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**ABSTRACT**

*Growing international trade and technological progress taking place through the globalization process have increased the number of congress and conference events. Congress tourism has grown rapidly in Turkey over time. Antalya has an essential role in congress tourism. Within the scope of the study, the hotel selection factors, and the services provided to the travel agencies in congress organizations in Antalya were evaluated. For this purpose, travel agencies operating in Antalya were administered a questionnaire and the results were interpreted. The three most important factors affecting the hotel selection of congress organizers include hotel price, quick response to solve organizational problems, and hotel image. In addition to all these, opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, and threats were analyzed using SWOT analysis.*

**KEYWORDS: Congress, Congress Tourism, Congress Organizer, Turkey, Antalya****1. Introduction**

Tourism encompasses the activities concerning satisfying the needs of people resulting from traveling outside their permanent residence and staying temporarily in places visited. People have traveled for different reasons throughout history. Today, due to the developments in industry, transportation, and communication, there has been an increase in people's income per capita, welfare level, and leisure time, which have had a very different effect on tourism compared to trips organized for different reasons in history.

According to research conducted in the field of tourism, congress tourism is a part of meeting, incentive, conference, and exhibition (MICE) tourism. The MICE industry, which creates millions of revenues for cities and countries across the world, is one of the fastest-growing segments in the tourism industry (Banu, 2016). The concept of MICE tourism (Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) results from globalization and economic reforms. People have been gathering in specific places for meetings since the old days. Archaeologists have discovered various gathering points used by ancient tribes. These gatherings aim to discuss a lot of subjects such as hunting plans, wartime activities, crop harvesting, or planning community celebrations (Banu, 2016). Because of the scientific and technological changes happening in the globalizing world, the number of meetings that various national and international organizations arrange to exchange information, discuss, educate, etc. is increasing day by day with the increase in economic and commercial activities. With this increase, people's existing travel, accommodation, and other needs bring out a new type of tourism, which is congress tourism.

Because congress tourism shows a rapid development trend lately, there are meeting rooms in numerous hotels in Turkey, ranging from city hotels to seaside hotels, resort hotels to mountain hotels. Hotels that turn to congress tourism also open convention centers along with accommodation so that they can increase their share in this market. In recent years, Turkey has increased its capacity in congress tourism thanks to the congress centers opened in locations such as İstanbul, Antalya, İzmir, and Ankara and the congress halls in the hotels. The congress and meeting market is growing day by day with the promotion and marketing activities of the hotels and agencies working in this field, together with the convention offices which were established in cities such as İstanbul, Antalya, İzmir, and Ankara.

People can both do business and become tourists in congress destinations thanks to congresses. This is because congress participants use similar services as the ones used by regular tourists. The congress participants spend more and tend to luxury consumption. This is what differentiates them from regular tourists. Besides, congress participants stay in the destination that organizes the congress for a shorter time than regular tourists do (Boz, 2010). Since the need for shelter is one of the most important needs of people, it is one of the important services from which the participants benefit like regular tourists. So, how do congress organizers decide to meet this important need? What facilities of the hotel are the most impressed by while making this decision? Do they pay attention to the quality of the services offered by the hotels or to other attributes other than the service? In this study, we are trying to find out answers to such questions.



## 2. Development of Congress Tourism in the World

The congress industry is a young, dynamic industry that grows and matures quickly (Bowdinet *al.*, 2013). When the history of congresses is examined, it is seen that there have been meetings since the beginning of human existence. For example, lots of buildings were particularly used for discussions and meetings in ancient Rome. The Roman Forum, which is a public square in the city center, was used for public debate, judicial matters, and other business as well. Although humanity has come together to organize meetings and to convene since the dawn of civilization – and they have witnessed ancient meeting grounds such as the Agora of Athens and the Roman Forum that have survived to this day these meetings have not been considered the beginning of the congress sector, but just a commercial activity (Spiller, 2009; Delice, 2012; Rogers, 2003). For centuries, organizations and meetings have been an important component of the cultural, political, and commercial approach and have made a significant contribution to the progress made by society as a whole.

The historical development of congresses began more actively after the Second World War (Aydın, 1997; Aymankuy, 1997; Rogers, 2003). The industrial revolution, scientific and technological advances, rapidly growing international trade, changing production style, and the fact that people need face-to-face communication to exchange information met by the relevant organizations are some of the reasons that encourage people to attend congresses. Congress tourism is developing faster day by day depending on these developments. This development is an important dimension of globalization; and many people from different races, languages, religions, and cultures come together through congresses or other meetings to try to understand each other, get new information, and convey information. Types of meetings (summit, meeting, conference, congress, convention, incentive) may show a variance and events may have different forms and emphases, but the basic components and goals are the same (Rogers, 2003).

The reasons why congress tourism is developing are generally the same as other reasons. In general, the reasons for the development of tourism include people making use of their spare time, increasing the income of individuals and countries, advances in the field of transportation, and the simplification or removal of travel formalities. However, together with these factors, scientific and technological advances and the increasing need for specialization should be taken into consideration when people come together for purposes like getting to know new technologies, explaining, or promoting their scientific studies, and

exchanging information. Furthermore, the fact that expenditures like travel, accommodation, participation fees, and even some of the other expenses of participants attending meetings are paid by the institutions or organizations where they work is among the reasons that facilitate the development of congress tourism (Aydın, 1997; Delice, 2012).

The growth experienced in the congress industry since the 1950s depends on a series of factors in terms of both supply and demand. Some of these factors are closely associated with the factors supporting the overall growth of tourism. For instance, the increase in disposable income, the rise in the tendency to travel, the increase in spare time, and the development of transportation and technology contributed to the growth of the congress industry (Spiller, 2009).

In the 1960s, some international organizations were founded gradually with the growth and development of the congress sector in Western Europe. The dates of establishment of some of these organizations are as follows: 1963-International Congress and Convention Association-ICCA, 1964-European Federation of Convention Towns - EFCT, and 1968-International Association of Professional Congress Organizers-IAPCO (Delice, 2012).

Congresses are organized in many countries around the world. According to ICCA's report, especially Europe is the continent that has had the highest number of meetings in the last 55 years (1963-2017). Although there has been an increase in the number of congresses in Europe, Europe's market share in congress tourism has slowly decreased (from 71.8% in 1963-1967 to 53.6% in 2013-2017). In contrast, Asia has had a rapid increase in market share (It has grown from 8.4% (1963-1967) to 18.5% (2013-2017) with an average increase of 2% a decade, which makes 10% growth over 55 years.) (ICCA, 2018a).

The weakest point of Far East Asia, which has started to become the center of the world congress market with its different culture, is its distance. Although the Far East is connected to Europe and America by a technologically advanced airline network, it is always a problem for European and American organizers because the distance increases the cost and lengthens the days of the participants. On the other hand, people need to see and discover new places with developing technology, faster and more reliable transportation services, and acceleration of tourism movements. This situation increases the interest in the Far East and makes it more possible to organize congresses when compared to previous periods (Boz, 2010).

**Table1 Top 15 topics on which most congresses organized**

N	Topic	1963-1967	2008-2012	2013-2017
1	Medical Sciences	17.0%	16.9%	<b>16.6%</b>
2	Technology	6.1%	14.4%	<b>14.4%</b>
3	Science	13.9%	14.0%	<b>13.5%</b>
4	Education	3.7%	6.1%	<b>6.4%</b>
5	Industry	7.2%	6.3%	<b>6.3%</b>
6	Social Sciences	6.7%	5.2%	<b>5.0%</b>
7	Economy	3.2%	4.1%	<b>4.2%</b>



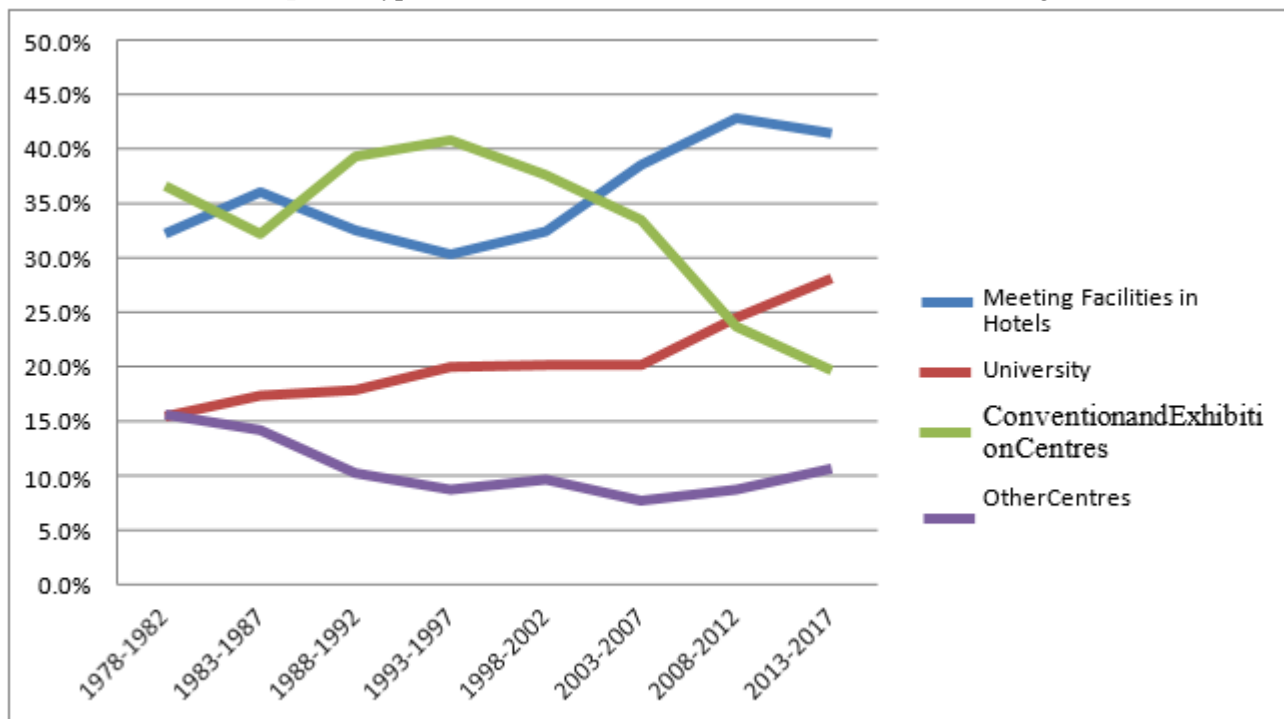
8	Management	3.0%	3.9%	4.2%
9	Culture	4.3%	3.2%	3.3%
10	Transportation and communication	4.3%	3.2%	3.3%
11	Law	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%
12	Trade	3.8%	2.7%	2.7%
13	Agriculture	5.0%	2.8%	2.6%
14	Ecology and Environment	1.5%	2.2%	2.2%
15	Sport and Leisure Time	5.0%	1.8%	1.9%
16	Other	12.7%	10.5%	10.5%
	<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%

Source: Taken from ICCA's 55-Year-Old Statistics Report between 1963 and 2017 (ICCA, 2018a).

The table was prepared using the relevant data.

When the data of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) for the last 20 years are examined, it is seen that the rate of preference for congress and exhibition centers is slowly decreasing, while the use of meeting rooms within the hotels is gradually increasing. The decline in the popularity of congress/exhibition centers and the increasing facilities of universities have continued in the last 5 years. This relatively downward trend in the use of convention and exhibition centers, and the decrease in the average number of attendees generally correspond to the shortening of meetings. Except for this, different meeting venues have started to stand out in the congress market. There has been a slight change in the use of historical sites, castles, boats, ships, theatres, and other venues in the last 15 years. Graph 1 demonstrates the change in the types of venues used for international meetings over the years (ICCA, 2018a).

**Graphic1** Types of venues used for international association meetings



Source: Taken from ICCA's 55-Year-Old Statistics Report (ICCA, 2018a)

Regardless of the distribution, the number of congresses and meetings is rising all over the world, and accordingly, convention centers and cities are being built and developing, which results in the rapid development of congress tourism. The meeting is an important component of the MICE industry. The size of MICE was calculated as \$805 billion in 2017 and is expected to reach \$1,439.3 billion by 2025 with a growth of 7.6%. The MICE industry provides tourism services to organizers and suppliers who manage and present meetings, conferences, exhibitions, and other related events organized to achieve various business, professional, cultural, or academic goals. The MICE industry is subdivided by event type and region. According to event type, the market is divided into meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions. By region, the market is addressed in four regions which are North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and LAMEA (Latin America, Middle East, and Africa). In 2017, the meetings segment had the highest share in the MICE industry. This is attributed to the increase in the globalization of enterprises and the increase in the number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) all over the world and especially in developing economies. In addition, the increase in the growth of the hospitality industry, as well as travel and tourism, also contributed to the growth of this





segment. The latest trends in the use of mixed conventions, social media, and convention applications are expected to increase the growth in the market shortly (Sablet *et al.*, 2019, <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/MICE-industry>, access date: 23.01.2020).

Europe and Asia-Pacific contributed more than 50% to the global MICE sector share. The high European market share in the MICE sector results from the increases in convention demands, adoption of smart devices, and internet penetration. Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing market in the world. The rapid growth in the business travel industry over the last decade has made Asia Pacific the fastest-growing market in the world. The high Asian market share in the MICE sector results from the high penetration of the internet and technology and the effective government policies of China focusing on regulating the moderate growth of the economy. Moreover, most of the countries in this region are developing ones and these economies offer profitable business opportunities for investors (Sablet *et al.*, 2019, <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/MICE-industry>, access date: 23.01.2020).

As the duration of congresses and business meetings to be held in a city increases, the hotels, restaurants, culture-art centers, and museums in the city also host the tourists coming to the congresses and contribute to the revival of the city's economy. All hotels, from the center of a busy city to its immediate surroundings, are booked according to the occupancy rate and 54 sub-sectors revive. Convention tourists are known as qualified tourists because they spend quite a lot. These tourists spend an average of 3-4 days in the city they visit and spend between 600 and 2,500 Euros daily

<https://www.ekonomist.com.tr/dosya/kongre-turizmi-yeni-atagah-hazir.html>, (access date: 24. 01.2020).

According to ICCA (2018), the international congress market in the MICE sector can be divided into two main markets: the corporate meetings market and the association meetings market. Corporate meeting markets can be classified as:

- International corporate meetings,
- Non-corporate meetings and,
- International and non-corporate meetings.

According to ICCA (2018), the association market includes a great variety of congress types and categories: medical meetings (largest segment), scientific meetings, other academic meetings, trade organizations meetings, professional meetings, and social group meetings. There are huge differences within and between categories in terms of size, budget, duration, and complexity. However, some similarities have been identified by ICCA (ICCA, 2018a, p. 15):

- Every "specialty" unit has a relationship that organizes one or more meetings.
- Most associations have meetings repeated at regular intervals.
- An attempt to host a meeting generally comes from a local colleague, for example, the national association. If the association cannot be motivated to organize the meetings, there is a good probability that the meetings be held elsewhere.

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- Association congresses last very long, and it is not unusual to see durations of 5 years or more.

- Decision-making processes are predicted to have a 'central initiator' that selects locations and venues according to predetermined and strict criteria.

### 3. Development of Congress Tourism in Turkey

Congress tourism, which has been emphasized more since 2000 in Turkey, shows that both industry-related and academic studies have increased. According to ICCA reports, Antalya has hosted 16 international congresses and meeting events and ranked 165th in the ranking

(<https://www.turizmgunlugu.com/2018/06/13/turkiye-dunya-kongre-ulkeleri-siralamasindadususte/> access date: 24.01.2020). According to the ICCA 2018 annual report, Turkey ranked 225th in the world and 112th in Europe. According to the data announced by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the number of incoming visitors to our country for congress, meetings, and business purposes was 1 million 780 thousand in 2017. This number is lower when compared to the 2013-2015 years. However, congress experts think that this situation will improve, and the number of congresses will increase in the following years.

Although Turkey does not have a large share in the congress market today, it has cities such as Istanbul, Antalya, Izmir, and Ankara, which have sufficient infrastructure and superstructure for congress tourism. The fact that congress tourism is not limited to a certain season has made it a type of tourism that generates out-of-season income. In addition, Turkey is considered the most convenient place to travel for a meeting, congress, and incentive purposes due to being at the intersection of Europe and Asia, briefly its geographical location, and due to its cultural and historical values.

Turkey successfully hosted its first international congresses, "International Congress of the Red Cross" and "World Chambers Congress" in 1969 and was appreciated by foreign countries (Aydın, 1997).

According to UIA reports, a total of 132 international congresses were held in Turkey between 1970 and 1979. If we examine the distribution of these congresses by year, it can be seen that there is no steady increase in the number of meetings.

LütfiKırdar Convention and Exhibition Centre, which was the largest conference and exhibition hall in Turkey when it was opened, offers all the possibilities of modern technology with its 2400-person foyer, 25 meeting rooms, simultaneous interpretation systems in 12 languages, and audio-visual production equipment. This congress center was awarded the "AIPC Quality Standard Bronze Certificate" on 25 August 2015. It is the first and only congress center to retain the AIPC Certificate in Turkey.

Turkey made its biggest breakthrough by hosting the "United Nations Conference on Human Settlements" "HABITAT II", which took place in Istanbul from 1st June to 15th June 1996 and is considered the greatest international organization over the last 20 years. With this conference, 25.000 people stayed in Istanbul for 2 weeks with the participation of institutions such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United

<http://dx.doi.org/10.33642/ijbass.v9n4p3>



Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which created this system together with the official delegations of the United Nations member states,

non-governmental companies, local administrations, private sector, and trade union representatives, as well as academicians, professionals in the field of housing and settlement (Aydın, 1997).

**Table 2 The number of meetings hosted by Turkey and its ranking in the world and Europe**

Years	Number of meetings	World Ranking	Europe Ranking
2000	35	34	20
2001	52	31	17
2002	51	34	19
2003	61	31	18
2004	80	31	18
2005	93	27	16
2006	98	28	17
2007	105	25	16
2008	98	28	18
2009	118	25	16
2010	160	20	12
2011	159	23	13
2012	179	21	12
2013	221	18	10
2014	190	19	11
2015	211	18	11
2016	103	37	20
2017	57	49	26
2018	55	52	26

Source: (ICCA,2018b,2018c;ICVB, 2017access date:21.11.19).

As revealed in Table 2, Turkey ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in Europe and 52<sup>nd</sup> in the world in 2018 with 55 international congresses, and 44<sup>th</sup> in the world with 24,410 participants. It seems that compared to previous years, there has been a dramatic decline in the last two years. Following the events of July 15 in 2016 and the act of the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkey, a great decline was experienced. According to ICCA'S 2017 and 2018 reports, Antalya ranked 165<sup>th</sup> in the world and 89<sup>th</sup> in 2017, 225<sup>th</sup> in the world, and 112<sup>th</sup> in Europe in 2018.

It is estimated that about 23.000 different association congresses are held regularly. Over the last 55 years, Europe has consistently attracted the highest number of meetings per continent. However, Europe experienced a gradual decrease in its market share from 71,8% between 1963 and 1967 to 53.6% between 2013 and 2017. In contrast, Asia increased its market share gradually and steadily; it has grown by 10% from 8.4 (1963-1967) to 18.5% (2013-2017), with an average increase of 2% every decade over the last 55 years (ICCA, 2018a).

While the estimated total number of attendees of all congresses was just over 2 million in the 1963-1967 period, it increased to approximately 25 million in 2013-2017. Europe's total market share, measured by the estimated total number of participants, has been 49.4% in the last 5 years, it is 53.6% according to many congresses in the same period. Asia, North America, and Latin America's market shares are measured by the estimated total number of attendees all rose slightly according to the market shares measured by the number of meetings. This means that conventions held in Europe are relatively smaller. In

addition, when it comes to the number of attendees, the United States has consistently ranked first over the past 55 years considering the total number of conventions held. The USA welcomed an estimated 2,095,712 participants between 2013 and 2017. In the ranking of 2017, it is observed that the cities were ranked differently. Accelerating in the race, Barcelona managed to surpass Paris and Vienna, which had always been at the top of the list. Barcelona surpassed Paris in the list first with 195 meetings. While Vienna and Paris maintained their ranking as the 2nd in the list, Berlin and London ranked 4th and 5th in the list (ICCA, 2018a).

#### 4. The Determinants of Convention Venue Selection

A good number of countries around the world have been trying to develop congress tourism. As we said in the previous section, congress tourism is an economically, socio-culturally, and politically important type of tourism. However, a city or country must be above a certain quality and capacity to be a congress tourism center. Therefore, a destination that is appropriate for general tourism may not be sufficient for congress tourism (Alaşhan, 2018).

Some researchers believe that geographical location is not considered very important today because the world has now entered into a process of integration. In addition, it is seen that these locations are not important in terms of distance in the first place, especially as a result of technological developments in the field of transportation (Aymankuy, 1997). The distance of the location could be quite acceptable if good services and facilities are offered, including the congress venues at the destinations.



Therefore, there is a strong connection between destinations and venues. Target destinations should generally offer the following (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001):

- Suitable venues for congress/congresses,
- Adequate accommodation if the venue is outside the residence,
- Attractions for successful, social and/or joint programs,
- Adequate access to the production market(s),
- Efficient transport systems within the destination.

Ficarelliet *al.*, (2013) divided the congress destination into two: the approved tourism destination brand and the unapproved tourism destination that is desired to be developed. These two types of destinations are described as follows: In the first case, there are hotel offers, attractions, and cultural activities that can meet the demands. In touristic places that have a famous brand, the possibility to change their brand consists of communicating between public and private structures to combine

the different elements included in the touristic place itself as much as possible. In the latter case, an unapproved destination that would like to get a nice perspective to host the congress has to make strong efforts to create structures and optimize regional features to create new demand. Sometimes, it can be useful to include such a destination in a wider context to show an integrated area of diversity. In the first case, the tourism destination's offer has already been approved, the brand is famous, and people have an opinion about the place before they go there.

According to the literature, there are many important attributes in site selection. However, it is not clear to what extent each attribute is important or what its impact is. Crouch and Ritchie (1997), who made a literature review of 64 articles and other publications addressing the factors affecting the decision of convention site selection, developed a classification. The determinants of convention site selection are presented in Table 3 (as cited in Cró and Martins, 2018).

**Table-3. Crouch and Ritchie's (1997) Site selection factors in country conventions**

Determinants	Dimensions
Accessibility	Cost-The cost of transportation and access. Time- The duration/distance of travel involved and the opportunity cost of that time. Frequency-The frequency of connections to the site. Convenience-The scheduling convenience of the connections. Barriers-The extent of any travel formalities that inhibit travel such as visas, customs, etc.
Local Support	Local chapter –The extent of assistance and support offered by the local chapter of the association. CVB/convention centre - Planning, logistical, and promotional support offered. Subsidies - The extent of destination offers to defray costs through rebates and subsidies
Extra-conference Opportunities	Entertainment – restaurants, bars, theatres, nightclubs, etc. Shopping – malls, major department stores, low prices, etc. Sightseeing – architecture, museums, monuments, attractions, parks, historical sites, local tours, etc. Recreation – sports and activities either as spectator or participant Professional opportunities – visiting local clients, negotiations, business deals, selling, making contacts, etc.
Accommodation Facilities	Capacity – the number of rooms available and whether more than a single hotel is required Cost – the cost of suitable accommodation at the site  Service – the perception of the standards of service Security – the extent to which the hotels provide a safe and secure environment Availability – are the facilities available when required?
Meeting Facilities	Capacity – ability of site to provide facilities of suitable size Layout – suitability of the facility layout and floor plan Cost – the cost of the meeting space required Ambience – the ability of the facility to create an appropriate atmosphere and environment Service – the perception of the standards of service Security – the extent to which the facility provides a safe and secure meeting space Availability – are the facilities available when required?





Information	Experience – has the site performed satisfactorily in the past? Reputation – what is the reputation of the destination among other meeting planners Marketing – the effectiveness of the destination's marketing activities.
Site Environment	Climate – the desirability of the destination's climate Setting – the attractiveness of the destination's surroundings Infrastructure – the suitability and standard of local infrastructure Hospitality – the extent to which the host organisations and community excel in welcoming visitors
Other Criteria	Risks – the possibility of strikes, natural disasters, boycotts, and other possible adverse events Profitability – the extent to which the site would produce a profit / loss for the convention Novelty – the extent to which the destination represents a novel location for the association's next convention

Source: (Cited by Cró and Martins, 2018) Note: This table presents the site selection factors in country conventions suggested by Crouch and Ritchie (1997).

According to the literature review by Cro and Martins (2018), 12 most important indexes have emerged among the factors affecting the selection of a convention destination:

- **Security and Safety** - Security issues are expressed as a key factor in the selection of countries for the organization of conventions. The security issue has two aspects in congress tourism. First, the city in which the congress is held must be a safe place. As well as the high cost of violence and common crime, the efficiency of the police services in protecting from crime and terrorism is considered in the safety and security index used in the estimates. The second aspect is to ensure security in the convention centers and halls where the meetings will be held. In particular, it is very important to ensure security at international congresses in which participants such as very important politicians, statesmen, or scientists participate because attacks can be organized by various illegal organizations and individuals, or individuals can be assassinated in such congresses (Aydn, 1997; Cró and Martins, 2018).
- **Health and Hygiene** - With the previous factor, health, and hygiene is also an important attribute that determines the country's selection for a convention organization. It is essential to ensure that a participant who becomes ill in any country is treated appropriately. Protection systems against dangerous viruses are introduced. If there is a high probability of threat of a virus or another type of disease in the country where the congress will be held, in such case, it is possible to cancel the convention.
- **Quality of Human Resources** - All authors mentioned in the literature review by Cro and Martins (2018) are unanimous on the importance of support services which includes language facilitation, hospitality, and professionalism of the staff to provide rapid and effective service. The quality of human resources measures how well countries develop their skills through education and training and ensures that these skills are best distributed through an efficient labor market.
- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Preparation** – This factor is also important along with

the other factors. ICT remarks the importance of the availability of modern fixed infrastructure (mobile network coverage and quality of electricity supply), and also the capacity of participants to use online services and the capacity of these services being provided. Communication in conventions is divided into internal and external communication. Internal communication comprises the tools used to exchange information during a meeting. These kinds of devices include audio-visual ones (for example, computers, overhead projectors, projectors, TV screens, video systems, wireless microphones, etc.). External communication, on the other hand, includes announcements and notices made through public communication tools like telephone, telex, radio, press, etc. to create public opinion (Aydn, 1997; Cró and Martins, 2018).

- **Travel and Tourism Sector** - Although not given priority, it is an important element. The importance of the target image and the effectiveness of marketing activities in the selection of a country to host a convention can also be mentioned here. The effectiveness of marketing campaigns and country brands in the travel and tourism sector, government subsidies, and the complete and timely provision of organizations' data on the travel and tourism sector indicate the importance that a country gives to the travel and tourism sector.
- **International Openness** - It expresses the importance of barriers (the extent of travel formalities that make it difficult to travel, such as visas, customs, etc.) as a key target quality in choosing a country. Restrictive policies such as strict visa requirements reduce participants' willingness to visit a country and indirectly curtail the availability of key services.
- **Price Competition** - Lower costs concerning travel in a country increase the country's attractiveness for many people as well as congress participants. Competitiveness, airfare taxes, and airport fees are among the considered points in the scope of price, which can make airfare much more expensive; these points also include the relative cost of accommodation, and the cost of living



represented by the purchasing power parity and fuel price costs, which directly affect the cost of travel. A high value for price competitiveness is a sign of lower costs to travel in the country (Cró and Martins, 2018).

- **Air Transportation Infrastructure** – Considering transportation in terms of congress tourism, fast, comfortable, and easy transportation to the country or city where the congress will be held plays an important role in attracting congress participants to the region. According to congress participants, the most used mode of transportation is airlines. Indicators such as air transport infrastructure, number of departures, number of available seats, airport density and number of airlines, and quality of air transport infrastructure for domestic and international flights can measure the supply of air transport (in quantity). Taking into consideration that congresses last 3-4 days on average, we can see how important minimizing the time spent on transportation is in marketing convention destinations in terms of transportation. The proximity of the airport and highway to the congress city in national and international congresses is important in terms of preventing time loss. The congress secretariat or planner usually designates an airline as the official carrier for itself. And these companies offer special transportation discounts to congress participants (Aymankuy, 1997; Cró and Martins, 2018).
- **Land and Port Infrastructure**– The provision of efficient and accessible transportation anywhere in the country is vital for the tourism and travel industry and the selection of countries that participate in the meeting. This requires a rather large road and rail network with roads, railways, and port infrastructure that meet international standards of comfort, safety, and efficiency with road and rail densities. The land and port infrastructure index considers these factors.
- **Tourism Service Infrastructure** - The presence of sufficient quality accommodation, holiday resorts, and entertainment facilities can provide a competitive advantage for a country. It measures the level of tourism service infrastructure with the number of “best quality” hotel rooms which is completed by accessing services such as tourism service infrastructure, car rental, and ATMs. A congress destination should have a sufficient number and capacity of accommodation facilities. Participants also prefer that the hotels are in an easy transportation network and are comfortable enough. Because they want to feel at home to concentrate on congress. Sometimes, most of the participants are willing to extend their stay in the congress area by 5-10 days to join some excursions. They spend more money and expect more. Therefore, it must have sufficient infrastructure for similar issues such as the congress area, convention center, and attractive restaurants. The congress city should not only have luxury and 4–5-star

accommodation facilities, but also clean, medium-level hotels which allow participants from different income levels and even students to attend the congress, and which have bathrooms and lavatories in their rooms (Aymankuy, 1997; Cró and Martins, 2018).

- **Natural and Cultural Resources** - Countries that have natural and cultural resources attract tourists and this gives them a competitive advantage in hosting meetings. The natural and cultural resource index includes the number of UNESCO natural and cultural World Heritage sites, the total number of known species of animals, the richness of the fauna in the country, the percentage of nationally protected areas, and the demand for culture. In other words, natural attractions are one of the important factors for congress tourism. Both congress participants and organizers are considerably affected by natural resources in tourist centers. On the other hand, if the participants want to consider the congress as a holiday before or after it and bring a companion with them, the richness of natural resources gains more importance in the selection of the congress center. In addition, the climate conditions of a country or region are important. Regions with favorable climatic conditions are important destinations for the demand for congress tourism. Besides, the historical and cultural attractions of a region provide an important advantage in marketing that country or city (Aymankuy, 1997; Cró and Martins, 2018).
- **Travel Distance** - Considering the duration/distance of the relevant travel, the opportunity cost of the allocated time is among the main factors in participating in the congress (Cró and Martins, 2018).

Natural and cultural resources, price competitiveness, and the quality of human resources which are among the 12 factors addressed by Cro and Martins (2018) in their research have a greater impact on the number of conventions to be held. Although all these factors are effective as a whole, some special situations seem to have more different effects than others. For example, it is stated that technological developments such as accessing various information about a destination on the Internet are effective in preferring it as a convention area (Alaşhan, 2018).

## 5. The Place of Antalya in Turkey as a Congress Destination

Defined as the tourism capital of Turkey, Antalya is home to many hotels in different categories. Especially, the abundance of 5-star hotels in the city draws attention. According to a 2017 report, there are approximately 352.000 beds in 405 5-star hotels in Antalya. Furthermore, according to the 2019 report released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, there are 567,101 beds in Antalya along with 1,777 accommodation facilities. Although Antalya stands out with its summer tourism, it is also one of the country's leading cities in winter tourism. Saklıkent ski resort in Antalya and Akdağ winter sports tourism center in Alanya are the facilities that highlight





Antalya in winter tourism (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Turkey, 2019a; <http://www.antalya.bel.tr/i/turizm> access date: 26.02.2020).

Congress tourism in the Western Mediterranean Region is mainly carried out in Antalya. Antalya has experienced significant developments in most of the sub-sectors for the development of congress tourism in recent years. Accommodation facilities in the Antalya area have been renovated and have completed the infrastructure investments required for congress tourism in a short time. In addition, some accommodation facilities have built convention centers.

Five-star hotels with large capacities in Antalya strengthen the destination in terms of congress tourism. Many of these so-called hotels not only have a high level of technological infrastructure equipped with advanced technologies but also offer facilities such as desks and the closed-circuit broadcasting system as standard that may be needed during accommodation.

Antalya, which hosted the conventions of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) and the Irish Travel Agents Association (ITAA) for the first time in 2012, also hosted the ICCA convention in 2014, which the USA has been trying to get for 27 years. Antalya hosted approximately 1,500 people then. With the happiness of the fact that the ICCA convention was held in Antalya, the business world pointed out that a convention center should be built in no time. Antalya successfully hosted the 53rd General Assembly of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, B20 and G20 summits between 2014 and 2015 <https://antalya.ktb.gov.tr/TR-68441/kongre-turizmi.html>, (access date: 20.03.2020).

HESTOUREX-World Health & Sports Tourism Congress and Exhibition, which was held in Antalya under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey in 2017, and the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey in 2018 and 2019, is another important organization that brought together the representatives of health, sports, and alternative tourism sectors from all over the world and is the first and only platform of Turkey in this sense. The exhibition, which achieved an important success in terms of both participation and business potential during those three years, is a great step to take to promote the potential of Antalya and Turkey in health, sports, and other alternative tourism activities and to establish a great deal of commercial cooperation in this field <https://antalya.ktb.gov.tr/TR-68441/kongre-turizmi.html>, (Access date: 20/03/2020)

According to 2018 statistics, Antalya hosted approximately 115 conventions and welcomed more than 75000 visitors to these conventions. Besides, approximately 300.000 visitors came to participate in incentive meetings. These data show that the existing infrastructure and superstructure of Antalya are sufficient for convention organizations <https://yigm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-9851/turizm-istatistikleri.html>, (access date: 20.03.2020).

## **6. Purpose and Importance of the Research**

The review of the foreign or domestic literature on the factors affecting the selection of destinations in congress tourism or the selection of enterprises related to the congress has revealed

many studies on this subject. However, it has been observed that very few studies have been conducted on the factors affecting the selection of the congress hotel. In the Antalya region, there is not yet a study on the factors affecting the selection of congress hotels. It is expected that this study will provide professional support for agencies operating in Antalya and companies working in the field of conventions. In addition, it is believed to contribute to the literature on conventions.

In recent years, Antalya's image about congress has been renewed, meeting halls and convention centers have been added to newly built hotels, convention centers have been established, and the number of travel agencies and congress organization companies has increased. Competition between enterprises has increased as congress tourism offers the opportunity to sell hotel rooms in bulk and congress participants are likely to spend more than other tourists. The authority to organize meetings in Turkey is given to travel agents falling into Category A. Agents in Category A operating in Antalya organize congresses. The purpose of this study is to reveal which attributes of enterprises are taken into consideration by travel agents planning congresses while choosing a congress hotel, which factors affect the selection decision more, and which of the congress services are attached more importance.

## **7. Scope of the Study and Research Methods**

The study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, a literature review was conducted by collecting data from secondary sources. In the literature review, university libraries, foreign and local periodicals about the congress tourism sector, and the internet were used.

In the second stage of the study, primary data were obtained by field research method and survey technique. In the survey, travel agencies were asked about the congress tourism opportunities in Antalya. The survey Fadil Boz, who had previously written a master's thesis on the topic "A Field Study about the Factors Affecting the Hotel Selection of Congress Organizers: The Case of Istanbul" (2010) made use of while designing the survey used in the present study. The survey consists of 24 questions under the purpose of the research. While determining the survey questions, first of all, previous international and domestic research on the subject was examined and survey questions were created based on the information obtained.

The surveys were applied to the travel agencies that organized meetings in Antalya. Among the agents, only travel agencies falling into Category A and specialized in the field of congresses were administered the survey. Within the scope of the research, travel agency personnel, managers, and business owners were contacted in general. The research was completed after asking the travel agents about congress tourism and its opportunities in Antalya via the survey technique. A total of 130 people from 33 agencies were reached.

According to the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there are a total of 963 travel agencies with their headquarters and branches in Antalya. The number of travel



agencies falling into Category A is 840 <http://antalya.ktb.gov.tr/TR-175736/turizm-seyahat-acentelari-istatistigi.html>, (access date: 12.05.2020). Of these, approximately 40 agencies operating in the sector are located in the Antalya region

<https://industryofmice.com/contacts/>, (access date: 28.05.2021). From these, 33 agencies were reached using the random sampling technique.

To obtain healthier results on the subject, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and meetings over social media (Linkedin, what's up, e-mail) were made with travel agents that stated that they organized congresses, and the websites of these travel agents were examined. The surveys were administered to 33 travel agencies located in the city center of Antalya and identified by the researcher. The study was finalized by having

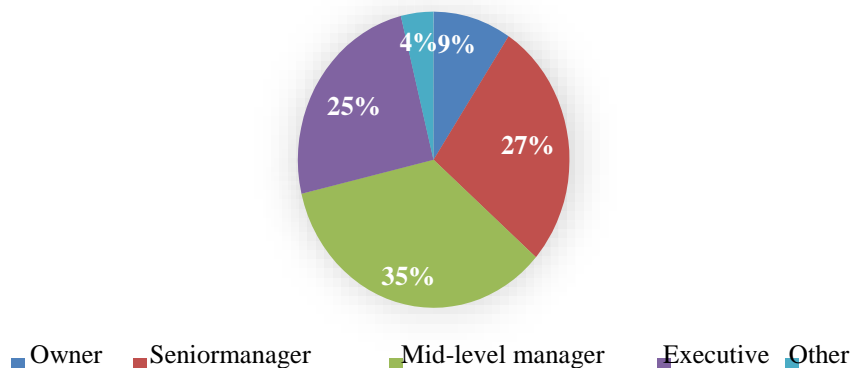
20 of the surveys completed via e-mail, 95 of them via social media, and the remaining 15 via personal visits to the enterprises.

Frequency analysis was performed on the obtained data. As a result of the survey, 32 hotel attributes affecting hotel choice were determined. The questions were prepared on a five-point Likert scale. Response options included ratings from 1 (Not at all Important) to 5 (Very Important).

## 8. Data Analysis and Findings

Percentage analysis was performed on 130 surveys collected from 33 agencies that organized meetings in Antalya. This section presents the findings obtained as a result of the analysis.

**Graph 2 Distribution of duties in agencies**

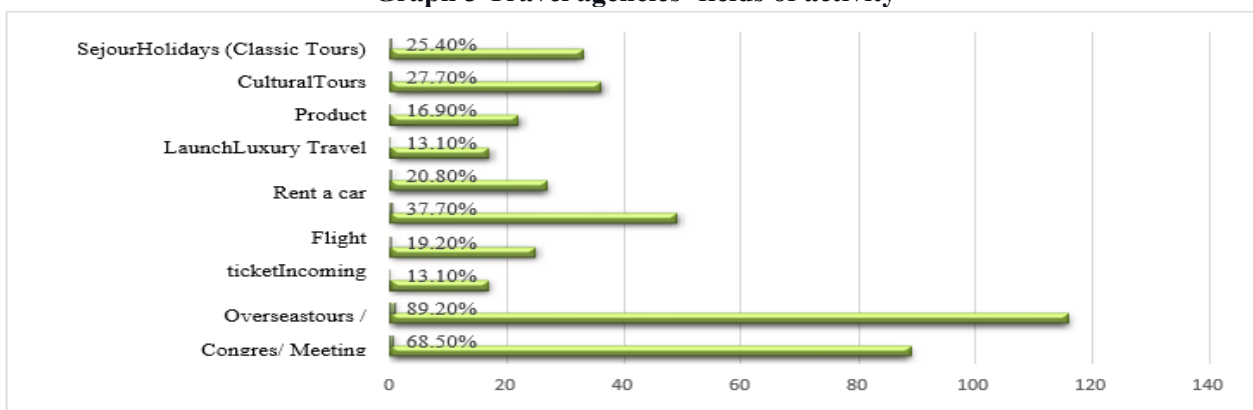


The distribution of duties in the agencies of the 130 participants who answered the survey is presented in chart 2. A total of 9% of the respondents answering on behalf of travel agencies are agency owners, 27% are senior managers, 35% are mid-level managers, 25% are executives, and 4% are those who are in different positions. The highest number of participants taking part in this research involves mid-level managers. Since the research aimed to reach more people, the number of people who could participate from the agencies was not kept limited. When the data is examined, it can be seen that there are 3 participants per agency on average. It was not easy to reach

agency owners and senior managers since congress organizations are large-scale events and the organizational structure of agencies is also large.

Today, agencies specialized in the field of conventions and operating only in this area are limited in number. In general, the agencies that organize meetings also operate in other areas (cultural tours, classical tours, etc.). In Turkey, travel agencies falling into Category A can do all the tasks that are carried out by tour operators as well as travel agencies falling into Category B and Category C. Therefore, these agencies need to specialize in certain areas for more effective marketing and sales methods.

**Graph 3 Travel agencies' fields of activity**



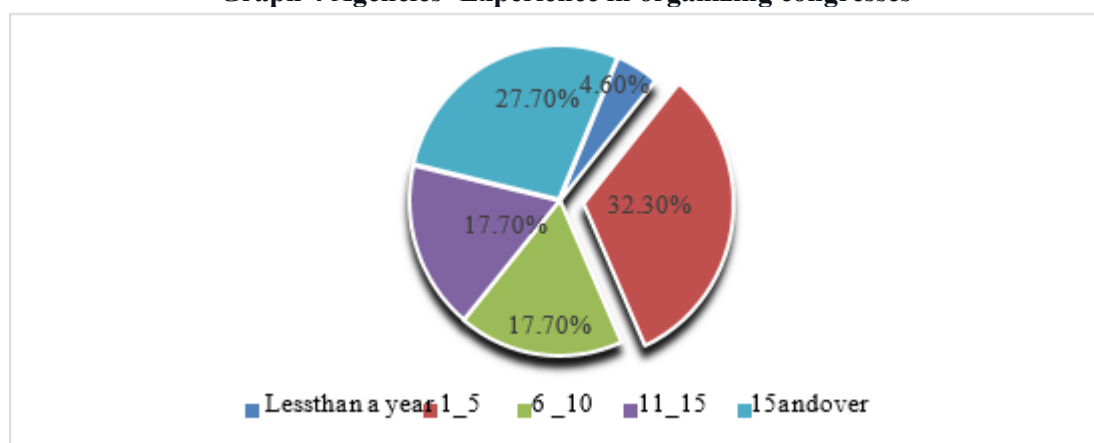


Graph 3 shows the distribution of the travel agencies' fields of activity. According to this graph, the most active fields of the agencies participating in the survey are congresses/meetings (89.20%) and incentive travels (68.50%). Respondents in the survey can choose one or more fields of activity while answering the question "Which fields of the area does your agency operate in the most?" It is normal to have such a result because the agencies participating in the study are especially specialized in the field of congresses. It is also natural for incentive travel to be the second-highest field of activity. The reason for this is that incentive travel is a sub-branch of business tourism like congresses. Therefore, agencies specialized in congresses are expected to specialize in this field. Flight ticket sales (37.70%) and cultural tours (27.70%) follow congress and incentive travel.

Congress tourism, which is one of the alternative tourism types, is important for Turkish tourism. Over the years, agencies

operating in this field have become more specialized. Graph 4 illustrates the experience of travel agencies in organizing meetings. The agency with the highest share in the graph has been operating in the field of conventions for 1-5 years with 32.30%. This data indicates that most of the agencies surveyed are new to the congress organization. This is followed by agencies that have been organizing congresses for 15 years or more (27.70%). Agencies that have experience in the congress market and that have been operating in the field of conventions for more than 15 years are more famous and have increased their credibility. Therefore, the probability of choosing these agencies should be higher than others. In addition, agencies operating for 6-10 years and 11-15 years (17.70%) rank third. Based on these data, it is understood that the number of agencies organizing congresses in Antalya has been increasing in the last 10 years.

**Graph 4 Agencies' Experience in organizing congresses**



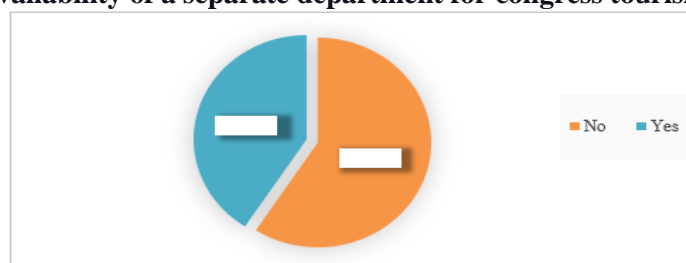
The fields of activity and capacities of the agencies included in the sample are different. Travel agencies that deal intensively with congress tourism need a separate department and separate staff to operate more efficiently in the field, while some agencies do not need to establish a separate department since congress tourism is not their main field. Travel agencies, which deal intensively with congress tourism, need a separate department and separate staff to operate more efficiently in the field, while some agencies, on the contrary, do not need to create a separate department since it is not the main area of congress tourism. These agencies generally carry on their congress activities together with their other business. In addition, another essential point is that the headquarters of many big agencies in Antalya are located in another city, so their congress departments are also located in other cities and the teams come together in

Antalya during the congress to make the necessary organizations. In addition, another important point is that since most of the big agencies in Antalya have their headquarters in another city, their congress departments are also located in other cities, and the teams come together in Antalya during the congress to make the necessary organizations.

Also, another important point is that since most of the big agencies in Antalya have their headquarters in another city, their congress departments are also in other cities and the teams come together in Antalya during the congress to make the necessary organizations.

Graph 5 demonstrates that 59.20% of the agencies participating in the study do not have a separate department related to the congress organization.

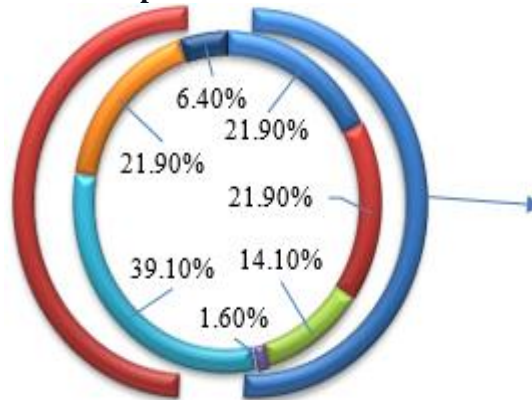
**Graph 5 Availability of a separate department for congress tourism in agencies**





In general, the majority of the convention agencies try to become members of national or international congress organizations. While 50.80% of the participants answered yes to the question “Are there any national/international congress associations or organizations that you are a member of?”, 49.20% responded negatively. Since the difference between the percentages is very small, it can be stated that the answers are distributed in half.

**Graph 6 The rate of membership in national and international congress organizations**



Graph 6 illustrates the rate of membership in national or international congress organizations. In the evaluation made among the agencies participating in the survey, it is seen that ACVB (39.10%) is the organization with the highest rate of membership. It is followed by ICCA, IAPCO, and IATA associations with the same rate (21.90%). Among the agencies taking part in the research, the association with the least membership is EFAPCO with a rate of 1.60%.

The number of annual meetings varies according to the capacities and experiences of congress agencies. Participants were asked about the number of national and international meetings they organized in the last 10 years with a minimum of

100 people. The answers are presented in Table 4. It is seen that the majority of the participants have organized 30 or more national and international meetings in Antalya in the last 10 years. When compared to the number of national congresses organized, it is found that fewer international congresses have been organized. However, there is not a big difference between the agencies in terms of organizing congresses of 30 or more. The percentage of national congresses is 48.5%, while it is 40.8% for international congresses. This is followed by those organizing 16-20 and 21-30 national congresses with a percentage of 13.1%, while the percentage of those organizing 21-30 international congresses is 15.4%.

**Table-4 The number of national and international meetings**

Number of meetings	Number of National Meetings/ Responses	Percentage	Number of International Meetings/ Responses	Percentage
1-5	13	10%	15	11.5%
6-10	9	6.9%	16	12.30%
11-15	11	8.5%	12	9.2%
16-20	17	13.1%	14	10.8%
21-30	17	13.1%	20	15.4%
30 and more	63	48.5%	53	40.8%

The frequency of congresses varies according to different topics. Those who participated in the survey were asked questions to find out on which topic the highest and the lowest number of congresses have been held or on which topic no congresses have been held in Antalya during the last 10 years. The travel agencies participating in the survey were asked to respond to this question by ranking the options according to the intensity from 1 to 5 for the congresses they organized. The topic ranking 1st is regarded as the most frequent topic and the one in the 5th place means that it is either the least frequent topic or no congresses have been held on it. The data obtained are presented in Table 5. According to the results, health (52.31%) emerges as

the most frequent topic for congress. It is followed by technology (50.77%) and sports (45.38%) with a slight difference. In addition, science and agriculture are among the congress topics with the same rate of 40.77%. Bibliography, weaving, and religion and ethics (53.85%) stood out as the topics that are the least frequent or that do not have any congresses on.

The top three topics on which most congresses have been held in Antalya in the last 10 years include health, technology, and sports while the topics on which few congresses or no congresses have been held are bibliography, weaving and religion, and ethics.



**Table 5 Topics of congresses held in Antalya in the last 10 years**

Frequency	The Most		Many		Average		Not many		Few or None	
Field	No	Pct. %	No	Pct. %	No	No	Pct. %	No	Pct. %	No
Bibliography, Weaving	5	3.85	4	3.08	14	10.77	31	23.85	76	58.46
Religion, Ethics	5	3.85	5	3.85	8	6.15	42	32.31	70	53.85
Social Sciences, Humanist Studies	13	10.00	12	9.23	38	29.23	33	25.38	34	26.15
Science	53	40.77	36	27.69	20	15.38	8	6.15	13	10.00
Law, Public Administration	9	6.92	28	21.54	56	43.08	19	14.62	18	13.85
Technology	66	50.77	38	29.23	13	10.00	9	6.92	4	3.08
Social welfare	12	9.23	36	27.69	50	38.46	17	13.08	15	11.54
Economics and Finance	22	16.92	52	40.00	32	24.62	11	8.46	13	10.00
International Relations	25	19.23	22	16.92	50	38.46	16	12.31	17	13.08
Sports, Entertainment	59	45.38	38	29.23	13	10.00	8	6.15	12	9.23
Professions, Employers	26	20.00	36	27.69	30	23.08	21	16.15	17	13.08
Agriculture	53	40.77	28	21.54	19	14.62	15	11.54	15	11.54
Art, Radio, Cinema	7	5.38	14	10.77	23	17.69	30	23.08	56	43.08
Trade, Industry	44	33.85	38	29.23	26	20.00	14	10.77	8	6.15
Transportation, Travel	23	17.69	43	33.08	41	31.54	13	10.00	10	7.69
Health	68	52.31	34	26.15	11	8.46	6	4.62	11	8.46
Education, Youth	26	20.00	34	26.15	36	27.69	18	13.85	16	12.31
Politics	23	17.69	22	16.92	43	33.08	21	16.15	21	16.15

The participants were asked in which province they organized the most congresses in the last 10 years. Antalya emerged as the province with the highest number of congresses, with a rate of 93.1%.

UIA reports revealing that international congresses were held intensively in April, May, June, September, October, and November between 1999 and 2018. Especially the busiest months are April, June, September, and October (UIA, 2019, p. 22). In general, low seasons are preferred to organize congresses. In the survey, the participants were asked to rank the months from 1 (Very Intensive) to 3 (Not very Intensive) according to the intensity of the congress organization. A total of 121 out of

130 participants answered this question. According to the data obtained, April is the first month (33.88%), the second is September (27.27%), and the third month is October (28.10%). When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the rates of the second and third months are very close to each other. There is no big difference between the rates of April (26.45%), September (27.27%), and October (24.79%). Similarly, may (24.79%), October (28.10%), and November (25.62%) are very close to each other as well. As a result, according to the intensity, April is ranked first, September is ranked second, and October is the last month.

**Table 6 Ranking of months in which congresses are intensively organized**

Intensity	1 Very high		2 Moderate		3 Low	
Months	No	Pct %	No	Pct %	No	Pct %
January	5	4.13	0	0.00	7	5.79
February	3	2.48	3	2.48	3	2.48
March	30	24.79	1	0.83	5	4.13
April	41	33.88	32	26.45	1	0.83
May	2	1.65	4	3.31	30	24.79
June	2	1.65	0	0.00	1	0.83
July	0	0.00	2	1.65	0	0.00
August	1	0.83	0	0.00	1	0.83
September	24	19.83	33	27.27	0	0.00
October	8	6.61	30	24.79	34	28.10
December	5	4.13	8	6.61	31	25.62
November	0	0.00	8	6.61	8	6.61



The congress participants' length of stay at the congress destination may vary according to different reasons. According to ICCA's research, the average congress duration between 2013 and 2017 was determined to be 3.65 days, that is 3 and a half days (ICCA, 2018a, p. 41). Considering this, it is stated that the average length of stay at the congress destination is 3-4 days. In addition, some studies point out that the congress participants' length of stay is 1-2 or 2-3 days. For example, in their study, Rittichainuwat Beck and Lalopa (2001, p. 50) determined the average stay of convention participants as 1-2 days. There can be different factors affecting the length of stay of congress participants, like being in a new destination, getting to know a new culture, or having the desire to take a vacation, etc. In this regard, the agencies organizing congresses in Antalya were asked about the average length of stay of the convention participants in Antalya. Most of the respondents (71.50%) stated that the average stays of congress participants coming to Antalya was 3-4 days. Therefore, the length of stay of the congress participants is different from that of other tourists. This shows that congress participants stay in a place for shorter durations.

Congress's destination is essential to successfully organize the congress. To successfully organize the congress, where it is held is very important. The main reason for this is that the participants of a congress accommodate at the congress venue. The same question was asked to the survey participants. Most of the participants (86.20%) preferred accommodation establishments with meeting/congress halls. The rest of them (13.80%) preferred convention centers.

It is essential to have all the necessary technical equipment in the congress venues for the congress to be successful. The majority of the survey participants (84.50%) think that the accommodation establishments in Antalya have adequate equipment. If convention enterprises have the necessary technical equipment to organize conventions, their share in the congress market is also high.

It is vital to choose a congress venue. It is very important to choose the right place where the congress will be held. In general, congress participants want to stay close to the congress venue or to stay in the hotel where the congress is held so that they do not waste time. The survey participants In general, congress participants want to stay close to the place where the congress will take place or to stay in the hotel where the congress is held, because this way they do not waste time.

**Table 7 Factors affecting the selection of the congress hotel**

Factors	Number of respondents
Price	39
Availability of High Quality Meeting halls in Sufficient Number and Size in Hotels	26
Service	22
High-Quality Service	15
Mutual relations, Relationship Between Hotel Managers and Organizers	18

The survey participants were asked who chose the accommodation establishment. The majority of the agencies (74.60%) stated that the place of accommodation was chosen by the association or company organizing the congress. It is also noted that the place of accommodation was also determined by PCOs (professional congress organizers) and travel agencies, however at low rates.

A city or country must be above a certain quality and capacity to have a good share in congress tourism. In this context, the city must have advanced infrastructure, superstructure, and transportation facilities. The participants of the study were asked whether the transportation network in Antalya was sufficient for the development of congress tourism. According to the data (89.20%) obtained, it is believed that the transportation network is sufficient.

The flawless organization of a congress requires expert personnel in this field. In meeting organizations, personnel is divided into two permanent and temporary. The number of permanent staff employed by congress organizers is not high. Therefore, most of the agencies seek help from qualified agencies to find temporary staff. Some of these have their temporary staff group. Agencies holding meetings in Antalya were asked how they selected the personnel for a convention. A total of 61% of the respondents chose the staff working in the convention themselves. On the other hand, 34% of the participants trusted human resources agencies that are professionals in this field and contact them directly to find staff to work in a convention. A small number of respondents (5%) chose staff both by themselves and with the help of qualified agencies.

Antalya, which has high-quality and new tourism facilities, is the city with the highest number of hotels in Turkey. The total number of accommodation facilities certified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was reported to be 889. 407 of these facilities consist of 5-star hotels and holiday villages (ROT Ministry of Culture and Tourism), 2019b). Most of the five-star hotels located in Antalya have all the necessary facilities to hold meetings.

The survey participants were asked to indicate the factors affecting the selection of a hotel where more than one meeting was held in Antalya. According to the data obtained, most of the participants preferred group hotels as the hotel where more than one meeting was held while the others preferred hotels operating independently.





Physical Capacity and Facilities of the Hotel	12
Image	5
Location	5
Ongoing Relationships	3
Experienced staff	2
Comfort	2

Under the main purpose of the study, first of all, 32 hotel attributes affecting the hotel selection were determined to reveal which factors and which services the hotel offers are considered by travel agencies that organize the congress when choosing a hotel, and data were collected using a five-point Likert scale. Then, the results were analyzed by performing frequency analysis. The participants of the study rated 32 factors in order of importance. The factor with the highest number of "very important" ratings was determined to be the most effective factor.

The results of the evaluation of the factors affecting the hotel selection of the travel agencies organizing meetings are evaluated. According to the evaluations made on a five-point scale ranging from "very important" to "not important at all"; 75.4% of the respondents regarded the factor of "price" as very important. When the arithmetic mean of the factor (4.7) is compared with the others, it is seen that the factor closest to being the most important factor is price. Regarding the same factor, only one participant stated that it was not important. In this context, the price was determined to be the most important factor for travel agencies organizing congresses.

When the factors are ranked according to their arithmetic means obtained in the analyses, it was found that the second most important factor is the quick response to solve organizational problems with a mean of 4.58. It is followed by hotel image with a mean of 4.57, the ventilation system of meeting halls with a mean of 4.54, maintenance of meeting rooms with a mean of 4.53, and security factors with a mean of 4.52, respectively. Another factor that is close to being very important is the location of the hotel with a mean of 4.48. Therefore, these factors were identified as the factors that affect hotel selection most.

When the other factors are examined, it can be seen that the means of these factors are close to 4.5. These factors can be listed as follows: availability of a convention center with a mean of 4.47, friendly and helpful staff with a mean of 4.45, staff competence and expertise in organizational matters with a mean of 4.43, and sufficient internet access at the convention center with a mean of 4.42. The factors that can have the same effect as these factors can be specified as the availability of the latest audio-visual equipment with a mean of 4.33, the language ability of the staff with a mean of 4.29, and finally, fast and quality food and beverage services with a mean of 4.26.

In addition, three factors stand out comfort and convenience in transportation services with a rate of 61.5%, cleaning services with a rate of 57.7%, and taste and presentation

of food and beverage services with a rate of 49.2%. The arithmetic means of these factors were found as 3.95, 4.15, and 4.11, respectively. The factors with the lowest impact include being an international chain hotel with a mean of 3.05 and entertainment services with a mean of 3.18.

## 9. SWOT Analysis of Congress Hotels

Since congress tourism is a guide to the future, the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of congress tourism in Antalya were examined using SWOT analysis, which is one of the most common methods.

Agencies that took part in the research consider the location of the hotels in Antalya, their physical facilities and high room capacity, the all-inclusive concept, and the availability of a sufficient number of convention halls as advantages. In addition, hotels can be more advantageous in convention organizations in terms of the availability of professional hotel staff, price balance, availability of options for every budget, and quality service.

As for the disadvantages; the lack of expert staff in the field of convention in congress hotels located in Antalya, the hotel staff's lack of foreign language skills, employment of seasonal staff, and the continuous change in the team's low-level staff are stated by the congress organizers as the weaknesses that can be improved primarily. In addition, the negative attitude of congress hotels towards group organizations and constant introduction of new rules, exorbitant prices in the sale of local products, the lack of available rooms in hotels due to being in a tourism zone, and the lack of technical equipment and flexibility in the high season are among the common problems for congress organizers. Other disadvantages to being taken into account besides these include the perception that Antalya is a cheap "Leisure" destination, the lack of adequate promotion of congress tourism, and the absence of VAT exemptions in international conventions and events.

Opportunities and threats that may arise in the selection of congress hotels in the future are the least answered questions in the survey. Most of the participants avoided answering these issues. The answers obtained are presented in Table 9. The impact of the development of technology and the internet will play a major role in terms of future opportunities for conventions. For example, with the advance of technology, hotels have more innovative opportunities and know no bounds for their guests, they are compatible with modern technology and use the latest technology, and they can establish a review platform in the convention organization and have the possibility of a 3D tour. In addition, the possibility of subcontracting professional staff and



workers to congress and the end of the all-inclusive system, and the takeover of boutique-style luxury hotels can be addressed.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

Convention organization services are divided into pre-convention, during, and post-convention. It is necessary to determine clear targets in the first place, create a budget, provide a venue, make accommodation and travel arrangements for the participants, prepare the program, and manage every detail throughout the convention.

Significant developments have been experienced in most sub-sectors in the Antalya region in recent years for the development of congress tourism. Antalya is 5th largest city in Turkey, which represents professionalism, experience, diversity, and quality. Accommodation facilities in the Antalya region renewed themselves and completed the infrastructure investments to be required for congress tourism in a short time. With its new and well-equipped businesses and convention facilities, there are thousands of hotels in Antalya with more than 650,000 beds and 250,000 seating capacity, which offer professional, trained, and experienced services. There are also travel agencies in Turkey that are centered on specialized interventions. Travel agencies that are members of the International Association of Congress and Visitors Bureau (IACVB) and take part in category A provide services, especially in the framework of MICE. According to the statistics of the I-MICE association, there are approximately 1000 agencies specialized in the MICE sector throughout Turkey. And there are approximately 40 agencies in Antalya.

It is possible to divide the businesses to serve congress tourism into two: "congress hotels" which own meeting rooms, and luxury and first-class hotels which are close to the center where the congress will take place. According to the type of tourism, the expectations of congress participants from the accommodation establishments in line with the features of the congress are different from the expectations of leisure tourists. Within the scope of the study, the factors affecting the hotel selection of the congress organizers were investigated. A total of 32 factors were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The three most important factors affecting the hotel selection of the agencies which organize congresses are the price of hotels, quick response to solve organizational problems, and hotel image. The 32 factors are listed in order of importance as follows: price, organization's quick responses to solve problems, image of the hotel, ventilation system of meeting rooms, maintenance of meeting halls, security, location of the hotel, availability of a convention centre, friendly and helpful staff, staff competence and expertise in organizational affairs, adequate internet access in the convention centre, availability of small meeting rooms, availability of latest audio-visual equipment, language ability of the staff, fast and quality food and beverage service, proximity to the airport, establishing good relations with the sales/convention manager at the hotel, sufficient number of rest rooms at the convention centre, cleaning services, the taste and presentation of food and beverage services, availability of smoking-permitted

areas in the convention centre, availability of food and beverage buffets at the convention centre, proximity to the city centre, comfort and convenience in transportation service, fast check-in and check-out, star rating of the hotel, large parking lots and reasonable price system, richness of the surrounding areas of the hotel (parks, historical places, etc.), physical facilities (health center, shopping centre, etc.), entertainment services and being an international chain hotel.

The price factor may be one of the most important factors which affect the purchase and selection for congress participants as well as for various tourist groups, yet it is not the only factor affecting the choice. Showing quick responses to solve the problems in congress organizations will ensure that the congress participants will attend the congress more comfortably and the satisfaction will be kept at a high level. Hotel image is also one of the factors that have an important effect on the hotel selection. Since congress participants spend a big amount of money and have a high level of education, the company or association organizing the congress is directed to hotels with a successful hotel image. The comfort and convenience of the convention halls, the maintenance of the meeting rooms, and the availability of the ventilation system in the rooms are among the important factors for cities with a climate similar to Antalya's. The availability of a convention hall or convention center in the hotel is one of the most important factors for congress organizers. The availability of high-quality technical equipment and the latest audio-visual equipment in the convention halls are among the important factors that affect the choice of the place where the congress will be held. It is also important that congress hotels be located in a safe destination. The congress's destination must be safe in terms of political, socioeconomic, and health issues.

Personnel is among the important factors for congress organizations. They play a major role in a successful and trouble-free congress. According to the results of the research, the factors to be considered in the selection of convention personnel include the friendliness and helpfulness of the personnel, their expertise in organizational affairs, their language ability, etc., which are important attributes. In addition, fast and quality food and beverage service is important for congress sessions. And this is due to the limited time between sessions. This factor may not affect leisure tourists as much as it does congress participants because they have no purpose to come to meetings. Hygiene is one of the most important elements for a healthy life, and cleaning services are also one of the factors that significantly affect the congress organizers' hotel selection.

When the averages are examined, it is worthy of notice that any of the attributes found in congress hotels aren't considered "not important" or "unimportant". Even the least rated factors on the scale have a significance level above the "indecisive" rating. On the other hand, entertainment services and being an international chain hotel is among the least rated factors, which may be important to other tourists, but they are the least important ones to congress organizers. Although less than the



other tourists, congress participants also benefit from entertainment services. Various gala nights and entertainment are also organized for them. In such events, services can be requested from other businesses around the hotel or from various entertainment venues in the city. Thus, going out of the congress area or congress topics, even for a short time, can motivate the participants to leave the region with better experiences and increase their loyalty to the company or association they are bound to.

When the SWOT analysis of congress hotels is examined, the highlighted strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are as follows; The strengths are that the congress hotels in Antalya are close to the city center, the airport, and historical places. The weaknesses are that the congress hotels in Antalya cannot find expert staff, there is a lack of staff with a good foreign language, they employ seasonal staff, and there is a constant change of the team's sub-team. These are the weaknesses that can be improved first as the congress organizers state. The impact of technology and internet development will play a major role in the selection of congress hotels in terms of future opportunities. For example, it is possible for hotels to have more innovative

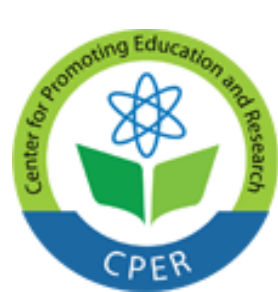
opportunities with the developing technology and know no bounds for their guests, to use the new and latest technology, to create a review platform in the convention organizations, and to provide 3D tour opportunities for the hotels. Among the threats to be considered in the future are the prominence of congress hotels with their health and safety measures, the selection of the congress hotel according to the occupancy rate due to the pandemic, and the shift of already few qualified personnel in the field of the convention to other sectors are among the problems that may be experienced shortly. As a result of this situation, it can be expected that hotels will increase their prices excessively to compensate for the lost revenue.

This study was conducted for travel agencies organizing congresses in Antalya. Future studies on this subject can be done on a country basis and the results can be generalized more easily at this level. The same study can be applied not only to the congress sector but also to all the agencies which operate in the MICE sector. In addition, the changes in the factors that affect the selection of congress hotels due to the pandemic can be examined as a separate issue.

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