

Conferences, fairs and soft power

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

A brand of global governance depends on more than standards. It also needs places where people meet. Basel's role as a meeting place goes back to the Council and the fairs of the fifteenth century. Today the BIS holds the meetings of central bank governors every two months, and its Annual General Meeting each June brings governors and senior officials from around the world to the city. Held with great discretion, these meetings remain largely invisible to the public apart from the security arrangements around the tower at the Centralbahnplatz. Their importance for the brand lies in the fact that decisions with global consequences are associated with the city.¹

The city's soft power rests also on culture and fairs. Art Basel, founded in 1970, has become the world's leading fair for modern and contemporary art and has exported the name of the city to Miami Beach since 2002, to Hong Kong since 2013 and to Paris since 2022. Part H, Chapter IV will discuss the history of the Basel fairs and the economics of Art Basel, and Part H, Chapter V the art market's exposure to money laundering. For the present argument it is enough to note that a fair held in Hong Kong under the name "Art Basel" carries the city's name to collectors and financiers who may never have heard of the BIS. The museums and foundations of the city, which Part J, Chapter V will discuss, add a further layer to this cultural reputation.²

These different meanings of the name reinforce each other. A central banker attending the Annual General Meeting of the BIS in June may visit Art Basel, which takes place in the same month. A compliance officer who uses the Basel AML Index may associate it with the city of the Basel Committee. A delegate to a conference on hazardous waste may assume, wrongly, that the Convention is administered on the Rhine. The brand works through such associations, which nobody controls and which can be neither planned nor fully understood.

1 Notes

1. On the bimonthly meetings of central bank governors and the Annual General Meeting of the BIS in June, see the BIS Annual Report and Part F, Chapter I. To be verified. ↩
2. On Art Basel (founded 1970) and its editions in Miami Beach (since 2002), Hong Kong (since 2013) and Paris (since 2022), see Part H, Chapter IV, and the publications of MCH Group. Dates to be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-conferences-fairs-and-soft-power