

Letter to the Editor : Conference Organization

Sir,

I just participated at the "International Conference" on the Applications of the Mössbauer Effect "held in Corfu (13-18 Sept. 1976), when the method of presentation adopted was the "unique session" in which only 56 papers, from a total number of 216 contributed papers, were selected for presentation.

Between the Mössbauer Conference of Tihany (17-21 June 1969) with 119 participants and 95 contributed papers, and this one, with 220 participants and 216 contributed papers (and through five other conferences between) different systems have been adopted (parallel sessions rapporteur sessions, unique session), depending on the number of participants, the technical facilities and the adoption or not of the principle of selection of papers for presentation.

It is very difficult to say which, among them, is the best method, each having its own merits and demerits¹⁾ but what we can say, in my opinion, is that :

1) any method allowing the stimulation of discussions and the exchange of ideas between the largest possible number of participants (without being limited to the presentation of some results only, even substantially new), is good. These methods

may be the "parallel sessions" or any other mixed system from parallel sessions to poster sessions²⁾, where the appropriate mixture for the different subjects is to be found by the organizing committees of the future Mössbauer conferences.

2) any method not satisfying the above criteria is bad. This is the case of the "unique session" (adopted at Corfu) which presents the following inconveniences

a) It excludes a large proportion of contributed papers from any presentation (75 % excluded in Corfu) and very often, the papers from younger "unknown" scientists. The percentage of such excluded papers will be more and more important in future conferences because of the continuously increasing number of participants. This certainly is not the best way to stimulate discussions and to bring together the Mössbauer people.

b) It does not remedy the problem of specialization (a danger of parallel sessions³⁾) because the specialization does exist, anyway, and becomes more and more necessary with the increasing load of the "steam roller" of Mössbauer results³⁾. One can see this specialization in the fact that except for some papers of general interest, the presentation of all contributed papers interests only a part of

the participants as witnessed from the attendance.

c) It does not even help the "Mössbauer community" to remain members of a "universal family"¹⁾). The exclusion of the majority of "participants" from any oral presentation breaks the "universality" and transforms the conference into a sort of meeting where a small number of participants present their results before two hundred spectators grouped for the occasion.

The "unique session" method is thus really the worst existing method. I hope, sincerely, that the organizing committees of the future Mössbauer conferences will consider this method as dead in Corfu.

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(C.N.R.S., Bellevue)

1. GONSER, U., *Proceedings Int. Conf. on Mössb. Spectroscopy, Cracow 25-30 August 1975*, concluding remarks, vol. 2, p. 475.

2. De WAART, H., *Proceedings Int. Conf. on the Applications of the Mössb. effect, Bendor 2-6 Sept. 1974*, concluding remarks, p. 697.

3. FRAUENFELDER, H., *Proceedings Int. Conf. on Mössb. Spectroscopy, Bratislava, 3-7 Sept. 1973*, part 3, p. 763.

In Reply

The scientific programme of the Mössbauer Conference was arranged by the Programme Committee with the assistance of an International Advisory Committee. Well in advance of the Conference, a questionnaire was circulated to more than fifty scientists in the field in order to form a representative opinion on organization matters. One of the questions in this circular referred to the method of presentation of the contributed papers. The large response to this questionnaire played an essential rôle in the final planning of the Conference. It is interesting to note in particular that the prevailing opinion was that parallel sessions should be avoided.

The Programme Committee discussed extensively, during its first meeting, the various ways of presentation of contributed papers and agreed to a selective presentation on the basis of the following guidelines:

- (a) Sufficient time should be allowed for oral presentation of contributed papers.
- (b) These papers should be primarily selected on the basis of scientific merit but provide also a wide, coverage of current activity in the field. Effort was made as well to select papers representing a large number of Mössbauer groups.
- (c) Extended abstracts (2 pages) should be submitted well in advance : they were available to all participants at the beginning of the Conference in order to stimulate discussions and the exchange of ideas.
- (d) Ample free time should be arranged between the sessions for informal sessions in specialized fields.
- (e) Parallel sessions should be avoided.
- (f) Young and new people should be included in the programme ; also a few areas of neighbouring interest to Mössbauer spectroscopy might be represented.
- (g) Self consistent proceedings should be published shortly after the conference both to avoid duplication and to finalize the conference material.

Apparently any of the methods so far applied has merits and demerits and the success of a conference depends also on other factors of equal importance, both known and unforeseen. Whether or not, however, "the stimulation of discussions and the exchange of ideas between the largest possible number of participants" has been achieved should be judged by the results of this conference rather than by the adopted method of presentation of contributions.

The scientific programme included 12 invited and 57 contributed talks. One or half an hour was allowed for the "unknown younger scientists" not only for the contributed talks but also for the invited speakers. The claim that only 57 people presented their results in front of an audience of 220 participants is misleading. More than 90 of the participants were directly

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at the Institute of Theoretical Physics of the University of Leuven (Belgium) for one or two years, starting October 1977. Position requires interactions with staff members and students and a moderate teaching load at the graduate and postgraduate level. The current research areas at the institute are: rigorous results in statistical mechanics, theory of critical phenomena, mathematical scattering theory, applied field theory, applied field theory in elementary particle physics.

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involved in these presentations as co-authors, and a larger number were indirectly involved, as members of groups which orally presented papers or made similar contributions giving them the opportunity for comments during the discussion time. If, in ad-

dition, we take into account a significant number of participants who did not submit a paper, we find that only a small percentage were not involved in some way or other with the contributed papers.

The stimulation of discussions and the exchange of ideas was also proven by the spontaneous extra sessions that were arranged by the participants during the Conference and by the collaborations initiated in Corfu. The coverage of the whole area of applications of Mössbauer spectroscopy was considered as essential. It is actually the only justification for a conference centred on a technique rather than on a given scientific topic.

A good criterion for the success of a conference is the attendances during sessions. Many participants expressed the view that attendances at this conference were remarkably high and according to the concluding remarks :

"The fact that all the sessions were extremely well attended, despite the rival attractions of the sea and sun of this beautiful island, is a handsome tribute to the success of the Conference": We believe that any opposite claim is unfair.

We do not think that future organizing committees should follow necessarily the procedures adopted in Corfu in order to organize successful conferences. One may add that the programme committee of the Corfu Conference discussed at length the possibility of introducing poster sessions. The final consensus was against this primarily because most of the committee members had too little experience with that method on a small special topics conference. While the selection of methods of presentation of the scientific programme must be guided by previous experience, it must always be open to new experiments. In any case it should reflect the consensus of prospective participants as to what are the best conditions to promote the exchange of information which is the objective of a conference. It is in this light that we believe remarks of the preceding letter raise confusion rather than contribute to the success of a future conference.

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FACULTY OF SCIENCE

associate professor (lector) of astronomy

The position of Associate Professor (lector) of Astronomy is available at the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands), as the head of the Institute for Astronomy, with astronomy teaching duties mainly for students in physics and mathematics.

Applicants are expected to collaborate in the astronomical research activities in the Netherlands, as well as with the existing physics research groups of the Faculty of Science.

Details of the research programmes can be obtained from Prof. dr. A. Dymanus, Faculty of Science, Toernooiveld, Nijmegen (the Netherlands).

Applications with **curriculum vitae**, list of publications (and where possible reprints), together with the names and addresses of referees, should be made to :

**Prof. dr. A. G. M. Janner, chairman of the appointment committee,
Faculty of Science,
Toernooiveld, Nijmegen (the Netherlands).**