

## To instruct and delight : how themes make an expo

***Citation for published version (APA):***

Wesemael, van, P. J. V. (2009). To instruct and delight : how themes make an expo. *Progression : the BIE Newsletter*, 11(winter), 1-1.

***Document status and date:***

Published: 01/01/2009

***Document Version:***

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of Record (includes final page, issue and volume numbers)

***Please check the document version of this publication:***

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

***General rights***

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

[www.tue.nl/taverne](http://www.tue.nl/taverne)

***Take down policy***

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[openaccess@tue.nl](mailto:openaccess@tue.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

## “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” The theme is the king of Expo 2015

Since the immense and entirely unexpected success of London’s 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works and Industry of All Nations, international exhibitions have been marked by thematic specialization, attracting visitors in search of knowledge and inspirations.



Over the past twenty years or so, anthropologists, geographers and historians have been joined by experts in communication studies in trying to come to terms with the significance of Expo’s theme for the modern world.

Their answer: the theme was and is the king of the Expos and it always will be.

Expos were and still are educational networks of global proportions. For this reason, millions of people use them for personal cultural development, starting from a focal point connected to their daily life.

Italy and the city of Milan had in mind this fundamental idea choosing “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” as the theme for Expo 2015.

Pursuing the twin goals of food security (good food and good water) and food safety (having enough to eat and drink) is a way to educate to the fundamental principle of sustainable development.

So the theme chosen for the Exhibition of 2015 would not only contribute to the improvement of the general living standard of all the people, but also have positive consequences for the growth of human capital.

In the end the theme “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” will produce through education the ultimate understanding and cooperation between the people, the territories, the associations and the Nations of the world.

Italy - Milan Expo 2015 Planning Committee



## A word from the President

World and International Exhibitions are marked, since their beginning in the 19th century, by an aspiration for progress, which is embodied in emblematic works.

In this beginning of the 21st century, in this world perceived as global at any moment, thanks to new technologies of communication, on a planet of 7 billion human beings, progress becomes more delicate and more problematic.

The grand exhibitions to come, through their themes—the city of tomorrow, the alimentation of the planet, the protection of our oceans—reflect these new concerns around the current challenges of humanity.

The question today is on the concrete role –the practical influence– that World and International Exhibitions will have on the treatment of these subjects.

Already, by displaying on its theme the best practices selected by a jury, the exhibition of Shanghai introduces an innovative initiative by allowing for a comparison of experiences and of solutions coming from everywhere on the question of the amelioration of cities.

Moreover, the exhibitions will have to work on these subjects with states but also with new actors who have the field experience, NGOs, foundations, and enterprises, directly related to the theme. Beyond this, the World and International Exhibitions should be a stimulus for awareness-raising and for a planetary reflection on the chosen theme by a retransmission of debates and of their conclusions.

By choosing themes of contemporary relevance, which concern the majority of the countries in the world, the candidate states and organizers draw their inspiration from a character of the BIE that is today more and more universal, who, with 154 member states, brings together the majority of the states of the planet.

For the International Exhibitions Bureau, it seems to me that it is also time to initiate an evolution. This evolution will make of it an authority, who not only has to supervise the technical organization of the exhibitions, but must also assume a role that is more political, in the noble sense of the word—that is to say, by ensuring the judicious treatment of the selected themes which concern the governance of the planet of tomorrow.



Jean-Pierre Lafon, President of the BIE

# Progression

## The BIE Newsletter

### THE THEME MAKES THE EXPO

#### SUMMARY



2  
It's The Theme Which Brings Success

Why should we organize an Expo on the theme of sustainable development?

BIE Editorial  
EXPO x EXPOS



3  
The THEME is the spark\*  
The Theme creates the story



4  
“Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”, the Theme is the King of Expo 2015  
A word from the President  
Important Events

### To instruct and delight

#### How themes make an Expo

If you line up the visitor numbers of successive world exhibitions then superlatives fall short: six, fifteen, thirty and even sixty million.

These people, of course, come to expos to meet one another and to enjoy each other’s cultural contributions in concerts, shows and celebrations: to delight.

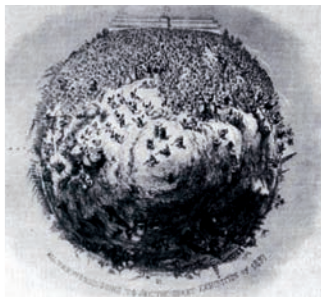
But of course entertainment was not the main motive of the six million visitors, amongst them a substantial element of working people looking to spend their scarce pennies on an excursion to the Great Exhibition in London (1851). In the nineteenth century, the world exhibitions represented a key instrument in emancipation, education and the evolution of the bourgeoisie and (at first hesitantly) the working class: to instruct.

In terms of civic pride but also in terms of vocational education for adults, the first fairs were at the beginning the only international podia for exchange of practical experience and knowledge concerning the transition from craft and guild to industrial production. This was clearly expressed in the title of the first world exhibition: ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’. This core message was equally clear expressed in the didactic setup of the exhibition: the exhibits in the Crystal Palace were arranged according to the logic of the industrial production process. From the raw materials section, via machine production to standardized mass products in order to finally pause at the section on applied art. The theme of industrialisation also came across loud and clear in the way the innovations were explained: in the machinery section entire machine fleets were demonstrated in operation to show the public how wool could be spun and woven, or paper produced, at amazing and unprecedented speed and precision.

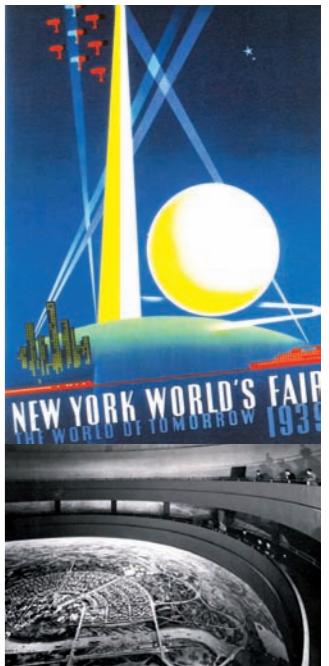
The more the exhibitions were aimed at the general public

in the decades to follow, the more explicitly their messages were articulated in themes and the more manifestly they were concretized in the exhibition didactics. The exhibition ideology is formulated far more explicitly in themes like: A Century of Progress or Progress and Harmony for Mankind. And these themes are in turn far more elaborated in the exhibition didactics through a cohesive network of lead theme expositions. Under the motto Building the world of tomorrow with the tools of today an enormous globe appears at the heart of the exhibition in 1939, in which the general public is quite literally “multi-sensorially” immersed into this vision of the future: a gigantic scale model combined with panoramic film shows a day in the life of tomorrow from sunrise – the new dawn – to sunset. The expo is then broken down into the various life spheres of the consumer/citizen and each of them is heralded in by means of a theme exposition provided by the organizers: in the spheres of living, working, mobility, food etc., they illustrate how new technical, scientific and aesthetic insights and methods lead to new products that will improve and enhance the life of everyone tomorrow.

In other words, the theme is of vital importance for an Expo. It is the most important way to articulate its social relevance and thus draw the masses to the exhibition, where they undergo the unique didactics of the expo: being collectively and physically immersed in a common experience of new and socially shared insight and belief in a better world tomorrow. And of course this demands the materialization of the theme in the exhibition didactics: the network of lead theme exhibitions, conferences and publications. The reverse is also true: without a theme, an exhibition is socially irrelevant and thus makes itself superfluous.



The poster of 1851: the whole world goes to the Exhibition of 1851



The Big Model

## Important Events

- 12 December, 2008 - 12 March, 2009 Exhibition Paris, Conciergerie  
« Paris and its World Exhibitions-Architecture, 1855-1937 »
- 30 January, 2008 - 6 March, 2009 Cycle of Conferences Paris, Petit Palais
- 13 February, 2009 Conference by Vicente González Loscertales Paris, Petit Palais  
« Les enjeux des expositions universelles »
- 2 June, 2009 BIE General Assembly Paris



### CONTACT

34 Avenue d’Iéna  
75016 Paris  
Tel : 01 45 00 38 63  
Email : [bie@bie-paris.org](mailto:bie@bie-paris.org)  
[www.bie-paris.org](http://www.bie-paris.org)  
© BIE