A SHORT REPORT:  
by the  
Secretary General, the  
2011 Wuhan Congress.

The future lies somewhere; in the cards?

THE PRESENT STAFF SITUATION IN THE HAGUE:

A. although there is a clear and demonstrable need to employ a replacement for the previous Chief Executive, there is no immediate possibility of being able to fund a new appointment to assume the role vacated by the previous incumbent. This is likely to continue to be the position for the foreseeable future. The complex negotiations for bringing the long association with Ms. Judy van Hemert to a successful outcome was finally concluded in February of this year, 2011. The settlement was very costly and heavily depleted our financial resources. The first priority for the Society now, is to bring our finances back into a stable balance. The second priority is to build up a financial reserve of at least one year of operating costs and related expenses as a reserve fund.

B. possible short term interim measures could include vacating our Hague office and operating as a virtual office. This measure would save around one thousand euros per month. There would be no change in the level of service that the staff would provide to the ISOCARP membership. As this would only be a temporary measure for say, one year, there would be a continuation of “business as usual” for the Society and its Hague Staff. There would be a number of significant problems and downsides, however, created by such a move, e.g. interim storage of archives, direct staff interfacing, photo copying, etc.
Proposition 1: the Society could consider operating as a virtual office until such times as our financial position significantly improves. It is difficult to see how this can be less than two years given the present International economic climate. However, as has been said above, there would be certain significant and related problems.

Proposition 2: the Society could eventually replace Ms Judy van Hemert with a person skilled and experienced in fund raising as well as office management.

Proposition 3: the Society could consider a possible move to new premises in the Hague for the reasons outlined below in a.b.c and d?

There could be some potential economic advantage for the Society if we moved our headquarters to the Binkhorstlaan Building in the Hague. This would link the Society more closely with IFHP, a move which IFHP would certainly welcome as it would reinforce the MOU which was signed by the two organisations. It is also linkage that the Dutch Ministry want to encourage. The reasons for this are as follows: -

a. the Ministry has indicated that it will not renew the thirty thousand euros that it was paying us each year for the past few years. The present global economic problems have obviously also badly affected Holland and its public finances. The availability of cash is quite limited and therefore prioritised.

b. The Ministry, however, is very keen to see a range of proposals coming from both organisations, preferably where the two Societies would work closely together in partnership. The Ministry could consider this new type of project for designation as UPAT type projects. In other words, they are open to considering a range of projects which are exciting, needed and, above all, innovative. It is understood that this new arrangement could either be a single or multi-faceted proposal stretching across an extended range of projects.

c. The ministry would prefer the two organisations, ISOCARP and IFHP, to be in relatively close proximity to their own Ministry offices.

d. certain ideas and proposals have now been put to the Ministry and other concepts are also being explored with IFHP. Any good, useful and innovative ideas coming from the grass-root membership of our Society would be greatly welcomed. If you have one, let us know.
THE LOGISTICS OF OUR PRESENT POSITION:

It is very clear that the Society has an ongoing logistical problem with regard to the Hague office. In the absence of a salaried Executive Director, I have put into practice, a weekly Skype between the Hague staff and myself. This virtual meeting allows me to keep in touch with things as they are developing especially with regard to difficult problems which do arise from time to time. The minutes of these Skype meetings are distributed to all members of EXCO within a day and, occasionally, within a couple of hours. The system is working quite efficiently and will remain active as a short stop-gap measure for the time being.

While present management procedures are working quite well, they only do so up to a point especially when there is a big pressure build-up such as occurs in the period of intensive activity in the run-up to a Congress. I have offered several ideas about how this could be managed in the immediate short term and I am still awaiting responses to those proposals.

The staff presently consists of one full-time member, Monica and a part time member, Gaby who works for a nominal 25 hours per week. In addition, we have the part-time services of Lucian who is indirectly employed by us on a consultant basis. By any system of measurement, this staff compliment is too small for the complex work involved. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that Gaby has to work very long additional hours to ensure that the Congress work can be done and done in good time. She has worked well in excess of 200 hours just to make sure that everything for the Congress was ready. We also employed a student for a month to help out at the peak pressure period and there was also one other young student from England who worked for us over a two week period. That cost the Society, 50 euros pocket money.

We do need a workable formula and I am presently considering the problem. I hope to be able to eventually put some short term ideas before EXCO in due course.

At present, there seems to be an inescapable conclusion that there is a large and inconsistent gap between having aspirations to be a world class global Society and, at the same time, having such a mismatch between that global objective and our present tiny staff and financial
resources.

Proposition 4: prepare a contingency plan for addressing the short term problems.

SITGES AND THE OUTSTANDING DEBT OF 60,000 EUROS:

As everyone is aware, Spain has been very badly affected by the global financial turmoil. This has clearly had a knock-on effect on Sitges. The recent elections in Sitges, however, have seen a change of administration and I have recently received details of the new Mayor and Chief Executive. I will write to the City asking that they acknowledge that the Society is owed 60,000 euros by the City and expect to be paid just as soon as the City can do so. It would be inadvisable to write off this money as the sum is just too large constituting, as it does, almost six months of our annual operating costs.

Proposition 5: arrange to visit Sitges in 2012 to have face to face discussions with the Mayor and relevant City Officials to negotiate some method whereby the City can discharge its debt to ISOCARP.

Proposition 6: alternatively, consider writing off the debt which means that it could be removed from our accounts immediately.
AN ACTION/BUSINESS PLAN FOR THE SOCIETY:

The Society is presently faced with the unprecedented chaos in the world’s money markets. The last report I saw indicated that global debt is now running into several trillions of dollars (a trillion is 1,000,000,000,000 or, ten to the power of twelve). Italy, alone, has a National Debt of 1.5 trillion. My view has been and remains constant in that the Society needs:

(1). A proper foundation for change and modernisation as a prerequisite. This will occur with the ongoing revision of the Articles of Association presently being prepared by the Sydney group. Their intention is to complete the draft for full consultations and have everything finalised for approval of and by the Society at the 2012 annual ISOCARP Congress now to be held in Perm, Russia.

(2). Our financial position must be significantly improved by any means that are open to us. Member suggestions would be most welcome.

(3). A Business/Action plan must be prepared to support (1) and (2).

In regard to item (3), I circulated the Action Plan element to EXCO and it was then subsequently placed on our web site for general inspection by all Society members.

The first Draft of the Business Plan should hopefully be ready by the end of January 2012. By that time, it is to be hoped that the global economies will be beginning to show some signs of revival and fresh growth. The combined Business/Action Plan could allow the Society to move forward with confidence as it will define a course of steady growth as well as identify how this might be achieved.

Proposition 7: Prepare a draft Business Plan for the next EXCO meeting i.e. the Winter meeting. Where and when is this meeting to be held?

Summary:
While it cannot be denied that things from the global financial standpoint are not great, it should be emphasised, however, that the Society has a lot of potentially very bright stars ahead of us. We have, for example, excellent prospects of having UPATs in China, Kenya, Russia, and Croatia. We will be signing MOUs with Kenya to consolidate the work that the President has been doing with UN Habitat, Nairobi. This could result in a combination of proposals to include teaching UPATs similar to the one recently undertaken in Abu Dhabi and professional UPATs along the usual project lines. There is the proposed ISOCARP Institute designed to help widen our fields of interest and a
new Vice President to push it forward. We are also concluding a follow-up Teaching/Professional UPAT in Abu Dhabi. This latter is especially good because it is a clear acknowledgement of the great quality of the first Abu Dhabi UPAT and how well that programme was received by the participants.

FUTURE CONGRESSES:

The only contender for the 2012 Congress is the Russian City of Perm and it is expected that the first MOU to confirm this will be signed during this Congress. There is a strongly expressed interest in holding the 2013 Congress in the Australian City of Brisbane and other potential bidders include, Oran, the second largest City in Algeria and Dublin, Ireland.

PUBLICATIONS:

The Vice President for Publications, Chris Gossop, working in conjunction with others, most notably Shi Nan, the Secretary General of the Urban Planning Society of China, UPSC, has achieved a remarkable turnaround for the standards of our publications. The quality is getting ever higher. So much so, that the Routledge Company has agreed to place 600 copies of this year’s Review with book sellers. Great work Chris and I, for one, will be sorry to see you go. Shi Nan will take up the challenge with a sure and steady hand, of that, I am sure.

THE ELECTIONS:

As always, when election time comes around for EXCO we know that some excellent EXCO members will be leaving. This time around we will be losing the services of Zeynep Enlil, Francisco Perez (Paco), Chris Gossop and Jim Colman. While their excellence and dedication will be
sorely missed they will be replaced, nonetheless, with equally excellent professionals all dedicated to ISOCARP and its future wellbeing.

A really big collective thank you to Zeynep, Jim, Paco and Chris for all your splendid service to the Society. Above all, please stay close so that the new VPs can share your experience and knowledge.

I am sure that the entire Society share my enthusiasm and optimism that the new raft of Vice Presidents will add greatly to the developing reputation the Society has for delivering superb products at the International level and always in good time. So, a very big welcome to our incoming new Vice Presidents: Jeremy Dawkins (Congress and Events), Australia: Martin Dubbeling (UPATs), the Netherlands: Khalid El Adli (Members and NDs), Egypt: Piotre Lorens (YPPs), Poland: Shipra Narang Suri (Technical Assistance - Projects), India: Shi Nan (Publications), China: David Prosperi (Academic Development), USA and President Elect, Milica Brkovic, Serbia.

I remain optimistic that despite the many limitations of the email communication system that communications will improve by keeping correspondence focussed, on target and relevant. Above all that communication will be both effective and consistent as required.

Hard at work and always to the point.
Proposition 8: it is proposed that the email system is used judiciously by EXCO members and kept effective by 1. all correspondence being read and, 2. where and when required, answering promptly.

Proposition 9: There is the ever constant need to keep improving our methods of communication so that every member can also let the Society share their ideas, thoughts and problems. Towards this end, some future consideration could be given to setting up an interactive platform.

In the meantime, still playing cards!

alex macgregor
Secretary General
ISOCARP