

**Report of the Organizing Committee (OC) on the
19th biennial Conference of IASPM, Kassel, Germany, June 26-30, 2017**

Kassel, June 29, 2017 (revised July 7, 2017)

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(in reply to the Report of the Executive Committee (EC) from June 16, 2017):

[http://www.iaspm.net/archive/2015-2017 IASPM EC Report.pdf](http://www.iaspm.net/archive/2015-2017%20IASPM%20EC%20Report.pdf)

Dear participating members of the IASPM19 conference,

there were some conflicts during the preparation of the conference. I did not consider raising these issues during the conference as a smooth conference experience seems more important to me. However, as allegations concerning the Organizing Committee (OC) have been raised by the EC (also publicly on the IASPM website) I want to pass a statement to you in reply. I am sorry for the inconvenience but maybe we have the chance to reach some general improvements for the upcoming IASPM conferences. Also, I was advised by Goffredo Plastino that we were to be scrutinized at the GM. So the following is to provide some clarification from our side. It can also be found on the conference website at:

[http://iaspm2017.uni-kassel.de/documents/2017 IASPM OC Report.pdf](http://iaspm2017.uni-kassel.de/documents/2017%20IASPM%20OC%20Report.pdf)

1. The Proposal

The original proposal to host the conference in Kassel 2017 was distributed ahead of the GM in Campinas, Brazil, via IASPMlist by myself on June 13, 2015. It contained three possible venues, one being the Institute of Music, second being the Campus Center Lecture Hall and third being the external Kongress-Palais Kassel. It was also stated that hosting the conference on University premises would be difficult before mid-July (the end of the German semester) and that an external venue might have to be rented depending on the specific conference date. This was not conceived of as a problem since there were funding perspectives to cover the rent. As this proposal contained copyrighted material, it could not be published on the IASPM website as requested by the EC, and a shorter version was created for this purpose. This is the one the current EC report is referring to. However, it was clear from the beginning that the conference might eventually not take place on University premises, especially since the GM decided the conference should be situated in the second half of June 2017. **I am hereby asking to reconsider this timeslot for future conferences**, as there were many voices after the GM saying that this date is actually in favour of Anglophone countries. Japanese scholars, for example, would be much more comfortable with a conference in July.

2. The Venues

After the decision at the GM in Campinas to have the next conference in Kassel, the board of directors of the music institute at Kassel University voted with slim majority the conference can take place in its own building and that all university teaching would cease during this period. It was required however by the board that the conference should happen over a weekend, so only three days of teaching would be affected. Meanwhile however, the conference date was fixed by the EC to a Monday- Friday interval from June 26-30 without involving me into the decision. My call for concession was not taken up. So we left it like this and the adjacent Giesshaus was also reserved to provide for enough space. Shortly after, however, the documenta art exhibition claimed the Giesshaus and a I needed to fix a new contract with an alternative venue, the current "Kulturbahnhof", fast. The actual rent amounts to much less than 50% of the funding granted much later by the German Research Foundation (see below). These figures were made available to the EC.

3. The Academic Committee

Next, the academic committee (AC) was appointed by the EC without even considering to include one of the local organizers. Thus, not only the conference date, but also its main topic "Popular Music Studies Today" plus the six streams and the call for papers were all conceived 'above our heads'. I had to conceal from the German Research Foundation we were actually not involved in the conference conception in order to retain the funding options. Who gives money for an event under almost complete external control? In addition, the maximum registration fee was determined by the EC to be EUR 200 and already included in the CfP, despite me asking to wait for the funding decision first and to only state the fee along with the registration information.

As a member of the IASPM EC from 2001-2003, I had already been co-organizer of its conference in Montréal, Canada, 2003. At this time, it was normal that a local organizer becomes part of the EC. **I hereby urge all members to find a mode so the local OC will have a central part in all decisions of this kind in the future (again).**

Now back to the evaluation procedure performed by the AC. First of all, it would be very useful for the person to later compile the abstracts volume if all submissions would make use of a template, so the font style and overall format needs not be adjusted (Countries should always be given, so it's not to be "Vanderbilt" but "Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA"). Next, an evaluation procedure drawing on dropboxes is of course not anonymous. The AC mistook some panel submissions for individual papers and vice versa. Also, it is a problem that one person is only entitled to one individual submission, but that some people submitted as much as seven panels with up to 4 contributions each adding up to several dozens. The AC never fully completed its work before it was passed on to the OC very shortly before the deadline for the funding application. For example, about 20 submissions were accepted as posters, but the authors were never informed and/or asked to agree. This task could not be taken over by the OC as it was not involved in the decision. The same is true for the rearrangement of some panels and the like, again without informing its conveners or contributors. The OC had no choice but to reverse all of these decisions. This is why we are not having posters (only two contributions were originally submitted as posters and both dropped out later). In effect, much of the remaining work of the AC **was left to the OC, including finding out which score actually meant "accepted" (this was revised several times), compiling a list with all submissions including individual panel contributions, sending the initial acceptance letters etc. All of this can be handled much easier with a conference management software.**

4. Conference Management

Next, I was asking to re-install the use of a professional conference management software as it had successfully been used for various IASPM conferences, e.g. Gijon 2013. However, without further discussion the EC's Web/Publications officer Ed Montano decided we would continue using Dropboxes and the like as had been practiced for Campinas 2015. I can now say that this was an absolutely fatal decision as it creates a multiple amount of work and almost unavoidable errors for the local organizers.

It is an open secret that IASPM has always had a very generous acceptance policy; this time the acceptance rate is at 95%. This is to give everyone the opportunity to apply for funding at their home institution and thus participate at the international event. I am in full support of this grassroots democratic principle. However, this in turn means that many people whose abstract or panel does get accepted will eventually not be attending. This time, from about 375 accepted individual presentations, only about 300 registered for participation and were thus included in the schedule. Currently, the protocol file for changes to the schedule lists 180 entries, the last two stemming from Tuesday evening. So more than half of the original

entries in the schedule had to be changed or cancelled. The whole of the conference is to be treated as a somewhat organic body with constant changes. We were trying to meet this requirement by keeping the online-schedule up-to-date and to only print out the schedule on the wall for one day. However, this meant to run four parallel universes to be constantly updated (an Excel list of participants, an Excel table with the conference program, the list of registered users in ConfTool, the printed and online schedule administered by the webmaster).

We used the conference management software "ConfTool" only for registration and payment. This part of the organisation ran smoothly. **I strongly advise all future organizers of an IASPM biennial Conference to make use of a platform including file management (such as ConfTool Pro) for the submission and evaluation procedure, the creation of the conference schedule and possibly even the proceedings.** I'm doing another conference later this year using this system. All authors can edit titles and abstracts of their submissions up to a defined deadline, and all of this is automatically included in the online schedule. In my eyes, this is the only way to handle the organic whole of the specific IASPM kind. Anything else is likely to create shameful errors and (rightly!) upset the presenters affected.

Long ahead of the conference, I asked Jacopo Conti, the current membership secretary, to provide a list of all members for verification at the conference office. However, the membership secretary failed to do so and I only received a part of this list on Tuesday, June 27, the second day of the conference. By this time, 285 people had arrived whose membership could not be checked. In his recent posting to IASPMlist, Lee Marshall suggested to revise the idea that the biennial Conference be restricted to IASPM members only. This issued will finally have to be addressed, too.

5. Proceedings

As an experiment new to IASPM, the proceedings were prepared in advance. Each presenter had the opportunity to submit a formatted and proofread full paper by Dec 23, 2016. Those were included in the conference proceedings, edited by Julia Merrill. They were published as print and ebook in the "Systematische Musikwissenschaft" series of Springer, Heidelberg, Germany. To my knowledge, this is the first conference since Montréal 2003 to also provide proceedings, and we thus meet international requirements which were stressed at the GM in Campinas. Also, there is no delay as the book is available already. The drawback is that only about 10% of the conference's contributions could be included in the proceedings. There will be a decision at the general meeting if more volumes should be produced. The suggestion of the current EC to publish proceedings online only does not take into account that the proceedings need to be peer reviewed in order to obtain travel funds in some countries so this needs to be revised, too.

6. Travel and hotel costs of the EC

When I was a member of the EC, each of us also gave papers and could thus apply for travel support at their home institution. IASPM money was only needed for independent scholars or if this kind of support could not be acquired. I mailed this suggestion to the current treasurer Emilia Barna on Nov 9, 2016 along with the information that German funding money cannot be used to cover travel and hotel costs of an external EC. I received a confirmation but learned that EC kept relying that Kassel would cover all these costs (it's a 7-member committee plus the journal editor) by an email of the president as late as Mar 21, 2017 with the words "we do however need you (or Kassel University, which is officially hosting the event) to arrange and pay for our [...] accommodation.". The overall costs easily amount to more than 10.000 EUR. So the current dispute with the EC really started when I insisted the printed abstracts book and the common meals (plus possibly the proceedings volume) would

be given priority over EC travel and hotel costs which I would only cover if money remained in the end. We then entered a process of mediation and a compromise to the benefit of the EC was found, which does not get mentioned in the EC report. Accordingly, the OC will pay for most of the EC hotel costs, but the proceedings volume needs to be purchased separately. **I urge all members to revise the current EC's suggestion that all their travel and hotel costs need to be covered by future conference conveners. In my eyes, this will completely block having IASPM conferences in middle- or low-income countries in the future.**

What is essential for a conference, apart from getting together and attending each other's presentations? In my view, this contains (at least) a printed abstracts book, an internet connection, common meals for informal exchange and possibly even a proceedings volume. In Campinas, we had none of these and were thus falling behind standards that had already been established within IASPM. This is not meant as critique of the local organizers (whose funding money was cut half shortly before the conference), but it is of course in the responsibility of the current president who is now in its second term. E.g. it could have been an enormously helpful move to get the Campinas abstracts PDF printed right on campus using money from the international if the local organizers could not provide for it due to the reasons given. Even more so, as IASPM saved money as all of the EC travel costs could be covered from the Brazil conference organizers. To sum up, if you find the current conference acceptable at all, it is despite and not because of the EC's decisions and interventions on some of its central issues.

7. Miscellaneous

On May 24, 2017, I had asked the General Secretary Sue Miller to add an item to the agenda of the GM to discuss if we should produce more volumes of the conference proceedings. I also suggested a change to the IASPM statutes and received a confirmation. Both items were dropped for unknown reasons.

There were also failures on our side. I had originally intended to reserve a number of beds for low budget accommodation at Kassel Youth hostel. However, when I tried to do so in September 2016, it was already fully booked because of the documenta. Also, no internet streaming of the sessions could be made possible as we are not on University premises. Overall, the internet is rather weak. Also, we are having problems with the manual processing of refunds for cancellations. Some people have been waiting for months, but their money will eventually be returned. I think it was right to focus on those actually attending and not on the cancellations.

For the first time, we had four wonderful international conference assistants who received free participation, accommodation and meals at the youth hostel and only needed to travel to Kassel at their own cost. Let's consider if this idea should be held up in the future as it is also giving extra support to junior scholars.

We put an enormous effort into providing a wide variety of book tables. Only the trade book table is not used. This idea can be omitted in the future.

For the first time, (free) childcare is provided at an IASPM conference.

Finally, I would like to thank all the understanding and appreciative presenters affected in one way or another by our errors. I would like to thank the webmaster and graphics designer Jürgen Fromm for excellent work. I would like to thank Julia Merrill for the preparation of proceedings for the first time since 2003. And I would like to thank the wonderfully supportive team of more than 30 helpers at the conference, most of them volunteering! I turn, we haven't heard a single word of appreciation or thanks from current EC members, most of which have not even been attending much of the conference up to this point.