

In the slow shift to a post-covid era, stable steps are done towards a new normality. Countries, cities, communities, organisations and individuals are investing in the design of a different future. In this process, priority and focus shift is given to new perspectives and developments, which will be key to moving forward, such as those linked to Sustainability.

Long-term Strategy for Associations - New Circular Economies



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ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria are now on the top of the agenda, among other important topics. ESG factors are used to assess companies and countries on how far they have progressed in sustainability. Investors are increasingly applying these non-financial factors as part of their analysis process to identify material risks and growth opportunities. In addition, since 2017, the EU has launched tools to measure the success of industries based also on their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions.

Thus, the value and power of an organisation today is not only dependent on its financial results, but also on its contribution and efforts to create a better world. Moreover, research has shown that companies that show important progress in sustainability elements, have a quicker access to funding and higher profitability.

The importance of a holistic approach to sustainability and CSR, which can deliver measurable results, will be a driving factor in the future., the implementation of long-term strategies at the national level, through multi-stakeholder collaboration and with the aim of providing a holistic solution to sustainability challenges, should not be considered optional in the new circular economies.

All industries must play their part and contribute to this global effort, and this requires teamwork and collaboration.

The meetings industry has proven to be a key player, not only for the economic development of a country, but also for the crisis recovery process. It goes without saying that events can rescue economies, but now it is also time for events to be additionally recognised as key drivers in circular economies. Our industry definitely has the power to contribute to the creation of a sustainable future.

While there is a growing focus on sustainability more widely, there has been little academic research on this topic in the meetings industry compared to the existing body of research on sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industries.

It is time for associations, event professionals and all stakeholders in our industry to realise that investing in long-term strategies around sustainability is the only way forward in the event design process, in all aspects and stages of planning, starting from the bidding procedure up to the post-event reporting and data analytics. Soon this will not be a matter of selection but an element of positive evaluation and growth. Associations can definitely play a leading role in this process, if they manage to integrate the sustainability element into multiple channels, such as their educational and scientific objectives, their strategic plan, the destination and venue selection, as well as collaboration with the professional congress organiser who understands the value of sustainable development.

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Destinations, associations, event professionals, all key stakeholders in our industry have to join forces with the aim of keeping up with all recent trends on the value of CSR and sustainability. This requires collaboration, education, creation of new knowledge and guidance by the experts of the field. It also requires innovation, thinking outside of the box, but also monitoring and adaptation of best practices.

Speaking of best practices, let's look at an interesting perspective on how to create awareness about sustainability at national level.

CSR HELLAS was founded in 2000, for the promotion and implementation of CSR in the strategies and operations of businesses and organisations in Greece, regardless of their size or sector.

It is currently composed of a dynamic group of companies acting as leaders in shaping new and innovative business practices, contributing to sustainable development and value creation for all shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, local community and environment, as well as for the national economy and society at large. CSR Hellas belongs to the CSR Europe Network which consists of 42 European Networks and 10.000 corporate members and operates with a shared mission and vision (2030 Agenda).

In 2019, AFEA became a member of CSR Hellas Network, being the first meeting organiser in Greece to join this network. At the same time, AFEA is a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which calls companies to take action for the protection of labour and human rights, environment and anti-corruption since 2018. AFEA has incorporated the 10 principles of the UNGC and declared its support to those principles.

During the pandemic, AFEA and CSR decided to join forces, with the aim of raising awareness on the importance of sustainability in meetings and events, as well as in the Tourism sector in the country. Jointly, the two organisations designed a number of webinars and activities throughout the year, inviting key stakeholders and decision-makers in Greece to discuss and exchange views, as well as agree on future steps in the sustainable development agenda. Some of the key speakers and panel members of these webinars were, among others, Ministers of Tourism and Commerce, city representatives, Heads and Board members of hotels and other associations, involved in tourism, senior managers of the biggest enterprises in Greece, representatives of the national air carrier and other important personalities. The success of these joint activities led to the creation of greater awareness and knowledge around sustainability, broadened the network and influence of CSR Hellas and, of course, contributed to the design of more strategies towards the implementation of sustainable events. Overall, an important initiative that is now turning into something bigger for the entire sector in Greece and opens new perspectives.

The collaboration led to a greater success, as the two organisations received the IAPCO Collaboration award for their joint efforts and teamwork on a very important topic. This has also contributed to greater awareness about the value of sustainability within the IAPCO community.

It is up to us in the meetings industry, to create more of these best practices and stories around sustainability and to showcase our industry's power in shaping the future!

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