

Congress Theme and Objectives

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ISoCaRP 2002 Congress will examine one of the most formidable and demanding challenges facing contemporary urban planners and managers: how to cope with the 'pulsar effect' as it relates to the provision of urban services, facilities and infrastructure.

In exploring this theme, the Congress offers a focussed opportunity for the exchange of professional experiences, lessons and knowledge amongst planners and researchers who have dealt with "pulses" - these being the peaks, troughs and recurrent or repeat events which have a distorting effect on the day-to-day operations of the modern city.

These events may be shaped by a formal planning process or by haphazard and unpredictable forces, which put them beyond normal control mechanisms. They often demand new operational arrangements, new forms of governance, and new approaches to participation and partnership. The context for urban professionals is one within which traditional and well-tested rationales may have to be discarded in favour of expedient procedures, inadequate research and analysis, and superficial assessments of supply and demand. Importantly, it is a context in which it is easy to make mistakes whose consequences for society may be far-reaching and costly.

Within this thematic context, Congress 2002 will address key questions including the following:

- How should planners cope with "pulse" events?
- Does our traditional focus on spatial planning adequately equip us to respond successfully to peak and recurrent demands in a context where the time dimension is uncertain, unexpected and unpredictable?
- How should we deal with the post-event situation - the 'hand-over' syndrome - when the city has to recover and revert to normality?

Some possible Approaches

Two areas of development activity involving pulses are particularly familiar and are the focus of much planning effort in many countries:

- the provision of tourist resorts and settings for second or vacation home
- the so-called 'big events' such as Olympic Games, World Expos, trade fairs and the like.

Other sectors may not yet have the same profile but can be included in the list. They include national and international religious and cultural festivals; the special events hosted by the United Nations and other international agencies; and the great gatherings of artists, scientists and scholars which occur from time to time and which tend to stretch local resources to the limit. Also included are the politically important projects such as prestige buildings and infrastructure - often generated by the ego or ambition of a leader.

In some of these cases the issue has already received much study and there is a considerable fund of knowledge and experience available. Many questions await more detailed attention, however - including

- how to reconcile peak or high season demands with those of the low or post - peak season;
- how to achieve efficient and profitable year-round use of big and costly infrastructure;
- how to achieve sustainability in fields often associated with extravagance and waste;
- how to ensure that a share of profits from successful 'pulse' events is directed back to the community in return for inconvenience and loss of amenity during the event;
- what are the critical environmental factors which must be addressed when dealing with major pulse events - is the concept of "carrying capacity" of value?
- and so on.

With the "big bang" events such as Olympic Games, planners are required to provide solutions for events which take place over a short period of time, which are designed to attract massive patronage, and which typically are highly demanding in land consumption, human resources, building materials and infrastructure. Whilst these mega-events are often seen as being very beneficial in a financial sense, they can also bring temporary but severe distortions and adverse impacts to local communities.

Typically, a shift in resource-allocation priorities from traditional infrastructure in small but important projects - dispersed throughout the city - to big investments concentrated in fewer places, may also cause new social or spatial inequalities in the cities.

How should society best deal with these events and with the necessary post-event adjustments?

Here we must acknowledge that there has been a tendency to form opinions and develop arguments which relate only to the benefits of pulses. The big projects and events can add prestige to the national identity and can help cities - and nations - to justify huge investments in replacing old facilities with new. Pulses are seen as bringing competitive advantages as cities compete with each other to attract investment, to better position themselves in the global market, and to present themselves as powerful and prestigious economic players.

But planners need to be aware that there is always a downside.

In the particular case of the big event it is the 'post-mortem' period which is of critical importance. Typically, the post-event time will be characterised by a sudden and massive collapse in demand for services or facilities, by an oversupply of infrastructure, or by a surplus labour force whose jobs have suddenly become redundant.