The Economic Issues are Back – or Never Went Away!

Recent financial events have demonstrated clearly that the words of two of our most recent economist keynote speakers were prophetic, to say the least.

From Will Hutton’s comments on public debt and the consequences of a lack of regulation in Liverpool to David Blanchflower’s recent review of the likely results of US and Eurozone debt problems, much of what they said about unresolved issues coming back to haunt the global economy has in fact taken place, particularly in the last few weeks. The result appears at this point to mean a prolonged period of slow recovery punctuated by periodic setbacks – predictions which they also made at the time of their respective presentations.

However, the fact that they got so much of it right suggests that we should also be paying attention to some of the advice they gave us as convention centres to go along with those predictions. And that brings us back once again to our role in economic development, and their contention that this is the way to engage the attention and support of our respective communities.

Clearly, this is a message that centres have embraced, as shown by the high level of activity in terms of enhanced community and government relations initiatives documented in this year’s convention centre confidence survey as presented in San Diego. Over 70% of centres said that they had increased their interactions with local business and government – a clear demonstration that more centres are recognizing the additional influence that is being seen to play a role in economic enhancement can deliver.

But there’s plenty more to be done – not just in communications but in hard programming that demonstrates just what centres can do to support local economic growth. Many centres have taken significant steps in this direction, and others can profit from their experiences. Amongst the ideas: connecting with government agencies and universities to pursue events with economic development benefits; recalculating measurements to put more emphasis on economic impact rather than tourism outcomes and working more closely with business organizations in the community.

Each of these is typically unique to the opportunities that exist in each area – but what they all have in common is the ability to show that a centre is an integral part of the economic development program, not just a way to attract new visitor spending.

Usually, these are the kinds of initiatives that happen when a new economic crisis hits – and are just as quickly abandoned when things get better. This time, there hasn’t been enough time between downturns for this to happen, so the programs have been ongoing. Let’s hope this is the way of the future – and that the industry truly has redefined itself in a way that will become our dominant image in the future.

Edgar Hirt, AIPC President

Member Survey Tracks Key Issues

The results of the second comprehensive AIPC member survey were presented at the 2011 Annual Conference in San Diego and took a step forward with a new format that provides a regional breakout of key results to enable the reader to compare how key issues are unfolding differently in various parts of the world. The survey, carried out in conjunction with Red7 Communications, is designed to assist members plan their own strategies, and is both tracking evolving industry trends while at the same time adding new areas of importance during a period of recovery and change.

The survey continues to attract high levels of participation, which makes the results highly reliable from a statistical perspective. Even with the regional breakout, where some regional numbers are relatively small, the proportion of total membership represented in the samples are high enough to give good reliability, which makes the results even more useful.
This year’s AIPC Annual Conference in San Diego, USA addressed both the challenges facing the industry and the opportunities that are available to those who respond appropriately. Starting with a warning that the global economic concerns are far from over, sessions progressed to the kinds of specific strategies and actions that centres should be taking in response, and how many have already begun to do so – lending a positive note to what otherwise included some dire predictions.

The tone was set for the Conference theme “It’s All About Change” by opening keynote speaker David Blanchflower, a former member of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee, and Professor of Economics at Dartmouth College named ‘Business Person of the Year’ by the Daily Telegraph. As the first policy-maker from the Bank, Treasury or Financial Services Authority to warn that the UK faced recession, he outlined his concerns for the current state of global economics and advised delegates that a return to robust growth should not be taken for granted and that a long period of slow recovery punctuated by periodic setbacks was much more likely. During this period, governments will be looking desperately for economic stimulus tactics and centres need to keep that in mind as they plan both their business prospects and the ways in which they interact with government owners.

Blanchflower’s strategic advice was followed by a series of reports on both major geographic areas and key sectors including association business, the exhibition industry and event planners interacting with both corporate and association clients. The common themes were modest growth combined with an ongoing need for flexibility and caution. Presenters also identified the need for a greater effort to look for new services that can generate value for both suppliers and clients and new ways of organizing business relationships that can again benefit both parties in times that are financially challenging for everyone.

The third major component of the program addressed the ways in which member centres are already addressing the challenges they face with a range of new planning, programming and community interaction programs. These elements included new approaches to revenue generation, facility design and refurbishment, the rise of premium food and beverage and managing change in a centre environment. Also addressed were the ways in which centres in various parts of the world are adjusting their arguments around the role they play in economic development in order to attract new attention and investment from governments and communities.
Driving much of the program were the results of a comprehensive member survey carried out in the months immediately prior to the Conference that covered business confidence, performance results, key economic and business factors and new response tactics. The survey was completed in a way that enabled the wide variety of topics it contained to be broken out by region in order to enable a comparison of how various factors are playing out in different parts of the world.

“What we learned didn't necessarily make those of us hoping for a speedy recovery entirely happy, but there was general agreement that a realistic assessment of business conditions combined with a spirited discussion of tactics for response provided members with the best possible value for their participation”, said Hirt.

“I think we all consider ourselves to be better prepared for the challenges of the future as a result of what was conveyed in the course of the Conference and this is the best outcome we could have achieved.”
New AIPC Members, Board Additions Maintain Global Representation

New Members and Board elections completed in conjunction with the General Assembly at AIPC’s 2011 Annual Conference in San Diego combined to ensure a diverse and continuing global representation for the membership.

In Board elections, Iker Goikoetxea Mendoza, who is the Managing Director of the Kursaal Congress Centre in San Sebastian, Spain, replaced Marisa Marin as a Spanish representative and Peter Gunn, the Chief Executive of the Bournemouth International Centre replaced previous UK Board member Jacqui Rogers. Re-elected for subsequent terms were current Board member Carol Wallace, CEO of the San Diego Convention Center Corporation, Treasurer Jonas Scharf, Managing Director of Congress Centre Basel; Vice President Geoff Donaghy, representing Cairns Convention Centre in Australia and President Edgar Hirt of Congress Centre Hamburg. Board Member Clare Amsel, Director of Conferences of the Megaron Athens International Conference Centre, was re-elected in 2010 and remained in this position. At the same time, AIPC welcomed seven new centre members to the Association, again representing a broad global mix. The seven are the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center, Boston; the Atatürk Congress Culture Center, Bursa (Turkey); ICE Krakow Congress Centre; the Los Angeles Convention Centre; the Centro Banamex Convention and Exhibition Centre, Mexico City and the Sokolniki Exhibition and Convention Centre, Moscow.

Brisbane and Québec Achieve AIPC Quality Standards “Gold”

Two more AIPC member centres – the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre in Australia and the Québec City Convention Centre in Canada – have achieved AIPC Quality Standards accreditation at the “Gold” level and both intend to put their new credentials to good use.

Said BCC General Manager, Bob O’Keeffe: “In the very early days of the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC) we made a strategic commitment to establish our credentials as a successful and globally responsible organisation and to pursue a sustainable and ethical future for our clients, our staff and our community. This was fundamental to our decision to seek AIPC Quality Standards Certification.”

O’Keeffe noted that being ranked among the top three convention centres on three separate occasions in the AIPC Apex Award for The World’s Best Congress Centre, accreditation in the form of ISO 9001 and ISO 22000 and having received 113 industry awards since opening in 1996 has added extra stimulus and further credence to their decision.

“All of these achievements require intense and detailed auditing and documentation for benchmarking purposes which thankfully formed the basis for our submission. It became a fairly straightforward process using existing documentation to demonstrate our eligibility for the certification.”

The AIPC Quality Standards certification process refocussed BCEC their overall objectives and helped them identify areas where they could raise the bar even further. At the same time, it also helped to engage staff and reinforce their commitment to a quality product and performance.

“We were thrilled and very gratified to receive Gold Certification and have already proudly communicated this achievement to our clients, our stakeholders and our staff and will continue to do so through our regular communication and marketing activities locally, nationally and internationally”, said O’Keeffe. “BCEC operates in a very competitive global marketplace where providing quality customer service and operational performance is critical to our competitiveness and success”.

Québec City Convention Centre CEO P – Michel Bouchard agrees. “In an increasingly complex international context and growing competition, we wanted a seal of quality to validate our orientations, methods and procedures. The AIPC Quality Standard is an extensive exercise to say the least and this standard establishes the Québec City Convention Centre among the leading international convention centres”.

Bouchard noted that the QS process was an intense but achievable one. “Since our opening in 1996, we have thoroughly documented our methods and procedures. The challenge for our team was to put together a solid application to obtain the highest level of the standard. The amount of available information was impressive and represented a challenge in itself. We dedicated an employee to the gathering and compiling of information. This person did a tremendous job; he led the process and prepared a general overview that proved priceless.

Bouchard said they also found that because the standard is multidisciplinary, every department had to be involved at some point in the process, and as a result team building was a huge benefit since each department had to produce and give documents detailing methods and procedures by sector of activity.

“It was incredibly satisfying for all involved to see years of work used to obtain such a prestigious international certification”. The benefits will be long term, he said. “As for any recognition or award, the AIPC Quality Standard certification will further establish our credibility and hopefully bring to light the amazing work done by our team. Ultimately, the customers will benefit from this standard. We intend to use your new qualification going forward by practising continuous improvement and using the certification as a building block to manage every aspect of our operations and customer service”.

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Delegates to the 2011 AIPC Annual Conference in San Diego were treated to a new supply of innovative management, marketing and operations concepts and two AIPC member centres walked away with top recognition as a result of this year’s edition of the AIPC Innovation Award.

The Award was divided between an overall Award winner that is selected by a panel of judges including AIPC Board representatives, previous Award winners and outside industry / business consultants, and the “Member’s Choice” Award which is determined on the basis of a vote by Conference delegates following their participation in a poster session. The poster session is an integral part of the conference program, and all Award finalists participate by preparing a poster-formatted description of their innovation and engaging with other delegates to answer questions in a special session.

The overall 2011 Innovation Award winner was the Vancouver Convention Centre, which it earned for its Service Excellence Program, comprised of distinctive service practices and standards reflecting the organization’s purpose, values and guest service promise. The Service Excellence Program touches every area of operation, every department and supplier and each employee, from Daily Service Line-Ups and a Guest Ambassador Team to creative delegate giveaways and a public tour program.

The 2011 Member’s Choice Award winner was Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre for their Touchpoint system which was conceptualised and designed internally and built as a first-of-its kind mobile interactive digital signage to meet the varied requirements unique to the Centre. It affords a fully integrated digital platform with sophisticated displays and high interactivity encompassing a variety of services, including a business directory of events, real-time live information including news feed, weather and transport details and an interactive way-finder.

“The AIPC Innovation Award reflects AIPC’s mission of encouraging and recognizing excellence in congress centre management”, said AIPC President Edgar Hirt. “The Award is made for specific projects or initiatives that represent “innovation” in the true sense of the word; that is, the development of a new, more creative or more effective approach to any aspect of congress centre management, operations or marketing”.

Some of the key findings this year included:

While there has been evidence of a business recovery from earlier years, this is highly variable in different parts of the world.

“Macro” economic factors that are largely out of the control of individual centres are driving business prospects (i.e., economy, competition, oil prices)

New construction and planning has slowed somewhat with a shift toward renovation / refurbishment of existing facilities. However, the growth in convention and exhibition business has been modest by comparison with supply.

Associations remain the strongest business sector in most areas, with a “buyer’s market” firmly in place and more negotiations as a result.

Centres are getting the message about communicating their key role in economic development with over 70% putting more emphasis on community, government and business relations in their respective communities.

New revenue streams are starting to look limited with fewer centres reporting new initiatives in this regard.

Some areas of the survey, such as business growth, event priorities and the methods used to measure performance display distinct differences in various regions, suggesting that there are still many different approaches and tactics members can learn from each other.

The full presentation as delivered at the Annual Conference is available for review on the AIPC web site along with other conference materials.

“Member Survey Tracks Key Issues”
Leigh Harry to Assume Senior Government Role

Leigh Harry has resigned as Chief Executive of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) to accept the role of Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Victoria and Deputy Secretary, Tourism and Aviation, Department of Business and Innovation as of September 23, 2011.

“Leigh has overseen the development of MCEC into a world class convention and exhibition centre from the time it was a building site in 1989 to today when it has become one of the world’s leading convention and exhibition destinations,” said Tourism and Major Events Minister, Louise Asher MP. “Tourism is a crucial Victorian industry and his experience will be invaluable in the years ahead.”

As Chief Executive of the MCEC Harry has been a well respected figure in the national and international business events industry. He is the President of the Joint Meetings Industry Council and was the President of the International Congress and Convention Association from 2006 to 2010. In addition, he is also the Deputy Chairman of the Melbourne Convention + Visitors Bureau; Chairman of the Business Events Council of Australia; and past president of Meetings and Events Australia.

Recruitment for the MCEC’s new Chief Executive has commenced, however during the interim period the MCEC’s Deputy Chief Leighton Wood will be acting chief executive.

A Major New Addition for the 2012 AIPC Academy

An announcement in the AIPC Program Update session prior to the General Assembly confirmed that the AIPC Academy program will expand in 2012 to include a new advanced component to be known as the Management Symposium. This will join with the Academy’s Professional Development Program which started five years ago as an efficient and effective way for centres to address the need to expand the perspectives of staff preparing for more senior management responsibilities and to orient individuals who already had their professional credentials in another field but needed to learn more about the specifics of our industry.

In contrast, the AIPC Academy Management Symposium has been designed to meet the needs of existing managers who already have significant centre management experience and who are looking for a forum in which they can work with Academy Faculty and colleagues on developing strategies to meet today’s most pressing management needs. This program, designed as a highly interactive forum, will take up where the Professional Development Program left off by offering a workshop format and a higher level management approach to problem-solving while further encouraging the kinds of industry networks that can open future doors to ongoing cooperation and exchange.

The Management Symposium will be targeted to management level attendees with 5 or more years working in a convention centre management capacity with supervisory and decision making responsibilities and / or have already completed the first year course. It is intended to provide an opportunity for those that have already attended the Academy to continue with their learning and networking opportunities at a more senior level and to generate productive interactions between “new” managers and those with more extensive experience.

As the program is designed to focus on the issues that are unique to the management of congress centres, topics will focus on current issues and addressed through a format of case study presentations followed by workshop-formatted analysis and the development of interactive group solutions in a “think tank” approach. Topics currently under consideration for the first year include such areas as changing business dynamics in the Meetings Industry; leadership, change management and problem solving; strategic planning; innovative business practices and the development of new revenue sources.

www.aipc.org
Asia’s rise as MICE central has been nothing short of meteoric. Asia now hosts more than one fifth of the world’s meetings, while the region currently offers a total gross indoor space of over six million square meters. As Asian cities jostle to build more facilities to vie for a piece of the MICE pie, how do existing venues stay ahead of the game and expand their market share?

In today’s venue business, capacity is commoditized. Established centres have to reinvent themselves through innovative solutions and good governance to create the defining difference that enhances the event experience and meets the evolving needs of event organizers who today are increasingly focused on generating higher returns on investment (ROI) for all parties in the MICE value chain. At the same time, global conferences are also rightsizing into decentralized intimate sessions to speak directly to their target audiences. Venue managers therefore need to move beyond capacity supremacy to adopt a strong people-centric approach towards operational excellence and creative solutions where partnership and customer focus are the priorities. Leading spaces must now focus on developing ancillary services like hassle-free internet connections, delegate-focused concierge services and intelligent technical capabilities like mood lighting systems and video conferencing technology to differentiate themselves.

In this ROI-driven environment, quality assurance and smooth event delivery are more important than ever. Venues can demonstrate their commitment to customer-centric quality management systems through the adoption of industry best practices and globally recognized certifications like the ISO 9001:2008 achieved by Singex. These reflect a venue manager’s longstanding commitment to good governance and 360° customer service approach, and assure end-users of a fuss-free event experience.

Adding to the list of concerns today are potential security threats and natural disasters. To cope with the realities of a changing world, venues must prepare robust and responsive crisis communication and disaster recovery plans. Critical business functions should be reviewed regularly with partners and public agencies such as the civil defense, and venue managers can work towards receiving certification in business continuity management, like the BS25999 and SSS40:2008 awarded to Singex, to signify that their centres are able to resume operations during service disruption within a reasonable timeframe and with minimal interruption.

Finally, good governance also extends to good citizenship. Green initiatives are becoming less of a flash-in-the-pan trend and more of a business requirement. From energy efficiency to waste minimization and sustainable goods procurement, venue managers should reflect on the carbon footprint left by their properties and incorporate environmentally-conscious measures into their daily operations. Replacing artificial light with natural light in walkways and recycling waste after each event are two common eco-friendly practices for venues. At EXPO – managed by Singex - air-conditioning systems use NEWater to cool chillers, while MAX Atria (EXPO’s enhanced convention wing opening in early 2012) is certified Green Mark Platinum, having integrated innovative sustainability features in its construction.

As major Asian economies continue to forecast strong economic growth for 2011 and beyond, Asia is set to be the focal point for trade and investment in years to come. Continued focus on good governance and operational excellence can only be positive, motivating venue players to collectively raise industry standards through healthy competition and contribute to an even more vibrant and dynamic MICE landscape.

**Upcoming AIPC Professional Development Opportunities!**

Once again this year, AIPC will be staging a series of professional development programs specifically designed to meet the needs of centres managers and their staff. With dates now scheduled, it’s time to decide which of your team should be taking advantage of these opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and share the benefits of our collective member experience. Here are the next offerings:

**AIPC Facility Operations Summit**
- **Barcelona | Nov 27–28, 2011**
  - Held in conjunction with the EIBTM trade show, this session brings together operations and event managers from around the world in a two day program designed to address key operations issues and strategies while accessing new expertise in areas of collective interest.

**AIPC Academy Professional Development Program**
- **Brussels | Feb 5–10, 2012**
  - An efficient and effective way for centres to address the need to expand the perspectives of staff preparing for more senior management responsibilities and to orient individuals who already had their professional credentials in another field but needed to learn more about the specifics of our industry.

**AIPC Academy Management Symposium**
- **Brussels | Feb 5–8, 2012**
  - Created to meet the needs of existing managers who already have significant centre management experience and who are looking for a forum in which they can work with Academy Faculty and colleagues on developing strategies to meet today’s most pressing management needs.

**AIPC Academy Sales & Marketing Summit**
- **Frankfurt | May 20, 2012**
  - A “must attend” session for sales and marketing managers who need to keep up on the latest market developments, and an opportunity to exchange perspectives and strategies with other centres from around the world.

Space is limited so register now at www.aipc.org
An Interview with UIA

An associate of the Meetings Industry for many years, the Union of International Associations (UIA) is a research institute and documentation centre registered as an international non-profit association under Belgian law. It was founded in the 1907–1910 period, re-established following World War 2 and has remained one of the most important sources of information about organizations worldwide and the activities such as meetings and conventions they hold. AIPC Communiqué interviewed Joel Fischer, Head of UIA Congress Department and Co-editor of the Yearbook of International Organizations, to find out what its activities and priorities are today;

Who are your members? What do they expect from you? In the main the UIA is not a traditional membership organization. It has Active Members who are elected to their position, and whose membership is capped at 200 persons and an Associate Membership which is open to a broad range of offices and institutions. The majority of the current Associate Members are in the meetings industry. 

Active Members participate in the institutional life of the UIA and comprise the major intuitional organs. Associate Members look to the UIA for quality information and services (data, statistics etc) related to understanding the community of international associations and their global meetings activity.

What are your objectives as an organization? Our objectives according to our Statutes are: 
• Contribute to a universal order based on principles of human dignity, solidarity of peoples and freedom of communication 
• Facilitate the development and efficiency of non-governmental networks in every field of human activity, especially non-profit and voluntary associations, considered to be essential components of contemporary society 
• Collect, research and disseminate information on international bodies, both governmental and non-governmental, their interrelationships, their meetings, and problems and strategies they are dealing with 
• Experiment with more meaningful and action-oriented ways of presenting such information to enable these initiatives to develop and counterbalance each other creatively, and as a catalyst for the emergence of new forms of associative activity and transnational co-operation, and 
• Promote research on the legal, administrative and other problems common to these international associations, especially in their contacts with governmental bodies

What kinds of activities do you carry out to address these objectives?
The main activities of the UIA at this point in time are documentary, publishing and public education / outreach. Recent years have also seen an increase in our activity to work with partners to bring international associations together to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern.

How many organizations are in your database today? What kinds of information do you gather about them? There are approximately 35,000 active organizations described in the UIA’s database out of a total of 64,000 entries. There are approximately 300,000 international meetings described in the UIA’s meetings database (the International Congress Calendar).

The annual International Meetings Statistics report covers some 12,000 events for the preceding year as well as the historic scope of events over the past decades.

How do you see UIA activities as most relevant to global issues? This is a multifaceted question for us. On the one hand we are a record keeper, noting the existence of associations and initiatives which are no longer active. In many cases dating through the late 1800s and first half of the 20th Century the UIA’s information is the only organized record of the life of these organizations.

In the current world and looking forward, UIA’s interlinked databases on international organizations, international meetings and world problems & solutions are a powerful tool for understanding the complexity of global issues and the policy environment that can foster effective action. This element is further advanced by the many graduate students who work with our data and with whom we often cooperate.

What should people in the meetings industry know about you? The UIA is the most comprehensive source of information on international associations, their activities and concerns, and their meetings activities. This information is of obvious value to those in the business of facilitating and accommodating the meetings component of these activities.