

Association Conferences:

Site selection and satisfaction for the segment



Master Thesis

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by

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate factors influencing associations for choosing Norway as destination for their next conference, and also the factors influencing the satisfaction among associations who have already arranged their conference in Norway.

According to Crouch and Ritchie (1997) it is crucial to understand how to create a competitive conference destination in order to reduce unnecessary expenditure and to improve the customer service. Further, Choi (2004) highlights satisfaction within the conference industry as an important topic for future research since this area has been limited explored, and he stresses the importance of creating a list of site satisfaction factors.

It appears as this type of research is lacking in Norway, and therefore this research will employ a qualitative research using face-to-face and telephone interviews. Departing from factors identified in previous studies in other contexts, a comprehensive list of factors relevant for Norway have been identified and discussed.

The findings indicate the pre-determined factors accessibility, local support, extra conference opportunities, and meeting facilities as being transferrable for the decision of Norway. Additionally, two new and distinctive factors proximity in city and significant actors within the association were found to be important factors for choosing Norway.

The already existing factors important for satisfaction being transferrable to Norway were price, overall affordability of destination, and meeting facilities. Further, the particular factor conference tools have been identified as a new factor exclusive for Norway.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	7
Introduction	8
Aim of the study, research question and justification	9
The conference industry	11
Development of the industry	11
Terminology within the industry	11
The structure within the industry	13
Benefits of the conference industry	16
The conference industry in Norway	16
Norway Convention Bureau	17
Norway's position in a global industry	17
Economical benefits for the industry in Norway	19
The site selection process for associations	20
The site selection model	20
The site selection factors	21
Former empirical research	23
Association planners' satisfaction	25
Customer satisfaction	25
Site satisfaction factors	27
Former research	29
Accordance between the factors	29

Association Conferences	5
Summary	30
Methodology	31
Research approach	31
Research Paradigm.....	33
Research design.....	34
Data collection	34
Sample.....	37
Data analysis	39
Reliability and validity.....	40
Limitations	42
Results.....	43
The site selection factors.....	43
The site satisfaction factors.....	54
Discussion and implications.....	63
Theoretical discussion.....	63
Practical implications.....	73
Conclusion	80
References.....	83
Appendix 1.....	88
Appendix 2.....	91

List of figures

Figure 1 A general conceptual model of the site selection process.....	20
Figure 2 Adapted from “Customer perception of quality and customer satisfaction”.....	26
Figure 3 An Expectancy disconfirmation approach to satisfaction	27
Figure 4 Components of data analysis.....	39
Figure 5 The site selection factor for Norway.....	54
Figure 6 The site satisfaction factor for Norway.....	62

List of tables

Table 1 Number of meetings per country.....	18
Table 2 Number of meetings per city.....	19
Table 3 Site selection factors.....	22
Table 4 Site satisfaction factors.....	28
Table 5 Accordance between expectations and perceptions.....	30
Table 6 Author and type of study.....	33
Table 7 Site selection factors for Norway.....	53
Table 8 Site satisfaction factors for Norway.....	62
Table 9 Transferrable, unique, and not transferrable site selection factors for Norway.....	81
Table 10 Transferrable, unique, and not transferrable site satisfaction factors for Norway...	81

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Introduction

The meeting, incentive, and conference industry is a relatively new and emerging industry within tourism, and several researchers have expressed the importance of more studies within the field (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Lee & Back, 2005; Oppermann, 1996; Yoo & Weber, 2005). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) the business travel sector was, in the past decade, responsible for one third of the global trade growth, and visitor spending grew by 20 % from 2000 to 2010 (WTTC, 2011).

The conference industry includes several different buyers like corporate organizations and association (Rogers, 2008), and it seems like the various buyers have distinctive preferences when it comes to choice and satisfaction of a conference. This research will focus on the site selection and site satisfaction of association, a segment Norway Convention Bureau wish to make greater efforts in order to attract more of their conferences to Norway. Because of the enormous benefits a conference gives: (a) economic growth, (b) employment, (c) upgraded infrastructure, and (d) knowledge, the various destinations are having a strong competition trying to attract potential buyers in order to achieve these benefits (Clark & McCleary, 1995; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Lee & Back, 2005; Rogers, 2008).

According to Crouch and Ritchie (1997) it is crucial to understand how to create a competitive conference destination in order to reduce unnecessary expenditure and to improve the customer service. Further, they argue knowing the importance of unique factors for particular sites as essential for the destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Lee & Back, 2005). In order to make the destinations able to attract more buyers, the perceived importance of various factors should be researched in specific regions (Choi & Boger, 2002). Mainly, the

research done within this sector has concentrated on North America, and therefore Yoo and Weber (2005) suggest future research to focus on other parts of the world.

Choi (2004) highlights satisfaction within the conference industry as an important topic for future research since this area has been limited explored, and he stresses the importance of creating a list of site satisfaction factors. The past experiences of recently conferences will weight heavily of the people involved (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997), and therefore it is important to provide the association planners with what they expect and eventually make them satisfied (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, & Godleweska, 2008).

Aim of the study, research question and justification

The aim of this research is to explore and interpret the factors influencing associations when deciding Norway as destination for their conference in 2012. Further, it will explore and interpret the factors important for the satisfaction among associations already arranged their conference in Norway through 2011. It will be interesting for the industry to know whether it is the same factors being crucial for both deciding Norway as well as being satisfied with Norway as destination for conferences.

Based on the discussion above, the research question for this master thesis is: “Which factors are important when associations decide Norway as destination for their conference, and which factors are affecting the satisfaction of Norway as destination among associations?”

The thesis will contribute to the industry by providing the suppliers in Norway with a clear understanding of what associations consider when they decide Norway for their next conference, and also which factors are important for their satisfaction. Further, this information can be used in marketing to attract more associations to decide Norway as site for their next conference.

The subject is also interesting for me personally. Hopefully a future manager within the industry, and this will help me get a deeper understanding and a closer relationship to the selected field.

The conference industry

This first section will give an introduction of the conference industry. Firstly, it will look at how it has developed, provide a clearer understanding of the terminology, how the industry is structured, and the benefits one can gain from it.

Development of the industry

People have always gathered to share common interests, but it is during the last two centuries the modern convention industry has been developed and it has mainly functioned in the United States and in Europe (Spiller, 2002). Rogers (2008) argues the congress in Vienna from 1814 to 1815 to be the launch of what we today refer to as the conference industry. The first convention bureau opened in 1896 in Detroit, USA, and during the next decades several convention bureaus were established. As a result several trade associations were established to form a proper industry for the various bureaus (Rogers, 2008), for instance The International Association of Convention Bureaus (IACB) was founded in 1914 (Spiller, 2002), and is today known as Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) having 3300 members in over 20 countries (DMAI, 2012). The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) was established in 1963 and today it has over 900 suppliers in 86 countries (ICCA, 2011a).

Terminology within the industry

The terminology within this industry is non-standardized and various countries use different words and terminologies for the same concepts. At the macro level words like business tourism, business events, MICE (meeting, incentives, conferences and events), and MC&IT are used interchangeably. At the micro level words as congress, conference, convention and meeting are almost used as synonyms (Rogers, 2008). To make a clearer

understanding and meaning of the words, they will be explained below in accordance with how Rogers (2008) defines them.

Business tourism is when the main purpose of the travel is to participate in an activity or event associated with the person's business or interest, and this term is used mostly in Europe. Business events are the same as business tourism, and is the term used in Australia.

MICE is an acronym for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions/events. The acronym is widely used around the world. Further, MC&IT is the adjustment of MICE used in Canada and it stands for meetings, conventions and incentive travels.

Congresses are gatherings of large groups of individuals belonging to an associative group, and are held to discuss a specific subject where the members contribute through presentations and discussions. The congresses often last for several days and have more than one session at the same time. The time of the congress is generally announced in advance and is often annual or pluri-annual.

Conferences are used, by organizational groups, to gather people with specific interests to debate, exchange views, or communicate messages. A conference is generally small in scale, of short duration and has specific objectives.

Conventions are held to let the attendees join educational sessions, take part in meetings or discussions, socialize, or participate in other organized events. A convention always includes an exhibition.

Meetings are almost the same as conventions, the only difference is the meetings do not include an exhibition.

This thesis will use the conference as main terminology, as this was the word used mostly by the respondents in the interviews. Even though some of the events mentioned in the interviews can be seen as congresses according to Rogers, the associations still referred to

them as conferences. By using one terminology consequently, the thesis will most likely appear more clear and readable.

In addition, it also seems like the words site and destination are often used, but the differences are seldom explained. A site is defined as “the area or exact plot of ground on which anything is, has been, or is to be located” (Dictionary.com, 2012b), and researches (Choi & Boger, 2002; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997) identify the site within the congress industry to include the specific venue of the congress in addition to accommodation, meeting facilities, location, attractions and sightseeing, personnel, and security.

According to dictionary.com a destination is defined as “the place to which a person or thing travels or is sent” (2012a), and further Tinsley and Lynch argue, based on several studies, a tourist destination as being “a system containing a number of components such as attractions, accommodation, transport, and other services and infrastructure” (2001, p. 372).

Based on the definitions above, one can argue destination and site as being two words with quite similar meaning, and this thesis will use the two words interchangeable.

The structure within the industry

The buyers. The buyers within the conference industry are meeting planners and conference organizers hiring conference venues for their events, and consist of corporate, association, public sector and entrepreneurial buyers (Rogers, 2008). As this thesis will focus on association buyers, most effort will be put in describing them and only a brief description of the three other will be given. Corporate buyers work for corporate organizations established to generate profit and financial return for the owners. The public sector buyers are not-for-profit organizations accountable for spending local funds, and cover local authorities/municipalities, educational bodies, central government departments, and health

service. Entrepreneurial buyers are characterized as people identifying topics of interest and further plans and implement a conference where the topics are discussed and presented by experts (Rogers, 2008).

The association buyer is defined as “not-for-profit organizations which exist to provide a service to their members and to the community at large” (Rogers, 2008, p. 40), and include several different organizations: (a) professional or trade associations, (b) voluntary associations and societies, (c) charities, (d) religious organizations, (e) political parties, and (f) trade unions (Rogers, 2008). The typical characteristics for delegates attending association congresses are that they choose to attend themselves, expenses are paid by the attendant, different accommodation are required (from guest house to five stars), and the number of attendants are often high. Many of the larger associations have event organizing units (referred to as association planners) or dedicated conference organizers to help with planning and implementation of the conference. Often, associations stage congresses for groups over 500 people and are in need of large venues, most destinations do not have many venues accommodating such large number of people and therefore the associations often make reservations a decade ahead of the congress. Typically, associations have a pattern they follow when arranging their annual conference and destinations need to be aware of this pattern when trying to attract associations to their destination (Rogers, 2008).

The suppliers. The suppliers within the congress industry are the ones offering venues, destinations and other services for external hire. The types of venues being used to host congresses are: (a) hotels, (b) purpose-build centers, (c) academic venues, (d) civic venues, and (e) unusual venues (Rogers, 2008). The most important type of venue within the conference industry are the hotels, not only can they provide with a venue for the congress but they also have the advantage of having the possibility to house the delegates in their hotel

rooms. Purpose-build centers are designed to host all kind of events, from small meetings to congresses with over thousand delegates. Academic venues consist of collage and universities and such buildings are used for hosting meetings and congresses during student vacations. The civic venues being used for hosting events are among others council chambers and town halls. The term unusual venues include sporting venues, cultural and entertainment venues, tourist attractions, and transport venues (Rogers, 2008).

The destination is the country, region, city, or town where a congress takes place. These types of destinations must offer venues, facilities, accommodation, support service, infrastructure, and attractions in order to attract the conference business (Rogers, 2008).

Other suppliers within the congress industry are the ones providing other types of services like audio-visual, telecommunication, transportation, entertainers, catering, and exhibitors (Rogers, 2008).

Agencies and intermediaries. Within the conference industry the agencies and intermediaries have specific skills and knowledge and function as a link between the buyers and suppliers. The Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB) are not-for-profit organizations working to promote the destination and attract congress buyers and PCOs (described below) to choose the specific destination. In order to function the CVBs receive founding from contributions from the public sector, hotel taxes, membership fees, and commissions from suppliers for placing a congress with them (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). In the next chapter there will be given a more detailed description of Norway Convention Bureau.

Another such intermediate are the Professional Congress Organizers (PCO) assisting the association when organizing the congress by doing research and recommend venues, plan the congress program, handling marketing and registration, book accommodation for the delegates, and take care of the finances. The associations pay the PCO, and in addition they

charge commission from the venue, accommodation, and other services booked (Rogers, 2008).

Benefits of the conference industry

The business tourism and conference industry relies on similar infrastructure as leisure tourism, but by hosting conferences the destination can achieve extra benefits making this industry even more attractive. The benefits are suggested by Rogers (2008) and most of them are further empirically proven, the benefits are: (a) greater profitability, since business tourists are more willing to spend money than leisure tourists (Suh & McAvoy, 2005; Tysvær & Meling, 2009); (b) all-year-round activity, resulting in a more stable flow of people and permanent jobs (Kim, Chon, & Chung, 2003); (c) future inward investment, by providing a memorable experience the destination can expect the attendees to come back (Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2003); (d) professional development, gathers professionals within specific fields to a destination and this knowledge can be transferred to the destination (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis, & Mules, 2000); (e) green tourism, generate less damage and pollution than mass tourism, as the group receives information about the community; and (f) improved quality of life, the benefits a destination gains from this industry affects the whole society in a positive way, through the economical, cultural, and environmental contributions (Dwyer et al., 2000; Rogers, 2008).

The conference industry in Norway

This second section aims to describe the congress industry in Norway. It starts with an introduction of Norway Convention Bureau, and further Norway's position in the industry is portrayed. It ends by describing the economical benefits Norway can gain by attracting this segment to the country.

Norway Convention Bureau

Norway Convention Bureau BA (NCB) is a non-profit organization working to market Norway as an international meeting and conference destination and assisting PCO's with organizing meeting and congresses. NCB is a cooperative organization consisting of 24 partners within the Norwegian tourism; destination companies, hotels, congress-centers, and transportation suppliers. These partners are the ones providing financial support to NCB, in addition to Innovation Norway. NCB's main task is to inspire and motivate through marketing and by providing assistance, free of charge, helping to make Norway a potential destination for upcoming conferences (NCB, 2011b). In 2009 NCB and Innovation Norway started to cooperate on getting international meetings and congresses to Norway and they developed an official meeting planner site for Norway (VisitNorway.com, 2012).

Norway's position in a global industry

Every year the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) presents statistics on association meeting market worldwide, these statistics include all meetings organized by an international association on a regularly basis, and rotate between at least three countries (ICCA, 2011b). Table 1 (next page) illustrates the number of association meetings held in 2010 and one can see the total number was 9120 meetings, and the countries hosting most meetings were U.S.A followed by Germany and Spain. Norway reached a 26th place with 125 meetings held.

Table 1 Number of meetings per country (ICCA, 2011b)

Rank	Country	2010
1	U.S.A	623
2	Germany	542
3	Spain	451
4	United Kingdom	399
5	France	371
26	Norway	125
	TOTAL	9120

It is also interesting to see how many meetings the congress cities in Norway hosted in 2010. In table 2 (next page) one can see a total of 9170 meetings with Vienna as the most popular city, followed by Barcelona and Paris. The city in Norway hosting most meetings was Oslo, followed by Bergen, Trondheim, Tromsø and Stavanger. Three of the four other capitals in the Nordic countries are above Oslo on the list, and further also several other smaller Nordic cities are above the Norwegian cities (ICCA, 2011b). This indicates the great efforts Norway needs to complete in order to be more competitive and attract more conferences.

Table 2 Number of meetings per city (ICCA, 2011b)

Rank	City	2010
1	Vienna	154
2	Barcelona	148
3	Paris	147
4	Berlin	138
5	Singapore	136
15	Copenhagen	92
17	Stockholm	89
28	Helsinki	67
40	Oslo	49
54	Gothenburg	34
74	Reykjavik	24
96	Bergen	19
103	Trondheim	18
120	Aalborg	15
146	Malmö	12
146	Turku	12
159	Tromsø	11
196	Aarhus	9
249	Stavanger	7
	TOTAL	9170

Economical benefits for the industry in Norway

The conference industry is known for its economical contribution to various destinations all over the world, both as income to the destination as well as employment to the citizens (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Dwyer, 2002; Yoo & Weber, 2005). Spending by visitors is seen as a potential source to economic growth for the city and countries (Hodur & Leistritz, 2006).

In Norway there has been conducted some research to estimate the average daily spending for such travelers visiting Norway. According to Tysvær and Meling's study (2009) of attendees spending on three conferences in Norway, the average daily spend of were NOK 4955,- . Further, NCB did a research on congress attendees spending in Norway in 2010

among 302 congresses and meetings and found the average attendee spending to be NOK 3383,- per day (NCB, 2011a).

The site selection process for associations

In this section one will get an understanding of the site selection process within the conference industry. First a general conceptual model of the site selection process is illustrated, followed by the site selection factors. The former research within this field is also presented in the end of the section.

The site selection model

There are some variations on how different associations select sites for their next

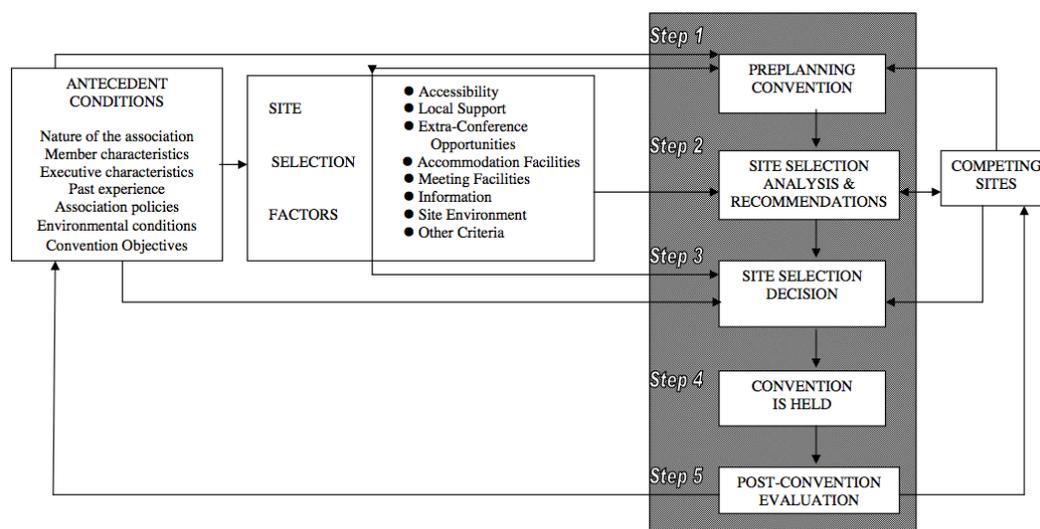


Figure 1 A general conceptual model of the site selection process (Crouch & Ritchie 1997)

conference, but after studying 64 articles and publications Crouch and Ritchie (1997) also found several similarities showed in Figure 1. It will be beneficial for both the buyers and suppliers to understand the site selection process for associations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997).

The first step in the process is the preplanning, where some of the basic details about the congress are determined, like potential dates, budget, policies, and competing sites. The second step is where detailed information about the various potential sites are gathered and

analyzed, this often include visiting sites, before the final recommendations are found. The site selection decision, the third step, is where the final decision of site is made. Normally the association's committee or executive board performs this decision based on the recommendations from the second step.

The site selection (table 3) factors play an important role in both the second and third step, and different committee members or meeting planners weight the factors differently. In the fourth step, the conference is held and afterwards a post evaluation, step five, is undertaken. This evaluation is used as an antecedent when planning the next congress (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997).

The site selection factors

Crouch and Ritchie (1997) developed a list of eight different site selection factors influencing the decision of where to arrange the next conference, these are showed in the table below (table 3). The different factors consist of several dimensions.

Table 3 Site selection factors (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997)

Factors	Dimensions
Accessibility	Cost – expenses of transportation Time – distance of travel Frequency – of connections to site Convenience – of the connections to site Barriers – visas, customs etc.
Local Support	Local Chapter – assistance and backing of the local chapter of the association CVB / Convention centers – support in planning, logistics and promotion Subsidies – rebates from destination
Extra Conference Opportunities	Entertainment – restaurants, bars, theatres, nightclubs, etc. Shopping – malls, low prices, etc. Sightseeing – museums, attractions, parks, historical sites, etc. Recreation – sports and activities Professional opportunities – visiting local clients, negotiations, business deals
Accommodation Facilities	Capacity – rooms available Cost – for suitable accommodation Service – perception of standard Security – safe and secure environment at the hotels Availability – available when required?
Meeting facilities	Capacity – suitable sized facilities Layout – suitability layout of facilities Cost – of the meeting space Ambience – appropriate atmosphere at facilities Service – perception of standard Security – safe and secure facilities Availability – available when required?
Information	Experience – performed satisfactory in the past Reputation – among other meeting planners Marketing – effectiveness of destination marketing activities
Site Environment	Climate – desirability of climate Setting – attractiveness of surroundings Infrastructure – suitability and standard Hospitality – how welcoming the destination is
Other Criteria	Risks – possibility of strikes, natural disasters, etc. Profitability – site produce a loss for the convention Association promotion – credibility to association and generate membership Novelty – represents a novel destination

Former empirical research

Several studies have been conducted on the factors influencing associations when deciding a site for their conferences. It seems like the search for the most important factors for choosing a conference site started in the 1970's, and the theme is still highly relevant today. The studies vary in approach, method, data collection, and results. This section will present a brief review of the former empirical research done.

Fortin and Ritchie (1977) conducted a research among 2906 members of 900 associations located in USA or Canada, and the respondents were within three categories: (a) permanent staff executives, (b) elected officers, and (c) regular members. Totally, 39 factors were used in the study and the five most important factors among the respondents were hotel service, hotel rooms, conference rooms, price level, and hospitality.

In his article "Convention destination images: Analysis of association meeting planners' perceptions" Oppermann (1996) analyzed the importance of 15 destination attributes among 123 meeting planners in USA. He found meeting rooms and facilities as being most important, followed by hotel service quality, hotel room availability, attractive location, and safety.

The relationship between characteristics of an association and the criteria for site selection were studied by Choi and Boger (2002), the study was conducted in USA and 252 associations responded. Proximity to the meeting facilities, capacity of meeting rooms, hotel cleanliness, number of meeting rooms, and quality of food and beverage was found to be the five most important factors of the 45 used in the study.

Crouch and Louviere (2004) investigated the factors determining site for a convention by conducting an experiment among 86 meeting planners and convention organizers in Australia. The study consisted of 20 factors and the most important factors were

found to be costs, food quality, plenary room, accommodation in close connection with convention facility, and proximity for participants to the site.

In the article “Understanding Association and their conference decision making”, Comas and Moscardo (2005) completed ten semi-structured interviews with association conference organizers and found capacity, technology, and pricing as major considerations when deciding where to host a conference, followed by meeting facilities and accommodation.

In his case study of Taiwan, Chen (2006) created a list of criteria for what meeting planners evaluated when selecting a site. The most important criteria were meeting and accommodation facilities followed by site environment.

DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf and Godlewska (2008) conducted a study among three international associations, International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), were members that also are planners ranked 13 different selection criteria. The result showed the exhibit space, value for money, and costs to be the most important factors for IAEE. MPI rated value for money as their most important criteria followed by costs and reputation of destination. Further, PCMA found the support services, costs, security, and accessibility by air as their most important factors. All three associations rated the same criteria lowest, and found the variety of nightlife as the least important criteria.

The destination competitiveness for Norway in the business tourism was investigated through a case study by Mackay (2010). Three sources, academic literature, industry publications and market surveys, were used to list the nine most important factors and they were: (a) meeting facilities, (b) accommodation facilities, (c) information, (d) accessibility,

(e) site environment, (f) local support, (g) other criteria, (h) extra conference opportunities, and (i) internal association criteria.

Summing up the main factors. The ten studies presented above, including the one by Crouch and Ritchie (1997), offer the researcher with an extensive list of factors being important when choosing a destination. When comparing the studies, two factors stand out as being the most important and they are costs (of travel, accommodation, and congress facilities) and the layout of the congress facility. Further, the service at accommodation facilities seems to have an important role, followed by proximity for the delegates to the destination. The reputation of the destination also appears to have a significant role, and newer studies also highlighted the quality of food and beverage and “value for money” to be important.

Association planners’ satisfaction

This section describes the concept satisfaction by starting with the general customer satisfaction, followed by customer satisfaction and site satisfaction factors within the conference industry. There is limited research done within this topic, but the two existing studies are presented.

Customer satisfaction

Several services within all types of industries focus on getting satisfied customers, because research have demonstrated that satisfied customers result in several advantages for the organization: (a) they are more likely to come back, (b) they tell others about their positive experience, (c) is correlated with economic health like earnings and stock value, (d) can be associated with customer loyalty, and (e) is linked to the organization’s profit (Peter & Olson, 2005; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009).

Customer satisfaction is defined as: “the customer’s evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service met the customer’s needs and expectations” (Zeithaml et al., 2009, p. 104). Further, these authors claim if needs and expectations are not met, this will result in dissatisfaction. The satisfaction of a customer is influenced by several aspects showed in figure 2, and these aspects are service quality, product quality, price, situational and personal factors (Zeithaml et al., 2009).

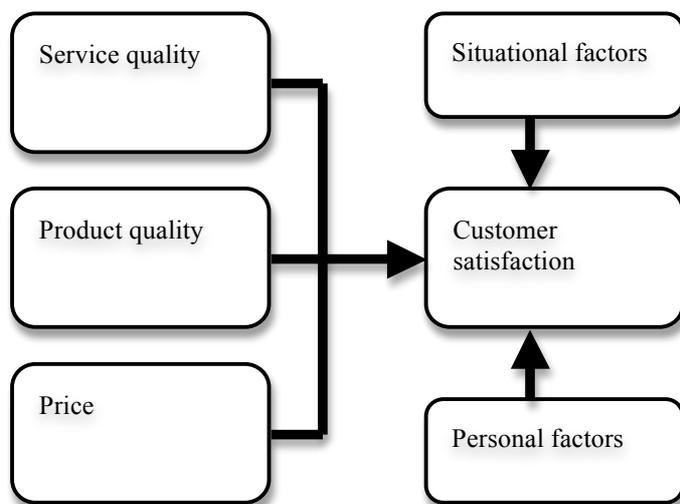


Figure 2 Adapted from “Customer perception of quality and customer satisfaction” (Zeithaml et al., 2009, p. 103)

Figure 2 illustrates what influences customer satisfaction, but it is also important to understand what determines the satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The customer satisfaction is determined by the disconfirmation; the difference between what one expects before a purchase and the perceptions of the performance after the purchase (figure 3). Further, it is argued that there are three types of disconfirmation: positive, negative and neutral. When the disconfirmation is positive the performance exceeded the expectations and the customer becomes satisfied, if the performance is lower than expected the customers tend to be dissatisfied. A neutral disconfirmation occurs when the performance meet the expectations, nothing better or worse (Peter & Olson, 2005).

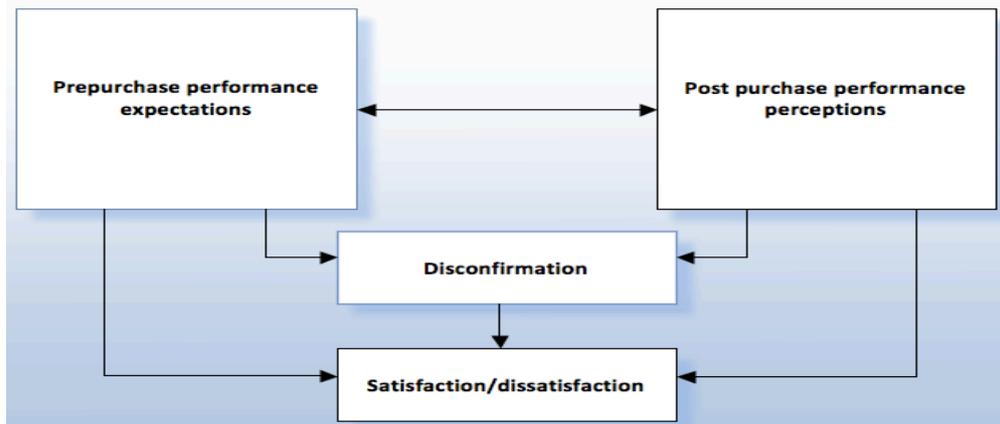


Figure 3 An Expectancy disconfirmation approach to satisfaction (Peter & Olson, 2005, p. 404)

Site satisfaction factors

Researchers have studied customer satisfaction within several academically fields (Peter & Olson, 2005), and recently the focus has also been put on customer satisfaction within tourism and hospitality, like hotels (Shaw, Lewis, & Khorey, 1991), cruises (Teye & Leclerc, 1998), and business travels (Heide, Grønhaug, & Engset, 1999), and all these studies argue that customer satisfaction consists of several dimensions. Even though this former research exist, Teye and Leclerc (1998) argue the unique characteristics particular tourism industries has are important in order to understand customer satisfaction within specific fields. Further, several researchers have highlighted that satisfaction within the conference industry has not received significant attention (Choi, 2004; Choi & Boger, 2000; Shaw et al., 1991). Satisfaction within this industry is important in order to be competitive, and it is extremely important for the congress suppliers to have satisfied customers in order to make them back come (Choi, 2004).

Based on the previous study by Choi and Boger (2000), a list of 45 attributes were factor analyzed and resulted in eight factors explaining the satisfaction of association planners (Choi, 2004). The factors with the belonging attributes are presented below (table 4).

Table 4 Site satisfaction factors (Choi, 2004)

Factors	Attributes
Price	Meeting room rates Complimentary meeting space Sleeping room rates Competitive catering rates Sleeping room discounts
Quality of sleeping rooms	Size of sleeping rooms Room amenities Appearance of sleeping rooms Comfort of sleeping rooms
Hotel personnel	Friendliness Efficiency of check-in/-out Timely, readable, and accurate billing Problems-solving skills
Overall affordability of destination	Cultural attractions and sightseeing Major events/exhibits Hospitality of local community Convention visitor bureau services
Quality of meeting rooms	Lighting, climate, and soundproofing Meeting room design Availability of audiovisual equipment Comfortable seating in meeting room
Inventory	Number of meeting rooms Capacity of meeting rooms Banquet space Capacity of on-site parking facilities Number of sleeping rooms
Location	Proximity to shopping, art, and business Availability of nearby restaurant facilities Availability of nearby recreation facilities Distance travelled by attendees
Quality of convention service	Availability of on-site recreational facilities Availability of business services

Interestingly, all these factors did only account for 22 % of the satisfaction in the study, and therefore there is a requirement for more research within the field in order to capture more factors influencing the satisfaction within the congress industry (Choi, 2004).

Former research

It seems like the satisfaction of association planners' is a phenomenon that has received little attention among researchers, compared to satisfaction within other areas. This section will present two studies focusing on this phenomenon.

To evaluate association planners' satisfaction, Choi and Boger (2000) used a questionnaire to ask 252 association planners' to answer about 45 attributes considering their recent convention. The analysis revealed quality meeting services, prices, and meeting facilities as being most important for satisfaction.

Choi (2004) conducted a study among 252 association planners in six states in USA, and the questionnaire included 45 attributes describing their satisfaction. Proximity from the hotel to the meeting facilities were seen as the most important factor, followed by capacity of meeting rooms, friendliness of hotel personnel, hotel cleanliness, and number of meeting rooms.

Accordance between the factors

Table 5 summarizes the main factors for both site selection and site satisfaction established in the former research. As one can see, some of the factors, like costs, service, and meeting facilities, are important for both the site selection and satisfaction. This table will be further developed after the data has been gathered and analyzed, and will result in a table utilizable for Norway. The new model will most likely include some of the existing factors, but new factors will be added if they are found.

Table 5 Accordance between expectations and perceptions

Site selection factors	Satisfaction factors
Costs	Quality of meeting services
Layout of congress facilities	Prices
Service at accommodation	Proximity from hotel to meeting facilities
Proximity to destination	Capacity of meeting rooms
Reputation	Friendliness at hotel
Quality of food and beverage	Hotel cleanliness
Value for money	Number of meeting of rooms

Summary

In the first sections of this master thesis the theoretical foundation for the research has been established. The reader has now been provided with an understanding of the conference industry generally; development, terminology, structure and benefits, and specifically for Norway; NCB, positioning and benefits. Further, the site selection process and the site selection factors have been described along with association planners' satisfaction and site satisfaction factors. The section ends with an explanation of the accordance between the factors. The next section will focus on the methodology issues for this research.

Methodology

This section will describe the methodology used in this master thesis. Firstly, the research approach will be presented, followed by the research design, the performed data collection, and a description of the sample. Additionally, a description of how the data was analyzed will be given, along with an explanation of how the validity and reliability of this study can be proven. The section will end with a discussion of the ethical considerations found in this thesis.

Research approach

There are two different types of research approaches, quantitative and qualitative, and they have different characteristics, but as in all social research the purpose of both is to connect gathered data to concepts or ideas (Neuman, 2011). The main differences are in the way the data is gathered, analyzed, and interpreted.

A quantitative research: (a) is deductive, meaning it is based on theory, trying to find relationships between the existing theory and the data; (b) uses large samples, (c) is highly structured, and follows a set process from start to finish, (d) gather data as numbers, and (e) analyzes the data using statistical techniques (Ringdal, 2007).

In contrast, a qualitative research: (a) is inductive, meaning it will detect new concepts and build new theory; (b) uses small samples, (c) is flexible, and the researcher has the possibility to move back and forth in the process; (d) the data is soft, meaning it consists of words, sentences, photos, etcetera; and (e) do not convert the data into single mediums like numbers, but are rather nonstandard and diverse (Ringdal, 2007). Further, the purpose of a qualitative research is to interpret and get detailed information in specific areas. Before conducting a qualitative data collection it is important to reflect upon concepts, but they are often redefined during and after the collection (Neuman, 2011).

The purpose of this master thesis was to detect the factors influencing associations for both the decision of Norway and the satisfaction with Norway as destination for conferences. The researcher desired to find the complete lists of factors unique for Norway, by using the predetermined factors already existing as a starting point. The research intended to investigate if these existing factors were transferrable to Norway and would also like to search for new factors; resulting in a new Norwegian model. Since this might include the building of new theory, a qualitative approach will according to Ringdal (2007) fit this research the most. In addition, the table below (table 6, next page) shows that mostly quantitative studies has been done within North America, and that there is a need for more qualitative studies to create awareness of the industry within other parts of the world (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Yoo & Weber, 2005). Additionally, the dominance of quantitative studies results in the use of factors determined by the researchers (Comas & Moscardo, 2005), and this study will contribute with an extensive list of factors developed by the industry through personal contact with association planners rather than the researcher. Therefore the most appropriate results were reached by using a qualitative research developing new theory (Ringdal, 2007) in form of creating a list of the factors relevant for Norway.

Table 6 Author and type of study

Author	Type of study
Fortin, Ritchie & Arsenault (1977)	Quantitative research – North America
Clark, Price & Murrmann (1996)	Qualitative research – North America
Oppermann (1996)	Quantitative research – North America
Crouch & Ritchie (1997)	Literature review
Choi & Boger (2002)	Quantitative research – North America
Baloglu & Love (2004)	Quantitative research – North America
Crouch & Louviere (2004)	Qualitative and Quantitative research – Australia
Comas & Moscardo (2005)	Qualitative research – Australia
Lee & Back (2005)	Literature review
Yoo & Weber (2005)	Literature review
Chen (2006)	Quantitative research
DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, Godlewska, (2008)	Quantitative research – North America
Mackay (2010)	Literature review – Norway
Crouch (2011)	Quantitative research – International

Research Paradigm

There are two different research paradigms; positivism and interpretive. Positivism refers to research as studying people from the outside, whereas interpretive research let people present their explanation of their behavior from their personal point of view (Veal, 2006). The goal for interpretive social science is to offer an understanding of how people act in their social settings. There are a number of reasons for why people act as they do, and an interpretive research intend to capture the various reasons by emphasizing subjective feelings and individual processes from the respondent's point of view in their natural context (Neuman, 2011).

By using an interpretive research paradigm, this research will create an understanding of the behaviors the various association planners within international associations have when deciding and evaluating conference destinations. These behaviors are captured through

conversations with the planners in their natural settings where only their subjective feelings are expressed. Further, the results are demonstrated from the respondent's point of view.

Research design

The main purpose of a research is often to describe, explain, evaluate, or explore a phenomenon, and sometimes a research can have multiple purposes for investigating one specific topic. When conducting an exploratory research the subject is relatively new and similar research has often not been conducted before. The research is not always embedded into a specific theory or questions, but rather put focus on specific topics and makes it more understandable. An exploratory research seldom gives definitive answers, but is more often used as a starting point for future research. A researcher conducting exploratory research must have creativity, flexibility, and be open minded in order to ask the right questions and to take advantage of unexpected answers or situations (Neuman, 2009, 2011).

This research immerses into a relatively new topic within the chosen context, and the purpose is to develop a general understanding of the important factors for selection and satisfaction of Norway as a conference destination for associations. The topic seems to be little understood within research conducted in Norway, and therefore this study will have an exploratory design being a basis for further research within the same field in the chosen context. Findings from this exploratory research cannot be generalized to the population, but the factors determined can be used as an indicator for the conference industry in order for them to understand the site selection and site satisfaction factors.

Data collection

The research method is the techniques used for gathering the data needed for a study (Bryman, 2004). This section will describe how the data was gathered for this master thesis.

Secondary and primary data. Secondary data is data collected by others, and include journal articles, statistics, financial statements, books, web pages, newspaper articles, dissertations, etcetera. Such data is often used by researchers in introductions and when wanting to support an argument (Ringdal, 2007). When starting a research project it can be beneficial to do a literature review in order to get an overview of what kind of literature and research exist within the chosen topic (Neuman, 2009, 2011). This research uses several types of secondary data: (a) journal articles were used to get an overview of existing literature, (b) books were used in order to find definitions and other useful material, (c) the statistics show the size of the industry and put solid numbers to the phenomenon, and (d) web pages are used for definitions and to gain information about different organizations and associations. In order to assure the quality of the research, only peer-reviewed articles from well-known journals were used, additionally, the books are all written by well-known authors within the field and the other sources were carefully evaluated before being used.

The primary data is the data collected by the researcher for the purpose of the study, and includes interviews, observations, questionnaires, etcetera (Ringdal, 2007). The primary data gathered in this research was interviewes, and will be further presented below.

Interviewing. In a qualitative research the data can be gathered as photos, maps, interviews, observations, etcetera (Neuman, 2011), but the most used method is interviews (Mehmetoglu, 2004). A face-to-face interview is interaction between an interviewer and a respondent, where the purpose is for the interviewer to gather specific information from the respondent. This interaction is a structured conversation, where the interviewer has prepared questions and the respondent answers. Interviewing is an effective method when striving to obtain accurate and superior information within specific topics (Neuman, 2011). Telephone interviewing can be used if the researcher wants to interview respondents living at another

location than the researcher. A telephone interview follows the same procedures as a face-to-face interview, but the interviewer does not have the opportunity to observe the respondent's body language (Mehmetoglu, 2004).

When using interviewing as a method, there are three different types to use and they are structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. A structured interview is when all the questions are predetermined, and the interviewer has to ask all the respondents the same questions in the same order. This type of interview does not open for variation and flexibility, but often it makes it easier to analyze and categories the answers from all the respondents. In a semi-structured interview the interviewer has some predetermined questions and themes, this is called an interview guide. By including themes, and not only questions, the interviewer opens for dialogue with the respondents, making the interview more flexible and includes the possibility to discuss themes not included in the plan. In this type of interview, the same questions and themes are used for all the respondents. The unstructured interview does not include any predetermined questions, and the interviewer adjusts the themes and questions based on the situation and behavior of the respondent. Still, the interviewer will get valuable information as the research question always it the basis for the interview (Mehmetoglu, 2004).

There are several advantages within the interviewing method. Firstly, the interviews have high response rates and allows the most comprehensive questionnaires (Neuman, 2009). Secondly, it includes the interviewer's possibility to clarify confusing issues and also the opportunity to encourage the respondent to elaborate when there is more information to be given (Neuman, 2011). Third, the interviewer can observe the settings and interpret nonverbal communication (Neuman, 2009).

At the same time, the interviewer needs to be careful not to bias the respondent by encourage them to give “desirable” or “expected” answers. This can be avoided by: (a) interacting in a professional manner, (b) being exactly when asking questions, (c) explaining the procedure to the respondent in advance, and (d) recording answers for accuracy and not include anything that was not said (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009). Further, the interviewer needs to be nonjudgmental and not expose own opinions; helping the respondent to give the most truthful answers. An interviewer also needs to be prepared to use probe; a follow-up question to elicit unclear or incomplete questions (Neuman, 2011).

In order to gather information of high quality, this master thesis will use semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews. The two interview guides (appendix 1) were developed by the researcher, in cooperation with the supervisor, and included both specific questions for the respondents but also themes to discuss. The questions and themes were based on previous studies within the same field and experts within the field were also asked to secure the quality of them.

Norway Convention Bureau presented all the respondents to the researcher, and they also provided with contact information. Further, the researcher contacted all the respondents early in the research project to assure that they were comfortable with participating in the project, and in order to prepare them for the interview a description of the project was sent to them shortly before the interview. In addition, they were asked to agree on allowance the to record the interviews.

Sample

In a quantitative research the researcher wants to apply the study to a population, which is a large group of cases. In order to do this in an efficient way, there is drawn a sample, a small selection of cases representing the population. As mentioned above, a

qualitative study has a different purpose, striving to gather detailed information about specific areas and therefore the sample seldom is an accurate reproduction of the population. In other words, the sample within qualitative studies include a small number of cases able to illuminate key features about specific areas (Neuman, 2011).

There are several types of non-probability sampling techniques to use in a qualitative study, but this research will focus on only one: the convenience sampling. In a convenience sample a nonsystematic selection method is used to select cases that are easy to reach, available, and convenient. The challenge with a convenience sample is the possibility of it not representing the population (Neuman, 2009), and therefore it is not perfectly suitable in quantitative research but in a qualitative explorative study, this type of sample is legitimate.

Sample size. Because of the scope of this study, and the generous help from Norway Convention Bureau and their offices in the five biggest congress cities in Norway finding the most suitable respondents, a convenience sample was chosen for this master thesis. The researcher found this technique suitable for this research, since main actors within the conference industry in Norway get the possibility to influence the sample by providing contact information to the different association planners they want to get more detailed information about. The sample consisted of nine respondents, where five were planning a conference in Norway in 2012 and four had already arranged a conference in Norway in 2011. The various respondents were association planners in addition to being members of the association, all the conferences were international, with a varying amount of countries included, having from 150 delegates to 1200. The sectors included in the interviews are associations from medical, production, disabilities, emergency management and archeology. The researcher continued to conduct interviews as long as relevant or new data emerged and

ended when no additional data was found, this is in accordance with what Bryman (2004) refers to as theoretical saturation.

Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the data had to be analyzed. According to Neuman (2011) the analysis of qualitative data is a comprehensive process, which requires to read, reflect on the data, and reread the notes over and over again. The data analysis started already in the data collection phase, as the researcher carefully transcribed all the interviews verbally according to the recordings done during the interviews (Mehmetoglu, 2004).

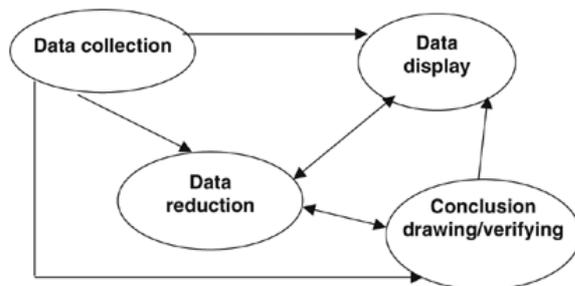


Figure 4 Components of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Further, the researcher followed the figure (figure 4) developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), defining data analysis as three activities going on simultaneously; (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) the drawing of conclusions and verification. In the data reduction the transcribed data was summarized and obtained in a coded scheme in order to prepare for the data display. The displaying of data included developing the themes emerging from the interviews using a thematic analysis: “an emphasis on what is rather than how it is said” (Bryman, 2004, p. 412). The transcribed data was read carefully and reflected on several times. In total eight themes were developed for the site selection and four themes for the site satisfaction. These themes will be presented in the result part, and during the analysis process all irrelevant data was removed.

Reliability and validity

This part will demonstrate how the reliability and validity issues were carefully considered during the process of writing this master thesis.

Reliability. The reliability of a qualitative research is the consistency or dependability of the study, meaning that other researchers will draw the same conclusions from the same data set (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Neuman, 2011). Within quantitative research, one can only argue for reliability if the results of the research will be identical under similar conditions. On the other hand, in qualitative research it is acceptable to find distinctive results when using different measures and methods, and “the diverse measure and interactions with different researchers are beneficial because they can illuminate different facets or dimensions of a subject matter” (Neuman, 2011, p. 214).

In order to improve reliability in qualitative studies, it is important to be consistent, thoughtful, and stable when gathering the data. The researcher can secure this by closely monitoring its own behavior and observations during the study and make sure the data are reliable by being consistent and self-conscious (Neuman, 2009).

To secure reliability in this master thesis, the researcher performed several measures. Firstly, the same interview guide was used in all interviews to guarantee for consistency, by letting the various respondents answer the same question and talk about the same themes, in the data gathering. Secondly, the researcher tried to be consequent in not showing any emotions, commenting answers or behaving in a way that could influence the respondent's answers. Thirdly, the interviews were recorded in order for the researcher to be able to quote the statements like they were said in the interviews.

Validity. The word validity means truthfulness, and it tries to convince that the concept used in the research and the method used to measure it matches. In quantitative

research the main focus within validity is put on the measures used, like for example the questionnaire, and whether the findings can be generalized to the population or not (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Neuman, 2009). When it comes to validity in qualitative research, it is hard to argue that this type of research finds the “truth”, but it rather tries to achieve authenticity within one specific field. Meaning, the research offers fair, balanced, and honest view of a social aspect from the people having inside information about it (Neuman, 2011).

Further, researchers (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Walsh, 2003) argue there are four components of validity in qualitative research, and they are: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

When a study is credible, it means the researcher demonstrate confidence in having trustworthy findings and results by presenting them from an insider-perspective and not from the researchers point-of-view (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Walsh, 2003).

Transferability refers to whether the findings and results are applicable to other settings or contexts. The purpose of a qualitative study is not to generalize it to a population, but rather achieve rich and detailed information, therefore the transferability within this type of research focus on similar findings within matching circumstances (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Walsh, 2003).

The dependability of a qualitative research has similarities to the reliability of the study, focusing on duplicity of the study and if the results would be the same if the research was performed once more with the same participants (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Walsh, 2003). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Mehmetoglu, 2004) the researcher can enhance the dependability by including extensive information and documentation of the method used, data gathered, decisions made and conclusions, in order to let the readers evaluate and understand how the researcher achieve the conclusions.

In order to achieve confirmability, the researcher must keep objective and not include own opinions. The researcher can enhance the confirmability by continuously providing the reader with quotes demonstrating directly what the respondents expressed about the phenomenon (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Walsh, 2003).

The researcher put extensive effort in securing the validity of this research and by presenting the results as quotations matching exactly what the respondents expressed in the interviews one can assure for credibility in the research. Further, the transferability of this research can be guaranteed by referring to previous research within the same field, the previous researches have found similar results as this current research. This research is dependable in the way that it is presenting detailed and comprehensive information regarding method used, how the data was gathered, decisions made and how the conclusions were drawn. Confirmability is reached by not including the researcher's opinions and using quotations giving the reader an exactly picture of what the respondents expressed.

Limitations

During a research process there is always a possibility of experiencing issues being seen as limitations for the research, and has also occurred during this process.

Even though the researcher started to contact and achieve respondents, it was experienced as a challenge to get enough people interested in participating in the research. The conference industry is seen as a busy industry where people are struggling finding time to perform the interviews. Luckily the realized sample was big enough to reach the saturation point, but a bigger sample would have been ideal.

The language issue might also be a limitation for the research, as there have been several languages included in the process. Firstly, all interviews were conducted in Norwegian although two of the respondents did not have Norwegian as their native language.

This might have resulted in misunderstandings during the interviews. Further, all interviews were translated into English, and since this is not the native language of the researcher, some mistakes and misinterpretations might have occurred during the process.

Ideally, the sample should have been randomly drawn in order to capture the real picture of the population, but this thesis has chosen to use a non-random sample. Because of this, the results cannot be generalized and further this can be seen as a limitation for the thesis.

Results

The purpose of this part is to present the key findings relevant for my research question, from the conducted interviews. To organize and make the findings more readable, they are presented in two sections: (a) the site selection factors and (b) the satisfaction factors.

In order to keep the respondents anonymous, the names were encoded and only the numbers of respondents are showed in the text (Example, R1 means Respondent 1). Additionally the name of the cities, hotels, venues, and other specific names are removed from the text to keep the respondents as anonymous as possible. Further, the answers are closed within quotation marks, and excluded parts of the answers are marked with (...).

In the first section, the results from the interviews regarding site selection factors are presented according to factors emerging through the interviews. In the second part, the site selection factors revealed in the interviews are presented.

The site selection factors

In this part all the site selection factors emerging from the interviews will be presented. In total, eight factors were found to be important for associations choosing Norway as destination for their next conference. The first six factors are: (a) accessibility, (b)

local support, (c) extra conference opportunities, (d) accommodation facilities, (e) meeting facilities, and (f) costs. These factors have already been found significant in other contexts and are now proven to exist as site selection factors for Norway. Additionally, two new factors were found: (a) proximity in city and (b) significant actors, and these two factors will together with the first six factors cover a model of site selection factors for Norway.

Accessibility. The accessibility factor includes the dimensions cost of transportation, distance of travel, frequency of connections and barriers like visa and customs, in order for the delegates to get to the site (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997).

In general, it is not seen as a challenge to get to Norway.

“It is relatively ok to come to the city by plane.” R3

Further, the findings reveal that frequency of flights from various destinations in Europe are mentioned by several respondents, and is therefore seen as an important factor for choosing Norway. Additionally, the flights from bigger cities in Europe are directly to Norway.

“When travelling from America or Asia one need to transfer in Europe to get to Norway (...) and it is no problem getting from Frankfurt, Paris, or Copenhagen to the city (...) so the accessibility was not seen as a challenge.” R1

Even though the airport in the city is not seen as the busiest one, it still has direct flights from more than one European city.

“The accessibility when it comes to travel is important, and the city is has not the busiest airport (...) There are direct flights from Copenhagen and Amsterdam to and from the city (...) The flight connections are good, and the delegates from Australia, Canada, and USA must have a connecting flight anyway.” R5

Local support. This factor consists of the assistance and backing of the local chapter of the association, the support by convention and visitor bureaus, and subsidies given by the destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997).

The importance of having an advantage within the field the association belongs to have been revealed as important.

Firstly, it was seen as essential to be ahead within the development of equipment within the field.

“We are far ahead in the hearing development here in Scandinavia.” R1

Secondly, to have researchers and lead the research process in a city was exposed as important for attracting the conference.

“There are several professors within the field living in the city and the chief of research within the association is also located in the city.” R5

Thirdly, having companies in the city being interested in the association’s field of research can result in companies requesting for conferences, giving the association an opportunity to convey their knowledge to other industries.

“In Norway there was an interest in one specific topic, and a company requested a conference within the field. There are some researchers across the world doing science on the topic, and I said that our association could host the conference and I suggested Norway. In addition, we have big sponsors in Norway (...) This city was chosen because the initiative was taken here.” R7

Further, the support from the local Tourist Broads were seen as an important factor for attracting the conference to the city. They have the knowledge and experience with organizing international conferences.

“We have had a positive relation to the local Tourist Board. We contacted them early and they were incredibly positive and helped us contacting the right people.” R1

“I have been in contact with tourist board, and they have been very helpful and made several suggestions.” R7

The personality of the employees at the Tourist Board was also highlighted and it was seen as important to get customized help to meet individual needs.

“The conference department at the local Tourist Board is amazing, and the people working there are hardworking and especially one person has helped me a lot (...) She has listens to my questions and answers accordingly (...) They have supported me a lot with brochures (...) and invited me to other events to see how an actual conference takes place” R3

Additionally, the Tourist Board was seen as helpful and sponsoring with different effects.

“The local tourist board was extremely helpful by sponsoring us with different things like brochures, information and also by having a hospitality desk at the airport and at the hotel.” R9

The help received by professional conference organizers were emphasized as essential for choosing the destination.

“VIA travel will support with hotel bookings, registration page with the sign up, and negotiations and agreements.” R5

In addition, the support from the municipality is a great advantage for cities. As most associations are non-profit, the support they achieve can be crucial for choosing the specific city.

“The municipality is generous and they invite big conferences to a reception in the City Hall (...) They sponsor us with food and drinks and have a guided tour in the City Hall.” R7

“The mayor has invited us to a reception at the City Hall the first evening.” R9

Extra conference opportunities. According to Crouch and Ritchie (1997) this factor includes entertainment, shopping, sightseeing, recreation, and the opportunity to visit local clients.

It seems like the conference surroundings are important for associations when choosing destination, and they wanted to give the delegates the opportunity to experience more than the theme of the conference.

“I am quite sure that it was not the theme we had chosen for the congress, but the advertising we promoted that was essential for choosing Norway.” R1

“Several of the delegates are not experts within different fields, but still they want to come to Norway as tourists.” R9

Further, the respondents mentioned the tourist value of the city and especially the typical Norwegian elements like the midnight sun, scenery, and the fjords were highlighted.

“We promoted the midnight sun, the long and light summer nights, fantastic experiences in the nature, and that is probably one of the reasons why the city was chosen. It is not only a saying that the city is the “Gateway to the fjords”, it is a fact (...) several of the participants are also going on the day trip

“Norway in a nutshell”. There are several opportunities and to experience the fjord are what many associate with Norway.” R1

Additionally, the importance of having the conference in a city offering the opportunity to visit tourist attractions and go sightseeing were emphasized.

“The previous conference city had no tourist attractions, and this city is known as a tourist city (...) Especially people from France, Spain, and Italy know Norway as exotic, and I find it romantic (...) This city is Norway’s tourist city.” R3

Further, one conference will be hosted close to the 17th of May, and to let international delegates experience this day was used in order to attract it to Norway.

“The conference will take place close to the 17th of May, so this event was used to attract it to come to Norway.” R9

Accommodation facilities. When it comes to the accommodation facilities it contain the capacity of rooms, costs, service, and availability of rooms at the destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997).

The most concerning issue regarding accommodation in Norway were the prices, but when one requested for many hotel rooms it is more easy to get deals. Additionally, the cities in Norway have hotels in different standards in order to meet all budgets.

“We have made deals with different hotels, and also more cheap hotels like hostels (...) In this way, everyone can order hotel that fit their economy.” R1

Even though the prices are experienced as high, the service is corresponding. It seems like the hotels in Norway are known for their relatively high service and standard.

“The prices on the hotels are relatively high, but the quality is corresponding. There are no bugs in the hotel rooms in Norway.” R3

Not only the price was mentioned as important for the accommodation facilities, also the capacity of the hotel was seen as central when choosing the destination.

“The hotel was chosen, not because it was cheapest, but there were only two hotels available when we requested, and we chose the specific hotel due to its layout and we could afford such a nice hotel.” R7

Additionally one association wanted to host the conference at a distinctive hotel, not a regular city hotel.

“The excellent hotel was an important factor for choosing Norway, the cooperation with them is good and it shows a part of Norwegian culture and has uniqueness outside the city center (...) this might cause some challenges with transportation, but it makes the atmosphere more intimate.” R9

Meeting facilities. According to Crouch and Ritchie (1997) the factor includes the dimensions capacity of the meeting facilities, layout, costs, appropriate atmosphere, service, security, and availability.

When making the choice of destination of where to host a conference, the importance of having the appropriate meeting facilities is crucial. The layout of the venue is important, since many conferences requested several rooms for parallel sessions.

“It was important to have short distances and we where in need of four rooms to have parallel sessions. The hotel and the hall is located close to each other, so we can use the hall for plenary sessions and one smaller and three at the hotel for parallel sessions. Then we have one big and four smaller rooms. In addition, we need room for exhibits, posters and small rooms. We were in need of many types of rooms and to rent the whole hotel was a good solution.” R5

Further, not only the various rooms were highlighted as important, but also the technical solutions.

“The hotel has the opportunity to have several parallel sessions, and additionally they have small rooms. This is the ideal conference hotel. The facilities are excellent and the technical team there seems to be magnificent.” R9

Simultaneously, some associations only required one room as they have all lectures in plenary.

“The conference takes place at a hotel and we have all lectures in plenary, because of two reasons. The hotel does not have the opportunity to have parallel sessions, but also because the sponsors wanted everything to be in plenary.” R7

Further, some association required special equipment and could only host conferences at destinations offering what they needed. According to one respondent, good support from the venue by offering such equipment was important for choosing the specific city.

“We require different technical solutions (heard of hearing) than others (...) for example type interpreting to Norwegian, English, and Japanese and more (...) and a camera showing the face of the lecturer for those reading lips (...) this is new for the venue. We will use some of their technicians but also our own (...) it looks like this will function excellent in the venue” R1

Costs. The relatively high costs in Norway, and the changes in the economical world seemed to influence the choice of destination, resulting in respondents indicating the costs in Norway as being the most concerning issue when evaluating Norway as destination.

“When planning a conference in Norway, it is not seen as a good financial suggestion. A hotel room, for instance, will cost NOK 1495,- and we know that a similar room would have cost NOK 400,- in the Balkans. So it is not the prices that brings us to Norway.” R7

Several countries in the world are in great economical difficulties, and having a conference in Norway might result in delegates not having the chance to attend.

“The Norwegian Kroner has increased and it is more expensive for the delegates, simultaneously as the economy in Southern-Europe is bad now.” R3

Further, some associations thought creative to make Norway less expensive, by for example offer simple lunches and have less expensive activities in the mandatory program.

“We have gotten some feedback that Norway is expensive, but we try to make it as cheap as possible by having simple lunches and program to not bother them with high fees.” R5

Other associations choose more expensive countries when the conference budget allowed it.

“We have an academic community in Norway, and it is a good choice to have it there when the economy allows it as it did this time. We have been so lucky that we have the opportunity to invite and pay the trip and stay for 30 professionals.” R7

Proximity in city. Several respondents highlighted the distance between the venue, the hotels, and tourist attractions as important.

It was seen as important among the respondents to offer proximity, and especially short walking distance from various hotels to the venue.

“By using the specific venue located in the city center, we can guarantee no more than ten minute walk regardless of what hotel one is staying at.” R1

Simultaneously as too far distances were experienced in other cities, and seen as negative, the possibility of having the conference in a compact city was highlighted as extremely important.

“In the previous congress, a large conference center was used and the 1400 delegates felt that it was too big. In addition, the conference center was placed

kind of far from the city and the hotels. A great advantage by having it in the city is the short distance from the hotel to the big conference hall, it is right across the street from the main hotel and all the other hotels and the tourist attractions are also in walking distance. The city is a compact city (...) to find a such compact solution and to have everything within walking distance is smart.” R3

Not only the distance from the hotel to the venue was seen as crucial, but also being close to tourist attraction, shopping etcetera.

“The hotel has fantastic location, when you walk outside the door you are in the middle of the city with the tourist attractions, shopping and so on within short distance (...) It is also nice to have everything within the same building.” R7

Significant actors. The importance of having a prominent member of the association in the conference city is emphasized and it influenced the choice of destination.

Firstly, these actors can be asked to host the conference.

“In 2006 I was on a conference in South- Africa and it was requested from the president to propose for the congress in 2012 (...) Actually it was personal reasons, one person knowing an other” R3

Secondly, people in the associations that are seen as a driving force and are well known within the association is important for where the conference takes place.

“Basically it is one person, which is a driving force within our field that happen to live in the specific city, and attracting the congress to the city (...) He is an important reason for having the congress in Norway.” R5

“A core person within the field, lives in the city, and is important for choosing where to have the conferences, not the destination itself.” R9

Thirdly, when the president lives in the city and wanted to host the conference, the decision is made quite easy.

“Me, the president of the association, lives in the city and I have previously arranged to conferences here.” R7

Summing up. To get a more clear understanding of the main site selection factors with including dimension they will be presented in the table below (table 7).

Table 7 The site selection factors

Factor	Dimension
Accessibility	Easiness of getting to destination Frequency of flights Connection of flights Direct flights
Local support	Ahead within the field Research at destination Help from local tourist board Supporting companies Support from municipality
Extra conference opportunities	Tourist attractions Norwegian scenery
Accommodation facilities	Price Standard Deals
Meeting facilities	Number of meeting rooms Size of meeting rooms Special equipment
Price	Increase of the Norwegian Kroner Economical difficulties in Europe Deals
Proximity in city	Short distance between hotel and meeting facilities Short distance between hotel and tourist attractions
Significant actors	President of the association Remarkable researcher Expert within the field

The new site selection factor model for Norway will be as followed

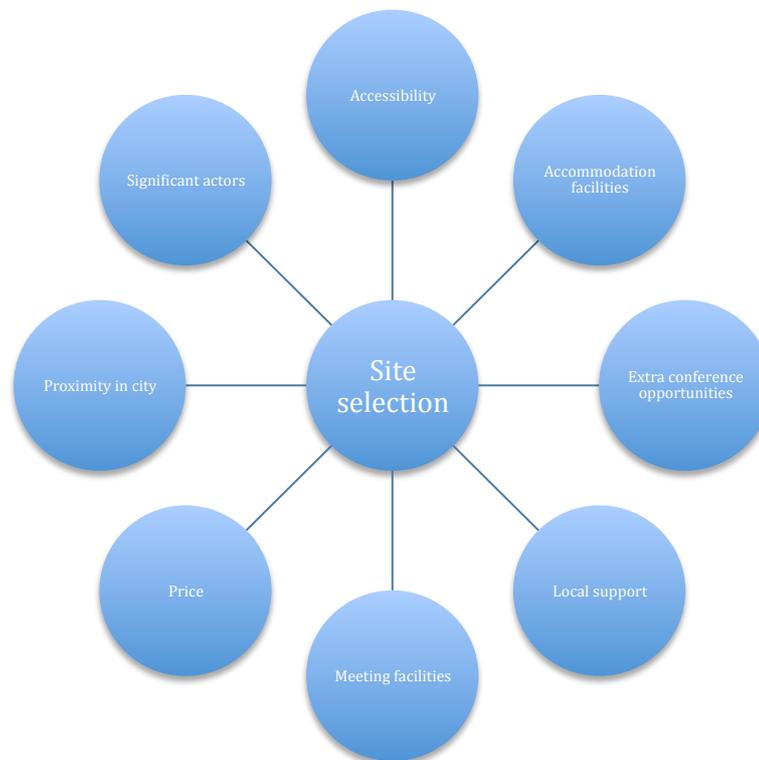


Figure 5 The site selection factors for Norway

The site satisfaction factors

This part will present the satisfaction factors discovered in the interviews. Totally, four factors were found to be important for the satisfaction of Norway as a destination. The three first factors are: (a) price, (b) overall affordability of destination, and (c) quality of meeting rooms. These factors have been proven in previous research, and are also found to be significant satisfaction factors in Norway. Additionally, one new factor emerged from the interviews: (a) conference tools. This factor will together with the first three factors cover a model of satisfaction factors for Norway.

Price. The price factor for satisfaction includes the meeting room rates, complimentary meeting space, sleeping room rates and discounts, and competitive catering rates (Choi, 2004).

Generally it seems like the prices in Norway were experienced as high.

“Generally the respondents found the prices quite high.” R2

“People experienced the prices in Norway higher, compared to Denmark where we had the previous conference, even though we tried to be affordable.

Simultaneously, the prices were not deterring as many people still came to Norway.” R6

The delegates seemed to appreciate having all costs included in the registration fee.

“One typical feedback when arranging conferences in Norway are the complaining of high prices in the country, it is expensive to stay in Norway and the delegates find everything not included in the registration fee as expensive.” R8

Especially the transportation, like the airport express shuttle and taxis, were highlighted as extremely pricy.

“The most expensive here is taxis, the airport express shuttle is pricy, but the taxis are even worse.” R2

Simultaneously the associations made deals with different suppliers in order to make the conferences more affordable.

“1300-1400 NOK for a hotel room is not seen as cheap for academics from all over the world, luckily we got some deals with some hotels and accommodated several of them here.” R2

Some associations also received help from the local tourist board to subscribe deals in order to make the stay cheapest possible for the delegates.

“Through the local tourist board we got deals with several hotels in Stavanger and Sandnes.” R2

And creativity was used to include other measures to make the conference as cheap as possible. For instance, professional conference organizers were not used in order to prevent unnecessary expenses.

“We did most of the work ourselves, and did not engage any bureaus handling the booking or anything else. Partly to keep the costs as low as possible and also because we did not find it necessary.” R6

The lunches were made less fancy and the associations tried to gain some sponsorship in order to be able to offer something for free.

“What we did to prevent the prices for being too high was to have a cheaper lunch offer and to sponsor with some free drinks during the social gatherings.” R4

Simultaneously people are prepared for the high prices in Norway, and therefore one need to try to include intelligent solutions to keep the costs low.

“People are prepared for the high prices in Norway, but I think there are a limit for how much they accept, therefore I think one need to cut the costs to a greater extent when one expect people from abroad. It was also beneficial for the budget when the reception was free of charge for the delegates, so they did not have to buy a dinner this day.” R6

“The reception at the Fortress was not simple, we had plenty of food so the delegates perceived it as a meal. In this way, they did not have to buy food in a restaurant afterwards. Several such measures were done to minimize the costs.” R4

Overall affordability of destination. This factor includes cultural attractions and sightseeing, major events, hospitality of local community, and the service provided by convention and visitor bureaus (Choi, 2004).

The tourist attractions were highly appreciated among the delegates.

“The city as a destination worked out excellent, and the tourist attractions were very popular.” R2

“The city in itself and the good attractions we suggested was particularly satisfying among the delegates. The program also included pictures and descriptions of the various attractions in the city (...) this made them get to know what they wanted, the history and archaeology in the city.” R4

Along with the scenery and attractions typical for Norway.

“We also took all the respondents in a bus and drove to a local, special and well known place. First we went to see some rock screeds and a nymph surprised everyone by jumping out from the screed singing for us. We drove further down the hills and came to the place, where we had dinner and entertainment. On this trip the participants got to see Norwegian mountains and valleys, something different than what they have seen in other conferences (...) everyone was extremely satisfied!” R2

In addition, the municipality sponsored several conferences with a reception, which made great impression, and reduced costs.

“We had a reception sponsored by the municipality at a local museum, this was very well organized and all the participants were extremely impressed and the municipality received a lot of positive feedback. The vice mayor had a speech, food was served, and a guided tour at the museum was given to those wanting it (...) and we received much positive feedback from it.” R2

“We met great favor from the municipality, by them sponsoring a reception in a beautiful old building the first day including tapas, wine, a lecture about the

building, and a cultural performance (...) A representative from the municipality welcomed everyone. In total it was an amazing evening and the kindness the municipality had is highly appreciated by us and it gives a good impressions of the city (...) We walked through the city on our way back to the hotel, and in this way we managed to show them parts of the city as well. We also met a corps on our way, that was not expected.” R6

“We were invited by the municipality to have the reception at the City Hall, which was a stunning experience for the delegates and highly appreciated among them. Additionally it helps keeping the cost down, as one evening is sponsored.” R8

Respondents highlighted help from the visitor bureaus in the various cities as influencing their satisfaction level.

“I can emphasize the local tourist board as good helpers, with especially one person including us in discussions associated with the conference. We could elaborate around several topics concerning the conference.” R6

Further, one employee at one certain tourist board were highlighted as important for the satisfaction of one association.

“We received help from especially one person in the local tourist board.” R2

The tourist board is additionally seen as people with knowledge and they are professionals in what they do.

“The local tourist board helped us a lot and was extremely professional in the way they handled everything.” R4

Several of the conferences cities in Norway were also mentioned in a positive way.

“The participants liked the city a lot, and were very satisfied with it. A lot of admire of the city and it was seen as beautiful” R6

“The delegates experienced Oslo as a city in a very positive way (...) the weather was also good at this time.” R8

Quality of meeting rooms. According to Choi (2004) this factor includes the atmosphere, design of the meeting rooms, along with audiovisual equipment and comfortable seating.

The meeting rooms were seen as an important factor for satisfaction, especially the design of the rooms. Some of the rooms were noticed as better, but overall the rooms were suitable for the conference, along with a well-functioning recreation area.

“Especially the Hall was outstanding, but the smaller meeting rooms were a little narrow, but we were also a little too many in them (...) They are kind of simple and have lower ceilings compared to the Hall, which is perfect. However, it worked out well and we would have chosen that hotel anyway. Further, the Hall and the recreation area outside it is extremely fresh and beautiful. We also had some food there in the breaks and the coffee bar is free.” R6

It was also recognized as positive to have everything within one building.

“We used the facilities at the University (...), and it was pleasant to have everything in one building.” R2

The importance of having the technical equipment working was highlighted.

“We had hired personnel to take care of computers, sound, power point, and all the other electronic elements. That personnel were only meant for us and we paid for it, and it worked out very professional and well functioned. No

other conference has succeeded in having such control at all technical parts, but we had to pay for it.” R4

Negative aspects were also mentioned, but the respondents had explanations for them. *“A disadvantage at the hotel is the distance between the big hall and the smaller meeting rooms, one need to go through the whole hotel, so they could possibly be a little closer. One of the rooms could also have been a little bigger for our purpose, but it is hard to control when we choose to not pre-book on the sessions (...) That is the price to pay when choosing an older hotel (...) We chose a hotel we think have traditions, but also with its own character, making it more than a regular business hotel. Such hotels can also host great conferences, but we wanted a hotel with more charisma.” R6*

Further, the personnel at the meeting facilities were seen as important.

“The people working at the meeting facilities were students educating within service and hospitality, so they know how to provide service.” R2

“The implementation of the meeting went smoothly and the food was extremely good (...) the feedback was positive and all the delegates were satisfied.” R8

And the cooperation and two-way communication between the personnel and the association was highlighted as crucial.

“We had one contact person at the hotel making all the preparations on beforehand, and during the conference there were different represents from the hotel present. It was always easy to get help if there were any problems with the technical. Everyone were helpful, the personnel in the front desk and the waitresses. They were very helpful and I was extremely satisfied. I am proud of the conference and the cooperation with the hotel. I will gladly recommend the

hotel to someone else. Having a certain contact person at the hotel is preferable.” R6

Conference tools. To get a scientific conference successful the importance of having a computer program for handling the process with abstracts and reviews was highlighted.

One association rented a computer system, ConfTool Pro from a company in Germany, making time-consuming activities more easy and less time-consuming. The support given by the company was also highlighted as a success factor for the conference.

“We rented a computer system from a company in Germany called ConfTool Pro (...) this system worked fantastic and also had a 24h support center (...) A very good follow-up. The price for renting it was also acceptable (...) This system helped us a lot with planning, the review process, registration, printing of nametags, and printing and setup of schedule (...) If someone else should have done this for payment per hour, the budget had not been met.” R2

Two other associations received computer support from a conference organizer to handle the process of dealing with abstracts and reviews.

“We had a computer program, supported by a conference organizer and I have to give them some of the honor for making the process of dealing with the abstracts so easy for us. The program had to be adjusted to fit our needs, but it functioned very well.” R4

“We engaged a PCO, and they arranged the registration, abstracts submitting, and so on (...) the cooperation with them was well functioning (...) The help received from the PCO was extremely valuable.” R8

Summing up. The main site satisfaction factors will be presented with their related dimension in the table below (table 8).

Table 8 The site satisfaction factor for Norway

Factor	Dimension
Price	Expected price level Registration fee Cheaper solutions Deals Simpler lunches Support
Overall affordability of destination	Tourist attractions Hospitality from local community Support from convention and visitor bureau Help from local tourist board
Quality of meeting facilities	Suitable meeting rooms Recreation area Technical equipment Personnel
Conference tools	Computer programs Support from PCO

The table below can be summarized in a new Norwegian model for the site satisfaction factor, presented below (figure 6).



Figure 6 The site satisfaction factors for Norway

Discussion and implications

This section consists of two parts: theoretical discussion and practical implications. In the theoretical discussion the findings presented in the result section will be discussed in relation to the theory presented in the theory section. Further, the practical implications will present suggestions and advices for improvement and advanced development of the conference industry in Norway. Both parts will firstly discuss the site selection factors followed by the site satisfaction factors.

Theoretical discussion

In this part the results will be discussed in relation to the theory presented in the literature review. Firstly, the site selection factors will be discussed followed by the site satisfaction factors. Additionally, the factors not found as transferrable will be discussed.

The site selection factors. This part will start by discussing the eight site selection factors found to exist for associations planning to arrange a conference in Norway in 2012. According to the theory several factors have been found to have significant impact within other parts of the world, and this research will give a deeper understanding of the site selection factors applicable and existing for Norway.

According to the results, the associations find it accessible getting to Norway. Most of these conferences have delegates from all over the world, and the easiest form of transportation is to travel by plane. It seems like the frequency and connection of flights from the European continent to the Norwegian cities are seen as an important factor for choosing Norway. The respondents especially highlight how convenient it is having direct flights from European cities like Frankfurt, Paris, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam to Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger. This is also in accordance with the study done by DiPietro et al. (2008), which highlighted the accessibility by air as being one of the influencing factors for

selecting a destination. Ideally the international delegates travelling to Norway from other parts of the world like Australia, USA, and Canada should have the opportunity to travel directly to Norway, but as it is today they have to transfer in a bigger European city anyhow and the connecting flights to Norway are numerous. It seems like Crouch and Louviere's (2004) findings differ from the findings in this study, as they indicated proximity for participants to the site as an important factor, but this study reveal delegates coming from all over the world and the distance is not seen as an obstacle. The reason for this might be the tremendous increase in flights during this latest decade, according to Avinor.no the number of flights to and from the four largest airports in Norway (Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim) have increased from 353 014 in 2001 to 403 681 in 2011, an increase of 50 667 flights (Avinor, 2012). Further, the barriers to get in to Norway was not mentioned and one can therefore assume this dimension as not being a challenge for the international delegates choosing to attend a conference in Norway, as the visa rules in order to get in to Norway is relatively easy to get through for most travelers. Based on this discussion above, the predetermined factor accessibility, (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997) showed in figure 1 (p. 20) and table 3 (p. 23), is highly transferrable to Norway as several of the respondents mentioned numerous of the dimensions included in this factor. This is also coherent with Mackay (2010) research using academic literature, industry publications, and market surveys to identify the site selection factors for Norway.

The results revealed the local support as a significant factor for choice of Norway as destination, and this support must be both within the association and also from the local community at the destination. The importance of being ahead within research and development in the field was mentioned as having a major influence on the decision of Norway as destination. One association highlighted their position as being ahead in the

development within their field, and it seems as a motivator for all the members to visit Norway and gain knowledge and experiences from a part of the world being more educated than them. This was further supported by a second association stressing the advantage of having the research department of the association in the city as an important reason for deciding to arrange the conference there. This is in accordance with Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) findings (table 3, p. 23), revealing the important of having support within the local chapter of the association as a crucial dimension for choosing a destination. Additionally, it seems like several associations cooperate with corporate organizations within the same field and these organizations often have specific topics they need a deeper understanding of, and then they request the association for a conference with the specific topic as main theme. The association can help the organization bringing the best professors and researcher from all over the world to the city where the organization is located in order to communicate their knowledge and expertise within the field and to help finding solutions for their challenges. For one of the respondents this was one of the motivations for getting the conference to Norway. In this case the corporate organization can be seen as what Rogers (2008) refers to as entrepreneurial buyers, the difference is they outsource the implementation to the association, but the topics of interest is located within the corporate organization and the association has the opportunity to gather experts within the field to discuss and present the requested topic. Within the factor local support the involvement and genuine interest from the local tourist boards was recognized as an important reason for choosing the specific city. The local tourist boards have proficiency in arranging conferences in the city and they can suggest appropriate hotels, venues, and people to contact. All the associations highlighted the help they achieved from the tourist boards and also some individual employees working there with special personality and commitment resulting in them getting customized help to meet

the individual needs from their association. The support from local tourist board has been emphasized in several studies (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; DiPietro et al., 2008), and according to Davidson and Rogers (2006) the primary activity for them are to attract conference buyers to the various destination. This dimension was also found as crucial for selecting Norway. Further, the support from the municipality was emphasized as essential for choosing the destination as they often provide with opening ceremonies with food and drinks included. Such initiatives can be crucial for choosing Norway, as the prices are relatively high and support from the municipality can reduce the costs. It seems like this dimension has not been highlighted in previous studies, and is therefore exceptional for Norway as destination. This might indicate that the government within other parts of the world do not engage in and support conferences at the destinations, resulting in this dimension being an extremely competitive advantage for Norway. The local support was the second predetermined factor (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997) being transferrable to Norway, since the including dimensions was emphasized from various associations in the interviews. This is further supported by Mackay (2010) as he found the local support as being an crucial factor for choosing Norway.

It seems like it is important for associations to have the opportunity to offer the delegates more than a good theme for the conference, additionally they want to give them the chance to experience something besides the conference. Such opportunity was also seen as essential when associations chose Norway as destination for conference in 2012. This is in accordance with the study of Crouch and Ritchie (1997), which found extra conference opportunities as a significant factor for choosing a destination. One respondent confessed that it was most likely not the theme of the conference being most attractive, but the tourist attractions and scenery one can experience in Norway having greatest influence in choosing it as destination. Further, more of the respondents highlighted the Norwegian fjords, nature

experiences, and long light summer nights as crucial for choosing Norway. One association had previously arranged a conference in a city with no tourist attractions, and according to the respondent this was not seen as a success among the delegates. Therefore it was essential for them to arrange it in a tourist city in 2012. This is further supported by Oppermann (1996) which found the importance of having an attractive location as essential when deciding where to arrange conferences.

When planning to arrange a conference, it seems like one cannot exclude the accommodation factor as many delegates are not citizens of the city and need a place to sleep during the stay. According to the interviews this factor was also significant when selecting Norway. The prices for staying at a hotel in Norway was highlighted as high, but the associations mentioned the importance of having several hotels with varied standards, and the importance of contacting the hotels at an early stage to make cheaper deals for the rooms, as crucial in order to have an opportunity to meet all types budgets. The price for accommodation was also found as an important dimension factor in several former researches (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; DiPietro et al., 2008; Fortin & Ritche, 1977). Further, most of the same studies include the service and perception of standard at the hotels as a dimension and this is also emphasized in this current study. It seems like the standards of hotel rooms in Norway are perceived as high, and so do the interviews confirm. One of the respondents, for example, state that no bugs are found at hotels in Norway, something one cannot take for granted in other parts of the world. A respondent also mentioned the hotel's capacity, and the fact that hotels in the city can be fully booked needs to be taken into account when deciding the site for a conference. Based on the discussion above, the factor accommodation facilities are found to

be transferrable to Norway, which also is in accordance with Mackay's (2010) literature review.

The objective for associations when arranging a conference is most often to have lectures and therefore the need of meeting rooms in various sizes is crucial. According to the interviews the different associations have diverse requirements when it comes to the meeting rooms, some might need one big room for plenary sessions while others need several rooms for multiple parallel sessions. Previous research has found both plenary rooms (Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997) and having the opportunity to several parallel sessions (Choi & Boger, 2002; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Fortin & Ritche, 1977; Oppermann, 1996). Further, one of the interviewed associations needed special equipment as the group included people with hearing disabilities and for this association it was crucial to choose a city and venue having the opportunity to support them with the equipment they needed to accomplish the conference. The importance of having modern and sufficient technology was additionally emphasized by Comas and Moscardo (2005) as being a major consideration when deciding site for the conference. The various dimensions discussed above emphasized the importance of the meeting facilities also for Norway as destination, which is proven by both this study and the one conducted by Mackay (2010).

The costs for arranging a conference at a destination have been highlighted in various researches (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; DiPietro et al., 2008; Fortin & Ritche, 1977) during the recent years, and this factor was also found to be highly evaluated and influencing when choosing Norway as destination. Several of respondents mentioned the increase of the Norwegian Kroner and the recent poor financial situation in a number of countries as something they had to assess before deciding Norway as

destination. Further, it seems like they have done a remarkable job in trying to cut the costs as much as possible by having simpler lunches and less expensive activities in the programs.

Among several of the respondents emphasizes the biggest conference cities in Norway as compact with small distances between the venue, hotels, and tourist attractions. The proximity in city has only been found significant in two previous studies (Choi & Boger, 2002; Crouch & Louviere, 2004), and is therefore quite special for Norway. A reason for this might be that the biggest cities in Norway are still small compared to a world scale, and therefore the associations see this as a highly influencing factor for choosing the cities in the country as destination. By having everything within close distances, the associations can guarantee no long transportation rides to get to the venue and/or short walks to get there. One respondent highlighted the experience of a previous conference being arranged with the conference center too far from the hotels, and this was experienced as negative, therefore it seems like the compact and closeness within Norwegian cities are a crucial factor for selecting them as destination.

The support of the local chapter in the association has already been highlighted as important for choosing the city, but the interviews also revealed the significant actors within an association as being crucial for deciding destination. This person is not always the president or part of the local chapter, but it can also be a person having published remarkable scientific work or done other outstanding work for the association. A such person has similarities with the members of a core group in organizations, highlighted by Norman (1977), which argued these members embodying new ideas for the organization. In the same way one can claim the significant actors within the various associations for being such members. Sometimes these significant actors are asked to arrange the conference, it can be expected since this person is an expert in the topic or it can be the president deciding it.

The site satisfaction factors. The second part will discuss the four site satisfaction factors existing for Norway as destination for conferences. According to the theory some factors have been found significant within other parts of the world, and this research will give a deeper understanding of the site satisfaction factors applicable for Norway.

The price factor was found to be an important factor for the association's satisfaction with Norway as destination for their conference. This is in accordance with Zeithaml et al. (2009), demonstrating price as influencing customer satisfaction. Several of the respondents highlighted the relatively high prices in Norway as intimidating for the delegates, but the price level was not deterring and several delegates still came to the conference. The price factor was also found to be significant in Choi's (2004) study, and is highly transferrable to Norway. Further, it seems like the association planners in Norway were creative in order to cut the costs as much as possible and make it affordable for international delegates. Choi (2004) highlights the rates and discounts for sleeping rooms as important, and several of the association planners in Norway made deals with various hotels in order to get the lowest price and to include different standards to meet all kinds of budgets (Rogers, 2008). Further, the association planners in Norway included several other measures for making the prices low, like for example having simple lunches with baguettes and sandwiches instead of comprehensive lunches with warm dishes and desserts. Simultaneously, some conferences were sponsored with the reception or a certain amount of money, in this way they were able to provide the delegates with meals free of charge resulting in the delegates saving money. The interviews revealed the delegates expecting high prices when visiting Norway, so by being creative and achieve support, the associations can prevent dissatisfaction because of the high prices and rather make the delegates have neutral or be satisfied with the conference (Peter & Olson, 2005)

It seems like the overall affordability of Norway as a conference destination was highly influencing the satisfaction level in a positive way. The interviews revealed the cities in Norway as admiring among the association planners and the tourist attractions were greatly appreciated; this is in accordance with Choi's (2004) findings where the cultural attractions and sightseeing were found as important dimensions influencing the satisfaction level. Additionally the Norwegian scenery was seen as breathtaking and it really made them satisfied with the destination. Further, Choi (2004) argues the importance of experiencing hospitality from the local community as influencing the satisfaction. Several of the association planners emphasized the generosity the various municipalities displayed by sponsoring the reception including food and drinks. This was pleasing for both the association planners and the delegates as it made them feel more welcomed and the impression of the city was extremely increased. In order for the associations to be even more satisfied with the overall affordability of the destination, the service provided by convention and visitor bureaus are extremely important (2004). For Norway the local tourist boards offered the association planners with helpfulness and professionalism in the work they do in order to help associations to arrange conferences in the different cities in Norway. According to Peter and Olson (2005) customers get satisfied if the experience exceeded their perceptions, and based on the results from this research it seems like the Norwegian attractions and scenery was more outstanding than what the associations expected.

It appears as the conference suppliers in Norway succeeded in finding the most suitable meeting rooms for the various associations. Several of the conferences required many different types of meeting rooms for both plenary and parallel sessions, and the venues having the possibility to provide the distinctive meeting rooms within short distance or within one building are seen as even more satisfying for the associations. Additionally, the

recreation area used for breaks during the conferences was highlighted as an important dimension for the quality of meeting facilities. When arranging conferences, it was confirmed that the technical equipment is important for the satisfactions, as found significant in Choi's study (2004). The associations rely on having functional computers and audiovisual equipment, and it was mentioned as a pricey dimension for Norway. Further, the personnel working at the meeting facilities highly influenced the quality of the meeting rooms, which again influenced the satisfaction of Norway as destination. This dimension was not highlighted as important in the literature, and is therefore special for Norway as destination. One association also stressed the importance of having cooperation and two-way communication with both the hotel personnel and the conference personnel, as it resulted in an effective problem solving. The meeting facilities are extremely important for the satisfaction of a conference, and Choi (2004) chooses to divide the issues concerning this into three distinctive factors: (a) quality of meeting rooms, (b) inventory, and (c) quality of convention service. Additionally, the personnel within the meeting facilities have not been emphasized in the theory, and this needs to be included in the Norwegian model. For Norway it seems like it is not necessary with three different factors, as all the dimensions within these factors were mentioned in relation to each other. Therefore this study chooses to convert these factor into one; quality of meeting facilities. It is further supported by Zeithaml et al. (2009) that the quality of both the service and the product are influencing the satisfaction.

A new and interesting factor emerging from the interviews was the importance of having useful and efficient conference tools. As many of the conferences are scientific, the need for a computer program or a professional conference organizer handling the great part of the details in advance of a conference is crucial. The respondents mentioned the effort regarding registration, handling the abstracts, the review process, printing nametags, setup

for the schedule etcetera. Such program makes the preparation less time-consuming and the interviews revealed this as a significant factor for satisfaction. Additionally, the cooperation between the associations and the PCOs handling these details are critical for the satisfaction of the destination. Not all associations have the same needs, so it is important for the PCOs to adjust the program and process fitting the needs of each individual association.

Factors not found. Several of the factors found to exist within other contexts were not transferrable to Norway. The reason for why these are not important for selection and satisfaction for Norway can only be assumed, and this part will try to discuss why.

The site selection factors not transferrable were (a) service at accommodation, (b) reputation, (c) quality of food and beverage, (d) value for money, and (e) proximity to destination. Based on these factors it seems like Norway is perceived as a country where associations expect high service and quality as being obvious, and therefore it is not determined as a crucial for selection Norway. Additionally, it seems like the high prices in the country makes the associations expecting value for the money they spend. The proximity to destination is not important for choosing Norway, and the associations might see the distance and time of the travel being compensated for by Norway being perceived as an exotic destination.

The hotel Cleanliness was not determined as a site satisfaction factor for Norway, and the reason is most likely the strict rules and regulations the hotels in Norway follow for cleanliness.

Practical implications

In this part the researcher will provide the conference industry in Norway with suggestions and advices for how they can attract more associations to Norway and how they can make the associations planning to come even more satisfied.

The site selection factors. One of the factors attracting associations to Norway is the accessibility, in other words it is seen as easy to get to Norway. Therefore it is extremely important for Norway as a destination to communicate to all associations worldwide how easy it is to get to Norway by plane. Many international associations might think that Norway is too far distance to travel, and not have the knowledge of all the direct flights from big European cities. Innovation Norway has included some of this information on the front page of their web page (Innovation Norway, 2012), where arrivals and departures are showed from various cities in Europe to Norway (appendix 2). This information could have been further enhanced by including the duration of the flight in the table. In fact, Norway is just maximum two hours away from the biggest connecting airports in Europe. These extra two hours of traveling can be compensated for with other factors exclusive for Norway.

In order to attract more international associations to Norway, it can be beneficial for the conference industry to get more detailed information of the associations having advantages in Norway. Norway is a highly modern and educated country possibly containing associations having specific knowledge and expertise they can communicate to the rest of the international association. Findings also emphasize research communities as initiators for attracting conferences. Therefore an investigation of the association's local chapters located in Norway and informing them on how to receive support in organizing conferences, can result in the Norwegian conference industry being ahead as potential destination when the association plan their next conference. Such local chapters can for instance be found within the oil industry, health care, tourism, education and agriculture. Further, the local tourist boards need to keep up the good work they do by always being updated on the various venues and hotels in the city, simultaneously as they actively search for new potential associations to attract to Norway for their next conference. As well as the municipality can

help to attract possible conferences by being enthusiastic about supporting the conference. Norway might be perceived as a relatively high-priced country, and the fact of getting something for free might attract even more associations to arrange their conference in Norway.

Based on the discussion above, extra conference opportunities are expressed as highly important for associations when choosing Norway. Therefore it is necessary to include this factor when Norway is promoted and suggested as a conference destination. After the interviews it appears as one can expect almost the same quality for meeting rooms all over the world, and thus the visualization of the Norwegian nature, scenery, and the various tourist attractions in the cities need to be included in the brochures and on the numerous web pages promoting the conference facilities in Norway.

When trying to attract potential associations to host their conference in Norway, the results revealed the importance of cooperation among the various suppliers within the industry as remarkably significant. As accommodation facilities are crucial for the associations and often their conferences are on strict budget (Rogers, 2008), it can be beneficial for both the associations and the hotels if the conferences were arranged in the slow seasons for the hotels. In this way, the associations can get cheaper prices simultaneously as the hotels can get the chance to have people staying at the hotels in the slow seasons.

It is important when being in the conference industry to have the knowledge of what different associations request when they are to arrange conferences. Further, the suppliers need to have the opportunity to provide both big plenary rooms and also have smaller rooms for parallel sessions. By having different solutions the venue suppliers can use it as a measure for recommending different solutions, this makes them appear as more professional,

and at the same time the solutions might result in the venue being able to sell more rooms to one association. Additionally, some association requires special equipment for people with disabilities. It can be beneficial for the venue suppliers to invest in the most common settings and equipment needed to be able to include people with disabilities in their meeting facilities. Such settings and equipment can include elevators, larger doors, and more space in the meeting rooms for wheelchairs, and additionally microphones, telescope, typing and cameras for the ones with hearing disabilities.

In the interviews several of the respondents revealed Norway as a destination with higher costs compared to other potential destinations, and in order to attract more international associations to the country one need to think more creative to reduce the total price for the conference. As more countries are having financial problems and the Norwegian Kroner is strengthened compared to other currencies, many associations might see Norway as a destination with too high prices. Therefore the conference suppliers need to be able to have competitive prices and not let other countries get the conference due to the price difference. There are several initiatives the associations can do to make the price lower, like for instance: (a) making deals with hotels for the price of sleeping rooms and meeting facilities, (b) having less fancy food opportunities by excluding warm lunches and not eating expensive three-course-meals for dinner, (c) use public transportation instead of taxis, (d) have the meeting venue close to the accommodation to reduce transportation costs, (e) invite the conference delegates at an early stage, so they can book cheaper flight tickets etcetera.

In order for cities in Norway to attract more international associations to arrange conferences in the city, it can be beneficial to promote how compact most of the cities are. Several associations will see this as an advantage for the city, as it will reduce transportation costs and also be more convenient for the delegates as they can walk around in the cities for

both conference purposes but also for leisure purposes like sightseeing and shopping. The cities in Norway need to take advantage of being smaller than other cities in the world, and use the compact and closeness in the city as a competitive advantage.

There are probably many significant actors within several associations in Norway, and some of them might not have been identified by the conference industry in Norway. It is extremely important for conference suppliers to detect these significant actors and suggest for them to arrange a conference in Norway. By having an informal conversations with this person can result in influencing her or him and most likely the chance of the association this person is part of arranging a conference in Norway will increase. Therefore one needs to have an overview of all associations having members in the specific cities, and try to attract these associations to Norway.

The site satisfaction factors. There are several measures that can be done in order to improve the satisfaction regarding the price level in Norway. Generally the prices are experienced as high in Norway, and therefore the various destinations and conference suppliers need to appear as inexpensive as possible. This can be done through include most of the costs within the registration fee, since the interviews revealed everything not included was seen as expensive. It also seems like people experience one high amount of money as less expensive than several smaller amounts, meaning it can be advantageous to have a higher registration fee instead of having a low registration fee with additional expenses. Therefore it can be beneficial for Norway to include more than only the meeting rates and lunches in the registration fee, like for instance also the transportation, meals, accommodation, and sightseeing. Additionally the associations need to have a decent dialogue with the hotels in order to get good deals when they plan to arrange a conference. By having such dialogue the hotels can recommend the best time for the association to have

the conference, for example the low seasons, and provide them with a more economical solution. The conference suppliers also need to take the lunch offers into consideration, as many of the associations have budget conferences, and therefore need to have less expensive solutions to offer. This does not mean they have to reduce the quality of the food, but rather have simpler lunches with sandwiches and fruits instead of a big buffet including warm and cold dishes with dessert. Further, the companies and municipalities within the Norwegian conference cities should use their opportunity to sponsor conferences for associations when they have the opportunity. Such sponsorship gives an extremely respectable impression of the cities, and will most likely attract them to come back.

In order for the conference cities in Norway to keep up the satisfaction level for the overall affordability of the destination, the suppliers need to actively engage in the recommendations for which tourist attractions and sightseeing trips to include in the conference program. Additionally the support offered by the municipality was seen as extremely generous, and therefore it is important for the municipalities in Norway to cooperate with the conference suppliers in order to engage themselves in conferences by sponsoring them with for example receptions, dinners, free sightseeing etcetera, and make the various associations feel more welcome and satisfied with Norway. Further, the respondents confirmed the importance of having a well-functioned conference and visitor bureau. The help they receive from them can be essential for the satisfaction level. If the conference and visitor bureaus do not understand the needs of the associations, they might get a conference being a failure due to misunderstandings.

The various destinations and conference suppliers need to have the opportunity to provide the associations with the conference tools they request. This can be done by cooperating with companies providing such programs and including their information in the

advertisement of the destination. It is also important for the PCOs to have adjustable programs in order to make it suitable for all the different needs the various associations have. Further, the extensive conference suppliers can invest in their own conference tools in order to give the associations the assistance they need during the process, and this will according to the interviews increase the satisfaction level of the destination.

In order to increase the satisfaction level on the quality of the meeting facilities, the destinations need to consider all the dimensions included in this factor. It is extremely important to have suitable meeting rooms for the associations, the size of the conference and the needs of the association vary and it is crucial to be able to provide them with the type of meeting room they had requested for and additionally to understand their needs as this is extremely influencing on their satisfaction level. Simultaneously it is important to keep the recreational area connected to the meeting rooms fresh and delegate. This includes having the expected servings like coffee, tea, and refreshments in addition to comfortable space and seating. Further, the needs of the associations most often include standard technical equipment but it might also include special technical equipment and it is necessary for the suppliers to acknowledge their needs by having suitable equipment if the associations include disabled people like hard of hearing, visually weakened, wheelchair users, etcetera. Additionally it is crucial for the destinations and conference suppliers to have professional personnel working for them. This can be done developing a service minded and customer-orientated workforce, and the strategy in order to achieve this is to: (a) hire the most suitable people, (b) develop employees to deliver service quality, (c) provide the employees with the needed support systems, and (d) retain the best employees (Zeithaml et al., 2009).

In order for the conference suppliers to increase the satisfaction level, they need to offer the associations with the needed conference tools for scientific conferences. Therefore

the suppliers should have the opportunity to provide them with such program, by either invest in it themselves or have cooperation with other suppliers having such program. A program like this can reduce the time used for preparation with like for example registration, handling abstracts, and printing nametags, and will result in more satisfied customers.

Conclusion

The conference industry is in continuously growth, and the numbers of associations arranging conferences seems to increase every year. All over the world various conference suppliers are having great competition in order to attract the associations to them, as the result of hosting a conference are numerous of benefits. In order for the destinations to attract the associations it is crucial for them knowing what brings them to the destination and have a clear overview of their competitive advantages. Further, it is important knowing what makes them satisfied with the destination.

This master thesis has achieved to develop a Norwegian model for the site selection factors (figure 5) and site satisfaction factors (figure 6) using predetermined factors as a starting point and also succeed in finding new factors unique for Norway. The factors are presented in the tables below (table 9 and 10), also including the factors not found to be transferrable to Norway. As one can see there are some similarities between the selection and the satisfaction factors, for instance the extra conference opportunities can be seen in relation to the overall affordability. Additionally the meeting facilities and price are crucial for both the selection and satisfaction of Norway as a destination.

Table 9 Transferrable, unique, and not transferrable site selection factors for Norway

Site selection factors		
Factors transferrable to Norway:	New factors unique for Norway:	Factors not transferrable to Norway
Accessibility Local support Extra conference opportunities Accommodation facilities Meeting facilities Price	Proximity in city Significant actors	Service at accommodation Proximity to destination Reputation Quality of food and beverage Value for money

Table 10 Transferrable, unique, and not transferrable site satisfaction factors for Norway

Site satisfaction factors		
Factors transferrable to Norway:	New factors unique for Norway:	Factors not transferrable to Norway
Price Overall affordability of destination Quality of meeting facilities	Conference tools	Hotel Cleanliness

There are several suggestions for the conference industry in Norway in order for them to attract more associations. Firstly, it is important for them to gain knowledge about associations worldwide; who is located in Norway, the local chapters having advantage in Norway, and the significant actors in Norway. Secondly, it is crucial for them to use the factors in marketing, for instance highlight how easy it is to reach Norway by plane, use the Norwegian attractions and scenery, in addition to the cities being compact.

When it comes to the satisfaction of associations, this research has provided the conference industry in Norway with several measures. It seems like the most crucial factor

for satisfaction is the price, therefore Norway needs to package the conferences as cheap as possible, invite them to have their conferences in slow seasons, and the support provided by the municipality is extremely valued. Further, it is crucial to understand the needs the association have when it comes to the meeting facilities. This need to be investigated in order to provide them with the right meeting rooms, equipment, recreation facilities, and having the right employees.

Further research should use the factors found significant in this thesis to perform a quantitative research in order to reveal which of the factors being the most important and to what extent they explain the decision of and satisfaction with Norway. It could also be interesting to investigate how big expenditure associations have when they arrange conferences in Norway to see how much effort one should put in attracting them to Norway.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide – selection factors

OPEN QUESTION

1. Can you describe the factors influencing the choice of Norway as destination for the congress?

THEMES

1. Accessibility (Tilgjengelighet)
2. Local Support (Lokal støtte)
3. Extra Conference Opportunities (Ekstra muligheter)
4. Accommodation Facilities (Overnattings fasiliteter)
5. Meeting facilities (Møte fasiliteter)
6. Information (Informasjon)
7. Site Environment (Omgivelser)
8. Other Criteria (Annet)

FACTORS

1. Costs
2. Congress facilities
3. Accommodation service
4. Proximity to destination
5. Reputation
6. Quality of food and beverage
7. “Value for money

DEMOGRAPHIC

1. Size of the congress
2. Member of an association (forening)? Size of this
3. Your role in the decision-making and choice of Norway
4. Where in Norway did the congress take place?

Interview guide – satisfaction factors

OPEN QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe the factors influencing the satisfaction of Norway as destination for the congress?

ASPECTS OF SATISFACTION

1. Disconfirmation, the difference between: (Bekreftelse)
 - 1.1- Expectations before a purchase (Forventninger)
 - 1.2- Perceptions of the performance after the purchase (Oppfattninger)
2. Nødvendinge faktorer / bestringsfaktorer
3. Service quality (Kvalitetet på tjenesten)
4. Product quality (Kvalitet på produktet)
5. Price (Pris)
6. Situational factors (Situasjons faktorer)
7. Personal factors (Personlige faktorer)

THEMES

1. Price
2. Quality of sleeping rooms
3. Hotel personnel
4. Overall affordability of destination (prisgunstighet)
5. Quality of meeting rooms
6. Inventory
7. Location
8. Quality of convention service

FACTORS

1. Quality of meeting services
2. Prices
3. Meeting facilities
4. Proximity from hotel to meeting facilities
5. Capacity of meeting rooms

6. Friendliness at hotel
7. Hotel cleanliness
8. Number of meeting of rooms

DEMOGRAPHIC

1. Size of the congress
2. Member of an association (forening)? Size of this
3. Your role in the decision-making and choice of Norway
4. Where in Norway did the congress take place?

Appendix 2

Flight frequency to

Bergen ▾

- Amsterdam: 4 daily arrivals
- Berlin: 2 weekly arrivals
- Copenhagen: 4-6 daily arrivals
- Frankfurt: 2 daily arrivals
- London: 1-2 daily arrivals
- Paris: 2 weekly arrivals
- Stockholm: 3 weekly arrivals

Last updated 07.11.10



Flight frequency to

Stavanger ▾

- Amsterdam: 4-5 daily arrivals
- Berlin: 2 weekly arrivals
- Copenhagen: 3-6 daily arrivals
- Frankfurt: 1-2 daily arrivals
- London: 0-3 daily arrivals
- Paris: 2 weekly arrivals
- Stockholm: 8-10 daily arrivals *

* Via Oslo
Last updated 15.41.10



Flight frequency to

Trondheim ▾

- Amsterdam: 2 daily arrivals
- Copenhagen: 1-3 daily arrivals
- Brussels: 1-3 daily arrivals *
- Frankfurt: 4 daily arrivals *
- London: 3 weekly arrivals
- Paris: 4-6 daily arrivals *
- Stockholm: 4 weekly arrivals *

*Via Oslo
Last updated 07.13.10



Flight frequency to

Oslo ▾

- Amsterdam: 6-8 daily arrivals
- Brussels: 1-3 daily arrivals
- Copenhagen: 7-20 daily arrivals
- Frankfurt: 4 daily arrivals
- London: 9-12 daily arrivals
- Paris: 4-6 daily arrivals
- Stockholm: 6-19 daily arrivals

Last updated 07.05.10

