Overview:

The 2017 Politicians Forum comprised three key elements:

1. A set of private meetings amongst the national level and local / regional level attending officials to discuss topics specific to their respective interests;

2. A Forum-opening presentation by Professor Greg Clark, Chairman, The Business of Cities Ltd and Hon Professor, UCL City Leadership Lab, University College London, on the topic of how city development and transition benefited from the facilitating role played by the Meetings Industry in each community, and

3. An open discussion forum in which attendees put forward their responses to the opportunities and challenges presented by the government / Meetings Industry interface and offered relevant experiences for consideration. These interventions were summarised and responded to by Prof. Clark as a way of achieving summary conclusions for each discussion topic.

The core programme was further enhanced by two additional activities on the same day:

1. First, a keynote presentation at the Official IMEX Opening Ceremony, also by Prof. Clark, which set the stage for the Forum discussions, engaged the broader IMEX audience in the Forum theme and informed the subsequent political group discussions in the afternoon, and

2. A tour of the IMEX exhibition floor which oriented visiting politicians to the scope and diversity of the industry and enabled them to see how their respective cities and countries presented themselves relative to others in the global marketplace.

Proceedings:

The resulting points and conclusions arising from these various components, in chronological order, included the following:

1. The IMEX Opening Keynote:

As indicated above, in addition to the formalities of the Opening Ceremony there was a presentation by Prof. Greg Clark which served as a thought-provoking scene setter for the Forum discussions that followed. Amongst the key points addressed by Prof. Clark in the presentation were:

- That the world is in a phase of unprecedented urbanisation which creates and also brings major challenges;

- That city-related decisions made in the next 30 years will fundamentally shape cities for the next 1-200 years, which is creating an emerging “Science of Cities”;
• That urban development is also impacted by three other issues:
  • Tensions between cities and rural / other non-urban areas.
  • Interactions with national governments, national economies, and other regions.
  • The forces of anti-globalisation, populist nationalism, and the retreat back to a nation-state mindset.

• That the Meetings Industry is potentially a major facilitator of urban development with roles in such areas as:
  o Jobs, sales, and incomes
  o Taxes and revenues
  o Connectivity and accessibility
  o Internationalisation, open-ness, diversity, presence, and reach.
  o Amenities and facilities and place making
  o Identity, Visibility, Affiliation, and Reputation.
  o Strategic alignment with, and reinforcing capabilities for, other dynamic sectors.

• However, the benefits are limited by a “Partnership Gap” between the industry and most local governments that results in the industry being largely unrecognised as a factor. This gap is due to such issues as confusion with tourism, a lack of local appreciation and a failure to see the role of the industry in broader policy advancement;

• That meetings are a required mechanism for interpreting and understanding the bigger picture about our planet, our race, our century, and

• That a professional industry is required to make those meetings great such that they facilitate the quality of exchanges required to address the larger issues

A complete script of this presentation forms an appendix to this report as Attachment A

2. National Government Discussion:

The National Government Discussion was chaired by ICCA President Nina Freysen-Pretorius and took the form of a round table focussing on key areas that represented the most important issues facing governments in their interface with the Meetings Industry today. Under the overall theme “Nations and Cities - differences and complementarities in the international meetings market”- these were:

• How do you measure and report success for your country in terms of the Meetings Industry?

• What specific mechanisms do you use to deliver your country’s meetings strategy?

• What strategic model is most relevant in your country? Which model do you currently employ?

• Which relationships are the most critical, and which are working well in your country?
• How is your country marketing itself as a meetings destination, and what works best at the national level vs. city level;

Amongst the points made in the group discussion were:

• Building a "whole government" strategy through inter-agency committees as established in Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya will help avoid fragmentation and maximise potential to win and benefit from meetings;

• Building capacity and skills, not just physical infrastructure, is important. There is also a need for long-term strategy, as the business is not tactical;

• Governments can work with neighbouring countries to stimulate new, rotating, regional meetings as in Uruguay with Brazil and Argentina. Developing countries can also use major meetings such as World Economic Forum to kick-start the business as in Tanzania or by exploiting the international institutions headquartered or with regional offices in their country;

• A clear overall country brand as developed in the UK is preferable to having a different brand used by each government agency. The sector should not be called "business tourism" but rather "business events" or "meetings & events".

• There is a need for tourism and the meetings industry to cooperate in positive messaging to overcome shared misperceptions and preventing cities from duplicating effort and expenditure.

3. Local / Regional Level Discussion:

The Local / Regional Discussion, Chaired by John Greenway, former Member of Parliament (UK), was similarly preoccupied with key issues and opportunities associated with the government / Meetings Industry interface, this time at a local / regional level where decisions were more likely to be around industry investment and programming.

It began with a short industry overview presented by Rod Cameron, Executive Director of the Joint Meetings Industry Council who proposed that the industry is being driven by an ongoing realisation of the value of face to face meetings as economic, academic, professional and business drivers. Also that the major challenges facing both the industry and those destinations that are active participants are increasing competition, the need for adaptation and the pursuit of relevance, particularly the ability to measure and track the benefits generated.

Ensuing discussions took place in the form of discussion groups under the leadership of moderators and revolved around the following two questions:

1. "How can the important relationship between local/regional government and the meetings industry be successfully developed?"
2. "How should local/regional government and the meetings industry work together to create and implement a successful destination development strategy?"

Amongst the points raised in the ensuing discussion were:

- The importance of being able to show measurable benefits to local government and the community, particularly in areas such as jobs;

- The value of creating local networks both amongst government agencies and with local academics, professionals and business leaders to ensure collaboration;

- The need for having a common vision that links the strategies of various players not just in the local area but the region as a whole;

- The importance of growing the talent pool and linkages to the academic world to generate support and appeal to the “next generation”;

- A need for linkages between the industry and infrastructure development strategy overall to optimise synergies, and

- The importance of establishing structures for ongoing dialogue with local and regional politicians as well as partnerships between the meetings industry and local and regional government to develop strategic plans with potential to deliver economic goals.

3. Politicians Forum Opening Keynote by Prof. Greg Clark

Following the conclusion of the private meetings as outlined above, government participants joined with a wider group of industry leaders in a more formal forum setting for the joint portion of the Forum programme. This was led by a second presentation by Prof. Clark which built on his morning presentation at the IMEX Official Opening to focus on the practical aspects of the government / Meetings Industry interface as context for the subsequent open forum discussions. Amongst his points were the following:

- That ‘Globalising Cities’ comprise a diverse and complex group that are today challenged by many factors including populism and anti-globalisation

- That there are identifiable key ingredients in achieving city success, which play out in various ways depending on the state of city development in a particular destination;

- That there is a complex interface between nations and cities, including both “love” and “hate” components that can either support or compromise city development;

- That there is an opportunity to leverage the role of the Meetings Industry in the urban economic development process to mutual advantage;
• That affordability is a growing issue in many cities and that there are questions as to whether or not this is actually achievable;

• That there are growing impacts and opportunities for cities being created through the Sharing Economy (AirBnB, UBER, etc) which are disrupting many traditional relationships and business opportunities, and

• That there is a required “marriage” between cities and the Meetings Industry to optimise their relationships and some serious questions around how best to make this work effectively.

The slides from this presentation forms an appendix to this report as Attachment B

4. Open Forum Exchange:

The open forum section of the programme took the form of interventions from the wider audience which were responded to by Prof. Clark in his capacity as an expert in urban development driven by a series of questions relating to the specific topics arising from the areas of interface which were raised earlier in the day. Amongst these were:

**Impacts of populism and anti-globalisation:**

• Global events are as likely to be enhanced as challenged by populism and anti-globalisation as meetings are the medium for resolutions. Events that address this need are likely to be amongst the most successful as they support “constructive dialogue”

• Creating an “open” and welcoming image is the best strategy for destinations wanting success under today’s conditions

• Meetings and events are important vehicles for developing and enhancing a destination’s profile and reputation under any international conditions

• The industry promotes inclusiveness, and ethnically diverse companies and countries are more likely to outperform their competitors

**Respective roles of Nations and Cities:**

• National governments can best support the industry by creating an overall welcoming and capable environment that the industry can use to attract business

• National governments can take the lead in explaining the broader role meetings and events have in attracting new business and investment and benefiting local communities

• National governments can create programmes that provide leverage for local initiatives to be more successful; the relation must be collaborative
The role of the Meetings Industry in advancing City Success

- Major events can be a catalyst for redefining a city’s priorities and attracting global attention to such changes

- Major events are increasingly looking to use their event as a way to leave a community legacy, and this can support city success in terms of both increased profile and valuable knowledge transfer. These can be documented to illustrate an added-value from meetings

- Addressing the Meetings Market can provide an additional rationale for enhancing public facilities as they add value for an organiser but leave citizen benefits

- Local citizens often do not know what benefits the industry leaves behind – we need to do more education in this regard

- The Meetings Industry has become a major force in promoting sustainability and supporting local suppliers which leaves a positive legacy in host communities

Cities and the Sharing Economy

- This is still in the early stages but is already having a big impact on cities, and requires more study and regulatory frameworks to manage the potential impacts

- “Disruptors” are a fact of life for the future and must be accepted as an ongoing reality if they are to be managed effectively

The city government / Meetings Industry Interface

- The industry is not well known or understood in most cities and a sustained effort is required to measure and communicate its diverse benefits if there is to be support from government

- Governments and industry working together can strengthen competitiveness and attract the most beneficial events

- Collaboration not just with the destination marketing organisation but also with economic development agencies will produce better results

- Creating formal working groups can be a good way to maintain momentum in terms of industry / government cooperation.

Overall Conclusions:

The overall conclusions arising from the combined elements of the Forum Programme again related closely to the areas of discussion identified for the overall programme as well as an
assessment of how these conclusions reflected the current state of understanding between represented governments and the Meetings Industry. These included:

- That the Meetings Industry has a critical role to play in addressing both the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanisation and urban transition in a variety of ways; however,

- This role is being limited by a lack of appreciation for how governments can most effectively utilise the industry to advantage in terms of addressing and advancing key policy priorities and countering development challenges;

- That specific initiatives can and should be undertaken to improve this interface to mutual advantage, but

- These must be based on collaboration, enhanced communications and well-documented evidence of industry benefits that can be utilised in government decision-making

- That doing this effectively requires that governments establish specific mechanisms to align Meetings Industry marketing strategies with priority economic and social policy and develop ongoing vehicles to facilitate better exchange between government and the industry.

The IMEX Policy Forum will take place on Tuesday 15 May, 2018

Save the date in your calendar and register your interest now by emailing natasha.richards@imexexhibitions.com