



# UIA'S POINT OF VIEW: TIME TO UPGRADE?

IN THE QUEST FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, ICT-BASED COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS HAVE FOR SOME TIME BEEN VIEWED AS THE WAY FORWARD. STILL, SOME ASPECTS REMAIN IN THE SHADOWS. IN THIS ARTICLE THE EDUCATION & SUSTAINABILITY TEAM PRESENT THREE DIFFERENT WAYS OF MAKING EVENTS MORE SUSTAINABLE WITHOUT IGNORING THE DARKER SIDE OF THE ICT INDUSTRY.

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Just upgraded to the latest videoconference equipment? Or are you waiting for an even slimmer iPad that weighs 'next to nothing'? Well, the inconvenient truth is that these products have a heavier impact than we think.

Let's take the example of mobile phones. Around 30 different minerals go into making each phone; and to give you an idea, for the extraction of a tonne of platinum 950,000 tonnes of raw material are displaced. Next comes the manufacturing process; each chip

requires approximately 3,200 litres of water, 72g of chemicals and 700g of nitrogen and produces 6 kg of CO<sup>2</sup>. Add to that the 99 kg of CO<sup>2</sup> produced using the phone. As with all kinds of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), around 80 % of the environmental impact of mobile phones comes from their use, not the manufacturing process.

Globally, around 50 million tonnes of electronic waste are produced each year, and

most of it ends up in countries like China and India where children collect, burn and re-sell what they can, not to mention the contamination it brings to the rivers, land and sea.

To sum up - the market price doesn't include all the 'real' costs of ICT. So where does that leave us? What is our responsibility as event organisers, businesses and digital citizens? How can we use the new technology more sustainably and fairly, how can we reuse and redistribute resources, and most importantly, how can we make sure we make the most of the collective, interactive and open learning processes that the new technologies offer?

For starters we know that learning takes place more in the coffee breaks than the conference room, and that we learn through a process that relates to personal experience,

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social networks and interactive applications. So social networks, phone applications and all sorts of online stimulation are a must. Energy efficiency, low impact, switching off, free software, open source, creative commons, recycling, and donating old equipment are all part of the challenge.

There are endless possibilities for creating web-based environments to reduce the environmental impact of your conference but before you upgrade, think about the consequences!

## CASE 1

People travel, but stay for a shorter time.

### Event: A 2-day workshop on Pedagogy for Sustainable Development

Held by SWEDES, the Swedish International Centre for Education for Sustainable Development together with Global Action Plan International, in Visby, Sweden, November 2009.

Normally an event of this kind would be expected to last for at least 4 days. Since the 65+ participants came from all around the world, this would have meant 5-6 or even 7 nights' stay, depending on connections. Instead, the workshop was preceded by a kind of e-learning program. A website was set up, using e-learning software. Registered participants and facilitators were divided into groups and invited to submit structured descriptions of their case studies in advance, and to comment on the case studies in their group.

Even the organizers were a little surprised at the response: nearly 50 case studies were submitted in advance. Consequently the workshop was judged a success despite its severe time limits; and participants have continued to interact both directly and via the website after the event. Having only 3 overnight stays considerably reduced costs. The organizers have concluded that a 3-day event (4 nights) would have been optimal.

## CASE 2

Almost everyone stays home. Video links enable interaction.

### Event: Acting Towards a One-Planet Future, a 1-day 'interactive conference'

Hosted by WWF Sweden for universities and others, February 2010.

This was an asymmetrical event with a main event in one place, Stockholm; only a handful of people travelled to the event, principally one of the main speakers (from the USA) and a small group of Norwegian participants. Around 10 universities in other places were connected - at least sporadically - by video link. All participants there were local.

It would seem that the potential for such events could be great, at least when there are easily identified local groups. The opportunity for hosting organizations is to provide permanently installed, tested and reliable video conferencing facilities. The time lost by using 'imported' equipment and trying it out during the event can be considerable.

## CASE 3

Working with regional nodes. 2-days on-site, 1500 users off-site.

### Event: EMSU - Environmental Management for Sustainable Universities

Hosted by the Technical University of Catalonia, the Autonomous University of Barcelona and RCE Barcelona, 15-17 Oct. 2008.

EMSU is held every two years with the aim of stimulating the higher education sector into action for sustainability, covering multiple issues from climate change to poverty, governance to urban futures. The conference series targets academics, students, and administrative staff in universities around the world.

The idea in 2008 was to do things differently - and above all more coherently with the global theme. Why generate tonnes of CO2 flying people across the globe to talk about ways to reduce emissions? In addition, the organisers also wanted to reach a large and diverse audience as well as keep to their modest budget - maximum participation, minimum footprint.

Six months before the conference regional 'nodes' were set up to participate in the EMSU activities before, during and after the conference in 7 different countries. Participants joined the debate via a social network, online questionnaires, workshops and research and the results were shared in the conference via a variety of media; Skype, videoconference and pre-recorded messages.

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