

Declaration Debate: Participants Commit to the Future of EE

Reaching Consensus in Record Time

As the final session of the EE 2000 event ended and participants headed for their coffee break, the plenary room was rebuilt into a debating “arena.” To facilitate more personal discussions, session host, NEEF Secretary, and reports coordinator Peter Fokkens requested that chairs be arranged so that keynote speakers and session presenters filled those seats closest to him.

As Fokkens stressed in his opening remarks: the aim of the event coordinators was to create an atmosphere of casualness and collegiality. He invited participants to share openly their opinions during the discussion that ensued.

As one of the two editors of the daily Web magazine covering the event, Fokkens was familiar with all the session reports and had selected topics from them and divided the related ones into sections. Every topic was formulated as a possible future goal for the field of EE. The participants were asked to answer three key questions related to every topic:

- Is the goal essential for the future of EE?
- Is the goal achievable?
- What should be said about a topic within the text of the declaration?

Fokkens deftly managed the flow of the conversations, ensuring that every topic resulted in some amount of discussion in the 2 hours allotted to the session. At the session’s end, the participants were relieved to know that they could enjoy an afternoon in the Arnhem Open Air Museum. But the drafting of the Declaration was just beginning.

The Declaration editing team met in a corner in the plenary room. The team consisted of Martine Bouman, Patrick Coleman, Vibert Cambridge, and Phyllis Piotrow. Robert Jacoby, who managed the Web magazine team with Fokkens, acted as an involved secretary. Fokkens again chaired the meeting.

Fokkens planned four rounds of work. The first was dedicated to deciding key positions and their content, without details. From this round, seven key positions emerged: Synergy, Ethics, Theory and Practice, Research Agenda, Training and Education, Sound Business Practice, and a Sustainable Network.

In the second round, Jacoby and Fokkens teamed up to compose the initial draft. In about 30 minutes their draft Declaration was completed.

The third and fourth rounds were comparatively easy. The entire team met again to thoroughly consider every point proposed. Not much was changed, and after another 30 minutes, Jacoby and Fokkens retreated to the editing room to make the final version.

Two hours later, editing team secretary Lucie Timmers placed copies on a table at the entrance of the restaurant where the gala evening dinner was held. That night, after Martine Bouman read the Declaration to all, participants appeared genuinely surprised, and appreciative, that so many of the discussion topics from their afternoon session were addressed in such a compact text; and everyone realized that a new record of consensus building had been set.