

IS THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY A SHE?



“My peace of mind has the shape of your arms and the sound of your voice”, a company owner told the main organizer or, as we would say, an event planner. She responded by dialling down the radio used for communicating with a team of technicians for just long enough to answer: “Everything will be fine. I know this is important and you can count on me”. Then she got back to work. Is this a true story? Let us find out! One thing is certain – they have known each other for more than ten years, which is a long time.

Face-to-face meetings and events play an integral role in reinforcing national economy and key business sectors – this is the outcome of the latest report of Oxford Economics, commissioned by Events Industry Council and supported by Meetings Mean Business Coalition and other industry partners. Data compiled in the report was collected as part of a nationwide study of meeting planners, exhibitors and representatives of venues. In this manner, almost 9,000 domestic business trips were successfully analysed, along with close to 50,000 international flights and data from 11,000 U. S. hotels. The results are optimistic – it turns out that meetings directly generate hundreds of billions of dollars for the national economy and influenced the creation of approx. 5.9 million jobs! There have been approximately ten similar reports conducted all over the world and acting as a driving force behind the meetings industry’s growth in various countries (e.g. Great Britain, Canada, Denmark and Poland).

A NEW DEAL

The meetings industry is not only gaining strength, but also changing its structure. For decades we have been hearing about various kinds of markets, including the MICE sector, discriminating female employees. Back in the 1970s women were declaring that they handle only 65% of all operations conducted by men. Today this figure already exceeds 80%. In other words, we are observing increasingly smaller disproportions between genders, regardless of what caused them in the first place. Already this May a meeting focused on the power of women, among its main issues, will be staged at the IMEX exhibition, one of the key platforms of knowledge transfer in the meetings industry. Its roundtable discussions will start with the subject matter of female empowerment, an analysis of what is missing to reinforce the position and role of women. The list of topics will include i. a. balancing family and career, building a personal brand and preventing cases of sexual harassment. This wide range of topics is not only aimed at

women involved in the meetings industry, but also their male colleagues who would like to learn more about the new problems, challenges or simply the everyday reality of the fair sex. Viewing the market from a global perspective, the percentage of women working in the meetings industry is estimated at about 65%. Pew Research Centre recently published a report showing that the gender pay gap became considerably smaller since the 1980s – in 2015 women earned 83% of what men earned. However, an article published by The Foundation for Economic Education’s think tank continues to take a critical look at differences between wages of the two genders. It is worth noting that the meetings industry is among the sectors when women actually constitute a majority of the labour force. In other words, the issue of equality and professional advancement is especially urgent in its case.

POINTS OF REFERENCE

The power of women in the global meetings market is unquestionably on the rise. Howe-

ver, we need to discuss the needs of the growth of women as part of particular organisations – regardless if they are employed in a major global corporation or a small company that is just starting out. Each such entity has the power to build awareness and create a strong work ethos of the meetings industry that appears as an attractive and relatively profitable sector placing emphasis on experts irrespective of their gender. It is also crucial to cooperate with the right people, such as mentors, bosses or the management board of a given organisation. After all, they have the greatest impact and we should be able to rely on them. One of the few methods of answering the titular question I posed (“is the meetings industry a she”) involves looking for case studies, which would act as determinants of success. This calls for identifying organisations and people actively creating and developing programmes influencing the changing status of women. It is worth finding out which initiatives worked well and then adapt them to the requirements, culture and goals of a given organisation. Finally, when working in the meetings industry, it is recommended to learn from the experiences of other people to create new and effective solutions.

IT IS THE RELATIONS THAT COUNT

Especially when working with young leaders, a question frequently comes up how to build the first portfolio of partners or customers. The answer is actually very simple. After all, men are among the most loyal supporters of women. Young female leaders should then use their intuition and network of contacts (both within and outside of their organisation) to connect with both men and women representing different functions and levels. It is also crucial to share experiences, challenges and needs connected with the professional growth of women and men in an open environment distinguished by mutual respect and a willingness to change the status quo. Mutuality and collaboration ha-

ve been described in detail by the Bangkok Manifesto document published by Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) after its January conference held in Thailand. The manifesto includes a statement that “Relationships and teamwork build business results, not isolated individual effort. And nothing creates and strengthens relationships more effectively than shared incentive travel experiences”. By drawing attention to the role of incentive travels, at present the de facto very foundation of the existence of incentive systems, SITE also subtly emphasises the role of women. Other associations representing the discussed sector, including MPI and ICCA, published similar documents.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE

Event planning is a fantastic career path both for women and men. It is fun, fast and guarantees great growth opportunities. While women account for the majority of event planners, the latest research conducted by PMCA claims that women in the meetings industry on average continue to make about 24% less than men. How then do women find ways to stand out and stimulate their career in such a competitive and developing sector? Obviously this is one of the first questions that come to mind when analysing the gender of the meetings industry. As for

the answer, each one of us has different goals and definitions of success. It is certainly key to boast the right knowledge and self-confidence needed to create your own path to the goals you set for yourself. Along the way there might be obstacles and challenges, but you can overcome them by assuming a passionate approach to the industry. Regardless of your gender self-identification, the meetings industry can act as your fantasy and a tool to pursue objectives. It continues to be beautiful no matter if it appears as a delicate dragonfly revealing its feminine nature or as a manly game of influence played when securing each successive major event. It acts as a source of inspiration, offers growth opportunities and makes dreams come true. The meetings industry is a “she” whose mysteries are not fully explored yet, boasting remote corners of influences and flows of dependencies. This, however, is precisely what renders this industry so magnificent and makes it possible to fulfil one’s potential by helping others. True, this is happening under pressure, often under the impact of differences in culture and practices or interconnections, but then we live in the twentieth-first century. In spite of all, the meetings industry can be compared to the peace of mind shaped like the most important arms and sound like the one voice you are looking for...

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR KRZYSZTOF CELUCH is a speaker, an academic lecturer, an entrepreneur and certified trainer (CMM, CITE, CIS, HMCC, CED). His company **Celuch Consulting** specializes in the meetings industry and event marketing helping organizations in a journey from content to impact. Head of the Poland Convention Bureau Polish Tourist Organization (2009-2017). Krzysztof gained professional experience by working in convention bureaus, being involved in international associations and organisations, as well as by conducting scientific research. As a lecturer he cooperates with, i.a. San Diego State University, Skema Business School and several Polish universities. He is an author of articles and books dedicated to the meetings industry, reports and research projects, including *The Economic Impact of Poland's Meetings Industry*. Finally, Krzysztof has been distinguished by numerous international awards and distinctions, i.a. MPI Rise Award, Events Industry Council Pacesetter Award and, presented by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland, the honorary distinction "For contributions to tourism".

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