

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR  
POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS**



**HOW TO ORGANIZE A CONFERENCE  
STEP BY STEP MANUAL**

**ENLISTMENT OF IDEAS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS THAT IS GOOD  
TO HAVE IN MIND WHEN ORGANIZING A CONFERENCE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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This manual is not meant to be a Bible for the ones who want to organize such an event as a conference is. It is more of a handbook or a booklet of tips. This manual can be used as a general guideline for the organizers. It can give you an idea of all the steps that need to be taken when organizing such an event. It is absolutely necessary for you to use this manual in complement with your own thinking and ideas. You are welcome to write in your own tips, so the manual can grow from an event to an event and some day become a true IAPSS Manual for organizing conferences.

Don't just blindly follow the instructions in this booklet. I don't have all the right answers and my ideas are not always the best solutions.

Having a conference means having opportunity to:

- meet political science students from other countries,
- become familiar with study and faculty in a hosting country (curriculum, faculty equipment and possibilities for research work, first hand information about student exchange possibilities, local and national student organization and their projects, sport and casual events etc.),
- become informed about national programs and events connected to political science,
- promote your association inside and outside your faculty,
- gain connections, build networks with institutions important to your association's work,
- bring new active students into your association,
- get to know the history and beauties of the hosting country,
- get to know the culture and religion of the hosting country,
- be introduced to social life in hosting country by being part of it for a while,
- travel,
- gain new life experiences,
- train your management skills,
- gain new friendship,
- and a lot of other reasons, professional and personal.

## **PRE-PREPARATION**

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### **Idea for organizing a conference**

#### Idea of an individual

At the beginning there is usually an idea of one or more students who woke up one day with a thought that the student life at the faculty is just not what they want it to be. They are tired of seeing the same faces day by day, having the same discussions over and over again and they want something new, something fresh. And what better way to accomplish this than by inviting your fellow students from different countries to attend a conference at your faculty. This will give you a chance to meet new people with new ideas, different opinions on current issues. Give you a chance to finally use the foreign language, that you have been learning almost all your life, in practice.

#### Wanting to organize an event

So now we have an idea. What we need next is a desire (ok, maybe it's too strong word) to really want to organize a conference. I know that it's easier to sit in a comfortable chair and wait for the faculty management to do it but as this is not likely to happen (Deans around the globe, please prove me wrong) it is on you, my dear fellow students, to create yourself an opportunity to meet foreign students of political science. When you finally accept the fact that you want to be the one who'll go the extra mile to give your colleges an opportunity to broaden their horizons is time to get inspiration from many student conferences that happen every year.

#### Inspiration from different conferences

Why is it necessary to look at other conferences? Mostly because it can give lots and lots of ideas, hints, tips on almost every aspect of the conference. For example, a quick look at the web page of some student conference can give you tons of information on how should an application form look like, how should the web page be like (if you decide to have one - it's a good idea but you need a webmaster, who will keep the page updated 24 /7), what information to put on the web page, the structure of the programme (when to get up, when to start lectures, when to have a lunch break...) and so on.

In this phase it is also a good idea to look for ideas with a little help of brainstorming of interested individuals. All the ideas that arise in the process are written down and you'll discuss about them later in the preparation period.

Please try to avoid the "copy – paste" technique when building the frame of your conference. Use the other conferences simply as an example. Organising such an event can be a challenge for anybody, so do not give up at the beginning, try something new, better and more interesting and funny and you will be satisfied and your guests will be pleased at the end.

## **Is your organization prepared to be an organizer?**

### Presentation of the idea to the members

The "initiative team" must now present the idea within their local organization. The easiest way to do this is to send e-mails and set up a meeting on which you will discuss this issue. Before you go to this meeting prepare yourself for the presentation. Don't let them catch you off guard. Develop the idea and prepare lists of possible solutions for the problems that might emerge during the organizational period. Don't go to a meeting and say: "Why don't we organize a regional conference." You have to have a plan on how can your association do this task successfully.

### Getting much needed support for the idea

If you'll be well prepared and enthusiastic about it then you should have no problem with getting the support for this project. If there is no or little support then is most likely that the idea of having a conference at your faculty will die☹. Close the manual and put back on the shelf. But if you have the support you are welcome to keep reading the manual☺. Why do we need support? Because during organizational period there is so much work to be done that it's quite impossible for one or two people to do it qualitatively and successfully. You will need approximately at least 7 people (depending on the size of the conference) in your organizational team plus additional 5 – 7 for technical support and logistics. If you sum this up you'll see that you need 12 – 14 people working on the project. So you see now why the support is so crucial.

It's also a very good idea to have the support from your faculty as they are most likely the ones letting you use the classrooms and the equipment. The Dean may have a welcoming speech, the professors would participate on the conference as lecturers, you may use the faculties mess for lunches, etc.

### Goals (what do we want to accomplish?)

Here we will define the goals of the group as well as that of the individuals. What do we want to accomplish? Why do we even want to organize such an event? Does this represents a personal challenge for us or is it something else? Let's ask ourselves why and find all the answers to this simple question.

This manual will not give a list of possible answers. It cannot. Every particular person must think about it and find that inner force that pushes her/him towards organizing a conference. But it is very important for the group and individuals to define the goals of their work, because this represents the foundation and the starting point for the evaluation of the project.

Define the collective goals (good organization; no delays with lectures, round tables; make sure that the participants enjoy every minute of their stay...) and goals of individuals (Heads of specific areas). It is clear that the individuals set up their own goals and follow them through the whole process. We then try to achieve these goals and evaluate them in the analysis period.

Once the goals are set we do not change them in the light of covering up our mistakes (My goal is to set up the budget in time. I missed the deadline for setting up the budget. I failed to achieve my goal so I simple delete it or change it). If we do that, than the evaluation has no meaning. We will always do the same mistakes instead of preventing them. The evaluation is the process that helps us to do the later.

### **Checking the available resources (know-how, individuals with different skills...) for the conference (this task is essential to find out if you have the manpower to organize an event)**

This task is a logical continuation of getting the support because the ones who are supporting you are most likely to take an active role in preparing the conference. With this task you'll find out who is prepared to do a specific task and who has the knowledge to do it. You want to know who has any kind of experience concerning the task that is ahead or has any organizational skills. Ask your colleges if they know someone who would be prepared to give you a hand on any of the fields listed below.

Your team should consist of following individuals (each "Head" can have additional persons to help her/him successfully fulfil the task):

- Head of conference (usually is also Head of organizational team);
- Head of finances (preparing the budget, providing the money for the conference);
- Head of programme (what would be the programme like, getting in touch with the guests, lecturers, participants of the round tables...);
- Head of accommodation (reservation of the hotel and everything concerning the staying of participants at the location, meals,);
- Head of logistics (transport hotel-faculty-hotel and around the city, sight seeing, night life...);
- Head of technical support (preparation of classrooms, audio-video equipment, info-point, photocopying...);
- webmaster;
- Head of public relations;
- others.

#### Head of the conference

As stated above the Head of conference is usually also the Head of organizational committee. She/he is in charge for technical and organizational preparation of the conference. She/he directly leads, organizes and supervises the work of entire organizational team. She/he takes part in all fazes of preparation, execution, ending and evaluation. From these general assignments<sup>1</sup> we can enumerate specific tasks:

- she/he is responsible for executing all the tasks of the organizational team;

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<sup>1</sup> This tasks provide a general overview. It is possible to decline from this view in both ways. The purpose of this overview is to give an idea of what should a particular »Head« do.

- she/he takes part, with her/his suggestions, in preparation of the lists of needed materials (office and other);
- she/he is responsible for updating the home page of the conference;
- she/he is available for the members of her/his team for help and advice;
- she/he is responsible for a normal course of events;
- she/he passes out the tasks to her/his team;
- she/he pronounces praises and rebukes;
- together with the members of the team sets up a time frame of the event;
- deals with conflicts inside the team in case they emerge.

During her/his work the Head of organizational team takes into consideration suggestions and advices of other members of the team. For the needs of harmonization of the work he organizes regular meetings of the team. An essential part of these meetings is also analysing of the work that has been already done. After the conference she/he takes an active role in evaluation and drawing of the final report of the event.

### Head of finances

The most important task is drawing up the budget and gathering the funds needed for the event. All the other members of the team help her/him with her/his task, especially the Head of conference. Head of finances is responsible for positive management of the event. She/he is coordinating the needs (financial, material) of other members of the team. With the available resources she/he tries to satisfy as much needs as possible.

Individual tasks are:

- she/he's in charge of financing before, during and after the event;
- she/he collects and keeps track of delegation payments;
- during the event she/he's in charge of common purse;
- responsible for appropriate security of common purse;
- responsible for setting up the final financial report.

### Head of programme

Her/his job is to prepare the programme of the conference. This means she/he has to plan every event from getting up in the morning to going to sleep. She/he can conduct this task with the help of the team or other people, but if the task is not completed in time or not done properly she/he is the one responsible. Individual tasks are:

- preparing the order of the day;
- getting in touch with the lecturers, participants of round tables etc.;
- informing the Head of technical support which classrooms are need and when;
- planning the evening events, making reservations if needed<sup>2</sup>;
- informing the Head of accommodation when should the meals take place;
- responsible for a contingency plan in case lecturers cancel their attendance five minutes prior to start of the lecture.

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<sup>2</sup> This is conducted with Head of logistics.

### Head of accommodation

This is one of more difficult tasks. She/he has to find a place to stay for about 20 - 120 participants. The hotel must be cheap and must offer as much as possible. Avoid, if possible, accommodating your participants in different hotels around the city as this will pose a big problem for Head of logistics. It's not as easy as it looks. She/he has to make reservations in a hotel early enough. Here she/he must work closely with Secretary General as she/he is the one who can give the exact number of participants. Make sure you that closing date for applications gives you enough time to make the reservation. Once you have the exact number of participants you can make reservations for lunch and dinner. Add to the number five more meals, just in case. And don't forget that the organizers need food too☺. A few days before the conference starts check if everything is O.K. with your reservations. Make sure that the hotel and restaurant management are prepared for the incoming of students.

**For smaller types of regional conferences (up to 30 participants, up to 4 days) organizing team should consider accommodating the attendants at student dorms/apartments.**

### Head of logistics

This task includes all transport of participants around the city during the event. It also includes transport from/to airport, train station, etc. The arrival of delegates probably represents the most demanding part of this task as they arrive at different times and different locations. This means you need to have enough people and transport means to transport the delegates to the hotel. The easiest part is therefore transport from hotel to faculty and back as it takes place at the same hours every day. And you already have all the delegates in one place. You'll probably use public means of transport so make sure to give the participants the tickets.

You also need to organize transport for sight-seeing. If this event takes place in the city this poses no problem - you can use public means of transport in the city. If you plan a trip outside the city and visit some distant places, then you should rent a bus to take the participants for a field trip.

### Head of technical support

Her/his task is to prepare the classrooms in time, make sure that the audio-video equipment is working properly. For successful conducting of this task she/he should have 4 – 5 people helping her/him (depending on the size of the conference). Some other tasks are:

- she/he is responsible for up date of info – point and materials available there;
- she/he also photocopies all needed materials for the conference. This task is conducted before and during<sup>3</sup> the conference;

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<sup>3</sup> This is especially important during IAPSS AC as there are many documents that need to be multiplied and distributed among delegates.

- other tasks as providing the white board markers, floppy discs for the delegates, etc.

### Webmaster

Her/his task is to maintain and refresh the home page of the conference (if you have one). She/he is not in charge of the content of the home page, only the outlook of the page. Individual Heads provides her/him the content for the home page. PR team can be responsible for the outlook of the page and the webmaster becomes in charge for the technical side of the page. It is your decision.

### Head of public relations

If you want to be mentioned in the media than you need your PR team. Task of this team is to get in touch with as many journalists, reporters as they can and keep them informed about your events (lectures, round tables, etc.). Prepare special maps with materials for journalists and make sure that they have a seat in front of the classroom. This task is not easy. Rather on contrary as it is quite hard to get in to newspaper as a student organized event. At least that is my experience, but you are more than welcome to prove me wrong 😊.

### Others

Depending on your needs you can have additional people for carrying out some special tasks. For example, we can put here a "second in command", a person that will the place of Head of conference during her/his absence. You can have a special person for this or it can be one from your organizational team. It doesn't really matter as long as she/he is well informed and prepared to take such a responsible place. We can also put here the Secretary General. For IAPSS AC 2003 she/he was the one collecting applications of delegations.

Some of the tasks mentioned above are shorter and less demanding than others. This gives to team members the chance to help each other in accomplishing their tasks. But be careful with this help as you must not neglect your task for the sake of helping others. If the personal relations within the team are good then the work inside the team should pose no problem at all.

**Please note:** when you are executing these tasks it's not absolutely necessary to keep this strict line between the competences of each Head. You need to be flexible and adjustable as it will not be possible to conduct particular tasks due to different reasons (illness, absence of the person in charge, etc.). I also did not enumerate all the tasks that need to be done and are crucial for a successful conference. One of these tasks is definitely preparing the coffee and refreshing drinks during the short breaks.

## **Specifying the features of the conference**

### What kind of a conference (regional, European, thematic...)

Before you send out the invitations for your conference you need to specify what kind of a conference you want to have. You need to do that because once you decide on this issue, you know who you can invite. If you have a regional conference and you are from Central Europe, than it's obvious you won't invite someone from South Europe or from other parts of the world.

You also need to specify the features of a conference before you go to talk with lecturers to participate at the event. The first question the professor is going to ask you is "What kind of a conference is it?". She/he needs to know that in order to prepare her/himself for the event and to even see if she/he is the right person to talk about the suggested subject. The specification will also help you to contact the right lecturers. Because if you ask professor who teaches methodology to come and have a lecture on terrorism it will make you look totally unprofessional and unorganized. And the word spreads fast and you can be sure that soon all the professors at your faculty will hear about your "mistake".

### For who is the conference organized (who to invite)

Once you have specified the features of the conference you know who to invite. As you are the organizer you are in charge of who to invite and who not to. It's always a good idea to invite your friends from abroad that you have met at different events in the past. If some of them don't quite fit in the frame of the conference (they are not from the region) invite them as guests who will participate and observe the conference.

How to get in touch with students from abroad? Once again a good idea is to check the internet and look for any student political science organizations. If such an organization has a web page then it will also have a contact address. Another option is also your personal contacts that you've gained when you participated on a conference. If you have no contacts than you can always ask the ExCom to provide you with list of IAPSS members. This should not be a problem.

In case you want to do the conference and you are just looking for the students who are interested you can announce your idea at the Event corner of the IAPSS WebPage or send an e-mail to IAPSS mailing group.

### Where will it be held

Decide on the place of the event. Is it going to be at your faculty or in a prestige conference centre down town? The easiest and the cheapest way is to have it at your faculty. But if you are drowning in money than go ahead and make reservation at the conference centre and organize a classy conference with all the glamour and prestige 😊.

### When will it be held

Here you set up a date of the conference. It sounds easy but please keep in mind not to set up the event around mid terms or vacations as you won't have lot of participants. Check when do your participants have mid terms or different vacations, holidays, etc. It is a good idea to start the conference in the middle of the week (Wednesday or Thursday) and end it on Sunday. I find the best time for a conference to be March, April or end of the September. You also need to watch not to organize an event at the same time as some other conference is already scheduled.

### How long

There is no rule of thumb for this one. The only thing to keep in mind is if the conference is shorter than 3 days it is most likely that only a few students will participate. I think that not many will fly to a conference only for 3 days and then head back home. But on the other hand the conference shouldn't be too long. Remember that we are all students who have obligations and cannot afford longer absences from school.

## **PREPARATION**

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### **Invitation for applications**

Invitation means establishing a first contact with students. If you have a specific country or faculty you want to invite at your conference, you can ask students you might know from there or ask your Contact person to help you with establishing the contacts. Send out the invitation as soon as possible, preferably 4 – 5 months before the event will take place. This should give you enough time to prepare the conference well. Close the application period about 3 weeks prior to the start of the "show".

Here you can see a list of important information which you have to put in your Invitation:

- what kind of a conference is going to take place; where; from when to when;
- who can apply to participate;
- who is the organizer;
- deadline for applications;
- how many applicants from one organization;
- costs;
- official application form;
- address for all sorts of information;
- special requirements.

### What kind of a conference is going to take place; where; from when to when

Write down the features of the event. What is the theme of the conference, what are the questions you'll try to enlighten during the conference, where will it be held, which city, country, time period, etc.

### Who is the organizer

Which organization is organizing the event? Make sure you give the name and address of the Head of conference and address on which all other information is available.

### Deadline for applications

The application period. When you are setting up the closing date of this period give yourself enough time to make all the necessary arrangements around accommodation, meals, transport or to even cancel the event due to not enough applications. Don't set this date to close to opening ceremony of the conference. It is very important to warn the participant to send their applications in time!

### How many applicants from one organization

As you are the organizer you also decide on the number of applicants from one organization. Usually there are 2 – 3 participants from one organization. But if you have a smaller number of organizations invited the number of participants can increase and vice versa.

### Costs

Here you inform the participants how much it will cost them to participate at your conference. Usually they pay only the trip from their country to yours and back and all other expenses are covered by the organizer. But this is a matter of your decision and the available resources.

### Official application form

Official application form is the form through which you'll accept applications. Usually you put it on the web site as most of applications are done via internet. Application form is essential for getting the needed data from applicants. In there you have full name, surname, address, date of birth, sex, time of arrival, means of arrival... This data is essential if your participants need visa to enter the hosting country as you need to send them official letters of invitation by which they can apply for a visa at the embassy. From application form you can also see if someone has a special diet (due to illness or other reasons), needs to take certain medicines and needs a cool place to store them, etc<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of an application form see Supplement No. 1.

### Address for all sorts of information

Write the address where the participants can get other information. Also write down the address of your web page and inform the delegates that they can also find useful info on the web page.

### Special requirements

Must participants prepare themselves for the conference with an essay or a paper? Should they be familiar with any specific theme or problem that you'll discuss during the event? Let them know what you expect from them so they can prepare for the conference in time.

### **Passing out the organizational tasks**

After establishing contacts and finding students or a faculty who would like to work with you, promote the project among students of your faculty and find people who would like to be part of the organising committee. As I mentioned above you'll need a lot of people helping you in order to complete the task successfully. We are talking about 12 -14 people. Of course it is possible to do it with less people but this means that you'll have a lot of work on your hands and this work won't be done properly.

I already mentioned what are the tasks of each individual so here we will talk only about passing these tasks to certain individuals. Each place inside the team needs a person with certain capabilities and knowledge. It is important to think about who is the most appropriate for a certain spot. Take into consideration the wishes of individuals. Give someone the task she/he is wishing for as she/he will most likely do it very good. Avoid giving tasks to individuals who don't like it as you will put in trouble the entire team. You will also encounter the case where more people would like to do the same task.

In my opinion and experience the biggest problem is finding the Head of organizational team and conference. This position requires a responsible person and we all know that most students try to avoid responsibility. Everybody would like to help and do this and that but no one is really prepared to help. For your organizational team select only ones who are truly prepared to work. All the others can during the event help you around smaller tasks.

### Head of conference (usually is also Head of organizational team)

Has to be a person with organizational and management skills. Has to be able to adjust different interests and tasks inside the team. Has to have authority and use it in the right time or situation. Should not be too dictatorial or to democratic either. Has to be able to take control over the situation as soon as she/he sees that they hit a brick wall. Should not be a lazy person as she/he is the engine of entire team. She/He should know how to advise the members of her/his team. Should not under-estimate them and should not think of her/himself as a God who came down from heaven to lead the blind

people through the valley of shadow of death☺. She/he has to have a sense for teamwork.

### Head of finances

Needs to be very good with numbers. Has to have good language skills as he is the one talking with possible sponsors and donators. Has to be precise and economical. Must have a will of her/his own and not be influenced by the financial needs of the members of the team.

### Others

Here we can enlist all those who play bigger part in preparation of the event than in actual execution. More or less they need the same characteristics as all the others. They all need to be team players and not have problems with authority. Organization of such an event as conference demands clear division of duties. Keep in mind that organizing such an event is a big responsibility for organizing committee.

### **Executing of organizational tasks**

Organise a meeting with your colleagues, who are interested in having a conference, collect ideas about program, have some brain storming about accommodation, food, visits, interesting topics for discussions or lecturers, trips, evening and sport events ...

### Management of the organizational team

This is one of the most demanding tasks in the whole project and the person who must do this task properly is Head of the organizational team. What I mean by management is being on top of the whole preparation process. The Head needs to divide tasks among members properly so everyone feels O.K. with the tasks that lie ahead. She/he needs to monitor the progress and how the things are developing and take proper measures if something has gone bad. She/he calls regular meetings of the team where they inform each other of the situation on their field of work. As this task (management) is quite difficult, especially for regular students as we are, a big help is needed from the rest of the team. By self initiative and homogeneity within the group they can contribute a lot to the management. Especially when they encounter some minor problems they should be able to deal with them by their selves and not always run to the Head crying for help. It is also very good if the members of the team don't need constant guidance in the sense of what they should do – self initiative. As you can see this is quite a complex part of the project so it's hard for me to explain it properly☺.

### Finances

As you should figured it out by now, this project will also cost you some money. Make it easier to yourself and try to find some sponsorship. I know it is hard to find funding for student related projects but with a little bit of effort and thought you can do it.

The first thing to do is to prepare a budget and see how much money you'll actually need. Think of all the expenses and also possible incomes. Do not look just for the financial support; think also about other non-financial help. Maybe companies can offer or arrange lunch or dinner, someone could be interested in paying your costs of trip or offer you the accommodation, another one could give you some presents for your guests, arrange interesting lectures...

Have in mind that the biggest expense for your budget will be accommodation and meals.

Now we can move to the hardest part of everything – getting some sponsorship. It is true nobody will give you money just because you need it. You have to offer them something. Think in this way and try to find answers on following questions:

- Do you have any company in your country?
- Is it a small or a big one?
- Do they produce just for your country or also for other parts of Europe and world?
- Do they have a smaller factory of their concern in other countries or do they plan to have it?
- Which countries are on their list or in their plans, where they have to improve their marketing? Invite people from there!
- Do they own any hotels, restaurants ...?

Now it's your turn. If answers are positive, then go on.

Ask them about possibilities of:

- visiting their company;
- organising a lecture & round table debate on specific theme;
- having lunch in their cantina, restaurant ... for free;
- oversleeping in their hotel during the trip for free or with discount;
- paying for the travel costs for the trip;
- renting you a car, a van, a bus, etc.

But there are not just companies. Think further and think about state institutions, faculties. Ask yourself these questions:

- What could we show our guests? New, modern Parliament or maybe an old City hall? Both. Why not? Arrange a visit.
- Is there any conference room?
- There shouldn't be any difficulties to arrange with your faculty to lend you classrooms for the conference (audio-video equipment included).
- One good point is also informing your dean and she/he can say a few welcoming words to your guests.
- If you have a cantina at the faculty, you can arrange with the faculty a free lunch for your guests.
- Ask professors to have a short lecture or be part of discussion on a specific theme.

Is there any other possibility to get some financial or material support? We are sure there is. Try also with:

- centre for the promotion of your country (promotional material such as maps, beauties of your country, sport and cultural events in that period, souvenirs ...);
- travel agencies (discount for the trip if you book the whole bus, because you will invite also colleagues from your faculty to join you on the trip);
- stores (get a discount or some free drinks, chips, chocolate, paper, cups ...; it depends what your program is including for evening events, trips,...);
- parents and friends (maybe they know somebody who can help you).

When you are looking for the sponsorship you have to have in your mind that you are not the only one who is asking for financial or any other help, so you have to give many good reasons of what you can offer them.

### Programme<sup>5</sup>

Have a brainstorming to get some ideas of what could you be doing during the event. Collect as many ideas as possible and discuss them later on. You can include also sport events, sight seeing, visits to the state institutions, etc. Start getting in touch with possible lecturers. Prepare a plan for the case of bad weather or a delayed event. You also need a contingency plan in case the lecturers cancel their attendance at round tables or lectures. Don't forget to include breaks, meals and returns to the hotel in the programme as participants are always keen to know this and are also one thing less that they can ask you.

### Accommodation

When you know the number of people that will participate at the conference, you will be able to arrange the accommodation. Try to find something nice and cosy for reasonable price. Think also about possibility to host your guests in your homes. Make sure that there are enough rooms reserved for your guests. If you will be eating at the hotel inform the kitchen of any participants with special dietary. If you are eating somewhere else get in contact with the restaurant management and make reservations. Before you make a reservation make sure that they have the capacity to accept and feed all of the participants at once. Try to arrange a special price or a discount as meals are one of the biggest expenses.

### Logistics

What are the tasks of the Head of logistics is written in the part about resources. She/he must be in contact with Secretary General (or the person responsible for applications) to see when and how will participants arrive so she/he can make the arrangements to have someone pick them up. The best thing to do is to make a list of delegations arriving with

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<sup>5</sup> For an example of the programme see Supplement No. 2.

plane, train, bus or a car (four different lists). Write down the arrivals and start to plan how many people and vehicles will you need for the transport. Prepare special "waiting boards"<sup>6</sup> and give them to the people who'll escort the delegates to the hotel. Arrange transport around the city via public transport or via rented bus. If you'll rent a bus it will be faster and easier to transport delegates from the hotel to the faculty and back - but it will probably be more expensive. During the conference she/he is in charge of buying all the needed materials (paper, pencils...) and refreshing drinks and food for coffee breaks.

### Technical support

She/he and her/his team are the one who come to the faculty every day an hour or so before the start of the events and start preparing the classrooms. They prepare the audio – video equipment (if needed), prepare the seats for the media, attending professors, guests... They prepare the materials for the participants, refresh the info-point with new information, weather forecast, etc.

### Others

You should be in touch with your guests all this time. Let them know what they can expect from visiting you, give them some basic data about your country, faculty, money, weather, prices, WebPages about your country all those things that could rise their interest before coming to your country. Try to help yourself by asking what you would want to know if you were to attend a conference in a foreign country. Be sure that you will be informed about their arrival (when and where, how many of them) to pick them up. It's a good idea to create a special mailing list for all the participants and regularly send them information concerning the conference. It is absolutely necessary that two weeks before the conference starts, you send the participants information about the hotel (address and phone number are obligatory, give them also web page and e-mail address), weather, money, getting around, telephone numbers of the organizing committee, cabs, public transport, links to airports, railway station, web pages of the hosting city<sup>7</sup>.

Also have in mind that you need to prepare the accreditation cards<sup>8</sup>, cards with names of delegations, attending professors and guests of your round tables and many more minor things that help in organizing a (close to) perfect conference.

## **Checking of organizational tasks that have been done**

### Check what has been already done and what still needs to be done

Head of organizational team sets up regular meetings of her/his team. One of the issues to be debated on these meetings is also checking of what was already done, what is in the process and what needs to be done in the future. You must do that to be able to

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of such "waiting board" see Supplement No. 3.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of such Infopack see Supplement No. 4.

<sup>8</sup> For an example of accreditation card see Supplement No. 5.

plan the actions ahead and to see where the problems are. Because you know how the preparations are going you can redirect human resources to the tasks that need special attention and are critical in the light of falling behind schedule. If you know where the problems are you can start to look for possible solutions. Tasks that are already finished can be temporarily “closed” and you can redirect people from here to other, critical fields. Checking of what has already been done enables you to see if you are on schedule or falling behind.

### Prepare a list of priority tasks

During the preparation period you will be most likely forced to change your timetable of preparation several times due to different circumstances. These circumstances are probably delays of different nature. When you come across some task that needed to be done weeks ago don't panic. Sit down with your team and discuss what the best thing to do is. Is it more important to come up with much needed funds or to prepare the exact programme of the event? Be flexible and be prepared to take a turn off your timetable in order to keep up with the schedule in the later stages. Prepare list of priority tasks and include in accomplishing these tasks as much man power as needed. But be aware not to stop with all the other activities as this would cause another delay on these fields. Find a “third way” between keeping up and not slowing down.

### **Timetable of the event**

#### Agreement in the organizational team

As you can see here we will talk about the timetable of the event, from the first day of the conference to the departure of your participants. Try to correctly plan the starting hours of the first day, especially the meeting of the Heads of delegations (if you will have one). Please note that on the first day the organizers should be at the faculty up to 2 – 3 hours before the arrival of the participants. Try to keep up with the schedule, not allowing too much delay. Once you start to be late it is very hard to come back on track. To do that you'll need at least half a day. Think about the required time for different events, add a few minutes and that should do. Please note that the participants will constantly be late so it's on you to try and make this delay as short as possible. The delays pose a big problem if the lecturer is already in the classroom waiting to start but there are no participants. Try to avoid this kind of situations.

#### Deadlines for different tasks (programme, application, reservations...)

I can only write here that you must start with work too early☺. It is always better to have time to spare in days before the event than grasping for the last minutes in the days before. You should have things arranged several days before the start. Once you've made your timetable of preparation – stick to it! And always give a day or two of reserve for the unexpected events. Have a special place in the office where you'll put the finished materials, papers (info pack, programme, presentations of lecturers...). Make sure to allow access to these materials only to the members of your team.

## **EXECUTION**

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After a few weeks of preparations and maybe also losing some nerves and energy, the guests are finally here. Put a smile on your face and let them know you are a professional and used to do things like that 😊. However, be also prepared for some unpredictable problems; try to find a solution as easy as possible, not occupying all the people with your problems, especially not guests.

Arrange warm reception for your guests. Try to stick to the program, but be flexible or open for changes. Try to involve as many students as possible from your faculty in this event. Having a student party in your program might be a good idea and opportunity for this. Include in your programme a half day of sight-seeing. This is especially important if the conference is longer (5-7 days or more). Put sight-seeing in the middle of the conference and give the participants the chance to relax and prepare themselves for the other half of the conference.

### Everyday arrival of the organizers to where the event is taking place

It is always nice to have the organizers present at different events, but it's sometimes hard to achieve this as there is always a lot of work to be done behind the scenes. Anyway some members of the organizational team must be present at the faculty early in the morning (technical support). It's a good idea for the Head of the conference to come early and check if everything is O.K. and make some moderate changes if needed. Make sure that everybody knows when they should be at the faculty on every particular day. Do this before the start of the conference and make changes (if needed) on your everyday team meetings. I suggest you have this meeting in the evening and evaluate the passing day and prepare for the following. There is no recipe on how to set the time of arrival. This largely depends on the amount of work you need to do before the lessons start.

### Preparations for the arrival of the participants

These preparations include knowledge about exact arrival times of participants and providing enough people and vehicles to escort them to the hotel. It is very important not to forget to pick someone up! Make sure that delegations will immediately recognize the escort (see Supplement No.3) and make sure that nobody will get lost. Have prepared something for the participants also on the official arrival day, as some delegations will come early in the morning and some late in the evening. Some delegations will probably come a day early. Have some people at your disposal to take participants in the city and keep them busy. Be prepared to answer million questions at the time as the participants are always a little bit "lost". Try to think what are the questions you might be asked. Help yourself by asking what you would want to know if when were attending the conference. Make sure that the escort is able to answer all the participants' questions as well. The escort must have the lists with names of delegates.

Have one or two students available to take the delegates to the exchange office as they would want to exchange money.

Your "escort team" represents the first contact with participants so make sure they are nice and that they give a warm welcome. It's a good idea to leave a good first impression with the delegations.

### Meeting with the Heads of delegations

This is the meeting where you present how you imagined the conference would run. Usually the meeting is run by Head of the conference. Prepare a list of things you want to discuss. Plan enough time for this meeting as it may last longer than you think. Inform the delegates of all the things they need to feel here as comfortable as possible. Inform them about the order of the day and the programme. Tell them where they can get all the necessary information (info point), etc. Be prepared to answer a lot of questions. Some of them will be quite silly - but don't get nervous, put a smile on your face and answer as nice as possible☺.

If the Heads are well informed, than you have less questions and problems in the future days so it's worth to make an effort in preparing the meeting with Heads of delegations.

### Day to day preparations for the events planned one day ahead

This is why the evening meetings of the team are for. To prepare for the long next day ahead. On these meetings you should discuss what went wrong during the day, where were the difficulties, should some changes be incorporated in the project. Discuss also what the tasks are of the following day. If you have lecturers coming, arrange someone to meet them and take them in to the classroom. Usually this is the job of the one who made contact with lecturers and arranged their attendance. Just go through the programme of the next day and see what you need to prepare to make it through the day successfully.

## **ENDING**

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### Departure of participants

The same applies here as for "Preparations for the arrival of the participants". Make sure you have the departure times of delegations and arrange an escort to the airport and so on. Thank all the delegates for coming and honouring you with their presence at the conference. You can also confer them the Certificate of attendance and the picture of all the participants and organizers. Make sure that everyone caught their plane, train, bus. Wish them a safe and calm trip back home and wave them goodbye☺.

## Relaxing

Finally you can lay back, put up your feet and relax. You certainly deserve it for a job well done. Now all you have to do is to put all the documents on the CD (this way you have everything prepared for the next conference, you only need to change the dates☺), analyse the event and write the report.

## **ANALYSIS**

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The best time for analysis is one week after the event. Any assessment taking place after this period is considered to be a “cold assessment” because the feelings start to turn in a more positive way than they maybe were during or shortly after the event. In the week after the event you can also remember more clearly what the difficulties were during the event. You remember also the little details that went wrong or were not done properly or according to plan.

### **Assessment by the participants**

You can, during the event, assess how the participants are satisfied with your organizational skills. If you do your job correctly, according to your plan, than the delegates will most likely be satisfied. And believe me that participants have a nose to tell if everything is running smoothly or are you struggling to keep the things together. You can see it is quite easy.

### General assessment

General assessment is assessment during the event. This assessment is given to you by the participants themselves through the comments about the conference. Crucial factor for success is organization. These means that everything is running smoothly, there is no delays or times when participants have nothing to do. Were they satisfied with accommodation, food, transport? How were the lectures like? If delegates could not get certain information at the time they asked for it, then this certainly is not good. Have a good and well informed info point. But also have in mind that general assessment is not necessarily impartial. On most occasions participants tell you only the good things about the event.

### Objective assessment

Objective assessment can be easily obtained by anonymous inquiry<sup>9</sup> among all the participants. You carry out this task shortly before the formal closure of the event. Questionnaire should consist of questions which have multiple possible answers and participants pick the answer or answers they like the most. The questionnaire should

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of such a questionnaire see Supplement No. 6.

embrace all fields of organization, food, accommodation, etc. The concept of the inquiry largely depends on which information you want to gather with it. Leave some free space at the end for possible remarks by participants. It is absolutely necessary for the inquiry to be ANONYMOUS. Make sure that you get back as much of these questionnaires as possible in order to make an impartial assessment.

## **Personal assessment of the event**

### Let's be self critical!

It is nice to sit back in your comfortable chair and rest after the event and enjoy the moments when no one is asking you the same things over and over again and everyone wants something from you. Although you and your team made it safe through the event your work is not over yet. You still need to evaluate your work, make a final assessment and write a report. I must emphasise that the final "mark" of the event is only possible with a high degree of self criticism. You received congratulations for a job well done from participants anyway. Self criticism is needed to evaluate your mistakes, the ones that remained hidden from the eyes of participants and large number of staff members and were visible only behind the scenes. It is necessary to recognize these mistakes and find out why did they occur and use this info to prevent them from happening in the future projects. Therefore the main purpose of evaluation is preventing the same mistakes from happening in the future through the system of self critical evaluation.

In this process all the members of your team must participate. Include also the ones who did not play a major role in the process of preparation but helped a lot during the execution of the event. How?

Everybody should write down, by themselves, positive and negative things which they encounter during the event and assess their work and the work of their colleges. This should be done in the week after the event. Evaluation should be carried out one week after the event. This is the period in which you can still remember the bad things and all the little things that leave a bittersweet taste.

Evaluate your work by comparing it with the criteria for evaluation of your work which you prepared before the conference. They represent the platform for assessment. Constructive criticism is the way to assess the work of your colleges. This means that it's not about personal criticism but EXCLUSIVELY about the quality of work that a particular person did or did not do. Discuss about each others views sincerely and try to abolish the mistakes that were noticed.

This task is very important so it's absolutely necessary that you take it very seriously.

Evaluation should consist of the following elements:

- assessment of reaching goals;
- concept of the event (tasks, execution... + and -);
- analysis of the questionnaires;
- constructive criticism of work, that was done by members of the organizing team;
- others.

## **Mistakes committed**

### Why did they arise

Are the mistakes the consequence of our sloppiness or unfortunate circumstances? There comes a time when we must admit that we did not work well enough. On most occasions the mistakes were made because of our misjudgement. Try to find a cause for every mistake. If you find it, then the next time you can abolish it and from year to year you commit less mistakes and some day organize a perfect event. Although some can find it hard to admit they made a mistake it's necessary to do so. If you want to organize a perfect event than you need to strive for perfection on all fields of your work. This task demands a fair attitude towards yourself and all the other members of the team, when the time comes to evaluate your performance. The purpose of searching for mistakes is not a punishment but improvement of the quality of the event and therefore improvement of the level of the work of the team members.

### What should we do to prevent them

Considering the sort of mistake and its cause we can quickly discover the needed measures to prevent the mistake from happening. On most occasions the systems for preventing mistakes were established but we did not follow them through (different deadlines). Maybe we misjudged ourselves at dividing the tasks, we were short staffed, the team was inappropriate, etc. There are million possible combinations. Start searching for an answer systematically. Go step by step, from mistake to mistake and find the best solution. There can be more possible solutions, not just one. Maybe a combination of several solutions is the right answer. Don't be satisfied with the first answer. On the other hand some mistakes have always the same answer – start with the preparations early enough.

### We must take this into consideration for the next time

Write down carefully all your findings and remember them the next time when you'll be organizing a conference (or any other similar event). Then you simply take your list and use it together with this "cook book" - or upgrade the manual with your findings. The purpose of analysis is to offer you help for the next event. To prevent the same mistakes from happening once again.

Last, but not least, your experiences are worth like gold, therefore write a report to the EXCOM and do not hesitate to write and share your experiences with the political science students all over the world in an article for IAPSS Newsletter. It could be also a great article for your local newsletter (or newspaper if you have one). Do not forget to add a few pictures so that readers could feel the magic of Conference Spirit.

## **Plans for the future**

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It is difficult to talk about the plans for the future as it is not likely that you'll organize such an event every year. But you might consider about some other, smaller projects you could carry out in the following year. It's your decision and you can direct your energy in any direction you like. Be aware of the importance of giving the new generations of political science students the know-how you have gained!

### Improvements

What can you do to improve the event? Have this in mind also for the generations coming behind you as they may one day want to organize a conference or two. Improvements can be incorporated on all fields, from preparation, through execution to analysis. Keep the solutions and concepts that worked well. Try to use all the potential a certain concept has.

### Changes

Here you can change something or completely abolish. Once again you can adopt changes on all fields of the project. This can give your event some fresh spirit and diversity that is sometimes needed as there are too many similar events.

### Novelties

The same as before. They can bring a lot of freshness and attractiveness in to an event and therefore more students might be interested in attending the conference as interesting as yours. Try to bring down the walls of your mind and let your imagination free.

## **CONCLUSION**

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*There, I made it. I'm certain that during the reading you came up with an idea or two and also some questions found a warm home inside your brain. That is good because that means you thought about the text and tried to understand what I wanted to say. What can I say – it is a challenge to organize a conference; but be sure to enjoy every minute of it. Let this manual be the additional motive and factor that will lean the weighing machine on the side that wants to organize an event.*

*Peter Bajec,  
Head of the IAPSS Annual Conference 2003,  
Head of the "Good morning terrorism" conference*