



Congress destination Netherlands

Substance, creativity and excellent facilities

The Netherlands have a large number of associations. Partly because of that, our country is a popular destination for international congresses. The fact that a great effort is made in the field of knowledge development and that cities do not hesitate to collaborate with each other, is another reason why this small country can very well compete with bigger players.

For many years now, the Netherlands have been doing very well when it comes to attracting international association congresses. It is with good reason that year after year the country has occupied a place in the top 10 of the ICCA ranking. According to independent event professional Ingrid Rip, this is partly due to the fact that in the past years, Holland has managed to better and better present itself by focusing on a number of specializations. "Initially, many Dutch destinations aimed their efforts at the same goals. Especially the medical congress market was very popular because

of the budgets. However, these budgets are now curbed by compliance regulations. At the same time, we realize even better that worldwide, tens of thousands of congresses are organized each year. So the pond is big enough. Partly because of these developments more and more parties are specializing, which created a natural division of the market. Thanks to these specializations you can offer a client a better product, and thus achieve a better congress. And that again increases your chances of being chosen as destination."

KNOWLEDGE

The various Dutch universities that conduct leading research on a number of fields have had a distinct influence on this specialization. The city of Delft has the second largest robotics cluster worldwide. The city of Leiden houses one of the largest biotech clusters in Europe. The city of Rotterdam has a very strong maritime sector in the form of the Rotterdam port and the

pertaining logistic processes. The city is worldwide market leader in the field of risk management for the shipping industry. The city of Eindhoven presents itself as Brainport region and is exceptionally strong in all things hightech and design. Wageningen University & Research focuses on sustainable food production. And we should not, of course, forget to mention our expertise in the field of water management. The best known manifestation of this are the famous Delta works. It is not for nothing that the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education is established in Delft. This is UNESCO's knowledge and training centre for water. "And you must not forget our know-how in the field of aviation and space technology", adds Ingrid Rip. "In Delft research is conducted into this matter, whereas in Leiden the space law field of study is internationally leading. In the city of Noordwijk sits the European Space Research and Technology Centre (ESTEC), which is known as the technical and administrative heart of the European Space Organisation ESA. Together with The Hague, these three cities have worked closely together, with the result that the Space Studies Program of the International Space University will come to Holland next year. That four Dutch cities make a joint effort to accomplish this is unique. Collaboration creates a win-win situation."

CREATIVITY

Apart from the development of knowledge, the Netherlands also rank high in the field of creativity, according to Ingrid Rip. "The Dutch are very well capable of getting things done by thinking out of the box." This creativity yields solutions for the changes that are taking place within the association market. "The new generation of congress delegates has a need for an other type of congress and an other way of knowledge transfer. In contrast to the older generations they communicate much more via online channels, because of which they set much more store on personal meetings. They also attach more and more value to networking and the exchange of experiences. This means that you have to be more flexible in dealing with the work forms that are deployed during a congress. The professor on the stage will not be the common denominator for much longer. Instead of this it is better to sometimes choose other work forms that are more effective. For instance short brainstorm sessions in which nine participants sit at a table with an expert. Or take people out of their comfort zone and place them in a suitable surrounding where they are not distracted, or otherwise in an unexpected surrounding where they may come up with alternative ideas. By carefully considering the purpose of a congress, this meeting can, apart from complying with



Delft

a demand (the congress must, of course, be organized according to the statutes) also make an enormous contribution to realizing the association's goals. Besides, with another set-up you realize a congress the delegates will still talk about in five years' time, and that is, of course, what every organizing committee wants."

MEMBERS

Another point of interest with the new generations of congress visitors is the fact that these specialists and academics less and less often become member of a professional association. "This means that a congress will be serving more different target groups. It will also create an increasing need for specialized content so these non-members can choose the sessions that match their interests. You can adapt your programme to that, for instance by organizing a day exclusively for your members. Before or after that day, you plan a day with a programme that is also open to conferees who are not a member but do have a specific interest in the congress's theme. Hybrid congresses can also offer a solution,

because they create the possibility for additional target groups on certain specific sessions. Especially the smaller congresses with between 250 and 700 delegates which worldwide are the most organized events, offer the best opportunity to network and to make new contacts, but also to apply the necessary flexibility."

BUDGET

The changing world puts the budgets under pressure. Take, for instance, the fact that subsidies are granted less and less often. Delegates also subscribe shorter and shorter before the event date. What is more, the tightening up of the compliance regulations, for instance the Dutch Advertising Code Medicines, the regulations regarding the sponsorship have become more strict. But also banks and insurance companies that before were quite lavish, now feel that they are monitored more sharply. That makes it more difficult for them to find sponsors. Also decreasing are the forms of sponsoring that used to be standard, like the logo on the notebook, because the congress bags 'old style' disappear.



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Once again, the Dutch creativity can come up with the answer. “The art is to make people enthusiastic to realize a good congress with less money. As an organizer you have to be creative in coming up with new sponsor packages. An example is the purchase of content. In the old days, people were suspicious when a company gave a seminar. But by giving this a good twist and to mention that company X has donated a ‘Knowledge Grant’ to partly make the congress possible, you can still choose independent speakers and have a type of sponsoring as well. Besides that, you can draw up your congress budget in such a way that your basic programme is paid for by the delegates themselves. By means of sponsoring you further dress up the programme by, for instance, asking a sponsor for a financial contribution to hire a band during the drinks hour, the catering for a dinner or a pleasant social activity. It may seem a lot of bother, but small sponsors are valuable and together they can bring in a considerable sum. By creatively handling sponsoring you also keep a lid on your budget.”

QUALITY

A third trump card the Netherlands hold is the excellent quality of the basic facilities. “As a country, you can

be very good at knowledge development and creativity, but if your facilities are not up to par, you will have a very hard time winning a bid procedure. Fortunately, the quality of the hotels and accommodations in the Netherlands is excellent, as well as the accessibility. Amsterdam Schiphol Airport is a hub in Europe and has many destinations. This means that the travel time is relatively short, which is a huge advantage when you consider that the number of congresses lasting several days is decreasing. Obviously you want to spend the free time you have during those days as pleasantly as possible. The good image of the entertainment climate and the many sights in many of the Dutch congress cities is definitely a bonus. And another important fact, especially in these troubled times, is that we have a politically and economically stable climate. In combination with the huge amount of knowledge and the remarkable congresses the Dutch event professionals can organize, the Netherlands constitute the ideal venue for association congresses.”