

ELSA EVENTS

A practical "how to" and "how not" from the OC's point of view

Forewords

- Yours truly
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 - Sec Gen of ELSA Italy 2000 & 2001, President of ELSA Rome 2002, Sec Gen of ELSA Rome 1997 & 1998
 - Head of the OC for 1 ICM (Rome '98, 381 participants), 2 Italian NCMs (about 140 participants each), 2 International Seminars (30 and 50 international guests, scores of Italians), a number of local seminars, 1 multilateral study visit (Rome-Freiburg-Passau).
 - Participated in 10 ICMs, 5 International Seminars, 2 IPMs, a number of other ELSA events.
- The ELSA "average event" and the *large one*
- The improvised vs. the organized OC

The 4 Pillars of any event

- Objectives
- Human Resources (the OC)
- The Materials
- The Logistics

1 - Objectives

- Obvious: producing an event with a good balance of "serious" and "social" moments which delivers the planned contents in a relaxed environment full of fun.
- Obvious, but at times forgotten: ensure the overall well being and, most especially, safety of the participants.

1 - Objectives/2: About safety

- The downside of the ELSA Spirit
- The local dangers and the role of the OC
- The most recurring cases:
 - The no man left behind general rule
 - It is one of the top priorities of any OC to ensure that no participant is left stranded in an unfamiliar place, potentially surrounded by people (in particular, law enforcement) who do not speak his language
 - The no girl left behind corollary
 - The good (Cagliari USA2 '09), the bad (Rome ICM '98) and the ugly (Somewhere Some event '05)

2 - Human Resources

- The OC's structure
 - The Head of the OC
 - The "Officers"
 - (The communication officer)
 - The crew
 - Too few vs. too many.
 - How many then? The 5+10% rule.
 - Know your men (and women): core/non core/hardcore.
 - *The transport, escort, firefighters teams*

2 - Human Resources - tips

- The golden rule for OC management: keep them motivated, keep them flexible, keep them alive for the whole event (and possibly after then).
- *3 is the charm*
 - *Organize your teams in turns, so that one is in service, one in reserve (and hopefully having fun), one is resting (and hopefully sleeping).*
 - *Case in point: Rome ICM '98.*
- Specialists are good, redundancy is better
- The OC as a recruitment opportunity (but keep it light for the freshers)

3 - The Materials

- Any OC **MUST** provide for:
 - Documents for VISAs (an the occasional phone call to embassies)
 - A place to stay
 - In-Programme Transports
 - Meals
 - The badge
 - Program Delivery tools (flip-charts, projectors, ...)
- Any OC would be strongly advised to provide:
 - The Internet (in some form)
 - The OC package (a map, contact list, reccomendation, suggestions)
 - Point of arrival - Place of staying - point of departure transferts
 - **Next OC's training**

3 - The Materials - tips

- The Basic infos to provide right away and in the OC package
 - Program, contacts, directions, legal requirements
- The badge is your friend (and has two sides)
 - The badge is not just a pretty thing to take back home as a memory, but it's the most immediate information delivery tool: have the essential telephone numbers and the address of the location on the back!
- Make clear what the OC will provide and what the participants are expected to bring (the necessary and the useful).
- Everything will go according to plan, but...
 - Health and damage insurance (hotel/expensive equipment) is a very good idea and usually reasonably cheap. (Cases in point: Heidelberg ICM '98, Rome ICM '98, Coimbra ICM '01, Cagliari USA2 '09)

4 - The Logistics - tips

- VISAs
 - Getting a visa for a participant can be a lengthy process. While participants bear the most of responsibility, the OC must be timely in sending invitations and documents and MUST do some follow-up on the process
- Know the theatre of operation
 - Every OC member should know the place where the event takes place as the back of his hand: a walk around all together in the days right before the event is useful. **Simulations can be useful as well.**
 - The OC "officers" should know the location and the faster route to 4 priority locations: The closest supermarket, pharmacy, hospital, police station.
- Accomodation
 - Ignore the stars, but mind the showers: more than 3 people (girls especially) sharing one shower will dramatically slow turn-around time, potentially crippling the best laid-out schedule..
 - Ignore the stars, but mind the kms: easy of transporation has the precedence on almost any other consideration when choosing an accomodation.
 - Ignore the stars, but mind the space: there should be SEPARATE work and "logistic" spaces
 - Maintaining a good relationshio with the accomodation management is of paramount importance (Heidelberg ICM '98, Rome ICM '98... actually, almost any ICM in ELSA History).
 - Having a whole accomodation reserved for the ELSA event helps as the major cause of attrition are other customers' complains.

4 - The Logistics - tips/2

- **Communications**
 - Each OC officer should have EVERY participants' mobile number with him AT ALL times.
 - Communication costs can easily become staggering with large numbers of participants: phone companies may offer "linked phones" options
- **The herd mentality**
 - Keep them together and to do so, develop a group spirit (The badge is your friend, again). The last thing you want is a group to disintegrate in small, untraceable, minigroups going around on their own.
 - Case in point: Brussels IPM '99, Cagliari USA2 '09
- **Escort: The guardian angel concept**
 - Someone of the OC should be with the participants AT ALL TIMES
 - An example: marching arrangements (Rome '98, Rimini NCM '01, Rome ISV '06, Cagliari USA2 '09)
- **Transports: the public/private/bus options**
 - Keep the rides to a manageable level in terms of number and length
 - Case in point: Rome ISV '96, Rome ICM '98, Brussels IPM '99, Rome ISV '06, Cagliari USA2 '09

4 - The Logistics - tips/3

- Weather
 - The first rule of ELSA meteorology: You know your own weather, participants don't (and if you think they'll inform themselves, you are wrong). (Vilnius ICM '05)
 - The second rule of ELSA meteorology: Actually, not even you really know.
 - The Brussel corollary: don't pretend you do not know your weather (Brussels IPM '99)
- Food
 - Know of specific requirements as vegetarian, religious ones and allergies (Case in point: Rome '98, London '06, Cagliari USA2 '09)
 - Give specific times and respect them: a hungry participant is a troublemaker participant. Possibly, have the dining room and food ready before the participants arrive
 - Vary the diet (Packet lunch vs. "restaurant")

Things to always remember

- The bad news: no ELSA event is ever objectively perfect.
 - The good news : perfection of an event is often judged on the grade of fun the participants had
- More bad news: any OC, however well trained its members and well laid down the plan, is bound to make mistakes.
 - More good news: participants tend to notice only the major flaw in an organization and generally have a lot of goodwill towards the OC.
- Always keep in mind that you may think you are dealing with university students, yet somehow, between lack of sleep, alcohol and general influence of ELSA Spirit, you can find them regressing to kindergarden level.:
 - Be prepared to temper tantrums, bout of depression, broken hearts, broken bones, the occasional brawl and generally people finding always new and amazingly creative ways of doing incredibly stupid things.
- Have always plans allowing for a minimum of flexibility, contingency plans and remember that you can relax only when the last of the participants has left, not a second earlier.

An ELSA event:

The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster...

Strangely enough, it all turns out well.

Thank you for your attention.