

# **World Exposition 1995**

## **Vision and Reality**

by Gerhard Feltl

“Great plans which have not been realized flutter in the wind”; wrote Golo Mann about a distant epoch of history - “partly because the planners are of no use, partly because the means are insufficient and partly because those who are willing disagree amongst themselves.”

This has always been so. Must it apply to all further projects?

The chance of the century to host a World’s Fair jointly in Vienna and Budapest must be seized in a business-like manner, prepared professionally and pursued with verve. Exact planning and control but also capacity to imbue others with enthusiasm and power of persuasion have always constituted part of the World Exposition business.

The World Exposition 1995 is an entrepreneurial challenge to Austria. However: How should we meet this challenge?

First of all through an **open discussion**: Objectives, contents, location, financing, future use, earnings power and overall economic effects in Vienna and Budapest have to be discussed in public and in detail. The amount of time and energy spent on discussions is not a sign of weakness in our democracy but rather a guarantee that so-called isolated decisions do not lead to the wrong paths or the wrong commitments. These discussions will continue to accompany the project in every phase of its realization.

The second principle is the **requirement of the State’s detachment**. The final political responsibility is a fact, which the governmental parties have taken into account by constituting a “Steering Committee”. For the success of the project, however, it will be of decisive importance to delegate the legal and economic responsibility to such an extent that the World Exposition Authority will indeed be able to decide, act and function. There are plenty of examples to show that considerable economic success is attainable through such an organization and that such huge projects need not necessarily be a burden for the tax-payer. Two examples are the economically successful Olympic Games in Los Angeles and the World Exposition in Brisbane 1988.

The third principle is the **requirement of co-operative federalism**. That means that the World Exposition must be planned and conceived from the very beginning as a matter involving all of Austria.

Furthermore, the World Exposition can be seen as a chance in the world of tomorrow. In this new “commercial world”, so vividly sketched by Richard Rosencrance, military arsenals and world-wide armies will not be of such importance as the productivity of companies, their innovative capabilities and the effectiveness of their commercial strategies.

In order not to be the “experimental station for the end of the world”, as described by Karl Kraus, but rather to become a workshop and showroom of a new era, will of course require the mobilization of all intellectual and cultural as well as all technical and artistic capabilities of our country.

Austria, a land-locked country having no access to the sea, suffers from an “inland mentality”; thus the World Exposition offers a unique chance for intellectual expansion. The “bridges to the future” are for the country itself primarily “gates to the world”: Provincialism in the form of open ethnological self-centredness can and must be overcome. The anticipated intensive contact with foreign visitors accentuates the question of self-identity, of aims and direction in particular for young people. Accordingly, answers must be found to the question as to what this country can offer its young people. Abstract visions will not suffice. One will have to offer concrete projects which can be carried out for and by the community.

The success of the World Exposition will also be judged as to whether the event could be based on a viable intellectual foundation as well as on a conclusive world exposition philosophy. The preparation stage is no less important than the event itself.

Manès Sperber pointed out that for thousand of years man has been striving to escape the daily grind and the dull reality. Extremes can cause an unconscious desire for war and civil war and lead to a complete upheaval of all values.

One of the oldest remedies for the burden of daily routine is celebrating special events. So every world exposition is of additional value over and above its economic and medial dimensions: It becomes a special day in the history of a people, an interval in humdrum life, a place and a time for people to rejoice and celebrate.

This is one of the first elements in this philosophy, still to be completely developed, of the World Exposition in Vienna and Budapest.

Another element is the already apparent idea of making the coming event this World Exposition with a difference: World expositions are an invention of the 19th century and corresponded to the needs and possibilities of this time and were the most important source of information about the latest technical and scientific achievements. The focal point were technical skills, the product, the machine and its development. In contrast, there are world expositions which aim more at innovation, creativity, life and quality of life for the human race.

There is a kind of cycle, or curve, in which the themes of the world expositions alternate between high-tech and high-touch. At the moment there is a trend towards art, creativity and new-age values.

Vienna and Budapest with their theme "bridges to the future", are following this pattern: The frontier-breaking twin-city concept; the fact that for the first time two cities (in particular two cities with differing social systems) are putting on such an event; the Austrian and Hungarian tradition as cultural nations, the national character of both countries favours a humanist kind of world exposition - as an answer to the increasing need for harmony, for agreement and international partnership. The human element should be equal to the technical one, the intellectual level equal to the material one, thus reflecting the change of values which young people are seeking and demanding, and which will accompany the human race into the next millennium.

The idea to build "bridges to the future" means not only considering the later use of the exposition ground but also creating a link with the millennium celebrations of 1996. "Bridges" should after all link east and west, the orient and the occident, yesterday with today, economy and culture and nature and technology. Union and reconciliation are basic elements of Austrian ideology.

Vienna's opportunities therefore lie not only in the development of its local infrastructure but above all in its contribution to the necessary transformation of our technical and industrial image to a humanist ecological one.