



Editorial

Conferences and journal: A virtuous interaction

Someone whose name I do not recall maintained that conferences are rarely of use in producing good ideas, whilst they are frequently effective in destroying bad ideas.

Over and above the cynicism conveyed by this statement, conferences undoubtedly represent one of the main means of communication and dissemination of research findings, playing a fundamental role in the advancement of scientific activities.

A similar activity is undertaken by journals applying a peer-review process aimed at ensuring the quality of papers published. The comparative characteristics of conferences and journal publications are summarised in Table 1.

The main advantage of conferences is associated with the ready availability of information, the immediate possibility of opening a critical debate and establishing networking between individuals working in the same sector, although at times in different contexts. Related negative aspects include the monetary costs of participation (e.g. travel, hotel, registration fees) as well as the associated environmental impacts (e.g. CO₂ emissions associated with transport) to reach the conference venue.

Peer-reviewed journals guarantee higher quality of published papers, negligible costs for authors (with the exception of open journals) and low environmental impact (which is virtually lacking in the case of a journal published solely online. The different value in advancing an author's career also has a strong impact on the division between journal and conference publications. The desire by some authors to improve their professional standing may lead them to choose a journal submission over a conference submission. It can also lead to basing a decision on where to publish on a bibliometric index such as the impact factor. Unfortunately, the same pressure for career progression can lead to more self-serving practices by authors, such as citation clubs, self citations, sycophantic citations towards the journal to which the paper is submitted, and research fractioning in several papers. In some countries the mechanisms underlying the awarding of a Ph.D. entail the publication of a specific number of journal papers, leading to a massive submission of journal papers, at times of scarce scientific relevance. Many young people quite often focus excessively on quantity and formal scientific aspects rather than quality in terms of relevance and scientific interest of the paper. The above features determine interesting differences in the distribution of nationality of authors submitting papers to conferences and to journals.

To better identify these differences two separate samples of papers produced from 2009 to 2010 were examined. The first sample comprised papers submitted to *Waste Management* (approximately 1500) and the second papers submitted for presentation at the IWWG Symposia, Sardinia 2009 and Venice 2010 Symposia (a total of approx. 1380 papers).

Figure 1 illustrates the nationality of authors of accepted papers.

While the number of Italian authors was clearly affected by the fact that the conferences were both held in Italy, the findings obtained clearly revealed how emergent countries such as China and India are investing heavily in scientific research and are strongly motivated to publish in peer-reviewed journals, but take part in International Conferences to a much lower extent.

A similar situation is observed for other countries featuring economic restrictions or high costs of travel due to their geographical position (e.g. New Zealand).

One negative effect of the low cost and high reward for authors who publish in *Waste Management* is the large number of weak submissions. Approximately 50% of papers submitted to *Waste Management* are judged to be out of the Journal scope as they focus on other disciplines, or are of low relevance, either from an application or scientific point of view. The percentage of rejected papers falls to below 10% for symposium papers. Delegates planning to face the costs of travel and conference registration are obviously careful not to submit papers of scarce interest for the conference audience!

A large number of authors from industrialized countries, particularly European countries and Japan, do not display a fervent interest in publishing on a peer reviewed journal, implying that frequently articles of high scientific interest are buried in conference proceedings and seldom cited.

The total number of represented countries is higher for the Journal (85) than for the Symposia (68).

In the light of these observations and with the aim of highlighting the most interesting scientific articles produced on an international level, *Waste Management* promotes a virtuous interaction between conferences and the Journal in line with the following criteria:

- Journal submissions originating from conferences are handled according to the same criteria applied to papers submitted regularly to *Waste Management*.

Table 1

Comparison between conferences and a peer-reviewed journal as communication tools for scientific activities.

Performance parameter	International conference	Peer-reviewed journal
Timely information	+++	–
Critical discussion	++	+
Networking	+++	+
Paper quality	+	+++
Participation costs	– – –	0 (except open Journals)
Advancement of academic careers	+	+++
Environmental impact	– – –	– (0 if online only)

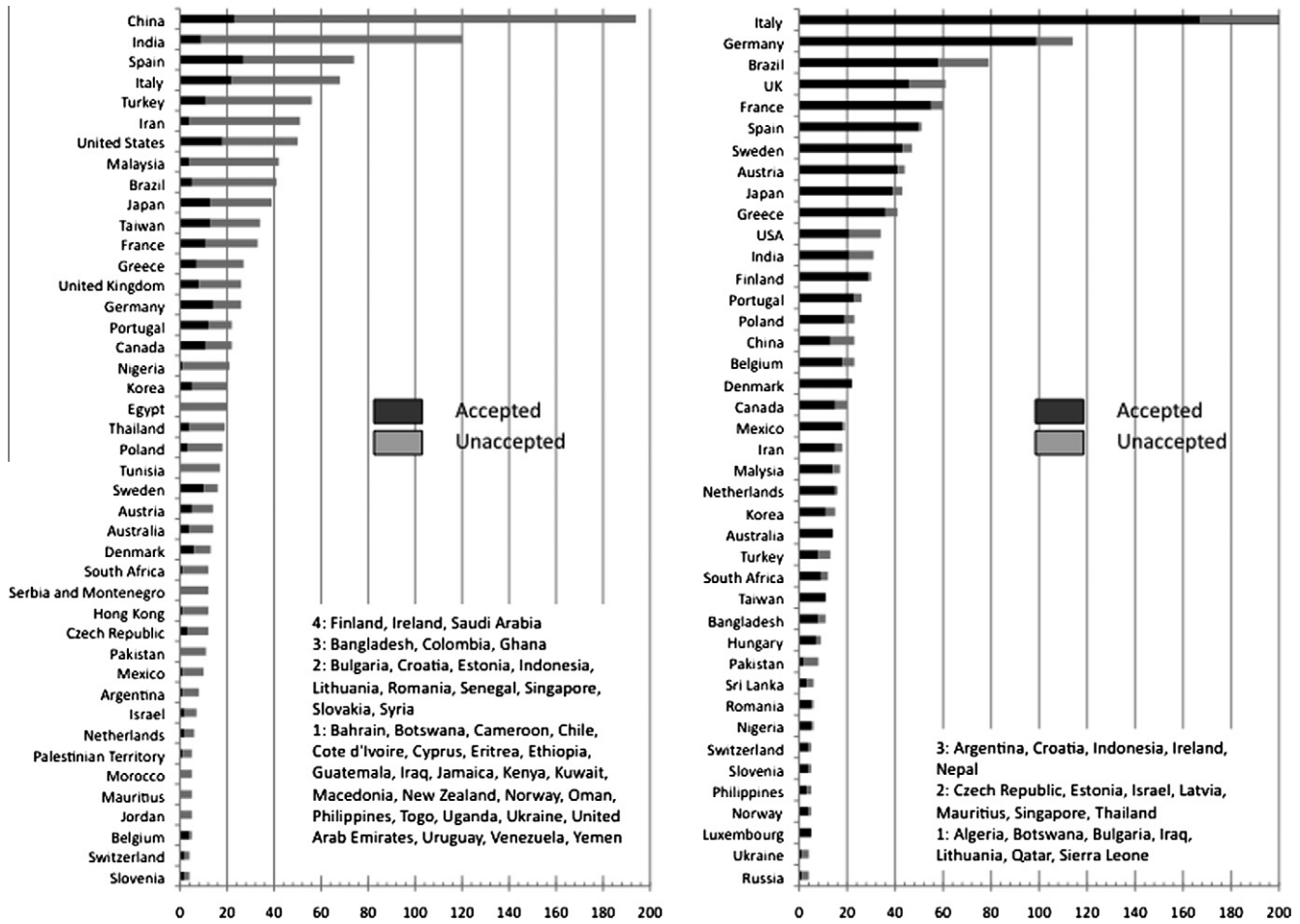


Fig. 1. Nationalities of authors submitting manuscripts to *Waste Management* (left) and presenting papers at the IWWG International Symposia Sardinia 2009 and Venice 2010 (right).

- Selected peer-reviewed papers, originating from conferences, may be published in a special thematic issue, even at times together with papers from the Journal stock. These journal issues are published so as not to resemble conference proceedings (e.g. no reference will be made to any conference).
- Conference Organizers wishing to publish an entire set of peer-reviewed papers as selected proceedings, if deemed by the publisher and editor-in-chief to be of interest to journal subscribers, should apply for a supplemental issue and pay the extra costs incurred.

The range of possible interactions between *Waste Management* and conferences with regard to papers from conference proceedings is summarised in Table 2, indicating the type of

publication possible, the role of the Conference Organizer (CO) and the administrative aspects handled by the Publisher (Elsevier).

As a general rule the CO interested in publishing a selection of papers from a conference should identify the type of publication that better suits the need (A–C).

The CO should subsequently contact the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) to propose the publication, preferably attaching a list of paper titles selected for potential publication. In the case of type C, should the EiC judge the proposal to be of interest with regard to scientific and journal content, he will forward the request to the Publisher who will undertake the necessary administrative negotiations with the conference organizer. Advertising in the journal may be arranged for all types of publication.

Table 2
Possible interactions between waste management and conference organizers in terms of paper handling procedures. (CO = conference organizer, EiC = editor-in-chief, ELS = Elsevier).

Type	Role of conference organizer (CO)	Paper selection	Final decision	Guest editor-publisher agreement	Individual submission via EES	Normal peer-review	Payment of publication costs
A: Selection of individual papers to be upgraded to WM standard	Proposal	EiC	EiC	NO	YES	YES	NO
B: Establishing of a special thematic issue or section, including papers from Journal stock	Guest co-editor	EiC	EiC	YES	YES	YES	NO
C: Publication of a set of selected proceedings in a supplemental issue of WM	Guest editor	CO and EiC	ELS/EiC	YES	NO	YES	YES

The list of selected papers will be subject to approval by the EiC according to the standard preliminary screening procedures applied by the Journal (scope and relevance) based on abstracts submitted by the CO.

The EiC will appoint one or more editors for the special issue, to always comprise a member of the Journal Editorial Board, who will be responsible to act as technical and scientific supervisor. The conference organizer may both act as Guest co-Editor of the special issue, or special section if the number of papers is insufficient to allow the compiling of a normal issue (180–200 printed pages), and be invited to write an editorial.

An agreement between the Guest Editors and the publisher, defining deadlines, issue outline and commitments, will need to be signed for publications of type B and C.

To conclude, I believe that a good paper, presented at a reputable conference, discussed by colleagues with expertise in the field and subsequently upgraded and published in a good journal is highly preferable to a bad paper!

I believe.

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