“If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.”

African Proverb
Smartness in Conference ecosystem.
The case of AIESEC conferences.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

*Master of Science (MSc) in Hospitality and Tourism Management*

January 2019
Thessaloniki – Greece
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Abstract

The fundamental values of gathering, direct communication, networking and mutual exchange of ideas is widely identified since ancient times. Conferences, a sector of business tourism, encompass these values and involve delegates and all those actors that contribute to their organization, forming therefore the conference ecosystem. The epoch that we are unanimously passing now is characterized by Social Media conversations, user-generated content, remote control of life through mobile devices and dynamic interaction during the service production. The aforementioned are key factors that evolve tremendously the tourism services to targeted, efficient, context-based services. Passive receipt of a service is transformed to an interactive process between producers and consumers introducing therefore in the literature the term of “prosumer” (Xie et al, 2008).

Not all the conference stakeholders deliver a direct impact on the delegates experience, nevertheless, their contribution remains important. The conference represents a sub-sector of business tourism which subsequently faces changes to its structure, processes, service perception. The significant advances in technologies shape innovative ways of communication, cooperation, tasks completion, and consumers’ expectations.

The concept of smartness and the conference segment is extensively analyzed in the literature review since this dissertation aims to lay the reasonable ground on the concept of “Smart Conference ecosystem” with a case study of AIESEC conferences supported by professional aspect and consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the conference sector, while the second aims to conceptualize the smart conference. Considerably, the layout of the analysis demonstrates the design of research method conditions. The findings of the qualitative analysis are revealed in the following section. Ultimately, the closing section summarizes results and recommendations.

**Keywords**: Conference, Business Tourism, Ecosystem, Smartness, Smart Conference
Acknowledgment

This dissertation was the concluding part of the master’s degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. It enriched the author with invaluable knowledge, expertise, and extensive network. Two academic years of challenge, creativity, brainstorming, teamwork, and growth as a scientific researcher.

Several people supported me, and I am grateful for. First, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, for the remarks, the active engagement, the useful comments and his continuous effort to keep me in the right track towards this endeavor. In addition, I would like to thank all the selected participants in this research for their precious time and remarkable insights.

Conclusively, I must express my very profound gratitude to all those dearest people in my life, my parents and family, my lifelong friends and especially my fellow students Maria Vafeidou and Natalie Ferranti for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout the years of study and through the process of researching and producing this thesis and to Christos for believing in me for his continuous motivation, inspiration and understanding. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

Thank you!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Underneath the umbrella of smart destinations including smart cities, the integration and use of ICTs (Information Communication Technologies, network technologies, real-time awareness) re-engineer the tourism industry, sector of which is the business tourism and consequently the conference segment. Customers as well as specifically delegates of the 21st century are active rather than passive consumers of their services, who belong to a universal network. They are always “connected” plus they interact with each other and the service provider through social media and various platforms. The synthesis of this global connection and the unprecedented entry of ICT in consumers’ lives, allows them to draw highly personalized plans for their future travel and business experiences.

When it comes to the clients of the 21st century, the most considerable percentage and especially generation Y or the Millennials as they are more frequently mentioned, are keen on using their mobile devices to get useful information, rather than communicating with locals, so as to receive the appropriate and on-the-spot information for the destination they are about to explore. (Law et al. 2014, Koo et al. 2015, Werthner and Klein 1999).

A conference is an amalgam of those actors involved for its planning, organization, conduction and the participants who choose to attend it for specific reasons, including knowledge, exchange of opinions, networking, skills empowerment, discussion, etc. In this era of technological evolution, smartness introduces new ways of operations where business ecosystems are interconnected and agile and services are the results of co-creation between clients and service providers. The integration of smartness shapes a new era for the conference which will be analyzed in depth in the following chapters.
Chapter 2: Business Tourism – Conferences

2.1. Overview of the Business Tourism

Tourism industry involves many spheres and it can be segmented in various typologies based on type (heritage, rest, experience) purpose, income, characteristics, location preference etc. Some indicative tourism forms are:

✓ Ecotourism,
✓ Sport tourism
✓ Ski tourism
✓ Cultural tourism
✓ Agritourism
✓ Religious tourism,
✓ LGBT (“Pink”) Tourism
✓ Grey tourism
✓ Golf Tourism,
✓ Bicycle Tourism
✓ Urban Tourism
✓ Heritage tourism
✓ Medical tourism
✓ Educational tourism
✓ Dark tourism

Segmenting it by product there is mass tourism and special interest tourism which involves group or individual tours by people who wish to develop certain interests and visit sites and places connected with a specific subject. ¹ When it comes to travel purpose tourism is segmented to business and leisure tourism.

¹ Source World Tourism Organisation (WTO) 1985
This section aims to elaborate on a specific segment of business tourism, conferences, thus the author acknowledged the importance of a brief description of what is business tourism and its contribution on a global scale. Rob Davidson attempted in his book in 1994 to define business tourism as follows: “Business tourism is concerned with people traveling for purposes related to their work. As such it represents one of the oldest forms of tourism.”

It is very frequent to combine business with leisure, thus people who travel to a destination for a conference, meeting, partnership launch or trade fair can meanwhile explore the place during the free time or extend the trip for leisure purposes. Davidson (1994) pointed out that: “Business tourism can involve a substantial leisure element.” Conference delegates, a visitor to trade fairs and independent business travelers can also visit local restaurants and places of entertainments, do sightseeing tours at the end of their working day. It gives delegates or colleagues the opportunity to unwind together and to get to know each other in a less formal way. Especially, those people who do not include traveling in their main priorities, find the motivation to visit a place when it is connected with their business goals and plans. Additionally, according to Barkley study, Millennials tend to plan their next travel experience when a special occasion occurs, i.e. outdoor activity, friends and relatives’ special days, events, etc.

Business travel focuses in particular on the movement of business traveler from point A to point B. In the same manner, it engages also those people who make a day trip for business purposes and therefore they cannot be counted as true tourists since they do not stay necessarily away from home for at least one night (John Swarbrooke and Susan Horner, 2001).

Some historical moments that prove the origins of business travel and tourism are the great empires of Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, the medieval trade fairs as well as the Silk Routes and many more. According to the Events Industry Council’s (EIC) first Global Economic Significance of Business Events study show the business events industry injects
more than $1.5 trillion into the global economy in 2017. This number reflects on financial flow towards planning, producing, attending and hosting business events, which are defined as “a gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of four hours in a contracted venue,” and include meetings, conferences, conventions, exhibitions, and incentive travel.

As shown in the figure, Western Europe contributed $266 billion. The report also found that Asia was the largest region in terms of business event participants, representing nearly one-third of 1.5 billion total participants worldwide. Western Europe ranked second with almost 30 percent, followed by North America with nearly 22 percent of all attendees. 

![Business Events Direct Spending by Region](https://www.pcma.org/eic-study-business-events-industry-global-gdp-impact-hits-1-5t/)

Business travel and tourism are comprised of many different fields that mainly can be divided into:

- Meetings, conferences, and conventions
- Exhibitions
- Training courses
- Product launches
- Incentive Travel

Source: Events Industry Council: Oxford Economics
As it is depicted in figure 2 business travel and tourism involves also those people who decide to study or work in a different place from their home area. In the following section, the author focuses on the analysis of conferences a significant subsector of business tourism.

2.2. Conferences- A sub-sector of Business Tourism

The conference industry is a recent and evolving industry that faces tremendous growths. Its origins belong to Europe and North America. Due to its recent appearance as an established industry, it lacks specific features such as precise terminology, well-established definitions and education path that properly teach its clear routes and processes. It is accepted though, that conferences are undoubtedly an important sector of the business tourism industry. (Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016)

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4 Source: John Swarbrooke and Susan Horner
There are many types of conferences, however, all of them have one common goal which is to bring people together physically or virtually in a sense of exchanging ideas, knowledge, experience, information. Further to the discussion of the topics, an appropriate consolidation of the information brings valuable and useful results, such as business performance, scientific features, bonded human relationships, etc., for the future. Notwithstanding the plethora of numerous terms used (convention, congress, meeting, incentive, summit) to describe the variety of the formats and different structures of the event, their core parts and objectives remain identical.

It would be impossible to refer to “Conference industry” a couple of decades before since it has a very recent origin. However, human's need of coming together for a common reason, an annual celebration is recognized since the very first civilizations.

In Ancient Greece, the “Ancient Agora”5 was the heart for the public life and the meeting place throughout the history of the city of Athens. It was the place where everything was happening including social, political, economic, cultural and religious topics. People could come together and discuss diverse topics.

A fulfilled terminology towards meetings was delivered in 1993 under the Auspice of the Convention Liaison Council and the Joint Industry Council as the International Meetings Industry Glossary. 6

Few definitions from this glossary are below:

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6 Source https://insights.eventscountcouncil.org/Industry-glossary
Conference: Participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact, finding, problem-solving and consultation. An event used by any organization to meet and exchange views, convey a message, open a debate or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue. No tradition, continuity or timing is required to convene a conference. Conferences are usually of short duration with specific objectives and are generally on a smaller scale than congresses or conventions.

Convention: Gathering of delegates, representatives, and members of a membership or industry organization convened for a common purpose. Common features include educational sessions, committee meetings, social functions, and meetings to conduct the governance business of the organization. Conventions are typically recurring events with specific, established timing.

The conference is a project that involves many stakeholders, huge information flow and several tasks to be accomplished. The workload of these tasks is significantly reduced with the emergence of different software for conference management. Although project management techniques, new technologies, and the internet unleashed the power of connection and communication speeded up the routine workload, it is still the human factor and the synergies patterns among it that will bring a successful realization of a conference.

2.3. Conference processes before, during and after its realization

Exploring in detail, there are many aspects that should be taken into consideration when organizing a conference, including likewise legislative framework, guarantee agreements, health and safety management.

Rogers 1998 believes that: The more complex the event and the numbers involved in organizing it, the more the need for some form of critical path analysis, mapping out the sequence of events in a logical order and within a realistic time-frame. Apparently, conference management refers to techniques of project management. The organization of a conference involves processes namely pre-conference activities, on-site coordination, change management, and post-conference coordination.
The tasks of each phase of the conference are summarized below:

Tasks before

- Establish goals and objectives
- Target the population
- Design the program
- Select the speakers
- Create and track the budget
- Select location and venue
- Ensure accessibility and transportation
- Negotiate contracts
- Formulate committees
- Event marketing
- Hire subcontractors
- Engage sponsors
- Design food and beverage function
- Logistics
- Partners and their benefits proposals

Tasks during

- Activities involved
- Include move in/ move out
- Implement the plan
- Adapt to changes
- Coordinate various participants in the event
- Consolidate and coordinate conference proceedings

Tasks after

- Evaluation
- Feedback
- Future planning
These tasks are delegated to different people, companies, or organizations that form the stakeholders' cycle of a conference. Time management, effective communication, and real-time information are required in order to avoid delays in tasks and poor-quality servicing as well. D. Buhals and A.Amaranggana in 2015, summarized the significance of real-time information as stated below:

- **Before Trip**: To support planning phase by giving all the related real-time information based on user profiling in order to make a more informed decision;
- **During Trip**: Enhanced access to real-time information to assist tourists in exploring the destination, direct personalized service as well as real-time feedback loop; and
- **After Trip**: Prolonged engagement to relive experience as well as decent feedback system which allows tourist to review their holistic tourism experience.

Advancements in technologies and the internet enable organizations to excel in their services towards customers. At the same time, the interconnection of stakeholders in an ecosystem can be empowered tremendously with the use of ICTs. In the conference industry, social media enables meeting organizers to create online communities that generate meaningful conversation and interest in their events before/during/after a meeting (Sieburgh & Berkus, 2007).

In the case of conferences, before identifying the functions and processes that could be enhanced with the presences of technologies and smartness, it is important to discuss and segment the parties that are involved for their organization and implementation. In the following section, the author aims to conceptualize the potential conference ecosystem.

**2.4. The conference ecosystem**

The tourism industry is comprised of several stakeholders either discussing from a micro or macro perspective and they are committed to assisting the same end-customer, the tourist, by providing their services. The fact that tourism experiences are multidimensional in nature, various involvements along the trip (including before, during and after) could also affect overall tourism experiences (Stickdorn and Zehrer 2009). Zooming in to business
tourism, we reach conferences which are projects where many actors are involved. It is of paramount importance to divide each of those actors into relevant groups. The product in the case of conferences is the amalgam of all of the tangible and intangible elements that contribute towards their success (Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016). These stakeholders form an ecosystem where all parties come together for one common goal: To result into a successful conference, serve properly their common end-customer, the delegate.

Before analyzing the conference ecosystem, a discussion on a business ecosystem is prerequisite. Business ecosystem finds its roots in the idea of value networks (Normann and Ramirez, 1993). Ecosystems represent a group of organizations and companies, which simultaneously create value by combining their skills and assets (Eisenhardt and Galunic, 2000). A network of organizations — including suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, government agencies, and so on — involved in the delivery of a specific product or service through both competition and cooperation. The idea is that each entity in the ecosystem affects and is affected by the others, creating a constantly evolving relationship in which each entity must be flexible and adaptable in order to survive, as in a biological ecosystem. In a business ecosystem, inter-organizational networks consist of both collaborative and competitive relationships which result in a “coopetition” structure (Moore, 1993).

2.4.1. Conference Demand

Beginning with the demand side, a significant note is a difference between customer and consumer. John Swarbrooke and Susan Horner, 2001 highlight that customers can be companies, associations organizations, and sponsors that provide the funds.

Consequently, the customers are those people who become the attendees of the conference, they have actually traveled and consume these business and tourism services.

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7 Source: [https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/business-ecosystem.asp](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/business-ecosystem.asp)
Henceforth, an important stakeholder and actor of conferences are the delegates who receive the knowledge and the discussion during the event and the respective sponsors and associations that support and fund the conference.

According to Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016, there are four main types of initiators of demand as it is illustrated in figure 4. The initiators who “buy” the conference product can vary from corporate to public and governmental sectors, and from alliances and non-governmental organizations to educational institutions and numerous associations.

![Figure 4: Initiators of demand](image)

Another segmentation is the generation category where Severt, Fjelstul, & Breiter, in 2009 argued that conference attendees often extend multi-generations: “Baby Boomers,” who were born between 1946 and 1964; “Generation X,” whose members were born between 1965 and 1980; and “Generation Y,” whose members were born between 1979 and 2000. Fenich et al. (2011-2012) described that Generation X and Y are more technology familiar, expecting ICTs to be integrated during the whole conference and these generations are considered to be the main segmentations of today’s convention attendees, with Millennials (born between 1977-2000) being 2.5x more likely to be an early adopter of technology.⁹

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⁸ Source: Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016
⁹ Source: Futurecast Research
Needless to say, that social media are important tools of communication and marketing, therefore delegates generated content plays an invaluable role in the conference's success and future conduction. Social media are the number one channel of broadcasting real-time information and as S. Lee and C. H. Lee, 2014 discussed in their research, the most used social medium by the conference delegate was LinkedIn followed by Facebook and Twitter mostly for interaction, networking and business insights. Delegates' level of satisfaction with a conference usually depends on their response to a range of individual elements that have been 'packaged' together for their purchase, over which they have little control. (Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016)

Reflecting the above statement, in the era of unprecedented technological change, experiences and consumer power, to the same notion of tourists, delegates play an active role in the service delivery and their needs and wants are actively shared not only as feedback after the conference but also before and during the conference. Today's convention attendees demand technological advances (Fenich, Scott-Halsell, & Hashimoto, 2011; Lee, Park, & Khan, 2012) and business travelers including conference delegates bring various information and communication technology (ICT) devices. Yoo and Chon (2008), believe that attendees develop an attitude towards the conference based on their experience and evaluation of particular attributes applied by the event organizers. Deciding to attend a conference means that a person either wishes to gain and extend knowledge on a particular topic, or to network with people sharing the same interest or even reunite to an alumni event of an association.

According to Shinyong Jung & Sarah Tanford, some of the most important attributes that delegates take into consideration when attending a conference are the following:

- Networking opportunities
- Education through sessions and workshops
- Conference physical setting and environment, accessibility and sense of convenience, service quality and staff
- Destination Image

Apparently, the expectation of today's delegates towards a conference is relatively high comparing to a few decades ago. The technology advancement and the global awareness of things make the new generation of attendees technology savvy, a push factor that re-shapes the conference industry.

Further to the aforementioned facts, delegates are the end-consumers of the package called “conference”. Except for their power to affect the conference realization, there are still groups of actors who work together to provide high levels of satisfaction and quality servicing throughout the event.

2.4.2. Conference Supply

In the supply side, many actors from different aspects contribute in their own way in order to bring the conference into a reality. Further to the delegation that attends and participates in various workshops and sessions of the conference, some important stakeholders are the companies and the associations that deal with delegates servicing and with the overall conference management. Following the accessibility and transportation partners, including all the means and last but not least the conference venue. Transit zone refers to the stakeholders of the conference that provide transportation. Transport providers carry conference delegates to and from the conference location. Destination zone or more precisely conference zone includes many stakeholders. First, the accommodation providers where delegates' rooms are allocated. Usual is the case where the venue and accommodation are in one hotel's premises. Another important stakeholder is the venue that hosts a conference. Except for the convention facilities of hotels, there are also the purpose-built conference centers. Other places that could be a venue hosting a conference
are museums, universities, theatres and even cruise ships. Further, is the importance of catering and food and beverage supply in conferences. (fig.5)

Quality of meals, coffee breaks, and gala dinners are prerequisite to ensure satisfaction of delegates during the conference. During this time, usually, attendees tend to communicate, entertain themselves interact and do networking. Technical services, namely expertise in audio-visual services, sound system, and supply of necessary equipment are major factors towards the implementation of a conference.

Either they are leased by the hired conference organizers or the venue itself is equipped, it is significant that these services are coordinated according to the conference's guidelines and plans.

Facilitators, partners, speakers, sponsors, and various in-kind suppliers provide their own significant effort, services, knowledge, and products respectively for one common goal, make the conference a reality.

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10 Source: John Swarbrooke and Susan Horne, 2001
Intermediaries are divided into those who work on behalf of the supply team of conferences and those on behalf of demand-side figure 6 (Tony Rogers and Rob Davidson, 2016). It is common though, that some associations, organizations, and companies form their teams and committees that oversee the organizing processes of their own events.

![Diagram of Supply and Demand Intermediaries]

Exploring further the actors that are involved in conference realization, someone can easily identify numerous stakeholders. It is worth mentioning that the demand side of conferences can change from hairdresser seminars to medical conferences and from a volunteer organization to business product launch meeting, thus the target group of potential delegation differs. To the same degree, the physical setting is changing, thus the context of a conference, however, the actors that form the conference ecosystem in total remain the same.
In figure 7, the author attempted to present the stakeholders that are involved to realize a conference. The effective co-operation and collaboration of the above stakeholders go hand in hand with the successful conduction of the conference including delegates thus end-consumer’s satisfaction. The Typology of Supply Chain Management in a 4C approach where 4C stands for the communicative, coordinated, collaborative, and co-optitive, comprises both inbound and outbound operations at various stages (Miguel A. Lijeune Navena Yakova ,2005).

![Conference ecosystem](image)

According to Iansiti and Levien (2004) there are two important ingredients that contribute to the success of business ecosystems:

- First, business ecosystems are characterized by a large number of interconnected actor’s dependent on each other for their mutual performance. Each actor is specialized in a specific activity and it is the collective efforts of many actors that

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11Source: The author
12Source: [https://hbr.org/2004/03/strategy-as-ecology](https://hbr.org/2004/03/strategy-as-ecology)
constitute value, while efforts individually have no value outside the collective effort.

- A second vital element is a need for a "keystone" organization whose role is to ensure that each member of the ecosystem remains in good health.

Conferences as projects rely on strict timelines and deadlines, concrete tasks and goals and effective communication. The patterns of synergies among stakeholders can be enhanced when the information generated is handled properly.
Chapter 3: Conceptualizing Smart Conference

3.1. Introduction to smartness and the concept of smart tourism

The concept of "smartness" refers to the integration of a network of organizations and smart features that engage in interoperable and interconnected systems to simplify and automate daily activities and to add value throughout the ecosystem for all stakeholders (Buhalís and Amaranggana, 2015; Leonidis et al. 2013). According to Townsend (2013), smartness finds its origin in the 90s and it posited the integration of ICT to improve processes and interconnect sub-systems. From the organizational and business perspective, smartness empowers the systems and processes through which an organization operates, creates, values, cooperates with the stakeholders and conducts customer relationship management.

When it comes to the tourism industry, tourism products are mostly services that are characterized by perishability, inseparability, and intangibility and thus tourism services are characterized by high perceived risk. The information should be received to the customer in a timely manner, with personalized attributes covering all the needs before, during and after the travel experience. Smartness has also been reviewed and discussed for its use and importance in the tourism industry. Smart tourism is a term used to highlight how the emergence of new technologies transform the way that tourism industry operates. It refers to ICTS that can manage a massive amount of information and bring as an output value-creation of services for the tourists.

The direction of Europe towards smartness focuses more on innovation, competitiveness and developing smart end-user applications that support enriched tourism experiences using already existing data combined and processed in new ways (Lamsfus et al., Boes et al., 2015). In the same manner, an example of these directions can be embedded in the project of European capital of innovations. This prize recognizes and advances innovation
in European cities. For 2018, Athens is nominated with this prize as a city which can best demonstrate the ability to improve citizens lives. Particularly this award recognizes:

✓ contribution to open and dynamic innovation ecosystems
✓ involvement of citizens in governance and decision-making
✓ innovation to improve the resiliency and sustainability of their cities

As far as Greece is concerned, in figure 8 it is ranked 24th among 136 countries, according to travel and tourism competitiveness index and in ICT readiness sub-index it took the 51st place. This pillar measures how developed is the ICT infrastructure in a country as well as how extensively it is used by individuals and businesses in the country.

![Figure 8 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness index](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/prizes/capital_en#what)

13Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/prizes/capital_en#what
Although Smart Tourism does not have a universally accepted definition, it is commonly agreed that it refers to the use of the internet, mobile devices, communication systems and augmented reality aiming to serve the stakeholders of the tourism industry by providing innovative services and shared information. (Hunter, Chung, Gretzel & Koo, 2015; TU&Liu, 2014)

Tourists are the end-users of different services during their travel experiences. When smartness emerges and connects creative people dynamically who share their knowledge to the system that is well supported by decent learning environment (Buhalıs and Amaranggana 2014), then the possibility to deliver prosperous services is in significantly higher levels comparing to the traditional way of serving customers.

At this point, it is important to highlight that in Smart tourism the human interaction, empowerment of experiences and services co-creation is a major factor that characterizes it. In an effort to comprehend smart tourism an attempt by Ulrike Gretzel, Hannes Werthner, Chulmo Koo and Carlos Lamsfus in 2015 to define Smart Tourism includes the below statement:

“Tourism supported by integrated efforts at a destination to collect and aggregate data derived from physical infrastructure, social connections, government/organizational sources and human bodies/minds in combination with the use of advanced technologies to transform that data into on-site experiences and business value-propositions with a clear focus on efficiency, sustainability and experience enrichment.”

![Figure 9: Components and layers of Smart Tourism](image)

Figure 9: Components and layers of Smart Tourism

16 Source: (Ulrike Gretzel, Marianna Sigala, Zheng Xiang, & Chulmo Koo, 2015)
Zhu et al. (2014) think that smart tourism benefit tourism industry by providing convenient access to information for both tourism organizations and tourists through integrated and centralized data platform. If, for instance, a guest in a hotel will be offered a dynamic interactive platform upon check-in, that could be a mobile application, where much personal information regarding dietary restrictions, restaurant reservations could be entered, then automatically the hotel achieves a significant level of personalizing the services for each of its guests. At the same time, real-time promotions of different outlets in the hotel could be received instantly by the guests who can plan accordingly their trip.

When data is collected in a manner of aggregating them towards enhanced services then they provide ground to form a smart network that in a smart destination offer augmented and personalized smart experiences to customers (Fig.8).

The concept of traveling abroad either for business or leisure purposes is characterized by specific, usually, limited timeframes. Therefore, through the data generation, someone can easily have for example access to a real-time estimated transportation arrival, possible traffic conditions, location-based offers according to profile’s shared attributes.

A case from a real-life resort where the real-time information plays a paramount role is the below: A guest of a 5* resort was staying in a specific room category and by updating himself via mobile internet he noticed the announcement of the special offer that the resort uploaded a few hours earlier (not to say minutes) and in no time, he came to the reception and arranged the next nights of his holidays to spend them in a higher category suite. In this case, there was a mutual goal realization:

1. The guest who brought added value to him and his family for the rest of his holiday with special price.
2. The resort who achieved flash sale, meaning that it sold an unsold room in a special price, in no time, it covered an occupancy gap and last but not least it generated revenue.
Several times there is a confusion in the concept of smart tourism which can be wrongly considered and relied only on the emergence of mobile applications, free-Wi-Fi etc. However, Smart-Tourism is a social phenomenon that combines the use of new ICTs in such a way that transforms the tourism experience (Hunter et al, 2015). Buhalís and Amaranggana (2014) point out that the part of the smart experience focuses on personalization, contextualization and real-time information awareness. The internet and cloud computing bring timeless speed for information sharing, a fact that enables businesses to operate in a more interactive environment where data can be interchangeably used to bring value-based services.

3.2. Importance of Big Data management and interoperability of conference ecosystem

A conference is part of learning, and in the experience, economy learning shall be interactive, the knowledge should be co-created, and networking is always part of it. People will never stop gathering, it is part of human being, no technology will replace this need. However, the evolution that is already observed in the conference industry recognized the empowerment of conference organization and experience with the assistance of ICT, mobile applications, social media platform, and the internet. The opportunity to manage effectively the wide flow of big data can reveal invaluable information. The rising use of #, hashtags can provide massive information towards the way that time is spent in a specific location at a specific time allowing companies and organizations push information and offerings of their service that match accordingly to the theme and topic of the received information.

Apparently, there is so much information out there that can be capitalized in favor of tourism professionals along with a better and agile system of services offered. People produce millions of data every day through interactive and social platforms.
Except for consumers, tourists and organizations, data can be also used interchangeably by different objects that are connected with each other, a concept known as the Internet of Things. The basic idea of the IoT is the pervasive presence around us of a variety of objects tags, sensors, actuators, mobile devices, etc., which are able to interact with each other and cooperate with their neighboring objects to achieve common goals (Want et al. 2015). Hence, the IoT enables the development of various platforms able to transmit a wide range and various types of data using participatory sensing systems (Gutiérrez, et al. 2013). IoT functions into three different layers including smart systems (data acquisition); connectivity (data transmission); and analytics (actuate other IoT objects) (Chuah, 2014).

Successful realization of services is directly proportional to effective data and information management. The internet of things and the new types of products that are revolutionized by information technology, alter industries’ structures, reshape their boundaries and expose companies to new competitive opportunities and threats. (Michael E. Porter and James E. Heppelmann, 2014).

Therefore, the more the destinations, companies, and organizations will use new technology infrastructure as a basic element in their marketing strategy and in services implementation, the more they will attract, engage and interact with potential customers that will maximize their revenues and their profitability ratio.

Companies have already integrated technologies for their daily operations among different departments. However, great importance lies in the necessity to develop bridging software between the partners of the companies aiming to interchange data, get real-time updates and manage the operations and synergies accordingly.

Buhalis and Leung,2018 in figure 10 provide a sense of how most of the information that is produced around from different sources, can be strategically structured addressing the goals and objectives of the respective organizations involved. Technologies in form of sensors, operation systems, business software, and various applications, which are
everywhere assist different parties to fulfill business tasks and satisfy needs, can be categorized in the network layer. These data along with the contextual external information are mixed together and create big data for purposeful utilization among actors of the ecosystem.

To maintain and create a comprehensive and real-time hospitality big data depository, actors of the ecosystem should always update their business information to the cloud. Further to the second cloud layer, organizations can take advantage of the aforementioned big data as a valuable tool for strategic thinking, decision making, competitive steps taking and holistic business and environmental awareness receiving.

Figure 10: Architecture of Smart Hospitality Ecosystem

3.3. Smartness in conference ecosystem

Acknowledging, the emphasis of business ecosystem towards the vision of implementation of a common goal, value creation to customers and teamwork, recent studies in literature discuss the emergence of smartness and how it can empower this connection in favor of each stakeholder. In the case of a conference, many actors are coming together that form the conference ecosystem. Each of the stakeholders has different requirements and smartness can change their functions in a way that will bring benefits and create value. Information and communication flow plays a major role in organizing a successful conference ecosystem.

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37 Smart Hospitality- Interconnectivity and Interoperability towards an ecosystem (Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018)
conference since many processes should be fulfilled in a timely manner. The conference ecosystem is formed by direct and indirect actors that aims to serve the delegates and create value for all the stakeholders involved.

Intermediaries and management teams of a conference are committed to deal with many tasks. They are the brain of a conference since many routine tasks such as finding speakers, defining the goals of the conference, marketing and delegates coordination are, among others, processes that should be completed before the starting date of a conference. Agile management through technology utilization favors the hospitality industry which is highly interconnected industry and the stakeholders are numerous. (Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018). By the same token, smartness enables the interconnectivity and interoperability of partners in a business ecosystem (Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018). An example of interoperable actors is booking.com, while customer except for accommodation searching, is re-directed to in-destination transportation platform Mozio.com. By simply identifying the needs of a customer, ICT and Internet enables tourists to have access to wide options of both accommodation and transportation companies. On the other hand, it is observed that generations Y and Z express a strong desire to protect their personal information while surfing on the Internet. Thus, the concern around digital footprints makes young people increasingly self-censoring, risk-averse and socially rigid. Scientific American, states that social connection is not only the most essential part of being human, it is also a key ingredient in happiness and health. Supplementary to that statement, Jeff Fromm in 2017 wrote that Millennials can take the great adventures, chart the less traveled paths and embrace the risks they wish to pursue, therefore service providers should initially begin with understanding the need of these people for co-creation, co-participation, and experience innovation as demanded by Millennial consumers.

Smartness is a concept and a great tool for marketing, growth in sales, services personalization and interconnection of different parties in organizations unless it invades people's privacy. In May, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) went into effect and among others, it protects user-generated data such as social media posts. The failure in complying with this regulation can cost an organization or a company 4% of the annual revenue.

3.4. Upcoming Trends and future of Conferences

The digital revolution and use of social media are a key channel for sharing messaging are reinforcing the value of engagement, discussion, conversation, and networking – all areas where meetings and events triumphs. (Tony Wagner, Vice President, Americas, CWT Meetings & Events, 2018)

According to CWT Meetings and Events report, it seems the terrorist attacks in the UK, France, Spain, and Germany in 2016 and 2017 have not significantly dampened demand in London, Paris, Barcelona, and Berlin, while safety and security are always a priority when planning any meetings and conferences.

Further, this report emphasized the cost-saving and customization that is gained through online booking of group transportation for the attendees of a conference while at the same time these online booking tools can be fully integrated with conference's registration platform.

In addition, Chargifi, a cloud management platform is an intelligent wireless charging that keeps guests of hotels or attendees of a conference connected. It also adds value to companies and organization by providing user behavior insights that can increase satisfaction and revenue streams and last but not least is blends these customer data providing as an output enhanced customer experience.¹⁹

¹⁹ Source: https://chargifi.com/
As far as venues are concerned, ivvy.com is a disruptive platform where buyers of a conference can search online venues and group transfers. Virtual venue inspections give to potential buyers the opportunity to explore rooms by way of 360-degree. It also gives the sense of being there a tool that helps conference organizers take grounded decisions concerning the seating in the venue.\(^\text{20}\)

As per the virtual and augmented reality, the new trend called “phygital”, a hybrid of a digital and physical meeting has a positive impact in memorizing and increase delegates' attendance. Cecile Drevillon, Operations Support & Technology Director, France, CWT Meetings & Events said that “Virtual or hybrid meetings are a way to share a message with greater audiences, plus take advantage of reduced travel and optimize time”.

Additionally, augmented reality (AR) could be used for way-finding at larger congresses, where attendees need to find their way around an extensive venue.\(^\text{21}\)

Intro, CamCard, Contxts, Spotcard are some application that enables real-time professional data sharing among the attendees of a conference. Delegates have access to the LinkedIn or other professional profiles of their fellows and can instantly get connected. In the same manner, an application such as Group.me enables effective communication of the several groups that are formed during the conference sessions.\(^\text{22}\)

Apparently, mobile devices have a lot of capabilities that augment people's lives and personalization and customization of services become prerequisite that brings competitive advantage to organizations.

The future of events and conferences focuses on evolving delegates experiences, including less time-consuming processes, cost-effective services, smart engagement and networking, interactive meals, co-created workshops and sessions.

\(^\text{20}\) Source: https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/hotel-technology-trends
\(^\text{21}\) Source: CWT Meetings and Events report
\(^\text{22}\) Source: https://www.practicalecommerce.com/16-Mobile-Apps-for-Networking-Events
Chapter 4: Research in AIESEC Organization

4.1. Overview of AIESEC

AIESEC is a global, non-political, independent, not-for-profit organization managed by students and fresh graduates of institutions of higher education. Its members are interested in world issues, leadership, and management. AIESEC was founded in 1948 in 7 countries in Europe by Jean Choplin (France), Bengt Sjøstrand (Sweden), and Dr. Albert Kaltenthaler (Germany). AIESEC was originally an acronym for Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales. AIESEC is no longer used as an acronym but simply as the name of the organization. Members of AIESEC are known as "AIESECers." It is a global network of leaders under 30 years old, thus Millennials, who strive to better themselves and deal with issues such as leadership development, cultural understanding and experiential learning. It is the biggest student-run organization and its vision embraces the peace and fulfillment of humankind potential. It is an NGO with no dependency to any other entity but in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), affiliated with the UN DPI, member of ICMYO, and is recognized by UNESCO. Some of the most important facts are depicted in figure 12.

![Global Facts of AIESEC](https://aiesec.org/about-us)

Source: [https://aiesec.org/about-us](https://aiesec.org/about-us)
AIESEC's core values include the following:

- activating leadership
- demonstrating integrity
- living diversity
- enjoying participation
- striving for excellence
- acting sustainably.

It is an organization that operates by young people for young people, the opportunities of being a member and engage in tasks in various local or national committees are numerous and except for that young people can live the below experiences through AIESEC:

![Image of AIESEC Experience](https://aiesec.gr/about-us/)

Figure 12 AIESEC Experience

In terms of conferences, AIESEC organizes approximately 350-400 conferences annually. In Greece, AIESEC was founded in 1956 and today it has a presence in 7 cities and 9 universities across the country. It is made up of 300 active members and over the last 3 years has affected more than 3000 young people. In 2018, AIESEC Greece's actions were integrated into the Greek Government's Voluntary Evaluation Report of the General Secretariat of the Government, for their contribution to the achievement of 2030 Agenda.  

24 Source: [https://aiesec.gr/about-us/](https://aiesec.gr/about-us/)
The unique characteristic in AIESEC is the specific timeframe for the term of every executive board of local committees and national committee respectively. Each year new teams are formed that lead the entity, enabling young people to explore their leadership potential and gain valuable knowledge through an active role within the organization. Each local committee performs recruitment processes, engaging new members in their entities to take a leadership role. It is one of the AIESEC goals to engage and educate members towards its vision and mission, by activating their leadership potential.

The strategy of AIESEC in general and in Greece as well among others includes the planning, organization, and realization of national and international conferences. In general, AIESEC Conferences are events in which AIESEC members meet physically for several days in order to get to know each other, receive and provide education and training, interact with partners and socialize. HeADCo (Hellenic AIESEC Development Conference) is a four-day conference, where AIESECers from all parts of Greece are becoming one, interacting and discussing how to make the society better through intercultural exchanges. Interactive workshops from major partner companies, as well as speeches from AIESECers from other countries, take place during the conference and fill the experience with important knowledge.25

Concluding, it must be acknowledged that in AIESEC transition of the knowledge from term to term is conducted internally within its members, and conference management, coordination, and organization could not be an exception.

4.2. Research Question

The objective of this thesis is to explore the potential improvements and empowerment that smartness can bring to the conference ecosystem and which functions of every actor of a conference ecosystem smartness and technology can enhance. The author proposes a comprehensive smart conference ecosystem with the notion of interconnectivity and

interoperability of conference stakeholders. The main questions lie in the current way of synergies applied in offering services from each stakeholder and how it is developed with the concepts of smart interconnectivity. The author was also interested in finding out the advantages and disadvantages of potential integration of cutting-edge technologies in the processes of conference and whether there is a clear value-creation for each actor of the conference ecosystem when embracing the concept of smartness. The research question states: "What is the current status of collaboration among conference stakeholders and how can it be excelled with the notion of smartness?"

Until now the already existing studies are focused to the notion of smart tourism, smart business ecosystem, interconnectivity and interoperability of hospitality ecosystem, smart cities and destinations. Smartness as a concept due to its recency is reviewed and conceptualized for its importance from various authors and researchers. Relatively limited is the research upon implementation of smartness in conference ecosystem. Due to this reason, the selected topic seizes the absence of general information and academic research on the concept of smart ecosystems in the field of conference sector.

4.3. The methodology of the Research Approach

The aim of the thesis is filtered through the research strategy and design. (Bryman A, 2012). The research questions of this dissertation are better traced on the grounds of qualitative, inductive research, intending to provide new insights for the pilot concept of smart conference ecosystem. In general, tourism is a social science and is linked with the high level of interaction among people, therefore favors qualitative research (Saunders., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2009).

The basic characteristic of the inductive method of research is that it develops an argument (in this case: the formation of the Smart Conference Ecosystem) after data collection and does not start with a pre-determined theory. Inductive reasoning is based on learning from experience.
The characteristic in qualitative methods is that they provide in-depth knowledge about the perspectives of people in real-life conditions using multiple sources of evidence namely secondary and primary data (Yin, 2011). Additionally, the dissertation's research methodology and design were based on an exploratory real-world single case study, AIESEC Conference, with face-to-face and online interviews. Case study, as a strategy is an empirical investigation about real conditions settings, that aims to generate rich understanding about a phenomenon not clearly conceivable (Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A., 2009).

More specifically, data collection was achieved with structured interviews and the instrument of a questionnaire, that was applied to current and past key persons in the management team of conferences in AIESEC. As a student-run organization and selected case study AIESEC will provide insights on “How the members get stuff done internally?” in order to organize a conference. Thus, a professional perspective in the field of conference organizing was also prerequisite for a complete research approach. The advantage of a structured interview is that the predetermined set and order of questions manages to aspire identical interview incentives for respondents' and aggregate their responses without deviations (Bryman, A., 2012).

Last but not least, a wide range of secondary academic literature was selected with the intention to provide the theoretical framework concerning fields of smartness, business ecosystem, smart tourism and conference sector along with information about features in AIESEC.

4.4. The rationale of Research instrument & reasoning of the research sample

The framework of the dissertation is a blending of grounded theoretical literature, on-desk research, and primary research with the method of a unique case-study analysis (users) supported by professional aspect with interviews and questionnaire. Further to that, the author is alumna in AIESEC, a fact that enabled her not only to have a clear understanding of the selected case study but also to approach the current and Alumni network.

More specifically, the purposive selection of case study enabled a detailed examination addressed to generation Y, global network and conference organizing of AIESEC.
The intention was to explore the following aspects:

- Explore whether stakeholders (supply and conference management team) related to AIESEC Conference organization have the potential to develop the basis of smart conference ecosystem
- Estimate the potential of AIESEC to organize a conference in an interoperable and interconnected environment
- Identify whether the current conference “product” of AIESEC has processes and patterns associated with smartness that enable collaboration in real-time with an enhanced network
- Get professional insights on what is implemented in conference and events organizing and the smartness awareness

Proceeding with the measuring of instruments, the information gathered from interviews will serve as a qualitative ground for inquiry. Supportive data referring to the tools that are used will be presented with the authorization of President of AIESEC Greece 2018-2019. A relatively small number of responses has the benefit of manual handling and coding in a simple software i.e. Microsoft Excel. Eventually, the collection of findings will be analyzed as the last step and in all conditions attempted to secure validity and reliability of outcomes.

The author has gathered in total 15 interviews that come from purposive, non-probability sampling while these are applied to qualitative research and case studies (Bryman, A., 2012). The sample is comprised of members and alumni of AIESEC and conference and events organizing professionals and is representative for its population with final response rate around 55,55%. Although AIESEC involves many tasks and processes that are delegated to its members in order to organize the conference, the reason for conducting also the interviews with people with events and conference organization specification lies on receiving the professional aspect towards the research question.

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26 15 Out of 27
Generally, the author's network was used to collect the necessary information for interview participants in AIESEC, networking in Philoxenia Fair 2018 for the professional conference organizers and the Internet. The next step after the aggregation of information concerning telephone numbers, e-mail addresses of the population, followed the approaching of AIESEC representatives with telephone calls and e-mails. The content of the e-mail included the interview questionnaire and an accompanying paragraph with an explanation about the researcher's identity and the reason for research. Afterwards, in cases of an affirmative response from participants, an appointment for a face-to-face interview or online interviews with the help of doodle to detect the matching time and date of both parties (interviewer and interviewee) was arranged. Transcription of responses was manual.

4.5. Limitations

As a greatest limitation and continuum challenge for this dissertation is the multitasking environment from the author's part since the combination of the dissertation and work subsequently reduced the time for research. Due to this fact, the timeframe of analysis was purposely, mainly conducted during the winter period, and during Christmas holidays where the author had days off, but unfortunately coincided with the absence for most respondents. However, this time-space served for reviewing carefully and comprehend in-depth once more the secondary academic literature. On the other hand, the familiarity of the author with the organization selected for the case, enabled her to come in touch with key persons in a time-effective way. Moreover, it resulted in an extended timeframe for interview conducting, namely from 6/12/18 until 8/1/2019. Another constraint but at the same time motivating factor that already has been noted associates with, still, relatively insufficient academic research for the term of a smart conference.
5.1. Report and Overview of Findings and Results

Supplementary to the literature review and on-desk research, primary research was also conducted. The desirable objective of current chapter is to report the findings, examine and evaluate whether traces of smartness are integrated to conferences that are conducted in AIESEC organization while presenting and reviewing also the professional aspect from event and conference organizers. Focusing on the research sample, 15 interviews were conducted in total by current and Alumni members of AIESEC organization and professionals in the fields of conference and events organizing. Below are presented the primary data research conditions and the characteristics of interviewees in table 1:

- Sample of population: 1 current member of AIESEC in Greece (President of the national entity), 8 alumni in AIESEC and 5 professionals in conference & event organizing and 1 volunteer in TEDx event organization
- Sampling Method: Purposively selected sample
- Gathering method: Personal Structured interview face-to-face, online and via telephone with the questionnaire
- Location of conducted research: On-site of the company, Skype, in Thessaloniki area and via phone and Internet
- Research Period: During the timeframe: 6/12/2018-8/01/2019

The author created a specific interview path in an attempt to reach in a rational definition of smartness in conference ecosystem connecting both the responses and the extensive literature review which defined conference ecosystem and the notion of smartness, therefore real case scenario and literature.
The analysis was fulfilled by the following the below steps of qualitative research:

Figure 14 Overview of Qualitative Analysis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>Role in conference organizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dafne Faneromenou</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Members Committee President 2018-2019 in AIESEC Greece (Country Manager), overall responsible for the strategy and implementation of national conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lina Zia</td>
<td>Compliance Officer in Mediterranean Shipping Company</td>
<td>President of the conference committee at WeGrow 2013 (international conference for executive boards of local committees of AIESEC, held in Greece)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dimitris Paliouras</td>
<td>Executive business coordinator at Global Events</td>
<td>Professional Conference Organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sissi Lygnou</td>
<td>CEO AFEA Travel &amp; Congress Services</td>
<td>Professional Conference Organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dimitris Mavroudis</td>
<td>Front End Developer in Movvin</td>
<td>National Marketing Director and technical support in AIESEC Greece in 2015-2016. Responsible for the national conference of AIESEC Greece in 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Danae Matakou</td>
<td>Project Manager at Think Global School and in various company as exchange program project manager</td>
<td>Conference manager in national level in Greece (4 conferences in total in AIESEC). Responsible for organizing international conferences AEGEE and ESTEC and the Job fair for career days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kostapanos Milaresis</td>
<td>Founder of Ethelon organization</td>
<td>Volunteers coordinator at TEDx Athens, and curator at TEDx AUEB. National trainer in AIESEC Serbia and in various conference projects as part of conference organizing team. Support events and conferences through Ethelon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alexandre Egger</td>
<td>Business Developer - Artion Conferences and Events</td>
<td>Professional Conference Organizer- Expanding activities out of Greece at Artion Conferences and Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vasiliki Ziaka</td>
<td>Project Manager IT, Roche Diagnostics</td>
<td>Members committee president in AIESEC Greece (country manager) 2016-2017, Overall responsible for conferences' execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Petros Stratis</td>
<td>Founder of Easy conferences</td>
<td>Professional Conference Organizer for Academic Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Giannis Christidis</td>
<td>Credit Cards Product Manager, Eurobank Ergasias SA</td>
<td>In AIESEC: - Agenda team and responsible for session delivery - Head organizer of smaller conference - Chair during the conference responsible before and during the conference of the teams engaged with the conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Renata Pylarinou</td>
<td>Project Manager &amp; Sales freelancer at Upwork</td>
<td>Members committee president (country manager 2015-2016), Conference manager for national conferences in AIESEC 2013-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Oraianthi Toumazatou</td>
<td>Localization Coordinator, Google Ireland</td>
<td>In AIESEC conferences participated as a delegate, as part of the organizing committee (twice), as a speaker, and as a chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Manos Zacharakis</td>
<td>Regional Transportation Management System Master Trainer</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; Africa in DHL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Maria Karyda</td>
<td>Pricing Analyst</td>
<td>Ex TEDx Curator, TEDx University of Macedonia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

The purpose of first and second questions of the interview was to identify the profile of the respondents along with their involvement in AIESEC organization when addressed to members and alumni. Professionals, instead, analyzed in-depth their role in conference organizing. To begin with, the majority of the respondents related to AIESEC are identified and were involved in AIESEC conferences organizing in a form of:

1. overall responsibility and strategy of conference planning as national presidents (Members Committee presidents) respondents, Nr.1,9,12
2. Logistics management, the presidency, and event coordination, organizing committee
3. Conference management respondents, Nr 6,12
4. Agenda and content management, head of smaller conferences and chair position in the conference
5. Special events management, study tour coordination and delegates servicing

At the same time professionals, and more specifically the conference organizers provided the core products of their business which mostly refers to medical and academic conferences, respondents 3 and 10 respectively. An important fact to highlight is the foundation of Ethelon organization which was an initiative of respondent nr.7 after the end of his AIESEC experience. An organization which offers numerous volunteerism opportunities, from societal issues to events and conference organizing. 

As shown in table 1, current occupation of AIESEC alumni is in fields different from conference organizing, however, during their interviews, they stressed the insights as former conference organizers from their personal perspective throughout their various roles.

Continuing the interview questions, the author aimed to identify the stakeholders of the conference ecosystem and the processes. Majority of stakeholders that are illustrated in figure 16 are involved throughout all the stages, namely pre-during and post-conference. Almost all respondents mentioned the same stakeholders including the professional conference organizers, while the extra points of the latter are depicted in yellow shades in figure 16.

Even if all the stakeholders do not have direct access to the delegates experience, they all play a key significant role in conference realization. This point is well understood by the
When we had a PanHellenic psychiatric conference to organize in Kos, where there was no accessibility, we practically spotted the needs, discussed upon them with airline companies in order to raise charter flights 2 from Athens and one from Thessaloniki, coordination of road transfer in order to bring delegates and speakers to the venue and hotel of the conference”.

The internal conference organizing team in AIESEC and the Professional conference organizers respectively, coordinate various functions and processes. These processes, among others will be achieved only if the stakeholders can be well-informed, interconnected, properly communicated. The external stakeholders (transportation, venue, sponsors, partners, freelancers) are mostly contacted and communicated via phone, email or physical meeting with proposals according to major responses and a reference of “organized supplier management system” from the professional conference organizer.

For contents and proper agenda flow, feedback from delegates is essential in order to create tailor made conference. When it comes to transportation, venue and accommodation, real-time information sharing regarding updates of participation, timeline and necessary infrastructure will determine the effective coordination. In addition, the respondents highlighted, that handling the procurement, in-kinds and sponsorship needs require awareness of past practices in specific conferences, current needs according to level of participation in the upcoming conferences and well-defined partnership proposal towards existing and potential partners and sponsors. Especially, most of the respondents believe that content stakeholders i.e. chair, speakers, facilitators, delegates, external partners for workshops, should be totally aligned with the principles and objectives of the conferences that they are about to take part in.

The main processes in conference organization are summarized in figure 17. They can be split into three categories content, logistics and delegates. The yellow block refers to the extra points that were stressed from professional conference organizers as abstracts, scientific part and budget play significant in every conference, either it is organized by an
NGO which cares about the reserves for sustainability, or a company that cares about its financial stability.

Questions to be answered in conference organizing, as discussed with respondents can be: “Do we have a similar template for the power points? Do we include time space for the feedback process? How is the registration of delegates going? How will the delegates be separated among different parallel sessions? Did we align the venue with our needs? Are the plenaries enough? Are partners informed about their date of participation? Do we know their content? Are there changes in the sessions? In terms of logistics and suppliers did the facilitators communicate their logistics needs to the organizing committee? Is everything in order with our transportation partners and the venue? We track the progress of sponsorships of in-kind supplies”
"Technology can enable real-time updates for all participants (conference team, delegates, venue, speakers etc.) regarding the agenda. E.g. completions of sessions, delays, special requests etc" is a phrase of a respondent that provides the space to continue further with the interviews discussion.

Some of the google sheets that are used for AIESEC Conference organizing are depicted below (after the access request and approval of the president of AIESEC in Greece):

![Feedback and Logistic Tracker for AIESEC Conference](image-url)
In figure 18, obviously there is an understanding of cloud computing where logistics needs are updated instantly, speakers and logistics organizers are interconnected in order to provide the desired sessions for the delegates. At the same time, awareness of personalization of experiences and consideration of delegates' insights can be identified in figure 19 in the conference agenda, while there are parallel sessions, with various topics and soft skills empowerment. Henceforth, besides the common plenaries' delegates can be firstly categorized by their level of engagement in the organization (new member, experienced) and by their expectation in the session deliverables.

In the three categories of conference processes, content-based, logistics-based and delegates based, the respondents discussed further with the author the necessity of collecting all the processes in one database. More specifically, this database would have inputs inserted by the completion of processes i.e. Agenda, Allocation of sessions and
speakers, coffee-breaks, delegates participation, venue allocation, timeline of transportation, logistics needs, registration, documents collection, partnership contracts, budgeting, availability of partner hotels, excursions and study-tours booked etc. A former conference manager in AIESEC conference shared in detail the scenario where:

“A technologically empowered conference ecosystem and the use of it to fullest potential and capacity and various apps, even building a conference system you eliminate the budget behind it and the timeline required behind it, you can have all the data aggregated and immediately go and update the other areas that it corresponds with.” Aiming to understand, why technology and smartness is important, how it is implemented and how it could be involved in conferences, the author firstly identified which facts define a successful conference.

Therefore, proceeding to the next group of questions, the respondents were asked to recognize the ingredients that determine success in conferences and to point out the ICTs and technologies used for their functions. A common attribute of all respondents from AIESEC organization for a successful conference is effective communication. An example of external communication as said by a respondent states: “External communication means a continuous update of registration process which should be directly and always communicated to the accommodation provider.” In figure 16, the author presents the summary of the responses for this question. The connection with the notion of smartness starts to come into reality at this stage of the interview path, while main facts that define successful conference according to respondents encompass the information sharing, the active engagement of delegates and partners, the real-time resource planning and updates. Supplementary to the above, in figure 19, the orange blocks refer to the extra ingredients that professional conference organizers stressed for successful conference organization. It is worth mentioning that all the respondents from conference specification fields are clients oriented.
As technologies are one of the ingredients of conference success, moving to the next question the examples of technologies named by respondents are presented in figure 21. Respondents voiced the importance of managing the project on the cloud. The most useful tool was google package. In this manner, google drive where information is updated instantly regarding agenda, logistics tracking, delegates registration and insights sharing via google forms was highlighted by the respondents.
An opinion by a respondent from AIESEC conference organization: "the communication can be direct and fast between all stakeholders, for example in an international conference, we were able to communicate with delegates across various countries before the conference for things such as the location of the conference, how to arrive, visa issues, travel costs, who will be the speakers etc. so they had access to important information directly <<<...>>> many costs can be eliminated since many processes can be conducted via the internet. Regarding, social media and technology help to create a platform where their products and services can be promoted and bring added value back to their companies" is totally aligned with what professionals think about the value of technology and the art of engagement since they state that technology provides "Great value and visibility pre, during and post congress". Further to that, an example of crisis management which could be eliminated is the following "you are a speaker and you need to receive an instant update, or you need to know the direct time to attend a session that is starting shortly. The most panicking thing is to run across the venue trying to find a key person. The other part is that technology in a form of
application can coordinate various stakeholders upon short-term deadline via a notification”.

Delegates by sharing profiles with special preferences and personal attributes in registration forms generate data that could improve their experience by providing real-time information about what knowledge they would like to gain, which particular soft-skills wish to empower, with whom they wish to stay, dietary restrictions etc. Through their engagement with ICTs, customers (delegates) could gain richer experience within their actual physical setting (Neuhofer et al., 2013).

As far as the project management software is concerned (Podio, asana, trello etc), it is very efficient and professional in usage however, all the stakeholders involved should be familiar to use them, in a more direct way: “…. rarely all people are familiar with these tools, when a technology is selected for management then all the team members should feel comfortable in using it with no exception". In addition, former AIESEC conference organizer clarified that software in such specification cannot be easily passed through volunteers who work in the organizations since it refers to an amateur way of organizing with a lot of great processes and strategies though. Limited is also the timeline (2-3 months) for conference planning, within which the assignment of roles and education of members is also included.

At this point it is worth the citation of “Hivebrite” by a respondent, an online dashboard where all the stakeholders are connected in one place, receiving updates, files, news and any information regarding the conference in a sense of online interoperable community; a notion supported both by Cheung and Lee, 2009 who believe that the emergence of Web 2.0 provides online social spaces, also refereed as virtual communities, where people can share general interests by easily creating and exchanging information; and Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018 who argued that the coordination of all the service providers in conference organizing can be facilitated through an interoperable “plug and play” system Engagement of partners and delegates via social media during the conference can bring
value both to the delegates and partners, a sentence well supported also by a respondent: "Having the ability to essentially connect all the different moving parts of a conference over multiple platforms such as twitter, Instagram even snapchat was invaluable because maybe you were in one session and you were able to see what is happening in another session, what was happening in the rest of the conference." And regarding partners and sponsors: "You were not just introduced with the random company, but you had the chance to go on the website or either see app. "Oh I know a word for our partners and sponsors". Debating polls via Twitter, interactive Q&A panels, special hashtags for engagement, networking are among others, the processes which are created with the help of social media.

When it comes to professional conference organizers, they mostly refer to online integrated platforms that serve the below processes:

- Online Registration & Abstract Software
- E-Newsletter Engines
- Barcodes System
- Online Apps & Voting Software
- Evaluation Software and others
- Websites of conferences
- Feedback of conferences

They also focused on software that bridge the above processes in one database that enable conference organizers to collect all the necessary information in one place. “From the registration of the delegate, the accommodation selection, abstract management from the judges, various reminders and notifications and billing<<......>> With this software we eliminate the human workload and the time required for these tasks. (Paliouras, Global Events). Easy conferences, a professional conference organizing company, has also an integrated one-stop shop software with many functions that unleash the power of technology-enhanced service. (Stratis, Easy Conferences) However, the latter called for attention the following issue: “ The big issue is that we are in the service industry, and by growing, there is jeopardy when making everything automatic to lose the personal contact
that can have as a penalty the loss of a job. There is no technology that will replace the physical gathering."

In the last parts of the interview, the degree of familiarity with the concept of smartness, the benefits of smartness, and what can smartness do for each actor of the conference ecosystem was questioned along with the changes that respondents would like to see in the conference organizing sector. Ten out of fifteen respondents answered that they were not familiar with the term and were not sure if they comprehend it with its correct meaning. However, the benefits of Smartness, from the aspect of AIESEC Conference organizers and the professional conferences organizer who were familiar with the notion of smartness are depicted in figure 22.

Figure 22 Benefits of smartness in conference ecosystem
Some mentioned concepts smart city, the use of IoT, cloud or Big Data in order to make cities more efficient. Impressive was the phrase of the respondent referring to the smartness understanding around people: “When realizing the potentiality of smartness then we could see a person handling the whole conference through a smart app or device. We live still in an analog world. Smartness is defined by the era we live. In this era, we refer to smartness in hospitality when we can book instantly our services via phone, in a few years this could evolve to inform a device for preferences achieving personalization.”

Providing though, the other side of smartness integration some respondents highlighted that: “We should remember that it is important when smartness is fully integrated into processes it can prevent the errors of human factor but in the same time without a human factor the service cannot be fulfilled”.

In terms of changes, respondents from professional sides referred to the issues that they face related to the law and bureaucracy: “There are some restrictions by law for example that conferences are not allowed to be conducted on summer period for medical conference <<…>>. In an island which is not the capital of a region, a conference cannot be realized in a 5-star hotel even if it is more cost effective.” (Paliouras, Global Events)

Therefore, with the smartness and interconnected network delegates shape their own path in the conference, partners can launch and brand their products in an interactive form, through an application or a dynamic session where delegates take active role. Speakers are aware of the vibes that the conference aims to generate, with real time information. Notwithstanding, external partners, suppliers, transportation, accommodation and venue are dynamically interconnected with the needs of the conference, since through cloud computing inter-organizational systems, the information is transmitted instantly, whether it refers to rooms availability, or refreshments orders, or transportation arrangement.

Last but not least, AIESEC respondents suggest that some changes that they would consider impactful in terms of conference organization improvement are:
• Global trends awareness
• AIESEC network approach for best case practices around the globe
• Access to the existing knowledge
• Platform creation for knowledge specialized on conference organizing
• Better research of needs that leads to better partnership proposals for sponsors and speakers
• Focus on delegates experience co-create sessions
• Take advantage of existing technology for interaction, virtual engagement
• Sustainability of knowledge produced
• Train people on project management systems
• Documentation of processes
• Live showcase materials for partners
• Transparency

5.2. Evaluation and Recommendation

In this section the author aims to demonstrate her contribution in the conceptualization of smart conference ecosystem after the careful critical literature review and detailed screening of interview insights. Her initial willingness to explore the scenario of a smart conference, where the functions will be implemented in an interconnected system relied on the existing literature that proposes the smart hospitality ecosystem which was conceptualized by (Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018). The necessity of a conference to become smart from the organizing part is identified by the fact that many stakeholders interact with each other, the conference is a project with demanding, tasks, deadlines, synergies that is divided in pre, during and post faces. During a conference, crisis management is important, while many changes occur, numerous external factors can affect the realization of a conference (i.e. absence of delegates, speakers, external context, terrorism, charter flights and accessibility, rooms availability, traffic, weather, suitable venue, percentage of participation etc)
In the literature, the author provided the definition of a conference as it is globally accepted. This definition focuses on the act, namely: “What we do in a conference?” a participatory meeting, “For what reason?”, meet and exchange ideas, convey a message, a for a predefined period. The author amplified this definition focusing on the organizing part of it and the notion of smartness, an embedder of inter-operable systems.

Smart conference ecosystem relies on the actions of:

- Empowerment of connection and cooperation among stakeholders
- Asynchronous and real-time tasks completion
- Personalization of delegates experience
- A win-win game

The above actions demand active involvement in the creation of conference big data repository where the interrelated stakeholders will have access to receive the appropriate information. Different systems need to come together in order to create this cloud storage both internally for the organizing team and with external accessibility features so as to update the external partners that are involve respectively. Some examples of the external accessible feature in a cloud system are: the transportation partner, will receive the information that is included in a tab of Conference timeline and dates, the accommodation partner will receive information that refers to the registration process and room plan prepared. In such an ecosystem, sharing of information across the network is important (Del Chiappa and Baggio, 2015). Second, the system needs to support collaboration so that decisions can be made more efficiently (Boes et al., 2016). Finally, all members of the ecosystem can participate anytime, from various locations (Vargas-Sanchez, 2016).

The concept of smart conference is depicted in figure 23 while the systems that should work together are illustrated in figure 24.
Delegates in conferences expect to receive 100% the knowledge that the conference content team promised to deliver. Further to that, the unique characteristic of conferences comparing to other methods of knowledge and information transition is the physical gathering, delegates expect from conferences to provide a space of reasonable and personalized networking, where information and ideas are exchanged.

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29 Source: The author
Interoperable system in a form of an interactive platform can provide instant feedback collection towards sessions and active participation in workshops design. Two actors of the ecosystem, delegates, and speakers can communicate in an online platform proposing their expectations in session delivery. This flow of data can remain as repository information on the cloud that enables conference management team to understand in-depth the desires and needs of delegates in-terms of content, their preferences, sessions, and workshops.

Likewise, the influence of technology advancements is highly reflected in the way that businesses operate. The conference supply chain is re-engineered with the emergence of smartness. The receipt of delegates' related data (registration, origin, preferences, occupation, dietary restrictions, personal information) can be automatically forwarded the conference management team via an online application form. This information is accordingly managed and passed to the related stakeholders in order to pre-define the services and in-kind needs. Specifically, hotel contractors through shared information can receive valuable data in terms of room allocation plan and occupancy management in dates of conference, arrival time of delegates and speakers, meal plan and dietary restrictions if applicable. A notice to the personal data protection and a box accordingly should be included in such forms of application in order to acquaint the delegate with the information that the declared information will be accordingly handled by other parties.

Effective interconnection prevents queue phenomena during check-in and registration process in hotels, the availability issues can be eliminated, and the conference management team is able to receive competitive accommodation rates as an early bird group booker. Through open online platform suppliers and procurement, stakeholders can have access to order information and needs of the conference, arranging efficiently their tasks that ensure supply delivery within the timeline and pricing frameworks. At the time of the conference, an easily accessible sub-ecosystem could provide information related to the conference venue, regarding the seating plan and the conference plenary allocation. The author relied on the statement: “Smart hospitality cannot be deployed unless there is strong
commitment on big data contribution from hospitality and tourism entities in the ecosystem. The big data contributed by each organisation is stored in a central database on the cloud. (Dimitrios Buhalis, Rosanna Leung, 2018), while same as in hospitality, conferences involve various actors.

Sponsors and partners gain empowered benefits through an interconnected network when supporting a conference. Their presence in the conference can be showcased instantly in various interoperable platforms as well as in social media of delegates profiles. Co-creating partners’ workshops can enhance the interest of delegates in participating actively, which enables the latter share their experience and accordingly enhance the brand of the first.

Ubiquitous connectedness and mobile devices allow data communication among various applications. Context in tourism is described as any relevant information that gives attributes to the current state of its users and therefore the context-based marketing engages the physical environment of tourists by co-creating their experiences considering the optimization of internal and external conditions introducing the term of “Contextual Information”. Social media and various applications provide real-time and interactive data sharing, where delegates can communicate. IoT and sensors installed in the conference venue can provide external information referring to traffic, weather and location-based marketing using beacons. management. Members of the hospitality ecosystem and sub-ecosystem can also make use of beacons to launch location-based marketing campaigns by actively pushing information to smart phone application to nearby customers rather than passively promote themselves via traditional mass media advertisement (Toedt, 2016). For instance, an application that connects registered delegates of a specific conference can be also accessible by local restaurants and entertainment company at the destination where the conference takes place. This interoperable network application enables nearby companies to create targeted offers and services to delegates.

Through technology, delegates can provide instant feedback after the session that gives the opportunity to the conference team to capture the drawbacks and work upon them in real-
time so as to avoid repeating them in next sessions. At the same time, the conference team can spot which are the best-case practices of each day in a conference. Information in an interoperable ecosystem is fast, concrete and direct from delegates to the conference organizers and vice versa.

The next level of an agenda is to become real-time enabling the change and time management, where all the information during a conference is updated. An interchangeable tool across the related stakeholders providing a concrete timeline and enabling the organizer to prepare the coffee breaks, gala nights and networking hubs in a timely manner. Finally, the knowledge can be saved in an online conference library, in which all the participant by entering specific filters could reach the speeches, sessions, workshops that require.

Attempting to comprehend the systems that work together, the author will firstly refer to the intranet platform that is used for the operations of AIESEC. EXPA is an inter-organizational system where all the member of AIESEC are globally interconnected, in a form of local committees, members and exchange participants. It is an interactive platform where exchange participants and open opportunities are coming together in one place aiming to match accordingly the job description and the available opportunities with the Curriculum Vitae of the potential intern. Below are some examples of the interfaces.  

30 Source: https://learnogip.weebly.com/expa.html
In such an intranet a feature of conference management is recommended by the author, where delegates and members will be interconnected, along with the speakers. Statistics and analytics of conferences will be saved online, knowledge and proceeding of the conference will be accessible to everyone and internal marketing will be achieved dynamically. In terms of external partners collaboration, data generated from AIESEC EXPA intranet can be handled in an intergenerational system. The result of interconnection of stakeholders in figure 23 implies connection of various systems that namely result on an aggregated cloud data regarding conference planning. These systems are intranets of conference organizers as the aforementioned example in AIESEC. The information which is
generated is filtered and is communicated with the extranets of the stakeholders. In figure 25, systems that are interconnected are categorized on those of the internal conference systems operated by the conference management team, collecting and generating data regarding the content, the logistic needs, the accommodation, marketing and transportation requirements with continuous financial management.

![Diagram of Smart Conference Systems]

Figure 25 Smart conference interconnected systems

Accommodation providers, transportation and suppliers operate their own software which through an extranet relate to the conference organizers, matching thus the supply and the demand parts of the conference organization in such a way that a cloud-based data is generated. During the conference, engagement of partners and delegates is applied while they are interconnected in various applications, namely conference applications, venue application, feedback forms, Q&A platforms, personalized session path selection, dynamic and long-lasting networking created physically and preserved virtually.
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Research

It is crystal clear, that conference industry passes a transitional phase in its structure where technology plays a major role, the conference “product” has been enriched and packaged and the service itself is a result of co-creation and customer-with-organization interaction. Information and communication technologies i.e. mobile applications, virtual reality, interactive chats, platforms etc., transform the conference distribution system to an interactive playground where conference organizers, partners, sponsors, and delegates co-exist, they have both the same amount of decision-making power.

Same as applied in other researches, the results of this survey be obviously filtered within a context of certain limitations. Due to the difficulties already explained in the methodology chapter, qualitative research refers to a unique case study, which is an NGO, that includes in its operations the conference organizing part. The survey addressed those actors involved in AIESEC for conference planning and execution, filled and supported also by the opinions of professional conference organizers. Hence, a future and more detailed research based in a larger sample and context could shed more light on the concept of Smart Conference where a holistic approach could be collected by the perception of the stakeholders involved namely: venues, suppliers, sponsors, transportation. See how they comprehend their partnership in conferences and how technology can empower them directly.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire: Smart Conference Ecosystem. How smartness enhances the conference ecosystem?

1. Please introduce briefly yourself. (Name, Profession, Company)

2. What is your current role in AIESEC and which is your role in the conference organization of AIESEC?

3. Conferences involve many stakeholders (hotel, venue, transportation, supply, sponsors, delegates, speakers etc). Which ingredients ensure successful cooperation? (e.g. information sharing, effective communication, timeline etc) Please elaborate on your answer.

4. Technologies changed the way that businesses and organizations operate and complete their tasks. Which ICTs (information communication technologies) do you use to excel functions at the time of conference planning and organizing? Please provide examples.

5. Which are the main stakeholders involved before the conference date, during and after and you conduct the connection with them? How technology, internet and social media can bring value to stakeholders?

6. Which are the main processes during the conference and how technology can engage different actors involved?

7. Are you familiar with the concept of smartness? If, yes please provide examples.

8. What would you change in the organizing process of a conference?
Appendix B

Responses

Daphne Faneromenou

1. Members Committee President (MCP) of AIESEC Greece 2018-2019
2. MCP gives the direction for all the processes and the decisions in order to let the entity grow both for the current term and in the future as well. The conference is part of this direction and is closely connected with the strategy and with all the things that we do. It is a project of excessive importance since we have the opportunity to gather twice a year altogether in one plenary. Education conference, it is more effective, and the impact is more sizable for the results by implementing the conference. Indeed, speaking with data, there are indicators demonstrating the growth of performance after attending a conference either due to the motivation that delegates get or due to sharing knowledge and interaction. This happens frequently in organizations that are a network in contrast to a company. The conference timeline is highly reliant to the timeline of our national strategy and the way that this non-profit organization operates. Conferences are strategically organized depending on when our active members should be educated when the strategy should be properly implemented so the timeframe is changed for example in order to catch the summer peak the conference is organized way in advance.

3. Effective communication Fast communication. I will refer primarily to the need for effective communication with the external stakeholders. For example, with sponsors, lack of communication or late information can lead to lack of in-kind products during the conference. In the case of in-kind, many people are involved. Especially conference manager who should track the whole process, the organizing committee member in charge of logistics who should determine the space to save them and allocate accordingly, the organizing committee delegates services member who should define in each coffee break which will be the quantity of those in-kinds will be served for consumption. Additionally, the salesperson is involved who should come in touch with the partners. Usually, the dates of our conference are before Easter or Christmas, so not in season and without clear expectations for the timeline and effective communication. Even when it comes to the receipt of the in-kind, it should be clear if they will be delivered, or the organizers should go. Information sharing: Inside the conference team. I will focus on the information received from the delegates. Mostly the communication between delegates and the conference. Before each conference, we create a google form with separate layers for experienced and new members with proposals of session topics in order to spot their needs. If these do not result to high participation or are ungiven to agenda manager in a timely manner...
in order to develop the session and to the organizing committee to organize the concept of the session such as decoration, logistics, etc. then we face lag in conference organizing. The main timeline is shared with me the organizing committee president, the conference manager, and the agenda manager. At that point the timeline is split among various tasks and responsibilities that create specific tasks and deadlines in each team. Clear goals and objectives.

4. Prior to the conference, we use the google forms for registration and then in excel files shared with everyone. There is an additional shared file among the management team for the content management and the agenda and afterward, we share files for the organizational part (room allocation, food restrictions, arrivals, etc.). So we take the information from the google forms and we choose the insights designed to meet the needs of the content and the logistics issues are managed by the organizing committee. In addition, we have a Facebook group where all the delegates are invited, and we operate it for the promotion of the conference and afterward, we can showcase our sponsors and partners as a virtual community. During the conference, we use this group to share updates regarding the session and any information regarding breakfast, etc. Every day we have also the feedback form to be submitted at the end of each day. We have a WhatsApp group for the conference team, and we chat at any time anywhere. Room allocation is managed by the OCVP delegates services. The allocation is forwarded to the venue. The way that venue is separated in various plenaries and meeting rooms for a session is equally crucial we meet in Mira Mare and due to off-season period, we use in our disposal the entire venue. At the end of a session, we provide a ppt with the orientation of the delegates. Workshops are already delegated in advance from the opening plenary through a shared google form where the delegates decide in which session they would like to take part. Feedback is always taken into consideration and if a change is required then we try to proceed amendments.

5. Referring to our partners, the vice president in the sector concerning business development has as a task among others to achieve sales in terms of employers branding. Companies come to our conferences and produce workshops because they receive value and become more visible and recognized to the audience as a role-model employer so as to target AIESECers for their future employees. They pay a fee to participate in our conferences. In our partnership portfolio, we include many activities, and one of those is the conference participation from their side because in this way our partners receive enhanced value. During the latter years in our conference sessions, we try to be absolutely demanding, and we are very careful with what is included in the signed contract because the content of the workshop should be aligned with the AIESEC and with the conference objective so as to keep the delegates engaged. Hence, the flow is as follows: The salesperson achieves to sell for example two spots for partners in the upcoming conference and then the content and the needs regarding the session is designed with the collaboration of the agenda manager. In addition, we communicate the collected needs of the delegates to the...
partners requesting specific skills to be covered such as knowledge on sales, customer experience and then by default we know what we ask when approaching the partners for conference workshops creation. The preparation of the conference starts one and a half months before its date. So the agenda manager and the business development vice president track the follow up regarding the partners’ workshops, setting deadlines, receiving draft power point, proceed with dry runs so we examine the content, we are aware of the workshop and then we share with our partners the conference agenda, they see the topic of the day and try to connect their workshop with the outline of the day. Partners are showcased in the Facebook group, and visibility is empowered. They receive the youth perspective from AIESEC, i.e. Vodafone brings specific hashtags to be used during the conference.

6. Before the conference I divide it to content and logistics sector meaning all the conference management regarding further to the agenda (tracked by organizing committee and conference manager). In the agenda I will check the progress with the sessions, do we have a similar template for the power points, do we include time space for the feedback process? How is the registration of delegates going? How will the delegates be separated among different parallel sessions? Did we align the venue with our needs? Are the plenaries enough? Are partners informed about their date of participation? Do we know their content? Are there changes in the sessions? In terms of logistics and suppliers, we check: Did the facilitators communicate their logistics needs to the organizing committee? Is everything in order with our transportation partners and the venue? Buses are booked one month in advance after the registration process and the regarding venue we have a yearly contract and we provide our specific dates one month in advance. We track the progress of sponsorships of in-kind supplies with a collaboration of organizing committee member responsible for external relations. It is important for our organization’s sustainability to prevent the project of a conference to be a loss in the budget, therefore tracking the sales for partners’ spots and external relations for in-kinds are the main priority. In addition, we speak with the chair and with the international facilitators to share the conference content and assist them with the visa our other issues. For all these processes we usable sharable worksheets in google drive and work on the cloud, and we communicate with the team via slack creating specific threads for the conferences, in this way the information is not lost (i.e. for session delays, an absence of delegates, in-kinds need).

7. Not sure

8. Preparation and empowered communication

Lina Zia

1. Compliance Officer in Mediterranean Shipping Company
2. Alumna. I was president of the conference committee at WeGrow 2013 (an international conference for executive boards of local committees of AIESEC, held in Greece), also logistics teamster in Euroco 2014 (an international conference for presidents of local committees of AIESEC). Event Coordinator in AIESEC 2013-2014

3. The first factor to ensure successful cooperation and communication of stakeholders in a conference is to have a clear plan with goals and vision between the members of the organizing committee. Every member should clarify its role in order to know with whom to cooperate, to be aware of his/her role and with whom to communicate. Afterward, the communication flow among various channels should be defined and clear i.e. who speaks with the venue, who is responsible for the sponsorships, who contact with the delegates to avoid any inconvenience and to set clear directions that do not blend with each other.

4. An information sharing system is very helpful so as to assist the members to know with whom to come in touch every moment, through internet, email, phone, application etc. eventora/Eventbrite/ google forms for delegate applications - Excel with timeline- tasks- goals per month/week/day before conference — Excel with analytical tasks — exact position for all-conference team during the conference.

5. Delegates, in-kind sponsors, funding sponsors, venues, transportation, local government, local administration Goal setting, market research, search database of previous partners, contact, track progress through the sales management system. Daily/weekly tracking and evaluation with Finance team is important. Of course, the internet, social media and technology play a major role in the improvement of a conference. An example that crosses my mind is that the communication can be direct and fast between all stakeholders, for example in international conferences that I participated in the organizing team, we were able to communicate with delegates across various countries before the conference for things such as the location of the conference, how to arrive, visa issues, travel costs, who will be the speakers, etc. so they had access to important information directly. Furthermore, many costs can be eliminated since many processes can be conducted via the internet. In addition, as far as sponsors are concerned, social media and technology help to create a platform where their products and services can be promoted and bring added value back to their companies. Last not least, after the conference, the internet prevents the knowledge loss, helps the sharing of the conference materials among speakers and delegates and of course any contact and networking that was created during the conference can be saved and kept afterward providing benefits to all.

6. Planning: shared tools through Google docs Sales: research through the internet, tools like sales management system to keep track During conference: make better presentations, have virtual delegates, share knowledge

7. Not sure
8. Foremost, I would take advantage of the global trends regarding conference management. I would approach AIESEC network for good case practices on conferences and generally, I would try to have access to the present knowledge, and if there is not, I would try to develop a platform that would specialize on knowledge upon conference management. Referring sponsorships, I would adopt better technology in order to do better research on our needs and afterward these needs to be communicated in a more targeted way to specific companies that match with the profile of the conference and the AIESEC Network, that can deliver value to the conference and at the same time receive value. To a great degree to that, I would try to communicate with organizations similar to AIESEC that organize conferences, so as to exchange knowledge, to achieve probable solutions in issues that we face during the conference organizing and generally create a synergy spirit and why not to organize in the future a common conference. Last but not least, I would ensure from the initial moment the conference to be built on the needs of the delegates and focus on their experience, if it is possible to co-create with them the session, to communicate their learning needs and their practical needs in order to achieve them. During the conference, to take advantage of every existing technology in order to create an interactive conference virtual speaker, delegates, virtual engagement and at the end of the conference to save the knowledge, share it with everyone and utilize it in future conferences, so sustainability of the knowledge.

Dimitris Paliouras

1. Executive business coordinator at Global Events

2. My name is Dimitris Paliouras. We are a group of three companies and in near future, we will be four. The first is Global Events the second refers to tourism, via Volta, and the third refers to lodge and apartments management in Greece, approximately 10-20 rooms. In January we will have a company anniversary from its establishment. It is considered to be one of the significant companies in Greece in this field, in terms of turnover and human resources. But I am not 100% sure. In Global events which is the associated company of your survey, I am a shareholder. My official title is Executive Business coordinator. I undertake every responsibility regarding the development of the company and since it is a family business I am in charge of financial management as well. In the office, we have four departments: The conference which includes the accounting and project managers. The tourism department divided into air ticketing and tourism lodging and accommodation. The graphic design department and last but not least a department for website support,.90% of our conferences are focused on the medical sector.

3. important fact is a correct communication and collaboration. In my case, I do not search for new partners as we have as a company in our portfolio specific partners. If there are three conferences at the same time and I have one partner for the audiovisual equipment, then we
ensure to have effective time management to satisfy all the customers. Information flow and a common goal.

4. Website support department online platforms, etc. One of the platforms are the websites of the conferences. The second platform refers to the feedback of conferences. The third platform refers to abstract management referring to submission and evaluation of the abstracts and last platform related to the registration process. However, in the last 4 months, we proceeded with a purchase of software that conducts all the above and bridges these processes, it is not a Greek but international software with a purpose to collect all the necessary information in one database. This software practically allows the online booking and online registration; a delegate will not need to go to the administration office of the conference to receive the badges.

5. The first feedback for the conference organizing is received by the customer that wants to make the conference. Afterward, I contact with a wide range of my partners and collaborators in order to delegate the tasks and ensure correct coordination for a successful result. An example to understand the importance of stakeholders is when we had a PanHellenic psychiatric conference to organize in Kos, where there was no accessibility, we practically spotted the needs, discussed upon them with airline companies in order to raise charter flights 2 from Athens and one from Thessaloniki, coordination of road transfer in order to bring delegates and speakers to the venue and hotel of the conference. The scientific segment of each conference is equally important. Last but not least the hospitality and tourism services tracking to ensure that delegates are served properly, the transfers are conducted in a timely manner, etc. We have the holistic management of the conference organization; few remain the parts that are managed exclusively by external partners e.g. Printing material. When it comes to customer servicing we have many cases but always try to do personalized services, there are cases where a loyal customer wishes to organize the same conference but in a different city and there is a customer that requests the same venue but with different content and needs. Thus, there is not a common practice for customers servicing. During the conference, there is a member from the organizing team that deals with the sponsors, one person for delegates servicing such as the change in air tickets, flight delays check in, etc.

6. As a company we try to evolve each year, as a result, we will have this new software that bridges many processes in one place and database. From the registration of the delegate, the accommodation selection, abstract management from the judges, the information management from sending the badges to various reminders and notification and of course the billing. With this software, we eliminate the human workload and the time required for these tasks. Next we receive a notification in a reporting framework with the information entered by the customers-delegates (e.g. paid registration, venue information etc). Additionally, we have created some applications for some conferences that provide notifications that now starts the opening
ceremony, the sessions timeline. Delegates receive the newsletter to be invited in such applications after their registration they receive the aforementioned real-time information. We have some more applications such as platform where delegates can submit online questions in real time in a session in contrast to the process of standing up receiving the microphone and address the question to the whole conference, for some people this is a demanding process. This is a mobile application that we run during the conference. In addition, our supplier consolidates all the discussions and the sessions during the conference which are processed, and he had created a platform in a form of conference library. Through this platform, delegates can search with the help of personalization filters, the speeches and the sessions that were insightful and interesting according to their needs. After the end of the conference, we have a form where delegates can vote the venue, our service, the topic of the conference, the speakers.

7. Not sure
8. There are some restrictions by law for example that conferences are unallowed to be conducted on summer period for the medical conference according to the national organization for medicines for medical conferences and Pharmacist's Supplying Cooperative of Attica (PRO.SY. F.A.P.E.) provide the direction with which the pharmaceutical companies as sponsors should be compiled. Another issue could be that in an island which is not the capital of a regional conference cannot be realized in a 5-star hotel even if it is more cost effective. Some issues that are defined by law refer to the distance of the conference venue and accommodation from the city center. In addition, in the free time of the delegates, when it exists, we cannot arrange a touristic package for entertainment purposes as a PCO such as an excursion. We can share ideas and experiences or suggestion.

**Sissi Lygnou**

1. CEO AFEA Travel & Congress Services
2. CEO AFEA Travel & Congress Services
3. Timeline, Event-Design, Team & Teamwork, Technology, Quality Suppliers & Partners, Planning & Strategy
5. PCO, Client, Organizing & Scientific Committee, Sponsors, Participants Via an organized supplier management system. Great value and visibility pre, during and post-congress. Technology, internet, social media are necessary tools
6. Registration & Accommodation Management, Scientific Management, Speaker Management, Sponsorship Management, Budgeting, and General Congress Operations, Marketing
7. Not sure. Smart Organizational Structure of a Congress Organization
8. Smart Organizational Structure of a Congress Organization
Dimitris Mavroudis

1. Front End Developer in Movvin

2. I am in the field of information technology working as a Web developer for the last 2 years. I have worked in the marketing sector and in AIESEC I was responsible for marketing and technical support. And finally, I was responsible for the national conference of AIESEC in 2015.

3. Ensure the connection between speakers and delegates, to be aware of what delegates want and why they participate. In the other side, there are the speakers who should be aware in advance what they should prepare and of course, the process of the preparation should be also tracked accordingly. It is very important to meet the needs in this way, because for example if speakers have prepared their material, they know what to say and how to proceed with the session then it is way easier to continue the process of organizing the conference. So for me, the core part is to ensure the delegates the speakers the venue and then all the other parts

4. The essential concept is that everything is operated on the cloud. The most important and flexible tools are the google drive and the office of Google, it helps you amend and update at any time the information keeping the related people updated. The prime tool was google sheets and excel where many tasks were written and delegated, and it was shared between conference organizers and speakers. So the information was received directly from agenda manager and the conference manager for issues regarding the logistical part. To be more specific, the agenda manager is aware of the venue. How many plenaries exist and any question that may arise can be solved through this shared file with the information included. Keeping the template of such a file allows the team to know at an exact time the needs, and everyone can adapt it to create their own file with specific deadlines and tasks for each sector (agenda, logistics, synergies between speakers and conferences). In google drive, someone could have access to presentation drafts and various other sources of information obtainable directly in every place any time. So if for example as an agenda manager I would make a change in the agenda, everyone will directly get informed about it since the information is transferred on the cloud, I add a note for the reason of change so that to resolve the queries that may occur. For delegates, we tried using Facebook as a tool of connection, but it was not so easy, because some of the delegates were checking the updates in a Facebook group but not all of them. Between speakers, we use group conversations on Facebook or WhatsApp and google drive.

5. The most important stakeholders are the speakers, and the delegates to further to that comes the venue because space plays a major role, we should know what we want to do in each space inside the venue and find the appropriate one because in other cases many issues pop up during the conference. In third place come the transportation, sponsors, partners, etc. they are the stakeholders that will enhance the conference financially. It depends on who is the supplier and in what stage is our partnership. We initially create a proposal with AIESEC numbers and
conference numerical details in terms of audience. There is a specific contact person that tracks the follow up with the partner. Mostly via a phone or in a formal sale through a meeting. Referring to in-kind, we knew the information for our needs from archives of our previous conferences, so we try achieving the same quantities either by the same sponsor or split it to more. It is important, though, to point out that there is a need with a specific framework in order the information of supply needs to be in detail saved and used for every future conference as an important tool. For sure the most important fact is the direct communication among various people. Applications such as Slack are extremely helpful for group communication. Communication is the most and most challenging part of the conference organizing especially when the time is limited. During the conference especially the information flow is significant, e.g. You are a speaker and you need to receive an instant update, or you need to know the direct time to attend a session that is starting shortly. The most panicking thing is to run across the venue trying to find a key person. The other part is that technology in a form of application can coordinate various stakeholders upon short-term deadline via a notification. Referring to the venue, it depends on how the venue conducts its operations which can be evolved with the technologies. The communication with the venue can be enhanced for example regarding with the allocation of rooms or other specific inquiries. There is also the need for human factor in any case.

6. We start with the agenda and the election of agenda managers. We set the goals and objectives. Conference manager ensures the booking of a venue in advance. Content and logistics are set to start in different and simultaneous time. They meet with each other they work in the same office. Marketing is conducted by the conference manager via organizing committee and delegates start to be approached since Facebook group is created. Logistics needs to start their operations. Delegates services for badges and the necessary information. Content creation speakers are working on their sessions and through delegates applications, they receive insights to adapt to the contents of the sessions. Throughout the time of the conference, the first thing is the check-in, registration, and venue familiarization. The case of unexpected events plays a major role, there is an example of long delay with a delegates’ bus when the venue was changed, the information was limited and the crisis management not so strong.

7. Yes. Since I work in a startup company in which aims to apply smartness in the field to bus transportation, smartness takes aside bureaucratical obstacles, human factor obstacles that can be evolved by technology. It is a shortcut, an easy way for information transmission, through a picture via a chat, or an infographic a fact that in a previous year someone should provide a description. In terms of interconnectivity, how the information is applied in summary and not from person to person. An example is the Amadeus software in the case of airlines, revenue management. Big data insights that can provide information on what a customer needs during a
specific timeframe, what price to set according to historical data, the receipt of credible forecasts. In conferences, smartness could enhance the collection of data, e.g. The delegates demographics, why they attend the conference. If someone will have well-structured questions, then he/she can see if the conference delivered what it promised. Information that can provide insights into the future conduction of the conference. And for sure the CRM with sponsors and the partnership data approach. A system where the information is directly addressed to the suitable each time stakeholder in real time. You can have a well-structured excel with all the data but when it is received directly by the responsible person, in a specific time and way then that is where smartness comes.

8. We live still in an analog world, venues and hotels are specific that delivered such an enhanced service. Smart products (watches, etc.) the IoT in our homes will change for sure the way that things happen. Smart venues. When realizing the potentiality of smartness then we could see a person handling the whole conference through a smart app or device e.g. The technical stuff. Smartness is defined by the era we live. Egg in this era we refer to smartness in hospitality for when we can book instantly our services via the phone, in a few years this could evolve to inform a device for preferences achieving personalization., in few years this could evolve to inform a device for preferences achieving personalization.

Danae Matakou

1. Project Manager at Think Global School and in various company as exchange program project manager

2. My name is Matakou Danai, I work in various companies from America that conduct exchange programs either for students or pupils. I am the project manager. In AIESEC I am alumni, I was in 2018 conference manager in national level. During that year I was responsible for two national conferences, Grow Conference, Initiate and Euro X Pro. Except for AIESEC, I was also responsible for organizing international conferences in other organizations namely AEGEE and ESTEC as well as the Job fair for career days.

3. The main ingredient for success is communication. Firstly, the communication between stakeholders e.g. with the hotel, the drivers, the national committee of AIESEC, the agenda manager etc and the communication between the team. When you organize a conference there are many tasks running at the same time so direct information with the respective stakeholder is important especially when the dates of the conference are close. An example of external communication is the continuous update of the registration process which should be directly and always communicated to the accommodation provider. In addition, in terms of internal communication, as far as marketing and communication strategy is concerned, should be totally aligned with the member responsible for the delegates services.
4. In conferences mainly we use Gmail and google drive and shared folders on the drive, thus a total use of google package. Which is a basic approach, I believe that there are many apps and technologies that could support more effectively the conference organization. For example, if all teams could use Trello or Asana for task management or Slack and even during the conference app as a walkie talkie, these would solve many problems. The thing is that rarely all people are familiar with these tools. Thus when technology is selected for management then all the team member should feel comfortable in using it with no exception. When a conference is long term project and the company responsible for that will work more than 6 months then it is easier to educate people on new tools, apps or technologies.

5. Category 1: Conference partners: These are mainly venue and transportation. Category 2: Sponsors for in-kinds supply and financial support. Category 3: Agenda manager and speakers (content of conference) Category 4: Delegates. Category 5: The team. Before the conference, the initial step is the team (form it, educate, delegate the tasks) and the partners, meaning to find the hotel, venue and the transportation. The connection with the partners can be through email, physical visit (if it is new) ad phone. With the team through meetings and any communication channel (slack, mail etc). Few days before the conference, a more active role have the speakers and delegates. It is time to deliver expectations. Since during that time contracts should have been already signed between sponsors, venue hotel and transportation so the focus lies on the formation of speakers and the needs of delegates. During the conference, there is continuous contact with the hotel, especially since delegates and speakers usually expect something. So the conference manager is the one that connects the organization with the space provider. There is equipment that can enhance the announcement or the real-time information during a conference in bigger conferences and professional ones however AIESEC lacks those and thus the announcement is made via Facebook and to ensure that all the delegates are informed the updates are also provided during the plenaries. After the conference, the most important stakeholder is the sponsor since the organization should provide the deliverables signed. The communication with partners and sponsors via phone and email and with delegates through local committees and social media. With speakers, through tracking tools to be aware also of the needs required for session delivering. Internet and social media enhance communication. It becomes effective and direct. Either for small updates e.g. the dinner will have a delay, the coordination via technology is a success instead of running to inform the delegates. Data changes a lot, there is crisis management so instant information is important. People do not take advantage of even 50% of the existing technology. Software for a budget, timeline, project management. Technology should be used in such a way to receive benefits and social media as well for marketing and enhance awareness.
6. When saying technology, apps and social media come to my mind. For example, in a session by creating an interactive session where delegates are asked which party they prefer in a form of a poll. This shows also that their opinion matters. E.g. through Twitter you keep delegates updated.

7. I am not totally knowledgeable on the concept of Smartness but I would say that I am familiar with it. The example that comes to my mind is a smart city, which is the concept of using IoT, cloud or Big Data in order to make cities more efficient. Using technologies in order to make cities smarter. Empowered conference ecosystem and real-time information: When delegates apply to the conference then you do manually the management referring to who is vegetarian, create the budget etc., the quantities of logistics from in-kind sponsors and then you need to constantly contact with other team members. Also, many mistakes can be made accidentally by writing the wrong number. By having an empowered conference ecosystem using Podio or excel, and use its fullest potential and capacity and various apps, even building a conference system you eliminate the budget behind it and the timeline required behind it, you can have all the data and immediately go and update the other areas that it corresponds with. For example, you get the sponsorship and it can calculate the quantities that you need or like input or send a message to the rest of the team and update automatically that "Yeah we have that sponsorship, so there is no need to look for more sponsorships". Even for speakers, who need to provide you what they need in their sessions, so a system that can automatically send reminders or provide information of logistics session needs and the system can take this information and send it to the logistics manager to research on the market. All that saves a lot of time and makes communication less complicated. Updates on the time that they happen to simplify your life. Personalization of experience could also be a benefit, since you always try to go to the extra mile for the delegates and that requires getting information out of them catering, do the exact requirements, t-shirts, get them together, room allocation is very time-consuming for the delegates services coordinator since you have to have the final updated list of the names of people coming and then certain criteria of you room people with and then you have the rooms that the hotel gave you and it always happens last minute and it is a total nightmare. So again a system that takes the input and gives the answers would really solve a lot of issues and be a lot smarter

8. The only thing that I would change in a sense of trying to improve is the communication and the constant flow of information between the team. A conference has a million small things that should be perfect and it is really hard for that information to be available to everybody as it happens. It is easy for people to get lost in their tasks. Find the time to train people in these apps and systems and then try to integrate them more into the organization aspect of it. So the system will be automatically updated and send a notification so there will be no need to make long hour
meetings, not text or call a person in order for everybody to be on the same page. Integrating smartness (communication apps, task manager apps, Google sheets) is a good thing that ideally I would like to see happen. But at the same time it is not the be-all end-all in the sense of you have limited time to educate to organize a big conference, you have young people as volunteers (for NGOs) who are not super educated in terms of technology and you cannot recruit people that are so into technology. On a professional level, however, I would consider it as an investment to create a system on your specification and educate people it will be time wise and money wise in long term. It depends on the conference you organize and understand if it is worth it to integrate investments for smartness.

Kostapanos Miliaresis

1. Co-Founder, CEO and BoD member at Ethelon, volunteers coordinator at TEDx Athens, and curator at TEDx AUEB, National trainer in AIESEC Serbia and in various conference projects as part of the conference organizing team

2. From early years I loved the field of events that's why my first I did my first seminar for event management in Highschool. And when I entered university I joined AIESEC both for the events and the exchange part. So my main role in the organization was related to the conference either as a speaker or in the organizing team. And after the end of my AIESEC experience, I spotted the need of volunteers from events and at the same time many people wished to participate as volunteers and offer to an event so I found the GloVo which is now the Ethelon and does match this exact need.

3. For sure every stakeholder expects a different way of communication, which is the key for a successful conference. If I could distinguish one this would be the direct access and common information. So shared files accessible to everyone is important for success in a conference. As an example we were responsible for a company to organize an event the Day of Volunteerism which would take place in 3 different cities and there were involved the company itself, us as Ethelon team and their PR agency and we had at the same time 3 separate teams, so common files, strategies, updates and direct access assisted to better organize the event at the same time in 3 different cities.

4. Technology helps a lot to be on the same page especially when you cooperate with people from various time zones. We use mostly google drives and Asana for task delegations and Skype. Also, another technology is the Hivebrite platform that I used as a speaker, which collects all emails, and everything is online, a platform for communities, where online exist the profile and who participates, a dashboard where all the files are online there, and any update or notification can be applied when a new file is uploaded e.g. agenda, logistics etc.

5. During an event, we have two common chats depending on which is more usable in each country (messenger or WhatsApp). One chat involves all the organizing team anything, basically, anyone
that comes in touch with a stakeholder or with the delegate for accessibility in information regarding a session change, or a room change. And a second chat with the main speakers. We work with walkie talkie for direct communication during the conference.

6. We create an online timeline where we set the goals and we do brainstorming and goal setting. Then through emails and phones we contact all the stakeholders that we want to collaborate with (either invitation of a speaker, book a venue). Via mail usually to be effective in prepayments and payments as well among others. Then comes the registration process which mainly is conducted online. During the conference for the check, there is an application most useful the Eventora. And for Q&A part in a session, there is a platform for interaction with the audience, for example, the or a networking platform for example in TEDx Athens or in Forbes all the attendees are online and interact with each other.

7. Smartness is the interaction and effective work in the organizing team with fewer errors. Smartness is an enhanced experience for the delegated. So to what extent a delegate can be engaged in a conference through google notification, through an application. And during the conference, there are applications that include all the delegates and with various filters, so depending on what the organizer wants to achieve in a conference you can approach them and search in a targeted way. Smartness can enhance via a platform the allocation of tasks to be done, namely the materials that will be bought, which are the speakers to be approached received a live update of the status for the follow up in various stages (contact, progress, pending, acceptance, reject etc) So time can be saved to inform each other about the individual progress did I speak, did we achieve a partnership, etc. Financially also the budget can be tracked online effectively. Even e-shopping helped us to excel in our workload. In Serbia, we created an online conference, duration 1 week, 500 delegates from 75 countries. There is no venue, no logistics except for the platform. No restriction, only prerequisite to finding a suitable time zone.

8. Customization can be empowered. New technologies require fewer resources and can help delegates receive customized experience. As an example of a Netflix series by choosing an episode you set the plot the same can be applied in the conference according to the selection of different workshops delegate can create a customized conference experience path. What workshops to be delivered, in what level and then these insights of delegates to be filtered and applied. Innovation should be also in our plans. Big data personalization is important. However, a balance between the physical gathering and technology should be kept. In the last conference I did a workshop in order to create a toolkit for the part of volunteer engagement every delegate provided its opinion, this information was gathered online and was consolidated after the event.

**Alexandre Egger**

1. Business Developer - Artion Conferences and Events
2. Expanding our activities out of Greece at Artion Conferences and Events
3. As for any product/services, its success is measured with the client’s satisfaction. This involves a strong relationship with the client and enough adaptability in order to tailor-make the service. On the second hand, the coordination (deadlines, alternative options, supervision...) and communication within the team is in order to provide the best service possible.

4. Same as before: the main aspect is the client’s satisfaction. Therefore, close communication is required, therefore, communication technologies (emails, calls, Skype calls, etc) are fundamental. Internally speaking (within the operational team), project management tools are strong assets on top of communications tools (this can be the traditional Gantt chart, as well as software like Podio, Monday, etc...).

5. Actually, all of the following main stakeholders intervene at each step of the conference organization: the clients (always the most important); the suppliers (venue, catering, technical and A/V team, the operational team). The difference comes when it comes to the intensity of the involvement of the stakeholders (for instance, the client will be extremely present before and after the conference, while the suppliers will be more present during the conference). Regarding communication with the suppliers, emails and phone calls are the most efficient ways. Social media has definitely a strong impact on delegates (they feel more involved, their number can be increased, and the resources dedicated to involve them is way lower). For the others, I still have an unclear opinion on how other new technologies (not talking about the internet) can have an impact on the rest of the stakeholders.

6. I would focus on delegates as mentioned earlier, my opinion regarding other stakeholders and new technologies is still unclear. Regarding delegates, social media is a way to involve them during the conference as they can directly interact with the speakers and take part in the debate.

7. Not sure

8. This question might be too vague.

Vasiliki Ziaka

1. Project Manager IT, Roche Diagnostics
2. Alumni, MCP 2016-2017, Overall responsible for conferences' execution
3. Proactivity is important. Preparation for a conference plays a major role since conference involves a lot of work. Awareness of the timeline, to track the deadlines define tasks. Be on the same pages in terms of objectives, what should be delivered at the conference. Even if it is clear in the members committee sometimes organizing committee lacks this understanding due to different levels of engagement. It is significant to have a well-performing person for logistics and partnerships. A key stakeholder is the organizing committee president and conference manager to wave the stress from the financial director who tracks the conference manager. Clear responsibilities among the organizational structure. Have an ambition for uniqueness. Communicate correctly all the necessary information among various partners for delivery days,
actual conference days. Resilient people to be there during the conference not exhausted for the preface process.

4. We were mostly working with Microsoft Office and Google products: Gsheets, PowerPoint, Hangouts for meetings prior to the conference

5. Before: Chair, Facilitators, Agenda, external partners, Team, OC. During: Partners, Venue, Sponsors, Media (same as before) after OC, an output of conference, agenda team, the showcase of the partners. Communication with suppliers via phone. Technology and the internet play the most important role, especially in virtual teams where you don't have the privilege of having everyone in the same place. Through social media, we could showcase the previous conferences to potential sponsors, brand the result of the conference to all our stakeholders in order to strengthen our impact and also engage more the members during the conference with campaigns and hashtags that would keep them engaged. We could also help the members that couldn't attend, understand what was going on and then downscale faster the direction that we wanted to give for all the membership.

6. Processes. Before: Set the dates, define agenda team, recruit organizing committee. Agenda team defines objectives, collect inputs, see the operational timeline, messaging and performance deliverables, what is the strategy. Frame the delegate experience. Collect inputs for delegates from local committees. Check the level of international vibes. Map the sessions. (block) allocate the profiles of speakers and present it to the national team. Final deadlines for materials, draft ppts, draft presentations and a first dry run to present the sessions and see the cohesion and coherence among various session. Provide feedback. At the same time, organizing committee team has recruited a team which deals with logistics, in kinds, sponsor partnership. Communication to the audience in partnership with the conference manager. The chair comes 2 days before the conference makes a pre-meeting to discuss the agenda, team building, and ensure that everyone is on the same page. During the conference, an extra process is the post-meeting with agenda team, conference manager and organizing committee president. After the conference evaluation, feedback, send outputs and consolidates the insights to make the necessary follow up and keep the vibe of the conference. Send showcase materials to sponsors and partners. Business development partners. The main technology is the google sheets.

7. Not sure

8. Proactiveness to be on time. Documentation of processes and learnings of current conferences to use it as a tool for future conferences in terms of challenges, ways of communication etc. In addition, to have more live showcase material for partners to conduct better the sales. Interaction among delegates can go to another level and let them shape their delegate experience so every delegate to shape their own journey. Screens with feedback and polls.
Petros Stratis

1. Founder of Easy conferences

2. My name is Petros Stratis our company mainly deals with academic conferences. We started in Cyprus and in the last years we conduct conferences also abroad, in Thessaloniki especially. We have exceeded 40 conferences annually. We create our software for online registration which is one stop shop where the participant can book accommodation, registration, airport transfers and also we did the abstract submission system and evaluation process.

3. In cooperation, there should be a win-win relationship, from an academic that will make the request for a conference, to the association behind the professor, delegates who with the conference fee should receive value for money, suppliers, hotels, taxi drivers. Anyone who will be involved should feel that he/she earned more than he/she offered. So this is the way that we try to work in our company.

4. When we started our system it was only for the registration process, the paper submission came as a need. So during the last years with our system being flexible we try to develop and include the aforementioned two factors that will form new ingredients which will cover other needs that are offered in other conferences, such as the research gate. So some of the needs that are covered currently from the research gate can be also covered by our software. So, when we will finish, we will have the advantage that someone can submit the abstracts and papers in any case and register in the conference in the same software.

5. Associations that conduct the conference every year in a different country. When the conference will come for example in Cyprus and there will be a responsible local organizer, then he should find a company that will support all the processes except for the academic part. venue, local PCO, the supporting hotels, taxi companies, guides, excursions, restaurants. We have a network with partners and we contact them. But as the company grows there is a need to have the data in written.

6. We start to find the venue in collaboration with the local PCO, then the supporting hotels, taxi companies, guides, excursions, restaurants. We have a network with partners and we contact them. But as the company grows there is a need to have the data in written. The big issue is that we are in a service industry, and by growing, there is jeopardy when making everything automatic to lose the personal contact that can have as a penalty the loss of a job. There is no technology that will replace the physical gathering. I spoke with a professor that participates in a virtual conference. I will agree that smartness enhances many things but we should understand that especially in academic and medical conferences networking and knowledge exchange play a major role.

7. Smartness in every level among us, participants and organizers, should make the interaction easier between everyone. Eliminate the errors (double bookings, meetings among partners and
academics) in order to extract from a system all the things that could be forgotten, then in an emergency case to send automatically update for example to send to a taxi company all the arrivals. So real-time information.

8. We should remember that it important when smartness is fully integrated into processes it can prevent the errors of human factor but at the same time to realize that without a human factor the service cannot be fulfilled

Giannis Christidis

1. Credit Cards Product Manager, Eurobank Ergasias SA

2. Currently, I am an alumnus of AIESEC in Greece, having served in the Executive Board as VP of Public Relations and Marketing. As a conference organizer I was part of:
   Teams that built the agenda of the conference and the respective sessions to be delivered
   Head organizer of smaller conference responsible for all the organizational aspect and the respective teams for the conference
   Chair during the conference responsible before and during the conference of the teams engaged with the conference

3. The most important parts are clear goals, clear expectations, and trust between the parties involved. The organizing team should have clear goals as to what it wants to achieve in terms of the conference (message to delegates, venue facilities, the experience offered to delegates) These goals should be clearly stated and communication to all parties involved before and during the conference with constant and transparent communication. This type of communication is essential in order to build the right expectation for everyone involved and in order to build trust. e.g. If you communicate to the venue a specific need, like 10 projectors, because you need to be safe, but you want 5, then you break the trust with the venue. It is much more effective to communicate that I want 5 projectors all the time running, so the venue must be responsible to have spare in case a projector broke down. That means also that the correct planning with clear goals and timeline plays an important role in enabling a clear communication and a fruitful cooperation

4. Besides any project management software, that will help with planning and tracking some other ICTs that can be used are:
   ▪ Regarding the size of the conference and the scale, a cloud-based file sharing location can enable the team to exchange the necessary files between them without getting lost in a lot of emails and versions of the same file. Also, virtual spaces (e.g. skype or any like program) enabling the team to perform fast meetings in order to take fast and effective decisions.
   ▪ If the scale is big enough then important stakeholders/partners, like the venue or key suppliers should be part of the cloud-based platform that will be updated with the key milestones to be delivered and the tasks each participant needs to deliver at a specific date.
I wish to note that the system of communication to be chosen, must enable both asynchronous and real-time communication. Asynchronous means that I can share any information that someone will review when the time is available, and real-time means that this information must be available the moment it is shared.

5. Before (during this stage the team gathers requirements from the stakeholders, incorporate them in the planning process and it starts executing the plan)
   - Conference team
   - Venue
   - Suppliers (in-kind, speakers, anyone that supplies something to the conference that the team does not build itself)
   - Sponsors
   - Delegates

During (during this phase, it is paramount for the team to be in communication with the venue and the delegates which are the ones physically located in the conference and the ones impacting the overall conference experience)
   - Conference team
   - Delegates
   - Venue

After (report and analysis of keep, start, stop)
   - Conference team
   - Delegates
   - Sponsors, suppliers, venue

Regarding supplies, you can either know how can supply your needs through already established relations or you might not know. If you know you just inform the supplier about your needs. If you don’t know, it is best to do a Request for Proposal (RFP) in order to officially inform potential suppliers about your needs and then to evaluate, screen and select the one that can cover them. E.g. You can create a website with all your requirements and ask suppliers to submit the proposal. Irrespective of the communication way, it is important to have clear and written communications, in order not to have any room for misunderstanding, especially in the planning stage of selecting the suppliers. Technology name its internet, social media, imaging techniques, video etc, can bring value to a conference. The issue here is to understand what the overall goal and the sub-goals is and how technology can enable each of them. IT is of no use to use tech for the sake of tech or to show that you can use tech. E.g. creating from scratch a booking site, specifically for a conference in order to easy delegates registration might be a huge organizing problem when instead you can just use
already established platforms like eventora or similar. The organizing team needs to understand what is the crucial and differentiation elements of the conference and focus all its effort there and just delegate the secondary activities to suppliers (like delegates registration). e.g. if booking a specific speaker is the differentiation element, then effort should be made in booking the speaker even with live streaming, and then delegating the technical part of live streaming to the venue or other suppliers. Not trying to solve how to live stream. Social media specifically is a good tech to enable promotion of the conference and engagement with delegates. But it should not be seen as the official communication platform.

6. Main processes should be executing day to day plan of the conference.
   - Agenda on time
   - Breaks on time
   - Infrastructure always ready to perform

Technology can enable real-time updates for all participants (conference team, delegates, venue, speakers etc) regarding the agenda. E.g. completions of sessions, delays, special requests etc. Of course, there should be 2 channels of real-time communication. One informing the delegates and one for the actors participating in organizing the conference (e.g. between the team and the venue)

7. Not sure

8. Knowledge and training on general project management processes and especially big focus on planning and risk management before, during and after a conference.

Renata Pylarinou

1. Project Manager & Sales freelancer at Upwork
2. MCP 2015-2016, Conference manager 2013-2014
3. Clear roles and responsibilities. One person for transportation, one for the venue, partners, members committee, sponsors. Specific communication to define these roles both physically and virtually.
4. database and storage drives, excel, communication channel skype. CRM for partners and sponsors (Sales Management system). It is important to keep the data in an online platform. Inside a conference is important to have platforms and technologies to engage and increase the interaction with delegates or more effective allocation of rooms and be aware online who stays with whom. Newsletters
5. Chair, Facilitators, Agenda, external partners, Team, OC. During: Partners, Venue, Sponsors, Media (same as before) after organizing committee +supervisory group and alumni, international delegates. During same. After is the accountant the closing of the budget. Through
the conference, manage is conducted the communication with partners and the organizing committee for the logistics.

6. The processes, tasks, responsibilities and deadlines are numerous and I can elaborate a lot but this is not the case. I would stay on the fact that main processes are handled with effective cooperation, coordination, awareness of task before, during and after the conference.

7. Not sure

8. I am not in the field however following the trends and taking into account the value that is created for all the stakeholders involved should be always a priority in any type of a project either that means to integrate technology, or invest in people.

Oraianthi Toumazatou

1. Localization Coordinator, Google Ireland

2. I’ve been an AIESEC alumna since 2015. My last role was as MCVP OGX for AIESEC in Spain. In my years in AIESEC, I participated in conferences as a delegate, as part of the organizing committee (twice), as a facilitator, and as a chair, so I’ve really had the chance to see the process and the experience from all sides.

3. A very clear and detailed project plan is very important. Clear timeline and responsibilities. This project plan should be 100% transparent, all the people involved should be aware of it. Delegates arrival, logistics come in speakers needs etc. Everyone has their own aspects of the conference that only they are responsible for. For the success of the conference, all the things should be clear from one another fundamental preparation is important and clear communication flow. Despite the best of plans thinks can come up unexpectedly, Flexibility and creativity are important. It does not matter if it is 100% perfect, if the delegates think it is then it’s great

4. Besides social apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger for connecting and communicating with organizing/face team members, Google Drive, and particularly Google Sheets, was a very convenient way of sharing and collaborating on all the documents needed (presentations for the day, music files, logistics information, delegate information, etc). Twitter and Snapchat/Instagram were also at times (different conferences) used as a means of engaging delegates with the content of the conference before and during.

5. Before: main stakeholder the suppliers the venue makes sure that all the logistics are in place. During delegates and venue, the partners throughout the whole process. In terms of connecting and communicating with delegates over social media and such platforms. With venue and suppliers email, phone calls, cold calls. Transportation. With the partners social media to make sure that they are engaged with the delegates, emails and call Having the ability to essentially connect all the different moving parts of a conference over multiple platforms such as Twitter,
Instagram even snapchat was invaluable because maybe you were in one session and you were able to see what is happening in another session, what was happening in the rest of the conference. This was used to engage people with the partners far more directly. You were not just introduced with the random company, but you had the chance like at the moment or in the minute to go on the website or either see app. It not only contributed to conference success it made also the integration of partners in conference ecosystem, feel more natural like "Oh I know a word for our partners and sponsors". It also contributed to the delegates ‘experience since they were engaged in meaningful ways. It definitely brings value to the stakeholders since you can experience the conference in many different ways. Being able to share directly the experience for example through twitter is fantastic.

6. Make sure the logistics are correct and in place in a timely manner. Ensure delegates experience. Technology can enhance that, communication is fast and easier, processes can be done automatically. The process of learning and experiencing the conference can be empowered a lot through technology and completely add new things.

7. Not sure

8. Not having enough transparency and clear communication between parts of the conference committee can lead to misunderstandings and problems, so I would ensure that all sides are on the same page all the time. I would put a lot of focus on having the delegates share their experience.

Manos Zacharakis

1. Regional Transportation Management System Master Trainer | Middle East & Africa in DHL
2. Alumnus in AIESEC. I’ve been in AIESEC for 5 years in total. WeGrow ’13 Congress Committee Special Events Teamster & Study Tour Coordinator, EuroXpro 2013 Conference Committee Teamster Study Tour Resp.EuroXpro 2012 Congress Committee Teamster Study Tour Resp., International Congress, Study Tour’s Organizing Committee Delegates Servicing and Promotion Resp.
3. The key is to identify the audience, how many are the participants where are they coming from their requirements like the visas, how the going to get there any special requests and needs. Then you need to understand what are the different providers, stakeholders, suppliers that you need to involve like the venue, transportation and all that. And right from the beginning to have the plan and understand what role each stakeholder will play into the organization of the conference. Namely, we need a transportation provider from the airport to the hotel, and from the hotel to the venue. Then different speakers, the equipment for different sessions, the various launches from the partners, the speakers, the external speakers, you must email them check the availability and schedule. Dry run of speeches. Obviously, you have to understand how the all together they come into place and delegate that into the team. A team with clear roles and
responsibilities for various parts of the conferences from delegates services, logistics from flipcharts and markers to delegates services.

4. From excel file to a sophisticated software as the Microsoft project. The key for me is to have all of the tasks and deadlines for them and responsible for each task, who is assigned to what task. Off course different ways of tracks for the delivery and progress of each task such as color coding depending on the completion.

5. Main stakeholders before transportation, hotel, venue, external speakers, sponsors they might do launches and promote products, logistics providers for in-kind. Communication varies, in Greece we had some calls we introduce ourselves and what we exactly plan to do. Then we send an email with a proposal with exact things that we do what we need. During conference all different parties and what we have promised before we actually materialize during the conference. After the end we should make sure to send different photos as testimonials and sponsor launch or for in-kind providers like delegates using their product, thank them and execute the payments. Keep the contacts and make sure to pass the contact in international level or make sure to use them for international conferences. With technology we can obviously promote all the services and products of the external participants, we can communicate to the participants which transportation to be used and provide the service quality and excellence. Promote the venues, send newsletters, put them in social media. Use all the communication channels internet, email, newsletter to showcase all the different experiences that we provide during a conference via our external stakeholders.

6. During the conference, you need a dashboard and agenda and during a coffee break or lunch you need to see who is responsible for this block. The deliverables for session material, setting up the room, the coffee break and have a checklist like Microsoft office and with a comment you can provide info if the task is done or not. At the end of the day the feedback is collected from facilitators and delegates, and feedback from the organizing perspective so we put these together and take correct actions.

7. No

8. One factor that is not taken into consideration is the Plan B. Risk management and risk assessment. Feasibility study of conferences and organization of them

Maria Karyda

1. Pricing Analyst at SmartestEnergy
2. Ex TEDx Curator, TEDxUniversityofMacedonia
3. Planning of the initial resources you are going to need/ put the plan into a realistic timetable with your team /share common approach for different stakeholders /share information internally so that the team is aware /plan your external approach and the amount of shared information /communicate your brand - brand awareness is really important so you can be xxx
trustful into the community /engage all your stakeholders in what you are doing so they can trust you and you can also share the right experience with your audience in the day of the event.

4. Conference planning - we have used the google docs that are open to everyone and easy accessible so that we can all share information at real time - excel file for planning/timetable/schedule - excel files for tracking the progress of every separate subteam - emails so we can keep in track for weekly tasks - social media (messenger) so we can arrange meetings - polls for finding common time to meet up. Conference organizing - emails so we can approach different stakeholders (partners) and speakers for the event - social media like Facebook (Instagram nowadays) to reach the audience through different pre-events - an active blog that keeps the community life and creates a broader experience for the audience.

5. Before the conference date - organising team /volunteers team /venue responsible /sponsors and partners /speakers

   During the event date - organizing team /volunteers team /sponsors and partners /audience /speakers /video-audio production partners for recording the event.

   After the event - organizing team /volunteers team /independent translators team.

Technology, internet, and social media can have a positive impact on the whole event experience and success if they are used with care. Technology and the internet are two important tools that can bring information into the organizing team - provide a stream of communication and be a tool for reaching out to your audience.

Social media can be a tool for reaching out to your audience and have a significant impact on the marketing strategy you can follow as an event.

Social media can also create the whole experience for your audience during the event day by interacting with them. Also, they can share with more people their experience and that brings a broader brand awareness. The strategy that we have followed so far is that we try to create a message that everyone in the team is aware so we can communicate later to our audience and every stakeholder and create the unique experience of every different TEDx event.

6. Different sessions with speakers - media used during the speech to attract audience attention according to the will of the speaker. A recording is not allowed during the session by TEDx rules

   Breaks - Social media can create a wholly unique experience for the audience to interact with different partners/sponsors and communicate the event's message.

   Parallel speeches/events - according to the parallel activity social media and technology play a significant part of them so that they can introduce a new/different approach to the audience.

7. No
8. More direct interaction between the different sub-teams so that we can all share more ideas upon the event and introduce further collaboration in different areas. As I am not part of the organizing team anymore but I have a more supporting role I believe that new teams engage the social media and technology in a more sophisticated way than in the past. The brand name is stronger now and they have the ability to reach further. Though I would like to learn more about the Smart Conference (the image above wasn’t very clear for me to read) so I can share it with the team.