



"People who can't talk about the value of a congress talk instead about the costs."

AIPC

Generally changeable situation

Almost 150 delegates from more than 70 cities gathered for the annual general assembly of the International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC). The main topics on the agenda in Quebec City were demographic change, the widening gap between supply and demand and new challenges for venues.

On the whole the mood of the event was rather pensive. For the time being, the golden days are over for the meetings industry. "Certainly, economic recovery and an easing of global political tension are now palpable," Barbara Maple, president of the Association Internationale des Palais de Congrès (AIPC), said at the beginning of the gathering. But "the impacts of recession and heightened security requirements all over the world" will change meetings business and

make it more complicated in future, Maple told the assembly.

Keynote speaker David Baxter from the Urban Features Institute also looked into an uncertain future. The population expert forecast profound demographic change, with dramatic economic implications for the MICE industry as well. According to calculations by the United Nations, in the middle of this century 1.4 billion more people will be living in Asia than at present. In Latin America the population

will grow by 246 million, and in Central Africa the number of people will almost treble by 2050 from 112 million at the moment to 309 million. At the same time the number of inhabitants in Europe and Japan will drop. And the share of over sixty year-olds will soar during the same period from 11 percent to 26 percent worldwide.

In line with this trend the pressure will increase in countries with declining population figures to siphon off money from the

workforce and share it among the pensioners. This will dampen expansion, causing economic growth engines like Japan and the big EU states to fall behind other and new business centres. The economic map will then also have to be completely redrawn for the MICE industry, the population expert predicts.

The future holds out problems not only for the meetings sector. More and more conference centres are being built, "supply is expanding faster than de-

mand," John Christison, CEO of the Washington State Convention & Trade Centre, summarises current trends. What is more, venues are becoming ever larger, while meeting sizes are tending to shrink. This is increasing the pressure on suppliers, Christison concluded. The glut of meeting facilities is not only relentlessly driving up service demands, but also prompting increasing demands for discounts.

Keynote speaker John Parke from Leadership Synergies and Didier Scaillet, Director of Meeting Professionals International (MPI), therefore called in Quebec for ways to monitor event success and for close collaboration with the demand side. Didier Scaillet has observed that if the success of a meeting cannot be documented, the consequence is clear: "People who can't talk about the value of a congress talk instead about the costs." John Parke likewise prophesies a great future for methods that can come up with answers to the return on investment (ROI) in meetings. The transfer of



The surroundings of Quebec provide unspoiled nature.

knowledge is simply no longer enough to justify the costs of a meeting, he insists. Companies are increasingly looking for proof

after the event that the transfer of knowledge is actually taking place and that the meetings budget was warranted.

In principle, therefore, business is set to become harder rather than easier; on this practically all the delegates agreed. But for all the uncertainty, one thing is for

sure, was David Baxter's reassuring conclusion for the industry: "In future, too, networking and verifying findings will continue to take place at meetings and cannot be replaced by electronic means of communication." The internet is nothing more than the ultimate telephone, was Baxter's



Québec City

Quebec City on the St. Lawrence River is steeped in history and very European in character. The lofty towers of the Château Frontenac dominate the skyline. Narrow streets drop steeply to the Lower Town, where the most restaurants are to be found. With its citadel, stone walls and ramparts, the old quarter of Quebec is the only fortified city north of Mexico and a UNESCO world heritage site.

The new AIPC vice president, Edgar Hirt, head of the International Congress Center München, at the teambuilding activity boat-building.

impassive conclusion. And in an economically ever more networked world, "congresses and meetings are basically becoming more and more important".

The next AIPC general assembly takes place from July 16 to 19, 2006 in Montpellier. DM