



Memories of EAHIL 2024 Conference in Riga, Latvia, 11-14 June 2024, and its organisation process

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The amount of work done to organise EAHIL 2024 conference in Riga seems insurmountable. Looking back at such a long and intensive period in our lives feels surreal. But it happened, and here is how.

Application for organising. In the Autumn of 2022, Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU) Library found the idea of hosting an EAHIL conference increasingly compelling, leading to the decision to submit an application. The primary goal was to present Latvia and its vibrant capital Riga, showcasing the city's rich cultural heritage. The conference aimed to provide participants with new and innovative experiences by adopting a hybrid format, offering both online and in-person participation. This approach not only facilitated broader engagement but also ensured that the event was accessible to a global audience, further enhancing the exchange of knowledge and ideas.



Despite changes in the Local Organising Committee (LOC), the support of and collaboration with the International Programme Committee (IPC) colleagues allowed us to navigate challenges effectively. Together we managed to keep the conference moving forward, ensuring that it not only highlighted the unique qualities of Riga but also delivered an enriching experience for all participants.

Theme and website. The theme of the Riga conference "Small step and a giant leap: reorienting towards a new environment" encouraged libraries to adapt and thrive in a constantly evolving landscape. It emphasized the importance of both incremental changes and significant advancements, building on the inspiring ideas from the EAHIL 2023 theme. The IPC developed key subthemes to guide discussions, including shaping the educational environment, advancing research and open science, positioning libraries as change agents, enhancing visibility and strategic presence, and leveraging technology and tools.

A website was also set up immediately so that potential participants could find out all the latest information on the conference plans as soon as possible.

Logo. Main aspect of the event visual identity for us was the logo. It had to be memorable, raise associations with Riga and inspire all the other printed and online materials. Looking through previous year's examples, we were particularly wowed by the elegant EAHIL 2022 Rotterdam "Broaden the Horizons" logo. But from the ideas that "Bounce" agency provided us with, we chose something more sharp and edgy, it reminded us of Riga silhouette and upward movement – fitting to the theme. And colour gradient from the letter "A" could be used as a colourful palette for further visual materials.

Agency. With a LOC that small (7 people) this event could only be possible by outsourcing part of the organisational tasks. Renting venues, creating and printing visual materials, filming and live-streaming the event, catering and helping with organisation of social events were the main tasks that we defined in the

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procurement documents, so that we could attract an event agency to help us. It ended up being the marketing and communication agency "Addiction", who we worked closely with both before and during the conference.

Working with the event agency also made sense to us from a financial standpoint – that way we could significantly reduce the number of invoices and receipts we had to pay. And huge thanks to RSU Finance Department for helping us to plan budget estimates and to pay for some of the services before we could get money in from sponsor and conference fees.

Abstract submission and evaluation. Main part of the conference is its contents – oral presentations, posters, interactive workshops and continuing education courses. For those we made a call for abstracts and submission process was hosted by a trustful partner – cloud-based conference management software "ExOrdo". They proved their excellent service for several years by providing abstract submission and evaluation platform to our RSU Research Week bi-annual conferences. We also used "ExOrdo" for programme compilation, registration and abstract book building processes. User support was always fast, kind and very helpful.

A total of 130 submissions were evaluated by our team of 12 IPC members – Lotta Haglund, Marshall Dozier, Laura Muñoz González, Wichor Bramer, Baiba Holma, Witold Kozakiewicz, Evamaria Krause, Tuba Akbaytürk, Bea Winkler, Louise Farragher, Karen Marie Øvern and Kristīne Kuzņecova. On 23 November, Marshall and Witold were able to visit Riga and join locals Kristīne and Baiba for the in-person part of the abstract evaluation meeting. Other IPC members joined online. Marshall and Witold also had a chance to visit the venue and give valuable advice about what to consider when planning the event and its programme. And their support didn't stop there – Marshall was joining our regularly organised MS Teams calls from the very start of the journey, Witold started joining us in January.

91 abstracts went through to our conference programme – 49 oral presentations, 17 poster presentations, 20 interactive workshops and 5 continuing education courses.



Fig. 1. One of the oral presentation sessions on 13 June 2024.



Fig. 2. Best poster prize winners at Poster Presentation Rapid-fire session

Venue. National Library of Latvia was always a number one choice as to a venue for main events of the conference, because it stands as a central hub for libraries, knowledge, and culture. This iconic location was selected not only for its architectural significance but also for its role in embodying the values and mission of the conference, making it the perfect setting for discussions on how libraries can adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

EAHIL Board meeting and continuing education courses were organised in the newest RSU building – Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre. It was opened in March 2023, and it doesn't just house the Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, the Department of Pharmacology, and the Department of Applied Pharmacy and the Laboratory of Finished Dosage Forms, but also has plenty of rooms for seminars and meetings with visitors from abroad.



Fig. 3. *EAHIL Executive Board Meeting.*



Fig. 4. *Platinum sponsor Wolters Kluwer stand at sponsor exhibition*

Sponsor attraction. After putting up EAHIL 2024 Sponsorship Prospectus and updating some of the previous year's sponsor list contact information, a lengthy and thorough process of communication with potential sponsors began. It was slow in the beginning, and we got scared a bit. But timing of the financial planning of next year's budget made sense and, in the end, we did receive enough positive answers from 4 sponsors (Wolters Kluwer, EBSCO, Elsevier and Amboss), 18 exhibitors (Thieme Group, S. Karger AG, Springer Nature, Sage Publications Ltd, Covidence, The Cochrane Collaboration, Technology from Sage, Clarivate, Accucoms, BMJ, TDNet, MA Healthcare, Oxford University Press, JAMA, MDPI, CABI, Taylor & Francis and Bentham Science) and one walk-in agent (OCLC).

Keynotes. "Yes" from our first keynote speaker Kristīne Pabērza-Ramiresa (Impact & Insight Manager at IFLA) we received in early December of 2023. Kristīne was teaching a professional development programme "Impact planning and evaluation in academic libraries" for Latvian libraries during autumn semester and this topic felt extremely important for libraries to be aware of. Not just doing things for the sake of doing, but really



Fig. 5. *Kristīne Pabērza-Ramiresa giving keynote speech on 12 June 2024*



Fig. 6. *Conference participants listening to opening keynote speech*

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analysing community needs, knowing what our patrons are expecting from us, planning and then evaluating the impact libraries have on their existing and potential patrons. And we were happy and relieved to hear a positive answer from Kristīne, and grateful to see her perform on the main stage on 12 June.

Due to busy schedules, invitations to second keynote speaker candidates were sent out quite late and after receiving a couple refusals, we wished we had done it earlier. So, this time we were even more relieved to receive a positive (and very quick) response from Andrea Alessandro Gasparini (Senior Librarian and Researcher at University of Oslo Library). His speech about a designerly perspective on using AI in research libraries on the main stage on 14 June gave the conference participants overview and some ideas about how to plan their work around this still new and emerging technology. Another event, that Andrea quite literally saved for us, was the panel discussion about AI on 13 June. He agreed quickly and was willing to adapt to the aftermath of trade union strike in Norway by taking part in panel discussion online on Thursday, then hopping on a plane and arriving in Riga to be present at the keynote speech on Friday. As a result, we had a decent number of 3 panel speakers, including also the lovely Simone Willis and Marydee Ojala.



Fig. 7. *Andrea Alessandro Gasparini giving keynote speech on 14 June 2024*



Fig. 8. *Panel discussion "Benefits and limitations of automation and AI tools in research" on 13 June 2024*

Programme and registration. Programme with set structure and presentations, interactive workshops and CECs put into their time slots was the main condition for opening registration to the event. Marshall and Witold once again shared their experience and helped us to put together the programme that one of our LOC members transferred to “ExOrdo” Programme module. We shared this programme online with potential conference participants so that they could decide to pay us a visit in June. Because several CECs, parallel sessions and interactive workshops were taking place at the same time, data from the programme was used in setting up “ExOrdo” registration form and participants could book desired workshops and CECs, which also helped authors prepare for the number of people, who planned to attend their hosted sessions.

Social event venues and entertainment. Let's be honest, a conference is only as fun as its social events are. We chose a set of venues, that would give our participants a unique taste of Riga and Latvia, showcasing our architecture, culture and traditions.

Latvia has a strong education history and there are plenty of science and education-based institutes and museums, one of them being RSU Anatomy Museum, based on the first teaching collection used in anatomy studies in Latvia. During our first-timer event, participants could explore the first floor with the collection of skeletons, embryos, bones, body parts and organs (if they weren't too uneasy about that kind of stuff), but in the second-floor event room have a chat with other participants, the evening accompanied by wine, snacks and music.



Fig. 9. *One of the workshops on 13 June 2024*

Most glorious and intricate venue (The House of the Black Heads) we kept for the high point of the conference – Gala dinner. Luxurious Celebration Hall was a stunning background to have dinner and listen to modern jazz band Lupa. The evening was wrapped up by visiting the "First Latvian Rock Cafe", to dance till the morning comes.

Virtual platform. The ambitious goal of making this conference hybrid was tackled by a) outsourcing the event agency to do the filming and live-streaming process; b) hiring local experts from "Mitto events", who created a virtual platform, where online participants could watch live streams of parallel sessions, panel discussion, keynote speeches, opening and closing ceremonies, make comments and post their questions, check out and comment posters, message each other, find sponsor and exhibitor information. Mitto events also helped us to create and disseminate the evaluation forms and attendance certificates after the event. When the conference week was over, virtual platform accounts were created for in-person participants as well, so that they could watch recordings of the sessions that they couldn't visit during the event.

Mobile App. To give in-person participants some assistance in getting around the conference venue and curating their own personal programme (by bookmarking desired sessions to attend), we used Guidebook Builder functionality, as you can synchronize it with "ExOrdo" programme and you don't have to input programme sessions manually.

Week before. In the last week before the event, organisers were busy with final preparation tasks – printing posters and participant badges, testing Zoom calls with online presenters, sending presentation information to the virtual platform, checking virtual platform and mobile app, preparing themselves mentally.

We really wanted conference participants not only explore Riga Old Town architecture, but also get some insight into what was happening behind those walls, so we hired some guides to lead the tour around Old Town before the Welcome reception. The reception was held at the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, which has stunning interiors and household items of 13th-20th centuries. The evening was made unforgettable by the help of the folk singer Katrīna Dimanta and her group, who played the instruments, sang songs and taught participants some traditional Latvian dances. During the rest of the evening the accordionist Kaspars Gulbis kept our spirits very high, showcasing his top-notch accordion skills in different music styles – from traditional folk songs to Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean".



Fig. 10. *The Welcome Reception venue - Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation*

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Fig. 11. Gala dinner at The House of the Black Heads

coffee and lunch breaks. Agency members reacted swiftly when there were technical issues or we needed some extra visual materials to be printed out or put on the screen (such as prize winner certificates, that participants were complimenting after the closing ceremony). National Library of Latvia staff members were very accommodating, making sure that participants felt comfortable.

Week during. Time during the event didn't fly and it didn't drag. It really felt like it was – approximately 60 working hours long. Varying between "so nervous, that our hearts are going to jump out of our chests" and "we got this, we can relax now", this experience can't be traded for anything else. Even though Riga LOC team was very small, we experienced a lot of help from everyone around. IPC members took the task of chairing oral presentation sessions very seriously. Fiona Brown was willing to chair the panel discussion instead of Marshall, who sadly couldn't make it to Riga. But Marshall was still following everything via our virtual platform, being very active in the comments sections. Our team of volunteers was helpful in reading out questions posted on the virtual platform, carrying microphones and checking up on participants during



Fig. 12. Lotta Haglund announcing EAHIL President and Board election results at the General assembly



Fig. 13. EAHIL Scholarship winners at the closing ceremony

On Friday afternoon our cheeks were hurting after hours of endless smiles on our faces – everyone who was leaving the venue to travel home or experience a bit more of Riga showered us with compliments and words of gratitude. It helped us realise (much sooner than we originally thought we would) – it was all worth it.

Weeks after. Being organisers of the conference didn't stop at the closing ceremony. We still had to arrange evaluation surveys, certificates, presentation slide uploading, abstract book, making virtual platform accounts for in-person participants, paying off bills. But that could be done in a slower tempo with less stress, and we could finally pay more attention to our other duties, that we, maybe, neglected a bit for the sake of giving our all to the conference.

Advice to future organisers. Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, we know what mistakes we made. Only one of the LOC members had an extensive experience in organising events, so it was understandable for



Fig. 14. Prize winners at the closing ceremony



Fig. 15. Part of LOC and volunteer team at the closing ceremony

the rest of us to feel a bit like fish out of the water. Couple of notes to us and future EAHIL event organisers – get more people in the LOC (even though it seems, that we were the only ones, who had team this small), have someone outside the team go through conference website and tell, if everything is clear there and nothing is missing, try setting up more than one payment method (preferably both – bank transfer and card payment), even if one of them will appear later during registration period, don't be afraid to ask catering to include more/better options for different dietary needs, don't be disheartened by low activity from potential sponsors – they will apply, they just need time to sort out their budgets.

EAHIL 2025. Some of us haven't even been to the EAHIL conference before. Now we know that it is an amazing event and a wonderful community. Most LOC members haven't experienced this event fully, we could only go to two, one or even zero sessions – conference days were spent at the registration desk or chatting to the sponsors. Hopefully, we will get a chance to have our first proper EAHIL event visit next June in Łódź, because Witold's presentation made us very excited about it. And don't be mistaken – we will get a full bank out of those workshops.

With greetings from Riga

Kristīne Kuzņecova for the EAHIL 2024 conference LOC members

Photos by Roberts Blaubuks