

Christian M. ROGERSON

Business tourism under apartheid: The historical development of South Africa's conference industry

Abstract

Conference tourism as part of MICE tourism has attracted a growing international literature. It is argued existing scholarship is overwhelmingly 'present-minded' and that historical issues relating to the conference industry often are overlooked. Using historical documentary sources and industry press, this paper examines the evolution of conference tourism in South Africa from the early 1960s to the period of the country's democratic transition in 1994. Under apartheid, conference tourism was primarily a domestic affair, lacked professionalism and quality infrastructure in terms of dedicated proposed built conference venues. By 1994 whilst the country's conference industry did not have any global standard facilities, the planning for such convention centres was in process in the country's three major cities.

Keywords: business tourism, MICE tourism, conferences, historical tourism, apartheid, South Africa

1 Introduction

Conference tourism is a component of international scholarship on business tourism. Although its definition is contested the concept of business tourism is applied usually to encompass mobilities for independent business trips and travelling for purposes of meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions – MICE tourism (Davidson, 1994; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Davidson & Rogers, 2006; Ladkin, 2006; Beaverstock et al., 2010; Rogers, 2013; Willis et al., 2017). Conference tourism is seen as a high-yield area of the tourism industry and a significant generator of tourism expenditure, foreign exchange and employment generation (Horvath, 2011; Iacuone & Zarrilli, 2018). Both Weber and Chon (2002) and Locke (2012) stress that because of the high quality, high-yield nature of these business travellers, tourism marketing organisations are keen to attract conference or convention visitors. Accordingly, the competition for MICE tourists, both domestically and internationally, is extremely intense (Weber & Chon, 2002; Weber & Ladkin, 2003; Marques & Santos, 2017a). For destinations there are several advantages of encouraging MICE tourism, including employment and income contributions, increased foreign exchange earnings, and local development impacts (Oppermann, 1996a; Dwyer & Mistilis, 1997; Mistilis & Dwyer, 1999; Weber, 2005; Horvath, 2011; Jones & Li, 2015; Marques & Santos, 2017a, 2017b). In addition, as Abdullah (2011: 16) points out the rise of MICE tourism “has the potential to lead to increased use of the destination for leisure tourism, with delegates possibly being motivated to return to the country, or extend their business trips, and to recommend it to others”. It is observed that an increasing number of countries and cities are building conference centres and bidding for events in order to capitalize on this sector of tourism and leverage opportunities for local economic development (Law, 1987, 1993; Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008; Monge & Brandimarte, 2011). Lau (2004: 1) states “MICE properties now form an important component of local economic development strategies and are often supported by significant public spending in the set-up and development phases”. Overall, convention centres can attract business to urban centres and catalyse substantial

returns for local economies in the form of spending on accommodation, local transportation and other tourism products in the value chain of MICE tourism (Law, 1987; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Lau, 2004; Iacuone & Zarrilli, 2018).

The decision-making processes, satisfaction and the destination images of association meeting planners as well as of MICE tourists are vibrant research themes (Oppermann, 1996a, 1996b; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Oppermann, 1998; Go & Govers, 1999; Weber, 2001; Weber & Chon, 2002; Hankinson, 2005; Casanova et al., 2006; Ladkin, 2006; Monge & Brandimarte, 2011; Chiang et al. 2012a, 2012b; Chiu & Ananzeh, 2012; Elston & Draper 2012; Fenich et al., 2014; Kuznetsova & Silcheva, 2014; Park et al., 2014). Often the results of such research, including the application of choice modelling exercises, are used to strengthen the competitive positioning and branding of individual destinations for MICE tourism (Oppermann, 1996a; Weber & Ladkin, 2003; Hankinson, 2005). The capacity of conference facilities, quality of service, accessibility as well as cost considerations are determining factors for the competitive dominance of certain cities as MICE destinations and correspondingly areas for improvement for enhancing the position of others (Go & Govers, 1999; Lew & Chang, 1999; Qu et al., 2000; Lee & Josiam, 2004). Emerging research issues in the international literature on MICE tourism encompass local policy development towards MICE tourism (Locke, 2012; Wu & Xiao, 2012; Marques & Santos, 2017a), accommodation products for business travellers (Greenberg & Rogerson, 2015, 2018), and the environmental impacts of conferences (Lee et al., 2013; Whitfield et al., 2014).

The progress made in international scholarship about conference tourism is acknowledged (Weber, 2005). This said, one notable gap in existing writings relates to historical studies of the evolution of conference tourism. Against the backdrop of the limited scope of historical research this paper analyses the evolution of conference tourism in South Africa from the early 1960s to the period of democratic transition in 1994. A range of historical documentary sources are drawn upon including national government reports, industry press, local newspapers and consultancy reports on business tourism in order to analyse the challenges of establishing a competitive conference industry sector in South Africa. Within the existing body of international and local scholarship the historical focus of this investigation is original as it represents a counter-balance to the overwhelming ‘present-mindedness’ of business tourism scholarship in general and of MICE tourism writings in particular. The unique historical context of apartheid and the making of segregated spaces impacts the unfolding development of South Africa’s conference industry.

2 MICE tourism in Africa

In recent years the global meetings industry has begun to acknowledge Africa as a preferred destination for conferences. Major international convention centres have been constructed in several countries, including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, South Africa and most recently in Malawi as anchors for building competitiveness for conference tourism (Rogerson, 2015a, Magombo et al., 2017). This said, in terms of tourism scholarship on Africa, business tourism has been somewhat neglected in comparison to the large amount of research devoted to leisure tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011; Rogerson, 2012). The relative oversight of business tourism in African tourism writings is unfortunate in view of the considerable weight of business tourism within Africa as a whole and especially for the tourism economies of certain African countries (particularly those in West and Central Africa) which have undeveloped leisure tourism economies. At present the largest volume of

existing literature relates to South Africa (Rogerson, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Fenich et al., 2012; Thomas, 2012; Donaldson, 2013; Tiflin & Balkaran, 2014; Rogerson, 2015b; Marais et al., 2017). Among the most well-developed research issues are the growth of new accommodation services for business travellers in terms of networks of business hotels and of the contribution of business tourists to total commercial bednights (Rogerson, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b, 2016a, 2018a; Magombo et al., 2017) and serviced apartments (Greenberg & Rogerson, 2015, 2018). Outside of South Africa an analysis of African tourism scholarship undertaken for the past decade uncovers only a handful of research studies which shed light on the formal economy of business tourism as a whole and on the organisation of MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) tourism more specifically (Coles & Mitchell, 2009; Fawzy, 2010; Fenich et al., 2012; Rogerson, 2014a, 2014b; Schroeder et al., 2014; Rogerson, 2015a; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2016; Kodi, 2017; Tichaawa, 2017).

Information on the spatial distribution of conferences in Africa by international associations discloses a high degree of clustering with South Africa one of the leading destinations (Davidson, 2012). South Africa's international tourism marketing arm, South African Tourism, has stated that it seeks to expand the country's share of the international market for MICE tourism, including for conferences. The Department of Tourism's National Tourism Sector Strategy is committed to boosting the competitiveness of South Africa as a preferred MICE tourism destination (Republic of South Africa, 2017). Accordingly, over recent years, a number of strategic initiatives have been launched in order to enhance South Africa's attractiveness as a business tourism destination and particularly for conference tourism. In addition to the attraction of international conferences, the significance for tourism expansion of hosting domestic conferences has not gone unnoticed by South African cities (Rogerson, 2005; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017). Several major South African cities now incorporate the boosting of business tourism, including the attraction of domestic conferences, as part of strategies for urban economic development (Rogerson, 2013; Nel & Rogerson, 2016). Conference tourism is a vital facet of tourism growth in South Africa's leading cities (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, 2016, 2017). A number of local destination marketing organisations in South Africa have a mandate for business tourism promotion, including for conference development, and support of bids for various conventions/conferences as well as assisting local organizations to host successful meetings with maximum advantage to local economies. Among key challenges for the contemporary development of South Africa for international business meetings are the maintenance of international standards of convention centre facilities, marketing the country for business tourism, international air accessibility, and visa regulations. In addition, for the growth of both international and domestic conferences it is critical also to manage the challenges around the effectiveness and suitability of conference centres and destinations, including from the perspectives of conference organisers and delegates (Tiflin & Balkaran, 2014). These multiple challenges confronting the modern conference tourism sector of South Africa can best be understood in relation to an understanding of the historical evolution of the country's conference industry.

3 The conference tourism industry under apartheid

Tourism history in South Africa has been largely an uncharted terrain with only a few exceptions (eg. Ferrario, 1978; Saunders & Barben, 2007; Pirie, 2011, 2013; Rogerson, 2013c; 2016b, 2017, 2018b; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018). Given that tourism emerged as a major research theme with South Africa's re-entry into the global economy (post-1994) and the withdrawal of international sanctions imposed on the country, the neglect of tourism studies for the apartheid era is remarkable. For the apartheid period, in a review of research for the period 1948-1990, it was observed that tourism scholarship was "meagre" (Grundlingh, 2006: 104). This finding should be set against the fact that during the apartheid years South Africa recorded a major upturn of international tourism arrivals as well as witnessing the consolidation of a strong sector of domestic tourism, albeit restricted to the market offered by white South Africans because of racial segregation planning (Rogerson, 2015c).

Arguably, in the opening decade of the new apartheid government, tourism was a low priority sector and during the 1950s international tourism arrivals were mostly regional visitors from surrounding southern African countries (Ferrario, 1978; Saunders & Barben, 2007). This said, from a sector of the economy of little policy interest, tourism emerged by the early 1970s to be South Africa's fifth largest earner of foreign revenue (Grundlingh, 2006). From 1963, amidst technological advances of the growth of commercial jet travel, national government showed heightened awareness of the importance of the tourism sector as indexed by the establishment of a Department dedicated (in part) to tourism (Rogerson, 2011). As argued by Saunders and Barben (2007: 30) at least until 1976 "few overseas tourists had qualms about visiting the country and South Africa's tourist arrivals for the period 1963 to 1970 outstripped the rate of tourist arrivals worldwide". The impact of international sanctions on South Africa's international tourism arrivals was felt most strongly only in the period after the 1976 Soweto riots. With falling international arrivals this meant a corresponding rise in the significance of domestic tourism for the tourism economy under apartheid (Rogerson, 2015c). As Grundlingh (2006: 107) asserts as a whole "it would be wrong to assume that apartheid meant that tourism was historically a stagnant" enterprise.

From the early 1960s national government's emerging policy interest and initiatives for tourism promotion centred firmly on nurturing the international market of leisure tourists (Saunders & Barben 2007). Little consideration at this time was accorded to issues around supporting business tourism as a whole or to the requirements of conference tourism in particular. Nevertheless, the decade of the 1960s saw an awakening interest by private sector providers to the economic prospects of a developing conference sector. In particular, hotels in the country's major cities sought to cater for meetings of various sizes. In addition to hotels other venues for hosting conferences were civic halls, theatres and other multi-purpose buildings; many South African universities also began to offer their venues for occasional use for the running of conferences (Rogerson, 2005). The conference sector of South Africa throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s experienced haphazard development. Arguably, at this time it was evident that South Africa lagged international standards for conference tourism in terms of a lack of professionalism, absence of dedicated conference facilities and very importantly the quality of the majority of the country's existing stock of hotels. Overall, the general standard of existing conference facilities was poor in terms of how they were run and the equipment and services they offered to delegates which often included makeshift structures in banquet rooms (City of Cape Town, 1990). As late as the early 1970s it was observed that many hotel managers "have got into the habit of regarding

conventions as requiring no more management sophistication than the local Chamber of Commerce banquet or a plush wedding reception” (Property Mail, 1972). Indeed, in another industry press commentary it was seen as not surprising that many so called convention facilities ”look as if somebody has just swept up the confetti” (Property Mail, 1972). In Johannesburg, South Africa’s major economic and commercial hub, it was reported that conference facilities “are pretty grim” and that “public relations men hardly leap at the chance of organising prestige conventions and conferences in the Golden City” (Financial Mail, 1967). Although the provision of quality conference facilities in coastal centres was not always an improvement on those in Johannesburg, their beach and nightlife attractions often were viewed more positively for conference attendees. But, with the generally dismal state of local conference facilities, many organisers instead turned to the occasional possibility of using one of the Union Castle ocean mail ships which offered quality accommodation and facilities for conference trips between Durban and Cape Town (Financial Mail, 1967).

One of the central structural weaknesses of South Africa’s evolving conference industry during the 1960s related to the weak state of the country’s hotel sector. Historically, the growth and development of hotels in South Africa was tied to the liquor trade (Rogerson, 2011). During the 1940s and 1950s the national hotel industry became liquor-dominated in its revenues as well as increasingly liquor-dominated in relation to patterns of ownership. In terms of tourism development there was a distinct shortage of quality accommodation which was in part also the consequence of price controls introduced by national government which reduced private returns on hotel investment. New hotel investment was discouraged and in several of South Africa’s major cities, especially Johannesburg and Cape Town, shortages of hotel accommodation were further exacerbated by the conversion of many hotels into flats or the razing of hotels and replacement by office developments. The poor quality standards of the majority of the country’s hotels was inseparable also from the absence of a national classification system or grading of hotel establishments. By 1962 it was evident that the hotel industry was in crisis with critical shortfalls of accommodation in the country’s major business centres as well as holiday resorts (Rogerson, 2011; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018).

In restructuring the foundations of the hotel industry national government confronted the legacy and impact of the country’s liquor legislation by first abolishing the ‘tied house’ system which served the interests of the alcohol sector at a cost of reducing the hotel sector’s commitment to providing accommodation services. It was argued that the hotel industry of South Africa consisted of two different sets of establishments. The first was a group of liquor dominated hotels – approximately 70 percent of all South African hotels - which mainly had less than 50 beds, low occupancy rates and with 77 percent of their profits from liquor functioned essentially as an important retail channel within the alcohol trade. For these hotels the provision of accommodation services was ignored, of inferior quality and maintained only to a minimal extent in order to ensure the annual renewal of a liquor licence. The second group of hotels were accommodation-dominant hotels, mostly with more than 50 beds and with a revenue stream that was more balanced between liquor and accommodation services (Rogerson, 2011). A radical restructuring of the South African hotel industry was launched in 1965 which required that all hotels be ‘classified’ by the department responsible for liquor control and in this process hotels had to meet certain minimum standards in terms of accommodation for the reward of an automatic on-consumption liquor licence. This set the stage for the introduction of a grading classification of tourist hotels to ensure for the first time quality standards in line with international benchmarks. These legislative changes alongside the introduction of Government financial support for the modernization of tourist hotels represented a turning point for the South African hotel industry. Alongside the

closure of large numbers of those 'hotels' that were little more than thinly-veiled liquor outlets, the legislative changes encouraged new investors into the South African hotel industry as well as a wave of reinvestment by traditional hotel investors. Beginning in the late 1960s this set the stage for a wave of new hotel construction supported by concessionary loans and tax depreciation allowances that would form the basis of a set of high quality leisure hotels as well as the provision of hotel accommodation services specifically to the business market (Rogerson, 2011).

Overall, these new hotel developments served to enhance the infrastructure for the South African conference industry. By the early 1970s it was recorded that conventions or conferences held by business or professional organisations "have become an important source of revenue for some South African hotels" (Rushburne et al., 1972: 219). Although the precise value of the conference business was unknown, it was estimated that for the country's large hotel groups, which provided the major share of conference functions, "the figure is usually placed at 5-10% of total revenue" (Rushburne et al., 1972). The motivation for hotels to compete aggressively in the conference market was to sell additional room nights "from delegates staying in the hotel, as well as to generate incremental food and beverage business" (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1991: 104). At the base of the South African conference industry was the hosting of domestic meetings and conventions. It was estimated for the period of the late 1960s that domestic conferences represented as much as 95 percent of all the country's conference tourism market (Rushburne et al., 1972: 219). As Ferrario (1978) pointed out South Africa was geographically not well located to attract international conventions. Any major extension of international convention markets would be dependent on the availability of reduced air fares for groups of a minimum size.

During the mid-1970s national government made its first serious policy interventions to support explicitly the further development of conference tourism. In 1975 the South African Congress Bureau was established within the framework of the Department of Tourism. The decision to establish this bureau followed a conference on congress promotion which took place at Kempton Park in November 1974 which "underlined the necessity for concerted action in the marketing of congress facilities abroad as well as the establishment of an organisation to co-ordinate such action at the national level" (Bester, 1977: 33). The designated aims of this congress bureau were, *inter alia*, the collection and dissemination of information on congress facilities and services in South Africa; the production and distribution of publications to support the marketing of South Africa for international congresses; and the initiation of contacts between local congress promotion companies and user organisations abroad. It was made clear that the bureau itself did not function such as to arrange congresses or related events but that "it gladly assists as far as possible with any preplanning investigations and with the planning of events to be staged in South Africa" (Bester, 1977: 33).

With its launch occurring only 18 months prior to the Soweto uprisings which precipitated South Africa's pariah status in the global tourism economy, the achievements of the South African Congress Bureau were inevitably modest. Nevertheless, in the 1976 report of the Department of Tourism it was stated optimistically despite the (understated) 'internal unrest' in the country that South Africa was targeting at securing more international meetings for the country and "now for the first time seeking to penetrate meaningfully into this sector of tourism" (Republic of South Africa, 1977: 5). The challenges facing South Africa in building itself as an international conference tourism destination were viewed at this time as mainly in terms of addressing the competition from established destinations in Europe and North

America. During 1976, however, it was recorded hopefully that the national Congress Bureau had "completed the necessary preparatory work in order to enter meaningfully and with coordinated marketing efforts into this challenging sector of the tourism market abroad" (Republic of South Africa, 1977: 6). Its first achievement was gathering information and material for the launch of a "prestige congress marketing brochure during 1977, by means of which South Africa's congress facilities will be introduced and marketed abroad" (Republic of South Africa, 1977: 6).

Further optimism was expressed in the 1977 report produced by the Department of Tourism of "a positive and hopeful climate and atmosphere for increasing congress activities and for obtaining new international congress business for South Africa as well as for the stimulation of such activities in the country" (Republic of South Africa, 1978: 6). The release took place in October 1977 of the promised 'prestige congress marketing brochure'. This proclaimed South Africa to be "a new, exciting venue for International Congresses, Association Conventions, Corporate Meetings, Scientific and Technical Seminars, Fairs and Exhibitions and Incentive Travel Programmes" (Republic of South Africa, 1978: 7). The opening of two new potential conference centres respectively at Cape Town (the Good Hope Centre) and Pretoria (the CSIR Conference Centre) was welcomed and interpreted as a positive signal of progress in building a more competitive infrastructure for conference tourism. With continued political turbulence and South Africa's worsening international image, however, the 1978 Annual Report could offer little concrete evidence of substantive achievements (Republic of South Africa, 1979). The following year's report was even forced to concede that "1979 could be regarded as a relatively quiet year for South Africa from the point of view of holding large international congresses" (Republic of South Africa, 1980: 6). Confronted by a hostile environment for attracting international conferences and meetings to South Africa the bureau admitted that its activities were focussing now on encouraging incentive travel (Republic of South Africa, 1980: 7).

With limited prospects for marketing South Africa for international conferences the domestic conference industry again became the central focus for the country's MICE tourism economy. Of significance during the closing years of the 1970s and early 1980s was the establishment of several large conference venues outside of the country's major metropolitan areas. Geographically, the supply of these new conference facilities occurred within the territories of the group of so-termed 'independent' Black Homelands created by apartheid planning. In the four Homelands that acceded to 'independence' under apartheid gambling resort developments were allowed to operate in contrast to the space of so-termed 'white' South Africa where casinos were not permitted. The potential for hosting conferences at gambling venues plus the extensive profits that flowed from the casinos situated in the Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda made possible the construction of new conference facilities as part of these casino resorts. By far the most significant of these conference developments in the Homelands was a large multi-purpose facility that opened to attract conferences at the Sun City resort in Bophuthatswana which is situated about two hours drive away from Johannesburg or Pretoria (Rogerson, 2005).

These facility developments occurring outside the metropolitan areas were matched by the continued addition to the supply of conference venues in and around the country's cities. In 1986 a booklet titled 'Johannesburg Conference City' produced for the city listed a total of 248 convention or meeting venues, the majority of which could accommodate no more than 300 delegates (Appleton, 1987). The momentum of hotel project developments linked to conference centres was stemmed, however, by the withdrawal in 1988 of government income

tax incentives which formerly had supported new investments. This action served “to inhibit new hotel development, and almost certainly prevent those that are developed from building large conference facilities” (Kessel Feinstein Consulting 1991: iii). Instead of hotel conference venues there appeared a number of specialised independent conference venues some of which were linked to accommodation services but others without. Nevertheless, an observed trend by 1990 was for the expansion of a number of non-hotel conference centres. These were adjuncts to some other primary core business or activity of the owners, which often were large corporates such as Volkswagen (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1994). Another observed trend in the early 1990s was the establishment on the periphery of major cities of small conference centres with accommodation facilities and designed to attract executive -level conferences with capacities for an average of 50 delegates (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1994).

It was only during the early 1990s, the closing years of apartheid, that South Africa began to recognise and subsequently follow long-established international trends for the construction of purpose-designed and publicly funded conference centres (City of Cape Town, 1990). The first such development occurred not in the major cities but at Mmabatho, the so-called capital of ‘independent’ Bophuthatswana. The financing of this convention centre, which included a 3000 seater auditorium, was provided by the Government of Bophuthatswana with the underlying motivation to lend some veil of legitimacy to the territory’s sham independence. The management of the Mmabatho conference centre was to be undertaken by Sun International, South Africa’s major enterprise for casino resort development. The drive towards the building of purpose-built conference or convention centres in South Africa’s major cities was inseparable from the rise of local economic development planning in the early 1990s. All the country’s major cities identified the growth and employment-generation potential of conference tourism (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1991) and a growing inter-city competition for meetings began to occur. Early initiatives centred upon the upgrading of existing facilities in order to enhance their competitiveness for conference tourism (Kessel Feinstein Consulting 1994). This said, a major infrastructural supply gap was the absence of international standard sophisticated convention centres that could accommodate a minimum of 1000 delegates.

In Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban the municipal authorities engaged in energetic planning for new convention centre development as part of broader initiatives for urban economic development. Investigations about the construction of a convention centre in Johannesburg were linked to the city’s aspirations to be recognised as a ‘world city’ (Rogerson, 1996). It was considered that “one of the impediments to Johannesburg’s growth as a major centre for foreign visitors is its lack of a convention centre near the CBD on the scale of those in other first world cities” (City of Johannesburg, 1992: 11). As part of its ‘top-ten projects’ released for consideration to enhance the city’s image as an investment destination the boldest, perhaps, was the proposed Johannesburg Trade and Investment Centre which was to accommodate 2500 delegates and to be situated in the inner city. But, with the parallel planning of competing business convention centres or proposed centres in both Cape Town and Durban, the feasibility studies around this planned convention centre showed that project was “likely to be a ‘loss leader’, albeit one with potentially significant catalytic spin-offs for growth in the CBD” (Rogerson, 1996: 151). In Durban the promotion of business tourism by the local state has been a consistent theme for the City Council in terms of diversifying the city’s tourism base as far back as the 1970s (Freund and Padayachee, 2002). Detailed investigations were pursued during the 1980s and in 1991 the decision was taken for the city to leverage public funding for the construction of a dedicated

conference centre (Ridsdale, 1997). In Cape Town a major investigation was completed in 1991 to support the city's vision of Cape Town becoming a national and international conference destination (City of Cape Town, 1990; Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1991). This study argued that municipal financing of a new convention centre was essential. It was stated: "We see no realistic alternative than for the City to finance the proposed new conference centre" (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1991: 107).

4 Conclusion

International scholarship on conference tourism is expanding albeit it mainly is concentrated on contemporary challenges that face industry development. This article sought to examine through an historical lens the challenges of the evolution of the conference industry in one country. In terms of the establishment of South Africa as a competitive destination for MICE tourism at the period of democratic transition arguably the country had an adequate supply of conference venues, particularly in the small and medium sized category, to meet current and projected demands. This said, it was evident that "professionalism and recognition of the industry as an important component of the economy" were lacking (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1994: 105). Question marks remained also about the quality of certain facilities and services which were viewed as "constraints on conference industry development" (Kessel Feinstein Consulting, 1994: 105). Another shortcoming for the future expansion of conference tourism related to the limited assistance offered by municipal governments to support conference tourism. Of South Africa's four major conference cities – Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth – only Durban provided any marketing support. It was striking that Johannesburg and Cape Town offered no specific marketing expenditure for the conference industry and in the case of Johannesburg the publication of a conference guide had been discontinued in 1993 because of budgetary constraints (Kessel Feinstein Consulting 1994: xvii).

Overall, notwithstanding signs of an improving environment for the conference industry in South Africa by 1994 business tourism remained the poor relation of the national tourism sector (Rawana, 1995). Significantly, the first draft national documents for developing the tourism industry in the post-apartheid era made no mention at all of conference tourism. It was argued by local representatives of the conference sector that South Africa remained "blind to the earning potential of the conference industry" (Rawana, 1995). Furthermore, it was stressed that "we need to convince those in power to invest money in physical structures and infrastructures" in respect of dedicated convention centres (Rawana, 1995). For South Africa to be able to attract major international conferences it was acknowledged that the major issue was the country lacked international standard purpose-built convention centres with the capacity to handle at least 1000 delegates. By the early 1990s, however, preliminary investigations and project planning was under way in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg for the construction of such infrastructural facilities. The successive openings of Durban's International Convention Centre in 1997, the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg during 2000 and the Cape Town Convention Centre in 2003 began a new chapter in the development of conference tourism in terms of building South Africa as a competitive destination in the global meetings industry.

Christian M. Rogerson, School of Tourism and Hospitality, University of Johannesburg, South Africa (crogerson@uj.ac.za)

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