

Video Conferencing in Philately

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During the coronavirus pandemic, many people started to meet “virtually” in video conferences because physical “live” meetings were not possible. In addition to a computer with a monitor and speakers – for passive participation – you need a microphone and/or a camera to be actively heard and seen or digital images (e.g. photos or scans) of covers and stamps that you want to show. The ArGe Baltikum also set up such video conferences, for the first time in May 2021 (see report in BALTIKUM no. 12/2021 on p. 66).

After more than 40 such videoconferences, sometimes with an announced topic, sometimes “just” with what the participants had to hand and show, an unexpected positive effect has emerged: when it comes to questions about the content of document inscriptions, prints, stamps, etc., such network meetings offer opportunities for feedback that many other forms of exchange do not:

1. The “classic” form of public question and answer, by publication in a magazine with a reply by one or more readers in the next issue, was limited to the answers given; follow-up questions were extremely rare, and if they were, they were usually bilateral between the questioner and the answerer. Readers were usually not informed of the final answers.
2. Asking an expert directly (by letter with a copy of the piece in question, later by e-mail), which was assumed to have a high probability of being answered correctly, sometimes led to a satisfactory answer, but could “miss the mark” if the person knew nothing more about the subject. Again, there was no further publicity with contributions.

3. Personal encounters in the form of a visit or a get-together, e.g. in the context of a general meeting or a joint exhibition stand, also made it possible to take valuable originals, but here too the knowledge of the participants was limited - often there were neither comparative pieces nor further literature to hand.

In videoconferencing, on the other hand, participants usually have their reference materials with them or can bring them in very quickly, and literature with references is available next to the computer. In addition, the 'swarm intelligence' of all participants is 'tapped', in the sense of brainstorming, ideas are considered aloud, rejected, deepened, and one thought leads to the next - all in connection with the possibility of access to comparative pieces, literature, and the knowledge of the group. It may be that a questioner does not even think of explicitly asking a particular person because he does not expect an answer to his question, but in the context of working out an answer in the group as a whole, this can lead to completely different solutions than the questioner had in mind.

Two examples may illustrate this:

1. The following cover is shown and the meaning of the blue box stamp 'saatetud' (Estonian for 'sent') is explained. The back shows a 'normal' sender's address, the destination address is a PO box.

The discussion leads to the verification of the sender's address on Google Maps during the video chat.

Maps shows "(uus) Tallinna vangla", which means "(new) Tallinn prison". This makes it clear that the letter is part of the prison mail, presumably from a prisoner, and has a postmark to prove the date of posting.

Another cover shows the address of the former Tallinn Prison (right in Tallinn), thus explaining the postmark of the same design affixed there.

It was only during the video chat that the idea of checking the address was born, and the Estonian language skills of one of the people involved made it possible to quickly establish the circumstances.

2. The following cover is shown in an internet forum and the question is asked why it does not have the usual value imprint and has a date long before the first stamp after Latvia regained independence (which was issued in October 1991).

A catalogue owner among the participants discovers after a quick browse that it is the postal stationery Michel No. U2, which was issued on December 24, 1990. The first-day postmark reads "Rīgas Galvenais pasts" - "Main Post Office Rīga". The envelope was sold for 80 kopecks, the postmark was valid for the domestic rate of 5 kopecks (which was also

used for postage to Estonia, Lithuania and the USSR). Without the additional fee, the postmark was only valid until December 31, 1990, when the domestic fee rose to 15 kopecks.

The video chat made it possible to access a catalogue in the hands of a participant, while the questioner didn't know that this person owned a Michel postal stationery catalogue with a section on Latvia.

The list could go on and on. The monthly video chats are now a huge benefit to the participants, and it would be unthinkable to go back to a time without these video get-togethers. It makes you wonder how collaboration ever worked before. Perhaps you would like to give it a try - a "jour fixe" on the first Saturday of every month could enrich your Baltic philately hobby enormously!

Fig. 1 (top): Sender (name obscured)

Fig. 2: Front of the cover

Fig. 3: Google Maps image excerpt

Fig. 4: A postal stationery cover discussed in the video meeting