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An Exploration of the Role of Convention Bureaus in Competing for International Association Conferences

by

Emma Delaney

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ABSTRACT

International association conferencing is the largest and most profitable segment of the events industry. Competition to host these events is fierce and convention bureaus (CBs) offer a range of incentives to attract professional conference organisers to their destination. Many second-tier destinations have invested in their facilities and incentives in order to compete with more traditional conference cities. However, to date there has been a limited exploration of the process of destination or site selection. Therefore, this thesis critically assesses international approaches to destination management and explores the process of site selection in the organisation of association conferences. Prior research has generated conceptual models of site selection, which, though insightful, do not adequately reflect the role of CBs in the process. A critical evaluation of these models and the supporting literature on site selection has provided the basis for a qualitative inquiry, conducted through the lens of pragmatism. The outcome of interviews with thirty professional conference organisers, convention bureau managers and venue managers, has led to the creation of two models: an amended conceptual model of site selection and a new conceptual model of CB competitiveness. These models draw attention to the role of subvention and visa support and are tools that can be used to benchmark CB performance and inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events.

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Emma Louise Delaney

Contents

0.1 List of Abbreviations

AAE	Association of Association Executives
ABPCO	Association of British Professional Conference Organisers
AMC	Association management company
BVEP	Business Visits and Events Partnership
BVES	Business Visits and Events Strategy
B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
CB	Convention Bureau
CRM	Customer relationship management
CVB	Convention and visitor bureau
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DMC	Destination management company
DMO	Destination management organisation
IAPCO	International Association of Professional Congress Organisers
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnerships
MICE	Meetings, incentive travel, conference and exhibitions
MPI	Meetings Professionals International
PCO	Professional conference organiser
RFP	Request for proposal
SMERF	Social, military, education, religious and fraternal (meetings)
UIA	Union of International Associations

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Emma Nolan

declare that the thesis entitled

An Exploration of the Role of Convention Bureaus in Competing for International Association Conferences

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission,

Signed: 

Date: 22 November 2020

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My thanks go to Mark for always listening and encouraging me, for believing in me (even when I did not) and for being genuinely interested in my research. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father, Edward Delaney, who showed me by example how passion, endurance and devotion for a subject can lead to great achievements.

1.0 The Introduction

1.1 Study Context and Purpose

The conference sector is the largest and most profitable segment of the events industry and conferences play a pivotal role in terms of knowledge creation and knowledge transfer between industries and communities (Davidson, 2019). Association conferences, held by mostly not for profit organisations, are the largest in terms of length and delegate numbers and as many associations have an international membership, their events are peripatetic (Nolan, 2020a). The lead time for international association conferences can be in excess of five years during which, convention bureaus (CBs) will invest substantial time and resources in attempting to persuade professional conference organisers (PCOs) to bring the event to their destination (Rogers, 2013). In recent years, competition to host conferences has intensified (Park *et al*., 2014) and there are a growing number of convention bureaus specifically targeting international association conferences. Consequently destinations are finding it increasingly challenging to attract the attention of meeting planners (Chiappa, 2012) yet despite this, there has been limited research to date exploring the role of the CB in the process of destination, or site, selection. This first chapter will provide an introductory look at the conference industry in the UK, state the objectives of this exploration and outline the structure of this thesis.

The UK is a major competitor for international association conferences, has several major conference destinations (including London, Manchester and Glasgow) and has maintained a top ten ranking by the International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA) for many years. Business tourism policy and strategy in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is provided by and funded through the devolved governments, and delivered by the national tourist boards (VisitWales, VisitScotland and Tourism Northern Ireland). Since 2015, VisitBritain, the UK's national tourist board, has had the responsibility of promoting England as a business tourism destination and is the official convention bureau for England. VisitBritain is primarily funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and they were involved in the DCMS's development of the Business Visits and Events Strategy (BVES) (2013). This, the first policy for the events industry, outlines the government's goals for increasing the UK's market share of international association conferences and the DCMS have tasked VisitBritain with delivering many of the policy's objectives. However, given the intensifying nature of competition to host business events, will VisitBritain be able to maintain the UK's overall position as a leading ICCA conference destination (as determined by the combined

number of events held in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)? Or does the lack of a coordinated approach to delivering business tourism in the UK give competitors a chance to overtake the UK? There are indications in the strategy that the UK is already struggling to compete as it has no national subvention policy (subvention is the provision of state funded financial incentives used to secure conferences and is typically administered by a convention bureau). Yet, new and emerging conference destinations are increasing their share of the market, much of which is being achieved by using subvention (Spalding, 2017, Ozbuk, 2017). As such the DCMS's policy and action plan may not be enough to ensure the UK retains its status as an established conference destination, which would dramatically impact the many UK destinations, businesses and professionals reliant on business tourism. Furthermore, given the economic uncertainty created by the UK's departure from the European Union in 2021 (BREXIT) and the yet to be felt, full impact of the Covid-19 Corona virus global pandemic that started in 2020, the conference sector in the UK may now be extremely fragile.

1.2 The Business Visits and Events Strategy (BVES)

According to leading industry organisation the Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP) the events industry has experienced massive growth in the last 30 years and is worth £42billion annually to the UK economy, supports 25,000 businesses and half a million workers (BEVP, 2016). The meetings, incentive travel, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) subsector is responsible for 1.9% of UK full time employment (ibid) and, as in most developed countries, is a primary economic driver.

In 2014, after many years of what events industry professionals have described as feeling extremely undervalued and unsupported by central government (Colston, 2018; Rogers, 2013; Pugh, 2004), the DCMS announced plans to collaborate with the BVEP in order to develop and launch the first strategic policy document for the events industry. The policy, the Business Visits and Events Strategy (2013), was published in 2015 by the DCMS and it contains a plan for growth based on the outcome of multiple research projects undertaken by the BVEP (BVEP, 2011; BVEP, 2016). Since the launch of the policy, the DCMS has also published the 'UK Government's International Business Events Action Plan' (2019) in order to set out 'further steps the UK government will take to create, attract, grow and retain international business events' (DCMS, 2019, p.4). The action plan recognises the increasingly competitive nature of the MICE industry and asserts that 'the UK needs to keep pace' (ibid, p.7). It also states that

the government's support for the industry in the past has been 'discrete…[and] not done on a strategic, overarching basis' (ibid, p.8), thereby acknowledging that provision in England, Wales, Scotland and Norther Ireland has varied.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of convention bureaus in competing for international association conferences. This investigation aims to understand the role of the PCO and the process of choosing a destination for an association conference. It will critically analyse different, international approaches to destination management and explore domestic tourism policy and VisitBritain's ability to compete for international association conferences. Additionally, this research will propose how tools, including conceptual models of site selection, can be used to inform business tourism policy makers across the world.

Specifically, the objectives of this thesis are to:

1. Critically assess the socioeconomic significance of business events and the potential impact of government policy on convention bureaus' ability to compete for conferences;

2. Critically review the type of support offered by leading and emerging international convention bureaus when competing to attract professional conference organisers;

3. Critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences;

4. Create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers across the world involved in the management of destinations for business events.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two (Context of the Study) outlines the development of an identifiable conference sector and this chapter includes a critical assessment of the socioeconomic significance of

business events in the UK today. The chapter explores the relationship between industry and government and reviews the development of the BVES (2013). The role of policy and governance in the management of destinations for business events is discussed, drawing on Foley, McPherson and McGillivray's (2012) seminal publication 'Event Policy From Theory to Strategy'. To date, this is the only text to focus purely on policy for the events industry and therefore it is a valuable reference. However, the text does not feature any business tourism case studies which is indicative of a significant gap in the literature. Nonetheless, there are a number of international case studies published in a variety of journals that provide alternative perspectives on approaches to event policy, particularly in relation to business tourism (Pearce, 2015; Gligorijević and Ubavić, 2016; McCartney, 2014; Grzinic and Saftic, 2012). Included in this chapter is a review of my professional background and how this is relevant to and has shaped this investigation.

Chapter three presents a review of the apposite literature. The first event specific journal, the Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management, was launched in 1997. Now known as the Journal of Convention and Event Tourism, it is a rich source of literature and features articles by a number of leading event scholars including Donald Getz, who wrote 'Event Studies'; the first academic textbook specifically focused on developing knowledge and theory about planned events. Event Management and the Journal of Destination Marketing and Management are also valuable sources of contemporary research as are a number of high-ranking journals in closely linked subjects including Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research and the International Journal of Hospitality Management. Although the number of specific event management journals and scholars is comparatively small, there is enough literature to underpin this investigation and much expertise in the field of convention planning to include Choi (2005), Kang, Suh and Jo (2005), Hong, Kim, Jang and Lee (2006), Crouch (2010), Lee, Lee and Yoon (2013), Fenich (2015) and Getz and Page (2016).

Lee and Back's (2005) extensive review of meeting and convention management articles from the 1990s to 2003 points to notable achievements in the domain of conference and destination management including Hiller's (1995) model for convention-host city relationships and Oppermann and Chon's (1997) model of the interrelationships among the main players in convention tourism. These findings have propelled further research into the complex issue of conference site (destination) selection and destination management and chapter three of this thesis critically assesses the academic literature. Additionally, it analyses destination websites,

reports and documentation as well as discourse from key industry organisations and the government (central and devolved administrations). This culminates in a comprehensive index of types of destination management organisation (DMO) support and a review of international perspectives on destination and association conference management. This chapter also reviews competitive theory and customer relationship management theory in relation to the PCO/CB relationship.

Throughout the literature, the significant role of DMOS, specifically CBs, in the destination or site selection process is explored from a number of angles. However repeatedly the term 'convention bureau support' has been used often but only in a broad sense and this has shaped this investigation, which is discussed in chapter four, the methodology. A pragmatic paradigm steers this investigation as I explore the process of site selection with the participation of a number of industry professionals. In this investigation, the phenomenon under review is the influence of convention bureau support over the decision-making process and the factors are the types of convention bureau support offered and sought. Maxwell's (2005) conceptual framework for the design and conduct of research has been adapted and is illustrated and discussed in this chapter. These resources have contributed to the design of the research and help to address issues of bias and generalisability.

Chapter five and six present and discuss the outcome of the investigation which has resulted in a small, but valuable insight into the role of the professional conference organiser (PCO) in the site selection process which has been achieved via an empirical investigation involving industry professionals. This investigation has established the type of convention bureau support that is sought by conference organisers and how it influences the choice of destination. A small, but representative, number of professional conference organisers, convention bureau managers and venue managers have been interviewed to explore their experience of the site selection process, and the results are presented and discussed here. Aspects of this research will focus on how this may impact the UK conference sector, however these implications have more far reaching consequences. This thesis culminates with the presentation of two new models; a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process (as anticipated) and a new model of convention bureau competitiveness. As such, it presents a new contribution to the academic discourse by defining and discussing the term 'convention and visitor bureau support' and by conceptualising convention bureau competitiveness. The final chapters of this thesis demonstrate how these models could be used to inform policy makers involved in the

management of destinations for business events and therefore how they have the potential to influence future strategy and direction for organisations such as VisitBritain. Aspects of this exploration will focus on how this may impact the UK conference sector, however these implications have more far reaching consequences.

1.5 About the Author

I began working in the tourism and events industry at the age of 18, while at university, and as a graduate I began to build a career which would span working in theatres, visitor attractions and local councils. In 2002 I joined the tourism department of Eastbourne Borough Council as the Conference Manager. This role was within the convention bureau which was wholly funded by the local council. The remit of the bureau was to promote all of the town's business tourism offer; hotels, venues and attractions and my role was to specifically promote and manage the council's own multi-purpose venue, the Devonshire Park Centre (DPC). This is the town's principal conference centre, which at the time had a capacity of 1,700, over 40 separate hireable spaces, a banqueting capacity of 850 and exhibition space exceeding 3,000m^2. Due to the size of the DPC, and the quantity of bedstock in the town, the venue was marketed to the association sector. The DPC was a popular venue with domestic associations and I oversaw conferences held by political parties, trade unions, religious groups, trade bodies and a number of social organisations. Typically, these events were held over three days in the spring or autumn and attracted over 1,000 delegates per event. On average the centre hosted fifteen major association conferences per year, creating an economic impact in the town in the region of £71million per year.

Through my role as Conference Manager I worked closely with PCOs and organising committees. This included bidding for conferences, negotiating venue charges, and agreeing the terms and conditions of each hire. As part of the process of bidding and negotiating, I made strategic decisions about whether or not to offer subvention, and how much subvention (and what form of subvention) should be offered to individual clients and the organisation they represented.

To ensure the legal and health and safety compliance of each event, I approved the programme content, suppliers for and marketing of each conference. Given the lead time for

conferences, this meant working with some PCOs and committees for a period of several years. I also worked closely with hoteliers, local suppliers (AV providers, florists, transport providers etc.) and the venue's appointed caterer. I led site visits and familiarisation (fam) trips, worked closely with a number of other national convention bureau staff, particularly at trade events and I took part in shared marketing and networking events with the regional DMO, Tourism South East. Eastbourne was a member of the BACD (British Association of Conference Destinations), which has since been subsumed by EVCOM. Membership allowed me to attend several training and networking events run by them and by partner members including VisitBritain.

I was responsible for the marketing of the venue which involved developing website content, brochure design and production and writing copy for trade publications. I attended trade shows and organised and led fam trips. I contributed to the development and delivery of the tourism strategy for the town and took a senior role in the planning and delivery of the town's major public events programme.

In my role as Conference Manager I was involved in the strategic development of the town's conference offer and this included writing and implementing the subvention policy for the Council. The policy set out the terms and conditions of the provision of subvention in the form of venue discounts and/or the provision of civic functions. I determined the amount of subvention made available to each conference, based on factors including delegate numbers, catering spend and number of venues hired. In most cases, the charge for the main meeting room would be waived providing that the event would host at least five hundred delegates for a minimum of two nights and that the accommodation booking service (operated by the convention bureau) was used by at least fifty percent of delegates or a minimum spend per capita was achieved through pre-booked catering. Based on predictions and key performance indicators I submitted a bid for the subvention fund each year to my employer, Eastbourne Borough Council. The bid was normally met, but usually after a protracted discussion which involved convincing cabinet members that subvention was a valuable marketing tool. Using client testimonials, I was able to demonstrate that without subvention, I would not have been able to bid for a number of major conferences and these would have been lost to competitors.

As the Conference Manager I worked closely with PCOs and conference committees and was very familiar with their challenges and expectations. Bidding for conferences would typically

involve producing bespoke bid documentation and meeting with the committee to present the bid. As I oversaw the planning and delivery of the conferences that were won, I would go on to work very closely with PCOs and committees for many years. I won a number of bids for regional and national conferences, securing the town's place on a rotation pattern for many major associations.

I was also familiar with my destination competitors as well as sector trends. I worked closely with local stakeholders, notably hoteliers, who were keen to demonstrate their support for the work of the department to Council officials. As the political makeup of the Council was fairly evenly balanced between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, elections frequently saw a change of leadership from one party to the other. The leader of the council, cabinet members and mayor changed regularly thereby affecting the vision and priorities of the Council. Although both parties were supportive of leisure tourism, and the ongoing provision of financial support for the promotion of tourism in the resort town, they were less supportive of business tourism and sceptical as to its value and significance. This led to what I would describe as my first-hand experience of the tumultuous relationship between the events industry and the government. Every year that I was in post, my operational budgets were cut which included the subvention fund, and a number of my colleagues were made redundant. This was despite the production of client testimonials and annual reports illustrating the huge local economic impact of the conferences that I was overseeing. This was also despite the many attempts by the destination's stakeholders (notably hoteliers) to demonstrate their support for the work of the convention bureau. The cuts were a source of frustration and anger to myself, my clients (professional and amateur conference organisers) and to the destination stakeholders.

Since moving from industry to academia in 2008, I have remained a passionate advocate of the significance and importance of the association conference sector. I remain frustrated at the perceived lack of interest in and support for this sector from central, and to an extent, local government. This passion and frustration has been the source of inspiration for my thesis. My first-hand experience of working for a state funded CB has provided me with much insight into the challenges of destination management. Having worked closely with a number of associations, PCOs, venues and other industry suppliers I have accrued much knowledge of the inner workings of the association conference sector and the interrelationship between DMO and PCO. Although, this has fuelled the development of this thesis, it also confirms author

bias. However, this has not been at the expense of academic integrity and throughout the preparation and conduct of this investigation steps have been taken to minimise and mitigate against bias, which are discussed in detail in chapter four.

1.6 Summary

It has become essential that more research is carried out focusing on what influences PCOs choice of destination as this has become a hugely competitive environment for destinations (Nolan, 2020b, Chiappa, 2012; Park *et al.*., 2014). Therefore, this thesis provides a valuable contribution to the growing body of business tourism literature with a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process and a new conceptual model of convention bureau competitiveness. While a national policy on business tourism has been identified as the mechanism to move the sector toward a more stable and profitable future (Spiller, 2002) the key challenge facing governments is the need for a framework of analysis which will determine the level of support required to support events (Dwyer *et al.*., 2000b). These models and the rationale presented in chapter six provide this framework and demonstrate how destinations can use these tools to develop a competitive advantage. The development of a site selection model that has replaced the term 'convention bureau support' with more meaningful terminology, and the creation of a model of CB competitiveness, have the potential to sustain and grow the UK conference sector. However, the next challenge is to promote the results of this investigation within academic, industry and government circles and advance the agenda for the development of research specific to business tourism.

At the time of submission, the events industry is bracing for what will certainly be, the full impact of the Covid-19 virus. At this time, it is impossible to predict how business tourism will change or be forced to adapt as a result of the global pandemic. Therefore, while it is acknowledged that the business tourism sector in the UK and in most parts of the world is going to be affected by Covid-19, this thesis cannot speculate on how the results of this investigation may appear in light of ongoing developments.

2.0 Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the evolution of the global conferencing sector and the context of business tourism as a key international industry and an important socioeconomic driver. The crux of this thesis lies in the exploration of the concept of CB support for PCOs, and this chapter will outline the role of the PCO and the capabilities of destination management organisations. The chapter will review strategic destination management practices, global competition and approaches to destination governance. This chapter will provide an overview of the relationship between the UK government and the events industry and it will include an initial discussion of the potential implications of the Business Visits and Events Strategy (2013). Additionally, chapter two looks at business tourism from a global perspective, taking into account common characteristics of the industry as well as growing, international competition. As such this chapter will advance the first objective of this thesis which is to critically assess the socioeconomic significance of business events and the potential impact of government policy on convention bureaus' ability to compete for conferences.

2.2 Event Tourism

Event tourism is a phenomenon which was first identified in the 1980s (Raj, Walters and Rashid 2013) and refers to the influx of visitors to a location to attend a specific event. This branch of tourism has the potential to generate huge economic activity as event attendees will spend money in the destination on travel, accommodation, food and drink, shopping, sightseeing and using leisure and entertainment facilities. This is often referred to as the multiplier effect or 'inscope expenditure' (Edwards *et al.*., 2014, p.409) and both are terms that describe money generated by the event that the host destination would not have otherwise received.

Business tourism is a subsector of the events industry and refers to travel to a location to attend an event such as a meeting, conference or exhibition or to take part in incentive travel (typically a holiday awarded to sales staff by an employer as part of a motivational bonus scheme). The sector is well established, as a recognisable conference industry emerged in the nineteenth century in the US where a surge in the formation of trade and professional

associations and religious groups led to the organisation of large-scale conventions in specific locations across the country (Rogers, 2013). In the UK and across much of Europe, the industrial revolution propelled the exponential growth of the conferencing industry and this was sustained well into the twenty first century by the impact of commercial air travel (Marques and Santos, 2017). Similarly, across the globe the increase in the number of government and quasi-governmental organisations, multinational corporations and pan-national agencies, interest groups, professional bodies and pressure groups has and continues to fuel the demand for meetings and conferences (Dwyer *et al.*., 2000b). Current predictions suggest despite the economic and political uncertainty in the UK created by Brexit, the UK events industry is still set to grow (Fullard 2019c).

The industry is now clearly divided into two distinct halves; the corporate sector (events held by profit making organisations) and the association sector (events held by non-profit making groups). Corporate conferences are typically short in duration (less than two days), tend to have a short lead time (less than a year) and small delegate numbers (less than three hundred). In contrast, association conferences last longer, take longer to organise and involve far greater numbers of delegates. Within the organisation of large association conferences, in excess of five hundred delegates, there are four major stakeholder groups: buyers, suppliers, intermediaries and others (Kim, Sun, Kang, 2015). The term 'buyer' refers to the event organiser which may be one person or a committee of several people. Suppliers include venues as well as providers of all components of complex events such as speakers, audio-visual equipment, catering, flowers, staging etc. Intermediaries that provide the link between buyers and destinations includes CBs and other types of destination management organisations. Additionally, other stakeholders can include the media who are often invited to attend association conferences such as political gatherings and certain trade events.

Delegates are of course, another significant stakeholder group, and there have been some studies of the influence of delegates over the choice of destination and their motivation to attend international and national conferences, which will be discussed in chapter three. Additionally, in the USA alone there are more than six hundred association management companies (AMC) in operation, providing fee based administrative, technical and project management support to associations for their conference operations (Dumas, 2016). The rise in the use of AMC's is attributable to a growing recognition of their expertise in conference management and their ability to save associations time and money (Pinto, 2020). It must be

noted that although delegates and AMCs have great potential to influence site selection, within the scope of this investigation, the focus of the inquiry will be on the PCO's role in site selection.

2.3 Characteristics of Association Conferences

The Event Industry Council's (2018) assessment of the global business tourism sector, suggests that approximately 1.5 billion delegates attend business events per year, across 180 countries, generating £1.6 trillion of GDP. Specially, there are approximately 24,000 major international association meetings occur regularly (at least once every two years) (ICCA 2015), and the Union of International Associations (UIA) (2015) suggests that this figure increases to around 468,700 when taking into account regional and national conferences, conventions and symposia. The sector is buoyant as the number of conferences taking place each year has continued to rise over the last twenty years and is predicted to grow further in the next ten years (ICCA, 2015; Davidson and Rogers, 2016). This is a global trend as is the evidence that the sector is resilient to economic downturns and has not been noticeably affected by recent recessions (Fullard, 2019d).

The association sector is broadly divided into two halves. The first half is made up of professional organisations such as medical, scientific, academic and trade bodies as well as trade unions and political parties. The second half of the sector is made up of SMERFs (social, military, education, religious and fraternal organisations). Both halves share characteristics and the average duration of an association conference is three days with a lead time of three to four years (Opperman and Chon, 1997). Delegate numbers can vary enormously from association to association, from a few hundred to several thousand delegates. Frequently, delegates attending SMERF conferences will bring a partner to the event. Typically, partners do not attend the conference sessions, but may be invited to some of the social events and during the day will take part in an organised programme of activities in the destination.

In terms of the organisation of association conferences, approximately thirty-five percent of these events are solely managed by a PCO who takes responsibility for the choice of destination and venues (Fullard 2019d, ICCA 2015, UIA, 2015). This percentage is steadily increasing, as more organisations are choosing to employ a third-party organiser to oversee their events (ICCA, 2015; Rogers and Smith, 2018). Around 70% of association conferences

are organised by a committee that is typically comprised of five to eight people (Clark, Evans and Knutson, 1997, Kang *et al.*, 2005). Membership of committees can include salaried staff or volunteers, or a mixture of the two (Nolan, 2020b, Shone, 1998), but in the organisation of major conferences this will include a PCO who will have a significant influence over the decisions taken by the committee (Clark *et al.*, 1997, Weber, 2000, Kang *et al.*, 2005). There are a small but growing number of AMCs in Europe, and several hundred operating in the USA (Dumas, 2016). The level of involvement of an AMC can vary from full-service (taking full control of membership, conference planning, financial management of the association etc.) to outsourced services (taking responsibility for specific tasks or one-off conferences) (Silberstein, 2020). Figure 2.1 Illustrates these options for an association's conference management, ranging from one PCO to a committee to an AMC.

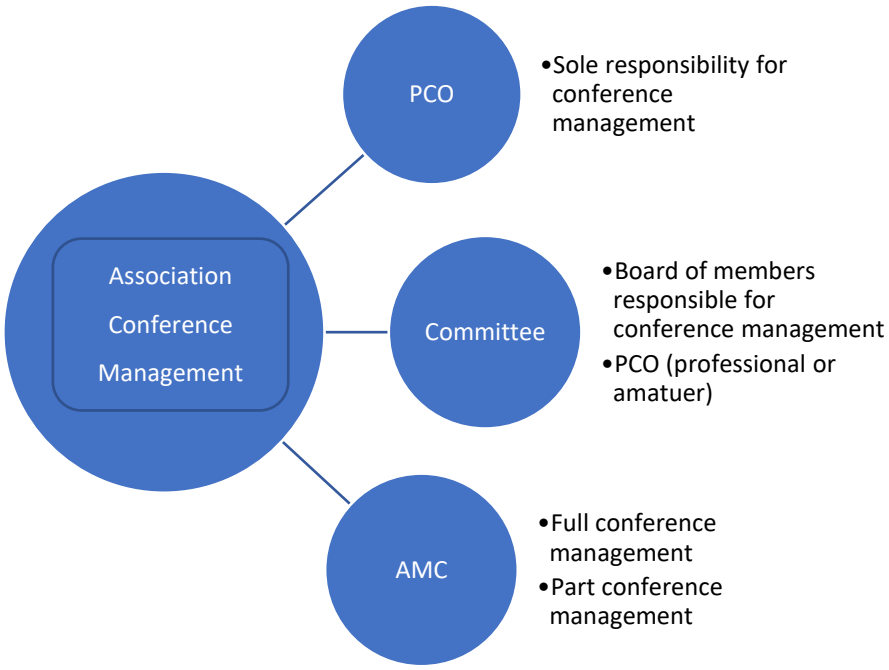

Figure 2.1 Association Conference Management Options

2.4 The Role of the PCO

Historically the task of arranging an organisation's conference or AGM has been a secondary role for a member of a team and as such it has often fallen to a secretary (Beaulieu and Love, 2005, Goldblatt, 2000). This is still evident today as a number of meeting planners fulfil this

role alongside other administrative or personal assistant duties (Beaulieu and Love, 2008). However, there are now a high number of full-time PCOs and they can be categorised by those working freelance or in permanent employment in venues, event management agencies and specific corporations and associations (Kim, Sun and Kang, 2015). The role of the PCO is now an established profession that requires specialist proficiencies and knowledge such as budgeting, design and conflict resolution (Sperstad and Ceil, 2011). Negotiation and strategic event management are the primary features of the role and determine the essential skills needed to be successful (Kim *et al.*, 2015, Goldblatt, 2000, Beaulieu and Love, 2005). Although the internet now provides easy access to industry suppliers, PCOs work closely with CBs when organising destination events as they value their expertise, neutrality and the quality and depth of service they provide (Chacko and Fenich, 2000, Shin *et al.*, 2007, Weber, 2000, Jago and Deery, 2005, McCartney, 2014).

In most developed countries, meeting planners can join a national trade body and there are a few international organisations with significant reach and influence, notably Meetings Professional International (MPI) which has a global membership of over 60,000 individuals (MPI, 2018). Additionally, there are membership organisations specifically supporting and promoting the work of association PCOs which includes the UIA, the Association of Association Executives (AAE) and the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO). There are no legal or formal entry requirements to the profession, but event management is available as both an undergraduate and postgraduate qualification in various universities around the world and most membership organisations have developed their own certification in meeting planning, as well as professional standards and codes of conduct.

On average a PCO will be over thirty, will have an undergraduate degree, will have accrued at least ten years of relevant experience and will belong to a national trade body (Weber, 2001; Baloglu and Love, 2005; Kim, Sun and Kang, 2015; Shin *et al..*, 2016; Sheehan *et al..*, 2000). Ten percent of them have a postgraduate qualification, two thirds are female (ibid), and there are more females in executive positions than men (Goldblatt and Joseph, 2000). The role of the meeting planner is therefore a defined career within the event management industry and is globally recognised as a skilled and valued profession. The majority of PCOs are highly skilled women and the various membership organisations supporting the profession have created national and international professional networks, generate industry specific research and are effective promoters and lobbyists.

2.5 Destination Stakeholders

The interrelated private and public stakeholders who jointly serve the needs of MICE events can be grouped into physical attractions, sociocultural attractions, infrastructure (event venues, transport providers, restaurants etc.) and accommodation providers (Caber, Albayrak and İsmayıllı, 2017). Due to the different characteristics and budgets of corporate and association conferences, a number of stakeholders tend to market themselves to either the corporate or the association sector. For example, large purpose-built venues with the capacity to host more than three hundred delegates will focus on drawing in association events, while luxury hotels with smaller but grander event space will market to the corporate sector (Nolan, 2018).

As a whole, this cluster of suppliers form a destination which is then marketed to both leisure and business tourists and event planners through a destination management organisation (DMO) who manage and coordinate the overall brand of the destination. DMOs will spend much of their marketing budget focusing on the more lucrative business tourism sector and this will include placing adverts in trade journals, direct mail campaigns and running fam trips to attract the attention of PCOs (Nolan, 2018, Opperman and Chon, 1997). The promotion of business tourism is a challenge as it requires a particular approach that involves condensing the many identities that the destination may have, created by its diverse stakeholders, into one that is makes it identifiable as business city (McCartney, 2008).

In a number of destinations worldwide, the main convention and exhibition centre is owned and operated by the DMO. The prevailing trend in destination management is to combine the sales function of both the DMO and the principal event venue as this attracts association PCOs looking for a one stop shop style of service in the destination (Nolan, 2020b, Fenich and Bordelon, 2008). Other standard services offered by DMOs to PCOs include sourcing additional venues, providing an accommodation booking service to delegates as well as a range of marketing support services to promote the conference. The DMO will also connect PCOs to relevant suppliers (e.g. AV providers, caterers, florists etc.) and they provide help and advice on transport to and within the destination.

2.6 Destination Management Organisations

A destination management organisation (DMO) or a destination management company (DMC) may be any private or publicly funded organisation that has responsibility for officially representing an area as a tourism destination (Rogers, 2013). These terms have evolved from the previously established phrase 'destination marketing organisation' and the change reflects the contemporary role of the organisation which extends far beyond just marketing the location (Reinhold, Beritelli and Grünig, 2018). There is also a general consensus that a DMO or a DMC is a privately-owned organisation whereas a convention bureau (CB), or convention and visitor bureau (CVB), carries out the same function but is, at least in part, state funded (Lee, Kim and Kang, 2019, Aureli and Del Baldo, 2019). Historically, most established destinations have had a national as well as several regional and city convention bureaus, all funded through central and/or local government (Reinhold, Beritelli and Grünig, 2018). However, funding for tourism has been reduced or cut altogether in many parts of the world in recent years as governments have had to tighten their belts and prioritise spending. This has resulted in the creation of wholly or partly privatised organisations tasked with the management of the destination and thus many CBs are now semi-public organisations that partner up with both private sector companies as well as local or regional authorities (Raj, Rashid and Walters, 2013). Most of these organisations continue to operate under the name 'convention bureau' or (where the function of the business tourism department and leisure tourism department have been merged) under the name 'convention and visitor bureau'. The primary function of CBs and CVBs remains unchanged and much of their role involves targeting PCOs and seeking the opportunity to bid for large scale international association conferences. Given their links to state funding, CBs and CVBs are thought to be impartial organisations, serving the destination stakeholders equally, whereas DMOs and DMCs are profit driven which influences how they work with clients and their destination stakeholders (Aureli and Del Baldo, 2019, Rogers, 2013). The difference between a DMO and CVB is illustrated in figure 2.2.

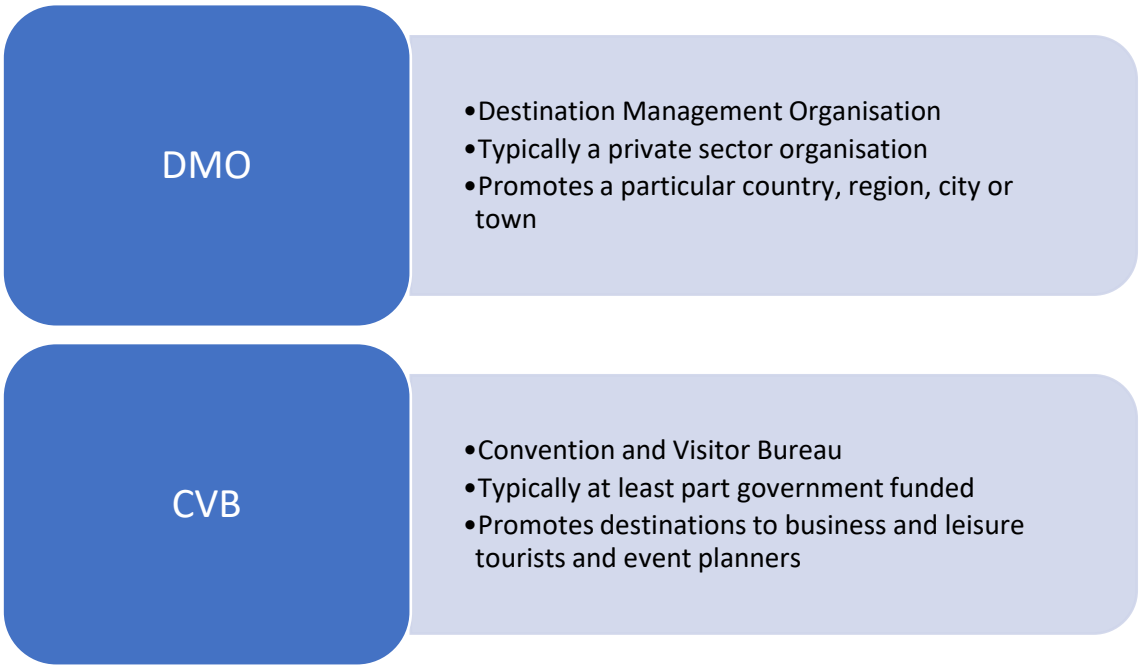

Figure 2.2 The Difference Between a DMO and a CVB (adapted from Nolan, 2018)

Given the scope of competition for conferences, CBs and CVBs also offer a number of financial incentives to encourage bookings. This can range from providing discounts for delegates (accommodation, transport, entrance to attractions etc.) to substantial financial support for the organisation of the conference, often referred to as subvention. Subvention can take the form of discounted venue hire, a contribution to marketing costs, a company loan, the provision of an event (e.g. a civic reception) or simply a donation (Nolan, 2018, Davidson and Rogers, 2016). Subvention is usually funded through central or local government budgets and as such it is generally available to CBs and CVBs but not to DMOs. It is generally administered by the CB or CVB and although the practice is much disliked by industry professionals (ibid) it is widely used, particularly in destinations where the CB owns the main conference venue. A number of traditional conference destinations offer subvention including Vienna and Barcelona and there is much evidence of newer destinations actively promoting their subvention fund including Singapore, Jeju (South Korea), Tallin (Spalding, 2017) and St Petersburg (McDonald, 2019). Within the UK, subvention is available in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and it is funded by the devolved administrations and administered by the three national convention bureaus. VisitBritain do not offer subvention funding for England (DCMS, 2013) however many cities across England offer subvention, albeit discretely, and this is funded through other sources such as regional councils (Wills, 2011b, Long, 2009).

2.7 International Competition

The significant economic impact of hosting international association conferences has drawn the attention of a number of governments worldwide in recent years. This has led to their investment in facilities in order to compete for a share of what is seen as a stable and lucrative market. The growth in competition has also forced existing destinations to revisit and question how they are managed and marketed (Van Wyk *et al.*, 2015) and government support for the MICE sector has become very apparent in both traditional and emerging destinations.

In particular, China has become a key player in the industry following significant backing of a bid to compete with traditional destinations, which was launched by the Chinese government at the end of the twentieth century. Additionally there have been substantial investments in infrastructure to support MICE events in South Africa, Thailand and Dubai (Quinn, 2013) and there is mounting competition from some of Asia's strongest economies including Malaysia, South Korea, and Singapore (Park *et al.*, 2014).

The heavy investment in infrastructure in a number of Asian cities has propelled Japan, New Zealand and Australia to take steps to reinvest in their MICE industry after losing market share to Asian competitors (Weber and Chon, 2002, Park *et al.*, 2014). Up to 25% of bids lost by Australia, has been attributed to the stronger financial incentives available in competitor destinations (Colston, 2019). In 2018 Melbourne State officials announced plans to increase funding for CB coordinated subvention packages, and government policy, investment and support for the MICE sector has been identified as the reason for the city's renewed success (Powell, 2020).

The US continues to lead the sector in terms of the number of international meetings and events taking place but also in terms of investment in infrastructure as over 100 purpose built convention centres were built in the 1970s and 1980s (Spiller, 2002). Support for the events industry has remained consistent from both state and federal offices. Federal legislators have since created laws to enable each state to build and finance event venues should they wish to and now approximately 60% of convention centres are state owned (Fenich and Bordelon, 2008). Furthermore, some states have extended their support to include the public financing of large hotels as part of their strategy to increase business tourism to the area (Nelson, 2006).

Across Europe, the industry is buoyant, with a healthy domestic sector accounting for 80% of all conferences held across the continent (ibid). Additionally, Germany, the UK, France and

Spain consistently fare well in terms of ICCA rankings. Data collected by ICCA records the number of meetings held by region, country and city, number of delegates, frequency and length of conferences which is then used to create annual rankings which act as a benchmarking system for both countries and cities. In 2019 these countries took the second to fifth ranks (respectively) with the USA retaining its first-place position (Colston, 2019). In terms of city rankings Europe dominates, accounting for at least eight out of the top ten city rankings in the last five years. Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Barcelona typically vie for and share the top four rankings with Singapore and Seoul making up the non-European entries in the top ten.

The criteria for ICCA rankings are narrow, as meetings are only counted if they are organised by an association, are held on a regular basis, have at least fifty delegates and rotate between at least three countries (ICCA, 2015). Therefore, the rankings provide a limited assessment of destination performance. However, as data are generated annually, the rankings provide a longitudinal assessment of the performance of key destinations and act as a useful benchmark for competitors. ICCA is the only industry organisation that conducts regular international research on destination performance in terms of association conferencing, and therefore the yearly rankings and reports are a valuable resource to the industry and academia.

In the UK, London is the leading destination in terms of the number of meetings held annually, and the city has retained a top ten ICCA ranking for the last five years. This is despite the fact that unlike a number of its international competitors, London has limited purpose-built conference space, none of which is managed by the CB, and despite inclusion in Spalding's (2017) table of destinations offering subvention (see chapter three), London does not have an official subvention policy or package. The DMO for London is 'London and Partners' a not for profit public-private partnership, which launched in 2012 and receives three quarters of its funding from the Mayor of London through a grant awarded by the Greater London Authority (GLA). In exchange for funding the London and Partner's remit includes attracting not just business and leisure tourists to the city, but also investors, businesses and students (London and Partners, 2020a).

In comparison to some of its international competitors, London appears to be under-funded, receiving just over £13million from the GLA in 2019 (London and Partners, 2020b) and although it is faring well in terms of ICCA rankings, a comparison of Las Vegas and London (see table 2.1) illustrates the disparity in funding and resources.

	London and Partners	LVCVA
Mission Statement	To support the Mayor's priorities by promoting London internationally as a leading world city in which to invest, work, study and visit.	To attract visitors by promoting Las Vegas as the world's most desirable destination for leisure and business travel.
Number of Employees	178	503
Total Annual Income in 2017	£21.6 million ($28 million)	£205.5 million ($267.2 million)
Economic Value of Tourism in 2017	£341 million ($443 million)	£ 45.2 billion ($58.8 billion)
ROI (based on income and economic value)	1,479%	219,851%
Number of Delegates Received in 2017	220,389 (1.2% of total visitor numbers)	6.3 million (14.6% of total visitor numbers)

Table 2.1: Comparison of the London and Las Vegas CBs, sources: (LCVCA, 2019; Partners, 2019; Fenich and Bordelon, 2008; London and Partners, 2019)

Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester also feature in the top one hundred cities. Elsewhere in the UK, resorts that have invested in suitable infrastructure including purpose-built venues and a range of hotel accommodation, have established themselves as successful destinations and this includes Brighton, Bournemouth and Torquay (Shone, 1998). However, the challenge faced by all conference destinations now and in the immediate future is maintaining growth and realising the benefits of investment (Weber and Chon, 2002). The market has become densely competitive and the continued growth in air travel makes it not just possible, but desirable, to hold meetings in new and exciting destinations. Although the international association conferencing sector continues to grow exponentially, the cities that are not yet in the top ten list are demonstrating the most growth (ICCA, 2015). Furthermore, Fullard (2019c), an industry journalist who has spent many years collating and analysing data on destination competitiveness, suggests that countries that receive significant government investment in both infrastructure and support for their convention bureaus will soon be able to overtake the traditional leaders.

2.8 The Economic Value of Business Tourism in the UK

Both halves of the conference sector generate a significant economic impact in the destination and income to associated industries (Lee, Lee and Yoon, 2013). Economic impact is identified as the nominal change in economic activity during the event to include spending (e.g. delegate spending on food, drink, accommodation etc.) and re-spending (the money earnt by local businesses that is also spent in the destination). In the UK, the most robust study of event economic impacts was commissioned by MPI in 2012. The research concluded that the delegate spend generated by qualifying events held in the UK (domestic and international) totalled just under £40 billion. The total economic impact, to include indirect and induced benefits, is predicted to be in the region of £60 billion. This converts to a contribution of £58.4 billion to the GDP, £21 billion in tax revenues and 423,445 FTEs. These figures demonstrate an overall contribution to the UK GDP of 2.9% and rank the events industry as the UK's 17th most valuable sector. Despite the political and economic uncertainty created by Brexit, prospects for the UK's MICE sector remain strong, reflective of the robust nature of the industry (Fullard, 2019c).

Business tourism is particularly attractive to destinations worldwide as delegates, attending a corporate or an association conference, will spend substantially more money in the destination than a leisure tourist (Rogers, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2014; Quinn, 2013). Data collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the International Passenger Survey (2013), demonstrates that the average daily spend of a business tourist can be around 72% more than that of a leisure tourist. Furthermore, the average stay of a business tourist is 50% longer than the typical destination visitor (Lee, Lee and Yoon, 2013; Lee, 2006) and they will often return to the destination for a follow up visit with their family (Morgan and Condliffe, 2006).

Business tourism is also particularly attractive to destinations due to the seasonality of these events. For example, spring and autumn are peak months for association conferences and this compliments the typical leisure tourism season experienced in both resorts and inner-city destinations. This creates a year-round tourism industry that sustains employment in towns and cities that would otherwise struggle to offer permanent jobs (Davidson and Rogers, 2016; Shone, 1998). This has been an extremely important element of the revitalisation of a number of UK coastal resorts that experienced significant decline in the late twentieth century, as a result of the impact of commercial air travel which led to a surge in outbound leisure tourism.

Investments by the public and private sectors in developing a business tourism offer has reinvigorated these destinations, thereby enabling them to provide continuous employment and year-round facilities to locals. This has contributed to the development of MICE related career opportunities for professionals which is mitigating some of the characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industries such as a limited career potential, high staff turnover rate and low average salary (Nolan, 2018, Rogers, 2013).

In addition to employment, business tourism can contribute to the development of destination facilities, create local business opportunities and promote community cohesion and a range of cultural benefits to residents (Nolan, 2020b, Raj, Rashid and Walters, 2013). As such, business tourism has the potential to generate a number of socioeconomic benefits, even in under-developed countries, and because of this it has become a strategic priority by a number of governments around the world. Much international government policy has been underpinned by event economic impact assessments and there is a growing body of literature on the wider benefits of business events and a number of detailed case studies illustrating the full potential of business tourism (Edwards *et al.*, 2014; Lee, Lee and Yoon, 2013; Nelson, 2006; Davies *et al.*, 2013; Van Wyk *et al.*, 2015; Dwyer *et al.*, 2000a). However policymakers tend to focus on the tangible benefits of events and ignore the, often greater, social, environmental and cultural impacts that events can have on communities (Davies *et al..*, 2013; Daniels, 2004; Morgan and Condliffe, 2006) even though the social legacies of conferences in particular can be substantial (Rogers, 2013).

2.9 The Socioeconomic Impacts of Business Events

Social impacts are those that impact on the quality of life of the local residents and these can be numerous (Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2003). The transformative power of events is well documented, yet the majority of event impact studies focus on sports and cultural events. However, despite this shortcoming in both literature and industry reports, there is evidence of how conferences in particular not only deliver economic prosperity, but can revitalise communities (Shone, 1998; Nelson, 2004), provide training and development opportunities for residents (Comas and Moscardo, 2005), enhance civic pride (Crouch, 2004) and create community cohesion (Lee, 2006). Furthermore, business events can reinvigorate facilities (Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2003) and the infrastructure developed to support conferences

improves the quality of life for local residents (Nelson, 2006). Events held in a destination create business networks and forums for knowledge exchange and training (Dwyer *et al.*., 2000a) and can draw significant media coverage of a destination which in turn can attract sponsors, investors and visitors and develop and improve the destination brand (Van Wyk *et al.,* 2015).

Another recognised socioeconomic benefit of events has been termed the 'psychic income'. This describes the positive psychological and emotional benefits that residents believe they receive from the event taking place locally, even if they do not attend the event themselves (Morgan and Condliffe, 2006). This is an example of the potential of tourism to induce sociological effects such as an enhanced sense of community pride which is an indicator of the social capital of the community (Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2003). Furthermore, the impact of corporate social responsibility is evident within the delivery of conferences as the trend for creating an event legacy in the destination is emerging. For example, delegates may volunteer their time and expertise to supporting community projects during their stay (Rogers, 2013) or a public information event will be staged by the organisers alongside the main conference (Wills, 2011b). Additionally, there is evidence that by hosting conferences, destinations can persuade organisations to relocate their headquarters to the area (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000), thereby creating long term socioeconomic impacts for the area. Furthermore, the holistic socioeconomic benefits of association conferences are considerable as not only do these events promote knowledge exchange and continued professional development, they are held to advance the goals of the organisation which can range from improving professional standards and eliminating poverty to combatting diseases and promoting sustainability (ICCA, 2015).
To summarise, despite the under-recognition of the wider benefits of hosting business events, the economic value of conferences is well documented and this continues to draw the attention of policy makers and investors. However, this is a worldwide trend and consequently the competition to host conferences is increasing with a number of established cities now bidding against emerging destinations. Across the globe, state support and investment in developing conference destinations is increasing and there is much evidence of newer destinations employing ever more aggressive tactics to secure conferences, including subvention.

2.10 Business Tourism Policy in the UK

The strategic development and growth of tourism has been a mainstay of UK national and regional tourism policy for several decades, since the publication of the Development of Tourism Act 1969. Government interest in business tourism was strong in the 1970s when state funding was used to create several purpose-built venues including the Wembley Conference Centre, the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in Birmingham and The Brighton Centre. This was part of the government's strategy to nurture the business tourism industry by developing inner city conference destinations and revitalising coastal resorts (Nolan, 2018) . However, support for tourism has been subject to peaks and troughs and changes in government priorities in the last twenty years has led to the sale of many of these venues to private investors (such as the NEC) or, in the case of the Wembley Conference Centre and part of Earls Court, demolished to make way for housing. Today, Liverpool, Manchester, London and Birmingham are successful conference destinations, each with a purpose-built conference and exhibition centre, however all are privately owned and operated. A number of coastal resorts are thriving in terms of the number of domestic association conferences that they host and this includes Blackpool, Southport, Eastbourne, Torquay, Brighton and Bournemouth. In each of these resorts the principal venue is at least partially owned and managed by the local government funded CB.

Today, tourism is a devolved matter and the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish and Northern Irish governments continue to invest in venues, generous subvention offers and financial support for their national CBs. Government support for the events industry in Scotland has been particularly strong since the publication of the first strategy for the sector, *Scotland the Perfect Stage,* in 2008. The policy sets out a vision for the development of business tourism and as part of the implementation of the policy, a bid budget of £2million was created to include a subvention fund of £800,000. The impact of the policy and the funding has resulted in VisitScotland winning bids for thirty-eight major conferences which is predicted to create a return on investment of £87million over seven years (Fletcher, 2013) and 24% of all major association conferences that take place in the UK each year are now held in Scotland (Fullard 2018a).

There is no CB for England and the UK's national tourist board, VisitBritain, is responsible for promoting England as a MICE destination. It must be noted that a limited amount of promotion is conducted through the VisitEngland website, but although this appears to be a

standalone DMO, it is now managed by VisitBritain. Funding for VisitBritain is through the DCMS and it has been subject to fluctuations in the last decade. During the lead up to the London 2012 Olympic Games, funding for the organisation was reduced by 34%. This led to VisitBritain cutting seventy jobs the following year and closing one of its main tourist information centres in Lower Regent Street. The vision for the Olympic legacy included growing the tourism industry by one million overseas visitors per year (DCMS, 2010) however, the ONS annual report showed that the total revenue from inbound tourism in the year following the Olympics fell by £8billion compared with the previous year. Tourism revenue for this year (2013) was comparable with performance in 2011, the year before the games, thus demonstrating no post games growth by that point.

Another impact of the pre-Olympics budget cut was that in 2010 VisitBritain ceased all promotion of business tourism, thus leaving England with no active DMO. Despite VisitBritain's suspension of the promotion of business tourism between 2010 and 2015, the UK retained a top six ICCA ranking during these years. This may be in part due to the fact that conferences taking place at this time would have been booked years earlier, but it could also be a residual impact of the halo effect around the time of hosting the Olympics. The halo effect refers to an increase in tourism to an event city as a result of the publicity generated by hosting a large-scale event (Jago *et al,* 2010). The continued promotion of business tourism at this time in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by their own national convention bureaus, will also have contributed to the ICCA ranking for the UK.

In 2015 VisitBritain resumed the responsibility for the promotion of business tourism in England and included the objective to 'establish a clear strategy and role in the Business Visits and Events Sector' in their 2016/17 annual report (VisitBritain, 2017). VisitBritain also began to support Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) management of sub-regional destinations, perhaps because LEPs are effective DMOs as they are less politically constrained than CBs (Cooke, 2018). The relationship between the events industry and government can be considered to be poor, particularly in England, as the industry feels unsupported, under recognised and undervalued (Colston, 2018; Rogers, 2013; Pugh, 2004). The events industry has no SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) code, which Jenny Jenkins, former CEO of EVCOM (Event and Visual Communication Association), describes as leaving it 'homeless' and she also commented on the industry's lack of a clear voice which limits the its ability to effectively lobby the government (Jenkins, 2019). In 2018 a number of industry professionals petitioned the government to stop its plans to close London's flagship MICE venue, the Queen

Elizabeth II Conference Centre (QEIICC) so that it can house government workers during a major refurbishment of the Palace of Westminster. The venue hosts in excess of six hundred events per year, generating a net economic contribution to the economy of £145million and closing it could cause irrevocable damage to London's MICE sector (Fullard, 2018b).

2.11 A Critical Review of the UK's Events Industry Strategy

In 2015, the DCMS launched the Business Visits and Events Strategy (2013) as the first policy document for the events industry, aimed at growing the sector by 2020 and giving confidence to businesses to create more event jobs. The policy is designed to support VisitBritain in targeting specific international exhibitions, increasing the number of successful bids for international association conferences and removing barriers to bidding (DCMS, 2013). Progress on the implementation of the strategy to date has been limited as, for example, the policy states the development of the UK MICE sector could include 'investing in a new, congress style event facility' (2013, p.19), however, this has not yet happened and the government has since begun to plan the closure of the QEIICC. Additionally, although the policy sets out the goal of providing government support of a bid for the World Expo in 2025, the UK did not submit an application to host the event. Furthermore, an examination of the minutes of the Events Industry Board meetings (the industry/government body tasked with delivering the strategy) indicate that no progress has been made on the strategy's twenty proposals (Events Industry Board 2017, Events Industry Board, 2018).

In 2019, the government also published the UK Governments International Business Events Action Plan and the Tourism Sector Deal (2019). All of these policy related documents acknowledge the growing international competition to host business and government's commitment to increasing non-seasonal visitor numbers through business events. The Tourism Sector Deal (2019) also confirms the government's commitment to delivering the International Business Events Action Plan (2019) which refers to improving bidding capabilities to make the UK more competitive. This action plan also confirms the government's ongoing position regarding subvention, in that it will not fund it for England, stating that the country's conference offer is strong enough without it (DCMS, 2013, DCMS 2019). The strategy and the action plan acknowledge that subvention is widely used by the country's competitors (DCMS, 2013) but state that most requests for support are not financial. Conversely, the BVEP research (upon which the policy document has been designed) states that a number of bids

have been lost to overseas competitors due to the lack of subvention funding in the UK (BVEP, 2011, BVEP 2016).

The lack of progress made against the Events Industry Strategy may suggest that this policy, and the subsequent action plan, do not provide sufficient guidance to support the development of business tourism in England. Furthermore, as global competition to host business events intensifies, the MICE sector in England may well be at risk of decline. The lack of adequate government recognition of and support for the events industry, particular business events, continues to frustrate industry professionals (Fullard, 2020). The economic uncertainty created by Brexit and the significant impact of the Covid-19 virus will also contribute to the fragility of England's business tourism offer and may deflect government attention away from supporting the MICE sector. This could have a serious impact on the many businesses directly and indirectly reliant on business tourism in England.

2.12 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that business tourism is the most stable sector of the events industry and an important socioeconomic driver in most countries. There is a complex relationship between different governments and their events industries, highlighted by fluctuating support for national convention bureaus. Regardless of funding challenges, CBs must actively compete to host large-scale conferences and subvention is an example of the tactics used by established and emerging destinations. Despite this, there is limited evidence of what type of CB support is most valued and most sought by PCOs and how this influences the choice of destination (Falk and Hagsten, 2018; Elston and Draper, 2012; Chacko, 2000).

In the UK, London and Glasgow are leading conference destinations despite the differences in the level of support from their national convention bureaus. However, there is growing competition from a number of new destinations, many of which have recently received significant state funding and support and evidence of aggressive campaigning being undertaken by emerging destinations and renewed efforts on the part of a number of traditional destinations. The UK government's new policy for the events industry is focused on the growth of the association conference sector in England, however there are indications that VisitBritain, who have been tasked with delivering this objective, has not yet made any progress against this goal. As competition to host events is intensifying, the conference sector

in England may be under increasing pressure. This would negatively impact the many businesses and professionals reliant on business tourism. The aim of this research is therefore to explore and understand the role of CBs in competing for international association conferences and this may point to alternative policy options that could be used in future policies. A change in policy direction could sustain and then grow the UK conference sector as a whole, thereby ensuring its long-term future prosperity. Consequently, chapter three will present a detailed review of the literature on the process of site selection within the organisation of association conferences. The chapter will draw on a range of international perspectives and examples of destination management from around the world. The chapter will explore governance within business tourism and establish the current academic dialogue on the emerging topics of the role of the PCO and destination competitiveness.

3.0 The Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two of this thesis presented a contextual overview of the association conferencing sector in terms of both its stature and significance globally as well as within the UK. Developing the key themes identified in chapter two, this chapter will explore the literature on the site selection process that is specific to the organisation of association conferences. Additionally, this chapter will review theories of competitiveness and customer relationship management and consider their relevance within the context of convention bureau operations and PCO/CB relationships. In particular, this chapter will principally focus on two of the objectives of this exploration which are to critically review the type of support offered by leading and emerging international convention bureaus to PCOs and to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process.

According to the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2018), there are four ranked event management journals. The highest-ranking journal (two star) is *Event Management*, additionally one star has been awarded to *International Journal of Event and Festival Management, Journal of Convention and Event Tourism* and *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events.* All of these journals have been accessed via the University of Chichester and the University of Winchester and have yielded useful articles which will be cited in this chapter in addition to a number of other journals that have provided insightful work, notably the *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management.* The literature on planned events is developing, however tourism and leisure are more established fields (Thomas and Bowdin, 2012) and as such a select number of business tourism specific articles from the four star journals *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Tourism Management* have proved extremely valuable to this investigation. These journals are the most used and respected within the subject area (Park and Park, 2017; Getz and Page, 2016) and they will provide a solid foundation to this chapter.

Google Scholar and access to the British Library have been useful resources in the literature search which have provided access to many lesser known international papers of particular relevance to this inquiry. Event management is a young academic discipline and was first taught at HE level in the UK in the 1990s. Thus, most publications that are specific to the subject area, also date from the late 1990s onwards. There are a small number of articles from

the 1970s to 1990s that are relevant to this inquiry, and consensus across the literature that the first exploratory study of the convention site selection process was undertaken by Fortin and Ritchie in 1977. However, the literature does also suggest that as an emerging subject, there is still much to be learnt about a number of aspects of event management and in particular, the topic of business events is under-reported. However, for the purpose of underpinning this investigation, it has been possible to locate all academic publications which reference the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences from 1977 to present. To corroborate this, a number of journal articles were found which feature a comprehensive review of business tourism literature (Getz and Page, 2016; Elston and Draper, 2012; Park and Park, 2017; Crouch, 1997) and these have facilitated a process of cross checking which has ensured, as far as possible, that every published article discussing the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences will be included in this review.

In addition to academic literature, this chapter will draw on a number of industry articles and government publications (UK and international) to reveal notable controversies, standpoints and trends in the management of association events. The UK publications Conference News, M&IT (Meetings and Incentive Travel) and MeetPie are useful sources of industry opinion as these are well-established trade magazines that have been publishing articles by leading business managers and event management journalists since the 1980s. This chapter will therefore present a comprehensive review of the literature on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences and summarise the key articles that have established and progressed the academic dialogue on this growing area of investigation.

3.2 Conceptualising the Process of Site Selection

The first attempt to conceptualise the site selection process was published by Fortin and Ritchie in 1977. Their exploratory study used generic literature on organisational purchase behaviour to develop a rudimentary conceptual model of the site selection process, the first of its kind to be applied to business tourism. The model, shown here, is rather basic as it simply outlines a four-stage process (as highlighted). It does, however, acknowledge the characteristics of the association and the 'buying center' (the committee and PCO) as important antecedents and the primary research included in the article is very insightful.

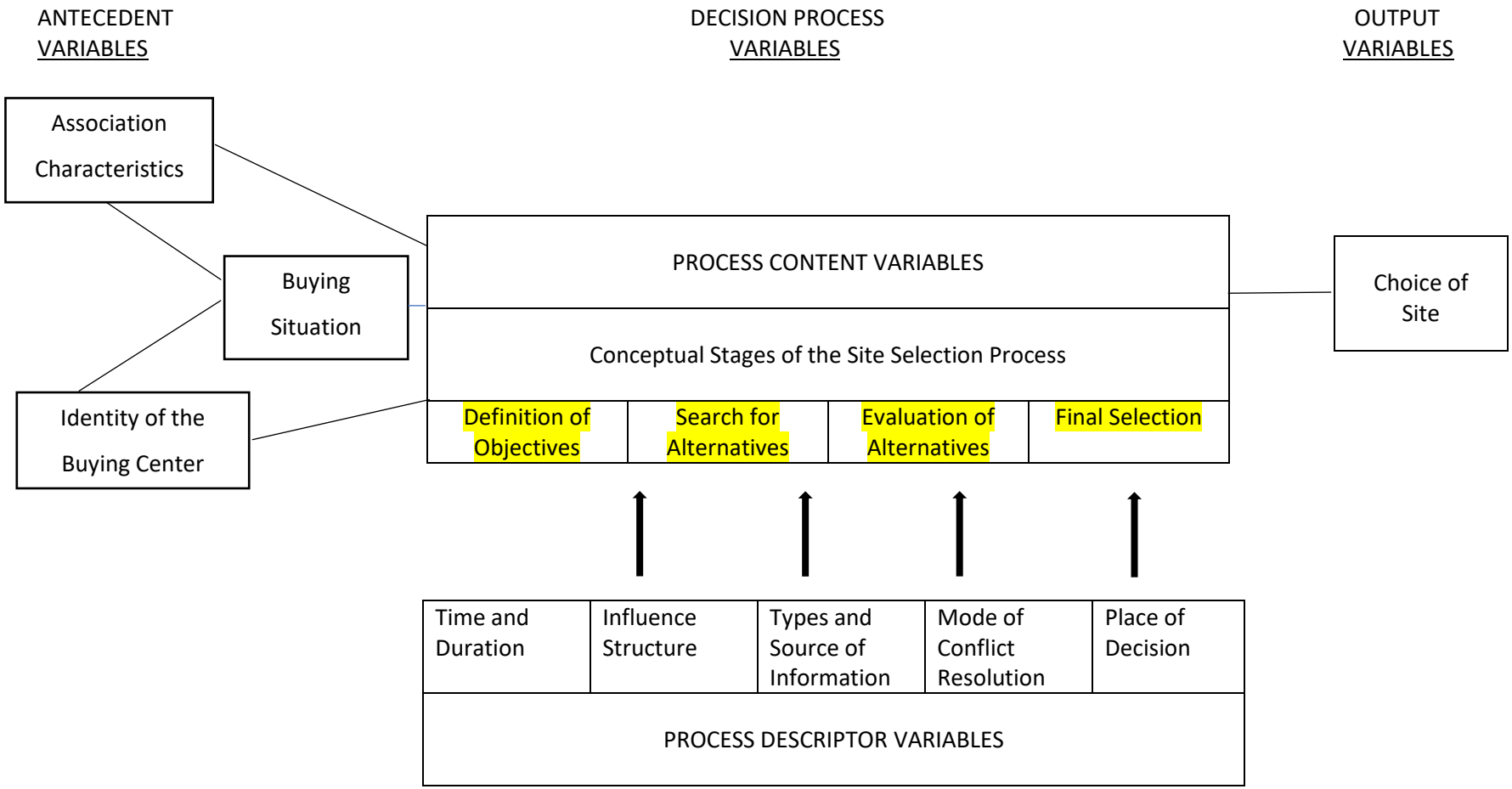

Figure 3.1: Fortin and Ritchie's Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process (1977, p.14)

Fortin and Ritchie's (1977) investigation involved surveying various members of association committees and asking them to rank thirty-nine variables that the authors believed to feature in the site selection process, which included conference rooms, convention bureau aid, price levels and financial assistance (as highlighted). The complete list of variables is presented in table 3.4 (below).

Variable	Ranking	Variable	Ranking
Hotel Service	1	Exhibit Space	21
Hotel Rooms	2	Well-Known Site	22
Conference Rooms	3	Scenery	23
Air Access	4	Language	24
Price Levels	5	Getting Away	25
Personal Safety	6	Never Visited Site	26
Hospitality	7	Recreation Facilities	27
Restaurant Facilities	7	Auto Access	28
Geographic Location	9	Regional Lifestyle	29
Hotel Info/Assistance	10	Potential Contacts	30
Local Interest	10	Convention Center	31
Local Availability	12	Pre/Post Activities	32
Metro/Resort Site	13	Professional Activities	33
Tourism Features	14	Rates of Exchange	34
Transport Facilities	15	Financial Assistance	35
Previous Experience	16	Published Information	36
Convention Bureau Aid	17	Sports Facilities	36
Spouses Activities	17	Major Event	38
Border Crossing	19	Children's Activities	39
Climate	20		

Table 3.1: Variables Influencing the Site Selection Process (Adapted from Fortin and Ritchie's Rated Importance of Factors (1977, p.17))

There is limited literature within the article and as such, it is unclear how they identified the variables, yet despite this, this seminal piece of research has influenced a number of successive investigations which use the model and the variables as a basis for further research. In particular, conference rooms (the main conference venue in particular), price levels (cost), convention bureau aid and financial assistance have featured in subsequent articles and are particularly interesting to this investigation and will be discussed in this chapter.

3.3 Variables Influencing the Site Selection Process

There have been thirteen principal studies into the site selection process dating from 1995 to 2018 and each reaffirm that the variables represent the key to destination competitiveness, particularly in terms of attracting association conferences. As such they have provided a useful foundation for the basis of this inquiry in terms of establishing key elements of site selection. In terms of which of the Fortin and Ritchie's (1977) original variables influence the site selection process, the thirteen studies, all involving PCOs, yield a number of comparable results. Cost is a variable that is cited in all studies, from Clark's (1995) early investigation, to Park *et al.*'s (2014) more recent work. This is unsurprising and reflective of, not only the influence of delegates, but also reports from the UIA (2015) that the financial management of the conference is a major challenge and source of anxiety for the PCO. Most associations charge a registration or attendance fee to delegates (Shone, 1998) and the revenue generated through this contributes to around one third of an associations annual operating expenses (Lee and Fenich, 2016) thus the event represents an extremely important income stream, thereby placing the PCO under pressure to secure high attendance and deliver an outstanding event. The quality and capacity of the main conference venue have also been cited as an extremely important variable by Opperman (1996), Choi and Boger (2002) and Crouch and Louvriere (2004). Most studies discuss the importance of being able to 'sell' the destination to delegates. Rompf, Breiter and Severt (2008) suggest that a destination's brand image is a mixture of its name and logo, identifying images and anything that consumers associate with the location. Although this is a little vague, they also go on to describe popular destination brands as ones that evoke heritage, local culture, scenery and status. In their studies of site selection Di Pietro *et al.* (2008) cite the promotional appeal of the destination as one of the top four factors while Chacko and Fenich (2000) and Jiang *et al.*, 2016 suggest that the image of the destination is the most important variable of all.

The specific facilities in the destination are noted by many as significant and these include the proximity of the venues to each other as well as the overall accessibility of the location (Crouch and Louvriere, 2004, Nelson and Rys, 2000 and Kang *et al.*, 2005). The safety and security of the destination features most prominently in the older investigations (Oppermann, 1996; Nelson and Rys, 2000; Choi and Boger, 2002). The reason for it appearing less frequently in more recent studies, is likely to reflect the fact that security is now a major issue at all events and not destination specific. By comparison, the political stability of the destination and the

role of the government in business tourism has appeared as a key variable in the more recent investigation undertaken by Nolan (2020b), Park *et al.* (2014) and McCartney (2014).

There are a number of criticisms that can be applied to all of the aforementioned studies, which illustrate the limited scope of the research and raise questions about the generalisability of the results. Firstly, nearly every investigation has focused on a very narrow geographic area such as parts of China (Park *et al.*, 2014), parts of Australia (Crouch and Louvriere, 2004, Comas and Moscardo, 2005) and specific cities within North America (Opperman, 1996, Clark *et al.*, 1997, Chacko and Fenich, 2000, Nelson and Rys, 2000, Choi and Boger, 2002, Baloglu and Love, 2005 and Di Pietro *et al.*, 2008). In so doing, this has meant that the PCOs involved in the research have a limited remit in terms of the type and size of the conferences they organise. This is liable to influence their view of the site selection process, which is likely to be far more formulaic than it is for the majority of association conferences, for which the site selection process is extremely complex (Weber, 2000, Chiappa, 2012). All of the authors of the thirteen investigations have noted the limited geographic scope of their research, which points to a need for future inquiries, to take a more international approach in terms of the location of the PCOs involved in the research. However, the overlaps in the investigations highlight the location factors that are most attractive to a PCO and suggest that costs, venue capacities and venue quality are significant elements of destination competitiveness.

Of the thirteen studies of the site selection process from the point of view of the PCO, eleven were conducted using quantitative methods which has limited the depth of the results as in each case the researchers capped the number of variables that they included in surveys, and the rationale for inclusion or rejection of variables is, in each case, quite limited. This is most evident in the investigations conducted by Clark and McCleary (1995) and Nelson and Rys (2000) who chose to omit the support of a CB with no explanation and extremely limited references to any literature within their work. Even in the investigations conducted by Oppermann (1996) and Comas and Moscardo (2005), who initially discuss the significance of the support of a CB and comment on the work conducted by Fortin and Rithie (1977), the influence of the CB is omitted from their questionnaires. In the case of Comas and Moscardo's (2005) inquiry, this is an apparent oversight as their research culminates with their updated model of the site selection process in which they add in the role of the CB as a significant factor in the site selection process.

Moreover, very generic terms are used in the descriptions of the variables. For example, it is unclear what is included in 'price levels' in Park *et al.*'s (2014) survey, or what is meant by Di Pietro *et al.*'s (2008) 'perceived value for money'. The vague terminology has been an issue in all of the studies, which started with Fortin and Ritchie's (1977) variables which also included 'price levels' as well as 'convention center', 'major event', 'local availability', 'professional activities' and 'local interest'. Such vague descriptions raise a number of questions as to what was meant by the researcher and also how this has been interpreted by the respondent. For example, 'price levels' could refer to the cost of hiring all of the meeting rooms, the cost of accommodation, the cost of travel to and within the destination, the cost of services within the destination (to the PCO, such as local suppliers, and to visitors, such as retailers and attractions). Price levels could be interpreted as meaning the average price of all or some of these expenses and in terms of international conferences, it could also refer to exchange rates. A greater exploration of these terms would therefore lead to a more rounded understanding of what the variables are and what meaning they have to both PCOs and CBs. This would seem achievable via qualitative research so that the terminology is not predetermined by the researcher but discussed and explored with participants. Furthermore, in many of the studies the researchers have tried to rank the importance of each variable, using different mathematical methods and as Crouch (2011) points out, this is a very questionable approach because of the multidimensional and intangible nature of many of the variables and because there has not yet been any consensus in literature as to how this can be achieved (Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2003; Caber, Albayrak and İsmayıllı, 2017).

Only two of the studies were conducted using qualitative methods; Clark and McCleary (1995) interviewed twenty-three association PCOs who were all based in Washington DC, and Comas and Moscardo (2005) interviewed ten association PCOs based in northeast Australia. When discussing their methods, Clark and McCleary (1995) explain that they were interested in exploring *how* PCOs choose a destination, and Comas and Moscardo (2005) were keen to discover *why* they are influenced by certain variables. To both sets of researchers, this was deemed more valuable than simply identifying and ranking *what* influences the choice of destination. Clark and McCleary's (1995) investigation confirmed the importance of the PCO in the committee and the flexibility of choice of destination. However, on the whole their exploration is limited in scope, as although the process for site selection is reviewed, key variables such as cost and destination image are not discussed in detail, and the role of the CB is not referred to at all. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that the interviewers asked respondents to focus on key elements of the site selection process including the perceived risk

associated with the event, the power dynamics of the organising committee and the 'buyclass' of the destination which is their term for how familiar the committee and the association are with the location.

Of all of the studies of the site selection process, only Comas and Moscardo's (2005) approach was to allow PCOs to freely discuss the topic, without imposing any restrictions on what they could comment upon. The overall purpose of their investigation, was to explore and progress the conceptual model of the site selection process that had been created by Crouch and Ritchie (1997). This model has proved enormously influential over the site selection literature, as it has been cited in each of the thirteen studies of this process and as such, it remains the most prominent publication in this area of research.

3.4 The Development of Conceptual Models of the Site Selection Process

Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) model was an extension of Ritchie's earlier effort with Fortin and was created through an extensive review of site selection literature. Crouch and Ritchie (1997) reviewed sixty-four articles, to include work predating the Fortin and Ritchie (1977) investigation and up to and including Opperman and Chon's (1997) influential work on the conference participation decision. The aim of Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) investigation was to synthesise the key findings from literature which reported on the variables influencing the choice of destination. Using their results, they created their conceptual model of the site selection process for association conferences, as shown here. Their model represents a major development of the original, in that it focuses on the variables that influence the decision, rather than the process of making the decision. The model condenses the variables into eight principal factors (highlighted), and although these are fairly broad, the article includes a comprehensive annotation of each factor. The discussion confirms that although price is not identified as a standalone factor, it is an important element of five of the factors; accessibility (road and air access to the destination), local support, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities and other criteria.

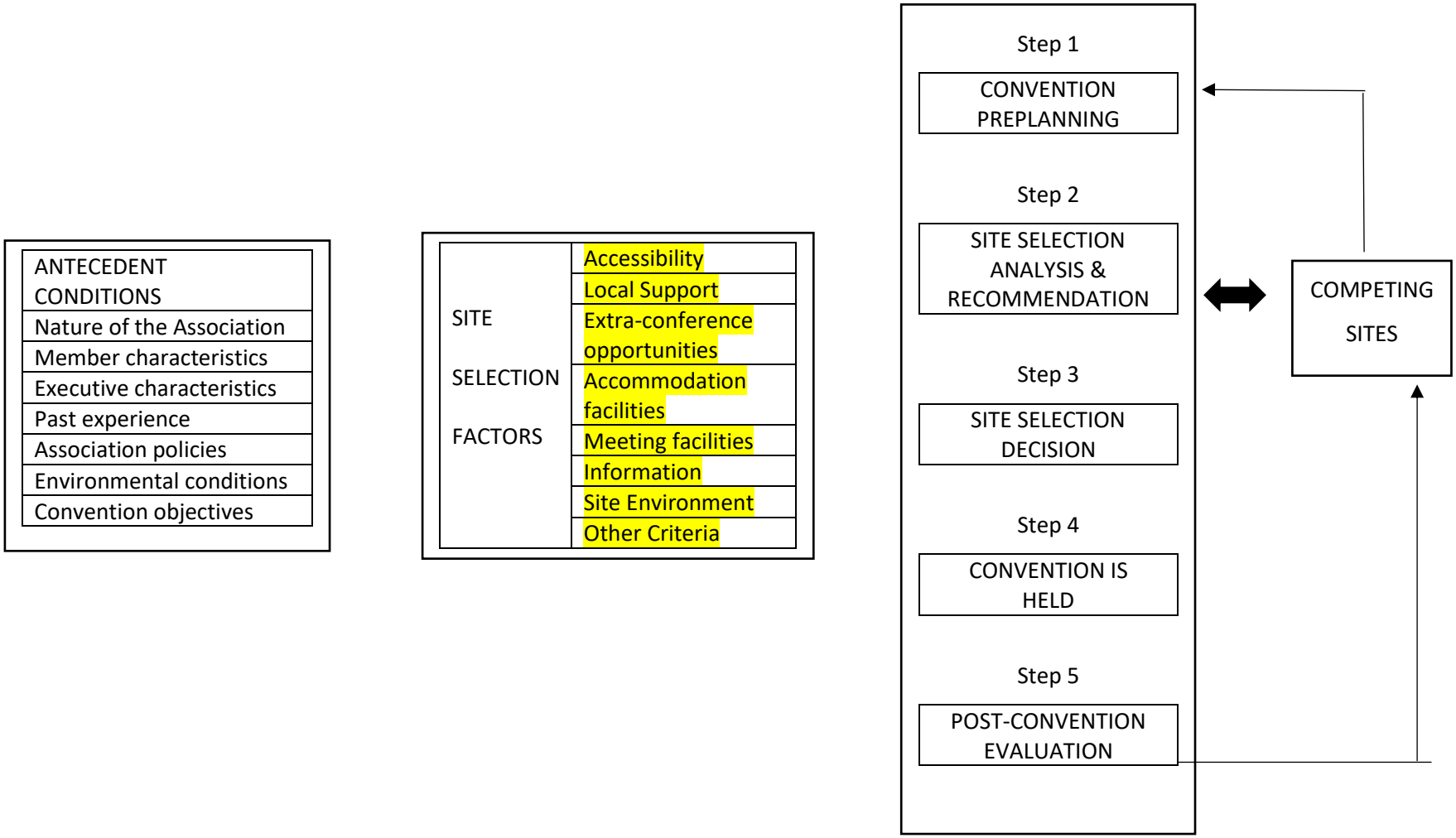

Figure 3.2 Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) General Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process

The term 'local support' features on the model and Crouch and Ritchie (1997, p.59) go on to explain that this refers to two services provided by CBs which are 'planning, logistical, and promotional support…[and] subsidies – the extent to which the destination offers to defray costs through rebates and subsidies'. The inclusion of 'local support' is important for two reasons. Firstly, this acknowledges the significance of the CB in the site selection process and this is a substantial development from Fortin and Ritchie's (1977) original work. Secondly, the model introduces the notion of subsidies as an important element of association conference management and destination competitiveness and points towards the use of subvention.

Crouch and Ritchie confirm that all of the variables are underexplored and that the original purpose of their article was mainly to 'stimulate increased academic interest in this fertile field' (1997, p.52). This was certainly needed, as their article was the first major publication on the site selection process in twenty years and it has been an effective springboard for research as the model continues to be cited in contemporary investigations. The most recent investigation, conducted by Jo *et al.* (2019) has resulted in a very comprehensive and detailed list of forty-five variables which breaks down costs into many components including government incentives. They have updated the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) model to incorporate some of these variables, and although the resulting model is more detailed, it really just confirms the existing literature which collectively demonstrates there are many factors that influence site selection. The inquiry conducted by Comas and Moscardo in 2005, however, remains the most notable attempt to develop the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) model and take up their challenge of deepening our understanding of the meaning of the variables.

Comas and Moscardo's approach involved interviewing a small number of association PCOs and although this culminated in a limited amount of primary research, the results provide insight into areas of the site selection process that have previously been largely untouched. The key finding of their research is that the bidding process for a conference is a specific and significant stage in the site selection process, and one that involves CBs. Furthermore, their findings confirmed that the venue and the costs involved were important influences over site selection. There are two aspects of the Comas and Moscardo (2005) inquiry that are of particularly noteworthy; their chosen methodology, and the inclusion of CBs in their updated model of the site selection process. Their chosen methodology was unusual in that it was purely qualitative in support of an exploratory study with a focus on words rather than numbers in order to make progress on understanding the variables in site selection (Comas and Moscardo, 2005). This approach proved effective as it enabled them to explore key terms

with PCOs which led to them making a total of eight amendments to the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) model and these are highlighted here.

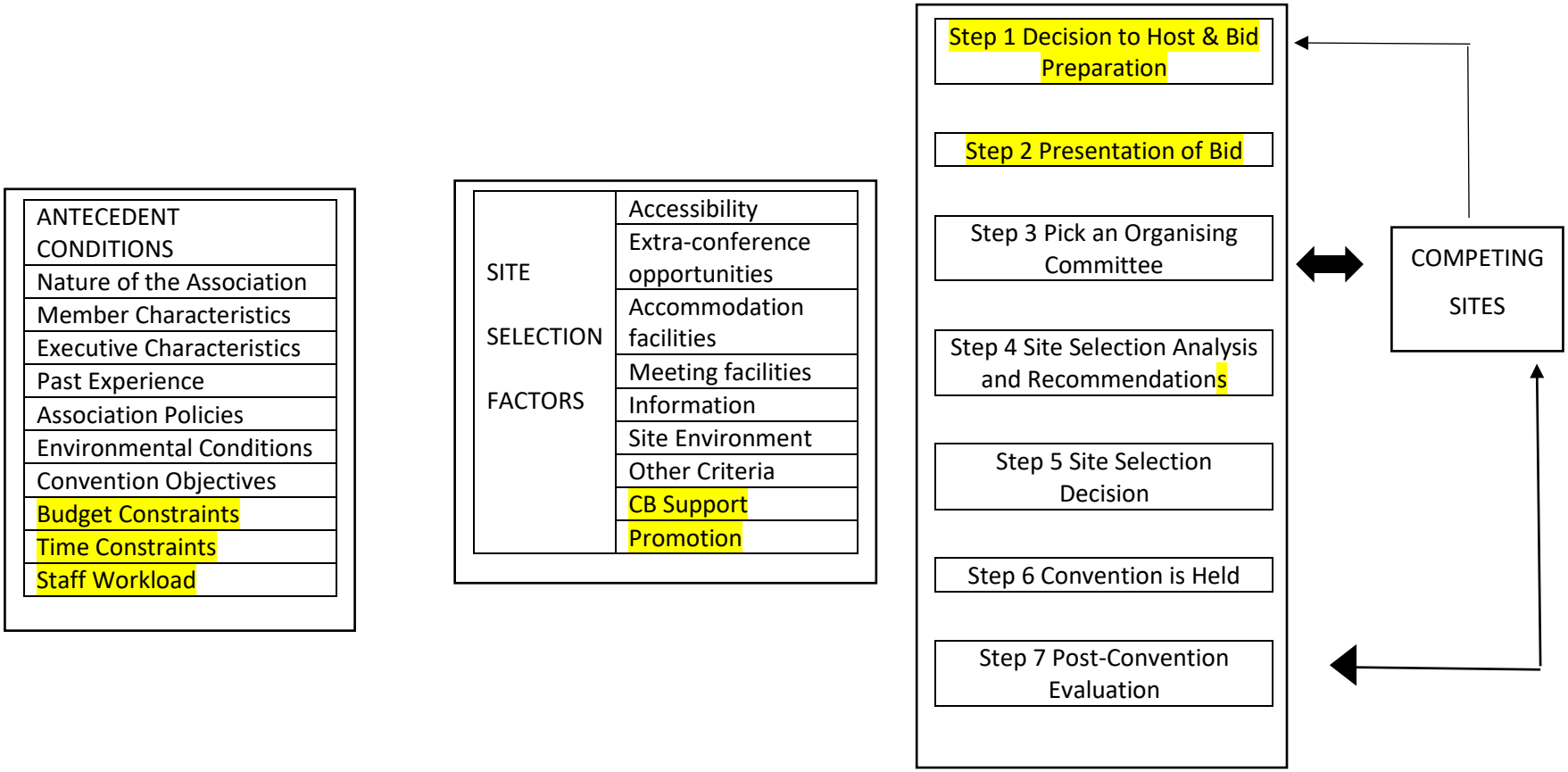

Figure 3.3 Comas and Moscardo's (2005) Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process

The Comas and Moscardo (2005) model draws attention to some of the challenges and processes of site selection namely budget and time constraints. They have extended the list of antecedents, in part to reflect the growing importance of budget on the organisation of association conferences. The model also updates the wording on Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) version from 'local support' to 'CB support'. Although this is a minor modification, it is significant because it acknowledges the heterogenous role of the CB in the organisation of association events as being extremely influential. Furthermore, as Comas and Moscardo (2005) note, the involvement of the CB in the bidding process and in providing subvention are noted by respondents as not just extremely important, but at times, being the deciding factor in choosing the destination. However, the authors conclude that the although the term 'CB support' has earned its place on the conceptual model of the site selection process, this remains a vague description of CB services and the importance of CB support remains under researched. Yet, what their research has demonstrated is that it is possible and important to continue to develop the conceptual model of the site selection process and as Di Pietro *et al.* (2008) confirm, the investigation conducted by Comas and Moscardo (2005) has paved the way for more investigations. Moreover, as Crouch (2011) later points out, there is now great value to be had from conducting qualitative research into destination competitiveness.

Nearly all of the studies of variables and destination competitiveness have produced empirical research specifically from the PCOs' viewpoint (Jo *et al.*, 2019) and in nearly every study, the PCOs were identified and approached via their national trade body. This is reflective of both a growing understanding of the significance of the PCO in the site selection process and the emergence and professionalisation of the role that has ensued in the last forty years. Although the original Fortin and Ritchie (1977) model demonstrates the characteristics of the association as an important antecedent, the subsequent research has shown that these are less influential on the site selection process than previously thought as most of their conferences are entirely flexible in terms of destination (Weber, 2001; Chiappa, 2012; Elston and Draper, 2012). The role of association management companies are important, and certainly worthy of further exploration, as there is growing evidence of their role in part to full conference management for associations (Dumas, 2016). Similarly, there is scope to assess the influence of committees, referred to by Fortin and Ritchie (1977) as the 'buying center', and both committees and AMCs are examples of important antecedents. However, as the PCO is repeatedly identified as the most influential member of the committee they remain the focus on this inquiry and the literature on PCOs and their relationship with the rest of the committee, delegates and CBs, is fundamental to this investigation.

3.5 The Relationship Between the PCO and the Committee, and the PCO and Delegates

As identified in the literature supporting the models of site selection, the conference organiser, often referred to as the 'buyer' is the key stakeholder in the choice of destination. Within the organisation of association conferences, the buyer may be one person (a PCO), or a committee of several people, usually to include one PCO or at least one highly experienced volunteer. In some cases, the buyer may also refer to association management company

There have been very few scholarly inquiries into the role of the committee in the site selection process, but early investigations and more recent work have produced comparable results. Kim *et al.* (2015) produced a detailed study of the influence of different committee members on the choice of destination, suggesting that the chairperson or association director can sway decisions according to their personal preferences. This is a view shared by Chiappa (2012) and Fawzy and Samra (2008). However, they all agree that even when a strong-willed president has the ultimate choice of destination, the committee will override this and make final decisions, usually based on the advice, judgement and recommendations of the PCO. Kim *et al.* (2005) and Clark *et al.* (1997) all infer that although the PCO will consider the views of the chairperson, they will eliminate undesirable or unworkable choices and manipulate the information presented to the committee in order to influence the decision. This is an example of strategic event management in practice, whereby managing the client is an element of the role (Nolan, 2018). Furthermore, the power and sway of the PCO over the site selection process will increase with their tenure (Clark *et al.*, 1997) and as most PCOs have accrued at least ten years of relevant experience, their influence over committees is nearly always going to be significant.

The influence of delegates on the site selection process is very underreported, however there is some literature on the relationship between the PCO and delegates. Opperman and Chon's (1997) formative research into the delegates' conference participation decision making process, was the first study to formulate a conceptual model of the interrelationships of key stakeholders in the organisation of association conferences and this has shaped successive investigations. They concluded that delegates are primarily influenced to attend a conference by cost, specifically the cost of travel to the destination and the fee for attending the event (Oppermann and Chon, 1997). The destination was cited as important to delegates, mainly in terms of the cost of travelling to and staying in the location, but destination image was also noted as being relevant. However, as Jago and Deery (2005) and Fawzy and Samra (2008)

point out, a key limitation of Oppermann's and Chon's (1997) work is their avoidance of discussing the role of the CB in conference management despite their involvement as a key stakeholder and they suggest that future research should involve CBs.

Successive research on the influence of the delegates over the choice of destination is vague. Choi (2005, p.66) describes delegates as an 'educated customer base', meaning that collectively they will have extremely high expectations of the event. Hiller (1995) notes that the PCO will seek to maximise attendance and will therefore take the views and preferences of the delegate into account. Jago and Deery (2005) confirm that delegates have an influence over the site selection process in abstentia, as the PCO will want to satisfy them. However, none of these authors elaborate on these statements or articulate the level of influence of delegates' preferences and expectations over the decision-making process. Conversely, more recent research into delegate motivation to attend conferences has produced clear results, indicating that the primary drivers of attendance is the opportunity to gain and exchange knowledge and to network (Lee, Lee and Yoon, 2013; Mair, Lockstone-Binney and Whitelaw, 2018) and although it is important, the location of a conference does not appear to greatly influence the delegate's decision to attend. However, it must be noted that the destination becomes a more significant element of the event if a partner programme is going to operate, which occurs at approximately 20% of association conferences (Jago and Deery, 2005). Furthermore, due to the limited budget of many association delegates, the location of the conference is important in that it must be cost effective to travel to the destination and a variety of accommodation options must be available in the area (Mair, Lockstone-Binney and Whitelaw, 2018). Therefore, in terms of the influence of delegates over the PCOs choice of destination, price is clearly the main factor to be considered.

3.6 The Relationship Between the PCO and the CB

The literature exploring the connection between the PCO and the CB is extremely limited. Of the thirteen studies of the site selection process conducted with PCOs, few discuss the relationship between PCO and CB and the lack of involvement of convention bureau staff in their research has been identified as a key limitation by Park *et al.* (2014), Comas and Moscardo (2005), Fawzy and Samra (2008) and Jago and Deery (2005). However, what is evident in the existing literature is that in terms of the process for making site selection, and other key decisions, PCOs are highly dependent on the help and support of CBs. Despite the

obvious appeal of the internet to provide an alternative, and potentially cheaper means of making destination choices, PCOs continue to favour using CBs over alternative means such as another type of intermediary or simply the internet (Jago and Deery, 2005; Chacko, 2000; Shin *et al.*., 2016; Weber and Chon, 2002; McCartney, 2014). This is particularly true in the case of high-risk events which includes any international conference (Shin *et al.*, 2007). There is also evidence that experienced PCOs are more likely to use the services of a CB than less skilled meeting planners (Nolan, 2020b, Weber and Chon, 2002, Shin *et al.*, 2007) as familiarity with their services has shown them that using a CB is the most time and cost-effective way to organise a complex, destination event (Nolan, 2018, Rogers, 2013). Furthermore, there is much evidence that the early and proactive intervention of the CB in the site selection process is very much sought by PCOs (Weber and Chon, 2002; Fawzy and Samra, 2008) and this has been identified by them as a key stage in the process of creating a trust-based relationship with destination stakeholders (Shin *et al.*, 2015). Industry research conducted by both ICCA and the UIA continually highlights the dependence of PCOs on CBs, particularly in support of the organisation of association conferences (UIA, 2015, ICCA 2015). Furthermore, all PCOs involved in Jago and Deery's (2005) research confirmed that the CB has an extremely important role to play in the management of events as they are uniquely positioned to coordinate the cooperation of a whole city. In particular, PCOs greatly value the extensive and unbiased local knowledge provided by CBs (Shin *et al.*, 2017, Davidson and Rogers, 2016, Nolan, 2018) and their strong relationships with government organisations (Jago and Deery, 2005, Rogers, 2013). Thus, the relationship between event organiser and CB is crucial in the management of complex association events, yet thus far there has been limited research which fully explores the type of support that is sought by and provided to PCOs and very few investigations have drawn on the views of CBs despite their prominent role in the site selection process.

3.7 The Role of CBs in Site Selection

CBs initially developed in the 19th century in cities that were characterised by the presence of industrial activity and infrastructure in place for leisure tourism (Marques and Santos, 2017). They are now commonplace in nearly every major city in the world, and most countries operate a combination of city, regional and national CBs. Historically most CBs, have been funded by a central or local government, however, financial support for their operations has

been subject to much fluctuation in recent years (Cooke, 2018, Rogers, 2013, Dwyer *et al.*., 2000a). As a consequence, local and regional tourist bodies in particular have shifted from being inside and outside of council control and sometimes this has resulted in them disappearing altogether (Pearce, 2015). Bonham and Mak (1996) explore this in their investigation of public versus private financing of destination promotion in the USA, highlighting that until 1993 all states received state funding for promoting tourism but since the mid-nineties there has been a clear trend towards the abolition of all such funding in favour of alternative methods such as a bedroom tax. This is a state supported compulsory tax deduction of around 5% of each accommodation booking in the destination which goes directly to the CB, thereby providing them with a fairly reliable and constant income stream. This has proved enormously effective in cities such as Las Vegas, which has a large quantity of bedstock, but also a world class and exceptionally busy convention centre (Sanders, 2002). In the UK the bedroom tax system is less popular, although the cities of Oxford, Bath, Brighton, Birmingham and parts of London are considering the scheme (Cooke, 2018) and it is about to be launched in Edinburgh. Moves to introduce a bedroom tax have been vehemently opposed by the British Hospitality Association (BHA) who attest that it would be disastrous for the industry, as UK hotel rooms are already taxed at double the rate of most European hotel rooms (Fountain, 2017).

In an attempt to categorize CBs, based on funding and governance, D'Angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi's 2010 investigation, culminated in a definition of four archetypes: normative, leading firm, entrepreneurial and fragmented. Normative CBs may be publicly and privately funded, governed by the state (e.g. Vienna). Leading firm CBs are publicly or privately funded and governed by their members (e.g. Barcelona, Berlin). Entrepreneurial CBs are funded and governed by a single organisation (e.g. Milan). Fragmented CBs are typical in destinations where the rise of business tourism has been unplanned and haphazard (e.g. Perugia). VisitBritain is an example of a normative CB, as its funding comes from many sources and it is governed by the state, through the DCMS.

Although the four archetypes are still broadly applicable to business tourism today, many CBs have faced huge cuts to their state funding in recent years while demand for their services has increased (Reinhold, Beritelli and Grunig, 2018). This has led many CBs in the UK and around the world to explore different approaches to replacing or supplementing their income, such as by implementing a commission system on accommodation bookings and reservations, increasing the sales of merchandise and chargeable services (e.g. research) and in some cases

merging with other DMOs (Beritelli and Laesser, 2014). In total, Beritelli and Laesser (2014) identified 7 potential revenue sources for CBs which are listed below. The first four are examples of commission and chargeable services and the rest are state subsidies or taxes.

1. Membership fees
2. Partnership platforms, initiatives
3. Commercial revenues
4. Overnight taxes
5. Regional and state subsidies
6. Municipal subsidies
7. Tourism taxes

Table 3.2 Revenue sources for DMOs, source: Beritelli and Laesser, 2014, p214.

Bonham and Mak (1996) are firm advocates of the bedroom tax system and argue that it is the most effective way to privately finance a CB, perhaps because it represents a combination of all of Beritelli and Laesser's (2014) revenue sources. However, they also point out that this ensures the continued involvement of the state which is not necessarily beneficial as, for example, this can slow down operations. Furthermore, if CBs are state funded or supported (even partially) this does contest Jago and Deery's (2005) claim that they are in a position to lobby government bodies. Using D'Angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi's (2010) archetypes of DMOs, most CBs are classed as 'normative' or 'leading firm' organisations and as such they are either fully or partially state funded and governed. Their relationship with government may be strained as in order to survive they must operate as commercial organisations which can conflict with being bound by government policy (McCarthy, 2014). The relationship between privately owned CBs and government can also be strained as there is clear evidence that the enormous financial pressure placed on CBs has created much tension between the two (Pearce, 2015, Beritell and Laesser, 2014, Jago and Deery, 2005). In some cases, this has also negatively impacted the relationship between CB and PCO as Shin *et al.* (2017) explain; the CB/PCO relationship is based on a mutual understanding and awareness of profit needs, and the increased financial strain experienced by CBs has unsettled the trust placed in them by

PCOs. While Shin *et al.'*s (2017) assertion may be true, relationships between PCOs and CBs tend to be exceptionally positive and to date, Weber's (2000) exploration of meeting planners' evaluation of CBs remains the most substantial review of their role in conference management. She notes the nine principal CB services most valued by PCOs which are listed and explained in table 3.3.

CB Service	**Explanation**
Destination Information	Provision of information about products and services available, marketing materials etc.
Referral Services	Suggesting appropriate and reliable suppliers in the destination
Lead Services	Venue finding
Registration Staffing	Providing staff to support registration upon arrival at the conference venue
Familiarization Trips	Sponsored visits to the destination for PCOs
Housing Assistance	Accommodation booking service (e.g. for delegates)
Attendance Promotion	Marketing support to promote the conference
Convention Center	Management of the principal venue
Registration Services	Support with the process of delegate registration at the conference venue/hotels

Table 3.3: Weber's (2000, p.603) List of CB Services

This would appear to still be the most comprehensive account of CB services to date and in addition to identifying these nine key areas of CB operations, Weber (2000) also notes that CBs are used more by experienced PCOs and generally by PCOs organising association conferences. The overall high quality of service is noted as the key reason that PCOs use CBs (Weber, 2000) and there is an underlying theme in Weber's (2000) research that being able to trust an experienced CB is important to PCOs. Taking into account that the conference sector has grown exponentially since Weber (2000) undertook this investigation, there is scope to investigate whether these services still accurately reflect the nature of the CB/PCO relationship today. Such research could be then be used to apply Weber's (2000) list of CB services to the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) or Comas and Moscardo (2005) model of site selection.

Weber (2000) is not the only researcher to confirm that the relationship between the CB and the main event venue is critical to winning association conference business. This has also been noted by Wills (2011a) who has suggested that this has implications on the site selection process. Frequently, a publicly owned CB will also manage the main conference venue in the destination or have responsibility for its commercial operations (Fenich, 2008; Fenich and Bordelon, 2008). This is partly why a number of venues operate at a loss (Weber and Chon, 2002; Jones and Li, 2015) as the focus of the CB is to attract the high yield conference to the destination (Weber, 2000) which can be achieved by offering subsidized room rental (Rogers, 2013, *Park et al.*, 2014, Fenich and Bordelon, 2008). Discounted or free venue hire is one example of the type of subsidy used to defray costs and this is commonly referred to within the MICE sector as subvention. Furthermore, the cost of hiring the venue has been repeatedly identified as a significant factor in the management of conferences (Robinson and Callan, 2002). The implication of this setup on the choice of destination is significant in that if the CB is responsible for determining the hire charges of the conference centre, the CB controls two of the key variables that have the most influence on PCOs; cost and venue. Therefore, although they are not named in a number of important investigations, the conclusions drawn by researchers indicate that the CB is integral to attracting PCOs to the destination and they have a much greater influence over the site selection process than the literature would seem to indicate. This reaffirms the need to involve CBs in future research and suggests how models of the site selection process may evolve.

3.8 Subvention

Subvention is the state funded provision of financial incentives used to attract association PCOs, such as a cash donation, a company loan, payment for event marketing or free venue hire and the fund is usually administered by a CB (Nolan, 2018, Rogers, 2013). Although the use of government funded subsidies within the MICE sector is a common global practice, it is not generally discussed or promoted (Park *et al.*, 2014). This is perhaps because it is widely disliked, likened to bribery (Rogers, 2013) and considered unethical by some (Spalding, 2017). Such aversion to its use may explain why the word ‘subvention’ appears infrequently in published journal articles on site selection, conference organisation or destination management. There may be a reluctance to discuss it on the part of research participants (particularly PCOs), moreover there may be a limited scholarly awareness of this industry

practice. The terms 'financial support', 'incentives' and 'subsidies', however, are used although often without explanation other than to confirm that they are offered by CBs to attract PCOs as is the case in of articles published by Crouch and Ritchie (1997), Weber (2000), Park *et al.* (2014) and Baloglu and Love (2004). Additionally, McCartney (2008), Jones and Li (2015) and Edwards *et al.* (2014) confirm that the use of incentives can refer to free or reduced venue hire that is provided through government subsidies. It is arguably true that subvention is a form of discounting, or subsidizing costs. However, anecdotally, industry professionals seem to agree that the term 'subvention' refers to a specific agreement and form of support between a CB and an association. For example, in contrast to the absence of an academic discussion of the term subvention, there are a number of industry reports and articles which discuss it, particularly in reference to destination management and competitiveness. Wills (2011a, 2011b) and Spalding (2010, 2017) have reported regularly on the use of subvention by CBs for industry magazines and, although by no means comprehensive, particularly in terms of which destinations discount venue hire, Spalding (2017) has produced details of the type of subvention offered by a number of destinations, which includes free venue hire or a donation towards the operational costs of the conferences (noted in table 3.3 as cash).

Destination	Cash	Free Venue
Belfast	√	√
Gijón	√	
Hong Kong	√	
Jerusalem	√	
Lausanne	√	
London	√	
Osaka	√	
Porto	√	
Utrecht	√	
Vienna	√	
Warsaw		√
Zurich	√	

Table 3.4: Destinations Offering Subvention (Source: Spalding, 2017)

Dioko and Whitfield (2010) are perhaps the only scholars to use the term 'subvention' in their work, and after investigating price competitiveness within business tourism, they suggest that subvention is unsustainable and does not influence site selection. However, they add that this contradicts all other research and their findings are largely based on analysing the performance of one destination (Macau). In his discussion of global subvention practices Spalding (2017) confirms that although there is no consistency or transparency in the use of subvention in the MICE sector, it is widely used and destinations are keen to discover what their competitors are offering. There has been much evidence of this in other trade publications in articles published in MPI (Basler, 2010), Kongres Magazine (Ozbuk, 2017) and CIT (Fletcher, 2013) presenting case studies of how destinations, particularly emerging ones, are using subvention as part of their strategy to attract association conferences. Furthermore, in a recent blog, the editor of trade magazine Associations Meetings International (AMI), congratulated Seoul's CB on its innovative subvention scheme which rewards association PCOs who meet their targets on delivering sustainable events (AMI, 2017).

Long's (2009) investigation into global subvention practices for M&IT magazine concluded that national subvention funds are common. Long (2009) goes on to suggest that having a centrally funded subvention budget and strategy is key to destination competitiveness and a transparent central policy mitigates some of the criticism around the ethics of offering financial incentives. In terms of subvention policy, Wills (2011a) explains that the destination will typically offer subvention in relation to the number of delegates attending a conference and historically this approach has been effective as it minimises the financial risk to the destination and supports the argument that subvention is a proportional incentive. The BVEP (2011) have calculated that the return on investment for destinations that offer subvention is twelve to one, further illustrating the use of subvention as a sales strategy rather than a bribe.

The use of subvention has worked for the city of Glasgow, an example of a normative CB, as its funding comes from many sources but primarily from Glasgow City Council who govern the organisation. Glasgow's CB partnered with the purpose-built conference and exhibition centre to co-create a subvention package. This formed part of their joint initiative, called 'The Glasgow Model', which has proved effective in attracting international association conferences thus generating a significant return on investment (Wills, 2011b, Rogers, 2013). Specifically, over the last twenty years Glasgow has attracted a number of major international association conferences, including more than twenty engineering events, generating an economic impact of around £400 million for the city (Wood, 2018).

Some of Glasgow's success has also been attributed to its ambassador programme which has proved highly effective in attracting technical associations to the city, partnering with the University of Strathclyde's leading engineering department (Fullard, 2018). An ambassador programme is a CB led strategy for the identification and training of key destination professionals who will help to bid for specific conferences, usually within their trade related associations (Rogers and Davidson, 2015). As in the case of Glasgow, academics can make suitable ambassadors as they promote the specialist knowledge base in the destination which can form part of the CB's bid strategy. Lockstone-Binney *et al* (2014, p66) investigated the motivation of ambassadors and conclude that ambassador programs are a 'must-have in a DMOs' arsenal of strategies for attracting international meetings and events'. On the whole there has been limited research into how effective ambassador programmes are as part of CB operations (ibid) although in the UK they appear to have been most effective in destinations that also offer subvention such as Derry, Blackpool and Glasgow. Furthermore, the overall success of the Glasgow Model has been attributed to the clear subvention offer and policy, and the efforts of the CB to use it as part of a campaign to develop strong relationships with PCOs (Fletcher, 2013). Wills (2011b) goes on to confirm that leading industry professionals, including the chair of ABPCO (Association of British Professional Conference Organisers), agree that simple and transparent subvention policies work best and to be effective they should be clearly advertised to PCOs. Therefore, industry publications clearly demonstrate the active role that subvention plays in destination and conference management. However, although the Glasgow Model features in the Roger's (2013) academic textbook, subvention has yet to be overtly discussed in any journal article. Consequently, from an academic perspective, the specific lure and influence of subvention, as well as ambassador programmes, over site selection remains unknown and could prove a valuable element of future research.

3.9 Policy for Business Tourism

There is a dearth of literature on policy for the events industry (Dredge, 2001; Ritchie, 2003) and since the release of the Getz's book *Event Studies; Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* in 2007 there have been no publications focusing on policy for the industry with the exception of Foley *et al.* 's (2012) *Event Policy*. However, within these publications the discussion and case studies focus almost entirely on leisure events. Although the 'analysis of tourism policy is in its infancy' (Dredge, 2011, p.377), there are a small number of international

journal articles which discuss policy in reference to business tourism in developing and established destinations and Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) book *The Competitive Destination*, includes a chapter devoted to events and public policy and these have proved extremely useful to this inquiry.

Gursoy, Saayman and Sotiriadus (2015) confirm that although there is no single definition of what is meant by destination governance, this generally refers to the process of setting and developing policy and strategies for destination success. Almeida-Garcia (2017) suggests that policy is a vague concept, accepted by some as a general phenomenon and by others as a political instrument. Within the scope of this thesis, policy is considered to be a political instrument as per Ritchie and Crouch's (2003, p.148) definition:

> tourism policy can be defined as a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide the framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken.

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) go on to suggest that policy formulation should ensure that a destination remains sustainable (it must retain and protect its resources) and competitive (be able to compete effectively within the marketplace). Jones and Li (2015) argue that a policy for business tourism should be determined at a national rather than a regional level in order to set the tone for the country's industry. Weber and Chon (2002) concur, as they confirm that a national policy on business tourism is an essential mechanism to ensure the sustainability of the sector without which some destinations will stagnate and decline. A central policy can also reduce internal competition for events which can occur when associations approach more than one CB per country (Jago and Deery, 2005) and this internal sharing of knowledge is an important element of destination competitiveness (Thomas and Wood, 2015). Furthermore, at the IMEX Policy Forum in 2018, an industry event attended by association leaders, and national and city level policy makers, a national policy was determined to be important as

> An integrated approach [helps] to avoid conflicts with other areas of government policy and regulation [plus] immigration, taxation and security policies support a meetings strategy (Cameron, 2018, p.2)

When discussing the discretionary provision of tourism in the UK, Pugh and Wood (2004), describe how at local authority level, limited policy direction can result in missed opportunities

and they suggest that this can be improved through a national strategic destination marketing plan. They go on to confirm that long term strategies are needed to effectively manage destinations, a view supported by Falk and Hagsten (2018) and Grzinic and(2012) who suggest that destination management must be conducted in a way which enables a gradual advancement of competitiveness through a proactive policy.

There have been a number of barriers to successful policy development for the industry felt across the globe, identified by Weber and Chon (2002) as the fragmented nature of the events industry, and by Jones and Li (2015) as a lack of evidence-based decision making. Furthermore, user communities tend to lack awareness of academic research, particularly in relation to policy formation (Minnaert, 2014). Dredge (2015) also confirms that not only does a lack of research limit policy-making, but a lack of coordination and commitment to policy implementation is a characteristic of governments that do not value tourism and events.

However, there is now a growing argument that policy should be informed by experienced academics (Getz, 2012b) and that the knowledge generated through academic research into policy issues provides tools, frameworks and insight that can be readily used by policy makers (Ritchie, 2011, Dredge, 2015). An example of such a framework has been developed by Almeida-Garcia (2015, p.5), shown here, which suggests that the development of a tourism policy is a 4 step process; *demand*s - identifying government interest in a problem, *decisions* – steps taken to address the problem, outputs - the use of goods and services to deliver political decisions, and *outcomes* – the results of an implemented policy.

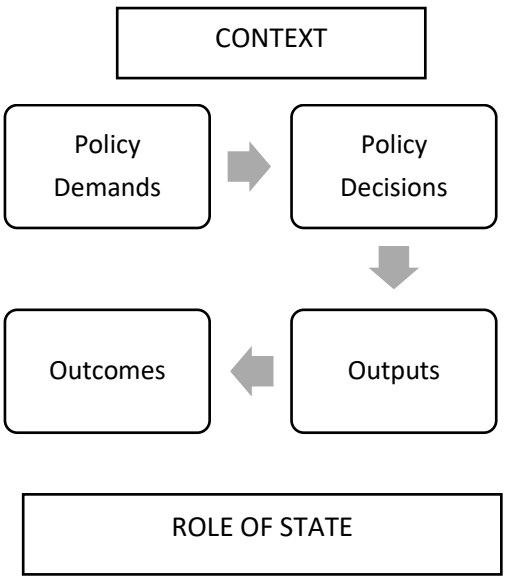

Figure 3.4 Components of Tourism Policy (Almeida-Garcia, 2017, p.7)

There is however scope to develop this framework, particularly to expand on policy decisions. This could be achieved by looking at competitive theory and models of site selection to determine what a policy for business tourism should consider, for example in order to support a destination in bidding for conferences as this has become a very competitive market. Australia is a particularly interesting case study of where policy for business tourism has been robustly compiled and successfully implemented.

3.10 Business Tourism Policy Study: Australia

Australia has traditionally had a top down interest in tourism development as a result of having a strong, centralised postcolonial government (Dredge, 2001). State powers, and responsibility for regional tourism development, increased in the latter part of the nineteenth century and became a key priority across the country during the economic boom felt after the Second World War (ibid). Policy and funding for tourism is now provided at federal, state and territorial level and the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade hold the portfolio for tourism in the current Australian Government (ibid). The government has its own Bureau of Tourism Research, who regularly report to them on the country's performance in terms of inbound and domestic leisure and business tourism. The government funds Tourism Australia, the national tourist board, who report to the Federal Minister for Tourism and produce the country's tourism policy (Tourism Australia, 2020). The current policy, 'Tourism 2020', was launched in 2011 with an overall objective of increasing tourism revenue from A$70 billion to A$115 billion per year and plans to launch the next strategy in 2021 are well underway (Australian Trade and Investment Commission (2020). The government released funds totalling in excess of A$43 million to state and territory governments to help them achieve the goals of Tourism 2020 and an additional tourism recovery package of A$76 million was put in place after the 2019 bushfires (ibid).

Business Events Australia, a subsector of Tourism Australia, is responsible for promoting the country as a destination for MICE events (ibid). Australia faces much international competition to host business events, particularly from Singapore and Hong Kong (Weber and Ladkin, 2003). In an effort to attract PCOs to the country, the government launched the Business Events Bid

Fund Program which is a subvention fund available to qualifying international business events. Funds can be offered by Business Events Australia during the bidding process and PCOs must complete an application requesting a specific amount of subvention. There is no upper limit and the amount requested can be used to cover event costs including accommodation, venue hire and transport. Qualifying applications (events with at least 700 international delegates generating an economic value of more than A$3 million) are advised to apply for a minimum of A$50,000 (Business Events Australia, 2020a). The Australian government have not revealed how much subvention has been provided through the Bid Fund, however in 2019 after reports that Asian rivals were increasing their share of the market, the government was asked by industry to increase the Bid Fund by and extra A$10 million (Colston, 2019). A report from Business Events Australia (2020b) confirms that the Bid Fund helped them to win thirty bids in the previous year, with an average of 1,659 delegates per association conference, resulting in an ROI on subvention of twenty-four to one. In terms of the most recent ICCA rankings, Australia has jumped up one place to twelve and is far ahead of Singapore (31) and Hong Kong (34) (ICCA, 2019). It could be argued therefore that Australia's success as a conference destination can be attributed to its experienced convention bureau, robust and well-established policy and government funding as the country's business tourism industry is thriving despite intense competition from Asia. This conclusion can be further substantiated when taking into account theories of competitive advantage and Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model of destination competitiveness.

3.11 Theories of Competitiveness and Customer Relationship Management

As well as developing the conceptual model of the site selection process, Crouch and Ritchie (2003) explored and developed a model of destination competitiveness based on theories of competitive and comparative advantage including Porter's (1991) five forces. Using Porter's (1991) theory, the ability of a destination to compete for association conferences will be affected by existing and new competing destinations, the power of suppliers to the industry, the power of associations and PCOs that work for them, and the threat of substitutes (e.g. virtual conferencing).

Crouch and Ritchie (2003) have acknowledged the influence of the micro and macro environment on destination competitiveness and developed a model to identify the five key areas of specific relevance to destination competitiveness, as highlighted. The model

acknowledges the fundamental aspects of a destination in 'qualifying and amplifying determinants' such as the need for the destination to be known. Core resources and supporting factors breaks down the components needed within the destination, such as infrastructure and (road and/or air) accessibility. The model draws attention to how the destination is managed, and to the role of destination policy and indicates that these significantly impact upon the competitiveness of a destination.

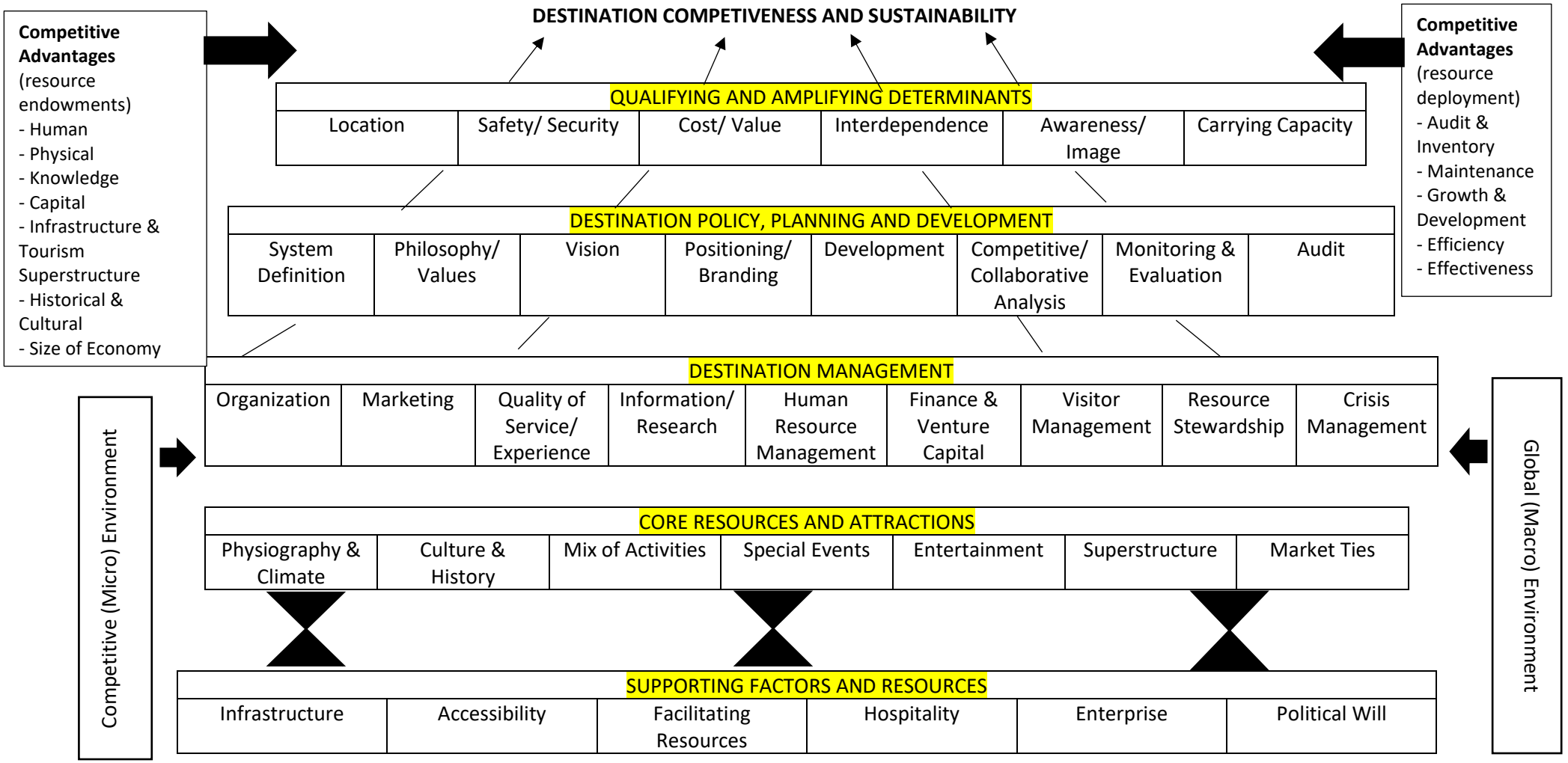

Figure 3.5: Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness

In subsequent articles Crouch (2004) discusses the model in detail and explains how it is substantiated by literature on destination competitiveness from a range of sources, thus indicating its relevance and generalisability to the events industry. Crouch (2011) also confirms that a competitive advantage is gained not just through destination resources but also through the capacity to deploy them. Zehrer and Hallmann (2015) concur, explaining that the competitiveness of a destination is centred on adding value to the products available, much of which is achieved through an appropriate policy. Getz and Page (2015) illustrate this by citing not just investment in infrastructure but also in bidding capabilities as the ultimate key to success and the ability to offer discounted venue hire and subvention are forms of bidding capabilities.

Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) value positioning theory could also be applied to destination competitiveness and indeed Blythe (2009) suggests that this has greater flexibility in a contemporary business environment's than Porter's (1991) theory. They argue that there are three broad areas of organisational competence; operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy and to prosper a business must match its competitors in two of these areas and outperform them in the other (Treacy and Wiersema, 1995). Applying this to Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model would suggest that for destinations to survive they must have a range of resources which are managed by a competent team and they must have strong relationships with customers (within business tourism this would include PCOs). The value positioning theory could also be used to compare destinations, with a simple scoring system applied to destination's resources and relationships. Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) strategy once again infers that experience and trust are vital components of the CB/PCO relationship.

Despite Crouch and Ritchie (2003) drawing attention to the importance of how the destination is managed, there has been extremely limited research exploring what makes a CB competitive. Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) noted this gap in literature and developed the first conceptual model of DMO success. This was subsequently updated by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) who also drew on the work of Comas and Moscardo (2005). Their model identifies four determinants of DMO success: networking, transparency, resources and professionalism. It is not clear exactly what is meant by these terms, as neither article (Volgger and Pechlaner, 2014, Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010) discusses them, which appears to be quite a significant oversight. It can be assumed that networking refers to a CB's relationship with destination stakeholders, resources is the list of destination attributes (as detailed on Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model) and professionalism could refer to the CB's

experience and the trust placed in them by PCOs. Further research to explore these terms is certainly warranted as what is clear in the literature is that in order to survive, CBs must now compete with an increasing list of rival destinations (Jiang *et al.,* 2016, Chiappa, 2012, Park *et al.,* 2014). As such marketing theory could provide insight into how destinations must operate in order to successful compete.

Marketing theory is long established, but towards the latter part of the twentieth century it has become more focused on customer relationship management (CRM) (Kotler, 2008). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.20) have pioneered the development of relationship theory, stating that they 'theorize that successful relationship marketing requires relationship commitment and trust'. Their research led to the development of their commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, which they confirm can be applied to all marketing scenarios including B2B services, and which they illustrate in their key mediating variables (KMV) model of relationship marketing, as shown in figure 3.6

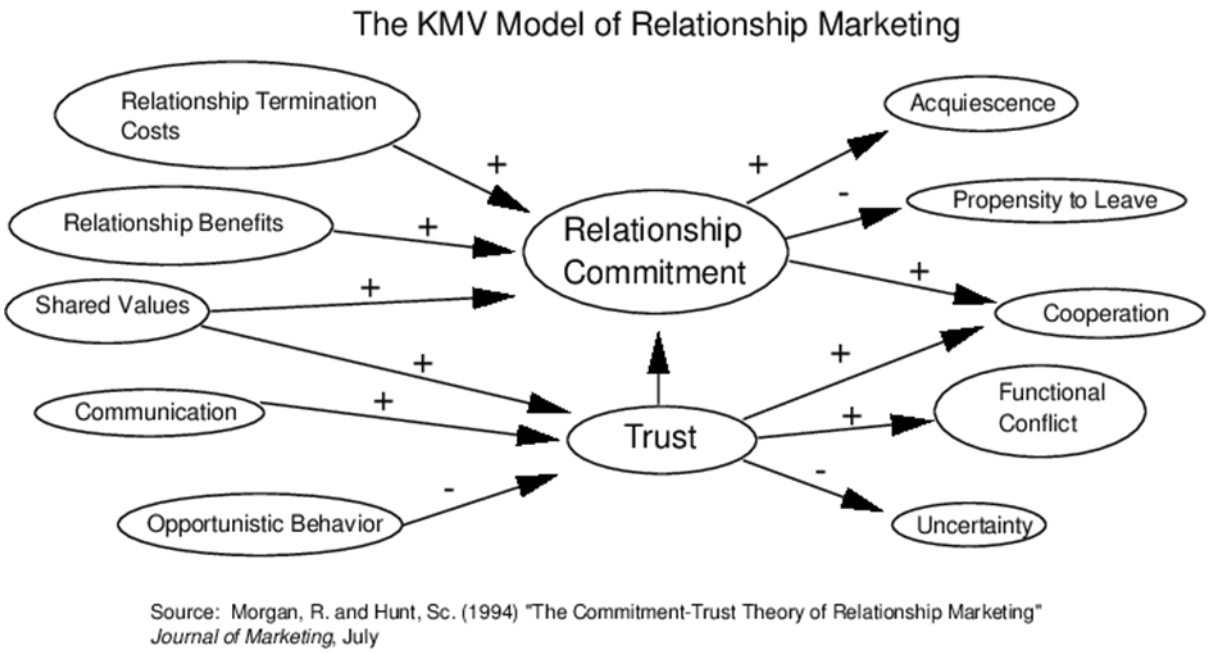

Figure 3.6: Morgan and Hunt's (1994) KMV Model of Relationship Marketing

As figure 3.6 illustrates, there are several key components to relationship marketing and applied to a CB/PCO relationship this would include shared values, strong lines of communication and benefits (such as links to other suppliers). Within the model, uncertainty and opportunistic behaviour (e.g. being deceitful) are noted as detracting factors while trust in and commitment to the relationship are central to the success of the relationship.

B2B marketing theory began to emerge in the nineteenth century (Cortez and Johnston, 2017), and as it has evolved it has also placed particular emphasis on the role of trust in successful B2B relationships (Levitt, 1986, Buttle, 1996) resulting in a general consensus that trust is the cornerstone of successful B2B relationships (Naudé and Holland, 1996). Developing this notion further Maister (2005) suggests that earning the confidence of a client involves being able to demonstrate trustworthiness. Research by Doney, Barry and Abratt (2007) suggests that in B2B relationships, particularly within the service sector, trust is more of an influence over the success of the relationship than cost. Most views of trust discuss client vulnerability (Sakburanapech, Sackett and Cooper, 2006) and this is a key element of Doney, Barry and Abratt's (2007) view of trust as they state that within a B2B relationship, the trusting party (buyer) must be in some way vulnerable (there must be risk involved). They go on to confirm that a service provider must be credible and benevolent and applied to the PCO/CB relationship, the process of site selection can be viewed as high risk, particularly for international conferences, thereby making the PCO extremely vulnerable. The credibility and benevolence of a CB could be determined by their level of experience and the extent of the relationships within the destination and with the government. Additionally, Doney, Barry and Abratt (2007) suggest that although price might not be the driving factor in a transaction, cost savings offered to the buyer by the provider is further evidence of their credibility and benevolence and therefore engenders trust. Within a PCO/CB relationship the most substantial cost savings could be achieved through venue discounts and subvention and thus, this indicates that these elements of the CB's offer will generate PCO trust. In summary, theories of competitive advantage and relationship management can, in principal, be applied to the process of site selection and the CB/PCO relationship, but in order to establish PCO trust, CBs must be able to demonstrate how they are trustworthy. As such, there is certainly scope to empirically test and potentially develop these theories in relation to business tourism and specifically to the relationship between a PCO and a CB.

3.12 Destination Competitiveness

In terms of destination competitiveness for association conferences, there have been significant developments across Asia in the last 25 years which has led to the emergence of new conference destinations referred to in literature as 'second tier' cities. Second tier, or secondary, cities, are typically smaller cities that have historically attracted mostly domestic conferences but are now aspiring for a stake in international conferences (Nelson and Rys,

2000). Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and Oppermann and Chon (1997) noted that second tier destinations were finding it relatively easy to compete for association business in the late 1990s and this trend has gained momentum as destinations in the Asia-Pacific region in particular have been taking market share from Europe and North America since the turn of the century (Weber, 2000, Park *et al.*, 2014). Evidence suggests that much of the success of secondary destinations is due to the perception that they are friendly and safe cities (particularly for women) and more affordable (Rys and Nelson, 2000). Much attention has been given to second tier destinations at trade shows and in the trade press, and early indications show that the trend for using them over established conference destinations is set to continue (Fullard, 2019c). The reason for their success is attributable not only to their safe image, but also to changes in demand as well as massive government investment in facilities and CBs. As Grzinic and Saftic (2012) explain; destination competitiveness is driven by globalisation, and deregulation. Globalisation has created both the desire and the means to travel more widely (Weber and Chon, 2002) and the huge investment that some destinations have received in order to differentiate them from competitors has made them extremely attractive to PCOs (Gomez *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, as Nelson and Rys's (2000) and Weber and Chon's (2002) investigations discovered, PCOs have identified a number of benefits of working with second tier destinations, which includes affordability, generous incentives and exceptionally proactive CB staff.

As the literature on destination competitiveness illustrates, CBs are best placed to promote and manage a destination (Weber, 2000, McCartney, 2014, Chacko and Fenich, 2000, Ritchie, 2010) and the most effective CBs also manage the destination's principal conference venue (Fenich and Bordelon, 2008, Weber, 2000). Irrespective of how they are funded (publicly or privately), CBs must have adequate capital and the support of the government to be able to competitively bid for association conferences. To operate efficiently, CBs should be working towards achievable goals, within a flexible but robust strategic plan for the destination. As Ritchie (2004) explains, tourism policy is the key to destination competitiveness and therefore appropriate policy and governance is an essential element of effective CB management. Examples of both successful and unsuccessful MICE destinations, in terms of the importance of policy and governance, are the rival destinations Las Vegas, Macau and Seoul.

3.13 Destination Cases: Las Vegas, Macau and Seoul

A summary of the key characteristics of Las Vegas, Macau and Seoul is presented in table 3.5.

	Las Vegas	Macau	Seoul
Location and Airdrop	Desert location, isolated from other cities, one international airport.	One international airport but no direct air connectivity to other potentially lucrative markets such as Japan, South Korea, Europe, the US and Canada (Leong, 2000).	One international airport which is a major international hub for Northeast Asia (Yoo, 2003.)
Ranking	163 world city ranking (ICCA, 2015) 3rd city in the US for conferences (Cvent, 2012)	No ICCA ranking	13 world city ranking (ICCA, 2015) 4th most popular business events destination in Asia (Kim and Kim, 2008).
CB	1950s – Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority (quasi-public organisation) set up (Sanders, 2002).	2006 - The creation of the Macau Business Tourism Centre by the Macau Government Tourist Office (Leong, 2007).	1979 – launch of the Korean Convention Bureau (Yoo, 2003).
Principal Conference Venue and Bedstock	The Las Vegas Convention Center (CB owned) 4.6 million square feet 150,000 hotel rooms 2.5 million square feet of exhibit space, 225 meeting rooms (LVCVA, 2021)	Venetian Casino resort (privately owned) nearly 1 million square feet. 6 additional conference and exhibition centres, 30 hotels. 19,573 hotel rooms (2 – 5 star) (Wan, 2011)	COEX Convention Center (government owned) 15 million square feet, 11 million square feet of exhibit space, 55 meeting rooms (Coex Center, 2021) 64,000 hotel rooms (STR, 2019)

Table 3.5: A Summary of the Key Characteristics of Las Vegas, Macau and Seoul

Competition to host conferences within the USA is particularly fierce as the massive investment in venues in recent years now means that supply outweighs demand (Nelson,

2006). Yet despite having a modest airport, isolated location and an image that is not immediately conducive to business events (McCartney, 2008), Las Vegas continues to dominate the US MICE market (Sanders, 2002, Fenich and Hashimoto, 2004). Although the popularity of Las Vegas as a conference destination has been attributed to the reasonably priced and large bedstock (Baloglu and Love, 2004, Chacko and Fenich, 2000) there is evidence to suggest that Las Vegas is a popular destination with PCOs due to the structure and governance of the CB, referred to as the Las Vegas Model.

Las Vegas is a purpose-built MICE destination, designed in the 1950s by Clark County officials as an extension to the existing gaming industry. The CB, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is a quasi-public organisation that has been in operation since the 1950s. It has over five hundred employees and a thirteen-member board of directors, six from the private sector and seven state elected officials (Fenich and Bordelon, 2008). As well as being the DMO for Clark County, the LVCVA owns and operates the main conference venue and manages the bedroom tax which generated $267.2 million in 2017 (LCVCA). 81% of the bedroom tax is used to finance the CB with additional funding through venue hire (the remainder of the bedroom tax supports education and transport in Clark County) (ibid).

There have been a number of scholarly assessments of the success of the Las Vegas Model and results of the investigations undertaken by McCartney (2014), Chacko and Fenich (2000) and Sanders (2002) have produced comparable results. They confirm that the success of Las Vegas is attributable to the structure and governance of the CB. They go on to explain that the income generated through the bedroom tax provides the LVCVA with a substantial income that enables them to offer low venue hire charges and incentives to PCOs. Additionally, as the main venue is CB owned and operated, this provides a one stop shop style service to event organisers which represents a time and cost saving facility for PCOs. It must be noted that once again, the term 'incentives' is used but not substantiated in any of the reports even though this seems to refer to something offered separately to discounted venue hire. In his research, Sanders (2002) explains that the lure of the destination must go beyond the capacity of the convention centre, modest hotel rates and an abundance of attractions and Chacko and Fenich (2000) confirm that PCOs consistently cite the quality and ease of service provided by the LCVCA as key to the destination's appeal. This once again suggests that experience and trust are fundamental aspects of the CB/PCO relationship.

The Las Vegas model has been much admired by other destinations to the extent that the Chinese government has built the Cotai Strip in Macau, a copy of the Las Vegas Strip, and attempted to recreate a purpose-built gambling and MICE destination. To stimulate casino tourism the government introduced a 'free travel scheme' allowing mainlanders to travel to Macau for the purpose of gambling (which is otherwise illegal) and this has proved highly successful (Gu *et al..*, 2018). In order to lure PCOs to Macau, the government invested heavily in infrastructure and incentive packages, using Las Vegas as a benchmark, but with projections to become a more successful conference destination (Leong, 2007). In this case, incentives clearly refers to the generous subvention packages that are overtly advertised as available to PCOs and this include heavy subsidies of accommodation, marketing and speaker costs (Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute, 2018). Yet despite this investment in important destination attributes, Macau has not yet proved to be a successful MICE destination with, thus far, a fairly poor performance compared to its international competitors (Wan, 2011).

There have been a few academic assessments of Macau's attempts to replicate the success of Las Vegas with the most substantial investigations having been undertaken by McCartney (2008; 2014), Wan (2011) and Dioko and Whitfield (2019). They concur that one of the key reasons for Macau's poor performance as a MICE destination is that unlike Las Vegas, it lacks appropriate policy and governance. Both explain that the key issue for Macau is the absence of a strategic tourism master plan and limited government coordination of a body responsible for the management of the destination and this has drastically limited the ability of the city to attract PCOs (McCartney, 2008, 2014, Wan, 2011). Whitfield (2010, p.39) concurs stating that Macau's 'meetings industry sector seems to be stagnating'.

Fenich and Bordelon (2008) explain that in order to be a successful MICE destination, it is important for the destination's stakeholders, particularly owners of leisure facilities, to support the CB's pursuit of business tourists. This has contributed to the success of Las Vegas, as the leaders of the established gambling industry embraced the notion of broadening the city's tourism offer (McCartney, 2014; Nelson, 2004) and the subsequent diversification to include business events was effectively directed and managed by the CB. The clear strategy and leadership, provided by the LVCVA, has continued to be effective, evidenced in the ongoing development of integrated hotel and venue spaces in Las Vegas which support business and leisure tourism and are actively promoted to both markets by the CB. Conversely, in Macao, there is no coordinated approach to destination marketing, and limited interest in integrated facilities on the part of hotel managers (McCartney, 2014). There is no consensus between

stakeholders on how Macao should be marketed, and the increasing fragmentation of the tourism industry has been attributed to the absence of a dedicated CB (Wan, 2011, McCartney, 2014). As such, thus far Macao has been unable to effectively compete for MICE events and can be considered to be trailing significantly behind its competitors (Dioko and Whitfield, 2019, Wan, 2011).

Therefore, applying Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) strategy to Las Vegas, it can be argued that Las Vegas is excelling as it more than matches competitors in terms of its resources, it has a large CB with much experience and it would also appear to have particularly strong relationships with PCOs. By comparison Macau is struggling to survive as although it has most of the resources that it needs to compete, the destination lacks a competent CB, and this is undoubtedly affecting relationships with PCOs. As further illustration of the significant role of government support in destination competitiveness is the exponential success of South Korea as an international conference destination, and in particular, the capital Seoul.

After the end of the Korean war in 1953, the South Korean government launched a series of strategies and initiatives to change the perception of South Korea from a war-ravaged country to an attractive tourist destination to international visitors. Two government departments were tasked with the challenge; the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Industry and Energy (Yoo, 2005). In 1979 efforts were bolstered by the creation of the country's first national convention bureau and massive investment in infrastructure to support hosting the Seoul Olympics in 1988 (Pyo and Koo, 2002). After winning the bid to host the games, Seoul's reputation as an events destination began to grow at a rate of nearly ten percent per year (Yoo, 2005) and it is now the fourth most popular business events destination in Asia (Kim and Kim, 2008). Its success as a conference destination has been identified as due to a combination of the abundance of conference facilities as well as many cultural and natural attractions (Kim, Moon and Choe, 2016). However, some studies have also shown that South Korea is considered to be an expensive destination by PCOs, and this has led to additional government funding for subvention packages to offset venue and accommodation costs (Yoo, 2005). In the academic assessments of Korea's performance as a conference destination, Pyo and Koo (2002) and Yoo (2005) concur that central to the country's success has been the enactment of the Convention Promotion Law of 1996 and the consistent government support for the development of the country's MICE industry. The Convention Promotion Law was designed to ease building regulations and provide tax breaks and financial incentives to encourage private investment of additional purpose-built convention centres. It

formed part of a strategy to develop seven cities as conference destinations alongside Seoul. This strategy has been effective in sustaining wide global interest in the destination as a whole, and as a consequence South Korea continues to attract a range of international association conferences (Kim and Kim, 2008; Yoo, 2005; Pyo and Koo, 2002). Seoul in particular continues to feature prominently in ICCA rankings and much of its success is due to its principal convention centre, which was financed through the creation of a public/private organisation after the Convention Promotion Law was passed.

The three case studies conjointly demonstrate that to be a successful conference destination, investment in infrastructure, a choice of purpose-built event venues and the provision of competitive rates and incentives are crucial. However, as in the case of Macau, investment alone does not guarantee success and government driven strategy is an important element of destination success. The Las Vegas and Seoul case studies both demonstrate how consistent government support and long-term strategies underpin destination success. They confirm, that as per Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model, policy is an essential component of destination competitiveness and works well when implemented by a well-funded, flexible and experienced CB.

3.14 Summary

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the role of CBs in competing for international association conferences. This can be achieved by understanding the site selection process and by exploring the role and influence of the CB over the decision-making process. This will have the potential to influence future policy development by directing policymakers towards strategic objectives that can ensure that England retains its status as a leading global conference destination. This chapter has presented the culmination of a broad and inclusive process of gathering literature on the site selection process and it has demonstrated that since Shone (1998) claimed that the association market has received hardly any attention from researchers, there have been some significant developments in this burgeoning area of academic research.

This chapter has established that the PCO has a significant influence over the site selection process and this is shaped by a number of variables, with cost being the most important. The

review has confirmed that the role of the convention bureau is significant in the decision-making process, but the exact nature of the support offered and sought is still under researched. The review of literature has highlighted a number of limitations of existing studies particularly in terms of the narrow terminology used in investigations and their restricted geographic scope. The conceptual model of the site selection process created by Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and modified by Comas and Moscardo (2005) represent significant achievements within academic research. However, these and subsequent investigations have been criticised for their lack of discussion of the role of CBs in this process (Jago and Deery, 2005, Opperman and Chon, 1997). Furthermore, the lack of involvement of CBs in research has also been repeatedly cited as a weakness of existing studies and this presents the opportunity to involve them in future research and begin to address this issue. As such, there is now the opportunity to explore areas of destination policy such as governance, CB controlled venues, the use of subvention and other tools to aid the bidding process.

The potential value of research into the role of CBs in site selection is significant as knowledge is critical to destinations to enable them to adapt and thus to gain a competitive advantage (Hudson, 2013). Furthermore, according to Fenich (2008), Fawzy and Samra (2008), Chiappa (2012) and Park *et al.* (2014) understanding the decision-making process of the PCO has become one of the most valuable areas of research to policy makers and destination managers. There is now therefore much scope to develop theories of competitive advantage and customer relationship management that are specific to business tourism. This investigation therefore has the potential to provide further evidence to propose ways in which CBs can compete for association conferences. This may influence policy development and for organisations such as VisitBritain this could leader to a new strategy to sustain and develop their conference sector. As such, chapter four, methodology, will discuss the strategy for the conduct of primary research that will follow on from the review of literature. This chapter will explore the design for data collection and analysis that will underpin this investigation into the site selection process, thereby progressing the remaining objectives of this thesis.

4.0 The Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The remaining objectives of this thesis are; to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences and to create a modified conceptual model of this process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events. Therefore, the overarching research question is: how does convention bureau support influence PCOs' choice of destination? Pragmatism is the research lens that I planned to adopt for this inquiry. For pragmatists, the research question is central to the investigation above ontological or epistemological positions as the debate about the nature of truth and reality is unresolvable and pragmatism is about solving problems (Parvaiz, Mufti and Wahab, 2016). However, pragmatism is often criticised for being a vague philosophical paradigm which can lead to 'sloppy' research (Feilzer,2010, p.14). Therefore, a strategic and robust methodology must be developed to guide the collection of evidence to answer the question and this chapter will discuss the strategy that I designed to underpin this inquiry. I will, therefore, discuss my approach to research in terms of my ontological and epistemological beliefs, the methods available to me and the choices I have made in designing my inquiry. This chapter will also include a brief review of social science research, particularly within the field of tourism and event management and review access to and the selection of participants, and the design of and process for data collection and analysis. Within the chapter there will be an assessment of ethical considerations, the influence of bias and the transferability of results. Carefully planned investigations will always have limitations (Denscombe, 2010) however, a thorough and considered approach to research design will enable an inquiry to withstand such criticism.

4.2 Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Considerations

This inquiry traverses the academic disciplines of tourism and event management and research from both fields, and from diverse international sources, has underpinned the literature review in the previous chapter. Therefore, in terms of developing a methodological approach for this inquiry, the ontological and epistemological philosophies that have been associated with both academic disciplines can be drawn upon. However, it must also be stated that both fields of study can be considered to be immature. Getz (2012) describes the field of event

studies as relatively new and suggests that as such, a full ontology of event management has yet to be constructed (Getz, 2012). Similarly, Goodson and Phillimore (2004, p.37-38) state that 'tourism is less methodologically and theoretically advanced than other fields in the social sciences'. However, event tourism, as a specific sub-field of both event and tourism studies, merits its own ontological consideration that will yield distinct claims to knowledge about this specific field of study (Getz and Page, 2015). As the research question is 'how does convention bureau support influence PCOs' choice of destination', ontologically I am seeking to explain what is meant by 'support' and with the results of the investigation I intend to extend the model of site selection to incorporate this new knowledge. I plan to involve participants from a range of geographic locations for a board view of CB support. Such exploratory, or inductive, research also has the potential to generate new theoretical insights into event and tourism related topics (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016).

My ontological position is intuitively that of a realist as I accept the concept of the existence of truth that can be objectively found. Sayer's (2000, p.2) definition of realism is that it is 'the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it' which Denscombe (2010, p.119) also describes as a reality that exists whether or not we approve of it. I planned to conduct the inquiry from an objective point of view, and as a realist, it was important to allow the participants to be the focus of the study and to allow them the freedom to discuss the term 'convention bureau support' with minimal input from myself. This neopositivist stance is what Alvesson (2003, p.15) describes as someone 'eager to establish a context-free truth about reality' which he explains does go some way to minimising researcher bias. In epistemological terms this is a more interpretivist exploration as I am seeking to understand a situation. There is a clear contrast between my epistemological and ontological views which results in tension although one can argue that my epistemological beliefs are complimentary to my stance as a realist as I am an etic researcher; I believe that the investigator can be impartial, and that evidence can be gathered from an outsider's position. Nonetheless, it is challenging to undertake social research with total objectivity (Cohen *et al.*., 2011) and many scholars would argue that all qualitative researchers must accept that their subjective view of their inquiry will influence the results (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012). Denzin and Giardina (2008) make a valid point that although complete objectivity is not possible, the qualitative researcher can take steps to eliminate bias. Furthermore, Denscombe (2010) confirms that the researcher may be biased but they can still conduct a robust inquiry with impartiality.

Although a pragmatic approach to research does not require a specific epistemological perspective (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013), both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in previous event tourism investigations and therefore are viable for this research. In studies of site selection, quantitative methods have been dominant, and as such, I gave much consideration to adopting a similar approach. However, as the literature review revealed, previous studies have produced comparable results; there are a number of variables that influence site selection and there is a consensus on key variables, and dispute over whether or how the rest can be ranked. Early researchers Fortin and Richie (1997), Oppermann (1996), Clark *et al.* (1997) and Crouch (1997) all used questionnaires as their primary tool for data collection. Despite acknowledgement of the limitations of this approach, quantitative methods were also used by later researchers including Chacko and Fenich (2000), Nelson and Rys (2000), Weber (2001) Choi and Boger (2002). As I seek to explore the term 'support', a more inductive approach is needed and, as Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang (2016) suggest, a benefit of exploratory research is that it does not impose the structure and framework of prior definitions upon its design.

The literature review also highlighted several common limitations of prior investigations: minimal involvement of CBs, narrow geographic scope and a restriction on the type and description of variables used (thereby limiting the analysis of their significance). Consequently, our collective understanding of the site selection process lacks depth (Crouch 2011), particularly in terms of the role and influence of CBs (Baloglu and Love, 2004). Irrespective of early advice from Clark and McCleary (1995) to adopt qualitative methods to look at the broad concept of destination competitiveness, and Crouch's (2011) later endorsement of qualitative methods to record the experience, knowledge and insights of destination managers, most research in this area continues to be based on quantitative methods. This has been recently shown by Falk and Hagsten's (2018) investigation of how European cities attract international conferences. I could take a quantitative approach and expand my exploration by involving CBs from around the world and look to include additional or alternative variables and a quantitative study would be appropriate if I was seeking to confirm the results of earlier studies. However, such an approach to research felt at odds with my objectives as I am not seeking to extend the list of variables but to clarify one of the broader variables, that of CB support. However, there is now a need for event researchers to embrace both positivistic and inteprevisits philosophies and qualitative and quantitative methods (Robertson *et al,* 2018) and as I am aiming to develop the model of site selection, an approach which would lend itself

to in depth discussions of CB support felt more appropriate. Additionally, as few of the existing studies of the site selection process have involved CBs or recorded the opinions of destination managers, I determined that interviewing industry professionals, CB staff and PCOs, is key to unravelling what is meant by the term 'CB support' and providing insight into how influential it is. The goal was to include a number of participants from different continents to record global perspectives on what is very much a global industry. Of particular importance was to involve senior CB staff, as elite professionals can provide the most insight when exploring unclear or ill-defined phenomena (Sinkovics and Elfriede, 2011).

Welch *et al.* (2016) and Sinkovics and Elfriede (2011) strongly advise against quantitative methods when targeting elite participants (as surveys are often ignored by them) and once again this steered me towards a qualitative approach. What encouraged me further, was that Comas and Moscardo (2005), one of the few teams of researchers to be able to develop pre-existing models of site selection, had accomplished this largely through conducting interviews. Their investigation is an example of how within the study of tourism, qualitative research is now not only accepted but it is encouraged as it is recognised to produce richer research than quantitative approaches (Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015). Their approach can be used to counteract criticism of the predominant use of quantitative methods in the past, as this has been unable to capture the 'soft core concepts' that are to be found in organisations that have strategic relationships within a tourism environment (Pansiri, 2005, p.193).

Previous studies of site selection have primarily used participants from the specific region of a country in which the researcher is based (e.g. Australia, China, USA, Italy) which has been primarily driven by convenience. Despite this, the results of these investigations have yielded comparable findings, indicating similarities within the sector, irrespective of location. This is a logical conclusion, particularly in the case of international association conference management as these are events that will be planned by professionals based in one country, which will take place around the world and involve a multitude of delegate nationalities. As such, there is no obvious need for this inquiry to focus on or be limited to one geographic area. It is anticipated that the majority of participants will come from within the UK as part of an initial, convenience sample. However, as technology has advanced over the last twenty years, it has become much easier for researchers to identify and target participants around the world, using internet resources including social networking sites. Therefore, online databases, forums, and professional networking sites are available to source and secure participants who meet the

criteria of this inquiry, from outside of the UK. However, Welch *et al* (2016) suggest that research that crosses international borders and which involves interviewing elite professionals, is particularly challenging for researchers as there are few tools to guide this process.

In summary, consideration of ontological and epistemological choices in event tourism research, as well as an in-depth assessment of the body of literature, has been the starting point for determining my philosophical basis for this exploration. Disparity between my epistemological and ontological views have caused me to carefully reflect on how to proceed but above my philosophical standpoints and central to this inquiry is the research question: how does convention bureau support influence PCOs' choice of destination? To answer this, I planned to explore the term 'convention bureau support' and use this new knowledge to expand the model of site selection. This has led me to develop a pragmatic, philosophical paradigm for this investigation which Savin-Baden and Major (2013, p.171) describe as 'an approach that draws upon the most sensible and practical methods available in order answer a given research question'. As such, conducting this research through the lens of pragmatism has led me to look to develop a qualitative approach to answering the research question.

4.3 Exploring Research Strategies and Developing a Philosophical Paradigm

Qualitative research has expanded the number of paradigms, methods and strategies used within tourism and events research (Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015). In particular, many types of qualitative methods that have emerged, particularly since the 1960s, facilitate a less reductionist and a more flexible and holistic inquiry (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012). One of the qualitative research tools that I gave much consideration to is grounded theory. This qualitative approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is used to create knowledge about relationships between variables from the data that is collected. To work effectively, the researcher must have an open mind (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016) but then they can determine patterns in smaller amounts of data which can be repeatedly tested to develop theory (Jordan and Gibson, 2004). Decrop (2004) suggests that grounded theory works particularly well with purposive sampling to generate transferable results. As I planned to use purposive sampling by targeting specific industry professionals, this was a viable approach. I had not planned to create or develop theory, nonetheless my research had the potential to develop theory in relation to destination competitiveness and business to business relationship management.

However, I felt that my industry background and insider knowledge of conference management was likely to influence the investigation. It is important to consider how preconceived ideas of a topic can influence the research strategy (Maxwell, 2005, Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015) and as my overriding goal was to modify an existing concept and model grounded theory did not seem an appropriate method. Additionally, I was unsure whether or not there would be any patterns in the data that could be tested repeatedly and the questions that I began to formulate were designed to focus the attention of participants on specific areas of site selection. As such, it did not feel as though I was going to conduct research with an open mind and I concluded that grounded theory was not the most appropriate methodological tool.

Conducting ethnographic or action research could potentially yield extremely insightful results as these can be applied to various group-based scenarios within the tourism industry (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016). It would be fascinating to observe meetings between the PCO and CB, and indeed the principal venue in the destination. Attending site visits with them and analysing email correspondence could yield invaluable data and insight into the complexities of site selection. However, this would be extremely difficult to conduct as the relationship and the interaction between PCO and CB involves confidential negotiations and, given average lead times, takes place over several years. Discounting ethnography, action research and grounded theory was a part of the process of clarifying my ontological and epistemological standpoints and considering how they affect the inquiry. Ultimately one must adopt the research approach that feels right (Costley and ebrary, 2007) and decisions will be based on logic and intuition (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012). Interviewing PCOs, CBs and potentially venue managers, would be a much more practical and viable method to gaining insight into site selection and as such I determined that I would conduct interviews with a range of professionals. However, 'good' social scientific research is based on suitable approaches that are explained and justified by the researcher (Denscombe, 2009). As such I have found the work of Savin-Baden and Major (2012) particularly useful in developing the strategy for my exploration.

Savin-Baden and Major (2012, p.46) describe the research lens as 'a mental model that helps researchers to clarify the focus of the investigation' and it is illustrated below in figure 4.1.

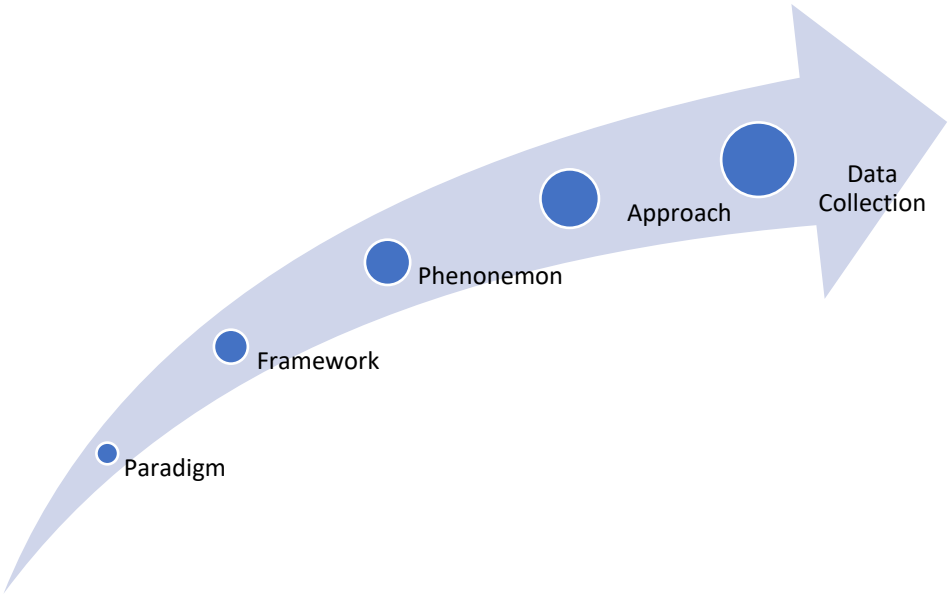

Figure 4.1: The Philosophy and Theory Lens adapted from Savin-Baden and Major (2012, p.134)

Applying this model to my inquiry means that I planned to adopt a pragmatic paradigm, use literature and my insider knowledge to formulate questions that provide me with a theoretical framework, and I planned on using these questions to explore the phenomenon of site selection within interviews to collect data. The model clarified the decisions that I needed to make to progress the inquiry, and these are discussed throughout this chapter.

Pragmatic research is rooted in the work of the Chicago School of interactionists who were largely realists (ibid). However, there is no single set of philosophies that underpin pragmatism and no agreement on the definition of this relatively new phenomenon (Talisse and Aikin, 2008). However, I am a Peircean Pragmatist as I subscribe to the ideologies of the founder of pragmatism, Charles Peirce, that reality is independent of our views of it and through perception we can identify one truth (Talisse and Aikin, 2008). There is concurrence among the early pragmatists that truth is an ideal and beliefs can be mistaken and that as a research philosophy, pragmatism sacrifices the search for truth for a more realistic inquiry (Shook and Margolis, 2006). Furthermore, William James, with whom Peirce and Dewey, established pragmatism as a philosophical movement (Suckiel, 2006) described pragmatism as taking an approach that feels appropriate, using common sense and accepting compromise

(James, 1978). This certainly represents a move forward from Peirce's initial view of pragmatism as James challenged Peirce's view of pragmatism which was shaped by Peirce's scientific background (Shook and Margolis, 2006). Pragmatism continues to develop but the pillars of pragmatic philosophy continue to demonstrate that standards of practice will evolve with and be constrained by each inquiry (Schwartz, 2012) but they are also flexible enough to adapt to each situation (Colapietro, 2006). Such ideals have helped me to accept my conflicting ontological and epistemological beliefs, as pragmatism suggests that the researcher should not be restrained by conflicting views and should welcome the influence of diverse philosophies (Schwartz, 2012).

Pragmatism is an appropriate paradigm for this exploration for a number of reasons because, as Morgan (2014) explains, the value of pragmatism as a philosophy for social research extends far beyond its usefulness in terms of practicality and flexibility. Pansiri (2005) asserts that pragmatism has the potential to yield better results than more traditional paradigms as a blended approach works well in the study of the complex alliances formed between diverse organisations operating within the tourism industry. Moreover, Feilzer (2010, p.10) argues that pragmatism reminds researchers of their "duty" to be curious and adaptable. Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009, p.711) liken this to an approach which cultivates creativity in scientific research thereby generating useful knowledge which they term 'epistemological instrumentalism'. They go on to assert that pragmatism enables the development of concepts as 'our understanding of the whole is modified by our progressive understanding of the parts' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009, p.717). This approach fits well with my objective of developing the conceptual model of site selection while allowing flexibility to potentially develop theories of competitiveness and relationship management.

Although pragmatism means that researchers are not compelled to follow the 'rules' of a particular philosophy, Feilzer (2010) argues that pragmatists believe that quantitative and qualitative methods share many similarities. Additionally, Pansiri (2005) suggests that pragmatists concur with the positivist view of the existence of an external world. As such, my planned approach of conducting interviews and analysing data for patterns aligned with these views of pragmatism. Rather than simply cherry-picking approaches from various philosophies, I planned to conduct this exploration through the lens of pragmatism as this represents a synthesis of my ontological and epistemological standpoints.

As per Savin-Baden and Major's (2012) model, this has influenced the choices I made regarding tools, frameworks and approaches in that I have chosen what best fits my objectives of evaluating the influence of CB support and modifying the conceptual model of the site selection process. Using their philosophy and theory lens, I have identified that the existing conceptual models of site selection, rooted in site selection literature, have provided me with a theoretical framework upon which to base my inquiry. I am also able to use my experience (insider knowledge) to formulate questions using appropriate terminology and jargon. The models have identified the role of the CB in site selection and provide insight into the process of site selection, antecedent conditions and site selection (influencing) variables. The models illustrate the phenomena which is the whole of the site selection process and they have identified the steps involved in this process. I am going to look specifically at the part of the process when the PCO and the CB interrelate, which will typically occur after the RFP has begun and often as part of a bid process. This is step four on the Comas and Moscardo (2005) model, as illustrated in figure 4.2. and step two on the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) model (site selection, analysis and recommendation) and as illustrated in figures 4.3.

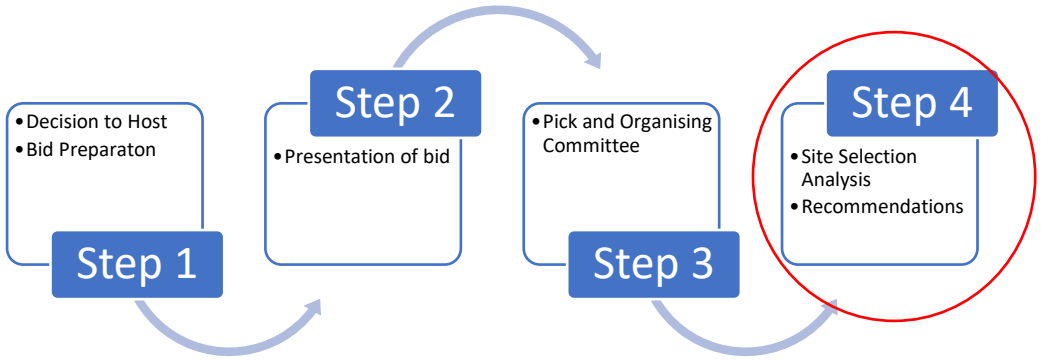

Figure 4.2: Extract of the Comas and Moscardo (2005) Model of Site Selection

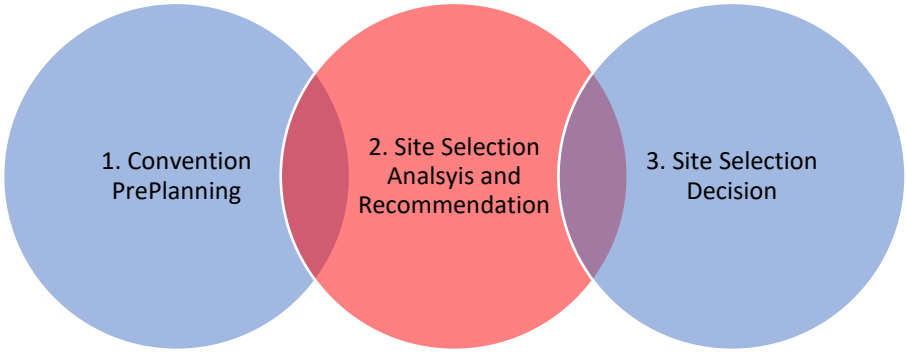

Figure 4.3: Steps in the Site Selection Process, adapted from Crouch and Ritchie (1997)

Step one is conference preparation, such as the development of an association's commitment to hold a conference. Step two (site analysis) will then be conducted by either a PCO or a committee, culminating in recommendations to the committee to finalise the choice of destination (step three). Typically, CBs will be involved step two, although their connection to the association and to the specific event may begin as part of step one and, if successful, will carry on into step three and beyond. My interest in the business to business relationship between PCO or committee and CB is centred around step two, when the analysis of destinations begins and the majority of the interaction between CB and PCO takes place. As the literature has indicated, PCOs welcome the early involvement of CBs, however this generally happens once a CB has been invited into the process by the PCO. Either they will be approached by the conference organiser through the RFP process, an invitation to bid, or a general request for information. It is from this point in the relationship, until the committee selects the destination, that is of relevance to this inquiry. This is a largely unexplored element of the site selection process and as such, this research has the potential to significantly develop the model of site selection. There are a number of tools that would enable me to explore the relationship which can now be considered as part of a qualitative approach to the research.

4.4 A Conceptual Framework for a Qualitative Approach using Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative research has been described as

> a distinctive research strategy [not just]… a set of methods, [which is] a new way of approaching and understanding research, an approach which seeks to highlight and then remedy, the so-called deficiencies of 'natural science' methods which underpin quantitative research (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004, p.4-5).

Within this inquiry, the 'deficiencies' of previous studies of site selection are the repeated use of questionnaires to rank variables and the lack of involvement of CBs. This has steered me towards choosing an alternative, qualitative, method that has the potential to yield more useful and insightful data. The drawback of such an approach is the time involved in data collection, the researcher's limited control over the process and the challenges of analysing the data (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016). Therefore, interviews were carefully planned to focus on the phenomena under investigation and to answer the research question: how does

convention bureau support influence PCOs' choice of destination? As such, the construction of interview questions, the selection of participants, the conduct of the interviews and the analysis of data will need to be carefully planned, beginning with the development of a conceptual framework for this inquiry.

Maxwell (2005) advocates every investigation should be underpinned by a framework of four elements; (1) the researcher's own experiential knowledge, (2) existing theory and research, (3) a pilot study or exploratory research and (4) thought experiments. Using this template, I have mapped my conceptual framework as illustrated below.

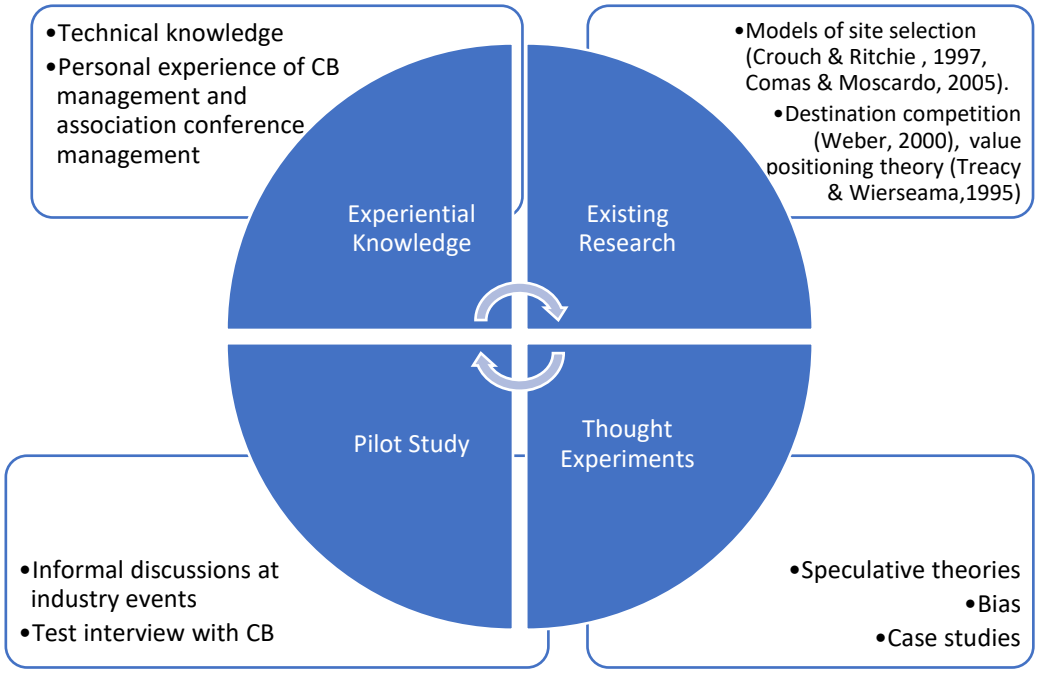

Figure 4.4 A Conceptual Framework for this Investigation

I determined that my own experiential knowledge of PCO and CB relationships will enable me to develop questions to use in my inquiry. I have had much first-hand experience of convention bureau management, venue management and working with PCOs on association conferences. Through my work experience I am also familiar with industry jargon and terminology which could be useful in developing interview questions and engaging with respondents. As this investigation is foucsed on when a PCO invites the involvement of a CB into their association conference planning, and ends when they have drawn up a shortlist of

viable destinations, it is essential that the research questions are designed to focus the attention of participants on this. The involvement of the CB can begin with the RFP process and shortlisting will usually be based antecendent factors and influencing varibales. Antecedent factors include the associations past experience of the destination and the specific objectives of each confernce (Crouch and Ritchie, 2007) and variables will include land and air accessiblity of the destiaton and its type and size of meeting spaces and bedstock (Comas and Moscardo, 2005). Therefore I planned to use semi-structured interviews as this balances this requirement with being able to understand the perspective of participants, which is fundamental in qualitative inquiry (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews can be the optimal tool for teasing out information as this method can generate 'the richest single source of data' (Gillham, 2000, p.65) and as Arksey and Knight (1999) confirm, semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to stick to their agenda but permit a detailed discussion which explicates the research question. The social scientist must maintain an ongoing awareness for the potential of preconceptions which will unduly influence research (Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015) and due to my industry experience, I have a number of strong opinions over the site selection process. Therefore, I planned to use predetermined questions to combat bias and open questions to allow the respondents to talk freely, thus limiting my influence, and supporting my epistemological beliefs that the investigator can be impartial. Furthermore, allowing interviewees to talk at length increases the reliability of the data (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

Combining the existing scholarly research and case studies that I analysed in chapter three, led me to draft questions to use in the interviews. These were then developed by thought experiments, whereby I combined my personal experience of the MICE industry with existing models of site selection to create questions based on speculative theory about what CB support might entail. This culminated in the design of appropriate questions to put to three potential groups of participants: PCOs, CB staff and venue managers. Additionally, I developed prompts to use in the interview if the respondent seemed unsure of how to answer, which is an important element of developing the interview agenda (Yin, 2014). In line with Savin-Baden and Major's (2012, p.369) advice, I have prepared twelve semi-structured questions and allowed an hour for each interview (see appendix 6, p.189). Table 4.1 illustrates how a question to be put to a PCO has evolved from the process of reviewing literature, reflecting on my own experience and conducting a thought experiment.

Question:	Do you need the CVB to liaise with the local authorities on your behalf?
Link to literature:	Literature suggests that a CVB that has a strong relationship with government/governmental departments is of great appeal to a PCO because of how it facilitates planning. Additionally, industry reports suggest the destination's government support of the event is important to PCOs.
Link to experience:	Having worked for a government owned venue/funded CB I know that this positively influences the relationship you develop with PCOs.
Prompt:	Do you need the CVB to help with visas, licensing, permits, road closures? Do you expect a civic welcome, letter of support from civic dignitaries etc.

Table 4.1 The Evolution of an Interview Question

A full set of questions and prompts that were planned to be used in interviews with PCOs, CBs and venues can be found in appendix 6 (p.189) and these are cross referenced with the results of literature, my experience and thought experiments.

Using my own knowledge during the interviews indicated that I would be able to show empathy towards industry professionals, which would help me to develop a rapport with the interviewees and gain their trust, which is fundamental to acquiring accurate and reliable data (Gillham, 2003, Arksey and Knight, 1999). Maxwell (2005) explains that the researcher's background has an important part to play in an investigation and that although this is sometimes referred to as bias, their experiential knowledge and thought experiments add value to the strategy for designing and conducting research. Denzin and Giardina (2008, p.272) concur and suggest that without this influence, research can be 'anaemic'. Therefore, the questions and prompts were carefully designed to avoid researcher bias, and I planned to research each participant prior to the interview, partly for indications as to how I could empathise with them. Once I had begun to draft interview questions, I was in a position to conduct a pilot interview.

4.5 Conducting a Pilot Interview

I first began to discuss the plans for my thesis with my own network of professional contacts in 2017. This included discussing the role of subvention with two British CBs; one privately owned and one funded through a local council. Both demonstrated keen interest in being involved and lamented their lack of subvention funding and how this limits their bid potential. In November 2018, a chance opportunity to meet with the director of a major UK CB at their office developed into a pilot interview. Appendix 5 (p.188) provides a summary of key questions posed during the interview. Conducting the interview confirmed my ability to engage with an industry professional on the controversial topics of subvention, government support and financing of the events industry, international competition and the viability of a bedroom tax. The interviewee gave full and frank answers to all questions posed. At no time in the interview did I find myself struggling to elicit answers from the interviewee and we mostly chatted very conversationally which I believe is attributable to the naturalistic approach I took to conducting research, something which I aimed to replicate.

However, conducting a pilot interview highlighted several ways in which I needed to refine my approach to interviewing industry professionals. On reflection, I noticed that I spent some of the interview time asking for information that I could have just as easily obtained from the CBs website. Understandably, this seemed to slightly irritate the interviewee who directed me to the comprehensive resources available online. This also ate into valuable interview time, that could have been spent exploring more interesting and opaque topics. Additionally, despite the openness of the interviewee, I was a little hesitant to ask very probing and direct questions. This was despite noticing that although the interviewee initially gave, what could be described as 'stock' answers to questions, some of her later responses were quite controversial. I had anticipated predictable responses from CBs to questions about the destination's strengths and weaknesses, as they operate primarily as a marketeer for the destination. However, when I asked the interviewee for her personal opinion on the notion of a bed tax, her response was detailed, impassioned and surprisingly in favour of it (despite the fact that the CBs members have been audibly opposed to it). This illustrated to me the great value to be had from conducting interviews as it allowed the participant to fully expand on their answer, in this case discussing the benefits to CB operations that can be derived from a bed tax as viewed by an industry professional, speaking from experience. Consequently, I determined that in future I can afford to be more confident as I will build up to the more penetrating questions and I will

also have reminded interviewees that they can opt out of answering. Ensuring my participants have the relevant experience may result in a similar outcome as asking more searching questions could yield great insight into the challenges of conference and destination management.

Gillham (2000) explains that the pilot interview is the process of getting the questions right rather than getting the interview itself right and after conducting the pilot I removed some of my initial (basic) questions and made a note to check the organisation's website for this information in advance of the interview. Furthermore undertaking pilot interviews is part of the process of practicing and developing the skills required in the craft of interviewing (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015). Conducting the first interview with a very senior member of a CB and getting some very detailed responses, reinforced my belief in my approach as well as my surety of the remaining questions. Additionally, the pilot helped me to identify that my participants fall into Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015, p.113) category of 'informant' as they have been invited to participate due to their expert subject knowledge, thus resulting in more factual and descriptive data and less emotional and personal views, even when asked for a personal opinion. Asking for personal opinions on controversial industry topics will also enable me to determine their ontological position. One consequence of this is that participants who lean towards a more positivist epistemology may ask me questions as they also seek answers to their questions and corroboration of what they believe to be true. However, this does not pose any ethical issues as I planned to openly publish the findings of my research which has been incorporated into my procedures for the ethical conduct of this inquiry. Once I had completed and reviewed the process of conducting a pilot interview, I planned to target a range of industry professionals to interview.

4.6 Selecting Participants and Sampling Strategies

The selection of appropriate industry professionals is essential to this exploration and therefore is is useful to set inclusion criteria which help determine the suitablity of participants (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016). Taking into consideration the objectives of my research, the literature on site selection and the result of the pilot interview, I decided to include a small number of venues, as well as PCOs ad CB staff, in my investigation and I determined that participants should be:

- A PCO with at least 5 years experience who has delivered at least one major international conference *or*
- A PCO who has been genuinely involved in the planning of at least one association conference that involved at least one CB *or*
- A senior member of a CB, representing a viable destination for an association conference *or*
- A senior member of a principal conference venue

Having successfully interviewed a very senior industry professional for the pilot, I was keen to target elite business professionals, but this brings with it particular challenges; access, the balance of power, assessing openness and feeding back (Welch *et al.*, 2016). As Welch *et al* (2016) elaborate this means that it can be difficult to get elite professionals to participate in research, and then the researcher must cope with them dominating the discussion (power) or simply quoting official responses from policy documents (assessing openness). The final challenge (feeding back) is getting verification of the accuracy of the transcript of the interview. Additionally, the detailed guidance on interviewing international elite professionals from Welch *et al.* (2016) and Sinkovics and Elfriede (2011) points to the challenge of identifying the ontological position of participants and how this may influence the interview. In particular, they infer that cultural differences may influence how questions are interpreted and answered by elite interviewees and how they may be quite guarded in their responses. With all of this in mind, I planned to identify and target a range of industry professionals (more than I anticipated would agree to be interviewed).

The target population for this research is extremely large as, based on ICCA league tables, the number of convention bureaus actively competing for association conferences is more than three hundred (ICCA, 2015) and the number of PCOs operating worldwide is incalculable. Membership of MPI (just one of the many PCO trade organisations) totals more than 200 in the UK and Ireland and around 17,000 across the globe (MPI,2019). The large target population, combined with the general consensus that there is no 'right' number of interviews in qualitative research (Baker and Edwards, 2012) opens up the question of how many interviews will suffice? Baker and Edwards (2012) go on to suggest that the researcher keeps going until no new answers are given by respondents, a view echoed by Bryman (year, p.18) who refers to this as 'saturation'. While this approach seems reasonable, some sort of numerical target is helpful when planning a research project and as thirty interviews is the

approximate number to aim for identified by Savin-Baden and Major (2012, p.369), Adler and Adler (2012 p.9) and Bryman (2012, p.18) this seemed appropriate. As Gomm *et al.* (2000) explain, fewer number of cases means that more data can be collected from each, or as Adler and Adler (2012, p.9) explain this offers the 'advantage of penetrating beyond a very small number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering'. Baker and Edwards (2012) point out that the value of interviews can sometimes be found in securing the involvement of specific organisations, and as few prior studies of site selection have involved CBs, even a small number of such organisations would add value to the existing body of research. Furthermore, Flick (2006, p.27) suggests that what should determine the number of interviews is ensuring that every 'dimension' is included and ideally having two interviewees per 'dimension'.

In terms of my investigation (which does not include committees, AMCs or other stakeholders), there are seven dimensions; PCO (agency), PCO (in-house), CB (national), CB (city), CB (state funded), CB (privately funded), venue. I therefore planned to include at least two participants from each dimension within my research, which would be easily achievable within an overall goal of thirty interviews. Additionally, although my research has no geographic aims or boundaries, my goal was to involve a variety of PCOs, CBs and venues, and I planned to include professionals from at least five continents. Although on balance, the number of participants would be drawn from mostly UK venues, agencies, and CBs, this can still be considered and international study. Firstly, the UK resident participants would be targeted based on their involvement in international conferences (conferences that are globally peripatetic and also that attract an international delegation). This would ensure that their views traversed the complexities of site selection within but also external to the UK. Similarly, non-UK resident participants would be targeted based on their involvement in international conferences. The data would therefore reflect broad views of the site selection process, based on multiple experiences of working in different geographic locations. The ontological standpoint of participants is a consideration and as such participants would be selected based on them having substantial professional experience to draw from. Additionally, an analysis of participants (via LinkedIn) and initial interview questions, would establish their views of international association conference management and of the concept of site selection. Furthermore, this form of quota sampling ensures equal representation according to the stratified sampling group (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016). Based on my pilot interview, I anticipated a keenness to be involved which I believe is evidence of what

Denscombe refers to as a 'ready-made interest' in the area of my investigation (2009, p.183) and I predicted that securing the participation of thirty professionals to be achievable.

I planned on accessing interview participants through multiple channels including my own professional networks. During the initial phase of my thesis I approached a number of international convention bureaus to assist with another research project. At this time, I enquired as to their involvement in this research and all confirmed a willingness to participate. This was another early indication that securing the involvement of at least ten CBs was a realistic proposition. I then began with purposive sampling, by inviting industry professionals known to me (CVB staff and venue managers) to take part in my research which culminated in six interviews. I asked each of these participants to introduce me to other professionals, and this snowball effect resulted in a further four interviews (with PCOs and venue staff). The snowball effect has been identified as particularly useful when planning to interview elite professionals (Welch *et al.*, 2016) and it is also useful in identifying participants who may otherwise be hard to locate (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang, 2016). This was certainly true for PCOs although through my membership of ABPCO I was able to place an advert in their newsletter for participants, and this resulted in a further two interviews. I had anticipated that sourcing PCOs would be more challenging, and I planned to use LinkedIn and ICCA and IAPCO membership lists to identify appropriate candidates. These sources yielded many results and I contacted all appropriate PCOs. Many ignored or declined my request to participate, but nonetheless this approach was effective and enabled me to secure several participants. I also contacted several PCOs directly after they were featured in industry trade articles which proved to be very effective as most professionals approached in this way agreed to take part. This is planned to result in a sample of a range of PCOs from different countries, working with different types of associations.

Through a combination of my insider knowledge and my review of literature, I identified a number of CBs that I wished to interview (more than the minimum number needed) and I contacted all of them directly. Convention bureaus were selected upon evidence of their active pursuance of association conferences. This can be determined by their prior successes (evidenced in ICCA league tables and industry publications) and/or their current marketing strategy (identifiable through their websites and publicly available documentation). I had planned to interview a small number of national CBs, and a greater number of city CBs. This was primarily due to the diversity of archetypal city CBs (compared to national CBs which are, without exception, normative). I planned to target a mixture of normative, leading firm,

entrepreneurial and fragmented city CBs. I planned to invite a range of CBs to take part, from those representing traditional and emerging destinations including those that own the principal venue and those that do not. Of the CBs that I approached directly, some were willing to be involved, and a few declined but perseverance led me to secure enough for this inquiry.

I planned to research each interviewee in advance (using their organisational website and LinkedIn profile) to tailor questions to each interview based on their specific experience. In particular, LinkedIn proved hugely helpful in communicating with event professionals, researching their background and verifying their suitability for this inquiry. In an effort to mitigate against a power struggle and to encourage openness, as identified as challenges when interviewing elite participants (Welch *et al.*, 2016), I used my knowledge of industry practices and jargon to word the questions for each participant in a way that demonstrated empathy for their professional challenges and an in depth understanding of their work environment. For example, I planned on referring to recent bid success or awards won (with CBs) and the pressures of budget limitations (with PCOs) which is known to be a leading cause of work-related stress (UIA, 2015). The wording used in questions (such as convention or conference) would be adapted to reflect geographical differences and I planned on referring to my attendance at industry events which they had also attended, and having worked with organisations that they have also worked with (such as trade publications and membership organisations). Furthermore, as per Welch *et al.*'s (2016) suggestion that elite professionals like to use the interview process to learn from a well-informed academic, I planned to offer a summary of my results to all participants.

By interviewing a range of PCOs, CBs and venues, from different associations and locations, the data from the interviews may be regarded as generalisable to the conferencing sector. However, to ensure the validity of the data I gave careful consideration to construct and external validity. Construct validity concerns ensuring the reliability of the data collected. This can be met by selecting appropriate techniques for gathering evidence, using multiple sources of evidence, and with interviews, ensuring that participants understand their involvement in the process of data collection (Yin, 2014). Within my investigation and the quota sampling approach, I planned to gather data from a range of elite professionals from a PCO, CB or venue background thereby generating multiple sources of evidence. Furthermore, I planned to share transcripts of interviews with participants, providing them with the opportunity to check, and verify, the data. This is an example of ecological validity, or communicative validity which

authenticates the data (Flick, 2006). External validity relates to generalisability or the concept of the applicability of findings to populations or contexts. Within qualitative research, there are divergent views on the importance of generalisability with many scholars rejecting this as a goal of the inquiry (Hammersley, Foster and Gomm, 2000) and the much-cited work of Lincoln and Guba (2000, p.43) stating that samples do not need to be statistically representative in order to offer generalisabilty. Schofield (2000, p.71) argues that qualitative research aims not to create a set of standardised results but 'to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of the situation'. However, researchers must ensure that the interpreation of data does not mispresent the data (Stake 1995) and I therefore gave much attention to devising techniques for analysing the study data, as discussed later in this chapter.

Finding a way to conduct interviews that enable the researcher to be objective and to put participants at ease is challenging (Bryman, 2012). In order to do this, interviews were planned to be conducted in a professional setting that is familiar to the interviewees, such as via Skype from their office, and in person, at their office. This was planned to encourage a conversational format which can help to avoid alienating respondents and promotes more trust (Dunne, Yates and Pryor, 2005). Building trust is fundamental in interviews as it also helps to minimise bias and strengthen the validity of the data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). I agree with Costley (*et al.*, 2010) that the researcher can never be truly neutral although as (2007) asserts, this lack of impartiality can lead to having a strong rapport between interviewer and participant which is fundamental to eliciting valuable rather than superficial information. As Wellington and Szczerbiński (2007) explain, if interviews are carried out in an environment that is familiar to the participants this increases their engagement with the research questions. Furthermore, as Alby and Fatigante (2014) assert, it is important to understand the interviewees' view of the world and align with their perspective, for example by seconding their viewpoint and agreeing with their concerns, which does not need to detract from critically analysing their views. The insider knowledge that I have of the industry will help to do this. Within qualitative research, the subjectivity of the researcher and participants and how this is manifested through observations, impressions etc., becomes part of the data that is collected (Flick, 2006, p.16) and therefore my relationship with interviewees will be taken into account during the data analysis phase of this inquiry. Yin (2014, p.49) confirms that 'the goal of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases in a study'. As such, I developed a database to manage data collection and embedded Yin's (2014) protocol into my ethical procedures.

4.7 Ethics

In accordance with The British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines for educational research, as well as the code of practise set down by the University of Chichester, informed voluntary consent will be sought from all participants prior to their participation in my study. A copy of my application for ethical approval can be found in appendix 1 (p.179) and a copy of the consent form can be found in appendix 2 (p.183). Informed consent is 'an ethical consideration that involves demonstration of a respect for people' (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012, p.323) and as such I will reiterate the contents of each with participants verbally at the start of each interview. Furthermore, each participant will be provided with an information sheet (appendix 3, p.185) in advance of the interview, thereby providing them with key information about this inquiry. Lastly, a verbal debrief will take place after each interview to reiterate key information to participants (appendix 4, p.187). Each of the participants will be promised confidentiality, which as Cohen *et al.* (2007, p.65) describe as when although the 'researchers know who has provided the information given…they will in no way make the connection known publicly'. Within this thesis all personal data about respondents will be anonymised and data will be collected and stored as outlined in the ethics form and in line with GDPR regulations.

In addition to following the University of Chichester's Research Ethics Policy, I have adapted Yin's (2014) protocol for research. This guidance suggests that prior to undertaking research, the investigator should map out their research goals, provide information about themselves to participants, consider the protection of human subjects (participants) and confirm how data will be collected and stored. Table 4.2 (below) shows how I have embedded Yin's (2014) protocol within my four key documents that underpin the ethical conduct of this inquiry.

	Application for Ethical Approval (Appendix 1)	Ethics Consent Form (Appendix 2)	Information Sheet (Appendix 3)	Debrief Sheet (Appendix 4)
Overview of the research goals	√		√	
Information about the researcher	√		√	√
Data collection procedures	√	√	√	√
Protection of human subjects	√	√	√	√

Table 4.2: Protocol for the Conduct of this Inquiry

As participants will be involved in my research in a professional capacity and will comment upon business rather than personal actions and thoughts, there is extremely limited chance of causing participants any undue stress. I am, however, mindful that some of my questions around government funding are sensitive topics. Furthermore, as Brinkman and Kvale (2015) explain, qualitative researchers can create a tense interview environment through their desire to ask increasingly probing questions. Thus, I planned to use prompts (see appendix 6, p.189) when I felt that an interviewee was uncomfortable with a question or topic. Additionally, I am adept at conversing easily with others and I planned to use empathy, and examples of my industry experience to engage with participants. As Alby and Fatigante (2014) confirm, these strategies can be used to uncover the ontological position of participants, create an intimate interview format and thus create fruitful data. Furthermore, my industry experience and insider knowledge enables me to empathise with PCOs and CBs, therefore diluting a stressful situation and gaining the trust of interviewees. As part of my commitment to ethical standards and ensuring the quality of my data, all participants have been provided with the opportunity to terminate the interview, skip questions that they did not want to answer, and review the transcript of the interview.

4.8 Data Analysis

One can argue that both quantitative and qualitative research is similar in its purpose of discovering patterns (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) and although my research is exploratory, I planned to analyse data in order to determine similarities in the participants' views on the

process of site selection. I planned to transcribe all interviews and although this may be laborious, it effects what Denscombe (2007) describes as a closer engagement with the data. Transcribing can also enable a deeper analysis of data and a greater understanding of its meaning (Dunne *et al.*, 2005). I then planned to follow Wellington and Szczerbiński's (2007) advice to totally immerse myself into the data; listening to the interviews repeatedly to absorb some of the nuances and subtleties of participants' verbal and nonverbal communications. I then anticipated proceeding with Denscombes's (2007) four stage process of interpretation; coding data, categorising the codes, identifying themes and finally developing generalised statements which will be applied to the conceptual model of site selection.

The coding of the data, which can also be described as indexing (Arksey and Knight, 1999), will be broadly conducted through content and domain analysis. Content analysis is essentially the process of reducing data into relevant and noteworthy categories (Flick, 2006) and creating categories based on substantive statements (Gillham, 2000). Domain analysis seeks to determine commonalties in data based on semantic relationships (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012). This has been deemed an appropriate method of data analysis in this inquiry as there is much jargon used in the industry and a lack of common terminology (Rogers, 2013). This is particularly true of industry language used in North America compared with Europe. Thus, domain analysis will enable me to make links between participant responses that may, on the surface, seem unconnected. For example, the term 'congress', 'convention', 'symposium', and 'colloquium' are all acceptable descriptions of a conference and 'incentives', 'waivers' and 'discounts' can be forms of subvention.

More specifically, I planned to use Saldaña's (2016) coding manual as this is a comprehensive review of over thirty methods for coding data, built on a number of previous studies of coding qualitative data. Saldaña (2016, p.73) proposes this as the initial technique for analysing interview data, while maintaining an open mind to alternative methods should this not yield 'substantive discoveries'. A mixture of attribute, In Vivo, provisional and thematic coding will be used in the first cycle of coding. Table 4.3 describes attribute coding and shows how it will be applied to my data.

Type of Coding	Description	Application
Attribute	Using descriptions as relevant to basic data	Participant code: P1, P2 etc. for PCO, V1 etc. for venue, C1 etc. for CB PCO: - location - type of PCO (in-house, agency) - type of association/s (e.g. medical, scientific, any) - size of conference/s Venue: - location - type (e.g. purpose-built) - capacity - ownership (public, private, combination) CB: - location - national or regional - ownership (private, public, combination)

Table 4.3 Attribute coding (adapted from Saldaña, 2016)

In keeping with Saldaña's (2016) advice, I will then apply a mixture of types of coding in order to complete the first cycle as this provides a useful breakdown of a large quantity of data. Second cycle coding can then be applied to facilitate an in-depth assessment of the most relevant parts of the collected data. These coding techniques are set out and explained in table 4.4.

Type of Coding	First or Second Cycle	Description
In Vivo	First	Verbatim quotes, key phrases, argot
Provisional	First	Predetermined terms (e.g. as derived from the literature and insider knowledge)
Thematic	First	Outcomes of coding, categorising, recurrent patterns
Pattern	Second	Clustering themes, meta coding
Axial	Second	Determining dominant themes, removing less important/redundant themes
Elaborative	Second	Top down coding, appropriate for studies that build on previous research, to elaborate or modify existing theory through creating more meaningful categories

Table 4.4 First and Second Cycle Coding, adapted from Saldaña, 2016.

Additionally, as part of this process I planned to carry out a diagrammatic analysis of the substantive statements made by interviewees and as part of the process of coding and analysis, I aimed to describe and discuss key anomalies, which Arksey and Knight (1999) confirm strengthens the credibility of the work. Taking this approach helps to reduce distortion and bias, as ensuring impartiality is particularly important for researchers working alone on projects that they are passionate about (Bryman, 2012). The results of the data analysis will enable me to achieve the remaining two objectives of my research:

- to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences

and

- to create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events.

Furthermore, the planned methodology will enable me to explore theories of competitiveness and relationship management. This and the final two objectives are discussed in the following

chapters, as chapter five presents the results of my inquiry, and chapter six discusses the results and the implications of my findings.

4.9 Summary

The lack of involvement of CBs in previous research has been repeatedly cited as a weakness of these studies and the use of mainly quantitative approaches has limited the depth of understanding of what influences the process of site selection. To date, tourism scholars have been reluctant to adopt and accept qualitative methods (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). As Arksey and Knight explain, the majority of criticism that qualitative research is faced with, is 'based on theories of social science that want this approach to research to deliver what it cannot' (1999, p.171). Acceptance of qualitative research would appear to be increasing as there is evidence that many researchers suggest that future investigations should use qualitative tools to develop models of site selection (Comas and Moscardo, 2005, Park *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, as Robertson *et al* (2018, p.872) state' given the ubiquitous nature of organized events in modern society, their capacity to either determine, affect, or house new paths of research should not be a revelation'.

As a pragmatist, I identified that a qualitative approach was best suited to my goal of developing the existing conceptual model of site selection and answering the research question of how does convention bureau support influence PCOs' choice of destination? Furthermore, one of the great strengths of qualitative research design is that it facilitates a more theoretically informed flexibility than most quantitative approaches (Silverman, 2006). Savin-Baden and Major (2012) argue that pragmatic qualitative research is particularly suited to professional inquiries and can inform professional practice. Furthermore, Schofield (2000) suggests that the current trend in policy-orientated research is to use qualitative methods and as my research aims to influence policy and practice these are encouraging endorsements of my position as a researcher.

I have developed the following research position; my fundamental paradigm is pragmatism, this and my conceptual framework underpin my study of the process of site selection and my qualitative strategy of inquiry uses semi-structured interviews and content analysis. I am keenly aware of the key criticisms of my chosen paradigm as pragmatism has been charged with drawing the researchers' interest away from relevant and important theory by being too

focused on achieving the end outcome (Talisse and Aikin, 2008). However, as Denscombe explains, carefully planned research will always have limitations, as no matter the approach 'gains in one direction will bring with them losses in another' (2009, p3). By using Yin's (2014) protocol for research and developing my conceptual framework based on Maxwell's (2005) template, I have designed a robust strategy for my research which will mitigate against the potential limitations of my approach.

My industry background and experience has been extremely valuable as tourism policy research from an insider perspective is rare (Mosedale, 2014). However, I have planned to take steps to ensure that my inherent bias does not unduly influence the results of my exploration. This will be achieved through the design and implementation of a strategic methodology underpinned by ethical procedures, the adaptation of Maxwell's (2005) conceptual framework for conducting research and Yin's (2014) tests to determine quality.

I planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with 30 participants. Interviews yield rich, detailed data although they can be time consuming and resources intensive (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012, p.371). Although the process of transcribing and analysing the data may be arduous, this can still be considered a relatively small number of participants and most will be based in the UK. However, the interviewees have international experience and knowledge and as such their views are relevant and many of them will be elite professionals, who when interviewed, can yield the richest and most insightful data (Sinkovics and Elfriede, 2011, Welch *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, this is an appropriate number of participants in a small-scale research project with typical characteristics such as budgetary restrictions where the researcher is the main resource (Denscombe, 2009) and the results of the exploration will be illustrated in chapter five (results) and chapter six (discussion).

5.0 Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss the results of the interviews that I conducted. Having determined that I would adopt a pragmatic research lens for this inquiry and use a qualitative approach, I spent several months securing participants and conducting and transcribing interviews. In total thirty interviews took place in person, over the telephone and by Skype with a range of event professionals: venue managers, agency PCOs, in-house PCOs, heads of national convention bureaus and regional convention bureaus. All interviewees had at least five years' experience of working in their sector and had worked on attracting or delivering both national and international association conferences, in terms of where they took place and the where delegates travelled from to attend. Although, most interviewees are based in the UK, the majority of those interviewed had extensive experience of organising globally peripatetic events. Additionally, eleven participants are based in North America, Asia, Africa and Australasia and across the range of participants, views of the global challenges of site selections were recorded.

This chapter includes an overview of the participants and explains key characteristics of each participant and the codes used throughout the analysis to identify them. In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, the letter 'X' has been used throughout the chapter to replace revealing words such as the name of destinations, venues or organisations. This chapter will present the results of the interviews in two sections: the concept of CB support and destination competitiveness, and across the two sections there are nine themes. Some of the themes were somewhat anticipated, as they relate to my industry experience and to the literature on site selection. Two themes, subvention and the significance of visa requirements, are notable as they are not at all apparent in the literature but yet were commented upon quite vociferously by participants. This chapter presents excerpts of the interviews to illustrate the nine themes, and it concludes with a summary of the key results of the primary research. This chapter is the basis for the more detailed discussion which will follow in chapter six looking at the overlap of themes between the CB support and destination competitiveness. Chapter six will also demonstrate how my data can be used to update conceptual models of site selection. These two chapters will therefore address the third and fourth objectives of this thesis: to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences and to create a modified conceptual

model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events.

5.2 The Sample

Of the thirty participants, fourteen are heads of CBS. Three manage national CBs, promoting the country as a whole (one based in Australasia, one based in North America and one based in North Africa). Of the others, nine manage teams within a city CB (mostly in the UK but also in North America and Australasia) and one manages a team promoting a region (part of a state in North America). The average length of time that each participant has spent in their current role is ten years and all of the CB interviewees have experience of working with international clients and marketing their destination on a global scale.

Eleven PCOs were interviewed, six in house PCOs (employed by an association) and five agency PCOs (working on various association conferences). Their industry experience ranges from five years to twenty-eight years and all are in management roles. Seven of the PCOs are based in the UK, one is based in India and three in North America. All have experience of working on association conferences that attract international delegates. With the exception of one (P8), all have experience of delivering conferences in their own country as well as abroad. P8 is the most experienced PCO, in terms of length of service, but only delivers conferences in the UK (although they are for an international audience). As such, despite the majority of PCOs being resident in the UK, they drew on their international experience which involved working with venues and CBs across several continents.

Five senior venue managers were interviewed. Four based in UK venues, and one based in North America (V5). All venues are substantial in size and compete for national and international association conferences. All of the venue managers have accrued several years of experience in the MICE sector. One venue is privately owned (V4), one venue is government owned (V2) and the other three are financed through a mixture of private and public sources. Although the majority of the venues managers that were interviewed are based in the UK, they are all responsible for marketing their venue to an international audience and working with PCOs based around the world.

Throughout this chapter, brief information about each participant is used to preface key excerpts of the interviews and a full (coded) list of participants to include their role, length of service within their current organisation, and brief details about their remit, can be found in Appendix 7 (p.195).

5.3 Overview of the Interview Schedule

At the start of the interviews, participants were asked to consent to being audio recorded and reminded that they could opt out of answering any questions however, all participants answered every question posed. General questions were used at the start of the interview to confirm basic information about the participant including time in role, brief description of their duties and the structure of organisation and venues and CBs were asked how they generate leads and who they compete against. For PCOs, general questions included how flexible is the choice of destination when organising an association conference, and what factors influence site selection. More probing questions included what do conference organisers particularly ask for, and what can you do to sway a decision towards the destination (for CBs and venues), why do you want CBs to be involved when organising a conference and what can they do to influence your decision towards their destination (for PCOs). A full set of interview questions can be found in Appendix 6 (p.189). The questions that were not planned in advance, and used to tease out information, are articulated throughout this chapter. All of the interviews were very conversational and I found it easy to chat with all of the participants. Building a rapport with each of them was straightforward as we share a passion for the MICE sector and the questions flowed quite easily. Occasionally I encountered what Welch *et al.* (2016, p.616) describe as participants who are 'practised in fielding questions….[and] quoting the party line', but on the whole, participants seemed to consider the questions carefully and often gave very detailed responses. Most participants appeared very interested in my work and eager to know how their responses compared with other professionals. Most of them commented on how useful it would be to them to be able to see the results of my inquiry and thanked me for asking them to take part in my research.

5.4 The Coding Process

Once the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, and a sample sent to participants for cross checking for transcription accuracy, first and second cycle coding was applied to the data using Saldaña's (2016) techniques. This began with attribute coding, using letters and numbers to identify participants (e.g. P1. For the first PCO interviewed). These codes were cross referenced to a table that I created which recorded basic descriptive data about each participant including their location, role and type of organisation (Appendix 7, p. 195). In Vivo coding was then applied, which involved highlighting phrases that stood out as being of particular interest and potentially worth revisiting as well as jargon and references to key organisations (such as ICCA). These are shown in pink (short quotes) and green (long quotes) on the excerpts of transcripts of the interviews with P3 (an agency PCO based in the UK) and P6 (divisional director for a major international agency), which are in appendix 8, p.198. and appendix 9, p.199. Provisional coding was then used to highlight predetermined terms which included variables influencing site selection (venue, accommodation, marketing support, information for delegates, access etc.).

Once I had read through the transcripts several times, thematic coding was applied which involved highlighting additional sections of text that showed references to recurrent topics (topics which were clearly appearing across several transcripts). Some examples are shown in blue on the transcripts (appendix 8, p.198. and appendix 9, p.199.). Upon completion of first cycle coding, three techniques of second cycle coding were used to further examine the data. Saldaña's (2016) techniques of pattern and axial coding were used to remove minor themes and cluster and determine the dominant themes of the interviews and finally, elaborative coding was used to describe these themes. This process began by grouping together some of the topics and this is illustrated in table 5.1 which shows the thirty-three themes, which have been highlighted to cluster commonalities. They are presented in no particular order and using the words, phrases or terminology that was used by the interviewees. They are cross referenced with variables drawn from the literature on site selection and the third column indicates which themes were removed from the final stage of analysis (through axial coding).

	Results of First Cycle Thematic Coding	Variables Drawn from Literature (Park *et al*, 2014, Di Pietro *et al*, 2008, Fortin and Ritchie (1997)	Removed via Axial Coding
1	Guidance, reassurance, trust, empathy, reliability, continuity, approachability	Trust	
2	CB with experience		
3	Size of team		√
4	Outreach	Network of stakeholders	
5	Effort, bespoke, personalisation		√
6	The 'story' of the destination	Destination image	
7	Partnerships, stakeholders	Network of stakeholders	
8	Relevance of subjects, centres of excellence	Ambassador schemes	
9	Take weight off their shoulders		
10	Collaboration, key partners	Network of stakeholders	
11	Each association is different		√
12	Synergy, key sectors, strategy, focus		
13	Competition, tier 1, tier 2, Asia, emerging, capital cities	Growth of second tier destinations	√
14	Council/government support		
15	Subvention, incentive, inducement, underwriting, discount	Cost	
16	Value for money, added value, cost, budget, affordability, profit	Cost	
17	Academic excellence	Ambassador schemes	
18	Economic benefits		√
19	Association politics		√
20	Image, profile, perception, reputation, branding	Image	
21	Access, air lift, visas	Access	
22	ICCA		√
23	Rotation patterns		√
24	On staff researcher		
25	Ambassadors	Ambassador schemes	
26	Exhibition space	Venues	√
27	Business models		√
28	Tax, bedroom tax, tourist tax	Cost	
29	Risk		√
30	Culture, heritage	Image, attractions	√
31	Leveraging and negotiating	Cost	√
32	Inward investment		√
33	Variables (conference venue, accommodation, transport, AV, attractions)	Network of stakeholders, attractions, venues, access	

Table 5.1: Results of First Cycle Thematic Coding Cross Referenced with Variables Drawn from Literature (Park *et al*, 2014, Di Pietro *et al*, 2008, Fortin and Ritchie, 1997).

In order to determine which of the 33 entries could be considered dominant, or more valuable to the study, axial coding was then applied. This involved analysing highlighted text within the context of the interview and/or in view of the literature on site selection and taking into account the amount and richness of information given by the participant and their strength of feeling on the topic. Topics which were not discussed at length, were removed through axial coding. Additionally, topics that were anticipated (having featured in the literature review) where also discounted if the participant did not add any commentary which could be considered noteworthy.

This process is illustrated in figure 5.1 using the theme of rotation patterns which appears at the top of the excerpt of the transcript with P3 (appendix 8, p. 198). and which was determined not to be a dominant theme.

Figure 5.1 Axial coding to reveal a non-dominant theme

Figure 5.2 illustrates this process for the theme of sector strategizing which was determined to be a dominant theme.

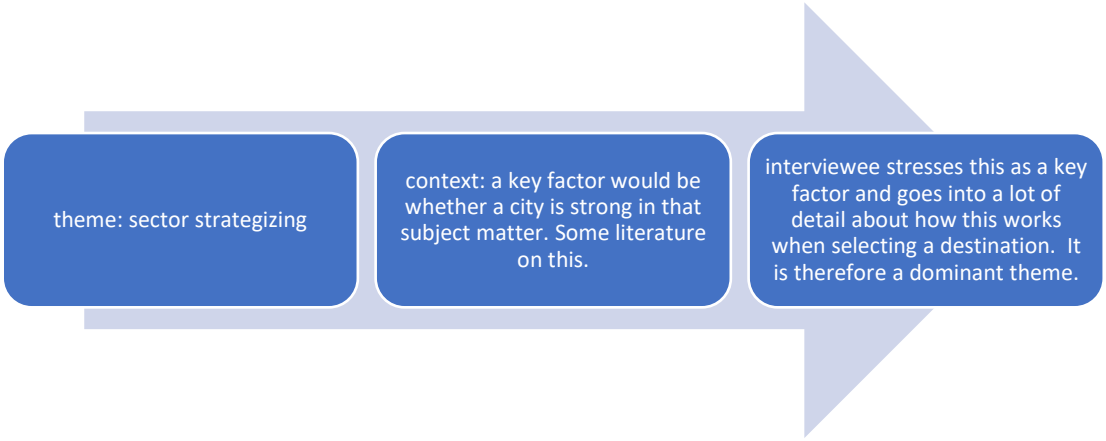

Figure 5.2 Axial Coding to Reveal a Dominant Theme

Axial coding was a lengthy and complex process which was followed by elaborative coding. This involved looking at the nine dominant themes and applying clear descriptions to each. This process also resulted in creating two categories of dominant themes: those relating to the concept of CB support and those relating to destination competitiveness, as illustrated in figure 5.3.

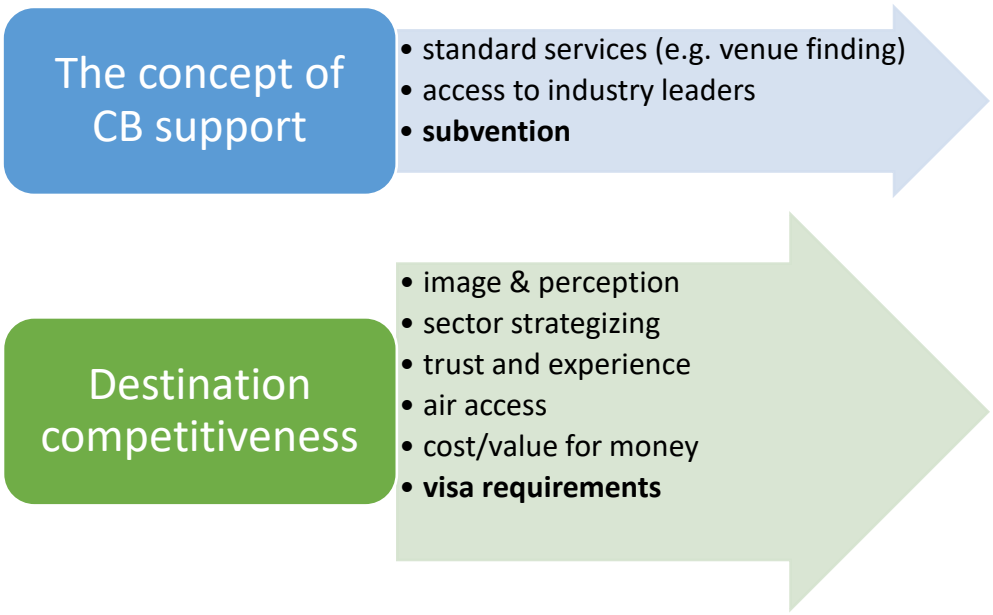

Figure 5.3 Themes Derived from the Data

Subvention and visa requirements were identified as the most significant findings, as subvention was by far the most recurrent theme in the interviews which generated a lot of rich and insightful data, and visa requirements was the most surprising theme. This chapter will continue to look at these themes in more detail, and chapter six will consider the elaborative coding process of themes in relation to the development of the model of site selection.

5.5 The Concept of Support - Standard CB Services

In response to initial questions "what support do you get asked for" (to CBs) and "what support do you look for from a CB" (to PCOs) a number of anticipated responses were given. Many of the answers mirrored the substantial literature on the topic of CB support which has been summarised by Weber (2000) as including providing destination information, referral

services (finding suppliers), lead services (venue finding), registration staffing, housing assistance (ABS) and attendance promotion.

C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, articulated this particularly well:

> "we have the very much traditional and familiar services that a client would expect a convention bureau to offer, such as venue finding for their conferences, promotion of the destination, various digital tools, videography, information for delegates, delegate offers, bid strategies and bid support" (C1).

Fam trips were mentioned by both CBs and PCOs and when asked how helpful they are, P7, founder of a UK based agency, commented:

> "Very. As a small business they really do help us because obviously gathering that knowledge and being really clear on what's out there saves us a huge amount of time …when a client comes to us and says 'I want to go to X city', if we have a good knowledge of that city then that really helps us" (P7).

Venue finding services was mentioned repeatedly, meaning support finding conference venues and delegate accommodation, with P8, an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association (and the most experienced PCO interviewed) confirming that this is the main reason she works with CBs:

> "If there's a convention bureau in a city where I have a big accommodation requirement, they will be my go-to for my preferred accommodation supplier" (P8).

Information and discounts for delegates, marketing materials, information and assistance with booking flights were cited throughout the discussions with several references to the provision of an information desk on arrival, help with delegate registration and signage in the destination. P7, founder of a UK based agency, added:

> "we will be looking to them (CBs) for information, for their real knowledge of the area, of ideas that we might not be aware of…it's really their local knowledge that helps us" (P7).

C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern Ireland, explained that providing small items for delegates such as a branded canvas bag or luggage tag are popular confirming that requests for support are "not always financial" (C3). Conversely, requests for subvention were also mentioned by both CBs and PCOs and this is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

In terms of the relationship between PCOs and CBs, the results of my interviews confirm not only the dependency of PCOs on CBs for support but also their early involvement, as indicated in previous studies of site selection conducted by Fawzy and Samra (2008) and Weber and Chon (2002). My results would also appear to corroborate Weber and Chon's (2002) and Shin *et al.*'s (2007) investigations showing that experienced PCOs are more likely to use the services of a CB than less skilled meeting planners in order save time and money. This was clear in the interview with P8, an in house PCO with a UK based scientific association and the most experienced PCO that I interviewed, having accrued twenty-eight years in her current role. She confirmed that, although she has extensive knowledge of the destinations she uses, she still works with CBs particularly to source venues (meeting rooms and accommodation). Furthermore, P9 explained how she drew on her extensive experience to switch to using CBs when she took up her current role as an in house PCO with a major international association, based in the USA. She explained that when she joined the organisation they were:

> "outsourcing to a third party who was then going direct to hotels and taking commission and I said to them that is not the most cost-effective way for us as an organisation to do this. My background is travel, I was a travel agent for about 12 years before I came into the meeting and congress organising world so I always came with 'we go to our CVBs…they are a free of charge service…and we should be using them because they're not going to charge us a fee and they're going to help get our RFPs out so ship it up to that model'…always go to CVBs" (P9).

By comparison, P1, an in-house PCO for UK based medical association and one of the least experienced PCOs that I interviewed, discussed her lack of awareness of subvention until she was offered it by a CB when organising her first international association conference. She confirmed that based on this experience she will "engage a convention bureau, wherever" in future and this again highlights that experience drives PCOs to using CBs more.

The theme of working with experienced CBs was evident in many of the interviews and the concept of trust emerged as part of discussions around PCO reliance on CBs. It became clear

that an experienced CB, one that can be trusted, was of great significance to PCOs. As trust and experience are characteristics of a CB, and not forms of support, this theme has been grouped with other forms of destination competitiveness (as shown in figure 5.1), but in the interviews it was mentioned frequently, particular when interviewees were asked to give examples of CB support. Similarly, the data collected also pointed to access to industry leaders to be another important element of the PCO/CB relationship.

5.6 The Concept of Support – Access to Industry Leaders

In terms of what constitutes CB support, access to destination suppliers was very much anticipated and mirrors my experience and the literature on site selection. For example, it has a central position on Weber's (2000, p.603) list of standard CB services and is noted as a 'referral service'. However, what was much less anticipated was the many specific references to access to industry leaders and renowned academics which was pointed out as an important and distinct element of CB support.

C6 and C7 cited their connections to business leaders, universities and access to keynote speakers as to a type of support that they are regularly asked for. C1, C3 and C9 all explained how they use their connections with university academics to source associations and they work with the academics to bid for future conferences. V4 described a similar approach:

> "we work very closely with the convention bureau who run our ambassador programme and generate as many ambassadors as possible within healthcare, academia and business so that they can proactively act as a source of leads for us as they can approach their organisation directly and say that they would like to hold a conference in X (city)" (V4).

He went on to describe the:

> "strength in ambassadors that we can put forward [which] adds weight to our bidding process" (V4).

C3 also explained that much of their lead generation comes from their:

> "network of 1,200 local professionals…[including] academics, surgeons, professors, lecturers" (C3).

She went on to describe how this ambassador programme is as old as the CB:

> "So, it's fairly established, and we like to think that we pretty good at looking after them (ambassadors), understanding them, and delivering for them because it's a 2-way relationship. We take a very sectoral approach based on the sectors that we're strong in such as cyber security, life sciences…so we follow the areas where we are strong as we're going to have more success in those conference segments and certainly when we've got an ambassador by our side, so that's a huge part of where the leads come from" (C3).

C9 also discussed the ability to make introductions to industry leaders, who would act as conference speakers or sponsors, as a strength of the CB. She commented:

> "We set up an ambassadors club to explain to the professors in all the teaching hospitals and universities, that the convention bureau is here to help them and that if they want to host …it's convincing them that they want to do that, as they are busy people and to take on a congress is huge work. So, we get leads that way [and] the best piece of business won (as a result of the ambassadors club) was a medical conference with 33,000 delegates which generated an economic impact of £100 million" (C9).

P8 an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association, confirmed that a leading influencer over site selection for her conferences is that the destination is a recognised "centre of excellence" in a related subject area. When asked "what gives you the edge over other destinations?", C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, explained that he wears "many hats", one of which is a senior role in a local trade organisation which is part of an international network. He went on to describe how this

position gives him access to 330 organisations based around the globe which he uses as a gateway to sourcing exhibitors and delegates for PCOs who will hold events in his region. He described this level of CB support as:

> "unique to our destination because we are part of X (trade organisation) and because I am the Executive Director" (C13).

P6, divisional director for a major international agency, also illustrated the importance of access to leaders as when asked "what are you expecting from a convention bureau as part of the bidding process" she answered:

> "They will bring the collateral together, the content together so that it demonstrates the appeal of the destination (including)…academic brilliance in the field, that there will be local institutions in the destination that will support that congress, that might endorse it and support it" (P6).

CB support as including access to industry leaders and renowned academics is not overtly evident in literature and interviewees were not specifically asked to comment upon this. Nonetheless, a number of them did suggesting that this is a specific type of CB support sought by PCOs. Once again, this may not have appeared in previous studies of site selection due to the narrow terminology used by researchers in describing CB services and the quantitative nature of the studies. During these interviews, participants had time to talk freely on what they consider to be significant elements of destination success and consequently access to industry leaders emerged as a specific theme. Where both the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and Comas and Moscardo (2005) models of site selection refer to 'CVB support' and 'extra conference opportunities', my data perhaps suggests that access to industry leaders through the CB is a distinct element of both.

The terminology used by interviewees included many references to "ambassadors" and this term was used frequently to describe the relationship between CBs and industry leaders. The literature on ambassador schemes is scant, although Rogers and Davidson (2016) have described how such schemes are used by CBs to identify and train key destination professionals who will help to bid for specific conferences, usually within their trade related associations. C3, suggested that ambassador schemes have been in existence for decades,

which would appear to be valid as C1, C6, C7, C9 and V4 also discussed using their connections with local universities and businesses to generate business. Furthermore, access to industry leaders was also commented upon by two of the PCOs who work in-house for specific associations and this all points towards this as a distinct element of CB support. There would also appear to be a connection between access to leaders, ambassador schemes and sector strategizing, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Lockstone-Binney *et al* (2014), conducted research into the motivation of ambassadors and conclude that ambassador schemes could be a distinct element of CB competitiveness. All of this suggests that the effectiveness of ambassador programmes is an element of destination competitiveness and the data collected points to access to industry leaders as a distinct and influential element of CB support.

5.7 The Concept of Support - Subvention and the Role of the Government

Subvention is a dominant theme in the interviews, with every participant except one, discussing it in some detail. The topic of subvention was frequently discussed in relation to the limited budgets that association conferences have and the financial risk involved in organising an association conference. The one CB that did not discuss subvention was C5, the owner of a DMO (promoting a country in Africa) which, as a privately funded, non-government organisation, does not offer subvention. All PCOs raised the topic of subvention without any prompting, and before the word was used by the interviewer and there were some clear and strong viewpoints.

The notion of subvention was discussed when P5, owner of an agency based in India, was asked what type of support they want from a CB support and stated:

> "the convention bureau can leverage freebies….and the minute an international association knows the facilities of the convention bureau, half the selling is done" (P5).

All PCOs confirmed that they have been offered subvention and most ask for it routinely with P8, an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association (and the most experienced PCO), adding:

> "I always go for a discount…we negotiate quite hard with venues" (P8).

When asked what they expect in terms of CB support, P6, divisional director for a major international agency, first response was "of course, subvention is always a question" and they went on to add:

> "to compete successfully on the global stage, one has to realise and appreciate that it's an element of success" (P6).

P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, commented:

> "subvention can make or break a budget of a conference" (P3).

This view was similar to the opinion of P6, divisional director for a major international agency, who referred to association conference budgets stating:

> "cost is really important because if a congress has a deficit, is in a loss situation, it can close an association down" (P6).

P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, also confirmed that:

> "cost will come into it because some events just can't afford some venues so unless there was a significant discount it would be a no" (P4).

Additionally, V1, head of business development at a multi-purpose venue in London (who offers subvention) suggested that:

> "if it's just money, that works to a certain degree…because they (associations) can't take the risk otherwise" (V1).

Similarly, P10, in-house PCO for a professional association (based in North America), suggested:

> "it's very important….it helps us to alleviate some of those hard costs" (P10).

Although P10 was also a little frustrated with the terms and conditions attached to subvention stating

> "it's great but then I'm under all this pressure to put so many heads in beds to get that subvention" (P10).

P7, founder of a UK based agency, was also a little cautious suggesting that:

> "subvention is a great help. It's not something that's routinely offered I've noticed, it tends to be for bigger events. I don't know that it makes a difference as to whether we will or won't go but it's definitely a factor, it's nice to have rather than a decider, it's added value" (P7).

Many PCOs and CBs confirmed that subvention is not limited to venue discounts, but can include civic receptions and marketing support. P11 stated:

> "it could be a venue discount or a cheque" (P11)

while C3, C9 and C13 all explained that their subvention offer can be in the form of marketing support and P4 commented:

> "it might not be overtly a discount on the price…it can be welcome receptions and civic hospitality" (P4).

P5, owner of an agency based in India, referred to subvention taking the form of venue discounts, free venues, a banquet for all delegates, excursions and free travel passes and V1, head of business development at a multi-purpose venue in London, confirmed that they offer discounted hire and delegate receptions. P1, an in-house PCO for UK based medical association, explained that the offer of subvention they received (on the only international conference they had run) was a cash contribution:

> "to put towards enhancing the delegate experience" (P1).

C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, offers clients “a menu of items” to choose from and they went on to describe some of the more creative menu items as including setting up a call centre to boost delegate attendance, creating apps to promote interaction at the event and offering delegates VIP passes to other events taking place in the destination.

One interviewee, P9, an in-house PCO for a major international association (based in North America), was very vocal about wanting subvention to be used more creatively, to fund an interesting speaker or to facilitate delegates from developing countries attending the conference, commenting:

> “CVBs are just throwing collateral at me…I’d like to see more varied help” (P9).

Similarly, P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, talked at length about several positive experiences she had in one specific destination when negotiating what form the subvention would take. She stated

> “in the past they had a lot more flexibility and were much more open to creative opportunities, that were win win for both of us” (P4).

C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, was the only participant that had to be prompted to discuss subvention, which they offer and clearly advertise. When asked if it influences site selection she commented:

> “It shows that the city really wants the conference to come but when you look at it in the size that a conference budget would be, it’s actually a very small amount of money but I think that it’s nice to have to show that commitment, that we recognise the importance of the conference, we recognise the economic benefits that the conference brings to the destination and we as the city are willing to give a little bit of that back as a support mechanism to make the conference a success” (C1).

The notion of subvention as a gesture was also apparent in comments made by C8 who, when discussing subvention, said:

> "you will always lose the business if you don't make a gesture of some sort" (C8)

and by P9, in-house PCO for a major international association (based in North America), who suggested that:

> "even a small amount of money that the local convention bureau gives can make all the difference and it does go some way to showing that…. it doesn't have to be a huge amount of money… but it shows the association that there is the will to bring them to X (countries)" (P9).

Similarly, C2, C4 and V2 all discussed the importance of "showing you want the business" with V1, head of business development at a multi-purpose venue in London, adding:

> "a lot of it (being competitive) is showing that you want the business, that you understand it, that you can deliver on it as well".

Seven of the eleven CBs interviewed offer subvention and four do not. Across the CBs there were mixed views on how influential subvention is. Of those with a subvention fund the following comments were made by C1, C2, C3 and C6.

C1, head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, stated:

> "We have been in a bid situation against cities that have offered funding that has been higher than ours and we won the conference. So, I think that it has to be considered in the round and it's one of the reasons why a conference can be successful but just offering money wouldn't make us win the bid" (C1).

C2, the owner of a private CB in Southern England, made similar comments:

> "We've beaten destinations where they've given the venue for free and we've charged venue hire and still won, so it's not always about cost" (C2).

While C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, commented "it gives me a leg up" and C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia, stated:

> "We know that two of our barriers are distance and cost…so the bid fund gives us the opportunity to help alleviate some of those hard costs…we know some of our competitors certainly have large subvention funds so I think it makes X certainly competitive from that respect. So, for us it's very important and we're seeing very good results from our bid fund" (C6).

When asked if they know why they lose bids to other destinations C2 listed some of their competitors, stating that they offer subvention and going on to describe the lack of it as "a barrier". When asked what they believe PCOs look for primarily from a CB, C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, answered:

> "I think they look for…obviously the government funding is a key link" (C10).

When asked how important subvention is, C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, stated:

> "I don't think it's the be all and end all because if you present the business case and make a good business case you would win it (the bid) without dangling the carrot…but it always comes down to budget" (C9).

When asked if the lack of subvention was a barrier to success C9 added:

> "yes…we do (lose bids) because of it, particularly to Asia and to new cities as they will give lots of subvention" (C9).

C8 expressed a similar view:

> "you don't feel that you are on a level playing field…money talks over relationships sometimes" (C8).

P6, a UK based divisional director for a major international agency, also talked about the barrier of not offering subvention:

> "I've got the Business Events Strategy here in front of me…subvention comes up in it which is quite interesting, but this is old, this document. It's pre-Brexit. It says that subvention isn't everything but do you know if you're competing against a destination in Australia for a very big event, we did recently for something to come to the UK, and failed against Melbourne…the fact that they get a free venue because the government supports it to that end…it's very difficult to compete against….there are destinations that will happily pay a lot of money for major events that we would like to have here in the UK, I know one was recently lost to Lisbon because they paid a lot of money for it, We lost one to Melbourne because they put a lot of money on the table" (P6).

V3, assistant director of a purpose-built venue in the North of England (publicly and privately financed), was very vocal on the topic of subvention, stating that not being able to offer it has impacted their bidding capabilities and they lose between four and six major international association conferences each year because of not being able to offer it:

> "the 'super associations' know the value of their event and are used to getting high levels of subvention and we just can't be competitive and those are the kinds of events that really make a difference to a city. The lack of it (subvention) has made us less competitive (V3).

The secretive nature of subvention was commented upon by V6:

> "it's not talked about but when it's raised it opens a door to a discussion" (V6).

P1, an in-house PCO for UK based medical association, revealed that she has only been offered subvention once, and she referred to it as an incentive (and did not use the word subvention). When asked if she would request it in future she commented:

> "yes, because I didn't know that thing existed…you hear things being talked about in industry but unless you are actually going through it you won't often…the cogs don't slip into place" (P1).

When questioned if she would ask for it again in the future she added:

> "I would definitely ask for that going forward and I would see if we can engage a convention bureau wherever we went" (P1).

C4, business development manager for a city CB in Northern Ireland, (who offer subvention) commented:

> "It needs to be correctly handled otherwise it comes across badly. So, I think that's why I'm cautious about when, who, where I have that conversation because it can be just a disposable line and a percentage of the bottom line for the conference. I'd rather have it as an inducement or sweetener or thank you for bringing the conference to X rather than throwing it down rather disposably" (C4).

The CBs offering subvention are all funded by their government, and questions regarding the relationship between CB and government came about quite naturally during the interviews. When asked what is the key to the success of the destination, C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, commented:

> "We have always had huge support and understanding from our city council. The convention bureau was started in the late '80s when X (city) was transforming itself into a destination and there was an understanding by the city that conferences were a key strategy to attract people to the destination, and probably before tourists were coming to X (city). And that strategy really has been a great focus for us, it's been a key pillar for the economic development of X (city)" (C1).

C1 also went on to say:

> "we're very fortunate to still have it (subvention) and it helps us to bring business into X (city)" (C1).

C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern Ireland, made similar comments:

> "we are very fortunate to currently be in receipt of a subvention fund or a city support fund as it's sometimes known".

C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia said "we are very fortunate to have really strong relationships (with government), "central government are very supportive of business events" and C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, added:

> "we have very good links into our state government and that's where we get a lot of support for our bids from … PCOs look for this in a CB…government funding is a key link and I think that sense of recognition (from the government) is much higher in X (country) than anywhere else…the government has a better understanding and more recognition of business events here…than anywhere else".

Of the CBs who do not offer subvention, some strong feelings were expressed when asked about their relationship with government. C2, the owner of a private CB in Southern England, commented:

> "the government don't put enough effort into business tourism" (C2)

while C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, referred to the size of her team as 'ridiculously small' and went on to say:

> "It's all about money and everybody thinks that X (city) has huge amounts of money to promote itself and it just doesn't…. no way do we get support from the government, which a lot of other cities do…our budgets are absolutely tiny" (C9).

When asked if the government supports them in bidding for major international events, C9, replied no and when asked if they found this frustrating she went on to say:

> "It is! But that's the way it is...they are not going to gives us a lot of money to win events. Because subvention really is the underwriting of an event and that just isn't their strategy…so we have to go with other routes" (C9).

V3, assistant director of a purpose-built venue in the North of England (publicly and privately financed), suggested that:

> "the lack of it (subvention) has made us less competitive and a lot of European cities are backed by their local government and national government. We could get more help than other industries do…it would help if there was a national subvention fund which could be run by a national body which could be fair so you're not competing against other home destinations. The national government doesn't seem to be doing that much which means that we're not as competitive in what I deem to be my own country" (V3).

In answer to the earlier question of whether or not the local council (who partly fund the venue) are hands on or off in terms of how the venue is run he answered:

> "Luckily hands off. To be honest, it is one of the reasons why I was attracted to the position" (V3).

PCOs were also asked whether they felt it was important for a CB to have a strong relationship with government and P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, commented:

> "I think so. Some convention bureaus do it better than others…and even the better ones…improvements can be made because convention bureaus try to attract inward investment…government departments and councils try to attract inward investment and they could work more closely together. I think it's really important because it's bringing that awareness of the industry, of the economic benefits that conferences and events bring and if they (government) are not flying the flag for that, then maybe the message might get lost" (P3).

P6, divisional director for a major international agency, commented on the UK government's relationship with the events industry, stating:

> "They are not at all aligned. In terms of inward investment, they (government) are very short sighted. The government still doesn't understand as much as it should, particularly in my area of events, which is association congresses "(P6).

Subvention and relationships with government is perhaps the strongest theme of the interviews as this was discussed in detail throughout the interviews. Participants had different views on the importance of subvention, with most participants advocating its influence over site selection and destination competitiveness. Similarly, there were different views on relationships with government, with most CBs in receipt of state funded subvention confirming a strong, positive relationship and commenting on their good fortune, and those without suggesting a more strained relationship. This may be further evidence of what Pearce (2015), Beritelli and Laesser (2014) and Jago and Deery (2005) have described as the tense relationship between CB and government, when the CB lacks funding. This is perhaps also further evidence of the success of second tier destinations that are in receipt of government funding and support for their development.

As identified in chapter three, there is limited scholarly literature on subvention, which may indicate a limited academic understanding of the controversial topic which is very specific to association conference management. My research would seem to contradict Park *et al.*'s (2014) assertion that subvention is not discussed or promoted, as interviewees spoke freely and at length on the topic. The, perhaps, academic sensitivity to the word subvention (and preference for the terms 'financial support', 'incentives' and 'subsidies') was not mirrored by the vocabulary used by interviewees. They all used the term "subvention", and, with the exception of one participant, did so without any prompting. Moreover, my data would seem to corroborate industry reports on the wide use of subvention, particularly in emerging destinations. The data also confirms that subvention is used to offset the financial risk involved in association conference management, as previously identified by Wills (2011a). Although there is a dearth of academic literature on the role of subvention in site selection, the many and varied views and experiences of offering and receiving subvention that appeared throughout my interviews, have provided rich data on this type of CB support and firmly suggest that it is a key type of CB support and an important and distinct element of destination competitiveness. Much of my research relates to a number of elements of specific and fundamental elements of destination competitiveness.

5.8 Destination Competitiveness - Fundamental Elements of Destination Success

Much of the data gathered in the interviews relates very clearly to elements of destination competitiveness and pointed to key elements of destination success. These include, the driving factor of venue capacity in the destination (for plenary and breakout sessions and exhibitions), the significance of costs (venue hire, transport and accommodation in particular) and inclusion on rotation patterns, as these were mentioned repeatedly by all parties. There were many obvious links between the study data and the literature on site selection variables which points to the importance of the destination's heritage, attractions, facilities and safety (Park et al, 2014, Weber, 2000). Similarly, the participants alluded to the image of the destination as an important factor, which also corroborates the literature on the importance of the destination's image and brand (Di Pietro *et al*, 2008).

When asked "what makes a destination suitable for an association conference" P5 responded:

> "costs are important but I wouldn't put costs as the primary reason…. primarily, the important thing is that the venue should be able to provide for the number of parallel sessions" (P5).

This view was mirrored by PCO comments, as P4 made a similar point:

> "lots of factors come in to play but size is important, particularly if there is a requirement for a big exhibition. Cost is also a factor" (P4).

However, cost is undoubtedly a significant favour as the venue hire charges and price of accommodation were mentioned frequently, for example, when asked "how big a factor is cost?" P7 answered:

> "with associations, it's huge, a huge factor. Price is a very big consideration" (P7).

When asked "when comparing cities, what sort of things are you looking at" the response from P9 was detailed and she commented that as the association has grown, the "site selection process got more complicated". She added:

> "The cost to produce the event, because it's got to make money. Is it going to make money? Do we fit? There's no point going there if we don't fit in the building. And is it an attractive destination? Those three are pretty standard in the industry I think" (P9).

When asked what is important other than venue capacity, P7 answered:

> "ease of accessibility, location for ease of travel with train stations, car parking potentially, overall costs, what's included, is the AV included" (P7).

Similarly, P11, in-house PCO for a scientific association (based in North America), said that the venue:

> "has to be city centre, that's a driving factor" (P11).

As expected, the data collected has confirmed that the capacity of the main conference venue is a driving factor and as such it is a variable that has remained consistently important from Opperman's (1996) early study to contemporary investigations. Similarly, the results of this exploration reinforce cost as being a significant factor, as identified from Fortin and Ritchie's (1977) initial study to Falk's (2018) recent work. The data also confirms that cost can mean the hire charge for the meeting rooms as well as accommodation, travel to and within the destination, the cost of services within the destination and exchange rates. The PCOs interviewed also drew attention to the fact that costs are also important in relation to the association's budget for the event which is further evidence of the UIA (2015) findings that indicate that the financial management of the conference is a major challenge and source of anxiety for the PCO. This research also builds on the work undertaken by Crouch and Louvriere (2004), Nelson and Rys (2000) and Kang *et al.*. (2005) in demonstrating that the specific facilities in the destination, in particular the proximity of the venues to each other, are significant influencing factors. Additionally, across the thirty interviews that I conducted, very few references were made to the safety and security of the destination. In chapter three I concluded that the limited references to security in recent literature reflects the fact that security is now a major issue at all events and not destination specific and this assumption would appear to be borne out by the interviews. Furthermore, the data collected suggests that destination competitiveness, particularly in terms of second tier destinations, is a growing influence as is the image of the destination and the overall value for money of a destination,

particularly from the perspective of a PCO. This all suggests that the varying elements of destination competitiveness have a significant role to play in site selection and have implications on destination management.

5.9 The Concept of Destination Competitiveness: Trust and Experience

When asked what PCOs look for in terms of CB support, C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, confirmed that experience was the second most important factor (the first being subvention). Similarly, when asked about their strengths as an organisation and destination, C4 commented:

> "we succeed by being able to empathise with a client, which is a much-overlooked aspect of the sector" (C4).

C13 confirmed that as a CB they are not promoting any one venue or supplier and as such they see themselves as:

> "a very unbiased, service orientated sales team" (C13).

C1 articulated this in detail, describing the organisation as:

> "a safe pair of hands. I think the team are very established here. We're lucky that the average length of service for the city with our sales team is about ten years so they're incredibly experienced" (C1).

She also went on to say:

> "I think that there are some conference organisers that have worked with convention bureaus and realise there is this ream of impartial advice available, and they've had a good experience so they will always use a city bureau" (C1).

C9 made comparative comments, describing the CB as "a very well-oiled machine" later adding:

> "it's all about reliability and continuity…and my team has been here a long time" (C9).

Experience, as a part of why CBs can be trusted, was also mentioned by C5:

> "we've been in business for twenty-two years…we've done many, many, many events in the past so it's quite reassuring for the meeting planner" (C5).

C3 commented:

> "we're in our twentieth year which means we've been doing this a fair amount of time" (C3).

Interestingly, when asked how important the experience of a CB is when influencing PCOs, C7 also pointed to other factors such as strategizing (which is discussed later in this chapter). She confirmed:

> "yes, to an extent it's down to experience. It's also down to research, keeping an eye on trends and what's changing, and having a strategy" (C7).

It could be argued that CBs are predisposed to always positively promoting their destination and services, and this may have influenced their responses and inflated their views on trust and experience. Nonetheless, as I was not a client nor a potential buyer, the CB participants had nothing to gain from the interview and therefore no motive for using the discussion to emphasise the attractiveness of the destination. Indeed, the themes of experience and trust also featured in most of the interviews with PCOs. P3 confirming:

> "we will put forward a destination that we've worked with before and had a good experience of. If they are a convention bureau owned by a council or similar, then you gain a bit more trust with them (clients)" (P3).

P3's detailed discussion of relationships with CBs illustrated how the client (the association) will trust them (PCO) when they work with the CB which highlights the positive perception of CBs by associations. P3 was an interesting interviewee as she used the words "trust" and

"reassurance" several times, reiterating how this forms the basis of strong PCO/CB relationships. When asked how soon they involve a CB in planning a conference she added:

> "I would say that we almost exclusively involve convention bureaus because when it comes to associations, they like that reassurance that the city's behind it and it's a team effort. We find that our bids are more likely to be successful if there's all three parties, the venue, the convention bureau, the PCO, at the table" (P3).

P5 also commented on the relationship between the CB and the client suggesting that:

> "the convention bureau can handhold them" (P5).

P1, one of the least experienced PCOs interviewed, reiterated this view, confirming that the last CB that they worked with gave:

> "advice…understanding...and sort of just guided me and I can't explain how helpful that actually was" (P1).

P9 was a particularly interesting interviewee because of her detailed and frank responses to questions. She is the in-house PCO for a major international association (based in North America) and when we were discussing how reliant she is on CBs she replied, "yes to working with CVBs and no to DMOS" and when asked why she added:

> "because I don't think they (DMOs) really care about my members…I think they care about whether or not they're making money" (P9).

The difference between a DMO and a CB is not widely discussed in literature, but there is a general understanding that the former is a privately-owned company, and the latter is government funded. However, as illustrated by D'Angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi (2010), most CBs are now financed through a variety of sources in addition to the government. As such, the structure of CBs and the views of PCOs on this would certainly seem to be worth exploring in future as P9, an experienced professional, had a very definite view on this, built on extensive, international industry experience.

The notion of trust was anticipated, as it has been discussed at length in the literature and evidenced in previous studies of site selection. For example, Shin *et al.* (2017) focus on trust in their investigation of the PCO/CB relationship and suggest that a CB becomes an essential contributor to meeting planning once a strong trust-based relationship has been established with a PCO. The first and second cycle coding have revealed trust to be significant in this investigation, as participants voiced clear and detailed views of the importance of trust in business to business relationships. Furthermore, this was done without any reference to trust in any of the questions that I posed. A number of elements of CB support and destination competitiveness were discussed by CBs and mentioned briefly by PCOs, including the effort put into bids and the ability to negotiate with suppliers, but by comparison both spent longer discussing trust. This perhaps reflects their extensive industry experience which, as the literature shows, indicates how trust is fundamental to strong PCO/CB relationships. Furthermore, the data collected illustrates that PCOs use CBs despite the ease of using the internet to source information, which was commented upon in several studies including those by Shin *et al.*. (2016) and McCartney (2014) as well as key industry sources (ICCA, 2015 and the UIA, 2015). My data contributes to the literature on the importance of trust by presenting the views of CBs which has been omitted from previous studies, as noted by Park *et al.* (2014), Comas and Moscardo (2005), Fawzy and Samra (2008) and Jago and Deery (2005) and which further corroborates the view that trust is the basis of fruitful PCO/CB relationships.

What was also illustrated in the interviews, was the importance of strong stakeholder relationships in the destination to both PCOs and their clients and how this contributes to trusting and valuing the CB. The topic of collaboration clearly overlaps with the significance of experience and interviewees referred to partnerships between CBs and various destination stakeholders (attractions restaurants et cetera) but in particular to the collaboration between the CB and venue. Furthermore, the collaborative relationship between the CB, venue and PCO appeared significant and a notable strength or weakness of the destination. C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, explained:

> "We are very much part of that host partnership across the city and we work very closely with all of our industry whether that be with venue X or with our universities. The package of support…the way we all work together…makes it a very attractive destination to association meetings" (C1).

This view was echoed by P3, who suggested that:

> "associations like that reassurance that the city's behind it all and it's a team effort" (P3).

When asked what influences choice of destination P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, stated:

> "if there was a big coordinated effort from ourselves, the city council, the venue…something they (council and venue) would commit to, it (the destination) would become a possibility" (P4).

C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, commented that:

> "we have a very close collaboration with them (convention centre) which works well. We are an extension of their sales team…focusing on international associations" (C10).

This was something that they identified as one of the destination's key strengths in attracting association conferences, adding:

> "What they (PCOs) love to see is a very joined up approach within a city. So rather than people operating in silos, it's operating in collaboration. It's very much appreciated that we can make those introductions and facilitate those collaborations" (C10).

P6 and V3 suggested that the partnership between CB, PCO and venue is key to success with V3 describing it as "a three-pronged attack" and P6 stating:

> "the best solution is when all three are working together…when there's a good collaboration between the destination, the venue and the PCO" (P6).

Similarly, P4 stated:

> "we try to work in partnership with the DMO and venues" (P4).

P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, explained how important it is for the venue and CB to work together, saying:

> "if they're trying to sell themselves as a city where everyone's on one team, but in reality there are two different people, then clearly there's a disconnect there. In my experience, cities vary in terms of whether it's the convention bureau or the venue that has the upper hand when it comes to taking the initiative on leads. On the whole they communicate, but some cities are better than others at doing that" (P3).

When asked how destinations are chosen to be on the rotation pattern for the association, P2, commented:

> "we take into consideration the hotels surrounding the venue and what partnerships that venue may have with local hotels, partner hotels" (P2).

Interestingly C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, agreed that the strong relationships they have with venues is an element of their success in attracting meeting planners, but added that:

> "what's good about our structure is we're not funded by independents… transportation companies, restaurants" (C13).

This is a particularly interesting view as nearly all CBs are funded through membership schemes, at least in part, and this suggests that there is scope to further explore the structure of CBs and consequently build on the work of Beritelli and Laesser (2014) which looks at DMO funding as well as D'Angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi's (2010) classification of DMOs.

C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, identified a lack of collaboration between key stakeholders as a significant barrier to success, commenting that when she first joined the CB, she was:

> "told that X (city) was difficult to deal with, very fragmented…we work hard to be more approachable, offering solutions and stronger, long-term relationships" (C9).

She went on to describe her frustration at working with hoteliers who did not necessarily understand the long lead time involved in bidding for conferences:

> "You're dealing with somebody, explaining how important to them bedrooms are but that this booking is coming in four or five years in advance. And trying to get them to understand how important it is for the city that the venue, the hotels, and everything knits together…that is probably the most frustrating part of the job…when you are trying to book 10,000 rooms and some people don't even bother to reply (to you)" (C9).

As anticipated, a number of standard variables were discussed in relation to the questions I posed about what types of CB support is sought and the interviewees confirmed that CBs are significantly involved in association conference planning. As a further endorsement of the literature, notably the work of Shin *et al.* (2017), Davidson and Rogers (2016) and Nolan (2018), the PCOs interviewed placed great value on CBs' extensive and unbiased local knowledge. Furthermore, the collected data supports Jago and Deery's (2005) research which highlights the unique position of the CB as the coordinator of a city's stakeholders.

The theme of experience and trust were somewhat anticipated as these elements of destination competitiveness appear regularly in previous studies of site selection. However, the analysis of the data revealed it to quite an important aspect of the relationship between CB and PCO. I did not mention or infer the relevance of trust in any of my questions and despite this, it was discussed in detail by nearly all PCOs who all related it to a significant reason as to why they work with CBs and that their clients also feel they can trust CBs. This discussion of trust highlights the benefits of using a qualitative approach. Previous, mostly quantitative studies of site selection, asked PCOs to rate variables and this did not allow them the freedom to comment on the more subtle and soft elements of CB support such as trust

and experience. Furthermore, the references to trust which do appear in the literature have been based only on the views of PCOs while the comments made to me by CBs corroborate the PCO viewpoint which has therefore developed the narrative on this key element of CB and PCO relationships.

5.10 Destination Competitiveness - Image and Perception

Most of the previous studies of site selection reported on the importance of being able to 'sell' the destination to delegates, with some indicating this as one of if not the most influential factor (Chacko and Fenich, 2000, Di Pietro *et al.*, 2008). Although I did not ask any questions that specifically referred to destination image, most of the interviewees made explicit references to image and perception. Primarily comments related to the importance of the perception of destinations, but comments were also made about the image of the association and the venue. When asked "as a CVB what gives you the edge over other destinations that offer comparable venue choice and access?" C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, stated:

> "I believe that we have the best event service professionals in the world. We have the number one college in the world for learning hospitality management and the biggest hotels in the world which are all staffed by graduates…. hospitality is as synonymous with X (city) as anything else you can think about" (C13).

C1, C3 and C6 all discussed the importance of telling "the story" of the destination when bidding for events and C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia, elaborated:

> "Our people, our place, our produce, the activities and some of the experiences to do in X are very popular and seen very favourably overseas. We know it's an aspirational destination to come to" (C6).

C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, commented:

> "everybody knows X (city) …you don't have to…most people have been here, they know it, they love it" (C9).

They later added that the city brand was more established and recognisable than the country's brand. This was somewhat echoed in the views of C13, who stated that the until recently, the country in which his regional CB is located:

> "never promoted themselves as a travel destination" (C13).

He added that in terms of marketing the destination brand, they now work closely with the national CB as a means to developing the perceptions, branding and the image of the region that they promote and using opportunities to work conjointly on marketing initiatives:

> "working with the national CVB…it just allows the brand of the X (city) to be out there and it allows me as X (city) to hitch my wagon to that (country brand)" (C13).

Similarly, C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia, discussed this relationship from their perspective:

> "we rely on them (city CBs) for market support, branding and marketing X (country) as a destination, as a whole" (C6).

Both C4, business development manager for a city CB in Northern Ireland, and C5, head of a privately owned DMO based in Africa, work in destinations with an image that has been a barrier to attracting conferences. C4 explained that, in their destination, which has been subject to much political unrest in the last fifty years, civic dignitaries are used by the CB to:

> "cut through any perception that there may be of X (city)…because of it's recent history …the city is keen to portray that no matter the internal politics, everyone is keen to welcome conferences as much as they possibly can" (C4).

C5, the owner of a national DMO, also explained how image has been a significant barrier for promoting his country in Africa. When asked what is the main challenge of selling the destination to PCOs he commented:

> "well I think the main challenge we have is the political and geopolitical situation worldwide and particularly in the part we are in. The destination is very often

> perceived as a Middle Eastern destination…and that's our main issue, perception, because when something happens in the Middle East, meeting planners will stop offering X (country), just because they think it will not be safe to come to X (country) and yet we are very far from the Middle East but yet people perceive the destination as potentially dangerous….things are getting better but we have suffered quite a long time…maybe ten to fifteen years, because of this perception" (C5).

These views, linking political stability and destination image, resonated with previous research as although it is a topic that is not widely reported on, Park *et al.* (2014) and McCartney (2014) have suggested that the political stability of the destination is an influencing factor when choosing a destination for association conferences. Additionally, many of the PCOs interviewed also made comments about image with P1 commenting on how the image of the venue "could reflect badly" on how the association is viewed by delegates and P8, an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association, adding that the destination image can be why one city is chosen over another stating:

> "image can influence it (site selection)…recognised centres of excellence can be why one destination lost to another as it didn't have the same international reputation" (P8).

Similarly, P9, in-house PCO for a major international association (based in North America), described their delegates as:

> "a highly educated group who want to be culturally immersed" (P9).

She went on to cite "an attractive destination" as a "driving factor" (P9).

When asked if a CB had changed their view of a destination, P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, confirmed that:

> "the ones who are spending more time on building their profile are [and are] doing a good job of showcasing the destination" (P3)

V1, head of business development at a multi-purpose venue in London confirmed that image is a factor as:

> "there's a big perception that London is expensive and budget is key…[so] you have to sell the destination as well as the venue" (V1).

These views were echoed by V5, executive director of a purpose-built venue in North America, who identified the key to the venue's success as related to the image of the destination:

> "our brand is really alive and fully formed for meeting planners" (V5).

V4, director of a purpose built, privately owned venue in the Midlands, talked at length about venue image and branding. He explained that when he started in his role as venue director, the venue was struggling to attract conferences as despite its large capacity, it:

> "wasn't perceived as a facility that was fit for purpose for associations" (V4).

When asked about the significance of the venue's name and brand when working to attract PCOs, he talked at length about competitor venues that struggle because their:

> "brand is just letters…[which] doesn't mean anything to people" (V4).

He explained that some venues are forced to use acronyms because of their media partners, but he added that:

> "it just doesn't sit right for the conference market…[even though] it does with the entertainments industry" (V4).

Overall, most of the participants discussed image, branding and perception, mostly in relation to the destination but also in terms of the association's profile. Although I did not pose any direct questions about image, brand or perception, during the discussions we shared about destination competitiveness and the PCO/CB relationship, these themes occurred quite organically. This has resulted in the collection of some data which suggests, as does some of

the literature, that the image of the destination is a distinct and significant site selection factor. Although I have not gathered extensive data on this topic, the views of the interviewees would certainly suggest that the image or perception of the destination is an element of or a barrier to, being able to successfully compete for association conferences. Similarly, many of the interviewees pointed to sector strategizing as another key component of site selection and destination management which also points to how the perception of, or image of, the destination is a significant influence over site selection.

5.11 Destination Competitiveness - Sector Strategizing

Many PCOs organise events for specific industries, for example P8 is employed by a very specialised scientific association in the UK and the conferences that she manages attract scientists in the sector from around the world. It would now appear that many CBs are taking a similar approach, and targeting certain industries. This involves researching and bidding for particular conferences and showcasing the destination's suitability for the event, such as having a university in the destination with leading academic specialists in the subject area. Sector strategizing is somewhat apparent in the literature on destination competitiveness as it forms the basis of an ambassador scheme. Such schemes feature a partnership between the CB and an academic or a faculty, whereby the CB supports an academic in targeting and bidding for a sector specific conference (Rogers, 2016).

This notion of sector strategizing, or targeting specific industry sectors, was discussed by both CBs and PCOs, and to a lesser extent, venues. It became apparent that this was part of current strategies for competing for business. C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, confirmed:

> "We have an in-house researcher who looks at the association world in the key sectors that X (city) and X (country) are strong in and try to match conferences that we haven't had before and hope that the synergy between the world's best minds living and working in X (city) helps encourage conferences to come" (C1).

She went on to add that the CB will:

> "always consider the relevance of the subject matter to our city…so we can tailor the bid" (C1).

When asked what makes the destination successful, C2 confirmed that it comes down to focusing on specific sectors, as did C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia:

> "having sector strengths and industry leaders is key" (C6).

C6, went on to add:

> "A key part of our role is to tell everybody how smart some of our X (country) industry leaders are across a whole range of sectors…so that the international association decision makers get a better understanding and a better story of X (country) and the strengths that we have in particular sectors" (C6).

C3 confirmed they that "take a very sectoral approach" and target associations in cyber security and life sciences. C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, stated:

> "over the past five or six years we've focused on our government's priority sectors…science and medicine" (C10).

While C8, head of events at a city convention bureau in North America, stated:

> "we work with an economic sector strategy, which is where we've aligned ourselves with the trade division of the government and the High Commission, where they have various sectors that they see as the key resources from X (country), where we excel - technology, life sciences, aerospace, agriculture. We then created knowledge maps so that we can go into event agencies and companies and we can talk confidently about what resource, in terms of business, is coming out of X (country) or is produced in X (country). As that gives them resources or makes sense as to why they should bring their conference to X (country). We launched the strategy three years ago and we were really ahead of the game in terms of what other destinations were doing and now other destinations are starting to catch up" (C8).

C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, explained:

> "having a small team means we have to be very focused on what we're going for because we just can't cover it all" (C9).

Similarly, many PCOs discussed how they focus on working with specific sectors, as P8, an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association, explained:

> "our portfolio (of events) is dictated by sector groups" (P8)

and P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, stated:

> "as the company is building, we're focusing more on the markets we're strong in, medical, scientific, academic and (when choosing a destination) a key factor would be whether that city is strong in that subject matter as we've come to be focused on particular subject matters" (P3).

P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, confirmed that when considering adding clients to their portfolio they will:

> "look at how it fitted in with everything else" (P4)

and when asked what influences choice of destination P3, an agency PCO based in the UK, commented:

> "a key factor would be whether that city is strong in that subject matter" (P3).

P6, divisional director for a major international agency, confirmed:

> "our focus is increasingly in the digital space. In terms of choice of destination, we look at where the need of the sector, that the congress is showcasing, is greatest. The broader showcase of the destination, for example academic brilliance, must be evidenced in bid documents to win" (P6).

The theme of sector strategizing was less evident in the interviews with venues. Nonetheless V3, assistant director of a purpose-built venue in the North of England (publicly and privately financed), confirmed that he also employs a full-time researcher to find associations and:

> "match them with local ambassadors where we have some kind of seat of expertise in the city…that then marries quite nicely with what the convention bureau do, so we work very closely with the convention bureau" (V3).

He went on to stress that they aim to attract:

> "really impactful conferences that you want to have in your city for the kudos and everything like that. And they tend to be… if not medical then they tend to be academic in nature" (V3).

Similarly, V4, director of a purpose built, privately owned venue in the Midlands, are targeting high impact conferences using two researchers to find and "actively sell to the association market". He confirmed that his strategy is centred on:

> "the larger association business that won't fit into the X (a competitor venue)" (V4).

C12, commercial and business development officer for a city convention bureau in Scotland, also talked extensively about their ambassador programme which works closely with local academics, primarily highlighting the free support available through the CB, to convince them to bid for conferences to come to the city. When she first joined the CB she was the ambassador programme manager, as she explained:

> "When I started at X (city) convention bureau, my role was to research the conferences and identify people in the local medical and academic communities who were ideally board members of that association or they regularly attended the conference or at the very least were members of the association. And then we'd reach out to them and find out whether they, at least in theory, were interested in bringing the conference to the city and tell them a bit about what the convention bureau could do for them. A lot of it was about explaining that, one, the convention bureau actually exists and its part of the council and what it is offering is free of charge" (C12).

When asked if ambassador programmes work, she went on to add:

> "if we didn't have an ambassador programme, or if we weren't concerned with academics themselves, these conferences could go anywhere" (C12).

The notion of focusing efforts on particular association sectors was a very clear theme that appeared in interviews with over half of the CBs and it was also evident in discussions with PCOs and venues. However, as previously mentioned, there has been very little exploration of how successful ambassador schemes are and limited scholarly research on sector strategizing as an element of competing for association conferences. Much of the data that I gathered from CBs suggests that targeting specific sectors forms part of their current strategy, which is also influenced by the size, structure and funding of the CB. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the number of competing destinations is increasing, a fact which all interviewees demonstrated a keen awareness of, and it can therefore be logically concluded that CB marketing and operational strategies take this into account. Consequently, my data suggests that sector strategizing is a comparatively new and significant element of destination management, as is support with visa applications, which emerged through discussions with interviewees around the topic of international air access.

5.12 Destination Competitiveness - International Air Access and Visa Requirements

I had very much anticipated international air links to the destination to be mentioned by participants as the extensive research conducted by Crouch and Louvriere (2004) as well as Nelson and Rys (2000) and Kang *et al.*. (2005) all demonstrate the importance of road and air access when organising association conferences. The data that I collected strongly supports these views. C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern Ireland, confirmed that site selection decisions are "driven by access", confirming that the reason they lose bids is the perception that the destination is not easily accessible. C4, business development manager for a city CB in Northern Ireland also confirmed that the perception of restricted air access was a factor in bid negotiations, stating that flight access is something "we would address straight away". This participant went into some detail on the support they offer PCOs:

> "I have my own emails on air access, who the carriers are, which airports they fly from, how many times they fly…a sort of grid with links to different websites so you can source the most competitive costs. There are a couple of airlines I work closely with, their revenue and sales account team, to get fixed pricing and I was able to secure them (clients) a discount if they used X (city) airport" (C4).

The head of the national, private DMO in Africa (C5), a tier two destination confirmed that:

> "a key success factor is access and the increase in international flights, but often we might be losing business because of access, that's one of the main reasons why we lose conferences and business" (C5).

C6 (Australasia), C8 (North America), C9 (England), C10 (Australasia) and C13 (North America) all stated that good international air access into the destination was one of their biggest strengths for attracting and winning association conferences: "a huge selling point for coming to X (city) is air access" (C9), "international air access is one of our greatest strengths" (C6), "we are extremely accessible with numerous air lift options" (C8), "for us a key success factor is flight connections" (C10).

PCOs gave similar viewpoints about the importance of air access with P1, an in-house PCO for UK based medical association and P2, an in-house PCO for UK based scientific association confirming that direct flights into destinations was a deciding factor as to whether or not destinations would be added to the association's rotation pattern. P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, confirmed that they primarily seek support from CBs when it comes to help with flights and access and P5, owner of an agency based in India, confirmed international flight accessibility as one of their top three influencing factors over site selection. Additionally, P6, divisional director for a major international agency, confirmed that choice of destination is driven by the location of delegates adding that the conference is affected:

> "if it's very expensive or difficult to get there or if the sponsors can't or don't want to get there" (P6).

Despite anticipating access to be a very strong influencing factor over site selection, in terms of road and in particular, air access, I had not expected the topic of visa requirements to be significant in the interviews. However much, very strong sentiment was expressed about the barrier created by destination visa restrictions and how this is compounded by a lack of support with visa applications. P8, an in-house PCO with a UK based scientific association, confirmed that they had lost a number of bids to PCOs in other countries:

> "because X (country) is perceived as being particularly difficult to obtain visas for delegates to attend" (P8).

P6 (UK), divisional director for a major international agency, stated "visas are a big issue" and P5, owner of an agency based in India, confirmed that:

> "most countries have a visa problem, so if the convention bureau is there…fast tracking visas for the registered delegates, fast tracking the immigration once they enter the city… these are very important things" (P5).

P5 (India), went on to stress how important it is for the CB to provide advice on visa regulations, stating:

> "otherwise what happens is people are groping about in the dark as the first time they're entering a country, they have no clue. They go by what's on the internet, and many a time the internet is not right" (P5).

P9, an in-house PCO for a major international association (based in North America), was also quite vocal on the topic, suggesting that CBs never help with visas. She explained that dealing with delegate visa issues takes up a lot of time and resources and when asked whether if that help was provided it would influence site selection the response was immediate and forceful:

> "Oh my gosh yes! That would be a great resource to have…I would be grateful for that!" (P9).

She also added:

> "I would also be cautious about how my people were handled…it's always hard for an association to hand over their members" (P9).

The issue of BREXIT was raised by most of the UK based CBs, PCOs and venues, with P4, an agency PCO based in the UK, confirming:

> "the most unsettling thing (about BREXIT) is the possibility [it brings] of needing a visa" (P4).

The CBs had similar views on visas with C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, describing visas as a barrier and stating:

> "the ease of movement, customs, if that's not smooth and easy to do, it would affect the congress" (C9).

While C5, the owner of a DMO in Africa suggested that "visas – it's not an issue" but they did go on to add:

> "it's quite easy to get the visas, there is a procedure that we help the meeting planners put together" (C5).

C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, explained that for conferences for over 10,000 delegates they will help with visas by taking the PCOs to the visa office and explaining the application process to them. Greater levels of support is available from some CBs, with a clear visa application service offered to all PCOs by C10 (Australasia) and C13 (North America). C10, director of business development for a city CB in Australasia, explained in detail how the convention bureau has direct links to several government departments, and there is a member of the team whose sole focus is to liaise with the national government.

On the topic of visas, she went on to say:

> "it's something the government have realised is important to business events. It actually makes a very big difference, and the fact that we have a direct link into the department of immigration on the events side makes a massive amount of difference" (C10).

C13, vice president of global sales at a regional convention bureau in North America, offers a comparable service, stating that:

> "we are involved in that (visas) in many different levels…we become a validator…being very active at the national level in helping to make that process go quicker. That's something only a destination can do, it can't be done by an individual hotel, it can't be done by a standalone convention centre, it really has to be from a destination" (C13).

C13 also went on to describe how the CB and the destination's international airport work together on "air service development" which is a scheme designed to increase the number of international flights into the city.

The view of venues also suggested that visa requirements are a barrier, with V2, head of international sales at a purpose-built, government owned venue in England, stating:

> "these issues came up…we'd have anecdotal comments on the drawbacks of the visa regulations…it would be quite difficult (for clients)" (V2)

and V4 (UK) appearing frustrated that the national convention bureau's website advice on visa requirements just refers PCOs to other sites adding:

> "we don't make it easy for clients at all, internationally, to come to this country" (V4).

V3, assistant director of a purpose-built venue in the North of England (publicly and privately financed), went further by commenting:

> "we're conscious of attracting conferences that would potentially have a high delegate number with the majority needing visas…that kind of puts them off and also, it's a barrier….it's difficult enough to get a flight over…we come against it a lot…it's one factor that can just tip the balance on how to decide for an event. So, if it's easier to get into another country that could be the tipping point and it's just one of those things where if everything else stacks up….surely there must be an easier way to get into the country" (V3).

The majority of venues, PCOs and CBs voiced strong opinions on the importance of air access to the destination and the significant issue of visa regulations, with many of the views coming from interviewees based in Australasia, North America and India. Indeed, this was noted by two PCOs as being essential to being included in a rotation pattern and by several CBs as their key strength as a destination. Furthermore, other PCOs were vociferous about the burden of visa restrictions and one was elated at the possibility of a CB supporting her with applications. As both C10 and C13 described their fully developed visa support scheme, it is clear that these CBs have invested great effort in setting up these processes with their central government. This demonstrates the importance of visa support, the significance it has over destination competitiveness and the need for a CB to manage the process and the relationship between PCO, delegates and immigration officials. The lack of support, and the detriment caused by having visa regulations, was clearly commented upon by PCOs, venues and CBs, further confirming this significant element of destination competitiveness and factor influencing site selection. Although the issue of air access is apparent in the literature, the barrier created by visa restrictions and the significance of CB support in securing visas for delegates and speakers has yet to be fully explored in the literature on site selection. As such, this is perhaps the most noteworthy theme that has emerged from the interviews and the implications this has for models of site selection will be discussed in the next chapter. Support with visa applications, as with all the other themes, would appear to be an element of destination competitiveness which has emerged as an overarching theme within my research as it very much binds all of the themes together which became apparent when discussing competing destinations during the interviews.

5.13 Destination Competitiveness - Competing Destinations

During the interviews, all CBs were asked about their competitors and in particular who they typically bid against, and lose to. Predictably, responses included reference to a number of similar sized, geographical competitors. In terms of bidding specifically for international conferences, a number of destinations were repeatedly cited as prominent competitors including Paris, Barcelona, Vienna, Amsterdam, Dublin, Lisbon, Singapore and Dubai. As all of these destinations rank highly on ICCA league tables this was unsurprising. Moreover, half of the participants referred to ICCA during the interviews and in particular to purchasing and using the ICCA database to generate leads. Interestingly C11, the senior business tourism manager of a city CB in the North of England, stated that he doesn't have many problems competing with tier one cities, but he does with second tier destinations, explaining:

> "we don't have much of a problem competing with them financially (tier one cities), it tends to be the newer markets that we struggle with, particularly within our competitive set as we are not a capital city" (C11).

C8, head of events at a city convention bureau in North America, also discussed lots of geographical competitors and then added:

> "Asia comes up a lot, and new, emerging destinations like Vietnam and South America to an extent" (C8).

This was echoed by C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England:

> "we do (lose bids) because of it (subvention), particularly to Asia and to new cities as they will give lots of subvention" (C9

All of this corroborates the literature on the influence of second tier cities, fuelled by the significant sums of subvention that they are able to offer. The study data would seem to corroborate the growing involvement of second tier cities in international association conferencing and in particular, their value for money offerings. However, conversely C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern Ireland, commented:

> "we've beaten destinations where they've given the venue for free and we charge venue hire and we've still won so it's not always about cost. It's sometimes about the strength of the local organising committee, the ambassadors behind that and the programme that we can offer" (C3).

When asked what clients tell her is the reason they have chosen another destination, C2, the owner of a private CB in Southern England listed her geographical competitors and said:

> "I think X (city) offer subvention. I know that X (city) do, I would consider them a competitor too. Their bureaus are linked to their local council and they are able to offer some subvention and what is what we have as our competition" (C2).

When asked "are there any common themes as to why you lose to other destinations"? C1, the head of a city convention bureau in Scotland, commented:

> "There do tend to be themes. It tends to be whether or not there has been a bid from another host society that have bid before and they're seen as…it's important that if you've bid once and lost you may get the conference the next time. You tend to find that it really isn't our time, that comes up a lot. The politics of an association is fundamental, because there tends to be a small group of decision makers and if for any reason one of those decision makers is not convinced of the bid, then it's the politics within the society that would mean it would go elsewhere" (C1).

C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern Ireland, also added:

> "sometimes it's very fickle, you'll get feedback that the president just wants to have it somewhere else. It's typically that, that would be reason we wouldn't win, it's something out of our control" (C3).

Additionally, and as illustrated earlier in this chapter, perception of the destination is a common factor, with C3, head of business tourism at a city convention bureau in Northern

Ireland, C6, head of business events for a national CB in Australasia and C5, the owner of a DMO (promoting a country in Africa) all explaining that the destination is perceived as difficult to travel to which acts as a major barrier to attracting association conferences. Interestingly, although C5, the owner of a DMO (promoting a country in Africa) highlighted the reasons he loses bids as coming down to:

> "value for money, infrastructure, access…access is the main thing. That's one of the main reasons why we lose conferences and business" (C5).

He also went on to comment on the lack of suitable venues as a barrier, stating:

> "we get a lot of requests as operators that we have to turn down because we don't have the infrastructure…So, what happens now if whenever we have more than 1,000 people for a conference, let's say 1,000 up to 2,000 people, whenever we have more than that we have to build infrastructure like tents and things like that. Which is not ideal and obviously it increases the cost of the conference. I think we definitely need a big conference venue because it would be very useful as well and we need to turn down a lot of business because of that…because we just don't have it" (C5).

Similarly, C9, head of associations at a city convention bureau in the South of England, identified a lack of venues as a reason for losing bids. She listed the city's principal venues, described how they are used for music events or exhibitions and then added:

> "the city is not as big as X (competing city)…[which] has two or three big venues, it is a real congress city. Whereas, I would say X (the city she promotes) is a corporate led city, not a convention led city".

In terms of what makes a destination competitive, the interviews have drawn attention to a lack of subvention, poor perception of the destination, an unfavourable rotation pattern and the politics of the association as of notable significance. The interviews with CBs in particular, have very much confirmed the view expressed in literature that the number of rival destinations is increasing, particularly in Asia. More than twenty years ago, Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and Oppermann and Chon (1997) suggested that second tier destinations were finding it relatively easy to compete for association events and this would still appear to be the case.

As the amount of subvention offered by some emerging destinations is substantial, this was confirmed by several participants as hard to compete against. This, once again, points to the significant influence of subvention over site selection and supports the results of Nelson and Rys's (2000) and Weber and Chon's (2002) investigations which demonstrate that PCOs choose to work with second tier destinations because they are more affordable and offer generous incentives. Furthermore, the data collected mirrors the literature which has highlighted the significance of association politics over site selection as noted by Kim *et al.* (2015), Chiappa (2012) and Fawzy and Samra (2008).

5.14 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the interviews conducted with thirty event professionals: in house PCOs and agency PCOs, venue managers and heads of national and regional convention bureaus worldwide. A robust and systematic analysis of the data, conducted via the application of Saldaña's (2016) attribute, In Vivo, provisional, thematic, pattern, axial and elaborative coding, has created nine meaningful categories. This chapter has illustrated these themes of standard CB services, access to industry leaders and subvention as forms of CB support, and image and perception, experience, collaboration, sector strategizing and air access and visa requirements as elements of destination competitiveness.

Although some of these themes are clearly apparent in the apposite literature, this new data suggests that trust, collaboration, image and perception and sector strategizing are becoming ever more present and significant. Furthermore, the data suggests that subvention is a very dominant theme and a strong influence over site selection. Additionally, the theme of visa requirements would now appear to be a very significant and emerging variable in terms of both site selection and destination competitiveness. The next chapter will discuss, in detail, the significance of these findings, thereby completing objective three of this thesis: to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences. Chapter six will examine the overlap between CB support and destination competitiveness and it will show how the themes presented in this chapter, can be added to existing models of site selection.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The analysis of the collected data, as presented in chapter five, led to the development of nine meaningful categories which illustrate forms of CB support and elements of destination competitiveness. There is a clear overlap between the services provided by the CB and the success of the destination, and both of these broad concepts feature on existing models of site selection. This chapter will discuss in greater detail, the significance of the data and how the nine themes have enabled me to modify the conceptual model of site selection. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate how the data provides new insight into CB competitiveness, which, with the small amount of literature on the topic, has enabled me to create the first conceptual model of CB competitiveness. This has been achieved through the final stage of elaborative coding, as adapted from Saldaña (2016), which involved using data to modify existing concepts by creating more meaningful categories.

This chapter considers the potential impact of my research on the development of government policy for business tourism and on CB practices. The chapter reviews the limitations of my approach and makes recommendations for future research into event policy and competitive strategies for CBs. Chapter six presents this unique approach to updating models based on this new understanding of site selection and it will therefore achieve the final objective of this thesis: to create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events and this begins with a discussion of how this model has been created in order to define CB support.

6.2 Updating the Model of Site Selection by Defining CB Support

The most robust model of site selection, developed by Comas and Moscardo (2005), added in the term CB support to the section on site selection factors. One of the key goals of my inquiry was to develop this vague term into more meaningful terminology and thereby amend the model of site selection which I am now able to discuss and present.

As discussed in chapter three, Weber's (2000) comprehensive list of CVB services, as shown in table 6.1, suggests some terminology that could be applied to the model.

CVB Service	**Explanation**
Destination Information	Provision of information about products and services available, marketing materials etc.
Referral Services	Suggesting appropriate and reliable suppliers in the destination
Lead Services	Venue finding
Registration Staffing	Providing staff to support registration upon arrival at the conference venue
Familiarization Trips	Sponsored visits to the destination for PCOs
Housing Assistance	Accommodation booking service (e.g. for delegates)
Attendance Promotion	Marketing support to promote the conference
Convention Center	Management of the principal venue
Registration Services	Support with the process of delegate registration at the conference venue/hotels

Table 6.1: Weber's (2000, p.603) List of CVB Services

The study data corroborates all but one of Weber's (2000) suggestions (convention centre) as the interviewees clearly confirmed that destination information, venue finding, supplier suggestions, registration staffing, familiarisation trips, accommodation booking services, marketing and registration support are standard elements of CB support. Very few of the CBs that I interviewed manage the principal venue in the destination (only C13). Nothing was apparent in the interviews to suggest that this is important to PCOs or expected of CBs. However, this was not explicitly discussed and there was nothing in the interviews to suggest that this is not important to PCOs. As such, all of Weber's (2000) CVB services have been adapted into my model of site selection.

The data collected clearly demonstrates that a CB's networks are important to PCOs and influences site selection. This is in terms of a CB's ability to source venues, accommodation and suppliers, which is a basic expectation of PCOs and a standard service provided by CBS. What the collected data shows is that the networks that CBs have with academics and business leaders is particularly valued by PCOs. The data strongly corroborates the studies by

Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) and Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) which confirm the networking capability of a CB to be a key element of their success, and therefore destination success. Their studies discuss networking in general terms and point to this being a CB's ability to act as an intermediary with a range of destination stakeholders, including venues, hoteliers and government departments. The study data has drawn attention to the distinct attraction to PCOs of the relationship between CBs and academics and business leaders. Consequently, I have added this specific description to the model as an example of a CB service. Furthermore, my data strongly suggests that subvention is primarily accessed through CBs, and in many cases, managed entirely by CBs. As such, it clearly merits an entry on the model. Although Crouch and Ritchie (1997) have explained how CB services (on their model) refers to the provision of 'subsidies', I strongly suggest that the term 'subvention' be used on future models. None of my participants used the term 'subsidies', yet all but one of them used the word 'subvention' repeatedly. They were all clearly familiar and comfortable with this term. This also mirrored my own industry experience of using the term subvention, which went as far as writing a subvention policy for a CB. Furthermore, most CB websites and industry publications do not discuss subsidies, but they do discuss subvention. The data collected strongly suggests that if academic models, discussions and suggestions of site selection are to have any correlation with industry practice, then appropriate and contemporary language should be used.

Consequently, using the study data and Weber's (2000) list, I am able to develop the entry of 'CB support' on the model of site selection. I had expected to develop the model in this way, however I had not anticipated collecting data that I could also use to develop the model in additional ways. Nonetheless, the data strongly points to how the term 'accessibility', noted as a site selection factor, could also be updated.

6.3 Updating the Model of Site Selection by Adding to the term 'Accessibility'

Although I set out to focus on CB support during the interviews that I conducted, the data that I collected began to point strongly to various views of accessibility, in terms of the location of the destination. This is another general term which is listed under site selection factors and which Comas and Moscardo (2005) discuss sparingly, only commenting once that it refers to travel to the destination and the location of the conference venue in relation to other

amenities. The original Crouch and Ritchie (1997, p.59) model also used the term accessibility which they interpreted as 'transportation…distance of travel involved… the frequency of connections to the site [and] the scheduling convenience of the connections'. Of particular note, in retrospect, is their additional reference to accessibility as 'the extent of any travel formalities which inhibit opportunity cost of that time travel such as visas, customs, etc.' (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997, p.59). This is the only mention of visas in their research and there is no further exploration of visas in Crouch's (2010, 2019) later publications on destination competitiveness.

Contrary to the limited literature on visa requirements as an element of site selection, and indeed destination competitiveness, my research clearly points to the topic as a significant factor of both. This was an unexpected theme which emerged through strong opinions on the topic from both CBs and PCOs. Given the extensive investment into visa support that has been undertaken by three of the CBs interviewed (on three different continents: North America, Australasia, Europe) this would appear to be a noteworthy element of contemporary CB strategy. Consequently, I feel that the use of the word 'accessibility' on the site selection model can now be updated to indicate its three principal meanings:

- location of the (conference) venue (which has been referred to throughout literature and corroborated by the study data)
- air and road access (also referred to throughout literature and corroborated by the study data, particularly in terms of international air access)
- visa requirements (some references within literature, and strongly suggested by the study data).

Figure 6.1. shows, once again the Comas and Moscardo (2005) model of site selection and figure 6.2 is an updated version with the amendments highlighted. The use of 'e.g.' on the model indicates that the entries are not necessarily comprehensive and they are in alphabetical order, indicating no hierarchy of terms.

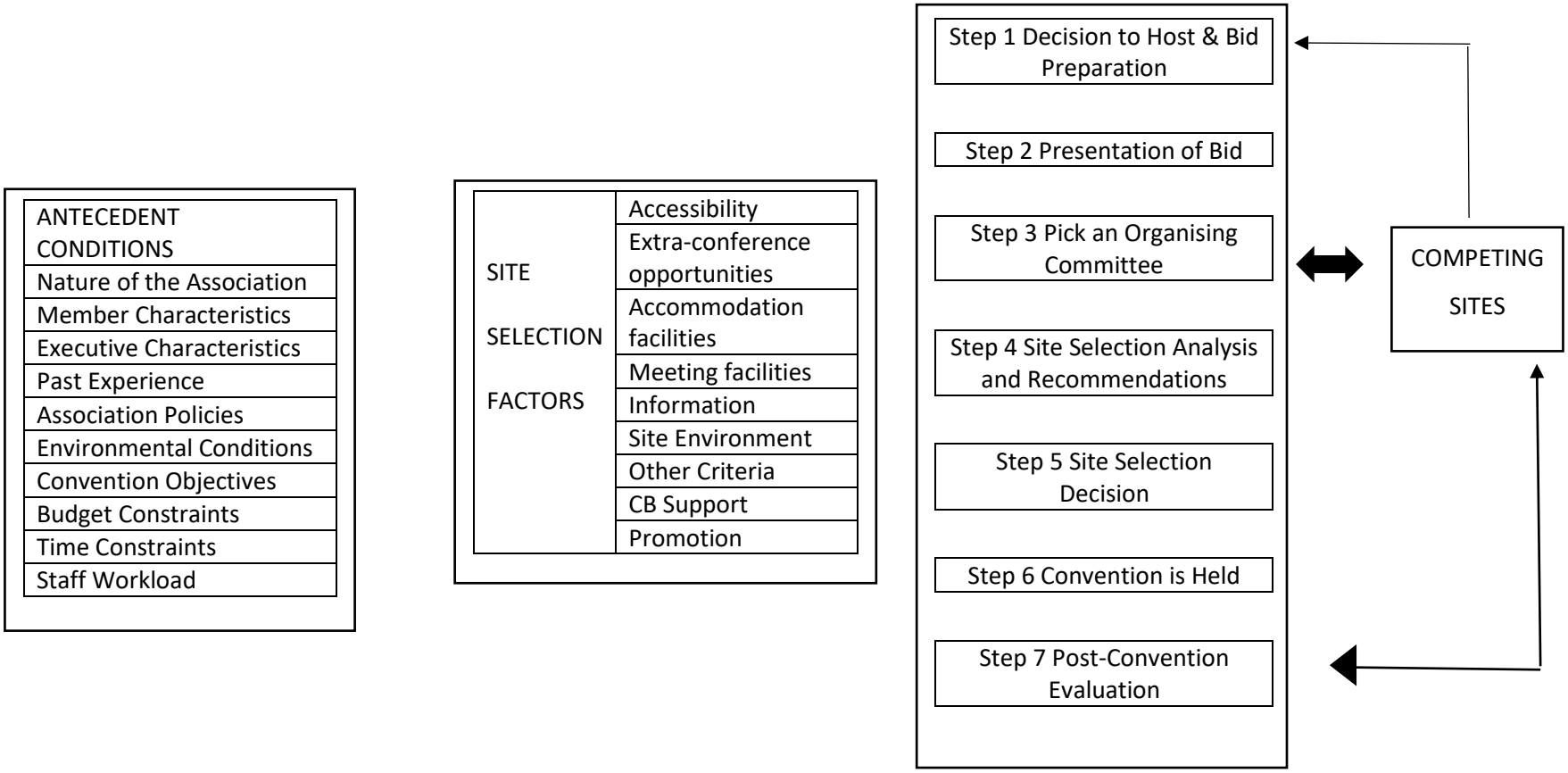

Figure 6.1 Comas and Moscardo's (2005) Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process

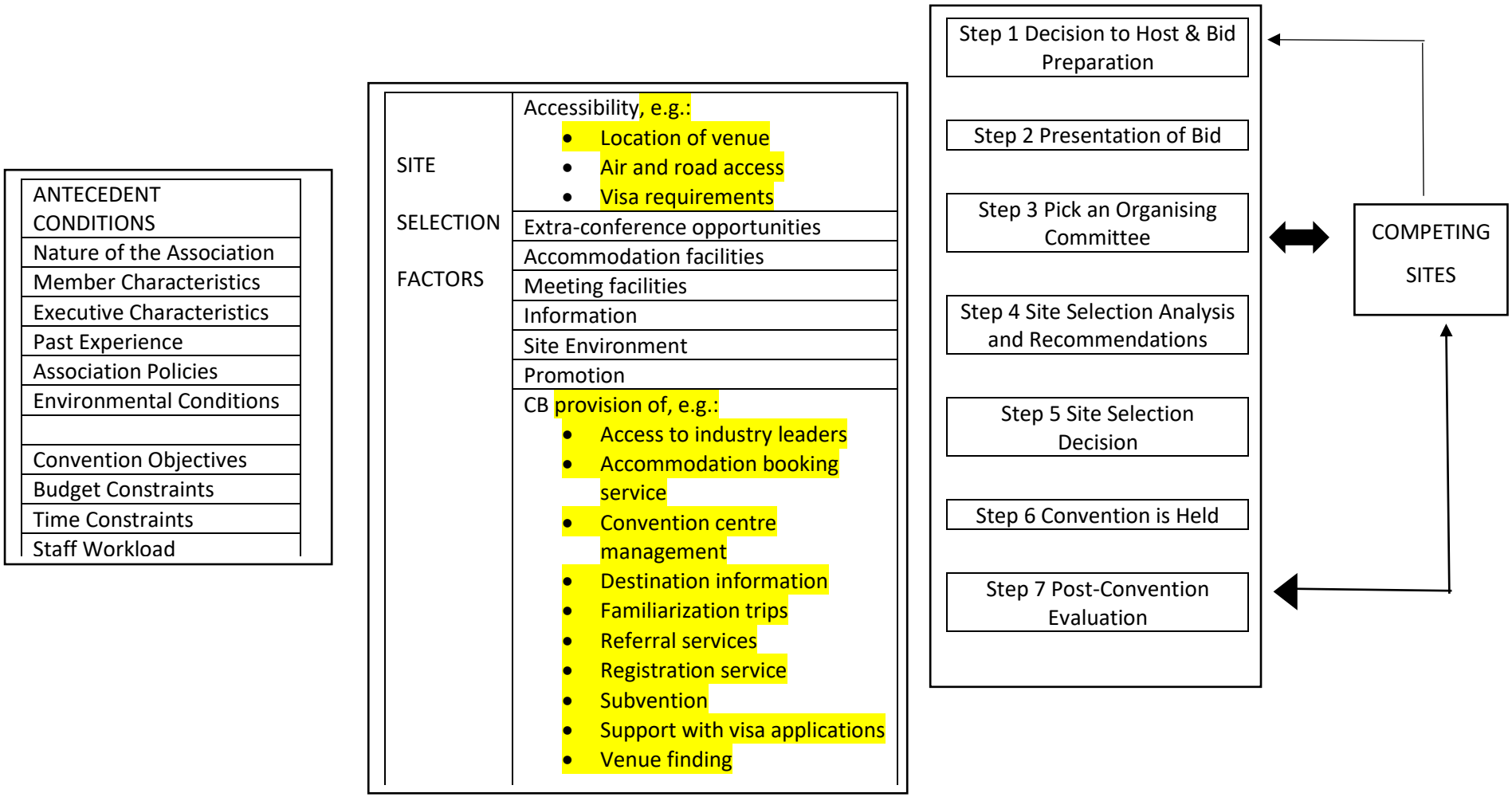

Figure 6.2 An Updated Version of Comas and Moscardo's (2005) Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process

These amendments reflect the significance of the study findings and in particular, they show that the role of the CB is extensive. Specifically, I have introduced the term 'subvention' to the model of site selection and drawn attention to the importance of visa requirements. The potential impact of these findings on the development of policy for business tourism is discussed later in this chapter as is at the new model of CB competitiveness which I have now created.

6.4 Creating a Model of CB Competitiveness

There has been only been one attempt thus far to conceptualise what makes a DMO or CB successful which was investigated by Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) and developed into a model by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014). This model identifies networking, transparency, resources and professionalism as elements of DMO success (Volgger and Pechlaner, 2014, p.65). The discussion of these terms is somewhat obscure, however it would appear that networking refers to a CB's set of relationships with destination stakeholders as well as the CB's capability of networking and creating further relationships. These have been repeatedly identified integral elements of CB success and therefore the overall success of the destination (Weber, 2000). Volgger and Pechlaner's (2014) reference to resources is arguable the list of destination attributes (landscape, bedstock, venues, access etc.) and the term professionalism points to the PCO/CB relationship, the level of experience accrued by the CB and the trust placed in them by PCOs.

However, as discussed in chapter 3, the efficacy of the model is questionable as neither sets of authors have provided an adequate explanation of this terminology. Nonetheless, there is some value in the work undertaken by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) and taking this, other elements of literature on CB competitiveness and the study data I am now able to present the first model of CB competitiveness which is shown in figure 6.3.

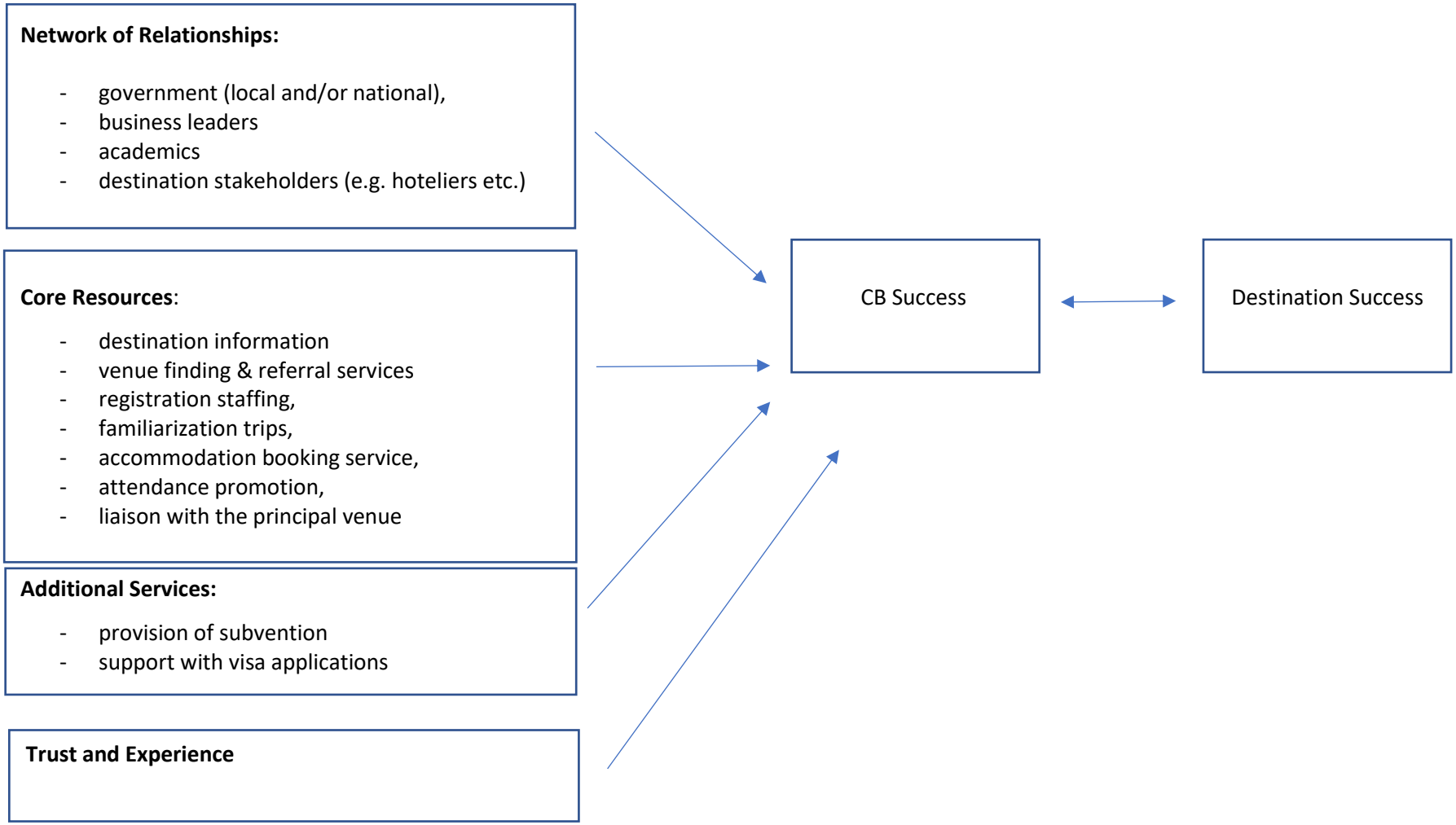

Figure 6.3 A Conceptual Model of CB Competitiveness (Author's Research, 2020)

This conceptual model of CB competitiveness demonstrates that there are four key elements of convention bureau success: a network of relationships, core resources, additional services and trust and experience. The model is underpinned by Weber's (2000) list of CB services, which are represented here in 'core services'. This is comparable with the term 'resources' used by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014). My data strongly corroborates this literature which points to these various fundamental elements of CB services as including destination information, venue finding and referral services, familiarization trips, an accommodation booking service, attendance promotion and liaison with the principal venue.

The section of the model called 'network of relationships' represents the results of the interviews which have clearly shown that CB relationships with external agencies, notably business and academic leaders, are valued by PCOs and key to the competitive strategy of a number of CBs. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) and Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) have identified that a CB's networks is key to their success and the success of the destination. Furthermore, Jago and Deery (2005) and (Rogers, 2013) have discussed how a strong relationship between the CB and government is valued by PCOs as is their extensive local knowledge and connections with stakeholders (Shin *et al.*, 2017, Davidson and Rogers, 2016, Nolan, 2018). The study data clearly demonstrates that affiliation between a CB and academics and industry leaders is significant. As such, the 'network of relationships' section of the model takes into account a CB's connections to all of these, individually named, external bodies.

The 'additional services' entry on the model represents the key findings from my research which shows that the provision of subvention and support with visa applications are distinct elements of CB support services but can be considered to be additional rather than core services. They are clearly an element of CB support that PCOs value and that have an influence over site selection. However, the study data also demonstrates that these are levels of support that PCOs do not routinely expect to be offered. As such, they warrant a specific segment on the model to differentiate these services to the core CB services which are very much expected and offered as standard.

Trust and experience is the final element of CB competitiveness on the model. The significance of trust and experience are evident in literature on site selection and were recurrent themes in my interview. For example, the most established CBs that were involved

in my research (C1, C2 and C5) have all been in operation for more than twenty years and they all commented on their length of experience as a significant factor of why they are successful. It may be logically concluded that as the competition to host association conferences has intensified in recent years, these CBs have drawn on their experience to remain competitive. It may be suggested that the entry on Volgger and Pechlaner (2014)'s model entitled 'professionalism' is comparable to trust and experience. Although there is no discussion of this term in their work, or in that of Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010), upon which their model is based, it may represent the importance of the CB having experienced staff and being able to build a relationship with PCOs based on trust.

Finally, in line with Volgger and Pechlaner (2014)'s model, Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan's (2010) study and the pioneering work of Crouch and Ritchie (1997), this new conceptual model of CB competitiveness also reflects the strong interrelationship between CB success and destination success. The success of a destination can be greatly enhanced by the work of its CB (Weber, 2000) and destination attributes (landscape, venues, access etc.) directly affect the ability of the CB to do this (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997). As such, the CB and the destination are inextricably linked and this is reflected on the model. In summary, this model embodies the findings of the literature on CB competitiveness, together with key outcomes of my research. The four categories (network of relationships, core services, additional services and trust and experience) represent this accumulation of knowledge on determinants of CB success. It also provides the foundation for an assessment of how CBs can improve their capability to compete for business and as such, it has potential implications for future developments of policy for business tourism.

6.5 Developing Theories of Customer Relationship Management

The study data strongly suggests that Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing is relevant to the PCO/CB relationship. Their key mediating variables (KMV) model placed trust at its core and their theory confirms this is the most important factor in all business relationships. While the data I collected confirms the significance of trust in the PCO/CB relationship, the model of CB competitiveness (figure 6.3) does not rank the variables influencing CB success. The model suggests that while trust is certainly a key factor, a network of relationships, core and additional resources also have a pivotal role to play in CB

(and therefore) destination success. This suggests that Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory, does not apply to the precise context of a PCO/CB relationship and the model of CB competitiveness provides a more contextual illustration of the factors that can be applied to this B2B relationship. The model suggests that trust is an important part of the PCO/CB relationship, but PCOs also value the CB's network of relationships and core and additional resources. However, as my data suggests that trust is one of four core elements of CB competitiveness this infers that there is scope to conduct future research mapping the PCO/CB relationship to Morgan and Hunt's (1994) KMV model. This could be achieved by using trust, network of relationships, core and additional resources as a starting point for determining the corresponding variables.

6.6 Implications of the Research Findings on Policy for Business Tourism

Applying Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory of competitive advantage to the conceptual model of CB competitiveness, it can be logically concluded that for a CB to survive it must have a core competence (in this case core services) or a unique resource (in this case a network of relationships, additional services or be trustworthy and have experience). In order to prosper, a CB must excel in one area and match the competition in the other three. This suggests that a CB could outperform the competition by, for example, offering subvention or visa support. Equally, a CB that offers both could gain a competitive advantage by developing its relationships, particularly with business and academic leaders.

Figure 6.4 illustrates Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory of competitive advantage, blended with the model of competitive advantage and applied to Australia and England's convention bureaus. A simple scoring system is used to rate the CB against the four criteria from the model of competitive advantage: one (poor), two (average), three (good), four (excellent). Although these scores are somewhat intuitive, they are based on various sources of information and an interpretation of the literature on the two destinations.

Figure 6.4: The Competitiveness of Australia and England's Convention Bureaus

As discussed in the case study in chapter three, Australia has excellent core services, a substantial subvention fund and the CB also offers help with visa applications. The CB is established and experienced and appears to have excellent relationships with stakeholders and government. These have been mapped on the chart in blue by showing a score of four (excellent) against each criterion and this illustrates that Australia is excelling as a destination. This application of Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory to the model of CB competitiveness would seem to support the results of the case study which shows that Australia is thriving and therefore outperforming its major rivals (Singapore and Hong Kong).

By comparison, England scores less well. In terms of core resources, England has excellent transport links including international access, extensive hotel stock and several large, purpose-built conference centres and therefore scores four (excellent). VisitBritain is an established organisation but has only been England's convention bureau since 2015 and therefore scores three (good) for trust and experience. It has strong relationships with venues, hotels and also with central government, primarily through the DCMS but it does not operate an ambassador scheme nor does it appear to have any particular links to industry leaders or academics. Therefore, England scores three (good) for network of relationships. In terms of additional resources, England falls short with no official visa support system and no subvention fund and therefore it scores one (poor). Figure 6.4 therefore indicates that England's CB is not as strong a competitor as Australia's CB. The scores that have been awarded to the two CBs are naturally debatable and although this is perhaps an unsophisticated assessment of CB competitiveness, it does nonetheless, clearly demonstrate how, for example, VisitBritain can become more competitive in order to successfully attract international association conferences to England. The implementation of an ambassador scheme, the introduction of a subvention fund and a visa application support system for PCOs could dramatically increase VisitBritain's ability to win bids for international association conferences.

Such actions could contribute towards the UK Industrial Strategy (2017) and in particular the Tourism Sector Deal (2019) in which the government sets out a commitment to increasing non-seasonal visitor numbers through business events. The Tourism Sector Deal (2019) also confirms the government's commitment to delivering the International Business Events Action Plan (2019) which refers to improving bidding capabilities to make the UK more competitive and providing support for delegates via the Border Force. Therefore, in terms of developing the BVES (2013), the Tourism Sector Deal (2019), the International Business Events Action Plan (2019) and the UK Industrial Strategy (2017), my research has shown that these are the areas that the government can invest in to support VisitBritain in sustaining and developing England's conference sector. Additionally, the conceptual model of CB competitiveness (figure 6.3) has shown that Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory of competitive advantage can be applied to the management of destinations for business events. This has been achieved by applying the theory to the variables that I identified through my research and, with the use of additional literature, conducting a mapping exercise to illustrate the competitiveness of Australia and England. This has only been achieved by using variables created from the study data. Therefore, I am able to confirm that the conceptual model of CB competitiveness has contributed to developing this theory of competitive advantage.

6.7 Recommendations

My inquiry has drawn attention to specific areas of CB competitiveness and factors influencing site selection that warrant further investigation. For example, there is scope for research which looks at the relationship between venues and CBs. Much of the literature points to the importance of a strong relationship between venue and CB, even suggesting that they should be government funded (Dioko and Whitfield,2017) and CB managed (Fenich and Bordelon, 2008, Weber, 2000) and my data also suggests that the relationship between a CB and the primary venue in the destination is of particular significance to PCOs. Yet, the role of the venue does not have a clear place on models of destination or CB competitiveness. Similarly, there is great potential for research which explores the role of committees and association management companies in the site selection process, as the majority of conferences are organised by a team of people. Furthermore, whether the terms CB, CVB, DMO and DMC have minor or major semantic differences could be explored further as the results could

demonstrate a synthesis or a divide between exiting studies of these organisations. This would enable development of the research conducted by Beritelli and Laesser (2014), which identified sources of CVB funding, and D'Angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi's (2010) work which classified types of DMOs. Similarly, transparency and professionalism are terms that have significant places in Volgger and Pechlaner (2014)'s model of DMO competitiveness, yet neither have been explained by them. Future studies of competitiveness could interpret the terms differently in the context of CB, CVB, DMO or DMC management.

There is of course scope for research to test and corroborate my results and in particular to develop my model of CB competitiveness. As this is the first model of its kind, it represents an initial synthesis of our collective knowledge of CB competitiveness. However, as this is a very underexplored area of destination management, there is great potential to develop the model further. As well as looking at the concept of CB transparency and the role of trust and experience, sector strategizing also requires further investigation. The data collected would seem to show that sector strategizing is a comparatively new but emerging form of strategic destination management. However, one of my interviewees (C13) is the head of one of the most successful destinations in the world yet he does not overtly appear to employ such a strategy and it would be particularly interesting to understand if this is the case why he does not and how this compares to other leading destinations. Furthermore, as suggested earlier in this chapter, future research could also map the PCO/CB relationship to Morgan and Hunt's (1994) KMV model. However, what is encouraging about the existing literature on site selection and CB competitiveness, and which I feel has been reflected in the attitudes of my participants, is that there is a growing academic and industry appetite for this research which will propel further studies of this dynamic sector of event management and potentially have further implications on developing aspects of competitive theory and customer relationship theory.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has presented an updated conceptual model of site selection which reflects some significant changes to previous versions. I have added a detailed list of CB services to the model, including the term 'subvention', as well inserting 'visa requirements' into the description of accessibility. I have also created the first conceptual model of CB competitiveness which integrates my data with literature on this topic. This new model

suggests that Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory, does not apply to the precise and particularly complex context of a PCO/CB relationship. However, my data suggests that Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory of competitive advantage can be successfully applied to the management of destinations, when used in conjunction with the model's variables. Furthermore, this model may act as a resource for CBs to assist with developing marketing and operational strategies. As shown in figure 6.4 (the competitiveness of Australia and England's CBs), it is a tool that can be used to make comparisons with competitors, identify areas for development and indicate where time and resources can be invested to improve the capability of a CB to win bids.

Additionally, the model of CB competitiveness has the potential to influence government policy for business tourism in terms of strategizing for CB and destination success. For example, the model draws attention to the competitive advantage that may be gained by offering subvention and visa support, both of which can only be achieved with government support. Furthermore, much of what makes a destination competitive, and therefore what makes a CB competitive, is also government influenced or even controlled, such as airport development. Therefore, government policy for the CB and for the destination as a whole can potentially be influenced by my models of site selection and CB competitiveness.

These two models can be used to guide capital investment in destinations and their management organisations and they can be used to direct CB operations as they have the potential to underpin strategic destination management. As such, the creation of these models has enabled me to more than meet the final objectives of my thesis; to critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences; and to create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events. Additionally, this chapter has made several recommendations for future research to develop the narrative on site selection and CB competitiveness.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 A Review of the Aim and Objectives of the Research

The process of site selection in the organisation of association conferences is complex and influenced by many factors including rotation patterns, the availability and cost of facilities in the destination and the level of support offered by the destination's CB. Despite the growing number of destinations competing to host international association conferences, to date there has been limited academic research focusing on the role of the CB in this process or defining the term 'CB support'. Therefore, the overarching aim of this research was to explore the role of CBs in competing for international association conferences and specifically, I set out to:

1. Critically assess the socioeconomic significance of business events and the potential impact of government policy on convention bureaus' ability to compete for conferences;

2. Critically review the type of support offered by leading and emerging international convention bureaus when competing to attract professional conference organisers;

3. Critically evaluate the influence of convention bureau support on the site selection process in the organisation of association conferences;

4. Create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events.

The evaluation of the literature on site selection and destination competitiveness, from 1977 to present, demonstrated the influence of the PCO over the choice of destination. It highlighted the many variables influencing this decision and confirmed the significant role of CBs in the process. This chapter also explored the relatively under researched topic of destination and CB competitiveness despite the fact that a global marketplace continues to force businesses to seek out products, processes, and technologies that add value to their own offering (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p.24). The literature, and the conceptual models of site selection (Crouch and Ritchie, 1997, Comas and Moscardo, 2005) formed the basis of my

inquiry which aimed to update and develop the model to expand on the types of support offered by CBs to PCOs. As previous research had largely ignored the views of CBs and taken a purely quantitative approach to exploring site selection, it seemed clear that a new approach was needed.

As a pragmatist, I identified that a qualitative approach was best suited to my goal of developing the model of site selection and using relevant literature and my insider knowledge, I developed a conceptual framework to underpin my study of the phenomenon of the process of site selection. I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty industry professionals, mostly elite participants, which yielded rich and insightful results. The key limitation of this research is that it involved the participation of only a small number of convention bureaus, venues and PCOs, and further research in this area is needed to test and develop the conceptual models. Furthermore, there is debate over whether or not scholarly research can influence policy making (Getz, 2012a; Hudson, 2013; Živoder, Ateljević and Čorak, 2015) and one of my principle, ongoing, challenges is the dissemination of the results of this inquiry.

7.2 Anticipated and Unexpected Results

The interviews generated much, rich data. The experiences and opinions of the participants was detailed and insightful and as many of them can be considered to be elite professionals, capturing their views created the opportunity to develop extensive results. A thorough analysis of the interview data resulted in creating two categories of dominant themes: those relating to the concept of CB support and those relating to destination competitiveness and some of the data enabled me to create an updated conceptual model of site selection. Although this had been a planned outcome of this inquiry, it nonetheless represents generating significant new knowledge about the process of site selection. Unlike most other studies of site selection, my exploration involved convention bureaus and a range of city and national CB managers were interviewed. Consequently, the knowledge generated through data collection and analysis has enabled to me to append a detailed list of CB services to the model, to include, most notably, the new term ‘subvention’. The data also enabled me to develop the description of accessibility on the model to include reference to ‘visa requirements’. This was an unexpected result, nonetheless my data clearly pointed to this as a significant influence over site selection. Therefore, the new knowledge that has been

generated through my exploration, has resulted in a substantial update to the Comas and Moscardo (2005) model of site selection and it has brought this model up to date.

What was particularly surprising during the analysis of the interviews, was that some of the data strongly pointed to elements of CB competitiveness. Using the study data and the literature on this topic, I was then able to create the first conceptual model of CB competitiveness which was an entirely unplanned outcome. This enabled me to test theories of customer relationship marketing and develop Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) theory of competitive advantage within the context of the PCO/CB dynamic. This new knowledge represents a major contribution to the otherwise limited understanding of CB competitiveness. Given the fiercely competitive arena for international association conferences, such new insight is potentially of great value and significance to academia and industry. Furthermore, as the UK will have to re-establish its attractiveness as a conference destination post BREXIT and post Covid-19, understanding the elements of destination competitiveness and having a clearer view of what constitutes CB support may be invaluable to VisitBritain, the DCMS and the wider events industry.

This creation of the first model of CB competitiveness is also a significant step forward in terms of progressing the academic narrative on the role of the CB in site selection. It is becoming clear that the scope of academic work in this area is increasing as event management becomes a more established discipline. Furthermore, the model has the potential to be used by industry professionals to understand and benchmark CB performance. Although ICCA rankings are widely used by CBs to gauge and monitor destination performance, there is no such system in place to measure CB performance. My model of CB competitiveness now facilitates this by providing CBs with criteria by which they can assess their performance as well as that of their competitors. Furthermore, combining my model of CB competitiveness with my updated model of site selection, provides policy makers with tools that can be used to guide capital investment in destinations and underpin strategic destination management, as for example, they have enabled me to propose ways in which the BVES (2013) can be developed to better support VisitBritain in promoting England as a conference destination. These models, therefore, demonstrate a fulfilment of the final objectives of my thesis; to create a modified conceptual model of the conference site selection process that can be used to inform policy makers involved in the management of destinations for business events.

7.3 Implications of the Research on the Conference Sector in England

By combining the two models that I created with the data (the amended model of site selection and the first model of CB competitiveness) I am able to make firm suggestions as to how policy for business tourism can be developed. For example, they confirm the essential components of business tourism destinations (resources such as venues and accommodation), they illustrate the importance of networks of relationships (particularly with business and academic leaders) and show how subvention or support with visa requirements may give destinations a competitive advantage. As such they can be used to develop the BVES (2013) so that VisitBritain can act more effectively as England's national convention bureau and compete more successfully for international association conferences. In particular, the models can contribute towards the specific objectives of the Tourism Sector Deal (2019) and the International Business Events Action Plan (2019) which refer to increasing the number of business tourists, improving bidding capabilities to make the UK more competitive and providing support for delegates via the Border Force.

Since the launch of the BVES (2012) strategy, the UK as a whole has moved down in ICCA rankings, while certain cities, including Edinburgh and Glasgow, have moved up. This strongly suggests that English destinations are underperforming and although London has retained a top ten position, this is in jeopardy as the city looks set to lose its flagship (and most central) convention centre, the QEIICC. While destinations around the world invest in venues, visa support and subvention funding, VisitBritain does not appear to have a strategy in place that will allow England to compete in any of these areas. Furthermore, my research has drawn attention to the under reported, but clearly valuable, role of ambassador schemes in attracting conferences. VisitBritain does not have such a scheme in place, and the BVES (2013) makes no reference to their role in attracting conferences. Additionally, as VisitBritain has only been operating as England's convention bureau since 2015, and that the lead time for international association conferences can exceed five years, it is not as established as other CBs and this may indicate that PCOs do not have the same trust-based relationship with the organisation as they do with other CBs. As my research also draws attention to the significance of trust and experience as elements of CB competitiveness, this is also another area VisitBritain can develop in the future as the intangibility of trust means that it has a critical role to play in B2B relationships (Palmatier *et al*, 2006).

My model of CB competitiveness, and updated conceptual model of site selection, can be used to reframe the BVES (2013). They suggest that the way forward involves creating a dedicated convention bureau for England, which is adequately funded and resourced. There is also scope to reassess the role of subvention and visa support in attracting international association conferences. These models can also be used to analyse competitor destinations and to compare performance across CBs. As such, they have the potential to support industry initiatives and influence business tourism policy and in particular the UK Industrial Strategy (2017) and the Tourism Sector Deal (2019). The conclusions demonstrate that the overarching aim of my thesis; to explore the role of CBs in competing for international association conferences, has been met.

7.4 A Personal Reflection

The development of this thesis was certainly fuelled by my passion for the conference sector and the potential this sector has to effect significant positive impacts on host destinations. Having worked for a CB for a number of years, and facing the challenge of persuading the local council authorities to invest and support the CB, I felt that the role of government policy in CB competitiveness was worthy of an academic exploration. I was initially surprised and then a little deflated to find little in the way of scholarly literature on policy for business tourism and limited academic interest from UK sources. Nonetheless this did suggest that there would be many opportunities for research in this area, not just for my thesis, but also for post-doctoral projects. Detailed searches for relevant literature, began to reveal global perspectives on site selection for association conferences and set me on a path towards exploring non-UK approaches to CB management.

The highlight of my thesis journey has been interviewing PCOs, and senior venue and CB staff and talking to these professionals was exhilarating. I found it easy to connect with each of the participants as we shared a passion for business tourism and had dedicated most of our professional lives to working in the industry in one way or another. Most participants had had similar experiences to me, and we shared views on controversial topics (such as the use of subvention). Although I did not reveal my opinions to the interviewees, I was inwardly smiling throughout the conversations and upon completion of each interview I felt elated. Not only did the interviews immediately generate rich and insightful data, but they confirmed to

me that my research objectives were achievable and of great interest and potential value in certain industry circles.

I faced many personal challenges while completing my thesis, and at times studying provided a useful distraction. At other times, it was difficult to stay motivated and keep going. Completing my PhD studies has certainly taught me how to be more resilient in both my professional and personal life. It has also given me the confidence to pursue my own research interests. Prior to starting my thesis, I had a few publications under my belt but these had been achieved through collaborating with colleagues on projects that interested them. Developing my thesis has enabled to me identify and articulate my research interests and this in turn has given me the confidence to seek out additional opportunities to publish my work. Since starting my thesis, I have published two books, three chapters in books and two journal articles. I was a speaker at International Confex in 2019 and in the same year I was interviewed about my research for Conference and Meetings World magazine. Completing the thesis not only generated these opportunities, but it has honed my research skills, developed my network of academic and industry contacts, and as I plan a return to full time lecturing, is going to make me a better, research-informed teacher.

7.5 Summary

There is now a growing awareness and appreciation of research on the process of site selection in the organisation of association conferences and destination competitiveness for business tourism and this thesis makes a significant contribution to this narrative. The substantial new knowledge, generated through this inquiry, has resulted in a modified model of site selection and the first model of CB competitiveness. Combined, these models represent a significant addition to the academic narrative on destination competitiveness and the process of site selection. The new knowledge generated by this exploration has created these tools which indicate how CBs, such as VisitBritain, can become more effective at winning bids for international association conferences. These models can therefore be used be used to influence business tourism policy and they provide a new benchmarking system for CBs. They can be used by CBs to analyse competitors and they can be used to underpin further exploration of CB and destination competitiveness.

It must be noted that this thesis has been completed at a time in history when the MICE sector has come to a standstill due to the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The future of the MICE industry is uncertain, and it is likely that every conference destination faces an uphill struggle to re-establish its position within the industry. Given the significant socioeconomic impacts created by conferences, it is hoped that governments worldwide, including the UK government, will put business tourism at the heart of their plans to stabilize economies and reunite isolated members of communities. It is therefore my hope that my research, and the research of others in this field, can demonstrate to governments that business tourism is a valuable and powerful sector, worthy of their protection, support and encouragement.

Appendix 1: Application for Ethical Approval

Emma Nolan
An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity
Of the UK Conference Sector

University of Chichester

Application for Ethical Approval: For all applications for ethical approval (staff/PGR/Masters/UG)

This form should be used by ALL members of the University including undergraduate students, postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students, staff and those in visiting or emeritus roles who wish to undertake research involving human participants under the name of the University of Chichester. You do not need to complete this form if your research does not involve human participants directly or indirectly (e.g. observation studies) (see section 4.1 of the Research Ethics Policy (REF) for more information), however, you are expected to work within the Research Ethics Policy and Research or Code of Conduct. The University does not conduct research on animals. If your proposed project involves animals in any way please seek advice from the Research Office before proceeding.

THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETED AND APPROVED by the relevant person(s) and if categorised as Category B it must be approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) prior to commencement of research. Full guidance on the Application process can be found in the body and appendices of the Research Ethics Policy.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION Each Application must be submitted alongside relevant consent forms, information letters/sheets, and debriefing sheets. This documentation should be version numbered and dated.

Categorisation of applications for ethical approval:

Category A projects are less likely to involve participants from vulnerable groups and/or involve sensitive issues or areas/activities that entail a level of risk of distress or harm to participants or researchers. They only need to be approved by your supervisor and do not need to be considered by the Research Ethics Committee. The Research Ethics Policy provides further guidance on categorisation and areas of risk.

Category B projects need to be considered by the Research Ethics Committee. The process of approval can take several weeks or longer depending on the number of applications being considered at any one time and the resolution of any issues that are raised by the Committee. It is fairly common for applications to be returned for further amendments prior to approval. The Committee expects applications from students to be of the same quality as those from staff. A helpful way to consider this position is to consider the research project from the point of view of the research participant.

Undergraduate or taught postgraduate student applicants: Your tutors and programme team will be able to advise you on how and when to complete this form. Your project supervisor is responsible for categorising your application as Category A, A+ or Category B and for authorising it. **Communications relating to Category B applications should be between the supervisor and the clerk to the Research Ethics Committee. The student should not contact the clerk directly.**

The completed form will be kept for a period of five years after approval.

Postgraduate research students: Your PhD supervisor is responsible for categorising your application as Category A, A+ or Category B and for authorising it.
Academic Staff: Your line manager is responsible for categorising your application as Category A, A+ or Category B and for authorising it.
Emeritus or Visiting roles: The Head of Department of the area to which you are linked is responsible for categorising your application as Category A, A+ or Category B and for authorising it.

[***this is a detachable front sheet, the form begins on the next page***]

Emma Nolan
An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity
Of the UK Conference Sector

University of Chichester

Section A: Basic information

A1: Title of study:	An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity of the UK Conference Sector
A2: Name of Applicant: (in collaborative projects, just name the lead applicant)	Emma Nolan
A3: Position of Applicant (e.g. UG/Masters/PGR student, academic)	PhD student
A4: Programme of study: (for UG or taught Masters students only)	
A5: Department of Applicant:	Business School/Social Policy

A6: Checklist to ensure application is complete. Have you prepared the following documents to accompany your application for ethical approval, please tick the appropriate column for each of the following:

Document	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
Confirmation of Ethical Approval of any other organisation (e.g. NHS, MoD, National Offender Management Service)			X
Recruitment information / advertisement (e.g. draft text for email/ poster/social media/letter)			X
Information sheet for participants	X		
Information sheet for carers/guardians			X
Information sheet/letter for gatekeepers e.g. Head teacher, teacher, coach			X
Consent form for participants	X		
Assent form for younger children			X
Documentation relating to the permission of third parties other than the participant, guardian, carer or gatekeeper (e.g. external body whose permission is required)			X
Medical questionnaire / Health screening questionnaire			X
Secondary information sheet for projects involving intentional deceit/withholding information			X
Secondary consent form for projects involving intentional deceit/withholding information			X
Debrief sheet to give to participants after they have participated	X		
Statements about completeness of the application	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
For research involving under 18s or vulnerable groups, where necessary, a statement has been included on all information sheets that the investigators have passed appropriate ***Disclosure and Barring Service***[1] checks			**X**
I can confirm that the relevant documents listed above make use of document references including date and version number	X		
I can confirm that I have proof read my application for ethical approval and associated documents to minimise typographical and grammatical errors	X		

Declaration of the applicant:

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Chichester's policies and procedures, which include the University's '*Financial Regulations*', '*Research Ethics Policy*', *'Data Systems and Security Policy'* and *'Data Protection Policy'* and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In signing this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

[1] *Working with under 18's or other vulnerable groups may require a Disclosure and Barring Service Check. Contact HR@chi.ac.uk if you are not sure whether you have an up to date and relevant DBS check or if you require more information. Do note that a DBS check may take several weeks to obtain.*

Emma Nolan
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- The research study must not begin until ethical approval has been granted.
- The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without deviation (unless by specific and prior agreement) and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting the clerk to the Research Ethics Committee (research@chi.ac.uk) in the first instance).
- I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future, in keeping with the University's Data Protection Policy.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Research Ethics Committee and its officers and/or ethics reviewers) for five years after approval and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.
- For the Student Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of safety, ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my supervisor and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.

Signature of Applicant: Date: 21.02.18

(if you haven't typed in your name and title of study in the Header of the document then please write your name and title below to ensure that this page links to the rest of the document, otherwise leave this blank)

Name of applicant.....

Title of study.....

Emma Nolan
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University of Chichester

Section B: Authoriser assessment and approval

Where Applicants are students (undergraduate or postgraduate) supervisors should authorise this form; where applicants are staff members their line manager (or nominated signatory) should authorise this form.

B1: Name of Authoriser:	Dave Cooper
B2: Position of Authoriser: (e.g. supervisor, line manager)	Supervisor

AUTHORISER:
Please categorise the application (A, A+ or B) ensure that the application form and all of the required documentation are complete before signing this application.
Authoriser assessment: (tick as appropriate – *see Section 10 of the Research Ethics Policy)*

Category A: Proceed with the research project. ***Undergraduate applications***: Form and documentation retained at Department level. ***Masters, PhD and staff applications***: Form and documentation forwarded to the Research Office research@chi.ac.uk	✓
Category A+: (for placebo controlled studies or similar see Appendix 12) Proceed with the research project. ***Undergraduate applications***: Form and documentation retained at Department level. ***Masters, PhD and staff applications***: Form and documentation forwarded to the Research Office research@chi.ac.uk	
Category B: Submit to the Ethical Approval Sub-group for consideration. research@chi.ac.uk Proceed only when approval granted by the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee	

Authoriser, please provide a comment on your assessment of the research project and for those projects involving vulnerable groups that you are authorising as Category A please justify this classification in the box below. As a further point, do make appropriate reference to any other codes of practice in your discipline particularly if you think that the proposed research may be in tension with those codes.

Comment: There are very limited ethical issues with this business oriented research

Authoriser's declaration:

- I have read the Research Ethics Policy and this has informed my judgement as to the category of assessment of this application.
- I understand that the applicant has taken account of the Research Ethics Policy and other relevant University policies in preparing this application.
- For Supervisors: I understand my responsibilities as supervisor, and will ensure, to the best of my abilities, that the student investigator abides by the University's Research Ethics Policy at all times.

Authoriser, please complete this table making it clear which version of the application form you are approving:

Version of the form (e.g. original version/ amended version following REC sub-group comments)	**Signature of authoriser**	**Date**
Original version	DJ Cooper	28/2/13

For RO use: IF CATEGORY B: Signature of the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Appendix 2: Ethics Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in Emma Nolan's PhD Research,

The Business School, the University of Chichester

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY AND ANSWER ALL STATEMENTS

Study title: An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity of the UK Conference Sector

1) I have read and understand the information sheet (V2/26/02/18) for this research project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	Yes	No
2) I understand that my participation in the activity is voluntary and that I am therefore free to withdraw my involvement at any stage, without giving a reason.	Yes	No
3) I am aware of the timescales in which I can withdraw my data (as indicated on the Information Sheet)	Yes	No
4) I understand that all information will be anonymised and that my personal information will not be released to any third parties.	Yes	No
5) I agree to participate in this research.	Yes	No

Your name (please print)……

Your signature……

Date.....

Researcher's name: Emma Nolan

Researcher's signature…….

Date.....

Thank you for your time

Copies of the signed consent form should be retained by the Researcher and the Participant.

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Participation in Emma Nolan's PhD Research,

The Business School, the University of Chichester

Study title: An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity of the UK Conference Sector

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY

Introduction

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research is to produce evidence based alternative policy options for the Events Industry Strategy (the UK government's policy for the events industry, published in 2014). Research will be carried out via semi structured interviews with professional conference organisers and representatives from destination management organisations. Interviews will take place in person (e.g. at the interviewee's place of work), via Skype or over the telephone.

Your Involvement

Your involvement in this research project will be via an interview that is anticipated to last no longer than 1 hour. The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and via an agreed method (e.g. Skype). The interview will be video or audio recorded and the interviewer will take notes. The interviewer may contact you after the interview to clarify some of your answers or to ask follow up questions. The interviewer will make a note of your name, contact information and job title. However, the published results of this investigation will not reveal these details and any reference to you or your organisation will be anonymised in published work. Any personal information that is collected (e.g., your contact details) will be destroyed as confidential waste by the end of the project.

The potential value of this research is to positively influence the government to further support and nurture the events industry in the UK. The research will also provide insight into the level of influence of destination management organisation support over the conference site selection process. As such, your involvement in this project will help to develop important industry knowledge and champion government support for the events industry.

The interview questions are intended to explore professional relationships within the organisation of business events. As such they should not cause you any discomfort or anxiety at all. However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to decline to answer any questions.

Should you wish to withdraw from this study, you may do so at any point before the interview commences. Please note that once the interview has begun, data collected during the interview may be used in analyses and subsequent publications.

After the Interview

Once the interview has finished, I will store the data (notes and video/audio recordings) so that it can be analysed. All data will be kept securely at the University and it will be retained for up to 5 years, after which time it will be securely destroyed. Please note that you may withdraw your data from the study up to one month after the interview has taken place. After this time, data cannot be withdrawn and it may be published.

The data collected and the analysis of the data may appear in several publications such as journals and books and the thesis will be available to view via the library and public access databases. The anonymised data will also be available for access by other researchers.

Contact Information

If you would like to contact me either before or after the interview, please email me at: enolan1@stu.chi.ac.uk

Should you wish to make a complaint about the project, please contact the Director of Research at the University on 01243 812125.

This project has been approved in accordance with the University of Chichester Research Ethics Policy

Thank you for your time

Appendix 4: Debrief Sheet

Debrief Sheet (to be used during the verbal debrief)

Study title: An Exploration of Policy Options for the Sustainability and Long-Term Prosperity of the UK Conference Sector

The purpose of this sheet is to provide the interviewer with a checklist for the verbal debrief that will take place at the end of each interview.

- Thank participants for taking part
- Remind participants that there may be follow up questions
- Remind participants that the published results of this investigation will not reveal personal or identifying comments
- Remind participants that any personal information that is collected will be destroyed as confidential waste by the end of the project.
- Remind participants that all data will be kept securely at the University and it will be retained for up to 5 years, after which time it will be securely destroyed.
- Remind participants that they may withdraw their data from the study up to one month after the interview has taken place. After this time, data cannot be withdrawn and it may be published.
- Remind participants that the data collected and the analysis of the data may appear in several publications such as journals and books and the thesis will be available to view via the library and public access databases. It will also be accessible to other researchers.

Give participants my contact details once again.

Appendix 5: Pilot Interview Questions

Date: Monday 26th November 2018

Time: 11.00 – 11.45

Location: CB main office

Questions

1. Your CB has a very large remit, how do you prioritise the load?
2. Can you describe your relationship with central government?
3. Who are your international competitors?
4. How do you sway PCOs to choosing your destination?
5. What are your views on the amount and type of event venues in the destination?
6. What's your view on the Business Visits and Events Strategy?
7. And on a possible bedroom tax scheme?
8. If you had a wish list for the destination, what would be on it?

Appendix 6: Interview Questions Based on a Theoretical Framework

Interview Questions – PCO

Contextual Questions

Name (for the purpose of identifying the participant to the researcher only)

Description of your role (either as a professional or volunteer, affiliated to an association or independent etc.)

Type of association (sector, national or international, previous destinations used)

Summary of professional experience

Interview Questions

1. How flexible is the choice of destination when organising an association conference?

   Literature suggests that for most associations the choice is wide open. This question will help to confirm, contradict or elaborate on this assumption.

2. How important is the conference in terms of generating an income for the association?

3. When you are beginning to plan a conference, at what point do you think about involving a DMO/CVB?

   This question is to establish the overlap of the two organisations (as per the models of site selection).

   Prompt: may not use the term CVB, may use DMO, tourist board, specific names etc.

4. Why do you want them to be involved?

   Literature suggests that they are considered to save time and money. Crouch suggests their involvement falls into two categories (planning/logistics/promotional support and provision of subsidies).

   Prompt: alternative question is what services do they provide to you that you find useful?
   Prompt: do they save you money? Do they save you time?
   Prompt: what do you expect from a CVB?

5. What can a CVB do that will sway your decision towards their destination?

   This question links to q8 in determining the level of influence that a CVB has and what form this 'support' should take to have an influence.

6. Could you organise the conference without them?

Limited literature but anecdotal information suggests that the internet or other intermediaries (VFS, DMC) could replace CVBs. Literature suggests the more experienced you are as a PCO the more likely you are to use a CVB. This question may add to the discussion.

7. Do you need the CVB to liaise with the local authorities on your behalf?

   Literature suggests that a CVB that has a strong relationship with government/governmental departments is of great appeal to a PCO because of how it facilitates planning. Additionally, industry reports suggest the destination's government support of the event is important to PCOs.

   Prompt: do you need the CVB to help with visas, licensing, permits, road closures? Do you expect a civic welcome, letter of support from civic dignitaries etc.

8. Do you ever ask for something from a CVB that they haven't proactively offered to you?

   This question is to establish the nature of the negotiations between CVB and PCO and whether the influence of the CVB is potentially greater than the CVB realises.

   Prompt: Describe this. Did they provide it? How did you feel about having to ask?

9. Can a CVB change how you feel about using the destination?

   This question is to determine how influential CVB support is compared to other variables.

   Prompt: if you weren't sure about a destination (e.g. costs, type of accomm, distance not right) would the attitude/availability of help from the CVB make any difference?

10. How important is the cost of the destination? (Price of accommodation, venue hire, travel to the destination).

    Literature suggests that cost is the most important variable but the definition of cost is vague. Cost may also link to subvention therefore this question may help me to identify what is mean by cost.

    Prompt: do you take into account the cost of accommodation, the cost of travel to the area, the cost of venues. Are you expecting discounts on any of these?

11. How much influence do you have over the final choice of destination?

    Literature suggests that the PCO has the final say 1/3 of the time and is very influential the rest of the time. This will confirm, contradict or elaborate on this. It will also help to establish the boundaries of the CVB and PCO relationship as per the models.

    Prompt: do you have to present a shortlist to the committee? Do you get final say? Will the committee listen to your suggestions?

Interview Questions – CVB

Contextual Questions

Name (for the purpose of identifying the participant to the researcher only)

Role, time in role, summary of key responsibilities, details of others in the team

Description of CVB (summary of destination attributes, experience of hosting association conferences, ownership of CVB etc.).

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe the structure of your organisation.

   This question will establish the category and remit of the CVB which may have a bearing on answers to all questions.

   Prompt: how is the organisation financed and governed? Is there a board of directors

2. As the DMO can you summarise the services you offer to PCOs, meeting planners and event organisers?

   Literature provides a checklist of standard services. This helps to identify what is mean by the term 'CVB support'.

   Prompt: use the checklist and note any additional services

3. What do conference organisers particularly ask for?

4. What can a CVB do that will sway a decision towards the destination?

5. Can you tell me about your relationship with the principal venue in the destination?

   Literature suggests that CVBs who own or manage the principal convention venue are more successful destinations as they provide a more streamlined service and can discount venue hire charges. This will confirm, contradict or elaborate on this.

   Prompt: there may be more than one purpose-built venue, do you own/manage the venue and if not how closely do you work together? Do you collaborate on bids?

6. How do you create leads for association conferences?

   This question helps to establish the nature of the relationship with PCOs (when and how it forms).

   Prompt: Do you attend trade shows (which ones), run fam trips, have direct mail campaigns?

7. What incentives do you offer?

   This will help to establish how influential the CVB is over choice of destination, compared to other (fixed) variables, and much bidding power/flexibility the CVB has. Literature suggests that the more flexible the CVB is, the more competitive it is (and therefore the more successful it is). Literature suggests that CVBs that have strong government support are better positioned to attract PCOs. Literature suggests that bidding capabilities are key to winning business.

   Prompt: expensive, lack of bedstock, lack of venues, limited air access? What do you offer as an incentive?

8. How successful are you at attracting domestic and international association conferences?

   This question builds on the previous one by exploring how successful the offer of incentives is in converting enquiries, how important it is to have incentives or if a lack of incentives is detrimental and how important government support is.

   Prompt: how important is it to offer incentives? Do these work in converting enquiries? Can you give me some specific examples?

   Prompt: do you hold back any of the incentives to offer later on in negotiations? If so why?

   Prompt: do you get government/council support for bids (financial support, letters of introduction, offers of attendance or use of venues etc.).

9. Who are your competitors?

   Literature suggests that for most associations the choice is wide open. This question will help to confirm, contradict or elaborate on this assumption. It will also help to establish the level of competition across continents and between established and emerging destinations.

   Prompt: possibly but not necessarily geographically. Who do you loose bids to and why?

10. What do your competitors offer that you don't and what are your views on this?

    This question will help to establish the CVBs view of what makes a destination competitive and what influences site selection.

    Prompt: do you get asked for anything from PCOs that you can't provide? What and why? Is this something that your competitors provide?

Interview Questions – Venue

Contextual Questions

Name (for the purpose of identifying the participant to the researcher only)

Role (time in role, summary of key responsibilities, details of others in the team)

Description of venue (summary of event space, ownership and management, experience of hosting association conference etc.).

Interview Questions

1. As a venue can you summarise the services you offer to conference organisers and meeting planners?

   Literature provides a checklist of standard services. This helps to identify what is mean by the term 'CVB support'.

   Prompt: use the checklist and note any additional services

2. What do conference organisers particularly ask for?

3. What can a venue do that will sway a decision towards the destination?

4. Can you tell me about your relationship with the main DMO/CVB in the destination?

   Literature suggests that CVBs who own or manage the principal convention venue are more successful destinations as they provide a more streamlined service and can discount venue hire charges. This will confirm, contradict or elaborate on this.

   Prompt: there may be more than one purpose-built venue. Do you collaborate on bids?

5. How do you create leads for association conferences?

   This question helps to establish the boundaries of the relationship with PCOs (when and how it forms).

   Prompt: Do you attend trade shows (which ones), participate in fam trips, have direct mail campaigns?

6. What incentives do you offer?

   This will help to establish how influential the venue is in the choice of destination, compared to other (fixed) variables, and how much bidding power/flexibility the venue has. Literature suggests that bidding capabilities are key to winning business.

Prompt: expensive, lack of bedstock, lack of venues, limited air access? What do you offer as an incentive?

7. How successful are you at attracting domestic and international association conferences?

   This question builds on the previous one by exploring how successful the offer of incentives is in converting enquiries, how important it is to have incentives or if a lack of incentives is detrimental and how important government support is.

   Prompt: how important is it to offer incentives? Do these work in converting enquiries? Can you give me some specific examples?

   Prompt: do you hold back any of the incentives to offer later on in negotiations? If so why?

   Prompt: do you get government/council support for bids (financial support, letters of introduction, offers of attendance or use of venues etc.).

8. Who are your competitors?

   Literature suggests that for most associations the choice is wide open. This question will help to confirm, contradict or elaborate on this assumption. It will also help to establish the level of competition across continents and between established and emerging destinations.

   Prompt: possibly but not necessarily geographically. Who do you loose bids to and why?

9. What do your competitors offer that you don't and what are your views on this?

   This question will help to establish the venue's view of what makes a destination competitive and what influences site selection.

   Prompt: do you get asked for anything from PCOs that you can't provide? What and why? Is this something that your competitors provide?

10. How is the venue financed and governed?

    This question will establish the category and remit of the venue which may have a bearing on answers to all questions.

Appendix 7: Interview Participants

7.1 CVBs

Code	Title and role	Organisation	Time in role
C1	Head of X Convention Bureau, leads a team of 15 working to attract national and international conferences to the city	City convention bureau in Scotland	20 years+
C2	Owner and director of X Convention Bureau, team of 3 working to attract national and international conferences to the city	City convention bureau in South England (privately owned)	20 years+
C3	Head of Business Tourism, leads a team of 7 working to attract national and international conferences to the city	City convention bureau in Northern Ireland	7 years
C4	Business Development Manager, actively bids for national and international business events to come to the city	City convention bureau in Northern Ireland	15 years
C5	Owner and director of a national convention bureau, leads a team of 20 working to attract mainly international business events to the country	Country convention bureau in North Africa (privately owned)	20 years+
C6	Head of Business Events, leads a team of 5, working to attract national and international conferences to the country	Country convention bureau in Australasia	6 years
C7	Managing Director of X agency, contracted to manage a national convention bureau to attract national and international business events to the country	Country convention bureau in North America	11 years
C8	Head of Events, leads a team of 3 and actively bids on national and international association conferences to come to the city	City convention bureau in North America,	12 years
C9	Head of Associations, leads a team of 13, actively bidding on national and international association conferences to come to the city	City convention bureau in the south of England	9 years
C10	Director of Business Development, team of 2 actively bidding on national and international business events to come to the city (part of a wider team of 35)	City convention bureau in Australasia	8 years
C11	Senior Business Tourism Manager, team of 8, actively bids on national and international business events	City convention bureau in the north of England	1 year (20+ years in total)
C12	Commercial and Business Development Officer, working alone (and actively bidding) on national and international business events to come to the city	City convention bureau in Scotland	15 years

C13	Vice President of Global Sales, leads a team of 78, actively working to attract international events to the region	Regional convention bureau in North America	19 years
C14	Business Development Manager, actively bids for national and international business events to come to the city	City convention bureau in Scotland	5 years

7.2 PCOs

Code	Description of role	Time in role
P1	Conferences Manager: in-house UK based medical association. Has delivered conferences in the UK and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	1 year (10 years in total)
P2	Senior Manager of Events: in-house UK based scientific association. Has delivered conferences in the UK and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	3 years (7 years in total)
P3	Business Development Manager: UK based agency PCO, has delivered various sector conferences for national organisations, both in the UK and internationally	5 years
P4	Head of CPD Services: UK based agency PCO, has delivered various sector conferences for national organisations in the UK and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	20+ years
P5	Owner and director of X conference management agency based in India. He has delivered various sector conferences for national and international organisations, in India and internationally.	14 years
P6	Divisional Director (Associations) for X (major international conference agency). She is based in the UK and has delivered various sector conferences for national organisations in the UK and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	3 years (18 years in total)
P7	Founder and Managing Director of X (conference management agency). She is based in the UK and has delivered various sector conferences for national organisations in the UK and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	15 years
P8	Head of Events: in-house UK based scientific association. Has delivered conferences in the UK only, but many attracting international delegates	20+ years
P9	Director of Conference Services: in-house PCO for a major international professional association. She is based in North America but the conferences are international in terms of delegates and location and rotate between every continent (apart from Antarctica).	8 years
P10	Conferences Manager: in-house PCO for a professional association (education) based in North America. Has delivered conferences in the USA and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	2 years (20 years in total)
P11	Director of Special Events, Meetings and Travel: in-house PCO for a scientific association based in North America. Has delivered conferences in the USA and internationally, attracting delegates from around the world	7 years

7.3 Venues

Code	Title and role	Organisation	Time in role
V1	Head of Business Development (Associations): actively marketing the venue to and bidding on association conferences	Multi-purpose venue in London, mixture of public and private financing	2 years (20+ years in total)
V2	Head of International Sales: actively marketing the venue to and bidding on corporate and association conferences	Purpose-built government owned venue in England	14 years
V3	Assistant Director, Conference and Exhibition Sales: actively marketing the venue to and bidding on conferences and exhibitions	Purpose-built venue in the north of England, mixture of public and private financing	2 years (20+ years in total)
V4	Director: actively marketing the venue to and bidding on conferences and exhibitions	Purpose built, privately owned venue in the Midlands	5 years
V5	Executive Director: actively marketing the venue to conferences and exhibitions	Purpose built venue in North America, mixture of public and private financing	6 years

Appendix 8: Excerpt of Transcript of Interview with P3

strategic in their approach and they've decided that in order to share the expertise they want to have a set rotation pattern whereas others are maybe not so bothered. It tends to be with the internationals and Europeans they don't necessarily want to be in the same region for two consecutive conferences in a row, so in terms of European conferences they maybe wouldn't want to be in western Europe two years in a row, maybe one year western Europe, one year eastern Europe, one year north, one year south. With the internationals sometimes they'll try but it's really down to the association most of the time.

As I was saying about how we select them I suppose it would come down to our knowledge of having worked with the venue when we planned the conference there before. Was the experience good for the delegates? How easy where they to work with. were they flexible for our requirements? also, when it comes to cities, a key factor would be whether that city is strong in that subject matter? going back to how we source our enquiries.... so, the side of the team that I work in, where we proactively go you there to try to encourage academics to bid for conference then I will do background research. say we were looking at a conference on having advance materials so a good city for that would be [redacted] because they focus, their university focuses on that area whereas from the other side of the team they get the enquiries in so there's less of an opportunity to influence. the venue has already been chose or the city's already been chosen at that point.

In either case, once you're starting to plan a conference how often do you think about involving a convention bureau in what you you're doing?

I would say that we almost exclusively involve convention bureaus because when it comes to the associations, they like that reassurance that the cities behind it and it's a team effort. we find that our bids are more likely to be successful if there's all three parties...the venue, the convention bureau, the PCO... are all at the table.

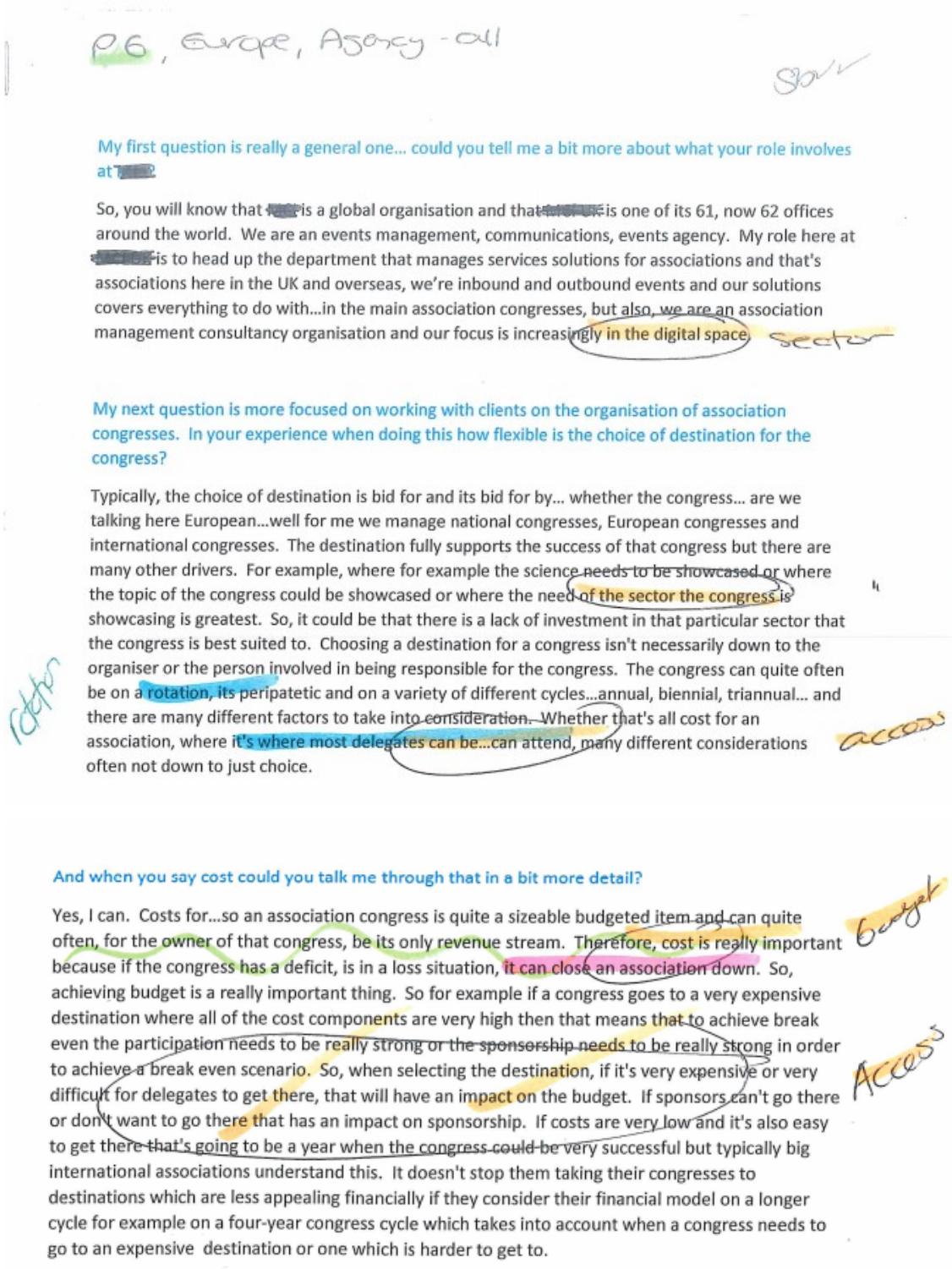
So, do you think it's important that the convention bureau has a strong relationship with the venue as well?

I think so because from my perspective from when I worked at the convention bureau if there's not good communication, if there's not a good relationship, there can be difficulty maybe when you're duplicating that effort of going after business rather than doing it strategically and keeping communications...both the venue and the convention bureau are targeting the same person and that might not come across very well to the association. It looks like... If they're trying to sell themselves as a city where everyone's on one team but in reality, there's two different people then clearly there's a bit of a disconnect there. It's really important...in my experience a lot of the cities they vary in terms of whether either the convention bureau or the venue has the upper hand when it comes to taking the initiative on leads but I would say on the whole they do communicate somewhat but some cities are better than others at doing that.

In terms of the convention bureau and what they can do for you, what sort of things do you particularly look for from them?

One key aspect is definitely subvention as that can make or break a budget of a conference particularly if we're coming to the UK or Ireland if we're competing internationally against

Appendix 9: Excerpt of Transcript of Interview with P6



P6, Europe, Agency - all

Slow

My first question is really a general one... could you tell me a bit more about what your role involves at [redacted]?

So, you will know that [redacted] is a global organisation and that [redacted] is one of its 61, now 62 offices around the world. We are an events management, communications, events agency. My role here at [redacted] is to head up the department that manages services solutions for associations and that's associations here in the UK and overseas, we're inbound and outbound events and our solutions covers everything to do with...in the main association congresses, but also, we are an association management consultancy organisation and our focus is increasingly in the digital space.

sector

My next question is more focused on working with clients on the organisation of association congresses. In your experience when doing this how flexible is the choice of destination for the congress?

Typically, the choice of destination is bid for and its bid for by... whether the congress... are we talking here European...well for me we manage national congresses, European congresses and international congresses. The destination fully supports the success of that congress but there are many other drivers. For example, where for example the science needs to be showcased or where the topic of the congress could be showcased or where the need of the sector the congress is showcasing is greatest. So, it could be that there is a lack of investment in that particular sector that the congress is best suited to. Choosing a destination for a congress isn't necessarily down to the organiser or the person involved in being responsible for the congress. The congress can quite often be on a rotation, its peripatetic and on a variety of different cycles...annual, biennial, triannual... and there are many different factors to take into consideration. Whether that's all cost for an association, where it's where most delegates can be...can attend, many different considerations often not down to just choice.

rotation

access

And when you say cost could you talk me through that in a bit more detail?

budget

Yes, I can. Costs for...so an association congress is quite a sizeable budgeted item and can quite often, for the owner of that congress, be its only revenue stream. Therefore, cost is really important because if the congress has a deficit, is in a loss situation, it can close an association down. So, achieving budget is a really important thing. So for example if a congress goes to a very expensive destination where all of the cost components are very high then that means that to achieve break even the participation needs to be really strong or the sponsorship needs to be really strong in order to achieve a break even scenario. So, when selecting the destination, if it's very expensive or very difficult for delegates to get there, that will have an impact on the budget. If sponsors can't go there or don't want to go there that has an impact on sponsorship. If costs are very low and it's also easy to get there that's going to be a year when the congress could be very successful but typically big international associations understand this. It doesn't stop them taking their congresses to destinations which are less appealing financially if they consider their financial model on a longer cycle for example on a four-year congress cycle which takes into account when a congress needs to go to an expensive destination or one which is harder to get to.

Access

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