

Pros and Cons for three SBE conference types

V5 25Apr21

Issues	Live	Hybrid	Virtual
Definitions	Includes facility rental, catering services and recording of sessions, but no streaming	Must allow for variability in number of each delegate type	Even if all delegates are remote, it is likely that some organizers and keynote speakers will be live
Sponsor involvement	Many sponsors prefer live events so they can network with potential clients - not a strong factor with researchers.	Sponsors may be positive if proportion of virtual delegates is low	Most sponsors are not enthusiastic about this model because it lacks direct contact with delegates, but some (cf Gothenburg) are OK with short sponsor videos in virtual plenary sessions.
Rental space for the event - plenary and parallel sessions	Baseline costs	Could be reduced if proportion of virtual delegates is high and is fixed well in advance	Greatly reduced space rental costs
Catering for breaks and meals			Catering only for small number of key on-site people
Conference management staff time and costs	Baseline costs	Delft SBE says that time for IT management can be up to 2X baseline, but other management time and costs will probably be reduced.	
Cost of double-blind peer reviews	Same for all options		
AV system cost	Baseline costs, assuming AV recording of keynotes and roundtables.	AV platforms capable of handling streaming several sessions simultaneously may be expensive (but Zoom may be cheaper - needs more research). Also, host organization may have existing contract with AV provider.	
IT support	Baseline costs for recording of keynotes, roundtables etc.	Need IT staff in all spaces where events are being recorded or broadcast, but student support is also possible. There is value in being able to use recordings later in other time zones, if acceptable to organizers.	
Travel costs and financial support for delegates	Many organizational travel budgets are declining	Costs are applicable to on-site delegates only	Savings for organizers and major sponsors who pay for keynote speakers' travel
Possible requirement for 14-day isolation for destination and return	Major cost factor if paid by university or will deter many from attending.	Costs are applicable to on-site delegates only	
Health risks	OK if delegates and on-site staff follow guidance and are covered by organization's health plan		
Attitude of delegates re. the three scenarios	Many attendees prefer live events because of possibility of networking with other researchers and/or to see industry exhibits.	<p>The Pandemic has strengthened acceptance of virtual work, but level of acceptance for virtual conference participation is still unknown, and adjusting to different time zones for international events is a problem.</p> <p>Few virtual delegates will sit still through 3-4-5 days as for a live event programme. Most virtual meetings during the pandemic have been adapted in length, but those retaining the same 3-4-5 days rigid programme have had reduced attendance. Virtual attendees will appreciate content being available for x days/weeks following the event.</p>	
Registration Income	If daily or sessional registration is permitted, there may be a negative impact on total income.		

Added contributions from Richard Lorch, Marc-Andr  Gemme and Don Ward



Individual views on SBE conference types

Richard Lorch; *Buildings and Cities* journal

I wrote a commentary on scientific conferences. I hope it might be of interest to you and your colleagues. In this commentary, I raise a number of questions and concerns about both present practices and new practices. Clearly the research community needs to be involved in a wide discussion, but leadership is also needed by those organisations with capabilities.

<https://www.buildingsandcities.org/insights/commentaries/scientific-conferences-and-the-pandemic.html>

Delft SBE

Additional considerations for virtual format:

- There has been an observed drop on registration numbers (due to overall virtual fatigue, approx. 30% in recurring events)
- Networking is considerably hindered in virtual formats (negatively impacting the potential for collaborations)
- Potential increase on abstract submission, but less active participants (as pre-recordings are more practical and convenient in virtual setups)
- Late registrations as people can decide at the last moment to join/ therefore uncertain income to the last moment
- Success of the conference more or less depends on the ability of the speakers to perform well online and their infrastructure (Wi-Fi, laptop, etc.) at home
- Program needs to be customized to an online format (shorter presentations, less hours per day, etc.) distraction of participants is high so you really have to rethink your program (also a nice challenge!)
- Sponsor income will drop dramatically (sponsor packages are cheap) Sponsors are willing to sponsor as it is less work for them than a live event but still gives the exposure, they look for
- Virtual events and live streaming allow participants to view content on demand
- For the virtual part we have to work with rules and regulations concerning privacy settings / General Data Protection Regulation
- Technology doesn't always cooperate; we are depending on one virtual platform to work everywhere in the world for participants that attend

Additional considerations for hybrid format:

- Increased uncertainty regarding attendance, therefore less attractive for sponsors, and higher financial risks
- Substantial increase of costs for technical support and digital platforms
- Estimated increase of double the amount of man-hour expenses expected for organization and management of the conference
- Sponsors are not fond of hybrid as the sponsor packages are relatively priced high and the work is double
- Difficult to manage the expectations of the participants that will be live in Delft (especially on the networking part). The vibe with 350 participants is totally different than the vibe with 100 participants. This can influence the overall experience of the conference for this group
- For the virtual part we have to work with rules and regulations concerning privacy settings
- Technology doesn't always cooperate; we are depending on one virtual platform to work everywhere in the world for participants that attend

Sustainable Buildings Canada

This NGO carries out many IDP workshops each year and also an annual green conference.

- In 2020, SBC did all Virtual with a combination of pre-recorded presentations and live hosting and live Q & A. Our MC was required to be in a studio and that studio managed all the virtual hosting etc. It was expensive.
- We significantly reduced our sponsor ask last year and halved it this year in anticipation of some in-person content. It's a challenge. Note that we included a virtual exhibit hall last year which some sponsors liked/used
- Regarding AV cost, Pre-recording requires professional editing and uploading to UTube or similar is time consuming. We have a professional editor on our team but he put a lot of time into this. Virtual hosting for more than 100 people has a cost. We have a new provider this year so I will have better info after GBFest
- Zoom has limitations for (large) numbers of people and length of time. There are other platforms with more functionality
- We did 7 hours of programming over 3 days. 9:00 to noon is the best time. Ensure you have at least 1 key note or engaging presentation per day. Our 1st and 3rd day had highest attendance.
- Q&A can be accommodated. We made all content available to paid attendees for a 3 month "exclusive" timeframe. After that, all recorded material was moved to open sources.