

“NEW” ASSOCIATION MARKETS

Issues and ideas

With its focus on international associations and organizations, the *Yearbook of International Organizations* adds between 900 and 1,200 new entries during each annual cycle. The demise of some associations each year is harder to track due to the manner in which some cease activities and how this is (or is not) communicated to the wider world. Even without an analysis of the organizational mortality rate, there is a net gain in the population of organizations listed in the Yearbook as time passes.

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE CONTINUES APACE

Are there such things as “new association markets”? To help answer this question I offer the following unscientific assessment of how transnational associations develop, generally and in “new” regions.

THREE MODELS OF TRANSNATIONAL ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT

1 - Transfer of business framework

The case of trade associations in manufacturing and industry is a clear example.

“The centre of the global economy is shifting towards Asia. This presents both new opportunities and new challenges for established high-income countries and for emerging economies” - Manufacturing at risk from global shift to Asia, Martin Wolf, Financial Times 20 May 2011

As multinational corporations relocate operations and offices, so too do the conjoined associations of trade professionals, managers and so on. The fundamental component of association life, a viable member population of individuals or companies, will bring leverage of one kind or another on the establishment of new

members and the creation of regional offices or relocation of headquarters. Further, some industries can bring with them secondary and tertiary supplier industries which themselves have associational lives. The supply chain for the automobile industry is a good example of this. For these reasons, some national and local governments actively engage in creating incentives for industry / business to relocate - incentives above and beyond the local conditions (raw materials, cost of labour, etc.) which may already exist.

2 - Organic development - the rise of new technologies or industries and through autonomous conference series

This point covers most traditional international associations whether scholarly societies or trade and professional associations. As new technologies or disciplines develop the companies and individuals concerned with them begin the basic activities of networking and communication based on shared interests. These activities are seen with great commonality in how an association describes its aims or *raison d'être*: *to advance the field; to share information and ideas; to provide a community; to protect and advance market positions; to develop and implement professional credentials and education; to*



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contribute to standards setting at national and international levels and so on.

One of the earliest ways these nascent networking activities can be seen is when a conference is organized around a topic without an association already existing in the field. Over time, if the event repeats and builds in size and importance it can lead to the creation of a formal association. In other cases the conference series can continue - often across many decades - independent of a formal association structure (though often with international steering committees of one kind or another). Examples include the hard sciences, manufacturers of new computer / internet technology, and new medical sub-specialties.

3 - Hothouse flowers / Incubation

Some locations have actively chosen to attract international associations to domicile / relocate in their city. Examples include:

- **Belgium (Brussels)** with a long history of according specific recognition to international scientific nonprofit associations (AISBL / IVZW status) and new initiatives



- from the city and regional governments.
- **Montreal International:** an office which used the existence of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as a magnet to attract other associations and the city-IGO relations as a platform to build incentives for other international organizations / associations.
- **Singapore:** has been working for 6+ years on a concerted effort amongst government departments to be a central location for regional corporate offices and association headquarters.
- **Dubai / UAE:** local partners with the cooperation of MCI worked to change the legal framework for international associations to operate from Dubai. This was quickly followed by the creation of the **Dubai Association Center (DAC)** under the aegis of the Chamber of Commerce and other partners.

In this we see how international associations, their headquarters and their meetings activity are themselves seen as an “industry” to be enticed to a location.

WHAT CAN WE SEE THAT ILLUMINATES THESE POINTS?

News, business and academic reports cover changes and challenges to the world economy, the implications of the BRICS countries and so on.

UIA’s statistics also show us the geographical distribution of international association headquarters, secondary offices and member countries. The UIA’s annual international meetings statistics report shows us where associations choose to hold their significant events, few of which occur in

locations which are not somehow tied to the association or its membership. Both of these data sets offer the possibility to examine changes over time.

Activities which support associational life are now occurring in “new” regions. These include various educational and training events for association managers / leaders and tradeshows in the meetings industry (e.g. the seven IBTMs organized by Reed exhibitions).

Outside of the realm of traditional associations, the internet continues to play a significant role in connecting communities of people with common interests – from shared concerns (emergency relief, rights campaigns) to the most frivolous (and serious) of cultural interests and diversions. Recent years saw a number of initiatives which transcended traditional structures to accomplish relief and development projects without the superstructure usually associated with NGOs in these sectors and

without any commitment to membership. It should also be said that there were critiques of these new forms of activities as well, notably in relation to accountability and duplication or misdirection of effort.

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