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International Conventions Site Selection Criteria

And a Case Study of Stockholm as an International Conference City

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Declaration

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Date: 2014.06.17

Handwritten signature of Moncef Henaien in blue ink, featuring a stylized 'H' and 'f'.Handwritten signature of Shalvi Sinha in blue ink, featuring a stylized 'S' and 'S'.

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We would like to thank our families for their constant encouragement, support, and love.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the destination site selection criteria for international conferences from the perspectives of the three main players of the conference industry, conference buyers (organizers and delegates) and suppliers. Additionally, the research identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the congress cities of Stockholm and Vienna. Through a comparison with Vienna, the top city for hosting international conferences, a road map for Stockholm has been designed, to strengthen its congress tourism opportunities, thus, obtaining a higher status as an international congress city. This qualitative research has combined both primary and secondary data methods, through semi-standardized expert interviews and secondary studies respectively, to fulfil the study's aim. The data have been analysed by applying the techniques of qualitative content analysis; the secondary data adopting an inductive approach according to Mayring (2003) while the expert interviews using a deductive approach according to Meuser & Nagel (2009). The conclusions of the secondary data have been further compared and contrasted with the outcomes of the primary data, to propose fresh discoveries, clarifications, and concepts related to the site selection criteria for international conferences, and for the congress tourism industry of Stockholm. The research discusses the discoveries of the site selection criteria, the implications of the strengths and weaknesses of Stockholm in comparison to Vienna, recommendations for Stockholm via a road map, and future research areas in detail. The findings and recommendation, not only provide specific steps and inceptions that Stockholm as an international conference city can apply, but also propose findings, which can aid conference buyers and suppliers to cooperate, to strengthen their marketing strategies and develop successful international conferences and destinations to help achieve a greater competitive advantage.

Keywords: Congress tourism, Convention city, International destination selection, Association meeting planners, corporate meeting planners, Convention participation decision making, Destination image, Stockholm congress tourism.

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List of Abbreviations

- AMCs: Association Management Companies
- BTA: British Tourism Authority
- CEMI: Conventions, Exhibitions, Meetings and Incentives
- CEO: Chief Executive Officer
- CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
- CPCs: Conference Production Companies
- CVB: Convention and Visitor Bureau
- DMCs: Destination Management Companies
- DMOs: Destination Marketing Organizations
- EFCT: European Federation of Conference Towns)
- ETA: Electronic Travel Authority
- EU: European Union
- FIM: Foundation for International Meetings
- GST: Goods and Services Tax
- IAEO: International Atomic Energy Organization
- ICCA: International Congress and Convention Association
- IMEX: Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive Travel, Meetings and Events
- JVC: Victor Company of Japan
- KPI: Key Performance Indicators
- KTH: Royal Institute of Technology
- MCE: Meetings, Conventions and Exhibitions

- MC&IT: Meetings, Conventions & Incentive Travel
- MECE: Meetings, Events, Conventions and Exhibitions
- MICE: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
- OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OPEC: Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
- PCMA: Professional Convention Management Association
- PCO: Professional Conference Organizers
- SAS: Scandinavian Airlines System
- SMERF: Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal
- UIA: Union of International Association
- UN: United Nations
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization
- USPs: Unique Selling Propositions
- VAT: Value Added Tax
- VFSs: Venue-Finding Services

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

The conventions industry had matured to become a crucial segment of the global tourism and hospitality sector (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). The significance of hosting meetings and conventions to a city has surfaced as an important strategic decision for destination stakeholders, due to the conference attendees spending, which creates a positive economical multiplier impact for the destination” (Huo, 2013). Some other benefits of the conference tourism industry are that it helps extend the tourism seasons and thus enhances employment opportunities and provides tourism revenues for many (Rogers, 2003). Therefore, convention and visitor bureaus put huge amounts of their time and effort enticing large associations that are looking for attractive destinations to host conventions (Crouch & Louviere, 2004).

In other words, convention tourism “involves buying and selling of convention destination services” amongst the three major industry players: meeting planners, host destinations and the attendees or delegates (Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Weber & Chon, 2002). Different buyers like corporate and association organizations are constantly in search of convention and related facilities that are offered by various destination suppliers to fulfil their needs for holding various kinds of gatherings (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). As meetings and conventions have grown in size, number and frequency, the number of potential host sites has also grown (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). Destinations have responded by building and expanding convention centres and facilities and hotels have improved their meeting facilities (Ibid).

According to a report by the ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), in the years 1963-1967 the number of worldwide meetings in the ICCA Association Database was 1,795, which massively grew to 54,844 meetings between the years 2008-2012. In 2012, Vienna was ranked as the top city for hosting 195 international meetings and Stockholm was ranked twelfth for hosting 110 international meetings (ICCA, 2013).

According to multiple researches, site selection is a crucial factor in any event planning and it has the potential to influence the success or failure of the event (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997). Though, a lot is known about the type and range of factors that influence the choice of a host destination, very little is known about the relative significance of the factors (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). There is “very little pre-existing real evidence of the actual significance or importance of each factor” (Oppermann, 1996). For instance, Crouch and Ritchie (1998)

reveal that “ the majority of the studies on association or corporate meeting planners’ site selection process lack conceptual and empirical rigor” (Baloglu & Love, 2005). Moreover, studies focus on the site selection criteria from the organizers perspective, or from a destinations perspective and only a limited number of studies have been done on the selection criteria of conference delegates (Getz, 2005; Breiter & Milman, 2006). Similarly, the studies have ignored the qualitative perceptions behind the site selection criteria and as the supply side develops, the perceptions can change and become out-dated (Baloglu & Love, 2005). Research in this sector has mainly concentrated on North America, and thus, Yoo and Weber (2005) suggest further research to be conducted on other parts of the world.

Given the considerable benefits of conventions and meetings to a destination, understanding the convention site selection process provides a great tool set for the various convention destinations (Weber & Chon, 2002).

1.2 Problem statement

Today congress tourism has become one of the fastest developing and most profitable industries within the tourism sector (Ibid). Vienna being ranked number one worldwide in the last few year’s holds a higher status as an international congress city than Stockholm. Although Stockholm has been lagging quite a few spots behind Vienna, it holds great prospects to establish itself as a major international congress tourism hub.

This study attempts to find the selection criteria for choosing international conference destinations from the buyers (organizers and delegates) and suppliers (destinations) point of view, to provide a 360-degree view on the international site selection factors. Though there are limited studies on the criteria that organizations follow to select international convention destinations, no research has concentrated on the site selection criteria of the multiple parties involved in the conventions industry. The findings will be valuable for any conference destination that is competing for a share of the conventions market. The additional aim is to identify congress tourism opportunities for Stockholm by benchmarking it from Vienna, the top destination for international meetings, as the study will help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the cities as convention destinations.

1.3 Aim and research questions

The research aims to determine the site selection criteria for international conferences and through a comparison with Vienna, identify the persisting gaps present in the congress tourism sector of Stockholm. The overall aim is to assist Stockholm in increasing its

competitiveness, propose possible solutions for the future development of Stockholm and shed light on where it can focus its resources and efforts to improve its attraction as an international convention city. For this, the following research questions have been formulated-

- What are the top site selection criteria that influence the decision making process of buyers when choosing international conference destinations?
- What are the top memorable factors of a conference destination?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Stockholm and Vienna as international convention cities?
- How can Stockholm enhance its competitive advantage as an international conference destination?

1.4 Scope of the study

This study appends a structured technique of how conference destinations are chosen, and on potential methods through which Stockholm, as a city, could pave its way into the top world rankings as an international congress city. Thus, the study has both theoretical and practical importance. Such a clear selection criteria and road map could provide immense growth potential to the city of Stockholm. Additionally, this research could assist conference organizers and host destinations in forming their marketing strategies, to effectively promote their destinations, develop new markets, achieve higher number of attendees and help them achieve a greater competitive advantage (Ro & Um, 2006).

Due to inconsistent definitions and measurement practices, the size and significance of the convention industry is hard to estimate, making any comparison difficult (Weber & Chon, 2002). Therefore, any statistics on domestic meetings is omitted. Different countries also use various terminologies for the same concepts. For instance, at the macro level business tourism, MICE, and MC&IT are used interchangeably while at the micro level words such as congress, conference, convention and meeting are used as synonyms (Rogers, 2008). Hence, this research uses the terms synonymously.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is designed in 6 chapters

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to congress tourism. The aim and research questions follow after the problem statement, where the importance of this study is presented, including

a concise comparison of the current state of Vienna and Stockholm. This section ends by defining the scope of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the description of the congress industry, consisting of sections on the evolution of the industry, definitions and terminologies, and the various players of the industry. Additionally, the chapter includes the site selection criteria of international conference buyers, the specific factors of the international site selection criteria, and addresses topics of convention destination image, and key performance indicators. The chapter further discusses limitation and merits of previous researcher to provide groundwork for the methodology section. This chapter will end by a section on convention city rankings, which is followed by a summary of the major findings illustrated in a model.

Chapter 3 presents the case studies of Vienna and Stockholm, including their brief introduction, which is followed by the description of their international conference industries. Mostly the strengths of the two cities are discussed here.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology and design of the research study. This section consists of the empirical research objective, research methods, the qualitative approach of content analysis, reason for adopting expert interviews and choosing the particular experts, the various limitation of the empirical study and the measures taken to ensure the quality of the research.

Chapter 5 presents the findings, and compares them to previous researches. The results and data collected from the primary and secondary research will be showcased here. It goes on to discuss the various implications of the findings and states new discoveries and clarifications related to the study's aim.

Chapter 6 comprises of the conclusion of the thesis. It dwells on the practical implications and future research, and makes recommendations for Stockholm.

2. Description of the conference industry

As the demand for conferences surged, so did the prospects for economic benefits in the congress tourism sector (Weber & Chon, 2002). The convention industry attracts high spending visitors whom often make long stays and repeated visits to the destination, and therefore, tourism authorities worldwide are looking for ways to attract convention visitors to their regions (Ibid).

According to Oppermann and Chon (1997) the association meetings market has three main players, the organizing association (buyers), the host location (suppliers) and the potential attendees. The buyers and suppliers have the common purpose of maximizing the number of attendees. Figure 1 shows the interrelationships between the three main players.

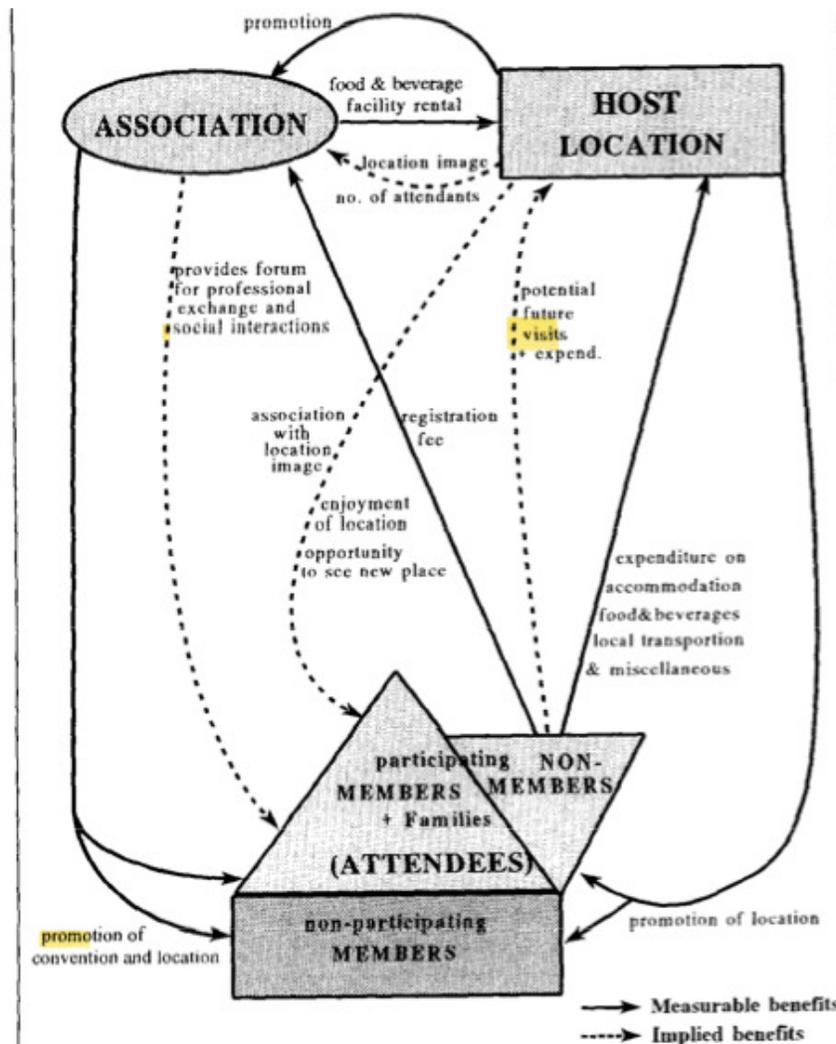


Figure 1- Interrelationship Between the Three Players of the Convention Industry.

Source: Oppermann & Chon (1997).

2.1 Evolution of congress tourism

Exchanging ideas and the aspiration to gather is an old tradition, as old as civilization (Weber & Chon, 2002). Starting from local religious, cultural, and political gatherings, the convention system developed and faced a high growth at an international level, creating new trends in the tourism business industry (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Most such meetings took place locally,

in public spaces, theatres and hotels and it was during the 18th century that meeting venues such as assembly rooms were built (Ibid).

From September 1814 to June 1815, Vienna held a congress to re-establish the territorial division of Europe after the Napoleonic war and this gathering is considered as one of the prominent events that launched the modern congress tourism industry (Rogers, 2003).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, meeting between business leaders and entrepreneurs materialized, as industrialization was surging through Europe and North America. Meetings on 'political, religious, literary, and recreational' topics were also regularly taking place (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Simultaneously, advances in the transportation industry, rise in the disposable income of the growing middle class, increase in leisure time and a growth of professions allowed a frequent mobility and travel for conferences (Ibid).

In Europe, the two world wars prevented a prompt development of the convention industry during the first half of the 20th century (Rogers, 1998). It was not until the later half of the 20th century that the foundation for the modern conference industry was set (Weber & Chon, 2002).

During the 1960's, in Western Europe, several international organizations were established. The EFCT (European Federation of Conference Towns) was established in 1964 to promote Europe as a conference destination and 'to assist meeting planners in the selection of destinations and venues (Ibid).

There are certain reasons for Europe's progressive convention industry. For instance, the promotion of trade and movement of goods and services within the EU allows convention organizers to annually rotate convention destinations (Ibid). The Euro as a common currency further facilitates this process, as prices are comparable, and an effective and cheap transportation link of trains and low cost airlines in the region allows for a higher individual movement (Ibid).

2.2 Definitions and terminology

Conventions and meetings are part of an industry sector that is commonly referred to as the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector. Other similar terms "used to describe the same industry are MECE (Meetings, Events, Conventions, and Exhibitions),

MCE (Meetings, Conventions, and Exhibitions), and CEMI (Conventions, Exhibitions, Meetings, and Incentives)” (Weber & Chon, 2002).

There are also varying definitions for conferences, conventions and meetings. For example Seekings (1991) defines a conference as “a large event with a hundred or thousand people, often lasting for several days and involving a social programme and exhibition with an international and national scope” while the British Tourism Authority (BTA, 1999) defines a conference as “an out of office meeting of at least six hours duration, involving a minimum of eight people” (Weber & Chon, 2002). However, Rogers (2002) states that the above-mentioned terminologies are now being used synonymously as different countries are using them to name the same concepts.

International Meetings are also defined in many ways. This research will use international meetings statistics provided by the UIA (Union of International Association) and ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) associations. As they have different criteria for data collection their data are not comparable.

UIA is an association that has collected data on meetings and conventions since 1949 (Ibid). The UIA requires specific criteria to be fulfilled by meetings to collect their date:

- At least 40% of the participants are from countries other than the host country and at least five nationalities are represented
- The meeting lasts at least three days, or is of unknown duration
- Has a minimum of 300 participants or has a concurrent exhibition

ICCA is an association that collects statistics on the international convention and meetings industry (Ibid). To collect data, ICCA (2013) requires the following criteria to be met:

- Be organised on a regular basis (one-time events are not included)
- Rotate between at least three different countries
- Have a minimum of 50 participants

2.3 Conference buyers

It is important to recognize that there are two main customers that constitute the demand side of the convention industry- corporations and associations (Weber & Chon, 2002; Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Table 1 highlights the key differences in the corporate and association market

segments. Additionally, as delegates attending conferences are the end customers of the convention industry they are considered as buyers too.

2.3.1 Corporations

Corporations, the largest single market segment estimated by Lawson (2000) make up for over 65% of the market segments for meetings (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). According to System Three (1998), 50% of the corporate conferences had less than 100 delegates and 40% of the conferences lasted for a day (Weber & Chon, 2002).

The delegate's attendance fee is usually paid by their businesses and most corporate meetings are held in hotels, and some in conference centres, training centres, or universities that are all of a very high standard (Ibid). However, many companies hold their meetings in their own premises (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Besides, not all corporations have conference management departments and corporations hire professional conference organizers for only large events (Weber & Chon, 2002).

Though corporate meetings form a large segment of the meetings industry, since the meetings are small in size and duration, and mostly held at their own premises, they bring no or little business to the international convention industry (Davidson & Rogers, 2006; Weber & Chon, 2002).

Table 1. Corporate and Association Market Segments- Key Differences.

Corporate	Associations
Larger in number	Smaller in number
Small average meeting size	Large average meeting size
Meeting goals aligned to the needs of the firm	Meeting goals more diverse reflecting the board needs of the membership
Limited number of players in the buying group*	Large buying group
Normally a short meeting planning time horizon	Much longer time horizon extending up to several years
Local geographic focus	More diverse geographic interests
Speedier decision making	Drawn years between possibility of a return visit
Likelihood of repeat buying from the same site	Often years between possibility of a return visit

Source: UK Conference Market Survey (2004), accessed from Davidson & Rogers (2006).

2.3.2 Associations

Though corporations own a huge chunk of the meetings industry, association meetings form the biggest segment and hold the largest and longest meetings (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

According to System Three (1998), 60% of association conferences in 1997 in the UK lasted for at least three days and more than 1/3 of the conferences had above 500 delegates (Weber & Chon, 2002).

Associations are usually non-profit, however their annual conventions have profit objectives and are a source of funds unlike the corporations (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). A survey conducted by the Professional Convention Management Association in the US found that one third of an association's annual income comes from its conventions (Weber & Chon, 2002). Consequently, it is important for associations to select a convention destination that enhances the attendance numbers (Ibid).

Though associations hold several types of meetings, the most important meetings from a destinations view are the annual conventions that attract a huge number of delegates, mostly in the category of thousands (Ibid). Associations' attraction members locally, regionally or internationally and this geographical extent helps determine the location for their meetings (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

2.3.3 Government and public sectors

The convention tourism demand side also consists of government bodies, from local municipalities to international, intra-governmental organizations and public sector bodies (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Internationally, most of the conferences are high profile events such as European Union's Intergovernmental Conferences (Ibid).

2.3.4 Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal Sectors

SMERF meetings are organized for reuniting, fraternizing or to share faith, and experiences (Ibid). Often they are included in the association sector, however, they are sometimes considered a separate sector, particularly in North America (Ibid).

2.3.5 International meeting buyers

During the past decade, the number of international meetings has dramatically been on the rise (Weber & Chon, 2002). There are multiple reasons for the recent growth in the international meetings industry.

A huge expanding market of new products and services, particularly showcased in expositions is generating both public and private shows (Ibid). As governments realize the economic benefits of conferences to their locations, they are providing multiple sponsored cost

incentives, which in turn enhance the attraction of international sites (Ibid). As the number of meetings is rising, there is an increased competition for delegates too. Therefore, holding meetings at exotic international destinations brings competitive advantage to organizers, (Ibid). International associations also hold educational conferences in the countries of their international members. Additionally, technology is erasing any marketing and communication barriers making overseas meetings an easier job (Ibid).

Montgomery and Strick (1995) explain that though many logistic details for domestic and international meetings are the same, international meeting planning requires further considerations (Weber & Chon, 2002).

2.3.6 Conference delegates

Delegates are the ultimate buyers of the conference product and are also known as attendees, participants or guests (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

As the delegates fund their own fee and travel expenses and are often accompanied by their spouses, their travel pattern and buying behaviour are influenced by the destination (Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

Attendees bring multiple benefits to a host destination by spending money on accommodation, food and beverages, transportation, and for other miscellaneous activities (Ibid). They also help to promote the destination through word-of-mouth and are a major source of off-season demand (Zhang et al., 2007). According to Volkshandel (1984), convention attendees generally stay longer and spend more in comparison to any other types of tourists (Zhang et al., 2007).

To keep the conference industry running, it is important that there is a constant participation of delegates. Therefore, it is essential that the behaviour of overseas convention attendees, and their decision making process, is understood. Post-conference evaluation, using questionnaires, are usually carried out to understand the satisfaction level of the delegates (Ibid).

2.4 Conference suppliers

As already stated, the convention tourism product is a service (Weber & Chon, 2002). The product here is a multiple set of experiences for the members that partake in a convention at a

particular destination and the various tangible and intangible elements that contribute to the success of the conference (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). The tangible elements of a destination comprises of the meeting venues, accommodation services, local restaurants, shops, attractions, transport operators, etc. (Ibid). The important intangible elements of a destination are its image and atmosphere, both of which are crucial in the site selection process (Ibid).

2.4.1 Convention centres and facilities

Many centres, facilities and venues exist that are individual convention service providers (Weber & Chon, 2002). They can be purpose-built conference centres (residential or non residential, specifically designed for meetings and conferences), seminar rooms, and hotel meeting rooms (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Many hotels house centres and facilities to provide convention services. Over 50% of conference venues in the UK are now dominated by the hotel industry (Rogers, 2013).

There are a variety of other venues such as universities, museums, multi purpose venues such as leisure centres, sport centres, council chambers or unusual venues such as cruise ships and theme parks that offer meeting facilities (Davidson & Rogers, 2006; Rogers, 2013).

2.4.2 Accommodation providers

International Conventions can last more than a day, which requires accommodation for the participants, speakers and organizers (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Various venues have on-site accommodation options while sometimes off site lodging options such as hotels, hostels, and guesthouses are arranged (Ibid).

2.4.3 Convention and visitor bureaus

Convention destination marketing can happen at both local and national fronts (Rogers, 1998). The most prominent organizations for it are the convention and visitor bureaus that come under Destination Marketing Organizations (Weber & Chon, 2002; Davidson & Rogers, 2006). They act as brokers of businesses, bringing together the buyers that want services from a destination with the suppliers of those services (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). CVB's could be representing specific cities, metropolitan areas, more than one city, regional destinations or entire countries (Weber & Chon, 2002).

The organizational structures of CVB's differ, depending on the destination characteristics, their product quality and the funding levels (Gartrell, 1994). They can also be public or private, non-profit or for-profit organizations. The public CVB's represent suppliers in a

particular geographical area, while private CVB's are membership based (Ibid). It is also critical to note that usually political considerations 'play an important role in the strategies and tactics adopted by the various convention destination-marketing organizations' (Weber & Chon, 2002).

2.4.4 Agencies and intermediaries

Sometimes, associations and corporations use their own staff to organize events, however, most of the time the assistance of professional intermediaries is important for a successful conference, especially if it is being hosted internationally (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

- Professional conference organizers: PCOs can be hired if the organizer is not able to cover certain specific elements of conference management such as knowledge or resources, or any financial, human or technical facilities (Rogers, 2013).
- Venue-finding services: The task of VFSs is to provide the buyers with suggestions regarding suitable sites and venues for holding the conference (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).
- Association management companies: AMCs are firms consisting of skilled individuals whose aim is to provide management expertise and specialized administrative services to associations (Ibid).
- Destination management companies: DMCs are also known as 'ground handles' and they provide conference organizers with in-depth knowledge regarding the destination such as about local suppliers, language, and customs (Ibid). They also provide a range of services such as "creative proposals for special events within the meeting, pre and post conference tours, VIP amenities and transportation, ... and accommodation services" (Ibid).
- Conference production companies: CPCs are intermediaries that are suitable for high profile events such as product launches, awards ceremonies and motivational events (Ibid). According to Davidson and Rogers (2006) innovation, creativity and technical knowledge are their particular value.
- Other important organizations: Other agencies such as, event management companies and experiential marketing agencies can be hired to provide and contribute with other limited services (Rogers, 2013).

2.5 Event tourism

“Event management encompasses the planning and production of all types of events, including meetings and conventions, exhibitions, festivals and other cultural celebrations” (Getz, 2005).

For a successful conference a team needs to be hired to conceptualize pre-conference planning and research (Rogers, 2013). The event management agencies such as PCOs are specialized in event management, and their aim is to act as consultants and use their skills, experience and knowledge to control the process of the event and act as project managers (Ibid).

2.6 Convention site selection criteria

As stated above, the criteria for international site selection combines the domestic site selection factors with further specific considerations (Weber & Chon, 2002).

As the corporate and association segments have many differences, their site selection processes also differ (Ibid). Table 2 states the key destination and venue selection criteria of the UK buyers. In comparison to corporations, associations enjoy greater flexibility in the destination choice. Since association members attend meeting at their own leisure and expense, they resemble the leisure tourists to a large extent (Oppermann, 1996).

Table 2. Factors Influencing Destination and Venue Selection (Listed in Priority Order).

Ranking	Selection criteria for associations	Selection criteria for companies/corporations
1	Location	Location
2	Price/value for money	Previous experience of venue
3	Access: road, rail, air links	Price/value for money
4	Capacity of conference facilities	Availability
5	Availability	Quality of service
6	Quality of service	Access: road, rail, air links
7	Staff awareness of needs	Quality of conference facilities
8	Quality of food	Capacity of conference facilities
9	Quality of conference facilities	Provision of leisure facilities
10	Cleanliness of venue	Staff awareness of needs

Source: Weber & Chon (2002).

*The buying group consists of the stakeholders who influence the eventual convention site decision.

Most studies on the site selection process are based on opinions, subjective evidence and experience in the industry (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). Much of the literature has focused on the importance of the size and design of a convention centre facility and the quality and range of the accommodation facilities for the site selection decision (Weber & Chon, 2002). However, other factors such as the accessibility of the convention site for delegates, service quality, destination image, safety/security, climate and dining facilities or vacationing amenities are often critical (Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

According to meeting planners it is also crucial to note that destination selection criteria could vary from country to country and year-to-year depending on the economic, social, technological and political aspects (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Additionally, buyers often have to be convinced that the destination is appropriate for their event and therefore take language, culture, environment, access, political stability etc. into account (Ro & Um, 2006).

In 1992, a study by Meetings & Conventions found that the main aspects of site selection could be presented in eight specific factors (Jun & McCleary, 1999). In 1996 and 1998 Oppermann combined three older studies including the Meeting & Conventions study to provide an up to date site selection criteria research. The results of the research indicated that meeting room facilities and hotel service quality rank high in the site selection criteria (Ibid). A study of 136 US meeting planners conducted by Hu and Hiemstra (1996) determined that price was the most important hotel attribute followed by location, guestroom comfort and meeting room properties (Jun & McCleary, 1999).

Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (1996) proposed six environmental factors that shape a destination, certain physical, social, cultural, technological, political, and economic characteristics, that directly influence the tourist perception and experiences (Ro & Um, 2006). Oppermann (1996) described 15 important destination attributes under the five factors of- service, cost, image, location, and facilities that make a destination's image. Certain important factors regarding a conference destination, according to Davidson & Rogers (2006), are venues, local suppliers, transport, communication and accessibility, attractions and events, and local economy and infrastructure.

Another study conducted by Crouch and Louviere (2004), on association site selection factors, that combined data from previous researches identified potentially important

categories of site attributes. They further ranked the site attributes in terms of their order of importance, according to the Australian market. The results are in figure 2 below.

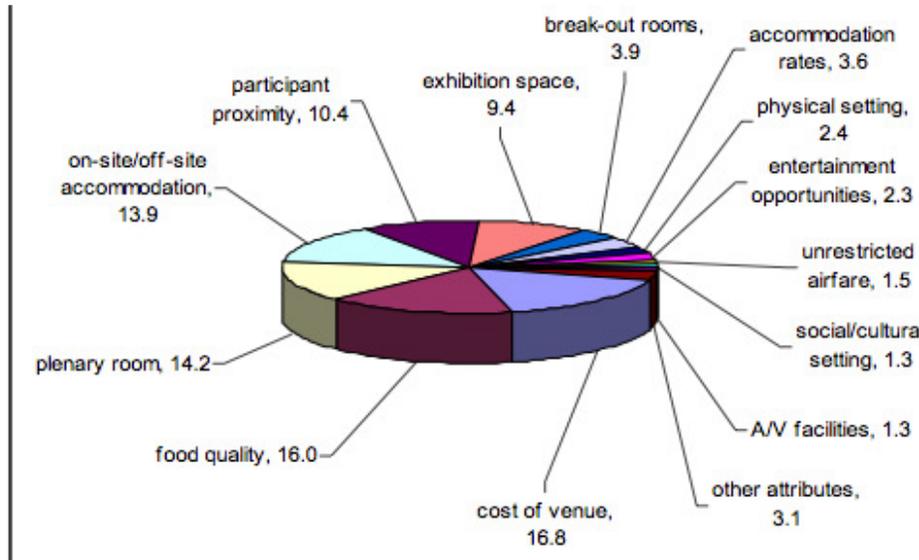


Figure 2- Importance of Site Attributes (%).

Source: Crouch & Louviere (2004).

In Table 3, Crouch & Ritchie (1998) have identified 36 convention destination attributes, which are classified in 8 categories, and are crucial in the convention destination choice.

Table 3. Convention Site Selection Factors.

Category	Dimensions
Accessibility	Cost- the monetary expense of transportation and access Time- the duration/distance of travel involved and the opportunity cost of that time Frequency- the frequency of convenience of the connections Convenience- the scheduling convenience of the connections Barriers- the extent of any travel formalities that inhibit travel such as visas, customs, etc.
Local Support	Local chapter- the extent of assistance and backing offered by the local chapter of the association CVB/convention centre- the extent of planning, logistical, and promotional support offered Subsidies- the extent to which the destination offers to defray costs through rebates and subsidies Entertainment- restaurants, bars, theatres, night clubs, etc.
Extra-conference opportunities	Shopping- malls, major department stores, low price, etc. Sightseeing- architecture, museums, monuments, attraction parks, historical sites, local tours, etc. Recreation- sports and activities either as spectator or participant Professional opportunities- visiting local clients, negotiations, business deals, selling, making contacts, etc.
Accommodation Facilities	Capacity- the number of rooms available and whether more than a single hotel is required Cost- the cost of suitable accommodation at the site Service- the perception of the standards of service Security- the extent to which the hotels provide a safe and secure environment Availability- are the facilities available
Meeting Facilities	Capacity- ability of site to provide suitable sized facilities Layout- suitable of the facility layout and floor plan Cost- the cost of the meeting space required Ambience- the ability of the facility to create an appropriate atmosphere and environment Service- the perception of the standards of service Security- the extent to which the facility provides a safe and secure meeting space Availability- are the facilities available when required? Experience- has the site performed satisfactorily in the past?
Information	Reputation- what is the reputation of the destination among other meeting planners? Marketing- the effectiveness of the destination's marketing activities
Site environment	Climate- the desirability of the destination's climate Setting- the attractiveness of the destination's surroundings Infrastructure- the suitability and standard of local infrastructure Hospitality- the extent to which the host organizations and community excel in welcoming visitors
Other criteria	Risks- the possibility of strikes, natural disasters, boycotts, and other adverse effects Profitability- the extent to which the site would produce a profit or loss for the convention Association promotion- would the site add credibility to the association and build memberships? Novelty- the extent to which the destination represents a novel location for the association's next convention

Source: Crouch & Ritchie (1998).

An association's characteristics greatly affect its site selection process (Weber & Chon, 2002). The influence the CEO's and board members of the associations have, and the freedom the meeting planners have, greatly affects the selection process (Clark, Evans &

Knutson, 1997). Moreover, an association's scope, regional, national, or international, also predetermines the range of convention locations available to the organizers (Weber & Chon, 2002, Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Crouch and Ritchie (1998) formulated association's site selection process consisting of five steps, see figure 3.

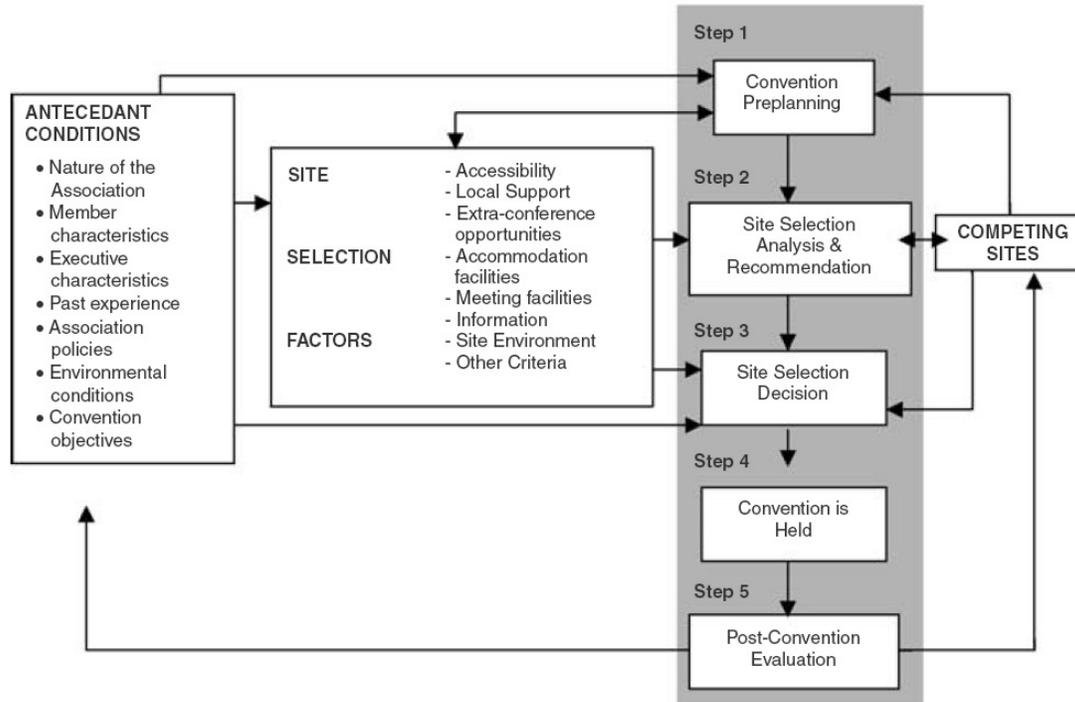


Figure 3- A General Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process.

Source: Crouch & Ritchie (1998).

2.7 International meetings site selection criteria

As stated above, planning an international meeting requires additional considerations. The site selection criterion for international meetings highlights the major issues from the meeting professional's prospective (buyers and suppliers) (Weber & Chon, 2002).

To explain the site selection process for international meetings it is first important to define international meetings. There are several definitions for international meetings; however, the ICCA provided criterion that considers regularly organized events that rotate amongst at least three different countries and have a minimum of 50 participants as international meetings, would be considered here (Ibid).

Today, gathering background information, on sites for meeting professionals, has become easier due to the Internet. However, a site inspection is essential before a particular

international destination is chosen for a conference (Ibid). Below, the different factors that are considered for selecting international convention destinations according to Weber & Chon (2002) are presented.

- Economic and political climate: One of the main factors while selecting an international conference destination is the economic and political climate of the region or country.
- Security and safety: Security and safety considerations are a critical factor in attracting attendees to an international meeting. Apart from the political situations and crime levels, the health, medical and weather conditions and airport and hotel security, corporate espionage and kidnapping are evaluated.
- Partnerships: Partners in the form of government agencies, professional groups, corporations, PCOs and DMOs in the host country are critical for the success of a conference.
- Sponsorships/incentives: Many countries offer incentives to attract international meetings and corporate entities can provide economic resources to cover various expenses such as providing scholarships for conference delegates.
- Communication:
 - Industry jargon- as English is not spoken all over the world, it is very important to keep in mind that terminologies, gestures and protocols can imply different meanings in different cultures and languages.
 - Interpretation and translation- both translations and interpretations can be required for international meeting.
 - Communication methods: over the past few years the use of Internet and email as a communication method has greatly increased. However, many still prefer the use of fax, telephone and mail.
 - Negotiations- negotiations could be the most difficult aspect to overcome when organizing an overseas conference as they have cultural implications.
- Contractual details: As contracts follow the legal structures of the government of the host country, their aspects and implications are vital.
- Currency, exchange, and payments: The base currency for contracts, and a fixed rate of exchange has to be established between the various involved parties. Numerous fees are involved for wiring, transferring, depositing and withdrawing money when using local banks.

- The Euro- has provided several advantages for the convention and meetings industry especially when it comes to comparing pricing for bids for an event.
- Taxation- during the site selection process, meeting organizers often investigate the tax liabilities as they could sometimes be reduced or waived completely.
- Meeting charges/inclusions- in many instances the hotel room charges are fixed while the charges for meeting spaces are often negotiable or could be waived completely. In many countries hotels and conference centres could also have additional charges for air conditioning, lights, water etc.
- Passport and visas: During the site selection process, international conference planners also consider the immigration requirements so that the conference attendees from various countries do not have visa issues.
- Shipping/customs requirements: Depending on the host country, the customs regulations vary and therefore the planners must know which items not to ship and document any shipment to avoid duties.
- Standards and measurements: Certain differences in hardware, software and electrical compatibility and different measurements must be considered to avoid complications (Ibid).
- Scheduling issues: According to Elliot (2000) scheduling international meetings requires at least double the time needed for organizing a domestic event (Weber & Chon, 2002).
 - Convention dates- the peak season for MICE industry events is in the fall and spring months, namely October, November, March and April; and September and June are the most popular for international meetings. Having business events during these months avoids the clash with leisure tourists that travel during the summer and Christmas break. Due to this, there is high competition for meeting space during this period. Additionally, holiday dates associated with different countries and religions are avoided as they significantly reduce the number of attendees and hinder the events course.
 - Activity scheduling- the cultural background and preferences of the conference attendees has to be considered when scheduling activities for them.
- Marketing issues: Marketing is considered as a major challenge when it comes to international meetings, as appropriate medium, design, material and language have to be decided upon. Cultural values, preferences, and protocols have to be established for each country as well.

2.8 Delegate site selection criteria

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the motivation of delegates to attend association conventions, and the desirability of the conference location has repeatedly emerged as one of the strongest factors (Ibid). Often the spouses and family members accompany the delegates, and research shows that they are important in the participation decision-making process as well (Ibid). Certain destinations such as shopping or golfing destinations have higher spouse turnouts based on their attractiveness and often, organizations get high attendance by holding conventions at more favourably perceived locations (Montgomery & Strick, 1995).

After realizing a need for travel, attendees usually explore information, and evaluate alternatives. After making a choice, they have an outcome and a post-evaluation (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Oppermann and Chon (1997) believe that the participation decision-making process in business travel, specifically for association convention travel, is similar to the general tourism destination selection process, such as weighing the various “push” and “pull” factors. The attendees have different wants and needs and a few studies have researched the motivational aspects of convention attendees and non-attendees and variables have been grouped into four categories (Ibid). Figure 4 shows the different factors of the conference participant’s decision-making process.

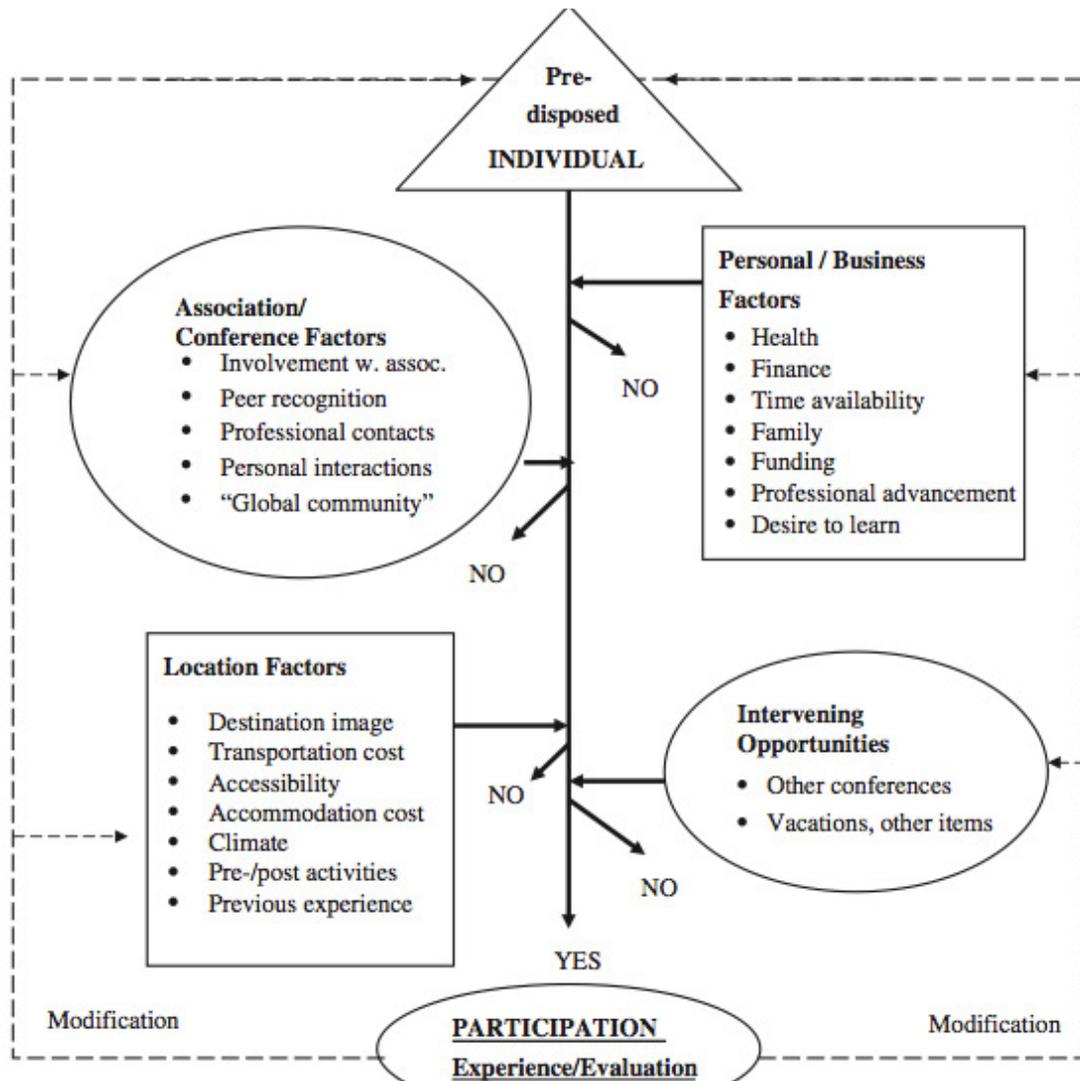


Figure 4- Conference Participation Decision-Making Process.

Source: Oppermann and Chon (1997).

Oppermann and Chon (1997) state that the location factors are influenced when considered in combination with the personal and conference factors. For example, the location of a convention nearby to the potential attendee may dominate their decision due to the low costs of travel. It is believed that the total conference costs related to the destination rule the decision process. Since less accessible sites are usually more expensive, due to the higher transportation costs, conventions and meetings in urban areas have a higher attendance (Ibid). However the length of the trip is also an important factor making air hubs more favourable for meetings. Other factors are climate and destination image (Lee, 2005). Attendees also put high importance on the “availability of high quality lodging near the convention centre” (Breiter & Milman, 2006).

A study done by Var et al. (1985) proposed that “the ‘expected’ number of delegates was a function of accessibility and attractiveness of the destination under individual cost constraints, assuming that other factors were constant” (Zhang et al., 2007). Zhang et al. (2007) state that Oppermann and Chon’s study missed factors such as cost, in terms of both monetary and time and the other studies lack a comprehensive analysis of all the relevant factors. They have established a refined model to guide further research, based on Oppermann and Chon’s (1997) model. See figure 5.

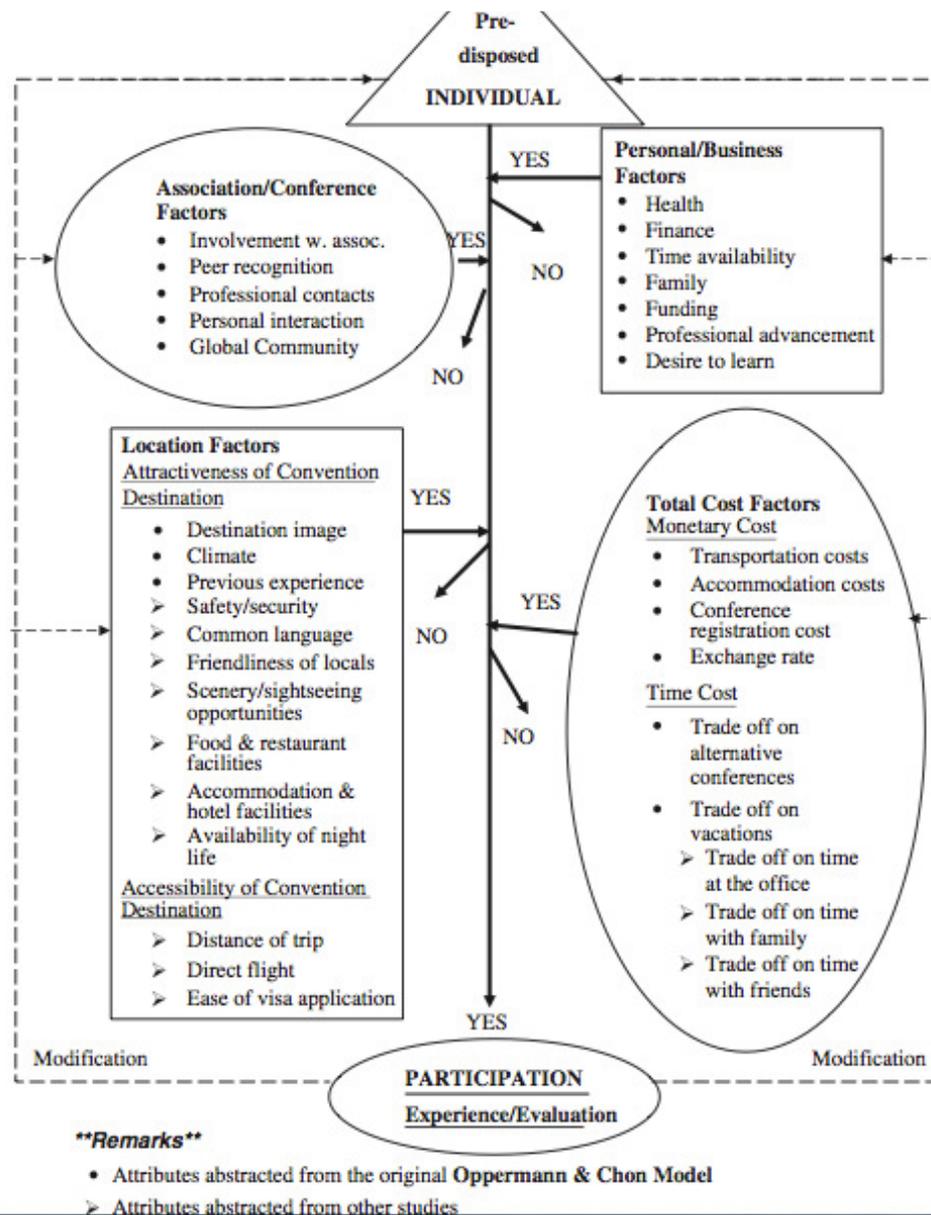


Figure 5- Modified Model of the Conference Participation Decision-Making Process.

Source: Zhang et al. (2007).

The new model mainly has two modifications; the “location factors” are divided into the subcategories of “attractiveness” and “accessibility” with additional factors. Var et al. (1985) found that attractiveness and accessibility are in most cases the determinant factors and argued that accessibility to the destination was more important than its attractiveness (Zhang et al., 2007). The second modification is the original “intervening opportunities” being replaced by the “total cost factor” (Ibid).

2.9 Convention destination image

According to Oppermann (1996), the topic of destination image has received much interest in tourism research. Mercer (1981) defines destination image as “the signal or symbol presented to the individual by a site or region, it is the aggregate sum of beliefs about each destination attribute” (Lee, 2005).

A study was conducted by Oppermann (1996) on the importance of convention destination attributes to evaluate the destination image of 30 North American convention cities, using a list of 15 decision criteria selected based on previous research (Ibid). The most important destination attributes, amongst the 15 were meeting room facilities, hotel service quality, hotel room availability safety/security and cleanliness/attractiveness of the destination (Ibid).

The destination image therefore is based on the destination having the most important attributes. Oppermann and Chon (1997) give an example stating that it may be more impressive for a North American participant to return from a conference in Bali than to one in St. Louis. In a study conducted by Usher (1991) it was discovered that the turnout of attendees at Las Vegas meetings was 365 times more than other comparable cities (Lee, 2005).

2.10 Key performance indicators (KPI)

Both financial and non-financial KPIs are critical elements or measures, that a company or industry uses, to explain and compare its progress towards its stated strategic and operational goals (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2007). The KPIs could vary between companies and industries, depending on their particular priorities and performance criteria (Investopedia, 2014). Understanding the specific KPIs of buyers and suppliers of international conventions could assist in developing a better and productive relationship amongst the two players.

2.11 Limitations of previous researches

The MICE industry is a fragmented industry where buyers, suppliers, including agencies and intermediaries, and industry organizations are all considered (Weber & Chon, 2002). Mostly, the entire industry is not reflected in researches and “only one viewpoint or aspect of the industry” is considered in a single project (Ibid). A further fragmentation example is the UIA and ICCA only considering meetings that fulfil their criteria.

Therefore, though this research portrays statistics from certain organizations that clearly omit certain data and there are varying definitions of the industry terms, the study’s main focus is the international site selection criteria from the viewpoint of the various stakeholders of the convention industry.

2.12 Summary

Figure 6 demonstrates the site selection criteria based on the theoretical framework. However, Very limited data was found on the site selection criteria of corporations due to their meetings being short in duration and size and being conducted at their own premises.

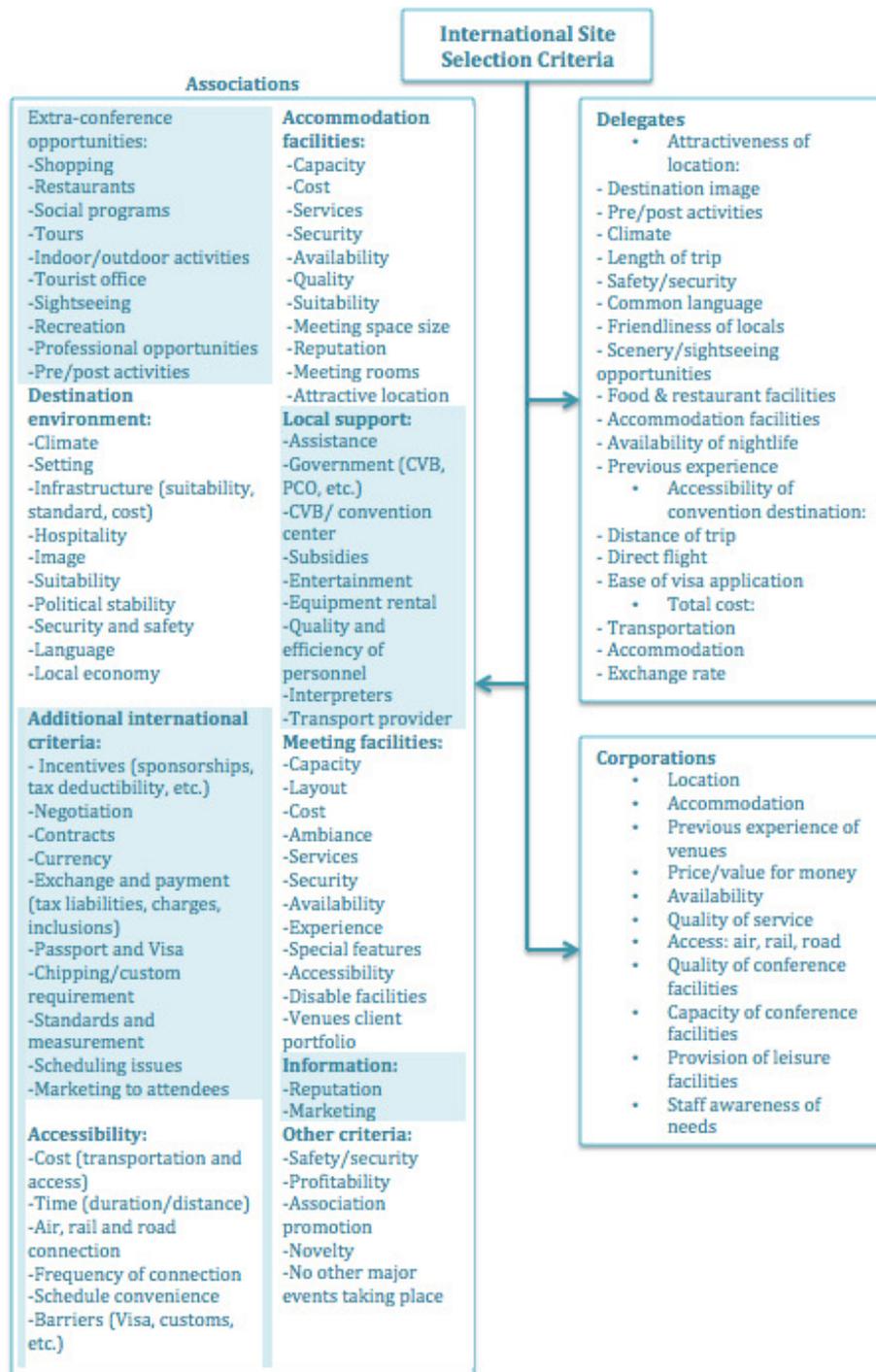


Figure 6- Site Selection Criteria of Associations, Corporations and Delegates.

Source: Modified model adapted from Weber & Chon (2002), Davidson & Rogers (2006), Jun & McCleary (1999), Oppermann & Chon (1997), Crouch & Ritchie (1998), Ro & Um (2006), Crouch & Louviere (2004), Zhang et al. (2007).

2.13 Convention city rankings

According to the UIA statistics, while Vienna has regularly been in the list of top 15 cities for international conferences from 1954 to 1999, Stockholm has only occasionally been in the list (Ibid). It is believed that most of the top cities on the list have headquarters of supranational continental organizations such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) (Ibid). Also, capital cities in general host headquarters to large corporations and therefore frequently hold international conferences (Ibid). According to Weber and Chon (2002) ranking fluctuations often occur for the lower ranked counties and any special events have positive influence on the country's ranking.

Figure 7 demonstrates the ICCA rankings of Vienna and Stockholm from the year 2000 to 2012. It can be seen that that only during 2000 and 2001, Stockholm held a higher ranking than Vienna. Table 4 below, again shows the higher rank of Vienna in the year 2012.

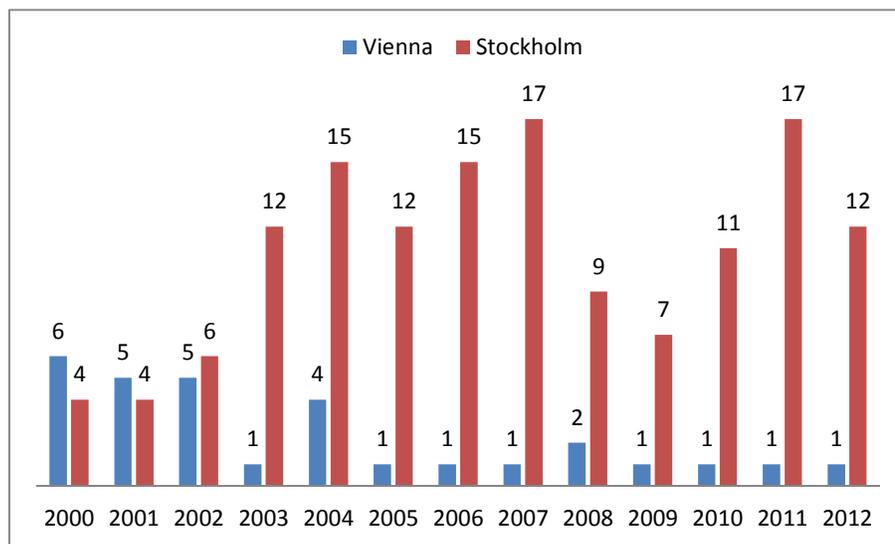


Figure 7- ICCA Rankings Based on the Number of International Meetings held in Vienna and Stockholm (2000-2012).

Source: Adopted from ICCA (2013).

Table 4. City Ranking for Vienna and Stockholm (Based on International Meetings Criteria).

ICCA & UIA statistics for Vienna & Stockholm (2012)		
City	Vienna	Stockholm
Ranking by ICCA	1	11
Ranking by UIA	3	12
Number of international meetings ICCA	195	110
Number of international meetings UIA	326	113

Source: ICCA and UIA (2013).

3. Case studies

As Stockholm’s international convention industry is being benchmarked with Vienna’s, information on the cities will be resented here. Figure 8 depicts the location of the two cities within the map of Europe.



Figure 8- Political Map of Europe Depicting Vienna and Stockholm's Location.

Source: Graphic Maps (2014).

Figure 9 shows ICCA data concerning the number of international association meetings held in Vienna and Stockholm from the year 2000 to 2012. It can be seen that though during the year 2001-2003 the two cities had similar number of meetings, Stockholm from hereafter has slower, even negative growth while Vienna has had a much steeper uphill growth.

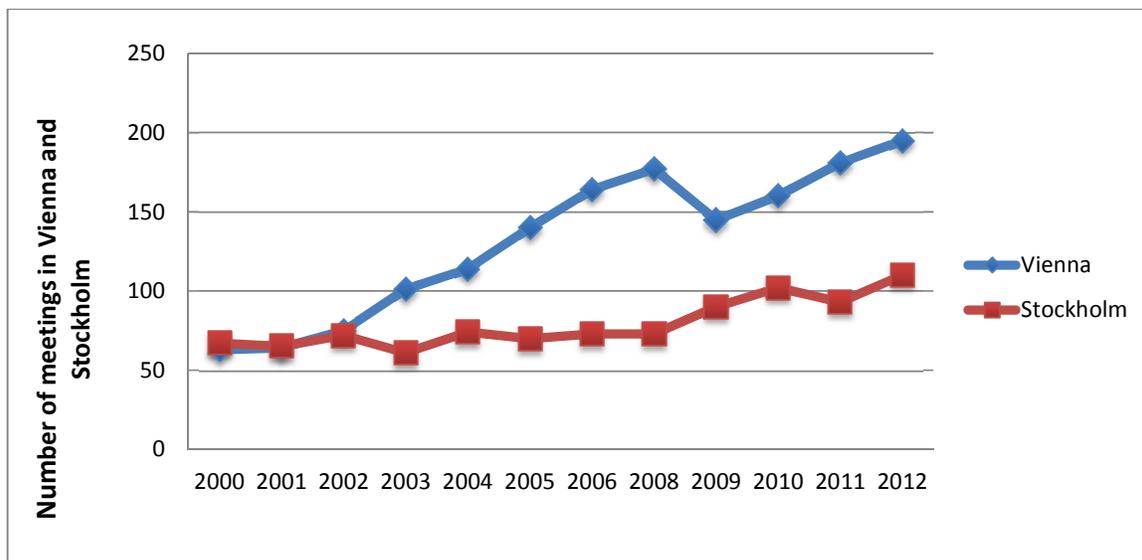


Figure 9- Number of International Association Meetings in Vienna and Stockholm (2000-2012).

Source: Adopted from ICCA (2013).

3.1 Case study of Vienna

Vienna, the capital of Austria, and the former capital of the early Habsburg dynasty, is located in the heart of Europe. The city has 1.7 million inhabitants (Vienna Convention Bureau, 2014). The official language of Vienna is German and the currency is the Euro. Since Vienna is located in central Europe, it is easily accessible by plane, car, train or boat and the longest air trip from any European capital to Vienna is below three hours (Ibid).

Vienna is well known as a popular tourist destination and has a high quality of life, which increases its international recognition. Vienna has several showcases of its imperial heritage such as the Schönbrunn Palace, the Bebelvedere and the Hofburg, including several concert halls and cultural attractions (Ibid). It is also rated as the first musical capital (Ibid). Some of Vienna's other known features are the grand parks, gardens, the Vienna Woods and Wetlands of the Donau Auen National Park. Another advantage the city has is its high level of safety and security (Ibid).

Why Vienna:

Vienna is not only a holiday and leisure destination, which interests visitor, business travellers that attend meetings and conferences also dominate Vienna's tourism industry. "In 2012, Vienna hosted a total of 3,376 congresses and corporate events, generating a total of 1,521,170 bed nights and inducing gross domestic product of 914.66 million Euros" (Vienna Convention Bureau, 2013). These figures represent all the aspects of the meetings industry that relate to other segments of the tourism industry.

Vienna also lives up to the expectations of a modern city, offering various cultural events, international cuisine, and shopping and sightseeing activities. Vienna has a combination of infrastructure and attractions, making it the top destination for international conferences and conventions. Vienna additionally has a high quality of life and safety and in a survey carried by Mercer (2011) it was ranked number 1 amongst the 250 cities evaluated (Mondial, 2014). Additionally, international accessibility is extremely important for the conference industry and the third runway at the Vienna International Airport is a huge success (Ibid). Vienna is a very multicultural city, with 49% of its population having a "migrant background" (born outside of Austria or with at least 1 parent born outside of Austria) (Wien Tourismus b2b.wien). Additionally Vienna has 9 universities, 5 advanced technical colleges and 6 private universities, making research and development a high priority there (Ibid).

According to Vienna Tourist Board (2014), meetings in Vienna are supported by municipal and academic facilities and there are 24 licensed certification agencies for Green Meetings that demonstrate Vienna's vision of environmental sustainability. Green Meetings are becoming increasingly popular in the international convention industry, thus, providing Vienna with a competitive edge. Vienna's Donau City is home to some of the world's major global corporations as well as multiple UN organizations. Additionally, the UN has labelled Vienna as one of its official seats with representing 15 of its organizations, including UNIDO (Industrial Development), IAEA (Atomic Energy) and UNHCR (High Commissioner for Refugees). OPEC (Petroleum Exporting Countries) and OECD (Economic Co-operation and Development) also have their headquarters in Vienna (Wien Tourismus b2b.wien). Around 200 multinational corporations such as JVC, Hewlett-Packard, Heineken have their Eastern European headquarters in Vienna and every year around 100 international companies open a location in Vienna (Ibid).

The city's increasing significance as a Central European Hub is also a valuable asset for Vienna. New hotel projects and redevelopment around the city centre, and around the area of the Main Railway Station are creating sustainable impetus. The modernization, internationalization and constant self-reinvention of the city of Vienna has assisted in a successful tourism industry there. The head of Vienna Tourist Board says that incentives regarding infrastructure, atmosphere and reputation are very important to attract international conferences and Vienna is excelling in all these areas (Wien.at, 2012).

International conferences held in Vienna are mostly in the areas of medicine, arts, and IT/communications, while business, political, and scientific conferences are decreasing (Wien.at, 2012). Thus, Vienna usually has a high reputation for hosting international conference on the topics of medicine and the rapid increase and development of the IT/communications sector is expected to have a positive affect on Vienna's conference industry (Ibid).

3.2 Case study of Stockholm

Stockholm, the capital of Sweden is a metropolitan city of 1.8 million inhabitants (Stockholm Convention Bureau, 2013). The national language is Swedish and the currency is the Swedish Crown. Stockholm is the largest city in the largest country in Scandinavia, and it has the largest stock market in Scandinavia too, thus considered the capital of Scandinavia (Ibid).

Stockholm is built on 14 islands that are connected by 57 bridges, thus, it is also known as the "Venice of the North" or the "City of water" (Paschou & Metaxas, 2013). Guided tours, sailboats, kayaks, canoes and seaplanes can be used to explore the Stockholm archipelago. The city has a strategic location, considering Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea highlighting it as a promising and important commercial port in Scandinavia (Ibid).

Why Stockholm:

Stockholm can be considered as an ideal city for working and living as it is ranked amongst the top global cities and has the potential to compete with the most promising and powerful rich cities of the world (Paschou & Metaxas, 2013). Stockholm is also known as the "Capital of culture in Europe" and due to its strong cultural and historical background, and the city's welfare providing a high level of safety and insurance, international conventions and multinationals are attracted to conduct important congresses in Stockholm (Ibid).

Certain features such as having its own position in the heart of Scandinavia, being able to provide world-class transportation, infrastructure and facilities, having multinational companies, and having a high number of venues and hotels make Stockholm a conference destination (Stockholm Convention Bureau, 2013). It also has a firm foundation in the fields of economics, culture, and political environment (Paschou & Metaxas, 2013).

Siemens (2009) presented a study on the environmental sustainability of 30 major cities in 30 European countries and found that the “Green City Index” of Copenhagen was the highest followed by the Stockholm, Oslo, Vienna and Amsterdam. In 2010 Stockholm was celebrated as Europe’s first Green Capital (Stockholm Convention Bureau).

The unique Nordic food and design and Stieg Larsson’s Millennium books have helped Stockholm gain popularity around the world. Stockholm is considered as a cosy yet cosmopolitan city by Lonely Planet (2012) and it is the epitome of eco friendly outdoor living (Ibid). It has a nice blend of old and new in terms of culinary and art. The nightlife in Stockholm is vibrant, including the world’s first permanent ice bar. Stockholm is beautiful all year round and is clean and safe. Since most people have not been here before, usually delegates get here early to explore the city (Stockholm Convention Bureau).

There are many conference centres positioned in Stockholm city centre that are a walking distance from hotels and social events (Stockholm Visitors Board). Stockholm also has some world-class conference venues, a wide selection of hotels, cultural sites, shops, restaurants, cafes and bars. Stockholm hosted the European Society of Cardiology convention that had more than 25,000 delegates (Stockholm Convention Bureau). English is spoken widely here, and although it is not a cheap destination, it does deliver value for money (Ibid). Convention organizers feel that though Stockholm has satisfactory accommodation for small and medium congresses, the hotel capacity can be increased for major conventions (Ibid).

Stockholm is easily accessible, as the Stockholm Arlanda Airport has direct flight connections from around the globe and the public transportation for getting around the city is easy. Around 70 airlines serve the airport with about 140 non-stop routes to international destinations. Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) has the most non-stop flight connections from Stockholm to international destinations (Ibid). Additionally, Stockholm also has Stockholm-Skavsta Airport that mainly has low cost direct flights around Europe.

Stockholm is also a leading centre for biotechnology, medical research and technology and it has the highest density of research and training centres in northern Europe (Ibid). Prestigious universities such as the KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Karolinska Institutet (where the Nobel prize in Medicine are awarded by the Nobel Assembly) attract students from all over the world (Ibid). Traditional Swedish industries include automotive, engineering domestic appliances, forestry, and telecoms (IT) being a particular strength in Sweden (Ibid).

4. Research methodology and design

4.1 Empirical research objective

As the literature review and secondary data analysis leave particular essential queries of this research unanswered, such as providing data from the multiple players of the convention industry, and the top memorable factors of a destination, primary data collection has been undertaken.

4.2 Research methods

The research method to achieve the objectivity of this particular study shall be done by collecting secondary data and conducting expert interviews. Through such a method of using both primary and secondary data the aim of the study has been achieved.

4.2.1 Secondary data collection

In this research, the importance of secondary data is vast as it provides information on the site selection criteria and crucial figures on the congress tourism sector for both Stockholm and Vienna. Parts of secondary data available on the congress and tourism industry and the site selection criteria that prove useful have been adopted for this research. There were no previous studies on the strengths and weaknesses of Stockholm and Vienna as conference cities. The secondary data therefore has been collected through reports and information from CVBs and other marketing websites, which provide an overview of the two cities, and certain facts about them that have been arranged as either the perceived strengths or weaknesses by the authors. This knowledge was used to form questionnaires for expert interviews and it helped the interviewers gain expertise in the field of study.

4.2.2 Primary data collection

For this study, the primary data was collected through semi standardized expert interviews.

According to Flick, (2009) semi-standardized interviews provide an individual's perception regarding a particular topic and are used to interpret answers for presenting existing knowledge. This method provides greater flexibility to both the interviewer and the interviewee than any other qualitative method (Ibid).

The expert interviews were conducted between the months of April and May 2014. 38 interviewees deemed as experts in convention industry were contacted via Email prior to the actual interviews. Out of these, 15 persons responded and as a result, 10 expert interviews were conducted which represent the different players of the convention industry, see Appendix A. Appendix B illustrates the job titles and organizations of the individual interviewees.

Amongst the 10 interviewees, 5 were female while 5 were male. All the interviewees requested, thus received the questionnaire in advance. Out of all the interviews, 2 took place via Skype, 1 via phone, 4 via Email and 3 in person. The Skype, phone and in-person interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. The in person interviews took place in Stockholm and Vienna.

The questionnaire contained between 11-12 questions, depending on the interviewee, that were targeted to attain in-depth understanding of the various aspects concerned with the study's aim and topic. The questionnaires can be found in Appendix C, D, E, F, and G.

All the face-to-face interviews were audio taped and the Skype interviews were videotaped. Notes were also taken during the interview but were kept to a minimal to not disturb the open and informal approach of the interview. Altogether the 10 interviews produced about 13 pages of transcribed text.

4.3 Research approach

Qualitative content analysis is a way to systematically analyse text. Through certain techniques, analysis is done within the text's context via rules and step-by-step models that help exclude rash quantification (Mayring, 2000).

In brief, selected secondary studies were examined using qualitative content analysis through an inductive approach (according to Mayring, 2000). Certain rules are followed here to form categories and codes, to reduce and summarize the material. Through this, certain patterns and ideal typologies were recognized. As a result, questionnaires were developed, and interviews were conducted and evaluated, by the deductive approach of qualitative content analysis

(according to Meuser & Nagel, 2009). Here, the categories that are already formed from the secondary studies are looked for in the text of the interviews and any new themes that emerge are added as extra categories.

Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 below describe the steps taken to perform qualitative content analysis on secondary and primary data.

4.3.1 Secondary studies

The special feature of qualitative content analysis is the use of categories, which can be derived from the theoretical models by bringing the categories to the empirical method instead of developing the categories from them (Ibid). This is done by analysing, using the inductive category development, which belongs to the procedure of *summary* (Mayring 2000).

The qualitative content analysis process can be divided into different stages (Ibid). It starts by selecting relevant studies that help answer the research questions, which were ICCA and UIA statistics, books and articles regarding the selection criteria of buyers and delegates, CVBs and other governmental data. As the documents were scientific and came from renowned scientific journals, books, and governmental organization, the data collection methods were trustworthy. However, in the case studies of Vienna and Stockholm, the data could have been biased since it came from the city's respective government bodies. The material has to be formally categorized by the researcher in the next step, by specifying the method of the documentation of the materials, and whether the transcription editing procedure was affected by any factors (Ibid). Subsequently, the research question of the document is clearly defined, linked theoretically to earlier research on similar issues and differentiated in sub questions (Ibid). Afterwards, the analytical technique of *summary* was selected, and the unit of analysis was thereafter defined, followed by analysis of the material and lastly the interpretation was carried out.

4.3.2 Expert interviews

The expert interviews analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques to discover and compare the substance of the experts' knowledge. The transcription of the interviews was done verbatim within a week of the conduction of the interviews to accurately apply the coding system, as the data was fresh for the researchers. Interview passages with similar topics, known as thematic units are sought and the context of the text is taken into account, regarding when they appear in the interview, to evaluate the significance of the statement (Meuser & Nagel, 2009).

Such a process was repeated on each of the nine interviews conducted for this study. Passages from different interviews that share comparable themes are afterwards tied together. In this process, the meanings of the field of action are connected to form theories and typologies (Ibid). These coded categories are then used for the analysis and description. Such a data analysis process provides new interrelationships between the primary and secondary data (Ibid). Meuser and Nagel (2009) also state that the aim of the interview is to discover the similarities and conclusions in the knowledge that the experts share.

4.4 Empirical research design

In this section the reasons for selecting semi standardized expert interviews as a method are described. The selection criteria for the interviews are also explained.

4.4.1 Reasons for adopting semi standardized expert interviews

According to Bogner and Menz (2002), expert interviews can be used to generate a theory about an issue based on the knowledge of various experts (Flick, 2009). As semi-standardized interviews allow the interviewer to have questions and topics that are predetermined but also allow the topics to progress in further dimensions, crucial insights can be captured (Flick, 2006).

4.4.2 Reasons for choosing the selected experts

Persons that represent ideal study subjects as they possess insider knowledge, have privileged information and operational knowledge, are educated, part of heterogeneous industries and have relations to a number of international conferences are conference buyers (conference organizers and delegates) and conference suppliers. Appendix A and B provide information regarding individual interviewees and their sectors.

4.5 limitations of the empirical study

The expert interviews have limitations despite the advantages that they offer. Some of the obvious limitations include defining the experts, limitations in conducting the interviews and resource constraints of money, time and manpower. Below, the limitations and the steps taken to minimize them have been stated.

4.5.1 Limitations of expert interviews

According to Meuser and Nagel, problems regarding expert interviews are the interviewer's capability to moderate the interview and guide the interviewee towards the main topic (Flick, 2009). The interviewees for this research proved to be experts in the field of congress tourism, had knowledge and played an active role within the industry.

As most interviews were not conducted face-to-face, it was not possible to read the facial expressions of the interviewees. But, as most interviewees had received the questionnaire beforehand, they talked in a free flowing and confident manner. Moreover, it was observed that the in person interviews lasted longer than the Skype and phone interviews.

Meuser and Nagel (2009) also explain the importance of the interviewer being on the same status quo as the interviewee to achieve a successful interview. For this limitation, the researchers thoroughly studied the technicalities and familiarized themselves with the topic.

4.5.2 Limitations in the selection of experts

Some of the deemed experts were not available in the time frame the interviews were held; however the target, 10 interviewees were accessible for interviews. This was achieved by inviting 38 experts for interviews.

Most but not all of the experts were from the cities of Vienna and Stockholm, especially the delegates. However, the nationality of the conference delegates is inane for the study, as all of them have attended international conferences. None of the conference organizers had organized conferences in Stockholm, thus they could not comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Stockholm.

4.5.3 Limitations due to research constraints

As it was not always possible for both the researchers to conduct and be present at the various expert interviews, it could be assumed that the interview conduction could have been executed more efficiently. Nevertheless, as the interviews were recorded, the researchers viewed them together to minimize the potential limitations. Time, manpower, and money constraints as in any other research were other limitations of this study.

4.6 Quality measures of the research design

The quality of qualitative research has been widely debated (Flick, 2006). There are concerns of standards, validity, reliability and rigor (Flick, 2007). Recently, much emphasis has been given on how the data is collected and analysed thus, improving the techniques and procedures of the data collection and analysis result in better theorizing with qualitative data (Ibid). The measures taken for ensuring a high quality of the research design are listed below.

4.6.1 Internal validity

Validity in qualitative research concerns the level to which the outcomes are to have been interpreted in an accurate way.

Internal validity determines that a certain event led to another event and was not influenced by any additional factors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Flick (2006) strategies such as prolonged engagement in the specific field, persistent observation, triangulation, reviews etc. could be used to increase the credibility.

The researchers of this study were involved in partaking and organizing several international meetings, thus being actively engaged in the convention industry. Additionally, several interviewees were previous contacts of the researchers, which permitted frank discussions.

4.6.2 External validity

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts or to other subjects, thus, being able to be generalized beyond the immediate study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since both the primary and secondary data were collected from the various international players of the convention industry, the generalizability of the findings is assured.

4.6.3 Theoretical validity

Theoretical validation by gathering relevant data was used in this research to increase the validity of the findings and analysis. Due to surveys from different countries and organizations adapting different design principles, the findings tend to be non-comparable (Veal, 2006). For this reason non-comparable data has been removed from this study.

4.6.4 Reliability

Reliability concerns with the extent to which the data collection approach will yield similar results on different occasions. For reliability, the theoretical framework of the research is based on the research questions, and the questionnaire for the interviews has been constructed regarding the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the steps of qualitative content analysis were strictly followed and the results were compared and agreed upon through the intra coder agreement amongst the researchers.

4.6.5 Objectivity

Objectivity relates to the extent to which the results are determined by the interviewees and not by the bias, interest or perspective of the interviewers and can be achieved by an appropriate methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To limit the bias formed during the theoretical review, open-ended questions were asked.

5. Research findings and discussion

The research findings are the results from secondary data and expert interviews. The below sections will display the results and their discussion.

5.1 Destination site selection factors

The primary data of this study have obtained the top site selection criteria for international meetings from the organizers and delegates perspective. Additionally suppliers' perspective is also acknowledged. As the previous researches did not cover the perspective of the suppliers, the current research has filled this gap, as the researches believed that the suppliers through their constant interaction with buyers must hold crucial knowledge regarding the conference industry. Additionally, as the site selection criteria have a tendency to change over time due to change in aspects, it is critical to perform on going research, which this particular research has accomplished.

It can be seen in table 5 below, that it is crucial for the conference organizers to have the destinations active support in the conference, and the involvement of the local industry that corresponds to the industry of the conference. The appeal of the city, from both business and touristic viewpoint, also holds high significance. It was moreover discovered, that international meeting buyers mostly concentrate on the countries located in Europe, Asia-pacific or the Americas that have warm weather during the conference period. The top site selection criteria for conference delegates were mainly concentrated on the travel time, access to the destination, and hotel availability close to the conference venue.

Table 5. Top Site Selection Criteria.

Organizers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major world city- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Accessibility to the destination -Sufficient hotel availability -Interesting conference venues • Touristic and business potential* • City located in Europe, Asia-Pacific or the Americas* • Active CVB and available programs to help conference organizers (ex. site inspections) • Good business connections in the city (ex. free conference venue from university, chamber of commerce, etc.) • Active support from the city to the buyer's industry sector and access to that particular local industry (ex. Funding and venue contribution from the city's innovation community for an innovation conference)*
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable travel time • Accessibility to the destination • Hotel availability close to the conference center • Touristic and business potential* • Good conference venue • Good cuisine • Good conference program i.e. activities after meeting and time to relax
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to the destination • Safety • Prices/rates of hotels and venues • Destination image/city appeal • City logistics • Standard of the particular local industry that corresponds to the conference topic* • Meeting and city infrastructure • Hotel offers • Warm weather*

* Completely new findings, not mentioned in secondary studies

Source: Authors.

The findings of the primary data, when compared to the secondary data, provided additional site selection factors in addition to several similarities. The new findings are indicated with asterisks in the table. Additionally, most previous studies state the various site selection factors, but have failed to demonstrate the importance of individual factors, while the empirical findings state the most important site selection criteria (Crouch & Louviere, 2004).

Moreover, the supplier's perspective is also provided, which mentions warm weather and the standard of the particular local industry corresponding to the conferences as being important site selection criterions. The conference organizers too feel this to be an important criterion as they wish to receive active support from the corresponding industry. Therefore, it can be inferred that a city's strength or standard in a particular industry would definitely attract international conferences from that sector. This aspect offers a new angle for suppliers to consider; as it can help them enhance the number of international conferences at their destinations, in particular fields their city already holds interest and high standards in.

The delegates' perception was very similar to previous researches, however an additional finding identified the importance of the combination of both tourist and work potential at a destination. The conference organizers also listed this as a top site selection criterion. Thus, delegates require a balance of work and leisure at a destination since, clearly international conferences are not entirely work oriented.

The interviewees also commented on the basic requirements for conference destinations and free meeting space by conference venues, and special delegate rates came up, see table 6. Delegates also feel that the conference venue must have enough restrooms available and the interior setting must be suitable for the different conference proceedings. Availability and easy access to free Wi-Fi is also considered a necessity.

Table 6. Basic Requirements for Conference Destinations.

Organizers perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free meeting space offered by the conference venue (either free venue via contacts or hotels offering delegate rates, effectively meaning free meeting space) • Hotels close to the conference venue • Positive agreement with hotels (ex. special delegate rates, guaranteed rooms, 1 in 30 free rooms, etc.) • English language standard • Vast Wi-Fi area in conference venues and hotels
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional and fully equipped meeting rooms (audio and visuals, notepads, pens, water and snacks, good ventilation and suitable temperature) • Interior setting that enables for a good discussion, seminar or workshop • Accessibility and transportation • Conference area that is closed for the public • Availability of restrooms to service shorter breaks • Vast Wi-Fi area in conference venues and hotels • English language standard
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the conference logistics • Good meeting infrastructure • Variety of hotel accommodation • Accessibility and transportation • Safety and security • Professional service providers on all levels • Airport

Source: Authors.

The basic requirements for conference destinations were determined to discover whether the top selection criteria were in-fact the basic necessities of the buyers. However, it can be seen that, though the majority of basic requirements are included in the top selection criteria, the top selection criteria have many additional variables. This helps distinguish between the necessities that are expected from a conference destination, while the rest provide further selection criteria that assist buyers in selecting the best possible conference destination.

Table 7 below lists the importance of the international city ranking of various associations to the conference organizers, delegates and supplier. All the interviewees agreed that the

international meeting city rankings by ICCA and UIA are not important factor in the site selection process.

Table 7. Importance of ICCA and UIA City Rankings According to the Perspectives of Buyers, Delegates and Suppliers.

Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not important
Delegates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not important
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the highest rank allows recognition, “but it doesn’t matter if you are No. 2 or No. 7”

Source: Authors.

Since most of the suppliers website on Vienna state its UIA or ICCA rankings, the researchers wanted to clarify the importance of such ranking. As it can be seen in table 7, though the rankings don’t hold any importance in the site selection criteria, having a really high rank, such as Vienna’s does provide recognition for the city. Thus, Vienna boastfully states its rankings.

5.2 Memorable destination variables

Table 8 represents the significance of the destination image in the site selection process. It can be seen that a positive image results in higher delegate turnout, while a negative one reduces their numbers.

Table 8. Importance of City Image.

Organizers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantageous to hold international conferences in attractive cities as it results in increased number of attendees • Cities known to be insecure or too expensive get reduced number of attendees • Hosting conferences in lesser-known cities however is also interesting, as people are curious and like to experience new cities too
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of activities for the attendees is important • Local cuisine • Unique factors at the destination, conference venues, and hotels • A positive city image results in future leisure trips • Expensive, insecure or unclean reputation results in low delegate turnout
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of high importance as it attracts many delegates (however, being too attractive can lead to delegates engaging in leisure activities, instead of focusing on the conference) • Bad weather has resulted in buyers turning down destinations

Source: Authors.

Top memorable variables of the destination were also discovered. They help evaluate meetings and create destination images, and are used as future site selection criteria (Weber &

Chon, 2002). City’s cleanliness, safety, food, and transportation were the memorable variables from all the parties interviewed.

Previous research has clearly defined the destination image to be one of the most significant criteria in site selection, as it directly corresponds to the number of attendees. The findings of this research are very similar to previous research as they confirm the high importance of destination image. However, this research also focused on how the destination image can negatively or positively affect the buyers, see table 9 below. For example, a positive city image results in future leisure trips by the attendees and cities known to be too expensive or insecure receive fewer attendees.

Table 9. Top Memorable Variables of the Conference Destination.

Organizers perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event costs (catering, printing, hotels, etc.) • Ease of dealing with suppliers (English language standard, ease of communication, payment terms) • CVB help (site visits, identifying venues, funding applications) • City’s interest level in the conference (support through sponsorship, promotion, speakers, etc.) • No. of local delegates attracted to the conference & the percentage of local vs. international delegates • Safety and security • Accessibility and transportation • City’s cleanliness
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International networking opportunities at the conference • Standard of venue and hotel interior • Availability of ample restrooms at the venues • Wi-Fi and technology availability • Food choice, restaurants and bars • Social activities • Safety and security • Accessibility and transportation • Service quality • Public transportation • City’s Cleanliness • Credit card payment facilities • Cell phone coverage
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venue standard • Service quality • Delegate turnout • Food and catering • Accessibility and transportation • Safety and security • Costs/prices • Weather • Accommodation • Internal meeting logistics

Source: Authors.

In relation to previous research the findings are similar, listing factors such as meeting room facilities, and the hotel service quality, hotel room availability, safety/security, cleanliness, and attractiveness of the destination as top memorable variables that form a destination’s image. Nevertheless, this research had some additional discoveries. From the organizers

perspective, the overall ease in dealing and communication with the various suppliers was a top memory, including the number of local delegates vs. the international delegates attracted to the conference. The additional findings related to the delegates were international networking opportunities, Wi-Fi and technology availability, credit card payment facilities and cell-phone coverage. Specific studies have been previously conducted on destination image formation models, which have concentrated on either countries or states but not individual cities (Oppermann, 1996). A study by Oppermann (1996) evaluated the destination image of 30 North American convention cities based on the destination's attributes by using a list of 15 decision criteria selected based on previous researches. However, this particular research approached this topic through an open-ended structure.

Figure 1 by Oppermann & Chon (1997) describes the interrelationship between the three players of the convention industry. It can be seen that there are several implied benefits of this relationship, such as the location image, and potential future visits of the delegates. Therefore, it can be said that the conference buyers post the conference conduction, create an image of the destination and based on it choose to either return or not return to the destination. In other words, the destination image consists of the memorable variables of the destination.

Additionally, figure 3, in the theoretical review section provides a general conceptual model of the site selection process. It lists the 5 steps that are important in the site selection process. Step 5 in the process is the *post convention evaluation* that according to Weber and Chon (2002) is retained for any further site selection processes (Ibid).

As any convention destination wants the buyers to return to the destination, to host conferences or for leisure reasons, they must understand the importance of memorable variables and post evaluation in further site selections.

As the site selection criteria clearly state the importance of a destination having touristic appeal, it was significant to further examine how interested the buyers were in leisure activities at the destination. Table 10 identifies the interest or importance of leisure activities at a destination. It can be seen that leisure activities only hold significance for the accompanying guests of the delegates, and ample activity alternatives enhance the destination image. This again signifies the importance of the destination image for the buyers, though the delegates might not take part in any leisure activities at the destination. Since conference tourists are mostly involved in social activities related to the conference, they seldom have

time for additional leisure activities. From the supplier’s perspective, it is comprehended that any large events at the city may create conflict with the conference.

Table 10. Interest in Leisure Activities at the Destination.

Organizers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegates don’t have time for many additional activities, however, its important for the accompanying family and guests
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable, safe and comfortable activities for all delegates (considering age, gender, religion, culture, physical ability, environment, timing etc.) Not too important if the conference trip is filled with conference related social activities such as gala dinners, etc.
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large events can create conflicts with the conference Important for delegates to have activities, but does not affect site selection Helps provide a good image to the destination which results in high delegate turnover Not as important for medical meeting delegates as for the corporate ones

Source: Authors.

5.3 Strengths and weaknesses of Vienna and Stockholm

Table 11 displays the strengths and weaknesses of Vienna and Stockholm based on the secondary studies. Table 12 on the other hand illustrates data from expert interviews, therefore portraying factors that they recognize as being advantageous or disadvantageous for the two cities. However, as none of the interviewed organizers had organized international conferences in Stockholm, the strengths and weaknesses of Stockholm are based on the perspectives of the delegates and the suppliers.

Table 11. Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Vienna and Stockholm as Conference Destinations.

	Vienna	Stockholm
Perceived Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central European location • The Euro • Rich heritage • Grand architecture • International cuisine • Cultural and social activities • Music and opera • Safety and security • National parks and woods • Green city • UNESCO world heritage • High quality of life • Shopping • Multinational and UN organizations • Multicultural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impressive maritime landscape • Green/eco city • Outdoor living • Forests and unspoilt nature • Shopping • Nordic food and design • Clean and safe • High welfare • Public transportation • International flight connections • Multicultural • Conference facilities in the city centre • No English language barrier • Not fully discovered yet (future growth prospects)
Perceived Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already explored • Language barriers • Low customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low hotel capacity for large conventions • Expensive • Currency- Swedish Crown
Other comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in conferences in areas of mainly medicine, arts, and IT/communications • Decrease in business, political, and scientific conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading centre for biotechnology, medical research and technology • Traditional Swedish industries- automotive, engineering domestic appliances, forestry, and telecoms (IT)

Source: Authors.

The concept of comparing the weaknesses and strengths between Stockholm and Vienna was based on the rankings that correspond to the number of international meetings held in the cities.

When comparing the two tables, a majority of strengths and weaknesses were found to be recurrent. Findings from the secondary data provide a longer list of strengths since the data source were mostly Vienna and Stockholm’s convention bureaus, therefore the data might be biased. On the other hand, expert interviews provide understanding of the current situation of Stockholm and Vienna, offering a fair comparison.

Table 12. Strengths and Weaknesses of Vienna and Stockholm as Conference Destinations.

	Vienna	Stockholm
Strengths/advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive and interesting touristic city (inner city within walking distance) • Variety of venues with different price range and sizes for both meetings and social events* • Three conference centers with different structures* • Good flight connections • Hotel industry support to the international congress industry* • Political support by the city government* • Hotels with large number of rooms • Public transportation • Active CVB (site inspection, venue selection, and delegate boosting) • Return visits by attendees * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice conference centers in the city center and by the archipelago • Nature inspired venues* • International cuisine • Good English language standard • Helpful people and good service* • Flight connections • Public transportation • “It works” (trust that everything (logistics) will work)* • “Small town, big city” (easy access)* • Sustainability
Weaknesses/disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively expensive (especially hotels)* • A popular destination for both tourists (especially in the summer) and events, which could affect hotel availability, rates, etc. • Popular conference destination (delegates might want to visit other cities instead) • Lack of inter-continental flights (ongoing improvements)* • Missing large dinner venue for more than 1000 people (will be solved within a few months time)* • Don’t offer financial support for meetings* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location (far from central Europe) • Rely on flights instead of a combination of flights, trains, etc.* • Expensive (especially transportation and hotels) • Lack of political support and understanding regarding the positive effects of the conference industry to a destination* • Climate* • Transportation delays during winter* • “<u>Herrgard</u>” or cottages cannot meet the international standards (Wi-Fi, rooms service etc.)* • Varied service quality (temporary staff for specific events)* • Insufficient information and service in comparison to the US* • Swedish staff can be neutral (perceived as impolite sometimes)* • Limited local cuisine*

*Completely new findings, not mentioned in secondary studies

Source: Authors.

Vienna has advantages such as housing multinational headquarters that organize or attract international conferences to the city. Stockholm has also created a high standard and gained the trust of organizers, due to the minimal risk rate of conference logistics. A buyer states that “clients trust that everything will work here”.

Due to Stockholm being located in northern Europe while Vienna in central Europe, Stockholm faces a loss of attendees that could easily arrive to Vienna through rail or road. The Climate too has proved disadvantageous for Stockholm, as organizers like to host conferences in warmer weather conditions. The winter climate often slows down any transportation means, creating a huge risk for the organizers.

The service quality in terms of customer service is considered weak in Vienna while service quality in Stockholm have been considered as its strength. Though, delegates have perceived the neutral behaviour of the Swedish staff as impolite behaviour. This could directly affect attendees destination image, especially if such behaviour is experienced more than once on a trip.

Figure 9 in chapter 2 displays the number of association meetings held in Vienna and Stockholm during the years 2000-2012. Vienna picks up a fast growth with a steep fall in 2008, possibly due to the world recession, and again leaps from 2009 onwards. Stockholm however had a slow growth till 2008 and only after 2008 seems to have picked up speed. Coincidentally, the empirical data shows that Vienna receives a high level of hotel and governmental support concerning the convention tourism industry, while Stockholm faces a lack of governmental/political support and understanding regarding the positive effects of the conference industry. Such an on going will certainly assist Vienna gain awareness and knowledge around the convention industry while Stockholm's future potential and growth as a conference destination would be stunted.

Apart from other basic differences such as currency, location, and transportation access, between the two cities, a significant finding was the leading industries of the two cities. Stockholm and Vienna are considered high pioneers of the pharmaceutical and IT/communication industry. However, Stockholm is also a prominent centre for biotechnology and has traditional industries such as automotive, engineering domestic appliances, and forestry. Stockholm's knowledge and experience in these industries can therefore be used as its strengths to develop its convention industry in these areas.

5.4 Suggestions and additional findings

Table 13 displays propositions, from the perspectives of conference organizers, delegates and suppliers, to attract attendees to international conference destinations.

Table 13. Suggestions and Future Possibilities for Attracting Delegates.

Organizers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding conferences in non expensive attractive cities • Create interesting offsite venues (ex. Conference dinners) • Engaging with local community (relating to the buyers particular industry) and working closely with the convention bureau at least a year before the conference date • Putting together interesting programs that attract both locals and international delegates (good speaker line ups, interesting social events, etc.) • Attractive marketing of the city (good websites, pricing information, quick replies from CVBs etc.)
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete conference experience linked to the destination • Creative surprises for delegates (ex. Goodie bags, survival kits, gift vouchers, etc.) • Providing basic information regarding hotel, venues, destination, activities etc. • Advanced city marketing
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility and transportation • Enhance destination image • Ample hotel rooms, variety and prices • Networking opportunities • Conference quality (content) • Spouse programs • Flexible timings

Source: Authors.

Certain vital supplementary outcomes are demonstrated in table 14, 15 and 16.

Table 14 illustrates the KPI's of the conference organizers and suppliers. This offers thorough knowledge regarding the organizations needs in order to achieve success in their respective industries.

Table 14. Organization's KPIs.

Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of delegates at the conference • Number and quality of the submissions at the conference • Amount of sponsorships attracted to the conference • Membership numbers
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profit • Attracting large conferences • Number of conferences the organization is proactively involved in • Number of confirmed bookings per year • Number of booking still pending at the years end • Number of turned down requests • Yearly statistical reports • ICCA and GMIC Index

Source: Authors.

Discovering the various KPI's of the conference organizers and suppliers is seen as a beneficial discovery for both the parties, as it can help them deliver better services, marketing strategies and an overall productive environment.

Table 15 below lists the various channels used by the buyers and supplier to keep informed about international conferences or destinations. This gives a chance for suppliers to educate themselves regarding the popular channels used by the buyers.

Table 15. Information Channels Regarding International Conferences/Destinations.

Organizers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MICE events such as IMEX • Newsletters • Networks
Delegates perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LinkedIn • Networks • Newsletters and magazines • Facebook • Word of mouth
Suppliers perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICCA database • Word of mouth • Member alliances within congress industry • UIA database • Google • Universities

Source: Authors.

Table 16 attains to discover the significance of a destination’s list of conferences on the organizers, delegates and suppliers. The buyers have stated the significance of such a list while the suppliers have listed where they publish the list, as it could have several uses for various parties. The implication for the buyers is crucial for the suppliers and could be used in an effective manner.

Table 16. Significance of a Destination’s List of Conferences.

To Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid clashing with another conference taking place during the same time at the destination which would affect the No. of available hotel rooms
To delegates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting if provided topic wise, as it’s nice to attend several meetings in one trip
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published on websites of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stockholm, Stockholm CVB, partner venues/PCOs -Vienna CVBs public convention calendar, press releases -ICCA

Source: Authors.

6. Conclusion

This research has focused on the top international conventions site selection criteria from the viewpoints of the three major players of the convention industry, conference organizers, delegates and suppliers, to provide a 360-degree view. The additional aim was to provide a road map for Stockholm to reach a higher status as an international convention city. Thus, the

case studies of Vienna and Stockholm offer a basis to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the convention industries in the cities.

Previous studies, regarding the site selection criteria of both conference organizers and delegates, have been discussed, and a model created by the authors summarizes the secondary data thus, providing a systematic list of the site selection criteria. This model was used as a comparison tool for the primary data of this research. The secondary data was collected through previous researches while the primary data was collected through conducting expert interviews. On both the primary and secondary data, techniques of qualitative content analysis were performed.

The findings of the research have been presented, and it was determined that though the previous site selection criterion still hold relevance, new factors are also important, such as a destination's ability to have potential from both business and touristic perspectives, the corresponding local industry at the destination providing support to the conference, and the destination being located in Europe, Asia-Pacific or the Americas. It was also learnt that many international associations rotate their meetings amongst their member countries, and warm weather countries are preferred for international conferences.

Apart from these findings, the importance of city or destination image, the top memorable variables of the conference destination, the strengths and weaknesses of Vienna and Stockholm, the KPI's of conference organizers and suppliers, the information channels for international conferences and destination, the significance of a destinations list of conferences, interest in leisure activities at a destination, and importance of the ICCA and UIA city rankings were also discovered.

Based on the findings and their discussion, recommendations for the city of Stockholm have been formed. In brief, the recommendations are made regarding the improvement of the accommodation facilities, converting weaknesses of location and climate into unique strength factors, using the knowledge on the buyers KPIs as a marketing tools and improving the service quality to the international standards. Another critical recommendation is to integrate the Swedish government and educate them regarding the various benefits of the convention industry. The recommendations are also been presented as a roadmap for Stockholm to follow.

This below section comprises of recommendations for Stockholm, and the practical implications and future research ideas.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and their discussion, multiple recommendations for Stockholm are provided, that the researchers feel would aid in the enhancement of its convention industry.

Certain factors about Stockholm that are perceived as its weaknesses but cannot be changed such as its climate and location must be converted into its unique selling points instead. This is a major challenge for Stockholm, since a warm climate and accessibility to the destination come under the top site selection criteria. An interviewee clarifies that bad weather conditions have resulted in buyers turning down certain cities, Stockholm being one of them. Therefore, future actions and possibilities lie in Stockholm enhancing its infrastructure and image as the ultimate winter conference destination, to attract international conferences all year-round. Instead of pouring huge chunks of resources such as time and money on attracting conferences only in the summer months, the allocation of resources must be distributed throughout the year.

According to Weber & Chon (2002) the peak months for international meetings are March, April, June, September, October and November as this avoids the rush of leisure tourists during summer and Christmas breaks. Therefore, during these months there is a high competition for meeting spaces. As stated above, cities that have warm weather during these months would surely attract a high number of buyers. Stockholm must be able to offer packages, and deals to attract international buyers during these months and must create suitable price ranges for venues and hotels.

As Stockholm is seen as an expensive destination, and cost is a top site selection criterion, package deals to suit the price range of different buyers, would give it a competitive advantage. Additionally, marketing efforts to educate people regarding the various price ranges, the “real” expense scenario, and value for money must be heightened.

An interviewee stated that transportation in Stockholm could face delays during winter therefore the city needs to solve this issue, and possibly invest in scientific studies, to reduce the risk rate of delays.

According to Roger (2013) buyers primarily purchase a location first; this consideration has always been of the greatest importance when compared to other factors such as price, type of

venue, quality of facilities and proximity to tourist attractions. Thus, improving Stockholm's destination image and cultivating and building attributes that make it an ultimate winter conference destination would be highly feasible for its future growth.

Combining the various newly discovered destination memorable factors, we see that they are mostly related to the availability of wide international networking opportunities, ample accommodation options, good service quality, particularly ease and promptness of communication and understanding, and high technological availability at the destination. Additionally, the number of local delegates vs. international delegates and the city's interest level in the conference is something buyers remember. These variables help assist in the site selection criteria for the next international conference, build a destination's image and probably build a factor in the competition between convention destinations. As an interview puts it, "it is a known fact that holding meetings in attractive cities result in a high delegate turnout".

The standard of the particular local industry that corresponds to the conference topic must be high. Stockholm has strengths in various sectors such as the pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, automotive, forestry and home appliances. Such sectors could be the focus for attracting conference buyers from the respective sectors. The various suppliers of the conference industry in Stockholm can assist them in providing and developing certain incentives for the buyers, thus, creating a competitive advantage for the city. Incentives could range from easy visa processes for international conference attendees to free meeting spaces in hotels.

As it was discovered that many major associations hold and rotate their annual conferences amongst their member countries, Stockholm should expand its international network and market itself to gain memberships in large international associations, especially in the industries it has high competence in. Therefore the Stockholm CVB, other suppliers, and local industries must constantly network and build strong relationships with the various sectors.

It is crucial to improve on the number and choices of accommodation, particularly on the number of hotel beds in Stockholm as it has a low hotel capacity for large conferences. Thus, it is a must that Stockholm is quick in building the required infrastructure to hold a larger number of people.

Enquiry on the service quality standard must be regularly made as bad service quality can give a bad impression or image of the destination thus resulting in a loss of future buyers. For example, a delegate mentioned that Swedish service could be considered impolite since it is very neutral compared to other international destinations. It is important that people who are in constant communication and contact with the international delegates and organizers are in par with the international standards, etiquettes and communication methods. Additionally, delegates also greatly appreciate a complete set of information regarding the accommodation, venue, and transportation before the conference date and such as package must be created for them.

Delegates, apart from a good conference quality, also want a complete conference experience linked to the city especially for their accompanying guests. However, such an experience must not always be repeated and therefore choices and alternatives are important for attracting the buyers and delegates to return to Stockholm. In order for a city to attract buyers and revisits they must continuously market and reinvent the city's appeal and characteristic so that the process and activities do not become mundane. For example, buyers feel that interesting offsite venues such as gala dinners can be exciting for attendees, and motivating programs for the delegates such as good speaker line-ups provide a great market appeal. According to the interviewed experts a limited Swedish cuisine is Stockholm's weakness. The city must focus on ways to reinvent itself in terms of cuisine, and experiences.

Destination suppliers that face a lack of leisure activity offering at the destination due to climate or other reasons could create activities that are part of the conference span to keep delegates and their accompanying guests involved, such as gala dinners or other activities that incorporate the city's strength points. This could be a way to fulfil the attendee's appetite for activities without them realizing that there is a lack of activities at the destination. Creative and suitable activities for the various groups of people must be created. For example, wine, beer or certain food tasting activities might not be suitable for particular groups of people.

As more and more people are also becoming interested in non-popular cities and delegates consider unique location factors as assets, international meeting buyers are considering organizing meetings in diverse locations. Stockholm, still having an aura of discovery, can definitely use this knowledge to heighten its marketing strategies. Additionally, Stockholm's

unique factors must also be marketed as they provide the city with a unique edge. Effort should be related to the unique environment, Nordic food and design and unique accommodation and conference venues.

According to suppliers, governmental support in the convention industry is lacking in Stockholm, which certainly hinders growth opportunities that the city can easily capture. The marketing principal in convention tourism is to enhance the benefit not only to the organizers and attendees but also to the destinations, venues, agencies, and suppliers that rely on the various economic, social and promotional benefits from conference tourism (Rogers, 2013). It is a must that the local government and various industries of Stockholm are involved in the congress industry to boost it and help Stockholm gain an excellent appeal. The conference attendees should be handled in such a way that they return to Stockholm for leisure purposes, thus, it is important for the city's multiple sectors such as transportation, restaurant and bars, etc. to together create unique, smooth and unforgettable experiences. The government can also provide incentives, and monetary funding for international meetings. It is also beneficial that the Stockholm CVB and other suppliers, work closely together with the conference buyers and market themselves in such a way that foregoes the various disadvantage factors such as the location and climate of Stockholm and converts them into unique selling factors.

Additionally, buyers use the channels of MICE events, newsletter and networks, social media such as LinkedIn, and Facebook to keep informed regarding international conferences and destinations. The suppliers therefore can make marketing effort for these specific channels and use technology as an advantage. It is crucial the suppliers website has clear and useful information, such as the various pricings.

Knowing the KPIs of the conference organizers and thus implying their fulfilment and assistance will surely help attract buyers to a destination. For example, the amount of sponsorships attracted to the conference is a KPI for the organizers, and the suppliers of the Stockholm convention industry can make an effort regarding this.

As the city rankings are not crucial in site selection it is not necessary that Stockholm reach a high rank in the ICCA or UIA rankings to succeed in the convention tourism industry. However, if they do wish to achieve a higher rank since it provides recognition, the best

method would be to fulfil the criteria UIA and ICCA use to include a particular international meeting in their data system for the rankings.

Weber and Chon (2002) state that destinations desire convention tourism prospects for the direct and indirect benefits that it brings to its community. According to them, the most competitive convention destinations understand the full potential that marketing, as a management function, can offer the various organizations involved in attracting and assisting the conventions industry (Ibid).

Below, a roadmap has been created for Stockholm based on the above stated recommendations.

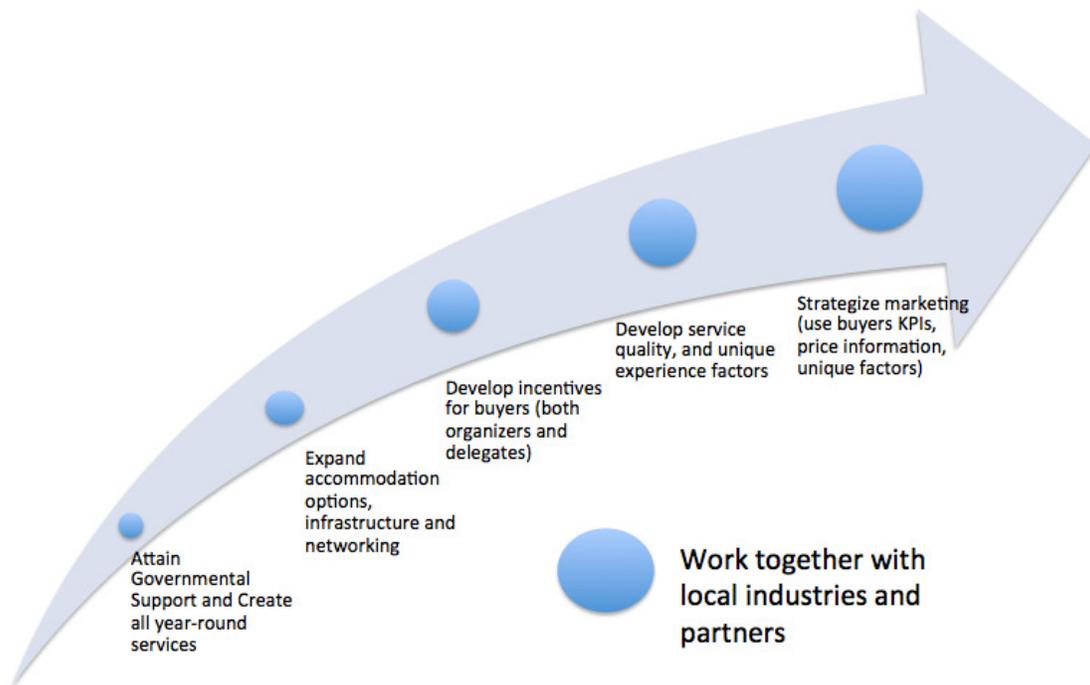


Figure 10 – Roadmap for Stockholm to help develop its international congress tourism opportunities

Source: Authors

6.2 Practical implications and future research

As this research focused on the site selection criteria, and the destination image is one its criteria, the literature and theories relating to it were briefly discussed in section 2.9 to assist in providing recommendations for Stockholm namely the memorable variables of

international conference destinations. Supplementary research could be carried out on how the various variables are interconnected and help create a destination image and thus pertain to the needs of the attendees. Such a topic needs further thorough research to gain significance.

The marketing strategies of Stockholm have not been separated in this study, which could provide further inputs and possibly underline maybe the marketing weaknesses. In depth analysis could be carried out on Stockholm's image as an international convention destination by conducting interviews on the various international convention buyers, both organizers and delegates that have organized and attended conferences at Stockholm. This could thus be used in improving its destination image and strengthening and focusing its marketing strategies. The detection of the existing marketing activities of the city of Stockholm could also provide a basis for its improvement.

Particularly, the *Importance Performance Analysis (expectancy value models)* could be done on Vienna, Stockholm and other European destinations to find their strengths and weaknesses that in turn form their specific destinations images. They are based on finding the attributes of a destination by the use of questionnaires or other methods of data collection to perform various mathematical calculations. However, as such a study requires an entirely different questionnaire and is quantitative in nature, it was not feasible for the authors of this paper to be able to conduct it on the cases of Vienna and Stockholm as a comparison tool between them. Such a study on the location's image could also be conducted from the attendee's point of view and this would again require a large amount of data from the delegates who have attended international conferences and conventions at the cities of Vienna and Stockholm.

A focus group discussion could be further conducted on the buyers, delegates and suppliers collectively, on topics related to the convention tourism industry, specifically the site selection criteria, to stimulate discussions and use its dynamic in developing conversation as the main source of knowledge (Flick, 2009). In group discussions like in everyday forms of communication, opinions are expressed and exchanged, using jokes and arguments which, permit a higher level of data authenticity in comparison to direct questions and also allow members to correct each other that work as a means of validating statements and views (Kitzinger, 1995; Flick, 2009). A major attribute of group discussions is its aim to through discussion of alternatives, find the most useful strategy to solve a problem that has been introduced by the researcher (Flick, 2009). The discussion reveals the meanings on the

discussion topic in addition to how those diverse meanings could be negotiated (Ibid). They are a superior method to collect data by examining the similarities between group participants and their individual differences (Kitzinger, 1994). Therefore, focus groups are able to reach dimensions of knowledge and understanding that other forms of methods are not able to.

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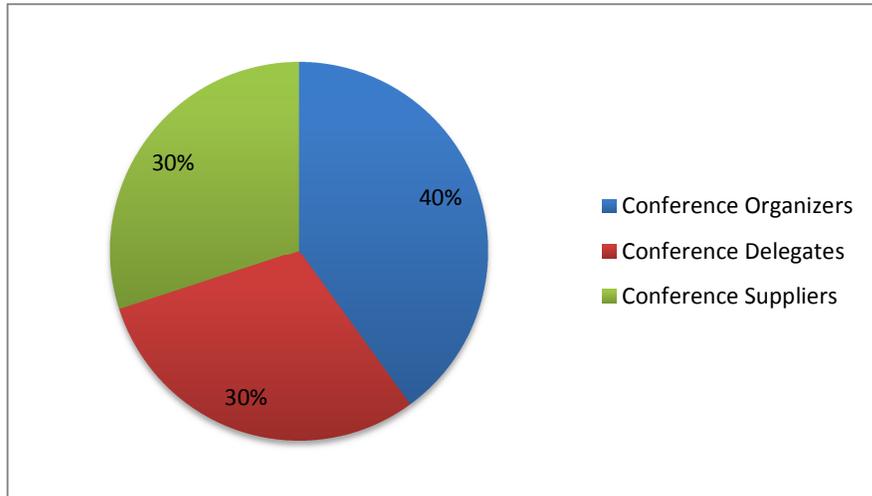
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Appendix

Appendix A. % of different interviewee players from the convention industry



% Of the Different Interviewee Players from the Convention Industry

Source: Authors

Appendix B. Expert interviewee's job titles & organizations

	Interviewee	Job Title
Buyers	1. Iain Bitran	Executive Director, International Society for Professional Innovation Management (ISPIM). Manchester
	2. Radhlinah Aulin	Division of Construction Management. Lund
	3. Michael Dell	Owner, Ratio Strategy & Innovation consulting GmbH. Vienna
	4. Ebba Lund	Chief Operations Officer, International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP).
Delegates	5. Winnie Wu	Product Manager, Warner Bros. Marketing Department. Stockholm
	6. Brajesh Sinha	Professor, Genetics and Plant Breeding, B.H.U. Varanasi
	7. Carina Pérez	PhD, Head of Biosafety Dept. Vironova AN-Stockholm
Suppliers	8. Karin Mäntymäki	Director, Congresses & Guest Events, Stockholmsmässan AB. Stockholm
	9. Christian Mutschlechner	Director, Vienna Convention Bureau. Vienna
	10. Christian Bergström	Marketing Manager, Stockholm Convention Bureau. Stockholm

Source: Authors

Appendix C. Interview guide

This study is concentrated on the process of international site selection (destination selection process) of conventions, conferences and meetings; therefore the three terms throughout the questionnaire are used as synonyms for each other.

Please elaborate and feel free to explain your responses. Please also include your job title, department and organization.

* International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and Union of International Association (UIA) are two of the major association that collect and provide data on the congress and convention industry. The associations have different criteria for collecting data.

*Key performance indicators (KPI) or Key success factors (KSI) help an organization define and measure progress towards organizational goals. For example, a university's KPI could be the graduation rate or the rate of employment of their graduates.

Appendix D. Questionnaire for buyers

1. What are your top 5 criteria (variables) for selecting international conference destinations before the conference takes place? (Disregard the conference topic, concentrate on the destination)
 2. What are the top 5 positive and top 5 negative variables that you remember about the conference destination after the conference?
 3. What are the most basic requirements for a congress destination?
 4. Does the international conference city ranking (ICCA or UIA, etc.) affect or matter in the site selection process? *
 5. What importance does the city's image or perception have in the international convention site selection process?
 6. Are you interested in special/leisure events and activities at the conference destination and what is their importance in the site selection process?
 7. According to you, what are the top 3 suggestions or future possibilities for attracting more delegates/attendees to a conference destination?
 8. What are the top 5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) or Key Success Indicators (KSI) that reflect the critical success factors of your organization? *
 9. Which channels are you using to be informed about international conference/convention destinations?
 10. Would a city offering you a list of the conferences that are being held there have any effect on your destination selection process?
- If you have organized conferences in Stockholm and/or Vienna then please answer the below questions
11. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages and top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Stockholm has for hosting international meetings/ conferences/ conventions?
 12. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages and top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Vienna has in terms of hosting international meetings/ conferences/ conventions?

Appendix E. Questionnaire for delegates

1. What are your top 5 criteria (variables) for selecting international conference destinations before the conference takes place? (Disregard the conference topic etc., concentrate on the destination)
2. What are the top 5 positive and top 5 negative variables that you remember about the conference destination after the conference?
3. What are the most basic requirements for a congress destination according to you?
4. Does the international conference city ranking (ICCA or UIA, etc.) affect or matter in your decision making process when choosing a conference destination? *
5. Does a city's image or perception influence your decision making process as an attendee when choosing an international convention destination?
6. Are you interested in special/leisure events and activities at the conference destination and what is their importance in the destination selection process?
7. According to you, what are the top 3 suggestions or future possibilities for attracting more delegates/attendees to a conference destination?
8. Which channels are you using to be informed about international conferences and conventions?
9. Would a city offering you a list of the conferences that are being held there have any effect on your destination selection process?

If you have attended a conference in Stockholm and/or Vienna then please answer the below questions-

10. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages and top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Stockholm has for hosting international meetings/ conferences/ conventions?
11. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages and top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Vienna has in terms of hosting international meetings/ conferences/ conventions?

F. Questionnaire for suppliers (Stockholm)

1. What are your top 5 criteria (variables) for selecting international conference destinations before the conference takes place? (Disregard the conference topic, concentrate on the destination)
2. According to you what are the top 5 positive and top 5 negative variables that conference organizers and delegates remember about the conference destination after the conference?
3. What are the most basic requirements for a congress destination?
4. Does the international conference city ranking (ICCA or UIA, etc.) affect or matter in the site selection process? *
5. What importance does the city's image or perception have in the international convention site selection process?
6. How important are special/leisure events and activities at the conference destination and what is their importance in the international site selection criteria?
7. According to you, what are the top 3 suggestions or future possibilities for attracting more delegates/attendees to a conference destination?
8. What are the top 5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) or Key Success Indicators (KSI) that reflect the critical success factors of your organization? *
9. Which channels are you using to be informed about international conferences and conventions?
10. Do you provide a list of upcoming conferences to the market (conference organizers and delegates), if yes, through which channels?
11. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages that Stockholm has for hosting international meetings/conferences/conventions?
12. What are the top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Stockholm has in terms of hosting international meetings/conferences/conventions?

G. Questionnaire for suppliers (Vienna)

1. What are your top 5 criteria (variables) for selecting international conference destinations before the conference takes place? (Disregard the conference topic, concentrate on the destination)
2. According to you what are the top 5 positive and top 5 negative variables that conference organizers and delegates remember about the conference destination after the conference?
3. What are the most basic requirements for a congress destination?
4. Does the international conference city ranking (ICCA or UIA, etc.) affect or matter in the site selection process? *
5. What importance does the city's image or perception have in the international convention site selection process?
6. How important are special/leisure events and activities at the conference destination and what is their importance in the international site selection criteria?
7. According to you, what are the top 3 suggestions or future possibilities for attracting more delegates/attendees to a conference destination?
8. What are the top 5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) or Key Success Indicators (KSI) that reflect the critical success factors of your organization? *
9. Which channels are you using to be informed about international conferences and conventions?
10. Do you provide a list of upcoming conferences to the market (conference organizers and delegates), if yes, through which channels?
11. What are the top 3 strengths/advantages that Vienna has for hosting international meetings/conferences/conventions?
12. What are the top 3 weaknesses/disadvantages that Vienna has in terms of hosting international meetings/conferences/conventions?