

## PARALLEL SESSION 7

FRIDAY 11 November 2016 16:40-17:40

# 7.A. Workshop: Reducing the Health & Environment footprint of European Public Health conferences?

Organised by: EUPHA section on Health impact assessment and  
EUPHA section on Environment related disease  
Contact: rainer.fehr@uni-bielefeld.de

Chairperson(s): Rainer Fehr - Germany, Dineke Zeegers Paget - EUPHA

To strive for sustainability is recognized as a prerequisite for improving people's health and their environment in the 21st century. At the EPH 2015 conference in Milano, the issue received prominent attention; topics included the anthropocene, human impacts on global processes and systems, and the planetary boundaries consistent with human health and survival. In a press release of 15 October 2015, EUPHA expressed its serious concerns about climate change and health. This resonates with concerns about global environmental change expressed by the World Health Organization, the European Commission and many others.

For an ambitious professional association like EUPHA, concern for the environmental and health impacts of our own activities must feature amongst our core values. This ought to be reflected in the arrangements for our large and prestigious annual conferences. Areas of concern include: mode of travel (especially by air); conference venue and accommodations; flow of energy and materials; food consumption; waste avoidance and disposal; physical activity; and equity, e.g. (financial) barriers to conference attendance.

While previous conferences have not been oblivious to these issues, more should be done. To intensify efforts would be consistent with the professional responsibility and ethical obligations which are shared by all in Public Health. Clearly, there is potential for sustainability and (long-term) health perspectives to be in conflict with other relevant mission components incl. face-to-face encounters, vibrant meetings and intensive campaigns. EUPHA is challenged to prove that it has the profile and capacity to create positive example. Through how we plan and deliver our conferences, we can demonstrate a commitment to the health of individuals, populations and the planet and its component systems.

A promising approach might have regard to issues like the following: Awareness-raising among EPH organizers and participants about conference impacts on health and environment; tools available for "benign and responsible" conference organization; existing approaches of good practice; ways to "make the (eco-) healthy choice the easy choice"; accepting that such an activity should not become unduly burdensome; and identifying ways to monitor progress.

Importantly, success for EUPHA in this venture could provide a template for adoption by other, e.g. national, professional associations. In addition, the "greening" of EPH conferences can stimulate and encourage both individuals and institutions to move along similar pathways.

### Key messages:

- For an ambitious association like EUPHA, concern for the impacts of our own activities features amongst our core values; this ought to be reflected in the arrangements for our annual conferences
- Building on existing examples, EUPHA is challenged to prove that it has the profile and capacity to create positive example

### "Greening" conferences - Experiences from the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE)

Nino Künzli

N Kuenzli, MS Ragetti, M Rössli

Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute; Department of Education and Training, Swiss School of Public Health, Basel, Switzerland  
Contact: Nino.Kuenzli@unibas.ch

#### Context

The environmental and climate footprint of large meetings is increasingly acknowledged. With most scientists recognizing that nothing can replace the added value of in-person get-togethers, the question is how to run a "sustainable" conference. This presentation informs about experiences from a conference where organizers explored, and practiced, a range of approaches.

#### Case study

The International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE), together with other associations, held a conference in Basel in 2013 which was attended by c. 1,800 scientists from > 70 countries. The local organizing committee also had one committee for addressing environmental issues, building on previous conferences and considering event guidelines. The estimated "footprint" of most areas of activity (print material; food) was relatively small, compared to the greenhouse gases produced by travel (c. 14 million km, >1.5 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per person). Several actions were taken. A printed program was only handed out upon request; c. 2/3 of participants opted for electronic versions. Caterers were asked that food should be seasonal, organic, and grown locally, or else be traded fairly. The four lunch buffets were vegetarian. The organizers chose two CO<sub>2</sub> compensation projects, in Uganda and China, with compensation (c. 20 Swiss francs per person) included in the standard costs. Challenges of the implementation of strategies and feedbacks from the audience will be discussed.

#### Conclusions

In the absence of a simple recipe or "truth", there is still a long way to go to accomplish "green" conferences. Lack of evidence creates challenges. Changes in standard practices and resource allocations may frustrate conference organizers, if not participants. It is important to keep the vision of a green conference high on the agenda.

### Guideline for a sustainable organization of events – Theory and practice

Myriam Tobollik

HH Eggers, D Huth, K Stechemesser, M Tobollik

Department of Ecodesign, Eco-Labeling and Environmentally friendly Procurement, German Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), Dessau/Berlin, Germany  
Contact: myriam.tobollik@uba.de

The "Guideline for a sustainable organization of events" (Leitfaden für die nachhaltige Organisation von Veranstaltungen) is published by the German Federal Environmental Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA), together with the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Protection, Construction and Nuclear Safety (Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit, BMUB). It originated in the UBA's Department of Ecodesign, Eco-Labeling and Environmentally friendly Procurement

(Ökodesign, Umweltkennzeichnung, Umweltfreundliche Beschaffung); the (revised) third edition was published in 2015. The guide provides information on a range of topics that are important for organizing an event in a “sustainable” way. Specific areas of activity include the following: mobility to and at the venue; accommodation of participants, use of energy and water, “green” procurement of goods and services, catering, waste management, communication, and social aspects (universal access; gender mainstreaming). Beyond contributing to environmental and health protection, to realize an event in a more sustainable way can also save money, especially in relation to the use of products and to waste disposal. In order to support event managers, the guide offers several work sheets that include specific objectives, measures to be taken, products and services featuring the “Blue Angel” ecolabel, and further links. Experiences of applying this guide in practice will be reported.

### **Footprint reduction: What can we learn from related initiatives within, e.g., the United Nations, World Health Organization, European Commission, and European Environment Agency?**

Rainer Fehr

*R Fehr<sup>1</sup>, P van den Hazel<sup>2</sup>, P Martin-Olmedo<sup>3</sup>, M Martuzzi<sup>4</sup>, O Meke<sup>5</sup>, G Morris<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Universität Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Public Health Services Gelderland-Midden, Arnhem, The Netherlands

<sup>3</sup>Escuela Andaluza de Salud Pública, Granada, Spain

<sup>4</sup>Environment and Health Intelligence and Forecasting Programme, European Center for Environment and Health, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Bonn, Germany

<sup>5</sup>Gesundheitsdaten und -analysen, NRW Center for Health, Bielefeld/Bochum, Germany

<sup>6</sup>European Centre for Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK  
Contact: rainer.fehr@uni-bielefeld.de

Various eminent international institutions have expressed concerns about global environmental change and its impact on human health and well-being. Moving beyond analysis and discussion, several have begun to tackle the issue in practice. Given that the measures required demand organisational and individual commitment and often require significant modification of behaviour, procedures etc., it is important to review how other institutions approach the issue of sustainability and health. Such an exercise can yield a range of benefits. Firstly, it can provide the opportunity to learn from the experience of others, e.g. concerning the actions which can deliver early wins, those which are worthwhile but demand careful thought and planning, and those which have been less successful. These insights may help EUPHA to press the arguments for engagement in this area by showing that others are engaged and active and that EUPHA’s contribution can be much more than mere tokenism in the face of a global challenge. The presentation looks at the United Nations (“Moving towards a climate neutral UN – The UN’s system footprint and efforts to reduce it”), the World Health Organization’s efforts to include the Regional offices in the carbon footprint assessment exercise and to develop a global WHO Sustainability Management System; the European Commission’s activities including “Greening the European Semester”, “Green public procurement”, and the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS); and the European Environment Agency’s project “Greening European transport consumption: change user behaviour and set carbon targets”.