

It's best not to fly to conferences

September 4 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Several times a year, researchers from all over the world travel long distances in order to share their latest findings and establish contacts at conferences. Dr. Sebastian Jäckle from the Department of Political Science at the University of Freiburg advocates a more conscious approach to such research trips. The political scientist examined the travel-related CO₂ emissions of the last six conferences from the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). In addition to

calculating the travel-related CO₂ emissions of the conference participants, Jäckle is also investigating how emissions can be reduced. The study was published in the journal *European Political Science*.

According to Jäckle's calculations, the average CO₂ balance of a conference visitor ranges from 0.5 to 1.5 tons of CO₂ equivalents per three-day ECPR meeting. In comparison, every German emits a total of about 11 tons of CO₂ equivalents per year; according to the current report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, every human being worldwide is likely to emit only 2.5 tons of CO₂ equivalents per year in 2030, meaning that the 1.5 degree target of climate protection is still achievable.

In order to determine the total emissions of the conferences, Jäckle took into account the distances travelled by the participants and the CO₂ emissions per kilometer for air, bus and rail transport. Travelling by plane is by far the worst option, whereas there is not much difference in CO₂ emissions between bus and train. Jäckle's data also show that a significant proportion of the issues are attributable to a small number of conference topics that travel very long distances: Seven percent of the participants at the conference in Hamburg, Germany in 2018 caused more than half of the total CO₂ emissions.

Nevertheless, Jäckle shows in his work that there is a large savings potential. By choosing central conference venues with good rail connections and by connecting participants through video transmission, especially for those from distant regions, the CO₂ footprint of conferences could be significantly reduced. "If researchers would then accept somewhat longer [travel times](#) by bus or train compared to air travel, up to 85 percent of a conference's emissions could be saved," says Jäckle. "Such savings are only possible, however, if both the professional associations hosting the conferences and individual researchers are aware of the problem and actively strive to make the conference as climate-

neutral as possible."

The [political scientist](#) has set a good example. In September 2019, he traveled by bicycle from Freiburg to the ECPR [conference](#) in Wroclaw, Poland in the most climate-neutral fashion.

More information: Sebastian Jäckle, WE have to change! The carbon footprint of ECPR general conferences and ways to reduce it, *European Political Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1057/s41304-019-00220-6](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-019-00220-6)

Provided by University of Freiburg

Citation: It's best not to fly to conferences (2019, September 4) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-09-conferences.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.