

AIPC putting the questions in Quebec

Canada provided the beautiful backdrop for a gathering of international congress centre clans. The AIPC 47th annual general assembly was full of debate and is clearly one of the industry's main forums for theoretical thinking about the big subjects facing the meetings and conference sector.

Changing markets and the requirement for changing responses were high on the agenda of topics for discussion at The International Association of Congress Centres 47th annual general assembly, held recently in Québec City.

The AIPC meeting provided a world-class platform for the exchange of strategic industry information and the seminar rooms provided laboratories for testing the latest high-level industry thinking and theories.

"The world is changing, and the challenge is to be responsive to change, and to use it to advantage rather than trying to resist it as so many do," said Urban Futures Institute's David Baxter in a presentation on how global demographic and attitudinal changes will impact the meetings industry.

With demographic changes driving a global realignment in the traditional patterns of economic growth, Baxter believes that much of the meetings activity of the future will be taking place with countries and organisations that are newly emerging economic powers.

The meetings industry will feel the impact of these changes in many ways, from shifting market opportunities to new expectations for technology and content, Baxter believes. The industry's overall future is secure, according to Baxter, because basic human needs to "meet and verify" could not be taken over by electronic communications. This need, he believes, will only increase as more commerce is conducted at arms length via the internet.

Perspectives on how convention centres are being specifically challenged by global changes were given a good airing at the AIPC's 'Designing new models for the future' forum. CEO of Washington State Convention and Trade Centre John Christison, in a review of trends impacting business in North America, noted "rapid growth in facility inventory, major shifts in centres of trade and manufacturing, more specialisation in meetings and exhibitions, greater price sensitivity and higher service expectations". He also identified a trend toward reduction in

government willingness to subsidise or tolerate operating losses and a lack of market response to ever increasing facility costs as key challenges facing operators.

MPI's director of European operations and global development, Didier Scaillet, noted that recent industry surveys were showing that both event numbers and budgets are on the rise. This, he said, increased the need for planners and suppliers, including centres, to recognise how they could work together more productively. "What planners would like from suppliers is that they work as partners rather than as vendors, develop increased flexibility in attrition/cancellation requirements and develop quicker turnarounds on requests," said Scaillet.

In turn, what suppliers want from planners, according to

Scaillet, is "more honest disclosure of budgets, more comprehensive communication and more detailed RFPs". The point was that by understanding each other's needs and expectations, planners and suppliers can work better together in delivering the best product for customers.

CEO of Ogden IFC Rod Pilbeam picked up on an increasing interest in exploring alternate ownership and management models and moving away from more traditional government

ownership/operation models. New models included governments retaining ownership but contracting out operations, or Private/Public Partnerships (where governments make a contribution but expect the operator to assume commercial risk as part of their involvement).

Pilbeam highlighted particular concerns in the market re: value for money; increased expectations for quality facilities and services; convenient, comfortable access and reliability and trust in delivery.

The marketing environment for convention centres was the subject of John Parke's keynote speech to the conference. He identified some major trends. Emerging priorities, in his view, included a fresh emphasis on return on investment (ROI) for evaluating events, the growing importance of, and expectations

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for technology, the need to deal with 'time poverty' in many sectors, the challenges of recruitment and retention in the meetings environment, new scrutiny on rates and service charges and the importance of addressing contracting issues.

Parke believes that new systems and strategies are needed to cope with these changes, particularly in the sales area, where staff needed to be much more targeted in their efforts and efficient with their time.

One of the panel discussions in Quebec centred on new techniques and strategies for accessing clients, new marketing techniques, the role of alliances, balancing sales and promotional activity and new forms of client-facility partnerships.

Munich's Edgar Hirt outlined the benefits that he believed had stemmed from Germany's Seven Centres alliance (a marketing programme incorporating Germany's leading congress venues). This alliance, said Hirt, had formed a new profile in the market and a new relationship with other convention business promotional agencies.



AIPC delegates were shown the full range of congress facilities during their stay in Quebec.

industry, including:

'Planning for the coming HR crisis': a synopsis of issues, opportunities and required responses to the implications of potential specialised labour shortages and the planning, recruiting and training strategies required to address these;

'New business opportunities for congress centres': an exploration of alternate revenue streams in an era of increased expectations by government for deficit reduction;

'Launching a new product': a case study from Perth, Australia, on successfully introducing a new convention centre product into a competitive market.

'Managing and evaluating performance'. A hot topic for the fast-evolving convention business.

'E-marketing': how new developments in IT and internet capabilities are influencing the range of choices that marketers have at their disposal.

'Helping shape the delegate experience': the growing importance of the overall delegate experience in marketing conventions and how centres and planners can work together on enhancing this.

'Managing community expectations and

interactions': based on case studies from Athens, Dublin and San Diego on how community and local government relations influence the operating environment of a convention centre and how centres should address this.

This year's AIPC general assembly also heard updates from board-led task forces in the areas of education, research, quality standards and annual conference;

AIPC reports an increase to 142 member centres and announced an aggressive new business plan for association activities over the period 2005/6.

Three new directors were elected to the board and four were re-elected.



AIPC on parade in Quebec.

Paris Expo's Laurent Chiron spoke about the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the marketing of multiple facilities, and Jose Miguel Ayerza of the Kursaal Centre addressed the changing needs of marketing in a world where an abundance of supply creates a need to address the emotional side of client expectations, rather than just the rational side.

There was no shortage of sessions in Quebec on issues identified as being of particular interest to the international

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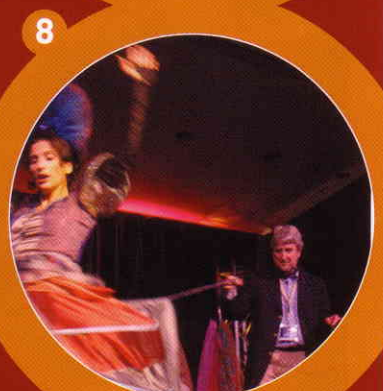
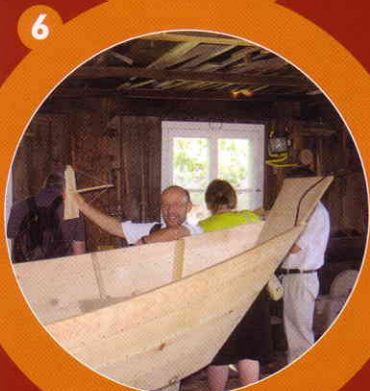
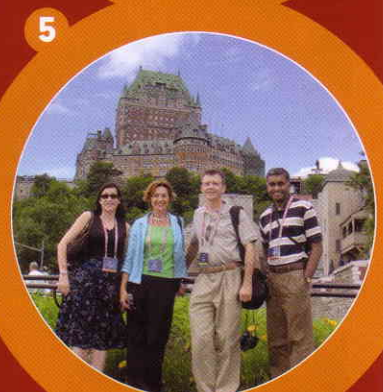
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AIPC IN QUEBEC

The International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC) met in Quebec this year for its annual convention. The great Canadian outdoors provided a stunning backdrop.



1 Rabaska ride on the Jacques Cartier River.

2 Barbecue at the Quebec Garrison Club.

3 AIPC delegates get the city tour downtown.

4 Meeting a la 19th Century Quebecois.

5 AIPC people building congressional castles on the ground.

6 Floating an idea at the Saint Laurent de l'Île d'Orleans Maritime Park.

7 National Assembly restaurant.

8 Madame Nathalie Choquette sets the musical evening spinning.