

From Monuments to Collectibles

Why a FEPA philatelic meeting? The idea came out of a frustration of a number of people, disappointed after attending FIP and FEPA congresses in which the main topic, quite often the only one to receive large coverage, concerned statutes and regulations. These persons recognized the need for improving the organization and solving some issues related to them, but what about the core business of these associations, namely the development of philately?

The meeting in Antwerp was the very first answer to these expectations and needs, and the chosen subject was related to the new issues policies, with specific reference to new developments in terms of the privatisation of postal services in several countries. It has to be considered the first attempt to create an awareness of the new approaches and developments in the issues policies around Europe and to enable the people managing philatelic organisations for advising philatelists and exhibitors through this period of change.

The meeting was prepared in about 10 weeks, hence it could be neither exhaustive nor final: but the appreciation of the attendees has clearly shown that these initiatives are valuable and, in the view of the FEPA Board, they shall be repeated in the future covering the subject of top interest for the philatelic community.

Member Federations are welcome to cooperate by suggesting themes and sending documents of general interest on the subject of publications in FEPA News or on the FEPA website

Up to now stamps issues, like **monuments**, have represented an official tribute of a nation to its history and culture; they have also highlighted its nature and products, events and places, or have been issued to educate and inform, or supports official fund raising campaigns. Over the recent years new marketing strategies of official philatelic departments, postal related organisations and private postal services, also capitalizing on new technologies, have generated a number of parallel "products/issues" valid for postage. Many of them, having been well received by the public who treats them as "Collectibles" as this interest does not rely on the postal nature of the items.

By Giancarlo Morolli



25 attended the Philatelic Meeting

Giancarlo Morolli, FEPA Director

In his opinion it is not easy to get a clear view of the current situation even in own country, unless it has kept just one central issuing authority. The view becomes at least a blur when it refers other countries, as different mail carrier organisations and regulations result into different approaches as far as the issuing of stamps is concerned, also because many situations have changed quite rapidly over time. The fact is that there is a wide range of items on sale, often available not only in E-bay but directly on the websites of such entities; they may be well known or newcomers, but all of them play differently from the past, using new sales channels and approaches.

Our philatelists have always considered stamps as are the prepayment of a fee for postal services and their issue has been authorised by a Governmental decree, as they have represented, from their very beginning, a sign of the State sovereignty.. Sometimes there are (or were) limits like the prohibition of devoted issues to living persons (with the obvious exception of the Head of State), and or to foreigners, or to celebrate only "round" anniversaries.

Exhibitors have been educated to comply with the original GREX definition: "Appropriate philatelic material is that which, for the purpose of transmitting mail or other postal communications, has been issued, intended for issue, or produced in the preparation for issue, used, or treated as valid for postage by governmental, local or private postal agencies, or by other duly commissioned or empowered authorities...".

Today is a common fact that postal companies, either public or private, seek business opportunities for additional revenue on top of their core business, namely the carrying of mail. Browsing through these companies it is possible to buy Personalized stamps, Individual Stamps, Smilers, Prestige booklets, Regional stamps and booklets, Private post commemorative and pictorial ("thematic") issues, Issues of Printing Companies sold through postal channels and recognized as valid for postage, Photostamps. Electronic stamps, Smart Stamps, end some more...

Many of these products are launched on the basis of market research, without any other need or requirement (or decree); the driving concept of their strategies is based on revenue and profit, hence they tend to issue what the customers want. If sales of a certain issue do not meet the objective the production is stopped; if it exceeds it, consideration will be given to adding new items to the series or issuing similar subject. Furthermore the denomination of these stamps may be lower than the price paid.

The customer set for these items is composed of collectors, non necessarily the current philatelists. Most of them apply other criteria than those that have guided philatelists over the many decades of our hobby. The success of similar initiatives for objects manufactured as declared imitations of the originals attest that collectors like items produced just to meet their interest and provide them pleasure, irrespective if they are original or, in our specific case, if they have a full postal significance.

A number of mail carriers operate on a multinational basis, but also national based companies can exploit globalisation via the Internet. It works as marketing channel but also can be used for getting feedbacks, in addition to sales statistics, to assess the customer's preferences and calibrate the new issues on the same: "tell us what you want next".

In the future philatelic organisations are asked to answer these questions:

- Which is/will be the impact on our philatelists?
- Any chance for a synergic effect?
- If yes, which are the goals and the requirements? Or Is our approach too traditional, perhaps obsolete?

Frau Ulrike Radl, Austrian Post

She pointed out that the strategy of the Austrian Post is summarized by the word „Innovation“. Innovative approaches have been a must in many areas of the human activities and philately cannot ignore it. The future of postal stamps has been strongly jeopardized by products of the new technologies, from email messages to electronic frankings, but the Austrian Post has shown that appropriate technologies can be exploited to make innovative stamps able to regain the interest of the public. Austrian technological issues encompass stamps with Swarovski Crystals, ground Meteorite, Embroidery with from to Petit Point, and len-ticular Technology. Furthermore the joint issue with Israel devoted to Simon Wiesenthal presents his portrait in a frame in the form of the Star of David, applied using a brand new printing technique based on laser etching and lacing technology as well as laser philatelic perforation.

General Post.at

Key Statement:

- Innovation is a MUST in our world; Philately is no area of exemption!**
- Due to tradition and the position of the postal stamp in society, stamp innovation has been neglected for decades.**
- New methods of postal franking, incl. Electronic developments, have brought the postal stamp to the edge of abyss.**

April 2010 Philately department

Introductory slide from the presentation given by Frau Ulrike Radl, Austrian Post

Austrian issues do not necessarily address the traditional customer set composed of current collectors, as they have been appealing for the everyday clients of the post offices. But the return on such investment in technologies largely depends on the measures put in place to secure that stamps are being sold in post offices (again!).

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What happened April 2010

Bojan Bračič, Slovenian Post

Since March 2007 the Slovenian Post has been producing personalized stamps: the latest figures show a total exceeding 3000 motifs. From one side the pressure to Stamp Advisory Committee, responsible for deciding upon the new issues, were at least 250 per year, and from the other personalized stamps could have generated additional revenue for the Post. Hence, it has been allowed to everyone to order personalised stamp, proposing his own motif, provided it respects the laws, the moral, the privacy. The personal motif is inserted in a frame, chosen among those (88 different) approved by Stamp Advisory Committee. The minimum order quantity is just one sheet, composed of 20 stamps.



Bojan Bračič presents the politic of the Slovenien Post

The reaction of Philatelists to this initiative has been a mixed one: some groups do not like this product and they reject the word "stamps", considering them as "labels", and this is also the opinion of other philatelists who are against selfadhesive stamps. On the contrary other philatelists have started collecting personalised stamps trying to get as many as possible. Some of them have ordered stamps depicting motifs for their thematic collection that cannot be found on other philatelic items; other individuals or societies have created maximum cards from them. Some philatelic clubs and societies have started using these stamps for marking special events and anniversaries. There have been initiatives for putting create private catalogues on the web.

The Slovenian Post has also introduced the Personalised Picture Postcards, with free chosen motifs on the back side.

Picture Postcards are issued by GAMA Ltd which collaborates with Post of Slovenia in this project and takes care of the delivery of these itemst to

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the addressees indicated by the customer, whose addresses are printed on the front side. On the same side there are the inscriptions "POSTAGE PAID at 1234 Xyzxyz (name of the post office)".

Francis Kiddle, Philatelic Federation of Great Britain.

He explained that nowadays many postal authorities did not just issue a set of stamps but using the basic set as a foundation, by varying products (eg miniature sheet, deluxe imperfs, prestige booklets, postcards etc) they increased the potential value of each issue. He quoted that a typical issue of British commemoratives had a face value of £2, yet collecting all the variants supplied by Royal Mail (including Smilers), meant a collector had to pay £50 per issue. 12 issues per year (plus extras) equates to over £1,000.

Looking at the investment into philately within Europe, he analysed what is happening within the seven European Foundations (Be, Ch, Dk, Fr, Ge, GB, NI). Three of them (Be, Fr, Ge) get major support from their post offices and obtain significant finance through issues of stamps, and through this, they can finance and promote philately. However, four countries (Ch, Dk, GB, NI) get zero funding from their national post offices. In each of these four countries, philately and new issues are simply aimed at maximising post office profit and there is no investment for the future, a classic 'milk cow' situation.

Discussion

A very wide discussion followed these presentations, and the key concepts recorded were:

The Postal administration should make sure that stamps are on sale at the counters as required: it was regretted that in many countries the offer is declining and that postal clerks tend to use machine generated labels or the like for franking letters.

Philatelists should understand that most of these stamps (or "labels" as other prefer to name them) have a postal validity, so they are perfectly acceptable in the exhibits, as long as there are justified within the overall concept of the exhibit).

No rarity can be claimed based on the fact that same issues (namely personalized stamps) have been printed in a very small quantity... ad they have been made on a personal order, to please the customer!

Philatelic organisations should look to the new collectors as a potential and a resource rather as philatelists of a lower class. Who can exclude that some of them could be later become philatelist in the current sense of this word?

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