination decision-making. The results of this study were presented and explained in section 6.3, satisfying this research question.

Several factors emerging from the discussions of the Delphi study confirmed the findings of the delegates' questionnaire. These included the importance of factors related to destination accessibility, networking, proximity between venues, Wi-Fi, contribution of cultural heritage, safety, availability of in-built technology at the venues, lack of barriers to enter the destination and the destination's image in terms of hospitality and service. Conversely, some diverging opinions between delegates and the rest of the conference tourism stakeholders were also exposed. These became clear when comparing the results of the two primary researches but were also identified when analysing the rounds of the Delphi study, where delegate representatives were also present.

Factors related to green credentials were considered important by panellists, as they cited awareness and expectations to be increasing in this regard. Conversely, the delegates' questionnaire showed that delegates did not value green credentials. It was noted that results in the questionnaire showed a wide variety of responses (SD >1) when addressing these factors, indicating that while a majority did not consider them important, a significant number was still concerned. This reflects the Delphi panel discussions, whereby one delegate representative was very vocal on green credentials while the rest did not see them as a priority.

Delegates were also shown to value highly their personal experiences. This emerged from importance given to past experiences at a conference organised by the same association, or prior travelling experience at a destination where a conference is going to be held, when deciding on whether to attend. Conversely, they were less concerned about the general reputation of a destination as a successful conference destination. This contrasted with the perspective of the other stakeholders, who considered the destination's conference

reputation to be important during destination-selection. Similarly, while delegates were not concerned on language barriers of staff and service providers, they expected customer care service to be of high quality. The other stakeholders were aware that this would not be possible if a language barrier existed indicating that while delegates only identified what would directly influence their stay other stakeholders understood that prior requirements needed to be satisfied for the delegates' expectations to be met. This derived from their experience as suppliers.

Surprisingly, while delegates considered safety to be very important, they did not classify factors such as fast police and medical response time as equally important. This contrasts with the panellists' perspective, where consensus was reached on the importance of response time. This stemmed from their experience, where conference organisers and conference venues would have handled emergency situations that a delegate would not be aware of unless having experienced this at first-hand. This situation was also reflected in responses to venue accessibility, whereby results from the delegates' questionnaire showed that disability access was not considered as high in importance as general accessibility factors, indicating that delegates with no mobility-challenges did not consider the necessity for others. This was also reflected in the high variance in response (SD = 1.07; 1.08 for venue accessibility factors). Conversely, the Delphi panel identified mobility challenges are regular issues, highlighting and agreeing on the importance of accessibility to accommodate all delegates for whom they would be responsible. In fact, it was evident that delegates' opinions were based on their own experiences and interests. This self-interest bias is reflected in all results from the delegates' questionnaire, and in results of previous similar studies concerned with the delegates' perspective. While factors that offered benefits to delegates were considered important (such as educational and career benefits and reduction of costs), factors that were more concerned with general benefits (such as the green credentials) or benefited others (disability access) were considered less important.

Furthermore, some factors were not covered in the delegates' questionnaire as they emerged in the first round of the Delphi study, and were eventually confirmed as being important or essential. These include good coffee and trained staff giving service with a smile. This finding confirmed that seemingly minor items may still influence significantly the delegates' experience, and most stakeholders were aware of this. Finally, both studies

agreed that climate was not an important factor, contradicting past studies (Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007 Park et al. 2014). As mentioned, this could be related to long time spent at the conference and accommodation venues (also related to the increase in integrated venues), which heightened expectations at the venues but made outside climate less relevant.

This chapter identified the factors and trends that have retained their importance in influencing conference tourism decision-making, as well as those that have been side-lined due to the emergence of others, which served to address the third research objective. This knowledge is considered very important for the study, as the final lists of factors developed to address this objective led to the identification of the characteristics required for a destination to become a successful association conference destination (objective 4), which was developed into the ACDVM, and finally the CCDT (objective 5). These will be presented in the next chapter, addressing the last two research objectives of this study.

Chapter 7: The Association Conference Destination Viability Model and Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the ACDVM, which is based on the results of the Delphi study. The development of the ACDVM is in line with the fourth objective of this study:

To develop an Association Conference Destination Viability Model that can be utilised to identify which characteristics are required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism.

This objective sought to utilise the primary knowledge generated to address the third research question, as well as the secondary data that was required to satisfy the study's second objective. The model was therefore developed, outlining and explaining the main factors influencing conference destination decision-making. This contribution is considered the first of its kind, as the factors were vetted and agreed upon by representatives of all the conference tourism stakeholders. This ensured the ACDVM presented a holistic perspective of the factors, rather than just basing itself on a single stakeholder or limited stakeholders' perspectives. The model also incorporated the external factors that have been shown to influence the decision-process. The development of this model was considered invaluable to mature destinations who aimed to diversify their tourism offer by including conference tourism. By offering a contemporary, holistic guideline of which factors are important, this model would contribute to these destinations' potential success in becoming association conference hosts.

Having identified the need for such knowledge to guide the efforts of practitioners and decision-makers in conference tourism, the knowledge generated by this study was also utilised to develop the CCDT. This presented the contemporary factors guiding the

conference site-selection decision-process visually to the industry, following a more practical presentation approach to satisfy the fifth and final research objective:

> *To develop a Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit for destinations to enable the evaluation and improvement of their positioning in the association conference tourism market.*

This study's results were presented in two different formats aimed at two different audiences. The ACDVM is aimed at an academic audience, proposing a model based on a holistic viewpoint that reflects all the stakeholders' opinions, bridging the gap in literature as identified in section 4.5. Furthermore, it updated academic literature by identifying the conventional factors that have not retained their importance and presented contemporary factors that had not been included in past academic studies. On the other hand, the CCDT targeted industry specialists and destinations, proposing practical guidelines to develop their association conference tourism product. By acting as a guideline, the toolkit helps destinations understand what is required to achieve the factors considered necessary and/or important in conference tourism. The ACDVM will be presented in the next section, while the CCDT is presented in Appendix 14.

7.2 The Association Conference Destination Viability Model

The ACDVM is unique in that it proposes a list of factors that influence conference tourism decision-making and which are approved by all the stakeholders involved in this sector. The holistic perspective given by this model is what distinguishes it from past academic research which has generally focused on studying conference tourism from the viewpoints of one or two stakeholders. Past research studied the perspectives of conference planners (Clark and McCleary 1995; Clark et al. 1998; Baloglu and Love 2005; Severt et al. 2007; Ariffin et al. 2008; Ryan et al. 2008; Mair 2010; Hayat et al. 2014), associations and organisations (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Kim et al. 2010; Yoo and Chon 2010, Whitfield et al. 2012, Mair et al. 2018), associations and conference planners (Kang et al. 2005), delegates (Mair and Thompson 2009; Tanford et al. 2012; Ramirez et al. 2013; Han and Hwang 2017), suppliers

and academics (Yoo and Chon 2008) and industry professionals (Yoo and Zhao 2010). More inclusive studies by Weber and Ladkin (2003; 2005) and included perspectives from conference centres, conference bureaus, hotels, professional conference organisers, destination marketing companies and academics, but they differed from this study as their main focus was to identify trends and forecast changes in the conference tourism sectors related to the United Kingdom and Australian markets. Furthermore, the delegates' perspective was not included in these studies, due to the different aim set.

The ACDVM was developed to help mature destinations that are seeking to diversify their current tourism portfolio through developing their conference tourism product. This is mostly due to the reaching of a saturation or decline stage in the mass tourism market. Nonetheless, the model is also of interest to destinations that already have a history of hosting conferences and are seeking to improve their competitiveness in the association conference market.

Understanding the destination selection process for association conferences, as well as what influences the decision, is complex (Clark and McCleary 1995; Baloglu and Love 2005), making it difficult to understand the requirements of decision makers. The ACDVM helps destinations to understand the decision process by simplifying it and revealing the different underlying influential factors. The study focused on larger association conferences, which were considered more attractive to conference destinations due to their bigger number of attendees and economic benefits (Holloway and Humphreys 2020). Nonetheless, these might have specific requirements stemming from their size.

The ACDVM identifies which factors a destination needs to address in order to become a successful association conference destination, and is presented in Figure 16. Factors put forward by the model were based on consensus of opinions among all representatives, which produced the holistic vision that would guide destinations to the necessary factors to become successful conference hosts. A distinction is made between the *essential factors* and the *important factors*. As their name implies, essential factors need to be addressed before a destination can be considered a realistic candidate. Associations will remove destinations who do not satisfy the essential requirements in the initial stages of decision-making, prior to shortlisting their destination options. The second set of factors become important once a destination is shortlisted, together with a set of alternatives. These

factors help a destination to improve its competitiveness in the association conference market. *Important factors* are presented in order of priority, ranging from the least to the most important. This has been considered crucial since the decision-making model proposed by Crouch and Ritchie who claimed that a "sense of importance of the various factors is needed" (Crouch and Ritchie 1998, p. 63). This scale helps destinations to prioritise when addressing factors, especially when resources are limited. Nonetheless, while these factors are important when competing in the conference tourism market, the essential factors remain the highest priority, without which destinations would be excluded from the association conference market altogether.

The model also indicates that associations select a conference destination in stages, reflecting the responses given in the first round of the Delphi study (section 6.3.7.2.3), whereby associations admitted that the different bids are filtered before the final decision is made on the shortlisted pool of destinations. This also resembles the first and second round of shortlisting indicated by ICCA (2019b) and discussed in section 4.3.1. The association first removes the destination options that do not satisfy basic requirements, which are equivalent to the essential factors in this model. The shortlisted destinations are then evaluated based on several criteria, presented as the important factors. These give the destination a competitive edge to be chosen over the other shortlisted options. Finally, the decision is taken, and the conference is held. The experience derived from the conference then influences decisions related to the association's future conference destination.

Key

- Destination
- Conference organiser
- Conference venue
- Accommodation venue

Association
Decision makers

Association internal factors

- Association characteristics; nature, type, size, stability, funds
- Destination Relationships
- Internal Power relationships and presidency
- Local chapters
- Association policies and rotation patterns
- Business and membership opportunities, sponsorships
- Competition strategies
- Knowledge and challenges requested at destination

Delegates

- Characteristics
- Requirements

External factors
(global /regional situation)

- Political
- Security & safety
- Environmental
- Economical
- Health

Past experiences influence future decisions

Level of importance

Most important

Very important

Somewhat important

Less important

Least important

Essential factors for conference tourism

Accessibility to destination	Conference venue capacity
Accessibility at destination	Proximity - conference venue to accommodation
Cost to organise a conference at the destination	Staff
Leisure facilities availability	High food hygiene standard
Total conference product at destination	Free, high speed Wi-Fi.
Networking opportunities	Comfort at conference venue

Shortlisted destinations

Destinations not satisfying essential requirements removed from options

Eco-friendly | Purpose-built conference centres | Easy VISA application | Destination image - hospitality & service quality | Destination conference host reputation | Wide range of accommodation available

Image of a safe destination | Strong cultural heritage at destination | Information about destination available in advance

In-built technology and support staff | Accessibility for disability

Unique memorable experience | Local authority policy vis-a-vis conference tourism | Local authority funding for investment in conference tourism | Fast response time from local police and medical service | Food options - cultural & dietary requirements | Flexible space configuration at conference venue | Translation available | Proximity of conference to attractive spots

Service providers with no language barriers | Good quality coffee

Important factors - destination's competitive edge

Destination decision & conference held

Figure 16. The Association Conference Destination Viability Model (Author's original)

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The destination-related factors influencing the site decision are presented and discussed in section 7.2.3. Moreover, several other non-destination-related factors have also been identified as influential in the decision and have therefore been included in the model. These factors have been mostly identified through secondary literature, while their importance has further emerged in responses to the delegates' questionnaire and the Delphi study. These include the delegate-related factors, the association internal factors, factors external to the association, and past experiences. The model also identifies the different stakeholders' input in improving the destination's attractiveness. This will also be discussed in sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 below.

7.2.1 Non-destination-related factors

Several non-destination-related factors have been shown to be influential in the association's site decision. These factors have been distinguished on the bases of whether they are internal to the association or considered to be external factors.

7.2.1.1 Association-related factors

The association's nature will determine the type of conference it requires and its characteristics (Rogers 2013). These will determine the association's needs and expectations that a destination should address. Each association has several internal objectives which influence its decision. Destinations who invest in research to understand such factors will be in a stronger position to partner with the association, but this will require extensive time and money-investment to structure strategies based on an association's specific characteristics. Internal association factors have been listed in Table 10 and discussed in section 4.2.3, all of which create pre-conditions that a destination should satisfy to qualify as a potential host destination for that association's conferences. These factors, also part of the ACDVM, include the nature of the association, its rotation patterns, membership potential and current membership base, local audiences at potential conference destinations, the need to transfer knowledge, raise awareness or help to overcome specific challenges at some destinations, business opportunities, expertise available at some destinations, opportunities to inspect sites

of interest to the association at the destination, competition from other associations and the influence of association sponsors (Bernini 2009; UIA 2018; ICCA 2019b).

Association policies create strong restrictions on the destination choice. The rotation system for example, as explained by the Delphi panellists (see section 6.3.7.1.1), automatically excludes some destinations that are not in line with the rotation policy. Similarly, association and conference size determine if the size of the accommodation and conference venues available at the destination will satisfy the association's demands. Furthermore, if a destination has the right-sized facilities available on dates that clash with other international or local association events for the association, the destination will still be removed from that association's options (ICCA 2019b).

The association's characteristics will also determine whether its aim is to make profit from the conference, attract new members or retain the current association membership base. This influences the destination decision, based on the priority of choosing the best location for its current membership base, or preferring a destination that is more attractive to potential new members. More established associations might be willing to take additional risk in choosing more innovative but less accessible destinations, while newer associations would prefer the conventional destinations to safeguard the conference's participation which guarantees attendance numbers and registration income (Crouch and Ritchie 1998). These characteristics influence the requirements of each association, and therefore influences their perception of the 'ideal destination'. This was also evident in the Delphi study, whereby some associations requested four-star standard accommodation options, while another association admitted that it sought self-catering accommodation, being cheaper and more attractive to their delegates (see section 6.3.2.3).

Furthermore, past experiences also influence decisions. Positive past experiences help put a destination into an evoked set of alternatives. This is the initial group of options out of which the conference destination is later chosen and increases a destination's chances of being shortlisted. Similarly, existing relations between association decision-makers and stakeholders at a destination will also influence the decision. The Delphi responses pointed to how experiences at a destination may foster relationships that influence possible future collaboration (see section 6.3.2.5). A positive relationship with a destination may in fact play

a key role in the decision and is as important as other qualities of the destination (Nikolich and Sparks 1995; Lee and Hiemstra 2001).

Another association-related factor that emerged from the Delphi study was the lobbying power and influence of associations' chapter based at different destinations (see section 6.3.1.3). The association's local chapter's pro-activity in bidding or lobbying for the destination contributes to attracting a conference to a destination (Getz 2004; ICCA 2019b). The local chapter is usually the link between the decision-making board and the destination. The chapter's influence could be enhanced if a positive relationship with the association's decision-makers exists, through for example, past connections, the chapter's very active role in the association, or a strong local endorsement by a public figure at the destination (ICCA 2019b).

Additionally, the characteristics of, and dynamics between, the individuals forming part of the decision process is also important. In the case of associations, the individuals who form the decision-making body, or 'buyer centre' as described by Fawzy and Samra (2008), are usually the board of the organisation. This group has the greatest weight on the choice of the host location (Kang et al. 2005; Donaldson 2013). Within the decision-making group itself, members' level of influence varies. This is dependent on how much power each committee member holds (Kang et al. 2005). Decision-influencers who are not formally part of the decision-making process may also be effective in influencing decisions.   Formal and informal decision-influencers are identified. While the formal is possibly engaged to assist or may directly and actively influence the decision-makers, the latter may do so passively or indirectly. These were outlined in Tables 11 and 12 and discussed in section 4.3.1.

Finally, the association members' characteristics and needs also act as pre-conditions in the decision. The members cannot be side-lined as the association is frequently interested in having the highest attendance possible. The results indicated that delegates based their opinions on personal experience and interests and were mostly attracted to factors that contribute to their personal benefit (discussed in section 6.4). The need to be aware of the delegates' past experiences and needs was therefore highlighted by the Delphi panel. Stakeholders acknowledged they would require this information from the associations, as it would be mindful of its average delegate's profile (see section 6.3.3.2). Therefore, stakeholders need to be aware that while the destination factors are identified within the

ACDVM, they are based on the average association and delegate requirements. An association may include a specific cohort of delegates that have different requirements. For example, delegates of professional associations expect higher quality standards, while delegates of non-professional associations are more interested in leisure facilities (Crouch and Ritchie 1998). These requirements influence the way decision-makers perceive the different destination offers.

This section has shown how association-related factors influence the association's conference destination decision. While the destinations cannot control the internal factors influencing the association, the outcomes from most factors may be forecast through the destination gathering the required data from the association and assisting the associations' local chapters. Having identified the importance of the local chapter in influencing the decision, as well as being the only direct connection a destination might have to the association decision-makers, the local chapter becomes the most important link in which the destination needs to invest so as to be better positioned to attract the association conference. Nonetheless, factors considered to be external to the association can also influence the decisions heavily.

7.2.1.2 External factors

The ACDVM includes another set of factors that are influential in the decision-making process and are both external to the association and to the destinations. These factors stem from global or regional changes, which exert pressure on the decision-makers by placing additional importance on specific destination-related factors in reaction to external circumstances. External factors influence the demand for conference tourism altogether, since conference tourism has shown sensitivity to political, health and natural hazards and terrorism (Crouch and Weber 2002; BCD Travel 2019) (see sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

It is frequently seen how conference tourism fluctuates according to global economic situations (Yang and Gu 2011; Borodako et al. 2011; Hayat et al. 2014; American Express Meetings and Events 2018). Costs have been confirmed in the delegates' questionnaire to act as a barrier to a delegate's decision to attend a conference (see section 6.2.3.6) and it was also identified as one of the risks of conference tourism by the Delphi panel, since

association conferences are very sensitive to costs (see section 6.3.7.2.4). An economic recession therefore exerts increased pressure on the decision-makers in relation to conference costs. This results from reductions in the association's budget and the decrease in its members' disposable income, equating to a potential decrease in attendee numbers (Duffy 2010; Hayat et al. 2014). This may also result in an increased interest in virtual conferencing to reduce costs, making the decision-makers more price-conscious and less interested in investing in physical conferences after a cheaper option has become widespread (see section 6.3.7.2.2). It may also increase pressure to try the less costly second-tier cities (Rompf et al. 2008; Hayat et al. 2014), which in turn increases competition for other conference destinations, as explained by the Delphi panel. Furthermore, the reduction in price at second-tier cities may come at the expense of quality (see section 6.3.7.2.3). Subventions also help to mitigate financially related challenges, as local support through funding and resources have been considered very beneficial in improving the destination's chances to attract conference tourism (see section 6.3.1.2). Nonetheless, the panellists admitted that subventions are rarely a long-term solution (see section 6.3.7.2.4).

Security threats, both in terms of natural disasters and human attacks, also influence the destination decision. Natural disasters and extreme weather events are known to have influenced conference tourism demands (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Destinations may attempt to mitigate these risks offering extra incentives to conference organisers,see section 4.4.7). Terrorism also affects conference tourism demand at destinations (Baytok et al. 2010; Mair et al. 2016). Findings from the delegates' questionnaire indicate that terrorism impacts whole geographical regions, spreading fear of travel to neighbouring countries (see section 6.2.3.8). Furthermore, the Delphi panel acknowledged that destinations suffering terrorism attacks are removed from the pool of alternatives until the act is forgotten (section 6.3.5.4), confirming previous findings (see section 3.3.3)

Any other global or regional instability will also influence the conference destination decision. Political instability and protests in Hong Kong led to cancellations and postponement, even though demand for the destination existed (CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Uncertainty linked to safety and security threats, is a priority for conference organisers who are not willing to compromise upon (Singh 2019). This may change the decision makers' perception of the hierarchy of destination-related factors, with one factor

such as security, being prioritised and warranting the exclusion of a destination from the available options.

Health hazards also influence decision makers. The SARS outbreak in 2003 and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 have shown how health risks strongly impact decisions, leading to postponement and cancellation of conferences at confirmed destinations (Kim et al. 2005; Maddox 2020; Detwiler 2020) (see section 3.3.3). These external factors trigger new requirements at the destination that supersede those that influence decisions during 'normal circumstances'. One example is hygiene. While this has been considered important in both the delegates' questionnaire and the Delphi study (both undertaken prior to the COVID-19 outbreak), the pandemic has made it an essential priority on top of other essential factors in the ACDVM (that assumes 'normal circumstances'). This is evident within the World Health Organisation's guidelines whereby cleanliness and hygiene are given top priority (WHO 2020b), and similarly most governments around the world (for example, Ministry for Health NZ 2020; Commonwealth of Australia 2020). "Correct hygiene measures" are now considered "critical" (Government of Malta 2020). This has triggered a response by stakeholders, such as the introduction of hygiene certification at venues (Palmer and Grimaldi 2020).

Competing destinations therefore need to understand the importance of external factors and try to forecast how these will influence the conference destination decision. When external factors disrupt 'normal circumstances', destinations are therefore required to mitigate such effect as much as possible. Destinations also need to focus on improving their image in order to be in line with external pressures. Perception is increasingly important, especially if prejudice is negatively affecting the destination. As humans, decision-makers base themselves on perceptions when selecting a destination (ICCA 2019b). The next section will discuss the different stakeholders, followed by a discussion on destination-related factors.

7.2.2 Stakeholders involved

Prior to discussing the destination-related factors that attract conference tourism, it is important to note that several stakeholders are involved in addressing each factor. A

distinction between the stakeholders can be made, depending on whether they act as clients or suppliers. The ultimate clients that influence demand and requirements are the delegates. This puts pressure on the association's decisions, acting as the conference organiser while aiming to attract as many delegates as possible.

The association acts as the conference organiser or initiator (the body that decides a conference is needed). Therefore, while the association is the direct client of the destination, it also acts as the host to its members (the delegates), acting both as a client and as a supplier who is responsible to ensure the conference is attractive to delegates. The destination on the other hand attempts to satisfy these two stakeholders' requirements in the best way possible, aiming to gain a competitive edge over other destinations.

The other stakeholders act as suppliers and are also responsible to address further factors outlined in the model, increasing the destination's attractiveness and therefore attracting the clients. While some factors are directly related to the destination, various factors are dependent on other conference suppliers at the destination, shown by colour-coding in the ACDVM (Figure 16). This identifies which stakeholder/s is/are mainly responsible to address each factor. The model identifies the conference venue and accommodation venue as the most influential suppliers, together with the conference organiser (frequently being the association, and possibly represented by a professional conference organiser) and the destination itself. The destination is represented by different institutions including the conference bureaus and local tourism authorities (national, regional and local), which guide the local supplier community and coordinate investment in the sector. Delphi panellists acknowledged that being unbiased, only official authorities can drive collaboration between suppliers. Unlike private stakeholders, authorities should not have any personal interests except to improve the destination's conference tourism product offer (see section 6.3.1.2). Official authorities have also been shown to head inter-cities collaborations when possible (see section 6.3.7.1.3). The need for collaboration between stakeholders will be mentioned in section 7.2.3.2.1

The inclusion of all the stakeholders' perspectives, reflected in the consensus on all factors proposed within the model, put the ACDVM in a better position to identify the different roles of each stakeholder in addressing each factor proposed. The destination-related factors presented in the model will now be discussed.

7.2.3 Destination-related factors

This section discusses the factors proposed in the model and that are related to the destination. These factors were also the foundation of the CCDT, which utilised the same knowledge extracted from the study's Delphi study. The essential factors, which have been defined as necessary for a destination to be shortlisted to the final pool of options, will be discussed first. These will be distinguished based on the main stakeholder/s responsible to address them. Subsequently, the second list of factors; which contribute to a destination's competitive edge after it has been shortlisted, are examined.

7.2.3.1 Destination-related factors; essential factors

The essential factors presented in the ACDVM are the most important set of factors that a destination needs to address. This section explores the components of each factor, outlining the expectations that need to be met. Several factors have similar underlying requirements, showing how some improvements can address multiple factors if planned well. Factors will be segmented based on the main stakeholder/s responsible to address them.

7.2.3.1.1 The destination's responsibility

The destination represented by its official institutions is responsible for fulfilling a substantial number of factors, with accessibility being the first prerequisite. Accessibility, a conventionally important factor (Mair and Thompson 2009, Horváth 2011; Park et al 2014; Ying 2017) has been reconfirmed in this study's delegates' questionnaire and also in the Delphi study. This study identified a suggested ideal travelling time of not more than 2.5 to 3 hours, based on the feedback of respondents (see section 6.3.1.1) and in line with literature (Donaldson 2013). Flights are the most popular mode of travel for delegates (Turner 2019), also evident from the frequent reference by the Delphi panel. International airports with frequent flight schedules are increasingly important. Direct fights reduce travel time and were considered most convenient, a characteristic becoming increasingly important to time-deficient delegates (see section 6.2.3.2). It is imperative for destinations to confirm that their

main airports are connected to other regional and global hubs. Nonetheless, issues related to air travel also exist. These relate to the security procedures and possible long queues at the airport, which can make the travel experience inconvenient (see section 6.3.1.1) Improving time-efficiency at airports therefore is important.

Alternatives to air transport are also important. These increase the delegates' choices, improving the possibility of selecting a more convenient mode of transport. Delegates have been shown to be very self-oriented (see section 6.4), with convenience therefore being a very strong motivator in their decisions. Furthermore, connectivity via alternative transport modes may offer greener solutions, addressing an increasing concern related to air pollution and its carbon footprint as flagged in this study (see section 6.3.2.6), and in line with industry reports (UIA 2018; American Express Meetings and Events 2019). The study has also revealed that a significant minority of delegates (see section 6.2.3.17) and most stakeholders within the sector were concerned about green practices (see section 6.3.2.6). Therefore, if an association or its decision board feel strong about the environment, a destination offering greener alternatives holds a competitive advantage (Henderson 2011; German Convention Bureau 2013).

Connectivity of the international transport nodes such as the destination's airports, seaports, rail stations and motorways to the rest of the destination and most importantly to the location of the conference has also been flagged as important in this study (see section 6.3.1.1). This shows the need to address ease of accessibility within the destination, akin previous research (Buhalis 2000; Fenich 2001; Ghazali and Ghani 2015). Delegates are less attracted to congested cities as they expect direct and time-efficient travelling. Therefore, destinations need to ensure their local public transport infrastructure is efficient. A range of transport alternatives is expected (Iwamoto et al. 2017) as it also increases the delegates' chances of opting for a more convenient mode. Cab ride apps have emerged as attractive to delegates, as associations admitted that international taxi service apps, that delegates recognise and trust, are preferred (section 6.3.1.1). Destinations should thus consider the inclusion and regulation of such international apps. Nonetheless, travel time and value for money remain important when offering transport options as delegates are not willing to pay high prices for low service and are cost sensitive.

Value for money is influential across most other destination-related factors. Associations are concerned about the costs required to organise a conference at a destination when exploring their options. While a destination's high cost of living has not been shown to be a deterrent, the cost of organising a conference at a destination has emerged as an important factor that influences decision-making. This is in line with past reports, also claiming that costs are a main concern (UIA 2018). Destinations therefore need to position themselves within an affordable bracket because most of the associations are frequently price sensitive. If the costs to organise a conference at a destination are not within the association's budget, the destination cannot be shortlisted to the final pool of alternatives, as it would not be affordable. The costs most considered by associations include the conference space and the equipment needed to set up the conference, as well as food and beverage costs if this is shouldered by the organising association itself. Depending on the conference, accommodation might also be packaged within the conference fee.

Associations organise their conferences as fund raisers, aimed at making profit especially since conferences are a main source of income (see section 6.3.7.2.4). This is not possible if costs are too high. Furthermore, associations are rarely able to increase the delegate's attendance fee, as internal association guidelines on pricing frequently exist. Increasing the conference fee would also risk decreasing the number of attendees. This is because association delegates are price-sensitive as indicated in the delegate questionnaire (section 6.2.3.6) and in previous studies (Tanford et al. 2012; Ying 2017; Skinner 2017). Thus, associations consider the costs delegates would need to cover when selecting a destination, including transportation costs to and within the destination, accommodation costs and food and beverage costs. The study has shown that destinations can improve their market position for price-sensitive associations by offering a variety of alternatives which offer associations and delegates flexible options to fit different budgets (see section 6.3.2.1). Offering subventions or sponsorships also makes the destination attractive and increasingly price competitive (discussed in section 7.2.3.2.1).

Leisure factors have been confirmed as essential in the model, including leisure facilities close to the conference and accommodation. This is in line with past studies (Pechlaner et al. 2007; Bernini 2009; Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Hanly 2011; Marais et al. 2017). Nonetheless this study identified that while leisure needs to be present, it is

becoming less influential in the delegates' decision to attend a conference (see section 6.2.3.11). The study (section 6.3.1.6) flagged different levels of demands related to leisure, which depend on the type of association and whether partners are invited to the conference. Professional delegates with no accompanying guests are less interested in leisure facilities. Nonetheless, when available, facilities need to be geared towards the conference delegate market. This is done by locating facilities near the venues where delegates spend most time, and by offering extended opening hours that consider the long sessions delegates need to attend.

Leisure is part of the package that destinations are expected to provide. This package extends to other pre-requisites, placed under the umbrella term 'Total conference product' (Clark 2006) which includes conference and accommodation venues, leisure facilities and retail facilities within close proximity to each other (discussed in section 6.3.1.5). Associations are not able to hold a conference at a destination that does not offer any one of these components. Thus, the availability of such facilities within short distances or with convenient travel, is essential. Other, more generic structural improvements are also needed as part of the product, and include water and sewage systems, electricity supply, telephone and transport networks (Davidson and Rogers 2006), together with what this study flagged as the basic technology infrastructure offering free Wi-Fi with the required broadband speed and power supplies at locations visited by delegates. These are critical as it is shown that delegates depend on technology especially for communication and work, and without which a smooth conference experience is not possible (see sections 6.2.3.1; 6.3.2.4; 6.3.3.3).

7.2.3.1.2. The conference venues and accommodation venues' input

Since the conference and accommodation venues are the locations where delegates spend most time, their contribution to the destination's conference tourism offer is crucial. The ACDVM identifies several factors that can be addressed by venues. At very initial stages of destination decision-making, associations exclude places that do not offer conference and accommodation facilities that are in line with their needs. One pre-condition is capacity, as associations cannot consider any destinations that do not provide conference venues large enough to host their audience (see section 6.3.2.1), which is also in line with the findings of various studies (Fenich 2001; Leask and Hood 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Choi and

Boger 2002; Priporas 2005; Lee and Min 2013; Marques and Santos 2016; Cró and Martins 2018). Capacity was required in terms of the main conference halls and all the breakout rooms for the side sessions.

A destination needs to be aware of its infrastructure limitations. If resources or space are limited, a destination can reposition itself to attract smaller association conferences, bidding only for conferences that do not exceed its capacity. These can include international associations' regional rather than global conferences, as these would be smaller in size with delegates from the same region or continent. A substantial number of conferences have been shown to host less than 100 delegates (27.3%) while the majority host between 101 and 500 delegates (48.3%) (UIA 2020). This eliminates the need for big investments to develop infrastructure to accommodate large groups, if this is not already available. Conversely, a destination that still aims to attract larger (and possibly more profitable) conferences, will require to assess its current capacity, and set guidelines for stakeholders to develop their facilities and increase the sizes, while assisting and coordinating.

Proximity is regularly listed in the ACDV Model, reflecting its frequent mention in the study's findings. This factor has been assumed to be important in past studies but has not been discussed (Baloglu and Love 2005; Tanford et al. 2012). The importance of proximity between the accommodation and conference venues is essential because of they are the places where delegates spend most time, and also motivates the development of integrated venues, whereby all facilities are housed within the same complex. This would be the most ideal scenario that a destination may offer in terms of proximity and will be discussed in section 7.2.3.2.2.

Staff have also been shown to influence the level of satisfaction of delegates and associations as high expectations related to customer care, knowledge and service by staff were flagged in this study. This study is one of the first to highlight the influence that staff have on conference tourism. Very few studies have mentioned the importance of staff quality of service and their friendliness within conference tourism (Ryan et al. 2008). The study shows the increased importance of staff training, which does not only translate into a better conference experience but improves the staff's attitude and abilities that are important at the very early stages, influencing site-selection decisions (see section 6.3.2.5). This is in line with literature indicating that trained staff who are helpful can build better relationships with

associations and have a greater probability of attracting conferences to their venues (Nikolich and Sparks 1995; Lee and Hiemstra 2001). This study also identified the importance of staff that smile, as stakeholders have specifically referred to this characteristic. The emphasis on how service quality improves by ensuring that staff smile constantly, has not emerged in previous academic research, and is therefore a clear indication that an awareness of giving service with a smile should be part of the required training to improve a venue's attractiveness. It also shows that minor details are in fact important to the conference experience and might lead to negative feedback if not given their due attention.

The model also highlights the importance of hygiene as a newly emerging factor, especially that related to food. Hygiene and cleanliness have often been referred to in this study, with the delegates' questionnaire (being a main factor resulting from the study's PCA) indicating these to be very important. All the stakeholders agree that high food hygiene standards should be considered an essential factor at the conference and accommodation venues. This study is therefore the first to highlight this factor's importance. Even though cleanliness and hygiene have been mentioned in other studies (Dwyer and Kim, 2003, Wan, 2011), most of these have shown that delegates consider hygiene as a pre-requisite and take it for granted. Previous studies consider it unlikely that hygiene can improve attractiveness but identify hygiene-related issues as a possible deterrent for delegates (Yoo and Zhao 2010). The ACDVMelevates the importance of this factor to an essential, emphasising the heightened importance of this factor as an influencer during the shortlisting of destinations, thus showing its increased value in attractiveness. Furthermore, while data collection has been carried out prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 of 2020, it is expected that this factor's importance will increase drastically due to the media and health organisation's emphasis on the importance of cleanliness and hygiene (see section 7.2.1.2)

Finally the model also outlines Wi-Fi as an essential. This study has reconfirmed that delegates specifically require high-speed Wi-Fi, that is free of charge (see section 6.2.3.1), while all stakeholders also agreed on the impact of Wi-Fi on attendance and its influence on the conference (see section 6.3.2.4), both of which exert pressure on destination decisions. This factor has been considered a traditionally important factor and has been given due importance in past academic research and industry reports alike (Fenich et al. 2014; Hussain et al. 2014; Palmer 2018). Due to the very high dependence on Wi-Fi, this is in fact

considered part of the most basic necessary infrastructure required to host a conference (see section 6.3.2.4). Unless Wi-Fi is available at the conference and accommodation venues, associations have to possibly cover the costs to provide it themselves. This has been shown from the delegates' high connectivity dependence during the conference (emerging also from the delegates' questionnaire and discussed in section 6.2.3.1). This motivates associations to exclude venues from their shortlisting that do not offer this service.

7.2.3.1.3. The conference venue's input

Additional factors specifically related to the conference venue, mostly related to comfort, are also identified in the ACDVM.   This study uncovered various comfort requirements through both the delegates' questionnaire (see section 6.2.3.10) and the Delphi study (see section 6.3.2.4). These include the possibility to control temperature and lighting, which have only been briefly referred to in previous studies (Crouch and Weber 2002). Contemporary expectations include the need to be able to completely manipulate the conference venue environment in terms of amplification, room shape, temperature, lighting and humidity. This relates to being able to control and shift the conference venue's ambience to the associations' needs, making it fit their theme, which has been considered important in past studies (Whitfield 2009b). Since different associations desire different themes, it may be challenging for a conference venue to offer the required environment and ambience, unless it has the functionality to adapt. Nonetheless this study revealed some requirements are difficult to satisfy unless these were planned-for during the venue's initial construction stages (see section 6.3.2.4). Additional technology to help control the venue environment can still be introduced, possibly with limitations, in older-type venues during refurbishments. Some venues may not be able to afford this investment, while in cases where this can be done, it might lead to an increase in price for conference organisers, as evidenced by the Delphi study results.

Seating comfort also emerged from this study as a contemporary expectation, which has not been covered in previous studies or reports. Providing seating options may help delegates choose their ideal seating since they spend long stretches sitting down. Venue planning also needs to consider acoustic requirements and include modern audio-visual technology, an element that is becoming a pre-requisite. The availability of in-house audio-

visual systems is attractive to conference organisers, as it removes renting costs due to third-party supplier. The infrastructure required to provide this service is linked to basic technology needs, which have already been discussed and are dependent mostly on Wi-Fi and power supplies. Destinations, through their institutions, may also guide and fund the right projects of refurbishments and construction of conference centres, in line with the toolkits' suggestions.

7.2.3.1.4 The Conference organiser's input

The association, acting as the conference organiser, is mainly responsibly to ensure the conference offers networking opportunities. Networking has been confirmed as one of the main motivators behind delegate conference attendance, from both the delegates' questionnaire (see section 6.2.3.4) and the Delphi study (see section 6.3.3.6). This study has also shown networking influences the delegates' preference to physically travel to a conference rather than attend virtually, confirming similar findings of previous studies (Hixson 2012; Mair et al. 2018).

The Delphi study has uncovered several expectations related to networking, which include the need for environments and spaces at the conference venues that facilitate formal and informal networking. Venue space should therefore be designed to enhance networking opportunities. This also requires spaces at or adjacent to the venue, including food and beverages spaces or entertainment venues within proximity of the delegates' sessions or accommodation, all of which facilitate informal networking. Furthermore, the conference programme has to be designed with networking in mind, dedicating slots for formal networking, as well as ensuring that free time is available that can be utilised for informal networking and socialising. As association membership is based on a shared interest in a common topic, networking is easier between association delegates and can lead to improved career prospects. This boosts the delegate's interest, having shown that delegates seek personal benefits when attending conferences.

7.2.3.2 The factors contributing to a destination's competitive edge

The ACDVM outlined a second set of factors. This section deals with the factors that become important after the destination is shortlisted by the association (having satisfied the essential factors outlined in section 7.2.3.1). Competing with other shortlisted alternatives, associations will distinguish destinations based on their competitive edge. Several factors have been identified as contributors to this competitive edge, and these are included in the ACDVM. Though all factors contribute to the destination's conference tourism offer, the model distinguishes the factors by level of importance, based on the consensus of the stakeholder representatives in the Delphi study. The next sections will discuss these factors progressing from the least important to the most important factor.

7.2.3.2.1 Least important contributors to a destination's competitive edge

This study has identified the importance of a local conference tourism policy that is developed to improve the destination's competitiveness This offers the necessary focus to channel long-term efforts and investment in the conference sector, which improve the destination's chances of success (see section 6.3.1.3). Even though reference to policy makers in planning and executing conferences and events has been made in some studies (Bauer et al. 2008; Whitfield and Dioko 2012), the present study is the first to highlight this contribution to the destination's competitive edge. The study also identified the need of an unbiased body to guide progress in the sector by coordinating the different stakeholders' efforts according to the policy provided (discussed in section 6.3.1.2). The Delphi panellists admitted that individual stakeholders act fragmentally as they strive to serve their self-interests rather than those of the destination. Furthermore, conference tourism policy and success also depend on collaboration with other official institutions. Land use is one such area, whereby conference tourism requirements indicate that some destinations might need to develop new venues or extend available ones. Private entities would struggle to create relationships with governmental bodies.

Marketing strategies are dependent on official institutions' efforts. Creating a destination brand is important but maintaining it requires a holistic approach that is guided

by an unbiased institution. The creation of CVBs and DMOs usually act as the bodies that market a destination based on the policy developed (Wang 2008). Such bodies also represent the destination without and handle the process of information gathering and bidding, helping its local stakeholders to be better prepared and updated for the conference market (Wang and Krakover 2008; Baytok et al. 2010). Professional guidance to local bidders was also considered valuable by stakeholders (see section 6.3.1.2). This could include training and other possible support, which may be passed on to an association's local chapter with the intention of attracting the association's conference to the destination.

Linked with policy and development, stakeholder considered local government funding and investment to be important, which has also been included in the ACDVM. Holistic investment in the destination is required to ensure the destination stays relevant and competitive against emerging destinations. Investment is also required in the destination's USPs as main attraction elements (refer to section 6.3.1.4) and shall be discussed in section 7.2.3.2.4. Funding is also significant towards the local stakeholders' investment to address contemporary conference needs, as this study has also revealed that some expectations can only be met by suppliers when external funding is possible. Subventions can be utilised as motivators to associations, who admitted in this study that these influence their destination shortlisting process (see section 6.3.7.2.4). Nonetheless, this study also revealed that stakeholders acknowledged that subventions cannot be a long-term solution, and this is in line with previous studies (Dioko and Whitfield 2015), meaning a destination needs to plan according to its available resources. The study identified further mechanisms that can motivate investment in the conference tourism sector and might be easier to sustain in the long term, such as reduced taxes on suppliers' investments within the sector and tax rebates. These have also been proposed in previous studies (Crouch and Weber 2002).

This study reconfirmed the importance of safety-related factors. While general safety at the destination was considered more important and will discussed in section 7.2.3.2.4, this study has highlighted a specific factor considered important in improving the destination's safety image – the police and medical authorities' emergency response time and support levels at the destination. This factor was controversial because, while delegates did not rank it highly in the delegates' questionnaire, the discussions during the Delphi study contradicted this, finally confirming that response time was in fact considered important. The reason

behind the disagreement could be related to delegates' responses being based only on personal experiences and self-interest as shown in the Delphi study, while the conference venue and associations were aware that they would possibly be held responsible in cases of emergency.

The model also emphasises the importance of overcoming language barriers. This has rarely been covered in past literature, except in the pilot study by Ngamsom and Beck (2000), where it was considered an inhibitor to conference attendance, and some other occasional mentions (Rowe 2018). This study recognised the importance of this factor as some stakeholders, such as the association, are required to communicate frequently with the various suppliers at the destination, having remarked that past experience exposed the importance of this factor (see section 6.3.2.5). Therefore facilitating communication through a common language is suggested to attract associations to a destination or supplier. On the other hand, once delegates are at the conference, staff are also expected to be able to communicate with the guests in at least one common language. The venues are responsible to identify a possible language through which their staff can communicate with most of the delegates, and ensure their staff are able to communicate in that language. This also relates to the importance given to staff training, discussed in section 7.2.3.1.2.

A previously unrecognised factor was identified as a contributor to a conference venue and destination's competitive edge – good quality coffee. For the first time this study showed how stakeholders believed good quality coffee enhances visitor experience. While this factor might be underestimated, the Delphi study indicated that it may contribute to negative feedback.. This study outlines how a positive conference experience might not be enough to satisfy delegates' contemporary expectations, as these are seeking memorable and irreplaceable experiences (see section 6.3.4.1), in line with recent literature and industry reports underlining the delegates' expectation of a compelling experience (Gilmore 2015). (). This goes beyond the programme happening inside the conference centre, and extends to any added activities or attractions outside of the conference centre (Ryan et al. 2008), aiming to produce an immersive experience for the delegates (Oates 2017; CWT Meetings and Events 2019). Therefore, the priority of conference organisers has shifted towards providing such experience (American Express Meetings and Events 2019), which is considered memorable if it cannot be replicated. Stakeholders, therefore, suggested that to achieve this

the destination or the conference needed to offer unique characteristics. This can be facilitated by giving conference organisers access to destination's unique cultural spots. Alternatively, financial aid can help enhance an environment, making the experience exclusive. Investing in providing uniqueness for a destination can also be used as a marketing tool to attract future conferences.

7.2.3.2.2 Less important contributors to a destination's competitive edge

While destination accessibility has been classified as an essential factor and was discussed in section 7.2.3.1, this study identified another specific factor related to accessibility: the visa application process. This study confirmed that a smooth visa application process improves a destination's competitive level, in line with the findings in previous studies (Zhang et al. 2007; Marais et al. 2017; Cró and Martins 2018; Tsui et al. 2018; UIA 2018). Two ways to improve this have also been suggested: providing clear guidance and information related to the visa application process and having an efficient application process that is not too bureaucratic and can therefore be carried out in a short period of time. These make a destination more attractive to associations, who, as the conference organisers, are frequently burdened with visa application-related issues (see section 6.3.1.1).

The destination's image and reputation in terms of hospitality and service have also emerged as very influential in conference tourism and have been included in the ACDVM. The importance of this factor is expected since attraction to a destination depends on their image of that place (Leisen 2001). The Delphi study confirmed that associations are influenced by online information about a destination, and that this should be managed accordingly by the destination as a strong marketing tool (see section 6.3.1.2). Managing perceptions is important as most decision-makers take decisions based on their opinion (ICCA 2019b). The level of hospitality also helps towards making a destination more welcoming and attractive, and providing media coverage of the destination's community, sense of pride and hospitality contributes to establish this image. This requires an image of friendliness and tolerance, which is potentially achieved through education at the destination and public relations. It also depends on the hospitality of the host community, which is essential to allow international delegations to feel comfortable (Crouch and Weber 2002; Jago and Deery 2005; Zhang et al. 2007). Nonetheless, for the destination to be a credible

conference host option, it also needs to showcase itself as a conference destination. Using its history of hosting conferences as proof of its ability, the destination can establish itself in the conference market (Mackellar 2006; Lee 2006; Chiu and Ananzeh 2012). Stakeholders confirmed that when a destination achieves the image of a successful conference host, this image will help attract further conference tourism.

Catering also emerged as an important factor in the study. Stakeholders emphasised the increased expectation in relation to catering for diverse needs. The increase in demand for healthy food was acknowledged, confirming that this is not considered an option anymore but an expectation that venues need to adapt to, even if this leads to higher costs (see section 6.3.3.4). Similarly, venues are expected to cater for diversity, including dietary requirements and cultural and religious expectations. This factor is thus a decision influencer as members' diversity has to be accommodated.

An emerging additional important factor was the need for a flexible venue space, making it easy for the organiser to switch layouts, , which this study has shown to be increasingly popular for fast-paced conference programmes. While academic literature has rarely referred to the importance of flexibility, it has emerged as increasingly important in recent industry reports (ICCA 2019b; IACC 2020; MPI 2020). Flexibility also allows increased opportunity for interactive set-ups, which delegates in this study have indicated as an important demand (see section 6.3.3.7). Besides, the more flexible the venue set-up the higher the possibility to address the theme requested by the conference organisers (MPI 2020), which this study also confirmed to be important (see section 6.3.2.1).

The necessity to overcome the language barrier re-emerged, this time in relation to the need for translation equipment. This strengthens the importance of ease of communication; identified in relation to conference organisers' communicating with suppliers (discussed in section 7.2.3.2.1). The model therefore highlights the importance of this newly emerging factor, rarely discussed in past studies. Nonetheless, stakeholders argued that the availability need does not relate only to physical translation equipment, but also to the necessity of finding skilled translators in the languages required, which might be challenging (discussed in section 6.3.2.4).

Proximity also emerged once again, this time relating to the distance between the conference venue and interesting spots. As the conference centre remains the venue where delegates spend most of their time, its proximity to interesting spots makes it more attractive. This is because it facilitates the inclusion of visits to interesting sites in the official programme, helping organisers enhance their conference package. It also allows delegates to visit these sites individually during their free time. Associations have suggested that they may therefore use attractions as added value when marketing the conference (see section 6.3.1.6). Proximity has emerged as a constant requirement in this study. Perception is influential, and therefore when distance is difficult to avoid an improved transportation network helps decrease travel time and improve perception of proximity. The increased importance of vicinity may be related to the strong time constraints and safety concerns referred to in this study. This also makes proximity one of the new factors that destinations need to consider in their conference planning and marketing, creating a package comprising the attractions and conference-related facilities by marketing an area rather than a venue and adding value to the offer.

Furthermore, while the need for a strong link between the conference and accommodation venues was discussed in section 7.2.3.1.2, this requirement culminated in the high interest shown in purpose-built integrated conference centres. This factor was considered important in the delegates' questionnaire (see section 6.2.3.12) and was reconfirmed in the Delphi study. This study highlighted the competitive edge offered by integrated specialised venues, as stakeholders remarked that these would be designed with most conference requirements in mind, thus increasing the chances of addressing all delegate and conference organisers' requirements. The right conference venues have always been regarded as important during decision making (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fenich 2001; Crouch and Weber 2002; Bernini 2009; Oral and Whitfield 2010; Huo 2014), and integrated facilities are increasing in popularity (Whitfield and Dioko 2012; Donaldson 2013). Purpose-built conference centres fulfil nearly all the proximity requirements that emerged in this study as challenges related to distance and travel-time are removed once all the facilities are available within the same complex. Nonetheless, unless a purpose-built venue is already available, a big initial investment is required for its development. Emerging destinations may in fact suffer from a scarcity of necessary financial resources to develop these services (Omerzel 2011; Alananzeh et al. 2019). This study has also shown that when an investment

is made, especially by private business, it requires a guaranteed return to sustain it (possibly influencing client prices), and frequently requires the support and funding of public institutions. Furthermore, when integrated venues include all services required by delegates, destinations risk to benefit less from delegates' spend; rarely requiring to travel outside of the conference centre and therefore spending more at the venue and less at the destination.

Green credentials are now an increasing concern as the Delphi study has highlighted their contribution to destination's competitiveness. Green credentials and their importance was mostly raised by associations, the conference venues and the conference bureaus in this study, showing their heightened awareness of this factor (see section 6.3.2.6). Nonetheless, a significant minority of delegates had also admitted their concern about the issue (as shown in section 6.2.3.17). As sensitivity increases, especially amongst associations, conference venues are required to introduce green measures in order to be attractive. This factor can be addressed by introducing green certification to venues based on their achieved level of sustainability, also increasing the attractiveness of both the venue and the destination (Park and Boo 2010; Turner 2019), and which sometimes also form part of the association's bidding requirements and need to be fulfilled.

7.2.3.2.3. Important contributors to a destination's competitive edge

The ACDVM includes two factors within its middle level of importance. The first is concerned with technology ranging from the most basic availability of Wi-Fi (see sections 6.3.2.4 and 6.3.6.3) to the hybrid technology expected by the conference organiser in order to impress the delegates. Stakeholders have shown that they give more importance to technology with which they are familiar. Reference was made to social media, which delegates expect to feature in conferences (see section 6.3.6.2). This shows that the technology that delegates and decision-makers are accustomed to has now become an important conference pillar rather than an innovative driving force (Oates 2017). Nonetheless, expectations for newer technology are also increasing, as the Delphi study showed an increased reference to tools such as virtual reality to enhance the conference experience.

Conference organisers seek an increase in the use of innovative technology, but this cannot be done without costly conference venue support and infrastructure (discussed in

section 6.3.6.2). Conversely, the conference venue might find it challenging to support technology, but third-party suppliers can resolve this issue by outsourcing technology, although this increases costs. This study has revealed that associations prefer venues with in-house availability as they are keen to avoid rental costs (as discussed in section 6.3.6.2). Stakeholders also agreed that at the conference venue constant technical support is expected.

The other factor relates to venues' accessibility catering for all delegates' needs. Even though destination accessibility has been widely covered in literature (discussed in section 7.2.3.1.1), previous studies did not highlight the importance of accessibility at the conference and accommodation venues themselves. This factor emerges in this study, as all stakeholders agreed that venues need to cater for diversity and disability, highlighting the importance of this factor with associations confirming that this is a set requirement (see section 6.3.3.4).

7.2.3.2.4. Very important contributors to a destination's competitive edge

Safety was repeatedly confirmed as a top priority, both in the delegates' questionnaire and the Delphi study. A destination's image of safety was indicated as influential towards site-selection, without which a destination would not be able to attract conference tourism (see section 6.3.5.3). Safety is a conventionally important factor covered in several studies and industry reports (Fenich 2001; Choi and Boger 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; CWT Meetings and Events 2019; Turner 2019). The importance of this factor can fluctuate depending on external circumstances and can become the single most important factor in determining the exclusion of a destination if an association feels that there is any element of risk (section 6.3.5.3). This is akin to the findings in past studies, whereby a destination is removed from the list of options until it is considered safe again (Baytok et al. 2010; Avraham 2015). Stakeholders also confirmed that time could be required for a return to attractivity if any instability occurs. This also reflected case studies referred to by this study, such as Istanbul (discussed in section 3.3.3). Furthermore, stakeholders agreed that a destination's image may be impacted by threats at neighbouring countries. This influences the view of associations on the whole region to be equally unsafe if perceived to be too 'close' to the affected area (discussed in section 6.3.5.3). This reflected the arguments in literature that any incident within a geographical region enforces the negative image of the region even if crises occur

in just one country within the area (Sonmez 1998; Taylor 2006). The panellists suggested that destinations need to invest in managing conference organisers' perception of the destination' level of safety. Accurate and up-to-date positive information and advice from official sources at the destination may help in outlining the potential exposure of a conference (CWT Meetings and Events 2019), as stakeholders agreed a destination can use such information to reduce possible prejudice.

The importance of available information about the destination has also emerged as an important factor in this study. Both delegates and associations admitted that information available about a destination is considered useful and influential in their decision process (see sections 6.2.3.16 and 6.3.3.3 respectively). While this factor has not been specifically highlighted in past literature, it has been considered part of the site-selection process for both the associations (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; discussed in section 4.1.2) and the delegates, who require information prior to selecting the conferences they wish to attend (Mair and Thompson 2009; discussed in section 4.2.2). Stakeholders have shown that information about a destination that is available online will guide their perception on that destination, and thus destinations should promote their USPs to gain a competitive advantage. This study also underlines the importance of information on how to travel to the destination, which should be made available from official sources. Stakeholders remarked that unless information is official, associations and delegates might not trust it. Available tourism information can also motivate extended stays by delegates (Davidson 2003). The conference organiser is responsible to ensure information related to the conference itself, with registration and programme being either easily available or sent to delegates in advance. This information and that on the destination has also been shown to contribute towards a smooth conference experience, which is a delegates' expectation and an essential part of the memorable experience that both the destination and the association aim to offer.

The third factor amongst the very important factors relates to the destination's cultural heritage. Stakeholders claimed that cultural heritage is a destination's USP and can contribute to the destination's competitive edge (see section 6.3.1.4). As the number of competing conference destinations are increasing, especially with new destinations entering the market, unique characteristics help to distinguish a destination from its competitors. The cultural element has not been specifically highlighted in previous studies, but it has been

referred to or included as part of a wider set of attractions (Ngamsom and Beck 2000; Kang et al. 2005; Baloglu and Love 2005). This study is therefore elevating the importance of cultural heritage, as one of the tools that can be utilised to improve a destination's competitiveness. Places associated with cultural heritage benefit from an image that is attractive to both delegates and organisers (Bernini 2009). Visiting and experiencing the cultural heritage present also contributes to an exclusive experience for delegates which is not replicable at other destinations as these do not possess the same heritage. This makes the destination attractive to organisers, who are increasingly under pressure to offer a memorable experience that cannot be replicated.

7.2.3.2.5 The most important contributor to a destination's competitive edge

This study has revealed that the most important contributor to a destination's competitive edge is the availability of a wide range of available accommodation. This finding supports literature that claims that the availability and standard of accommodation is a requirement to host conferences (Opperman and Chon 1997, Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Zhang et al. 2007, Fenich 2001, Crouch and Weber 2002; Bernini 2009). The stakeholders argued that associations request that all delegates can be accommodated within the same location, or within proximity to each other. This is in line with Crouch et al. (2019) who found that conference organisers place a premium on being able to accommodate all or as many delegates as possible at the same site.

This study also revealed that available accommodation is only considered when it satisfies a minimum quality standard. The delegates considered three-star standards and higher to be ideal (see section 6.2.3.9), while some stakeholders in the Delphi study preferred four-star options. Other associations admitted they were more interested in budget accommodation, confirming that a range of options is necessary to remain relevant for different association conferences (section 6.3.2.3). The increased demand for self-catering apartments emerged in the Delphi study as it was revealed that delegates were accustomed to use booking platforms such as Airbnb. Hostels were also considered a significant option as it has emerged that some cohorts of delegates and some associations prefer this accommodation type.

Associations and the conference destination decision-makers are aware that delegates require flexibility with accommodation options since delegate budgets vary. Accommodation budget is important since it is one of the biggest expenses related to the conference trip (Mair 2010; Mair et al. 2018). Ease of booking, possible through trusted online booking systems or from the conference organiser's suggested portals, was also counted upon (see section 6.3.2.1), with past studies confirming that a smooth and safe booking experience is expected (Ryan et al. 2008; Chatzigeorgiou et al. 2017). This study also exposed the importance of authentic local accommodation in the destination's accommodation offer, with stakeholders believing that this too could be part of a wider unique conference experience.

When associations are required to include lodging in the conference package, accommodation options become more relevant as these will influence the association's total organisational cost. As associations are bound to offer conference packages at restricted rates and with accommodation cost being one of the main contributors to the package cost, they will naturally seek destinations that offer options that fit their budgets. This re-confirms the need for a range of accommodation venue options as indicated from this study and included in the conference destination toolkit.

7.3 The Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit

The factors discussed in section 7.2.3 were also presented in the CCDT, which is presented as Appendix 14. The CCDT was developed to guide practitioners in terms of the requirements outlined in the ACDVM. The toolkit summarises the study's most relevant pieces of information, aiming to make this knowledge useful to a non-academic audience. It highlights the reasons behind the high interest in conference tourism, including its high revenue, benefits to a range of local industries, contribution to the destination's embellishment, the possibility of consolidating a total tourism offer, reducing seasonality and acting as an image enhancer for the destination. The toolkit also outlines the different stakeholders involved in the conference destination decision-making process, namely the association, the delegate, the destinations, the conference bureau, the conference venue, the accommodation venue and other local and international suppliers. Furthermore, it

distinguishes the delegate and the association as the clients within this process, while it identifies the other stakeholders as suppliers.

Subsequently, the CCDT offers an overview of the decision-making process, describing how destinations are initially shortlisted, before the conference host destination is eventually selected. The process suggested by the ACDVM is included within the toolkit, albeit simplified and in a more visual format. The toolkit then distinguishes between the essential factors; required for a destination to be shortlisted, and the factors contributing to the destination's competitive edge; which become important once the shortlisting stage is overcome. It highlights how these two sets of factors are linked to the decision-making process, and outlines 'how to get your destination shortlisted' and subsequently, 'how to stand out' if the destination is shortlisted. This guides the destination to prioritise its efforts and address the essential factors first. The toolkit presents each factor, listed under its headline (essential or competitive), including short descriptions to support destinations in their attempt to improve their offer. This serves as a checklist for destinations and practitioners, to help them address each set of factors.

The toolkit also includes a self-audit questionnaire, motivating destinations to evaluate their standing *vis-a-vis* the essential and the important factors for conference tourism. This makes it possible for the destination to evaluate its standing in terms of both sets of factors. The CCDT also guides the destination on whether, depending on the score achieved, the destination stands a positive chance to be selected or shortlisted, or else would need to apply more improvements possibly requiring planning and investment. This exercise also helps a destination to identify which factors require most attention, and offers the opportunity for it to monitor its competitiveness over a period of time by completing the self-audit questionnaire, while also monitoring its score with further investments to improve its offer. The contribution of the CCDT is outlined in section 8.2.4.2.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the contemporary factors that influence conference site-selection, and which act as the foundation of the ACDVM and the CCDT. The decision-making process is complex and demanding to understand, making it difficult to plan and invest

correctly. The ACDVM clarifies the decision-making process, showing how internal association factors as well as external factors influence the decision. It also proposes the two-stepped process in decision making, which shows that an initial set of essential factors help a destination to progress to the final pool of options. The second set of factors, which are also presented in the model, contribute to the destination's competitive edge. These are presented in levels of importance. The development of the model addressed the fourth research objective, as it identifies the characteristics required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism, while it also addresses the study's main aim. Having identified all the contemporary factors influencing the destination decision, it was recognised that the amount of information needed to be condensed into a practical version in order to allow destinations and industry practitioners to make us of it. The CCDT was therefore developed and is presented in Appendix 14. This is in line with the fifth and final objective of this study. This offered an instrument that enable destinations to evaluate their current association conference tourism offer, and act as guidance to improve their position within this competitive market. The ACDVM and the CCDT are discussed in sections 8.2.4 and 8.2.5 respectively, and their contribution explained in sections 8.3 and 8.4.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study explored the contemporary factors that influence conference destination decision-making, aiming to assist mature destinations rejuvenation by diversifying into this sector Influential factors have been investigated from individual stakeholders' points of view (Ryan et al. 2008; Mair 2010; Whitfield et al. 2012; Ramirez et al. 2013; Hayat et al. 2014; Han and Hwang 2017; Mair et al. 2018) while some studies incorporated the views of more than one stakeholder (Kang et al. 2005; Yoo and Chon 2008). Literature lacked research that identified these factors while reflecting the experience and concerns of all the stakeholders in the conference tourism sector. This study explored this collective perspective and outlined and analysed which factors are considered essential and important for a destination to become a successful association conference host. This knowledge was utilised to develop the Association Conference Destination Viability Model (ACDVM), whereby all factors were presented. Further to contributing to the body of knowledge, these findings are also invaluable to destinations and practitioners, enabling identification of such factors to improve their attractiveness in a highly competitive conference tourism market (DiPietro et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2010b; Hussain et al. 2014). This is essential to mature destinations who, as discussed in Section 2.4 are suffering from consequences after having their tourism product reaching a maturity and decline stage, and are thus eager to rejuvenate by means of introducing new tourism products such as conference tourism. To guide destinations, especially mature ones, in successfully diversifying into conference tourism, the study's findings were also developed into a Competitive Conference Destination (CCD) Toolkit.

8.2 Findings

The study was successful in achieving its aim and identifying the factors considered important for a mature destination to become a successful conference destination. Furthermore, the five objectives outlined within the research were all addressed; the findings relating to each will now be summarised.

8.2.1 Objective 1: To critically review the potential of conference tourism in contributing to a mature destination's rejuvenation

This study identified similarities between destinations, products and brands, all of which indicate a lifecycle leading to a point of maturity and possible decline, unless action is taken to change this course. Turning this situation around and rejuvenate was identified as the most desirable course of action, rather than allowing further degeneration and decline (Farsari et al. 2007; Solomon 2015). Nonetheless destinations may be oblivious to the reality that their tourism product is not as attractive as it was in the past, leading to lack of action. Causes and characteristics of declining destinations were therefore outlined and were usually linked to the lack of a long-term vision and planning, which reflected in consequences at a later stage when it is more difficult for a destination to change its course of action. Excessive tourist numbers frequently exceeded the destination's economic, social, environmental and physical capacity (Samora-Arvela et al. 2020). Market shifts also make the mature destination's tourism offer less attractive (Butler 2012); consumption trends have shifted towards individualistic and specialised holidays and away from the homogenous offer associated with mass tourism, which lacks USPs (Brandão et al. 2019). Decline in market share is accelerated by emerging destinations (Perles Ribes et al. 2012), as mature destinations are inflexible, offering an easily replaceable homogenous product (da Silva et al. 2018). This also leads to increased dependence on intermediaries to attract visitors, whereby bigger profit margins than those offered by competing destinations are required for collaboration (Clavé et al. 2015). This dependence is exacerbated by a lack of diversification of the mature destination's tourism product, making it easier to substitute (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez

2000; Kozak et al. 2010). These characteristics cause a decrease in the cost-benefit ratio for tourism business at the destination (Aguiló et al. 2003), which is frequently accentuated by high seasonality and demand fluctuations over the year (Alshuqaiqi and Omar 2019). This causes long periods of unemployment (Cuccia and Rizzo 2011), and increased dependence on unskilled staff lacking motivation and knowledge to work in tourism (Gregoric 2014).

By evaluating literature, the study also successfully identified several preconditions necessary to achieve rejuvenation, including the destination's willingness to recognise decline and act upon it, changing its course of action even if it was successful in the past (Schmalleger et al. 2011). Nonetheless, continual renovation and upgrading of the destination, and the introduction of higher-category establishments, are also critical to improve the destination's image (Farsari et al. 2007; Baidal et al. 2013). Renovation of general local infrastructure may also be needed (Müller et al. 2010), together with environmental enhancements and maintenance of public resources (Farsari et al. 2007; Hernández et al. 2015). To safeguard this, incoming tourists also need to respect the destination's 'desired conditions' (Kallis and Coccossis 2004). Furthermore, the introduction of development and marketing strategies to address the destination's rejuvenation also required the support of stakeholders (Aydin and Aksoz 2020) Santos et al. 2014; Simeoni et al 2019), comprising private and public efforts (Butler 1980, Martini and Buffa 2015).

Examining various rejuvenation strategies, diversification was acknowledged as the most ideal since it constitutes the benefits of most other alternative strategies. Furthermore, conference tourism was confirmed as a sector that has all the required characteristics to counter-act a mature destination's negative attributes, thus confirming its potential to contribute to a mature destination's rejuvenation when included as part of a diversification strategy. This also confirmed the necessity of this study's effort into understanding more about how destinations successfully attract association conferences, which are important and of high interest to mature destinations.

8.2.2 Objective 2: To critically examine and evaluate the factors influencing association conference tourism decision-making.

Decision-making processes - from both academic and industrial perspectives (Crouch and Ritchie 1998; Fawzy and Samra 2008; ICCA 2019b) - were compared. Identifying the more detailed and recent contribution emerging from the industry, this study adopted and adapted ICCA's (2019b) site-selection decision-making process for associations. Utilising industry reports to complement academic literature led the study to identify further association decision-making stages related to consultation, analysis and recommendation of destination options. It also introduced a minimum requirements stage, where destinations were assessed according to their fulfilment of several precondition. The main stakeholders in conference tourism were identified as: the conference agency, conference planner, delegate (Var et al. 1985), host location, association (frequently also being the conference planner) (Opperman and Chon 1997), conference centres, conference bureaus, and local governmental (Jago and Deery 2005).

The research also outlined the site-related factors identified in academic literature, which were supplemented with the factors listed in industry reports (BCD Meetings and Events 2017; American Express Meetings and Events 2019; BCD Travel 2019; CWT Meetings and Events 2019; Destinations International 2019; Turner 2019; ICCA 2019b; MPI 2020; IACC 2020). Reviewing the most recent industry reports on the topic allowed this study to identify emerging factors that had not been previously discussed in academic literature, most of which were eventually confirmed as highly influential in site-selection. These included the high level flexibility of conference venues (MPI 2020); availability of audio-visual and production set-ups to avoid outsourcing by the association (CWT Meetings and Events 2019); venue temperature crowd sourcing by attendees (CWT Meetings and Events 2019); social responsibility (American Express Meetings and Events 2019); the importance of perception over reality (ICCA 2019b); accurate up-to-date information prior to arrival (CWT Meetings and Events 2019); the digital dependence of delegates and its contemporary consequences and expectations related to digital integration (Turner 2019); the use of innovative tools to boost engagement, networking and overall conference experience (CWT Meetings and Events 2019); the importance of social media (Destinations

International 2019); augmented reality (CWT Meetings and Events 2019); and digital security (BCD Meetings and Events 2017; Turner 2019). Besides identifying new factors, industry reports also embraced contemporary opinions and updates on how traditional factors and their related expectations have evolved.

The study confirmed the more conventional site-related factors required to attract conference tourism including the right conference facilities (Bernini 2009; Oral and Whitfield 2010; Huo 2014); availability and standard level of accommodation (Crouch and Weber 2002; Bernini 2009); destination accessibility (Park et al 2014; Ying 2017); costs in attending a conference (Ying 2017; Skinner 2017) especially in the case of association delegates (Mair and Thompson 2009; Ramirez et al. 2013); the provision of a 'total convention product' (Clark 2006); the destination's image and reputation (Zhang et al. 2007; Girod 2009; Marques and Santos 2016); desirable climate (Zhang et al. 2007 Park et al. 2014); local support related to the community's hospitality (Jago and Deery 2005; Zhang et al. 2007); and financial support through subventions (UIA 2018) and incentives (Crouch and Weber 2002) and leisure facilities (Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Hanly 2011; Marais et al. 2017). Safety and security was also considered important in choice location (Zhang et al. 2007; CWT Meetings and Events 2019; Turner 2019).

By addressing this objective, the deficit between academic literature and industry reports was identified and this research sought to rectify this gap. The delegate's choice to attend a conference has been widely researched in academic literature but most studies are rather dated thus missing key contemporary elements that influence delegates' decisions, as indicated in industry reports. By reviewing industry reports, this study updated the available knowledge on conference decision-making, which served as the base for primary research to bridge further gaps in knowledge, as required by the third objective.

8.2.3 Objective 3: To critically examine and evaluate different stakeholders' perspectives on factors influencing the selection of conference sites and to identify the most significant site characteristics.

This objective led to the identification of contemporary factors influencing site-selection. A questionnaire was undertaken to address the contemporary factors influencing delegates'

conference attendance, while a Delphi study evaluated site-selection factors that are influential to all stakeholders in conference tourism. The data collected from the questionnaire and the Delphi study was a main contributor to academic knowledge.

8.2.3.1 Contemporary factors influencing delegates' conference attendance

The questionnaire outlined the delegates' contemporary needs. The factors tested by the questionnaire for importance were derived from past studies, industry reports and the author's experience. This created an extensive list of 144 factors, most of which were not previously identified in academic literature. In fact, while the findings of the questionnaire confirmed the importance of some traditional factors, important new ones also emerged, adding to knowledge.

The study revealed that Wi-Fi was the most important factor for delegates, but power supplies also emerged as a newly important factor. The delegates' dependence on social media was also exposed, as these considered the lack of access as a very important barrier. This topic has rarely been considered in academic literature but was listed in industry reports (Davidson and Turner 2017; BCD Travel 2019).

Time constraints emerged as important especially when related to work, which was in line with past research (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Comas and Moscardo 2005; Ramirez et al. 2013). Nonetheless the questionnaire findings revealed the delegates' increased expectations for a suitable environment that facilitated their work needs during the conference stay. As expected, career-related factors also ranked high amongst motivators, and included developing new skills, opportunity to work across culture; education improvement, career enhancement and developing the delegates' international reputation. This exposed the intention of most delegates attending conferences to improve their career prospects, confirming the relevance of previous research (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Jago and Deery. 2005, Severt et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2007; Bauer et al. 2008; Yoo and Chon 2008; 2010; Mair and Thompson 2009). On the other hand, this research challenged the argument made by Yoo and Chon (2010) that the importance of professional and educational opportunities changes over time as delegates' situations change, since the questionnaire's

response indicated that all respondents considered this important, irrelevant of their demographics. Delegates also highlighted the importance of networking; however the questionnaire introduced a factor related to socialisation and the informal side of networking, which was also confirmed as important. Delegates' expectations regarding networking were shown to have increased from the findings, as new factors such as the right networking environment and spaces at the conference venue and accommodation venue emerged as important.

Other conventionally important factors were reconfirmed as important, such as conference topic and conference programme (Mair 2010; Yoo and Zhao 2010; Tanford et al. 2012) and costs, especially related to accommodation and conference registration. Nonetheless, the questionnaire revealed that while delegates are highly motivated for having their travel expenses covered, partial discounts are much less attractive. Accommodation accessibility remained highly important, while the need of specialised venues was also highly regarded and in line with past studies (Whitfield et al. 2012; Donaldson 2013). In the questionnaire three-star accommodation or better was considered important, as also the proximity between conference and accommodation venue.

The questionnaire's findings indicate cleanliness and hygiene as significant, with their importance increasing when comparing with past studies (Dwyer and Kim 2003, Wan 2011; Jago and Deery 2005) which were always considered underlying expectations. An increased concern for terrorism threats emerged from the questionnaire, which also showed that delegates are negatively influenced when terrorism occurs in neighbouring territories of the conference destination. This increased concern also emerged in recent industry reports. Conversely, findings relating to leisure contradicted past research (Bernini 2009; Hanly 2011 Tretyakevich and Maggi 2011; Marais et al. 2017), as this study's findings revealed that delegates did not consider leisure highly on their rank list.

The questionnaire's findings highlighted the importance of delegates' experience and personal characteristics and circumstances in their conference-attendance decisions. The study's results on how personal health (which was considered important) influenced attendance, revealed a variety of responses across the respondents' sample, indicating that different opinions reflected different delegate circumstances. This could also suggest why this factor's importance was inconsistent in different studies (Rittichainuwat et al. 2001; Yoo

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and Chon 2008; Mair 2018). Similarly, findings related to family obligations reflected a range of different opinions, linked to the delegates' circumstances. The study further revealed delegates' loyalty and commitment to their association, as they confirmed that attendance is influenced by their interest to get involved with the association, in organising the conference, in influencing its future direction, in participating in its internal elections, and by experience at past conferences organised by the association. These factors showed that associations are strong in motivating their members to attend conferences.

Destination-related factors did not emerge as especially influential. Most important was accessibility to and within the destination (in line with past academic reports and past studies such as Crouch and Weber 2002; Mair and Thompson 2009; Horváth 2011; Davidson and Turner 2017) and the motivation to see the destination for the first time and its cultural and historical attractions were considered of high importance. On the other hand, the findings differed from past research by indicating that climate was not important. Finally, the study showed that while delegates stated it made a difference to them if the conference is held in a green destination, environmental-related factors were relatively unimportant. Analysing the range of responses opinions varied greatly, showing that while pro-environmental behaviour existed it was not a majority preference.

The questionnaire also served as the foundation for the second stage of primary research – the Delphi study. Seven important themes were derived from the questionnaire: the destination, conference and accommodation venue, delegate demands and needs, conference experience, safety, technology, and the future of conferences. These themes shaped the Delphi research.

8.2.3.2 Contemporary factors considered influential by all stakeholders

The Delphi study identified important factors that had not emerged in previous research (including the delegates' questionnaire). These include good coffee and trained staff that constantly smile. This shows that minor factors may still influence significantly the delegates' experience . Factors not previously given their due importance thus emerged and have been included in the model. These include: proximity, staff service that constantly smile, hygiene, memorable experiences, local authority policies, medical and police

response times, language barriers prior and during the conference, the quality of coffee, green credentials, food options to cater for diversity, flexible conference space, in-built technology, disability accessibility, cultural heritage and information on the destination. While some of these factors had been previously identified in academic research, they were not given the attention that this study confirms they merit. Most had not been tested in terms of their level of importance, while others were completely overlooked. This confirms the findings have contributed to bridge the gap between academic research and industry reports by updating both bodies of knowledge with the contemporary factors as approved by all stakeholders.

The study also underlined the importance of several conventional factors , such as destination accessibility, costs, leisure facilities, total conference product at the destination, Wi-Fi, comfort at the conference venue, networking, purpose-built conference centres, easy visa process, destination quality image and image as a conference host, safety and the need for a variety of accommodation options. While significance was retained, changes were also noted within the study identifying fluctuations in the way each factor is perceived. This is reflected, for example, in expectations such as the total control of the conference venue environment, and the way in which networking is to be facilitated.

The findings from the Delphi study affirmed those of the questionnaire, in which climate was not considered an important factor, unlike findings of previous researchers(Crouch and Weber 2002; Zhang et al. 2007; Park et al. 2014) . Conversely, some Delphi findings contradicted the results of the questionnaire, highlighting the difference in opinion between delegates and the other stakeholders. These differences could also be identified as divergencies in opinions within the Delphi study itself. Green credentials were considered important by stakeholders, as the Delphi's findings cited the increasing awareness and expectations in this regard. Conversely, most delegates in the questionnaire had considered these factors to be less important. The wide variety of responses when addressing these factors in the questionnaire suggested that while most delegates did not consider green credentials as important, a significant minority were still concerned. The importance given by the other conference tourism stakeholders confirmed that this topic remained important in destination selection.

The importance that delegates gave to their personal experiences was in fact revealed in the Delphi study. More importance was given to past experience at a conference organised by the same association or a prior travelling experience at a destination, than a destination's general reputation as a successful conference destination. This contrasted with the perspective of other stakeholders. Similarly, while delegates were not concerned about language barriers of staff and service providers, they expected high quality customer care service. The other stakeholders were aware that this would not be possible if a language barrier existed. Thus, while delegates only identified what would directly influence their stay, the other stakeholders, through their experience as suppliers, understood the prior requirements needed to satisfy delegates' expectations.

Similarly delegates perceived factors such as fast police and medical response time as less important in contrast with the rest of the stakeholders, where consensus was reached on the importance of this factor. The experience of conference organisers and conference venues that would have to handle emergency situations was highlighted in their opinion, while a delegate would not have any knowledge of such matters unless experiencing them first-hand. Similarly, regarding venue accessibility, delegates had shown a lack of significant consideration about disability access while the Delphi findings revealed that stakeholders identified mobility challenges as regular issues, highlighting and agreeing on the importance of accessibility to accommodate all delegates. This indicates that delegates' opinions were basically a reflection of personal experiences and interests. This self-interest bias reflected in the results of delegates' questionnaire, confirms results from previous similar studies concerned with the delegates' perspective. While factors offering benefits to delegates were considered important (educational and career benefits and reduction of costs), others more concerned with general benefits (such as the green credentials) or benefited others (disability access) struck a lower interest. This divergence in opinions and how opinions depend on the stakeholder's interest and experience stresses the importance of gaining all the stakeholders' perspectives thus avoiding a restricted response which risks being biased and exclusive.

8.2.4 Objective 4: To develop an *Association Conference Destination Viability Model* that can be utilised to identify which characteristics are required for a destination to become successful in attracting association conference tourism.

The study's primary findings were utilised to develop the ACDVM and the CCDT. The ACDVM (presented in figure 16) addressed the fourth objective of this research by presenting the characteristics required by destinations to become successful in attracting association conference tourism. This development of the model was also in line with the main aim of the study. The model highlights the study's contribution to academic knowledge, representing a detailed understanding of the factors that influence conference destination decision-making.

The factors influencing this process have emerged from this study, and developed through consensus with all the stakeholders in conference tourism. This holistic approach led to the identification of several factors that have either not been referred to in previous academic research or have only been lightly mentioned but have now been outlined in this study as contributors to the destination's conference offer. Several emerging factors proposed by panellists who represented different stakeholders whose perspective had not been previously studied, were included as new factors, contributing to the previous theories that existed in relation to association conference site-selection. The ACDVM can claim to present contemporary factors that update the body of knowledge; a reflection of how contemporary expectations and the dynamics between different stakeholder perspectives have shaped these requirements.

The study confirmed the importance of several conventional factors, such as destination accessibility, costs, leisure facilities, total conference product at the destination, Wi-Fi, comfort at the conference venue, networking, purpose-built conference centres, easy visa process, destination quality image and image as a conference host, safety and the need for a variety of accommodation options. While their importance was retained, this did not signify lack of change. On the contrary, the study identified variances in expectations, related to changes happening from both within and outside the conference tourism sector. This is reflected in expectations such as, for example, the total control of the conference venue

environment, and the way in which networking is to be facilitated. Furthermore, the increased importance of managing perception, and therefore the 'image' of the destination, has emerged in the model. This is because both associations as decision makers, as well as delegates, base their opinion on perception and available information. Improving and controlling perceptions as much as possible, especially via the media, has therefore become very important.

On the other hand factors such as proximity, staff service and ability to smile, hygiene, memorable experiences, local authority policies, medical and police response times, language barriers prior and during the conference, the quality of coffee, green credentials, food options to cater for diversity, flexible conference space, in-built technology, disability accessibility, cultural heritage and information on the destination, have emerged from this study, and have been included in the model. While some of these factors have been referred to in literature, they were not given the attention that this study confirms they merit. Most of these factors had not been tested in terms of their level of importance, while others were completely absent from literature. This confirms that the model has also bridged the gap that was identified between academic research and industry reports, by expanding both bodies of knowledge with the contemporary factors that have been approved by all stakeholders.

Nonetheless, it was recognised that the large amount of information presented might not be ideal for practitioners, motivating the development of the CCDT, offering guidance in a more practical manner. The toolkit was the fifth and final objective of this study.

8.2.5 Objective 5: To develop a *Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit* for destinations to enable the evaluation and improvement of their positioning in the association conference tourism market.

The CCDT addresses the fifth and final objective of the study. The toolkit, presented as Appendix 14, presents the same findings as the ACDVM in a different way as it addresses a different audience. The toolkit presents the research findings to destinations and practitioners, in a more compact and visually direct manner. This was necessary since the

large amount of information presented in the model and its explanation was not considered appropriate for practitioners, which required a more visual and streamlined summary of the new knowledge being presented.

The toolkit summarises the study's most relevant information, indicating why conference tourism is attractive, and outlining the stakeholders involved in the site-selection process, while identifying the association and delegate as the clients within the process. Furthermore, the CCDT offers an overview of the decision-making process, highlighting how destinations are initially shortlisted, prior to the conference host destination being selected. It also makes a clear distinction between the essential factors and those that bring about the competitive edge. Furthermore, the toolkit includes a self-audit questionnaire that offers a destination the opportunity to evaluate its strength according to the factors in each stage of the process. This serves as a checklist indicating which factors are most important, and thus helps identify if it is feasible for a destination to invest in association conference tourism, based on how far it is from being competitive in the market. The toolkit's contribution to practice is explained in section 8.4.

8.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in several ways. As per its objectives, it presents a comprehensive understanding of the conference site-selection decision-making process. Firstly, this research investigated the topic by studying both academic research and industry reports, aimed to address the knowledge deficit identified in academic literature. Such sources benefited the study and provided a fuller picture as industry reports are carried out regularly and are therefore mostly up to date. Furthermore, decision-making processes, such as those proposed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998) and Fawzy and Samra (2008), were compared and further supplemented by the process proposed by ICCA (2019b). This helped the present study to identify new requirements, such as the stage in the process when destinations are eliminated unless these satisfy a minimum level of requirements as set by the association. This study also confirmed where academic literature and industry reports converge in terms of factors that attract association conference tourism, while it also identified which factors had not been covered in academia but have been shown as highly

important from industry studies, and which have been summarised in section 8.2.2. This is evidence that this study has managed to complement areas such as those related to the decision-making process and site-related attributes, where most academic literature was not so recent, with current industry literature, thus offering a fuller picture of the process.

The study's main contribution, however, relates to its primary research. The delegates' questionnaire, the first data collection exercise of this study, tested 144 factors for importance. In order to contribute to the current academic body of knowledge, this study tested factors that did not only derive from previous studies, but also explored industry reports and made use of the author's extensive conference experience, to propose an updated list of factors to be tested, several of which were presented in academic studies for the first time.

This resulted in the emergence of new factors that are considered important by association conference delegates and which are summarised in section 8.2.3.1. These include the importance of power supplies, the delegates' dependence on social media, their expectations for an environment that facilitated their work needs even during the conference, the importance of informal networking, over and above the requirement of formal networking, as well as the expectation of specifically designed networking spaces. Furthermore, the findings in the questionnaire challenged previous findings related to the importance of leisure facilities and climate at the destination and presented an overall drop in importance of all destination-related factors. This new knowledge is essential for destinations competing in the association conference market, as it has a significant effect on destination strategies to attract association conference tourism. Personal factors also emerged as very important, as this study identified how delegates considered factors to be important, based on their personal experiences and circumstances.

Another major contribution relates to the findings of the Delphi study; the second data collection exercise of this study. This contribution emerged mostly due to the stakeholders represented and the method chosen to carry out the study, which had never been previously employed to study how factors influence conference decision-making. This study demonstrated the value and utility of the Delphi technique in identifying factors that can improve a destination's association conference tourism product. This technique was selected as this allows for a consensus to emerge automatically amongst the expert panellists without

the need for the researcher to select, and thus potentially prejudice the factors discussed. This study confirms the utility of such a technique to identify important factors within tourism sectors for any future research that aims to study numerous expert perspectives and based on the experts' consensus, propose guiding factors to help develop or understand tourism niches or sectors.

Furthermore, the Delphi research in this study was innovative in studying conference tourism as it presented a holistic perspective, found to be lacking in previous academic research. Information derived from the expertise and experience of all the stakeholders involved in the site-selection process was collected and analysed, leading towards a consensus on the importance of each factor. Previous studies had only identified site-selection factors that were important to a single or limited number of stakeholders, meaning that this Delphi study made a particularly original contribution. This also meant that the results of this method were, for the first time, backed by all the different stakeholder cohorts involved in association conference tourism decision-making, improving the credibility of its results and highlighting areas that were not covered in past studies. This holistic approach led to the identification of several factors that have either not been referred to in previous academic research or have only been lightly mentioned. These have now been outlined in this study as contributors to the destination's conference offer.

By analysing the Delphi study results, which allowed panellists to offer their opinion during its first round of open questions, this study has identified the changes in expectations relating to conventionally important factors influencing conference decision-making. These have mostly increased, and therefore reveals that what was confirmed as adequate in past studies, needs to be revisited. The Delphi study also reconfirmed the lack of importance related to climate at the destination, in line with the delegates' questionnaire results, and in contrast with past studies on the topic. Furthermore, it identifies how perceived minor factors do significantly influence the delegates' experience – such as good coffee and trained staff that constantly smile. This offers an insight into how details may in fact have a strong influence on perception, and to how such details might be what differentiates a destination or venue from its competitors. This also confirms the high level of competition within the association conference tourism sector. Other factors that had not previously ranked in terms of importance, or had been taken for granted, were also identified as important by the

panellists. These include proximity, hygiene, memorable experiences, local authority policies, medical and police response times, language barriers prior and during the conference, green credentials, food options that cater for diversity, flexible conference space, in-built technology, disability access, cultural heritage and information on the destination.

The stark divergence in opinions between the delegates and the other stakeholders also emerged in the Delphi study, offering another insight into the different stakeholders' perspectives. While this has not been discussed in any previous studies, this study identifies how delegates' priorities contrast, and are sometimes in opposition, to the ones of the other stakeholders. This is important to comprehend in order to grasp how different stakeholders rank destination factors based on different yardsticks, and in order to adopt the right strategies. This study confirmed a delegates' self-interest bias, which also emerged in the delegates' questionnaire, and shows that while factors offering benefits to delegates – such as educational and career benefits and reduction of costs – emerged as important to them, other factors that offered general rather than personal benefits – such as the green credentials – or that benefited others – such as disability access – struck a lower interest. This divergence in opinions and how view differ based on the stakeholder's interest and experience, reconfirmed the essence of covering all the stakeholders' perspectives to avoid basing results on a biased and exclusive viewpoint of a single or some stakeholders. Therefore, this study is the first to comprehensively present the varying views of all association conference stakeholders, and provides a significant direction for future studies in its field.

The findings of this thesis were further presented in the ACDVM, which may be considered a further contribution to the study of association conference decision-making. The model enhances the understanding of the relationship and dynamics influencing association decision-makers towards selecting a conference destination, presenting new knowledge in terms of factors and process stages. The factors influencing this process have emerged from the present study, and developed through consensus with all the conference tourism stakeholders. Therefore, the ACDVM is an original model, contributing to current knowledge by presenting factors influencing conference tourism decision-making that reflect the view of all the stakeholders involved. It addresses a gap in past studies, whereby only the perspective of an individual sector, or limited sectors, were covered. A further addition over other academic models is the inclusion of the minimum requirement stage,

which was an addition in this model and which resulted from this study's review of industry literature. This further confirms how this research has supported gaps in previous academic studies.

With its academic contribution, the knowledge presented through this thesis and the ACDVM act as a base for further research, having highlighted the different topics and factors that have emerged as important, as well as the trends that are guiding association conference decision making. This guides academic research towards new areas that had not been previously covered, and which will be discussed in section 8.6.2. Furthermore, the knowledge that was developed by the study is vital to mature destinations seeking to improve their conference tourism offer. This relates to the main aim of the study that sought to use the knowledge to assist mature destinations in their efforts to rejuvenate their tourism product and diversify from mass leisure tourism into association conference tourism. This is also debated in the study's contribution to practice and management, which is now discussed.

8.4 Contribution to practice

This study developed the CCDT to act as a practical guide for mature destinations in addressing the requirements outlined in the ACDVM, and in order to achieve rejuvenation. This study revealed that conference tourism offers mature destinations the possibility to rejuvenate, but that decision-making in conference tourism is complex to understand. The CCDT thus acts as a toolkit for mature destinations to successfully achieve rejuvenation. Through the toolkit, destinations can clearly identify the difference between essential factors and those that contribute towards a competitive edge, detailing how the former are the first factors that a destination needs to address, while the latter become important if the destination is shortlisted. This also guides mature destinations to prioritise their efforts and to address the essential factors first. Subsequently, the contributing factors of the destination's competitive edge are tackled. The toolkit is invaluable because it presents and briefly explains these contemporary factors more comprehensively than previous studies.

Further guidance is offered to mature destinations by means of a self-audit questionnaire that extends the opportunity to evaluate a destination's standing *vis-à-vis* the

factors in each stage of the process. This identifies the mature destination's actual potential, helping it recognise which factors essentially need to be addressed. As discussed in Section 2.4, mature destinations suffer from several negative characteristics that may require them to make large investments to become relevant to the conference tourism market. The self-audit helps a destination to comprehend those factors requiring attention and identify the existing gap between the destination's present qualities and those required to eventually succeed. This gap will outline the financial and strategic investment requiring attention for the destination to become competitive within the association conference market. The model therefore also acts as a checklist of requirements that a mature destination needs to fulfil, which becomes an indispensable guide for mature destinations due to the complicated decision-making process. This checklist will also indicate whether it is feasible or desirable for a specific mature destination to enter the association conference tourism market, while monitoring its shortcomings. Finally, this checking instrument also allows the mature destination to monitor its progress over time, by comparing its self-audit score to previous results, gauging how much its efforts and investments are improving its conference offer and the chances to succeed.

The knowledge presented is invaluable to mature destinations seeking to improve their chances in attracting conference tourism. By following the guidelines in the CCDT, which are based on the knowledge generated by this study, mature destinations can diversify in conference tourism more successfully. This allows them to progress beyond their stage of maturity and saturation, within which they would have become entrapped. Progressing past this point brings wider socio-economic benefits to such destinations. Nonetheless, even though the CCDT primarily focuses on supporting destinations that have reached a mature stage in their tourism offer to diversify, the toolkit also becomes an important tool for any destination interested in association conference tourism, providing these aspirants with valuable direction. In the case of mature destinations, or other destinations that are new to the conference market, the factors serve as a measurement of competitiveness and a guideline to the aims on which to focus. Furthermore, the toolkit is useful to destinations that are already hosting association conferences but seek to remain competitive within the market and improve their offer, because the CCDT indicates effectual best practice elements.

8.5 Recommendations for practice

Several recommendations based on this study's findings, can be made to attract more conference tourism.

1. Introduction of a universal accreditation rating system for conference venues would enable comparison between different venues based on universal standards, improving the efficiency of the selection process. The accreditation system might also include hygiene standards, which were identified as important in the results of this study and is expected to increase in importance

2. This study confirmed the very high importance of associations' local chapters in influencing decision-makers on site-selection. Destinations should therefore focus investment, attention and aid in order to encourage and motivate these chapters to influence and/or bid for the association's international conference to be hosted at the destination.

3. USPs were confirmed to improve the destination's attractiveness and conference experience in this study. As culture and rich history were identified as unique qualities of the destination, their presence could be enhanced to make the destination's offer more attractive. Destinations should therefore highlight their USPs to improve the marketability of the destination. Furthermore this study revealed how associations prefer to utilise historic or cultural venues to offer a memorable experience to delegates, but find it challenging to identify which venues can be used, which have accessibility issues and which are feasible. Thus destinations, through their conference bureaus, may offer guidance on those unique venues that can serve for conference events, such as dinners, increasing the attractiveness of the destination.

4. Variety and size of accommodation and conference venues were established as important factors in attracting conference tourism. Offering a range of venues in terms of size, facilities, and budget would broaden the appeal to match the needs and diversity of the association sector. Non-traditional conference accommodation such as self-catering and sharing economy offerings were also found to be important to the conference sector within this study. In order to satisfy the association conference

sector's needs it is important for destinations and government authorities to develop and enforce guidelines for owners of this form of accommodation.

5. The study has identified the increased dependence on technology. This requires infrastructure such as strong Wi-Fi and internet bandwidth, the availability of social media and trained staff that can handle technology-related issues. Findings have indicated that these can be considered part of the 'total conference product', making them necessary to compete in conference tourism. This should therefore be considered by a destination when diversifying into conference tourism.

6. The study has revealed that while several factors are frequently not specifically requested by delegates, they still expect them. These may include general factors such as hygiene, food options and coffee, as well as other demands that are more dependent on the delegate profile such as IT requests. This information should be progressively gathered from one conference to the next by the association in the post-mortem exercise and used to pre-empt the delegates' requests at successive conferences.

7. Stakeholders suggested that professional conference organisers should be entrusted to handle the logistics of association conferences. Associations state that this could improve the smoothness of the conference experience but felt that the high costs were not always affordable. Since association conferences are mostly aimed to make profit, it might be possible for PCOs to consider a share of profit offer, motivating associations to pass on the logistics to them. Furthermore, through their Conference Bureaus, destinations can also offer PCO services at no extra charge thus addressing challenges at the destination for the association, should it confirm to host its conference there, or it can aid associations through subventions. This acts as an additional motive for an association to select the destination.

8. This study's findings have shown that delegates are not interested in experiencing the conference in a passive way. They expect to be empowered and to be given an opportunity to contribute to the conference experience. Stakeholders suggested that at its basic level, engagement can be improved by utilising professional moderators who are able to motivate engagement. Nonetheless, engagement usually requires the use of technology, which most delegates are accustomed to. This can include the use of social media and other mobile apps that allow delegates to be part empowered from their phone, by voting, commenting, communicating with each other, and even crowd-

sourcing the room temperature. Festivalisation also makes the conference experience more interesting by offering different sessions and attractions that are of interest to different delegate profiles. This increases the chances that a delegate finds the session interesting to him/her.

9. Networking is considered an increasingly important factor within the conference tourism sector in general due to its potential to motivate physical attendance. Informal and random communication has emerged as beneficial in building relationships at the conference and is even more attractive in an era when individuals communicate virtually and lack the opportunity to do so in person. Therefore networking needs to be facilitated in order to keep delegates interested in physical conferences, as virtual conferences are becoming popular and hold several benefits for the delegates, such as decreased costs. The importance of networking in keeping physical conferences relevant was identified prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, and thus becomes even more important now that virtual meetings have become much more widespread.

10. This study confirmed the importance of perception in terms of safety, which influences site-selection. While changing the perception might be challenging, this can be improved by making safety-related information available online and promoting it, utilising the strength of the media. Furthermore, clear information on what to avoid and how to act, given by official authorities, is indicated as reassuring to associations and delegates.

11. The study has shown how association regulations may offer opportunities to destinations that are aware of them. The association's destination rotation system may act as a barrier to some destinations and an opportunity to others. It is therefore suggested that destinations are aware of these circumstances, possibly through the association's local chapter, and adapt their bidding strategy accordingly.

12. As benefits of conferences are increasingly recognised, the sector becomes more attractive. This study has shown how cities should not always consider each other as competitors, as it has revealed that collaborations between cities to attract association conferences may also be successful, whereby the offer is strengthened while the benefits may be split between collaborators.

13. The study's findings have suggested how change acts as an opportunity to the association conference market as it gives rise to new areas of interest. This usually

leads to related associations, and each community traditionally needs a conference to convene at. As this situation is adapted to the world's current COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on conference tourism, opportunities for physical conferences, at the right time may still exist and should be planned for.

14. Stakeholders suggested that as a cheaper solution to the conference (virtual conferences) becomes widespread, conference organisers and delegates would become more aware of the costs related to organising a physical conference. Having suffered the COVID-19 outbreak after the study was carried out, this situation has aggravated. Therefore when physical conferences return, associations will be more price sensitive as they, and their members, are more aware of cheaper alternatives.

15. Green credentials are important. This study indicates that even if most delegates might not consider them a priority, a significant minority feels strong about the topic. This minority is set to grow as delegates are educated on the matter. Furthermore, this study has shown how other stakeholders, such as the associations as conference organisers, already value green credentials at a destination or venue, with some associations admitting that this factor is a determinant during selection. Therefore investment in this sector may result in a competitive advantage to a destination or venue.

8.6 Research limitations and recommendations for future research

This study has made a significant contribution to knowledge by outlining and evaluating the factors influencing site-selection, which reflected perspectives across all association conference tourism stakeholders. The knowledge generated from this study has also led to the development of the ACDVM and the CCDT, both of which are an original contribution to academic knowledge and professional practice. Furthermore, this research study has successfully addressed all its objectives. Nonetheless, like any research, limitations have been identified. These are now discussed, while possible future research to offset such limitations will be suggested.

8.6.1 Conference segment focus

The study focused on just one segment of the conference tourism market – international association conference tourism. Though the reasons behind this choice have been clearly justified, this limits the application of the ACDVM and CCDT to this particular conference market segment. Furthermore, this study focused on larger association conferences. Even though the study has identified the larger association conference as the most attractive to most destinations, focusing on these type of conferences limits the application of the model and toolkit. This ignores the possibility of attracting smaller association conferences which might be more suited to the destination's available facilities.

Future research could adopt the approach of this study and consider other conference markets (such as the corporate markets, as well as the smaller association conferences market segment). This would help destinations identify which investments may help them attract more than just one market, and which, if any, are solely orientated around larger association conferences. It would also indicate which facilities can be used to attract different markets.

8.6.2 Additional research on conference destination factors

While this study has identified the range of association factors that can influence the decision-making process, further research on how destinations can satisfy these factors is required. Some emergent influences on decisions about conference destinations that have been identified by this study could be explored in more detail. These include factors such as what technology is requested by which delegate profiles; networking and its characteristics and expectations; the manner in which costs are interpreted by different associations, based on their characteristics; guidelines on how a destination can improve its reputation for safety and how perceptions can be influenced. In addition, further study into the importance of leisure is necessary: leisure was considered of low importance in the delegates' questionnaire but emerged as essential in the Delphi study. Other directions for further research include the way destinations may influence local association chapters as one of the main tactics of attracting international association conferences; the way safety issues in neighbouring areas challenges destinations in their geographic region; and the way in which

a growing focus on environmental and sustainability issues is changing the mentality of delegates and associations.

8.6.3 The influence of COVID-19 on conference tourism

This study has covered different threats in its secondary research, including health threats, and their influence on association conference tourism. Nonetheless, data was collected and analysed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research therefore excludes reference to this pandemic, although it is clear that COVID-19 has had a major influence on the conference tourism market and will likely influence it for some time to come. Like the case of terror attacks and their consequences, the COVID-19 pandemic may reshape the decision-making process, particularly the way in which associations prioritise destination factors, such as hygiene and safety, as well as the way large groups convene. Stakeholders' perceptions may also change, such as in the case of shared accommodation trends. This could result in a change in the hierarchy proposed by the ACDVM and the CCDT for a period of time. Further research on the effects of COVID-19 on the association conference market will therefore be necessary, with the results applied to the model and toolkit proposed by this research.

8.7 Final comments

The research has succeeded in fulfilling all of its objectives and its final aim: to assist mature destinations understand and fulfil their potential to rejuvenate by diversifying into conference tourism. The study has contributed to both knowledge and practice when addressing each of its objectives. This study, carried out in a novel way (which addressed the deficiencies of previous research) contributed to the development of the ACDVM, highlighting the academic effort of the study, and the CCDT, making this knowledge more accessible to stakeholders. The significant interest in the topic and high competitiveness within conference tourism will make these invaluable instruments for practitioners. In fact, the launch of the CCDT is a next step to be carried out in the near future. In addition, the research has also contributed to the researcher's own personal development, through developing and refining skills in time management, data presentation, achieving a balance

between details and the bigger picture and identifying and addressing problems. As a result of undertaking this research study, there is no doubt that the author will approach his professional practice in the conference tourism sector in a completely new way.

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Appendix 1: Association Delegates' Questionnaire

Dear respondent, my name is James Cassar and this questionnaire is part of my doctoral studies at Bournemouth University. The questionnaire aims at understanding the site selection process and the destination-related variables that delegates give importance to when choosing to attend a conference abroad. Please take a few minutes to answer all the following questions (this should take approximately 10 – 12 minutes). All information gathered from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and responses shall remain anonymous. I thank you in advance for your help.

This questionnaire has 3 sections:

- *Section A* will focus on the variables that affect the delegates' decision to attend a conference at a particular destination.
- *Section B* is concerned with some questions related to Malta as a conference destination
- *Section C* will gather background and demographic information.

Section A – Factors influencing delegate attendance

This section is concerned with understanding the importance of each of the following variables in influencing a delegate's decision to attend a conference away from home. Please tick [X] the applicable answer, depending on how important the following factors are to you. Please add any factors that have not been included here, in *other*.

1. Motivators. Please indicate how important are the following motivators in encouraging you to attend a conference. The importance increases from left to right, including *not important*, *of little importance*, *uncertain*, *important* and *very important*.

Conference-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Asked to be chair, moderator or helper					
Influence organisation's future direction					
Interesting conference program					
Topic of personal interest					
Participate in association /board elections					
High reputation of speakers					
Travel expenses covered					
Pressure to represent your institution/ association's local chapter					
Deliver a paper /presentation/workshop					
Innovative incentive programme					
Need to be present at the AGM					
Other: _____					
_____					

Career-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Career enhancement					
Education improvement					
Develop new skills					
Networking opportunity					
Develop international reputation					
Opportunity to work across cultures					
Judge speaker before consulting					
Avoid stigma of not being mobile					
Leadership training opportunity					
Other: _____					
_____					

Personal factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Attending with a friend, relative or colleague					

Personal factors (continued)

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Keep up-to-date on latest issues					
Escape from daily routine					
Combine business with leisure					
Visit friends or relatives					
Positive past experiences of attending a conference by the same association					
Positive conference experiences at the same destination					
Self-esteem enhancement					
Socialise and making new friends					
Opportunity to spend time on your own					
Activities for partners or family					
Other: _____					

Destination related

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Climate					
Direct flight available					
No barrier to enter destination (eg VISA)					
Entertainment facilities available close to accommodations or conference venue					
Gain from currency exchange rate					
Make a trip to another city or country close to conference destination					
See cultural and historic attractions					
Shopping facilities					
Famous local cuisine					
Participate in destination-specific activities or events					
Safe destination					
Unusual/ exotic destination.					

Destination related (continued)

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Convenient local transportation					
Discounted air fares					
First time visiting destination					
Other: _____					
_____					

Conference venue-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
High reputation of the conference venue					
Fully accessible					
Climate control during conference					
First time visiting new conference venue					
Networking spaces for free time					
Built-in technology systems (example concealed ceiling projectors)					
Other: _____					

Accommodation-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Clean accommodation					
High service quality					
Three star accommodation or higher					
Fully accessible					
Remote check-in (via an app)					
Remote climate control (via an app)					
Business facilities available					
Leisure facilities available in hotel					
Availability of gym, sauna, spa					
Quick-response customer care service					
Networking spaces for free time					
Short distance to conference facility					
Possibility of gathering loyalty points from accommodation that may be redeemed in other destinations					
Accommodation at a known hotel chain					
Discounted accommodation cost					

Accommodation-related factors (continued)

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Innovative accommodation setting					
Conference venue located within accommodation					
Other: _____					

Green credentials

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Conference environmental-friendly activities (example planting a tree)					
Environmentally-friendly transport					
Venue/ accommodation eco-certificated					
Marketing material disseminated electronically					
Only recyclable items utilised during conference (pens, pencils, paper)					
Freebies and merchandise environment-friendly					
Other: _____					

Technology-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Access to conference agenda / schedule from delegate's device					
Interest routes offered in apps (example shopping, history, jogging, walking)					
Voting through delegates' device (dedicated apps)					
Lunch/dinner food chosen remotely through apps					
Fast Wi-Fi availability					
Power supply availability for devices					
Possibility of customer care through fast-response apps					
Other: _____					

2. Barriers. Please indicate how important are the following in discouraging you from attending a conference. The importance increases from left to right, including *not important*, *of little importance*, *uncertain*, *important* and *very important*.

Accommodation

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
High accommodation cost					
Lack of wi-fi availability					
Environment not suitable to work					
Lack of leisure facilities					
Inconvenient meal times					
Poor customer care service					
Lack of accessibility around whole venue					
Sanitation problems					
Other: _____					

Conference venue-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Lack of wi-fi availability					
Slow wi-fi connection					

Conference venue-related (continued)

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Lack of suitable lighting					
Lack of accessibility around whole venue					
Lack of power supply for devices					
Lack of climate control					
Already visited conference venue before					
Conference venue not modern					
Lack of apps to communicate requests					
Use non-environmentally friendly items					
Conference venue not eco-certified					
Other: _____					

Destination-related factors

	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Already visited destination					
High destination cost-of-living					
Different time zones					
High travel expenses					

Destination-related factors (continued)	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Very important	Very important
Negative image of destination as a conference location					
Terrorism threat at the destination					
Safety at the destination					
Sanitation at destination					
Travel time to destination					
Travelling barriers (VISA, customs)					
Ban on access to social media (example Facebook)					
Does not cater for specific diets, allergies or cultural requirements					
Lack of cultural and religious tolerance					
Weak currency exchange rate					
Lack of destination information available					
Instability in neighbouring countries					
Local expectations regarding behaviour					
Instability/terrorism in neighbouring country					
Inconvenient travelling times					
Other: _____					

Conference-related factors	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Very important	Very important
Conference too long to stay away					
Conference registration costs					
Language barrier					
Conference advertised too late to fit into your schedule					
Lack of online information available about the conference					

Conference-related factors (continued)	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Very important	Very important
Complicated conference booking system					
Inflexible agenda (not possible to attend only one day of the conference)					
Other: _____					

Personal factors	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Very important	Very important
Family obligations					
Jet lag					
Free merchandise					
Lack of funding to attend					
Health problems					
Problem taking time away from work					
Not possible to delegate work back home					
Backlog of work to tackle on return					
Afraid of flying					
Loneliness during the conference stay					
Other (please specify) _____					

Accessibility	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Very important	Very important
Staff not trained to assist special requests					
Conference material not accessible to all (example lack of narration/ large fonts)					
Fee for helpers accompanying delegates not discounted					
Lack of disabled toilets					
Lack of permanent ramps					
Lack of accessibility to hospital/ doctor					
Specific food diets, allergies and cultural specifications not catered for					
Other: _____					

Section B – Malta as a conference destination

This section aims at understanding the delegates' perception of Malta, as well as its positive and negative aspects as a conference destination.

3a. Have you visited Malta previously? Yes ☐   No ☐

 b. If yes, how often? Once ☐   Twice ☐   Three times ☐   Four times or more ☐

4. Explain your perception of Malta *before visiting* the destination by describing it with 5 words. Then list 5 words to describe Malta as a destination *after having spent some time* here.

Before visiting	After having spent some time.
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

5. What do you like about Malta as a conference destination?

_____
_____
_____

6. What does Malta need to improve to become a more attractive conference destination?
_____
_____
_____

7. Does it make a difference to you as a delegate if the conference is held in a green destination? Yes ☐ No ☐

8. Do you feel it would be beneficial to delegates if conference venues had a universal accreditation rating system that indicates their standards level? Yes ☐ No ☐

Section C – Background questions and Demographics

This section aims at collecting data related to this conference and other demographic data. All data collected in this section is for research purposes only.

9. Which country do you represent?
_____.

10. How did you get to know about this conference? Please tick all the applicable answers.

    Newspaper ☐
    Trade magazine
    Local association branch
    Email to a mailing list
    Social media
    Internet search
    Other. Please specify_____

11. How frequently do you go for a conference trip (internationally)? Please tick the applicable answer.

    Not at all
    Less than once a year
    Once to twice a year
    Three to four times a year
    More than five times a year

12. What time of the year do you most frequently travel for conferences? Please tick the applicable answer.

    Spring
    Summer
    Autumn
    Winter
    All year

Please explain your answer: _____
_____

13. Gender. Please tick the applicable answer.

    Female
    Male
    Other

14. Occupation: _____

15. How many days do you usually spend at the destination before or after the conference? Please tick the applicable answer.

    Zero
    One day
    Two – three days
    Four-five days
    Other: _____

Please explain your answer:_____
_____

16. Level of education. Please tick the applicable answer.

    No formal qualifications
    Secondary education
    College
    Graduate
    Post Graduate

17. Age. Please tick the applicable answer.

    21 and under
    22-35
    36-50
    51-64
    65+

18. Status. Please tick the applicable answer.

    Cohabiting
    Single
    Divorced/ Separated
    Married

Please add your email address:
_____ *

*This is optional. Please note that this contact information may be used for possible follow up questions. This information shall not be distributed or used for any promotional purposes.

Thank you for your help!

Appendix 2: Ethics Checklist for Association Delegates' Questionnaire

Bournemouth University

Research Ethics Checklist

About Your Checklist

Reference Id	11120
Status	Approved
Date Approved	07/03/2016 13:30:53
Date Submitted	05/03/2016 18:15:49

Researcher Details

Name	James Cassar
Faculty	School of Tourism
Status	Postgraduate Research (MRes, MPhil, PhD, DProf, EngD, EdD)
Course	Postgraduate Research - Tourism
Is This External Funding?	No

Project Details

Title	A Conference Destination Viability Framework: Assessing the suitability and potential of a tourist destination to become a successful conference location.
End Date of Project	20/09/2016
Proposed Start Date of Data Collection	03/03/2016
Supervisor	Julie Whitfield
Summary - no more than 500 words (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)	
See attached document	

External Ethics Review

Does your research require external review through the NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or through another external Ethics Committee?	No

Research Literature

Is your research solely literature based?	No

Human Participants

Does your research specifically involve participants who are considered vulnerable (i.e. children, those with cognitive impairment, those in unequal relationships—such as your own students, prison inmates, etc.)?	No
Does the study involve participants age 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (i.e. people with	No

learning disabilities)? NOTE: All research that falls under the auspices of the **Mental Capacity Act 2005** must be reviewed by NHS NRES.	
Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (i.e. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of Nursing home?)	No
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent at the time (i.e. covert observation of people in non-public places)?	No
Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (i.e. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	No
Are drugs, placebos or other substances (i.e. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	No
Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? Note: If the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to be aware of obligations under the **Human Tissue Act 2004**.	No
Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participant or researcher (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	No
Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No
Will the research involve the collection of audio materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of photographic or video materials?	No
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No
Please give a summary of the ethical issues and any action that will be taken to address these. Explain how you will obtain informed consent (and from whom) and how you will inform the participant about the research project (i.e. participant information sheet).	

This study shall include three main sources of data collection: literature review, questionnaires and the Delphi study. The secondary study (literature review) shall be studying the human subject only indirectly through existent statistics and literature and thus ethical issues are minimal.In the case of the collection of primary data through email questionnaires; the reasons behind the study shall be made clear at the start of the questionnaire. Questions asked shall be pertinent to the theme and will not include personal details that may reveal the identity of the participants as the identity of the respondent shall be kept anonymous in the study. The sample selected and contacted for email questionnaires shall only include companies or associations whose details are publicly available on the web. In all cases it is the respondents' choice whether or not to fill in the questionnaires. In the case of the self-administered questionnaires by conference delegates, delegates shall have the liberty to refuse to participate and the reasons behind the study shall also be made clear prior to the filling in the questionnaire. A consent form shall be signed by the event planners responsible prior to the research taking place, allowing the researcher to carry out research at the conference venue.For the Delphi study participants, the sample selected shall only include those who would have consented to participate prior to the study. The procedure, scope and theme shall be explained before the first round of questions is initiated, and a consent form will be sent to the participants who accept the invitation to take part. The form shall include a written explanation of the reasons why the Delphi study is being held and what is expected from the participants. The Delphi study shall be conducted via email, thus allowing participants to answer at their convenience within a given time-frame. Questions asked will be pertinent to the theme and full respondent anonymity shall be preserved during all rounds of the study.

Final Review

Will you have access to personal data that allows you to identify individuals OR access to confidential corporate or company data (that is not covered by confidentiality terms within an agreement or by a separate confidentiality agreement)?	No
Will your research involve experimentation on any of the following: animals, animal tissue, genetically modified organisms?	No
Will your research take place outside the UK (including any and all stages of research: collection, storage, analysis, etc.)?	Yes
Does the country in which you are conducting research require that you obtain internal ethical approval (i.e. beyond that required by Bournemouth University)?	No

Please use the below text box to highlight any other ethical concerns or risks that may arise during your research that have not been covered in this form.

N/A

Attached documents

Summary of methodology.docx - attached on 02/03/2016 19:58:24

Summary of methodology v2.docx - attached on 05/03/2016 18:15:39

Appendix 3: Organiser Consent Form for Data Collection

Dear conference organiser,

My name is James Cassar, a PhD student at Bournemouth University, UK. My research aims to identify the factors that make a destination successful in attracting conference tourism. These are to be included in a model, which destinations can use to understand their potential in succeeding in conference tourism. Destinations may also follow the guidelines in the model to improve their conference tourism offer. As delegates are important stakeholders in the process, their opinion is essential for this research.

I am therefore requesting the permission to collect data from delegates attending your upcoming conference in Malta. The data will be collected at intercept points, which will be pre-agreed with you upon approval of this request. A research team of graduate students will hand out self-administered questionnaires at these intercept points. The team will remain available for any questions while delegates fill in the questionnaire. Delegates can refuse to fill in the questionnaire, as participation is voluntary. Delegates may also decide to withdraw at any point in time, prior to handing over the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire is handed over, a participant cannot withdraw due to the anonymity of each questionnaire.

No personal details will be requested, and the questionnaires will not request any information that can make it possible to trace the respondent at any later stage. The data shall be kept at the researcher and may possibly be stored in an online repository.

Should you agree to allow us to undertake this research during your conference, we shall only require a table and four chairs in order to set a station from where we can collect data. This station would be set up for the whole duration of the conference, or during the days and times that we shall be allowed to collect data.

If the above is possible, kindly confirm by returning this form.

Signature:

_____

On behalf of _____; orgnaniser of _____, to be held on _____.

Appendix 4: Delphi Study Participant Invitation Letter

Dear sir/madam,

My name is James Cassar, a PhD student at Bournemouth University, UK. My research aims to identify the factors that make a destination successful in attracting conference tourism. These are to be included in a model, which destinations can use to understand their potential in succeeding in conference tourism. Destinations may also follow the guidelines in the model to improve their chances of becoming a successful conference destination.

I have contacted you as you are experienced in your field. In fact I am currently looking for a working group of participants that are willing to answer a number of rounds of questions in order to build up such model.

This research will be composed of **three rounds of email questionnaires**. Each questionnaire will include a number of questions related to motivators, barriers and other characteristics that affect conference tourism at a destination, and will be seeking your opinions in detail. For each round, it is aimed to collect responses from each participant within 10 days. After each round of questionnaires, the researcher (myself) shall analyse the answers and a follow-up questionnaire (aiming at finding points of agreement in the previous round of answers) shall be sent. The tentative schedule of questionnaires is below.

Round one (Question & answer)	Questions related to, and agreement upon: • the top destination-factors influencing the site-selection decision. • the variables constituting each destination-factor.
Round two (Question & answer)	Questions related to, and agreement upon the guidelines • to measure the potential of a destination vis-à-vis each of the top-selected destination-factors. • to achieve/ improve the top-selected destination-factors.
Round three (Question & answer)	Proposal of and feedback on a draft model - *Conference Destination Viability Model* (underlining the requirements for a successful conference tourism destination).
Final version of the *Conference Destination Viability Model.*	

Once the final results are ready and analysed, these shall be shared firstly with the participants of the working group.

Kindly get back to us regarding your participation, both in case of positive or negative reply, and if you would like to ask any questions.

Thank you for your time.

James Cassar

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet (Delphi study)

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the research project

A Conference Destination Viability Framework: Assessing the suitability and potential of a tourist destination to become a successful conference location.

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the project?

The study aims to develop a Conference Destination Viability Framework that may be utilised to determine whether it is viable for a destination to develop a conference niche. This shall consider how well equipped a destination is to attract and sustain an international conferences industry when compared to competing destinations, and the weighing of potential benefits and consequences stemming from such a decision. The study thus seeks to develop a comprehensive framework that can be utilised by a destination that aims to develop and invest in the conference tourism sector. The proposed framework shall also act as a guideline offering recommendations to the destination for product development.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been contacted as you are experienced in your field, which is related to conference tourism.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the research is entirely voluntarily. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw from participation at this stage without giving a reason. You may also withdraw from the study once this has begun. This can be done before or after any of the three rounds of questions. Please note that once you have completed a round of questions that has been analysed, the researcher is unable to remove your anonymised responses from the results of that particular round of questions (or any other round that would have already been previously completed and analysed).

What would taking part involve?

As described in the introductory letter, this research will be composed of three rounds of email questionnaires. Each questionnaire will include a number of questions related to motivators, barriers

and other characteristics that affect conference tourism at a destination, and will be seeking your opinions in detail. For each round, it is aimed to collect responses from each participant within 10 days. After each round of questionnaires, the answers shall be analysed and a follow-up questionnaire (aiming at finding points of agreement in the previous round of answers) shall be sent.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

The main advantage of this research shall be to help guide conference destinations and potentially other interested parties in attracting conference tourism. Each participant shall receive a copy of the framework as mentioned in the introductory letter.

No sensitive information shall be requested, both work-related and personal.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Your opinion regarding conference tourism shall be requested. Due to the openness of the questions, the more detailed the answer, the better it is.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The questions shall be sent via emails and answers shall thus be received in writing form.

How will my information be kept?

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current data protection legislation. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university. Bournemouth University (BU) is a Data Controller of your information which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this [Notice](#) so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your information.

Publication
You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable.

Research results will be published as part of the final PhD research.

Security and access controls
BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.

Except where it has been anonymised your personal information will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to BU staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

Sharing and further use of your personal information
You un-anonymised data (if any) may only be available for BU staff and the PhD researched who are working on this research project.

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. Anonymised data will be added to BU's Data Repository (a central location where data is stored) and which will be publicly available.

Retention of your data
All personal data collected for the purposes of this study will be held for 1 year after the research. Although published research outputs are anonymised, we need to retain underlying data collected for the study in a non-anonymised form for a certain period to enable the research to be audited and/or to enable the research findings to be verified.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact James Cassar on jcassar@bournemouth.ac.uk.

In case of complaints
Any concerns about the study should be directed to Dr Julie Whitfield on jwhitfield@bournemouth.ac.uk, Dr Anya Chapman on achapman@bournemouth.ac.uk or Dr Duncan Light on dlight@bournemouth.ac.uk. If you concerns have not been answered by the supervising team, you should contact Prof Michael Silk, Deputy Dean for Research and Professional Practice, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet (Delphi Study)

Participant Agreement Form

Full title of project: **("the Project")** A Conference Destination Viability Framework: Assessing the suitability and potential of a tourist destination to become a successful conference location.

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Mr James Cassar, PhD researcher, jcassar@bournemouth.ac.uk

Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Dr Julie Whitfield, Senior Lecturer in Conference & Events Management, jwhitfield@bournemouth.ac.uk

PART A

In this Form we ask you to confirm whether you agree to take part in the Project. We also ask you to agree to some specific uses of your identifiable information, which we will only do with your consent.

You should only agree to take part in the Project if you understand what this will mean for you. If you complete the rest of this Form, you will be confirming to us that:

- You have read and understood the Project Participant Information Sheet [Ref: JC/PISH1] (sent by the PhD researcher) and have been given access the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy)

- You have had the opportunity to ask questions;

- You understand that:

  - Taking part in the research will include answering three rounds of email questionnaires.

  - Your participation is voluntary. You can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason.

  - If you withdraw from participating in the Project, you may not always be able to withdraw all of your data from further use within the Project, particularly once we have anonymised your data and we can no longer identify you.

  - Data you provide may be included in an anonymised form within an dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository

  - Data you provide may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

Consent to take part in the Project	Yes	No
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

PART B Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

This Form should be signed and dated by all parties after the participant receives a copy of the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated participant agreement form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix 7: Delphi Study First Round

Dear participant,

Thank you for accepting to participate in this Delphi study as part of my PhD research. As previously explained, this research aims to identify the factors that make a destination successful in attracting conference tourism. These are to be included in a model, which destinations can use to understand their potential in succeeding in conference tourism.

This questionnaire is the first of three rounds. This initial round shall include generic questions being presented to the participant team. **At this first stage, detailed answers that are relatively lengthy are preferred**. Please give your opinion and write extensively when possible. There is no right or wrong answer. It would be highly appreciated if the answers can be sent within 10 days. Each question attempts to cover specific factors related to conference tourism. The subtitle preceding the question indicates such factor.

Please note that all the information gathered from this questionnaire shall be used solely for the purpose of this study. All participants shall be kept anonymous.

Destination
1.   What are the characteristics of a successful conference destination?

Venue and accommodation
2.   What facilities are required at successful conference venues and accommodation provision?

Delegates' demands and needs
3.   How can conference delegates' demands and needs be met or exceeded?

Memorable experience
4.   What creates a positive memorable conference experience?

Safety
5.   What measures can be taken to ensure delegates' safety when attending a conference?

Technology
6.   How can technology enhance the conference experience? What cutting-edge technology can add value to the conference?

Conference futures
7.   Thinking about the future, what are the risks and opportunities for the conference industry?

Delphi Round 2

Thank you for answering the first round of questions.

 As a reminder the final aim of this study is to develop a Conference Destination Viability Framework that may be utilised to determine whether it is viable for a destination to develop a conference niche. Once the data from the first round of questions was analysed, this survey was created. The main aim of this survey is to identify the points of convergence between the participant panel, in order to propose the final framework.

Kindly answer all the questions below.

*** Required**

Email address *

Your email

Section 1. Essential variables for conference tourism
This section will produce a list of variables that are considered essential for a successful conference destination.

The following variables have come out from the answers to the questions in the first round of the Delphi Study. They have also been identified by numerous other academic studies.

Please confirm if you agree the following variables are essential. At the end of the Section 1, you will be given the opportunity to remove or add variables to this essential list.

*

Please choose YES to retain the variable or NO to remove the variable from the list of essential variables required for a successful conference destination. At the end of the section, you will be given the opportunity to remove or add variables to this 'all-time-important' list

	Yes	No
Ease of accessibility to destination including international airport, frequent direct flights and short travel time (and reasonable price) to destination.	○	○
Ease of accessibility at the destination including good public transportation at low cost.	○	○
Conference and accommodation venues are located close to each other.	○	○
Cost of living at the destination (accommodation, food and travelling at destination).	○	○
Overall costs for conference organisers to organise the conference at the destination (conference venue, transportation, social and gala activities)	○	○
Allocated networking opportunities during conference programme (formal and informal networking).	○	○
Climate at the destination.	○	○
Total conference tourism product including hotels, conference venues, conference equipment rental suppliers, retail outlets, restaurants and social activities within easy access of each other and of high standard available.	○	○
The provision of leisure	○	○

facilities for social programmes for both delegates and accompanying partners within easy accessof conference and accomosation venues..

High food hygiene standard.	○	○
Conference venue must provide comfortable seating, natural lighting, climate control, good sound acoustics and sound-proofing.	○	○
Conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as seperate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender neutral bathrooms.	○	○
Staff that constantly smile; are knowledgeable about the venues and able to handle complaints.	○	○
Free, high speed Wi-Fi.	○	○
Sufficient capacity of halls and venue space for large and small conferences, as well as plentiful accomodation in close proximity.	○	○
Professional moderators and renowned speakers	○	○

Would you remove any of the variables from the list? And Why?

Your answer

Would you add any other variables as an all-time important variable? And why?

Your answer

Section 2. Variables contributing to a competitive edge in conference tourism

Section 2 includes a number of variables that can help a destination be more competitive in the conference tourism market.

Please rank the following variables in terms of importance (1 being not important, 5 being very important). Please briefly explain the reason behind each answer for each question in Section 2.

There are 50 variables in total. At the end of the section, you will be given the opportunity to add more variables.

1. A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity as well (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity as well (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc)

Your answer

2. Discounts on transport to/from and within the destination; discounts at local retail operators and restaurants. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Discounts on transport to/from and within the destination; discounts at local retail operators and restaurants.

Your answer

3.An immediate welcome experience at destination transport nodes such as banners, specifically-created directional signage and manned welcome/help desks. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

An immediate welcome experience at destination transport nodes such as banners, specifically-created directional signage and manned welcome/help desks.

Your answer

4. Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, Conference Bureau, Foreign Affairs ministry). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, Conference Bureau, Foreign Affairs ministry).

Your answer

5. An easy VISA application process. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

An easy VISA application process.

Your answer

6. Relevant authorities' policy vis-à-vis conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Relevant authorities' policy vis-à-vis conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement.

Your answer

7. Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients.

Your answer

8. Purpose built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within one venue space). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Purpose built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within such

Your answer

9. Destination's strength in academic knowledge/ research or strong industry presence of a particular area. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination's strength in academic knowledge/ research or strong industry presence of a particular area.

Your answer

10. Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences)

Your answer

11. The destination's attractiveness in general for companions (including families, spouses, partners etc). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

The destination's attractiveness in general for non-delegates (families, partners etc)

Your answer

12. Proximity and ease of access from conference destination to other attractive destinations for visitation. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Proximity and ease of access from conference destination to other attractive destinations for visitation.

Your answer

434

13. The provision of pre- and post- conference tours. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

The provision of pre- and post- conference tours.

Your answer

14. Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality.

Your answer

15. Destination's image in terms of tolerance towards diversity (religious, national, cultural). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination's image in terms of tolerance towards diversity (religious, national, cultural).

Your answer

16. Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences.

Your answer

17. Destination has image of being safe. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination has image of being safe.

Your answer

18. Factual information about rate of crime at a destination is easily accessible. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Factual information about rate of crime at a destination is easily accessible.

Your answer

436

19. Destination offers approved venues to be used for conferences and social events, that are endorsed by relevant authorities in terms of safety standards and covered by required insurances. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination offers approved venues to be used for conferences and social events, that are endorsed by relevant authorities in terms of safety standards and covered by required insurances.

Your answer

20. High level of security at destination is visible not only within the central areas but throughout the destination *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

High level of security at destination is visible not only within the central areas but throughout the destination

Your answer

21. Destination weather conditions could be risky. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Destination weather conditions could be risky.

Your answer

22. Availability of dedicated and controlled areas for demonstrations and protestors during high-level conferences. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Availability of dedicated and controlled areas for demonstrations and protestors during high-level conferences.

Your answer

23. Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service.

Your answer

24. Security checks of conference space including identity checks before entering, sniffer dogs, bad searches, security at cloakrooms and at the venue. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Security checks of conference space including identity checks before entering, sniffer dogs, bad searches, security at cloakrooms and at the venue.

Your answer

25. Support from local authorities to allow vetting system of conference delegates at online registration stage when required. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Support from local authorities to allow vetting system of conference delegates at online registration stage when required.

Your answer

26. No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations

Your answer

---

27. Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language example English). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language example English).

Your answer

---

28. Badge technology and biometric monitoring of delegates. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Badge technology and biometric monitoring of delegates.

Your answer

---

29. Use of software to allow interactive discussions, voting in real time during sessions and connection with online delegates. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Use of software to allow interactive discussions, voting in real time during sessions and connection with online delegates.

Your answer

---

30. VR sets available at the conference to improve the delegate's experience. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

VR sets available at the conference to improve the delegate's experience.

Your answer

---

31. Use of Bluetooth low-energy beacons in tandem with conference event apps to distribute conference related material (and avoid paper material). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Use of Bluetooth low-energy beacons in tandem with conference event apps to distribute conference related material (and avoid paper material).

Your answer

32. Sufficient availability of power devices dedicated to each delegate (for laptops, mobile phones, iPads etc). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Sufficient availability of power devices dedicated to each delegate (for laptops, mobile phones, iPads etc).

Your answer

33. Conference apps to track attendees at the conference facilitate networking and instant communication/ customer care. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Conference apps to track attendees at the conference facilitate networking and instant communication/ customer care.

Your answer

34. Training at destination of social media platforms use for marketing the destination, the conference, engaging participants, voting etc. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Training at destination of social media platforms use for marketing the destination, the conference, engaging participants, voting etc.

Your answer

---

35. Accessibility to accommodate all delegate needs (catering for physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Accessibility to accommodate all delegate needs (catering for physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc).

Your answer

---

36. In-house entertainment or venue close to main attractions, restaurants, bars, nightlife with long opening hours. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

In-house entertainment or venue close to main attractions, restaurants, bars, nightlife with long opening hours.

Your answer

37. Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts, or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts, or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily).

Your answer

38. Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use.

Your answer

39. Food areas with built-in lounges to promote private networking and spaces at regular intervals for informal networking. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Food areas with built-in lounges to promote private networking and spaces at regular intervals for informal networking.

Your answer

40. Good quality coffee. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Good quality coffee.

Your answer

41. Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning.

Your answer

42. Wide range of accommodation available from 3 to 5 star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options in different styles and including authentic local accommodation options. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Wide range of accommodation available from 3 to 5 star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options in different styles and including authentic local accommodation options.

Your answer

43. Cultural conference venue offering local food and traditional local entertainment. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Cultural conference venue offering local food and traditional local entertainment.

Your answer

44. Option to use loyalty rewards at international accommodation chains. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Option to use loyalty rewards at international accommodation chains.

Your answer

---

45. Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics).

Your answer

---

46. Delegates require the be completely immersed in the conference experience for a number of days (festivalisation). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Delegates require the be completely immersed in the conference experience for a number of days (festivalisation).

Your answer

47. Delegates expect a strong element of local tradition and culture (to provide a unique experience) to be evident at the conference venue, social events and gala dinner. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Delegates expect a strong element of local tradition and culture (to provide a unique experience) to be evident at the conference venue, social events and gala dinner.

Your answer

48. All conferences should be planned by Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

All conferences should be planned by Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs).

Your answer

49. Tangible gifts with high symbolic meanings related to the conference or destination given to delegates. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Tangible gifts with high symbolic meanings related to the conference or destination given to delegates.

Your answer

50. Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Please explain your rating.

Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly.

Your answer

Would you add any other variables that you would consider important in conference tourism? Please explain why.

Your answer

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix 9: Delphi Study Third Round

Section 1 – Essential Variables for the Association conference industry

The below variables were listed in Section 1 of this study's previous round (second round). *Section 1A* indicates the variables on which consensus was reached, both in case of approval or dismissal from the essential variables' list. Section 1B lists the variables over which consensus has not been reached as yet. **Kindly make sure you save after you complete the form.**

Section 1A – Variables confirmed.

The below are a list of variables over which consensus has been reached in terms of having them included or excluded from the framework. ***Kindly add any additional comments if necessary at the end of the section.***

Variables to be included amongst the *essential variables for conference industry***:**

- Ease of accessibility to destination including international airport, frequent direct flights and short travel time (and reasonable price) to destination.
- Ease of accessibility at the destination including good public transport at low cost.
- Conference and accommodation venues are located close to each other.
- Overall costs for conference organisers to organise the conference at the destination (conference venue, transportation, social and gala activities)
- Allocated networking opportunities during conference programme (formal and informal networking).
- Total conference tourism product including hotels, conference venues, conference equipment rental suppliers, retail outlets, restaurants and social activities within easy access of each other and of high standard available.
- The provision of leisure facilities for social programmes for both delegates and accompanying partners within easy access of conference and accommodation venues.
- High food hygiene standard.
- Conference venue must provide comfortable seating, natural lighting, climate control, good sound acoustics and sound-proofing.
- Free, high speed Wi-Fi.
- Sufficient capacity of halls and venue space for large and small conferences and sufficient accommodation capacity in close proximity.

Variable to be excluded from the *essential variables for conference industry***:**

- Climate at the destination.

Comments:

Section 1B – Variables without consensus.

A consensus has not been reached on the below variables. The results of round two are indicated next to each variables. Please indicate if you would like include (yes) or exclude (no) these variables from the list.

- Cost of living at the destination (accommodation, food and travelling at destination).
  Results from round two (yes/no to confirming variable in essential variables list).
  Yes 53%
  No 47%

  YES   NO

- Conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as separate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender-neutral bathrooms.
  Results from round two (yes/no to confirming variable in essential variables list).
  Yes 47%
  No 53%

YES   NO

- Staff that constantly smile; are knowledgeable about the venues and able to handle complaints.
  Results from round two (yes/no to confirming variable in essential variables list).
  Yes 67%
  No 33%

YES   NO

- Professional moderators and renowned speakers
  Results from round two (yes/no to confirming variable in essential variables list).
  Yes 47%
  No 53%

YES   NO

Section 2 – Variables contributing to a competitive edge in the Association conference industry

Section 2 lists the variables that can help a destination be more competitive in the association conference market. The variables are listed in order of importance (descending order) depending on the ranking given in round two.

The group's average mean score for each variable is listed next to the variable (column 2), together with the standard deviation of the results from Round Two (column 3). The ranking allotted to the variable by you in the last round is also listed (column 4). In view of the average mean from round two, each participant is able to modify their score for each variable. If you wish to modify the score, please include the ranking in Column 5 (1 - not important, 2 - little importance; 3 - neutral; 4 - important; 5 - very important). Any comments can be added in the comments section (column 6).

Kindly note that in case you feel a statement is covering multiple variables, you can comment if your ranking is based on a specific variable.

There are 50 variables in total. **Please note that variables with an average mean score of less than 3.00 will be excluded from the final framework.**

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
Variables In order of importance	**Round 2 Mean Rank**	**Standard Deviation**	**Your Round 2 Rank**	**Revise ranking (only if you wish to revise your score) 1-Not Important 5. Very Important**	**Comments**
Wide range of accommodation available from 3 to 5 star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options in different styles and including authentic local accommodation options.	4.53	.516	4		

Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts, or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily).	4.33	.900	3		
Destination has image of being safe.	4.27	.704	3		
Purpose built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within one venue space).	4.27	1.100	5		
Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences)	4.20	.561	4		
No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations	4.13	.990	5		
Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly.	4.07	.961	5		
A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity as well (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc)	4.07	.799	4		
Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language example English).	4.07	.884	5		
An easy VISA application process.	4.07	1.100	3		
Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, Conference Bureau, Foreign Affairs ministry).	4.07	.961	4		
Accessibility to accommodate all delegate needs (catering for physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc).	4.07	1.100	5		
Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use.	3.93	.594	3		
Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality.	3.93	1.163	3		
Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service.	3.93	1.100	4		
Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences.	3.93	.884	4		

Destination's strength in academic knowledge/ research or strong industry presence of a particular area.	3.93	.799	3	
Relevant authorities' policy vis-à-vis conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement.	3.87	.990	5	
Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients.	3.80	1.146	5	
Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics).	3.73	.961	4	
Proximity and ease of access from conference destination to other attractive destinations for visitation.	3.73	.704	3	
Food areas with built-in lounges to promote private networking and spaces at regular intervals for informal networking.	3.67	.900	4	
Destination offers approved venues to be used for conferences and social events that are endorsed by relevant authorities in terms of safety standards and covered by required insurances.	3.67	1.291	2	
Good quality coffee.	3.67	.900	4	
Destination's image in terms of tolerance towards diversity (religious, national, cultural).	3.60	1.056	3	
Delegates expect a strong element of local tradition and culture (to provide a unique experience) to be evident at the conference venue, social events and gala dinner.	3.60	.910	4	
Cultural conference venue offering local food and traditional local entertainment.	3.47	1.060	2	
Sufficient availability of power devices dedicated to each delegate (for laptops, mobile phones, iPads etc).	3.47	1.302	4	

Immediate welcome experience at destination transport nodes such as banners, specifically-created directional signage and manned welcome/help desks.	3.47	.915	3	
Use of software to allow interactive discussions, voting in real time during sessions and connection with online delegates.	3.40	.986	4	
The destination's attractiveness in general for companions (including families, spouses, partners etc).	3.33	1.175	3	
High level of security at destination is visible not only within the central areas but throughout the destination	3.33	1.113	2	
Security checks of conference space including identity checks before entering, sniffer dogs, bad searches, security at cloakrooms and at the venue.	3.27	1.033	4	
In-house entertainment or venue close to main attractions, restaurants, bars, nightlife with long opening hours.	3.20	.862	3	
Use of Bluetooth low-energy beacons in tandem with conference event apps to distribute conference related material (and avoid paper material).	3.20	1.146	3	
The provision of pre- and post- conference tours.	3.20	.775	3	
Conference apps to track attendees at the conference facilitate networking and instant communication/ customer care.	3.13	1.302	4	
Destination weather conditions could be risky	3.13	.990	4	
Training at destination of social media platforms use for marketing the destination, the conference, engaging participants, voting etc.	3.07	1.100	2	
Factual information about rate of crime at a destination is easily accessible.	3.07	1.335	2	
Delegates require to be completely immersed in the conference experience for a number of days (festivalisation).	3.07	.704	3	
Badge technology and biometric monitoring of delegates.	2.80	.862	2	
All conferences should be planned by Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs).	2.73	1.280	2	

Availability of dedicated and controlled areas for demonstrations and protestors during high-level conferences.	2.73	1.280	2		
Option to use loyalty rewards at international accommodation chains.	2.67	.724	3		
Discounts on transport to/from and within the destination; discounts at local retail operators and restaurants.	2.67	.976	3		
Support from local authorities to allow vetting system of conference delegates at online registration stage when required.	2.33	.724	1		
VR sets available at the conference to improve the delegate's experience.	2.27	.961	1		
Tangible gifts with high symbolic meanings related to the conference or destination given to delegates.	2.27	1.223	1		
Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning	1.87	.990	1		

Thank you for completing this last round of questions!

Appendix 10: Ethics Checklist for Delphi Study

Bournemouth University

Research Ethics Checklist

About Your Checklist

Ethics ID	23324
Date Created	09/11/2018 08:30:11
Status	Approved
Date Approved	21/01/2019 17:03:50
Date Submitted	21/01/2019 13:01:21
Risk	High

Researcher Details

Name	James Cassar
Faculty	Faculty of Management
Status	Postgraduate Research (MRes, MPhil, PhD, DProf, EngD, EdD)
Course	Postgraduate Research - Tourism
Have you received funding to support this research project?	No

Project Details

Title	Conference Destination - Delphi Study
Start Date of Project	01/09/2014
End Date of Project	30/09/2019
Proposed Start Date of Data Collection	28/11/2018
Original Supervisor	Julie Whitfield
Approver	Research Ethics Panel

Summary - no more than 500 words (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)

As part of the PhD research, a Delphi study is to be carried out with a number of stakeholders within the conference industry. This shall be done via three rounds of email questionnaires, whereby each round will build upon the previous one.

Around 21 participants in total shall be required. All the participants shall be contacted beforehand, and shall only be included in the research once they contacted once they consent to participate.

No question shall require any personal information, while participants may decide to avoid including any details they feel they are uncomfortable with.

All participants shall be kept anonymous.

Filter Question: Does your study involve Human Participants?

Participants	
Describe the number of participants and specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used	
A total of 20-30 participants are required based on their involvement in conference tourism.	
Do your participants include minors (under 16)?	
Are your participants considered adults who are competent to give consent but considered vulnerable?	No
Is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check required for the research activity?	No

Recruitment	
Please provide details on intended recruitment methods, include copies of any advertisements.	
Participants shall be identified through online literature and a network of colleagues and friends. They shall then be contacted via email (when an email is available).	
Do you need a Gatekeeper to access your participants?	No

Data Collection Activity	
Will the research involve questionnaire/online survey? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the questionnaire/survey or sample of questions.	Yes
How do you intend to distribute the questionnaire?	
online,other	
If online, do you intend to use a survey company to host and collect responses?	No
If Other, please provide details.	
These shall be sent by the researcher via email	
Will the research involve interviews? If Yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the interview questions or sample of questions	
Will the research involve a focus group? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the focus group questions or sample of questions.	No
Will the research involve the collection of audio materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of photographic materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of video materials/film?	No
Will the study involve discussions of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	No
Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) be administered to the participants?	No

Will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potential harmful procedures of any kind?	No
Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants or researchers (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	No
Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No

Consent

Describe the process that you will be using to obtain valid consent for participation in the research activities. If consent is not to be obtained explain why.
Potential participants shall be emailed beforehand and asked if they are interested to participate in the project. Once interest is confirmed, a form shall be sent over for the participants to revise, understand the exact conditions, and sign.

Do your participants include adults who lack/may lack capacity to give consent (at any point in the study)?	
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent?	No

Participant Withdrawal

At what point and how will it be possible for participants to exercise their rights to withdraw from the study?	This shall be included in the participant agreement form prior to the start of the study.
If a participant withdraws from the study, what will be done with their data?	Personal data shall not be required and shall not form part of the data needed for the study. Should a participant withdraw, his records (name, surname, email address) shall be deleted.

Participant Compensation

Will participants receive financial compensation (or course credits) for their participation?	No
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No

Research Data

Will identifiable personal information be collected, i.e. at an individualised level in a form that identifies or could enable identification of the participant?	Yes
Please give details of the types of information to be collected, e.g. personal characteristics, education, work role, opinions or experiences	
The researcher will be collecting and retaining personal information that includes the name, email addresses and work role of participants. These will only be collected as they are required by the researcher to satisfy the sample requirements and will not be included within the study itself.	
Will the personal data collected include any special category data, or any information about actual or alleged criminal activity or criminal convictions which are not already in the public domain?	No
Will the information be anonymised/de-identified at any stage during the study?	No
If No, please provide details (e.g. explain why you need to keep identifiable personal, what are the benefits to your research)	
Will research outputs include any identifiable personal information i.e. data at an individualised level in a form which identifies or could enable identification of the individual?	
Have you considered and addressed the need for 'data minimisation'?	Yes

Please give brief details of how you will address the need for data minimisation or explain why you do not think this relates to the personal information you will be collecting.
In this study the very basic details are collected. These include the name, email address and role of participant. These details are the minimum details required to ensure that the participants satisfies the research's requirements (work role) and that the researcher can communicate with her/him (email address). No other information is to be requested.

Storage, Access and Disposal of Research Data

During the study, what data relating to the participants will be stored and where?	The data stored will be participant name, email address and work role. It will be stored on the personal online folder of the researcher and protected by password so that no third parties can access it.
How long will the data relating to participants be stored?	The data will be stored until the study is completed. This will include the time required for the researcher to be awarded the PhD.
During the study, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	Only the researcher.
After the study has finished, what data relating to participants will be stored and where? Please indicate whether data will be retained in identifiable form.	Only the name, email address and job role will be stored. These will be kept in the researcher's personal online folder.
After the study has finished, how long will data relating to participants be stored?	Once the study has finished and the PhD awarded, the personal data shall be destroyed.
After the study has finished, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	The personal data will always be accessible only to the researcher. This includes during and after the study.
Will any identifiable participant data be transferred outside of the European Economic Area (EEA)?	No
How and when will the data relating to participants be deleted/destroyed?	The data file will be deleted from the personal online folder of the researcher and removed from the recycling bin of the researcher's personal computer upon confirmation that PhD will be successfully awarded to the researcher.
Once your project completes, will any anonymised research data be stored on BU's Online Research Data Repository "BORDaR"?	No

Please explain why you do not intend to deposit your research data on BORDaR? E.g. do you intend to deposit your research data in another data repository (discipline or funder specific)? If so, please provide details.

Dissemination Plans

Will you inform participants of the results?	

Final Review

Are there any other ethical considerations relating to your project which have not been covered above?	

Risk Assessment

Have you undertaken an appropriate Risk Assessment?	Yes

Filter Question: Will your research study take place outside the UK and/or specifically target a country outside the UK?

Additional Details

What country will your research take place in? Please include details and measures taken to minimise risks.	Since the questionnaire shall be sent via email to different participants, it aims to cover as many countries as possible,
Does the country in which you are conducting research require that you obtain internal ethical approval (other than BU ethical approval)?	No

Attached documents

Questions.docx - attached on 09/11/2018 18:07:51

Participant Agreement Form - Conference PhD Research.docx - attached on 09/11/2018 18:08:08

Participant Information Sheet - Conference PhD Research v2.docx - attached on 21/01/2019 11:28:57

Appendix 11: Association Delegates' Questionnaire Results

1. Demographics

Table A.1 Which country do you represent?		
	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Germany	7.4	8.5
China	4.4	12.9
Slovenia	1.1	14.0
Singapore	1.8	15.9
Iraq	.7	16.6
Thailand	1.1	17.7
Algeria	.4	18.1
Australia	.7	18.8
Grenada	1.5	20.3
Rwanda	1.1	21.4
Jordan	1.1	22.5
India	2.2	24.7
Taiwan	1.8	26.6
Armenia	.7	27.3
Kuwait	1.1	28.4
Italy	3.0	31.4
Bulgaria	.7	32.1
Belgium	1.5	33.6
Indonesia	.4	33.9
Denmark	4.1	38.0
Austria	3.3	41.3
France	2.2	43.5
UK	2.2	45.8
Turkey	1.1	46.9
Finland	1.8	48.7
Other	52.4	100.00

Table A2 Gender		
	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	54.6	55.1
Male	43.5	43.8
Other	1.1	1.1
Total	99.3	100.0

Table A3 Age		
	Percent	Valid Percent
21 and under	35.7	35.9
22-35	57.7	58.1
36-50	3.8	3.9
51-64	2.1	2.1
Total	99.3	100.0
Missing	.7	
Total	100.0	

Table A4 Level of Education		
	Percent	Valid Percent
No formal qualifications	1.0	1.1
Secondary education	8.4	8.6
College	52.8	53.9
Graduate	25.9	26.4
Postgraduate	9.8	10.0
Total	97.9	100.0
Missing	2.1	
Total	100.0	

2. How did you get to know about this conference? (All applicable answers ticked)

Table A5 Newspaper			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	97.6	97.9	97.9
Ticked	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A6 Local association branch			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	57.0	57.2	57.2
Ticked	42.7	42.8	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A7 Trade magazine			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	99.0	99.3	99.3
Ticked	.7	.7	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A8 Email to mailing list			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	64.0	64.2	64.2
Ticked	35.7	35.8	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A9 Social Media			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	66.8	67.0	67.0
Ticked	32.9	33.0	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A10 Word of mouth			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	99.0	99.3	99.3
Ticked	.7	.7	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A11 Internet search			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	89.2	89.5	89.5
Ticked	10.5	10.5	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A12 Friend			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	95.1	95.8	95.8
Ticked	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	99.3	100.0	
Missing	1.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A13 Previous association conference			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	96.2	96.5	96.5
Ticked	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	99.7	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

Table A14 Direct email invitation			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not ticked	72.7	94.1	94.1
Ticked	3.8	5.0	99.1
3	.7	.9	100.0
Total	77.3	100.0	
Missing	.3		
Total	100.0		

3.Participants' conference travelling trends

Table A15. How frequently do you go for a conference trip (internationally)			
Response	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Not at all	16.1	16.2	16.5
Less than once a year	21.0	21.1	37.7
Once to twice a year	38.5	38.7	76.4
Three to four times a year	17.1	17.3	93.7
More than five times a year	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	99.3	100.0	
Missing	.7		

Table A16. What time of the year do you most frequently travel for conferences?	
Season	**Valid Percent**
Summer	27.9
Spring	33.6
Autumn	13.9
Winter	5.9

Table A17. How many days do you usually spend at the destination before or after the conference?	
Number of days	Valid Percent
Zero	16.8
One day	29.7
Two-three days	40.1
Four-five days	10.8
Other	1.8
Other - Seven days	.7
Total	100.0

Table A18 - Why do you travel to a destination before a conference?		
Reason given	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
To refresh	2.2	2.2
Sightseeing	23.6	25.8
Depends on flights	1.1	27.0
Go only for the conference	1.1	28.1
To see the destination since it is so far away	1.1	29.2
To travel around	11.2	40.4
Obligations	15.7	56.2
Taste local food	1.1	57.3
logistical convenience	4.5	61.8
Expensive	3.4	65.2
For networking	2.2	67.4
Depends on personal schedule	1.1	68.5
No time	1.1	69.7
Prefer to arrive early to be more comfortable but often not possible	1.1	70.8
Po benefit from social programme	1.1	71.9
Depends on time and destination	1.1	73.0
Preparation	2.2	75.3
Depends on flights	9.0	84.3
If possible	2.2	86.5
To get insight on what is to be discussed	1.1	87.6
to settle before conference	3.4	91.0
Tourism	1.1	92.1
To get used to the country	1.1	93.3
To experience culture	1.1	94.4
To experience lifestyle	2.2	96.6
Few days paid leave	1.1	97.8
Other	2.2	100.0

4. Motivator and barrier results

Table A19 – Motivating variables to conference attendance								
		Average		Respondents' ranking in %				
				Not	Little			Very important
Variable	N	Mean	Median	important	importance	Uncertain	Important	
Fast Wi-Fi availability in general	264	4.45	5.00	1.9	3.0	7.2	24.2	63.6
Topic of personal interest	266	4.35	4.00	1.1	1.5	6.4	42.9	48.1
Develop new skills	265	4.34	4.00	0.4	3.0	7.5	40.0	49.1
Clean accommodation	269	4.32	4.00	0.7	2.2	8.2	41.6	47.2
Interesting conference program	267	4.28	4.00	0.7	1.9	9.4	44.6	43.4
Power supply availability for devices in general	263	4.25	5.00	3.0	4.6	9.1	31.9	51.0
Networking opportunity	267	4.21	4.00	0.4	4.9	10.9	41.6	42.3
Opportunity to work across culture	268	4.20	4.00	1.1	3.0	14.9	36.9	44.0
Education improvement	267	4.18	4.00	0.7	4.1	10.9	44.9	39.3
Socialise and making new friends	267	4.04	4.00	2.6	5.6	10.9	46.8	34.1
Career enhancement	268	4.00	4.00	2.2	6.0	11.2	51.2	29.5
Influence organisation's future direction	267	3.97	4.0	1.1	7.5	12.7	50.2	28.5
Access to conference agenda/schedule from delegate's device	266	3.96	4.00	4.1	6.8	13.5	39.8	35.7
High service quality at accommodation venue	269	3.96	4.00	1.5	5.9	21.2	37.9	33.5
Develop international reputation	265	3.93	4.00	1.5	9.8	14.3	42.6	31.7
Safe destination	268	3.92	4.00	4.1	11.2	10.1	37.7	36.9
Positive past experiences of attending a conference by the same association	267	3.92	4.00	7.1	6.4	18.4	42.7	25.1
Short distance to conference facility from accommodation	264	3.90	4.00	5.3	8.7	12.5	37.9	35.6
Keep up to date on latest issues	267	3.88	4.00	2.6	6.0	16.5	50.9	24.0
Travel expenses covered	269	3.80	4.00	4.8	10.8	17.8	32.3	34.2
Fully accessible accommodation venue	264	3.77	4.00	4.5	9.5	17.0	42.8	26.1
Leadership training opportunity	262	3.73	4.00	6.1	8.0	18.7	40.8	26.3
Combine business with leisure	265	3.68	4.00	4.5	10.9	18.5	43.8	22.3
High reputation of speakers	264	3.63	3.00	2.7	12.5	23.1	42.8	18.9
See cultural and historic attractions at destination	269	3.62	4.00	5.9	10.8	18,6	44.2	20.4
Conference venue fully accessible	267	3.61	4.00	6.4	10.5	18.7	46.4	17.6
Networking spaces for free time at accommodation venue	265	3.60	4.00	7.5	10.2	17.7	44.2	20.4
Networking spaces for free time at conference venue	266	3.59	4.00	8.3	10.9	15.8	43.2	21.8
Conference venue located within accommodation	263	3.59	4.00	6.1	12.5	19.4	39.9	22.1
First time visiting destination	268	3.59	4.00	6.3	14.9	18.3	34.3	26.1
Innovative incentive programme	260	3.58	4.00	3.1	10.8	29.2	39.2	17.7
Participate in association/board elections	264	3.57	4.00	7.6	12.9	19.3	35.2	25.0
Three star accommodation or higher	267	3.57	4.00	6.7	12.7	21.0	36.0	23.6

Pressure to represent your institution	268	3.57	4.00	6.7	11.2	21.6	39.6	20.9
Convenient local transport at destination	268	3.57	4.00	7.5	10.1	18.3	46.6	17.5
Self-esteem enhancement	268	3.50	4.00	7.5	12.3	21.3	41.0	17.9
Attending with friend, relative or colleague	241	3.48	4.00	8.3	13.7	20.7	36.5	20.7
Climate control during conference	265	3.45	4.00	6.8	14.7	22.6	38.9	17.0
Quick-response customer care service at accommodation venue	266	3.44	4.00	12.0	10.5	20.3	35.3	21.3
No barrier to enter destination	265	3.44	4.00	10.9	15.1	19.2	31.3	23.0
Escape from daily routine	267	3.42	4.00	8.2	16.5	19.1	37.5	18.7
Unusual/exotic destination	266	3.41	4.00	7.9	15.4	25.6	30.5	20.7
Discounted accommodation cost	259	3.39	4.00	12.0	13.5	18.1	36.7	19.7
Voting through delegates' device (dedicated apps)	266	3.38	4.00	10.2	12.8	24.1	35.0	18.0
Deliver a paper/presentation/ workshop	267	3.36	4.00	10.9	13.1	23.2	34.5	18.4
High reputation of the conference venue	269	3.34	4.00	8.9	14.1	28.6	30.9	17.5
Need to be present at the AGM	188	3.32	3.00	8.5	11.7	38.8	22.9	17.6
Discounted air fares	268	3.31	3.50	10.4	15.3	24.3	32.8	17.2
Asked to be chair, moderator or helper	266	3.31	4.0	18.0	11.7	13.2	35.7	21.4
Participate in destination-specific activities or events	267	3.30	4.00	8.2	18.0	20.6	41.6	11.6
Built-in technology systems (example concealed ceiling projectors) at conference venue	267	3.25	4.00	14.6	15.0	19.5	32.2	18.7
Interest routes offered in apps (example shopping, history, jogging, walking)	266	3.25	3.00	12.4	17.7	21.1	30.5	18.4
Positive conference experiences at the same destination	267	3.24	3.00	12.7	17.6	27.3	32.6	9.4
Possibility of customer care through fast-response apps	265	3.19	3.00	13.2	15.8	28.7	23.0	19.2
Entertainment facilities available close to accommodation or conference venue	268	3.19	4.00	10.8	20.9	21.3	32.5	14.6
Leisure facilities available at accommodation venue	259	3.17	3.00	12.4	18.9	22.4	32.4	13.9
Business facilities available at accommodation venue	267	3.15	3.00	13.9	18.4	21.7	31.5	14.6
Climate at destination	259	3.13	3.00	15.1	17.4	19.7	35.1	12.7
Make a trip to another city or country close to conference destination	269	3.10	4.00	14.1	19.7	20.1	33.8	12.3
Conference environmental-friendly activities	267	3.09	4.00	14.6	17.2	24.7	31.5	12.0
Environmentally-friendly transport	267	3.07	3.00	12.4	19.5	27.3	30.0	10.9
Opportunity to spend time on your own	267	3.04	3.00	15.0	23.6	18.7	27.7	15.0
Marketing material disseminated electronically	265	3.04	3.00	13.6	20.8	25.7	28.3	11.7
Judge speaker before consulting	261	3.02	3.00	8.0	21.1	41.4	20.3	9.2
Direct flight available to destination	267	3.01	3.00	14.6	22.5	23.2	26.2	13.5
Innovative accommodation setting	252	3.00	3.00	11.1	20.6	31.3	30.6	6.3
Famous local cuisine	264	2.98	4.00	15.2	25.4	16.7	31.8	11.0
First time visiting new conference venue	263	2.98	3.00	18.6	16.0	25.1	29.3	11.0
Freebies and merchandise environment-friendly	265	2.94	3.00	15.5	22.3	26.0	25.3	10.9
Only recyclable items utilised during conference	267	2.91	3.00	14.6	24.0	28.1	22.1	11.2
Venue/accommodation eco-certified	263	2.91	3.00	17.1	21.3	25.1	26.2	10.3

Lunch/dinner food chosen remotely through apps	266	2.87	3.00	23.3	18.4	20.7	23.3	14.3
Visit friends or relatives	257	2.87	3.00	16.0	25.7	23.3	25.7	9.3
Availability of gym, sauna, spa at accommodation venue	268	2.86	3.00	19.4	23.5	22.8	20.5	13.8
Avoid stigma of not being mobile	263	2.83	3.00	18.6	20.5	31.2	18.6	11.0
Remote check-in (via an app) at accommodation venue	268	2.78	3.00	25.0	19.8	21.6	19.4	14.2
Remote climate control (via an app) at accommodation venue	266	2.71	3.00	22.9	24.4	24.8	14.3	13.5
Accommodation at a known hotel chain	268	2.66	3.00	27.6	20.1	23.1	17.2	11.9
Possibility of gathering loyalty points from accommodation that may be redeemed in other destinations	265	2.65	3.00	26.0	21.1	24.5	18.1	10.2
Shopping Facilities	268	2.56	4.00	29.1	24.3	20.1	14.9	11.6
Activities for partners or family	264	2.45	2.00	28.4	26.5	23.5	15.2	6.4
Gain from currency exchange rate	266	2.44	4.00	32.3	22.9	20.7	16.2	7.9

Table A20 – Barrier variables to conference attendance							
	Average		Respondents' ranking in %				
Variable	Mean	Median	Not important	Little importance	Uncertain	Important	Very important
Lack of Wi-Fi availability at conference venue	4.51	5.00	1.6	2.7	4.7	25.2	65.9
Slow Wi-Fi connection at conference venue	4.35	5.00	2,3	3.1	9.2	28.6	56.9
Sanitation at destination	4.29	5.00	1.5	3.8	81	36.9	49.6
Sanitation problems at accommodation	4.23	4.00	3.4	3.0	11.3	32.0	50.4
Lack of wi-f availability at accommodation	4.20	4.00	2.6	6.0	8.7	33.6	49.1
High accommodation cost	4.19	4.00	3.4	2.3	10.5	39.8	44.0
Safety at the destination	4.18	4.00	2.3	4.9	9.8	38.4	44.7
Terrorism threat at the destination	4.00	4.00	6.0	8.2	9.7	32.2	43.8
High travel expenses to destination	3.97	4.00	4.1	6.7	15.4	35.6	38.2
lack of power supply for devices at conference venue	3.96	4.00	3.0	6.8	15.4	40.6	34.2
Lack of online information available about the conference	3.96	4.00	4.2	4.6	14.4	44.5	32.3
Conference registration costs	3.95	4.00	1.9	6.9	18.7	39.3	33.2
Environment not suitable to work at accommodation	3.89	4.00	1.9	6.9	18.7	39.3	33.2
Conference advertised too late to fit into your schedule	3.88	4.00	4.6	5.0	19.5	39.5	31.4
Lack of cultural and religious tolerance	3.79	4.00	5.7	7.6	20.8	33.7	32.2
Problem taking time away from work	3.77	4.00	6.2	6.5	22.7	33.5	31.2
Lack of funding to attend	3.75	4.00	5.3	10.3	19.8	32.8	31.7
Health problems	3.71	4.00	9.2	8.8	15.6	35.1	31.3
Family obligations	3.67	4.00	8.8	10.3	14.6	37.5	28.7
Terrorism in neighboring country	3.66	4.00	7.9	11.3	18.9	30.2	31.7
Conference too long to stay away	3.66	4.00	5.1	10.9	20.6	39.7	23.7
Ban on access to social media	3.62	4.00	7.6	12.5	20.1	29.9	29.9
lack of suitable lighting at conference venue	3.62	4.00	4.8	10.0	21.6	45.4	18.2
Inflexible agenda (not possible to attend only one day of the conference)	3.58	4.00	4.6	10.0	26.9	39.6	18.8
Complicated conference booking system	3.54	4.00	5.1	9.1	30.8	36.4	18.6

lack of accessibility around whole conference venue	3.52	4.00	4.9	12.8	24.8	40.2	17.3
Not possible to delegate work back home	3.51	4.00	6.8	11.0	26.2	36.1	19.8
Travelling barriers	3.50	4.00	6.8	15.5	23.0	30.6	24.2
Lack of accessibility around whole accommodation venue	3.44	4.00	6.8	16.3	21.3	36.9	18.6
Poor customer care service at accommodation	3.44	4.00	5.7	18.9	22.6	31.7	21.1
High destination cost-of-living	3.40	3.50	8.6	14.2	24.3	33.7	19.1
Inconvenient mealtimes at accommodation	3.39	4.00	5.3	18.2	26.5	32.6	17.4
lack of climate control at conference venue	3.38	4.00	7.5	16.8	23.1	35.8	16.8
Backlog of work to tackle on return	3.38	4.00	8.9	12.0	27.9	34.9	16.3
Negative image of destination as a conference location	3.37	4.00	7.9	13.2	26.7	38.3	13.9
Does not cater for specific diets, allergies or cultural requirements	3.33	4.00	11.0	17.0	21.6	28.8	21.6
Conference material not accessible to all	3.33	4.00	11.1	12.6	25.3	34.1	16.9
Lack of destination information available	3.33	3.00	9.0	12.8	28.6	35.7	13.9
Instability in neighboring countries	3.32	4.00	10.6	16.0	23.2	30.8	19.4
Lack of accessibility to hospital/doctor	3.32	4.00	13.7	9.5	26.3	32.1	18.3
Language barrier	3.30	4.00	11.6	17.8	18.5	33.2	18.9
Local expectations regarding behaviour	3.30	3.00	8.7	15.6	29.3	29.7	16.7
Travel time to destination	3.23	3.00	10.3	17.6	25.3	32.2	14.6
Inconvenient travelling times	3.23	3.00	10.3	18.3	23.0	35.3	13.1
Specific diets, allergies and cultural specifications not catered for	3.20	3.00	16.8	11.8	24.4	28.6	18.3
Staff not trained to assist special requests	3.18	3.00	14.4	12.2	28.1	31.6	13.7
Lack of leisure facilities at accommodation	3.12	3.00	11.4	19.7	26.9	29.5	12.5
Fee for helpers accompanying delegates not discounted	3.03	3.00	14.2	17.2	32.2	24.1	12.3
Lack of disabled toilets in general	3.00	3.00	20.9	11.4	29.3	23.6	14.8
Lack of permanent ramps in general	2.90	3.00	21.2	13.5	30.9	24.7	9.3
Use of non-environmentally friendly items at conference venue	2.85	3.00	14.9	24.6	28.0	25.4	7.1
Conference venue not modern	2.80	3.00	19.9	21.3	25.1	26.6	7.1
Weak currency exchange rate	2.76	3.00	18.9	23.9	27.7	21.2	8.3
Conference venue not-eco-certified	2.74	3.00	18.7	24.3	27.7	22.8	6.4
Lack of apps to communicate requests	2.73	3.00	17.7	27.1	26.3	22.6	6.4
Free merchandise	2.64	3.00	21.6	28.2	23.6	17.8	8.9
Already visited conference venue before	2.60	3.00	24.8	23.3	24.8	21.1	6.0
Already visited destination	2.56	3.00	25.1	24.7	25.5	18.4	6.4
Loneliness during the conference stay	2.43	2.00	37.9	14.9	22.2	16.1	8.8
Jet lag	2.39	2.00	29.5	26.7	24.4	14.3	5.0
Different time zones	2.11	2.00	39.8	24.4	23.7	9.0	3.0
Afraid of flying	1.90	1.00	56.3	15.3	14.9	9.2	4.2

5. Total Variance - Motivators and Barriers

Table A21 - Total Variance Explained – Motivators' PCA								
	Initial Eigenvalues			**Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings**			**Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings**		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.752	27.518	27.518	2.752	27.518	27.518	2.105	21.049	21.049
2	1.520	15.204	42.722	1.520	15.204	42.722	1.642	16.420	37.469
3	1.352	13.522	56.244	1.352	13.522	56.244	1.622	16.223	53.692
4	1.034	10.345	66.589	1.034	10.345	66.589	1.290	12.896	66.589
5	.862	8.618	75.207						
6	.656	6.558	81.764						
7	.564	5.639	87.403						
8	.475	4.748	92.151						
9	.421	4.212	96.363						
10	.364	3.637	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.								

Table A22 - Total Variance Explained – Barriers' PCA								
	Initial Eigenvalues			**Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings**			**Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings**		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.496	43.701	43.701	3.496	43.701	43.701	2.317	28.963	28.963
2	1.498	18.720	62.421	1.498	18.720	62.421	1.987	24.834	53.797
3	.873	10.910	73.331	.873	10.910	73.331	1.297	16.217	70.015
4	.731	9.143	82.474	.731	9.143	82.474	.997	12.459	82.474
5	.558	6.972	89.446						
6	.371	4.637	94.083						
7	.270	3.373	97.456						
8	.204	2.544	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.								

6. General questions

Table A23 - Do you feel it would be beneficial to delegates if conference venues had a universal accreditation rating system?		
Response	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Yes	66.0	62.1
No	31.6	97.6
Missing	2.4	100.0

Table A24 - Does it make a difference to you if conference is held in green destination?		
Response	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Yes	51.4	51.4
No	47.4	99.6
Missing	1.2	100.0

Table A25: Environmental Factors Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
Venue/accommodation eco-certified	263	4	2.91	1.252
Only recyclable items utilised during conference	267	4	2.91	1.222
Freebies and merchandise environment-friendly	265	4	2.94	1.239
Marketing material disseminated electronically	265	4	3.04	1.227
Environmentally friendly transport	267	4	3.07	1.193
Conference environmental-friendly activities	267	4	3.09	1.244

Appendix 12: Factors extracted from Delphi Study - First round

No.	Extracted Factors
1	Wide range of accommodation available, from 3 to 5-star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options, in different styles, and including authentic local accommodation options.
2	Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily).
3	Destination has image of being safe.
4	Purpose-built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within one venue space).
5	Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences)
6	No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations
7	Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly.
8	A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc.)
9	Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language, example English).
10	Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, conference bureau, foreign affairs ministry).
11	An easy VISA application process.
12	Accessibility to accommodate all delegates' needs (physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc.).
13	Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use.
14	Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality.
15	Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service.
16	Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences.
17	Destination's strength in academic knowledge/ research or strong industry presence of a particular area.
18	Relevant authorities' policy *vis-à-vis* conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement.
19	Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients.
20	Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics).
21	Proximity and ease of access from conference venue to other attractive destinations for visitation.
22	Food areas with built-in lounges to promote private networking and spaces at regular intervals for informal networking.
23	Destination offers approved venues to be used for conferences and social events that are endorsed by relevant authorities in terms of safety standards and covered by required insurances.
24	Good quality coffee.
25	Destination's image in terms of tolerance towards diversity (religious, national, cultural).

26	Delegates expect a strong element of local tradition and culture (to provide a unique experience) to be evident at the conference venue, social events and gala dinner.
27	Cultural conference venue offering local food and traditional local entertainment.
28	Sufficient availability of power devices dedicated to each delegate (for laptops, mobile phones, iPads etc.).
29	Immediate welcome experience at destination transport nodes such as banners, specifically created directional signage and staffed welcome/help desks.
30	Use of software to allow interactive discussions, voting in real time during sessions and connection with online delegates.
31	The destination's attractiveness in general for companions (including families, spouses, partners etc.).
32	High level security at destination is visible not only within the central areas but throughout the destination.
33	Security checks of conference space including identity checks before entering, sniffer dogs, bad searches, security at cloakrooms and at the venue.
34	In-house entertainment or venue close to main attractions, restaurants, bars, nightlife with long opening hours.
35	Use of Bluetooth low-energy beacons in tandem with conference event apps to distribute conference related material (and avoid paper material).
36	The provision of pre- and post-conference tours.
37	Conference apps to track attendees at the conference to facilitate networking and instant communication/customer care.
38	Destination weather conditions could be risky.
39	Training at destination of social media platforms use for marketing the destination, the conference, engaging participants, voting etc.
40	Factual information about rate of crime at a destination is easily accessible.
41	Delegates require to be completely immersed in the conference experience for several days (festivalisation).
42	Badge technology and biometric monitoring of delegates.
43	All conferences should be planned by Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs).
44	Availability of dedicated and controlled areas for demonstrations and protestors during high-level conferences.
45	Option to use loyalty rewards at international accommodation chains.
46	Discounts on transport to/from and within the destination; discounts at local retail operators and restaurants.
47	Support from local authorities to allow vetting system of conference delegates at online registration stage when required.
48	VR sets available at the conference to improve the delegate's experience.
49	Tangible gifts with high symbolic meanings related to the conference or destination given to delegates.
50	Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning etc.
51	Ease of accessibility to destination including international airport, frequent direct flights and short travel time (and reasonable price) to destination.
52	Ease of accessibility at the destination including good public transportation at low cost.
53	Conference and accommodation venues are located close to each other.
54	Overall costs for conference organisers to organise the conference at the destination (conference venue, transportation, social and gala activities)

55	Allocated networking opportunities during conference programme (formal and informal networking).
56	Climate at the destination.
57	Total conference tourism product including hotels, conference venues, conference equipment rental suppliers, retail outlets, restaurants and social activities within easy access of each other and of high standard available.
58	The provision of leisure facilities for social programmes for both delegates and accompanying partners within easy access of conference and accommodation venues.
59	High food hygiene standard.
60	Conference venue must provide comfortable seating, natural lighting, climate control, good sound acoustics and sound-proofing.
61	Free, high speed Wi-Fi.
62	Sufficient capacity of halls and venue space for large and small conferences, as well as plentiful accommodation in close proximity.
63	Staff that constantly smile; are knowledgeable about the venues and able to handle complaints.
64	Cost of living at the destination (accommodation, food and travelling at destination).
65	Conference venue spaces must provide facilities such as separate break rooms, breast feeding rooms, smoking zones, gender neutral bathrooms.
66	Professional moderators and renowned speakers

Appendix 13: Delphi Study Results – Round Two and Three

1. A variety of food with attention to dietary requirements and cultural diversity as well (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc)

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

2. Discounts on transport to/from and within the destination; discounts at local retail operators and restaurants

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	42.9	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	21.4			

3. An immediate welcome experience at destination transport nodes such as banners, specifically created directional signage and manned welcome/help desks.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	50.0			
Important/ Very Important	42.9			

4. Detailed information about the destination and travel made available in advance to delegates from an official source (such as conference organiser, Conference Bureau, Foreign Affairs ministry).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	0			
Important/ Very Important	92.9			

5. An easy VISA application process.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

6. Relevant authorities' policy vis-à-vis conference tourism including professional bidding consultation, ambassador programme and local suppliers' endorsement.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	71.4			

7. Available local authority funding for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions for suppliers and potential clients.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	71.4			

8. Purpose built conference centres (including accommodation and a large numbers of delegate facilities within one venue space).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	5.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	7.1			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

9. Destination's strength in academic knowledge/ research or strong industry presence of a particular area.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	64.3			

10. Strong cultural heritage at destination (sightseeing, culinary experiences)

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	7.1			
Important/ Very Important	92.9			

11. The destination's attractiveness in general for companions (including families, spouses, partners etc).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	21.4	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	57.1			

12. Proximity and ease of access from conference venue to other attractive destinations for visitation.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.7			

13. The provision of pre- and post- conference tours.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	64.3			
Important/ Very Important	21.4			

14. Destination image in terms of hospitality and service quality.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	7.1			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

15. Destination's image in terms of tolerance towards diversity (religious, national, cultural).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	50.0			
Important/ Very Important	48.9			

16. Destination has an image and reputation of hosting successful conferences.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

17. Destination has image of being safe.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	7.1			
Important/ Very Important	92.9			

18. Factual information about rate of crime at a destination is easily accessible.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	28.6	3.50	4.00	No
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	50.0			

19. Destination offers approved venues to be used for conferences and social events, that are endorsed by relevant authorities in terms of safety standards and covered by required insurances.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	4.00	4.00	No
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	64.3			

20. High level of security at destination is visible not only within the central areas but throughout the destination

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	50.0			
Important/ Very Important	42.9			

21. Destination weather conditions could be risky.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	57.1			
Important/ Very Important	28.6			

22. Availability of dedicated and controlled areas for demonstrations and protestors during high-level conferences.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	50.0	2.50	2.00	No
Neutral	28.6			
Important/ Very Important	21.4			

23. Fast communication and response time from the local police and medical service.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	71.5			

24. Security checks of conference space including identity checks before entering, sniffer dogs, bad searches, security at cloakrooms and at the venue.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.50	4.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	50.0			

25. Support from local authorities to allow vetting system of conference delegates at online registration stage when required.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	50.0	2.50	3.00	No
Neutral	15.4			
Important/ Very Important	34.6			

26. No language barriers; up-to-date translation equipment for simultaneous translations

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

27. Service providers and staff fluent in a range of languages (or one common language example English).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	28.6			
Important/ Very Important	71.4			

28. Badge technology and biometric monitoring of delegates.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	28.6	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	57.1			
Important/ Very Important	14.3			

29. Use of software to allow interactive discussions, voting in real time during sessions and connection with online delegates.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	3.50	3.00	No
Neutral	42.9			
Important/ Very Important	50.0			

30. VR sets available at the conference to improve the delegate's experience.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	50.0	2.50	3.00	No
Neutral	42.9			
Important/ Very Important	7.1			

31. Use of Bluetooth low-energy beacons in tandem with conference event apps to distribute conference related material (and avoid paper material).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	21.4	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	42.9			
Important/ Very Important	35.7			

32. Sufficient availability of power devices dedicated to each delegate (for laptops, mobile phones, iPads etc).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	57.2			

33. Conference apps to track attendees at the conference facilitate networking and instant communication/ customer care.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	28.6	3.50	4.00	No
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	50.0			

34. Training at destination of social media platforms use for marketing the destination, the conference, engaging participants, voting etc.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	28.6	3.00	4.00	No
Neutral	28.6			
Important/ Very Important	42.8			

35. Accessibility to accommodate all delegate needs (catering for physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	5.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	85.7			

36. In-house entertainment or venue close to main attractions, restaurants, bars, nightlife with long opening hours.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	50.0			
Important/ Very Important	35.7			

37. Flexible space configuration (to easily split large halls into breakouts, or join to create larger spaces and ability to change seating style quickly and easily).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	5.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

38. Venue to have in-built technology (hybrid when required) and support staff to assist in its use.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	85.6			

39. Food areas with built-in lounges to promote private networking and spaces at regular intervals for informal networking

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	No
Neutral	28.6			
Important/ Very Important	64.3			

40. Good quality coffee.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	71.4			

41. Robots to provide simple service such as food delivery during breaks, cleaning

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mean	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	78.6	2.00	1.00	Yes
Neutral	21.4			*not to include in framework*
Important/ Very Important	0			

42. Wide range of accommodation available from 3 to 5 star accommodation, including apartment and hostel options in different styles and including authentic local accommodation options.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	0	5.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	0			
Important/ Very Important	100			

43. Cultural conference venue offering local food and traditional local entertainment.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.50	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	50.0			

44. Option to use loyalty rewards at international accommodation chains.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	42.9	3.00	2.00	No
Neutral	42.9			
Important/ Very Important	14.2			

45. Delegates require a unique memorable experience (needs to be related to the conference destination's characteristics).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	Yes
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	71.5			

46. Delegates require to be completely immersed in the conference experience for a number of days (festivalisation).

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	14.3	3.00	4.00	No
Neutral	64.3			
Important/ Very Important	21.4			

47. Delegates expect a strong element of local tradition and culture (to provide a unique experience) to be evident at the conference venue, social events and gala dinner.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	4.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	57.2			

48. All conferences should be planned by Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs)

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	42.9	3.00	3.00	No
Neutral	35.7			
Important/ Very Important	21.4			

49. Tangible gifts with high symbolic meanings related to the conference or destination given to delegates.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	50.0	2.50	1.00	No
Neutral	21.4			
Important/ Very Important	28.6			

50. Conference venue has green credentials and destination has an image of being eco-friendly.

Ranking	Percentage	Median	Mode	Consensus (≥70%)
Not important/ Little Importance	7.1	4.00	5.00	Yes
Neutral	14.3			
Important/ Very Important	78.6			

Appendix 14: Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit

Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit

Addressing important factors to become a successful association conference destination.

A practitioners' toolkit.

Why consider Conference Tourism?

High Revenue

Conference tourists are amongst the highest spending visitors, spending approximately three times as much as leisure tourists.

Beneficial to a range of Local Industries

Conference tourism income is broadly distributed across the destination. This includes accommodation, meals, souvenirs, retail, transport, entertainment and more.

Embellishment

New conference centres act as catalysts for regeneration and improvement in an area. This leads to investment in enhancing the environment, tourism infrastructure and conference complimentary services.

Consolidate Total Tourism Offer

Conference tourism complements leisure tourism, and offers the possibility to package attractions to improve the destination's total offer. This also offers the opportunity to gain from marketing synergy.

Reduce Seasonality

Conference tourism helps balance a destination's tourism inflow, as it helps attract tourists during low leisure tourism months. This makes it easier to employ motivated and skilled workers for year-round employment.

Image Enhancement

Conference tourism acts as an image enhancer, as conferences offer the opportunity to attract mass media coverage and attention. Hosting conferences also elevates the destination's image, as conference tourists are considered desirable customers.

Who are the Association Conference Tourism Stakeholders?

THE CLIENTS

Association

The association is the decision maker, selecting the destination for its conference. Frequently it creates an internal board to take the decision. Internal characteristics might influence its decision, especially their members' expectations.

The Delegate

Conferences aim to attract the attendance of as many members as possible. Since members are expected to cover most or all of their expenses, they become the end client of the conference. Their requirements and expectations, therefore, become important.

THE SUPPLIERS

Destination

The destination aims to attract conferences by offering what associations and their members expect. These may be general requirements related to the destination's characteristics, or factors that will require the input of other stakeholders.

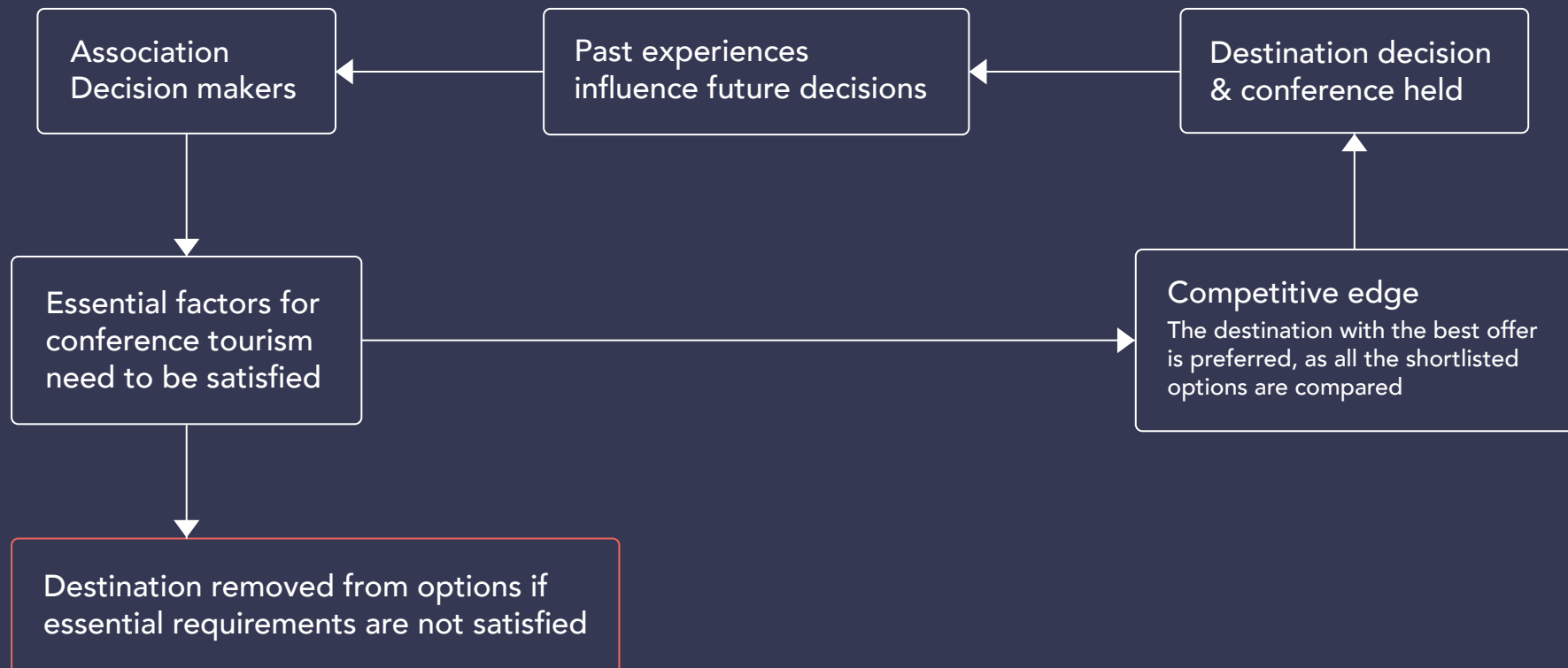*Conference Bureau*

Conference venue

Accommodation

Other Local and International Suppliers

What is the decision-making process?

Associations call for proposals and suppliers to express their interest. If the offers qualify (depending on association guidelines), the associations send the bid manual for suppliers to send their bids. Once bids are sent, options are shortlisted. This first shortlisting may, or may not, require site visits. Negotiations are initiated with the shortlisted destinations, as their bids are revised and resubmitted. Detailed site visits are carried out and negotiations continue until a final selection is completed. The simplified process is as follows:

```
Destination decision        →  Past experiences        →  Association
& conference held              influence future           Decision makers
         ↑                     decisions                       │
         │                                                     ↓
Competitive edge            ←                              Essential factors for
The destination with the best offer                        conference tourism
is preferred, as all the shortlisted                       need to be satisfied
options are compared                                            │
                                                                ↓
                                                           Destination removed from options if
                                                           essential requirements are not satisfied
```

How to get your destination shortlisted

These are the essential factors that influence site-selection, and therefore a destination must address them. The main stakeholders responsible are the destination (and its organisation bodies), the conference venue and the accommodation venue. The factors are grouped to show which stakeholder is mainly responsible for them, and a short description explains briefly what is expected from the stakeholder. Check if your destination is conference tourism ready by filling in the self-audit questionnaire.

Self-Audit Questionnaire

Complete this self-audit to see how well you address the essential factors for conference tourism.

On a scale of 0-4, please rate yourself.
0 = not at all; 1 = a little; 2 = to some extent; 3= quite strong; 4 = very strong

Getting shortlisted requires…

(1) DESTINATION
0 1 2 3 4

Destination connectivity: well-connected international airport, frequent direct flights and short travel time (ideally under 3 hours).
● ● ● ● ●

Good local transport network: several public transportation options including green alternatives and international ride-apps.
● ● ● ● ●

Costs: to organise the conference at the destination need to be reasonable and competitive.
● ● ● ● ●

Facilities close to each other: destinations need to offer good quality conference venues, rental suppliers, retail outlets, restaurants and other activities in one area.
● ● ● ● ●

Leisure: needs to be available for delegates and their partners.
● ● ● ● ●

(2) ACCOMMODATION & CONFERENCE VENUES
0 1 2 3 4

Conference and accommodation facilities: need to be available and close to each other.
● ● ● ● ●

High hygiene standard: official hygiene certification helps reassure delegates and organisers.
● ● ● ● ●

Free, high speed Wi-Fi: at all sites but especially at the conference and accommodation facilities
● ● ● ● ●

Smiling trained staff: knowledgeable and able to handle complaints.
● ● ● ● ●

Networking spaces: available for both formal and informal networking.
● ● ● ● ●

(3) CONFERENCE VENUE

Large halls and venues: conference cannot be hosted unless all the delegates can fit.
● ● ● ● ●

Comfort: comfortable seating, natural lighting, climate control, good sound acoustics and soundproofing.
● ● ● ● ●

0-20 planning and investment is necessary;
21-40 improvements required;
41+ positive chance to be shortlisted

Score: _____

How to stand out

If your destination is shortlisted, you need to offer a competitive edge to win the bid. These factors can help you. Once again, main stakeholders responsible are the destination (and its organisation bodies), the conference venue and the accommodation venue. The factors are grouped to show which stakeholder is mainly responsible for them, and a short description explains briefly what is expected from the stakeholder. Check your standing again by filling in the self-audit questionnaire.

Self-Audit Questionnaire

Complete this self-audit to see how well you address the essential factors for conference tourism.

On a scale of 0-4, please rate yourself.
0 = not at all; 1 = a little; 2 = to some extent; 3= quite strong; 4 = very strong

To achieve a competitive edge requires…

(1) DESTINATION

	0	1	2	3	4
Range of accommodation options: especially within the 3 to 5-star rating and include self-catering apartments. These should follow quality standards.	●	●	●	●	●
Strong cultural heritage: this should be made accessible to associations and utilised for marketing as it makes the destination exclusive.	●	●	●	●	●
Image of safety and security: official statistics and detailed information on what to avoid and how to act at the destination to help delegates and associations feel reassured.	●	●	●	●	●
Destination information available online: helps delegates plan in advance and should be issued by an official source.	●	●	●	●	●

	0	1	2	3	4
Efficient visa application process: that can be completed in a short timeframe. Guidance from relevant authorities makes the destination more attractive.	●	●	●	●	●
Conferences host reputation: destination utilises media to cover successful past conferences held at the destinations and to market itself as successful in the sector.	●	●	●	●	●
Hospitality: the way the destination is portrayed in terms of hospitality and service quality.	●	●	●	●	●
Dedicated conference tourism policy: that offers bidding consultation, marketing programmes and local suppliers' endorsement to promote the destination. Support to association chapters is a plus.	●	●	●	●	●
Funding: for investment in the conference sector, promotion of the destination and subventions.	●	●	●	●	●
Fast emergency service response time: from the local police and medical service when and if needed.	●	●	●	●	●
Green destination: supports green conferences and practices. Supported also by the conference venue.	●	●	●	●	●

(Continues...)

How to stand out (Cont.)

Self-Audit Questionnaire

To achieve a competitive edge requires…

(2) CONFERENCE VENUE

	0	1	2	3	4
Technology infrastructure: to support modern apps, and includes technical staff.	●	●	●	●	●
Flexible space configuration: allowing conference organisers to shift from one set-up to another in a short time frame.	●	●	●	●	●
No language barriers: offering equipment for simultaneous translations and translators knowledgeable in the languages required.	●	●	●	●	●
Close to attractive sites: allowing delegates to visit sites before, after or between sessions.	●	●	●	●	●
Good quality coffee: is expected by delegates and appreciated.	●	●	●	●	●
Purpose-built conference centres available: offer the possibility of providing accommodation and other services to delegates, such as leisure, within the same building.	●	●	●	●	●

(3) ACCOMMODATION & CONFERENCE VENUES

	0	1	2	3	4
Accessibility: needs to cater for all needs including physical, sensory, visual, cognitive, multiple disability etc.	●	●	●	●	●
Food variety: offering healthy food options, catering for different dietary requirements and cultural diversity (vegetarian, vegan, regional, organic, slow food etc.)	●	●	●	●	●
Staff communication: staff communicate easily with the organisers and the delegates and are able to speak their language.	●	●	●	●	●

0-30 planning and investment is necessary;
31-80 improvements required;
81+ well-placed to attract conferences

Score:

Author: James Cassar

A toolkit developed as part of the thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of Bournemouth University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, entitled: The Rejuvenation of mature destinations: Developing a Destination Viability Model for Association Conference tourism

List of Abbreviations

ACDVM   Association Conference Destination Viability Model

BID   Business Improvement Districts

CCDT   Competitive Conference Destination Toolkit

CVB   Conference Visitor Bureau

DMC   Destination Management Company

DMO   Destination Marketing Organisation

GCB   German Convention Bureau

IAPCO   International Association of Professional Congress Organisers

ICCA   International Congress and Convention Association

LCC   Low cost carriers

OOCCVB   Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau

PCA   Principal Component Analysis

PCO   Professional Conference Organiser

PFIs   Private Finance Initiatives

PLC   Product Life Cycle

RBP   Resource Based Perspective

SDIC   Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions

SMT   Sustainable mass tourism

TALC	Tourism Area Life Cycle
UIA	Union of International Associations
UMT	Unsustainable mass tourism
USP	Unique Selling Point
WHO	World Health Organisation