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**Determining the competitiveness attributes of conference tourism: a South African industry perspective**

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## **Determining the competitiveness attributes of conference tourism: a South African industry perspective**

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**Abstract:** This study reports on the qualitative findings of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design used to develop a framework for conference tourism competitiveness. By using destination competitiveness models and literature as a foundation, it sets out to distinguish the important conference tourism attributes identified by industry stakeholders. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 22 industry stakeholders (after saturation). The themes and attributes were analysed after each interview and a progression of themes was documented. This paper is the first attempt to investigate the conference attributes in South Africa that are important from a competitiveness perspective. The findings made it clear that location and accessibility were prioritised as conference tourism competitiveness attributes and that sustainability/greening was not prioritised as an important attribute. These findings and conclusions can contribute to developing and improving the conference tourism position of South Africa and enabling South Africa to become more competitive in this sector.

**Keywords:** attributes; competitive advantage; competitiveness; conference tourism; destination competitiveness; qualitative.

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## 1 Introduction

Business events such as conferences and conventions form one of the largest and most profitable segments that play a pivotal role in the global economy (Matiza, 2020; Nolan, 2020). According to the Travel and Tourism Index (2019), the industry generated 10.4% of world Gross Domestic Profit (GDP) in 2019. Emerging economies and destinations are becoming increasingly more attractive and showing greater competitiveness (Nolan, 2020). In light of this contribution, policymakers and industry stakeholders are analysing travel and tourism competitiveness continuously to increase this growing market. The South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB), an organisation that supports meeting planners, conferences, exhibitions, and incentive organisers in South Africa, hosted 207 international conferences from April 2018 to March 2019, before COVID-19 (SAT, 2020). Those conferences attracted over 87 000 delegates contributing R2.5 billion to the South African economy. Furthermore, South Africa has maintained its International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) ranking of 39th in the world (SAT, 2020).

The development of business events such as conferences is a viable option for destinations as it promotes job opportunities and justification for infrastructure, which, in turn, enhances long-term profitability; a significant determinant for competitiveness (Armenski et al., 2018; Komsic and Dorcic, 2016; Sainaghi et al., 2017; Zehrer et al., 2016). Furthermore, as competition increases, it becomes more important to determine the attributes that lead to conference tourism competitiveness and enable conference organisers to position their products in the market more efficiently. According to Kruger and Heath (2013), it is important to note that it is no longer considered an advantage to be

competitive, but a requisite. This forces the industry to follow a more integrated approach to competitiveness.

The pioneers of competitiveness (Porter, 1990; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) define this phenomenon as encompassing price disparities in search of favourable competitive positioning to increase profit in a competitive environment. However, Crouch and Ritchie (1999) warn that competitiveness is complicated because of its multi-faceted nature, which makes it difficult to measure (Mazanec and Ring, 2011). Most of the competitiveness research in the tourism industry focuses on destinations, with numerous studies, models, and theories that serve as a theoretical base for the application of competitiveness in tourism and destinations. Various authors have researched destination competitiveness in terms of attributes (Ariya et al., 2020; Haile et al., 2020; Huo, 2014; Komsic and Dorcic, 2016; Moon and Han, 2018; Schlesinger et al., 2020; Zehrer et al., 2016). Destination attributes, namely a variety of factors that attract leisure and business tourists to a destination, play an important role when selecting a destination for a business event (Haile et al., 2020; Moon and Han, 2018; Schlesinger et al., 2020). This underlines the importance of determining the attributes that are important to conference tourism competitiveness in order for the industry to remain competitive (Huo, 2014).

In recent years, the hosting of conferences has become part of the tourism competitiveness package, but under the umbrella of destination competitiveness. None of these include the competitiveness attributes of conference tourism in a South African context (Cronje and Du Plessis, 2020). Furthermore, attributes influence the delegates' decisions and are a motivator for revisiting intentions (Ariya et al., 2020; Moon and Han, 2018; Schlesinger et al., 2020).

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Destination competitiveness research*

The competitiveness concept extends over various sectors, with much of the research emphasising destination competitiveness. Different approaches to destination competitiveness have been followed, since it is a multi-faceted concept. Several authors have attempted to explain competitiveness in a tourism and destination context, basing their findings on the pioneer researchers in global competitiveness. Many researchers agree that the tourism industry can only be considered competitive when destinations are competitive in terms of services and products (Murphy et al., 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) and when the competitive attributes of the global market promote sustainability and growth.

Much of destination competitiveness research is based on the pioneering research of the Crouch and Ritchie model (1999), which is considered one of the most comprehensive models. This model has been commended for its inclusion of all elements of tourism competitiveness. Another pioneering researcher of competitiveness in destinations and tourism is Porter (1990), who developed a model of competitive positioning that consists of interrelated elements of the business environment that focus on productivity, demand conditions, factor conditions, strategy and rivalry, and supporting industries (Porter, 1990). In addition, Dwyer and Kim (2003) developed a model, based on the pioneer model of Crouch and Ritchie (1999), that focuses on a more integrated and holistic approach between different parts of the model (Armenski et al.,

2018) with a focus on ‘demand’ and “socio-economic prosperity”. Heath (2002), a South African researcher, contends that, from a Southern African perspective, the current models proposed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) and Dwyer and Kim (2003) lack sufficient integration of competitiveness and do not focus sufficiently on people. He consequently developed a model to include this dimension. Some researchers argue that there is no single set of indicators for measuring destination competitiveness, since each destination has its own unique set of features (Cronje and Du Plessis, 2020), and hence the need for research within the conference domain.

## *2.2 Conference and convention research*

Although attributes from a destination perspective overlap there is still a need to understand attributes from a conference tourism perspective. Recently, a growing body of research has been developed on conference tourism, but this is limited to decision processes and site selection of convention centres, and is based on the initial work carried out by Oppermann and Chon (1997), which examined the delegate attendance decision process (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Zhang et al., 2007). Jago and Deery (2011) examined the motivations for delegates to attend conferences.

A study conducted by Crouch and Louviere (2004) investigated the criteria used by Australian conference and convention planners to select sites for conventions. Mair and Thompson (2009) conducted a study with conference organisers in Scotland and identified six attributes for conference attendance, namely networking, personal and professional development, cost, location, time, and convenience. According to Kozak, Aksoz and Ozel (2015), weather and climate are considerations that could be used to benefit the business tourism sector, since conferences are held throughout the year (Kozak et al., 2015). A convention positioning study conducted by Kim, Yoon and Kim (2011) found that although climate was not highly prioritised, an attractive climate was a consideration for delegates and could affect their level of satisfaction with a convention. In South Africa, the favourable climate attracts both leisure and business tourists.

According to Kim et al. (2011), ‘price’ in the context of conferences refers to the conference package, which has an impact on the overall cost of the conference. Kim et al. (2011) state that accessibility can influence the ease of access to a destination for a conference. In a study conducted by Huo (2014), conference attendees ranked infrastructure as an important consideration when identifying a conference destination, together with city accessibility and destination image. A conference destination also needs to offer attractive entertainment elements (Crouch and Louviere, 2004), with Kim et al. (2011) concurring that a social setting and program are important for delegates. Concerning image, Crouch and Ritchie (1999) and Kim et al. (2011) conducted image studies on convention sites, although Kozak et al. (2015) suggest that the image of a conference destination is important, but that there is very limited research to substantiate this. In terms of health and safety, Ramsborg (2008) indicates that safety at a conference should be considered and sufficient resources at the venue supplied. Mair et al. (2018) identify technology as an essential attribute, as it makes provision for delegates to attend a conference in a ‘virtual’ setting, to attend simultaneous sessions, and to have access to online presentations. Hybrid conferencing has become a relevant attribute since COVID-19, as are the use of applications and other online and digital tools. Participants had different opinions about whether or not South Africa was a leading destination as far as technology is concerned. Another important attribute is sustainability, or ‘event

greening', which focuses on achieving societal policies and practices at events and ensuring that events are socially, environmentally, and culturally responsible (Rogers, 2013). Service quality increases customer satisfaction and improves the efficiency of services and facilities, which ultimately enhances the experience of quality at the conference (Mair et al., 2018).

According to Du Plessis (2015), the ever-changing macro environment necessitates marketing strategies to foster growth. Dwyer and Kim (2003) contend that conference organisers make use of web-based promotions to market and promote their conferences, and therefore conference organisers should understand the core preferences and values of the delegates. Conference venues need to maintain facilities, activities and services to remain competitive (Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Hassan, 2000). According to a study conducted by Huo (2014), facilities and activities have a high ranking with conference attendees.

Numerous studies have researched tourism and destination attributes that influence the selection of conference destinations and their competitiveness (Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim et al., 2011). However, this study focuses on the determination of conference attributes that affect competitiveness from an industry stakeholder perspective. It should be noted that many researchers highlight the importance of stakeholder collaboration to reach and maintain a sustainable competitive position (Lustický and Stumpf, 2021).

### 2.3 Conference attributes

According to Crouch (2007), an understanding of the needs of delegates in the conference domain is important, since each delegate's experience is different and the conferencing attributes could influence a delegate's decision to attend or not attend a conference at a destination. Important attributes include technology, which enables more efficient planning of a conference, more reliable implementation, and the opportunity for global communication (Rogers, 2013). The *location and accessibility* of a conference venue are closely linked to the site environment and include the attractiveness of the surrounding area, accessibility, and the infrastructure of the venue (Crouch and Louviere, 2014). With the current economic crisis, which has had a devastating effect on the conference industry, delegates are constantly looking for *value for money* (Rogers, 2013). According to Dwyer and Kim (2003), price competitiveness is considered value for money.

Almost all conferences include *food and beverage* services, and the quality and presentation of the food contribute to delegates' experience of the conference (Ramsborg, 2006). *Sustainability/greening* can also be reflected in the catering at the conference. Ritchie and Crouch (2000) indicate that sustainability refers to maximising positive economic, social and environmental impacts, and that event managers have an ethical responsibility to produce events that are socially, culturally and environmentally responsible. These practices include catering, waste disposal and water and energy conservation (Rogers, 2013). Conference organisers use a *program* to attract potential delegates; therefore the content of the program, speakers and entertainers should be appealing and focus on the objectives of the conference (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Zhang et al., 2007). *Accommodation* refers to the capacity of an establishment or venue, the costs associated with the venue, the conference services provided by the *venue* and the accommodation provided to the delegates (Crouch and Louviere, 2004). Various convention studies have identified accommodation as an important attribute for conferencing (Kim et al., 2011). Many meetings are hosted by professional associations,

industry associations, non-governmental organisations and academic groups. The delegates that attend those meetings do so for *personal development* and for the value and knowledge they can gain from attending the conference (Rogers, 2013).

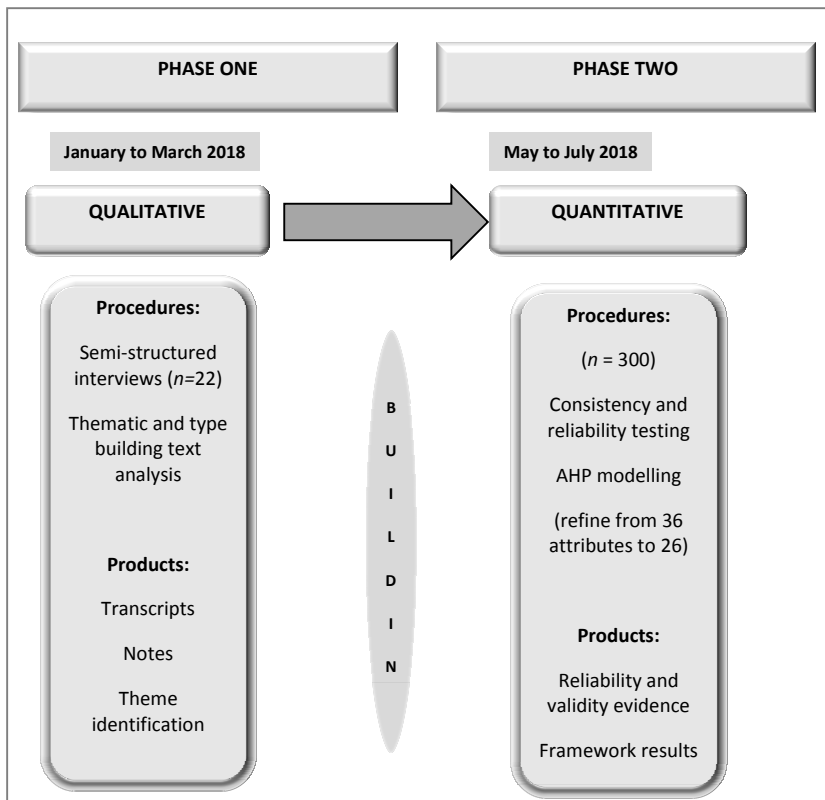
In conclusion, numerous studies have investigated tourism and destination variables and attributes that influence the selection of conference destinations and their competitiveness (Kim et al., 2011; Crouch and Louviere, 2004); however, this study supports the need to identify and understand the conference attributes that affect competitiveness.

### 3 Method of research

#### 3.1 Exploratory sequential design

The term ‘sequential’, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), refers to one form of data that is used for the collection of another type of data. The qualitative data (interviews) in this study (Phase 1) was collected and analysed and the findings thereof were used for the development of the instrument (questionnaire) (Phase 2) with the aim to develop a conceptual framework for conference tourism competitiveness. It should however be noted that this paper focuses on the findings of Phase 1 only. The research design is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design



Twenty-six ( $N=26$ ) conference industry stakeholders were selected as participants for this study with the assistance of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). No additional participants were sought, since the participants were willing to participate and the overall value of their years of experience surpassed the initial expectations. Guest et al. (2006) state that data saturation is frequently used to determine the sample size. In the case of this study, the themes and attributes were analysed after each interview and a progression of themes was documented. After 22 interviews no further thematic expressions emerged, which indicated that data saturation had been reached. The interviews took place over a three-month period and were conducted face-to-face, with the exception of one being a skype interview from Cape Town. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and were held with industry stakeholders comprising professional conference organisers (PCOs) (P), sponsors and academics (A), venue suppliers (V) and associations and organisations (O) (sample profile indicated in Table 1). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. It should be noted that the two sponsors interviewed were conference organisers and therefore delivered the same results. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review, with specific reference to the destination competitiveness studies of Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Heath (2002). Each of the industry stakeholders was asked to identify the most important conference tourism attributes, that is, those that would contribute most to enhancing competitiveness. A pre-test of five interviews had been done before the official interviews were conducted. Small adjustments were made to the interview process.

The interview guide (Table 2) was approved by an ethics committee of a higher education institution after it had reviewed all ethical matters related to this research (EMS14/10/16-02/04). Before being interviewed, the participants provided written consent of voluntary participation. They were permitted to leave the interview at any time without any repercussions.

### 3.2 *Data analysis*

The data was analysed using Microsoft Excel. The attribute themes identified during the interviews were entered into the Excel spreadsheet under the relevant stakeholder industry code.

### 3.3 *Findings*

Of the 24 attributes and themes examined, the 10 most important attributes, according to the number of stakeholders who identified them as important priorities, were found to be:

- Location – P3, P4, P6, A1, A2, V1, V2
- Accessibility – P1, P2, P7, V1, V2, V3, O1, O2, O3
- Price/value for money – P1, P2, P3, P5, V3
- Food – P4, P6, P7, A4, V2
- Technology – PR, P5, O2
- Personal development – A1, A3, P1



- Facilities – P6, A2, V3
- Accommodation – A1, V1, V2
- Program – P1, A4
- Greening – P2.

**Table 1** Sample sizes and participant profiles of the study

<i>Category</i>	<i>Participant profile</i>		<i>Total</i>
Associations/organisations represented in the conference industry (O)	1	Chief Executive Officer	N = 4
	2	Regional Director	
	3	Chief Convention Bureau Officer	
	4	General Manager	
Conference venues (V)	1	Director	N = 3
	2	Manager	
	3	General Manager	
Academics involved in conference attendance (A)	1	Senior Lecturer (PhD)	N = 5
	2	Senior Lecturer (PhD)	
	3	Associate Professor	
	4	Lecturer	
	5	Lecturer	
Sponsors for conferences (P)	1	Director	N = 2
	2	General Manager	
Professional conference organisers (PCOs) (P)	1	Director/owner	N = 8
	2	Director	
	3	Member	
	4	Marketing Manager	
	5	Team Leader	
	6	Manager	
	7	Senior Program Manager	
	8	Manager	
<i>Total</i>			<i>N = 22</i>

### 3.3.1 Location and accessibility

Overall location and accessibility were ranked as the top priority by most of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, A1, A2, V1, V2, V3, O1, O2, O3). Participants A1 and A2 indicated that “we would not attend a conference that was not accessible or located in a favourable destination”. A3 stated that “conferences hosted in unique locations are appealing”. O2 maintained that “if a destination wants to attract international association conference delegates from all over the world, they must be able to fly in either directly into the specific city, or maybe just have one connecting flight and also ideally enough international airlines must be able to fly into the destination”.

Participant 03 added that “*accessibility is not only the site, but visa accessibility, transport and accommodation accessibility*”.

**Table 2** Summary of tourism and destination attributes – Interview guide

<i>Key resources</i>	<i>Tourism development</i>
Natural resources and biodiversity	Destination marketing management*
Cultural resources	Destination policy planning
Infrastructure *	HR development
Activities *	Environmental management (greening)*
Shopping	
Entertainment*	
<i>Support factors</i>	<i>Situational conditions</i>
General infrastructure	Competitive micro environment
Service quality*	Destination location*
Accessibility*	Global environment
Attractiveness	Price competitiveness
Hospitality/accommodation*	Positioning in the market
Technology*	Innovative products and services
Health and safety requirements*	
Visa requirements	
Climate/weather*	<i>Market performance conditions</i>
Value for money*	Political stability*
Catering – food quality*	Price competitiveness*
Facilities*	Economic stability*

*Source:* Adapted from the work of Crouch and Ritchie (2003), Hassan (2000), Heath (2002) and Dwyer and Kim (2003)

### 3.3.2 Price and value for money

Seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, V3, 03) indicated that price and value for money were ranked as the next important attributes for conference tourism. Furthermore, P4 stated that “*due to the global recession, many companies were cutting down on conferences and therefore looking for value for money and more affordably priced conferences*”. Participant A3 indicated that “*many delegates weigh up what ‘adds value’ to the conference package; in other words, is there a component of authenticity and is the exchange rate favourable for international delegates?*” Concerning price, 03 and V3 both indicated that political and economic stability played a role, as delegates would be reluctant to visit a conference destination subjected to political or economic unrest. Participant V3 indicated that “*venues in South Africa are very expensive, adding to the overall expense of the conference*”. In addition, participants P4 and P5 mentioned that “*South Africa is still a ‘long haul’ destination, and expensive*”. This confirmed that many industry experts in South Africa agree that price and value for money in a conference setting is an important competitiveness attribute and that delegates look for affordably priced conferences with a component of value for money.

### 3.3.3 Food and cuisine

Participants P4, P6, P7, A4, V2 and V3 indicated that international delegates were becoming more aware of food trends and healthy eating. Participant A4 felt that South Africa should make more of an effort to meet these requirements and give menus a more ‘*South African*’ flavour to offer an ‘*authentic*’ appeal. P1 indicated that “*food is important for the individuals that are attending the event, not only quantity but quality. From an organising perspective, I think too many mistakes are being made that thinking that if you feed somebody, they will be content with what you give them. Food can make or break an event*”.

### 3.3.4 Technology

Participants P4, P5, P6, O2, O3, V3 and A2 pointed out that technology, infrastructure and facilities were of equal importance for conference tourism and for making a conference competitive. Participants V1 and V3 indicated that site selection was critical when identifying the facilities and infrastructure of the venue, as was logistical planning, to make the most of the infrastructure. Participants cautioned that even when a venue had the best facilities and infrastructure, the lack of a service-orientated element would affect the competitiveness of a country or destination, and therefore it is essential that staff be trained. Participant P4 indicated that “*technology was an important attribute*”, but added that “*in South Africa we are ‘lagging’ behind and still have a long way to go to meet international standards*”. Participant O1 stated that “*I do not feel we meet international standards and there should be a bigger driver to offer free Wi-Fi, as many conferences focus on new technology in the form of apps*”. Participant V3 raised concerns “*as a venue supplier, technical infrastructure/technology in South Africa is amongst the most expensive in the world*”. Participant P6 stated that “*infrastructure must be conducive to the type of meeting or conference and therefore the venue selected would play an important role*”. Participant P5 indicated, “*there are so many conference venues that are not up to speed with the way things are overseas. We have little pieces of paper flipcharts, we have little whiteboards on a stand; it’s not high-end, it’s not what’s happening in Europe where they have maybe whiteboards around a wall... There is not enough technology in the conference venue so everything has to be outsourced... If you take a conference venue you should automatically offer free Wi-Fi, you should automatically give benefits*”.

Industry stakeholders asserted that conferencing in South Africa was following the international trend of making use of apps as an important platform for communication between the conference organisers and the delegates, both before and after the conference.

### 3.3.5 Personal development

Participants A1, A3 and P3 agreed that personal development should be a consideration when selecting a conference to attend. Participant P1 stated that it was important to identify the following: “*What will I take away personally? Will it contribute to my skills set? Will it put me in touch with like-minded people? Will it advance my knowledge, and potentially my career?*” Participant A3 stated that she would not attend a conference if she would not be gaining any knowledge; this prompted her to note that the program content and the speakers were also a consideration. Participant A1 agreed, stating that if

the “keynote speakers ... are not well-known authors or well-published authors or authors that are not really my scope, I will also not consider going to the conference”, since it would not contribute to her personal development.

### 3.3.6 Facilities

Participants P6, A2, O3 and V3 agreed that the facilities and service at a venue were important considerations for many conference organisers. In other words, does the venue have the required facilities for the type of meeting or conference to be held? Participants V1 and V3 stated that site selection was critical when identifying the facilities of a conference venue. It was also noted that the facilities provided by the conference organisers or venue should be in good working order and easily accessible. Participant P5 agreed that facilities were important when selecting a conference venue and noted questions such as: “Do they have the technology that I want? Will they offer me free Wi-Fi rather than to charge me? Will they offer me hypothetically free parking where at another conference venue I might have to pay for parking? All of these make a difference to the end cost that the client will pay”. Participant P8 indicated that checklists for facilities would be a good idea to assist the organiser.

### 3.3.7 Accommodation

Participants A1 and V3 agreed that when considering accommodation facilities at a conference destination, one needs to consider the capacity and number of rooms, the costs associated with the accommodation, the services and facilities associated with the accommodation facility, and ensure that it meets the objectives of the conference.

### 3.3.8 Program

Participants P1 and P3 agreed that “the attractiveness of the program to accommodate different interests was of vital importance” and often a key consideration when deciding whether or not to attend a conference. Furthermore, keynote speakers are also an important consideration for the program (Mair et al., 2018).

In the current global climate, many academics need to be more discerning when deciding on conferences to attend and thus they pay more attention to the content of the programs and the guest speakers who feature in the conference program. Some conferences attract more prestigious speakers, which could influence an academic’s decision whether or not to attend the conference. In addition, the conference program should promote engagement and networking opportunities among delegates (Mair et al., 2018). From a South African perspective, it is important to offer top-quality conferences with a good reputation to remain competitive. This can be achieved by providing a high-quality program.

### 3.3.9 Sustainability/greening

The participants made it clear that sustainability and greening were not of importance for competitiveness in the conference environment. Only one participant (O1) commented that they felt it was an expensive concept to implement in business events, and noted that, “if it’s done right, sustainability and greening can actually reduce the cost, but it’s because we’re all trying just for the sake of doing it and window dressing or what we call

*greenwashing rather than this being part of your objectives, and I mean 90% of companies these days have – one of their values is sustainability and are you truly living that value then? – greening is not a concept, but a culture”.*

#### **4 Discussion of findings**

In a study conducted by Crouch (2011) using a destination competitiveness model with 36 competitiveness attributes evaluated, experts ranked accessibility and location as being seventh and tenth most important, respectively. These findings are consistent with similar studies conducted on convention attendee-related studies from a demand side (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Zhang et al., 2007), which found that three variables influenced the level of conference attendance. In research conducted by Chen (2006); Kim et al. (2011) and Kozak et al. (2015), location was deemed an important attribute for venue selection. In the study of Crouch (2011) mentioned above, value/cost was indicated as the sixth most important destination competitiveness attribute and was influenced by the macro and micro environment, which was governed by economic structures within the destination. Zhang et al. (2007), on the other hand, highlight that total cost factors are one of the four main dimensions of conference factors and note that meeting planners consider price and value for money as one of the top considerations for destination selection criteria for a meeting or conference. Those findings are consistent with the findings of this study. According to Kansal et al. (2015), value for money is a very important consideration for the tourist, whether for leisure or business. Currently, the South African exchange rate is favourable to international delegates and provides an opportunity for value for money.

In terms of food and catering, Ellis et al. (2018) and Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte (2016) explain that delegates are well-educated and well-travelled, and conscious of their health, with cuisine fast becoming an attractive trend. Destinations tend to include food, cultural authenticity and local nature as part of their destination strategies to attract both business and leisure tourists (Ellis et al., 2018; Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte, 2016). According to a study by Crouch (2007), which involved a survey of expert judgement by destination managers and tourism researchers, food services and facilities accommodation are ranked as the fourth most important under the determinant of tourism superstructure. These findings are in line with the findings of this study. Technology, personal development, program and environmental greening are attributes unique to conference tourism competitiveness, and do not feature in the studies conducted by destination competitiveness researchers.

Furthermore, industry experts did not view sustainability and the greening of events to be of importance and believed that it was expensive to execute events with greening principles. Lastly, food and cuisine were noted as a competitive attribute, with South Africa being in a unique position to offer authentic food experiences and cater for various special meals (Cronje and Du Plessis, 2020).

#### **5 Conclusion and implications**

The following findings emerged from the results of this study: Firstly, conference tourism competitiveness is also about contributing to the importance of evaluating and managing

attributes in the conference tourism sector. Secondly, the study makes provision for conference industry stakeholders and government to concentrate on specific attributes that could improve the competitiveness of conference tourism destinations worldwide. Thirdly, conference tourism has some distinctive attributes that differ from those of other tourism and destination sectors. These attributes include the entertainment at and program of the conference, the image or reputation of the conference, the size of the conference, the venue design and facilities, free Wi-Fi, state-of-the-art technology in a meeting room, and environmental practices that contribute to conference tourism competitiveness. Finally, the findings of this study provide a knowledge base of conference tourism attributes from a supply perspective.

The two main limitations of this study were that literature on the conference competitiveness was limited, and that many of the conference organisers approached for the interviews were very reluctant to participate.

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