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ArGEnCo

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Dear friends and colleagues of the "Structures in Fire" community,

One year ago, many of us were preparing their bags for the journey to Shanghai where they would attend the Eight International Conference on Structures in Fire: SiF'14. This conference was organised at College of Civil Engineering of Tongji University by Professor G. Q. Li and his co-workers, together with Prof. B Wu from South China University of Science and Technology, Prof. L H Han from Tsinghua University and Prof. Y L Dong from Huaqiao University. It took place from June 11 to June 13.

Once again, participation was a big success, considering the number of communication proposals that were received as well as the number of delegates who attended.

The number of proposals that we received has again increased from the previous conference because 285 extended abstracts were send for review. Each abstract was reviewed by three reviewers from the list of 51 who served for this conference, with Bin Zhao, Paulo Vila Real, G. Q. Li, Kang Hai Tan, Mario Fontana and Asif Usmani as track leaders under the leadership of Venkatesh Kodur.

The presentation were organised in 6 plenary sessions and, for the first time in the history of SiF conferences, 12 parallel sessions (two at a time) which gave possibility to accommodate not less than 80 twenty minutes presentations, which is still only a 3/10 acceptance rate. One forty minutes poster session was also organised every day at a time of coffee break, which allowed for the presentation of 74 posters.

Coffee breaks and lunch breaks were good opportunities to socialise with good friends or to create new links. The conference diner organised in town was a fantastic moment with plenty of delicious Chinese food and exposure to Chinese culture, and some more official moments when the location of the next conference was announced.

Although all papers have been printed in full length in the paper copy of the proceedings, it has to be recognised that presenting a poster does not give the same exposure as having an oral presentation. This is something that the steering committee wants to work on for the next conference.

The attendance was higher than ever with 244 delegates in total coming from 23 different countries.

The proceedings of the conference can be downloaded as a pdf file on the web site of the SiF movement at:

http://www.structuresinfire.com/corpo/conferences/sif14.pdf

The steering committee had received not less than four proposals to host the next Conference in 2016: Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Princeton University in the U.S.A., Queens University in Kingston Canada and Recife, Brazil. All these proposals were considered as excellent and could have been a good choice. Nevertheless, because a choice had to be made, the organisation of SiF'16 was awarded to Princeton University. It will take place from June 8 to 10 and Maria Garlock will be our host (http://sif2016.princeton.edu/).

An informal meeting was held at the end of the conference during which the delegates could express their views and suggestions for improvement of the future SiF conferences. Some hand raising votes have even been held in order to quantify the feeling of all delegates on important issues for which different opinions had been expressed. The minutes of this meeting are reproduced as an annex to this message.

Don't forget to visit our website maintained by Paulo: www.structuresinfire.com. You can find interesting information such as the proceedings of previous SiF workshops and conferences. Don't hesitate to contact Paulo if you want to contribute to the web site with relevant information.

Proposals for hosting SiF'2018 should be sent not later than one month before the start of SiF'16. The objective is to announce the location of SiF'18 at SiF'16. As decided in Singapore, SiF 18 will be held in Europe.

We look forward to meet you in Princeton.

For the steering committee

Jean-Marc Franssen

ANNEX: **SiF Minutes. Discussion session at the end of the 8th SiF Conference, Shanghai.**

Big issue #1. What size do we want for SiF?
Do we keep SiF small and chatty or do we let it grow into a major conference with many parallel streams and keynote speakers?
There are strong arguments both ways.
If it is too small, we die and get overtaken by others.
If it is too big, there is no in-depth discussion, and it becomes too impersonal.
Answer – we need to be somewhere in the middle, big enough to avoid being by-passed and small enough so that we meet the original principles.
The organisers of the 9th Conference will need to make compromises to find the middle road.

Some people are asking what SiF is for. Is it just a club where old friends meet and chat? Or does it have a bigger purpose? There is a strong view that we must be contributing to a safer world society, and not just be an academic talk-fest.

Big issue #2. How many presentations?
Do we want a few presentations with long discussion time for each, or do we prefer lots of short presentations? The problem is time.
Do we want a longer conference?
We could fit in more papers if we had more days, but a show of hands showed that 80% prefer to stay at 3 days.

Parallel sessions:
A strong majority (65%) wants to have two parallel sessions for part of the conference. 30% voted for a single session throughout and about 5% voted for more than two sessions.
Everyone wants some time for a single session where we discuss topics of general interest.
There is concern that we could become too specialised if the whole conference is streamed.

Time for presentations:
Initially a majority (75%) were in favour of retaining 20 minute presentations. 20% wanted shorter presentations and 5% wanted longer presentations.
Later, after discussion, it became apparent that we will have to reject a lot of papers if we have only two streams and long presentations. At this point, more people became in favour of shorter presentations.

Time for discussion of papers
It is clear that many people want more time for discussion.
One way to do that is to cut the 20 minutes per presentation time from 15 + 5 into 10 + 10.
Even then we may not fit in enough papers, especially if we add oral presentations for posters (see below).

A compromise may be to put the discussion into focussed panel sessions (one each morning and afternoon) rather than after each presentation.

Posters
It is clear that we must give posters more status. Several ideas were suggested;

- Have the coffee breaks in the poster room.
- Poster people to have short oral presentation. 90% agree.
- Force everyone to look at the posters. Give everyone a form to vote for the "best poster" in each category.

Time for each presentation
There is a danger that if we cut all papers to a much shorter presentation time, and add oral

presentations for posters, then there may become no difference in the presentation time, but the "weaker" papers will get a poster plus a presentation and the "stronger" papers will get only the oral. That needs to be thought about when the 9th Conference is planned.

Printing of proceedings.
There is a strong difference of opinion on this.
The vote was 70% for printing everything, 10% for no printing, and 5% for a book of abstracts.
One reason to print proceedings is to have the full paper to read during the presentation.
Another strong reason to print is to have a reference with page numbers for CVs.
Many people want a PDF to load on their laptop. There is no reason we can't post the papers on the web before the conference or provide a memory stick, or both.

The other factor here is listing in the Citation Index, and referencing all papers with a doi-number. It was agreed that we must do this, even if it costs a little money.
It was noted that papers from all previous SiF conferences are on the SiF website, but only the MSU papers are readily available through on-line search engines.

Other concerns
Review of papers.
Some people want full papers to be reviewed. This is impossible. The Scientific Committee is happy with the current system of submitting an extended (2 page) abstract.
There is difficulty reviewing poorly presented papers, and allocating papers to streams. The Chair of the Scientific Committee informed participants that a cover sheet will be required with all future submissions. This will include the requested stream for oral presentation.

Poor index. The index is unsatisfactory for the latest printed books. This must be improved when the PDFs are put on the SiF website and in future hard copies.

Andy Buchanan. 14 June 2014.