



REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE PROGRAM OF THE CONGRESS, presented in Beijing, September 2007

1. Preamble

Decision of the general assembly of Sydney of 7 July 2005

« Some delegates deplored the fact that the Congress program did not make more room for certain periods of history like the Antiquity period and the Middle Ages. On this subject, Prof. Vigezzi noted that the contribution of the National Committees and International Organizations would prove useful. He proposed that the Bureau examine the current procedure for developing the program and report to the next General Assembly.

The motion was carried. »

Creation of the Subcommittee on the Program of the Congress (extracts of the minutes of the meeting of the Bureau restreint, Madrid, 25 February 2006)

« The Sydney General Assembly gave the Bureau the mandate to report on two issues in Beijing: broadening the ICHS, and preparing the program for the next Congress. To accelerate the process, the *Bureau restreint* formed two subcommittees to prepare these two dossiers. Each subcommittee will include some Bureau members as well as representatives from National Committees and specialized Commissions. (...) The second subcommittee, which is responsible for studying the preparation of the Congress program and defining the roles of the National Committees and Commissions, will be chaired by the Secretary General and composed of two Bureau members and two members of the General Assembly.

Composition of the Subcommittee on the Program of the Congress

- Arnita Jones, American Historical Association
- Brunello Vigezzi, CIHRI and Giunta Storica Nazionale (Italie)
- Marjatta Hietala, Bureau member and past president of the Finnish National Committee
- Jean-Claude Robert, secretary general »

2. Current situation and background:

The Program of the early congresses of ICHS was mostly the responsibility of the hosting country committee, in conjunction with the Bureau. When ICHS resumed its operations after the Second World War, there was a first Congress in Paris in 1950 and criticism was made at the time of the too large place taken by the French historians in the organization of the program. Thus it was decided that the Bureau should be responsible for the program to ensure a more balanced national representation. Then at the Congress of Stuttgart (1985), the Bureau decided to give responsibility of each of the major themes (3) to a member of the Bureau with a mandate to make it truly international in scope. This was followed for Madrid, but not systematically for Montreal, and not for Oslo or Sydney. Then, at its Stockholm meeting (1996), the Bureau created a sub-committee in

charge of vetting all proposals for themes and of preparing a first draft of a program for submission to the Bureau and eventually to the general assembly. This procedure was followed for Oslo and Sydney.

The Bureau remains, as an elected body, entirely responsible of the program and its international scope.

2.1 *Actual procedure:*

- Year one of a new quinquennium (for instance in 2006, for the 2006-2010 quinquennium) the secretary general issues a call for themes to all members of ICHS for the next congress.
- Proposals for themes are ordered by the secretary general and discussed by a sub-committee of the Bureau in early spring of the year 2 of the quinquennium (2007).
- The Bureau discusses the proposal of the sub-committee by e-mail during the early summer and arrives at a consensus.
- The General Assembly (in the late summer / early autumn of year 2) is presented with the proposal for themes. After discussion and amendments, it is adopted. Members of the GA are asked to make proposals for organizers and discussants, along with communicants if possible.
- Year 3 is devoted to the recruitment of the organizers and discussants. After that, each organizer must recruit its team of communicants. He or she receives the complete list of proposals received by the secretary general, but the final say rests with the organizer. The important aspect to control is the truly international nature of the team chosen. In the past the secretary general had to intervene to ensure this.
- At the end of year 3 or early in year 4, a preliminary program can be put together.

The number of proposals received is quite high: in Oslo, there were 224 proposals for themes and 264 for Sydney. There are normally around 50 sessions, but 5 or 10 could be cut. Some sessions are not very well attended. But experience tells that neither the Bureau nor the General Assembly will be eager to reduce the number. The pressure is for increasing. It is true that in many countries of the world, travel grants are linked to active participation.

The sub-committee of the Bureau followed a few guidelines:

1. Find some top quality historians as organizers
2. Ensure a gender balance in organizers
3. Ensure a period balance to ensure that all periods are represented in the program. Of course this is a bit difficult because most of the program relates to the contemporary period, reflecting the actual make up of the profession worldwide.

2.2 *Constraints*

- ICHS has few resources and no permanent employee in its secretariat.



- National Committees are not always reliable and quick to respond. Some are not representative of historians but function as an agency of the State, and thus are liable to receive national mandates.
- Time is quite short to put up the program given the actual structure of decision.

3. First report of the subcommittee to the Santiago de Compostela Bureau meeting (October 2006)

3.1 The sub-committee began its work by exchanging e-mails. The preliminary discussions resulted in the following 11 points:

1. Establish criteria for selecting major themes and specialized themes.
2. Reduce the number of specialized themes to 15.
3. Reduce the number of round tables and make them more dynamic.
4. Reduce the number of sessions to 40 in all.
5. Take a closer look at the structure, composition and history of the entities that make up the ICHS.
6. Obtain information on the historiographical/history projects of ICHS members.
7. Give some members more general mandates for the Congress.
8. Institute a new type of session, the joint session.
9. Ensure that Organizations and Commissions submit proposals for the Congress.
10. Take into account the long-range projects of Organizations and Commissions.
11. Work on the Congress schedule.

The discussions brought some interesting facts to light. The selection of major and specialized themes did not seem to be a problem in the past because the General Assembly had always quickly agreed on the issue. Integrating the Organizations and Commissions into the development of the program could lead to communication issues. The deadlines are usually very tight, and some Organizations and Commissions are adamant about offering a specific program at the Congress. It would be necessary to devise a plan to improve communications among ICHS members.

3.2 Review of the procedures by the Bureau in Santiago

At the Bureau meeting a year following the congress, the Bureau reviews the procedure for the next one. This time, the operation was made taking into consideration the first report of the subcommittee.

(Minutes of the 2006 Bureau meeting)

« *Architecture of the 2010 Congress*



Bureau members agreed to conduct an in-depth review of the guidelines for organizing the sessions. First, the sessions, particularly the round tables, must be better differentiated from the specialized themes. Second, the number of communicators must be reduced in order to provide opportunities for individual expression of ideas and discussions.

From now on, the round tables would be organized around one single document prepared by the organizer and distributed ahead of time, and be responded to by four commentators during the session. Thus, each round table would have five participants in all. Participants would be recruited according to their knowledge of the specific field and their previous work.

The specialized themes would use more or less the same formula but include a maximum of six participants in addition to the organizer and the discussant.

The sessions for the major themes would include a maximum of 12 participants in addition to the organizer and the discussant. Each communicator would have 15-20 minutes and the discussant would have 15 minutes. The Bureau would no longer subdivide the major themes into sections.

The Bureau is reducing the number of sessions to 40 and breaking them down into three major themes, 20 specialized themes and 15 round tables. To increase the participation of Affiliated International Organizations and Internal Commissions, the Bureau has decided to create joint sessions, a new type of session to be led by two or more Affiliated International Organizations or by National Committees and Organizations or Commissions. This action would foster collaboration among ICHS members and better integrate the work of the Organizations and Commissions into the general program of the Congress. The Bureau has decided to plan for a maximum of ten (10) joint sessions at the Amsterdam Congress, bringing the total number of sessions to 50.

The organizers' responsibilities should be further distinguished from the discussants' to prevent organizers from divulging the substance of the presenters' communications before they even take the floor. The organizer must be content with presenting the theme and its problems, while the discussant states the highlights of the contributions in order to stimulate discussion.

Furthermore, it would be desirable to organize three or four large evening conferences during the Congress.

Lastly, since the proceedings will no longer be published, each organizer will be asked to prepare a short (about 500 words) summary report after the Congress, which will be published in the ICHS *Bulletin* the year following the Congress so that the sessions can remain on record, albeit in condensed form.

Theme selection: as is customary, a sub-committee will select the themes and then submit a proposal to the Bureau by e-mail. The members of the sub-committee will be Sorin Antohi, Hilda Sabato, José Luis Peset, Jean-Claude Robert, and Pierre Ducrey. According to the schedule, proposals will be accepted until October 31, 2006. The sub-committee will examine all the proposals from January to March 2007, and select about 50 for discussion with the Bureau. To facilitate discussions with the Bureau and then with the General Assembly, all proposals received by the Secretariat will be posted on the ICHS Website. »



[Note: William Jordan replaced Sorin Antohi on this subcommittee.]

3.3 *Meeting of the Subcommittee on the program (Santiago, 7 October 2006)*

The Secretary general informs the members of the subcommittee of the decision of the Bureau to pick up immediately some of the proposals, for example, the creation of joint sessions. A circular letter will be sent after the meeting to all members of ICHS and the deadline for submitting proposal will be moved to 31 December 2006.

Members of the subcommittee underline the importance of having more information on the members of ICHS and their own scientific pursuits in order to be able to build a better program for the congress. It is decided that a questionnaire will be prepared and sent to all members. The subcommittee will compile and analyze the results and make proposals.

4. Partial results of the compilation of questionnaires

The questionnaire was prepared by the secretary general and discussed by email with members of the subcommittee. The questionnaire was sent by mail and e-mail to all members of ICHS in April 2007. Because of the very low rate of return, a reminder was sent in June. As of 15 August, approximately 50% of members have responded (26/53 National Committees, 14/29 International Affiliated Organizations and 5/12 Internal Commissions). A last reminder will be sent to those who did not respond after this General Assembly.

The examination of the third section of the questionnaire, dealing with the level of satisfaction regarding the Congress Program, shows that a majority of members is generally satisfied with the actual procedure, but the International Affiliated Organizations are more critical. There are a certain number of interesting proposals that the subcommittee will wish to consider. The majority of the International Affiliated Organizations would be interested to pursue, in their own meetings, some of the themes of the congress.

5. Proposal to the General Assembly

It is proposed that the subcommittee continues its work and makes a final report at the first General Assembly in Amsterdam.