Opening Remarks to the 7th World Congress of the International College of Psychosomatic Medicine

Standing here, opening our 7th World Congress I am at the same time breaking a very solemn promise – practically an oath -given or sworn 24 years ago. Then – in the spring of 1959 – having been at the Hamburg Clinic for only a year, I watched Jores and Freyberger hosting and organizing the European Congress of Psychosomatic Medicine. What I perceived from my lowly position were hurt vanities of speakers or chairpersons for not having been attributed an adequate position, fights for more speaking time, and delays in the delivery of manuscripts. In my eyes – and this made the whole process simply agonizing – all these troubles seemed fully uncompensated by clear success experiences. As a consequence I gave myself the solemn promise to do anything and everything humanly possible to evade ever hosting an international congress.

Having broken my oath with qualms and apprehensions, I can tell you now that the latter were completely unfounded. However, this may be a stroke of luck due to two external but mutually interacting factors. One is the cooperative dedication and zeal of the whole staff of our Psychosomatic Department. It is a very small team, but we managed with only two outside cooperations: Bernd Dahme from the Department of Medical Psychology, and – and this is the second factor- the expert help of the professionals of the Congress Center Hamburg.

I am thanking them all for their work and for their dedication. Their cooperation achieved that computer outprints of plenary and symposium speakers were correct, the layout of programs attained expectations, the budget was updated regularly, and the timetable was kept throughout. Thus we have already had our success experiences and our narcissistic support, and therefore we can invite you to feel free of moral obligations and just give vent to your feelings. However, if we are quite honest, we would prefer you to enjoy the V[II]th ICPM World Congress and we believe there is an objective albeit predictive reason for this.

You certainly never have heard of the Meyer/Freyberger PPWC theorem, because we have only discovered it – independently but convergently – ad hoc of this world congress. PPWC stands for Progressive Pauperization of World Congresses. Its mechanism is an exceedingly simple and easy to understand economic process, one could call it the leverage depression acceleration for certain taxo-nomic subgroups of society (here scientists

Opening Remarks

Governments
Individuals
World congresses
Less tax revenue but
more expenses (e.g. unemployment relief)
Higher taxes.
Less government subsidies but
fixed or rising costs
Higher participation fees

Fig. 1. Flowchart of the Meyer/Freyberger PPWC theorem, i.e. of Progressive Pauperization of World Congresses. Fat arrows indicate self-aggravating/self-perpetuating feedback loops.

and their congresses) within general economic depression. However, the connections of this simple economic process to its participant elements are more complex, therefore I illustrate them with a flowchart (fig. 1).

The chart shows two accelerating or self-aggravating positive feedback loops. The one on the upper left shows that less individual income produces less tax revenues but higher government expenses and because governments usually try to compensate this through higher taxes, this in turn lowers individual income. The second accelerating feedback loop – on the lower right - shows that lessening attendance heightens congress fees and this in turn lesses participation numbers.

Unfortunately the first loop feeds the second through several routes. If governments have to economize, scientists and the sciences are among their preferred victims. In due fairness I stress that our government, the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, has spared us this fate. When individuals have to draw their belt tighter, journeying is one of their areas to economize and visiting congresses even more so. After all, congress proceedings can be read, although with a sometimes disadvantageous delay of one to several years.

M. My long story has a short moral: Enjoy this world congress as if it were your last, because you may soon find out that you cannot afford your next one.

Adolf-Ernst Meyer