

Academic Paper

# The Business of Events: Global Destination Report 2022

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*Conference, Meetings, Congress, Association, Destination,  
Business Events, Business Travel, Incentive Travel, Hospitality, Tourism*

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## Research Note

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## ABSTRACT

First published in 2021, The Business of Events: Global Destination Report by Davies Tanner is an annual survey of the leading global business events destinations, including National Tourism Organisations and Convention and Visitor Bureaus. The Business of Events: Global Destination Report was commissioned by brand communications agency Davies Tanner and conducted by SFA Connect to establish how the industry has changed since 2019. The research focused on funding, sentiment, and legacy to demonstrate to governments and policymakers the benefits of having a strong and supported business events sector. The survey was conducted in the summer of 2022 among more than 1,100 destination respondents, most of whom worked in small teams of between three and five people. In summary, the report suggests that the sector is being taken more seriously by governments around the world, that funding has broadly remained stable, and that there is an enhanced focus on the legacy of events. There is an indication of a decline in international events, but to date, this has been compensated by an increase in domestic events. The information included in the report can be used to influence government departments, public sector bodies, policymakers and influencers on the benefits of having a solid and well-supported business events sector to both national and local economies and broader society.

## KEYWORDS

*Conference, Meetings, Congress, Association, Destination, Business Events, Business Travel, Incentive Travel, Hospitality, Tourism*

## Introduction

The Business of Events: Global Destination Report 2022 (<https://daviestanner.com/>) seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of the global business events sector. Existing literature abounds with analysis of the impact of business events, not just as economic generators but as catalysts for knowledge creation, networking, and policy breakthroughs (Davidson & Cope, 2003; Getz & Page, 2016). The report underscores the economic aspects of this industry, shedding light on funding, volume, and subsequent impacts of operative elements. Yet, it goes further by focusing on regions, key players, and the significance of legacy and recognition.

Such a granular perspective substantiates the need for stewardship and responsiveness to global trends by event organisers vis-a-vis municipal, regional, national tourism and business departments. This stance aligns with Chalip (2004), who proposed that leveraging the potential of events demands an inclusive, strategic approach going beyond mere economic indicators. Furthermore, a study by Zavattaro, Morgan, and Risto (2014) substantiates that successful destination branding considers both societal legacy and governmental recognition.

In line with the managerial sphere, the report is pertinent for decision-makers in both private and public sector organisations involved in event planning and tourism. It provides key insights into operational shifts, aiding the refinement of strategies towards optimisation. The managerial relevance is evident in the emphasis on legacy and recognition, providing a lens into the perceptual shift of governments, thus granting stakeholders the needed information to engage more deliberately and strategically with government entities.

This report raises the following research questions:

1. How has the perception of the business events sector in terms of funding, volume, legacy, and recognition evolved since 2019, particularly amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How are the regional differences in the business events sector informing strategic decision-making and planning within organisations?
3. In what ways is legacy being utilised to harness socio-economic benefits from business events?
4. What impact does government recognition of business events departments have on the funding and event volume within the sector?

## Sampling and Data Collection

During the period 22nd September 2022 – 21st October 2022, a sample of 1,032 organisations within the global business events sector were contacted via an online platform. These organisations were a combination of city, regional and national convention bureaux and destination marketing organisations that specifically market, promote and attract business events to their destinations. Those organisations surveyed came from the following geographic regions:

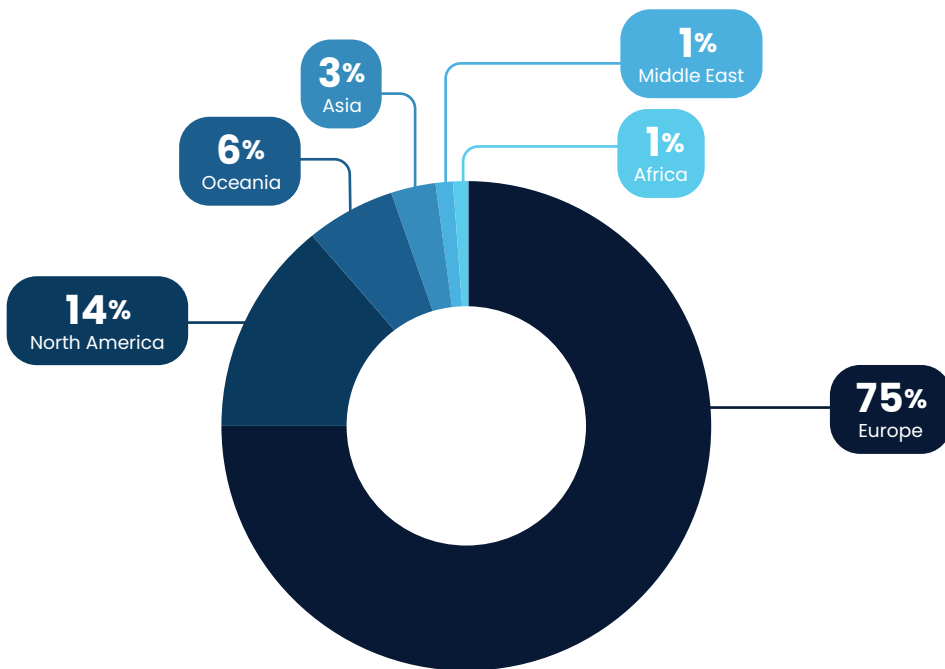


Figure 1: Geographic origin of the surveyed organisations

A total of eight individual questions were posed, primarily with a selection of multiple-choice responses. All data gathered was anonymous and confidential to ensure that respondents felt at ease with providing honest opinions and were, therefore, more likely to participate and provide accurate responses.

- 1 Where in the world are you located?
- 2 What is the size of your team that works directly across business events?
- 3 As a Convention/Visitors Bureau or agency, which official department do you report to?
- 4 Compared to 2019 have you seen a change in this year's central core funding i.e., budget and spending levels?
- 5 Compared to 2019 figures have you seen a change in the volume of your business events this year?
- 6 Compared to 2019 have you seen a change in your bid or subvention fund this year?
- 7 How important is legacy or future building when bringing a major event to your destination?
- 8 Has your profile (about how well known or regarded by your city, regional or national government) as a business events department/team changed since 2019?

*Table 1: Survey questions*

Approximately 75% of all respondents were based in and operated out of Europe. This is quite disproportionate to the overall data sample, which was split across all the major global regions. One reason for this might be that our own network, and that of many of our industry partners that supported the distribution of the survey, is more weighted towards Europe and therefore, the reach and response rate reflected this.

The balance of responses was spread across other regions, including North America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Oceania. The majority of respondents to the survey were based in smaller teams, with a total of 73% being positioned in a team of 10 or fewer and the biggest proportion being a team of 3-5. Given the value of business events to a city, it could be argued that this is a relatively small team.

## Key Findings

### Reporting

Whilst the below graph shows that 56% of respondents reported to the Department of Tourism, this number increases slightly when looking at the responses provided under "other" three, where an additional four people specified this department as the one they report to, bringing this proportion even higher to 62%.

### **Funding**

If looking at the figures in terms of whether more respondents saw an increase or a decrease in their central core funding from 2019 to 2022, then a larger proportion saw a decrease (42%). However, if we look at if the funding had decreased, then the minority would say it had, as 52% said they had seen an “increase” or it had “stayed the same”. Interestingly, when we look at this data split by location, there is not one location where the majority of respondents saw their core funding decrease since 2019. However, there is quite an even split between those who responded “increase/stay the same”, “increase”, and “decrease”, except for North America and Oceania, both of which saw the majority (73% for North America and 100% for Oceania) of its respondents seeing an “increase” or “stayed the same”.

### **Volume**

A significantly larger proportion of respondents have seen a decrease in the volume of their international business in 2022 compared with 2019 (particularly in Oceania, North America, Europe and Asia). There have been more regional and national business events in 2022 compared to 2019 (particularly in the Middle East, Africa and Asia).

### **Subvention**

The majority of respondents stated that there has not been a change in their international, regional, national or overall bid or subvention fund since 2019. It should be noted that for this question, there was a high number of unsure respondents, so put “don’t know”.

### **Legacy**

The response to this was clear, with only 5% saying that legacy or future building when bringing a major event to their destination was “not very important”. Meaning that the remainder of respondents believed it was important, with the majority saying it was “very important” (62%).

### **Recognition of destination business events department / team**

In terms of the destination’s business events department/team profile and how it is regarded by their city, regional or national government, the majority of respondents saw that there had been an “increase” (54%) in this since 2019, with only 7% of the respondents indicating that it had decreased.

## **Conclusions**

By way of context, it is interesting to note that just over half (56%) of the respondents report to a domestic Department of Tourism, while the remaining 44% report to various other departments and

agencies. This underlines that on a global scale, the business events sector is widely viewed as part of the supposed 'visitor economy', with governments generally seeing the industry as part of the wider tourism mix.

Yet there is a clear sign that the role played by business events departments is being taken more seriously. Respondents reported that how they are regarded by their city, regional or national government had 'increased' (55%) since 2019. Seven per cent of the respondents indicated that it had decreased.

Funding for business events has long since been a talking point around the world. The recent volatility of the economic climate has cast a shadow over finances more generally, with many public bodies having to cut budgets and divert funds elsewhere.

According to the findings in this report, most responses (52%) suggest core funding remained the same or increased from 2019 to 2022. However, 42% of respondents have seen their central core funding decrease in 2022. The remaining 8% were unsure, possibly indicating that budget confirmation has been delayed.

On subvention funding, many respondents stated that there had not been a change in their international, regional, national or overall bid or subvention fund since 2019. However, several respondents (an average of 20% across all four of these categories) were unsure, responding 'don't know'. Broadly, this indicates that government (or budget setter) attitudes to business events are unchanged.

Compared to 2019, a significantly more significant proportion of respondents reported seeing a decrease in the volume of their international business in 2022. This is, in large part, a knock-on effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has interrupted association congress cycles, and the relative uncertainty has made some corporations reluctant to commit.

Some key markets, such as China, are still facing lockdowns and are therefore not travelling overseas presently. However, respondents report that there had been an increase in both regional and national business events. This will likely have been accelerated by the backlog of domestic events in the wake of the pandemic.

The legacy of events has been a key talking point in 2022 as destinations begin to harness the power of what they can bring. Some governments actively encourage their business event teams to court conferences and congresses that align with their own national policies. The net result is to improve society as well as its economy. This is particularly pertinent for business events in the fields of healthcare, science, green energy, and technology. It was an essential element to respondents, with the majority (96%) saying it was important (62% selected 'very important' while 34% selected 'somewhat important'). This left just 5% saying that it was 'not very important'.

The insights revealed in the report suggest intriguing avenues for academic exploration. Here are a few research directions that could deepen our understanding of the business events sector:

### **1. Comparative Analysis**

A comparative analysis of changes in ideation, planning, and execution of business events across geographically distinct regions would be valuable. This could delineate if varying cultural, political, and economic systems impact the success of these events.

### **2. Pandemic Impact**

Given the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, a time-series analysis comparing pre-pandemic and post-pandemic trends could explicate the sector's resilience, adaptation strategies, and the pandemic's lasting impacts.

### **3. Organisational Structures and Funding**

It would be interesting to investigate how different organisational structures and reporting hierarchies within the sector influence funding and support for business events. Here, a focus could be placed on public and private entities, their designated reporting departments, and possible funding dynamics.

### **4. Legacy Measures and Outcomes**

A deeper dive into how the business events sector uses legacy strategies to ensure continuity and impact would shed light on the strategic importance of such measures. This could entail qualitative studies, surveys, case studies, etc.

### **5. Stakeholder Engagement**

As the report outlines a significant shift in government perceptions, it would be academically stimulating to explore this evolution, possibly surveying key stakeholders, influencers, and decision-makers involved in the process.

### **6. Sectorial Impacts on the Broader Economy**

Lastly, employing a macroeconomic lens, the research could address how fluctuations within the business events sector reverberate through the broader economy. An econometric modelling approach would be effective here.

Integrating these research directions can offer a more enriched understanding of the interplay between the business events sector, society, economy, and governments. This could ultimately contribute to advancing scholarship in this field.



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