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## Measuring stakeholders' attitudes toward sustainable development of conference and congress tourism: Serbia case study

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Scientific publications regarding business tourism, especially those which incorporate elements of sustainable development, still remain scarce in the existing literature. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine attitudes of local tourist organizations, travel agencies, catering establishments, chambers of commerce and other relevant stakeholders towards the sustainable development of conference and congress tourism (CCT) in Vojvodina, Serbia. **Methodology** – In order to investigate the attitudes of stakeholders (n=174), the adapted sustainable tourism attitude scale (SUS-TAS) was used in this paper. Moreover, the responses of the directors (managers) of local tourism organizations to several open-ended questions, which make an integral part of the survey, are also presented. **Findings** – The research instrument proved to be reliable. Based on other applied analyses (t-test and ANOVA), the existence of numerous statistically significant differences in the responses in relation to gender, job position, sector of work, age and education were identified. **Implications** – Apart from theoretical contribution, this paper reveals what aspects of CCT are in stakeholders' main focus and what seems to be out of their radar. This should help defining necessary actions for further improvements of CCT. Lastly, study limitations and future research guidelines are discussed.

**Keywords:** conference and congress tourism, sustainability, events, stakeholders' attitudes, SUS-TAS scale

**JEL classification:** L83, G14, Q01

## Istraživanje stavova stejkholdera povodom održivog razvoja konferencijskog i kongresnog turizma: Studija slučaja Srbija

### Sažetak

**Svrha** – Naučne publikacije o poslovnom turizmu, posebno one koje sadrže elemente održivog razvoja, i dalje su oskudne u postojećoj literaturi. Stoga je cilj ovog rada da se ispituju stavovi lokalnih turističkih organizacija, turističkih agencija, ugostiteljskih objekata, privrednih komora i drugih relevantnih stejkholdera prema održivom razvoju konferencijskog i kongresnog turizma (KKT) u Vojvodini, Srbija. **Metodologija** – U cilju istraživanja stavova stejkholdera (n=174), u radu je korišćena prilagođena skala stavova održivog turizma (SUS-TAS). Takođe,

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prikazani su i odgovori direktora lokalnih turističkih organizacija na nekoliko otvorenih pitanja, koja čine sastavni deo ankete. **Rezultati** – Instrument korišćen u istraživanju se pokazao kao pouzdan. Na osnovu drugih primenjenih analiza (t-test i ANOVA), utvrđeno je postojanje brojnih statistički značajnih razlika u odgovorima u odnosu na pol, radno mesto, sektor rada, godine i obrazovanje. **Implikacije** – Osim teorijskog doprinosa, ovaj rad otkriva koji su aspekti KKT-a u glavnom fokusu stejkholdera, a na šta ne obraćaju mnogo pažnje. Ovo bi trebalo da pomogne u definisanju neophodnih akcija za dalja poboljšanja KKT-a. Konačno, razmatraju se ograničenja studije i daju smernice za buduća istraživanja.

**Ključne reči:** konferencijski i kongresni turizam, održivost, događaji, stavovi stejkholdera, SUS-TAS skala

**JEL klasifikacija:** L83, G14, Q01

## 1. Introduction

Business tourism is a segment of tourism industry that refers to trips conditioned by work, i.e., for professional reasons (Davidson, 1996). These business events include meetings, incentive trips, fairs (trade fairs, exhibitions), and probably the most dominant forms – conferences, congresses, conventions, symposiums. This segment of tourism is also known as MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), and has a very significant economic and social impact on a local and regional level. However, it has been recommended moving away from the abbreviation MICE, even though it is popular, because it does not reflect completely the complex nature of this tourism phenomenon. Recently, the term *meetings industry* has been gaining popularity and more detailed differentiation between commonly used terms are presented in paper by Wroblewski and Ussenbayev (2022). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), business tourism accounted for 20% of total tourism industry spending in 2021 (WTTC, 2022).

Business tourists strongly contribute to the tourism industry. It is a generally known fact that business tourists are a high-paying category (Davidson, 2003), in part also due to the fact that travels are mainly financed by organizations that employ them (WTTC, 2022). In this regard, many organizers of these business events add elements of leisure activities in order to create a better experience for tourists and ensure a stronger economic impact on the destination. If we take into account the predictions that this segment of tourism will grow by 188% by 2028, as well as that 21% of business tourists perceive care for the environment as a top priority while 56% of them perceive it as a moderate priority (Williams, 2023), it is necessary to be more specific in the efforts to connect business events and sustainable development at the destination. The topic of sustainable development in tourism has been present for decades (Ap & Crompton, 1998) and is gaining more and more importance over time (Anuar et al., 2012; Turker et al., 2016). However, when it comes to business tourism and the impact on sustainable development of the destination, research is scarce.

Destination sustainability in the context of business tourism development implies the involvement of all stakeholders. There are numerous studies related to the local population, i.e. their attitudes towards sustainable tourism (Lee, 2013; Obradović et al., 2021; Sharpley, 2014). In contrast, the attitudes of local tourist organizations and other crucial stakeholders and service providers who create and shape business tourism at the destination have not been sufficiently examined in the context of sustainable development. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to examine the attitudes of local tourist organizations, catering establishments and other relevant stakeholders towards the sustainable development of CCT in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia. In this paper, the term CCT refers to business trips for participation in congresses, conferences, conventions, symposiums and similar gatherings.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. CCT and sustainability

The concept of sustainable development has long been present in literature and permeates all the economic activities. It is especially pronounced in the field of tourism as one of the fastest growing industries with a great impact on economic and social development. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2005), sustainable tourism is defined as: “*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.*” This definition refers to all the aspects of tourism, including CCT. So, this is about establishing a balance between the economic, social and environmental development. According to Weaver (2006), it is about minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive impacts of tourism. Residents of areas that thrive on tourism are the ones who are most aware of the benefits of tourism, which is why over time they have become more and more tolerant of the negative effects of tourism (Milošević et al., 2021). This is very important because it has been proven that sustainable development of tourism is possible only with the involvement of the local community, including the initial stages of planning (Mijatov Ladičorbić et al., 2023; Styliadis et al., 2014; Wang & Xu, 2015; Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, only destinations that take care of all three segments (also known in the literature as The Triple Bottom Line – profit, people and planet) (Gu et al., 2022) can talk about responsible behaviour and sustainable development of CCT.

Bearing in mind the very rapid growth of this sector of tourism (Lu et al., 2020), the principle of sustainability gains additional importance because it provides benefits for the event itself but also for the destination (Getz & Page, 2016; Kim et al., 2022), and these benefits are visible before, during and after the event (Lu et al., 2020). Although the Covid pandemic slowed down the aforementioned growth in previous years, it surely emphasized the importance of sustainability. Apart from the reasons for traveling for business, participants who participate in congresses and similar business events use all services like other tourists at the destination (Štetić et al., 2014), with the fact that they usually spend more money (Davidson, 2003) – even up to five or six times more (Šušić & Mojić, 2014) – making this segment of tourism generally profitable (Štetić, 2007).

Congress tourists generally travel more often during the year than tourists that travel to vacation. For them, it is true that they are an exclusive type of tourist who are very demanding in every way. Unfortunately, sometimes this is difficult to reconcile with the principles of sustainable development of the destination (Tršić & Arsenov-Bojović, 2018). It should be noted that almost all congresses and similar business events last at least two days, that many participants of these gatherings arrive at least a day or two before the event and usually stay at the destination after the end of the event, often accompanied by their spouse or family in order to combine private and business travel (Davidson, 2003). It is worth mentioning that nowadays many business events are shifting to a one-day event. This further implies a greater impact of business tourists on a local or regional level, including the impact on the natural environment. The importance of sustainability in tourism, including CCT, is seen through national strategies and development plans in many countries (Graci, 2013; Sharpley, 2020).

When it comes to Serbia, the importance of CCT and the principles of sustainability were also recognized, and the Serbia Convention Bureau was founded in 2007 as a special department of the Tourism Organization of Serbia, with the aim of achieving better positioning on the global congress map. As pointed out, this positioning is framed by the goals of sustainable development, where the participants, the wider community and environmental protection are in focus (Serbia Convention Bureau, n.d.).

## **2.2. The role of stakeholders in sustainable CCT**

What is characteristic of the organization of business events is that they are planned in advance. This fact represents an opportunity for long-term business development and the involvement of many stakeholders at the destination. Bearing in mind that business events are organized throughout the year and are not related to the seasonality of a certain destination, the number of stakeholders who are, or who can be involved in the development of sustainable CCT, is really large, making this segment of tourism very complex. Stakeholders can generally be divided into three categories: 1) supply, 2) demand, 3) intermediaries (Skopjak Kresović, 2015) and belong to the public, civil and private sectors. According to Timur (2012), stakeholders are distributed across tourism industry, environment support and local community and government, while Ritchie and Crouch (2003) see them as suppliers, supporting industries, members of public, marketing merchandise and facilitators. Regardless of the classification of stakeholders, what is evident is the necessity of their cooperation and exchange of information in order to successfully realize an event (Raj et al., 2013). Wroblewski and Ussenbayev (2022) point out that the most important stakeholder is the one who makes decisions and describe it as the “meeting/event owner”, which is not always the same as the “organizer” (e.g. local companies specialized for organization of business events). Apart from that, other stakeholder could fit into category “meeting/event participants”.

Harrison and Wicks (2015) suggest that the Triple bottom line concept could help managers to become aware of the company's overall performance and contribute to a rise in corporate accountability. Stakeholders can also impact whether a firm pursues a corporate social responsibility (CSR) or sustainability strategy. According to Sulkowski et al. (2017), social activists, regulators, and non-governmental organizations contribute to beneficial social and environmental development. Some studies have indicated that CSR and sustainability initiatives are the product of stakeholder influence, and corporations will not implement them unless forced to (Campbell, 2007). Sulkowski et al. (2017) emphasizes that the cooperation strategy among stakeholders should enable organizations to have a larger impact by influencing their supplier chains, changing cultural norms and attitudes, or striving toward circularity in the economy. In this way a long-term profitability could be achieved while eliminating social and environmental damages.

Multi-stakeholder involvement can cause numerous obstacles in business activities, not sharing the same goals as the main reason. A similar conclusion is drawn by the group of authors (Hörisch et al., 2014) who have also acknowledged several challenges that may arise while managing stakeholder relationships towards sustainability. These challenges include the company's ability to organize shared goals among stakeholders and enable stakeholders to act as environmental intermediaries. They also point out that in the case where a stakeholder who would like to work with another stakeholder committed to sustainable development, sustainability must be one of their own priorities. In other words, establishing shared sustainability goals is thus dependent on the distinct sustainability interests of various stakeholders (different goals, values, expectations, etc.).

The role of stakeholders can be observed from two aspects: global (macro environment) and local (micro environment). Ritchie and Crouch (2010) look at macro factors from six different perspectives: economic, technological, ecological, political and legal advances, socio-cultural challenges, and demographic. In contrast, at the local level, these are government institutions, tour operators, travel agencies, tourist organizations, congress bureaus, expo centres, chambers of commerce, the hotel and catering sector, the entertainment sector, transport and the public (residents, media, etc.). The importance of stakeholders in the context of sustainable development has changed over time, the focus has

shifted from state institutions and companies to local communities, i.e., from economic development to the empowerment of local communities (Ruhanen, 2013), all with the aim of transforming local economies and strengthening the capacity of local communities in a sustainable way (Richards & Hall, 2000).

Examining the views of stakeholders regarding the sustainable development of tourism is a frequently discussed topic in literature. However, mainly the attitudes of local communities, i.e., the population living at the destination, were examined (Albu, 2020; Burns, 2004; Hunter, 1995; Styliadis et al., 2014; Thetsane, 2019; Zhang & Chan, 2016). This is partially justified because residents are considered a key factor in the development of tourism and are directly affected by activities within its development (Kihima & Musila, 2019; Thetsane, 2019). Among rarer studies that have been conducted taking into account other stakeholders in CCT, we can mention the paper of Kim et al. (2022). Experts from the economy, state agencies and representatives of the academy participated in their research.

Clear views of all stakeholders are very important because an understanding of market trends is necessary for the management of complex events (Ivkov et al., 2015) and in order to maximize the positive effects of business events, continuity in their maintenance is necessary (Daniels & Norman, 2003). Holding an event at a certain destination also presents the destination and the local community through an economic, social and cultural prism. In this regard, the success of business events mostly depends on stakeholders at the local level, i.e., their connection and the level of quality of cooperation (Dolasinski et al., 2021; He et al., 2020; Jucu, 2020).

### **3. Methodology**

The research was conducted during the organization of the Tourism Summit of Vojvodina, which was held for the second time in June 2023, in Indija (Vojvodina, Serbia). The idea of the Summit was to unite all relevant stakeholders from the field of CCT and to discuss the challenges in this sector through several panels, as well as to improve the quality of the offer through joint action, above all in Vojvodina. The Summit was attended by over 200 participants, more than 30 representatives of local tourism organizations, as well as 15 speakers (local government, tourism organisations, travel agencies, hotel industry, congress bureau, etc.).

Data was collected from March to June 2023 through a survey distributed online. A Google form was created, and the link to the questionnaire was distributed directly to stakeholders, as well as indirectly through tourism organizations and the chamber of commerce. The respondents were informed that the research was anonymous and that it was being conducted for scientific purposes. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part primarily related to sociodemographic questions, the second part consisted of the adapted SUS-TAS scale (Choi & Sirakaya-Turk, 2005) of 44 questions divided into 7 factors, used in the research of the group of authors Mijatov Ladičorbić et al. (2023). The questions were slightly changed to emphasize CCT, not tourism in general. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions to be answered only by directors (managers) of local tourism organizations. The survey was answered by 174 respondents.

The research used 5-point Likert scale (1 – absolutely disagree, 2 – partially disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – partially agree, and 5 – absolutely agree), while IBM SPSS 23 was used for data processing and performing descriptive statistical analyses, scale reliability, t-test and ANOVA analyses.

## 4. Results and discussion

The results of descriptive data analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive data analysis

Gender	Education	Age (yrs)	Sector of employment	Work position	Travel expenses are covered by:	Media influence
Male 33.3%	Secondary school 10.9%	26-35 yrs 17.8%	Public 76.4%	Managerial position 46%	Organisation 78.2%	None 23%
Female 66.7%	College 5.2%	36-45 yrs 46.6%	Private 23.6%	Employee 54%	Personal sources 9.2%	Small 55.2%
	Bachelor 52.3%	46-55 yrs 19%			Combination 12.6%	Big 21.8%
	MSc 28.2%	>55 yrs 16.7%				
	PhD 3.4%					

Source: Authors' research

Based on the results from Table 1, it can be concluded that significantly more women participated in the research, as many as two thirds. Most respondents were in the 36-45 age category (46.6%), and if younger respondents are added to that, the percentage is as high as 64.4%. In other words, it can be concluded that the people up to 45 years of age are primarily engaged in this sector. What deserves admiration is that the vast majority of respondents completed university level education, i.e. slightly less than 84%, out of which 31.6% have completed postgraduate studies.

A little less than a quarter of respondents are from the private sector, while all the rest are from the public sector (tourism organizations, etc.). The situation is relatively uniform in terms of the positions in which they are employed, but still there are slightly fewer of those (46%) who are in some of the management positions (all levels). The results of this research support other studies (López, 2022) which point out that the costs of business trips are borne by the organization. The percentage of 78.2% shows that there is still room for improvement in this matter, i.e. organizations should cover the costs of business trips they initiate, not employees.

An interesting fact is that the majority of respondents are influenced by the media at some level when it comes to choosing and visiting a business event, i.e. a congress. A little more than half of the respondents state that the media has some influence, and almost a quarter claims that this influence is great. This is very important information for all stakeholders and above all, the organizers of these events, in order to implement the necessary marketing activities and ensure more successful promotion and implementation of the event.

The first part of the questionnaire included four more questions. When asked to what extent the destination is important to them when making a travel decision, most respondents said that it was partly important to them (48.9%), 17.8% of them did not have a particular opinion on this issue and 14.4% thought that the destination was a very important factor. Therefore, when choosing a destination for a business event, the attractiveness of the destination is important, not only the event itself. When choosing a destination, the organizers can also take into account the fact that for 19% of respondents the simplicity of the trip is crucial, i.e. the traffic connection to the destination/location, attractions and available activities (5.2%), while for the majority (74.1%) of respondent it is the combination of several factors what is important.



Table 2: Scale items (questions) grouped within seven factors (categories)

Items	Factors ( $\alpha$ )	M	SD
<b>Perceived social costs (0.809)</b>		2.79	0.84
I think that arrival of congress tourists to my local community could jeopardize the quality of my life		2.33	1.31
I believe that the quality of my life could be threatened with development of congress tourism.		2.09	1.15
I am often irritated by a representation of congress tourism in my community.		2.42	1.17
I think that congress tourists could overuse the tourist resources.		2.40	1.16
I think that development of congress tourism could lead to crowds in my local environment		2.63	1.08
I do not feel comfortable or welcome in the local tourist facilities.		2.11	1.12
I think that congress tourism will develop too fast in my local environment.		2.12	0.89
I believe that interpersonal relations in my community could be ruined due to development of congress tourism.		2.03	0.98
<b>Environmental sustainability (0.895)</b>		4.37	0.54
Cultural and natural heritage should be protected now, as well as in the future.		4.93	0.25
Diversity of the cultural and natural heritage must be valued and protected.		4.87	0.33
I think that development of congress tourism would lead to an intensification of efforts aimed at preserving the industrial heritage		3.92	0.83
Congress tourism must protect cultural and natural heritage of the local community		4.24	0.93
Congress tourism should be developed in accordance with cultural and natural environment.		4.23	0.95
Proper development of congress tourism means that cultural and natural heritage is protected every moment.		4.15	1.11
Congress tourism development must promote a positive attitude towards cultural and natural heritage among all participants in tourism.		4.53	0.86
Laws are required in order to reduce the negative impacts of congress tourism development.		4.27	1.12
I believe that congress tourism must improve the environment for future generations.		4.19	0.93
<b>Long-term planning (0.944)</b>		4.36	0.50
The congress tourism industry must have a plan for the future.		4.84	0.58
I believe that successful congress tourism management requires an advanced planning strategy.		4.61	0.64
I believe that a long-term view should be taken when planning the development of congress tourism.		4.55	0.75
I think that members of the local community need to be encouraged to take the lead in congress tourism planning committees.		3.44	1.02
I believe that a good planning coordination is needed for congress tourism development.		4.38	0.69
Congress tourism development plans should be constantly updated.		4.36	0.66

<b>Perceived economic benefits (0.710)</b>	4.47	0.65
I believe that congress tourism could provide new incomes to our local community.	4.61	0.58
I believe that congress tourism could provide a strong economic contribution to the local community	4.49	0.71
I believe that congress tourism could bring significant tax revenues to the local government.	4.33	0.85
I believe that development of congress tourism is good for the local economy	4.48	0.79
Congress tourism could provide an access to new markets for our local products.	4.45	0.75
Congress tourism could enable development of the local economy diversity.	4.43	0.77
Congress tourism could also provide benefits for the other activities in the local community.	4.49	0.73
<b>Community-centered economy (0.765)</b>	4.40	0.67
The congress tourism sector should use at least half of the goods and services from the local community.	4.39	0.91
Congress tourism companies should strive to hire at least half of their employees from the local community.	4.52	0.87
Members of the local community should have a significant share of benefits from congress tourism.	4.54	0.75
The congress tourism sector must contribute to development of the local community improvement funds.	4.26	0.89
Members of the local community should be given more opportunities to invest in congress tourism development.	4.29	0.78
<b>Ensuring visitor satisfaction (0.819)</b>	4.38	0.62
Congress tourism companies have a responsibility to meet the needs of the visitors.	4.45	0.77
Visitors' satisfaction must be monitored.	4.59	0.76
The congress tourism sector must provide a quality tourism experience for the future visitors.	4.50	0.66
The attractiveness of the local community is a basic element of interest to visitors.	3.95	0.91
<b>Maximising community participation (0.852)</b>	3.80	0.68
I believe that decisions about congress tourism must be made by all representatives of the local community, regardless of what they do.	3.70	1.22
I believe that an involvement of the local community representatives in a decision-making process regarding congress tourism development is a needed aspect of successful development of this activity.	3.96	1.02
It is sometimes acceptable to exclude the local community representatives from congress tourism development decisions.	3.44	1.24
Representatives of the local community should have an opportunity to be involved in congress tourism development.	3.77	1.04
The congress tourism sector must respect the values recognized by all members of the local community.	4.16	0.85

$\alpha$  – Cronbach's alpha coefficient; M – Mean; SD – Standard deviation

Source: Authors' research



Attractive destinations certainly attract the attention of tourists. However, the organization of congress events certainly contributes to its popularization and attractiveness. When asked whether they would visit a certain destination even if there was no business event, 41.4% of respondents said that they were absolutely convinced that they would, 28.2% of them were partially convinced, while 27% of them did not know. Only 3.4% of respondents would not visit the destination if there was no business event. When asked if they had already been to Indija, 28.3% of the respondents answered that they had not, while the rest had. Thus, it can be concluded that due to the organization of the Tourism Summit of Vojvodina, a significant number of tourism professionals visited Indija for the first time in their lives.

The reliability of the questionnaire was checked using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is the most commonly used method (Peterson & Kim, 2013; Taber, 2017). Although some authors state that the scale's acceptance threshold is a coefficient value of 0.6 (Gilbert, 1979; Hinton et al., 2004; van Griethuijsen et al., 2015), most often 0.7 is taken as the lowest acceptable value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In this paper, the value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient by factors ranged from 0.710 (lowest) to 0.944 (highest), while at the level of the entire scale it is 0.905. Based on these results, it can be said that the used scale is adequate and reliable for the relevant research (Table 2).

Like in other global researches (Choi & Sirakaya-Turk, 2005; Scaccia & De Uriostne-Stone, 2016; Yu et al., 2009), but also in those conducted in Serbia (Obradović et al., 2021) and in this study, which refers to sustainable CCT, a factor related to the involvement of the local community in the management of tourism development is detected as a possible problem. Local community, i.e. the local population, has no or very little influence on the decisions that are adopted regarding the development of tourism. This problem is even greater when it is taken into account that it is about sustainable tourism.

#### **4.1. T-test**

A great difference in responses between men (M=4.16) and women (M=4.5) can be seen in the Community-centered economy factor ( $p=0.03$ ,  $t=-3.093$ ), which indicates that women value this segment significantly more. Moreover, women give statistically notably higher scores when Long-term planning is concerned (M=4.43,  $p=0.021$ ,  $t=-2.332$ ) compared to men (M=4.24), and they also favour Maximizing community participation (M=3.89,  $p=0.027$ ,  $t=-2.225$ ) much more than men (M=3.65). Surveys that analysed the attitudes of the population regarding the development of sustainable tourism (Obradović et al., 2021; Rathnayake & Darshi, 2020) did not establish statistically significant differences in responses in relation to gender of respondents. In contrast, this research shows that men and women view congress tourism and sustainable development rather differently. It can be concluded that awareness among women is far more developed and that their starting point is long-term planning of the development of congress tourism as well as the involvement of the local community in order to maximize the benefits from tourism. The importance of the key role of women in community development has been recognized by other authors as well (Hassan & Silong, 2008).

If we compare answers of the respondents from the public and private sector, one statistically significant difference can be seen. The difference is in relation to Perceived economic benefits, where employees in the private sector believe that congress tourism brings more economic benefits to the community including the local government, which has additional income through taxes (M=4.73,  $p=0.03$ ,  $t=-2.980$ ), whereas the employees from the public sector agree with this statement to a lesser extent (M=4.39).

Statistically significant differences in the responses of respondents also exist in relation to whether they hold a managerial position or not. Those who hold managerial positions give significantly lower ratings to the factors Perceived social costs ( $M=2.60$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $t=-2.840$ ), Environmental sustainability ( $M=4.26$ ,  $p=0.021$ ,  $t=-2.337$ ), Community-centered economy ( $M=4.28$ ,  $p=0.037$ ,  $t=-2.105$ ) and Maximizing community participation ( $M=3.54$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $t=-4.994$ ) compared to those who are not ( $M=2.94$ ,  $M=4.46$ ,  $M=4.5$ ,  $M=4.03$ , respectively). This is an unfavourable result because it is mainly the people in management positions who make the decisions and create the business environment. What further makes the present situation unfavourable is the fact that among the respondents who are in managerial positions, majority are those who are from the public sector (tourism organizations, etc.), a bit over 56%.

#### 4.2. ANOVA

The ANOVA test was used in order to establish statistically significant differences in the respondents' answers in relation to age and education. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: ANOVA test according to respondents' age

Factors	Age				F	p	LSD Post-hoc test
	(1) 26-35	(2) 36-45	(3) 46-55	(4) 55+			
Perceived social costs					8.181	0.000	1,2>3,4
Environmental sustainability					3.563	0.015	4>1,2,3
Long-term planning					5.460	0.001	4>1,2,3
Perceived economic benefits					2.781	0.043	4>1,2,3
Community-centered economy					4.989	0.002	2,3,4>1
Ensuring visitor satisfaction					3.954	0.009	3,4>1,2
Maximising community participation					5.306	0.002	2,3,4>1

Source: Authors' research

Based on the results presented in Table 3, it can be concluded that there are statistically significant differences in the responses in relation to the age of respondents, regarding all seven factors. Differences in answers in relation to the age were also recorded in the research conducted by [Scaccia and De Uriostne-Stone \(2016\)](#). What can easily be seen from Table 3 is that the respondents who are over 55 years old give notably higher marks to the following factors: Environmental sustainability, Long-term planning and Perceived economic benefits. As a result of their life and professional experience, they give importance to these segments of the development of congress tourism. The older generation observe tourism differently than the younger one and for them tourism represents a component that can inevitably improve the quality of life ([Tuo et al., 2022](#); [Wang & Luo, 2014](#)). The situation is similar regarding the following factors: Community-centered economy, Ensuring visitor satisfaction and Maximizing community participation, where the perception of the importance of these segments of tourism increases with age. The views of respondents from the 26-45 age group regarding the Perceived social costs factor are as well quite interesting. They believe that their quality of life has been impaired due to tourism (massive number of tourists in the local community, excessive use of resources, etc.). There are 64.4% of these respondents in the sample and they represent a group of working age stakeholders, which means that further research into the causes that have led to these results is necessary.

Table 4: ANOVA test according to respondents' education

Factors	Education				F	p	LSD Post-hoc test
	(1) Secondary school	(2) College	(3) Bachelor	(4) MSc/ PhD			
Perceived social costs					5.734	0.001	1>2>3,4
Environmental sustainability					2.655	0.049	4>1,2,3
Long-term planning					3.893	0.01	4>1,2,3
Perceived economic benefits					5.265	0.002	4>1,2,3 2,3>1
Community-centered economy					9.951	0.000	4>1,2,3 3>1,2
Ensuring visitor satisfaction					7.857	0.000	3,4>1,2
Maximising community participation					4.719	0.003	4>1,2,3

Source: Authors' research

Not only based on the respondents' age, answers also differ based on the level of the education among respondents (Table 4). Statistically significant differences can be seen with all factors, and it is rather evident that education has a positive effect on the attitudes of the respondents. To put it in other way, the more educated the respondents are, the greater their awareness of all examined segments of sustainable development of congress tourism is. It is encouraging that 84% of respondents in the sample have completed university education, while almost a third have finished postgraduate studies. The negative impact of the absence of higher education can be seen when Perceived social costs factor is concerned. Namely, the respondents with completed secondary or college education believe that the development of tourism impairs the quality of their life as well as the environment, and they do not see the positive aspects of the development of this economic activity. A practically identical influence of education on attitudes was also recorded in the study conducted by [Obradović et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Scaccia and De Uriostne-Stone \(2016\)](#). Even if the education is informal, it has a significant effect on tourism stakeholders and it further influences the loyalty of tourists ([Machado Toffolo et al., 2022](#)). An additional advantage is if the education is in the field of tourism, because, according to [Moiescu et al. \(2020\)](#), it has a positive effect on the destination, i.e. the local community (increase in the number of overnight stays, income, etc.). When sustainable tourism is concerned, education plays a major role in the development of social awareness regarding sustainable development.

### 4.3. Attitudes of directors of tourism organizations

The last part of the questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions intended to be answered only by the directors (managers) of local tourism organizations. These questions were aimed at providing a better insight into the attitudes of tourism development leaders, i.e. to connect congress tourism with the attractiveness of the destination and the local community itself. The most important answers are presented.

#### 1. How can congress events and activities contribute to the attractiveness and competitiveness of a tourist destination?

Some stated the following: "They increase the number of overnight stays - business people usually travel in the company of a partner who is free and spends time sightseeing – based on

a good experience, companies recommend a destination to their foreign partners, awareness grows about the economic benefits for the local community through increasing competitiveness, empowering caterers, paying taxes...”

Some other provided answers were: “Revitalization and promotion of the municipality”, “Through the development of services and products”, “More tourists of different target groups”, “Through the positive experience of the participants”, etc.

## **2. What are the key factors that influence the planning and implementation of successful congress events and activities at a tourist destination?**

Some of the responses were: “Level of the infrastructural equipment, important companies that choose the destination, good preparation and communication with business clients at fairs and events (large corporate ones) in the country and abroad that would attract big congressmen to the destination (free time - if there is any, can be complemented by certain tours, larger congresses generally do not allow extra free time since they require participants to be present at the venue all the time).

Others also mentioned: “Location, capacity and technical equipment”, “Accommodation facilities, their quality and offer as well as tourist and cultural-historical offer on the destination”, “Capacities, infrastructure for quick arrival to the destination, cooperation with the local population...”, “Good exchange of information” and “Adequate accommodation facilities”.

## **3. How do congress events and activities affect the local economy and community at a tourist destination?**

“Significantly because it is about people who have influence in their communities, professions, who spread information about the destination, which thus increases the number of guests, and therefore more money remains for the local community. Participants of conferences and congresses are the biggest consumers of food, drinks, souvenirs, artistic artifacts of the destination...”

Others see this through: “Mainly through the rental of luxury facilities for presentations and overnight stays”, “Increasing traffic leads to higher incomes”, or “By increasing income and interest for the destination, but also by initiating ideas from the local community aimed at improving the offer”.

## **4. What are the best practices for the development and management of congress events at a destination?**

“After extremely strong promotion at important events, when the first congresses are agreed upon (preferably through successful business people from your place), business people should be offered luxurious facilities with equipped conference rooms as well as assistants who will help the event run smoothly. Good food, high-end hotels and restaurants, trained staff”.

Others also pointed out: “Determination and dedication to creating a tourist product” and “additional activities”. You can organize a congress in any hotel, university, etc., but if there is no quality content outside that area, the congress venue itself is less attractive...

### **5. How would you rate the current level of the development of congress tourism and its impact on the local community?**

“In my environment, congress tourism is extremely developed, the impact on the environment is multiple (but not visible to an ordinary person). It has the greatest influence on restaurant owners and local self-government (through taxes, increase in the number of overnight stays and project activities), as far as the presentation of tourism is concerned, it changes its form here, the name of the municipality - the city is mentioned at important business events throughout Europe, but it has no great influence on wider forms of tourism.”

On the other hand, many believe in the opposite: “Weakly developed, insufficiently affirmed”, “Non-existent, negligible”, “Very bad situation”, “Extremely low grade. Insufficient commitment. Even when something is organized, the organization is very low-quality.”

### **6. What are the key elements that must be addressed in order for the local community to benefit more from congress tourism in the future?**

“Attract important people from the world of business who would invest in the congress infrastructure, then invest money on presentations at important business events (initially throughout Serbia and then in Europe) and then present small food producers to restaurant owners (known only for that region), then open hospitality schools to train as many qualified people as possible so you can offer the best service which ensures sustainability.”

“Infrastructure and urbanism”, “More facilities that meet the conditions for this form of tourism, we currently have only few facilities that can enable faster development”, “Accommodation, its content and quality, the possibility of servicing the needs of congress tourism and promoting local cultural and historical attractions in its broadest sense”, “Including all relevant parties in the process of planning, presenting local community to tourists at destinations.”

Another interesting perspective is the following: “Individual initiative; standardization of service; continuous improvement of the quality of the organization; education; education; education!”

“Accommodation, its content and quality, the possibility of servicing the needs of CCT and the promotion of local cultural-historical and other attractions in the broadest sense”, “Inclusion of all interested parties in planning, presentations of the local community to tourists at destinations.”

## **5. Conclusion**

This study shows that stakeholders in Serbia (local tourism organizations, travel agencies, catering establishments, etc.) generally support the sustainable development of CCT. However, they pay most attention to the economic benefits of its development. Also, their focus is on the local community, and hence the involvement of the population in the processes and activities that tourism entails. Members of the private sector are much more convinced that congress tourism brings benefits to the local economy and community, so this is an additional confirmation of the need for involvement of the local community in the planning of congress tourism.

Responses of managers related to Environmental sustainability, Community-centered economy and Maximizing community participation are particularly interesting. Namely, it

has been proven that respondents who are not in managerial positions attach significantly more importance to these segments of the development of congress tourism. However, there is a need for additional research and the education of management staff in the context of sustainable tourism development. The level of education has long been recognized as a factor that influences people's attitudes (Jew & Bonnington, 2011), and involvement of the academic community is also necessary in order to provide education, provide innovative solutions, improve sustainable development, but also provide other benefits (Atterton & Thompson, 2010; Tomasi et al., 2020; Trencher et al., 2013; Wardle et al., 2018), which is the opinion of the authors of this paper as well.

Sustainable development of tourism, including business tourism, requires involvement of all the stakeholders in the plans, development and evaluation of tourism, i.e., better communication and closer cooperation, which is often not the case in practice. This paper is a part of the necessary set of research among stakeholders in CCT, which the authors of previous research referred to as well (Obradović et al., 2021). Apart from theoretical contribution, this paper should serve as an insight into stakeholders' attitudes. Knowing what aspects of CCT are in stakeholders' main focus and what seems to be out of their radar should help defining necessary actions for further improvements of business tourism. Organization of meetings or panels with representatives of all relevant stakeholders in business tourism, should be the first step towards such improvements, with the emphasis on necessary education of stakeholders including managers and other decision makers. This is especially necessary because Serbia has been chosen to host the prestigious business mega-event Expo 2027, which will be held in Belgrade in 2027 (Bureau International des Expositions, 2023). In this regard, the results of this paper will be public and also delivered to relevant stakeholders. This study has certain limitations. First, it is necessary to conduct a survey on a larger sample in order to get a better picture of sustainable CCT in the whole country. Second, due to the sample size, all types of stakeholders are treated as a one sample. Hence, further research should include more types of stakeholders (e.g. "meeting owners", event organizers, professional associations, media, etc.) and the results could be presented separately for each category for a better insight. Also, further research could include additional variables (e.g. field of education, length of experience in business tourism industry, etc.) which can be seen as another limitation of the present study. Bearing in mind the overall situation regarding CCT in Serbia, as well as the presented research results, there is a lot of work ahead to improve the area of sustainable CCT.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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