

10 forms of hybrid academic workshops

Background: The return to a new normal

During the global Covid-19 pandemic, academic communities adjusted and shifted to online formats for meetings and gatherings. As the pandemic recedes, plans are being made for returning to physical, on-site academic meetings and scholarly gatherings of various sorts. How can insights, practices, positive experiences and benefits of online meetings for the academic communities be reaped in the post-pandemic time?

Hybrid formats of academic conferences holds the potential to allow for some of the benefits with on-site meetings, without the negative environmental impact that is associated with previous typical academic gatherings, which to a large extent relied on participants traveling to an on-site gathering by air. As recent research points out: “Hybrid conferences, particularly if those participants from far away join the event online, combined with the promotion of land-bound travel for those attending in person—even if this means longer travel times than flying—could be a feasible compromise to reduce emissions by almost 90%.” (Jäckle 2021:456)

This inventory aims to map out some different forms of hybrid research meetings – meetings that combines online and physical presence of the participants. It is a tool in our ongoing work of inventing and applying new approaches to travels, field-research, conferencing and internationalization, in a more sustainable manner.¹

1. Paired workshop: Online workshop between two on-site groups

A conference arranged with two groups, with up to 15 participants each, at two different physical locations. Tables and cameras are arranged to give the impression that all participants are sitting along one long table. For this format it is important to have a suitable microphone set-up so that all speakers around the table can be heard (not only those close to the equipment). Suitable for projects which are clustered in different locations - e.g. for book-workshops or special issue projects.

2. Broadcasted workshop: On-site conference with passive online participation

A physical conference – or part of it, for example the keynote address or selected presentations – which is broadcasted online. Online participants can listen, but not actively engage. Although the message will be fairly one-directional, this format allows for wider circulation and reach.

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3. Multi-participatory workshop: On-site conference with semi-active online participation

A physical conference that is broadcast online which may, if moderated, allow for questions from online participants. It is important to have an online 'co-host' who can assist behind the scenes, for example, sort out connection-problems, practical questions from the online participants, detect problems with sound or image or other forms of technical issues. Overall, this format provides for some room for dialogue as well as a wide reach.

4. Merged workshop: On-site conference with active online participation

In this format, online participants are visible on a physical screen, and when asking questions will be in focus on the screen. One problem with this format is the asymmetry in visibility of participants: for the online participants, they are clearly visible on the screen, whereas the physical participants will be visible only as a crowd, not as individual participants. When using this format, it is good to have an online co-moderator to support the moderator that is on-site, as it can be quite difficult to capture both the online 'raised hands' and the physical 'raised hands'. It, of course, requires preparations and good cooperation between the two moderators. One possibility is to set up a specific camera and microphone for questions (at a separate table in the room) in order for those who raise their hand at the on-site location to stand up and go to the Q&A – camera and computer and ask their question there. With this, the full group can be in picture as well as the person asking the question. That will also facilitate for those who participate online: they can hear all the questions loud and clear and see who is asking the question. While somewhat demanding, this format holds the potential of combining the strengths of online and on-site workshops.

5. Connected workshop: Online speakers on on-site conference

This format has been fairly common for some time: one or a few of the participants in an on-site conference attend and participate online. Everyone listens together to a speaker (e.g. high-level keynote speaker or a panelist). This enables participants from far away to join an on-site conference or workshop online. It can be a good way to allow an international high-level intervention on a regionally based conference or workshop.

6. Post-workshop: Online event *after* on-site conference

Here the combination between online and on-site formats is sequential: two events are arranged and the (typically smaller) physical on-site event (e.g. key-note address, discussion, panel) is followed by an online event (e.g. discussions in 'break-out rooms'). This allows for wider engagement and distribution of the content, while having the benefits of the on-site discussions.

7. Recorded workshop: Online distribution after on-site conference

This is another form of sequencing: a recorded on-site workshop, to be distributed online after the event. This is a way to meet the demand of recordings from people who are not able to participate but want to have access to the discussions and presentations after the event has taken place. This format may also allow for the event to be edited before published.

8. Pre-workshop: Online event *before* on-site conference

Another possible form of combining physical and online events is to arrange online meetings as a build up to a physical event. This may increase awareness of the event and the topic, and

may allow participants in the online event to affect the shape of the on-site event, for example by identifying some of the questions to be addressed. It may also contribute to the audience, presenters and participants getting to know each other a bit and hopefully contribute to a more dynamic discussion during the on-site event.

9. Fused workshop: Online panels as part of on-site conference

Here, the panel discussions are broadcast fully online, but at least some of the participants are physically present at the same venue. For example, a group of researchers may travel and meet physically at one spot, and while there, together join an online international workshop or conference. Alternatively, one segment of an on-site workshop can be done online, allowing for broader participation during that segment. Participants who are present on-site may interact informally during breaks, allowing for more of the physical conference experience as well as deeper levels of concentration on the panels, compared to a conventional online conference where everyone is online and by themselves.

10. Cluster workshops: Regional on-site conferences, which are online connected

In this combination, three to four regional hubs of conference participants have joint, on-site, thematically organized panels or working-group meetings. Each participant is at the same time online and connected with the other hubs on their own lap-top. A clustered workshop allows for participants at one site to join different thematically organized panels, and thus the panels allow for interactions between the participants located at different regional hubs. This format, especially if organized in cross-country regional settings, give a lot of the conference experience, but allow for a more internationalized discussion than a regional meeting would.

Conclusion: Room for experimenting

To conclude, there are many different forms of hybrid formats available for those seeking to organize academic workshops and conferences.

The list here is not in any way exhaustive, nor are examples of the hybrid formats mutually exclusive. On the contrary, several components can be combined. Overall, there is a need for experimenting and inventing new formats, adapted to the specific needs of the academic gatherings. Countering the traditional, more or less exclusive, reliance on aeromobility for academic internationalization requires new thinking and practice. In this process, there may be an important role for hybrid meetings, and as this inventory shows there are many different forms with different advantages. The list provided here may provide impetus for new ways of organizing international research workshops, scholarly networks and conferences for academic communities. Indeed, taking steps “toward more online conferencing requires great courage from organizers because it clearly would be a departure from the well-trying conference format of previous decades.” (Jäckle 2021:461).

Jäckle, Sebastian. 2021. "Reducing the Carbon Footprint of Academic Conferences by Online Participation: The Case of the 2020 Virtual European Consortium for Political Research General Conference." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (3):456-461. doi: 10.1017/s1049096521000020.