Position Paper

How to make EHPS conferences more climate-friendly

First ideas for the 2022 meeting of the European Health Psychology Society

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After two years of EHPS conferences held online, **EHPS** 2022 is going "hybrid" for the first time. Although this new format University Grenoble Alpes, brings some challenges, it offers opportunities for urgently needed climate actions we can take as a community. According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change report, the world's CO2 emissions need to be reduced to zero London School of Hygiene by 2050 to avoid a tipping point (IPCC, 2022). Even though political and transformative decisions are necessary to reach this everyday consumer qoal, have University of Twente, The important impact. Here we reflect on some of the opportunities the hybrid

conference offers, share first ideas on how to make future EHPS conferences "greener", and ask for feedback and ideas for future steps we as individuals and a community can take.

1.Preparation

1.1 Online or in-person attendance

In-person conferences are important activities that enable sharing of the latest research and supporting good quality networking. Many EHPS members have forged friendships and collaborations lasting entire personal and professional lives. Nevertheless, the impact of an in-person conference on the environment is significant. Attending an inperson event produces approximately 840 kg of CO2 equivalent per person (Tao et al., 2021), which equals to charging a Smartphone an impressive 102,180 times (EPA, 2021), or a 5,100 km drive by a compact car (using E85 fuel; Myclimate). While transport is the most important source of greenhouse gas emission associated with in-person conferences (Bossdorf et al., 2010; Tao et al., 2021; van Ewijk & Hoekman, 2021), accommodation and food should not be neglected, as they represent around 13% to 18% of conference emissions (Bossdorf et al., 2010). Switching from in-person to virtual conferences can potentially reduce their carbon footprint by an impressive 94% (Tao et al., 2021). Besides being more climate-friendly, online conferences can be more inclusive as it may be easier for participants with lower financial resources or from farther away to attend, as shown increased attendance rates and similar satisfaction rates compared to in-person events (Yates et al., 2022).

1.2 Traveling to Bratislava and accommodation

The decision to travel to the conference in person will mean that some of us will consider alternative travel options to keep the impact on the climate as small as possible. For many, this will mean challenging their priorities or making tradeoffs. For example, a train trip from Amsterdam to Bratislava produces about 84% less CO2 emissions compared to flying¹ (according to Ecopassenger, also see Travelandclimate). Although trains might be the slower option, they offer opportunities to network, arrange preand post-conference meetings, finally read those books or provide feedback on that paper, enjoy city breaks, and have civilised meals. Traveling by train offers a great opportunity to enjoy the diversity of landscapes that Europe has to offer, something impossible to do when traveling by air. For those who would like to make their trip even more scenic this year, the ferry from Vienna to Bratislava is almost as fast as the train (approx. 75-90 versus 60 minutes) and comparable in emissions (approx. 2.8 litres diesel per passenger one way, Twin City Liner Ferry). There is also a cycle path along the Danube river (with pubs dotted along), connecting Bratislava with Vienna, and many other European cities (see EuroVelo paths 6, 9, or 13).



Photo by Willian Justen de Vasconcellos on Unsplash

 $^{\rm 1}$ approx. total CO2 emissions with climate factor for air travel 307 kg, for trains 49 kg on <code>Ecopassenger</code>

The 2022 EHPS conference starts on a Tuesday, so those who are time-conscious may choose to take a night train, or travel later on Monday. Bratislava can be reached in under 5 hours by train from Budapest, Prague, or Vienna (1 hour!), in about 9 hours from Zurich, Dresden, Venice, Zagreb, and Warsaw. Trains from Paris, Amsterdam, and Brussels take around 12 hours (all with slower but more comfortable night trains to Vienna as well). If booked in advance, train travel can even be the cheapest option. These travel search engines may assist in searching and booking a train trip to beautiful Bratislava: Omio, German Railway, Trainline, Rail Europe, NightJet-Trains. Once at the railway station in Bratislava, the old town is only a



Fastest train connections from selected European cities
Map from www.freeworldmaps.net/europe/europe-capitals.jpg

15-minute walk away. As all-conference and social venues will be in the Old Town, bringing comfortable shoes is a further tip for the trip.

In case flying is unavoidable, it is still possible to reduce its impact on the climate by taking the most direct flight, changing to a train from the closest larger airport (Vienna), or choosing an airline that emits <u>fewer</u> greenhouse gasses.

As any trip to Bratislava from another country will inevitably produce emissions, offsetting these may be a good alternative for some (e.g., Myclimate, Atmosfair, Goldstandard). As emission offsetting cannot reverse environmental damages already done, the better decision is to always use

travel options with the least emissions (e.g. using trains for distances under 700 km, or cycling).

1.3 Booking accommodation in Bratislava

The conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, which is located in the heart of the city centre. All venues should be within walking distance, with the farthest one being the University auditorium at 1000 meters from Crowne Plaza. Booking accommodation close to the city centre reduces commuting. More eco-friendly accommodation can be found using common search tools with eco-filters ("Travel Sustainable properties" within booking.com or "Green" within TripAdvisor). Some of the results are, however, large hotel chains that buy eco-certificates and should not be preferred over smaller hotels, especially hostels or apartments shared with colleagues (Google finds several apartments that at least label themselves "eco"). An accommodation's policies and practices on their use of renewable energies (as well as recycling, food waste, singleuse hygiene articles, water-saving, re-use of towels, etc.) may quide our choices. Even if the accommodation is further away, it is easy to get around in Bratislava either by cycling (e.g. bike rentals: VisitBratislava Bikesharing, Rekola, ANTIK) or by using a tram.

2. During the conference

Together with Easy Conferences (the organising company), this year's local organising team has already done a lot to make the in-person conference more climate-friendly. The conference venues are easy to walk to and within walkable distance from points of interest. There will be no single-use conference bags, and the conference program and abstract books will be published

online only. Once the conference is over, delegates will be asked to leave their conference name badges at the site to be re-used by Easy Conferences.

All catering services are advised to avoid single-use plastics and must source their ingredients as locally as possible. Lunch will be served as a buffet at the hotel cafeteria to reduce waste and packaging, and to enable delegates to avoid sandwiches with food they may not eat, (plastic) bottled water, or crisps in plastic bags (sometimes the defaults at previous conferences). Lunches for delegates attending meetings during lunchtime will be packed as eco-friendly as possible. The tap water in Bratislava is of good quality, and there are contactless drinking fountains available around the city. Bringing a refillable bottle will help translate "green intentions" into action.

As climate-friendly food options can be chosen by the majority of the delegates and have a considerable impact on the total conference carbon footprint (EAT-Lancet Commission by Willett et al., 2019; Neugebauer et al., 2020; van Ewijk & Hoekman, 2021), the organising team is keen to reduce meat and dairy products and make vegetarian and vegan food options available and attractive.

Tell us what you think about introducing vegetarian/vegan lunches or vegetarian/vegan days at in-person EHPS conferences, possibly starting in Bratislava, with four optional and very quick questions here (takes 2 minutes).

3. After the conference: Assessment of EHPS conference on climate

The conference organizing team will send a survey to the EHPS community after the conference. This will help them evaluate the conference experience, and ask a few questions about how delegates travelled to Bratislava and

Dubrovnik (for comparison). We will analyse this data anonymously and estimate the overall climate impact of the in-person conference in 2019 to the hybrid format in 2022.

4. Further ideas and inspirations are highly appreciated

If you have any further ideas on how to reduce the carbon footprint during the conference, or good tips for other delegates on how to travel more sustainably (e.g. planning on coming by bike, or taking the train despite a long distance), tag us on Twitter to share them!

#sustainableEHPS & Special Interest Group @Ehps4G.

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