

UIA ASSOCIATIONS ROUND TABLES: Since 2007

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The UIA was founded in 1907 to document and promote the work of international associations, to provide information and education to international civil society actors. A century of documentation adds up to a lot of paper and ink. Ten years ago the UIA team lifted its collective head from its dusty desk and saw that, while information was present in abundance, education had been rather neglected of late. And so the UIA Associations Round Table was born. It celebrated its 10th anniversary this year.

It started in 2007, the first of our three years of centenary celebrations, with an academic session in the Natural History Museum in Brussels. Though dinosaurs were perhaps an ominous backdrop for a new project, the next two years saw the baby grow into a half-day event with an increasing number of international associations participating. In 2010, the end of our centenary celebrations, over 100 association representatives came and filled three quarters of a day with presentations and discussions. The venue that year is remembered as dark, cold and cavernous, but that too was not indicative of the baby's future: by 2012 we were welcoming 200 participants for a full-day programme characterised by bright ideas, warm connections, and inspiring talk.

UIA knows associations. It knows that most have limited staff, limited budget, limited time. Travelling to a Round Table is often not possible. So from 2013 the Round Table started travelling to associations. The baby became twins – Round Table Asia-Pacific and Round Table Europe – and, as behoves an inquisitive child, it has taken to the road. There are now flags on the map for Belgium, Singapore, Korea, Ireland, Thailand, Monaco, France, and Malaysia. Some 500 associations have sent representatives to one or more Round Tables so far.

And so we come to 2016, the 4th Round Table Asia-Pacific and the 10th Round Table Europe. Every UIA Round Table is an opportunity to share and explore the challenges and problems and benefits of international association work. Speakers are people working in and for associations, with knowledge and experience and stories to tell. Those stories expand into discussions and every time again the discussions make it clear that everyone in the room is a passionate and motivated expert: we are all involved in running associations and we all want to do it better.

Some topics come back again and again:

- strategic planning, staying relevant, ensuring the knowledge we have is passed on
- leadership, volunteering
- membership: serving the ones you have, finding new ones, rethinking models
- fundraising, creating partnerships, finding new revenue sources
- communication, publicity, public relations
- legal questions and VAT puzzles
- organizing meetings, and finding the help to do so
- democracy, social engagement and legacy: what impact do we make as associations?

In Busan, Korea, this year, a team of energetic speakers –Chris Champion, Hemant Batra, Octavio “Bobby” Peralta – led us through the life-cycle of an association. How does one get started? How does one encourage and manage growth? What tools are available and do they work? And, through it all, how does one ensure the association stays relevant?

In Monaco, Denise Farrar had us question our values and whether we show them in our communications. Susan West coached us in conversations that lead to results rather than frustration. Amara Amara took us through the steps of organizing major meetings. Paula Byrne gave examples of how we can do more by partnering with others. Chloe Menhinick reminded us that, however much we need modern tools, members come before technology.

At both Round Tables 2016, Cyril Ritchie called our special attention to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and how they can – or should – impact our association work.
(<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>)

At UIA we consider a Round Table a success if the participants go home with new ideas, with increased motivation, and with names of people with whom they want to stay in touch. What do the participants say?

- *Many good tips and valuable experiences for me to absorb and understand how associations face the real world.*
- *It was a great occasion to meet and learn from my peers.*

- *The interactive sessions were lively and engaging. The participants came from various organizations so networking was great.*
- *I am still buzzing from the whole experience and have come back to work this week with a renewed determination and belief in the power of associations.*

There was an additional benefit to the Round Tables this year: meeting rooms with breath-taking views of the ocean. The child becomes a teenager, new horizons beckon!

To read more, please visit <http://www.uia.org/roundtable>