

european geography association for students and young geographers



EGEA COMMITTEE FOR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS'
"SMALL-SCALE" EVENTS ORGANIZATIONAL
HELP MANUAL

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Solving problems in the organisation of activities

This document has been created in order to help EGEA entities that are planning to organise a 'small-scale event'. This file is not really a guide with a step-by-step explanation, but some possibly occurring problems in the organisation of activities and some tips and tricks how to avoid them. It can prevent difficult situations, and is based on experienced EGEAns' ideas. Please, do not hesitate to contact BoE or other people on the EGEA forum if you need help or information about organising an event!!!

Now, *why* would one want to organise a small-scale event? Here are some of the reasons:

- It is fun!
- It is a good way of gaining experience in organising
- Newbies can join (part of) the activity so they can easily get infected with the EGEA-virus (-> especially important if you do not have enough people to join exchanges, newbies can be 'talked into it')
- Seeing people have a good time at 'your' event is very fulfilling
- Erasmus-student of geography can join, which is a good integration for both them and your participants and gives a bigger international atmosphere.
- Organising something together can increase the good relations and identity of your entity.
- It is relatively easy....!! ☺

These points make that organising a small-scale event in EGEA is a great experience. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to read this manual and get some ideas and tips how to avoid or solve difficulties. There are several 'sections' to guide you:

- Organisers
- Participants
- Finances and sponsors
- Activities – some general remarks

Organisers

1) For (small) activities: it is difficult to make people finish their tasks before certain deadlines.

- As a main organiser, you can move deadlines a few weeks ahead, so when the REAL deadline comes, people will by that time have done their task.
- Be serious and honest to the organising team: this just has to be done by that date, because...
- Keep, as a main organiser, close contact to the organising team by regularly asking them if they have already started or completed a task and by asking them if they need help if they did not finish yet.
- If people have responsibility over a certain field (activities, accommodation, groceries, evening program, gifts and materials, etc), there is a bigger chance that they will be motivated to have their tasks finished in time.

2) During certain periods (Christmas, holidays, exam periods), organising doesn't proceed much.

- Tough luck. Unless you manage to set a meeting during this period, probably not much will happen. Keep it in mind when you make the planning of your activity! There is another option, though, that is to ask moderators at the EGEA forum to open you a subforum and to include the organising team in it. This way, you can communicate even if you don't find time to meet and still make some decisions or discuss various options when you have any problem.

3) Both in experienced and less experienced entities, the practice of having to 're-invent the wheel' takes place when new people organise certain activities.

- We hardly have to tell you, but it is really a good idea to invite a more experienced person into an organising team or, if such a person is not available, ask for some tips & tricks from people from another entity. Experience is available and it can save you from beginner's mistakes or unnecessary hard work.

4) Organisers do not always know what they have to do.

- Dividing the tasks for organisers is a way to make organisers feel needed: they have a particular part that they are responsible for and it is easier for them to see what needs to be done (next). So: if possible, give people a specific task to carry out, it will make the organisation more structured and organisers more happy ☺.

5) Nobody takes responsibility

- In the case of real small events, an informal main organiser will normally show up. This is maybe the person with a big experience, with an official task (president of the entity i.e.) or with a natural leader aura. It is a good idea if this person has the overview about what's happening and who is doing what, but a real leader task is not so necessary.

- For bigger activities, it is absolutely necessary that one or a few people take the lead in the organisation. Dictatorships are not welcome in Europe, but main organisers should not be afraid to reinforce decisions.

6) Co-operation with people from other entities is difficult

- Communication is often a central part in co-operation. Make sure you are in regular contact with the other entity and try to see each other as much as possible in person: good relations make a good activity!

- The organisation of a pre-activity (weekend, birthday party, dinner, meeting) with all co-organisers and helping hands is a great opportunity to get to know each other, to discover problems at the spot (and to solve them), to discuss things, etc.

7) For some events, the level of workshops has shown to be too low according to participants

- There have been many debates about this. Now: solutions...! The level of workshops depends a lot on the level of preparation of the workshop leader. They can usually show it very well with their letter of application. You could ask

such a letter from every possible workshop leader. Important thing is to make sure that the person who is coordinating the workshop leaders is responsible enough and can easily recognise a good workshop leader from a not-so-good one. A workshop evaluation at the end of the congress is a good thing and could help the organisers to find suitable people to be workshop leaders, but important thing is not to count only on EGEA members but also to some not so active Egeans who have a lot of knowledge on the topic and could be great workshop leaders! So, the level of preparation and a clear idea of each workshop leader what exactly does he/she plan to do is the most important for the workshop's success.

Participants

1) It is difficult in an early stage to estimate how many participants will join and how many you can host.

- In recent years many activities rather had over-subscriptions than too few. It seems that you should not be afraid for having too little interest from participants.

- However, also because of financial risks, maybe small and/or young entities can better decide to 'play it safe'. Bigger entities, or entities with some financial buffer will suffer less from risk-taking.

- Do not forget that the character of organising significantly changes if you decide to host many more participants than first expected. Here is a list with the type of activity and the usual amount of participants (organisers excluded):

* introduction/freshmen weekend: 10-50, depending on the entity

* seminar: 25-50

* national weekend: 40-50

* hiking trips: 8-15

* special activities: strongly depending on organising entity ☺

2) It is difficult to reach enough people (promotion)

- It is advisable that one person is responsible for promotion, and that is: putting information and nice pictures on the EGEA website, opening a topic of the event, working on a website of the event, preparing leaflets which could be distributed at some other events, sending e-mails with promotion material to contact persons (it would be good to have a digital version of promotion poster), announcing the event at the shoutboxes etc. Of course, it is nicer if the person responsible for communication has a helper.

3) Last-minute cancellers

- The practice of letting people pay a few weeks before the activity has proven to work (see under 'finances').

- It is often useful to make a waiting list (if there are more subscriptions than places).

- If you make people re-confirm about say 2-3 weeks before the activity, it can be an indication of absence if people do not react.

- You can decide to invite a few people more than the places you have, calculating that a few will not show up.

- Keeping contact warm with the participants by sending them emails about how to get there, what to bring, etc can help to prevent them from cancelling for (almost) no reason.

Finances and sponsors

1) It is usual that some participants that have subscribed to the event do not show up. That is a financial burden for the organisers, because expenses have been already made (accommodation reservation, materials...).

- Since some years for most activities, participants are being asked to pay the fee in advance. In general this works good, there is a bigger threshold now for not showing up. Organisers can make their own rules about in which cases participants are being refunded. At the AC 2004 in Baarlo, only participants from EU(euro?)-countries, who could transfer the money for free, had to pay in advance. Especially when participants have to pay their bank for paying the fee, it is wise to suggest them to pay all the fees together in one transaction (participants from the same entity or country).

2) It is difficult to explain what EGEA is to all possible sponsors. The forum does not always show a lot of scientific interest and shows a lot of party pictures.

- The moderators of the EGEA forum are constantly trying to keep the forum's content representable. Another thing you can do is to use the new EGEA magazines as a serious 'business card' of what EGEA is like, by sending it or giving it to your contacts. These are full of positive messages, full-colour and downloadable from the EGEA forum.

3) Partners that are possibly interested, have to be contacted at an early stage, but often want detailed information (who will come, what will be discussed during the workshops, etc).

- For a seminar, it is useful to make a plan with which workshops you would like to have and which excursions, etcetera. Showing such a detailed plan to sponsors usually gives a good impression. Take care not to make it TOO detailed so you cannot 'move' during the actual organisation of your activity. Changes can often be made without big problems with your sponsors.

Activities – some general remarks

1) The 'run' in recent years on the bigger activities (RC's, AC) shows that there is by no means a shortage of interested participants in EGEA activities.

2) The right time to start organising an event is difficult to point out, because it is depending on how big the activity is and on the country. Bear in mind, that if you want to do fundraising through sponsorships and/or funds, a long time (often many months) is needed to make the contacts and to settle this. Furthermore, if you are organising an event with people coming from all over Europe, people need to have time to get to know about the event, to check their schedule and maybe make arrangements, to register, to maybe even book cheap flight tickets. For those events, at least three months in advance EGEAns have to be informed. For smaller events like weekends, less time is strictly needed but really, it is more fun to organise and participants will be happier if you announce your activity some months in advance.

3) Especially in smaller activities, a strict time-schedule during the event is not needed. Flexibility makes it easier for you as an organiser and more fun for the participants. In bigger activities, a clearer time-planning is important both for organisers and for participants. When exactly a more fixed schedule is needed is dependent on the degree of organisation, the number of participants and on the organisers themselves. An information board can be handy for informing people (at what time does dinner start, which room is used for the meeting, when do we have to get up tomorrow...).

NB if you are using this file as a help by organising an event, do not forget to check out the already existing manuals on the Internet:

How to organise an AC or RC:

<http://egea.geog.uu.nl/manual-ac.php>

What to do when going to a congress:

http://egea.geog.uu.nl/documents/manuals/going_congress.pdf

How to set up your new entity:

http://egea.geog.uu.nl/documents/manuals/setup_entity.pdf

Exchange manual:

<http://www.egea.eu/files.php?action=file&id=103>

Workshop-report about organising congresses:

http://egea.geog.uu.nl/congress/seminar/egea_b.htm

Workshop-report about organising exchanges:

http://egea.geog.uu.nl/congress/seminar/egea_d.htm