

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONFERENCE HOTELS





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“You have to have endurance in this profession. You start a project as a young person and then at the end you are another person. You are ready to go for your pension.”

Santiago Calatrava

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work to the best of my knowledge and has not been presented for an award of a degree in any other institution.

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TO THE ALMIGHTY GOD, FOR HIS CARE AND RENEWED STRENGTH EVERY MORNING,

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ABSTRACT

Kenya, Nairobi precisely, has hosted many International conferences since the 1980's due to its position as an economic and political powerhouse in East and Central Africa. International visitors have been hosted at Nairobi's two main conference centers which are the Kenyatta International Conference Center (KICC) and the Bomas of Kenya. However, Kenya has been losing the rights to these conference to neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and the Republic of Congo.

This study outline the findings from the main conference facilities in these two countries: the Kigali Convention Center in Rwanda and the Kintele Congress Center & Resort Hotel in Congo. The two were chosen not only because in the recent past the two have been hosting international conferences such as the African Union Summit amongst other major conferences but also because of their prime location, their capacities, the way the local culture has influenced the Architecture of the two facilities and lastly for the reason that the Congress centers have on-site tourist hotel thus making the facilities Conference/ Convention Hotels.

The findings revealed that in order for a convention hotel to function efficiently, a couple of considerations had to be put in place. These include but are not limited to ease of accessibility, urban and cultural integration, security, proximity to appropriate accommodation, sustainable design techniques among other factors. Conference attendees don't want to be trapped in the confines of the conference facility but prefer to mingle with inhabitants of the city while visiting the neighbouring tourist sites of attraction.

The study seeks to outline and recommend the absolute guidelines on how to plan and design modern conference hotels that are not only based on international conferencing standards but also reflect the culture of the people of the locality so as to bring about a sense of belonging for both the visitors and the locals. This will aid in improving Kenya's Conference Tourism sector.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

1.1 PREAMBLE

Kenya is predominantly a nature-based tourism destination with wildlife (concentrated in the southern part of the country) and beaches (along the Indian Ocean) accounting for over 85% of the international tourists visiting the country. Other attractions are based on the physical landscape of the country and the culture of the people. However, the emergence and constant growth of MICE travelers on the demand side have shifted the perceptions on tourism marketing globally.

Unfortunately, the full potential of conference tourism has not been exploited locally. The development, marketing and promotion of conference tourism in Kenya have been disparate. This has been entrenched further by the lack of a coordinated, targeted effort to market conference tourism in global markets.

The conference industry is one of tourism industry's lead revenue generators for many destinations worldwide. Continental ranking of conference tourism pits Europe and Asia as the leaders while North America and Africa follow suit. This has accelerated change and economic growth and more importantly the product development to embrace emerging needs and thus making the (tourism) sector the 29th largest contributor to the gross national product globally. (Wekesa, 2006).

Within Africa, South Africa has been the most popular in hosting meetings in Africa, followed by Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Kenya takes the 4th position. City wise, Nairobi ranks 5th after Cape Town, Durban, Cairo and Johannesburg. In Kenya, the Kenyatta International Conference Center, United Nations office in Nairobi, Gigiri, Safari park Hotel in Nairobi and the Whitesands hotel and Sun-n-sand hotel in Mombasa have been and still are the strong forces behind development of conference tourism, coming out as the main host venues for most of the international events/conferences coming to Kenya. In the recent past, a host of other hotels and institutions of higher learning in the country have been also instrumental in hosting meetings and events. (Victoria Safaris, 2007)

Most of the Kenya Tourism Board's efforts have been on high value holiday travelers neglecting the all-important M.I.C.E. travelers. The M.I.C.E segment is arguably the fastest growing global segment of the tourism market, growing at the rate of 8-10% per annum. According to the convention industry council's 2004, Economic impact study, the meetings, conventions, exhibitions and incentive travel industry in the United States alone generated \$122.31 billion in total direct spending in 2004, making it the 29th largest contributor to the gross national product.

According to the statistics report of International Congress and Convention Association (ACCA), there has been 60% increase in the world's total number of association meetings series taking place regularly and which rotate between different countries

(ICCA 2007).

Subsequently, this has accelerated change and economic growth and more importantly the product development to embrace changing needs. The MICE sub-sector is one of the fastest growing sub sectors within the tourism industry, which has embraced the state-of-the art technologies, contemporary marketing concepts as it is driven by tech-savvy and fast moving demand, which requires a matching supply.

According to the Kenya Tourism Master Plan (G.O.K, 2005a), Kenya boasts of world class meeting places in addition to the traditional wildlife and beach attractions. In the year 2004, the local conferences increased by 13.3% from 805 to 912 conferences while international conferences increased by 15.1% from 126 to 145 conferences (G.O.K, 2005b). Cairo and Nairobi are emerging to be the conference hub of repute in Africa, as well as commanding great rapport among conference organizers globally.

Specialized conference facilities have been developed thus increasing the conferencing supply capacity in the country. Conference facilities in most cases have gone hand in hand with holiday accommodation thus placing hotels and accommodation facilities as the frontline tourist facilities (Victoria Safaris, 2007).

During the tourism slump of the 1990's, conference service providers especially hotels and resorts strategically positioned themselves to take advantage of this money spinning business. The boom from this complimentary revenue source then was taken up seriously and perceived as the 'Goose that lays the golden egg, when the hen was not producing'. Further, the change of government in 2002 boosted economic- political stability and security, two main motivators for investment and thus investor confidence for international conference organizers on Kenya.

More than a decade later, conference tourism & business travel rather than holiday travel has developed to be the major boost to Kenya's tourism and travel industry. The same earned respect to Kenya as a reliable partner in regional peace initiatives for neighboring countries. These include the recent inauguration of the Somali interim government and signing of the peace agreement between southern Sudan and Khartoum government.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A 2018 Economic Survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics finds that the number of International Arrivals (in Kenya) for the purpose of visit has been on a steady rise from 1.18 million in 2015 to almost 1.5 million in 2017. These numbers could be attributed to the numerous global conferences and business convergences happening in Kenya year in year out due to implementation of the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) strategies by the Government of Kenya under the Vision 2030 policy framework as a means of Tourism promotion which is an Economic and Macro Pillar under the same (Vision 2030).

Locally, we have the Annual Devolution Conference happening in different counties each year. It is attended by 6000 plus delegates. This is just so as to bring to light the worrying shortage of conferencing facilities (plus the complementary facilities such as accommodation) in all counties except probably Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu.

Summarily, ADCs will continue to occur for as long as devolution exists and it would be prudent to begin to anticipate the need to fill this niche as this will open up the counties to host both Local and International Visitors. This Thesis therefore seeks to enlist the general provisions to take into consideration while designing a conference hotel and the climatic considerations while designing such a hotel.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the design considerations of Conference Hotels in terms of Built Form Planning and Spatial Organization.
2. To analyze and further document how the Urban fabric coupled up with Societal and Cultural norms and values influence the design of Conference Hotels.
3. To develop a Conventional design technique for the implementation of Conference Hotels/ Convention Hotels.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the primary considerations to be taken into account in the design of Conference Hotels?
2. What are the necessary auxiliary facilities (the likes of Accommodation) that are to be availed for the smooth operation of Conference Hotels?
3. Are there any currently existing Conference Hotels in Kenya? In what condition are they? If not, which countries within the tropics have such Conference Hotels? What lessons are to be learnt from such facilities in terms of design?
4. What lessons are to be drawn from the livelihoods of the locals for possible implementation in the design of Conference Hotels?

1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

About the 2018 Annual Devolution Conference in Kakamega, Kamothe Waiganjo of the Daily Nation writes “In Kakamega and Vihiga, hotel rooms that normally charge Sh2,000 were going for a whopping Sh5,000, if you could get one! Some hotel owners were auctioning rooms to the highest bidder so that pre-booking meant nothing, your deposit would be readily refunded in favour of a higher offer.”

This is enough evidence of the general shortage of the suitable Conference facilities in the country and especially in the Rural Counties. Therefore, there is a need to bridge this gap between the supply and demand of such conference hotels in the near future bearing in mind that most CIDP's have proposed MICE Tourism as an impetus to the success of devolution and development at the county level.

Also, it is a well known fact that 35% - 40% of energy produced in developing countries is consumed by buildings either in the Construction phase or the Operational Phase (UNEP, 2009). This therefore shows the importance of conducting research in the field of Climate Responsive Design with a view to developing a comprehensive and detailed set of Passive Design Strategies that can be used by designers in a bid to produce hotels that respond to the site/context, climate, socio-cultural and economic factors.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Government of Kenya under the Vision 2030 policy framework, just as well as most CIDP's, has identified MICE Tourism just as an Economic Macro Pillar of development both at the National and the County scale. As such, it is important to note that most county headquarters are basically a bunch of upcoming cities. Development of Modern Conference Hotels in the various counties is therefore a very useful tool that can be harnessed as a preliminary move while overlaying the urban fabric on the rural scene so as to catalyze the morphosis/development of these rural towns into cities/urban centers.

Secondly, design does not occur in isolation and as such it is the responsibility of the Architect to design with the environment/climate in mind. Such hotels should be designed to incorporate passive design strategies. This goes a long way in reducing/eliminating the need for using active means to achieve thermal comfort.

1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Conference tourism in Kenya is limited to only a few places namely the Kenyatta International Conference Center, the Safari Park Hotel and a few others. The author had a strict criteria of selecting case studies which was:

- (i) A conference facility coupled up with accommodation on the same site.
- (ii) A conference facility capable of catering to above 1000 pax.
- (iii) Ability to hold international conferences based on the recent meetings held at the facility under study.
- (iv) Location near any major transport routes. It could be a major road, airport, railway line or a waterway.

With the absence of one such facility locally, the author focused on such facilities in the nearby countries most of which are upcoming economic powerhouses.

Due to financial constraints, the author had to rely on the secondary data sources such as books, journals, magazines and the internet. Most of these Conference hotels have been built within the last 4-5 years and so they are not exhaustively documented on the various platforms.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The research is organized into 5 chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 gives a brief introduction to Conference Tourism with relation to other forms of tourism, its performance on the global scene, the African Scene and in the Kenyan scene. The author also outline the aims and objectives of the study as well as justification for the study.

Chapter 2 contains literature review of published and unpublished works based on Conference Hotels. The author outlines the specific considerations in the design of Conference Hotels, the various spaces to be provided for in the Convocation spaces and in the Hotel, and eventually the current trends in the design of Conference Hotels.

Chapter 3 details the various methods used in collection of data and the parameters considered in data collection.

Chapter 4 entails the fieldwork , findings of the fieldwork and a summary comparison of the case studies analyzed in the same chapter.

Chapter 5 outlines the lessons learnt on the field in relation to literature review, case studies and the recommendation of the author when designing Conference Hotels.

1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS

KICC Kenyatta International Conference Center.

ACCA International Congress and Convention Association.

MICE Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions.

G.O.K Government Of Kenya.

CIDP County Integrated Development Plan.

ADC Annual Devolution Conference.