



# from IUPS

## IUPS Congresses : Personal Observations

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### Introduction

The President of the International Union of Physiological Sciences (IUPS), Professor Akimichi Kaneko, has recently provided a general introduction in this journal to the activities of IUPS as well as his personal reminiscences of the last IUPS Congress to be held in Japan, namely the one in Tokyo in 1965. Recent reports about IUPS activities, with more specific details, can be found in the series of IUPS Editorials written by Professor Kaneko and myself for the journal *Physiology* (in the period 2006–2008) which is published jointly by IUPS and the American Physiological Society (APS) (see IUPS website: <http://www.iups.org>). In this short article, I shall not repeat all this information, but rather—as a prelude to the 2009 IUPS Congress in Kyoto—give a short account of my personal impressions from some of the more important IUPS Congresses I have attended. I have been privileged to have been able to participate actively in every single IUPS Congress since Washington D.C. in 1968 but, unfortunately, I was too junior in 1965 to have had the opportunity to be part of the Tokyo Congress. I do, however, remember well the excitement about the Tokyo Congress transmitted to me in a postcard from Tokyo and later in person, by my teacher Christian Crone (1926–1990;

Professor of Physiology at The University of Copenhagen, Denmark and Vice-President of IUPS [1983–1989]).

### IUPS Congresses 1968–2005

The IUPS Congresses held in the period 1968–2005 are summarized in Table 1 together with approximate figures for the attendance at each of these events. As shown, the attendance has fluctuated between about 2000 and 6000. As far as my personal relationship to these events is concerned, the congresses fall into three distinct periods. At the four Congresses from 1968 to 1977, I was a junior participant submitting voluntary communications, which were accepted for short (10 min) platform presentations. From 1980 to 1989 I was an Invited Symposium Speaker or Invited Lecturer and from 1993 I was present in an 'official' capacity, in Glasgow 1993 and St. Petersburg 1997 as Foreign Secretary of The UK Physiological Society and from 2001 as Secretary General of IUPS. I have therefore experienced the international congresses from very different perspectives and at all different levels.

As I have noted in a recent commemorative article written for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue of The UK Physiological Society's Magazine, *Physiology News* (see The Physiological Society's website:

<http://www.physoc.org>). no single person can ever sum up the multitude of events at an IUPS Congress, simply because of the many parallel sessions. Each individual will have his/her very particular impression of the events. Therefore it is clearly not possible to state objectively which of the many IUPS Congresses has been the best. By far the largest congresses, so far, have been the ones in Budapest in 1980 and in San Diego in 2005 (Table 1). These were in fact both extremely well run and impressive events, held in spectacular locations, although of a very different nature.

The Budapest Congress was of great general interest to many because Hungary was of course at that time still part of what 'The West' thought of as the 'Communist Block' and there was great curiosity about life behind the so-called iron curtain. At the same time, Hungary had acquired a reputation as a very advanced country and Hungarian Science, specifically, has traditionally been very strong and competitive. This happy tradition is vigorously continued today. Budapest in 1980 was in fact a very lively city and the Congress itself was a marvellous feast of great science. As noted by David Whitteridge in his excellent account of "One hundred years of congresses of physiology", which was distributed to all participants at the Helsinki 1989 Congress, the arrangements for publication of symposia and satellites after the Budapest Congress "were quite exceptional". No less than 15 volumes containing the proceedings of all the Congress symposia were published by the Hungarian State Publishing House! As Whitteridge correctly noted: "nothing on this scale is likely to be seen again". For me personally, this first encounter with Hungarian physiology was very important. Since then, I have been lucky enough to have had continuing contact with many excellent Hungarian scientists and been happy to have been elected

Table 1. Attendance (approximately) at IUPS Congresses 1968–2005

City, Country	Year	Attendance
Washington, USA	1968	3400
Munich, Germany	1971	3500
New Delhi, India	1974	2000
Paris, France	1977	4600
Budapest, Hungary	1980	6000
Sydney, Australia	1983	2700
Vancouver, Canada	1986	3000
Helsinki, Finland	1989	3000
Glasgow, Scotland	1993	4500
St. Petersburg, Russia	1997	2900
Christchurch, New Zealand	2001	2400
San Diego, USA	2005	5600* (12600) *

\* *The IUPS San Diego Congress was held jointly with the 2005 FASEB Experimental Biology (EB) meeting. The total registration was 12600 and 5600 of these were associated with Physiology (IUPS).*

an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as well as the Hungarian Physiological Society.

The 2005 San Diego Congress was also a spectacular success. My impressions of this event, which was held on a grand scale in the context of the very large Experimental Biology meeting in the superb San Diego Conference Centre, are recorded in the APS Magazine, *The Physiologist* (vol. 49, no. 1 pp. 54–55, 2006; see APS website: <http://www.the-aps.org>). This Congress was not only the first to create a very efficient and beneficial interface with neighbouring biomedical sciences, but also had another interesting innovation in the form of 'programming tracks'. I had the privilege of being asked to organize a comprehensive Calcium Signalling track, consisting of 6 separate events, and felt that this worked very well.

Whereas the congresses in Budapest and San Diego have been seen by many as the most successful, the Congresses in Paris in 1977 and in St. Petersburg in 1997 have perhaps had a rather

less favourable reputation. I must confess that my own main memory of the Paris Congress is the immense difficulty of simply finding the locations of the various sessions because of poor signposting! Nevertheless, I did attend some interesting sessions and I was happy to be able to present some exciting data from my own laboratory, together with my principal (and very brilliant) collaborator at that time, Noriyuki Iwatsuki, who had come to me from Tohoku University in Sendai.

In defence of St. Petersburg, it should be stated that 1997 was an extraordinarily difficult time to hold a Congress in Russia. Personally, I actually enjoyed the St. Petersburg Congress very much, but I did (as Foreign Secretary of The Physiological Society at that time) receive letters of complaint from members of my national society about lack of food and drink at Congress events and lack of payment of speaker expenses! Having said that, it is important to state that—in contrast to the general impressions and accounts often presented—the Russian organizers fulfilled their obligations (also financial) to the group of young UK physiologists exactly according to the written agreement with The Physiological Society. All speakers in the symposium I organized did in fact also receive their promised expense payments. Importantly, much of the science presented in St. Petersburg was very exciting and for many it

was an excellent opportunity to visit for the first time a city rightly renowned for its beauty.

There were of course many high points during the many other congresses I have not had space to deal with here. Fortunately, each IUPS Congress has always been so rich in content that nobody could possibly leave without having learnt much and met many interesting old and new colleagues. In fact, the many friendships initiated at IUPS Congresses are in themselves good reasons for continuing with these events.

### **Conclusion**

In my opinion, the many IUPS Congresses I have been able to attend have all been of great value. Physiology is a distinct subject providing the most comprehensive scientific basis for Medicine. There are masses of vitally important interconnections between the different branches of Physiology and only a large international Congress can do justice to these. As stated in a recent IUPS editorial (Kaneko & Petersen 2008; see: <http://www.iups.org>) we can be confident that the 2009 Kyoto Congress will be a great scientific event. Due to the enormous diligence and great scientific insights of Yoshihisa Kurachi, the programme for the Kyoto Congress really looks spectacular. I believe and hope that Kyoto 2009 will in the future be seen as one of the greatest of all IUPS Congresses.