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GPD Turns 25

Jorma Vitkala,
chair of the GPD Organizing Committee



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BRINGING OUT THE BEST

**GPD Celebrates
a Quarter Century
of Knowledge and
Networking**

by Ellen Rogers

For 25 years, Jorma Vitkala (left) has chaired the GPD organizing committee. He has helped create and grow an event that combines networking and social activities as well as informative and educational sessions.



Photos: GPD



Twenty-five years ago, Glass Performance Days (GPD), then known as Glass Processing Days, wasn't much more than a small seminar. About 30 people from the glass industry came together in Tampere, Finland to discuss innovations in equipment and machinery. The event was originally produced by the company known as Tamglass, today as Glaston.

"There was no industry tradition in the glass business with a focus on sharing information for the common good," says Jorma Vitkala, chairperson of the GPD organizing committee. "In this respect, glass companies differed a lot from the scientific community where information was freely shared. The early years [of GPD], perhaps even the first five to ten years, were marked by fighting to have a good idea accepted. It became clear to me, however, that the challenges faced and solutions required were common across the world."

Vitkala and his team knew this knowledge and information needed to be shared, and the conference quickly grew. GPD took place annually until 1995, when participation grew to 400. The next GPD took place in 1997 and became a biennial conference.

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“From 30 participants all the way to a total of 14,000 attendees, 1,000 speakers, 3,000 presentations and 10,000 pages of information [across all regional GPD events] to date is a long way,” says Vitkala. “It’s good, too, to remember that the start of the GPD took place before the age of the internet. Information flow was a different issue before that.”

GPD has seen tremendous growth, and continues to evolve. What can you expect to see this year? USGlass magazine got the scoop from Vitkala about the past, present and future of GPD.

USG: What are some of your favorite memories of GPD—favorite sessions, speakers, etc.?

JV: Each GPD has been memorable in itself because it has always reflected the top priorities in its time: technology, processing, solar applications, design, energy-efficiency, etc. Some speakers have launched very special statements about our business such as, why is the clock-speed of change in the glass industry so slow? Speeding that up became an important priority. One of our speakers once rejected the phrase “sustainable development,” which is so popular in environmental discussions. He explained, we don’t want to just be sustainable; it sounds too stagnant. We want dynamic change! He went on to say: “Why do we talk about green values? Since the sky is the limit, should we not talk about another color, i.e. blue?” Moments like these often become trigger points for development.

The spin-off conferences

in special parts of the world—China, Brazil, India, Turkey, Azerbaijan and most recently Cuba—have all been memorable openings addressing special regional issues with international dimensions. These conferences have been central for the spreading of information in their region and have attracted participants who might not have an opportunity to attend the main conference in Finland.

USG: Did you ever think the event would grow the way it has?

JV: I was such a strong believer in the value of information exchange as a driver of progress that I never doubted that growth would follow. We worked hard to market the GPD spirit along the lines that knowledge grows when shared. The validity of this statement is traced back to the Indian poet and grammarian Bhartrihari AD 450-510. We have a strong response to that in this very day.

USG: How does the event compare to when it was started?

JV: The biggest difference is how truly global and efficient the information flow is today. Local priorities used to dominate the industry, but now everything is global. Modern technol-

For Vitkala, every GPD has been memorable; this year, its 25th anniversary, will be no exception.



Specialized sessions take an in-depth look at some of the industry's most important trends, topics and developments.

ogy and advanced logistics promote the travel and adoption of international practices. Construction remains local, but technologies and construction components flow across borders as specialization more than upsets transportation costs.

USG: What will be new about GPD 2017?

JV: Everything—except the fine tradition. A new conference format, a new venue and some special program modules to promote innovation, ideas, support newcomers and transfer information between generations. The new thinking has attracted 180 presentations. This is a clear sign that the trendsetters of the industry have no fear for innovation and new concepts. The 2017 GPD moves away from closed rooms to the open stage like the information industry has done.

USG: What is the GPD Step Change and what does this bring to the conference?

JV: The Step Change approach is a new conference module bringing together new technologies, creative start-up companies, investors and business angels for the promotion of the entire glass industry. It's closely linked to another new module, the mentor program, where experienced industry professionals stand by to support newcomers to the industry. The melting pot for this program is the core of the conference arena and its exhibition center.

USG: Tell us about some of the “must see” events planned for this year—what is the one thing everyone must see or do?

JV: Making good use of the networking opportunities is the “must” of this conference. The get-together party at the beginning of the conference, extended coffee and lunch breaks, the conference dinner and the farewell party are ideal opportunities to form connections with speakers and other participants. With “anybody who is anybody” in the industry attending, the opportunity to network is unique. The meeting management service of the organizers, in turn, is geared to facilitate contacts. This service enables advance bookings for one-on-one meetings with participants representing the world's top expertise in the glass business. These meetings also form a starting point for follow-up contacts after the conference.

USG: GPD provides a look at so many new and emerging technologies. How does being involved with an event like this help those who attend?

JV: The internet was a facilitator of contacts once it got started. At the 2015 GPD one of the senior participants, however, made the observation that it seems that the content of the internet “has been diluted, maybe for competitive reasons.” The real help from GPD to attendees is providing know-how and technol-

ogy with a face—someone responsible. The GPD experts stand behind their statements and are willing to share them.

USG: What's the most challenging part about putting GPD together?

JV: From the beginning it was clear that quality participation requires quality presentations. That's still the top priority for the organizers. In this sense the work of the international program committee to find and engage committed speakers and session chairs is invaluable. The conference's profile emphasizes technical presentations. The cross-cultural effect of the conference has proven to be a great thing and the commercial messages have found their place in the exhibition module. The new format with the exhibition space at the hub of the meeting arena increases the opportunity for focused attention.

USG: What do you like to do once the event is over?

JV: When a conference closes, the follow-up work and analysis begins. Feedback and reporting is intense, and summaries are produced to define the state of the art as reflected by the conference. This time the analysis will be even more demanding due to the new experimental format. When the smoke clears, findings are published on the conference website, and it's time to plan for the next 25 years.

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Major GPD Milestones

1999

GPD became the largest conference in the glass industry with 800 attendees.

2007

The largest number of participants attended in GPD history (1,100 attendees).

2009

The most speeches (199) were made at the conference.

GPD 2017 Schedule at a Glance

Wednesday, June 28

4:00 p.m. GPD Opening

7:00 p.m. Get Together Party

Thursday, June 29

8:00-10:15 a.m. Presentations and Sessions

10:15-11:00 a.m. Coffee Break, One-on-One Meetings, Step-Change

11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

12:15-1:45 p.m. Lunch

1:45-3:00 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

3:00 -3:45 p.m. Coffee Break, One-on-One Meetings, Step-Change

3:45-5:00 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

7:30-11:00 p.m. Conference Dinner

Friday, June 30

8:00-10:15 a.m. Presentations and Sessions

10:15-11:00 a.m. Coffee Break, One-on-One Meetings, Step-Change

11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

12:15-1:45 p.m. Lunch

1:45-3:00 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

3:00 -3:45 p.m. Coffee Break, One-on-One Meetings, Step-Change

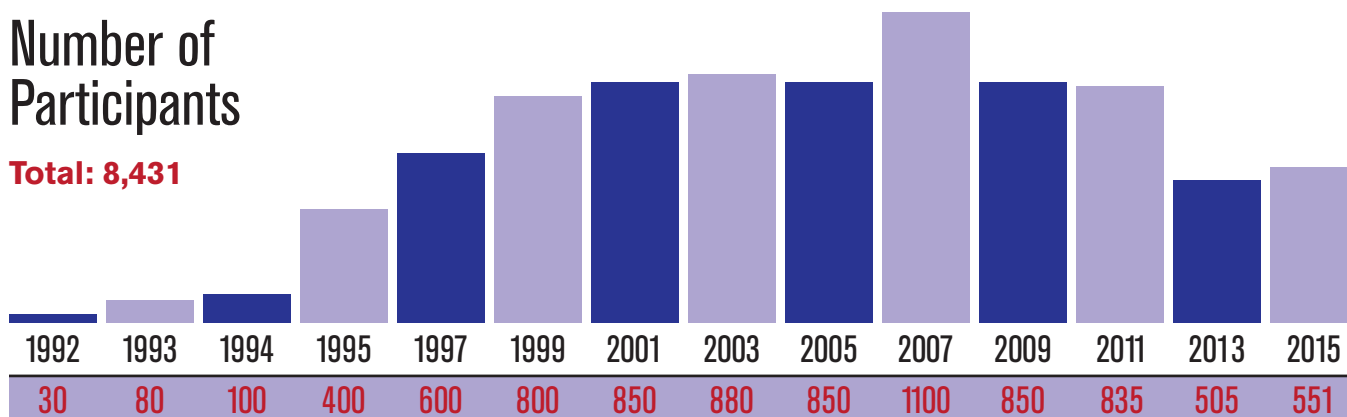
3:45-5:00 p.m. Presentations and Sessions

7:00 p.m. Farewell Party

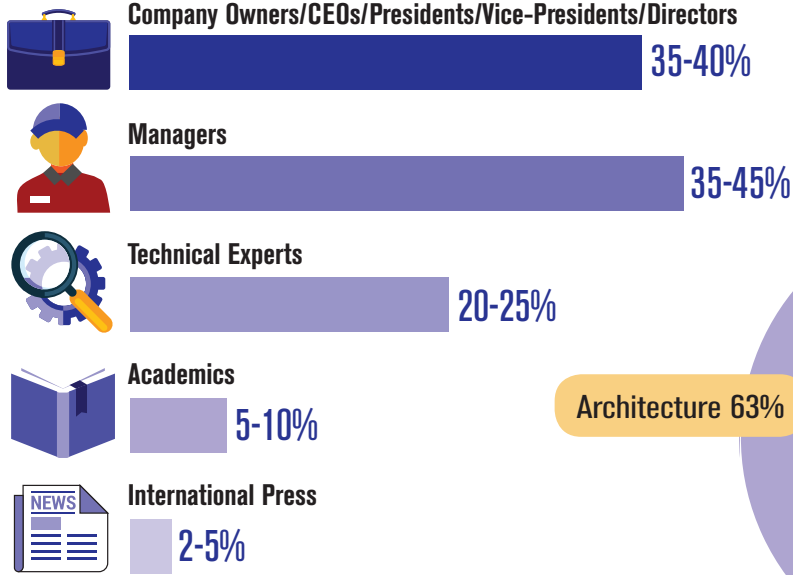
GPD Finland, by the Numbers

Number of Participants

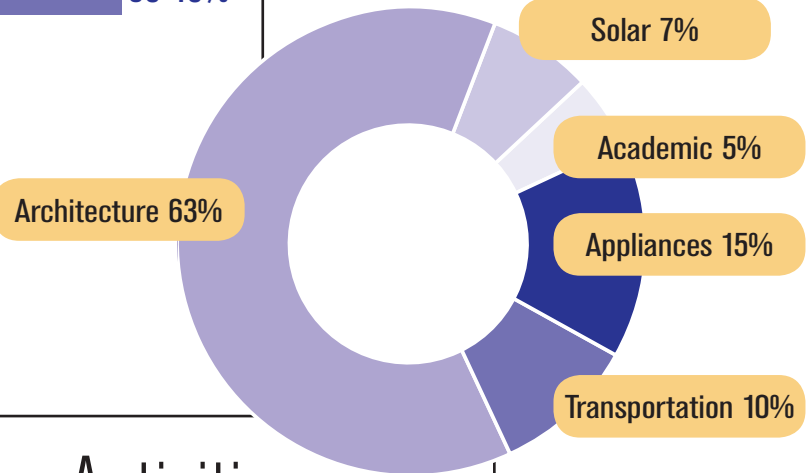
Total: 8,431



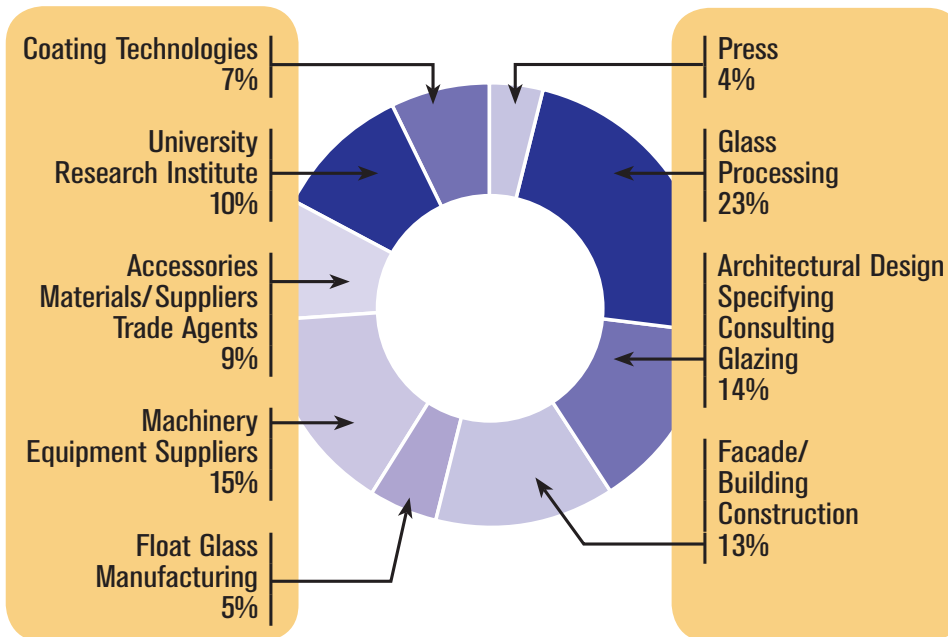
Participant Seniority Profiles



Participant Main Business Areas



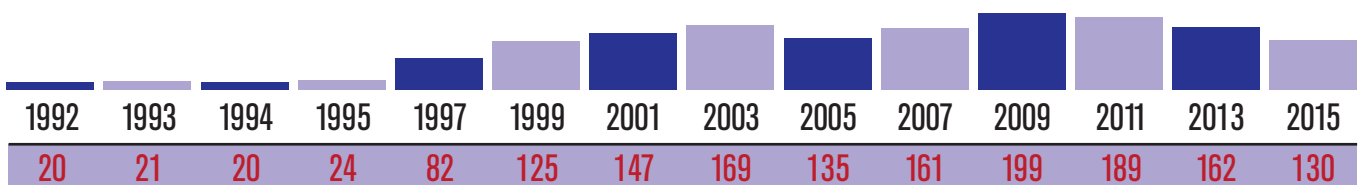
Participant Company Activities



Infographic source: GPD

Number of Presentations

Total: 1,584



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Photo: GPD

GPD is broken out into different tracks so participants can take in the ones best-suited to their business needs.

Focus on Knowledge

GPD is not your typical conference or event. It is an independent forum dedicated to the development of the global glass industry through education. It also addresses the entire glass industry supply chain—from researchers to architects, designers, glass producers, processors, equipment providers, universities and end-users. In addition to the high-level knowledge, presentations and workshops, GPD offers unforgettable networking and social activities.

The GPD 2017 opening ceremony will take place on June 28 at the Tahti Areena, a new venue for the event. Key-note speakers will include:

James Carpenter, founder, James Carpenter Design Associates Inc.

Michael Robinson, CEO and design director, ED Design srl

Bernard Savaète, founder BJS. Différences

Esko Aho, executive chairman of the board, East Office of Finnish Industries, Former Prime Minister of Finland; and

Stephanie Akkaoui Hughes, AKKA Architects

The opening get-together party at the same venue will follow.

Getting Social

When it comes to networking, GPD is like no other event. In addition to extended coffee breaks and lunches, participants have several other social activities to enjoy. These include:

- The **opening get-together party** on June 28 provides an opportunity to meet old as well as new colleagues and includes a buffet-style dinner.
- The **conference buffet dinner** on June 29 will offer food, drinks and entertainment in a unique setting.
- The **farewell party** on June 30 is the must-attend event of GPD. It will take place in an informal setting and includes special networking opportunities, activities and memorable entertainment.

Presentations and Sessions

Sessions will take place June 29-30 under six different tracks. Those include:

Facades

- Glass and Sustainability in Buildings
- Smart Glazing
- Facade Engineering
- Complex Geometry
- Do's and Don'ts in the Design and Installation of Building Facades

Facade Contractor's Forum

Glass in Architecture

- Structural Glass Applications
- Architect Forum
- Architectural Challenges and Solutions

Scientific Session

- Research and Development

Glass Processing

- Tempering/Pre-processing
- Quality Management
- IGU and Window Technology
- Coatings Technology and Applications
- Laminated Glass

Market Trends & Future Opportunities

- Market Trends and Future Opportunities

Specialty Glass

- Use of Glass in Transportation

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A Place to See and Be Seen



Photos: GPD

Over the past quarter century, thousands of people from around the world have traveled to Tampere, Finland—the “land of the midnight sun”—to take part in GPD as both attendees and presenters. Many agree it’s the one conference that’s a must when it comes to the latest advances and technologies across the entire glass industry.

Ren Bartoe, director of glass and industrial technologies with Vesuvius, didn’t make the first official GPD, but had the opportunity to join the gathering of global glass and equipment experts beginning with the second conference.

“I have seen it evolve from a somewhat specialized focus on glass processing and fabrication to a conference

encompassing every aspect of the industry from design and engineering through processing and fabrication, decorating and energy efficiency, to education and addressing economic implications,” says Bartoe. “The conference reaches out to students, glass professionals, designers and architects, and the environmental and economic communities alike.”

Mic Patterson, director of strategic development for Schuco-USA, has a similar perspective.

“GPD provides a unique immersion in architectural glass and facade technology, with professionals gathering from the world over to share their latest experiences and insights. The programs are designed to facilitate knowledge

transfer and information exchange,” he says. “Jorma Vitkala is a host extraordinaire. The days are long, the parties longer; the networking experience and access to industry thought leaders in this distraction-free environment are unprecedented. Career-long bonds are formed in Tampere.”

One of this year’s keynote presenters, James Carpenter, founder of James Carpenter Design Associates Inc., has been involved with GPD for many years and says the event serves a unique, important purpose.

“One of the most interesting aspects of GPD is that it gives us the ability to connect with all the technical people in the industry, whether it’s in coatings, sealants, or other areas. And it’s an un-



Participants travel to GPD from around the world to not only learn, but also for the entertainment and social opportunities.

usual conference in the sense that there are so many technical papers being provided. Other conferences tend to be much more generic, more sales-related. At GPD, we [as designers] can meet with colleagues whose work has a direct relationship to what we do."

He continues, "What makes GPD special is the sharing of information. Often times, the industry wants to be more protective of its technologies. But at GPD, there is a great degree of interaction—people discussing all the different technologies and the opportunities they present. It's not just, 'Here's our product, and here's what it does.' It's, 'here is the potential of this technology, and here is what we can make of it.'"

Bartoe adds, "GPD has evolved into a unique, fully integrated gathering of global glass professionals, and they have succeeded to make it enjoyable and socially comfortable. Jorma Vitkala and his staff deserve congratulations for providing this unique forum for our industry. I will not miss the 25th anniversary of GPD." ■

the author



Ellen Rogers is the editor of **USGlass** magazine. Follow her on Twitter @EllenGRogers and like her on Facebook at usgellenrogers to receive updates.



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