INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION DESTINATION

Competitive Index 2021

The Fourth Edition

GainingEdge

ADVISING THE WORLD'S CONVENTION AND MEETINGS INDUSTRY

GainingEdge

Contents

Executive Summary

Speeding Up Recovery

In the last three years, the *Gaining*Edge Destination Competitive Index has ranked destinations based on their competitive strength to attract international conferences. Our focus this year is to analyze destinations' competitiveness with the aim to help them understand which strategies and activities they can use to speed up their recovery post pandemic.

This year, the total competitive scores for all 101 cities - the same cities as in previous report - have declined due to the impact of COVID-19, although the relative positions among most have not changed dramatically with many destinations maintaining the same or similar ranking as last year.

Destinations which experienced a relatively greater decline are cities which have scored well in the past because of their air accessibility and large meeting venues, as well as leisure cities with strong destination appeal. Also, there is a trend that smaller destinations with more flexible infrastructure, and those with a strong association community, are less affected.

Our advice to all destinations is to analyze their competitiveness, within the correct set of other cities, in order to better understand their current challenges. In doing so, they can develop more efficient and effective strategies for speedy recovery from the pandemic downturn. Key findings from this report validate our belief that a destination should focus on:

1) **Intellectual Engagement** – Build relationships with local association leaders and leverage on their international reputation;

2) **Flexible Approach** – Have more flexibility in product offerings and an agile market approach;

3) **Technological Advancement** – Be ready to use new technologies in meetings and events to cater for live and remote participants;

4) **Regional Focus** – Work the national and regional markets for these are the short-term yield sources.

Each destination should compare its advantages and challenges within its primary competitive set and, based on that analysis, decide how to combine these strategically to become more competitive.

GainingEdge

Flagship Examples

We selected six cities worthy of mention because of their convention product attributes, and how well, or not, they have or can, optimise on their competitiveness.

Beijing – In our 2021 Index, Beijing jumped from 7th to 4th place globally and took 2nd position in Asia. Its fast recovery, growing competitiveness and being in the global top 5 for available intellectual capital (per our other GEAR research on Intellectual Capital) indicates great potential for further improvement in future years.

Istanbul – After a historical best in 2015, Istanbul's position declined due to political instability and related challenges. However, it boasts excellent destination products and jumped to 9th place globally (4th in Europe) in our 2021 Index. Since 2017, Istanbul has been on a path to recovery (albeit slowed by COVID-19) and we expect this to continue.

Moscow – Eastern European cities are relatively less competitive compared to Western European cities but Moscow is an exception as a global hub with excellent accessibility and infrastructure. Moscow has many local intellectual leaders who can help bring events however the city has yet to leverage on this competitive advantage well.

Budapest – Budapest is in ICCA's Top 30 for year 2019 and sits at 61st place overall in our Index, and at 29th in Europe. Although meeting numbers have declined, Budapest still achieved results above its competitiveness score. It has a bright future if it can activate its competitiveness in a strategic way.

Florence – Best known as a beautiful city with a strong leisure segment, Florence improved its competitive position to 47th place globally (21st in Europe). Ranked 88th by ICCA in year 2019, this gap nonetheless indicates solid potential for growth if the city leverages its key competitive advantages.

Ghent – Well-known as a European university town, Ghent is relatively less competitive when compared to larger, capital cities. However, continuous good results show Ghent has strong collaboration with its local academic community and is very effective at harnessing its intellectual capital - the key source of its success.

The Competitive Index

The Competitive Index

For the fourth year in a row, *Gaining*Edge publishes its **International Convention Destination Competitive Index Annual Report**. As in previous years, the report covers the top 101 destinations with the largest number of international association meetings (according to ICCA) held in the last recorded three-year series (2017-2019). As this analysis partly refers to the period since the whole world was affected by the COVID-19 (since early 2020), the report will point out some challenges international convention destinations have faced.

The *Gaining*Edge Competitive Index provides an assessment of how convention cities compare in terms of the strength of their destination products. The Index takes into consideration the key factors that influence the choice of the next host destination made by meeting planners and conference organizers, and these include: meeting infrastructure (meeting venues, hotel offer and facility package, international accessibility and logistics), distinctive factors (local scientific community, destination appeal and costs), as well as macro indicators (market size, economic strength, business environment, and social conditions).

However, as the Competitive Index does not take into account the efforts or effectiveness of convention bureaus' actions, this Index does not indicate if one city is more successful than the other as a convention destination. What the Index does say is that based on the destination's convention products, these results can be reasonably expected.

As such, the Competitive Index establishes relevant quantitative tools in the global meetings industry in order to help destinations understand their competitive position; the relationship between different competitive factors; and to identify areas for improving their destination products.

With this aim to provide quantitative analysis on destinations' competitiveness, as well as opportunities and resources for their success, *Gaining*Edge created an internal division *Gaining*Edge Analysis & Research (GEAR).

Destinations can use this Competitive Index to obtain preliminary data and directions which will support their further planning and implementation. To further assist individual destinations in their detailed strategic planning, GEAR also provides consolidated analyses based on the Competitive Index via a new service, the **Destination Index Report**. With the Destination Competitive Index, we have developed quantitative tools to evaluate the relative competitiveness of convention destinations and equate that to potential business levels, thereby providing a foundation for quantitative analysis and data for facts-based decision making.

Finally, the Competitive Index provides fact-based quantitative indicators which will help the business events industry submit their proposals, to their decision makers and funders (eg government or city authorities) to obtain much needed support through the recovery period.

The Competitive Index 2021

The Competitive Index 2021

As in previous years, the Destination Competitive Index 2021 presents the Top 100 destinations (exactly 101), their rank and number of competitive points (or competitive scores), based on a consistent methodology and research of the 11 competitive factors.

The Competitive Index report 2021 covers the same cities as in 2020, ensuring full comparability in the scores for the last two years.

It should be noted that some destinations have strong product attributes (meeting venues, air accessibility, large markets and/or strong economies) and high competitiveness, but are not included in the report as they are not listed among the ICCA top 100 (in the last recorded three-year period 2017-2019). This happens if these destinations, for whatever reason, were not focused on international association meetings in that period. Some destinations could be chiefly focused on their national market (especially in large and developed countries), while others may be more focused on the exhibition business or the international association meetings market is a new and emerging business segment for them.

However, any destination, even if not included in this research, is welcomed to ask for a competitive index analysis and GEAR is ready and able to provide relevant information and assessment of the destination's competitiveness, in relation to its competitive set.

Our main reason to include the same cities as in the previous 2020 report is because all destinations have been impacted by COVID-19. The ranking which ICCA provided in 2021 is based on planned meetings (but not necessarily held), and therefore not fully comparable with previous years. These data include cancelled, postponed as well as virtual and hybrid events. Relative relations among these events for each destination are different and the data is still not complete as some of postponed events will appear in future years. As a result, at GEAR we decided to maintain the same methodology as we did in the pre-COVID period.

Clearly it will take some time to include these events into the analysis and to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on all convention destinations in terms of meetings cancelled or held in future years (both onsite and online) and in virtual or hybrid form. Once complete and with comparable data, GEAR will be able to provide a full analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the competitiveness of convention destinations.

Impacts of COVID-19

COVID-19

Since early 2020, the world has faced the pandemic caused by COVID-19, and in addition to the staggering human toll, it has affected many destinations by reducing their economic activity, including convention business. As we observe the mid-term period (in a three-year series) to follow destination competitiveness, the pandemic has already significantly affected all meeting destinations around the world.

Compared to the previous year, overall competitive scores dropped for all listed destinations, with the level of decline varying for different cities. The most affected competitive factor is Air Accessibility, due to the huge drop in international flights since 2020. Next, use of the largest Meeting Facilities has declined as most large international congresses were postponed or canceled. In addition, the number of international visitors significantly dropped, so we have a decrease in competitive scores for Destination Appeal (although this score still includes data from before the pandemic).

It is important to note the Competitive Index model focuses on relative positions among destinations and the level of competitiveness for each factor. Therefore, although the total competitive scores for all cities have declined, the relative positions among them have not changed dramatically and so many destinations have maintained the same or similar ranking. Some destinations experienced a large decline in number of competitive points, while some of them lost only a couple of competitive points from last year.

We see the destinations which experienced a higher decline are large cities with good air accessibility and large meeting venues, as well as leisure cities with strong destination appeal (eg Kyoto, Taipei, Toronto, Milan, Mexico City, Barcelona).

On the other hand, smaller destinations with more flexible meetings infrastructure as well as a strong association community have been less affected (Ghent, Lausanne, Vilnius, Tallinn, etc.). Also, large Chinese cities (Beijing and Shanghai) experienced relatively small declines compared to other top global cities. These cities saw a relatively fast recovery, especially regarding Air Accessibility, so in 2020 seven of the 10 busiest airports in the world serve Chinese cities.

We expect the real effects of COVID-19 will be visible long after the pandemic and so the Competitive Index model will give us quantitative tools to measure this impact, based on changes in the relative contribution of different competitive factors.

To assist in speedy recovery, we strongly advice all destinations to undertake a deep analysis of their competitiveness in order to better understand their current challenges and so they can develop effective and efficient recovery strategies.

We remain consistent in our belief that destinations' recovery strategies should focus on efforts to:

1) engage with their local leaders and leverage their international reputation;
2) make their product offering more flexible;
3) be well-prepared for the use of new technologies and implementation of virtual components in business events; and
4) be more focused on national and regional markets.

Global Rankings

Global Rankings

The following table presents the top 101 international convention cities in order of their Competitive Index scores as well as their ranking in 2021 against 2020. Obviously, the competitive index scores in 2021 are lower for all these cities compared to 2020 and that decline ranges from just a few competitive points to over 90.

It is interesting to note that 17 cities maintain the same rank as last year, while 17 of them changed their ranking by more than +/- 5 places, indicating the relative relations among these destinations are more or less the same. A deeper analysis per region, or using different competitive sets may provide us more information about the destinations who used this period to improve their competitiveness.

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Paris	722.5	1	1	764.1	=
New York	695.5	2	3	715.8	+1 ↑
Singapore	680.6	3	2	744.9	-1 ↓
Beijing	678.7	4	7	681.5	+3 ↑
Tokyo	671.8	5	5	701.7	=
Bangkok	642.1	6	8	680.7	+2 ↑
London	638.8	7	10	673.4	+3 ↑
Barcelona	623.8	8	4	704.2	-4 ↓
Istanbul	622.4	9	15	656.8	+6 ↑
Washington	622.2	10	14	658.8	+4 ↑
Chicago	620.7	11	13	659.6	+2 ↑
Hong Kong	614.4	12	6	691.1	-6 ↓
Shanghai	610.3	13	20	613.8	+7 ↑
Boston	601.6	14	11	665.3	-3 ↓
Berlin	596.1	15	12	659.7	-3 ↓

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Kuala Lumpur	591.8	16	9	679.8	-7 ↓
Amsterdam	585.2	17	17	649.8	=
Seoul	571.9	18	18	633.5	=
Toronto	569.7	19	16	653.4	-3 ↓
Vienna	565.1	20	22	608.7	+2 ↑
Macao	561.1	21	25	599.8	+4 ↑
Bali	549.3	22	26	597.9	+4 ↑
Vancouver	538.6	23	28	590.7	+5 ↑
Brussels	537.1	24	33	568.8	+9 ↑
Madrid	534.9	25	23	603.2	-2 ↓
Milan	534.5	26	19	616.0	-7 ↓
Melbourne	534.4	27	27	597.7	=
Moscow	533.0	28	38	556.5	+10 ↑
Montreal	532.8	29	29	582.3	=
Rome	532.2	30	24	602.2	-6 ↓

Global Rankings

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Sydney	524.5	31	31	581.6	=
Taipei	523.7	32	21	608.8	-11 ↓
Hangzhou	522.2	33	37	561.3	+4 ↑
Delhi	519.7	34	36	563.3	+2 ↑
Dubai	517.5	35	35	564.0	=
Munich	516.3	36	30	582.2	-6 ↓
Copenhagen	512.6	37	34	566.3	-3 ↓
Mexico City	491.8	38	32	572.8	-6 ↓
Stockholm	487.2	39	39	554.9	=
Hamburg	485.2	40	44	522.0	+4 ↑
Manila	482.9	41	41	546.0	=
Lisbon	479.4	42	43	530.1	+1 ↑
Dublin	476.1	43	42	535.8	-1 ↓
Sao Paulo	475.8	44	46	511.7	+2 ↑
Prague	474.2	45	47	510.4	+2 ↑
Helsinki	465.5	46	45	512.0	-1 ↓
Florence	463.1	47	51	489.2	+4 ↑
Kyoto	459.5	48	40	553.1	-8 ↓
Lyon	459.4	49	49	500.9	=
Gothenburg	458.6	50	52	489.0	+2 ↑
Busan	456.7	51	50	490.1	-1 ↓
Rio de Janeiro	452.8	52	55	483.4	+3 ↑

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Glasgow	450.4	53	48	508.4	-5 ↓
Jeju	448.8	54	53	486.7	-1 ↓
Valencia	446.0	55	63	469.2	+8 ↑
Warsaw	444.7	56	65	455.6	+9 ↑
Geneva	442.7	57	57	479.8	=
St Petersburg	439.7	58	62	469.3	+4 ↑
Brisbane	439.5	59	56	481.8	-3 ↓
Bogota	436.5	60	54	485.2	-6 ↓
Budapest	435.8	61	61	471.2	=
Edinburgh	433.6	62	64	466.3	+2 ↑
Oslo	425.5	63	59	478.0	-4 ↓
Athens	424.4	64	58	479.2	-6 ↓
Manchester	423.4	65	60	471.3	-5 ↓
Cracow	421.1	66	68	437.9	+2 ↑
Marseille	419.5	67	67	444.1	=
Cape Town	408.2	68	71	425.3	+3 ↑
Torino	397.0	69	73	409.0	+4 ↑
Zurich	389.8	70	66	455.0	-4 ↓
Rotterdam	388.1	71	70	431.7	-1 ↓
Thessaloniki	387.0	72	75	403.9	+3 ↑
Buenos Aires	386.3	73	69	432.7	-4 ↓
Belgrade	379.4	74	79	399.2	+5 ↑

Global Rankings

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Toulouse	378.8	75	74	406.4	-1 ↓
Porto	378.7	76	76	402.8	=
Bologna	378.0	77	77	400.8	=
Bucharest	377.8	78	80	398.1	+2 ↑
Riga	377.0	79	78	399.3	-1 ↓
Venice	376.6	80	72	412.5	-8 ↓
Tallinn	375.6	81	84	390.6	+3 ↑
Sofia	374.8	82	86	382.5	+4 ↑
Auckland	372.4	83	81	395.8	-2 ↓
Lausanne	369.3	84	89	373.7	+5 ↑
Lima	367.8	85	82	393.1	-3 ↓
Aarhus	367.6	86	85	386.1	-1 ↓
Hague	367.2	87	88	377.1	+1 ↑
Ljubljana	366.9	88	83	390.8	-5 ↓

City	Score 2021	Rank 2021	Rank 2020	Score 2020	Change
Antwerp	366.0	89	92	367.5	+3 ↑
Panama City	362.4	90	87	377.4	-3 ↓
Cartagena	356.6	91	90	373.0	-1 ↓
Vilnius	352.0	92	96	354.0	+4 ↑
Zagreb	347.4	93	94	362.9	+1 ↑
Reykjavik	340.6	94	93	366.6	-1 ↓
Santiago	339.0	95	91	371.6	-4 ↓
Oxford	337.5	96	95	360.3	-1 ↓
Dubrovnik	335.5	97	97	346.7	=
Ghent	315.5	98	99	328.7	+1 ↑
Leuven	314.1	99	100	328.2	+1 ↑
Montevideo	301.0	100	101	313.8	+1 ↑
San Jose	287.2	101	98	340.0	-3 ↓

Gap Analysis

By comparing the destinations' ICCA ranking with our competitiveness ranking, we can determine which destinations are achieving results above, or below, their potential.

This 'gap' analysis is even more useful when we take into consideration destinations from the same region or within a specific competitive set.

There are destinations operating above their expected level of competitiveness, such as Budapest, Athens, Lisbon and Prague in Europe, as well as Buenos Aires, Santiago or Lima in Latin America. US cities are highly competitive, but are mostly focused on a large national market, and so they achieve a relatively lower position in ICCA ranking. A similar gap can be seen for some other destinations such as Macao, Bali or Moscow.

Regional Rankings

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Europe

City	Rank	Score	City	Rank	Score	City	Rank	Score
Paris	1	722.5	Hamburg	16	485.2	Oslo	31	425.5
London	2	638.8	Lisbon	17	479.4	Athens	32	424.4
Barcelona	3	623.8	Dublin	18	476.1	Manchester	33	423.4
Istanbul	4	622.4	Prague	19	474.2	Cracow	34	421.1
Berlin	5	596.1	Helsinki	20	465.5	Marseille	35	419.5
Amsterdam	6	585.2	Florence	21	463.1	Torino	36	397.0
Vienna	7	565.1	Lyon	22	459.4	Zurich	37	389.8
Brussels	8	537.1	Gothenburg	23	458.6	Rotterdam	38	388.1
Madrid	9	534.9	Glasgow	24	450.4	Thessaloniki	39	387.0
Milan	10	534.5	Valencia	25	446.0	Belgrade	40	379.4
Moscow	11	533.0	Warsaw	26	444.7	Toulouse	41	378.8
Rome	12	532.2	Geneva	27	442.7	Porto	42	378.7
Munich	13	516.3	St Petersburg	28	439.7	Bologna	43	378.0
Copenhagen	14	512.6	Budapest	29	435.8	Bucharest	44	377.8
Stockholm	15	487.2	Edinburgh	30	433.6	Riga	45	377.0

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Europe

City	Rank	Score
Venice	46	376.6
Tallinn	47	375.6
Sofia	48	374.8
Lausanne	49	369.3
Aarhus	50	367.6
Hague	51	367.2
Ljubljana	52	366.9
Antwerp	53	366.0
Vilnius	54	352.0
Zagreb	55	347.4
Reykjavik	56	340.6
Oxford	57	337.5
Dubrovnik	58	335.5
Ghent	59	315.5
Leuven	60	314.1

Europe

Europe boasts 60 cities among the top 101, showing the highest concentration of convention business. For the fourth time in a row, Paris is the most competitive convention destination in Europe as well as around the globe.

This year, London surpassed Barcelona and occupies the second position. Among the top 10 destinations, the biggest growth was experienced by Istanbul, which occupies the fourth position ahead of Berlin, Amsterdam and Vienna.

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Rankings within European sub-regions

Western Europe

City	Rank	Score
Paris	1	722.5
London	2	638.8
Barcelona	3	623.8
Istanbul	4	622.4
Berlin	5	596.1
Amsterdam	6	585.2
Vienna	7	565.1
Brussels	8	537.1
Madrid	9	534.9
Milan	10	534.5
Rome	11	532.2
Munich	12	516.3
Copenhagen	13	512.6
Stockholm	14	487.2
Hamburg	15	485.2

City	Rank	Score
Lisbon	16	479.4
Dublin	17	476.1
Helsinki	18	465.5
Florence	19	463.1
Lyon	20	459.4
Gothenburg	21	458.6
Glasgow	22	450.4
Valencia	23	446.0
Geneva	24	442.7
Edinburgh	25	433.6
Oslo	26	425.5
Athens	27	424.4
Manchester	28	423.4
Marseille	29	419.5
Torino	30	397.0

City	Rank	Score
Zurich	31	389.8
Rotterdam	32	388.1
Thessaloniki	33	387.0
Toulouse	34	378.8
Porto	35	378.7
Bologna	36	378.0
Venice	37	376.6
Lausanne	38	369.3
Aarhus	39	367.6
Hague	40	367.2
Antwerp	41	366.0
Reykjavik	42	340.6
Oxford	43	337.5
Ghent	44	315.5
Leuven	45	314.1

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Rankings within European sub-regions

Eastern Europe

City	Rank	Score
Moscow	1	533.0
Prague	2	474.2
Warsaw	3	444.7
St Petersburg	4	439.7
Budapest	5	435.8
Cracow	6	421.1
Belgrade	7	379.4
Bucharest	8	377.8
Riga	9	377.0
Tallinn	10	375.6
Sofia	11	374.8
Ljubljana	12	366.9
Vilnius	13	352.0
Zagreb	14	347.4
Dubrovnik	15	335.5

Analysis

Considering that most of these destinations are from Europe, it is more convenient to observe them at the subregional level. Among the Western European cities, Brussels achieved the highest growth by jumping from 33^{rd} to 24^{th} place in the world, which is a leap from 12^{th} to 8^{th} place in Europe. This is mostly thanks to a strong community of international associations based in the city.

On the other hand, destinations which experienced a decrease in their ranking are mostly cities in Mediterranean area, with a strong leisure component, such as Venice, Athens or Rome. It indicates that the Association Community advantage (as a competitive factor) have had a relatively stronger influence than Destination Appeal, especially in the current circumstances related to COVID-19.

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Asia

City	Rank	Score
Singapore	1	680.6
Beijing	2	678.7
Tokyo	3	671.8
Bangkok	4	642.1
Hong Kong	5	614.4
Shanghai	6	610.3
Kuala Lumpur	7	591.8
Seoul	8	571.9
Macao	9	561.1
Bali	10	549.3
Taipei	11	523.7
Hangzhou	12	522.2
Delhi	13	519.7
Manila	14	482.9
Kyoto	15	459.5
Busan	16	456.7
Jeju	17	448.8

US & Canada

City	Rank	Score
New York	1	695.5
Washington	2	622.2
Chicago	3	620.7
Boston	4	601.6
Toronto	5	569.7
Vancouver	6	538.6
Montreal	7	532.8

Australia / Oceania

City	Rank	Score
Melbourne	1	534.4
Sydney	2	524.5
Brisbane	3	439.5
Auckland	4	372.4

Latin America

City	Rank	Score
Mexico City	1	491.8
Sao Paulo	2	475.8
Rio de Janeiro	3	452.8
Bogota	4	436.5
Buenos Aires	5	386.3
Lima	6	367.8
Panama City	7	362.4
Cartagena	8	356.6
Santiago	9	339.0
Montevideo	10	301.0
San Jose	11	287.2

Africa / Middle East

City	Rank	Score
Dubai	1	517.5
Cape Town	2	408.2

Regional Rankings for Most Competitive Cities

Analysis

Asia

Singapore is again the leading convention destination in Asia, both in terms of the number of international association meetings and in overall competitiveness, while it is placed third globally. This year, Beijing jumped to the second place, surpassing Tokyo which is in third position. Bangkok took fourth place, moving Hong Kong to fifth.

Shanghai experienced the strongest growth in the region, jumping from 20th to 13th place globally and from 8th to 6th place in Asia. We noticed Chinese cities have performed well, mostly due to the large national market and fast recovery of their air travel. On the other hand, Taipei experienced a decrease of 11 places globally (from 23rd to 32nd) while Kyoto had a decline of 8 spots (from 40th to 48th).

Americas

The most competitive US convention destination is New York (and the second on a global level), followed by other US cities which listed among ICCA's top 100. This year, the order is somewhat different, as Washington takes second place ahead of Chicago and Boston. Then, a level below, we have three Canadian cities, Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. However, all these destinations are among the 30 most competitive cities globally, thanks to very strong meetings infrastructure, developed economies and large markets.

Among Latin American destinations, the most competitive is Mexico City followed by the Brazilian cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and then Bogota and Buenos Aires. All other destinations from this region are ranked below 85th position globally with some minor changes in competitive positions.

Rest of the world

Over 95% of the destinations included in our research are from Europe, Asia and the Americas, indicating the concentration of the global convention business. Australia/Oceania is usually considered as part of the Asia-Pacific region, while Middle East-Africa is considered as part of the larger EMEA region, so these are three basic rotations in the international convention business.

Australia/Oceania have four cities among ICCA Top 100, with Melbourne and Sydney highly positioned and close to each other around 30th place globally, while Brisbane and Auckland are in the second half of the list. Middle East/Africa have just two destinations included, Dubai and Cape Town.

Competitive Sets

Rankings within Different Competitive Sets

Top European Cities

City	Global Rank	Score
Paris	1	722.5
London	7	638.8
Barcelona	8	623.8
Istanbul	9	622.4
Berlin	15	596.1
Amsterdam	17	585.2
Vienna	20	565.1

South East Europe Capitals

City	Global Rank	Score
Belgrade	74	379.4
Bucharest	78	377.8
Sofia	82	374.8
Ljubljana	88	366.9
Zagreb	93	347.4

Scandinavian Capital cities

City	Global Rank	Score
Copenhagen	37	512.6
Stockholm	39	487.2
Helsinki	46	465.5
Oslo	63	425.5
Reykjavik	94	340.6

Top Eastern European Cities

City	Global Rank	Score
Moscow	28	533.0
Prague	45	474.2
Warsaw	56	444.7
St Petersburg	58	439.7
Budapest	61	435.8
Cracow	66	421.1

Top Asian Metropolises

City	Global Rank	Score
Singapore	3	680.6
Beijing	4	678.7
Tokyo	5	671.8
Bangkok	6	642.1
Hong Kong	12	614.4
Shanghai	13	610.3
Kuala Lumpur	16	591.8
Seoul	18	571.9

European University towns

City	Global Rank	Score
Lausanne	84	369.3
Aarhus	86	367.6
Oxford	96	337.5
Ghent	98	315.5
Leuven	99	314.1

Rankings within Different Competitive Sets

Analysis

The International Convention Destination Competitive Index report provides an overview of the competitiveness of the ICCA Top 100 destinations globally and regionally.

For strategic planning, the most accurate and useful analysis of this competitive index should be done within a given competitive set. Doing this will help destinations obtain specific information on their level of competitiveness in relation to their primary competitors, as well as their competitiveness in relation to each of the 11 product factors we mentioned earlier. This way, the destination will obtain fact-based data about its competitive advantages (which strategically should be used as part of its unique selling proposition) and disadvantages (which should be strategically addressed in the short and long term).

We use several criteria to identify and propose a competitive set (i.e. which other cities to be included in the analysis), such as city size, its region, destination profile, meeting infrastructure and business perspective. However, it may be that some cities desire to be in a specific competitive set, i.e. benchmarking themselves against 'uncomparable' competitor cities. The Competitive Index analysis also points to these challenges and offers solutions that can be used to identify possible improvements.

A common way to define a suitable competitive set is to select destinations from one sub-region, which typically are within the same rotation area for international meetings. Additionally, the set should be related to the destination profile (capital cities, regional centers, tourist destinations, academic towns, etc.). Every year we highlight several sets to illustrate the relative competitiveness of the cities within their assumed competitive set.

Each destination can belong to several different competitive sets. If that set is well-defined, the city can obtain high quality analysis. Our Destination Index Report will indicate if the competitive set is well chosen, show gaps in convention products, as well as in their results.

Fair Share Concept

Fair Share Analysis

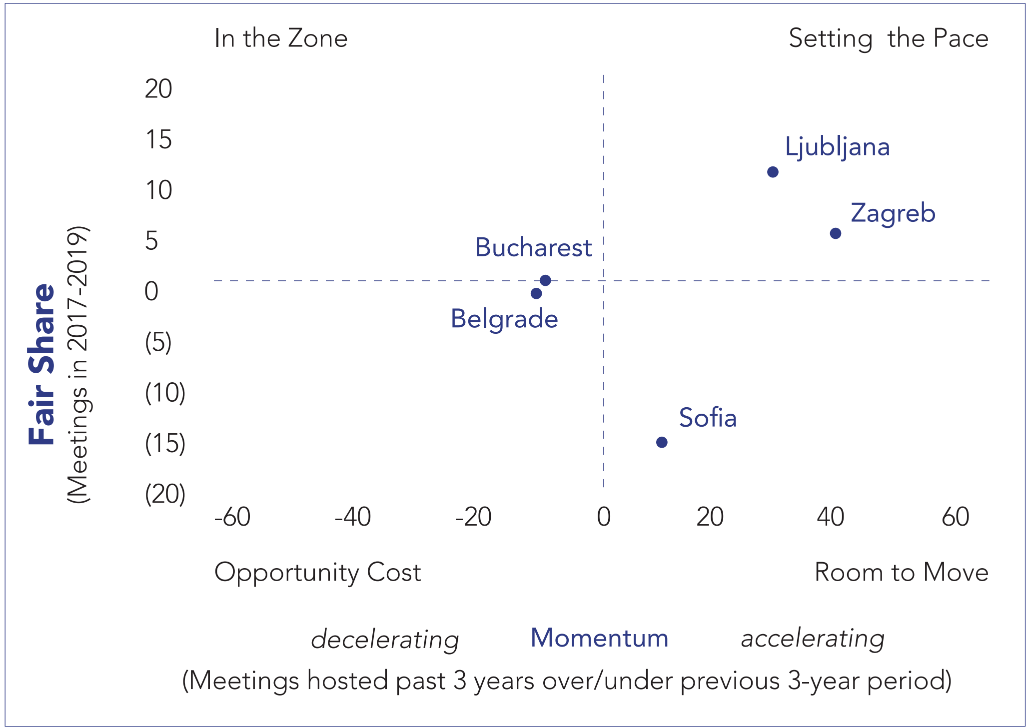
GEAR developed our Fair Share Analysis as a valuable tool in strategic planning for convention destinations. This concept states that a destination's competitive score, against the overall competitive scores within a given competitive set, represents its "fair share" of the total business possible within that set. By comparing their competitive position and actual share achieved, cities can determine if they are performing above or below their expected fair share, and by how far. The net sum of fair share variances within a competitive set is necessarily zero.

Destination	Comp Score	Meetings 2017-19	Product Share	Destination Fair Share	3 Years Variance	Annual Variance
Belgrade	379.4	136	20.5%	140	-4	-1
Bucharest	377.8	138	20.5%	139	-1	0
Sofia	374.8	93	20.3%	138	-45	-15
Ljubljana	366.9	169	19.9%	135	34	11
Zagreb	347.4	145	18.8%	128	17	6
TOTAL	**1846.3**	**681**	**100.0%**	**681**	**0**	**0**

Momentum Analysis

GEAR's Momentum Analysis shows if the destination is accelerating or decelerating in terms of number of international association meetings hosted in a three-year series (as per ICCA data), by comparing total number of meetings held in the last regularly recorded three years (2017-19), with the number in the three years prior (2014-16):

Destination	2014	2015	2016	2014-16	2017	2018	2019	2017-19	Change
Belgrade	47	49	50	146	47	43	46	136	-10
Bucharest	49	60	38	147	42	53	43	138	-9
Sofia	35	23	26	84	26	34	33	93	9
Ljubljana	32	46	59	137	51	60	58	169	32
Zagreb	34	38	33	105	47	44	54	145	40
TOTAL	**197**	**216**	**206**	**619**	**213**	**234**	**234**	**681**	**62**



Fair Share Scenario Model

GEAR's Fair Share scenario model illustrates how cities compare in terms of fair share and momentum:

- On Fair Share, destinations plot either above or below the midline to the extent that their actual meetings hosted vary from their fair share.
- On Momentum, destinations plot to the left or right of the midline based on their growth or decline in meetings hosted in the last two three-years series which have been considered.

There are 4 quadrants based on this scenario model and a destination can locate in any of them:

1. **Setting the Pace** – destination is above the fair share and is accelerating
2. **In the Zone** – destination is above the fair share and is decelerating
3. **Opportunity Cost** – destination is below the fair share and is decelerating
4. **Room to Move** – destination is below the fair share and is accelerating.

Within a defined competitive set, Ljubljana and Zagreb have achieved results above fair share, and while the number of international association meetings held in these cities have grown significantly in the last 3 years prior to COVID-19, they should put efforts into maintaining their positions in the 'Setting the Pace' quadrant. Bucharest and Belgrade are at or close to their fair share. Both cities have experienced some decrease in the number of international association meetings, so both have some room for improvement and should consider strategic steps to get into the zone above fair share. Finally, Sofia underperforms and although the business is accelerating, the city is still below its fair share.

Cities to Watch

Beijing

GE Competitive Index Score:	**678.7**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	4th
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	2nd
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	22nd
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	299

Pixabay

Among all destinations, Beijing experienced the smallest (almost negligible) drop of just 2.75 index points compared to the previous year. With 678.7 competitive index points, Beijing jumped from 7th to 4th place in the world and takes the 2nd position in Asia among the most competitive convention cities. Beijing is also among the top 5 in the world for available intellectual capital (per GEAR research on Intellectual Capital). However, it is 22nd globally in the latest ICCA ranking with 299 international association meetings hosted in the pre-COVID 3-year period. Fast recovery, growing competitiveness and available intellectual capital indicate great potential for Beijing to improve its results in future years.

Istanbul

GE Competitive Index Score:	**622.4**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	9th
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	4th
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	44th
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	129

Pixabay

After its historical best in 2015 with 159 international conventions hosted, Istanbul has experienced a large decline due to political instability and related challenges. Istanbul is currently in 44th place as per 2019 ICCA ranking with just 129 international conventions hosted in 2017-2019. However, Istanbul boasts great destination products and with 622.4 competitive index points, it jumped (6 places) to 9th place globally in the *Gaining*Edge Competitive Index 2021 (and 4th place in Europe). We see that since 2017, Istanbul has been on a path to recovery, temporarily halted due to COVID-19. However, this large gap between competitiveness and actual results should not remain for long and we expect Istanbul to keep growing.

Cities to Watch

Moscow

GE Competitive Index Score:	**533.0**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	28th
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	11th
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	70th
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	119

Pixabay

Eastern European cities are relatively less competitive compared with Western European destinations due to a weaker business environment and a lower level of economic development. Yet Moscow is a global hub with great accessibility and infrastructure and with 533.0 competitive index points, the city has experienced a strong growth compared to previous year, jumping 10 places from 38th to 28th place globally (11th in Europe). However, Moscow takes 70th position in the latest ICCA ranking with 119 international association meetings hosted in the 3-years period prior to COVID-19. Also, in our research, Moscow has many local intellectual leaders capable of bringing events to the city plus solid destination capabilities to support this process, however as of now, the city has not leveraged these factors well.

Budapest

GE Competitive Index Score:	**435.8**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	61st
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	29th
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	26th
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	345

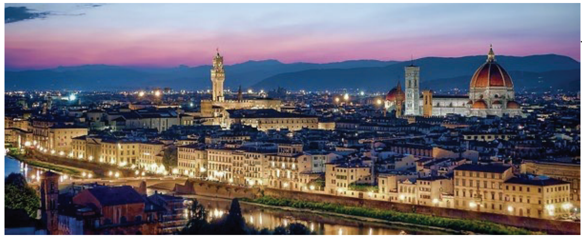
Pixabay

Budapest is in the top 30 cities per the latest ICCA ranking with 345 international association meetings hosted in the last three years prior to COVID-19. On *Gaining*Edge's Competitive Index 2021, the city is again at the 61st place on the list of the most competitive convention destinations globally (same as last year) and 29th in Europe. Although it experienced some decline in the number of international association meetings held in the city over the last three years, Budapest has managed to achieve results above its level of competitiveness. In GEAR's analysis, Budapest is a well-established Eastern European city able to compete in the international meetings market, especially so if it activates its assets strategically. Our conclusion is Budapest has a solid potential for growth in the near future.

Cities to Watch

Florence

GE Competitive Index Score:	**463.1**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	47th
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	21st
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	88th
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	119



Unsplash

Florence is a well-established European convention destination, but still better known as one of the most beautiful cities in the world with a strong leisure segment. Although convention destinations have been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Florence managed to improve its competitive position with a 463.1 competitive score jumping 4 places to 47th place globally (and 21st in Europe). With a decline in the number of international conventions hosted in the three-years before pandemic, Florence ranks 88th in the latest ICCA ranking list. However, this gap indicates solid potential for future growth if the city explores and leverages on its main competitive advantages.

Ghent

GE Competitive Index Score:	**315.5**
GE Competitive Index Rank (Global)	98th
Competitive Index Rank (Continent)	59th
Latest ICCA Rank – 2019 (Global)	57th
ICCA no of Meetings (2017-2019)	139

Pixabay

Ghent is a prime example of a European university town, relatively less competitive compared to larger or capital cities, but able to compete well in the international meetings market. Usually, such towns optimize their huge available intellectual capital, giving results significantly above their competitiveness. Ghent is the strongest among the university towns, with 139 international conventions hosted in the pre-COVID 3-year period putting it at 59th in the ICCA ranking list. With 315.5 competitive index points, Ghent takes 98th place globally in the *Gaining*Edge Competitive Index 2021. Continually good results show Ghent has a strong collaboration with its local academic community and is very effective at harnessing the destination's intellectual capital - the key source of its success.

Methodology

We maintained the same methodology as in previous editions and used the same 11 competitive factors of destination selection by international meeting planners. These are:

- **Convention facility capacities** (top 3 most utilised by international conventions)
- **Hotel offer** (capacity and proximity to the primary facility)
- **Air access** (levels of international direct service)
- **Destination appeal** (for business and tourism)
- **Association market audience** (strength of association community)
- **Cost** (staging and delegate costs)
- **Logistics** (ease of movement)
- **Market size** (population of the city, country and continent)
- **Size of economy** (GDP and GDP per capita)
- **Business environment** (competitiveness, innovation, ease of doing business)
- **Safety & stability** (crime rates and corruption levels).

A destination's strength in each of these factors is assessed based on 30 indicative data points, including 3rd party indices, other information sources and primary research. The external data points include those provided by ICCA as well as other respected reports by organizations such as the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and United Nations.

Each factor has been assigned a weighting and we have developed a model to calculate a point score in each category for each city. Over all of the factors, a maximum 1,000 points scoring system is applied. The weighting system applies 45% of the possible points to what are commonly referred to as destination "hygiene" or meetings infrastructure factors relating to capacity – convention facilities, hotel offer and air access. The remaining 55% of the weighting is spread over the remaining 8 factors based on meeting planner perceptions of what is important when it comes to selecting a destination for their convention.

Methodology

The Competitive Index is focused on a destination's meeting & conventions product issues, evaluating destinations in terms of:

Competitive Index

Hygiene Factors

Convention Facility Capacities
(top 3 most utilised by international conventions)

Hotel Offer
(capacity and proximity to the primary facility)

Air Access
(levels of international direct service and convenience of connections)

Competitive Advantages

Association Market Audience
(strength of association community)

Cost
(staging and delegate costs)

Destination Appeal
(for business and tourism)

Key Differentiators

Logistics
(ease of movement)

Market Size
(population of city, country and region)

Size of Economy
(GDP and GDP per capita)

Business Environment
(competitiveness, innovation, ease of doing business)

Safety & Stability
(crime rates and corruption levels)

The Competitive Index is a quantitative assessment of these elements as a way of predicting the relative business levels that the destinations might reasonably expect to achieve.

Destination Index Report

Destination Index Report

Our made-to-order Destination Index Report provides valuable information for destinations using the right competitive set (of other cities) and making comparisons. Our in-depth analysis will highlight gaps which indicate opportunities and directions the destination should consider when developing its strategic plan.

Further development of the model will identify numerous opportunities for deeper quantitative analysis of the competitive position of convention destinations. So, in addition to measuring performance and scoring destinations in relation to their competitiveness, we provide suggestions for a whole range of possible applications. These applications and analysis can significantly support the work of convention bureaus and destination marketing organizations. They provide quantitative indicators to identify an appropriate competitive set and define the competitive position of their destinations. Our customised Destination Index Report clearly indicates the destinations that make up a real competitive set, which significantly facilitates strategic planning because the most common strategic failures are caused by wrongly identifying primary or direct competitors, which many destinations are prone to.

Essentially, GEAR's Destination Index Report will focus on a destination's competitiveness within a well-defined competitive set, with the aim to ensure accuracy of the comparison and resulting strategic directions and points of improvements. Through this Report, we can evaluate destinations, establish their relative competitiveness and compare that to potential business levels. There are various ways for destinations to use results from the Destination Index Report which range from goal setting to performance measurement, and from strategic visioning to communications and branding. A key part of the Report is the Ratio analysis which provides the opportunity to clearly identify competitive advantages and disadvantages (strong and weak points) for the targeted destination. Following this, the Fair Share analysis then helps destinations to set reasonable business goals and project their future growth.

Destination Index Report

1
Competition Analysis

The Destination Index Report is a useful source of information for such analysis and a helpful tool for establishing competitive sets.

2
Goal Setting

The Index offers a tool for comparing the relative competitive strengths of destinations which in turn provides insights into how those relative strengths relate to business outcomes.

3
Performance Measurement

The Index will allow bureaus and destinations to strengthen these assessments based on a more sophisticated model, which sheds lights on the issue of "comparability".

4
Strategic Visioning

Sometimes we find that destination stakeholders (public and private) embark on visioning processes without any robust assessment of how visionary the goals actually are. The Index will provide a useful benchmark for visioning processes.

5
Strategic Planning

Once destinations have established meaningful vision and goals, the next step is putting in place strategies that will drive success. The Index will provide useful insights into key issues that will underpin those strategies.

6
Strategic Resourcing

As destinations set goals and develop a more rational focus on competitive sets and relative performance levels, they will be more capable of evaluating the resource needs that will be required to achieve their strategic goals.

7
Strategic Product Development

The Index will help destinations compare themselves to others in relation to key product issues. If they want to increase their competitiveness they will have an easier time identifying the factors that required the most attention and validating to policy makers and industry what needs to be done.

8
Communication & Branding

The Index will help identify key issues that need to be addressed in a destination's communications processes.

Components of a Destination Index Report

Competition Analysis

The Index examines the relative competitiveness of destinations that are included in a competitive set.

The selection criteria for such a set are:

1. Rotation
2. Size
3. Business profile
4. Infrastructure
5. Perspective

Fair Share Analysis

For the purpose of the Index, fair share calculations for a destination use its competitive scores as the substitute for inventory factor. More facilities, more hotel rooms, better air service, etc. drive its score higher and therefore it captures a higher proportion of the business occurring within its competitive set. A destination's competitive score as percentage (%) of the combined score in a given set represents its proportional fair share of the total business procured by that set. So, if a destination's proportion of "competitive points" within a set is 10%, then it could reasonably seek to secure 10% of the total business secured by the set.

Ratio Analysis

The Index provides the ability to determine the level of competitiveness for each of the 11 factors considered by international meeting planners. This analysis provides fact-based information about challenges which should be strategically addressed, as well as strong points which can be leveraged on when developing the destination's business events strategies.

Fair Share Scenario Model

The Fair Share scenario model illustrates how cities compare in terms of their "fair share" and in terms of their "momentum". The momentum shows if the destination is accelerating or decelerating in terms of number of international association meetings (ICCA statistics) which it has hosted, in a three-year series.

About Us

About *Gaining*Edge

*Gaining*Edge is a specialist consulting firm advising primarily to the convention and meetings market since 2004. We specialize in issues related to establishing and managing convention bureaus, advice on the development and expansion of convention centers as well as the broader aspects of the international meetings industry.

Our clients include convention and visitor bureaus/destination marketing organizations, national tourism agencies and convention and exhibition center developers and operators.

Our expertise:

- Destination Advisory
- Convention & Exhibition Centre Advisory
- In-Market Sales Representation
- Association Advisory

***Gaining*Edge Analysis & Research (GEAR)**
*Gaining*Edge Analysis & Research (GEAR) is *Gaining*Edge's internal division, formed with the aim to provide quantitative analysis on destinations competitiveness, their resources for success, as well as reporting on the global meetings industry. GEAR is involved in projects related to the analysis of destination competitiveness and development of customized Destination Index Reports for clients. Another global report GEAR produces is the analysis and research of destinations intellectual capital and how well (or not) they are leveraging on this competitive advantage. It provides valuable insights cities should use to engage their local association executives who are leaders in international associations.

About the Author

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Milos Milovanovic is a *Gaining*Edge consultant, with deep expertise in the activation and development of convention bureaus as well as destination marketing in Europe and Middle East regions. He has 15 years of experience in the meetings & conventions industry and has consulted many destinations around the world. In *Gaining*Edge, Milos is responsible for the development of research & analysis projects as Head of GEAR.

Milos is author of the *Destination Competitive Index*, a benchmarking tool for international convention destinations, published annually since 2018.
He is also author of the *Leveraging Intellectual Capital* global report, aimed at identifying the relative strengths of destinations in terms of the presence of their local association executives who are leaders in the governing bodies of international associations.

How We Can Help
The Destination Competitive Index identifies the city's competitiveness as well as available avenues for growth. Using the Destination Competitiveness Index, we can help destinations to:

- Identify their real competitive set
- Understand their competitive position
- Define their competitive advantages & disadvantages
- Analyze their momentum and fair share
- Set their optimal business goals
- Define their strategic directions.

- Destination Advisory
- Convention & Exhibition Centre Advisory
- In-Market Sales Representation
- Association Advisory

GainingEdge

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