

Review of IAIA'04 Annual Conference
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on behalf of
Three Canadian Affiliates of IAIA
Hosts for IAIA'04
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This report contains a brief overall description of the 2004 annual conference of the International association for Impact Assessment, a succinct summary of the reports prepared by session chairs, some comments on innovations introduced into the program and concluding comments on successes apparently enjoyed at the conference.

The conference involved: seven technical visits; several training courses; special events such as the World Bank Group Day; opening and closing plenary sessions; nine theme forum sessions; about 100 concurrent sessions; a poster session, practitioners' forum sessions; and a variety of activities intended to make the conference enjoyable as well as intellectually exciting (e.g., opening reception, the Cross Canada Casual dinner and party, the five kilometre fun run). All these activities are fully described in the final program, which should be construed to be an addendum to this report. The theme for this conference was "industry and impact assessment". Keeping with the conference being in Canada, a bilingual country, several sessions including the theme forums, all plenary sessions and selected concurrent sessions had simultaneous interpretation in both English and French.

Attendance at the conference was approximately 840 participants from 78 countries. This was the largest number of participants at an IAIA annual conference.

The following observations have been extracted from reports of session chairs for selected sessions, both theme forums and concurrent sessions. Copies of the reports are available and should also be construed to be an addendum to this report. They provide a more complete record of the conference, as reported by chairs.

1. Core business decisions can and should properly include both sustainability and the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to determine optimal business strategy as well as Environmental Management Systems (EMSs) to implement these strategies or to follow through on EIA and to manage risks.
2. Corporations are increasingly more strategic in their approach to environmental management. The public sector should learn from the private sector and make more use of SEA.

3. There is a need to develop means to do Health Impact Assessment (HIA) evaluations. The action plan proposed by HIA practitioners at the conference is for an “evaluation sub group” to set out an “Evaluation Cookbook” over the next six months – to be debated prior to IAIA’05 and delivered for further development. This is one of several activities started at IAIA’04 to be continued in the upcoming months.
4. Criteria are needed for critical appraisal criteria in a variety of areas of impact assessment. These areas include: HIA evidence, sustainability, SEA ...
5. Follow up in impact assessment is an overarching lesson coming from many sessions and many aspects of impact assessment: SEA, HIA, Social Impact Assessment, sustainability and more. This aspect of impact assessment is rapidly strengthening. There is a need for principles to be extracted from international best practices.
6. Creation of partnerships with stakeholders is a key to good practice of many forms of impact assessment. Building trust with communities is a crucial role developed and practiced by good impact assessment practitioners.
7. Impact assessment of trade continues to evolve as an important and extremely useful tool for understanding the effects of trade.
8. Capacity building is very important for several aspects of impact assessment (training, networks). [Isn’t this one of the things that IAIA conferences do?]
9. There is a need for “change management” in impact assessment – changes in projects, in regulatory processes, in understanding of the environments, etc.
10. Biodiversity, SEA and HIA have developed rapidly and are major professional impact assessment tools today. These have been developed and used in various ways, especially by industries. (e.g., HIA in infrastructure assessments with air quality)
11. Sustainability assessment requires great creativity (challenging of views and assumptions, collaboration with others, especially industries).
12. Traditional knowledge and indigenous inputs are increasingly important in impact assessments. While the indigenous peoples section did not hold concurrent sessions specifically directed at participation of indigenous peoples in impact assessment (because the section requested such treatment preferring to see this topic covered throughout the conference), these aspects were indeed widespread at IAIA’04.
13. Formation of a new IAIA section on agriculture, forestry and fisheries was proposed. This is an important area for the benefits of impact assessment to be better achieved internationally. If this section becomes a reality, IAIA can take a major role in achieving these benefits.

14. Great interest was shown in the topic of “impact assessment and decision making”. It was agreed that this area still needs more work in order to achieve greater effectiveness for impact assessment practice.

15. Impact assessment is being productively applied for tourism projects and for transportation projects. It is always good to see success creeping in.

At the time of preparing this report, the conference evaluations have not been analysed. Thus, the following ideas regarding success of conference innovations are based primarily on input received at the conference. The major innovation used for IAIA’04 was the theme forums. These were generally viewed as a success. Theme forums were intended to demonstrate integration of various aspects of impact assessment. Responsibility for each theme forum was delegated to a team of experts for that theme, who organised and chaired the sessions. In this way, those especially knowledgeable about the topic were able to obtain really excellent speakers. We recommend that theme forums, or some variation thereof, continue to be used in future IAIA annual conferences.