

INTERNATIONAL TAXATION PRACTICE GROUP (ITPG)

GGI ITPG Winter Meeting, Barcelona, Spain, 25-28 February 2016

Why international tax experts sell ice to the Eskimos

By Oliver Biernat

ITPG winter meetings are always special. In addition to the inspiring lectures of professional international tax experts, delegates always enjoy amazing locations, perfect seated accommodation and delicious food. The winter meeting is, in principle, much more than a technical exchange of knowledge; it represents a meeting for friendships cultivated and maintained over months and years. Delegates came to the winter meeting 2016 from all over the world – including many European countries as well as the USA, Canada, India, Mexico and South Africa. This cosmopolitan atmosphere of friendship and special spirit encouraged creativity. More on that to follow...

This year's meeting took place in one of the most beautiful cities in Europe – Barcelona. A total of 64 delegates and



Interior of Sagrada Família basilica

their 15 guests stayed at the Gallery Hotel, centrally situated close to the gothic heart of the city. It is surrounded by major shopping streets and is near to several must-see landmarks, such as Gaudí's La

Pedrera and the famously incomplete Sagrada Família basilica. Some of the delegates, who had arrived early on Thursday morning, spent the day on a hop-on-hop-off...next page



Barcelona sweets



Concentrated exchange

off-bus and were able to form a first impression of this vibrant city.

Starting with a welcome event at the hotel bar on Thursday evening, old friends were able to catch up and new acquaintances were made. Along with his wife, this year's host Carlos Frühbeck of Ficesa Treuhand, S.A.P, which is situated just a few minutes' walk from the hotel, offered us a first impression of the delicious local Catalan cuisine: various tapas dishes, traditional paella and the fantastic crema catalana, accompanied by local wine.

Friday morning started with words of welcome from me as global ITPG chairman, our host Carlos Frühbeck and GGI Founder and President Claudio Cocca, who gave a short review of the past twenty years and recalled the third GGI conference that took place in 1995 in exactly the same hotel in Barcelona. This year's meeting had double the number of delegates in comparison with the 1995 edition – what a success story for both GGI and ITPG.

Before the technical part of the meet-

ing started, I presented some topics related to the ITPG, such as statistics on its development (513 members, including 90 senior members), the forthcoming election of chairs and more. News from the regions was presented by Ashish Bairagra (Asia Pacific), myself on behalf of Doug Dickey (USA), Graeme Sagers (MEA) and Sergio Guerrero (Latin America). In addition, there was discussion around some marketing issues, such as how to improve the presentation of ITPG on the GGI website and the possibility of running an ITPG platform on social media platforms (e.g. LinkedIn).

The technical part started with a presentation concerning the question of how GGI firms can work together on cross border self-disclosure cases (Paul Malin). Ashish Bairagra presented a case study on an international Transfer Pricing (TP) case. After a short overview on the background and the possible TP methods, groups of six members each were formed and given 30 minutes to work on the study, name a speaker and showcase their results. The feedback of the dele-

gates on this workshop was overwhelmingly positive and satisfied their wish for interactivity in small groups.

Before lunch, the venue and host of the ITPG winter meeting 2017 were announced: GGI member Mario Kapp will welcome us to the beautiful Austrian ski resort of Schladming during the first weekend in March 2017. The Special Olympics World Winter Games are to take place here during the same month. In addition to discussing a myriad of tax topics, we will have the opportunity to network and enjoy ourselves on the slopes or during other activities such as visiting a glacier palace, ice skating or riding in a horse-drawn sleigh. A special event will be organised where delegates can enjoy typical Austrian hospitality and "Hütten- gaudi" in a mountain hut 1,800 metres above sea level.

In the afternoon, Prof. Robert Anthony successfully introduced a new format of speed-networking. A long day of presentations, lectures and activities was closed by the practice group meet-



The feedback of the delegates on the workshops were overwhelmingly positive



Dinner at the historic “Els Quatre Gats”



Claudio G. Cocca

ings of the “Indirect Taxes” (Steve McCrindle) and “Global Mobility Solutions” (Huub Kapel) PGs, the latter including a panel discussion on expat tax regimes in Spain (Carlos Frühbeck), France (Viviane Moro) and Italy (Matteo Bedogna).

Some brave men went for a jog through the red-light district (meaning: we had to cross many streets with red traffic lights) toward Sagrada Familia. After this, a quick visit to the hotel sauna refreshed our bodies and minds in preparation for a long day sitting in the conference room. Our attention then turned towards our rumbling stomachs: we were all keen to enjoy another delicious dinner at the historic “Els Quatre Gats” (The Four Cats). Lots of delicious tapas, lamb, fish, fabulous desserts and great Catalan wines were on offer. For those who still weren’t tired after dinner, there were plenty of bars and night clubs offering the chance to cement friendships, have some more drinks and a little dance.

On Saturday morning, Artur Plutowski started with a cross ITPG survey on CFC regulations. Robert Worthington

continued with an update on BEPS Action Plan no. 2 “Hybrid Mismatch Arrangements” and Marios Eliades and Christos Theophilou updated the participants on recent tax changes in Cyprus that make it an attractive location for headquarters, IP companies and funds. Massimiliano Russo presented the newly introduced Patent Box Tax regime in Italy.

The main topic for the Saturday was applicable to anyone running a business: “Online Marketing for tax experts”, presented by Paul Atkinson, Marketing Manager at Lawrence Grant, UK. In his presentation Paul gave us an impressive overview about what to consider in terms of webpage management. This included which tools to use to optimise your



Group work

Google ranking, how to deal with social media, how important a company logo is and what you have to do to get your webpage noticed. In line with the delegates’ wish for more interactivity, Paul formed several groups and asked them to set up a marketing strategy on “How to sell ice to the Eskimos”. The presentations afterwards revealed the incredible creativity of the groups. The dancing polar bear “Claudio” who sold “GGIce” will surely remain unforgettable. *...next page*



Presentation “Online Marketing for tax experts”





“How to sell ice to the Eskimos”

Due to a rain shower on Saturday afternoon, the participants could choose between a guided tour on foot through the Barri Gòtic (the city’s Gothic Quarter) or a guided tour inside Gaudi’s striking Sagrada Familia. Dinner on Saturday evening was at the nearby restaurant Tragaluz. Once again, this will go down as a culinary highlight. A fairly large part of the group continued networking in the Mojito Club until the early morning hours on

Sunday. A small group went on an excursion on Sunday to bodega “Alella”, 20km outside Barcelona. A tour through the wine cellar was followed by a wine tasting session and a delicious lunch.

Thanks again to our friend Carlos Frühbeck and his wife Ines for perfectly hosting this weekend in beautiful Barcelona, to all delegates who shared their knowledge with us and to all participants who made these days so special.



Excursion to bodega “Alella”

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