

Riga Congress Survey (2017)

A Brief Summary of the Results

Overall, the survey results suggest that the Riga congress was outstandingly successful: 99% of all respondents thought that attending it was worthwhile and would readily recommend a colleague in her/his home country to attend a IAML congress. Judging from the flood of enthusiastic comments these positive views had much to do with the excellent preparatory work of the local organizing team, the memorable food offered in the coffee breaks and the well-chosen venue which offered several appropriate rooms for the sessions and meetings in close proximity, as well as an impeccable technical infrastructure.

This year the survey was sent out to 222 email addresses and generated 153 responses, an exceptionally high ratio (69%, for the Rome congress it was 54%). The great number of responses arguably also reflects the general satisfaction of the participants but may also result from the relatively early date (18–22 June) of the congress thanks to which the survey could be conducted soon after the event, rather than only in the fall (as the unavailability of many colleagues in August demands in the case of congresses held in late July).

Daily attendance showed a tendency similar to previous years, but again with significantly higher figures than usual: the opening ceremony on Sunday was the least attended (75%), the last day somewhat better (83%), and the three days in between produced figures between 91 and 95%. The similarity of the general pattern is all the more remarkable since this year's congress was one day shorter than usual, an 'experiment' we specifically asked about in the survey as well. Most participants seemed happy with this arrangement: 45% explicitly liked the shorter format, 36% had no strong opinion, and only 19% suggested that ending only on Friday would have been better. The question whether this 'experiment' should be adopted for later congresses as well brought somewhat less unanimous results: 37% would consider this a good idea, but 17% is clearly against and the majority (46%) has no strong opinion. Those in favour of a shorter congress commented that a whole week away from work was too much, the truly relevant papers could easily be fit into four days, while a reduction of the costs would be welcome and might even result in higher attendance rates. On the other hand, those preferring the Sunday to Friday format argued that Friday is lost for work anyway (if there is a farewell event Thursday night), a denser congress programme may prevent participants from attending all sessions and working meetings of interest for them, the one-week duration makes long-distance travel more worthwhile and, overall, a shorter congress might work for somewhat smaller congresses (in less exposed locations) but less so for bigger events. Overall, the survey results reveal considerable openness to depart from the traditional Sunday to Friday format, which should allow the local organizers and the Board more flexibility when setting the dates for our annual congresses in the coming years.

Presentation sessions are still of prime interest for most participants (98% visited at least some of these), and poster sessions attracted the same ratio of participants as in Rome (44%). Over 80% of all respondents also participated in the General Assembly, a ratio 15% higher than in Rome (which suggests that the Riga event mostly attracted colleagues more closely involved in IAML's activities).

As regards social events, the Riga congress offered another unusual 'experiment': the farewell reception was made available for all participants without additional cost. Understandably, this arrangement generated an exceptionally high attendance rate (77%) and was received enthusiastically by both those who as a rule do not attend farewell dinners to avoid the extra cost and those who participate in these year by year but nonetheless felt that the inclusion of every colleague added much to the value of the event. It should be clear, nevertheless, that the financial and institutional background of each annual congress is different depending on the location, and so a 'free' farewell event is not something we could from now on expect from any organizing committee, even though the success of the Riga event left no doubt that most members would find this desirable.

As to the topics of sessions, for those taking the survey the most important were presentations on

- technical developments
- music research
- librarianship and library policy

The social programmes as well as the Wednesday tours are still of great importance for the majority, in accordance with the fact that networking with colleagues was indicated as a very important motivation for attending the congress by 69%.

While after the Rome congress the survey showed a 10% decrease among those who would like to see broadly similar kinds of content in future conferences, this time we again registered the 90% seen in earlier years. 'Current topics' and 'best practices' keep provoking interest, and there is still clear (though by far not unanimous) support for more discussion. Intriguingly, the increased openness toward new types of meetings seems to have consolidated (we saw the same numbers as last year: 46% in favour and 54% against), and the 'hot topics' session (first introduced in Rome in 2016) also received the same support it came to enjoy last year.

Posing the same question as last year about possible ways to make the presentations available to a larger audience after the congress, an increasing shift toward online solutions has become apparent. Whereas after the Rome congress 54% argued for the publication of papers in print, now only 44% were in favour of this solution, and the support for publishing in print at least summaries of the papers also dropped from 56% to 48%. By contrast, 83% would like to see more papers published on the IAML website, and 76% more Powerpoint slideshows (the latter represents an 8% increase).

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(on behalf of the IAML Board)