

A Philatelic
Round Table Discussion
'Investing for the Future'

Proceedings

15 November 2024
Thessaloniki, Greece

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Invitation to Speakers

Eight prospective speakers have received the following invitation to participate, and all eight promptly accepted.

The Invitation

On Friday, 15 November, at 11:30 am, during Balkanfila XX, you are kindly invited to participate as speakers in a Round Table Discussion under the title 'Investing for the Future'.

The General Idea

Behind the euphoria that often accompanies the conclusion of any philatelic event, there remain questions and unresolved issues concerning the future of philately. Balkanfila XX provides us with the opportunity to raise these issues, share our perspectives, and propose solutions.

As the saying goes, 'When different ideas come together, they create something great: the future'.

Agenda and Setup

- (a) Eight topics: Each topic will be presented by a different speaker.
- (b) Presentation time: Each speaker will have a maximum of 7 minutes (roughly 1000 words) for their presentation.
- (c) Q&A sessions: A brief Q&A session will follow each presentation.
- (d) Topic selection: Speakers may choose their preferred topic on a 'first come, first served' basis.

The Topics (the suggestions following the topic titles to be considered as examples)

- (a) The Image of Philately: How is philately represented in societies' premises, websites, events, literature, and more?
- (b) Our Good and Bad Habits: Are we introverted or extroverted? Do we respect tradition or idolise it? Are we welcoming to younger participants, or do we drive them away?
- (c) Communication: How do we communicate philately within our community, with collectors from other areas, and with non-collector audiences?
- (d) Cooperation: How do we collaborate with dealers, postal authorities, the public sector, museums, academia, and others?
- (e) Effective Use of Technology: Are we up-to-date with cutting-edge technology for presentations, publications, exhibitions, social media, tools for expertising, and others?
- (f) Innovation: Are we innovative? Are we spreading our innovative ideas? Have they made a difference?
- (g) Exhibitions: Should the exhibition format be improved? Are regional or virtual exhibitions potential solutions?
- (h) Open Topic Suggestions: You are welcome to propose any other topic that aligns with this framework.

Welcome Remarks

Good morning, gentlemen!

Please allow me to welcome you to Thessaloniki, my birthplace, and a city for which I have deep affection.

Thank you all, for accepting the invitation and participating in this Round Table Discussion. I am twice as grateful to our eight speakers who have spent their precious time preparing their presentations for us.

As we stretched out in the invitation to our speakers, ‘...behind the euphoria that often accompanies the conclusion of any philatelic event, there remain questions and unresolved issues concerning the future of philately. Balkanfila XX provides us with the opportunity to raise these issues, share our perspectives, and propose solutions’, and as the saying goes, ‘When different ideas come together, they create something great: the future’.

We plan to circulate the proceedings as widely as possible and repeat a similar discussion with another mixture of topics if we receive encouraging feedback.

Let me remind you that the speakers have been requested to tackle their topic in no more than seven minutes, to let us spend an additional three minutes on a Questions & Answers session after each presentation.

In short, please keep your eye on the clock!

Costas Chazapis

Our Good and Bad Habits

by Ambassador Viktor Gaber (North Macedonia)

In my contribution, I shall strictly concentrate on the dilemmas set forth in the search for a speaker on this subject. First, about some beneficial activities that follow stamp collecting, and the materials brought with it, and then for some activities that contribute to philately not being able to develop and have a positive impact on new generations. Of course, some of these are our experiences in North Macedonia, which may not always be identical to those of other philatelic unions.



Let me open the discussion with the dilemma: ***Do we welcome younger participants or drive them away?***

In recent years, the Union of Philatelists of Macedonia, without state support, has independently launched a program to promote philately and memorabilia collection with the goal of increasing membership. To achieve this, a series of books were published, and a task force has been established to foster engagement with school students and youth. The objective is to meet young people where they are—in their schools, clubs, and youth centers—and offer them something unique in a world where digital attractions dominate with extensive dynamics and colors.

We still believe that philately, in contrast, emphasizes the development of personal focus, the desire to explore new subjects, and the willingness to compare and learn—key elements that form the essence of stamp collecting.

As part of this initiative, we are actually engaged in the distribution of print posters in schools, colleges and youth clubs, featuring basic information about the philately and the Union and invitations to informal meetings with members. In locations where the project was embraced, posters were designed to attract the attention of young people, providing contact details and encouraging interaction. This was followed by presentations of philatelic collections, distribution of informational brochures, and answering questions.

One approach has been to inspire curiosity by encouraging participants to search for forgotten stamp collections in their homes—perhaps hidden in drawers or basements by parents or grandparents. Colorful albums of stamps are shown to keep their interest. Thematic collections, appropriate to the age group, have been highlighted, with subjects such as flora, fauna, airplanes, and ships, proving more appealing to younger audiences than collections focused on historical figures.

In parallel with these efforts, Union members have made appearances in the media and published articles to reach a wider audience across generations. Our invitation to support this project has been well-received, and the next step will be organizing an ‘Open Doors Day’ at the Union of Philatelists, with appropriate media coverage. The goal is to engage both children and their parents, offering them the opportunity to view various collections and have their questions answered directly by Union members.

Our Union’s ongoing objectives are to engage younger generations and encourage them to explore the world of philately, and to become familiar with the benefits offered by philately, both in its informative

and educational nature. We believe that all of these activities provide a valuable opportunity to engage with students in their daily environments and foster their interest in stamp collecting through direct interaction.

It is a good habit of our members, in addition to the above-mentioned efforts, to issue our own envelopes, with illustrations of persons and events which we consider not to be covered in the state programs.

But now for those circumstances which affect the rare processes in the development of philately, that is, the relations of our Union with the state bodies responsible for philately. Once again, these are our experiences, which may not always be identical to those of other philatelic unions.

Unlike in the monistic period, today, in the existence of coalition governments in our country, the management of the postal organization is on the margins of the interest of the ruling parties. In particular, this attitude towards our Union of Philatelists influenced the wider affirmation of philately itself in the N.M. public. All requests for support of our Union have been reduced to small donations in philatelic material, and not in support of proposed projects for organization of local and international exhibitions, for special editions in the field of culture, collaboration and joint actions with neighborhood unions and beyond, permanent participation of our members in the State Stamp Issue Boards, and investments in equipment to promote philately.

In relation to this topic, Mr. Chazapis posed a question: ***Do we respect tradition or idolize it?*** Yes, tradition is an integral part of our being, but is it adequately represented in philatelic publications and presented in our exhibitions? Do we, through philately, properly educate new generations of solidarity, empathy, humanism, and philanthropy? Or do we consciously or unconsciously create animosity in others with different national traditions and education?

In relation to what and how a motif of postage stamps becomes one subject, local tradition needs to be taken into account. Of course, tradition has to be respected and give inspiration to new generations. But in the choice of subjects for postage stamps, we can see in practice forcing themes that may create negative feelings in other environments, who have a different tradition, opposing views of those events and personalities imprinted on the stamps. I would single out the example of the territorial dispute between Uruguay and Paraguay in 1932, when Paraguay issued a stamp with the disputed territory, after which, dissatisfied with Paraguay's refusal to withdraw the stamp, Uruguay declared war, which Paraguay lost. Also, another example. The case of the provocations around Polish or German domination of Gdansk, when stamps were issued alternately with such intonations that in 1939 were one of the reasons for the German attack on Poland.

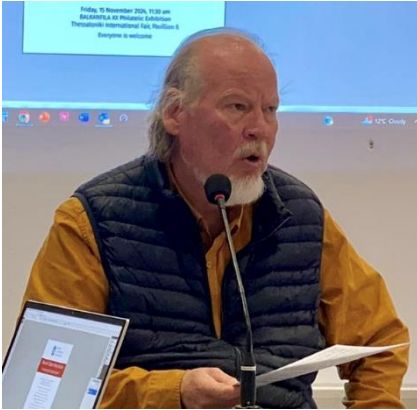
In the end: ***Are we introverted or extroverted?***

Yes, the truth about our relationship to philately seems to lie in the middle between introversion, when we tie our personality to our collection, and extroversion, when we want to display our material in order to present it publicly. If the former were limited to the presentation of philatelic material for educational and socially useful purposes, introversion would be a positive social activism, but, in my opinion, if we are obsessed with extroversion only for self-interest i.e. with strictly commercial interest it can only contribute to a further degradation of the role of philately in our societies.

Thank you.

Communication

by Christos Gikas (Greece)



Philately to the general public is incomprehensible and out-of-limits, belonging to a closed circle of people. Philately is a tree with roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit. Philately is also a 'staircase' of education from the nursery leading potentially to an Academic level.

One Postal Administration has devised an original motto: 'a World in Stamp.' However, many could argue that nowadays we find 'a World on our mobile screens.' The unanswered question remains: How can we effectively communicate, first, the charm of philately, and second, to whom?

Nowadays we are surrounded by instant and constant images and messages. **Philately, having lost the strength of images and messages, has unwillingly acquired a major weakness as many of us have become 'illiterate' in this fast-forward moving digital era.**

Do we communicate?

Yes! Oxford Dictionary defines *communication* as the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information.

Are we communicating philately beyond stamp perforations and postal rates?

On most occasions, we do not.

Do we communicate effectively?

No, because most of us lack the skills and prerequisites of effective communication.

What are the required skills?

Clarity: know what you want to say and say it clearly and well.

Brevity: be concise. Less is more.

Simplicity: avoid jargon, buzzwords, long sentences, and overly technical and scientific language.

Humanity: make sure it relates to your audience.

Authenticity: believe in what you are saying.

With the recently released HPS Anniversary Book, we have taken an unorthodox route to communicate philately to non-philatelists, following the five previously mentioned criteria.

We asked for philatelic items, irrespective of their market value, that could tell an attractive story (Humanity), clearly (Clarity), with up to 100 words (Brevity), as simply as possible (Simplicity), by showing to the reader, whether a philatelist or non-philatelist 'The Discreet Charm of the Philatelie' (Authenticity). *As you have realised, the title was 'stolen' from Louis Buñuel's 'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie'.*

Conversely, what we philatelists often miss to communicate is the **true essence of the postal items** by focusing on technical matters or peculiarities. In other words our 'Communication' resembles a **finger pointing at the moon and we were thrilled about the anatomy of the finger**.

What is the Essence of Philately?

To look at postage stamps as carriers of an unspoken visual message, similar to trademarks and/or logos, exporting national or multinational positioning (e.g. Europa CEPT stamps) on official ideology and world viewing.

To look at covers, and envelopes as the packaging (often with interesting information), whilst letters hold the attractive essence of posted communication.

A common postcard, one of hundreds of the sort, of a Greek political exile wrote to his wife, also a political exile at a different concentration camp, the following text: *'Love your prison cell, eat all your food and study a lot'*.

A SWOT Analysis of Communicating Philately

STRENGTHS: Exciting stories; unknown documents & testimonials; posted & postal history. In addition, low-cost digital communication technologies and online instant translation.

WEAKNESSES: Self-centred approach & thinking (beyond perforations and postal rates); inability to communicate with a clear strategy or effectively outside our closed circle; digital illiteracy for many of us; a mentality of 'Better Red than Expert' or 'the non-philatelists do not understand us'; failure to understand the usefulness of communication professionals. Are those who do not understand us less intelligent or are we unable to get the message across?

OPPORTUNITIES:

Shaping public opinion; people are both curious and eager to listen to an interesting story (the visitors to a gallery are not professors of Fine Arts, not painters, not art dealers, they are mostly people interested in Art); philately includes art, message, ideology, and history; Niche Exhibiting (a National Costumes collection at a Folk Museum, a Motorcar Exhibit at a New Cars Show, Postal History at a History Museum).

THREATS: A misleading, short-term euphoria after a successful exhibition; the digital world filled with images and stories where we have no voice; an overall ageing group of philatelists.

Our Message

Do we realise what we say, and how we say it? Is it attractive? Is it going through to the recipient?

Our Audiences

Follow the method of a Medical Doctor's communication. He communicates differently towards a journalist, a patient, a congress participant, and a layman. Have we adjusted our communication to a specific audience?

Effective Communication Prerequisites

1. **STRATEGY:** Targeted, scheduled, and consistent.
2. **5Ws:** Who, Whom, What, When, and Why.
3. **AIDA** (not Verdi's Opera): Standing for **A**ttention, **I**nterest, **D**esire, **A**ction.

Effective Communication Proposals

Design a Communication Strategy and execute it by setting goals.

Open a steady 'Communication Philatelic Corridor' among societies and federations of our region, as well as among the regional groups of federations.

Means of Communication

Collective Facebook / Website / Publications.

Planned teleconference meetings & lectures (Webex/Zoom).

Thank you all.

Cooperation

by Dr Bruno Crevato-Selvaggi RDP, FRPSL (Italy)

How do we collaborate and how should we collaborate with dealers? Frankly speaking, I have no idea.

How do we collaborate and how should we collaborate with postal authorities, the public sector, museums and others? Frankly speaking, I have no idea.

How do we collaborate and how should we collaborate with **academia**? Here I have ideas and I am doing it. I will tell you about it.



I am the Director of the Istituto di Studi Storici Postali 'Aldo Cecchi', based in Prato, Tuscany. The Institute is committed to the preservation of, research in, and sharing of knowledge on postal history and organised communication.

These are the Institute's four missions:

- **conservation** of its considerable bibliographic, archival, documentary and museum collections;
- making heritage **available** to researchers;
- organisation of **cultural events**;
- **scientific research**.

All this together with, on the one hand, looking to the future and linking it with tradition: on the other, looking to internationality.

The Institute publishes a series of monographs and a scientific journal.

It is the only private institution in Europe dedicated to these themes, and it constitutes an **international reference point** for those who are working in the area of postal history.

Some of us (myself, for example) are also philatelists; others are only scholars of the subject. We also collaborate with **universities** (in Italy, Austria, Spain, Greece), **State Archives** (in Italy, Croatia, France) **and professors** (in several European and American countries), who use our resources.

Every two years we organise an **international scientific Conference** aimed at universities. The three editions were attended by researchers from Italy, France, Spain, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, USA, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, India, China and Hong-Kong.

The last conference was held in Prato in June 2024, with the title: **3rd International Congress Postal History between Multidisciplinary and Diachronic Perspectives**. I cannot give you the entire programme, but I will say that there were 30 speakers. Of these, 20 were university professors or researchers; 4 researchers belonging to research institutes related to the postal world; 4 independent researchers; 2 philatelists.

At the end of the Conference, I proposed a **basic document**, which can be the basis for the publication of an **International Manifesto** to be presented to the international community of scholars.

Creating a **Disciplinary Statute** i.e. a **Statute of Postal History as a Field of studies**.

The statute of a field of studies is a set of definitions, tools and rules shared among scholars concerning that subject. In particular, it defines:

- The basic concepts of that field of studies
- Its field of competencies
- Its goals
- The tools used by researchers

I proposed a 6-page document.

Several professors from different universities in Europe and America, together with myself, are **evaluating** this paper. I hope to publish it in the first half of 2025.

When it is published, we will have a definition shared by the academic world and, I hope, also by the philatelic world.

Philately is a very important part of postal history (in the academic sense) and this is a virtuous example of collaboration.

What is the **focal point**? To present philately as a research tool, a material approach to history. Reading history through postal items. Postal archaeology.

History and archaeology are complementary disciplines, even studying the post: (postal) history defines the major concepts and the interpretative view of social economic phenomena; archaeology (in our case, philately) studies them and shows their application in reality through the materiality of postal documents. And, I would add, **a fascinating materiality!**

Therefore, with the Academy we can and must collaborate. **I believe that this will be the future.**

Thank you.

Effective Use of Technology

by Vladimir Milich (Serbia)

Four key fields will be highlighted, where it is possible to exploit new technologies to the maximum. The fact is that even now they have the advantage, to say the least, and in some aspects they absolutely dominate. This tendency will only increase in the coming period.



Literature – Digitalization and online access

The digitalisation of literature and its online accessibility has revolutionised how we consume, distribute, and preserve written works. We have increased accessibility, provided readers have internet access. Preservation is the key point: digitalisation protects rare or fragile works from physical deterioration. Also, what is important is that readers can carry thousands of books and magazines on devices like laptops or even smartphones.

In the Union of Philatelists of Serbia, the digitisation of the *Philatelist* national magazine is a top priority. Digitising printed materials has become a key process in the modern era of information. This process involves converting physical documents into a digital format, which provides numerous advantages over traditional print media.

Since its first issue in 1949, the *Philatelist* magazine has played a pivotal role in connecting, informing and educating philatelists. To preserve and share its rich heritage, the Union of Philatelists of Serbia, in cooperation with the University Library 'Svetozar Marković' in Belgrade, is carrying out the digitisation of the *Philatelist* magazine within the *Searchable Digital Library* project.

Correspondence – email vs. paper

The rise of digital communication had a huge influence on substituting traditional paper-based correspondence with emails. Several advantages of electronic communication stand out: speed (emails are delivered almost instantly), cost-efficiency (no expenses related to paper, printing, and postage), accessibility (send/receive it from anywhere with internet access), and ease of storage.

In the meantime, applications for instant messaging have surpassed email in popularity, elevating the level of digitisation even further.

In any case, paper-based communication has not been entirely replaced. A balanced approach that incorporates both methods remains practical and acceptable.

Examination – Stamps, overprints, and covers

The examination of stamps and covers has significantly evolved with the introduction of modern technologies. These advancements improve accuracy, authentication, and analysis processes for philatelists. For example, high-resolution scanning. Modern scanners provide ultra-high-resolution images, which is a prerequisite for identifying flaws, analysing printing techniques, and more.

Exhibits – Digital creation, development, and visual presentation

A computer and appropriate software are now the basic tools to bring the exhibits to a visually appealing level, as evidenced by the exhibits here at Balkanfila in Thessaloniki). Only a few exhibitors still use the old methods of preparing exhibits. I can safely assume that only those who have not changed their exhibit for ten or more years. This shift towards digital methods, like all previous ones, is unstoppable.

Thank you for your attention.

Innovation

by Dr Claudio Ernesto Manzati FRPSL (Italy)



I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the topic of 'Innovation' a subject dear to me, as I have always worked in the pharmaceutical industry, particularly in R&D, where Innovation is one of the pillars of this industry.

Today, in 2024, we are all aware that the philatelic collecting sector is in steep decline and we wonder what we can do to reverse this negative trend.

Costas asked me for my presentation to try to answer the following questions:

- 1. Are we innovative?**
- 2. Are we spreading our innovative ideas?**
- 3. Have they made a difference?**

I answer the three questions posed to me with a dry NO!

Considering that the actions undertaken so far have not produced a practical result, it is clear that philately has continued inexorably in its decline, perhaps they have only slowed it down a little!

I am referring in particular to the economic investment of time and organisation that more or less all national federations have made in recent years, with training in schools by expert collectors, funding the transport of students to philatelic events, producing educational brochures, etc.

The collections that we exhibit, according to current regulations we have to tell ourselves honestly, are very unattractive to a non-philatelic public.

With these examples, I have confirmed my NO to our ability to innovate and disseminate philatelic culture.

Innovation from Latin means altering the order of established things to make new ones; innovation comes from ideas.

I recall that: out of 3,000 initial raw ideas; therefore innovative¹, only 300 are tested or patented, 125 give rise to projects, and 1.7 become a product launched on the market, but only 1 becomes a successful product. Returning to our sector, success is not a commercial product but will be to reverse the negative trend in philatelic collecting.

It follows that the basis of everything is ideas, which are generated through what is called Brainstorming, where however the composition of the study team, in my opinion, should be made up of a few philatelists, and many participants from other sectors, including women who we know are not attracted to philately, but many of them develop collections in different sectors (e.g. ceramics) and above all, young people, who are in themselves carriers of innovation.

¹ Stevens - Burley '3000 Raw Ideas = 1 Commercial Success!'

Instead of teaching them, in schools, how great it is to collect, let us ask them, what they would do, to be attracted to philately!

In other words, if we want to reverse the negative trend, we have to find ways to develop creativity.

A creative team² must consist of people with different skills, who are open to new ideas, constructively challenging the ideas that are generated, and are committed to what they are doing. The task of the brainstorming organiser is to create an environment and conditions to develop creativity and organise it into concrete proposals.

Well, Claudio, could you tell us, after this nice story, what are your concrete proposals?

For years I have had a wish, hitherto unexpressed, and that is to organise brainstorming on the future of philately; to be afterwards translated into a real 3-5 year action plan.

For those of you who work in structured companies, it is like creating a draft Strategic Plan.

As an individual contributor to innovation, one of my ideas for change is to take the competition events to different places, i.e. in public places such as shopping centres, fashion shows, cultural events, or in the foyer of a theatre.

For reasons of space and security, by displaying the reproduction of a single frame, with a QR Code to be able to browse through all the frames at will via smartphone, or better still by providing a tablet for each frame.

From the point of view of competitions, distributing the pdf of the collections to be examined to the jury in advance, as has also been the case in Finland and Italy for years, this would reduce the costs of running the event as the time presence of the jurors could be reduced by 1/3 as well as the costs.

If we move on to philatelic literature in particular, I would like to mention a case, where I was involved with Thomas Mathà, president of the Italian Academy of Philately and president of AIEP together with Giorgio Migliavacca. When in 2019 we decided, through brainstorming encouraged by two good bottles of red wine, to create *POST HORN* Magazine.

We asked ourselves, what do we need to do to differentiate ourselves from important philatelic magazines such as the *London Philatelist* or the journal of the Collectors Club of New York? What should be the distinguishing factors for success? In our case, we decided that we had to focus on an innovative editorial line that would tell stories through stamps and postal documents as witnesses of time in history, that would be very focused on graphics and image, and that would be elegant (Italian Style) with international and high-level content and authors. Three factors that could attract a wider audience than philatelists.

This is a practical example of how we should approach the subject of innovation. We cannot be sure that a well-organised brainstorming program in Europe, combined with a clear action plan, will significantly revitalise philately. However, I am certain that if we continue to operate as we always have, decline is inevitable.

I conclude by saying that we must all ask ourselves three questions for the future of philately:

1. What should we stop doing?
2. What should we start doing?
3. What good we must maintain and strengthen?

Thank you for your attention. I invite you to take a look at the *POST HORN* Magazine of International Postal History.

² *Amabile - Keys - 'Assessing The Climate To Creativity'.*

Exhibitions

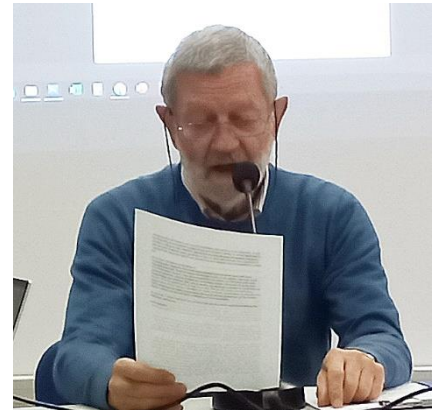
by Prof. Peter Suhadolc FRPSL (Slovenia)

Kalimera!

Good day!

I will restrict myself to competitive exhibits only.

As all of you know, competitive exhibiting is done at many levels and with various types of exhibits. Starting from the top, we have World FIP Exhibitions (General, WSC, Specialized), Continental ones (FEPA, FIAP, FIAF), International ones (Balkanfila, Nordia, Alps-Adria, Multilaterale in Europe), International theme related (Birdpex, PhilaLux, ECTP, Ulm fair), Bilateral, National (with international guest(s), or open to nationals only), Regional, Local.



Why do we have exhibitions?

From the collectors' point of view, to show their best exhibit(s), to compete for high(est) awards, to look at other exhibits and learn from them, to search for material at dealers' stands, to meet collectors with same interests, to socialize (private chats, get-togethers, dinners), and last but not least to do some tourism.

From the organizers' point of view (national federations) it is one of their fundamental tasks, to help collectors and exhibitors to gather, attract them to their country, have visibility in the philatelic world, help their own collectors to achieve the highest awards (a National Grand Prix). For international exhibitions, it is sometimes, like for this Balkanfila, a matter of rotation among its member countries.

The biggest problem in organizing an exhibition is the costs involved. The main one is the venue, then exhibition frames bought, rented, or their own), the hotel and the transportation airport-hotel-airport for jurors and commissioners, receptions and the Palmares dinner, possible excursions, the rental of booths for dealers, printings, security issues, manpower... For world and continental (but also international) exhibitions Patronage or Recognition fees.

A big headache for all organizers!

The costs are covered by funds (exhibition income and organizing federation assets) and sponsoring. The frame fee income is far from covering all the costs. In the past, exhibitions have been mainly and heavily sponsored by postal administrations. In Europe, regretfully, this is not the case anymore; rather an exception, nowadays. Exhibitions used to be up to ten days long, with whole-day excursions...; nowadays, most exhibitions are four to six days long.

Funding is therefore a matter of other sponsors. At the world and continental level, the sponsors are auction houses, dealers, and wealthy collectors (Platinum, Gold, Silver sponsors), while ordinary collectors are sponsoring some frames... At the international level, one can rely upon local city municipalities, a few dealers, some collectors, and an FIP Sponsorship (if you are lucky...). One can organize a local auction for the #1 of a limited sheetlet edition if they have the favour of the postal administration. VIP lounge fees can help. You have to be inventive! But for all exhibitions, enthusiastic volunteers, mainly from local clubs, that mount and dismount the frames are essential!

Will this go on in the future?

I am sure that exhibitions will continue to be organized, maybe less frequently, but the present number of announced future exhibitions all over the world and at any level is still quite high. Definitely, big exhibitions, since the pool of top-level collectors does not seem to decline (it is growing in Asia), but also international ones, especially at a regional level, since their overall costs and also the participation costs for exhibitors are much less.

Do we have alternatives to exhibitions?

In the last years, especially after COVID-19, digital exhibiting has become more and more frequently organized. There are several advantages to this: much smaller costs (no venue, no commissioners, no juror costs, no transportation, no booths, no Palmares, only some technical manpower, printing of diplomas, sometimes medals). There are of course also disadvantages. For the exhibitors, there are no dealers, no meetings in person, no socializing, no tourism. From a general point of view, jurors and internet site visitors do not look at original items, there is always a possibility of frauds as scans are used in place of originals. You look in detail sheet by sheet, but you lose the overall general appearance of the exhibit.

Maybe a mixture of real and digital exhibiting is a future possibility. Some trials in this sense have been already done in Slovenia.

However, there cannot be exhibits if we do not have exhibitors. Unfortunately, the overall number of exhibitors is declining, and the number of new exhibitors is not growing at a rate to replace the ones we are losing. It is our duty, therefore, to encourage existing collectors to turn into exhibitors.

To conclude, I remain optimistic that philately will not die and that the need to exhibit, and consequently exhibitions, will remain.

Thank you.

Philately: Hobby or Investment?

by Kemal Giray FRPSL (Turkey)



Having had the pleasure of being involved in the philatelic trade for more than thirty years, I have often encountered the question of whether philately should be considered a hobby or an investment, this question has been raised in various circumstances, and before diverse audiences.

Is it a hobby?

Definitely yes, if philately satisfies the collector's primary needs, by offering the pleasure of filling another gap in their collection, providing an education they could have never dreamed of, and presenting countless opportunities to socialise with other collectors,

to name just a few.

Can it be an investment?

Absolutely, if collectors can foresee future price changes, buy at low prices, and sell at significantly higher ones. Since investing is closely tied to diversification, all collectable rarities are potential candidates for investment—philately is no exception. According to major auctioneers, investors account for a significant portion of the philatelic market.

Stamps can be an investment if bought wisely, but should never be offered as an investment. The concept has been spoiled by some companies in the past that sold investment portfolios, 90-95% of which resulted in losses (e.g. Europa CEPT). Currently, a similar trend is followed by postal authorities, which issue large quantities of stamps at short intervals.

Conclusion

That said, most of the time, when buying for the hobby, the philatelist knows beforehand that their item may only sell for a fraction of the money spent. Yet, the enjoyment of adding to the collection, the time devoted to research, the delight of solving a philatelic riddle—all these, and much more are truly invaluable. At any rate, money spent on the collector's elusive philatelic treasure is still money better spent than on a fancy dinner—because, after the dinner, you are left completely empty-handed.

Thank you all.

Threats to the Future of Philately

by Iulian Cherata AIEP (Romania)



While I do not wish to sound pessimistic, we must acknowledge that philately is vulnerable. As a passionate collector, I feel obligated to highlight certain issues that could potentially threaten its future. By addressing these challenges, we can work toward safeguarding and revitalizing our beloved hobby.

Forgeries

With advancements in science and technology, forgers now have access to sophisticated tools, making forgeries increasingly difficult to detect. Alarmingly, some forgeries target inexpensive items—those collectors typically do not seek certificates for. Moreover, the resurgence of postal forgeries poses a significant threat to the use of stamps for regular mail. If postal authorities deem these losses unsustainable, they might discontinue issuing stamps as we know them. Without their everyday presence, stamps risk being perceived as relics of the past, potentially diminishing interest in collecting.

Demographics

Consider this: how many philatelists under forty do you know? Likely very few. As time passes, philately naturally loses its most experienced members, and younger enthusiasts replace them only partially. This demographic trend presents a long-term challenge for the survival of our hobby.

Falling Prices

One joy of collecting is acquiring new pieces, but the market faces an oversupply of material, leading to declining prices for common items. While rare pieces retain their value, the abundance of lower-value material—coupled with a shrinking pool of collectors—can discourage some enthusiasts and investors alike.

Collaboration

Healthy competition is vital, but exclusivity in niche collecting areas can alienate potential collaborators and buyers. If you dominate a narrow field, you might find yourself isolated over time, with no one left to buy or share your passion. By fostering a spirit of cooperation, we can create an environment where everyone benefits, ensuring our collections thrive.

Exhibitors' Disappointment

Exhibitors sometimes find their efforts undervalued, receiving fewer points or medals than in previous presentations of the same exhibit. Disappointment is compounded when critiques lack constructive feedback or professionalism, leading some to abandon exhibiting—or even philately—altogether.

Addressing this issue through fair judging and respectful critique will help retain passionate exhibitors and foster growth in the hobby.

I don't want to end on a pessimistic note. By identifying these challenges, we can work together to protect and revitalize philately, ensuring its survival and growth for future generations. Let's use this moment as a call to action to innovate, collaborate, and inspire.

Thank you.

Closing Remarks

Our discussion has come to an end. Thank you all for joining us today, and contributing with your questions or remarks.

I am especially grateful to our eight speakers for accepting the invitation, being here today, and adhering to the schedule so diligently!

Our discussion concluded after 90 minutes, demonstrating that the chosen format—short speeches followed by even shorter Q&A sessions—was highly effective. This suggests that organising a similar Round Table Discussion with a comparable mix of topics and speakers would be a logical course of action for the future.

As we plan to publish the proceedings and share them with the philatelic community, I kindly request our speakers to send me their texts at their earliest convenience.

Thank you all once again, and have a wonderful day!

Costas Chazapis



BALKANFILA XX
13-16 NOVEMBER 2024
THESSALONIKI, GREECE

Round Table Discussion 'Investing for the Future'

Eight experienced philatelists will address
eight highly engaging topics,
each followed by a Q&A session.

Viktor Gaber: **Our Good and Bad Habits**

Christos Gikas: **Communication**

Bruno Crevato-Selvaggi: **Cooperation**

Vladimir Milich: **Effective Use of Technology**

Claudio Ernesto Manzati: **Innovation**

Peter Suhadolc: **Exhibitions**

Kemal Giray: **Philately: Hobby or Investment?**

Iulian Cherata: **Threats to the Future of Philately**

Costas Chazapis will serve as the moderator.

Friday, 15 November 2024, 11:30 am
BALKANFILA XX Philatelic Exhibition
Thessaloniki International Fair, Pavillion 6

Everyone is welcome