



Synopsis

A reminder of what is being done to help us re-energize and re-focus our commitments to Sustainability.

Keynote Congress sessions looking at: Introduction; Global Thinking and Responsibility; There Must Be Hope; The Power of Change; A Policy Call to COP27; Stories That Inspire; So What About Venues?; Sustainability in Action; A Different Perspective. There are relevant links included.

Polite reminder: this article is a sketch capturing the essence of the events that took place. If you require more information, please contact David.r@iccaworld.org

Sustainability. The word is everywhere. It is used as a mission statement, a rallying call, a promise, even an accusation. It remains front of mind, written across banners, and on footers of emails. We are reminded of it every time we gather for an event, take a bus journey, or reach for a bottle of water. As an industry and as a society, Sustainability is seared onto our collective consciousness. And this is perhaps, the problem. Are we in danger of being blinded by such ubiquity? Are we now numbed to something sitting there in such plain sight? Or is our resolve ever stronger to confront, welcome, and embrace Sustainability as the corner stone of our strategy to tackle the most pressing issue of our age: climate change. Sustainability – a core ICCA pillar – and one that shaped much of the content at our [61st Congress](#) in [Kraków](#).

First, some context; let's consider what came well before Congress - the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, and just after Congress - **COP27**.

Global Thinking and Responsibility

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a shared framework in humanity's fight to protect and ultimately save our planet. Every industry and every sector has UNSDG's relating directly to them, and how they conduct their work. What the events and meetings industry may not be aware of, but now should be, is the recent launch of **The Roadmap to Net Zero Carbon Events**, fittingly at COP27. This unique initiative is driven by a working party of events industry experts and stakeholders, with ICCA proud to be a founding member. The Roadmap sets out *our* collective and practical commitment to tackling climate change... and driving towards net zero by 2050. It's a tangible and achievable way forward and marks a very important moment for all in – and connected to - our industry. An industry often seen as one that needs to address radical change due to the way our work is orchestrated and executed on the international stage. Publication of the Roadmap demonstrates a real willingness to lead - and use our collective voice to advocate for – change. The Net Zero Carbon Events initiative is open to all organisations in and around the events industry. And it is free to join.

The Roadmap launch is timely, especially for ICCA members, as it comes mere days after Congress concluded. Sustainability formed a major part of the content, and the Congress programme as a whole, and shaped our approach to procuring transport, sustenance, the collateral we created, and the work we did in the Kraków community.

There Must Be Hope

In his keynote speech, **Georgios Kostakos, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS)**, told us, implored us, to believe '**There Must Be Hope**'. And for a man who served in the top echelons of the UN, sitting on the **High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability** and the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change**... Georgios is perhaps better placed than most, to see why *hope* matters. Yes, there are problems faced by all which feed into negating the immediate relevance of the Sustainability argument; including economic downturn, employment crisis, global conflict, and pandemic. But we, as humans, are born to hope. The stringent guidelines set out – and now widely accepted - in the UNSDGs are driving a global commitment to change mindset. Things are thought of differently. Through financial upturns and downturns (they will continue to happen), change to bring about change, is now the dominant narrative of the working world. A much bigger picture is being painted for the benefit of all.

The Power of Change

Congress was keenly aware of the unique role our industry has to play in delivering change. We are increasingly following a strict set of Sustainability guidelines and embracing better practices for doing business. This leads the disrupters and changemakers to pose the following question: 'what if we put Sustainability at the top of every event agenda?' Would a seismic re-evaluation of how and why we meet – apart from driving business opportunities – spin our business off its axis? Or would it give us a certainty of purpose? Perhaps. But whatever we do, we must commit to changing mindsets and perceptions, and as an industry not only be part of the change... but drive the change. Change must be our shared goal. But goals, to be effective, need governance. The goals of society, the economy and the environment can only be achieved through governance. And governance can't be good for the environment and bad for people. So how do we address the old argument of fairness in an unfair world? The answer: discourse, dialogue, education. Our industry is global, it impacts people all over the world. We can be educators and changemakers. We can innovate, educate, question stereotypes and be the hope we want to see. And every time we do this, we need to shout about it loud and proud.

Yet, are we still nervous of who we are? Does the accusatory finger of air miles and individual taxi journeys still force us to lower our eyes when it comes to talking Sustainability? Can we overcome this residue of shame? Yes, we can. We can because we are nothing if not resilient. We are good at facing down challenges. We can flex, we can innovate, we can act to meet our Sustainability commitments. We've already proven how resourceful we are. Did our industry fold during the pandemic? No, it didn't. We are far more resilient and ingenious than we often think we are. We have a track record of finding a way through. We have big stories to tell.

A Policy Call to COP27

Congress also dialled in - via live link - to COP27 to hear from **Miguel Naranjo (Programme Officer, UNFCCC)** about what the policy makers and the politicians were doing in Sharm El Sheikh. It was a great opportunity to get live 'on the ground feedback' and ask the awkward questions. Are they doing enough? Miguel believes 'yes, there is genuine hope.' The world has never been as engaged in the problem of tackling climate change as it is now, despite everything else that is going on. Yes, the situation is indeed perilous, some may say irreversible. But there is an overwhelming willingness to act. Possibly because public opinion has grown so vociferous. And these dissenting voices are also voters and customers. Holding the government - and the private sector – to account is now normalised social behaviour, especially by the young. Everyone has a part to play. Everyone is accountable. People who think greenwashing is an acceptable deflection of policy and action, do so at their own peril. But those still inclined to do so, to hide behind it, need to be engaged. Dialogue and

engagement must be the way. For change to happen effectively, all stakeholders, even the outliers, must be engaged and that involves constant education and sharing powerful stories of hope.

Stories That Inspire

Across four memorable days in Kraków, in every session and in every discussion, Congress was brimful of stories of hope. Essential, compelling, inspirational stories. Stories of doing things differently. Stories saying 'this is us. What have you got?' One such session was '**Crucial Stories for Critical Times**' led by **Gustavo Koniszcz** (**Managing Director, FutureBrand Hispanic America**). Gustavo selected stories looking at countries comfortable in their own 'Sustainability Skin' and confident enough to invest in their brand, and promote themselves as trustworthy, honest, and full of integrity. This approach resonates with the business traveller, the conference organiser, the leisure tourist... all who want the experiential box ticked. And high on the checklist is of course, Sustainability. We heard about **New Zealand**, immensely proud of its cultural values, values long held by its first nation residents and now embraced and shared by the population. We heard about **Costa Rica**, a living breathing example of what can be achieved when there is a collective national desire to put nature and education at the heart of the national story. We heard about **Peru**, rebranding itself and bringing the population along with a 93% acceptance rate of a new national story. And later in Congress, we heard about a grand old city, **Porto** and their dramatic reinterpretation of what tourists bring to a city, whilst also addressing the heritage concerns of locals, in a fun and beautifully executed campaign. Sustainability also means sustainable living for communities, who can often feel marginalised by the incoming travel spend. Locals need to be engaged in the city/nation story. Again, dialogue between all.

There are briefing systems we can utilise to help get the essence of the Sustainability story right. The '**Who, What, Why, When, Where**' questions. Get the brief right, apply the concept to content, control, consensus, commitment, and consistency... and we can begin crafting our own Sustainability stories in ways we feel proud and worthy of sharing.

So What About Venues?

So what about the places, the **venues** where we all come and meet? How do these focal points play their part in the Sustainability story? Several Congress sessions were dedicated to venues and the part they play. We looked at the future of venue design. We looked at how meetings are curated to be truly memorable experiential occasions with Sustainability so embedded in the concept... it becomes a given and not a talking point. We also looked at how new venues are being planned and built following a '**carbon out, net zero in**' blueprint.

And across the venue sessions we were treated to voices and innovative examples from **Scotland, Melbourne, Edmonton, Switzerland and Hungary**. Examples showing the power of taking a stand, doing things differently, and growing an international reputation for being a modern, multi-purpose and multi-faceted destination... and reaping the rewards and recognition for displaying such clarity of ambition.

Sustainability in Action

The final morning of the 61st Congress staged the **Global Destination Sustainability Awards (GDS)**, recognising **Leadership, Most Improved** organisation and the most **Innovative** programme of the year. Results were determined in accordance with the **GDS-Index**, which measures and benchmarks destination sustainability. GDS-Index results informed the first two awards, while the latter was chosen by an independent panel of experienced event professionals and sustainability leaders. Presenting the awards was **GDS CEO and Chief GDS-Changemaker, Guy Bigwood**. Guy's team scrutinised every aspect of Congress from a Sustainability perspective and will feedback their findings so we can make our **62nd Congress in Bangkok** even more Sustainable. Proof that Sustainability isn't just a Pillar, but an ongoing goal.

Back to the Awards. The **GDS Leadership Award** was presented for the sixth time to **Goteburg & Co Gothenburg, Sweden** for its continual commitment, inspired vision, prompt action, and measurable impacts. **The Most Improved Award** was given to **Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)**, Bangkok, Thailand whose concerted efforts in supplier and destination management led to dramatic improvement in its ranking. **The Innovation Award** winner was named as **Visit Belfast** for its pioneering project "**Changing the Menu. For Good**" which raised awareness, funds, and supplies for those experiencing growing food poverty in the city. Representatives from all three joined Guy on stage to share their stories and receive their deserved accolades from the audience.

If one looks at the GDS-Index **Top 30**, 7 of the top 10 cities are from **Scandinavia**. Which segues nicely into the **Copenhagen Lecture**, featuring two young leaders: **Jacob Fritzbøger Christensen, (Political Director, Grøn** and **Nima Tisdall, (Founder, Blue Lobster)**. Both shared their compelling experiences of forcing change in their given sectors. Their keynote touched upon all ICCA Pillars – hence being scheduled towards the end of Congress – but Sustainability featured heavily. From using leisure tourism and travel to make a sustainable change in society, to taking on the fishing industry at source... Jacob and Nima were fearless and relentless in their commitment to making change happen. If they are representative of the voices of young leaders in business, hope is there for all. Know this: the young are not

afraid. The young will not compromise. The young are coming through. The young live and breathe sustainability. They will not accept enough is being done. They will ask the difficult questions. They will break the status quo. They will be the difference.

A Different Perspective

And finally, a different and more evocative perception of our fragile existence. World-champion gliding pilot, **Sebastian Kawa** entranced delegates as he took them into a **Skyfull of Heat** at the **Polish Aviation Museum** in one of our many out of the box sessions. Sebastian brought delegates out of our world, and into his. The irony is: it is the same world. One thing is certain: from ground level, sharing a coffee outside an auditorium, looking at the late afternoon sun flood in, waiting for moonrise above Wawel Castle Hill... or from 10,000 feet above the seemingly endless Montana plains... the world beside us, above us, below us, is the only one we have.