

Public and private sector collaboration key to convention success



By working closely with the government and numerous enterprises, Barcelona has emerged as a leading international model for conventions

by Marc Rodriguez

According to a report by the ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), Barcelona topped the world rankings of cities that hosted the most international congresses and conventions throughout 2017. This important statistic, reflecting joint efforts and plenty of dedication, served to confirm Barcelona's need to maintain its highly fruitful collaborative model, based on public and private sector cooperation. It has proved to be a successful formula, and it is one that is being observed by cities around the world.

Through the private management of public facilities, major examples of public infrastructure can look to the strategy in order to be run more efficiently by optimising the use of taxes, social input and suppliers. That's where Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona (CCIB), one of the biggest convention centres in southern Europe, shines as a clear example of the model working successfully. For every euro invested in the centre's construction and maintenance, Barcelona's population has recovered 1.39 euros (AED5.89) in direct form and another 8.50 euros (AED36) in indirect ways, according to a 2017 study by Barcelona University.

The CCIB helps to decentralise the city's tourism by promoting a new business area of Barcelona that has undergone spectacular urban change. This new area, which features the Torre Glòries skyscraper, is a magnet for start-ups and companies from the technological sector. For example, Facebook has just announced that it plans to open an operational centre in Torre Glòries to

combat fake news on its pages. The success in attracting companies from this industry has led to Barcelona now ranking fifth in importance as a European technological hub, behind London, Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam, according to the Start-up Ecosystem Overview, drawn up by Mobile World Capital Barcelona.

Congresses also play a key role in combatting the seasonality of tourism, helping to ensure more even use of hotel facilities and city services. Knowledge-based tourism and leisure (which combines business with pleasure) are good ways of complementing holiday tourism, helping to redistribute visitor arrivals across the year. Most visitors and delegates attending congresses also seek out quality leisure, cultural and gastronomic activities, in turn helping to generate more skilled employment within the city.

It is important to remember that congress and convention centres operate within a

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framework of sectors affected by medium and long-term business cycles. This makes them genuine barometers when it comes to predicting future economic activity. This invaluable information is fundamental for public policymakers, because it can be used to anticipate and assess the need to introduce measures to combat such cycles.

BECOME A STRATEGIC AND SOCIAL PARTNER

Aside from hosting 122 events and attracting an impressive 476,910 delegates to Barcelona over the course of 2017, the CCIB also became one of the city's strategic partners. Through this association, the centre helped foster interaction within the health-care and biotechnological sectors, as well as the university community and the cultural sphere – all important aspects of the city. In addition, networking has played a vital role in building loyalty during the organisation of corporate and scientific events, thus in turn helping to attract talent to the city.

The social component is also important and the CCIB has incorporated social policies in its road map. Through the Barcelona Forum District Association (of which the CCIB is a co-founder member, together with local hotels and businesses), more than 421 people at risk of social exclusion have been able to find employment since 2011.

In addition, in its capacity as the CCIB's partner, the public administration receives income in the form of dividends that can be reinvested in improving the quality of life of citizens living and working in Barcelona. In short, this is a valid model that truly benefits everyone. ◦

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