

# *The tourism of business and conferences – Opening a convention bureau (CVB) in Albania*

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## Abstract

*The tourism of business, conferences and exhibitions is classified as the oldest form of tourism in the history of humanity and an aspect of the tourism industry which has seen a significant increase in recent years. The main purpose of this article is to study the impact of opening a Convention Bureau, in terms of development of tourism of business and congress. To achieve this goal, a survey analysis was conducted, which involved 50 tourist organizations in 3 cities, Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan, with the key objective to highlight the importance of opening a Convention Bureau to develop tourism of business and congress, as well as how to study and obtain results on its impact regarding increasing the productivity of tourism sector services. Consequently, the improvement of communication, coordination of information, development of best marketing and PR practices, also increases the need for investment in more specialized human resources, who must know the functioning processes of the Convention Bureau structures, in function of the development of this tourism sector.*

*At the end of this study it was concluded that opening of a Convention Bureau causes a greater development of the tourism of business and conferences, and this is confirmed by obtaining data on how this cooperation may produce successful outcomes in this regard.*

**Keywords:** *Convention Bureau, business and congress tourism, information, promotion, tourism subject.*

## I. Introduction

The Organization of Tourism of the United Nations World Tourism (UNWTO, 2014) defines tourism as:

A social, cultural and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to places or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes.

These individuals are called visitors (tourists or day-trippers; residents or non-residents) and tourism pertains to their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditures (Bari & Shaheen, 2020). It certainly includes the tourists, but also the wide range of businesses that provide goods and services to the tourist, the governmental and political structure of a destination, and the local residents of the destination community itself. Each of these components is an essential part of a successful tourism destination and operates within the private and public sectors,

the built environment and the natural environment. All these come together to create the processes, activities and outcomes of tourism (Szpilko, 2017). As part of business tourism, one aspect of the tourism industry that has seen significant growth recently is conference and exhibition tourism (Convention Bureau), as conference and exhibition delegates spend more than the average tourist. The impacts on tourism that may result from the development of this form of tourism can be grouped into three main categories: economic, social and environmental.

Considering the impact that the development of tourism has on the economy, this study aims to provide an overview of the impact that the opening of a Convention Bureau will have on the further development of the tourism of business and conferences, as well as trying to give an indication of the evaluation of the factors that influence the relationship between the tourist entity and the Convention Bureau, in order to expand the clientele and improve the service. The study of the importance of opening a Convention Bureau, in terms of the development of the tourism of business and conferences, as well as its impact on increasing the productivity of services in the tourism sector, are set as the main objectives of this study. Also, this study has its limitations as having a limited target group it cannot be generalized but will serve as a starting point for more in-depth studies in subsequent years on the direct or indirect impact of opening a Convention Bureau in Albania, in the development of business and congress tourism. However, through the results obtained, it will be possible to create a more complete panorama for the development aspect of this very important, but also profitable sector for the tourist realities operating in our country. Another factor that can affect the reliability or validity of this paper is the short time available to obtain sufficient data, but also the inclusion of only the managers of tourist organizations in Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan, not providing information on other organizations tourists operating in our country.

## II. Literature review

*The Tourism of Business.* The tourism of business, as the oldest form of tourism in the history of mankind, is defined as the act of people traveling within a commercial arrangement, business meeting and conference. This type of tourism includes all trips related to the traveler's profession or related to his commercial interests. For example, we have the case of managers looking to expand their business to other countries (Tanvir & Baig, 2020). Business tourism was also defined by the WTO (World Tourism Organization) in 2007 as "travel to carry out an activity or event related to commercial interest". The ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association, 2012) defined it as "the provision of facilities and

services to the millions of delegates who attend meetings, conventions, exhibitions, corporate events, incentive travel and corporate hospitality each year”.

***The Tourism of Conferences.*** The Organization of the World Tourism of the United Nations defines (UNWTO, 2008) conference tourism as:

“...a gathering of 10 or more participants for at least four hours in a specified location, more than 50 miles from home. The types of meetings in these cases include conventions, conferences, congresses, fairs and exhibitions, incentive events, corporate meetings, as well as any other type of meeting where the participants do business, exchange ideas or learn from each other”.

International conference and exhibition tourists spent 2 to 3 times more than normal tourists. It is no coincidence that many cities have modernized and facilitated many services trying to attract as many business tourists as possible (Law, 1978).

***The Convention Bureau (CVB<sup>3</sup>).*** It is a non-profit organization whose objective is to organize a large number of congresses and conferences for a specific destination, but always focusing on protecting the interests of the congress organizers. It is considered a vital communication channel between congress organizers and planners, services, hotels, Congress Bureau centers and other service providers who come to the aid of tourism and tourists themselves (Kovačević, 2017). A large number of companies from different sectors organize one or more meetings, events, congresses, conventions, exhibitions, thus creating more and more congress offices, concentrating their resources on profitable segments for the country (Johnson, 2010). The bureau advises and informs tourists and planners on the best options that will work to learn about a destination while creating an environment conducive to business. The organizers themselves provide the budget of the tourism activities they carry and have a holistic view of the destination, while the destination stakeholders focus on achieving profits for their institutions (Robert, 2008). When a destination is highly attractive to tourists and all services are specifically located to welcome tourists to their businesses, the Convention Bureau helps private and public companies to increase their services and ability to cooperate with each other to welcome tourists (Volgger et al. 2017).

### III. Methodology

This study was conducted with the main focus on business and congress tourism, as well as on the impact that the opening of a CVB will have on the development

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<sup>3</sup> Convention and Visitor Bureau.

of this form of tourism in our country. To accomplish its goals and objectives, it was used analytical and quantitative methods of data processing. Literature review is based on appropriate researches by foreign and Albanian authors, in articles, scientific articles, books, scientific journals, study reports, as well as suggestions from professionals in tourism sectors, such as: hotels, tourist agencies. The target group is comprised of 50 managers (owners), general managers or marketing ones of various tourism entities in 3 main cities: Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës, as representative entities that are the main beneficiaries of a CVB. To achieve the research objectives, the questionnaire with open and semi-open questions was used as a tool for collecting quantitative data. The survey was developed through the google forms platform, while the data was analyzed and restructured through google docs. The quantitative data analysis has made possible not only the numerical description of key results, but also drawing conclusions and providing recommendations on whether the opening of a Convention Bureau has an impact on the development of tourism of business and conferences.

#### **IV. The Survey Analysis**

Tourism in Albania developed later than that of other countries and had to promote tourist spots to local and foreign tourists. The successes of tourism development in our country are related to several factors, but an important role was played by tourism marketing, which shows the progress of science and technology. Evidence of marketing success in tourism development is identified through indicators such as: increase in number of tourists who visited Albania, contribution to tourism, employees in tourism (Panajoti et al. 2014). Albania has no tradition in the development of tourism, despite the natural and economic potential it has. It is very important to underline that the economic and political history of Albania is attractive to foreign tourist and this is an advantage for starting the international tourist movement (Avdia, 2021). Recently Albania has begun to be appreciated by international tourists for nature tourism, nature and landscape beauty. Tourism will generally be recognized as the largest industry in the world, and in our country is considered a priority sector by the central and local government of Albania (Çani et al. 2013). But tourism businesses are facing increased competitive pressure from globalization and personalization, so they must meet the growing demand for unique and memorable experiences and provide superior service quality.

Through the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire developed in the tourist subjects of Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës, the impact of the opening of a Convention Bureau will be demonstrated once again on the basis of the development of business and congress tourism in our country. Based on the analysis

of demographic data, evaluating the job position of the tourist subject interviewed, it was observed that among the managers of the tourist subjects surveyed, 45% were marketing managers, 40% general managers and only 15% owners of the entities in question.

Regarding the type of tourism entities they managed, 25 of them operated as hotels, 17 event agencies and 8 of them were tourism or service agencies related to this sector. Also, most of them operated in the city of Tirana (27 institutions), followed by Durres with 12 subjects and 11 from Elbasan.

The results of the next question related to the category or type of activity they had, showed that the largest number of hotels tourist boards were in the cities of Tirana and Durres, while in Elbasan there were only 4 participating hotels. About tourist agencies, there were 16 tourist organizations in Elbasan, 24 tourist organizations in Tirana and only 10 such tourist organizations in Durres.

As regards the question whether these companies had requests for business or congress tourism, approximately 58.8% of the participants answered that they had requests from clients for the tourism of business and conferences and 41.2% had no requests for this type of tourism.

To get information on how well known the concept of business and congress tourism was, perceived according to the participants in the study to the extent of 50%, the concept of the tourism of business and conferences is little known by local entrepreneurial actors, while 7% think that this concept is not known, 41% think it is moderately known, while only 2% of them believe that this notion is well - known.

The lack of knowledge on the notion of the Convention Bureau may be due to the fact that some of them do not have much confidence that this type of service can lead to the development and improvement of services provided by tourist organizations, which are interested in providing these tourist services. This is because they also take into account the fact that, in order for this form of tourism service to work, it is important to take into account the collaboration between the tourist entity and the Convention Bureau. If the motivation of both parties does not work, the shackles, through which this system operates, will encounter difficulties and therefore the objectives of the Convention Bureau will not be achieved, as evidenced by the answers received to the following question.

As per the above question, the impact that the knowledge of this notion can have on the promotion of cooperation between the tourist subject and the local enterprise has been evaluated. The tourism subjects included in the survey answered that this cooperation has an average effect of 17.6%, a large effect of 14.7%, while the rest of the respondents rated the promotion of cooperation with local businesses by more than 64.8%, while only 2.9% think that this has no impact.

According to the questionnaires distributed to the subjects, it was observed that 76.5% of the participants was of the opinion that the tourism of business and conferences is a form of tourism that should be developed as it generates a lot of profit, but 23.5% of them stated that it is not very profitable.

The following questions are intended to provide information on whether these tourist organizations have thought of or developed promotion and development mechanisms to further expand this type of tourism in our country. And if so, what were some of these mechanisms? Some 61.8% of participants did not think of setting up mechanisms to promote this type of tourism sector, while 38.2% wanted to set up such a mechanism, as they consider it profitable in the activities they carry on. Here, it should be assessed whether these tourist entities are ready to develop in this sector, including location, accommodation capacities, staff training for the organization of major events, educational or cultural events. In other words, the preparation of human capabilities in taking steps to establish a Convention Bureau, would lead to the achievement of the latter's success and objectives.

In order for employees to adapt more easily to new technologies, managers must create efficient training programs, containing instructions and information necessary for an easier and faster adaptation to the operating methods of a CVB. The adaptation program helps tourism entities to have a clear understanding of the functioning of the cooperation procedures between the Convention Bureau and tourism entities in the shortest possible time. The orientation program should be organized in a short form through various means such as: powerpoint materials, short video clips, or information through brochures, leaflets, marketing procedures, etc. As mechanisms for the development of business and convention tourism, some 40% of respondents answered that they would choose sustainable development, 20% answered that they would develop or undergo training to develop this sector, while the 10% of them would have developed cognitive mechanisms of the process, while 30% of them would have done nothing.

Moving on to the question about the familiarity of these subjects to whom we addressed the questionnaire with the "Convention Bureau" term, some 61.8% of the participants in the study did not know the term at all, while only 38.2% had any information about it. They were also asked if they have any information or statistics regarding the role of conferences, trainings or meetings' development in promoting business tourism and conferences in the country. From the answers obtained, it comes out that 82.4% of the respondents stated that there are no real statistics on the role of conferences or meetings in promoting tourism of business and conferences, while 17.6% believe they have the information.

Around 35% of respondents said that partnerships or even a CVB development concept would be one way they would use to promote the development of tourism of business and conventions, while 30% of them thought they would focus on

promotion and marketing, some 15% thought about promoting the development of this sector through training, while 20% of them said they did not know how to act.

For about 70.6% of the respondents, the development of various conferences, meetings and training courses will significantly influence the increase in the number of business tourists in the country, 26.5% of them believe that it has already greatly influenced, while 2.9% of them believe that their development would have no beneficial impact on the business through the increase in the number of beneficiaries. The opening of a CVB would have many effects on the development of competitive skills in the market, as demonstrated by the results obtained from next question.

According to 50% of respondents, the opening of a CVB would have an impact on promoting competition in the market, with the aim of improving the quality of service and professional development, while 2.3% believe it has a limited impact on promoting competition and improving quality of service, while for 47.7% of them opening a CVB would have a great impact on promoting competition by improving quality of service, professional development and thus bringing about an increase of the number of satisfied customers, to have more and more customers every time. Therefore, at this point of the study, we noticed that the interviewed participants expressed that the opening of a CVB would greatly influence the development of business and congress tourism.

About 34 out of 50 subjects examined, in the subsequent question, expressed that it would be more prospective or profitable for them in various forms to open a CVB for their business, a fact which leads us to believe that this sector deserves to be encouraged towards a further development, whether through the creation of mechanisms, such as the opening of a Convention Bureau, which will offer more promotion, training, meetings and other forms of operation to promote further development of the sector and increase profits of entities offering commercial activities and services of conferences' tourism. Looking closely at a broader perspective, a good development of the business and congress tourism sector also favors the development of cultural events, favors the employment and consequently increases the overall income of the subjects involved, but also of the country in general. The rest did not prefer to answer.

At the end of this study, 95% of the participating tourism subjects stated that the opening of a CVB would be very valuable for their development in this competitive environment, in the further development of the business and congress tourism sector, it would increase the number of internal or external customers who preferred this type of tourism, while 5% considered it not very advantageous for their business.



## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Tourism of Business and Conferences serves as an engine for overall economic development by generating income, supporting a variety of local and national enterprises that serve as suppliers or service providers for restaurants, hotels, transportation and tour guides throughout the country. The opening of a convention bureau (CVB) is seen as a tool to encourage the development of business and congress tourism as it can also bring positive impulses towards further recognition of this tourism sector.

Opening of a Convention Bureau would have a significant impact on the development of business and convention tourism to a large extent, and this was confirmed by obtaining data on how this cooperation can work to each other to be as successful as possible.

The country needs coherent evaluation and the creation of homogeneous procedures in determining the functioning methods of the relationship between CVB and tourism and conference's, subject, by implementing appropriate mechanisms for interaction and coordination information, promotion and management procedures. These results can be used to identify the current weaknesses of the business and congress tourism sector, finding strategies to better operate in the market. However, the managers of these entities should take into account the philosophy of cooperation and coordinating the appropriate, sufficiently accessible and clear information for tourists interested in this area.

To maximize positive development, it is necessary to take important steps starting from the study of the services offered by the Convention Bureau, from the establishment of a correct information network, from training and hiring of suitable specialists ready to adapt to the new technologies that the market for the tourism of business and conferences offers every day.

The hotel - tourism business relationship can be quite profitable if managed in the right way. Event planners and group organizers should contact a CVB to get a hands-on perspective on the event venue, including area information, links to venues, and useful information about how businesses operate in the area.

Using CVB's marketing assets would be an excellent marketing tool for hotels, such as: CVB's websites, printed brochures with information on local locations, layouts, room capacities, availability, seasonal demand and more. To facilitate their work, hotels and other CVB businesses are advised to: share the latest data of organizers and group organizers who have organized events in a certain tourist location, provide recommendations for other locations to show how much the hotel appreciates the relationship with the CVB, connecting CVBs with people and resources who can help them promote the location as a whole, keeping and coordinating CVBs updated on the ability to carry out marketing campaigns, hotel investment - CVB relationship.

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