

# ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

## Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-LIU
Conference Title:	Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde
Dates:	26 – 30 September 2012
Chairs:	<b>Prof. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer</b> , Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, DE <b>Dr. Elina Druker</b> , University of Stockholm, SE <b>Professor Maria Nikolajeva</b> , University of Cambridge, UK
Rapporteur:	Dr.Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman

### General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

The topic of the conference was innovative: looking at children's literature produced in the avant-garde spirit from a global perspective (covering Europe including Russia, Americas, Australia) and combining literary research and visual arts. Another strength of the conference was the diversity of speakers, early career and advanced researchers, academics, artists and children book practitioners (museum director, publisher). The engagement, leadership qualities and professionalism of the chairs was impressive and was a key to the success of the conference.

### Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The programme was excellent. It was well balanced in terms of covering different countries/cultures/literatures, a long historical period and different art trends which can be classified under 'avant-garde'. Also a mix of keynotes and submitted contributions, advanced researchers and early career researchers was very good. Most presentations were new, interesting, very well prepared, also in terms of their visual quality. Sessions were fascinating and a pleasure to follow. The majority of participants were active in discussions.

The scope of the conference was very wide: any book, writer or visual artist which could be considered 'avant-garde' in a given cultural or historical context could be presented. When on one hand this made for a fascinating conference allowing for a confrontation of very diverse artefacts, trends, phenomena etc. and potentially leading to interesting possible comparisons it was noted in the final discussion that in the future it might be more productive to concentrate on specific geographic / cultural regions or on historical periods. Also more balance between the analysis of literary text and graphic/visual form would be advisable. In this conference presentations on book illustrations and graphic aspects were dominant. Very interesting were some presentations on editorial techniques and practices.

The main sessions were very well complemented by a poster session.

### Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

It was clear that not only convenors but all participants are enthusiastic about the conference and fascinated by the topic and appreciate the programme, the speakers and – probably most of all - the chairs who made it happen. The programme created sufficient possibilities for informal discussions which were engaging all participants.

### Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

The balance of participants was one of the strengths of the conference. First of all one has to stress that the participation of early career researchers was very strong in numbers and in quality: a large number of very good, promising young researcher participated. They were given the same time slots as more experienced researchers and they were fully integrated in the programme. In addition the chairs managed to raise funding for a special award for the best presentation by a young researcher.

Also the participants came from many countries and cultures: Europe with strong participation from Central and Eastern Europe including Russia, North and South America and Australia.

The most interesting aspect of the programme was the invitation of 'practitioners': visual artists, a children book museum director as well as amateur collectors of Soviet avant-guard children books – fascinating and very knowledgeable people.

This innovative selection of participants created a very special atmosphere of total immersion in the topic.

## **Outlook and Future Developments**

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

The participants were very enthusiastic about creating new collaborations. In the final Forward Look discussion they proposed to create research networks, conference series etc. They were however realistic that this requires time and money they may not be able to provide. They planned for a publication of proceedings of the conference and this sounded realistic.

It is much more probable that smaller collaborations involving two or three researchers will emanate from the conference.

## **Follow-up**

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

This is difficult to say but specific collaboration projects were discussed by the participants.

## **Organisation and Infrastructure**

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The conference was well organised and Norrkoping offered quite nice environment as it is a small university town. It would be much better for the integration of the group and for facilitating contacts and discussions if common dinners were offered. Especially that it is not so easy to find in Norrkoping a dinner place at a moderate price.

However very efficient, professional and friendly support by Allegra made up for all organisational weaknesses.

## **Summary & Overall Assessment**

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

I am convinced that the conference was a success. It enabled a very diverse group of scholars, artists and children book practitioners to meet and to exchange knowledge and views and to develop potential collaborations. I would like to stress again that the key to the success of the conference were the chairs who are experts in their field but also excellent conference convenors with innovative ideas.

## About ESF Research Conferences

### **The Scheme**

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

### **Conference Format**

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

### **Division of Tasks**

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: [www.esf.org/conferences](http://www.esf.org/conferences)