



ICCA Association Partner Case Study

Visit Brussels



ICCA

European Association Summit

10 editions dedicated to association professionals

The European Association Summit has celebrated its 10th edition. A gathering aimed at education, professional development, networking, and destination discovery that has been in constant evolution and adapting to changing circumstances and needs within the association community. A responsibility that Brussels, as the world's capital of international associations, carries as a perfect ground for fruitful projects and connections.

The 10th edition of the European Association Summit (EAS), held on 3-5 May 2022, has confirmed with its content and participation the various changes that have occurred in international and European associations over the last decade and in the Brussels Capital Region itself.



A conference that keeps up with the times

With its initial editions held as an addendum to another event, the conference has grown over time and established itself as its own landmark. Combining EU elements with association internal aspects or Belgian legislation, as well as topics common for various organisations such as communications, events management or governance, it has gained a character going beyond its long-standing approach of an "event for associations, by associations".

The conference has been organized since its inception by visit.brussels, the Brussels regional agency responsible for tourism and culture promotion. Among its founding partners have been key organizations representing the association community – the Union for International Associations (UIA), the European Society of Association Executives (ESAE), and the Federation of International and European Associations in Belgium (FAIB). Over time, at different editions, have also joined other key players within the association community, like Meetings Professional International (MPI), PCMA, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), and AssociationWorld.

The conference is also closely linked to the partnership Brussels has within the Global Association Hubs Partnership (GAHP), where Brussels, Dubai, Singapore, and Washington DC show their expertise and service quality towards international associations. Those cities are the main regional hubs for association headquarters in their respective regions, and the summit has also permitted to showcase not only the destinations but also the work of associations active in those regions.

With a slogan adapting to key matters for associations every year, the conference has put together a format combining case studies from associations from all horizons (e.g. education, petrochemicals, food, legal, social aid, medical, fire safety) that could inspire the participants in their own activities. Whether it was a communications campaign, a board management item, or a human resources aspect, the variety of topics never felt short, thanks to constant changes in the real world, where associations

are not just observers, but drivers of policy and actions.

The conference has also benefited from academic input in its programme, with the Solvay Business School (and its Executive Master in International Associations Management) or with Henley Business School at its last edition, as well as various law firms based in Belgium with tailored-made services for international associations and the non-profit sector.

Keynote speakers have included personalities from the academic sector or representatives of European Union institutions. However, mainly they have been representing the variety of associations. For example, the executive directors of Wind Europe or UITP – International Association of Public Transport, or the President of the European Broadcasting Union (yes, the one organising the Eurovision Song Contest, among others, but it is an association, too).

Changing format, needs and skills

While lectures and presentations are still extensively employed, the session structure has evolved into increasingly participatory forms throughout time. Panels have been organized to offer diverse points of view, exercise sheets using the presenting association as an example, applications to have a faster reaction, or roundtables with shifting dynamics, all focusing on case studies from associations.

To address the many issues, the conference has included practical sustainability workshops to focus on reducing residues, as well as executive masterclasses led by academic practitioners. Individual tables with legal firms, association management businesses, or other professionals can have more in-depth talks about certain parts of the organization, using the experience of the other party.

The conference has also embraced live streaming at an early stage for the plenaries, going into a full online version in 2020 and becoming a hybrid event in 2022 (80% live streaming).

Over time, the spectrum of associations has changed and their work as well. Besides being seen in the conference content, the phenomenon has also been reflected in the discussions present in various webinars held during the coronavirus pandemic.

The managerial skills, advocacy, communications, executive bodies and office management for organisations which operate at a global level have to undergo change in various aspects. Whether from an organizational, legal, or soft skills standpoint, The development of new training programmes, communities of practice or enhancing the exchange among peers may be the only beneficial way of having associations adapt to the challenges that shape global reality.

Continuity beyond the event

Associations are part of Brussels' DNA. The city has evolved steadily and has always been home to local craftsmen's guilds, social organizations, and scientific societies. For over a century, it has also benefited from a special legal status for international associations and currently hosts more than 2400 international associations' headquarters.

Besides the Summit and the supply of the material on the event website, promotion is also done by visit.brussels on the events focused on international associations in the different domains, driven by other organisations. This allows us to keep the continuity of knowledge presence and keep referring to the assets that an event may bring in a short time span, all year long, by "connecting the dots" with other opportunities.

With the European Association Summit, the city's seasonal discovery programme run by visit.brussels and regular events organised by association organisations, associations can quickly grow their knowledge, capacities and network, thanks to the ease with which they can exchange with their peers.

European Association Summit – www.easummit.brussels



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