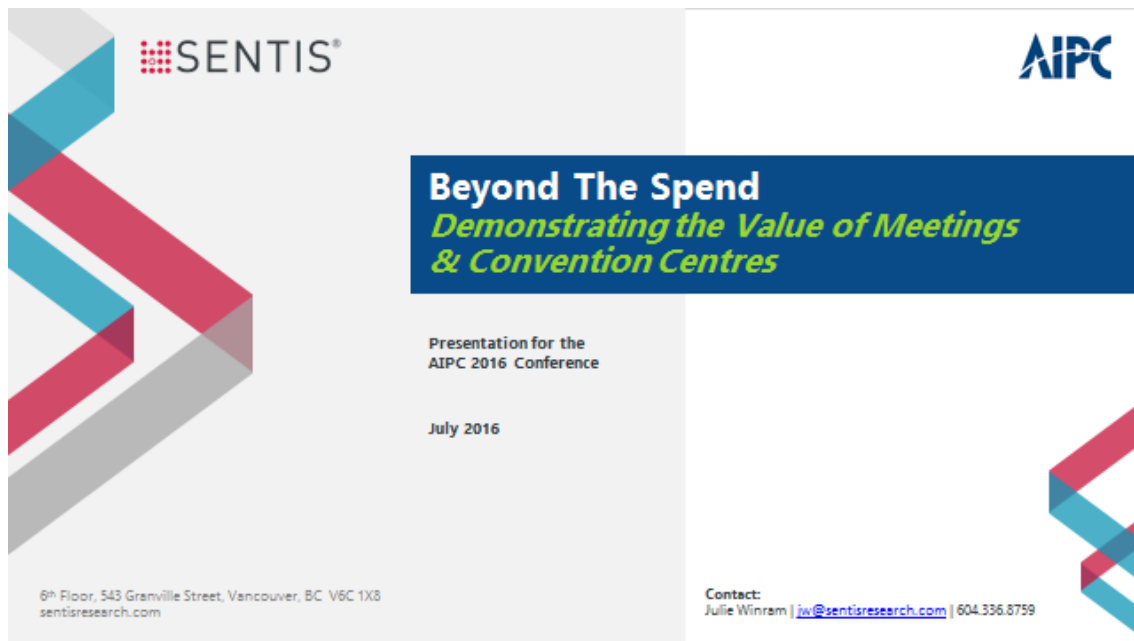


New AIPC Research Clarifies Attitudes, Misconceptions and Opportunities Amongst Residents



A recent research project carried out by AIPC has clearly put into focus a number of the key questions around how local residents regard centre-based meetings and conventions and the benefits they create for the community. At the same time, it has created a template for action by identifying misconceptions along with areas of opportunity for centre communications.

The survey, carried out by Sentis Market Research, was initially designed to explore the different values associated with meetings-related visitors as opposed to those on leisure travel in a series of cities where growing tourism impacts were seen as being a developing issue for both local government and residents. What it quickly revealed was that residents saw different types of values associated with each group – and not all was accurate!

The work was initially carried out in Barcelona, Amsterdam and Berlin with Sydney later added to incorporate a sample from a control destination where tourism impacts were not identified as a local issue. In fact, results across all destinations were remarkably similar and both benefits and concerns largely consistent.

What emerged as the key findings were the following;

1. Visitor impacts were not a particularly big issue amongst the broad cross-section of residents – suggesting that these concerns were in fact limited to a vocal minority and based on individual issues rather than a broad consensus.

2. However, the benefits associated with meetings and convention delegates were distinctly different, with leisure visitors associated almost entirely with spending-based benefits while those participating in meetings and events being seen to contribute to knowledge, business development, professional practices and other areas of broader community benefit.
3. At the same time, convention / exhibition delegates were significantly less likely to be associated with negative behaviours such as crowding and congestion, theft and vandalism, the environmental burden and disorderly behaviour.
4. Finally, respondents were twice as likely to believe that new investment to attract more visitors to their destination should be directed toward the meetings and conventions area rather than leisure tourism.

That's the good news. But there were also two other findings that clearly demonstrated we have a lot of work to do in order to capitalize on the opportunity for a more positive image.

The first was that while respondents felt that centers and the events they host created those broader output benefits, very few were clear as to what exactly these were. It is clear that there's a lot of work to be done in delivering information about the events we host to underline just what it is that they deliver and leave behind in our communities.

The second is even more important: with regard to the economic benefits associated with visitor spending, residents of all the surveyed communities had it completely backwards, believing that leisure visitors had higher levels of spending than delegates when in fact most studies have shown that per diem spending by delegates in most parts of the world where this has been looked at is at least 2-300% higher than for other types of visitors. This is a huge lost opportunity in the battle for community attention, and one that could be easily addressed by making sure economic impact information is credible and up to date and then using it more effectively in centre communications.

So now we know what they really think of us – and what kind of information would improve that opinion! That's a huge invitation to centres everywhere to shape a local advocacy program that could really make a difference in how residents – and the governments that represent them – see the work we do on their behalf.