

Post-workshop sentiments from the Basel LOC desk

EAHIL 2019

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Sixteen months ago, it was decided that EAHIL 2019 should be organized in Basel. 180 to 220 participants were expected, an average Workshop year. Important cornerstones – venues, budget plan, tentative reservations of hotels and gala dinner hall – could all be secured here in Basel. “Looks doable. OK, so we’ll do it. And it’s going to be fun, too...”

Support: Right from the beginning, the Local Organizing Committee relies on its brilliant and tireless assistant, Farah – always calm and in control, with a memory like a mainframe computer and a talent for the culinary arts (which later proved invaluable...).

Budget? Hmm... Finding sponsors and exhibitors will be decisive for ultimately achieving a balanced budget. With Karger Publishers as Main Sponsor, we have a good head start. They eagerly pick up the whimsical idea of using a swim bag (“Wickelfisch”) as a conference bag, true Baslers that they are. However, early-bird registration (10 percent discount!) doesn’t seem to be attracting many exhibitors. What’s going on? First sleepless nights...

Setting up the conference management system: Markus and Isabelle devote weeks of trial-and-error sessions to building a sound platform from a commercial blank program (now I know what it takes to qualify for sainthood!). Tests prove encouraging.

Forging the program: The International Program Committee under the amazing direction of Teresa flocks to Basel early in November. With a wealth of contributions to choose from. Can we tack on an additional workshop day? It’s a tempting idea, but no, we can’t. Outcome: three dozen workshops, eleven CECs, forty-odd posters. Great, we’re doing just great. The social program takes shape a few weeks later with the help of Anna and Monika. Basel isn’t a bad place for a venture like this after all.

February, four months to go. Now we need some participants. Is anybody going to come? Invitation to register is sent out and... hurrah, they’re coming! And in no small numbers – registration is booming. Wow! Four weeks later, it becomes evident that our Workshop is facing an entirely unexpected problem: we may not be able to honor all the applications. Once again, Isabelle, our diplomatic “secretary of external relations,” rises to the challenge and tries to convince workshop leaders to raise maximum participation numbers. Many oblige, thank goodness. A little footnote: EAHIL (European Association...) attracts many librarians from outside Europe... from as far away as North America, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand. Fabulous!

Early Spring 2019: exhibitors, after being nudged to participate, are starting to get motivated, and some even have lists of special requests. But that’s no problem with Farah around. All 20 exhibitor stands are booked. Two late-comers have to be placed at a slight distance from the exhibition zone. They don’t seem to mind, though. Good sports!

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Food and drinks: Piecing together the mosaic of requirements (quality, variety, price, dietary restrictions, practicality...) takes creativity and pragmatism, which turns out to be an ideal playground for Farah. We also decide to have plenty of water on offer in all session rooms. After all, Summer in Basel can be quite hot, and there is no air conditioning in the venue.

Staff: My ever supportive boss, Monika, volunteers as head of personnel management. Thirty-plus helpers have to be recruited, assigned to various jobs, instructed, encouraged, and kept motivated. She, too, is one of those precious library saints... Sleepless nights are becoming rarer.

Setting up with the professional support of venue technicians. Was not aware the University of Basel has such dedicated technical staff. Experts at what they're doing – goes a long way to helping us stay confident and relaxed. Everything is going to be fine.

Personal highlight of last-minute preparations: rehearsing with Teresa the evening before EAHIL 2019 starts. Preparing one movement of a concerto for two violas by Telemann as a little surprise gig for the welcome reception. Keeps me happy and focused. Yes, everything is going to be fine.

No, no... I'm not going to launch into a detailed report of the Workshop per se now. Blogs, photographs, individual session reports, memories of the 330 participants must suffice. One lasting post-workshop sentiment must grace these pages, though: my personal gratitude to the many, many people who together achieved a memorable chapter in EAHIL's history. And yes, it was fun, too, doing it!

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