UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER – CENTRE FOR TOURISM RESEARCH

MA CONFERENCE AND EVENTS MANAGEMENT

A COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTS OF INCREASING CROSS-CULTURAL MEETINGS ON THE CONFERENCE INDUSTRY IN LONDON AND VIENNA

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DECLARATION

"**Declaration:**

This Dissertation is the work of Carina Glaser. All other contributors are acknowledged in the text and listed in the bibliography.

Word count: 16,468 words"

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the topic "A comparison of the effects of increasing cross-cultural meetings on the conference industry in London and Vienna". The conference market is a young and vibrant industry which is rapidly emerging. Meetings have become a major profit centre and are an indispensable part of the communication process on which our "global village" depends on.

The following paper aims at outlining the high significance of cross-cultural meetings and the importance of having a general understanding of cultural diversity and the many important issues that come with it. Vienna and London were chosen as researched cities for this dissertation as they are major players in the conference and events industry, and therefore provide plenty of information for research.

The research questions focus on the disclosure of the practices and services that are of upmost importance for the success of cross-cultural meetings as well as barriers of cross-cultural communication. Further, emphasis is put on gaining general insight on whether Vienna or London is better prepared to host cross-cultural meetings. To analyse and evaluate the key propositions, qualitative and quantitative research was conducted in form of a questionnaire, which was sent out to 270 industry professionals, and twelve in-depth interviews.

The research findings show that in general, meeting planners and venues are aware of the practices and services that are highly significant for cross-cultural meetings. However, many are not informed in particular about the specific needs of the delegates related to their culture until later on in the planning process. Finally, results demonstrate that one needs to overcome certain barriers of cross-cultural communication to fully understand the *modus operandi* of hosting cross-cultural events.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMAI	Destination Marketing Association International
DMC	Destination Management Company
GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
MPI	Meeting Professionals International
ÖHV	Austrian Hotel Association
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAX	Persons approximately
PCMA	Professional Convention Management Association
PCO	Professional Conference Organiser
QEII	Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
RCP	Royal College of Physicians
ROI	Return on Investment
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UIA	Union of International Associations
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
VCB	Vienna Convention Bureau

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1   INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims at outlining the high significance of the conference business as a truly global industry. The main purpose of this study is to highlight the industry's international and cross-cultural facets and how well two cities, London and Vienna, are suited for hosting cross-cultural meetings.

1.1   Rationale

In the author's opinion, *cross-cultural meetings can be described as events which draw an audience from two or more countries.* Due to the lack of sufficient information about cross-cultural meetings and its effects on the industry, the researcher seeks to evaluate the importance of having a general understanding of cultural diversity and the opportunities and problems that come with it.

Further, there is a greater need to study cross-cultural meetings and their effects on the conference industry in order to learn lessons for future developments. The author will therefore attempt to fill this gap and reveal interesting facts about cross-cultural meetings.

1.2   Conceptual text

The chosen topic is of high personal interest as the author sees her future career in the dynamic and multi-faceted international conference business. Due to increasing globalisation, more and more countries are actively part of the conference industry nowadays. Cultures are converging as a result of this borderless world and multicultural awareness is a reality. Moreover, the shrinking globe enables employees to participate freely in work projects and meetings with colleagues all over the world. International events with culturally diverse attendees have become a normal course of life these days. Therefore, it is important for all stakeholders involved in the business tourism field to be aware and prepared to organise and host cross-cultural meetings on a regular basis.

Further, justification for the choice of Vienna and London as researched cities for this dissertation will be given. The first and most obvious reason for examining Vienna and London is that they are major players in the conference and events industry and provide plenty of information for researching how two different cities are affected by cultural diversity in the business sector and how they are responding to it. Secondly, the author was born in Vienna and currently lives in London and therefore disposes of firsthand knowledge about these destinations.

1.3   Research propositions

Increasing multiculturalism in the meetings industry provides many reasons to carry out research in this field. The key propositions draw attention to cross-cultural meetings in Vienna and London and to what extent those cities are prepared for hosting such events. Moreover, a deeper insight into the topic is gained through research questions which deal with the specific issues and strategies affecting successful meetings with various culturally diverse groups.

The following propositions will be explored during this dissertation:

1. What practices and services are of upmost importance for the success of cross-cultural meetings?
2. Which city is more suitable/prepared for cross-cultural meetings in the industry – Vienna or London?
3. How often is the planner/venue informed in particular about the specific needs of the delegates related to their culture?
4. What are the main barriers for cross-cultural communication?
5. To what extend do meeting planners and venues lack the thorough comprehension of cross-cultural meetings and all the issues that come with it?

1.4   Research design

The methodology chosen for this dissertation is both qualitative and quantitative, which is referred to as *triangulation method*. The deductive

research approach is applied and the dissertation is presented as an exploratory research.

To establish the basis of this paper, secondary research by means of an extensive literature review of books, journals as well as trade press articles and statistical sources is conducted. Primary research is carried out in form of a questionnaire sent out to 270 industry professionals. Further, qualitative research was completed through 12 in-depth interviews, six in each city, to complement the information gathered for the quantitative approach. The data analysis for the quantitative results was accomplished with SPSS and a manual method of analysis was applied for the qualitative approach.

1.5   Structure

Following the introduction, the literature review deals with the chapter "Multiculturalism in the workforce", drawing attention towards globalisation, cultural diversity and stereotyping. The chapters "Cross-cultural communication" and "Cross-cultural management in the meetings industry" comprise issues such as *business communication across cultures, service quality* and *tactfulness regarding specific needs.* Further, the section "Vienna and London as conference destinations" is dedicated to reveal the cities' importance in the global conference industry.

The methodology chapter then outlines the research methods used, followed by a thorough analysis of the gathered data. Additionally, the chapter "Discussion of findings" puts emphasis on answering the research question, drawing inferences about the similarities and differences between data results and the literature review. Ultimately, a conclusion and final recommendations are provided.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Multiculturalism in the workforce

The concept of culture is deeply rooted in human history and its scope extends far beyond the boundaries of organisational activity. One of the core elements of culture is that it is a shaping process (Brewster *et al.* 2007). According to Reisinger & Turner (2003), culture is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that is difficult to define, and the different definitions presented in the literature reflect this.

> "For a culture to exist, members of a group or society share a distinct way of life with common values, attitudes and behaviours that are transmitted over time in a gradual, yet dynamic process." (Brewster *et al.* 2007:14)

Culture refers to an invisible dimension (assumptions, values and beliefs) and a visible dimension (behaviour). Assumptions, values and beliefs can impact behaviour in a cause and effect relationship, as outlined in Figure 1 (Tinnish 2006).

Behaviour
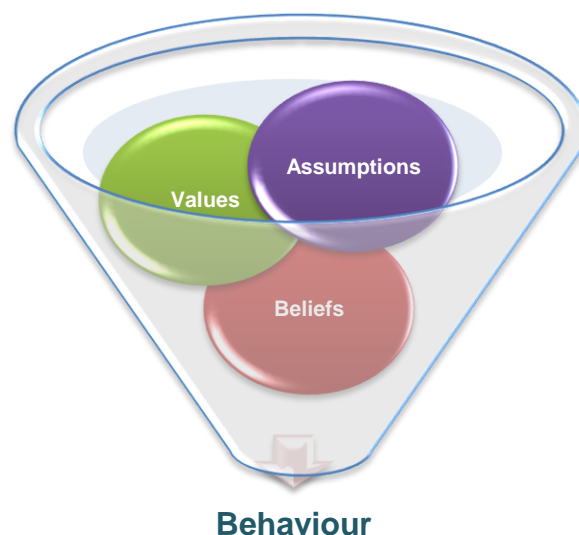
Figure 1: Definition of culture (Tinnish 2006)

French (2010) agrees to the fact that it is especially important to point out the essentially multi-faceted nature of culture. Cultures may comprise of different layers, ranging from obvious differences in cultural artefacts, such

as the colour of post boxes and typical mealtimes, to deep beliefs and assumptions.

Communication and language are deeply rooted in culture. Non-verbal cues are embedded in communication and are additions to spoken words such as for instance tone, volume, and inflection. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, gestures, eye contact, and spatial arrangements, is as important as the actual words used (Tinnish 2006). Harris *et al.* (2003) contend that the increasing internationalisation and globalisation of business has made the concept of culture and its impact on organisations' operations a critical topic for study.

2.1.1 Globalisation

"Globalisation refers to a process in which companies in countries around the world are increasingly linked by their activities and the opportunities they provide each other." (Jackson *et al.* 2009:26)

Browaeys & Price (2008) and Chocat (2009) both agree that globalisation is caused by a complex mix of factors, such as political disruption, liberalisation of the economy, technological changes, and emerging markets. As Tinnish (2006) states, multicultural awareness is a reality of our global market. Today's world is a global world with historical barriers, such as time, distance and communication, which is minimised through technology, travel and international commerce. Brewster *et al.* (2007) remark that the impact of information technology and global media has brought the world into our living rooms. Cultures are converging and advances in telecommunications, information technology, and global consumer products are leading to a "global village" where nations unite.

Taylor (2008) contends that national economies are fast being subsumed into a single global economy in which huge companies operate across national boundaries, serving worldwide markets and locating production wherever it is most effective to do so. The world seems to become far

smaller, with the capability of transporting people and goods quickly from one hemisphere to the other at an affordable cost.

According to Jackson *et al.* (2009), one of the most difficult challenges for global organisations is developing an effective HRM (Human Resource Management) system that works at home as well as abroad. A firm's decision about which practices will be used and adapted universally to reflect local conditions will ultimately determine its success or failure. Deng & Gibson's (2009) qualitative research with expatriate practitioners revealed a core series of cross-cultural leadership competencies such as transformational leadership (TL), emotional intelligence (EQ), and cultural intelligence (CQ).

> "The findings contribute to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of effective expatriate leaders' underlying EQ and CQ, as well as their specific TL style." (Deng & Gibson 2009:347-348)

Therefore, it can be emphasised that cultural variations certainly have a positive influence on a company's working climate.

2.1.2 Cultural variations at work

Brewster *et al.* (2007) and Khan (2008) are of the opinion that differences in national cultures are apparent to all of us, even if we never step outside our doorsteps. Each person's religion, values, attitudes, traditions, and language are inherent largely to their ethnicity.

Brewster *et al.* (2007:14) state that "in a management context, the need to take cultural differences into account is demonstrated in the growing field of worldwide mergers and acquisitions." Baum (2006) argues that an understanding of cultural diversity is clearly important in the international tourism, hospitality and leisure industry due to a workforce of multicultural origin. Further, Torrington *et al.* (2005) point out that a frequent saying about any form of international management is "global thinking, local action".

Taylor (2008) emphasises that when employees are recruited who might take up positions abroad, the following factors need to be considered in the selection process:

Existing language skills	Ability to learn new languages
Awareness of relevant overseas cultures	Ability to adapt to overseas values and norms
Preparedness for living conditions in foreign countries	Domestic circumstances

Table 1: Factors to consider in selection process (Taylor 2008)

Brewster *et al.* (2007) and Taylor (2008) both agree that in an increasingly borderless world, managers need to know how national cultural differences might affect the organisational structure, notions of leadership and HRM practices. While it is sometimes claimed that culturally the world is becoming more homogenous, for the foreseeable future substantial differences between national cultures will clearly continue.

Moreover, managers must understand how dimensions of national culture influence operational decisions based on the fact that such knowledge will better prepare global firms to manage the supply chain more effectively (Vecchi & Brennan 2009). An efficient and well-attuned corporate culture is the first step to success in a cross-cultural environment.

2.1.3 Cultural diversity in the workplace

> "A company culture is the unique pattern of shared assumptions, values and norms that shape the socialisation activities, language, symbols and ceremonies of people in the organisation." (Jackson *et al.* 2009:56)

Effective leadership ensures that people are working to achieve the same results. It is however not unusual to find several *subcultures* within a single organisation. Especially age-based subcultures (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y) are found in many societies worldwide (Jackson *et al.* 2009).

"Diversity is expected to enhance the available means of information and insights that should help groups to achieve their goals." (Cox *et al.* 1991, cited in Ayoko 2007:109).

The different forms of cultural diversity present in an organisation can influence how people think and feel. Eventually, their thoughts and feelings are translated into observable behaviours in the workplace and can shape the corporate culture. Examples of thoughts and feelings influenced by cultural diversity are for instance cognition, emotional reactions, perceptions of status and power, discomfort, and admiration (Schuler *et al.* 2004). This leads to the introduction of studies focusing on cultural variations and frameworks.

2.1.4 Cultural frameworks

In recent years, a number of studies have been carried out in order to categorise cultural variations (Taylor 2008). Brewster *et al.* (2007) note that one of the most influential pieces of research in relation to national cultures is the work of Hofstede in 1980, who found that the differences in responses in the field of intercultural management can be explained by four main dimensions, which were supplemented by a fifth dimension later. The dimensions are as follows: individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and short-term versus long-term orientation. For further information, please refer to Appendix 1.

According to Jackson *et al.* (2009) and Smith (2003), Hofstede's work continues to serve as a foundation for describing cultural differences, although more complex frameworks have been developed in recent years.

Furthermore, Jackson *et al.* (2004) remark that results from the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) research project describe cultural differences comparing values from 18,000 managers in 62 countries. Cultural dimensions or behaviours that society encourages and rewards are outlined in Table 2.

Assertiveness	Future orientation
Gender differentiation	Uncertainty avoidance
Power distance	In-group collectivism
Performance orientation	Humane orientation

Table 2: Cultural dimensions (Jackson *et al.* 2004)

Baum (2007) mentions another theoretical probing to be considered for this industry, that of context and time. "Context" can either be communicated explicitly through instructions (low context) or it is coded in the sense that little is written down but much is implied in what is said (high context). Tinnish (2006) examined that low context cultures are primarily found in North America, and Western Europe. Baum (2007) notes that Asia, Africa, South America, and much of the Middle East are listed as high-context cultures.

Finally, Harris *et al.* (2003) emphasise on some of the limitations of cultural frameworks. Firstly, the majority of the work undertaken in this area has been carried out by Western, in particular, European researchers. Secondly, it is quite dangerous to over-generalise or stereotype on the basis of these characteristics of cultural values.

2.1.5 Stereotypes

"A stereotype is a fixed, commonly held notion or image of a person or group, based on an oversimplification of some observed or imagined trait of behaviour or appearance." (Media Awareness Network 2010:n.p.a.)

Brislin (2008) highlights that in order to deal with the vast amount of information people have to process every day, the psychological process of categorisation is often applied. When referring to cultural differences, individuals are put into a category which is given a label. Most often these categories refer to ethnic group markers, such as skin colour, facial features (e.g.: eye shape), as well as language or accents. Sometimes

stereotyping might be necessary, however most people resent being put into a category because they feel that their individuality is denied. Lewis (2006) remarks that stereotypes should be used in a descriptive rather than evaluative way, and as a first "best guess".

Mattock (1999) emphasises that most stereotypes are out of date, twisted by the media, and popular mythology. Due to the reason that cultures are complex, flexible models are often built up to filter, focus, and frame observations relying on topography, religion, and history.

> "The potential for conflict is greater in culturally diverse than culturally homogeneous workgroups because of the operation of cultural prejudices, biases and stereotypes as well as value differences." (Harrison *et al.* 1998, cited in Ayoko 2007:106)

According to Torrington *et al.* (2005), we need to understand cultural differences of behaviour and attitude that are rooted in cultural diversity; otherwise we will misinterpret what we hear. As Brewster *et al.* (2005) state, the more popular culture has become as a means of explaining the way people behave at work across countries, the more careful the global HR practitioner has to be at taking findings at face value. French (2010) highlights that it is important to keep in mind that a stereotype can serve as a statistical statement about a group, such as a country, rather than as a prediction about individuals.

2.2   Cross-cultural communication

The effect of cultural values on business communication might have positive as well as negative connotations. Mattock (1999) is of the opinion that cross-cultural communication is a complex field. If business is carried out between different nationalities, one has to acquaintance him- or herself with the potential partner's culture, the company he or she comes from, and consideration has to be paid to his or her character before tactics can be taken into account.

Browaeys & Price (2008) refer to the term *culture shock,* expressing an unpleasant experience one can have when coming into contact with other cultures. Brislin (2008) outlines common symptoms of culture shock, such as an irritable mood, difficulty sleeping, and a decreased enthusiasm about life in general. However, French (2010) claims that culture shock is a normal and predictable phenomenon as most people will experience cultural surprises when living and working in another country.

The following subchapters focus further on the different aspects that might influence cross-cultural communication.

2.2.1 Relationship-focused versus deal-focused cultures

"The differences between relationship-focused (RF) and deal-focused (DF) business behaviour impact our success throughout the global marketplace." (Gesteland 2005:21)

As Gesteland (2005) notes, the vast majority of the world's markets are relationship-oriented, such as for instance the Arab world, most of Africa, Latin America and the Asia/Pacific region. RF people avoid doing business with strangers and therefore want to know their prospective partners before doing business with them. French (2010) brings up the subject of *guanxi,* which is an important feature in Chinese life, referring both to interpersonal relationships and connections. It demonstrates that Chinese people attach great importance to cultivating, developing, and maintaining *guanxi* (connection or relationship) in business relationships.

On the other hand, the deal-focused approach is common only in Northern Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, where people are relatively open to doing business with strangers. It can therefore be remarked that doing business with RF cultures might take up much more time and patience compared to setting up deals with DF cultures (Gesteland 2005).

2.2.2 Formal versus informal business cultures

The presence of status and power differences is universal and like many aspects of culture, distinctions exist in the degree to which power and status are distributed among societal levels (Brislin 2008).

According to Gesteland (2005) and Brislin (2008), negotiations between formal and informal cultures may provide misunderstandings. Formal cultures, such as most of Europe and Asia, the Arab world, and Latin America, tend to be organised in hierarchies reflecting major differences in status and power. Cultures corresponding to only one or two rungs of the power ladder are called *low power distant*. Informal cultures, however, value egalitarian attitudes with smaller differences in status and power. Informal business cultures are for instance the United States, Canada, Australia/New Zealand, and Nordic countries. Cultures corresponding to four or five ladder rungs are called *high power distant*.

Gesteland (2005) contends that these contrasting values can as well cause conflicts because formal cultures tend to ascribe status related to one's age, gender, and organisational rank. Other factors that can define status are family background, level of education and knowledge, of "high culture". Browaeys & Price (2008) state that in some cultures however, inequality of power is a given and no attempt is made to make any compensations on a socio-economic level.

2.2.3 Expressive versus reserved cultures

Gesteland (2005) notes that people of different cultures can misunderstand body language just as they may misinterpret spoken words. Herewith, French (2010) points out the term *kinesics,* referring to body language such as postures, gestures, and facial expression.

Expressive cultures, such as the Mediterranean region, Latin Europe, and Latin America, tend to use more gestures and facial expressions to be understood. On the contrary, reserved cultures might interpret loud voices and expressions as a sign of insanity. Typical reserved cultures are for

example East and Southeast Asia, and Nordic and Germanic Europe (Gesteland 2005). Lewis (2006) presents another categorisation of culture and refers to *linear-active* (introverts, reserved)*, multi-active* (extroverts, expressive), *and reactive* (prioritise respect) cultures.

2.3   Business communication across cultures

As already stated before, the increasingly global nature of business and the growing interaction between cultures is adding to the complexity of doing business (Browaeys & Price 2008).

> "International meetings are an area where differences in cultural values, etiquette, interpretations of professional conduct, and corporate rules are at their most visible and challenging to control." (Payne 2004:1)

Therefore, the aim of researchers is to reduce this confusion by introducing some predictability by classifying international business customs and practices into logical patterns.

2.3.1 Global business protocol and etiquette

Cultures unfold in various ways through developing norms. Such norms deal with a wide range of behaviours, such as for instance workplace interaction, punctuality, dress standards, and the amount of deference shown to bosses (Brislin 2008). Unfortunately, good manners in one country can be eccentricity or bad manners in another. Therefore, international business people often face a dilemma: should they maintain their impeccable behaviour from back home or should they imitate the people they visit and risk ridicule by not getting it quite right? (Lewis 2006)

Gesteland (2005) found out that every human being is surrounded by an invisible envelope of air called a "space bubble". This bubble varies in size according to where in the world the person grew up and the particular situation he or she is in. French (2010) points out the term *proxemics,* which refers to how space is used in communication intentionally and unintentionally. Among business people the handshake is the most common form of physical contact and its use varies worldwide, as for

instance the Germans' handshake is firm and brisk, whereas most Asians infrequently and very gently shake hands (Gesteland 2005).

Moreover, the different forms of address might imply problems. For example in formal cultures, it is more likely to use the person's family name plus any applicable title (Gesteland 2005). Therefore, Brislin (2008) notes that for Japanese it is highly significant to exchange business cards at official events, as the card gives details about the person's title and the organisation he/she works for. Due to the reason that the Japanese language has various stylistic features that are used with people of different status, they can better adjust their communication style when being given a business card. Allen (2002) moreover contends that the casual North American manner of using first names in business is not necessarily appropriate elsewhere.

Further, dress code is also important to consider. Some cultures value style, polished shoes, and accessories over the quality and price of one's briefcase, watch or jewellery. Brislin (2008) remarks that having a sense of humour often facilitates communication when interacting with different cultures. However, humour is a double-edged sword and many cultures might not appreciate the use of jokes in a business context.

2.3.2 Communication and language

According to Browaeys & Price (2008), the choice of a communication mode can be influenced by cultural factors. Gesteland (2005) emphasises that most often communication gaps exist between relationship-focused (RF) and deal-focused (DF) business people. Browaeys & Price (2008) contend that a business man from an individualist culture (DF) may rely on efficient communication by using straightforward language and comprehensive business proposals. RF people however often favour a more indirect, roundabout style of communication.

Moreover, Browaeys & Price (2008) point out that listening is a crucial element of any conversation and taking turns to speak may certainly ease

the process of understanding. Gesteland (2005) points out the term "conversational overlap" as a fancy meaning of interrupting another speaker. Expressive people regard interruptions as a normal part of conversation, however, overlap is considered as rude for people from reserved societies.

"The hierarchical nature of a culture can have a massive impact on the input given by participants in an international meeting." (Payne 2004:1)

For hierarchical cultures, actions such as speaking one's mind, criticising ideas, disagreeing openly, giving feedback, and reporting problems in front of the boss are all acceptable moves (Payne 2004). Additionally, Brislin (2008) emphasises that many business people find out what other cultures are interested prior to a social engagement in order to avoid uncomfortable silence.

Further, communication can also be expressed in form of body language and Gesteland (2005) remarks that perhaps the most subtle form of body language is gaze behaviour. Intense eye contact can be experienced in the Arab World, the Mediterranean region, Latin Europe, and Latin America. Firm eye contact can be observed in Northern Europe and North America. Indirect eye contact is for example appropriate for most of Asia.

2.3.3 Time and scheduling

"In global dealings, time is the most noticeable aspect of distance." (Mattock 1999:107)

According to Gesteland (2005), globetrotting business travellers quickly learn that people look at time and scheduling differently in different parts of the world. Therefore, Mattock (1999) highlights that it is of upmost importance to make arrangements about time to fit the local mood.

Gesteland (2005) and Payne (2004) both agree on the fact that in rigid-time societies punctuality is critical, schedules are set in concrete and meetings are rarely interrupted. Those cultures can also be called

"monochronic", clock-obsessed and schedule- worshipping, and they can be found in Nordic and Germanic Europe, North America, and Japan. In direct contrast are the "polychronic" cultures, where people place less emphasis on strict punctuality, they are not obsessed with deadlines, and several meetings-within-meetings may be taking place. Typical polychronic cultures are for example the Arab World, Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia.

Mattock (1999) examines that time does not always just refer to punctuality and deadlines, but also to daily working hours, careers, and the speed in decision making. In Japan, people might work up to 12 hours a day and may spend a lifetime in the same company. In North America, decisions are often made top-down and in a speedier process whereas in Spain people enjoy the pleasure of hospitality and unhurried decisions.

2.3.4 Corruption and bribery

Gesteland (2005) remarks that it is essential to have a look at how business is done successfully in difficult markets where corruption is rife and bribing government officials is accepted practice. In some countries corruption and bribes are sanctioned by custom even though they are illegal under local law. Therefore it is important to many business executives to know how to avoid them. The US government is the only one in the world which imposes heavy penalties for bribing; in contrast, many European countries permit companies to claim foreign bribes as a tax reduction.

According to Hooker (2009:251), "corruption is best understood as behaviour that corrupts: it undermines the cultural system in which it occurs." Based on the fact that cultures operate in very different ways, diverse behaviours can corrupt. What is perceived as corrupt in the Western world may be acceptable elsewhere. However, Allen (2002) emphasises that not every gift has to be a bribe, as for example in Japan, gift giving is a tradition, a sign of respect, friendship, and appreciation.

In response to this issue, many companies are increasing their ethics training for employees and also include corruption risks as part of their due diligence process prior to an acquisition (Bierstaker 2009).

2.4   Cross-cultural management in the meetings industry

"The conference industry is a young, dynamic industry, which is growing and maturing at a rapid rate." (Rogers 2003:1)

Davidson and Cope (2003) contend that meetings have become a major profit centre in recent times and an essential part of the communication process on which our "global village" depends on. Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) argue that the meeting industry has grown dramatically worldwide since 1950. Two reasons for this development have been identified: a growth in demand and positive changes on the supply side.

All different types of events have to do something with bringing people together face-to-face. They offer possibilities to exchange ideas and information, to discuss and in some cases negotiate, to build friendships and closer business relationships, and to encourage better performance by individuals and organisations (Rogers 2003).

International meetings can be defined in many different ways. PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association) regards an international meeting as synonymous with "any event that has participants from three or more countries" (Ramsborg & Miller 2006). UIA's (Union of international Associations) (2008) definition for international meetings is the following: "Meetings organised or sponsored by "international organisations", i.e. nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) or other meetings of significant international character, notably those organised by national organisations and national branches of international associations." (ICCA 2009)

Due to the industry's international character, cross-cultural management is an indispensable topic. As stated by Tyosvold & Leung (2003), cross-cultural management is a young, fragmented field which deals with

understanding diversity and improving professional practice for important areas to develop in the future. Cross-cultural management cannot be seen as a self-contained area but rather a field where professionals combine their expertise and ideas to thrive progress.

Moreover, Montgomery & Strick (1995) contend that the shrinking globe enables employees to participate freely in work projects, meetings and information sharing with colleagues all over the world. An individual's career is no longer constrained by the limits of an organisation, but more and more "boundaryless". McCabe & Savery (2007:115) refer to this new career pattern as the "butterfly" approach "whereby individuals 'flutter' from one sector to another or from one job type to another within the sector."

However, Fellers (2010) reports that the declining number of attendees and exhibitors during the recession have hit associations hard. In order to make up for those losses, many American organisations are looking beyond their borders to a potentially ripe new market: international attendees. Further, Khan (2008) notes that many companies are now discovering that previously ignored multicultural groups are growing in market power and that meeting their needs is an opportunity for success. Several major hotel corporations, such as Hyatt, Hilton, InterContinental, Choice, Starwood, Cendant and Marriott are demonstrating their commitment to diversity by initiating several minority-friendly measures.

The MPI Multicultural Initiative, a project funded by Walt Disney Parks and Resorts and the MPI Foundation, is determined on doing business in a changing world where multicultural markets can provide a substantial economic impact (MPI 2003). Additionally, the MPI CultureActive© Tool is an added component that offers MPI members the opportunity to improve their ability to understand and communicate with other cultures. The strategic advantages of this tool are an increased effectiveness in managing and being managed across cultures and minimising unpleasant surprises (culture shock) and expensive errors (MPI 2010).

2.4.1 Culture's impact on meetings

"Today's meeting attendees are becoming more diverse and the number and size of multicultural or ethnic meetings is increasing at record levels." (Khan 2008:169)

According to Tinnish (2006), a meeting can only be successful if successful communication occurs. Cross-cultural communication is challenging between two people but the stakes are even higher within a group. The speaker may be communicating to people from multiple cultures with differing perspectives, values, experiences and beliefs. Therefore, Khan (2008) emphasises that meeting planners are being made aware that today's conference delegates consist of people with different needs and expectations, and may demand a different marketing approach for planning, organising, creating, and implementing meetings. Therefore, more focus has to be put upon service quality.

- Service quality

The concept of service quality is particularly important when dealing with people of different origin. Williams and Buswell (2003) state that cultural and behavioural factors are essential prerequisites for the achievement of service quality. Due to demographic changes, social trends, increasing expectations, hyper reality, and technology, the significance of service quality has tremendously increased over the last years.

"The increased complexity of today's business environment and heightened international competition make it necessary for firms to improve quality performance by aligning their quality practices in their attempt to capitalise on all possible sources of competitive advantage." (Vecchi & Brennan 2009:149).

Wyckoff (1992 cited in Williams & Busnell 2003:47) defined service quality as "the degree of excellence intended that meets customer requirements". However, Brown *et al.* (1991) highlight that defining quality in services is particularly difficult because of the intangible nature of the service offering.

Baum (2007) found out that service quality is frequently presented as primarily a marketing-oriented concept, designed to assist organisations to win and keep customers. Beech & Chadwick (2006) point out that service quality is dependent on customer-employee interaction at the point of service delivery. However, this interaction is potentially problematic as a lot of responsibility for service provision falls on front-line staff. Therefore, employees must be in the possession of skills, knowledge, attitude, and authority to be able to provide a high-quality service tailored to specific customer needs.

Williams & Busnell (2003) note that the transferability of a standardised service across the globe is reliant on the notion of "cultural homogenisation", which means that the same market segments throughout the world require the same services. Different nationalities will expect different service standards and if suppliers are not aware of these needs, satisfaction levels diminish. Furthermore, Lehtinen (1991) remarks that it is beneficial to understand differences in customer service styles in different cultures in order to create expectations that can be met during the service production process.

After having considered cross-cultural management and service quality in the meetings industry, further detail will now be given towards the awareness of specific issues that come with cross-cultural meetings.

2.4.2 Tactfulness regarding specific needs

"For the meeting professional, an international meeting can add a new element of complexity and challenge to the meeting planning process." (McLaurin & Wykes 2006:441)

According to Montgomery & Strick (1995), the mixture of cultures in meetings dictate having to review learning styles, travel agenda and needs that may be entirely different from past attendees. Therefore, planners should firstly analyse the demographic profile of the delegates. Secondly, the objectives of the event need to be carefully reviewed and finally,

attention must be paid towards participants' benefits regarding the meeting. Moreover, McLaurin & Wykes (2006) contend that meeting planners have to develop an international meeting strategy in order to identify attendees and countries represented in the meeting and to research the geographical location of the meeting.

The MPI Multicultural Initiative focused its research on multiculturalism in the meetings industry in order to prioritise key issues to improve the success of cross-cultural meetings. A global online survey was conducted with 1,743 MPI members to discover the issues and strategies affecting successful meetings with various cultural and ethnic groups (MPI 2003).

The most significant finding of the research is the difference between the perceptions of the term "multicultural" when used to describe a meeting to residents of the US compared to the perceptions of respondents living in other countries. Respondents living in the US often pictured "multicultural" meetings as meetings of people from various ethnic backgrounds, including religions and races. Respondents living outside the US more often described "multicultural" meetings as meetings of people from various nations. Moreover, 90 % of respondents, regardless of their cultural background, mentioned that organisations need to be sensitive to culture and ethnicity (MPI 2003).

Consequently, meeting planners, venues and clients should be aware of the following issues and practices as they are of greatest importance for the success of cross-cultural meetings.

Concerning meeting planners and clients:

-   Appropriateness of the destination

McLaurin & Wykes (2006) and Choukroun (1999) both agree to the fact that selecting an international meeting destination requires in-depth research on potential destinations. The Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) is for instance a good source of information to gather worldwide data from.

Further, cultural considerations about the destination regarding restrictions of gender have to be considered just as well as traditions, customs, and opinions that prevail in the destination. Another important factor to bear in mind is if the destination's society is considered as a more open or closed one (McLaurin & Wykes 2006).

-   Selection of dates

Campbell *et al.* (2003) state that choosing the right date for the event is critical for its success, as potential delegates might be unable to attend during predictable peaks in their working year or if it conflicts with other events of interest to them. Moreover, McLaurin & Wykes (2006) are of the opinion that attention has to be paid towards any religious or statutory holidays that might be scheduled over the potential dates of the meeting. Yom Kippur is considered to be the holiest day of the year by the Jewish community and planning an event around this day would not boost attendance at all. Further, the traditional workweek varies around the globe, as for example in the Middle East, Thursdays and Fridays are considered weekend days.

-   Appropriateness of venue

"The success of an event depends on many factors, but careful selection of a suitable site is vitally important." (Choukroun 1999:73)

Campbell *et al.* (2003) claim that it is essential for a meeting planner to know how well the venue matches the event purposes. The location of the event can affect the number of participants attending and the overall feel of the event. Choukroun (1999) moreover mentions that the event history of the last three to five meetings and the rotating destinations should also help a meeting planner to find the most suitable venue for the client.

-   Programme planning

Masuch (1999) contends that a memorable conference programme comes in two parts:

- The *business programme* with sessions and speeches,
- The *social programme* in which delegates network.

Regarding the business programme, McLaurin & Wykes (2006) agree to the fact that today's meeting professional is expected to plan a programme that will deliver a significant Return on Investment (ROI). Having a theme might come especially handy with cross-cultural meetings through linking the business programme, food, décor, and entertainment to one central motif delegates can easily follow.

A major issue to consider for programme planning is **speaker and presentation screening**.

> "A presenter who is well-briefed on the purpose of the event, the host organisation and the audience becomes a valuable member of the planner's team and will contribute immeasurably to the success of the venture." (Huttenlocher 1999:118)

McLaurin & Wykes (2006) emphasise that when selecting a speaker for an event, the scientific committee needs to ensure that the speaker will be able to adapt accordingly to the multicultural audience. An issue could for instance come up if a speaker is not well-informed about the purpose of the event and considers making inappropriate jokes.

Regarding the **social programme**, McLaurin & Wykes (2006) note that social events can add significantly to the overall success in achieving the objectives of the event. Campbell *et al.* (2003) state that it is essential to provide a programme for everyone, taking feedback from previous events into account. Further, McLaurin & Wykes (2006) and Campbell *et al.* (2003) remark that attendees with religious beliefs or specific customs might not be able to take part in every ancillary programme organised, therefore, special attention needs to be given to delegate demographics.

Finally, the **selection of entertainment** is another crucial factor of programme planning. According to Allen (2000), it is most important to audition the band's repertoire of songs to avoid playing songs that are not

appropriate for the audience. Moreover, Winter-Nielsen (1999) points out that sometimes non-verbal entertainment is the safest option for a multinational audience. Different gestures mean different things in diverse cultures and some caution is needed. Therefore, religious and ethnic differences should never be used as a source of humour in a multicultural environment. Politics can also be a sensitive area which is best avoided.

- **Marketing**

    "Language is key to effective cross-cultural advertising." (Tinnish 2006:333)

Conferences do not belong to our daily routine; therefore everything associated with the marketing of the event should provide stimuli for delegates (Musco 1999). Weber & Chon (2002) point out that when marketing to an international audience, particularly in countries where conference attendance is not prevalent, the process may be complex. Cultural values, preferences, and protocol must be isolated for each country and marketing strategies designed accordingly. For example, in the US, marketing is primarily done through direct mail, on the other hand, in Hong Kong direct mail campaigns are more difficult to implement because it is illegal to sell mailing lists.

Concerning meeting planners and venues:

- **Awareness and recognition of social cultures**

    "Prior to a large international business meeting, identify who will be coming and what they can contribute." (Payne 2004:2)

It is highly significant to know if the meeting will cover different topics and if it will require input from different business areas. Initiating smaller meetings where group participants who are comfortable with one another can share expertise in the same area is often advisable (Payne 2004). Further, Carey (1999) underlines that one of the European Union's strengths is that this family of nations is tremendously diverse in its

cultures, languages, and customs. Therefore, Europeans are usually tolerant of the different behaviour of their neighbours.

-   Awareness of religious preferences

Allen (2002) is of the opinion that religion plays an enormous role in many areas of the world and it can affect the times and schedules of a meeting. Meeting planners have to treat this issue with respect and need to know what to expect beforehand.

Religion was often cited as a cultural distinction by respondents in the MPI survey. Because of the deeply personal nature of spiritual belief, recognition of religious customs and holy days is essential to creating successful multicultural meetings (MPI 2003). Allen (2002) states that, for example, a practicing Muslim will disappear several times a day when being called to prayer. Moreover, members of Jewish communities will not appreciate late meetings on Friday afternoon as they may need to depart to be home before sunset.

-   Awareness of food and dietary requirements

Allen (2002) contends that event planners must become masters in knowing which food to serve at international events and how to show cross-cultural sensitivity for local events. What is typical of a region can be quite exotic for a foreign visitor. Therefore, Campbell *et al. (*2003) point out that it is of great importance to plan the menu carefully as delegates will always remember the food that went wrong.

According to Khan (2008), it is essential to have knowledge of different food preferences and trends, for instance regarding vegetarian, kosher, Muslim halal, or caste-specific Hindu dietary meals. Therefore, hiring gourmet chefs that cook specific ethnic meals on-site are a suggestion to satisfy delegates with special needs. Campbell *et al.* (2003) also emphasise on respecting international delegates' body clocks and their expected energy level. Attendees might have travelled around the globe and therefore could expect and need food at odd times. Furthermore,

Tinnish (2006) points out that mealtimes distinguish cultures, as the purpose of a serving food might vary from nourishing the body to nourishing relationships. For example, food in Europe is a conduit to social relations, on the contrary, in North America meetings may include lunch during a presentation.

Allen (2002) states that DMCs can advise event planners about local customs, etiquette, and food peculiarities of the destination. Finally, Rutherford Silvers (2004) notes that it is the guest's responsibility to let the event planner know of any dietary needs or restrictions, however, it is the planner's duty to provide the mechanism for notification.

- Cultural education and awareness training for employees

Due to the various issues mentioned in this chapter, cultural education and awareness training for employees is of upmost importance. Delegates from around the world will have their own cultural etiquettes, gestures, mannerisms, and ways of expression. Shouting, throwing hands around and even storming out of meetings are all possibilities (Payne 2004).

> "Cultural awareness and competency training can teach employees about cultural similarities and differences, and perhaps diminish their reliance of inaccurate stereotypes." (Schuler *et al.* 2004:137)

Furthermore, multilingual staff at PCOs and venues is a key factor for the success in this industry. For a meeting planner, the secret to creating successful events in multicultural settings is to become fluent in different languages; otherwise miscommunication may occur (Allen 2002).

- Translation and simultaneous Interpretation

> "When moving from one language to another, *translation* is the term used for written documents. When language is oral, the term *interpretation* is applied." (Brislin 2008:161)

Zander & de Wijn (1999) note that interpretation is an essential part of an international conference. Although English is nowadays spoken at almost

every conference, a number of other languages might be used. Consequently, there are two basic reasons for employing interpreters: to facilitate communication between participants and for political reasons, in order to provide equality between delegations. McLaurin & Wykes (2006) remark that there might also be a need for multilingual print and electronic materials at international events.

Weber & Chon (2002) highlight that meeting planners in Asia attempt to deal with jargon and other language difficulties by hiring both an interpreter and an explainer to facilitate dual-language communications. Finally, Brislin (2008) and Weber & Chon (2002) agree to the fact that interpreters can also act as cultural informants through giving advice about local customs and habits of the destination.

- Universal signage

McLaurin & Wykes (2006) point out that signs are an important means of communication for attendees during an event, which are used to give directions and programme information. Signs are also applied as motivational tools, to greet delegates with a welcome or to recognise a corporation or association. Moreover, if a cross-cultural meeting is hosted outside an English-speaking country, good care has to be taken to universal signage, through displaying signs not only in the host language but in English as well.

2.5   Vienna and London as conference destinations

- Vienna

According to the Vienna Convention Bureau (VCB 2010), the tradition of Vienna as a major conference site dates back to the year 1815, when the city hosted the "Congress of Vienna". Since then, Vienna has established itself as a prime international conference location, providing all necessary infrastructure required to successfully host any type of event.

> "Vienna convinces as a conference destination because of its hospitality, innovativeness and professionalism." (Stolba 2010:n.p.a.)

Vienna's 152 conference venues can be divided into five sections: congress centres, conference hotels, historic venues, modern venues, and universities (VCB 2010). For the fifth time in succession, Vienna has headed the statistics of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) for the year 2009. Vienna hosted a total of 160 international congresses, followed by Barcelona (135) and Paris (131). According to UIA's statistics for 2009, Vienna ranks on fourth place (311 events) behind Singapore (689), Brussels (395), and Paris (316) (UIA 2010).

- London

London has grown to be a well-connected, cosmopolitan, culturally open and cutting-edge city. More than 50 major international communities have made London their home and about 300 different languages are spoken in the capital. This remarkable diversity makes London an ideal destination for international business (Visit London 2010).

London's five international airports welcome flights from over 300 destinations worldwide which makes the city a crossroads for Asia, Europe and the Americas. The city offers over 1,000 event venues and more than 100,000 hotel rooms. Over the last few years London has consistently bid for major sporting, business and cultural events. The city will moreover be the host city for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Visit London 2010).

Further, London's service sector is extremely well developed with legal, financial, insurance, property, personnel and recruitment firms competing for and serving business in London. The city ranks on 16th place, with a total of 83 international conferences, according to ICCA's statistics for the year 2009 (London.com 2010). UIA's statistics for 2009 however did not list London in the top ten (UIA 2010).

3   METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this research is to fill the gap of insufficient information about cross-cultural meetings in the conference industry by evaluating the importance of having a general understanding of cultural diversity and the opportunities and problems that come with it.

3.1   Methodology chosen

The methodology chosen for this dissertation is qualitative as well as quantitative research. The deductive research approach is applied, where "theorising can take place before the research enquiry" (Finn *et al.* 2000:17). The dissertation is presented as an exploratory research. Veal (2006) and Jennings (2001) both point out that exploratory research is conducted if very little data exists on the topic being investigated. It raises the question of causality, whether A is caused by B. Further, primary and secondary research is embodied in the dissertation.

> "Primary data is firsthand raw data and structures which have yet to receive any type of meaningful interpretation." (Shiu *et al.* 2009:45)

According to McDaniel & Gates (2008), primary data is collected to solve the particular problem under investigation. Finn *et al.* (2000) mention that it relates to original data collected using techniques such as surveys, interviews or observations. Moreover, Malhotra & Birks (2007) add that the exclusivity of producing primary data can mean higher costs and a longer time frame in collecting and analysing the data.

Secondary data is referred to as such because their primary use is administrative and research is only a secondary use (Veal 2006). Jennings (2001) states that secondary data sources can vary in nature, comprising of statistical and documentary sources. Further, Veal (2006) points out that secondary data can play a variety of roles, from being the whole basis of the research project to being a vital or incidental point of comparison. Finn *et al.* (2000) and McDaniel & Gates (2008) add that a great deal of

time and effort can therefore be saved if the researcher is aware of available data.

As already mentioned before, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed in this research. Qualitative techniques stand in contrast to quantitative techniques as in the case of qualitative research the information collected does not generally lend itself to statistical analysis (Veal 2006).

> "Qualitative research can be referred to an unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide insight and understanding." (Malhotra & Birks 2007:152)

Bradley (2007) emphasises that qualitative research does not measure the "amount" of emotion or opinion, but it may give an indication of the dominant feelings. Jennings (2001) examines that the main methods of qualitative data collection are interviews, participant observation, focus groups, Delphi techniques and case studies.

On the contrary, the quantitative approach to research involves statistical analysis and relies on numerical evidence to draw conclusions or hypothesis (Veal 2006). Moreover, quantitative research places heavy emphasis on using formalised questions and predetermined response options in questionnaires administered to a large sample (Shiu *et al.* 2009). Jennings (2001) adds that the research process is objectively constructed and the findings are usually representative of the population being studied. Finn *et al.* (2000) note that data may be derived from questionnaire surveys, from observation involving counts or secondary sources.

Based on the fact that both qualitative and quantitative methods are used for this dissertation, it can be referred to the *triangulation method*.

> "Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, involves using a combination of methods, researchers, data sources and theories in a research project." (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005:40)

Veal (2006) adds that the triangulation method helps to gain a broader or more complete understanding of the issues being investigated. It is often used complimentary, as the weaknesses of one approach are replenished by the strengths of another.

This particular research technique was chosen due to the low awareness level of this dissertation's topic. Moreover, the number of responses gained from the questionnaire is not representative to compare London and Vienna in a valid way. However, the qualitative data collection compliments the weaknesses of the quantitative approach and a fair amount of primary data was collected altogether.

3.2   Research methods and design

-   Secondary research

To achieve the purpose of this dissertation, secondary research by means of an extensive literature review of books, journal articles, and trade press articles was conducted. Further, statistical sources as well as documentary sources were embodied in the literature review. Those secondary sources provide the basis for this research paper. The reviewed literature covers topics on the conference and events industry, cross-cultural communication and management as well as human resource management.

-   Primary research

Primary research was then carried out by means of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

> "Questionnaires are a structured technique for data collection consisting of a series of questions, written or verbal, that a respondent answers." (Malhotra & Birks 2007:371)

Veal (2006) remarks that questionnaire surveys usually involve only a proportion, or sample, of the population of interest. The accuracy of respondents' answers depends on their powers of recall, honesty, and on the format of the questions. Therefore, Finn *et al.* (2000) mention that a

major benefit of questionnaires is that the flow and format of the questions can be controlled through employing either open or closed questions. On the other hand, Shiu *et al.* (2009) emphasise that one of the great weaknesses of questionnaires is that the design process should be a scientific one that integrates rules of logic, objectivity and systematic procedures. Not every researcher however knows how to deal with these rules explicitly.

Jennings (2001) emphasises that the advantages of e-questionnaires are that one is able to reach a global range of respondents and the cost of conduct is minimal. Therefore, such e-questionnaires were employed for this research. McDaniel & Gates (2008) point out that a further benefit of e-surveys is that target respondents can complete the survey at their convenience and data are delivered in electronic form. Moreover, Kotler *et al.* (2006) add that the survey can be available to a global sample without having to worry about international postal rates. However, Veal (2006) highlights that the enormous disadvantage of e-questionnaires is the problem of low response rates, as they may be seen as part of the increasing volume of "junk mail".

Questionnaires were sent out to 270 industry professionals of Vienna's and London's conference industry, consisting of PCOs, conference hotels and conference venues (purpose-built centres, historical, academic and unusual venues). In order to make sure that suppliers and intermediaries come into question for hosting or organising cross-cultural meetings, the sample was selected according to the following criteria:

− The companies are listed on the CVB's website as industry professionals for the city's conference industry.

− Venues and hotels have a theatre capacity of at least 500 and more PAX.

Concerning the qualitative data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted to complement the output of the questionnaire. Veal (2006) is of the opinion that an in-depth interview is characterised by its length,

depth, and structure. It can be seen as a major benefit that interviews seek to probe more deeply as interviewers typically encourage respondents to talk. McDaniel & Gates (2008) further note that group pressure is eliminated in one-to-one interviews and respondents can reveal more honest feelings. However, Bradley (2007) reports that a disadvantage of interviews is that the results are largely dictated by the situation and the willingness of the respondent to cooperate. Liamputtong & Ezzy (2005) remark that critics often state that this method of interviewing might intentionally introduce bias.

Altogether, twelve interviews were carried out, six in Vienna and six in London. The sample of interview partners is made up of three conference centres, two PCOs and the CVB in each city. The interviews were conducted in person in German and English, depending on the city, and were lasting for about an hour.

The six interview partners in Vienna are:

- **Mag. Renate Dobler-Jerabek**, Director of Congresses and Events at Reed Exhibitions Messe Vienna
- **Michael Part,** Sales Manager Associations at Austria Centre Vienna
- **Mag. Renate Danler**, Managing Director of the Hofburg Congress Centre
- **Wolfgang Fraundörfer,** Managing Director of Admicos
- **Helga Eismair**, Senior Congress Manager at Austropa Interconvention
- **Christian Mutschlechner**, Director of VCB

The six interview partners in London are:

- **Andrew Brett,** Head of Event Management at Excel Centre London
- **Sue Etherington,** Acting Commercial Director of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
- **Stephanie Ellrott,** Manager Meetings and Events at the Royal College of Physicians

- **Lisa Persson,** Meeting Planning Consultant at Congrex UK Limited
- **Becky Graveney,** Associations Sales Manager at Visit London
- **Rachel Ley,** Managing Director of RLC Productions

After having explained which research methods will be used for this dissertation, a justification will be given for the key propositions outlined in the introduction. The research questions were chosen for the purpose of gaining information from planners and venues about their personal experiences with cross-cultural meetings. Moreover, it was aimed to get a deeper insight into how two different cities are affected by cross-cultural meetings and how they are responding to it. The key propositions were established following the questionnaire as well as interview questions and can be answered accordingly.

3.3   Research instrument

The questions for the questionnaire were compiled relating to the most important issues and problems addressed in the literature review. Importance was drawn upon topics such as if the company is informed about the specific needs of the delegates related to their culture, cultural homogenisation or barriers of cross-cultural communication. Further, questions regarding positive experiences, challenges and best practice of cross-cultural meetings were asked.

In order to make sure that the questions are compiled in a clear and understanding manner for all companies, a pilot study was conducted.

"Questionnaires do not emerge fully-fledged, they have to be created or adapted, fashioned and developed to maturity after many abortive test flights." (Oppenheim 1992:47)

According to Malhotra & Birks (2007), pilot-testing refers to testing the questionnaire on a small sample of respondents to identify and eliminate potential problems. Pilot tests are best done by personal interviews, even if the actual survey is to be conducted via the Internet. Further, Finn *et al.*

(2000) remark that the aim of the pilot survey is to test the reliability and validity of the survey.

Therefore, a pilot study was conducted with three of the in-depth interviewees in July 2010 before the interviews were executed, so that answers were not biased. The pilot test was successful and only one question had to be slightly modified in order to be fully understandable.

The questionnaire was sent out on August 7th 2010 to 270 industry professionals via email, and participants were asked to complete the e-survey using the according Internet link. A reminder was sent a week after the questionnaire was launched and after two weeks the data collection period ended. Altogether, only 37 responses were received which bears the consequences that only patterns can be analysed from the questionnaire and unfortunately no valid comparison between Vienna and London can be drawn. For further information, please refer to the questionnaire in Appendix 2.

The questions for the in-depth interviews were compiled in relation to the questionnaire and the literature review. In order to gain more profound information from interviewees, the questions of the questionnaire were just modified slightly and adapted to each company.

The twelve interviews were conducted between June 8th and September 1st 2010 in Vienna and London. For further information, please refer to the interview script in Appendix 3.

3.4   Data results and limitations

Once the data collection of the questionnaire and the interviews had been completed, the analysis stage followed.

First of all, the researcher must determine if each of the questionnaires represents a valid interview and if editing is necessary (McDaniel & Gates 2008). Following the validation of the questionnaire, the data was entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). According to Shiu *et*

al. (2009), a method for quantitative data analysis is called descriptive statistics.

> "Descriptive statistics are used to summarise and describe the data obtained from the respondents." (Shiu *et al.* 2009:513)

This method of analysis incorporates the use of frequency distributions, percentage tables, standard deviation and cross-tabulation in SPSS (Jennings 2001). Graphic representations of data were produced in order to present results in the most powerful and efficient way possible.

Further, the qualitative information gathered from in-depth interviews was examined. The manual method of analysis was used to evaluate responses. Veal (2006) highlights that attention is usually drawn towards *emergent themes,* the equivalent of variables in quantitative research. The themes to be analysed arose from the research questions or emerged unprompted in a more inductive way. Finally, the data analysed from qualitative research was then agitated with the results of the questionnaires in order to gain a balanced result.

Regarding the limitations of this research, it can be added that the quantitative approach in form of a questionnaire did not turn out as a representative study due to the low response rate. Moreover, because of a general lack of literature available on cross-cultural meetings, the author experienced some difficulties in finding sufficient specific literature for this dissertation.

4   DATA RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following section deals with the data analysis of the quantitative and qualitative research approach. The first four sections show more general quantitative results; subsequently qualitative information will be introduced as well. However, as already mentioned before, due to the low response rate of the questionnaire (37 responses in total), the results cannot be treated as representative and therefore only patterns will be outlined.

4.1   Company's occupation

The first question treated in the questionnaire focused on the company's occupation. This question served as a filter question which identified the respondents either as meeting planners, conference centres/venues, or hotels. 43 % of the respondents answered to work for a conference centre or venue, 35 % for a conference hotel, and 22 % identified themselves as conference planners. For further information, please refer to Figure 2.
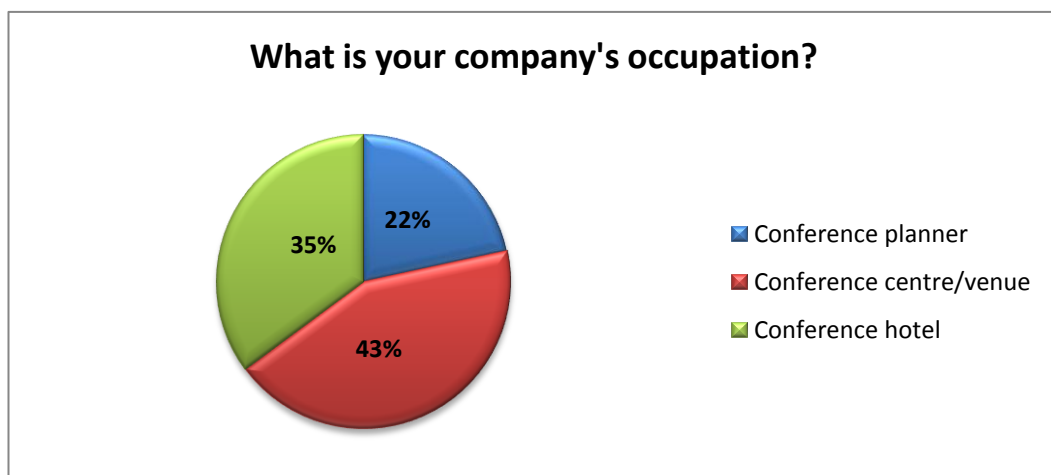
Figure 2: Company occupation

4.2   Conference planners

Figure 3 outlines the results regarding the amount of events organised by conference planners each year. Since only planners answered this question, just 8 answers were gathered altogether. It was indicated that 50 % organise 11 – 20 events, 38 % more than 41 events, and 12 % plan 31 – 40 events yearly. The options of organising 1 – 10 and 21 – 30 events yearly were never chosen by respondents.
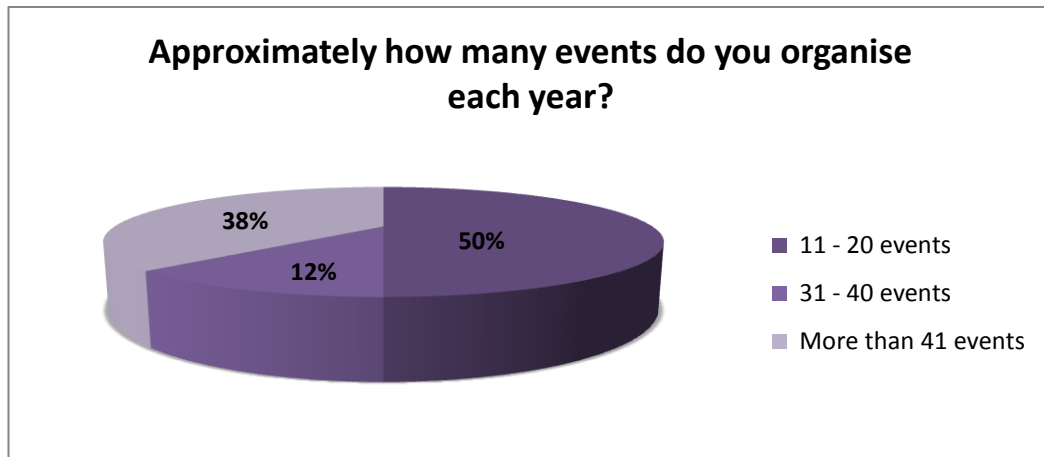
Approximately how many events do you organise each year?

38%
12%
50%

- 11 - 20 events
- 31 - 40 events
- More than 41 events

Figure 3: Events organised yearly

For further information about the size of events meeting planners organise on average, refer to Appendix 4 (Figure 10).

4.3   Conference centres, venues and hotels

What is your biggest room capacity for theatre style?

24%
17%
28%
31%

0 - 200 PAX   201 - 400 PAX   401 - 600 PAX   More than 800 PAX
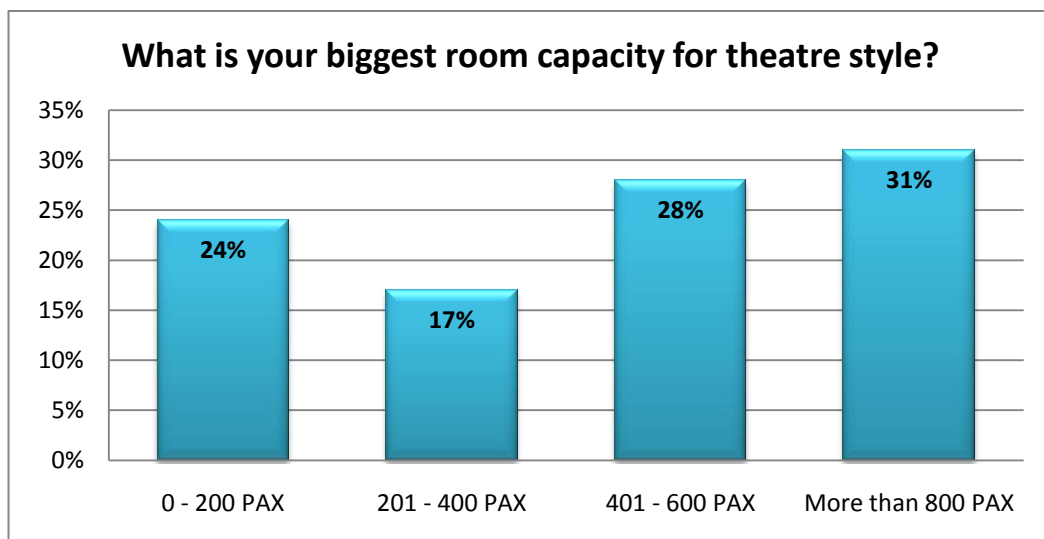
Figure 4: Room capacity for theatre style

The question displayed in Figure 4 was only aimed at conference venues, centres and hotels. 31 % declared that their biggest room capacity for theatre style is more than 800 PAX, 28 % stated that they are able to host 401 – 600 PAX, and 24 % claimed to have room for 0 – 200 PAX. This indicates that the majority hosts meetings on a bigger scale. Moreover, Appendix 4 (Figure 11) examines the amount of events hosted in conference venues and hotels.

For further information regarding the types of events organised and hosted by respondents as well as the origin of respondents' clients, please also refer to Appendix 4 (Figure 12 and Table 8).

4.4   Proportion of cross-cultural events

The following section is now dedicated to results regarding cross-cultural meetings, which are outlined in Figure 5. It can be observed that 35 % of the respondents stated that 21 – 40 % of the events organised or hosted are cross-cultural ones, 32 % indicated that 10 – 20 % are cross-cultural events, and 22 % named 41 – 60 % to be such events. This can be seen as an extremely satisfactory result and as a reassurance for having chosen the right kind of companies for this research.
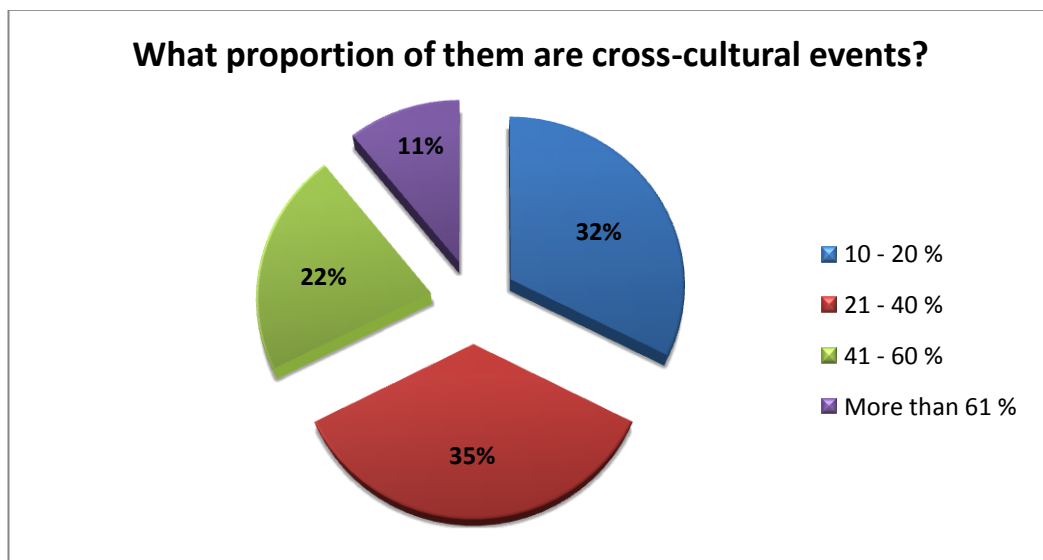
Figure 5: Proportion of cross-cultural events

Further, input can now also be given from in-depth interviews. For instance, the Hofburg Congress Centre in Vienna can be referred to as quite an international conference venue based on the fact that 70 % are cross-cultural meetings of the 600 events hosted annually (Danler 2010). Even in their mission statement it is declared that "in these times of globalisation and international networks we are increasingly looking to assume the role of an intercultural meeting place." (Hofburg Vienna 2010:n.p.a.)

Moreover, Visit London organises about 50 % of cross-cultural events. At present there are already a lot of events going on in preparation for sponsors and sporting bodies for the Olympic Games which will be held in London in 2012 (Graveney 2010). It can also be highlighted that Austropa, a PCO based in Vienna, organises 90 % of cross-cultural meetings due to their specialisation on international medical conferences (Eismair 2010).

4.5   Delegates' demographics

The next issue, which was raised only during in-depth interviews, focused on whether the company is informed right away about the demographics of the delegates when receiving a proposal for an event.

Both Danler and Etherington (2010) contend that in the Hofburg Congress Centre as well at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre (QEII) this information is usually passed on at a later stage for association conferences. However, it was emphasised that delegates' demographics can be investigated from previous events. Quite interestingly, Ley (2010) highlights that at RLC Productions, corporate clients principally hand on such details right away, based on the fact that they know where their event participants are from. Further, Graveney (2010) remarks that at Visit London the ICCA database is often used to look at past data. At Admicos, such information is usually only transmitted if it is important to the organiser or if there might be a community (Jewish, Muslim, etc.) in Vienna which might be relevant for an association conference (Fraundörfer 2010).

4.6   Delegates' specific needs

This section now deals with delegates' specific needs related to their culture and if respondents are informed in particular about these during the planning process of the event. Figure 6 illustrates that 30 % of respondents are randomly informed about the specific needs of the delegates, 27 % however are notified most of the time, and 22 % even claim to always be familiar with delegates' needs.

The results presented can be complemented with qualitative information gathered. Dobler-Jerabek (2010) and Fraundörfer (2010) state that usually the organiser is responsible for informing the PCO or venue about the specific needs of delegates. Additionally, Part (2010) and Ellrott (2010) are of the opinion that it is most often the dietary requirements that need to be taken care of in particular.

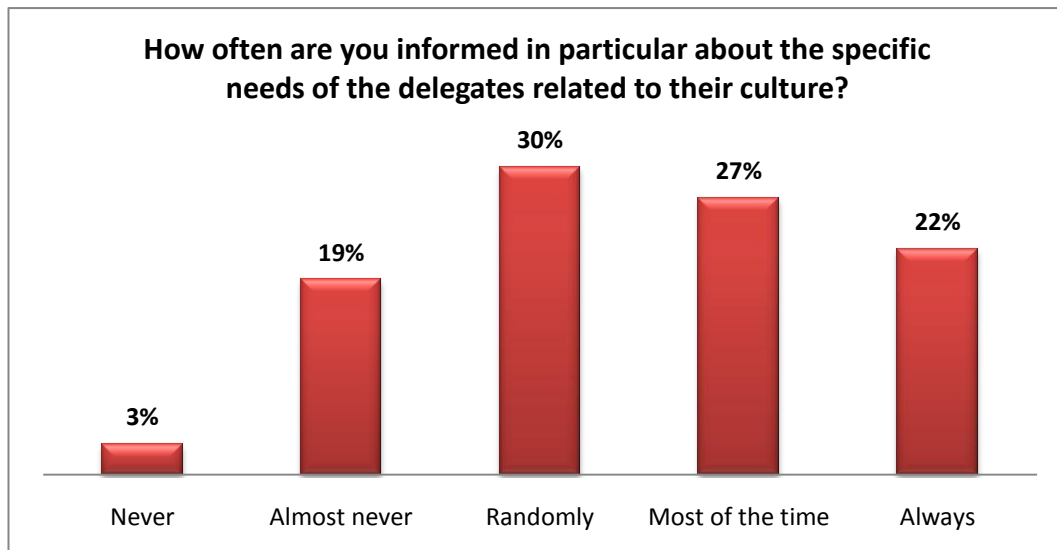
Figure 6: Specific needs of delegates
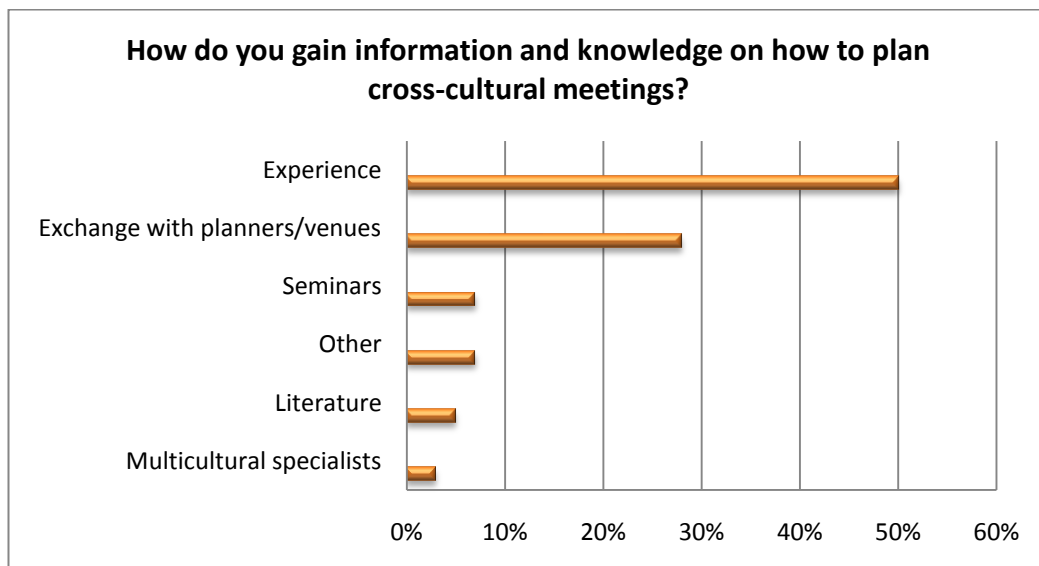
4.7   Knowledge enhancement

Figure 7: Knowledge enhancement

As displayed in Figure 7, 50 % of respondents remarked to base the planning of cross-cultural meetings on their experience, 28 % on

exchange with other meeting planners and venues, and 7 % on information gained from seminars. Moreover, 7 % specified to gain information from "other" sources, such as the MPI Culture Active Tool, from the ÖHV (Austrian Hotel Association) or when discussing details with the meeting planner.

4.8   Important issues for cross-cultural meetings

This key question deals with important issues to be aware of when organising or hosting cross-cultural meetings. The examples given to respondents and the chosen top five issues are ranked in Table 3:

Issues	First count	Final Rank
Appropriateness of destination	50 %	1
Recognition of different cultures	34.8 %	2
Appropriateness of venue	30 %	3
Selection of right dates	18.2 %	4
Awareness of religious preferences	10 %	5
Accommodation	0	6
Social programme	30 %	7
Food and dietary requirements	13 %	8
Speaker and presentation screening	12.5 %	9
Training for employees	7.1 %	10
Translation & interpretation	0	11
Marketing	0	12
Universal signage	0	13

Table 3: Issues for cross-cultural meetings

Further, input can now also be given from the qualitative interviews. Both Dobler-Jerabek (2010) and Danler (2010) highlight that the appropriateness of the destination is of upmost importance and especially for major cross-cultural meetings, a destination needs to have a good international reputation. Moreover, Dobler-Jerabek (2010) exemplifies that the International Aids Congress 2010 was hosted at the Reed Messe Vienna. For this conference it was particularly important that a destination was chosen with no entry restrictions for HIV patients.

Regarding the awareness of religious preferences, Ellrott (2010) states that at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), a permanent prayer room was set up due to the venue's high level of international delegates. Furthermore, Persson (2010) remarks that concerning the social programme, it is a nice gesture to welcome delegates appropriately at the destination by organising cultural evenings and gala dinners to familiarise them with the country's culture. Graveney (2010) points out that for a cross-cultural conference hosted in London in spring 2010, delegates were acquainted with the city's culture through a recreation of London's most popular areas, such as for instance Chinatown, Covent Garden, and Brick Lane.

Additionally, Fraundörfer (2010) informs that selecting the right date for an event used to pose a problem in former times. Nowadays, due to the Internet, it is much easier to keep track of the world's different religious, school and bank holidays. Finally, Ley (2010) stresses that regarding universal signage, it is essential to agree on a lead language for the whole event with the client. Most of the time, the common language chosen is English. However, due to difficult terminologies in for example the medical sector, simpler English would be used.

4.9   Service quality

The next issue was raised only during in-depth interviews and participants were asked about the issue of service quality for cross-cultural meetings.

It was questioned to what extent it can be stated that different nationalities might expect different service standards.

Mutschlechner (2010) contends that in general, there should be no difference in service quality between one event and another. Service should always be presented in a more or less conform way and delegates should be treated equally. Graveney (2010) adds that even though a uniform service is offered at Visit London, if delegates have special requirements related to services offered at the event, and those requests are easily arrangeable, they will try to make them feel as comfortable as possible.

At Congrex, the only way delegates might be treated differently is concerning food and dietary requirements. Food is the element of an event participants mostly remember and therefore, everything is done to satisfy them (Persson 2010). However, Ellrott (2010) states that the level of service should always be kept up, as the standards should not be compromised. Additionally, Brett (2010) examines that there is a different service delivery all around the world. At the Excel Centre, health and safety is regulated quite strictly and a "book of rules and instructions" is at the delegates' and staff's disposal. The next section further deals with the related issue of homogenised services.

4.10   Cultural homogenisation

Figure 8 illustrates that 60 % of the respondents agreed to the fact that *cultural homogenisation,* meaning to offer standardised services across the globe, is possible for cross-cultural meetings. 27 % however are not in favour of offering standardised services and 13 % were of another opinion. It was mentioned for example that all forms of service require a standardised building block to offer consistency, but these foundations also need to take in cultural diversity. However, others stated that it cannot be possible as different countries offer different types of services at a different cost.
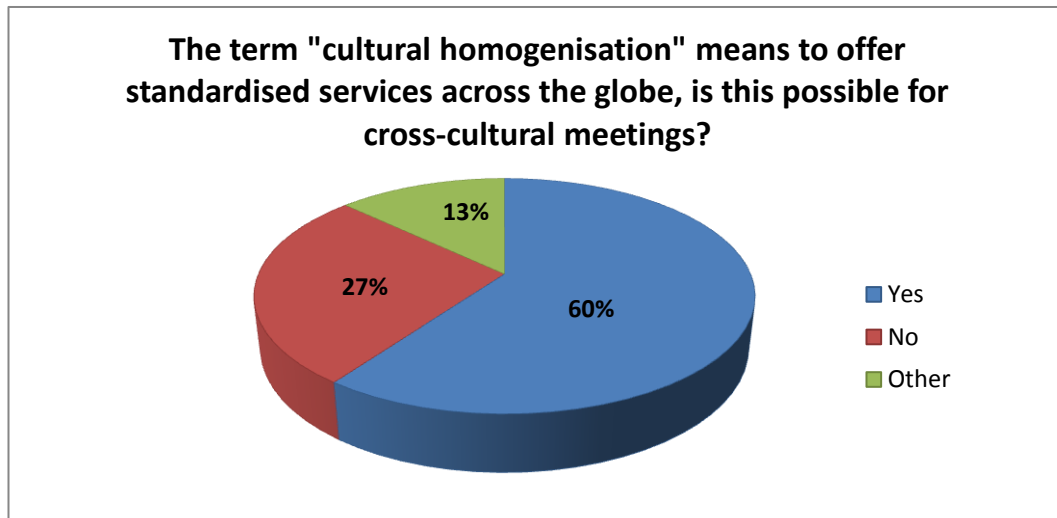
Figure 8: Cultural homogenisation

This information can be complemented with qualitative information gathered. Ley (2010) highlights that unfortunately, different services are provided worldwide, based on the fact that the planning process of an event varies immensely across cultures. It would however be essential to provide a uniform standard of service for health and safety as well as risk assessment around the world.

Eismair (2010) notes that only certain issues can be standardised, such as deadlines for instance. Therefore, it can be said that cultural homogenisation does not exist for services, only for procedures, as services need to be presented in a distinct way. Etherington (2010) emphasises that it would also be quite disappointing for delegates if they cannot fully experience the authenticity of the destination. Further, Danler (2010) adds that globalisation overruns us and many local customs have already been lost, therefore, cultural homogenisation of events is not necessary as well.

Fraundörfer (2010) however stresses the fact that it is somehow true that a conference becomes more homogenised the more international it is, as one cannot provide an individual service for everyone when catering for many thousands of delegates.

4.11   Challenges

Furthermore, the question arose if respondents have come across certain challenges during organising and staging cross-cultural events. The pitfalls mentioned the most are outlined in Table 4:

Language and communication barriers
Lack of awareness of individual differences
Unprepared translators or speakers
Different laws and provisions
Extra costs for special meal requests
Organisers shift responsibility on venue

Table 4: Challenges

The information presented aligns as well with answers collected from in-depth interviews. Concerning the issue of language and communication barriers, Danler (2010) remarks that such misunderstandings often are unavoidable, however, in the end people fortunately tend to rather laugh about those issues than to be concerned. Fraundörfer (2010) exemplifies that once a conference with many Jewish delegates was accidentally set on one of the most important Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur. In order not to upset delegates, Yom Kippur celebrations were organised spontaneously in addition to the conference programme and participants could enjoy both the conference and the festivities.

Further, Part (2010) points out that occasionally problems with contracts occur, as the different law systems in Europe and in the United States make it difficult to compare arrangements and to have the same understanding of it. Brett (2010) adds that often also a lack of delegates' consideration of rules and regulations, which differ in each country, imposes challenges. Moreover, Dobler-Jerabek (2010) notes that sometimes diverse opinions exist regarding deadlines between different countries. Therefore, Ellrott (2010) contends that it is important for meeting

planners, PCOs and venues to try to find out as much as possible about delegates and event settings beforehand.

4.12   Positive experiences

On the other hand, the question was posed if respondents can mention some positive experiences in connection with cross-cultural events. The answers listed the most are displayed in Table 5:

Delegates are pleased that organisers know about their culture and customs
Gaining different perspectives and experiences from cross-cultural events
Interaction of different cultures
Getting to know interesting and new people
Greater appreciation of different cultures

Table 5: Positive experiences

The experiences listed show the many positive aspects of cross-cultural meetings. These can also be complemented with information from qualitative research. Dobler-Jerabek (2010) and Fraundörfer (2010) both agree to the fact that a successful cooperation between key players of the city's conference industry adds to making the event a success. Moreover, it is an additional benefit that service providers tend to get to know each other better over the years when organising international meetings with long lead times.

Mutschlechner (2010) emphasises that it is always a great experience to host big conferences with up to 100 different nations being present, as it helps to widen one's horizon immensely. Ley (2010) further points out that especially during corporate teambuilding events it is a pleasure to watch various cultures working together enthusiastically to achieve one goal.

Cross-cultural meetings are not just the "same old standard thing". Especially if complicated and demanding tasks have to be completed it is even nicer to see positive results and satisfied clients (Graveney 2010).

4.13   Best practice

Another key question for respondents was whether some kind of best practice exists one can follow in order to successfully organise cross-cultural meetings. The advice mentioned the most is displayed in Table 6:

Gain knowledge about different cultures and habits
Stay in continuous contact with the client, agencies and parties involved
Be flexible, open-minded, sensitive, and responsible to individual needs
Be aware, take advice, ask questions, and manage expectations
Take careful attention to dietary requirements
Never assume, always ask!

Table 6: Best practice advice

The information gathered from in-depth interviews can support the recommendations listed in the table. Persson (2010) for instance states that open-mindedness, good listening skills, and experience are important issues in order to follow some kind of best practice model. Ellrott (2010) and Persson (2010) both agree that it is of upmost importance to conduct research about the client and previous events beforehand. Ley (2010) adds that first of all, research has to be undertaken to become acquainted with the delegates' culture. Subsequently, one has to try to neutralise the situation as much as possible, as overprotection of cultures and paranoia will only worsen the circumstances.

It is moreover essential to stay authentic during the whole organisational process of cross-cultural events. Showing clients as well as delegates the country's beauty and culture can provide many new experiences (Part 2010).

Additionally, Graveney (2010) contends that it is essential for the QEII to have an experienced team, maybe even consisting of different age groups, which is able to think outside the box. Persson (2010) emphasises that having many different nationalities in a team, such as at Congrex, adds many benefits as everyone brings in different languages and

cultures. According to Danler (2010), employees at the Hofburg Congress Centre moreover have etiquette trainings every two years in order to refresh one's knowledge about international standards.

4.14   Stereotypes

The following issue was raised only during in-depth interviews. Participants were asked if stereotypes, even though they are a controversial issue, are helpful to rate different cultures, or if they are a barrier to cross-cultural communication.

Generally, it is natural that one might think in stereotypes, however, if for example 1000 delegates from 100 different nations attend a conference one cannot stereotype anymore (Fraundörfer 2010). Mutschlechner (2010) stresses that delegates generally behave differently when they are abroad and are usually very keen on getting to know the local dishes and customs. Ellrott (2010) notes that to a certain degree, stereotyping is accepted, however, one should never assume and should rather ask. For instance, if many different nationalities attend a conference in London, they may have a different cultural background, but might already live in the city for a long time.

Moreover, Graveney (2010) states that in the business world it is not professional to apply pattern-thinking. Misunderstandings could quickly turn into bad word-of-mouth for the company. Persson (2010) points out that with stereotyping one might be better prepared but Dobler-Jerabek (2010) emphasises that precaution has to be taken that a stereotype does not turn into a prejudice.

4.15   Barriers for cross-cultural communication

The final question of interest concerned the barriers for cross-cultural communication and respondents were given a list of six examples. The top three barriers needed to be listed according to their own belief.

As illustrated in Figure 9, *communication and language, ignorance,* and *culture* were ranked most often on first place as barriers for cross-cultural

communication. *Different perceptions of time and scheduling* as well as *communication and language* were repeatedly listed on second place. Finally, *wrong approach to protocol and etiquette* and *generalisations and stereotypes* were ranked on third place. Table 7 further outlines the final listing.
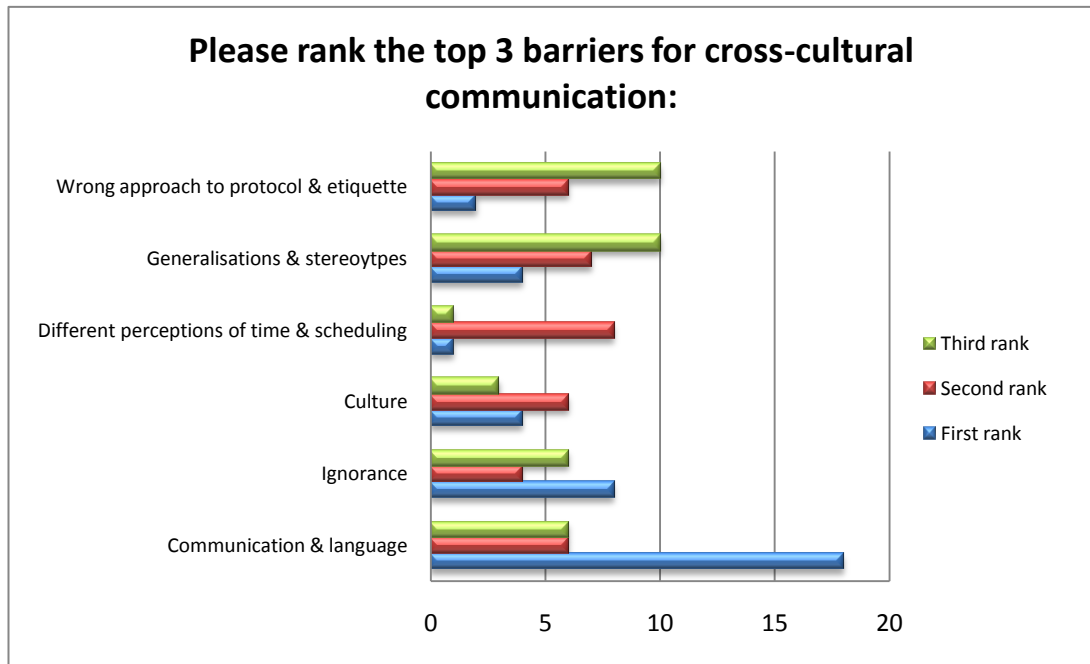
Figure 9: Barriers for cross-cultural communication

Final rank	Barrier
1	Communication & language
2	Ignorance
3	Culture
4	Different perceptions of time and scheduling
5	Generalisations & stereotypes
6	Wrong approach to protocol and etiquette

Table 7: Final ranking of barriers

In order to complement this with qualitative information, it has to be stated that predominantly, all of the interview partners mentioned *language and communication* as the most severe barrier for cross-cultural communication. The barrier ranked on second place was *different*

perception of time, followed by *stereotypes and prejudices*. Furthermore, Dobler-Jerabek (2010) and Brett (2010) both agree that different perceptions regarding women, values, religion, and customs might also impose certain obstacles. Finally, Ley (2010) notes that a person's apathy of being bothered with different cultures can as well result in a barrier for cross-cultural communication.

5   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter focus is put upon the comparison and discussion of the similarities and differences between the findings in the literature review and the data collected. Further, special importance is drawn to the dissolution of the research questions.

The aim of this dissertation was to find out about the effects of cross-cultural meetings on the conference industry through qualitative as well as quantitative research. It is however highlighted again that due to the low response rate of the questionnaire, the results cannot be treated as representative for the whole population. Therefore, only patterns will be outlined which are complemented with additional information gained from qualitative research.

Before going into detail with the discussion, the validity of the respondent's occupation will be outlined. The majority of answers were gained from conference centres/venues (43 %) and conference hotels (35 %). Only 22 % of the respondents indicated to be a conference planner. The results can however still be treated as valid, based on the fact that a greater amount of conference centres and venues exists compared to conference planners or PCOs. Moreover, it is emphasised that respondents probably found themselves in some kind of marketing role representing their company, and this can as well affect the degree of subjectivity of the research conducted.

Regarding the structure of this discussion, the five research questions will be cited in sequence and examined thoroughly.

5.1   Research question I

What practices and services are of upmost importance for the success of cross-cultural meetings?

This research question relates to key issues of this dissertation for which a long section was dedicated to in the literature review (Chapter 2.4.2). Meeting planners and venues should be aware of certain practices and

concerns as they are of greatest importance for successful cross-cultural meetings.

The literature suggested being conscious of issues such as the appropriateness of the destination and venue, right selection of dates, awareness of religious preferences, and programming planning. It is highlighted that the most useful information for this matter was drawn from different authors in Carey's (1999) *Professional Meeting Management,* as not all the authors can be mentioned here. This can be supported by information gathered from research (Chapter 4.9), as participants were asked to rank the top five issues for cross-cultural meetings, which are the following:

- − Appropriateness of the destination,
- − Awareness and recognition of different cultures,
- − Appropriateness of the venue,
- − Selection of the right dates,
- − Awareness of religious preferences.

These examples mentioned by respondents conform to the major issues raised by the literature.

Furthermore, service quality is another important matter to be brought in relation with the success of cross-cultural meetings. In Chapter 4.10, the main findings gathered from research participants report that services should always be presented in a uniform way for cross-cultural meetings. Delegates should be treated equally by making them feel as comfortable as possible. This links back to literature, as Vecchi & Brennan (2009) remark that it is necessary for firms to improve quality performance by aligning their quality practices in their attempt to capitalise on all possible sources of competitive advantage.

The term *cultural homogenisation* relates as well to the successful service delivery of cross-cultural meetings. Williams & Busnell (2003) point out that the same market segments throughout the world require the same services. Further, different nationalities will expect different service

standards and if suppliers are not aware of these needs, satisfaction levels diminish. The subject was also treated in both research approaches (Chapter 4.11), and even though the literature's key statements can be approved, data results however clarified that all levels of service require a standardised building block. One can never provide an individual service for everyone when catering for many thousands of delegates.

Therefore, the first research question's answer highlights the services which are of upmost importance for cross-cultural meetings and it can be stated that a high level of transparency can be drawn from results. Moreover, due to globalisation, cultural homogenisation has become possible; however research showed that this is not always achievable and preferable for cross-cultural meetings.

5.2   Research question II

Which city is more suitable/prepared for cross-cultural meetings in the industry – Vienna or London?

For this research question it is emphasised again that only patterns can be analysed due to the low response rate of the questionnaire. In order to show valid results, the analysis below is drawn only from in-depth interviewees' answers. It is moreover needless to say that interview partners rather leaned towards their own city when asked about which destination is more suitable for cross-cultural meetings. Therefore, company names will not be mentioned.

Vienna is historically predestined for conferences and events and embarked upon hosting conferences with the *Congress of Vienna* in 1814. Over the centuries, multicultural communities gained recognition and brought Vienna on the market for cross-cultural meetings. The *UNO City* was built in the 1980s and many international organisations such as OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) or UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation) located their offices in Vienna. The city is currently very successful in winning international conferences, even though it does not dispose of the same cross-cultural

background as London. Critics often emphasise that Vienna still offers quite old-established services, being proud of the imperial way of life, and inhabitants appear to be too narrow-minded to welcome international delegates accordingly. However, it has to be stated that for Vienna, cross-cultural meetings are still special, whereas in London multiculturalism is a normal course of life.

London offers many good reasons for attracting international conferences, as one of its major benefits is its reputation as an accessible hub city. Moreover, it is the appeal to what the city has in terms of cultural experience, history, and open-minded inhabitants what makes London a favourable cosmopolitan conference destination. The language spoken is English which makes it easy for international correspondence. Despite all these benefits, other nations still have negative connotations of London. The city does not dispose of European standards in terms of industry infrastructure, as it only offers one big conference centre in the centre city, the QEII. The Excel Centre (ICC) is not quite centrally located and the rest of the bigger venues are all conference hotels. Moreover, London's hotel prices are quite high and facilities can as well not be compared to European standards. It is perceived somehow that London does not want to host international meetings due to high prices, which might give the impression that they do not want to adapt. Finally, it has to be mentioned that it does not necessarily mean that a destination hosts multicultural meetings in a better way, because it is generally perceived as more cross-cultural.

Due to the lack of responses from quantitative research, this question can only be weakly answered. However, patterns can be identified, outlining that both cities are suited for cross-cultural meetings, even though London lacks infrastructure and a more committed approach towards cross-cultural meetings. This answer is derived from interviewee's and also the researcher's personal beliefs and can consequently not be treated as valid.

5.3   Research question III

How often is the planner/venue informed in particular about the specific needs of the delegates related to their culture?

The resolution of this key proposition was of upmost importance and therefore, two questions were dedicated to gather valuable information.

The first question treated the issue whether the company is informed right away about the demographics of delegates when receiving a proposal for an event (Chapter 4.6). The in-depth interviewees mentioned that this information is usually passed on at a later stage, depending on the client. Corporations however principally know where their delegates come from and can pass this information on right away. Moreover, it was highlighted that a vast amount of information about delegates' demographics can be gained from experience, previous events, and Internet databases.

These answers support Montgomery & Strick (1995), who emphasise that planners firstly need to analyse the demographic profile of the delegates. Attention must also be paid to the participant's benefits regarding the meeting. Further, it can be linked to MPI's CultureActive© Tool, which offers members the opportunity to improve their ability to understand and communicate with other cultures (MPI 2010).

The second question was then specifically raised to discover how often respondents were generally informed about the specific needs of the delegates during the planning process of an event. Chapter 4.7 informs that the majority is randomly informed about specific needs, a large proportion however is notified most of the time or even claims to always know about delegates' needs. It is assumed that the reason why the majority declared to be only randomly informed is that in fact most organisers and venues do not take those issues into account thoroughly. Most of delegates' specific needs are related to food and dietary requirements, which concern more or less just the caterers and these considerations are routine for them.

This confirms McLaurin & Wyke's contention (2006) that meeting planners have to develop an international meeting strategy in order to identify attendees and countries represented in the meeting. Moreover, it relates to Tinnish (2006), who points out that a meeting can only be successful if successful communication occurs, which might become challenging with a cross-cultural team. Therefore, one needs to be aware that people from multiple cultures have different perspectives, values, experiences, and beliefs.

Therefore, the third research question can be answered with the thought that the majority of planners and venues are randomly informed about the specific needs of the delegates related to their culture. Mostly, this information is not passed on during the initial planning stage, but later on in the process. It is moreover the meeting planner's responsibility to provide the mechanism for delegates to forward these details. Consequently, it has to be concluded that this in fact depends on the event and the parties involved and differs all the time.

5.4   Research question IV

What are the main barriers for cross-cultural communication?

This research proposition relates to another key issue for cross-cultural meetings. Research results indicate that *communication and language*, *ignorance,* as well as *culture* were ranked most often as barriers for cross-cultural communication. Moreover, examples such as *different perceptions of time and scheduling*, *wrong approach to protocol and etiquette,* and *generalisations and stereotypes* are also linked to this problem (Chapter 4.16).

These examples can be further supported by literature. According to Gesteland (2005) and Brislin (2008), barriers such as *time and scheduling, communication and language,* and *corruption and bribery* exist. Further, Payne (2004) remarks that for international meetings, differences in cultural values, etiquette, interpretations of professional conduct, and corporate rules are most challenging to control. Furthermore, based on the

fact that there are *relationship-focused and deal-focused cultures, formal and informal cultures* and *expressive and reserved cultures* (Chapter 2.2)*,* which all accomplish business differently, it is quite natural that problems occur.

Therefore, it can be concluded that this key proposition is fully answered by research results in accordance with the literature.

5.5   Research question V

To what extent do meeting planners and venues lack the thorough comprehension of cross-cultural meetings and all the issues that come with it?

This research question is linked to a quite sensitive issue and cannot be answered as easily as the other propositions.

As stated by Tyosvold & Leung (2003) due to the meeting industry's international character, cross-cultural management is an indispensable topic. It deals with understanding diversity and improving professional practice for important areas to develop in the future. Wintz (2006) adds that planners need intuition, common sense, diplomacy, and respect for the culture of both the host country and the international participants to successfully organise cross-cultural meetings.

Research results indicate that most industry professionals gain information and knowledge on how to plan cross-cultural meetings through experience, exchange with others, and seminars (Chapter 4.8). Further, respondents emphasised that even though some kind of *best practice* does not exist for cross-cultural meetings, open-mindedness, flexibility, sensitivity to individual needs, and knowledge about different cultures is essential (Chapter 4.14).

Moreover, Brislin (2008) contends that the psychological process of categorisation is often applied in order to deal with the vast amount of information people have to process every day. According to Torrington *et al.* (2005), the trap of assuming that all nationals conform precisely to a

single model must be avoided. Therefore, research participants were asked about their opinion on the controversial issue of stereotypes (Chapter 4.15). Respondent's uniform answer states that to a certain extent, stereotyping is accepted; however, one should never assume and should rather ask, as misunderstandings could turn into bad word-of-mouth for the company.

It has to be highlighted that initially, it might seem that planners and venues lack the thorough comprehension of cross-cultural meetings. This is based on the fact that they do no attach too much importance to it, as it is already a routine to organise and host such meetings nowadays. Nonetheless, meeting experts are aware that for events with many nationalities present, it is essential to neutralise the situation as much as possible. Overprotection of cultures and paranoia will only worsen the circumstances.

The experience they gained over the years equipped them with profound knowledge in order to think outside the box and not in stereotypes. Furthermore, many companies dispose of multicultural teams, especially in the conference industry, which facilitates many of the issues mentioned above.

6   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This last chapter concludes with final remarks on the research findings and provides some recommendations for future research.

The dissertation explored the effects of cross-cultural meetings on the conference industry in Vienna and London through an extensive literature review and qualitative as well as quantitative research. It is emphasised that one of the most significant findings is the information gathered regarding the services and practices that are of upmost importance for the success of cross-cultural meetings. Issues such as the appropriateness of the destination and venue, awareness and recognition of different cultures, as well as the selection of the right dates can be seen as essential for an effective accomplishment of such events. Further, service quality levels should be reviewed by companies in order to offer a uniform service, but making every single delegate feel as comfortable as possible.

Another important matter addressed to in-depth interviewees was whether Vienna or London is more suitable or prepared for cross-cultural meetings. Quite interestingly, Vienna received better reviews regarding infrastructure and openness to cross-cultural meetings, even though it does not dispose of the same multicultural background as London. London's benefit as a major hub and cosmopolitan city does nonetheless not make up for the lack of European standards and high prices. The results of this question can however not be treated as valid, based on the fact that only patterns were analysed.

Furthermore, the issue of how often the meeting planner or venue is informed in particular about the specific needs of the delegates was investigated in this dissertation. As anticipated beforehand, most of the respondents indicated to be only randomly informed about these specific needs related to the delegates' culture. Consequently, planners and venues rely heavily on experience gained from previous events, Internet databases, and exchange with others.

Moreover, the sensitive subject of whether or to what extent meeting planners and venues lack the thorough comprehension of cross-cultural meetings and the issues that come with it was explored as well. It is a fact that international meetings seem to be routine for most industry professionals nowadays. Therefore, not much importance seems to be attached towards special issues due to the reason that those requests usually come up anyways during the planning process. Therefore, meeting experts try to think outside the box, they rely on the experience of their multicultural teams, and continuously attempt to overcome any cross-cultural barriers that might develop over time.

It is now however of great significance to summarise once more the many outstanding facets of cross-cultural meetings. Organisers of such international events might come across many challenges such as language and communication barriers, lack of awareness of individual differences or different laws and provisions. On the other hand, many positive experiences can be taken away from cross-cultural meetings. One is able to gain different perspectives and experiences when getting to know interesting and new people. Due to the interaction of diverse cultures a greater appreciation of those might develop. Cross-cultural meetings widen one's horizon even though complicated and quite demanding tasks might have to be accomplished. In the end, it is always nice to see positive results and satisfied clients.

Finally, an important area of improvement will be outlined. As highlighted before, the low response rate of the questionnaire caused results that are not representative. This was quite dissatisfactory for the researcher. Due to the reason that it was rather difficult to find companies which came into question for hosting or organising cross-cultural meetings, the sample size of 270 companies was not big enough. Another restraint for this survey was that the researcher did not have access to databases where companies are listed that host big international meetings. Therefore, it can be concluded that for a PhD thesis this topic would be a good choice. The survey population could be expanded to pharmaceutical companies and

international associations, as well as corporations organising cross-cultural meetings.

6.1   Recommendations for further research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for further consideration. Due to the reason that there is a general lack of sufficient academic literature about cross-cultural meetings and its effects on the industry, this dissertation attempted to fill the gap. However, it may be beneficial to publish more research on this topic in order to reveal the importance of having a general understanding of cultural diversity and the opportunities and problems that come with it.

The undesirable response rate of the questionnaire as well as time constraints are examples for limitations of this study. Nonetheless, a number of hypotheses could have been derived for this research if the sample size were bigger. The following hypotheses are recommended to future researchers when comparing London and Vienna as conference destinations for cross-cultural meetings:

- London is more suitable/prepared for cross-cultural meetings due to its international character.
- Vienna however provides better infrastructure in form of conference venues to host major international meetings.

Furthermore, in the author's opinion and through input from in-depth interviews conducted, it might be advisable to compile a best practice guide for successfully hosting cross-cultural meetings. This guide could certainly not be produced for the whole industry; however, companies organising and hosting a significant amount of international meetings could provide a booklet containing suggestions and advice from previous experiences.

Additionally, companies who are willing to gain more international meeting business should effectively advertise their open-mindedness, sensitivity and understanding of cultural diversity. This could for instance be done in

the course of implementing this in the mission statement on their website. Moreover, it could be stated in the company's current advertising campaign or through public relations and lobbying.

Finally, some considerations will be dedicated to London and Vienna's image as international conference destinations. It can be concluded that both cities are major players in the meetings industry, nonetheless, Vienna ranks much higher in international meeting statistics than London. The reason for this might be, as respondents indicated, the lack of conference centres regarding London's meeting infrastructure, as well as the city's perceived standards for hotel accommodation. Therefore, the author deduces that before the problem can even be addressed, London's officials must firstly become aware of it.

In conclusion, it is highlighted once more that cross-cultural meetings provide an essential platform for the future of the conference industry. These days the world is characterised by constant and also ever-faster change. But the conference industry is rather resilient, despite the impacts of the recession, political instability, and new technology. In the author's opinion, the importance of face-to-face contact and personal networking will continue to sustain the meetings industry.

At cross-cultural meetings delegates are given the chance to unite in order to face current issues and share ideas and information for the benefit of all mankind. Conferences may have the potential for ensuring a permanent ease and calmness as they provide a framework for discussion rather than conflict. In the author's opinion, the conference industry will face an exciting future in this 21st century as the potential is huge, competition is immense, and rewards such as enjoyment and job satisfaction are immeasurable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Appendix 3: In-depth interview script

Appendix 4: Additional graphs from data analysis

❖ **Appendix 1**

Hofstede's cultural dimensions:

- **Individualism:** This factor deals with the extent to which people expect to look after themselves and their family only. The opposite of individualism is collectivism (Torrington *et al.* 2005). Where individualism is high, as for instance in the USA, people are believed to take care of themselves and their immediate family only. In collectivist societies such as Japan, people are integrated in strong, cohesive groups (Brewster *et al.* 2007). According to Baum (2007), only Portugal and Greece among European countries were identified as collectivist.

- **Power distance:** This dimension measures the extent to which societies accept that power in organisations is and should be distributed unequally (Brewster *et al.* 2007). It refers to the degree of centralisation of authority and the degree of autocratic leadership (Torrington *et al.* 2005). As Baum (2007) points out, power distance was found to be small in Northern European countries and higher in Southern Europe and the Arab world.

- **Uncertainty Avoidance:** This factor refers to the degree to which societies feel threatened by ambiguous situations and the extent to which they try to avoid uncertainty (Brewster *et al.* 2007). According to Baum (2007), low uncertainty avoidance societies include Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. To the contrary, high uncertainty avoidance is characteristic in Japan, Germany and all Southern European countries.

- **Masculinity:** In masculine countries, characteristics include those of male stereotypes such as competitiveness, materialism, profit and assertiveness. Feminine attributes include cooperation, caring and nurturing, life-quality factors and warm relationships. Due to the reason that the use of this term is open to criticism as innate gender characteristics are assumed, an alternative spectrum is called "assertive – nurturing" (Baum 2007). Brewster *et al.* (2007) note that the most masculine countries are Japan and Austria, whereas the Scandinavian countries fall into the feminine category.

- **Short-term versus long-term orientation:** The dimensions above were supplemented by this fifth dimension. A short-term orientation includes a focus towards the past am present with respect for tradition and preservation of face. A long-term orientation relates to the future, especially perseverance and thrift (Browaeys & Price 2008).

❖ **Appendix 2**

Questionnaire:

Dear Madam or Sir,

I am a Masters Student and Researcher for Conference and Events Management at the University of Westminster in London and I am conducting research into the effects of cross-cultural meetings on the conference industry in London and Vienna.

It would be of great help to me if you could take five minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire. The information I obtain is for the sole purpose of my research and will be treated in the strictest confidence and anonymity respected.

If you hardly ever organise or host cross-cultural meetings, please do not fill out this questionnaire.

Thank you for your assistance!

Kind Regards,
Carina Glaser
carina.glaser@my.westminster.ac.uk

1.) What is your company's occupation? (filter question)

( ) Conference planner

( ) Conference centre/venue

( ) Conference hotel

2.) Approximately how many events do you organise each year? (only planners)

( ) 1 - 10

( ) 11 - 20

( ) 21 - 30

( ) 31 - 40

( ) More than 41

3.) Approximately what size of events does your company organise, on average? (only planners)

( ) 1 - 200 delegates

( ) 201 - 400 delegates

( ) 401 – 600 delegates

( ) 601 – 800 delegates

( ) More than 800 delegates

4.) Approximately how many events do you host each year? (only venues)

( ) 1 - 10

( ) 11 - 20

( ) 21 - 30

( ) 31 - 40

( ) More than 41

5.) What is your biggest room capacity for theatre style? (only venues)

( ) 0 – 200 PAX

( ) 201 – 400 PAX

( ) 401 – 600 PAX

( ) 601 – 800 PAX

( ) More than 800 PAX

6.) What kind of events are they?

[] Internal corporate meetings (AGM, training and development, etc.)

[] External corporate meetings (product launches, road shows, corporate hospitality events, etc.)

[] Governmental Meetings

[] Association Meetings

[] Exhibitions and Tradeshows

[] All of the above

[] Other (please specify further):

7.) What proportion of them are cross-cultural events?

( ) 10-20 %

( ) 21-40 %

( ) 41-60 %

( ) More than 61 %

8.) Where do most of your clients (buyers) come from?

[] Western Europe (Spain, Portugal, France)
[] Central Europe (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein)
[] UK, Northern Ireland & Iceland
[] Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway)
[] Italy
[] Russia & Belarus
[] Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg)
[] Baltic countries (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania)

[] Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Moldavia)

[] South-East Europe (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Cyprus)

[] North America

[] South America

[] Asia

[] Australia/New Zealand

[] Africa

9.) How often are you informed in particular about the specific needs (dietary requirements, religious preferences, etc.) of the delegates related to their culture?

( ) Never

( ) Almost never

( ) Randomly

( ) Most of the time

( ) Always

10.) How do you gain information and knowledge on how to plan cross-cultural meetings?

[ ] Experience

[ ] Literature on this topic

[ ] Seminars

[ ] Exchange with other meeting planners / venues

[ ] Multicultural specialists

[ ] Other (please specify):

11.) In order to deal successfully with cross-cultural meetings, one needs to be acquainted with the diversity and the socio-cultural background of the different delegates.

How aware are you of the many important issues that come with cross-cultural meetings?

_____Appropriateness of the destination

_____Appropriateness of the venue

_____Selection of the right dates for the event

_____Speaker and presentation screening

_____Right choice of social programme

_____Right choice of entertainment

_____Marketing

_____Accommodation

_____Awareness and recognition of different cultures

_____Awareness of religious preferences

_____Awareness of food and dietary requirements

_____Cultural education and awareness training for employees

_____Translation and simultaneous interpretation

_____Universal signage

_____Security and safety

12.) The term "cultural homogenisation" means to offer standardised services across the globe, do you think that this is possible for cross-cultural meetings?

( ) Yes

( ) No

( ) Other (please specify):

13.) Can you mention some pitfalls you have come across during organising and staging cross-cultural events?

_____

14.) Can you mention some positive experiences you have come across when organising and staging cross-cultural meetings?

_____

15.) Can you mention some examples of best practice one can follow in order to successfully host cross-cultural meetings?

_____

16.) Please rank the top 3 barriers for cross-cultural communication, where 1 is the most fatal barrier, 2 is the second most fatal barrier, etc.:

_____Communication & language

_____Culture

_____Generalisation & stereotypes

_____Wrong approach to protocol and etiquette

_____Different perceptions of time and scheduling

_____Ignorance

Thank you for participating!

❖ Appendix 3

In-depth interview script:

1. How many events do you approximately organise/host each year?
   What kind of events are they?
   How many of them are international/cross-cultural meetings?

2. Where do most of your international clients (buyers) and delegates come from?

3. When you receive a proposal for an event, are you informed right away about the demographics of the delegates?

4. If it is a major cross-cultural meeting, how often does the client inform you in particular about the specific needs of the delegates?

5. Do you have an in-house appointed multicultural specialist for big international meetings?

6. A crucial task to take into consideration at cross-cultural meetings is the specific features that define the audience and their socio-cultural background.
   How aware are you of the many important issues that come with cross-cultural meetings?
   - Appropriateness of the destination
   - Appropriateness of the venue
   - Selection of the right dates for the event
   - Speaker and presentation screening
   - Right choice of social programme
   - Right choice of entertainment
   - Marketing
   - Accommodation
   - Awareness and recognition of different cultures
   - Awareness of religious preferences
   - Awareness of food and dietary requirements
   - Cultural education and awareness training for employees
   - Translation and simultaneous interpretation
   - Universal signage

7. How do you deal with the issue of service quality for cross-cultural meetings as different nationalities might expect different service standards?
Do you agree with that?

8. What do you think about the term "cultural homogenisation", meaning to offer standardised services across the globe?

9. Can you mention some of the pitfalls that you have come across during organising and staging cross-cultural events?

10. Can you mention some positive experiences of cross-cultural meetings?

11. Is there some kind of best practice a planner or meeting venue can follow in order to successfully host cross-cultural meetings?

12. Stereotypes are a controversial issue, however, in some cases they have been proven to be helpful as well. Do you think that stereotypes are helpful in order to rate different cultures or are they a barrier to cross-cultural communication?
Can you provide an example for this?

13. What do you consider as the main barriers for cross-cultural communication?

14. Do you personally think that due to London's international character it is better suited for hosting cross-cultural meetings than other European cities?
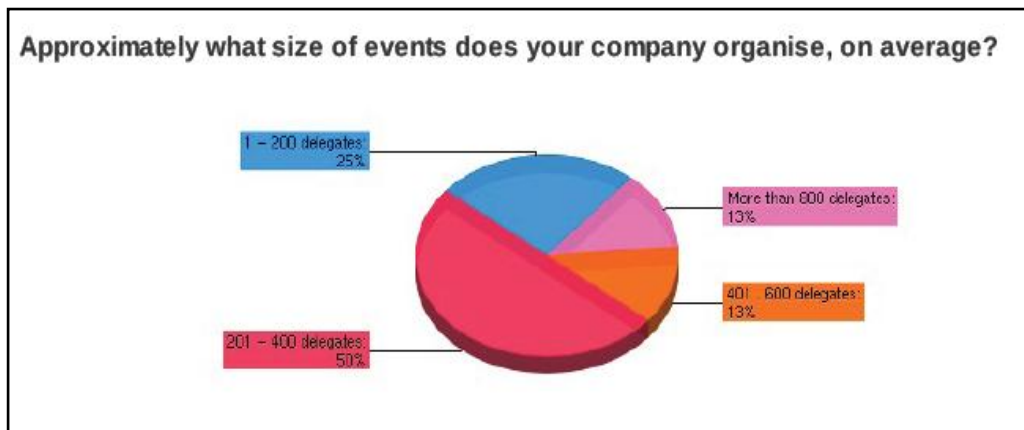
❖ **Appendix 4**
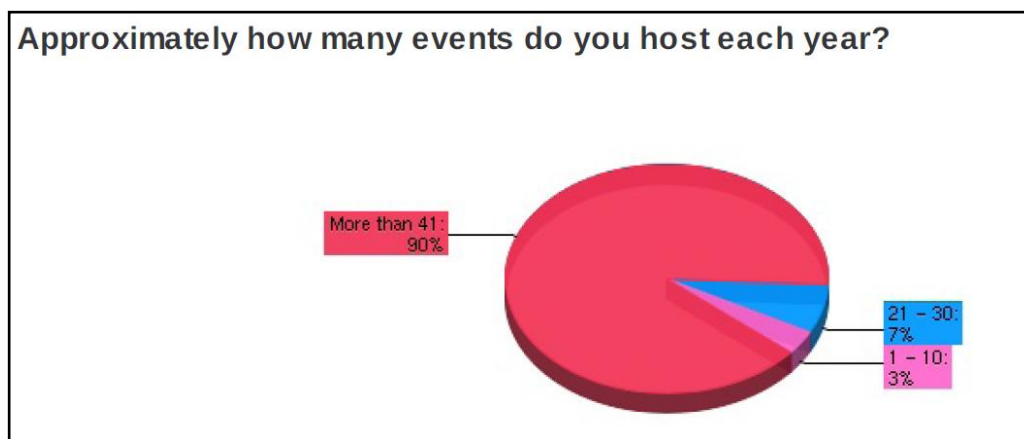

Figure 10: Size of events organised by planners

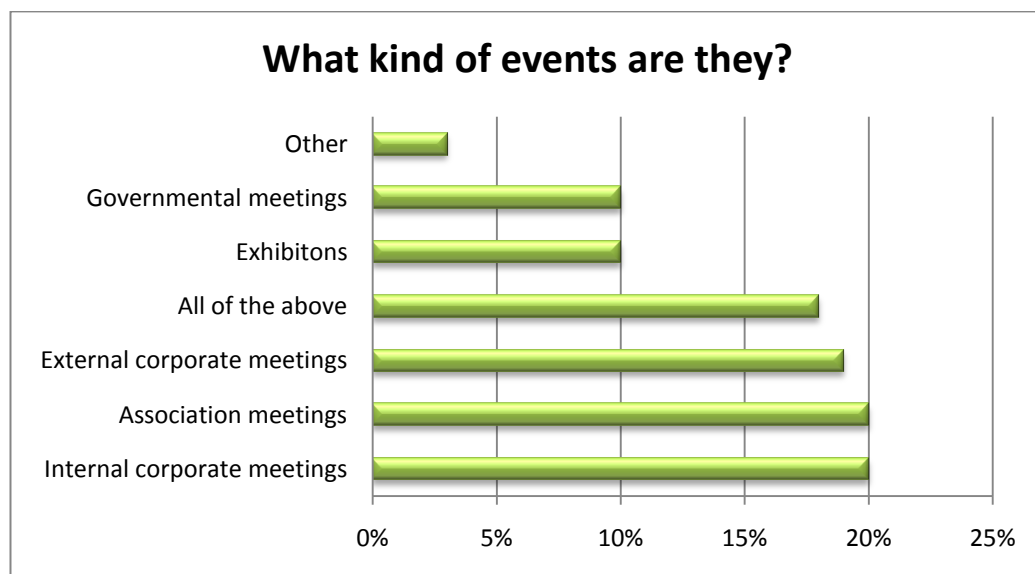**Figure 11:** Events hosted in conference centre/venues annually

Figure 12: Types of events

Central Europe (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein)	25	21.9%		Total Responses	37
UK, Northern Ireland & Iceland	24	21.1%			
Western Europe (Spain, Portugal, France)	14	12.3%			
North America	13	11.4%			
Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg)	10	8.8%			
Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway)	6	5.3%			
South-East Europe (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Cyprus)	5	4.4%			
Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Moldavia)	5	4.4%			
Italy	4	3.5%			
Asia	3	2.6%			
Australia/New Zealand	2	1.8%			
South America	1	0.9%			
Africa	1	0.9%			
Russia & Belarus	1	0.9%			

Table 8: Clients' origin