

STOCKHOLMIA 2019: A Retrospective

BY JONAS HÄLLSTRÖM, EXHIBITION MANAGER OF STOCKHOLMIA 2019



STOCKHOLMIA 2019 took place in Stockholm, Sweden from May 29 to June 2, 2019 (Figure 1). The event was the international celebration and sesquicentenary (150th anniversary) of the Royal Philatelic Society London (RPSL), being recognized as the largest international birthday celebration ever to held for a philatelic society. The exhibition marked 150 years of community and fraternity!

All philatelists around the world were welcomed, and many of them came. We registered 7,832 visitors from 51 different foreign country destinations.

This is my retrospective.

I am confident that our choice of venue became a foundation for the success of STOCKHOLMIA 2019. The venue, the Stockholm Waterfront Congress Centre, is Sweden's newest and most versatile venue for large-scale meetings and events. Located in the heart of Stockholm, across the water from the City Hall, the modern architecture is a spectacular addition to the city skyline. The center with 151,000 square feet (14,000 square meters) of space opened in 2011.

Stockholm as a city has been an important philatelic capital for a century or more, as home to prominent philatelists whose place in the world has been recognized over time. The city's prominence in commerce, beauty of architecture and philately made it

an easy selection for the UPU Congress back in 1924.

Since then, there have been important international philatelic exhibitions in Stockholm, including but not limited to the years 1955, 1974, and 1986. Each time, Sweden strived to bring international standards for hosting exhibitions to new highs.

With a "tradition of excellence" in mind, the vision of STOCKHOLMIA 2019 was to develop and improve the existing standards for philatelic events worldwide. STOCK-



Figure 1. Jonas Hällström, RDP FRPSL, exhibition manager for STOCKHOLMIA 2019.

Figure 2. Thanks to Patrick Maselis, then president of the Royal Philatelic Society London (2017-2019), no other philatelic event had ever been so extensively publicized as STOCKHOLMIA 2019.

HOLMIA 2019 may in the future be recognized as a new milestone for competitive philately conducted through the exhibition format.

With all critical foundational support for finance in hand, a Letter of Support from the city of Stockholm (i.e. Stockholm Convention Bureau) was received in 2015. The Project Directive with the RPSL was mutually agreed on and signed on November 1, 2015. The Philatelic Partnership Agreement and sponsorship from the Global Philatelic Network was signed in Monaco on December 4, 2015. The RPSL, the Global Philatelic Network, the Stockholm Waterfront Congress Centre and the City of Stockholm, were together the founding partners for the event. The partnerships emerged over time, and it was thanks to these partnerships that we were successful during the planning phase and its execution.

His Majesty the King of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf, graciously granted his patronage for the exhibition. The exhibition set a record in having two reigning monarchs of different countries as patrons: Queen Elizabeth II as patron of the Royal Philatelic Society London and King Carl XVI Gustaf as patron of the exhibition held in his country to celebrate the anniversary of the society.

From the very beginning, we made it easy for the RPSL membership to support the exhibition. They and other philat-

elists were invited as patrons and supporters. In retrospect, we would not have managed to perform as we did without them.

When we closed the books we reported total receipts of approximately 12.61 million Swedish krona (SEK) – which converts to 1.01 million British pounds or \$1.14 million. Total expenses were 11.87 million Swedish krona (£953,000; \$1.07 million), resulting in a net benefit to the RPSL of 750,000 krona (£60,600; \$68,000).

Of great importance is the fact that patrons and supporters (RPSL members for the most part) responded to our appeal for donations with great generosity, contributing about 7.95 million Swedish krona (£638,430; \$718,983) or 63 percent of all receipts, continuing a recent worldwide trend toward collector- and dealer-supported exhibitions. This was the largest appeal (fundraiser) in the history of the RPSL (begun before the recent appeal for the new building at 15 Abchurch Lane).

Sources of receipts included stand holders (15 percent) and exhibition partners (20 percent) and miscellaneous (2 percent). Expenses by percentage were the Center (32 percent), development, design and marketing (31 percent), execution of the exhibition (25 percent), frames (6 percent), exhibition catalogs (5 percent) and the library (1 percent). Committee members served more than five years in this endeavor without remuneration. Importantly, Gustaf Douglas (1932-2023) provided the financial guarantee to secure the conference center.

The exhibition had five pilot patrons, one for each of the pillars of a stamp exhibition generally: venue, frames, catalogs, medals and for this event, the large library. Because of their support, we were able to lay a solid foundation for a successful, privately organized and funded exhibition. Parts of the world that have enjoyed government-financed exhibitions realize that type of show is in the past. We hope that STOCKHOLMIA 2019 will inspire others to find private support and funding.

In marketing to our target groups of philatelists around the world (Figure 2), we doubt that any philatelist missed seeing an advertisement for STOCKHOLMIA 2019. No other philatelic event has ever had so much marketing before opening its doors. For this we owe one man, the then-president of the RPSL (2017-2019), Patrick Maselis of Belgium.

Our philatelic community is truly international. Stamps and postal history reflect a global connection among people and societies. While the exhibition's main organizing body was Swedish for logistical reasons, there were extensive international participation by volunteers in key positions and advisory roles. It is a fantastic experience to work with such a highly motivated group of professionals. They are all great colleagues, were easy to work with, and with the aggregation of skills, they were the reason why this endeavor became assured to be a great success.

Philatelic events are recognized typically by three characteristics: positive personal memories that propel people to talk about those experiences for years afterwards; the impressiveness of the keepsake of the exhibition medal; and

what was printed and published before, during and after. The organizing committee is attended to all three characteristics, laying the best of plans to achieve high scores on all of them.

Regarding the exhibition medal for STOCKHOLMIA 2019, we invested a lot from beginning to end (Figure 3). The choice of the designer, his design of the medal, the formats and size, form and shape, and its final presentation. Thanks to Sebastian Schildt, the medal designer, we were able to present an exhibition medal that speaks for itself with a blending of British and Swedish elements.

Publications are an integral part of our hobby and it had been a long time since any philatelic exhibition published as extensively as was done for STOCKHOLMIA 2019. The extensive publishing was intentional, and well-thought out (Figure 4). Thanks to technical developments, publications today are easy to prepare and even cheaper to print. So, why not make a statement with STOCKHOLMIA 2019 by making our publications an integrated part of the exhibition?

Thanks to Wolfgang Maassen, currently the leading authority in the world of philatelic publishing and literature – along with Wolfgang's wife, Claudia Maassen, and their publishing company Phil*Creativ – we prepared two very important volumes as exhibition catalogs: Volume I for the

exhibition and Volume II for the library. The displays were comprehensive.

More than 2,000 frames were filled with the most important philatelic exhibits of our lifetime. There are not words to fully describe in detail the care, love and passion that Jan Berg (Sweden) as the commissioner general put into the preparations. No other person than Jan would have managed to work directly with so many exhibitors. Jan was co-working with Bengt Bengtsson (Sweden) as deputy commissioner general, and the final display and presentation of all the participating exhibits from all over the world was, thanks to them, richly presented and partly illustrated to enhance its high performance.

The international jury was assembled by its president of choice, Lars Engelbrecht (Denmark). The jury and its work set the goals high, which transparently was presented in Lars' own leadership of the jury work. There were no less than seventy Large Gold and 96 Gold medals awarded by the jury.

Reviews of STOCKHOLMIA 2019 were overwhelmingly positive. Today, four years after the fact, people are still talking about the exhibition, which meets our goal of longevity. I look forward to seeing how future exhibitions take on the challenge of meeting the bar STOCKHOLMIA raised.



Figure 3. The beautiful STOCKHOLMIA 2019 exhibition medal and its presentation, is one of the key mementos in how the exhibition is remembered. (Photo by Per Myrehed).



Figure 4. The STOCKHOLMIA 2019 publications will, together with the exhibition medal, be among the items recognized as significant for the future of our hobby.