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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROTATION PATTERNS OF INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION MEETINGS AND EVENTS

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International association meetings and events (IAMEs) are a significant specialist segment of the business events sector. Noting the lack of longitudinal research available to confirm how these events rotate globally, regionally, and over time, this study analyzed the rotation patterns of IAMEs based on 236 meeting iterations sampled from the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) database held between 2009 and 2019. Results confirm intuitive rotation patterns not previously determined by a data-driven analysis to date. Namely, that global events rotated more widely geographically but also less often, while most regional events were annual events. These regional events were held in the same continent of the association awarding the rights to host, thereby demonstrating less reach. Delegate numbers for both global and regional events were comparable. Association preferences for rotating IAMEs were geographically heterogenous. The implications of these rotation patterns are discussed, and an associated future research agenda is outlined.

Key words: International association meeting and event; Rotation; Global events; Regional events; Knowledge

Introduction

Association meetings and events are an international phenomenon (Ramirez et al., 2013). Recognized as a key driver of economic activity and foreign revenue, countries around the world compete to attract international association conventions and the delegates they bring. Such international conventions have been occurring for more than a century and serve a vital purpose in providing a platform for communication to association members. Whether through dissemination of information, skills enhancement, or knowledge creation and transfer, the role of international association meetings and events is fundamental to a range of trade associations, professional societies, and

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academic institutions (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2014; McCabe et al., 2000). Primarily such associations are formed by membership of a profession or industry whereby the purposes of the international association meeting and event (IAME hereafter) are to discuss current and future trends, engage in analysis and information-gathering activities, the dissemination of research, and/or the facilitation of commercial activity.

Given the importance of business event tourism in the world economy, understanding the factors and patterns of destination rotations is increasingly essential and an underresearched topic. As Carvalho et al. (2016) noted, studies to date have failed to consider how "international business tourism operates in a global environment" (p. 156). The bidding process for association events is often a collaborative effort through convention bureaus, associations, professional conference organizers (PCOs), and other key stakeholders (Jo et al., 2019), seeking to target the delegates that these events attract. Understanding IAME destination movement and selection can better direct the efforts of these parties in the bidding process, particularly in terms of understanding the rotation of IAMEs in the near and distant past as a predictor of where they might be hosted in the future. Moreover, the collaboration between the event host association and local authorities is important to make event organization and management more sustainable (Maguire, 2021). This can only be done when local authorities and event hosts are knowledgeable of and can predict development trends in international, regional, and local events.

IAMEs usually convene annually but in the case of the largest of such events, due to their size and complexity, they may be held less frequently, occurring biennially or every 3 or 4 years (Davidson, 2019). Depending on the home location of an association and its scope of operations, such rotations may occur globally or in a regional geographical context such as Europe, Southeast Asia, or the Pacific Rim. Rotations may occur within one continent (e.g., South America). The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), as the leading association representing suppliers and buyers servicing the specialist IAME sector, notes that an IAME for their purposes must be regularly occurring, move between at least three different countries, and attract at least 50 participants (ICCA, 2018).

This study seeks to understand IAME rotation patterns based on individual event data from the legal sector to track their movements globally and at country level over a 10-year period as captured in ICCA's comprehensive Association Database. Available data enable the study to discern rotation patterns by the home continent and country of the host association, continent, and country of the rotating event, time period of hosting, event size, organizational scale, and event frequency. Acknowledging the size of the ICCA Database, containing data on 20,000 regularly occurring meetings (ICCA, 2021), IAMEs representing the legal sector were sampled as this sector typifies the Professional Service Firm (PSF) sector (Von Nordenflycht, 2010). PSFs are of increasing importance in a knowledge-based economy (Empson et al., 2015; França & Rua, 2018; O'Higgins et al., 2021). Law services, accountancy services, consulting services, architectural services, and engineering services are key examples of PSFs (O'Higgins et al., 2021). They are mooted as being vital components of globally significant countries and cities, where the capability to service, finance, and manage global operations must be present (Parnreiter, 2019; Sassen, 2001, 2016). As evidence of their importance, it is cited that prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, international trade in services was expanding far more rapidly than trade in goods (O'Higgins et al., 2021). Employees of PSFs share the need to exercise social and analytical skills, flexibility, creativity, and knowledge generation, and capacity building for working across international borders (Nieves & Haller, 2014). These are attributes that have been associated with the conduct and benefits of business events (Foley et al., 2014; Jago & Deery, 2010). The analysis of the legal sector may facilitate a tentative understanding of IAME rotations for other PSFs.

To ground this study, the following literature review discusses the extant literature on the hosting of IAMEs and business events more generally.

Literature Review

IAMEs represent a specialist segment of the events sector, which are described more generically as business events (Cassar et al., 2020). The

business events sector has grown substantively in the 10 years prior to COVID-19 (Carvalho et al., 2018; Nicula & Elena, 2014), driven by the rise of globalization and the pace of change in markets where business events (including industry conventions, networking events, exhibition and trade shows, training seminars and incentives) have been at the forefront of connecting professionals, industries, and stakeholders. Cities worldwide have sought to gain advantage from knowledge, increase their economic development capacity, and lead in existing, new, and/or divergent industries (soft, hard, and cultural). A body of knowledge supports the role that business events offer in terms of opportunities for exploration, systematic discussion, and acquisition of knowledge (Edwards et al., 2011; Foley et al., 2013, 2014; Jago & Deery, 2010; Mair, 2012). In the study detailed in this article, the authors focus on IAMEs for Professional Service Firms (PSFs), which are particularly designed to share, create, and develop knowledge (O'Higgins et al., 2021).

Government and private sector investment in this sector is often provided to support infrastructure development, sector representation (e.g., in the form of convention bureaus and subsidized conference facilities), and destination promotion. This support has grown as greater knowledge of the benefits that these event types and their related activity brings (Cassar et al., 2020; Mair, 2012), and as more sophisticated extrapolation of longer term benefits of business event and conference tourism has been identified (Hazira et al., 2022; Jago & Deery, 2010; Marques & Pinho, 2021). With this, there has also been a rapid increase in competitiveness between potential host cities (Falk & Hagsten, 2018; Hazira et al., 2022; Nolan, 2020a). As a consequence, there has been an important growth in related research.

Previous work has focused on the spatial agglomeration of business events, with a focus on specific local or regional venues and host location features (Alananzeh et al., 2018; Bernini et al., 2021; Cong et al., 2014; Fang et al., 2017; Jo et al., 2019; Nolan, 2020b). Looking at broader global effects of business tourism demand, and the potential or actual influence of other countries (Carvalho et al., 2016, 2019), the focus is made on behavioral influences on delegate attendance. These studies relate to previous event experience and perceptions of the host destination, especially the region and country's political and economic stability. Carvalho et al. (2019) posited that host location policymakers could work better to understand how external perceptions are essential in influencing international business tourism demand.

There is less research that focuses specifically on IAMEs in respect of understanding their movements globally and regionally. This is despite their marked significance when compared with other corporate events, or smaller local or national association events. IAMEs differ from corporate and government meetings significantly. The success of the association meeting is not determined exclusively by knowledge gained by delegates. It is marked by the attributes of the host location (destination), by the design of informal meetings and opportunities for knowledge exchange, and by enjoyable social experiences for delegates and any accompanying guests (Cassar et al., 2020; Cró & Martins, 2018). Essentially, they "emphasize revenue enhancement" (Cró & Martins, 2018, p. 221). This is to say, IAMEs have a greater propensity for extended economic and tourism impact. Due to their size and complexity, it is also the case that IAMEs cannot easily absorb costs if they do not ensure large attendee numbers (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022). So, ongoing understanding of the factors that influence their success is vital.

The role of association events as brokers of collaborative communication and potential innovative activity generators (Edwards et al., 2011; Jago & Deery, 2010) is vital in facilitating industry absorptive knowledge capacity. Many regions have lost out simply because they have failed to recognize the regional application of knowledge (Expósito-Langa et al., 2011; Lazaric et al., 2008) and its potential to assist regional socioeconomic growth (Fritsch & Kublina, 2018). The researchers involved in this article propose that regional absorption of knowledge and, accordingly, capacity for social and economic transformation may be enhanced considerably by utilization of IAMEs. This is most particularly the case for those IAMEs representing PSFs. Further, we propose that regional partnerships between international associations, conventions bureaus, or equivalent organizations and host university institutions will assist

in assuring long-term benefit of that knowledge (McKenzie et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2023).

It is generally understood that large international associations will rotate where they hold their meetings. Research relating to the deciding factors that affect where (the destination city) association meetings are held include: site selection factors (Crouch & Ritchie, 1997; Nolan, 2020a) association decision making processes (Comas & Moscardo, 2005), destination or host city attributes (Cassar et al., 2020; Cró & Martins, 2018; Falk & Hagsten, 2018; Mair, 2012; Nwobodo et al., 2020), and networking capacity (Cassar et al., 2020; Ihm & Castillo, 2017).

Concluding their study of price competitiveness and the efficacy of government incentives for attracting meetings to Macau, Dioko and Whitfield (2015) tested the conventional thought that the same destination is not revisited frequently in convention rotations, suggesting other structural decision-making features are also in play. They propose that the role of an active and financial member base within an association—and where the geographical weight of membership lies—also dictates the scope to which cities can secure association conventions. Further, they argued that regardless of price competitiveness and government financial support (through tactics such as subvention, i.e., grant, aid, or subsidy) this may still not be enough to secure association meeting business. They called for further research on the rotations of association events considering their findings.

This article highlights that the extant literature to date has focused on the decision-making determinants for associations in locating IAMEs in a particular destination. Carvalho et al. (2019) recently called for a global perspective on business event tourism, acknowledging that roaming business events occur within a global ecosystem, which studies focused on single destinations and/or events cannot presume to understand. The authors state the need to look further at controllable macrodeterminants (i.e., factors fundamental to decision choices which can be influenced) to see how they prompt the number of international association meetings hosted in a country. These were identified as 10 variables: "cost of living," "government effectiveness," "capital investment," "political stability," "rule of law," "regulatory quality," "leisure–tourism spending," "gross domestic product," "trade openness," and "foreign direct investment" (liberalness), with respect to the number of association meetings held (i.e., the dependent variable) (Carvalho et al., 2018, 2019). From an analysis of data spanning the years 2009 to 2016, and from 71 countries, Carvalho et al. (2019) concluded that only three of the variables—"stimulus of the economy," "political stability," and "previous positive tourism experience"—indicated statistical significance with regards to a destination's propensity to host business events. However, while important, their analysis is not specific to IAMEs—covering many other types of business event. Nonetheless, it does highlight the importance of studying IAMEs globally as a specialist segment of the business events sector. It is with this reference to Carvalho et al.'s work (2018, 2019) and acknowledging Dioko and Whitfield's (2015) conclusion that further analysis of the rotation of association events is needed to enhance host competitiveness. To the authors' best knowledge, there have been no studies that have tracked the rotations of multiple individual IAMEs over time and situated these relative to the location of the awarding association in order to reveal global and regional rotation patterns. The methods underpinning this study of rotations are discussed next.

Methodology

Given the lack of research on the rotation patterns of IAMEs, exploratory quantitative data analysis (Haig, 2018) was adopted to discern potential rotation patterns of interest.

An approach was made to ICCA to sample data in their Association Database. ICCA is the global member organization representing suppliers and buyers operating in the international association meetings market. ICCA has been collecting data on regularly occurring international meetings (meetings is their preferred terminology) since 1972 and, at the time of the study, this database contained data on 20,000 regularly occurring meetings (ICCA, 2021), which includes association meetings (noncorporate) of all kinds (i.e., conferences, congresses, etc.) held by scientific associations, other academic associations, trade organizations, and professional associations. One of the authors was based at an institution with membership of ICCA. This facilitated the data request; however, ICCA has been previously

supportive of the authors' research on the business events sector (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2014).

ICCA claims that it is the only database that provides an historical overview of each meeting listed, creating a complete track record of the rotation of each event over time. Acknowledging the size of the database, a convenience sample of data was extracted in February 2021 by an ICCA Data Research Analyst based on the following initial parameters provided by the researchers: that the association meetings selected represent a single sector, that the dataset cover meetings rotating over an extended period (i.e., 5–10 years), with data on a target number of association meetings (between 35 and 50), which would allow for the rotations of these meetings to be captured across this extended period.

In response, the ICCA Data Research Analyst supplied a dataset of 46 unique association meetings held in the law sector, which is one of 24 sectors defined by ICCA (others include, e.g., medical sciences, technology, science, education, commerce, and agriculture). Data were provided on 243 meeting iterations held over the period of 2009–2021, in recognition that ICCA distinguish between a meeting and each edition of a meeting. We note that there was no available data on rotations in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and only one meeting iteration was captured in 2021 (at the time the data were extracted). This 2021 rotation was excluded from further analysis and so our data on the historical rotation patterns of IAMEs must be considered in a pre-COVID-19 context, covering the 10-year period from 2009 to 2019. Further cleaning of the data revealed that despite our sample parameters, 6 IAMEs (run by three associations) were missing data for successive years despite these being labeled as annual events. Data for these IAMEs were excluded, leaving 236 meeting iterations (run by 43 associations) available for further analysis.

The data captured in the dataset and the recoding of these for analysis purposes are outlined in Table 1. The data were manually entered into IBM

Table 1
Study Variables

Variable	Coding (if Applicable)
Association variables (captured once in the dataset, providing details of the association awarding rights to host the IAME)	IAME name (String) Home city of association (String) Home country of association (String) Home continent of association (String) Home continent recoded: Asia and Australia combined into one option
Meeting organization scale (defined by ICCA - Global organizations have members from more than one continent; Regional organizations have members from several countries in one continent)	1 = Global, 2 = Regional
Meeting frequency	1 = Annual, 2 = Biennial, 3 = Every 3 or 4 years
IAME-specific variables (captured for each meeting iteration)	Event title (String) City of event (String) Country of event (String) Continent of event (String) Event continent recoded: Asia and Australia combined into one option Event year (uncoded) Event year recoded: 1 = 2009–2014; 2 = 2015–2019 Attendance number (uncoded) Event size recoded: 1 = 1–499; 2 = 500–999; 3 = 1,000+
Rotation number (enabling multiple iterations of the same meeting to be captured)	Defined by the sample data: Coded 1–11 based on how many times the association event rotated
Rotation number recoded (median = 3)	1 = Below median; 2 = Above median
Rotation area (created by comparing the first iteration of the meeting with the location of the awarding association)	1 = Same city, same country; 2 = Same country, different city; 3 = Same continent, different city; 4 = Different continent
Rotation area recoded	1 = Same continent; 2 = Different continent

Statistics v 26 and analyzed using descriptive analysis and chi-square tests to explore significant associations between the study variables (Buckalew & Pearson, 1982). Four required conditions of chi-square tests of independence (categorial variables; two or more categories for each variable; independence of observation; relatively large sample size) were checked before data analysis (Greenwood & Nikulin, 1996). The chi-square test allows the researcher to assess associations between categorical variables and to determine whether two categorical variables are independent or related. Only those tests with Pearson statistics (p values) of <0.05 and a minimum expected cell count of 5 were accepted as statistically significant (Coakes, 2012).

Results

The profile of IAMEs in our dataset is described and then those rotation patterns that were found to be significant and indicative of movement patterns operating in the international association meetings market are discussed.

Of the 236 meeting iterations in our dataset, these were equally split across 2009–2014 and 2015–2019 (n = 118, 50% for each time period). The median number of rotations was 3, with the number of meeting iterations held over the period of 2009–2019 ranging up to 11. All IAMEs rotated at least once to be included in the dataset. At this extreme of highly rotating events were two regional conferences (i.e., the Council Meeting & General Assemble organized by the Asian Patent Attorneys Association and the Conference of the Law Association) and one global event (i.e., the Congress of the Union International). Relatedly, most meetings were held annually (n = 150, 64%), followed by 24% (n = 57) held biennially and 12% (n = 29) held every 3 or 4 years. Based on ICCA's identifier for meeting scale, 56% of IAMEs (n = 133) were classified as global events and 44% (n = 103) as regional events.

Data on the home continent of the 43 associations awarding rights to host international meetings indicated that 48.8% (n = 21 associations) were based in Europe, followed by Asia (n = 6 associations, 14.0%), with Latin America, North America, and Africa each represented each by 5 associations (11.6% respectively). Australia was least well represented in terms of host associations with only 1 association (2.3%) based in this continent. We can compare these data to the profile of where IAMEs in the dataset were hosted. Here Asia was the continent that hosted the most events (n = 69, 29.2%), followed closely by Europe (n = 56, 23.7%) and Latin America (n = 50, 21.2%). North America was less well represented (n = 30, 12.7%), followed by Africa (n = 22, 9.3%) and Australia again, as a smaller market, hosted the least number of IAMEs (n = 9, 3.8%). 129 cities hosted the 236 IAMEs on behalf of the 43 awarding associations.

The recoded variable in Table 2 compares the location of the association and the location of the first meeting iteration recorded in the dataset. As these findings indicate, the IAMEs in our sample were commonly hosted in a different continent to the home association with only 16 meetings held in the same city and country. This is suggestive that the international association meetings market is highly mobile, creating passenger and knowledge flows on a global scale.

Table 3 summarizes the significant results of the chi-square analysis, which are discussed in turn.

Examining *event size* (delegate numbers), three significant associations were found with variables *rotation area*, *rotation number*, and *event year*. Somewhat surprisingly, smaller sized events (1–499) were found to rotate more to different continents (27.4%) compared to rotating within the same continent (16.2%). This compared to 1,000+ delegate sized events, 20.8% of which rotated to a different continent, with these meetings more likely to rotate within the same continent (38.5%). Within our dataset, additional testing revealed that smaller sized events rotated fewer times (28.5% below the median number of 3 rotations, 12.3% above) and meetings of 500–999 delegates rotated more (55.7% above

Table 2
Frequency Data on Rotations

Rotation Area	Number (%)
Same city, same country	16 (6.8%)
Same country, different city	27 (11.4%)
Same continent, different country	87 (36.9%)
Different continent	106 (44.9%)
	236 (100.0%)

Table 3
Chi-Square Results

Test	Result	Frequency		
Event size recoded vs. Rotation area recoded	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 9.97, p < 0.05$	*Same continent* 1–499 (16.2%); 500–999 (45.4%); 1000+ (38.5%)	*Different continent* 1–499 (27.4%); 500–999 (51.9%); 1000+ (20.8%)	
Event size recoded vs. Rotation number recoded	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 9.54, p < 0.05$	*Below median rotation* 1–499 (28.5%); 500–999 (42.3%); 1000+ (29.2%)	*Above median rotation* 1–499 (12.3%); 500–999 (55.7%); 1000+ (32.1%)	
Event size recoded vs. Event year recoded	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 8.52, p < 0.05$	*2009–2014* 1–499 (23.7%); 500–999 (39.0%); 1000+ (37.3%)	*2015–2019* 1–499 (18.6%); 500–999 (57.6%); 1000+ (23.7%)	
Rotation area vs. Organizational scale	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 56.17, p < 0.001$	*Global* Same city, same country (0.8%); Same country, different city (14.3%); Same continent, different country (22.6%); Different continent (62.4%)	*Regional* Same city, same country (14.6%); Same country, different city (7.8%); Same continent, different country (55.3%); Different continent (22.3%)	
Home continent (of association) recoded vs. Organizational scale	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 108.71, p < 0.001$	*Global* Africa (6.0%); Asia/Australia (5.3%); Europe (56.4%); Latin America (6.8%); North America (25.6%)	*Regional* Africa (15.5%); Asia/Australia (42.7%); Europe (15.5%); Latin America (26.2%); North America (0.0%)	
Event continent recoded vs. Organizational scale	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 46.12, p < 0.001$	*Global* Africa (6.8%); Asia/Australia (23.3%); Europe (33.8%); Latin America (15.0%); North America (21.1%)	*Regional* Africa (12.6%); Asia/Australia (45.6%); Europe (10.7%); Latin America (29.1%); North America (1.9%)	
Frequency vs. Rotation area recoded	$\chi^2(1, n = 236) = 17.01, p < 0.001$	*Same continent* Annual (74.6%); Biennial (14.6%); Every 3 or 4 years (10.8%)	*Different continent* Annual (50.0%); Biennial (35.8%); Every 3 or 4 years (14.2%)	
Frequency vs. Organizational scale	$\chi^2 (1, n = 236) = 13.80, p < 0.001$	*Global* Annual (53.4%); Biennial (31.6%); Every 3 or 4 years (15.0%)	*Regional* Annual (76.7%); Biennial (14.6%); Every 3 or 4 years (8.7%)	
Frequency vs. rotation number recoded	$\chi^2 (1, n = 236) = 34.63, p < 0.001$	*Below median rotation* Annual (48.5%); Biennial (30.0%); Every 3 or 4 years (21.5%)	*Above median rotation* Annual (82.1%); Biennial (17.0%); Every 3 or 4 years (0.9%)	
Event continent collapsed vs. Home continent (of association) collapsed	$\chi^2 (1, n = 236) = 118.53, p < 0.001$	*Home continent–Africa/Asia/Australia* Africa/Asia/Australia (82.7%); Europe (4.0%); Americas (13.3%)	*Home continent–Europe* Africa/Asia/Australia (40.7%); Europe (37.4%); Americas (22.0%)	*Home continent–Americas* Africa/Asia/Australia (1.4%); Europe (27.1%); Americas (71.4%)

compared to 42.3% below the median). The final significant association in combination with event size was event year recoded. Mid-sized meetings were more prominent during the 2015–2019 period (57.6%) compared 2009–2014 (39.0%). Relatedly, meetings attracting 1,000+ delegates were more notable during 2009–2014 (37.3% compared to 23.7% of meetings held over the later period).

ICCA's identifier for meeting *organization scale* (global vs. regional events), in combination with *rotation area*, highlighted that regional events were more likely to rotate in the same city and/or same country of the awarding association (14.6% compared to 0.8% for global events). Other stark contrasts noted relative to this variable combination were regional events also rotated more to the same continent as the association, but a different country (55.3%) compared to global events (22.6%), while global events in the majority (63.4%) rotated to a different continent than the awarding association compared to only 23.3% of regional events adopting this same rotation pattern. Interestingly, there was no significant association between ICCA's *organizational scale variable* and *event size*. While one may have reasonably assumed global events may be larger in scale, the analysis did not support this with event delegate numbers being relatively comparable for both global and regional events.

Looking at rotation patterns relative to specific geographic areas, the *home continent of the awarding association* relative to the *organizational scale* variable yielded some differential results. Asian/Australian- and Latin American-based associations held more regionally rotating events (Asia/Australia: 42.7% compared to 5.3% global events; Latin America: 26.2% compared to 6.8% global events) counter to the global mobility of meetings held by European (56.4% global, 15.5% regional) and North American (25.6% global, 0.0% regional) based associations. Location of the *event continent* (as determined by the awarding association) analyzed relative to *organization scale* unsurprisingly revealed similar rotational patterns. IAMEs held in Europe (33.8% global, 10.7% regional) and North America (21.1% global, 1.9% regional) were more likely to be global events, whereas Latin America and Asia/Australia meetings were regionally based.

Cross-tabulating *home continent of the awarding association* and *event continent* locations (this required a further recoding of the data to avoid violating the minimum accepted cell count), 82.7% of associations based in Africa/Asia/Australia held their events in the same broad geographic location, with only 4.0% of these associations hosting events in Europe and 13.3% in the Americas (North and South). Supporting the wider reach of IAMEs awarded by associations based in Europe, only 37.4% of these events were held in Europe, with 40.7% rotating to Africa/Asia/Australia and 22.0% to the Americas. Home associations based in the Americas were extreme in their preference for not hosting IAMEs in Africa/Asia/Australia, with only 1.4% of events held here. These associations instead held their events in the Americas (71.4%) and to a lesser extent Europe (27.1%).

Potentially explaining these patterns, the *frequency* of meetings variable was cross-tabulated with the recoded *rotation area* variable. The findings highlighted that annual meetings were more likely to be held in the same continent as the awarding association's headquarters (74.6%) as opposed to rotating to a different continent (50.0%). Biennial events, in contrast, were more likely to rotate to a different continent (35.8%), compared to 14.6% remaining in the same continent. No discernible differences were evident for meetings rotating every 3 or 4 years. Indeed, the cross-tabulation between the *organization scale* variable and event *frequency* supported that regional events were more likely to be annual events (76.7%) compared to events held globally (53.4%). Unsurprisingly, annual events were found to rotate more frequently, with 82.1% of annual events rotating more than the median number of rotations, compared to 48.5% of such events rotating fewer than three times over the 10-year period studied.

Discussion

The findings reveal the longitudinal rotation patterns (global and regional) of IAMEs for the sampled sector of ICCA's database. Over 2009–2019, IAMEs were highly mobile across continents, within continents, and over time.

The following data-driven insights can be drawn from the significant associations found between the study variables that may assist with theory generation for explaining IAME rotational patterns for this specialist sector:

- Larger events (+1,000 people) rotated more within the same continent.
- Mid-sized events (500–999 people) rotated more to different continents.
- Mid-sized events (500–999 people) rotated more often (above median rotation).
- There was a shift to smaller IAMEs (less than 1,000 people) over the 10-year period studied.
- Global events rotated to different continents more than regional events.
- Regional events rotated to the same continent more than global events and within that continent, they rotated to a different country.
- IAMEs rotating in the same continent were, in the majority, annual events.
- Regional events were, in the majority, annual events.
- Annual events rotated more often (above median rotation).
- European based associations held/awarded more global events in comparison to regional events.
- Asian/Australian based associations held/awarded more regional events in comparison to global events.
- Europe hosted more global events in comparison to regional events.
- Asia/Australia hosted more regional events in comparison to global events.
- European based associations spread the awarding/hosting of their events on a wider geographic scale compared to associations based in the Americas and Africa/Asia/Australia.
- Delegate numbers for both global and regional events were comparable.

Many of the above rotation patterns appear intuitive—that is, annual events rotate more, global events rotate more to different continents. This may lead some to devalue the findings on this basis. We would argue, however, that these rotation patterns are confirmed by the historical tracking of 236 IAMEs hosted by 43 awarding associations over a 10-year period, a data driven approach that has not been employed to date.

Importantly, the findings additionally highlight that association preferences for rotating IAMEs are heterogenous across different geographies. Europe dominated rotation patterns in terms of having the greatest percentage of awarding associations (48.8%) and in terms of its greater propensity to host global (compared to regional) events. This may suggest that knowledge flows in the IAME market are filtered through the lens of the Global North, potentially privileging Eurocentric and colonial views of knowledge and knowledge production (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Wijesinghe et al., 2019). However, European-based associations were more likely to geographically spread the hosting of their IAMEs to the benefit of host cities in other continents. This was compared to the greater parochialism of associations based in the Americas and Africa/Asia/Australia, which overwhelming awarded event hosting within their home continents.

Asia hosted the greatest number of IAMEs, exceeding Europe and the Americas. When recoded for further analysis, it was evident that Asia/Australia had a greater propensity to host regional events, as did Latin America and Africa. This was supported by the fact that regional events, in the majority, were more likely to rotate within the same continent, either moving to a different country or in a smaller number of cases, rotating within the same country.

In tracking IAME associations representing law, the results may have illustrative value for other sectors identified as PSFs. These are characterized by their specialist knowledge and knowledge intensity, and a professionalized workforce that collaborates with a range of other parties to determine success (Casidy & Nyadzayo, 2019; Smets et al., 2017; Von Nordenflycht, 2010). In short, they are particularly relevant to contemporary association conferences and meetings at a time of rapid change, and where regional and national bodies may seek business events and business tourism to support destination resilience (Khalid et al., 2021; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021).

In terms of managerial implications, our findings suggest that convention bureaus should be directed towards attracting mid-sized IAMEs, which rotate more often, travel further, and to newer destinations than larger meetings (1,000+) that are more likely to be held in the same continent. The longitudinal data signaled a potential move away by associations from large global IAMEs to smaller regional based events. This trend to smaller scale IAMEs has also been identified by ICCA in their research on the international meetings sector (ICCA, 2021).

Additionally, in light of understanding the rotation of IAMEs in the near and distant past as

a predictor of where they might be hosted in the future, convention bureaus across the globe should also be bidding for IAMEs hosted by European associations given the wider geographical dispersal of these events. Similar efforts to associations based in the Americas and Africa/Asia/Australia are likely to be less successful given the stronger preference of these associations to host IAMEs in their home continent. These macrolevel insights are timely for a sector transitioning in a turbulent post-COVID-19 operating environment, with business events cited as quickening destination recovery (Rittichainuwat et al., 2020).

Macrolevel insights are a required response to what Carvalho et al. (2019) noted is a preoccupation of academics in terms of understanding the decision making of individual delegates and associations in determining where association events are held, to the exclusion of broader macroperspectives. Moreover, it is proposed here that the 10 controllable macrovariables identified in the work of Carvalho et al. (2019) could be reviewed with reference to the rotation patterns highlighted. In the 2019 work, only 3 of 10 variables were identified as significant in affecting the number of association meetings held in any given country. Understanding rotation patterns further may serve to stop the results of their panel analysis becoming a truism (i.e., it may be able to determine what other factors may nonetheless be crucial in changing the capacity of a country to attract IAMEs).

Conclusion

This study provides valuable implications for regional/global associations and host destinations to develop a business event agenda for economic and knowledge-based benefits, with specific insight regards PSF associations. By identifying the tendency of event rotation related to key characteristics of IAMEs and awarding associations, future host destinations can be better informed regarding their chances of bidding success for these specialist events. This is based on an understanding of the rotation of IAMEs in the near and distance past as a predictor of where they might be hosted in the future. For example, Asian and Latin America countries may focus more on bidding for regional events/conferences, while European countries have more advantages in hosting global events. Host countries also can attract more medium-sized events (less than 1,000 participants) that have been organized in a different continent previously. Hence, results of this study provide event organizations and destination management agencies with deeper insights to focus their efforts on bidding for more suitable events (e.g., regional/global).

We acknowledge the limitations of our study. Drawn from a relatively narrow convenience sample of the ICCA database focused on the legal sector, the findings cannot be generalized to other sectors without further research confirming our results. These rotation patterns could be confirmed by a cross-sectoral analysis and an analysis over an expanded timeframe, noting the ICCA database extends back to the 1970s, including from 2021 onwards. Further, the exploratory techniques applied in the current study were not advanced. With a larger randomly sampled dataset and wider range of study variables, modeling the factors predicting rotation patterns would provide invaluable macroinsights for convention bureaus and destination planners. We note that while the IAMEs in our study did rotate at least once, the scope to which they could move geographically may have been limited by the scope of the association and its operations—some associations servicing regional memberships may never host their IAMEs beyond their regional boundaries. It is recommended that future studies verify rotation data with association statutes to identify the extent of such an issue. Having noted these limitations, we do consider the analysis valuable in shedding light on the global rotation patterns of IAMEs, patterns not discerned over time with longitudinal meetings data to date.

Further in focusing on one PSF here, a comparative investigation with other associations identified as representing knowledge-intensive organizations could be very valuable. Such a study may contribute to understanding how PSFs expand their knowledge base across international borders (O'Higgins et al., 2021, 2022). Further, the findings and discussion documented here have potential to coalesce with other current research relating to the hosting of IAMEs. These may connect to the themes of site selection, destination attributes, and networking capacity mentioned in the literature review (Cassar et al., 2020; Cró & Martins, 2018; Crouch & Ritchie,

1997; Ihm & Castillo, 2017; Mair, 2012; Nolan, 2020a). As a purely objective analysis, as intimated there are a range of subjective factors that may sway associations to award hosting rights, and the role of champions/thought leaders in this process should be further investigated, as should more explicit understanding of the role of supply chain actors in facilitating bidding for and rotational hosting of IAMEs.

In conclusion, given the dearth of research on the rotation of IAMEs and globally roaming events more generally, this will be a fruitful area of research for some time to come. Enhanced understanding of this underresearched area may assure resilience for both awarding associations and bidding cities in determining the future location of IAMEs globally and regionally.

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