

# *SOCIETAS LINGUISTICA EUROPAEA*

## On organizing a successful SLE meeting

### **1. General information**

#### **1.1. Mission statement**

SLE meetings aim at giving a platform to high-level research so as to be an innovative force in the field of European linguistics and beyond. The goal is to bring together scholars not only from different corners of Europe and the world, but also to gather people with different linguistic persuasions, both theoretical and applied. The core business of SLE conferences is to get in touch with and understand current trends and advances in the various subfields of linguistics, and to stimulate interaction and discussion.

The annual meetings are an opportunity of the SLE to promote its activities, and to bring in new members. They may also generate some financial benefits to support future initiatives. Together with the journals, the conferences give the SLE the potential to be a key player in the field, comparable to the LSA in the USA.

Finally, SLE meetings are conferences with a heart for people. A smooth organisation is the basis of our success. Our tight organisational model, explained below attempts to create an atmosphere of shared responsibilities as well as human warmth. SLE conferences care about people. Carefully arranging as many issues as possible before the actual conference takes off is a sign of respect for the colleagues attending our conferences, and pays back through improved quality.

#### **1.2. Selection of local organizers**

A calendar of the venues for the coming years is made on the basis of regional spread and availability of experienced local organizers. The SLE conference manager (CM) proposes a list of potential venues and organizers to the members of the Executive Committee of the SLE (EC), who take the final decision.

#### **1.3. Selection of the scientific committee**

The meeting's Scientific Committee (SC) is put together by the SC, who takes into account the suggestions of the EC and the local organizers. Its major task is refereeing the abstracts of workshops and papers for the conference. The Chair of the meeting's SC is the longest serving member of the permanent Scientific Committee of the SLE (5 members). A broad committee is desirable because it allows spreading the considerable workload. Also, it guarantees a greater representativeness of the field.

#### **1.4. Structure of the meeting**

An SLE meeting lasts 3,5 days, ideally from Wednesday morning to Saturday noon, and has plenary sessions and parallel sessions, which either belong to the general or the workshop type. Per session there are between 10 and 12 slots per day. Since over the last couple of years SLE meetings are growing fast, it is important to reserve rooms for at least 10 parallel sessions. There are no excursions during the actual conference. Excursions take place either before or after the conference. Evenings are reserved for the social program.

#### **2. Division of labour between local organizers and conference manager**

The Executive Committee of the SLE gives the mandate of organizing an SLE Annual Meeting to an SLE member, the local organizer (LO) in charge. This person, in turn, forms a Local Organizing Committee (LOC), which consists at least of the LO, a Secretary, and a group of members of the host institution, who may have several more specific tasks.

The SLE Conference Manager (CM) is the representative of the Executive Committee (EC). The CM is in charge of the overall coordination of the conference. (S)he organises the call for papers, the submission and reviewing process, the book of abstracts, and the conference program. During the preparations preceding the conference, the CM follows the timetable of the deadlines mentioned in the call for papers, as based on the experience from the previous editions. The CM stays in close contact with the LO, and also informs the EC about the progress and challenges.

The LOC takes care of all local issues, such as the conference infrastructure – auditorium, lecture rooms, catering, help desk and technical support during the conference – the hotel accomodation, reception, conference dinner, and possible excursions. The LOC also provides the local information for the conference website (see below). Finally, the LOC also invites one plenary speaker, who represents the organising university.

The CM discusses the plenary speakers with both the EC and the LOC. The CM does a proposal after having listed the preferences of both parties. The final decision is based on a consensus between EC and LO.

The CM is also in charge of the public relations. The CM's email address is [sle@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:sle@arts.kuleuven.be). The name of the conference is "SLE year venue" (e.g. SLE 2012 Stockholm). The CM uses the messages of previous years and does not send any circular without proposing the (pre)final version to the LO for approval. The CM and the LOC agree upon the conference website (sle + year, e.g. [www.sle2014.eu](http://www.sle2014.eu)) before the call for papers is sent around. Registration takes place via the SLE website ([www.societaslinguistica.eu](http://www.societaslinguistica.eu)). There should be a link to the relevant page of this site on the conference website.

There should be at least one meeting of the LOC that the Conference Manager physically attends. This should include an in-detail inspection of the venue. The SLE pays the necessary travel and accommodation expenses of the CM. Yet, these expenses are included in the conference budget.

### 3. Public Relations and the call for papers

All public announcements are made on the internet; some are made available via other media as well. By default, the SLE Annual Meeting uses the official SLE homepage ([www.societaslinguistica.eu](http://www.societaslinguistica.eu)) plus the conference website ([www.sleyyyy.eu](http://www.sleyyyy.eu)), to be constructed by the SLE webmaster (Sergio Aguado in 2011-2013). These sites are linked in a functional way. If local organizers wish to set up their own website, this can be discussed with the CM. In any case, all information on the conference website is monitored by the LOC. See the SLE homepage for examples of the conference websites of the last 10 meetings ([www.societaslinguistica.eu/meetings/meetings.htm](http://www.societaslinguistica.eu/meetings/meetings.htm)).

Over the period between the previous conference and the actual one, at least the following pieces of information are provided incrementally on the conference site (among many others):

- time and place of the SLE Annual Meeting,
- the LOC and the SC: list of members, complete address of Secretary,
- exact address of conference venue,
- local maps and detail plans,
- list of hotels, with links to hotels' websites,
- route description to conference location by diverse means of transport, a.o. from the nearest airport and train station
- route description to venue and residences, by car / public transport / on foot,
- reduced tickets for public transport,
- registration regulations,
- abstracts accepted,
- conference program.

The conference website also includes publicity for the SLE and for joining the organisation.

Registration for the conference, including the payment of the conference fee and extra's, such as conference dinner, excursions and accompaniment, takes place via the SLE homepage. There is a link to this on the conference site. The administration of this process is done by the SLE Secretary/Treasurer (S/T; [d.bakker@uva.nl](mailto:d.bakker@uva.nl)).

Apart from the website, the SLE Annual meeting is announced as follows:

- on the electronic (mailing) lists of the discipline: LinguistList, ...
- by e-mail circular to SLE members,

- (optionally) by posters sent out to Linguistics Departments.

The Call for Papers is sent out to a large list of (European) linguists, including all SLE members:

- It contains all the relevant information, including the identity of the LOC and the plenary speakers, deadlines for submissions and registration regulations.
- It invites contributions to the general, workshop and poster sessions.
- It emphasizes the importance of thematic workshops.

The Annual Meeting is also made known to the publisher of the SLE journals and to other publishing companies, so that they get a chance to present linguistic publications in the conference foyer.

All e-mail communication concerning the Annual Meeting is sent out by the CM. It is prepared together with the LO and is agreed upon by both the CM and LO.

See call for papers in the appendix.

## **5. Selection of the papers**

The organization of the refereeing process is a huge task. The CM organizes every step of the refereeing process and keeps in touch with the chair of the meeting's Scientific Committee. In 2013, almost 2000 evaluations (both general and workshop papers) were processed semi-manually. All submitters will receive their evaluations and scores shortly after the notification of acceptance or rejection, i.e. in April of the year of the conference.

The LOC is not involved in the selection of papers, but receives the final list before it is published online.

Abstracts are registered via the conference site. The online registration leads to an Access database and a dropbox with files. The automatic registration number of the titles in the database is linked to the abstract files, but since there may be "spammed entries", the CM has to check them manually. This is a lot of work but it has become a routine. The CM will also contract a student helper to check the database.

The database allows to assign reviewers to papers quite easily. Either the CM or the Chair of the meeting's SC links the abstracts to three reviewers. [For workshop papers, the convenors provide one of these three evaluations]. In case the CM carries out this task, the result is proposed to the Chair. After approval, the CM generates lists per reviewer and sends the papers to these. Reviewers are requested to mark from 1 (clearly unacceptable) to 5 (accept without reservations), 3 being an alternate position. They can also add comments, which may be valuable for the authors of the abstract.

Once all evaluations reach the CM, they are uploaded on the conference site, and the average results of the scores are calculated. The final list is presented to the Chair of the meeting's Scientific Committee.

The general average score is a reference point (threshold) for distinguishing between accepted, alternate and rejected papers. Alternate papers can be included in the program if there is room for them. E.g. in 2010 the reference point was 3,5 (5 being the maximum score). Alternates had an average score of 3,3333. In 2011, the reference point was > 3; alternates had 3. The strict peer reviewing of the papers and the publication of the percentages have resulted in the submission of fewer bad papers over the last few years. It seems that people think twice before they submit.

The number of available slots for the general session varies depending on the scores, but the goal is to respect the general average score and allot slots to all accepted papers. A reasonable number of alternates will be kept in store for replacing accepted papers which are cancelled shortly before the conference starts.

The notification of acceptance is communicated by the CM via the SLE email account. The letter is approved and signed by the Chair of the meeting's Scientific Committee, the LO, and the CM. The message refers to the list of accepted papers on the website and has been checked by the Chair and the LO before it is sent. This list does not include alternates in the general session, but may include alternates for the workshop sessions (depending on the wishes of the convenors).

*A note on the "old-fashioned" handling of the reviewing procedure.*

Nowadays there are a couple of computer tools to manage abstract reviewing online. They all have positive and negative aspects. The present – old-fashioned - approach of the CM focuses on the convenience for the reviewers. Some reviewers are not very familiar with computer tools and are worried by extra confirmation messages that some of these systems generate. In the current system, the CM is obliged to do some extra preparatory work but also sees several advantages. (i) None of the dozens of reviewers experienced any problems with the procedure in the past. Hence, no time has been wasted on explaining the workings of computer tools. And (ii) the offline database allows for generating lists, making the programme and doing research on the geographical and disciplinary spread of the papers that are accepted and rejected.

## **6. The local organizers keep in touch with several people**

### **The plenary speakers**

Once the plenary speakers are contacted by the CM or the LO, it is advisable that one of the members of the LOC is put in charge of keeping in touch with them. The points this member has to check concern: date of arrival, date of departure, booking accomodation, and special requirements. The slot that they receive in the program will be discussed by

the CM and the LO first. The CM includes the email addresses of the plenary speakers in the circulars. The message to the plenary speakers is attached below.

### **The publishers**

In the last two editions John Benjamins has sponsored the SLE meeting with conference bags and ballpoints. The design of the bags will be discussed between the LOC and Benjamins. The CM advises with regard to the number of bags.

De Guyter Mouton has sponsored our meeting with notepads and pencils. In return, representatives of both companies attend the conference for free (2 persons) and the conference pack contains inserts of the companies. The LOC can also contact other publishers. The message that we used on previous occasions may be found below.

### **Catering and dinner**

The LOC keeps in touch with the catering services and inquires about the deadline for fixing the exact numbers of lunches and coffee. On the basis of three previous editions, we can extrapolate the percentage of the participants that attends lunches and coffee breaks. These are: Day 1: 83 %, Day 2: 92 %, Day 3: 92 % and Day 4= 65 %. This has worked out perfectly well in the past.

The LOC also thinks of finding the smoothest way to serve food to 350 or 400 people. If lunch is by selfservice, there should be 4 or 5 serving points, so as to avoid long queues. The LOC also discusses how vegetarians will be recognized. [by the way: in Logroño vegetarians were served as vegans, but this is not necessary. Vegetarians can mark their preference via the registration form, whereas vegans should inform the local organizers that they have a special diet]

### **Chairs**

From two months before the conference it is also good to start thinking of chairs for the general sessions and plenary sessions. The workshop sessions are chaired by the convenors. For the plenaries the LOC may contact local colleagues as well as SLE officials.

All chairs and convenors will receive additional information at the reception desk. The guidelines for chairs go attached.

### **Local officials**

The opening session of the conference (30 minutes) usually schedules several officials, which should be contacted and informed about the conference.

- LO (5 min)

- President of the SLE (3 min)
- CM (3 min)
- (Vice-)Rector or Dean (7 min)
- Government official (7 min)

The closing session on Saturday consists of the presentation of the awards for the best conference presentations by students, which is done by the convenor of the Award Committee, and a word of good buy by the SLE President and the LO.

## 7. CM keeps in touch with workshop convenors

Given the first paragraph of the mission statement, the presence of semi-autonomous **workshops** is a big asset to broadening the scope of the meetings and to attracting new people to the SLE. Semi-autonomous workshops also have the benefit of spreading the workload and guaranteeing coherence and high level discussions in focused sections.

The selection of papers belonging to **workshops** is a joint venture between the workshop convenors, the conference management and the Scientific Committee.

Workshop proposals are submitted before the general deadline for submission. There are usually only two months between the end of the previous conference and the submission of workshop proposals for the next one. Yet, since SLE meetings are annual meetings, it is impossible to fix the deadline earlier.

Workshop proposals include a description of the workshop topic, the research questions to be addressed, and a list of potential contributors, among them potential keynote speakers. Although workshop convenors may invite a substantial number of workshop presenters and participants themselves, we strongly emphasize the need for open calls for workshop papers on The Linguist List. This has worked very well this year, with a lot of additional PR for SLE.

The workshop proposals are evaluated by the five officers of the SC. On the basis of the accepted proposals, the CM negotiates the number of slots with the officers. The number of slots is around 10 per day, with a maximum of 1,5 day for any workshop.

A good and respectful treatment of the workshop convenors is the basis for a successful conference, since they are its stakeholders. If we do not take into account some of their wishes, we might end up with fewer workshops. In the past we faced some problems because various authors were participants in different workshops. These problems have been solved now; we communicate our clear policy to convenors from the start of the process.

Usually convenors agree to have alternates to their workshop (often as a consequence of an overcrowded schedule). The scores of the Scientific Committee determine who will be alternate. These alternates can be mentioned on the conference website, with the

argument that they are part of the workshop but are placed on a waiting list because of lack of slots in some of the workshops. Another alternative is shifting them to the general session. In 2011 this has turned out to generate a lot of extra work. For future editions we will accept more papers than slots available, and count on cancellations. A reasonable guess of the percentage of drop outs can be made on the basis of experiences in the past.

Good contact with the convenors also allows the SLE to propose innovating approaches to workshops. E.g. convenors are invited to circulate draft versions of papers, and to ask participants to formulate questions to be presented during the meeting. The glossing of examples will also be a requirement. More interventions are to be expected.

## **8. The list of accepted papers and the book of abstracts**

The schedule of the meeting is set up by the CM. The first proposal is presented to the Chair of the meeting's SC and to the Chair of the LOC. After approval the CM can update and change according to the needs of the situation. People who do not register on time are reminded that their presentation will be removed from the programme in case no payment is done. Our experience tell us that most of those participants who do not reply to such messages, finally do not show up. A stricter policy with respect to no reply-ers has proven useful at SLE 2012 (Stockholm).

The ultimate goal is a conference schedule that is as full as possible. Therefore the schedule keeps on being updated until two days before the conference. Usually we have not too many cancellations, which were typically announced at the start of, or even during the conference. Still, it is good to keep some papers in reserve.

An electronic version of the book of abstracts is generated from the individual abstracts. This is done by the CM. The LOC make sure that they make arrangements with a local printing house. The book is usually printed locally one month before the conference.

The schedule (both a short version – with tables — and an elaborate one) is printed the day before the conference pack is being put together. This allows for last minute changes.

## **9. The reception desk and the conference pack.**

The organization of the conference pack and the reception desk is one of the most important tasks of the LOC. Our general philosophy is: keep it simple and try to eliminate unnecessary steps that would cost time and goodwill during the conference. The reception desk, and the people staffing it, are the heart of the conference. A good start without problems is certainly the best guarantee for a fantastic conference.

Splitting up the personal administrative side from the general side is a good way of avoiding confusion. This is why we keep the conference packs impersonal (no worry about



having to check them) and why we have the envelopes with all personal information centralized in boxes (with letters A-E, F-K, etc).

The SLE Secretary/Treasurer will make available all kinds of tables and lists of participants necessary to produce any of the elements below.

#### Conference pack

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The conference pack contains at least the following elements:

- 1) welcome information for the participants (information on welcoming reception and other things related to the venue etc)
- 2) detailed schedule (latest version)
- 3) simple schedule (latest version)
- 4) book of abstracts
- 5) map of the rooms on campus
- 6) map of city and touristic information
- 7) list of participants
- 8) call for papers next year's conference
- 9) inserts publishers
- 10) SLE information ( > SLE Secretary)
- 11) paper ( > De Gruyter)
- 12) pencils ( > De Gruyter) and pens ( > Benjamins)

#### Envelope with personal information

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- 1) Certificate of attendance (titles mentioned)
- 2) Vouchers lunch
- 3) Voucher conference dinner
- 4) Voucher excursion
- 5) Badge (if it is no badge, but a nametag with a lanyard, it is better to have it printed on both sides). Please prepare the badge so that people do not have to bother about putting it together upon receipt. The names should be big enough. E.g.



**Maria Koptjevskaja Tamm**  
Stockholms Universitet

SLE 2012

**Susanne Vejdemo**  
Stockholms Universitet

SLE 2012

The envelope has a nametag in the right corner, so that the names can be easily found when you put the envelopes vertically in a box.

If someone does not have an envelope. Please check whether they are on the list of participants. If they are, please remain patient and tell them they can come back within an hour. In that case, a new nametag has to be made. If they are not, the fee has to be paid in situ and a nametag will be made before the next coffee or lunch break.

#### Reception desk

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The reception desk is organized in four or five sections, according to the surnames of the participants. For instance

A – E  
F – K  
L – S  
T - Z

Prepare sheets with the letters and put them both behind you and on the table.

On the basis of the most recent list of participants provided by the SLE Secretary/Treasurer, the LO prepares an overview which contains information that should be checked. In case of payments that still have to be done, they arrange with the S/T how they will deal with it.

After the first day, people will start asking travel related questions. It is good to have:

- a printer for printing e-tickets
- Bus and train schedules
- Maps of the town
- Other transport related material
- Contact information (doctors – emergency)

## Opening hours

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The desk is open during the conference hours (from 8 am on the first day, a quarter before the first session on the other days).

Since people may have special queries during coffee breaks, please staff the reception desk also at those moments. It is also good to have someone at the reception desk during the last quarter/half an hour of the lunch break.

## 10. Finances

The LO, the CM and the Secretary/Treasurer of the SLE discuss the estimated budget before and after the deadline for the submission of abstracts. Typical points of attention are:

- Budget for catering (usually by far the largest item on the list)
- Conference Reception
- Rental of lecture rooms, main aula for plenary meetings
- Computers, both for presentation and for use of participants
- Cost of the conference website, and adaptation of the SLE homepage
- Student helpers
- Technical support during the conference
- Visit CM
- Student Awards
- Travel and hotel of plenaries
- Book of abstracts, badges etc

The budget must be agreed upon by LO, CM and S/T before it can be considered a financial guide for the conference. The budgets of the previous conferences may be used as a point of departure.

The goal of financial planning is to have a small surplus, which may be used in case of unexpected issues arising. If there is a surplus, this will be shared by the LOC and the SLE on a 50/50 basis. The estimated total budget of the conference will determine the (average) conference fee, assuming a realistic number of participants. As a very, very rough rule of thumb, based on the last few conferences, we assume 450 paying participants and an average 'bare' fee (i.e. without conference dinner and/or excursions, but including full catering) of €180. Note that there are reduced tariffs for students and colleagues from 'economically challenged' countries. We also have an early bird reduction.

The LOC must set up a bank account through which all relevant transactions are conducted. This may or may not be an account of the host university administration.

Upon request by the LOC, the SLE S/T may make some financial means available to them during the organisational process.

**Plenary speakers** may receive the following benefits:

1. The participation fee is waived.
2. Travel expenses are reimbursed.
3. Free accommodation is provided.
4. They are invited to the conference dinner.

Plenary speakers are not paid any honorarium. There is no compensation for members of the scientific committee, section chairpersons, and workshop organisers.

We try to keep the conference fees as low as possible, in order to make participation possible for as many linguists as possible, irrespective of their status and income. Therefore, the local organisers are urged to seek financial support from various sources, either in terms of money or kind. Possibilities include:

- Science foundations and research councils.
- Local and regional sponsors; their support can take the form not only of money, but also of natural produce.
- Some funds may be obtained from the host university and/or faculty. They are, at any rate, expected to waive any charges for infrastructure and administrative support. Also, lecture rooms may be made available for free

The last four editions of the SLE meeting were financially healthy experiences. Due to this, we are now in a position that we can plan the budget with high certainty of precision.

## **10. Social and touristic activities**

An SLE Annual Meeting typically offers the following amenities to participants:

- a reception at the townhall or equivalent venue,
- a guided tour through the town,
- conference dinner on the evening preceding the closing session,

Optional:

- welcome drinks and snacks in the eve (“warming up”),
- excursions into the environment after the conference closure.

The first of these items are usually included in the conference fee, while the others are typically booked and paid for individually. For the latter, it is convenient (but not obligatory) to involve a travel agency.

In the selection of the place for the conference dinner, the LOC should be aware that the participants look for a nice, familiar, affordable place. For SLE 2011, 2012 and 2013 the fee for the three course conference dinner (with drinks) was around €45 euros. 220-240 participants attended the conference dinner.

## 11. Schedule

In the table below, the number of months or days preceding the event mark the deadline at which this point should be settled.

months	Agenda
24	agreement with SLE, university and student residences, if any
24	fix date (first weeks of September)
15	set up the LOC and the SC
15	reserve rooms (LOC)
15	find plenary speakers (CM – LOC)
15	apply for funds (LOC)
August	first public announcement of Annual Meeting (CM)
August	call for papers, conference (CM)
August	Contact suitable local hotels (LOC)
August	Contact catering company – restaurants (LOC)
August	Discuss budget (CM – LOC)
September	Public announcement via mailing lists (CM)
November 15	deadlines workshop proposals (CM)
January 15	deadline for submission of abstracts (CM)
February- March	Reviewing process (CM – Scientific Committee)

March 31	Finish reviewing process, notify submitters (CM)
April 1	early bird registration
April	Discuss budget (CM – LOC)
May 30	abstracts on the internet (CM)
May 30	publish the time and room table (CM)
July	select chairpersons for sessions, get their consent (LOC)
July	increased registration fee
July	Print book of abstracts (LOC)
July August	Prepare nametags – certificates of attendance
<b>Days</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
4	Xerox the schedule (small and elaborate) (LOC)
3	The conference pack (LOC)
2	set up conference office (LOC)
1	post conference posters, signs for conference office, plenary hall, seminar rooms etc. (LOC)
1	cater snacks and drinks (LOC)
0	Check participants' booking of social activities (conference dinner, sightseeing ...)
0	update information on presentations on a regular basis

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