

How do meeting organisers choose convention sites based upon different types of meetings? An empirical analysis of the Italian Meeting Industry

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Abstract

In recent years, meeting destinations have been considered as competitive units operating in markets which are becoming more and more competitive.

Therefore, CVBs and DMOs have found it increasingly difficult to attract meetings to the destinations they manage and promote. As a consequence, it is necessary to understand the influence that meeting organisers exert when selecting a site and the criteria they use.

Previous destination marketing and management literature addressed this need, highlighting, however, an important gap. Indeed, no previous research has carried out any analysis to verify whether the influence that meeting organisers exert when selecting sites and the importance they attach to the specific features of the destination, is different according to the meetings they have to organise.

This paper aims at deepening and broadening the scientific debate on the subject, analysing – through an empirical study on the Italian Meeting Industry – if and how the influence which the different types of meeting organisers exert when selecting sites and the importance they give to the different features of the destination changes according to various types of conferences.

The findings of the research produced some important managerial implications both for public and private operators. Indeed, it is possible to identify a) the target of marketing communication and promotions b) meeting segments in which a destination could be better positioned according to its characteristics and c) the features which need to be strengthened in order to reposition the destination in different meeting segments.

Key words: Meeting destinations, types of meeting, site selection criteria, meeting organizers influence, Italian Meeting industry.

1. Introduction: MICE destination and typologies of meetings

In the last decades the M.I.C.E (meetings, incentive travels, conventions and exhibitions), a term that the international associations prefer nowadays to replace with that of Meeting Industry, has grown fastly and significantly (Braley, 2004a; Braley, 2004b; Braley, 2004c; Weber & Ladkin, 2003; Xiang & Formica, 2007). This is because it has become, in the literature related to event management and event tourism, one of the most important and studied (Getz, 2008) seen the large varieties of benefits that they produce for the hosting meetings destinations (Davidson, 2003; Kim, Chon & Chung, 2003; Zhang, Lieng & Qu, 2007).

Meetings destinations, as tourist destinations, can be considered as complex products resulting from the integration and coordination of a high and fragmented number of public and private operators offering, on a certain place, goods and services that more or less directly contribute to the organization of meetings (Del Chiappa, 2008). This means that a meeting destination obviously comprises the venue in which the meeting is organized but also a broad number of “peripheral” services that provide to the venue a good accessibility, appropriate hospitality and meeting facilities, good tourist attractions and, broadly, a unique destination brand (Del Chiappa, 2008).

As regards to the different types of meetings that a destination can host, it is useful to refer to the classification proposed by the main associations that represent worldwide the operators of the meeting industry, that is: MPI (Meeting Professional International), the Convention Industry Council and, finally, the IAPCO (International Association of Professional Congress Organizers).

More in particular, the Convention Industry Council (2003) and the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (2000) refer to: advisory board meeting, press conference, summit, congress, convention, political convention, forum, incentive travel, kick-off, seminar, symposium and, finally, speakers forum. Previous researches have underlined the main differences among these kinds of meeting and, more in particular, between the two macro categories of corporate meeting and associative meetings (Lee & Weaver, 1994; Oppermann, 1996; Weber, 2001).

2. The competitiveness of M.I.C.E destinations and the site selection process: a literature review

In recent years, convention destinations have been considered as competitive units operating in markets which are becoming more and more competitive.

Therefore, CVBs and DMOs have found it increasingly difficult to attract meetings to the destinations they manage and promote. As a consequence, it is necessary to understand the influence that meeting organisers exert when selecting a site and the criteria they use (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998).

To this regard, previous researches have studied how the different attributes of a meeting destination are perceived by meeting organizers (Baloglu & Love, 2001; Baloglu & Love, 2003; Baloglu & Love, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004a; Opperman, 1996; Opperman, 1998a) participants (Breiter & Milman, 2006;

Lee & Back, 2008; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Oppermann, 1998b; Severt, Wang, Chen & Breiter, 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Zhang, Lieng & Qu, 2007) and, finally, promoters. Literature has highlighted a substantial similarity and overlapping between site selection criteria used both by meeting organizers and participants (Lee & Weaver, 1994).

Prior researches suggested three conceptual components of destination perceptions: cognitive (attribute-based), affective (feelings), and overall impression (Baloglu & Love, 2005). Furthermore, the most used paradigm to evaluate the competitiveness of meeting destinations is that one of importance-performance (Martilla & James, 1977) applied to the main factors/attributes of the destination (Breiter & Milman, 2006; Oppermann, 1996). Researches by Crouch & Ritchie (1998) have identified eight main factors: accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities, information, site environment and, finally, other residual criteria as risks and novelty (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Chen, 2006; Crouch & Louviere, 2004a; Crouch & Louviere, 2004b; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Oppermann, 1996; Jun & McClaeary, 1999; Qu, Li & Tat Chu, 2000; W. G. Kim, H. C. Kim, 2003).

Anyway, it is necessary to underline that the site selection process (that normally precedes venue selection choice: Clark & McCleary, 1995) is not only affected by technical and logistic factors but also by the way in which the destination brand and image allows to achieve the desired identity and objectives of the promoters. As a consequence, some destinations can be perfect for certain types of meetings even if they are disadvantaged in technical and logistics factors. This occurs for example when destinations own a brand that is appealing and able to express image associations that help promoters in incentivizing people to participate to the event, in motivating participants and, finally, to evoke in them (the participants) associations that help promoters to gain the desired objectives. This is what normally occurs in incentive travels.

Moreover, previous researches analyzed the influence that different typologies of meeting organizers exert in the site selection process of a meeting destination and in the development of the relevant brand (Clark, Evans & Knutson, 1997).

Summarizing, national and international literature has deeply investigated both the influence meeting organizers exert in the site selection process and the importance they give to the different features of a destination. As regards to this latter point, Opperman (1996) highlighted for example that “in planning a conference, the respondents placed most importance on meeting room facilities and hotel service quality. Other important attributes were hotel room availability, safety/security and the cleanliness/attractiveness of the destination”.

Nevertheless, little is known about the relative significance of each attributes (Chako & Fenich, 2000; Chen, 2006; Crouch & Louviere, 2004a; Crouch & Louviere, 2004b) and the way their importance change according to the different dimension of Meetings taken in consideration meetings (Oppermann, 1996). Finally, no previous research has carried out any analysis to verify whether the influence that

meeting organisers exert when selecting sites and the importance they attach to the specific features of the destination are different according to the meetings they have to organise (Chen, 2006).

This paper aims to deepening and broadening the scientific debate on this latter point and want to verify the validity of two specific research hypotheses, that is:

Hp 1: The importance that meeting organizers give to each attribute of a destination changes according to the different typology of meetings they have to organize;

Hp 2: The influence that meeting organizers exert when selecting sites changes according to the different typology of meetings they have to organize.

In the next paragraphs, an empirical study on a sample of Italian meeting organizers is presented and discussed in order to test the aforementioned research hypotheses.

3. Methodology

The research was carried out by an on-line survey administrating a questionnaire to a sample of 1,000 meeting organizers provided by Federcongressi, the Italian association that gave the patronage to the present research, and by Meeting & Congressi, one of the main professional magazines related to the meeting industry.

The questionnaire was divided in three parts.

The first one described the objectives of the research and the procedures the meeting organizers had to follow in order to fill in the questionnaire.

The second one showed a list of 22 attributes. Respondents were asked to assess the significance they give to each of them according to the different types of meetings, that is: congress, convention, incentive travel, kick-off, seminar and, finally, symposium. To this purpose a 7-scores Likert scale ranking from not at all important/very important was used. Each respondent was invited to make a choice only relative to meetings typologies he/she has organized at least once.

The list was developed on the one hand, by a literature review that focuses on the site selection process adopting the perspective of meeting organizers (i.e Baloglu & Love, 2004; Opperman, 1996; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998;) and, on the other hand, realizing a focus group with professionals of the Italian Meeting Industry.

Finally, the third part of the questionnaire asked respondents to tell in which type of organization they operate (company, association, independent meeting organizer, Destination Management Company) and, furthermore, to express their capability in influencing the site selection process. As regards to this latter issue it was used the following scale: never, almost never, sometimes, almost always and always.

Before administering the questionnaire to the full list available, a pilot test on a small sample of meeting organizers was realized in order to verify the validity of contents, the comprehensiveness of the considered attributes, the comprehensibility of the scale used for the assessment and, finally, the clarity of the instructions provided to participate of the survey.

The 1,000 meeting organizers were invited to take part to the survey by sending them an e-mail in which the main motivations and objectives of the research were explained. The e-mail also briefly described the options that meeting organizers could use to fill in and return the questionnaire (on-line by clicking a link provided in the e-mail or, alternatively, by fax/e-mail). Then, the questionnaire was also attached to the e-mail together with a word file containing a brief definition of the six typologies of meetings investigated in the survey (congress, convention, incentive travel, kick-off, seminar and symposium as previously indicated). These definitions were taken from the Convention Industry Council (2003).

A total of 227 usable responses, belonging to the four categories of meeting organizers, were obtained registering a response rate of 22.7% (Table 1).

Table 1 – The composition of the sample (N=number of respondents)

| | Conference | | Convention | | Incentive Travel | | Kick-off | | Seminar | | Symposium | |
|---|------------|------|------------|------|------------------|------|----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------|
| | N. | % | N. | % | N. | % | N. | % | N. | % | N. | % |
| Corporate - (Meeting planner) | 96 | 64.9 | 151 | 77 | 100 | 73 | 104 | 74.3 | 116 | 69.5 | 70 | 65.4 |
| Association | 8 | 5.4 | 5 | 2.6 | - | - | - | - | 8 | 4.8 | 4 | 3.7 |
| Independent meeting organizers - (PCO) | 27 | 18.2 | 24 | 12.2 | 20 | 14.6 | 19 | 13.6 | 27 | 16.2 | 21 | 19.6 |
| Destination Management Company - (DMC) | 17 | 11.5 | 16 | 8.2 | 17 | 12.4 | 17 | 12.1 | 16 | 9.6 | 12 | 11.2 |
| Total | 148 | 100 | 196 | 100 | 137 | 100 | 140 | 100 | 167 | 100 | 107 | 100 |

It is necessary to highlight that the total number of respondents is never 227 because each respondent was asked not to make a choice concerning meeting typologies he/she has never organized.

4. Findings

Data were analyzed managing SPSS 17.0. Findings shed light on two main points. Indeed, they allowed to highlight if and how the influence which the different types of meeting organisers exert when selecting sites (paragraph 4.1) and the importance they give to the different features of the destination (paragraph 4.2) changes according to various types of meeting.

4.1 The influence that different typologies of meeting organizers exert on the site selection process

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of the answers that respondents gave to the question “In the following meeting typologies, how often are you usually able to influence the selection of the destination?”.

Based on these data, a chi-square test for each type of meeting was managed. The test resulted insignificant (conference: $p=.082$; convention: $p=.134$; incentive travel: $p=.060$; kick-off: $p=.325$;

seminar: $p=.043$; symposium: $p=.451$) indicating that an association between the row and column variables exists. This finding gave support to the first research hypothesis underlining, by this way, that the influence which the different types of meeting organisers exert when selecting destination changes according to the different types of meeting.

Furthermore, data highlighted that “internal organizers” (i.e those who operate within corporate and association) exert more influence on the site selection process than “external organizers” (i.e PCO and DMC). This occurs for all types of meetings. Specifically, the former exerts more influence in the case of congresses, conventions, kick-off and seminars whereas the latter does it in the case of incentive travels.

Table 2 – The meeting organizers and their influence on site selection process according to different types of meetings

| | Conference (N = 147) | | | | | | Convention (N = 195) | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------|
| | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | Always | Tot. | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | | |
| Corporate planner - (Meeting Planner) | 19 82.6% | 9 81.8% | 27 49.1% | 25 64.1% | 15 78.9% | 95 | 8 100% | 3 60% | 51 66.2% | 58 78.4% | 30 96.8% | 150 |
| Association | - - | - - | 3 5.4% | 3 7.7% | 2 10.5% | 8 | - - | - - | 3 3.9% | 2 2.7% | - - | 5 |
| Indipendent meeting organizers– (PCO) | 1 4.3% | 1 9.1% | 15 27.3% | 9 23.1% | 1 5.3% | 27 | - - | 1 20% | 12 15.6% | 10 13.5% | 1 3.2% | 24 |
| Destination Management Company – (DMC) | 3 13.1% | 1 9.1% | 10 8.2% | 2 5.1% | 1 5.3% | 17 | - - | 1 20% | 11 14.3% | 4 5.4% | - - | 16 |
| $X_{(12)} = 19.260 p = .082$ | | | | | | $X_{(12)} = 17.445 p = .134$ | | | | | | |
| | Incentive travel (N = 135) | | | | | | Kick-off (N = 137) | | | | | |
| | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | Always | Tot. | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | | |
| Corporate planner - (Meeting Planner) | 9 75% | 3 42.9% | 33 80.5% | 31 63.3% | 23 88.5% | 99 100% | 6 100% | 5 62.5% | 36 66.7% | 35 74.5% | 20 90.9% | 102 |
| Association | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - | - - |
| Indipendent meeting organizers– (PCO) | 1 8.3% | 1 14.3% | 5 12.2% | 10 20.4% | 3 11.5% | 20 - | - - | 1 12.5% | 9 16.7% | 8 17% | 1 4.5% | 19 |
| Destination Management Company – (DMC) | 2 16.7% | 3 42.8% | 3 7.3% | 8 16.3% | - - | 16 - | - - | 2 25% | 9 16.6% | 4 8.5% | 1 4.6% | 16 |
| $X_{(12)} = 14.954 p = .060$ | | | | | | $X_{(12)} = 9.212 p = .325$ | | | | | | |
| | Seminar (N = 167) | | | | | | Symposium (N = 105) | | | | | |
| | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | Always | Tot. | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Almost Always | | |
| Corporate planner - (Meeting Planner) | 9 90% | 7 70% | 36 56.3% | 39 75% | 25 80.6% | 116 | 9 90% | 7 77.8% | 22 52.4% | 21 63.6% | 9 81.8% | 68 |
| Association | - - | - - | 3 4.7% | 1 1.9% | 4 12.9% | 8 | - - | - - | 1 2.4% | 2 6.1% | 1 9.1% | 4 |
| Indipendent meeting organizers– (PCO) | 1 10% | 1 10% | 15 23.4% | 9 17.3% | 1 3.2% | 27 | 1 10% | 1 11.1% | 11 26.2% | 7 21.2% | 1 9.1% | 21 |
| Destination Management Company – (DMC) | - - | 2 20% | 10 15.6% | 3 5.8% | 1 3.3% | 16 | - - | 1 11.1% | 8 19% | 3 9.1% | - - | 12 |
| $X_{(12)} = 21.558 p = .043$ | | | | | | $X_{(12)} = 11.938 p = .451$ | | | | | | |

Table 3 – The prevalence of the influence of meeting organizers on the destination selection process (mean value of the sum of % “Almost always” and “Always” answers

| | Conference | Convention | Incentive travel | Kick-off | Seminar | Symposium |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| “Internal” Meeting Organizers (Corporate & association) | 80.6% ^d | 88.9% ^d | 75.9% ^e | 82.7% ^e | 85.2% ^e | 80.3% ^e |
| “External” Meeting organizers (PCO e DMC) | 19.4% ^e | 11.1% ^e | 24.1% ^d | 17.3% ^d | 14.8% ^e | 19.7% ^e |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Table shows the mean value of the sum of the percentage “Almost always” and “Always”

This last conclusion is more evident if we aggregate the percentages of answers “Almost always” and “Always” received from “internal” and “external” meeting organizers (Table 3)

4.2 How does the significance of each attribute of a convention destination change according to the different typologies of meetings?

In Table 4 a list of the key attributes that are useful in the site selection process are shown with the relative mean value of importance and F. and Sig. values, everything distinguished for a specific type of meeting.

Based on these data, it is possible to highlight the type of meeting in which each attribute assumes the most importance (grey box).

For example, meeting room facilities and availability of large convention center are particularly important in conferences, given the high number of participants. The same attribute assumes the lower importance in the case of incentive travel. Indeed, in this last type of event meeting organizers often ask for an informal and unstructured location and atmosphere in order to reach the objectives of motivation and socialization that are typical of incentive travels. Moreover, the availability of exhibition facilities is more important for kick-off given the necessity that meeting organizers have to fitting out spaces for customers’ products.

The destination brand is more important for business meeting and, among these, in incentive travels (Del Chiappa, 2008). The possibility to host all the participants in the same hotel is particularly significant for conventions and incentive travels given the necessity to foster the socialization between them in order to increase cooperation and team working within the company.

Table 4 – The importance of the attributes of the destination in the site selection process: mean values according to specific types of meeting

| Attributes | Mean for type of meeting ¹ | | | | | | Total mean | F | Sig. |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|--------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | | |
| Meeting room facilities and availability of modern audio visual equipment | 6.56 | 6.33 | 3.90* | 6.01* | 5.89* | 5.94* | 5.83 | 71.377 | .000 |
| Exhibition facilities | 5.41 | 4.10* | 2.56* | 5.64 | 3.59* | 3.66* | 4.20 | 46.155 | .000 |
| Availability of large convention center | 6.49 | 5.88* | 3.24* | 5.48* | 5.22* | 5.27* | 5.34 | 58.483 | .000 |
| Accommodation range | 5.97 | 5.94 | 6.23 | 5.31* | 5.16* | 5.01* | 5.64 | 17.835 | .000 |
| Accommodation rates | 6.08 | 6.29 | 6.22 | 5.76* | 5.72* | 5.65* | 5.98 | 6.258 | .000 |
| Accommodations facilities | 5.66* | 5.96 | 6.22 | 5.76 | 5.42* | 5.10* | 5.72 | 10.924 | .000 |
| Number of hotels within walking distance to convention center | 5.75 | 5.23 | 3.88* | 4.97* | 4.73* | 4.89* | 4.94 | 14.026 | .000 |
| On-site/off site accommodations (more of an hotel is required?) | 5.75* | 6.62 | 6.59 | 6.07* | 5.78* | 5.71* | 6.12 | 12.484 | .000 |
| Accommodation location relative to airport | 5.13 | 5.36 | 4.76* | 5.24 | 4.83* | 4.86 | 5.06 | 3.951 | .002 |
| Restaurant facilities (cost, quality and variety) | 4.84 | 4.95 | 5.31 | 4.83 | 4.54* | 4.61* | 4.85 | 4.082 | .001 |
| Local transportation costs and time | 4.40 | 4.16 | 4.28 | 4.20 | 4.24 | 4.36 | 4.26 | .333 | .893 |
| Destination accessibility | 6.28 | 6.27 | 5.80* | 6.26 | 6.04 | 5.94 | 6.12 | 4.264 | .001 |
| Destination image | 5.71* | 5.96* | 6.46 | 5.99* | 5.40* | 5.26* | 5.81 | 14.015 | .000 |
| Destination awareness | 4.85* | 4.97* | 5.58 | 5.15 | 4.42* | 4.35* | 4.90 | 12.852 | .000 |
| Destination novelty | 4.50* | 5.11* | 5.94 | 5.20* | 4.20* | 4.17* | 4.87 | 23.359 | .000 |
| Safety & security | 6.32* | 6.52 | 6.64 | 6.51 | 6.35 | 6.32 | 6.45 | 2.704 | .020 |
| Expected wear and tear | 4.43* | 4.83* | 5.86 | 4.79* | 4.28* | 4.19* | 4.74 | 26.127 | .000 |
| Physical and socio-cultural settings | 4.66 | 4.70 | 5.06 | 4.62 | 4.53 | 4.49 | 4.68 | 2.261 | .047 |
| Entertainment and extra meeting opportunities (shopping, theatres, museums) | 4.34* | 4.66* | 5.82 | 4.40* | 4.06* | 3.87* | 4.54 | 21.845 | .000 |
| Convention Bureau Assistance | 5.30 | 5.14 | 5.39 | 5.33 | 4.79 | 4.94 | 5.15 | 2.559 | .026 |
| Quality and efficiency of industry personnel | 6.44 | 6.49 | 6.53 | 6.55 | 6.44 | 6.44 | 6.48 | .394 | .853 |
| Overall affordability | 5.93 | 6.26 | 6.18 | 6.17 | 6.06 | 5.98 | 6.11 | 1.827 | .105 |

¹ 1=conference 2=convention 3=incentive travel 4=kick-off 5=seminar 6=symposium

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Incentive travel have a fundamental entertainment nature and this is because they ask particularly for good entertainment and extra meeting opportunities and a fine wheatear.

The overall affordability is important for business meetings (convention, incentive travel, kick-off and seminar). It seems that this occurs because companies show, as we know, a very rational (and poorly emotional) decision process given the fact that they pay all the organization costs of the event.

A deeper analysis can be done managing, for each attribute, a Bonferroni test in order to verify if the mean differences calculated considering the event in which the attributes assume the higher mean value (J^+) and all the other types of meeting (I)¹ are significant.

In this way, there are six attributes that are equally important in all types of meetings, that is: overall affordability, quality and efficiency of industry personnel, Convention Bureau assistance, physical and socio-cultural settings, safety and security and, finally, local transportation costs and time. Destination accessibility is important for all types of meetings with the only exception of incentive travels.

Indeed, destination accessibility is particularly important both for meeting with a great number of participants (conferences, conventions and symposia), often coming from a large number of countries, and for events that begin and finish in a short period of time (seminars and kick-off). Differently, the destination accessibility is less important for incentives. It is arguable that this could occur because a certain degree of difficulty in the accessibility of a destination gives to the meeting a certain degree of originality and exclusivity that helps to leverage on the emotions and motivation of participants. For similar reasons destination novelty is equally important for incentive travels and kick-off.

The number of accommodations available near to the airport is significant for conferences and conventions. This occurs because of the high number of participants, that cannot be hosted in a single hotel, and because of the necessity to concentrate them (the participants) in a restrict geographical area in order to reduce uncomfortableness and costs in logistics transfers. For similar reasons, the number of hotels within walking distance to the convention center is particularly important for conferences, conventions, symposiums and kick-off.

Accommodation rates and range are more important for conferences, convention and incentive travels. Contrariwise, accommodation facilities are relevant for conventions, incentive travels and kick-off. Destination brand (image and awareness) is significant for incentive travels and kick-off given its ability to create a unique and spectacular atmosphere that allow to reach the objectives of the event, that is to create a memorable experience for participants.

¹ See the appendix.

5. Conclusions and managerial implications

In recent years, convention destinations have been considered as competitive units operating in markets which are becoming more and more competitive.

Therefore, CVBs and DMOs have found it increasingly difficult to attract meetings to the destinations they manage and promote. As a consequence, it is necessary to understand the influence that meeting organisers exert when selecting a site and the criteria they use.

Previous destination marketing and management literature addressed this need, highlighting, however, an important gap. Indeed, no previous research has carried out any analysis to verify whether the influence that meeting organisers exert when selecting sites and the importance they give to the specific features of a destination, are different according to the meetings they have to organise (Chen, 2006).

The aim of the research was to contribute to fill in this gap realizing an empirical investigation on a sample of 227 professionals of the Italian Meeting Industry.

Effectively, findings seem to highlight that the influence which the different types of meeting organisers exert when selecting sites and the importance they give to the different features of the destination change according to different types of events. Specifically, “internal organizers” (i.e those who operate within corporate and association) exert more influence on the site selection process than “external organizers” (i.e PCO and DMC). This occurs for all types of meetings. Specifically, the former exert the most influence in the case of congress, conventions, kick-off and seminars whereas the latter do it in the case of incentive travels. This information is particularly relevant since it allows organizations responsible for the marketing and promotion of a meeting destination (basically, CVBs, DMOs, public administration, etc.) to define appropriately the target of communication activities according to the specific segment of event in which they intend to position the destination.

On the other one hand, findings shed light on another interesting point. Specifically, there are six attributes that are equally important in all types of meetings, that is: overall affordability, quality and efficiency of industry personnel, Convention Bureau assistance, physical and socio-cultural settings, safety and security and, finally, local transportation costs and time. Destination accessibility is important for all type of meeting with the only exception of incentive travel. Contrariwise, the mean importance of the remaining attributes change according to the different types of meeting that have to be organized. Just to make some few examples, meeting rooms facilities, availability of modern audio visual equipment and of a large convention center are important for conferences whereas exhibition facilities are relevant for kick-off. Destination awareness, image and novelty are significant for kick-off and incentive travels. For the latter type of meeting the expected weather and the entertainment opportunities are relevant as well. Overall affordability and the possibility to host all the participants in the same hotel is particularly important for incentive travels, conventions, kick-off and seminar. Destination accessibility is significant for conferences, conventions and kick-off.

Summarizing, findings show that the attributes on which meeting organizers concentrate their attention when selecting a destination, change according to the different type of events they have to organize. Some interesting managerial implications arise from these results giving support the destination governance, marketing and communication activities. Indeed, those findings allow to better identify on the one hand, on which segment of meeting it is appropriate to position the offer according to the present attributes and/or, on the other one hand, which investment needs to be done in order to strengthen some attributes in order to reach a favorable repositioning in new segment of meetings.

This means, for example, that a destination with a strong and unique brand, good accommodation quality and entertainment activities could position itself as a good destination for incentive travels even if the destination accessibility is not so good. Contrariwise, a destination that would like to position/reposition itself as a good site for conferences should invest, if possible, in order to realize a large convention center with a good audio-visual equipment, to improve destination accessibility and to plan a development of a certain number of hotels within walking distance to the convention center and near to the main approaches to the destination (particularly airport).

6. Limits and future research

Albeit findings seem to support both the hypotheses of the present study, the research shows actually some limits. Firstly, research is exploratory and findings cannot be generalized. Secondly, the sample of professionals is not perfectly representative seen its composition doesn't match the real percentages by which each category of meeting organizers is represented in the Italian Meeting Industry. However, it is noteworthy to observe that effectively also the Italian Meeting Industry can be considered mostly composed (in decreasing order) by: meeting organizers working within companies, PCO and DMC and, finally, meeting organizers working within associations.

Future researches are needed in order to repeat the study internationally and to verify, by this way, if meeting organizers belonging to different countries evaluate the importance of the different attributes of a destination in a similar way. This could help to generalize findings arising from the present study. Moreover, future researches could be done in order to verify if the importance meeting organizers attach to the specific features of a meeting destination change not only according to the different types of meeting but also, within the same type of event, according to the different objectives that meeting would like to reach.

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Appendix – Bonferroni test

Table 5

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1 | | -.231 | -2.659* | -.543* | -.663* | -.616* |
| 2 | .231 | | -2.428* | -.312 | -.433* | -.385 |
| 3 | 2.659* | 2.428* | | 2.116* | 1.995* | 2.043* |
| 4 | .543* | .312 | -2.116* | | -.121 | -.073 |
| 5 | .663* | .433* | -1.995* | .121 | | .047 |
| 6 | .616* | .385 | -2.043* | 0.73 | -.047 | |

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | -1.311* | -2.851* | .226 | -1.827* | -1.755* |
| 2 | 1.311* | | -1.539* | 1.537* | -.516 | -.444 |
| 3 | 2.851* | 1.539* | | 3.077* | 1.024* | 1.096* |
| 4 | -.226 | -1.537* | -3.077* | | -2.053* | -1.981* |
| 5 | 1.827* | .516 | -1.024* | 2.053* | | .072 |
| 6 | 1.755* | .444 | -1.096* | 1.981* | -.072 | |

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | -.617* | -3.258* | -1.012* | -1.274* | -1.223* |
| 2 | .617* | | -2.640* | -.395 | -.656* | -.606* |
| 3 | 3.258* | 2.640* | | 2.245* | 1.984* | 2.035* |
| 4 | 1.012* | .395 | -2.245* | | -.261 | -.211 |
| 5 | 1.274* | .656* | -1.984* | .261 | | .051 |
| 6 | 1.223* | .606* | -2.035* | .211 | -.051 | |

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | -.028 | .261 | -.666* | -.813* | -.962* |
| 2 | .028 | | .289 | -.637* | -.785* | -.933* |
| 3 | -.261 | -.289 | | -.927* | -1.074* | -1.223* |
| 4 | .666* | .637* | .927* | | -.148 | -.296 |
| 5 | .813* | .785* | 1.074* | .148 | | -.148 |
| 6 | .962* | .933* | 1.223* | .296 | .148 | |

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1 | | .203 | .137 | .327 | -.361 | -.438 |
| 2 | -.203 | | -.066 | -.530* | -.564* | -.641* |
| 3 | -.137 | .066 | | -.464* | -.498* | -.575* |
| 4 | .327 | .530* | .464* | | -.034 | -.111 |
| 5 | .361 | .564* | .498* | .034 | | -.077 |
| 6 | .438 | .641* | .575* | .111 | .077 | |

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| 1 | | .299 | .565** | .100 | .239 | -.559* |
| 2 | -.299 | | .266 | -.199 | -.538* | -.857* |
| 3 | -.565* | -.266 | | -.465 | -.804* | -1.124* |
| 4 | -.100 | .199 | .465 | | -.339 | -.658* |
| 5 | .239 | .538* | .804* | .339 | | -.319 |
| 6 | .559* | .857* | 1.124* | .658* | .319 | |

1=conference 2=convention 3=incentive travel 4=kick-off 5=seminar 6=symposium

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 6

Attribute 7

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 1 | | -.525 | -1.873* | -.784* | -1.020* | -.865* |
| 2 | .525 | | -1.348* | -.259 | -.495 | -.340 |
| 3 | 1.873* | 1.348* | | 1.089* | .853* | 1.008* |
| 4 | .784* | .259 | -1.089* | | -.236 | -.081 |
| 5 | 1.020* | .495 | -.853* | .236 | | .155 |
| 6 | .865* | .340 | -1.008* | .081 | -.155 | |

Attribute 8

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1 | | .874* | .841* | .328 | .029 | -.034 |
| 2 | -.874* | | -.033 | -.546 | -.846* | -.908* |
| 3 | -.841* | .033 | | -.513 | -.812* | -.874* |
| 4 | -.328 | .546* | .513 | | -.299 | -.361 |
| 5 | -.029 | .846* | .812* | .299 | | -.062 |
| 6 | .034 | .908* | .874* | .361 | .062 | |

Attribute 9

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| 1 | | .228 | -.368 | .117 | -.299 | -.265 |
| 2 | -.228 | | -.596* | -.111 | -.527* | -.493 |
| 3 | .368 | .596* | | .485 | .069 | .103 |
| 4 | -.117 | .111 | -.485 | | -.415 | -.382 |
| 5 | .299 | .527* | -.069 | .415 | | .034 |
| 6 | .265 | .493 | -.103 | .382 | -.034 | |

Attribute 10

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1 | | .104 | .469 | -.016 | -.309 | -.234 |
| 2 | -.101 | | .364 | -.120 | -.413 | -.338 |
| 3 | -.469 | -.364 | | -.484 | -.777* | -.702* |
| 4 | .016 | .120 | .484 | | -.293 | -.218 |
| 5 | .309 | .413 | .777* | .293 | | .075 |
| 6 | .234 | .338 | .702* | .218 | -.075 | |

Attribute 11

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | -.242 | -.127 | -.200 | -.168 | -.046 |
| 2 | .242 | | .114 | .042 | .074 | .196 |
| 3 | .127 | -.114 | | -.073 | -.040 | .082 |
| 4 | .200 | -.042 | .073 | | .032 | .154 |
| 5 | .168 | -.074 | .040 | -.032 | | .122 |
| 6 | .046 | -.196 | -.082 | -.154 | -.122 | |

Attribute 12

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | -.004 | -.479* | -.019 | -.241 | -.339 |
| 2 | .004 | | -.475* | -.015 | -.237 | -.335 |
| 3 | .479* | .475* | | .459* | .238 | .140 |
| 4 | .019 | .015 | -.459* | | -.222 | -.319 |
| 5 | .241 | .237 | -.238 | .222 | | -.098 |
| 6 | .339 | .335 | -.140 | .319 | .098 | |

1=conference 2=convention 3=incentive travel 4=kick-off 5=seminar 6=symposium

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 7

Attribute 13

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | .250 | .744* | .271 | -.314 | -.457 |
| 2 | -.250 | | .494* | .021 | -.564* | -.706* |
| 3 | -.744* | -.494* | | -.473 | -1.058* | -1.201* |
| 4 | -.271 | -.021 | .473 | | -.585* | -.728* |
| 5 | .314 | .564* | 1.058* | .585* | | |
| 6 | .457 | .706* | 1.201* | .728* | .143 | -.143 |

Attribute 14

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | .120 | .728* | .301 | -.426 | -.495 |
| 2 | -.120* | | .608* | .181 | -.546* | -.615* |
| 3 | -.728* | -.608* | | -.427 | -1.154* | -1.223* |
| 4 | -.301 | -.181 | .427 | | -.727* | -.797* |
| 5 | .426 | .546* | 1.154* | .727* | | -.070 |
| 6 | .495 | .615* | 1.223* | .797* | .070 | |

Attribute 15

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|---------|--------|--------|----------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | .612* | 1.442* | .708* | -.300 | -.326 |
| 2 | -.612* | | .830* | .096 | -.912* | -.938* |
| 3 | -1.142* | -.830* | | -.734*** | -1.742* | -1.768* |
| 4 | -.708* | -.096 | .734* | | -1.008* | -1.035* |
| 5 | .300 | .912* | 1.742* | 1.008* | | -.026 |
| 6 | .326 | .938* | 1.768* | 1.035* | .026 | |

Attribute 16

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | .199 | .32 | .190 | .026 | .002 |
| 2 | -.199 | | .121 | -.010 | -.173 | -.197 |
| 3 | -.320 | -.121 | | -.130 | -.293 | -.318 |
| 4 | -.190 | .010 | .130 | | -.163 | -.188 |
| 5 | -.026 | .0173 | .293 | .163 | | -.024 |
| 6 | -.002 | .197 | .318 | .188 | .024 | |

Attribute 17

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | .394 | 1.430* | .358 | -.150 | -.238 |
| 2 | -.394 | | 1.036* | -.036 | -.543* | -.632* |
| 3 | -1.430* | -1.036* | | -1.072* | -1.579* | -1.668* |
| 4 | -.358 | .036 | 1.072* | | -.507* | -.596 |
| 5 | .150 | .543* | 1.579* | .507* | | -.088 |
| 6 | .238 | .632* | 1.668* | .596 | .088 | |

Attribute 18

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | .047 | .406 | -.042 | -.131 | -.167 |
| 2 | -.047 | | .359 | -.088 | -.178 | -.214 |
| 3 | -.406 | -.359 | | -.448 | -.537 | -.573 |
| 4 | .042 | .088 | .448 | | -.090 | -.126 |
| 5 | .131 | .178 | .537 | .090 | | -.036 |
| 6 | .167 | .214 | .573 | .126 | .036 | |

1=conference 2=convention 3=incentive travel 4=kick-off 5=seminar 6=symposium

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 8

Attribute 19

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | | .327 | 1.487* | .067 | -.272 | -.464 |
| 2 | -.327 | | 1.160* | -.260 | -.600* | -.792* |
| 3 | -1.487* | -1.160* | | -1.420* | -1.760* | -1.952* |
| 4 | -.067 | .260 | 1.420* | | -.340 | -.532 |
| 5 | .272 | .600* | 1.760* | .340 | | -.192 |
| 6 | .464 | .792* | 1.952* | .532 | .192 | |

Attribute 20

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | -.165 | .086 | .021 | -.516 | -.364 |
| 2 | .165 | | .252 | .187 | -.351 | -.199 |
| 3 | -.086 | -.252 | | -.065 | -.602 | -.451 |
| 4 | -.021 | -.187 | .065 | | -.537 | -.386 |
| 5 | .516 | .351 | .602 | .537 | | .152 |
| 6 | .364 | .199 | .451 | .386 | -.152 | |

Attribute 21

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | .049 | .090 | .104 | -.002 | -.002 |
| 2 | -.049 | | .042 | .056 | -.051 | -.051 |
| 3 | -.090 | -.042 | | .014 | -.092 | -.093 |
| 4 | -.104 | .056 | -.014 | | -.106 | -.107 |
| 5 | .002 | .051 | .092 | .106 | | .000 |
| 6 | .002 | .051 | .093 | .107 | .001 | |

Attribute 22

| J \ I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | .326 | .251 | .240 | .126 | .051 |
| 2 | -.326 | | -.075 | -.086 | -.200 | -.275 |
| 3 | -.251 | .075 | | -.011 | -.125 | -.200 |
| 4 | -.240 | 0.086 | .011 | | -.114 | -.189 |
| 5 | -.126 | .200 | .125 | .114 | | -.075 |
| 6 | -.051 | .275 | .200 | .189 | .075 | |

1=conference 2=convention 3=incentive travel 4=kick-off 5=seminar 6=symposium

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level