

The Era of Transformers

A guest article by Jan Lichota

Associations are part of an ever-changing business universe – now even more than before. Political and international developments like Brexit, issues with taxes and regulations, the rise of new technologies and means of communication: all of these issues and more require adaptation. How are the associations coping with this constantly changing environment? Jan Lichota, Association Bureau Manager at visit.brussels will tell us all about it.

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2017 is an excellent year for thinking about future perspectives in the associations and meetings world. International developments, technology, regulatory issues, changes in communication – some elements that bring a new impetus to the discussion on the role of associations in the different fields they are active. Articles and books flow on this topic, showing a sector which is lively, creative and reinventing itself in all circumstances. Like the Transformers, robots that change appearance, associations have to cope with changes. So, why this year is so particular, compared to others?

Taxation now and in the future

Spring 2017 has been chosen by the European Commission as the appropriate time for public consultations on various tax files. Ending early June many of those have direct implications for the tourism sector, due to their cross-border character and the Europe-wide operations.

Applying fees to congresses and conferences with a differentiated tax rate has become a challenge for various events organisers. Although e-commerce experience and software improvements have delivered the right tools to deal with any potential difficulties, however they do not solve the issue at its base. Would the responses of the consultation on VAT rates and the follow-up of the decision-making process by the rel-

evant associations and sector actors as from autumn 2017 deliver the right results in the future? We will see. Currently, registration application process differs among EU Member States (as well as local tax authorities documentary evidence requirements) and VAT liability and reclaim issues are a good item for becoming a tax expert while working in the event planning and management area. A total transformation of original meaning or an intrinsically linked function for any abroad event organiser nowadays and for the future.

What about fairs and other events where goods subject to excise duties have specific administrative rules? Will the right input be provided by all those that organise for example wine shows to have an appropriate framework from fiscal and administrative management perspective?

In the last years taxation has received a new momentum due to discussions on corporate and labour taxation. Has the time come to simplify business operations from indirect tax perspective for everybody, including hotels, restaurants or event organisers? Fiscal matters being subject to unanimity vote in the European Union, nothing is guaranteed. Even if the United Kingdom position on these issues at European level might be different than in the past.



Who is Jan Lichota?

Jan Lichota is the Association Bureau Manager at visit.brussels, which he joined end 2016 to take care of international associations present, active or wishing to setup their activities in Brussels.

A lawyer by training with professional experience in EU associations, he also writes to various brewing magazines and is engaged in academic activities and publications.

All details about the Association Bureau are available on the visit.brussels website.



Beyond the Brexit

The changes occurring in the world also influence associations and Brexit will be a case which will bring a lot of things that will make history beyond politics and publications in the legal and political sciences area. Several articles came out immediately after the vote last year raising concerns on issues such as research funds, mobility of scientists, travelling and working possibilities, products sales and delivery.

Focusing on practical issues, all this means that in a case like the Brexit, the role of associations it is being put to the test. Some may benefit in terms of activities and representation reinforcement, in case their legitimacy or membership engagement have been at low levels, while other may struggle in finding a common position to represent members' interest or the organisation goals in the debate.

While the relationship between the UK and the EU will trigger further work not only for associations, but also for other organisations, it is already interesting to see how things have changed within one year since last June.

This year already is giving some answers on the next steps, but it also gives the ground for further queries on issues such as corporate or association seat headquarters, future of travelling, employment conditions, goods and services delivery. Items that would not only have to be addressed from Brussels or London perspective, but also from those of other countries.

Changing appearances

The role of the associations has also evolved over the years (or even centuries). While some still may have (even remote) origins in the medieval guilds, most were formed in the XX century following similar patterns of creating networks, knowledge exchange and/or interest representation aims.

Those principles remain the same. However, the change of methods for communicating and achieving goals have also meant a need for gearing up the associations functioning, to match members and interlocutors needs and expectations.

This year brings us new information on the future of technology, leading to think in more automated terms.



While chatbots and other tools may help humans in repetitive contact and information tasks, the role of meetings and interaction on commercial and policy issues will have to change.

Therefore, time has come to also for the association managers to deal with some of the various regulatory and society challenges, while simultaneously adapting the daily duties to new flexible work style. Timewise, maybe a good coincidence.

The time for changes is obvious, or are we obviously in changing times? While Transformers from toys became a cartoon, movie, and finally a franchise, they also show an interesting process changing its image, origin - going from local to global (Japan - USA - the world) -, and as most visible character its magnitude as phenomenon. An interesting example to learn from. However, with all the changes, they kept their basic function of being (generally) a vehicle faded in the

landscape and society, becoming a warrior robot when needed. Hopefully associations will have such dynamic characteristics and do not remain only as toys in the attic.

Held in a new format in Brussels on 30-31 May the 5th edition of the European Association Summit explores the best practices in diverse fields of international associations from practical perspective. More information easummit.brussels

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