

## Notes on Conference Planning

In my view international conferences fall into two broad camps:

**1. Open academic conferences**, with a call for papers and peer review  
(e.g. ISUF, International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments, etc.)

**2. Organisational / issue-based conferences**, where speakers are invited  
(e.g. CNU, CEU Berlin, A Vision of Europe, etc.)

Some conferences are a blend of the two.

(e.g. the Oxford Brookes conference "Vernacular Architecture in the 21st Century")

### 1. Open academic conferences

These have the following advantages:

- academics usually have a budget to attend events if papers are accepted
- academics receive credit for having a peer-reviewed paper accepted and thus are keen to submit
- promotion is distributed through various well-established academic lists etc. and reaches a wide range of potential speakers
- everybody pays a fee to attend, even speakers
- can attract hitherto unknown academic supporters to an organisation
- can provide useful support and exposure to younger academics
- likely to produce high quality written papers for publication
- audience is easier to please, ie no spouse programmes, accommodation deals, travel deals etc. are necessary.

and the following disadvantages:

- people who have submitted a paper usually don't attend if paper isn't accepted
- some who submit a paper that is accepted will not come once they are in the printed programme (particularly from 3rd world)
- unlikely to attract practitioner or "CPD" audiences (broadly speaking)
- can be unweildy (60 or 80 speakers is not unknown, with multiple parallel sessions)
- presentations are likely to be short because of the number of speakers
- not much control over the "message" individual speakers deliver
- publications can sometimes be of limited interest.

In terms of organisation, there is a very clear pattern:

1. Initial announcement of date and theme (typically at the previous year's conference)
2. Call for Paper proposals (9 months before event)
3. Receipt of paper proposals and peer-review (6 months before)
4. Notify accepted speakers and launch publicity & registration (5 months before)

5. Receive full papers (3 months before) \*
6. Event, at which the published papers are available. \*

(\* Publication can be after the event, in which case the full papers are required some time after the conference.)

If there's a Call for Papers there must be an academic committee to peer-review them. Normally only people with PhD or higher degree can do this.

Summary: more complicated to plan, but low cost and low risk.

## 2. Organisational / issue-based conferences

These have the following advantages:

- organisers can entirely control who speaks and range of topics covered
- can expect a good turn-out of organisation members
- opportunity to support organisation's supporters
- can attract "CPD" and amateur audiences
- provide an opportunity to get a specific and focussed message across
- can attract large audience if it hits the spot
- likely to lead to a publication of general interest.

and the following disadvantages:

- much harder to recruit, as it's a discretionary event
- need to be more attractively packaged, with tours, maybe spouse programmes, etc.
- presentations are likely to be longer because of the number of speakers and can drag, unless speakers are very good
- may miss a wider audience if the message is too tailored and precise: can be seen as "preaching to the converted"
- needs slick production and presentation which can be extremely expensive
- publications must attract general reader and are therefore likely to be more expensive to produce.

These sort of conferences do not have a call for papers and are therefore launched to the public as a final product, which has to be highly polished. It's a simple sequence:

1. Start finding speakers and funding (9 months before event)
2. Finalise programme, launch public registration & publicity (6 months before)
3. Event.

Summary: simpler to organise, but higher cost and higher risk.

Some of the problems with perceived narrowness can be answered by having well-chaired discussion sessions.

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