



Research meetings need more than one mode of participation

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I would like to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Owners of the land that we're meeting on today, and pay my respect to their Elders past and present.





Did you watch the Paris Olympics?

One billion people worldwide watched the Summer Olympics 2024 in Paris.

About 770,000 people travelled to Paris to watch the Olympics on-site.

Not even one per mil of the audience was on-site.





Mixed modes for watching the Olympics

The majority watched the Olympics at public events, at home with families and friends, or by themselves on their mobile devices.

While all the available modes of watching the Olympics were different, they all allowed a global audience to join a major sports event through a mix of different modes.





A missed Opportunity?

International research meetings were pushed into mainly online modes by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-2022.

While participation in online formats was initially high, it has since dropped, and only a small fraction of meeting organisers have made efforts to develop and adopt new formats that offer value to online participants.

Conference organisers seem to have spent little effort and creativity on developing new formats for mixed-mode events.



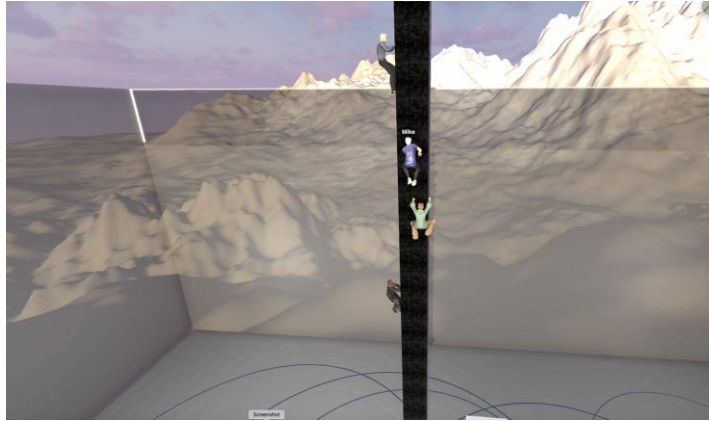
Why is this a problem?

Reverting to in-person only events misses the benefits of mixed-mode event formats.

It disregards the high environmental costs of large international meetings and favours those who can afford the high costs and time commitment of international travel, are likely to receive travel visa, and are, therefore, already advantaged.

What can be done to offer something better than “Zoom fatigue?”

The Carbon Footprint





Opportunities

‘For the first time, I actually mustered up the courage to ask a question in a talk at ISSCR! The chat is helpful for introverts like me.’

Mary Heather Celine Florido (@KiwiFlorido). Twitter; June 2020

Offering online participation opened the European Geosciences Union General Assembly (20k PAX) to thousands of researchers from around the world.



Challenges

'I know many senior scientists who are reducing attendance, but for someone like me without that recognition, how do I get my name out there without physically attending? Would love other options!'

Dr Louise Stephen (@ciliaNcilia). Twitter; December 2019

We had to put up with ...

- Awkward online poster sessions
- Unsatisfactory online networking
- A sense that some were becoming disconnected from their scientific community



As scientists, we need to experiment!

Scientists are creative people. We need to experiment with new formats for better results.

- What is the aim of the meeting?
 - Which modes work for which format?
 - What is required to make a specific mode work?
 - What is the critical mass needed for specific mode?
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- How can we measure and determine whether a mode is useful?



The Future of Meetings (TFOM)

<https://thefutureofmeetings.wordpress.com/>

TFOM was a CSIRO-hosted Cutting Edge Science Symposium held in September 2020 to explore the future of meetings.

- How can we use collaborative technologies?
- What existing culture and practices can we draw upon?

How do we maximise contributions and creativity while minimising negative interactions or outcomes?

Check the video on the TFOM start page!



#TFOM
TODAY TOMORROW FUTURE





There is more than one way to join

Not all modes are equal but offering mixed modes for participation make events more accessible.

There are many opportunities to innovate by blending in-person, hybrid, and online formats and adopting new technologies, including technologies such as virtual reality, or local or regional hubs where participants can gather to discuss and network.



Virtual Reality

We could give up the physical and go completely virtual. Virtual (VR) and augmented (AR) reality have been connecting people in virtual space for decades, and could be adapted for scientific meetings, workshops and conferences.

Visiting future conferences around the world in the form of a holograph or avatar?





Spatially Distributed International Conferences

A possible format is ‘spatially distributed’ international conferences. These bring people together in person while limiting long-distance travel by organising into a number of hubs, linked together through streaming technologies.

This model could work particularly well for fields where many countries already have thriving national societies or regional meetings that could form local hubs within international spatially distributed conferences.



What about the cost?

Conference hosts have voiced concerns that “hybrid” events are twice as expensive to run than single-mode events.

Local tourism boards discourage mixed-mode events.

Financial modelling by Copernicus GmbH, event organiser for the European Geosciences Union (approx. 20,000 participants) shows that offering online options results in only 5% additional cost but 20% more participants. With innovation in the online modes the number of online participants can be expected to grow.



What can you do?

To a certain degree, we have choices. We can choose to attend and support meetings organised with sustainability and accessibility in mind.

This will depend on your means and your objectives.

What do you think would make conferences better for you?

If you have an idea, we encourage you to discuss it with your colleagues and with the wider community in your field.



Conclusions

There are many opportunities to innovate by blending in-person, hybrid, and online formats and adopting new technologies in mixed-mode events.

Not all modes are equal, and it requires creative thinking about the goals of the event to enable worthwhile accessible modes.

Moving back to in person-only conferences is not sustainable.

Environmental costs of travel will become prohibitive and it is not equitable, as it favours the more wealthy parts of the research community.



Thank you

Mineral Resources

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TFOM



Further Information

- The [Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement](#) has some good resources and an active Slack community
- The [ACM Virtual Conferences page](#) includes a report from the ACM Presidential Task Force on What Conferences Can Do to Replace Face-to-Face Meetings (May 2020)