

## **Conference Reports**

### **WORLD CONGRESS ON HIGH TECH CERAMICS, MILAN, ITALY (23–28 JUNE, 1986)**

This was the 6th meeting in the CIMTEC series, an intermittent series, which, until this present meeting, had been held in Rimini, Italy. It was a very ambitious undertaking as is obvious from the stated objectives:

- (i) Review the science of ceramic processes for advanced materials and the 'state-of-the-art' in terms of the most recent progress and understanding of the phenomena involved.
- (ii) Discuss strategies for high technology applications and critical limiting factors.
- (iii) Report on present national research projects and plans for high tech ceramics in the more advanced countries.
- (iv) Provide an insight into the present market for advanced ceramics on a world basis and the expected areas of development in the medium term.
- (v) Assess the impact of advanced ceramics on key industrial sectors such as energy generation, conversion, distribution and storage, high temperature engineering, process engineering, electronics–nuclear–space technology and biotechnology.

The congress was held under the auspices of the Italian Ministry for Science and Technology and was co-sponsored by almost all the national ceramic societies world-wide. Since Rimini could not provide the required facilities of multiple simultaneous sessions, the congress was held at the new and very impressive Congress Centre of the World Trade Centre at

Milanofiori. As this must have been the largest conference in the field of ceramics held in Europe, reminiscent of the Annual Meetings of the American Ceramic Society, it is worth considering the advantages and disadvantages of such large meetings and of the choice of venue.

From an attendee's point of view, the programme of lectures (3 opening, 10 invited, 10 general, 182 contributed) and posters (199) offered plenty of interest in his particular field. In fact, probably too much, as often he would wish to hear lectures taking place simultaneously and an agonizing choice had to be made. Being unable to attend an event of one's particular interest always leaves a bad feeling of having missed something important. Fortunately, the posters were displayed all through the conference so that they could be studied in relative leisure although the authors were not always available at the set times when they were expected to attend.

From the organizer's point of view, financial considerations demand that there be a very large number of contributions in order to obtain sufficient funds from the conference fees. In addition, the organizer has to invite a number of lecturers to review certain fields whose names will attract additional registrations.

The large number of delegates (over 700) caused considerable logistic problems. They had to be accommodated in various hotels, some in the centre of Milan, some in the outskirts, with buses providing transport; these were liable to be delayed by heavy traffic on the 'tangenziale' and at least on one occasion one bus was an hour late in the morning.

There was an International Advisory Board of 34 well-known personalities but, without doubt, the whole organization of the scientific and technical programme was ultimately in the hands of the Congress Chairman, P. Vincenzini. The detailed organization was carried out by a commercial agency; their efforts were not particularly impressive. Thus, there was no list of participants issued, although a list was pinned on a board. It was not clear who attended, as we were told that because of fear of terrorist activities 60% cancellations were received from the USA. The number of posters actually displayed, i.e. 112 out of the 199 listed in the programme, indicated a 43% withdrawal. Whether this percentage was the same for the lectures was impossible to tell; it certainly did not apply to the invited and general lectures all of which were presented. A serious drawback resulted from chairmen carrying on with their programme in a continuous manner even when lectures were cancelled. This led to the situation that when one arrived at the scheduled time to hear a particular lecture one only heard the closing remarks because the lecture had started early as one of the previous speakers had not turned up. In an event with simultaneous sessions it is imperative to adhere strictly to the printed time schedule. Another annoying feature was that although the official language was said to be English, several speakers spoke in an 'unofficial' language.

Headphones were supplied to those who wished to listen to the simultaneous translations from English, but those who understood English did not bother to collect these and therefore sometimes found themselves unable to understand those speakers using an 'unofficial' language.

It is of course impossible to mention the contents and quality of each of the many lectures and posters; almost every subject was covered. Some of the review lectures of key areas were very informative and Dr Vincenzini must be congratulated on having assembled presenters for such a vast amount of information. The proceedings of the congress will be published by Elsevier, North Holland in 2 volumes running for several thousands of pages. The prospect of being able to read the contributions one missed is eagerly anticipated, although with some trepidation about the cost of the publication.

One has to ask oneself whether meetings on this scale are desirable. I remember an American colleague saying to me at an American Ceramic Society Meeting when I mentioned that the trouble was that I would like to be in three places at the same time: 'I am not coming for the lecture, I come to meet people and see the exhibition'. This brings me to the small exhibition which, save for the stand by ASEA on isostatic pressing, was really not very interesting. The main reason for this is that the high technology activity in Italy is almost non-existent and potential foreign exhibitors would therefore consider the cost involved as a bad investment. Meeting people was not particularly easy. One usually saw people one would have liked to talk to rushing from one lecture location to another. There were no coffee or tea breaks, although there was some opportunity to meet people at the very pleasant evening receptions. However, these were more of a social occasion and in any case one was so exhausted by the end of the day (it was very, very hot outdoors) that one kept one's conversation away from ceramics. The congress was concluded by a very pleasant dinner in the Cloisters of St Francis a charming location in alta Bergamo.

In conclusion, the reviewer has formed the opinion that meetings on this scale should only be held if accompanied by a worthwhile exhibition of high technology ceramic materials and equipment for their R & D and production; and this can only be achieved in a country with high activity in this area.

**PM 86 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND  
EXHIBITION, POWDER METALLURGY  
DUSSELDORF, FRG (7-11 JULY 1986)**

Because the programme indicated much subject matter of relevance to high technology ceramics, the reviewer decided to attend this conference; after