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My ideas were clear: writing an article about blurring boundaries, inter-organizational collaboration and other subjects, all interfering with my PhD.

They were... till I went to that conference

Blurring boundaries...

I have a training and professional education and experience in the service and hospitality industry. A leitmotiv in my career has always been commercially, internationally responsibilities in managerial jobs in the service industry. Being enthusiastic by processes, dynamics and cultures (organizational, national, etc), I extended my education to organizational sciences. Simultaneously my career focus went from commercial executive to association management getting involved in lobbying and building bridges between scientists and academics, governmental officials and corporate executives. That just to provide you with a bit of background.

Let's go back to the *Egos conference*

(European Group for Organizational Studies). This was the second time that I was participating as a delegate in a conference which I visited because of the content not being hospitality or conference-industry related. That's where the divergence starts. Being a professional and 'protagonist' of conferences I have to split up the two components of conferences:1)

the organizational or logistical one (knowing that logistics do not cover the whole organization) and 2) the content one.

To start with the organizational one. There were 1.000 delegates attending this event. Forty different tracks with specific focal areas. Participating in a track normally means that one stays in this track, starting, undergoing and finishing it. Most participants of a track presented their papers (of course these have been reviewed before being accepted) but the presentations and the unfolding discussions afterwards are an extra feed-back on the spot by your own peers! Fantastic! So what's the point? Me, as a first timer, hopped from one track to another.

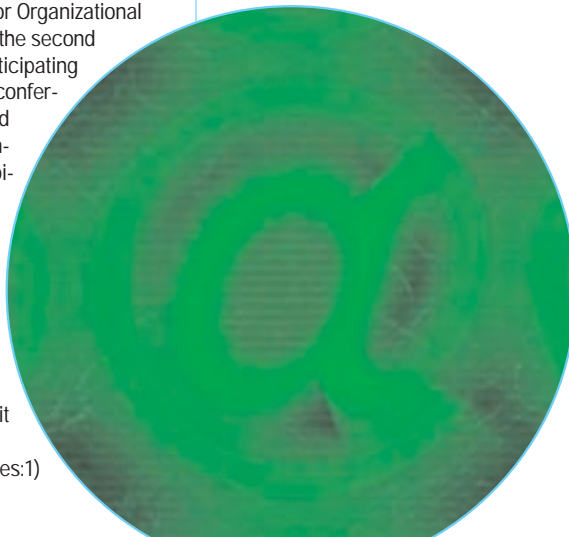
The peer reviewing part

is an essential part of this conference. Some tracks kept the presenters strictly to their presenting time, some surpassed it, which left no space for discussion. Some tracks had convenors who had been very selective and had examined the subject and paired-up presentations, asking the presenter to act as an opponent to its 'co-presenter' enabling a discourse among delegates, others had the convenors commenting on the articles. For me as first timer, structures, if any, were vague. **Amazingly enough, quite some presenters struggled with the 'presenting part', this while most of them are giving lectures as part of their academic career. This not only concerning the presentation but also the linguistic side of it, meaning being able to express oneself fluently in English. Some poured out their presentation without one pause, any intonation, moments for**

reflection, space for essence.

Drowning in their abundance of speech and knowledge. Perhaps the conference organizers among us, either Pco's, centres or otherwise involved, may shrug their shoulders and say, that's content... No, that's not or not exclusively in my opinion but more about this later.

There were few other, logistical, points as the cues at the coffee or lunch buffets, the amount of buffets,



hitting the conference world?

the signage, to name a few. But in this case I think these were minor details and for the audience only minor irritations (although I heard that the year before it was the same...). We all know, organizing committees have their own views and wishes, often ignoring the advice of conference professionals. The second aspect, the content. The conference was about 'unlocking organizations'. The introduction said (literally copied from the brochure): *'Organizations often get locked in specific ways of seeing and doing things. Sometimes, they even get trapped. Such lock-ins occur at different levels ranging from group, departmental, alliance, regional, industrial and societal level. The manifold dynamics underlying these processes are characterized by autopoietic, reproduction, standardization, bureaucratic vicious circles, self-fulfilling prophecies, power, and politics.'*

Academics and few consultants (in this case intermediaries between organizations and researchers as academics) were there to discuss organizational aspects in all its broad perspectives. This was my second conference where I was participating in a discourse about organizations being studied without the subjects of study being present. What the fuss one would ask? Exactly this aspect is the fuss! And



why is this interesting me?

If we, or they, we as conference suppliers either conference centers, Pco's or any other supplier or they as content-responsible, either the association or the professionals/scientists are not getting more and deeper involved in each other field, how can we then improve the quality of conferences, how can we measure Roi, how can we professionalize the conference industry? How can we help our customers with their improvements? Not only the tangible part of the Roi, but also the intangible part of their (and our) Roi as being more effectively presenting their papers? How can we understand their 'drivers' and motivation? **How can we then make sure that our means of communication (e.g. virtual communication) is not going to take over the power of physical encounters? Perhaps we will think that this will never happen as it did not happen the last decades... since the**

emergence of the Internet. But a new generation, far more individualistic, far more digitalized is looming up on the horizon. One who is used to play with gameboys and addicted

to communicate via MSN. Without

any interference of face-to-face encounters.

I am not saying that the future for conferences is fading away, nor am I



saying that things aren't changing but what I am trying to do is to start up the discussion more fiercely than before and try to figure out how bridges are to be built...and how the organizational and content parts of conferences are getting unlocked... The academic world will need the interference of the corporate world, let it be alone for its funding. Scientists need to publish and present their work to obtain their professional rewarding and recognition. Our world, the conference world, need to professionalize quicker and has to put itself more often and persuasively in the shoes of those organizers. We should gain more influence on the way the conference formats are being shaped to name one example. Or how (international) conferences gain better exposure, to name another... How to do this? I long for your comments and thoughts. Let's start to exchange views and experi-