



29th International Conference on the History of Cartography. Bucharest: July 4-8, 2022.

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Review by a Remote Participant of the ICHC

On Monday morning, July 4, 2022, I tuned in to participate in the 29th International Conference on the History of Cartography (ICHC), organized for the first time in a hybrid format. The beginning was not great, as I could not locate the link that would allow me to follow the opening ceremony. So there I was, in my office, afraid that now I would miss the whole conference and regretting that I was not there on the spot in Bucharest, enjoying the beautiful city and the presence of my fellow conference delegates. Some twenty minutes later, the link popped up, just in time to listen to the excellent keynote by Pinar Emiralioğlu. The first day of the five-day conference had officially started for me.

Even though following presentations remotely has become customary during the past two years, and people have learned to juggle a variety of digital platforms, the basic challenges remain. These include how to ensure that the connections and audio work and that sharing the presentations functions as it should. The ICHC 2022 Bucharest team had to respond to these challenges every day to ensure that the conference program advanced smoothly. The local technical team was swift in solving the range of difficulties that emerged. They also responded to queries from remote participants speedily.

The main conference platform used was Rendezvous by Telestream and it offered a visually appealing experience for the remote audience. The platform allowed for the display of videos during the breaks, informing the virtual audience, for instance, about the Romanian National Centre for Cartography and the digitized collections of the RGS. However, Rendezvous proved unreliable especially during the first days, as presenters struggled when sharing their PowerPoint slides from their computers. For some the matter resolved quickly, while for others this affected the whole presentation as the slides did not advance as they should have, or they could not share their presentations at all. After the host took on the responsibility of managing the presentation slides, everything started to flow better, although issues with the audio and live streaming continued to cause problems. For me, connecting with Rendezvous usually required refreshing the live stream quite often and it was difficult to say whether this owed to the instability of the platform or my own internet connection. In addition to Rendezvous, some sessions were organized via Zoom and Google Meet. Juggling many platforms in my view added to the challenges relating to accessing the live stream and issues relating to the audio and sharing the presentations. However, they did enable a remote attendee to glimpse some of the oth-

er remote participants, which was nice compared to Rendezvous.

All this being said, I think there are some lessons to be learned from the first hybrid conference. The first relates to familiarizing the presenters with the platform being used. To avoid issues with the audio, a solution would be to offer the remote presenters an opportunity to try out the presentation mode before the conference and check that their headphones and mic work as they should. Second, I consider it vital that the organizers upload the presentations to the conference platform beforehand to avoid the possible technical issues relating to sharing the presentation from your own computer. Third, it would be great if the platform offered some way for the remote presenters to see who is in the audience. Fourth, having the option of a digital interactive “coffee break” would be nice and add to the conference experience of the remote participants.

The hybrid mode has a great goal—to allow participation in situations when traveling to the conference site is not possible. This makes the conference more inclusive as it lowers the costs of participation and erases the issues relating to travel arrangements (including visas, etc.). Participating remotely is also a greener choice and the importance of this for some delegates should not be underestimated. However, going hybrid adds to the technical requirements of organizing a conference and increases the responsibilities of the local organizing committee, starting from obtaining lecture halls equipped for the hybrid format to having a knowledgeable technical team (which the Bucharest team had). If there are parallel sessions, it becomes necessary to be able to host simultaneous hybrid presentations, which is not an easy task. Going hybrid demands more flexibility from participants, remote and present, as well as from the conference schedule, as it is always possible that everything will not go as planned when trying to connect people from across the world.

It was truly a pleasure being able to participate in the 29th ICHC remotely. As the conference days passed, I was able to get into the mood of the conference and felt that I had been part of a shared conference experience. This may have been because there were no competing sessions. It may sound foolish, but I could feel how Professor Steven Seegel’s closing keynote on the importance of map collecting and archives for remembering and witnessing history in the context of Ukraine moved the conference audience. Even though nothing beats being on the spot, participating remotely is the second-best choice and adds to the impact of the conferences. I would keep this in mind when making decisions about the formats of future ICHCs.

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