

BRUSSELS REGION KEEPS DEVELOPING ITS MICE MARKET



The MICE market is no laughing matter in the Brussels Region. For the capital, which claims to be the world's leading host city for international association gatherings to the very end of its nails, this form of tourism is a rolling affair.

According to the 2015 figures, the MICE sector reportedly earned € 632 million that year for the Brussels Region. **In 2014, about 60% of the salaried jobs of tourism in the broad sense depended on congresses and corporate events.** That's about 16,890 jobs.

Last week, the 60th anniversary reception of the Palais des Congrès in Brussels took place. Built for the occasion of World Expo 58, the Palais boasts over 10 million visitors since the opening, who took part in just over 17,500 events. On their own, the congress delegates who frequent the place would spend some 60 million euros a year in Brussels.

The political representatives at the reception were not short of praise for a niche that helped keep the tourism sector afloat in the storm that followed the terror attacks.

According to the statistics, a leisure tourist spends an average of 150 euros a day in Brussels, and a business tourist 350 to 400 euros. The figures nevertheless deserve a little context, the latest data of the regional agency Visit Brussels reveal an average of 242 euros of expenditure per day and per an event participant. Patrick Bontinck, CEO of Visit Brussels, explains this difference by the fact that the figure so frequently cited also takes into consideration the expenses related to the organization of the event itself, in addition to personal expenses of tourists.

"We must realize that behind the business tourism in the Brussels Region, there is not only the expenses of the congressman, with accommodation, the restaurant three times a day but also everything that revolves around the conference, whether room rental, audiovisual equipment, interpreters."

To defend its global position, the MICE market in Brussels can count on 20 congress areas with a capacity of 1,000 people or more. According to the businessman Philippe Lhomme, Brussels already has, with its Parc des Expositions, "the best overall infrastructure of Belgium", "partly under-exploited".

This does not prevent the Brussels Region and the City of Brussels from wanting to push their desires for grandeur a step further, with the mega-congress center that will be opened on the Heysel plateau as part of the second phase of the Neo project.

Patrick Bontinck swears that the demand exists for a place of this size. "For all congresses, the size tends to very strongly increase with the globalization and the fact that now all the countries and all the continents are present. So congresses that were made of 10,000 people will soon reach 15,000 or 20,000 people."

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