

## Introduction

The purpose of this two-part motion is to strengthen the Society so that it can continue working to expand the global use of system dynamics. The motion proposes changes in the location of the annual conference and a concomitant commitment to explore other mechanisms to ensure inclusivity.

Most members would probably agree on these two aims for the annual conference:

- 1) To provide a forum for SDS members to meet and exchange ideas on the principles and practice of system dynamics with the aim of advancing the field.
- 2) To provide a line of income to the Society.

(As a number of contributors to the discussion have pointed out, and as PC can confirm, point (2) is the 'way the world is', at present. It may not be the case in the future but right now the health of the Society's finances depend on a flow of cash emerging from the annual conference. It might be noted, however, that this is not at all uncommon amongst professional societies. But the Society's ability to engage in a range of activities to help develop the field is critically dependent on its having sound finances.)

We have also operated something like the following aim:

- 3) To aid outreach, catalyze interest in the field and helping to nurture and develop the emergence of interest in the field in new disciplinary and geographical areas.

The core of this motion is that this bundle of aims does not work - or, at least, cannot be relied on sufficiently to work.

We want an annual conference which is in a location which attracts the leading figures of the field. We also want a location which attracts many people. Both of these help to create a high quality event which runs at a surplus, therefore accomplishing aims (1) and (2). Running the conference at remote locations is widely seen as a way of achieving aim (3). But too frequently the unintended consequence of this is to reduce the extent to which the first two aims are met. First, key colleagues choose not to attend and only small numbers attend (hence reducing average quality). Second, Home Office must spend considerable time supporting the conference. The costs for this work are now allocated to conference budgets and as locations keep changing there is limited learning. Time spent on annual conference support is time not spend on other activities to develop the field.

Moreover, concerning aim (3), the ability of the annual conference to operate effectively in building sustained, high quality system dynamics activity in remote locations is not clear. The results have been highly variable. Certainly, the situation gives one pause for thought about whether we should be employing – risking, in fact – the annual conference to try to achieve this aim and then not achieving aims (1) and (2). A more flexible and creative approach to local activities is likely to prove more effective. We see examples such as the Winter Camps, the European System Dynamics Workshops, Chapter meetings and a host of *ad hoc* training activities, all of which seem more tailored to specific needs.

Putting Society resources into supporting and developing such activities seems a more effective approach, rather than committing the entire annual conference – with all of the risks that that entails.

### **The Motion**

With the aim of increasing the volume and quality of exchanges at the conference and ensuring a financial income to the Society (including reducing Home Office costs) we are therefore proposing a focusing of the locations of the annual conference via the first part of the motion:

a) That the Society move to a conference location policy which has two default locations, one in North America and one in Europe. Location outside these will be considered; this will be done on a case by case basis, the essential requirement being that any alternative offers significant improvement in expected benefits to the Society and the field when compared with the default.

Comment: To maximize accessibility, the default locations should be cities that can be reached by direct flights from multiple cities in the alternate continent. Boston is the obvious North American default and the idea of going to Washington DC in 2011 can be seen as an example of a move to an alternative location. Note that this part of the motion explicitly excludes a US-centric view by embedding a European site in the default model. An added benefit of the default location is that the Home Office will be able to be proactive in the planning of the conference. Moreover, rather than having to wait for bids for conference locations, Policy Council will always have a feasible option to evaluate the merits alternative proposals.

With the critical second part of the motion the Society recognizes that the inclusion of all members and the spreading of interest in system dynamics are also central aims and that part (a) might be viewed as a step away from doing this via the annual conference. Hence, to balance this geographical focusing of the conference venues:

b) The Society should examine and develop other mechanism for promoting and strengthening the field in other locations.

Comment: the increased financial health of the Society produced by part (a), as well as the Home Office time that is freed up can be used to channel and create more focused activities.

Brought together, we believe that these measures will aid the growth of the field, the quality of work that is done and the financial and staff resources available to extend the field into new geographical areas. We hope that this statement acknowledges the analyses of the situation that have been circulated as well demonstrating sensitivity towards some of the other concerns that colleagues have raised.