

6 April 1999 revised version

Reflections on the 1998 IFSAM World Congress at Alcalá, Spain *

This excellent world congress was held in mid-July 1998. The theme of the Fourth International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management (IFSAM) World Congress was 'Globalisation: Impact on Management, Education, Research and Practice'. It was gratifying that the congress included such a wide range of people from many different countries and perspectives.

The Congress was organised with great flair and enthusiasm by IFSAM President, Professor Santiago Echevarria and his colleagues at the University of Alcalá. Alcalá de Henares is an old city about an hour's drive from Madrid. It is best known as the birthplace of Miguel de Cervantes, author of the celebrated *Don Quixote*. There were prehistoric settlements at Alcalá, then a Roman city, Complutum, which the Arabs rebuilt. Alcalá means castle in Arabic. Subsequently Christians destroyed Alcalá and rebuilt it.

The first colleges were established there in the year 938. In 1293 a Royal Charter was granted and in 1499 they were transformed into a University. It developed a fine reputation and some of the earliest universities in America were modelled on it! However, Alcalá's splendour lasted for only a century. Unlike contemporary universities, Alcalá experienced shortages of funds and resources, internal rivalries and feuds! (Would such experiences be understood by current readers?)

In 1836 the University moved to Madrid. Alcalá's grand buildings became military quarters. (Walking between them brought the music and scenes from Bizet's opera *Carmen* into mind.) The University did not return to Alcalá until 1977, after General Franco's demise. It soon regained much of its past glory and now has 16,000 students.

Some of the Congress delegates were lucky enough to be housed in the beautiful old Higher College of San Ildefonso. Rodrigo Gil de Hontanón designed the building. (He also designed several famous cathedrals in a similar style.) This building is a jewel of the Spanish Renaissance. The Congress's opening ceremonies were held in its great hall (1516) and the University Chapel (1600). It has prominent stork nests on the belfry. The University's Chorus

offered a wonderful welcoming concert against the background of the stork's wings flapping and beaks chattering!

At the opening ceremony, the Spanish Secretary of State for Finance and the Economy contended that Spain is now one of the most open economies in the world. He gave a very positive account of the Spanish economy, and argued that, since joining the European Union (EU), Spain has changed from being one of the poorest economies in Europe to being an economic success story. Cynics might retort that most national treasurers would present similar glosses on their countries. But in the case of Spain, the data seem to support his assertions. Moreover, it may be even more successful when Spain abandons the Peseta and adopts the new Euro currency. He held that the European Monetary Union provided European economies with protection against the volatility that many Asian economies experienced in 1998.

The closing key note address was by a Japanese Director of Minolta, Europe. As might be expected, he presented a wonderful PowerPoint presentation. It was even more polished than most of the academics' presentations!

Abstracts of all of the academic papers are included in the Congress book. But fortunately delegates were spared the excess baggage costs likely to be incurred by carrying home the full papers as these were supplied on a CD-Rom.

Since there were more than seventy papers in parallel sessions with seven keynote speakers, and seven panel sessions, it would be impossible to summarise the whole conference in a short article. Therefore this account will include only a few impressions (further details can be gleaned from IFSAM's web site <http://ttg.sba.dal.ca/ifsam/>).

One reflection from several discussions, including that following the paper presented by this scribe (together with Russell Lansbury), is that notions of globalisation are not as new as some current proponents suggest. There was much evidence of globalisation, for example, in the nineteenth century by imperial powers, enterprises and even by unions.

For many participants, the fringe benefits of such conferences include the associated social, cultural, and technical programmes which help people get to know each other. This IFSAM Congress excelled on these fronts as well as having a varied and interesting academic programme.

Keep an eye on IFSAM's website for details of its future World Congresses e.g. 2000 in Montreal and 2002 in Australia.

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* It is acknowledged that this article is reproduced from Academy News Vol 13, No. 3, August 1998 (a periodical published by the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management).