

CASE STUDY

Expo '92 Seville, Spain: a World's Fair (1976–92)

World's Fairs are temporary expositions where nations and organizations build pavilions whose architecture and contents celebrate themselves and their achievements. They draw large crowds and can act as catalysts for further development in the host city. The plan and infrastructure of the fair sites are important aspects of the overall design. They have to be easily plugged into by assorted pavilions designed by a variety of architects striving to outdo each other in attracting attention. The infrastructure also has to provide a pleasant (i.e. efficient, comfortable and interesting) circulation space for the pedestrians that throng the fairs on important days.

The 1992 World's Fair in Seville celebrated the 500th anniversary of the discovery by Europeans of the New World and its peoples. It was supposed to have paralleled a fair in Chicago but that city withdrew in 1987. The initial idea for a fair in Seville came from Felipe González, the socialist Prime Minister of Spain who hailed from Seville. King Juan Carlos picked up the idea in 1976. González saw it as an opportunity to do more for Seville than put it on the world map. He sought and obtained funding from the European Community (now European Union) programme for depressed areas for a new airport (designed by Rafael Moneo), a new railroad station (designed by Cruz/Ortiz) and a high-speed train (AVE) link to Madrid. (The introduction of the train reduced flights from Madrid by 90%.) He saw them to be necessary infrastructure elements to both run a successful World's Fair and as a catalyst for a more enduring impact on Seville. It would also

consolidate Seville's position as capital of the Autonomous Andalusian region.

The site chosen in 1985 for the fair is an artificial island, Isla de la Cartuja, in the Guadalquivir River. The island falls between the river and an artificial flood control channel. Only a 425-acre (162-hectare) part of the island was used for the fair but the remainder was improved with vegetation. One of the problems facing the site designers was the difficulty of linking it to the historic core of Seville especially as obsolete rail tracks as well as the mainstream of the river intervened. Emilo Ambasz of New York and a consortium of Spanish engineers (Fernández Ordonez (brother of Spain's Foreign Relations Minister), Martinez Calzon, Junquera del Diestro and Perez Pita) were awarded first prize *ex aequo* in an invited competition of 12 teams. It has been widely assumed that 'political considerations' weighed heavily in the decision to have joint-winners. The two teams were supposed to collaborate in producing a new design but that effort only lasted for 2 days.

The competition brief called for a theatre (to seat 2000), an auditorium (to seat 2200), a drama theatre (to seat 1500), an outdoor auditorium (to seat 10,000), an Olympic swimming pool (with seating for 5000), a planetarium and an arena for 25,000. As the programme changed no heed was paid to Ambasz's design. The problem that arose was due to the Fair's unanticipated success in attracting international exhibitors; the number increased from an expected 60 to 108.

Ambasz's scheme (see Figure 10.19) drew water from the river into three large