

Summary of the RR-comments on the LOC 2007 report

LOC

In general, the regional representatives seem to be satisfied with the LOC report and agree with it that the Amsterdam conference was well organised and successful. The most appreciated feature was that a free public transport card was included in the registration package. The card made participants' stay much easier. Other praised features were the banquet and excursions which provided to chance to contact the environment. Furthermore, activities in the venue worked smoothly. It is noteworthy that in this conference there was no discussion on technical problems with IT facilities.

The main criticism was directed to delays and mistakes in the LOC's communication. Participants and chairs did not receive information and service they expected. This inconvenience was found irritating and seemed to influence on the mood of some participants in the conference. Quick and supportive communication is an issue that should be paid more attention in the future conferences.

Programme

The feedback to the overall programme was mixed. Some parts of the programme were praised and others criticised. As a generalisation can be mentioned that as a rule social events were well received but the scientific programme raised very mixed feelings. Both the opening session and plenary panel were considered a bit boring. The Publishing Workshop was, in contrast, regarded both inspiring and useful. Regional sessions again divided opinions. Some scientific sessions were found interesting and some others not. Regional representatives seem to recommend to emphasise more themes, more coherence within sessions and the encouragement of free discussion in compiling the programme. Because none of the RRs commented the main theme of the conference, I suppose that it was found a successful choice.

Scientific committee

In the Amsterdam conference participants perhaps discussed more arranging the programme and organising sessions than in other similar meetings. Not all sessions were regarded coherent and interesting. Similarly, the LOC report takes a reserved stand to the Scientific Committee, and regional representatives suppose that the SC did not choose an appropriate strategy in compiling the programme. There are two major critical issues. First, splitting proposed sessions in parts and adding some extra papers in submitted sessions were considered mistakes by several RRs. A strong opinion seems to be that proposed sessions should be kept in tact. As a result, session proposals should be either accepted or rejected as entire packages. It is thought that session organisers know the papers they propose better than the SC do. However, it was not any strategic decision of the SC but a central feature of the software *Oxford Abstract* used by the LOC to treat, grade and rank all paper proposals separately without considering whether they were submitted as part of a session or individually.

Rrs consider the practice to aggregate sessions from individual paper submissions as the SC's second failure. At least some of sessions aggregated by the SC

were found artificial and less appealing. However, it is admitted that such aggregation is a difficult task and sometimes impossible only on the basis of abstracts.

As remedies it is suggested that in the future the SCs should pay more attention on the quality and coherence of the entire panels and treat session submissions as packages - not dividing them into individual papers. The SCs should encourage to submit session proposals instead of individual papers. Nevertheless, it is admitted that having individual papers is a method to encourage newcomers to come to the ESEH conferences. The ESEH should enlarge the set of themes dealt with each future conference. The formulation of these themes should be enough open to provide possibilities to include the latest trends and approaches in environmental history to conferences.

In addition, RR agrees with the LOC report that the upper limit for accepted papers and the careful evaluation of submissions are necessary for specialised conferences as those of ESEH. Some regard 200 papers as an appropriate upper limit and recommend to encourage rejected submitters to resubmit their proposals as posters.

Finally, RRs suggest that we should reserve enough time for the SC to evaluate paper/session submissions and compile a high quality programme. A high standard scientific programme seems to be the primary goal of the future ESEH conferences; in this respect RRs are quite ambitious and unanimous.

Irresponsible submitters and participants

The LOC report seemed to ignite discussion on 'non reliable colleagues' who do not show up to excursions, dinners or the entire conference. It is clear that RRs are worried about this tendency but nevertheless they consider preparing blacklists and punishments on the basis of them unreasonable. In contrast, it is suggested to make communication between the LOC and participants more frequent and build up double checking mechanisms that provide possibilities to confirm the attendance in desired events.

Overall evaluation

Regional representatives regard the LOC report as a good instrument to evaluate a conference and provide opportunities to learn from experience. They also congratulate Petra and her team on a rewarding conference.

Timo Myllyntaus
7.1.2008