European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music: Position paper on climate change

17 August 2019

We agree on the following points and ask colleagues in other regions and other disciplines to consider them.

1. We enjoy our conference traditions and are proud of what they have achieved. We also recognize that:
   a. the cost of travel, accommodation and registration excludes many colleagues from low-GDP countries;
   b. the carbon emissions of traditional conferences represent a significant proportion of all academic emissions; and
   c. to solve these problems we can take advantage of emerging and improving technologies for electronic communication.

2. We accept the main findings of climate science and their implications. We consider the future of human civilization to be incomparably more important than our conference traditions. Given that international climate politics is lacking leadership, academics can rise to fill the gap. We therefore aim to achieve the emissions reductions recommended by IPCC in 2018, halving global emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050. Since fast reductions may be impossible in some areas, even faster ones will be necessary in others.

3. By far the greatest source of emissions at a typical academic conference is flying by individual participants. Efforts to reduce emissions should therefore begin by reducing flying.

4. Carbon emissions from academic conferences can be radically reduced while improving other aspects such as accessibility, electronic documentation, and cultural diversity. Face-to-face interaction can be maintained by mixing real and virtual interaction ("semi-virtual"). Promising formats include:
   a. Live-streaming of all presentations (e.g. to YouTube) to improve documentation and allow for global virtual participation and dissemination.
   b. A conventional conference program with added virtual presentations. These can be combined with virtual social activities such as group skype meetings before and after formal presentations.
   c. Regional multi-hub conferences with real-time electronic communication between conference hubs and parallel live and virtual presentations at each hub. The program is confined to office hours in a central time zone plus or minus 1-2 hours. At each hub, participants choose between parallel live and virtual presentations. All presentations are seen live at one location and virtually at another (e.g. ESCOM 2021).
   d. Mixtures of the previous two: a regional multi-hub conference with added virtual presentations from outside (e.g. a North American conference with NE, NW, SE and SW hubs plus virtual presentations from Europe and China); or a conference that connects two regions with more than one hub in each region.
   e. Global multi-hub conferences with balanced representation from different global regions. Similar to regional conferences but with a 24-hour global program and hubs that are roughly equally spaced around the globe (e.g. ICMPC 2018).
   f. Fully virtual conferences with almost no carbon footprint. Lack of personal contact can be made up for by accessibility and cultural diversity (e.g. Ken Hiltner: NCN guide).

5. New conference formats need to be tried out before decisions can be made about long-term conference cycles. For that purpose it may be appropriate to interrupt existing conference cycles.

6. Academic societies in different regions and different disciplines can collaborate to facilitate the transition to a new style of academic conference that takes advantage of modern communication technologies and reduces carbon emissions to a minimum.