

REPORT OF DR DAMASO DE LARIO
CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF COMMISSIONERS GENERAL OF SECTION AT THE 1988
WORLD EXPOSITION, BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA,
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1.- In spite of the initial lack of support and enthusiasm of the Australian Federal Authorities, as well as a negative Australian attitude, it is a forgone conclusion that at the end of the exercise World Expo 88 has been a resounding success. Two indicators are full proof of this:

(1).- An attendance of over 15 million visits (not including the staff ones), thus doubling the initial forecast by the Expo Authority of 7.8 million.

(2).- The recognition given by (i) the international community, with 36 international participants and the visits of 14 Heads of State and Government and a large score of Ministers and M.P.s and (ii) the Australian community at large, with the participation of all the States and major Territories of the Commonwealth of Australia.

2.- The reasons for that success have been basically three:

(i).- The great determination and flexibility displayed by the World Expo Authority Board -particularly at times of criticisms and national official scepticism - and in particular by its Chairman, Sir Llewellyn Edwards, whose leadership and skills have been fundamental to the overall success of the exercise.

(ii).- The attractiveness of the site which, in spite of its size (42 hectares only), combined esthetics, technology and entertainment and was essentially an amusing and attractive site.

(iii).- The international component, which gave a broad dimension to a rather locally oriented exposition, and provided a cosmopolitan flavour much appreciated by the visitor.

3.- That positive outcome of Expo 88 has provided the participating countries with a unique opportunity to gain a wide exposure in Australia and to have some echo within the South Pacific countries.

As for the State of Queensland and the City of Brisbane, Expo 88 has given them a relatively large exposure throughout the world and has of course lifted their profile immensely in Australia. The business community in general, and the tourism and hospitality industries in particular, have already drawn important benefits from it and are likely to maintain the trend at least in the medium term.

4.- Expo 88 was born as a "loser", as no one outside Queensland believed in its success. Now apart from the reasons stated in paragraph 2, it was the full support of the Queensland Government and the positive attitude of the Brisbane City Council what made the project a "winner". That support was maintained throughout the Expo period as the international participants could well appreciate, and recognition as well as appreciation should be given in full to both the Government of Queensland and the City of Brisbane for their cooperation and hospitality.

The Government of Australia, as it was often mentioned to the Steering Committee and to myself, strictly honoured the terms of the B.I.E. Convention from the very beginning, as the host country of Expo 88, but it was rather late in the exercise when the good-willed bureaucrats in charge of administering the Acts of the Australian Parliament were allowed to "stretch to their limits" the letter of the laws in order to help the international participants beyond the sheer letter of the Convention.

5.- The situation outlined in the previous paragraph originated a series of problems for the international participants that should, in my view, be put on record. These problems, although often related to one another, can be organized, for methodological purposes, around two main sets :

(i).- The need of the Expo 88 Authority to run the event as a business operation.

(ii).- The lack of substantial support of the Government of Australia of World Expo 88 Brisbane.

The need of the Expo 88 Authority to run the event as a business operation.

6.- With very limited Federal and State funding Expo 88 had to be approached by the Authority as a strict business operation, and although it has been a financial success, having even made a slight profit at the end of exercise, that has proven hard on the international

participants.

Thus, apart from the high cost of renting the pavilion space, the insurance premium for public liability to be borne by participants was originally fixed at the unusual high rate of \$A 12 per sq. meter, and later reduced to A\$ 8 after a long negotiation between the Expo Authority and the College of Commissioners General of Section.

Another example is covered parking. It was provided at the cost of A\$ 90 per month and vehicle, and limited to two vehicles only.

7.- That "need for money" approach made the Expo Authority initiate operations of a commercial nature notwithstanding the participants' interests or the commitments and rules previously established. Three significant examples at this regard were:

(i).- The food and beverage concessions given to a great number of mobile booths, some times even in locations which created problems with neighbouring pavilions.

(ii).- The operation of people movers on a paying basis, two months after the opening of Expo, in spite of the previous warning to participants that no vehicle would be admitted on site during operating hours for public safety reasons.

(iii).- The use of the helicopter pad for paying fun rides, when it was supposed to be used for V.I.P. transportation only. This created a continuous noise pollution problem in the vicinity of several pavilions, in particular of those of the U.S.A. and New Zealand.

8.- Other areas where the sheer business operation approach surfaced were:

(i).- The on site medical care in the initial period of Expo, which was dramatically below standards, although improvements were later made to deal with emergencies, upon the insistence of the Steering Committee.

(ii).- The violation of artistic property, such as the sale of postcards

reproducing art work in disregard of existing copyrights, as was the case of the United Nations pavilion.

The lack of substantial support of the Government of Australia of World Expo 88 Brisbane.

9.- Expo 88, although legally an international exposition, seemed to be de facto considered by the Australian Federal Government, at the beginning, as a Queensland affair basically with some external ramifications. It was only when the exposition appeared to be on the road to become a national and international success, that the Canberra authorities decided to change the approach and fully support the event.

That basic and essential attitude of the Government of Australia reflected at three levels:

(i) .- The attitude of the Expo 88 international participants.

(ii).- The absence of adequate legislation at Federal level to meet the special requirements of international expositions

(iii).- The little importance given by the Canberra Authorities to the Office of the Commissioner General of the Exposition.

(i).- The attitude of the Expo 88 Authority towards the international participants.

10.- It should be said from the outset that the goodwill and negotiating skills of the Expo Chairman, Sir Llewellyn Edwards, and the tireless efforts of the International Participants Division and its Director, Mr. Richard John, were the two elements that permitted the international participants to have an active role during the exposition and to act as partners at the event most of the time.

11.- The attitude, however, amongst most of the other Divisions of the Expo Authority, and in particular of the Operations Division, was that the running of Expo was the Authority's business and that the international participants - as well as the corporate ones - were "to play along", -although their voice could of course be heard.

That led to many a problem between the Steering Committee and the Expo Authority, that the strong attitude of the former and the

willingness to negotiate on both sides permitted to overcome.

- 12.- Nevertheless there was a low level of recognition - other than in verbal terms - by the Expo Authority in general of the role played by the international participants in the success of Expo 88.

Issues involving international participants tended to receive low priority and were often aggravated by deficient communications with the Divisions concerned.

On the other hand many a decision was taken by the Expo Authority without consultation, in matters affecting the operation of international pavilions.

- 13.- Some examples of the above mentioned situation were:

- The existing erratic rules - and their arbitrary implementation - on site access for special categories of visitors and even for pavilion employees.

- The re-design of some parts of the Expo site, in the pre-opening period, with scarce consultation with the participants, although it affected the public view or the traffic around certain pavilions.

- The need to insist once and again in order to have a better crowd control in certain areas.

- 14.- Finally it is to be noted that the Opening Ceremony of Expo 88 did not include the handing over of the B.I.E. emblems nor any special consideration for the Commissioners General of Section.

As for the Closing Ceremony, it was only after a long and intense negotiation that the international participants obtained adequate recognition in the ceremony itself and in the final speech of the Expo Chairman.

(ii).- The absence of adequate legislation at Federal level to meet the special requirements of international expositions.

- 15.- Although the Queensland Parliament approved an "Expo 88 Act" especially esigned to meet the specific needs created in the State by the exposition, the Federal Government did not propose to the Parliament of Australia any special legislation or provisions taking consideration the specific needs created. Hence the Australian authorities had to consider the international participants needs

and requests within the regular legal framework, which at times was less than adequate.

It must be noted however that the sensibility and good-will of the Federal Government representatives, and the tireless efforts of the Commissioner General of the Exposition, Sir Edward Williams, permitted to overcome many a difficulty and stretch to the limit existing legal possibilities. At any rate that proved to be insufficient in issues concerning immigration and immunities, and customs, duties and tax matters.

- 16.- As far as immigration matters were concerned, visas were issued by Australian Embassies to nationals employed by countries' pavilions according to the standard practice. Thus, foreign students residing in Australia on a temporary non-working visa status could not be issued with working permits to work at their national pavilions unless they left the Commonwealth of Australia and applied for an appropriate visa from another country.

Eventually a solution was found to overcome that problem in most cases, with the help of the Commonwealth Employment Service.

- 17.- No diplomatic or consular privileges were conferred upon the Commissioners General of Section or their Deputies, on a personal basis, unless they benefited from them by their previous status as was the case of Commissioners General who already were Consul-General of their countries in Australia.

These restrictive measures had practical consequences such as the payment of excise tax on all property purchased, the payment of visa fees for members of the family, the enforcement of all police rules such as the search of vehicles, and the payment of departure taxes at Australian airports.

As for the immunities, these were practically non-existing initially. After the matter was raised at an International Planning Meeting and I followed it up with the Commissioner General and the Senior Foreign Affairs Representative in Queensland, a limited series of immunities was conferred by the Federal Government and incorporated in the Expo 88 Protocol Regime.

- 18.- A procedure for the exertion of sales tax on local purchases of supplies or equipment related to pavilion building and operations was initiated only upon request by the international participants.

However the controls imposed upon the concession of exemptions were often excessive. Thus, it was necessary to produce a list of guests invited to a function prior to the opening of Expo, in order to obtain sales exemption on liquor.

- 19.- Donations of imported display items from pavilions were not permitted at the end of Expo unless custom duties and sales tax, when applicable, were paid - and except when these donations benefited Federal agencies, diplomatic missions or local national communities.

This measure, which contradicted policies followed in preceding expositions caused a great deal of frustration and resulted in the destruction of many pieces of exhibitory the donation of which to charitable institutions might have had a symbolic significance in the extension of goodwill towards the host country.

- 20.- A last sector in which adequate consideration to the

international participants lacked was in the unnecessary and cumbersome bureaucratic work imposed upon us in view of complying with the existing legal regulations to provide (i) statistics on sales performed by restaurants and other retail outlets, and (ii) monthly pay-roll of all employees including nationals with diplomatic status. This last measure, which concerned the Queensland State Authorities, was most unnecessary as pay-roll tax was not to be paid below a certain level of salaries.

21.- It must also be noted that the local services gave little consideration to the international usages especially in the area of taxation. Direct and sometimes harassing controls were enforced, in disregard of the prerogatives indulged by foreign official institutions and without even letting such controls be previously known by the Commissioners General of Section.

(iii).- The little importance given by the Canberra Authorities to the Office of the Commissioner General of the Exposition.

22.- The Commissioner General of the Exposition, Sir Edward Williams, not only lent his personal support, and that available at his Office, to the international participants, but also was an essential element in the organization and conduction of the National Days. It is only fair, therefore, to put on record his unabatable hard work and to praise him for the way he carried out his duties under difficult circumstances.

23.- It was quite clear to the international participants, from months before Expo 88 started, that the support given to the Commissioner General by the Federal Government was very limited, as his attempts to rectify many of the situations described above would not find, in most cases, adequate backing. That enhanced the role of the Expo Chairman, while diminished the Commissioner General's authority within the Expo framework, thus letting the Steering Committee of the College, and myself as its Chairman, directly confronted with the Expo Authority.

What has just been described was a de facto and awkward situation which we had to live with throughout Expo 88, and it was only thanks to the goodwill and common sense of the Commissioner General, the Expo Chairman and the Steering Committee that the problem could be sorted out in order to have a peaceful event.

24.- However the circumstances outlined here did not prevent this exposition to be a very successful and positive one, as it has already been said.

Expo 88 had of course many good points too, but I believed that to stress and try to explain the problems encountered would be far more helpful in the good running of future events than indulging in a bland and uncompromising report.

25.- Based on the Expo 88 Steering Committee experience and on the comments made here, I would like to propose the following

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1).- It would be most desirable that, in future, Expositions are not run on an exclusive profit-basis only. It is fair to assume that the tax-payer of the host country should not carry the full cost of organizing the event, but the host Government should be able to ensure substantial financial support.

(2).- I will repeat once again the recommendation of the Expo 70 Steering Committee Chairman, that the Expo 86 Steering Committee one, Mr. E.R.I. Allan already had reproduced in his report:

"The host government must accept its direct responsibility, develop procedures and amendments to existing laws and regulations to permit efficient implementation and planning, co-ordinating the jurisdiction of sub-governments involved with the site, give the host Commissioner General control of the exhibition organisation, and present to the foreign participants a straight forward command structure and a simple method of approaching problems".

As Expo 88 has proven, not to follow that recommendation can be a source of continuous problems for the international participants and ultimately put in jeopardy the success of a exposition.

(3).- It would be worth while that the B.I.E. considers the possibility of giving international expositions a similar status to the one that the international conferences have, within the framework of the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations.

That would solve at once many of the immunities and privileges problems that participating nations generally have in expositions.

(4).- When the exhibition organisation of an exposition adopts the system of "official suppliers", these should not have the monopoly of their area. Some degree of competition would enhance the quality of the services offered and improve the price structure.

- (5).- It would be most desirable that the B.I.E. devices a mechanism by which the Steering Committees of expositions can consult with it quickly and, in the event of disputes, find a swift solution to problems arisen during the event.
- (6).- A number of the recommendations proposed in the final report of the Expo 86 Steering Committee Chairman have been followed at Expo 88. Nevertheless, in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions here, it would be very useful to consider those recommendations in conjunction with these ones, as many of the suggestions made will still be very helpful when planning and running future events.
- 26.- I would like to commend the quality and imagination of the entertainment of Expo 88 that, together with the sitescaping, was one of the highlights of the exposition.
- 27.- I also wish to express my thanks to my colleague Commissioners General and Deputy Commissioners General of Section for their support throughout Expo 88. A special vote of thanks should go to the members of the Steering Committee, in particular to the Vice Chairman, Mr. Ian Fraser (Commissioner General of the New Zealand Section) and the Rapporteur, Ms. Katy Kalb (Deputy Commissioner General of the U.S.A. Section).
- 28.- Once again it has been proven that expositions are about nations letting one another know how they are in relaxed, pleasant and attractive atmosphere. They are, in fact, unique exercises on diplomacy of goodwill. That is why visitors enjoy them immensely, provided their organization and conduction is sound. And this is precisely what happened at World Expo 88. The international and corporate participants, and the Expo Authority were equally responsible for providing the basis for the excellent and successful event that this exposition was. The public did the rest. Thus, as long as the standards, the results and the spirit witnessed in Brisbane are maintained, I am sure that the future of international expositions is secured.