

1 **Dave Lee**

## 2 **Intelligent crowd control**

3 original at:

4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8307733.stm>

5 Predicting how large crowds will react in certain situations has long been  
6 the holy-grail for architects and planners. Many factors, such as a person's  
7 emotions or intelligence, can determine how they act when confronted  
8 with a busy scene or an emergency. Crowd simulation software has  
9 always tried to recreate realistic behaviour, but the unpredictable nature  
10 of people is yet to be faithfully replicated.

11 However, new software designed by the University of Milano-Bicocca  
12 hopes to change the way in which we simulate crowd control. The  
13 traditional approach was to try to design equations that describe flows of  
14 people. The new approach is to try to observe the individual behaviour of  
15 people who are part of the crowd.

16 Crucial to this is the social research into how people interact with others  
17 when confronted with different problems in a range of places.

18 For example, groups of people in airports tend to stay as far away from  
19 each other as possible and crowds are seen as uncomfortable or  
20 upsetting. But other large groups, such as those at concerts or sporting  
21 events even seek out crowds to enhance the experience of the event.

22 Scientist at Milano-Bicocca hope the technology will lead to safer, better  
23 designed buildings in the future. The software allows a series of 'what if'  
24 scenarios to be acted out. This will help architects of new buildings to  
25 predict how crowds will cope in the instance of a bomb threat or other  
26 emergency.

## Questions

- 1) Having read the article, could you explain what 'crowd control' means?
- 2) Paraphrase 'has been a holy grail' (line 6).
- 3) According to the text, can scientists currently fully predict the reactions of people in a crowd?
- 4) Explain the difference between the traditional and the modern approach to crowd flow modelling.
- 5) Why is social research important for developing models of crowd behaviour?
- 6) What practical implications does research into crowd behaviour have?
- 7) What is a "what if" scenario" (line 23 and 24)?
- 8) What is your opinion on 'crowd control'? Do you think that it is something we should welcome or something we should be afraid of? Do you consider it to be good for authorities to have something to base their decisions on when dealing with large crowds?

## Vocabulary

**approach** (line 13) – a method of doing something or dealing with a problem

**crucial** (line 16) – extremely important, because everything else depends on it

**seek out** (21) – to search hard for and find a specific person or thing

**cope** (line 25) – to face and deal with responsibilities, problems, or difficulties, especially successfully or in a calm or adequate manner

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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