

Conferences are a learning experience. Some events are instructive in a negative way and succeed in showing how not to do things. The best meetings, in turn, are logistically smooth and socially rewarding. They produce inspiring contacts, fresh thinking, and collaborative projects. One sign of success is popularity: year after year, high quality attracts a sizeable crowd, which is a mixture of new faces and those who would not want to miss the event under any circumstances. Together they create a dynamic buzz. A sign of success for the individual attendee is the odd combination of happy brains and terrible sleep deficit once it is all over.

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For me, the conference series on Gambling and Risk-Taking has been a thoroughly positive learning experience. Over the years the organizers have set a high standard for conference logistics, venue choice, program design, and intellectual and social endeavors. The series has therefore continued to stand out as an example to follow among the expanding selection of gambling conferences. When organizing seminars of various sorts I, too, have resorted back to previous programs of “the Eadington conference” to look for ideas for session design and scheduling.

My first encounter with the conference series happened about fifteen years ago, when I was generating an interest in gambling studies. The conference in 2000 gave a good overview of the field. The emphasis in the era of worldwide industry expansion, technological change, and regulatory challenges was on regional business and legal development, impact studies, and problem gambling. But there was space for other topics, too. A session about gambling math left me mesmerized. I learned about particular jurisdictions, and was delighted to find a presentation or two about history, morality, and philosophy. A session about teaching, and case studies about gambling, urban development, and tourism were most instructive. The atmosphere was relaxed and welcoming to new participants. And I liked the way the scene broke conventional boundaries of professional monocultures by bringing together academics, regulators, industry experts, and treatment specialists.

The little that there was in the early 2000s for a cultural studies person was, in retrospect, worth a fortune. A handful of similarly oriented colleagues from history, sociology, and anthropology kept good company to a geographer whose interests seemed to be similarly off the mainstream map. But we got reasonably sized audiences for our talks and tough questions from prominent colleagues. The tone was curious, intellectually challenging – and sincerely encouraging. We learned that in this venue novelty and well-defended arguments were generally welcome.

It was this open-mindedness and genuine interest in a variety of ideas that turned me – and those culture- and history-oriented colleagues – from newcomers to those who would not want to miss this particular conference under any circumstances. The experience was also critical in convincing me that the social-scientific and cultural study of gambling

was the way forward. That people were willing to interact beyond their usual scope was stimulating and there were opportunities for interdisciplinary and international collaboration.

Diversity, open-mindedness and encouragement represent dynamic continuity in this conference series. This continuity has fostered and sustained change by welcoming new scholars and new topics. One trend that has stood out over the past decade is the growing interest in the social-scientific and cultural study of gambling and, especially, the expanding attention to gambling in ordinary people's daily life. What in 2000 was a handful of scholars is now a sizeable group that in 2009 at Lake Tahoe filled several sessions. Another trend is the expansion of diversity to include more women, ethnic minorities, and academic subdisciplines. And it is all increasingly international and interactive, as former newcomers introduce their students to this venue.

Continuity is comfort, but it stays interesting because of its capacity to sustain change. That there are things one can count on, and something new to learn each time, is a solidly built platform for this conference series to stay successful.

Pauliina Raento, Ph.D.  
Research Director, The Finnish Foundation for Gaming Research  
Professor of Human Geography, University of Helsinki