

President's Perspective

By Antoine Guedeney



Dear colleagues and friends,

The summer was, again, a time of major crisis. Then financial crisis hit hard, and everyone is concerned for the future of children and the way to deal in Europe and in the US with the amount of debt. Strict budget regulation already has and will continue to have impact on the level of health related expenses. Mental health expenses, prevention programs, research programs are likely to suffer cuts.

But there was more to that: global warming sort of disseminates and increases the strength of storms, tornados or drought. So we are faced with an extreme situation in Ethiopia, with women and infants walking distances to reach camps, suffering thirst and hunger, and dying... Japan has resumed its activity with astonishing courage and dignity after such a serial of catastrophic events. We will be eager to hear from our Japanese colleague experience, if they can join us in Cape Town. Recently also, on a different sort of catastrophe, a whole country has been stricken by the blind shooting in the Oslo island of some of the smartest and politically aware young people in Norway, plus bombs exploding in the middle of this quiet, peace full city. The shock in Norway is immense, as almost everyone knows someone who is linked with some of the families hit. And again comes the endless question: what is the sequence of events and influences, the risk factors and absence of resiliency factors leading so such a personality disorder and to such isolation into such a distorted trend of thoughts with such an absence of empathy?

9/11. Ten years ago, everyone remembers this day, the incredulity, the shock while looking repeatedly to these images of planes hitting the towers and of the towers going down. We were all of us New Yorkers then. One of the remarkable things in 9/11 is the ability of a human group to sacrifice for unrelated other human beings, as much as to consider some other human beings as non human and to kill them without remorse. New York firemen got into mankind history for going up the towers when knowing they had little chance to escape, just because they were firemen and because it is their duty and honour. Just as the two thousand Russian 'cleaners' did in Chernobyl. This is the specific ability of man to kill the other for other reasons than survival as well as to cooperate, empathize and sacrifice even for strangers.

In these different events, WAIMH has worked as warm and efficient network to share experience, feelings and to provide help. Our world congresses are the place where we can think of the way to increase our speed and effectiveness of reaction in front of such events.

So Cape Town is coming soon, now with the dead line for submissions being on Oct 15. The concept of mentalizing is a great one for a general theme of the congress. We hope people from all over the continent will be able to come and gather and share in Cape Town. We have a lot to learn from the studies and from the programs lead in South Africa: there is a very young population there, with problems on a big scale but with a lot of energy and capacity for adaptation and invention. We will implement our new way of sharing on training, with the Training Village, just before the regular precongress events.

In Cape Town, we will have two days of board meeting, which will enable us to make plans for work till the next congress in Edinburgh 2014 and plan the elections to the board. The board has worked hard in the last months, particularly examining bids from international conference organizers. The board was looking at ways to reduce costs and increase effectiveness in the preparation of congresses, which is always a difficult task to organize between Professional Congress Organiser, WAIMH Central Office and Local Organising Committee. With some congresses the WAIMH has gained and with some lost money some brought extra money to WAIMH (Leipzig, for instance, but also Melbourne as I forgot to mention in the precedent Signal). The question was: could hiring an International Congress Organiser for a longer term make organizing a world congress simpler and less expensive? After a lot of consulting and reflection the board considered that choosing an ICO was not timely now. The board will continue to help LOC's choosing a CO and signing a good enough contract.

Finally, we will have our first board meeting online soon, thus reducing costs to the organization.



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