

Congress and Meetings Tourism and Destination Brand

Sara Ficarelli, Sandra Sendra, Lorena Parra, Jaime Lloret

Universidad Politécnica de Valencia

Camino Vera s/n, 46022, Valencia, Spain

sara.ficarelli22@gmail.com; sansenco@posgrado.upv.es; lparbo@epsg.upv.es, jlloret@dcom.upv.es

Abstract— Congress tourism has been enforcing its presence in global industry despite recent years of economical hardship and it is becoming more and more important. This tourist field is a high level sector, which involves a lot of people and money. In fact, it is a kind of tourism that requires organization, intermediary, high capacity destinations and high territorial and human resources. Destination management is increasing as a professional way to study congress destination characteristics, meetings requirements and customer satisfaction in order to optimize the hosting process and promote destination brand. The tourism sector offers benefits and impacts in many different ways and completely changes the way we understand tourist destinations. Firstly, we are going to consider this kind of tourism as a tourist segment. Secondly, we are going to focus on what are the factors that influence the choice of a congress destination. Finally, we are going to analyze the demand and the offer in Spanish tourism industry to understand the reason why it is so well located in global ranking.

Keywords- Congress tourism; Destination management; Congress requirements and impacts.

I. INTRODUCTION

Congress tourism is a subset of the larger field of business tourism. “Business tourism is the provision of facilities and services to the millions of delegates who annually attend meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, incentive travels and corporate hospitality” [1]. In this definition, ICCA gives a general perspective of this segment in the tourism industry. In fact, there is no official definition of Congress and Meeting tourism.

From an anthropological point of view, tourist experience is always a special event in the ordinary life of people. The travelers abandon daily life to enter in a different circle of activities and way of life. In fact, tourists change their usual context and experience a new environment organized for leisure time or for other purposes [2]. Actually, event tourism refers to marketing and creating special events that become a way of living the tourism experience itself [3]. In general, event tourism aims to increase the attractiveness of one tourist destination with the purpose of creating tourism demand and satisfy tourist requirements. Another goal is to localize the destination in the marketing field [2]. Generally, events are propulsion factors to create tourism or to enforce tourist destinations and they are preeminent elements in a destination marketing plan. In fact, planned events are a force-factor for destination competitiveness [3].

Events are useful occasions to renew the urban planning of a city and to develop the cultural aspects of destinations. Congress tourism is included in the more general perspective of event tourism and it is one of the level in which tourism and events are connected in a strict relation [2]. Planned events are nowadays a consolidate field of research and study. D. Getz [3] defines 8 fields: (1) Cultural Celebrations, (2) Political and State, (3) Arts and entertainment, (4) Business and Trade, (5) Educational and scientific, (6) Sport competition, (7) Recreational, (8) Private Events. Congress tourism is included in the Business and trade subset, which refers to: meetings and conventions, consumers and trade shows, fairs, and markets.

In this paper, we analyze the element of competitiveness and image promoting of a congress destination brand. We also look at essential characteristics a place must have to be considered as a congress destination and analyze how tourist offer and incoming services are essential in the selecting process. This work helps us understand what are the motivations behind a congress destination choice and why this type of organization requires such a high level quality.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we present some works that have analyzed the creation of a congress tourist destination and look at requirements and impact on the branding process. Section 3 explains the different parts a congress is composed of. We discuss both the immaterial and materials parts of the congress process, analyzing destination management activities and tourist requirements. In addition, we analyze the global impact of congress tourism in the tourism industry. The research will be focused on Spain for its qualities and its position in global ranking. The results of this analysis are shown in Section 4. Finally, we discuss these results in Section 5. Conclusions are shown in Section 6.

II. RELATED WORK

This section shows several works on the connection between congress tourism, meetings, events planning and destination requirements.

G. Del Chiappa [4] inquiries into the process in which a congress destination is built as a complex brand, with different kinds of qualities and characteristics. This analysis reveals that a destination is not only a set of goods and services but also includes symbolic images and immaterial qualities. The consequence is that, in this sector, the role of the mark territory has become essential to organize a place in a competitive way. In Del Chiappa’s work, the tourist who

uses this kind of travels gives more importance to the previous period of time. In Destination Branding optic, the most important period of time in congress tourism is the selection part. In this, the territorial mark is what tourists and business look at. Del Chiappa analyzes the main destinations and investigates the process, which concerns the mark creation.

Following this philosophy, D. Getz shows us the destination perspective on event tourism [3]. His work is built on an anthropological point of view, in which he analyzes typologies of event tourism and requirements needed for each one. D. Getz also identifies patterns and processes related to this aspect and tries to identify possible research methods to study how to obtain knowledge about the creation process. The author focuses his work on outcomes and impacts on event tourism by identifying three fields of research: temporal, policy and spatial. D. Getz concludes that congress tourism, in a social and cultural way, can be understood as including a real effort behind organization, a very strong impact on communities and way to live. In his opinion, for this field, "event management" professions are important.

This is a fast growing professional field focused on destination management and marketing of customers' behaviour. This way, it is possible to look at event tourism as a set of actions, with each one of them having a planned work and a predictable effect on the host territory. In Sicily Convention Bureau report, it is possible to see how congress tourism can be a positive resource for an already confirmed tourist destination. This association gives importance to the high costs received from delegates who attend congresses and makes a list of favorable effects in this kind of tourism, which brings visibility outside the simple tourist season. We talk about this work because it is a summary of a critic view of the Sicily territory. The important thing in this work clarifies that the offer needs to unify a territory: a congress destination has to be integrated within a context in which it is located and communicated with other national congress centers [5]. These elements help us identify how we should organize a country's congress destinations. Spain, for example, shows a complex and integrated offer that should be compared with requirements included in Sicily Convention Bureau work.

III. CONGRESS TOURISM AND DESTINATION BRANDING

In this section, we are going to consider some research and literature which can show congress destination requirements and impacts. Spain is taken as a model for its congress destination offer and its tourism demand.

A. Incoming offer requirements in congress tourism

We can identify a few elements of strengths for meetings and conventions, namely:

- High capacity cost of participant (big spenders).
- Destination congress and leisure image promotion.
- Brands enforcement.

To understand how these elements characterize this kind of tourism we can see the complexity in demand and offer

meeting. Demand and offer in congress tourism organization create a meeting which involves different kinds of actors. From the demand side, professional associations, scientific associations, enterprises and organizations are looking for a possible congress experience. They also represent the advertising recipients and it is possible to see them as customers of the tourism industry. From the other side, the offer is composed on incoming services, food and beverage agencies, entertainment agencies, transports companies and public entities [4].

Managing a congress destination means creating a system with different elements, which are connected to each other in order to satisfy customers requirements. The whole phenomenon of acting congress tourism can be resumed in a circle way: Motivation of choice - Planning and managing the event - Tourism - Destination aspects - Impact and effect on territory - Brand and Economic incomes. It is clear that the process can be improved by knowing every element and by connecting events feedback with motivation of choice of future participants [6].

The entire process of planning, organizing events and promoting a congress experience looks like a tourism system. Tourism studies identify a set of economic and social inputs [7]. Distinguishing a pre-congress and a post-congress period, it is possible to look at many sub-factors which are strictly related, such as transport and technical services. Furthermore, it is possible to identify the differences between immaterial procedures and material procedures.

Facilities required in the material part of congress tourism are [6]:

- Conference rooms, offices and exhibition areas and multifunction halls.
- Translation equipment and technological instrument (sound systems, projectors, etc.) to satisfy audiovisual and video requirements.
- High quality hotels (and high quality personnel)
- Protocol events, formal event and activities (excursions and tours)
- Food and beverage related to different countries to satisfy international needs.

Involving local people can help increase the motivation of possible tourists in choosing a destination, by, for example, meetings translators, which are intermediaries with the place. This can encourage congress members to participate actively to the life congress. From another point of view, translators are useful to avoid languages barriers. English is a spread and common language but, in some destinations, different languages are needed and here the role of translators becomes much more important.

These requirements are confirmed by Del Chiappa's survey research [8]. Results data show that different kinds of meetings require different kinds of structure, despite a common need of large incoming space. For example, the availability of large convention centers is important because of the high number of participants. Incentive travels need an informal location to create socialization. The common necessity to achieve spaces has also been evaluated with the

purpose to give delegates the possibility to cooperate. The accessibility, in Del Chiappa's opinion, is one of the most important elements. The survey gives importance to destination branding which improves destination management with the aim to achieve conference kick-off [8]. This is known as the immaterial part of a congress. The immaterial part of congress tourism includes pre-organizing, monitoring and getting congress feedbacks.

We have to distinguish two kinds of destinations:

- Affirmed tourist destination brand.
- Non-affirmed tourist destination which wants to improve it.

These two kinds of tourist destinations are involved in congress tourism because both of them have to increase or change something in their brand to adapt their offer on congress demand. In the first case, we have to change in image promoting: here, we already have activities such as hotel offer and attractions which can satisfy a particular segment of demand. But now, congress destinations have to be prepared to be as multifunctional as possible. In tourist places which have an affirmed brand, the possibility to change their brand consists in performing communication between public and private structures to unify as much as possible the different elements that are included in the tourist destination itself.

Looking at new tendencies and the utilizing of resources to show the destination in different ways, it is important to add congress demand in an already confirmed destination.

Furthermore, a non-affirmed destination which wants to get an attractive perspective to host congress, has to make strong efforts to create structures and optimize territorial characteristics to create a new demand. This kind of reaction includes the possibility to study new tendencies about business travel and to adapt the territory to specific needs. Sometimes, it could be useful to include this kind of destination in a bigger context to show an integrated variety of spaces. In the first case, the offer of the tourist destination is already confirmed, the brand is famous and people have an idea before going there.

The destination management in pre-congress period has to study how to satisfy the pull factors [9]:

- Geographic accessibility: good transport and simplicity to arrive.
- Social-political aspect (affordability): condition in which tourists can live the experience.
- Economical: the entire cost for traveling to a destination and staying there.

Another important thing is to study membership tendencies and their needs. Delegates move the entire congress economy by using economical components such as transports and accommodations, registration fees, entertainments and tours fees, extensions in accommodations and paying for being accompanied [7]. In the last few years, the studies of customers behavior improved the knowledge about congress participants as a social group and we can identify three categories of participants [10]:

1) *Functional participant: he/she participates in the congress by professional motivations, for the cultural exchange and for increasing his/her own knowledge.*

2) *Relational participant: he/she participates in the congress for getting professional relations and generally interpersonal relationships. He/she also participates in the tourist excursion and leisure offer.*

3) *Symbolic participant: he/she participates to congresses to reach visibility, notoriety and image. He/she wants to find a high-level revenue, a perfect organization and a good level of representation.*

The congress tourist customer has an exigent and informed profile with a middle-high cost and education. The congress tourist customers are keen on travels. In comparison with the leisure tourist, congress tourists look for a different quality of host system and wants a high level of incoming services. The sojourning time is less flexible than a leisure tourist and he/she usually thinks less in prices and costs [10].

It is important to design a planned marketing valuation in the pre-congress phase and it is also interesting to study future memberships needs. The marketing of congress destinations works on four levels [10]:

- Delighting demand market.
- Identifying objective attractions which can attire this sector-aim.
- Defining a positioning strategy and prove destination brand.
- Acting tactics and operations.

Thanks to these points of organization, organism like *Conventions Bureaux* are using more and more often previous studies to identify congress users and knowing the demand. Firstly, it is necessary to identify the social group which should participate in the congress and try to design a customer's satisfaction line. After this, it is possible to adapt the structure and create an inventory of material components needed to reach this goal. It is possible to define the economical impact even as a function of the listing operating cost and the number of expected participants [10].

We have to distinguish another kind of segmentation in this offer. It is related to the difference between hosts and guests. The organizers and the delegates in the congress tourism have a different systemic role. Firstly, organizers have to guarantee services (like food and beverage) which have to be available before conference starts. They also have to prepare documentation (promotion materials, congress announcements, etc.) and have to rent equipment and instruments to support the correct operation of the congress [4].

From the organization point of view, we find connections with the field of information. Communication connections between exterior market and incoming market allows us to plan the visit. It is also important to improve the revenue system. The integrated system of revenue allows guiding and reaching the hospitality in the destination [10].

The process of organizing meetings is a complex work of people but there are different ways to plan this kind of event.

Firstly, a meeting can change its way to be organized from the temporal point of view.

Using a structured approach, it is possible to create a list of congress requirements to give a congress image for a destination. Firstly, it is necessary to connect delegate numbers and create a relation with the destination. The location becomes important for the offer that gives people who come in the country (or region) and it is important to calculate the impact on size attendance. Local speakers are important from the organization point of view because they are intermediary between organizers and delegates and if they are local, they can be also a guide which permits to give importance to the geographical context.

A destination has to be supported by exhibitors and sponsors. So, it is important to connect the destination choice and the sponsors feedback in order to know in which way the location can be useful to support the congress. The value exchange is important to ensure the success in travel organization and customers' behavior. People prefer to have a tourist experience where they can spend a lot time thanks to a favorable value [7].

Finally, we can build a scheme about the entire process of organizing a congress where destination, congress and brand are related.

We should distinguish primary service relationships which are services at the core of the brand experience, such as hotels and hotel associations. This segment communicates with consumers (residents and employee, internal customers and non-conflicting target markets) and communication media (functional communication from one side and induced marketing communications and advertising from the other). These elements are built on brand infrastructure relationship which are composed of access services (external and internal transports), hygiene facilities (car parks and open spaces) and BrandScape. These elements work together and the final result is that Destination Brand is characterized by personality, positioning and reality of place [4].

B. Congress tourism in global scenery

In global situation, congress tourism represents one of the fastest developing sectors which are increasing in the tourism industry. This element has been developed very recently and tourist companies are approaching to this segment in different ways, giving to the global scenery a complexity in offer and demand.

In Fig. 1, we can see where Europe is placed in global raking. These observations are strictly related to Europe tourist characteristics which can be derived in this paper and discussed at the end of our research.

A recent survey about congress tourism of future global situation reveals that, in the 2012-2020 period, this tourist sector will have different external factors which will impact it.

Firstly, 71% of industrial managers opinions say that the economic uncertainty would impact this sector strongly. For 49% of respondents, new technologies, including the possibility of pushing on virtual conferences, can be another important element. 47% of respondents think that the most important factor is the economical aspect while 46% think

that Asian policy influences the development of conferences. 91% of respondents say that those industries have to demonstrate a return of investments (ROI) tangible for their customers (first choice for the 76% of respondents). Meanwhile, 59% think that is more important to create personalized events and 51% say that they will assist on a development in interactive-learning experiences. New online Social Networks are strongly considered. 63% of respondents think that social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. will be key elements to promote an event. For 60%, these factors will allow an instantaneous feedback during congresses and events [11].

This survey let us thinking about the importance of ICT in congress tourism. Congress participants need fast connection to the Internet and better access to new technology than other kind of tourists. Consumers' expectations are changing parallel to invention of new technologies and congresses have to be prepared for new applications and innovations. Keeping in mind these factors, we should highlight two words. The first one is "connectivity". A business meeting is a work place which hosts several workers in a period of time. The Internet connection has become important because it allows us to communicate outside the congress context.. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that participants get information every time they need. The second word is "presentation". The formality and quality are the most important requirements in congress tourism. In fact, a well presented congress and good services will guarantee the presence of high level ICT. The "technological solution" will not replace the real presence of participants. ICT would just strengthen visibility of congresses and give more eases to delegates [12]. Hotels and congress planners have to build connections which allow creating networks between participants. In this context, it is necessary that event planners and hotels look at new technologies in order to be prepared to reach new applications. Lack of these kind of services can create problems in organizing congresses and can decrease the quality of the incoming process. A recent survey about perception of new technologies in convention context reveals that congress palaces managers find Wi-Fi and audiovisual streaming essential, but for 64% of them, organizers and participants have to look at these services in a more realistic way. In fact, providing a speed and free connection is a critical point of discussion in this context. For 76%, the pricing offer should be diversified by different customers. For 54% of respondents, free Wi-Fi access should be sponsored by the event hosted and for 42% of them, connection has to be free only in public spaces. Only 25% of respondents think that Wi-Fi should be free in all of the building spaces. The survey shows us how high is the customers' expectation and how important free Wi-Fi service has become for the participants. In fact, 86% of respondents are interested in having a permanent signage system in the common areas of the congress site and 56% of respondents think that it can give more value to the event, especially if they want to localize the event, advertise and build information [13].

The event web page has to be well planned and with all the information customers need, that is, tourist information, incoming information and congress contents. In experts' opinion, a convention promotion takes 6 steps strictly connected with ICT: (1) not excluding use of social network like Facebook or Twitter to produce a publicity effect; (2) using traditional internet instruments like main listing and social media to collect participants feedbacks after the congress and to stimulate their opinion on the event; (3) utilizing twitter during the congress with the *hashtag* (#name event, for example) to promote the event and suggesting to the event followers to *retweet*; (4) creating a Facebook event page and inserting the "I like" in the congress website page to show the event to people who are not directly connected with the event; (5) publishing the event in on online calendars, hosted by many websites and publishing it on Foursquare or Gowalla; (6) creating a live connection during the event publishing news on real time and photos, for example on Flickr [14].

Another important element is the use of geo-localization. It is an application given to participants due to the necessity of speed and commodity requested by delegates. ICT are also important to promote the congress itself.

Congress planners also have to procure applications which can be downloaded on the new high-tech mobile phones. This is important because enterprises often give to participants these new instruments. An example of this importance is the iPhone and iPad application called

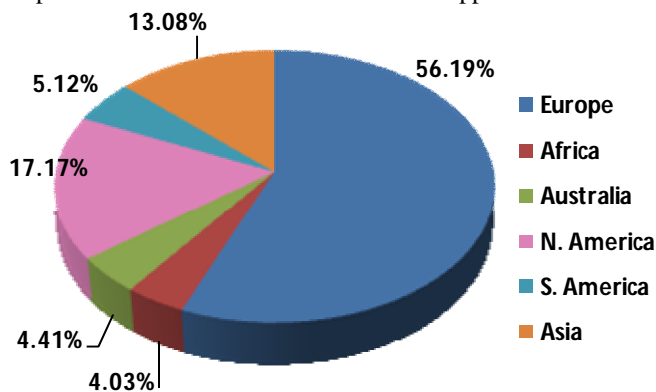


Figure 1. Congresses global distribution in 2011.

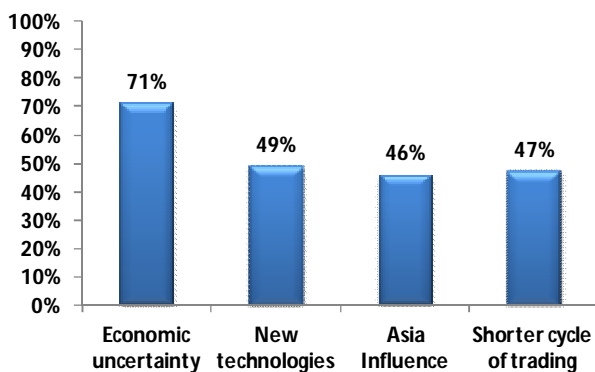


Figure 2. External factors which influence congress tourism.

ITCongress 2.1 (the reviewed version), presented by Tecnoconference – TC Group in occasion of BTC, the Rimini event-fairy. This kind of application allows visualizing videos and abstracts of the papers, geo-localization, the building map and the event description [15].

Mobile phone are more and more connected on real time and if they are connected on real time (and here, we can see the importance of connectivity) it allows us to communicate outside the congress building, promoting the event and increasing the customers' satisfaction.

C. Spain as an increasing congress destination model

Spain Convention Bureau was created in 1984 and it is composed by 55 destinations. This association works with the Spanish tourism institute (TURESPAÑA) in order to organize events, international faeries, marketing studies, workshops and destination promotion [16]. Nowadays, Spain congresses have a big impact on the economy of incoming tourism. Spain occupies the third position in ICCA global ranking in number of congresses [17]. In 2011, Spain hosted 463 international congresses.

Fig. 2 shows the main external factors which have impact on congress tourism.

Fig. 3 shows the number of meetings per country in the world in 2011. Fig. 4 shows the top ten cities which have organized the major amount of conferences in 2011. As we can see, Barcelona and Madrid appear in this top ten list of cities.

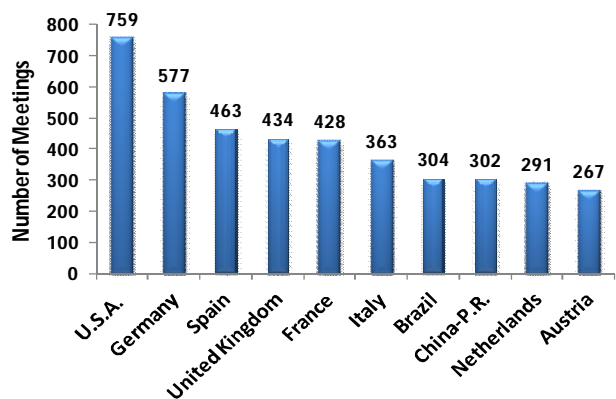


Figure 3. Number of meetings per country in the world in 2011.

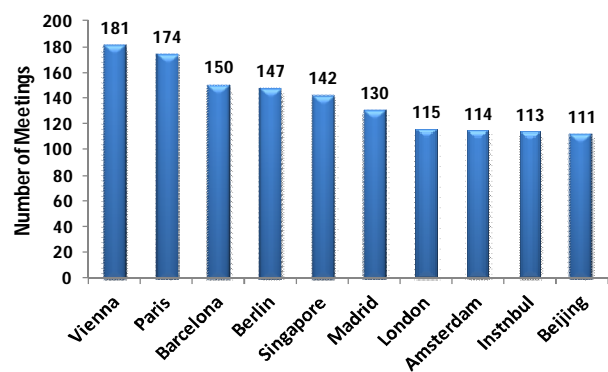


Figure 4. Global ranking: number of meetings per City in 2011.

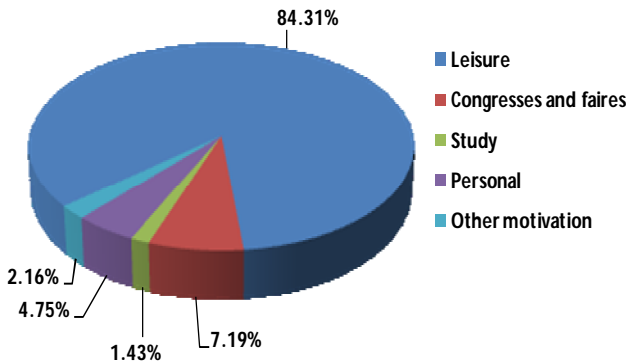


Figure 5. Motivation of travelling in international Spanish tourism.

The annual economic impact is about 11% of tourist international introit in 2011. In Fig. 5, we can see the position of this kind of tourism in the international motivation of travelling. The middle-cost for a single-travel-person is about 332 €

Turespaña joined the second IMEX AMERICA Edition in Las Vegas with 31 Spanish expositors aiming to promote the Spanish offer regarding congress tourism. Other associations participate this year in specialized visits as SITE, ASAE or MPI, in Madrid, Pamplona and Tenerife, setting up the platform Spain Meetings & Events Community @i-Meet [18].

Speaking about the rising importance of congress tourism, it is important to mention the case of Farmaindustria. The farm industry has gained a relevant position within the thematic congress sector which brought 5335 events in Spain in 2011, with an increase of 5% compared to 2010. Nevertheless, this industry has been into a radical change this year. In 2011, the new Farmaindustria code (Codigo de Buena Prácticas) observes that congresses and events related with this industry cannot include leisure activities and according to the new auto-regimentation [19], it cannot reserve Golf hotels and Thematic Hotels. This point has brought us to think about the important relation among hotel offer, theme congress and event purpose. In this case, the enterprise seeks to find reasonable locations and adequate sojourns to the quality of scientific program with a hosting place suitable to the new austerity level.

An enterprise prefers to choose a 4-5 stars hotel. However, lots of places mean to start a reclassification. In fact, the 5335 events in 2011 respected this code. In MPI opinion every year more and more enterprises decide to auto-regulating themselves in order to defend their reputation. The consequence is that the whole congress organization is regulated in different ways connected with the political sector. In fact, we can observe the strength of the relation between demand and offer and how a destination can change their brands or their tourist structure. These changes have the aim of satisfying congress customers and participants without damaging the destination brand of the congress [19].

Fig. 6 shows the ten spanish cities which have organized the most meetings throughout 2011. Madrid and Barcelona play an important role as most important congress cities in Spain. In ICCA ranking, these destinations occupy third and

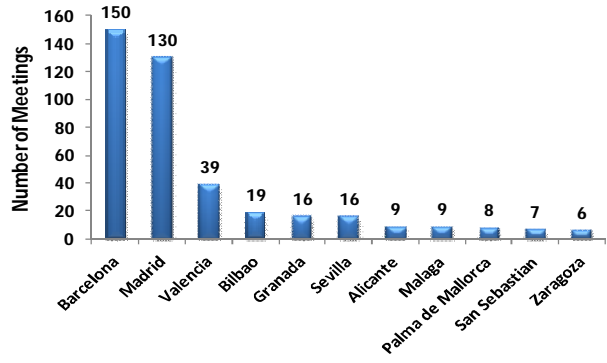


Figure 6. Number of meetings in the main cities of Spain in 2011.

sixth position, respectively [17]. The Spanish offer is complex and includes a lot of destinations. The Spain Convention Bureau (SCB) unifies 38 congress cities and there are several other places not federated into SCN which show us how Spain is a consolidated congress country [14].

Nowadays, Barcelona is living an important moment of prosperity in this kind of sector. In 2011 (See Fig. 6), the segment increased by 5% in participant numbers compared to 2010 [20]. The positive trend is also referred to meeting numbers which these years have increased by 6.8% in relation to 2010 with the total of 2,283 meeting and 647,693 participants (80% of them are foreigners). In particular, the courses and daily meeting subsets increased by 50% more (64.612 delegates) than meetings in 2010. This fact implied 2,523,937 reservations (almost a 2.6% more than 2010) in the Catalan capital. Hence, we can see Barcelona as a perfect model of congress destination city. The Barcelona region presents an important role in ICCA. Barcelona is the second place with the highest number of hotel capacity system. It is also important to consider how this city is well-seen. In many reviews and in many famous newspaper readers opinion (Askmen, Forbes, Monocle’s, Time Out) Barcelona appears as a one of the best cities to live in [21].

Despite all these important attributions, the most important seems to be the big capacity of reception.

The high dimension of the incoming offer located in a rich tourist region, amounts on a big set of establishments (more than 1000 spaces which can host meetings, 38 golf camps, high level sport installations and the presence of city) account for the fact that Barcelona (which has a great position in global ranking) would be considered as a strategic position in Mediterranean sea and Europe.

We cannot forget the important role of transport and infrastructures which makes possible reaching the territory by train and plane. Barcelona airport grows every year more and every year it improves its connections with USA, South America and south-east Asia. 29% of the intercontinental air traffic is attributed to this city which means 40% of Spanish traffic to middle-orient and Asia [20].

Catalonia does not include only Barcelona as a city congress. We can identify different places which are important in this sector, for example, Girona. Another place is Lleida which grows itself like a “smart city” and finds its force in its location and in recent years has seen a positive

increase of congress tourism thanks to infrastructures, new technologies and tourist equipment. Congress activities generated in 2010 7,32 millions of euro in the city economy [21]. Fig. 7 shows the origin of participants in Barcelona congresses.

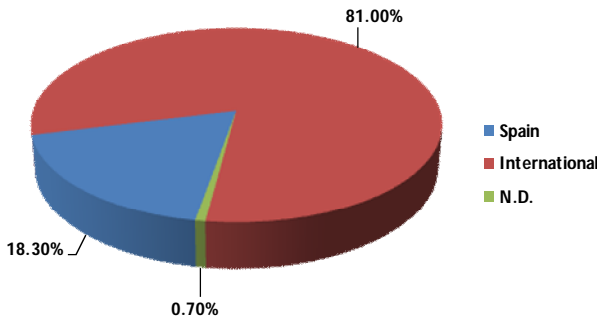


Figure 7. Barcelona congress participants origin in 2011 [16]

The second most important city in Spanish congress tourism is the capital, Madrid. In 2012, this city has enforced its presence in global congress market by participating in many thematic meetings Meedex (París), IMEX (Frankfurt), AIBTM (Baltimore), CIBTM (Pekín), IMEX América (Las Vegas), MICE Place International (París) and EIBTM (Barcelona). The promotional strategy that Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau is trying to improve the city aspect showing this city as a perfect destination model, opening the market to international demand like China or USA [23].

Another important congress destination which must be included in this research is the Andalusia Region. It presents strength characteristics such as favorable climate and geography (seaside, natural protected spaces), a good golf fields offer, sportive ports, good gastronomy and very-well organized hotel offer (big conference halls and audiovisual technologies). It is important the role of the particular mark called “Asociacion de Palacios de Congresos de Andalucia” which demonstrate the importance of destination promoting. In comparison with Catalonia region, we can identify some points of weakness which have to be considered in a destination management study. Firstly, Andalusia region does not have good airport connection and its infrastructures have not been built with the purpose to create trade meetings. They are old-aged and so it is not possible to increase the incoming market.

These weakness elements do not allow an incoming offer evolution and a re-qualification of buildings and transports would be necessary to improve the incredible territory offer [10]. There are many cities in Andalusia that can host a congress such as Sevilla, Córdoba, Granada, Cádiz and Málaga, capital of the *Costa del Sol*. This last destination is requested for its hotel offer and for its sophisticated resort area fruit of 30 years of tourism development.. Places like Torremolinos, Marbella, Fuengirola and Estepona are good for sports and activities thanks to a very good climate. The point of strength is also the presence of a high number of high-level hotels and restaurants. Costa del Sol is also a strategic point for its perfect position for daily excursions to

other cities of Andalusia. Cadiz and Sevilla are also congress destinations very well positioned. Sevilla in particular has an airport and it is well connected by train with Madrid.

In the North of Spain, Basque Country is strategically positioned in the transport network which includes boundaries with the south eastern areas of France. We can find high-level infrastructures and its tourist offer is oriented to natural and cultural activities thanks to the presence of museums and parks very well known. Outside Iberian Peninsula, the Canarias Islands represent another part of Spanish congress tourism offer. The force-point of Canarias is the natural landscape and the hotel offer which works all the year thanks to favorable climate and the presence of golf fields [23].

Another important congress destination is Valencia, the third largest metropolitan city in Spain. Fig. 6 shows that Valencia hosted 39 conferences in 2011. With 39 meetings, Valencia is positioned as third national destination. In 2010, the city also occupied the third position in ICCA Europe cities ranking and the tenth position in global ranking.

Unfortunately, its position changed in 2011 because of strong competitiveness in congress destination branding and European keen competition. Despite this data, we can look at this city and observe qualities which it presents. In fact, from 1998, Valencia has seen a growth rate of 600%. *Turismo Valencia* approved 2012-2015 strategic plans giving an important role on convention and congress incoming tourism. In these three years, the aim will be to maintain its position in national ranking and include it in the first 25 European positions and in the first 50 in global position. Looking at the permanence of international arrivals to the city, we can understand why the first aim of *Turismo Valencia* is oriented on international congress demand. In fact, the capital of autonomous community of Valencia is getting importance of the international tourist demand in Spain thanks to its tourist offer and the improvements of choice in last years. As we saw before, facilities requirements as conference rooms, offices and exhibition areas and multifunction halls are essential in destination brand promotion [24]. A strong promotion incoming factor is certainly the Valencia Conference Center, which was designated as “World's Best Convention Centre” at Apex Award 2010 by AIPC (International Association of Congress Centre) in Liverpool [25]. This conference keeps on giving the city an improving image. In 2010, the center hosted 114 events with 89,304 participants and in 2011, it hosted 19 international congresses. The conference center is starting up a process of improvement which will be completed on 2014 through the opening of a more multifunctional congress building in order to host a major number of people [24].

Furthermore, Valencia-Manises International Airport is a hub between northern Europe and the Mediterranean countries. In Valencia region, tourism is of essential importance and its airport made possible international arrivals to Costa Blanca beaches. In the last few years, Valencia brand has been growing after having built City of the Arts and Sciences. In autonomous community of Valencia, it is also important to mention Alicante as a new congress destination.

In 2011, congress tourism brought to the city of Alicante 70 events including meetings, conventions and daily congresses. The presence of “*Ciutat d’Elx*” and the Alicante’s conference center, is certainly a pull factor. The ACB (Alicante Convention Bureau) is oriented to host a major number of participants thanks to new incorporations in the conference center structure [24].

IV. DISCUSSION

After this research and these statistics, we can talk about the field of congress tourism. Organizing meetings and congresses is a part of business tourism and events tourism. This activity involves a plurality of actors and resources.

We have identified the main elements which are referred to the component in material part of this tourism. In the immaterial part, we have talked about destination branding and its goals. In this part, we have included the analysis of the demand and the offer where we have defined the services in a congress which should have to be very-well positioned in international destination marketing. The most important thing seems to be the accessibility and the high-quality hotel offer. In this sense, there are more and more important modern commodities related with new technologies. We have also distinguished two kinds of destinations. One of them is a destination already famous and confirmed in international scenery. The others are places which want to be considered congress destination but before this, they have to improve many elements. Both of these kinds of destinations are present in Spain and are presented as a great model in global congress demand. In fact, Spanish cities and regions satisfy all the elements which have been considered in these researches.

We have also talked about weakness point in Spain country. We made a critical review about some element, like one present in Andalusia region. As we can see in ICCA statistics, Europe is very well positioned in global ranking. The most important thing, we can achieve thanks to this paper is that congressional tourism has to be included in general tourist offer for its mix of business and leisure.

When a territory is a complex kind of tourist offer, it can automatically become a potential congress destination. This is because, in this segment, the pre-congress moment is the most important element. Brands are becoming the motivation of choice for congress organizers and participants. Spain and the other European countries present a tourist image, a destination brand which is generally already famous and confirmed. This is a point of strength and secondary destinations can be used to increase the incoming services by destination management studies and re-qualification activities. We can conclude saying that the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) will increase in importance. As a consequence, ICTs are essential for the congress Spanish tourism deal with the ICT and the role played by Spain in regards to this field of study [26].

V. CONCLUSION

We have shown that congress tourism is a complex way of travelling and it creates a very particular relation between demand and offer. In the more general field of event tourism,

planning is the most important moment. In most parts of the hosting congresses work, the act of managing becomes a priority process which involves every part of the destination and the membership expectations. Furthermore, this segment does not impact only in the place where a meeting is hosted. Talking about a congress destination means that we should consider the entire context in the place where the meeting is located. A set of elements motivate the choosing process and most of them are often related with the more general destination location.

The conclusions drawn from this study can be used to mitigate/harmonize the regional tourist requirements. It can also be used to adapt and improve existing portals and web services to new demands of customer needs considering their comments. We believe that this document can help creators and researchers of tourism websites. This work has helped us achieve a better understanding of new ways to understand tourist destinations. In fact, the more general business tourism requires different kinds of quality and necessities. The difference between leisure travel and business travel are essential to understand the selection of destination. Moreover, studying the new business tendencies and customers behavior in working place and meeting aim can help the destination brands to become more attractive not only in this sector but also in every part of its economic offer.

Challenge between destinations will be more competitive and destination management will be a universal useful recognized field to improve or create more attractive destinations. Analyzing Spain as a well-positioned country in global ranking allows us to take it as a model of reference. In this country, general tourist offer and fame have met congress tourism requirements in a very interesting way. When a country has a great diversified offer and high hosting potential, it lets us understand how a congress destination can be built.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Authors would like to thank Carola Giannino and Laura di Lorenzo for their help in improving this paper.

REFERENCES

- [1] ICCA-International Congress and Convention Association, “FAQ’s”, 2012. Available at: <http://www.iccaworld.com/>
- [2] A. Simonicca, *Antropologia del turismo. Strategie di ricerca e contesti etnografici*. Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1997.
- [3] D. Getz, “Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research”, *Tourism Management*, Vol.29, Issue 3, 2008, pp. 403-428.
- [4] G. Del Chiappa, “The brand building process of a convention destination”. In proceedings of the 7th International Conference Marketing Trends, Venice (Italy), January 25-26, 2008.
- [5] Sicilia Convention Bureau, “Il turismo congressuale come risorsa per lo sviluppo economico del territorio”, (2009). Available at: <http://www.siciliaconvention.com/cms/docs/TurismoCongressuale.pdf>. (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [6] MCI Building Community, “Successful Conference Management: choosing the right destination”. Available at: http://www.mci-group.com/Country_Navigation/Countries/Ireland/~/_media/M

- CI/LocalFiles/Ireland/PressReleases/choose_destination.ashx, (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [7] M. Manente, "Destination management and economic background: defining and monitoring local tourist destinations" In proceedings of UNTWO Conference of Tourism: Knowledge as value advantage of tourism destinations, Malaga (Spain), October 29-31, 2008.
- [8] G. Del Chiappa, "How do meeting organisers choose convention sites based upon different types of meetings? An empirical analysis of the Italian Meeting Industry", *Event Management*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, April 1, 2012, pp. 157-170 Available at: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com>
- [9] M. Cerquetti, "Il territorio come destinazione turistica. Lo sviluppo turistico del territorio in chiave sistemica". Available at: <http://docenti.unimc.it/docenti/maracerquetti/organizzazione-e-gestione-delle-imprese-turistiche/modulo-ii-gestione-e-marketing-delle-destinazioni/il-territorio-come-destinazione-turistica> (Last access: January 20, 2013).
- [10] D. Jiménez and M. Sánchez, "El Marketing del turismo de negocios: Los Convention Bureau como herramienta promocional", *Journal of Investigación y Marketing*, vol. 87, 2005, Pp. 56-63.,
- [11] X. Canalis, (June 12, 2012), "El futuro del turismo de reuniones en los próximos diez años", in Hosteltur web site. Available at: http://www.hosteltur.com/191560_futuro-turismo-reuniones-proximos-diez-anos.html (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [12] E. Hirt, "Meetings technology: threat or enhancement?" Available at: http://www.aipc.org/mediacoverage/308_MICE%20Italy%2008.10%20Tecnologia%20per%20congressi.pdf (Last access: March 12, 2013)
- [13] Smart City Networks, (August 25, 2012) "releases findings of telecommunications and technology survey", smart City Network web site. Available at: <https://www.smartcitynetworks.com/media/pr.aspx?newsid=127> (Last access: March 12, 2013)
- [14] S. Pesarini, "Promuovere un evento online con i social media". Available at: <http://www.italiaconvention.it/it/magazine-articoli/promuovere-un-evento-online-con-i-socialmedia.html> (Last access: March 12, 2013)
- [15] Event Report web site, (July 4, 2011), "Dal web al mobile, Tecnoconference TC Group presenta le novità tecnologiche per i congressi". Available at: http://www.eventreport.it/stories/agenzie/582_dal_web_al_mobile_tecnoconference_tc_group_presenta_le_novita_tecnologiche_per_i_congressi/ (Last access: March 12, 2013)
- [16] Spain Convention Bureau web site. Available at: <http://www.scb.es/> (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [17] International Congress And Convention Association (ICCA). "Country and city rankings report 2011." Available at: http://www.iccaworld.com/dcps/doc.cfm?docid=1364&ei=G13LUPalO4mI0AXZjoCwDA&usg=AFQjCNHQFKpz7AWVpHeP5_nAbMkPMIHpg&sig2=57K74r8ubJodSBDPdKf3aA (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [18] Hosteltur, (October 10, 2012), "El turismo MICE representa un 11% del gasto turístico extranjero", Hosteltur web site. Available at: http://www.hosteltur.com/196300_turismo-mice-representa-11-gasto-turistico-extranjero.html (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [19] X. Canalis, (April 7, 2012), "La nueva austeridad de Farmaindustria redefine el turismo de congresos". Hosteltur web site. Available at: http://www.hosteltur.com/176560_nueva-austeridad-farmaindustria-redefine-turismo-congresos.html (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [20] Barcelona Turisme, (March 6, 2012) "El turismo de reuniones crece en Barcelona un 5% durante 2011." Available at: <http://professional.barcelonaturisme.com/files/8684-841-pdf/NP-060312.cas.pdf> (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [21] Interview to Xavier Espasa i Añoveros, "Cataluña es el primer destino de Reuniones", hosteltur web site. Available at: http://static.hosteltur.com/web/uploads/2011/12/La_capital_de_Cataluna_lidera_los_listados_mundiales_del_sector.pdf (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [22] Hosteltur web site, (May 10, 2012), "Madrid gana una veintena de nuevos congresos y eventos internacionales", Hosteltur web site. Available at: http://www.hosteltur.com/183270_madrid-gana-veintena-nuevos-congresos-eventos-internacionales.html (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [23] Spain Incentive and Meeting Association (SIMA). "Destinations". Available at: <http://www.sima.es/destinations.html> (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [24] Hosteltur web site, "Valencia se consagra como el tercer destino de España para el turismo de congresos". Available at: http://static.hosteltur.com/web/uploads/2011/12/Una_tercera_parte_de_las_4_millones_de_ternocaciones_de_2011_corresponden_a_este_sector.pdf (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [25] MC ONLINE, (July 14, 2010), "Valencia Conference Center premiado da AIPC". Available at: http://www.mconline.it/news/3792/valencia_conference_centre_premiado_da_aipc.htm (Last access: January 20, 2013)
- [26] S. Ficarella, S. Sendra, L. Ferrando, and J. Lloret, "Effects of Web Technologies on Tourism Industry in some Southern European Countries", *The First International Conference on Building and Exploring Web Based Environments (WEB 2013)*, January 27 - February 1, 2013, Seville (Spain).