

Report on the Consultation and Deliberation Processes about the 2025 ISA Forum

September – November 2022

Should the 2025 ISA Forum of Sociology be an entirely virtual meeting? Or should it be an “in-person meeting” with some possibilities of hybrid participation? In May 2021, in the aftermath of the 2021 ISA Forum and while the COVID-19 pandemic made the future of global meetings uncertain, the ISA decided to hold the 2025 Forum online. Eighteen months later, the evolution of the pandemic and a series of information from other international scholar associations suggested that it would be wise to reopen the collective deliberation on this issue.

Two consultations of the ISA Research Committee Coordination and of the RC/WG/TG and the deliberation and vote of the Executive Committee led us to decide to hold the **2025 ISA Forum on-site** with some possibilities of hybrid participation.

The call for bids for hosting the V ISA Forum of Sociology 2025 is open until the 1st of March, 2023. It is available on the ISA website: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/call-for-bids/cfb-isa-forum>

The consultations and deliberations led not only to reverse the earlier decision but also to setting some guidelines and criteria that will be important in the selection process of the host of the 2025 Forum. This report synthesizes the consultation and voting process and the main arguments supporting this decision.

1. Context and arguments

An extensive consultation on the 2025 ISA Forum took place in 2021. A synthesis of the arguments in favour of both options was published in the “VP Research Letter #11” : <https://www.isa-sociology.org/uploads/imgen/1058-vpr-letter-11-june21.pdf>.

However, three new arguments have led to reopening this question. They were not known at the time of our previous deliberation.

1. The 2025 Forum may reveal crucial to maintaining ISA membership, as we may expect a decline because our 2023 and 2027 congresses will be held in Australia and South Korea while most of our members are based in Europe and the Americas.
2. The main regional and international professional associations in social sciences have held major congresses this year or will hold one next year. The balances of these encounters are very positive, with people enthusiastic about meeting again.
3. The ecological argument that was raised (decreasing flights) should be relativized as we expect most of our members to join another association congress if the ISA does not organize a Forum in 2025. Besides, holding international meetings on different continents will allow our members to attend one of them without travelling too far.

2. Results of the consultation

On this basis, two online consultations about the 2025 Forum have taken place in September and October 2022, among the EC-RCC (10 EC members) and then with the RC/WG/TG delegates who compose the ISA Research Council.

All the opinions expressed favoured a “presential”/ “on-site” ISA Forum in 2025, with only one exception.

It is seldom to have such a strong convergence both in the EC-RCC and the Research Council. 29 RCs, WGs or TGs replied to the consultation. A majority have reported enthusiastic and unanimous opinions in favour of a presential Forum in 2025 from the consultation they held with their RC board or among their members.

RC07 had a different but not opposed collective opinion. Its representative did not oppose but “cannot report too great enthusiasm about reopening the issue at this moment”.

Important proposals emerged during the consultation process. They were presented to the ISA Executive Committee and submitted to vote.

- 1. The call for bids for hosting the Forum should mention, “Considering the venue of recent and future congresses, the 2025 ISA Forum will be held in Europe, Africa or Latin Americas.”**
→ *The EC voted in favour of this point.*
- 2. “Some possibilities for virtual participation”.**

Several RCC members and RC delegates requested that the Forum offer some virtual participation possibilities.

It is a fact that most, if not all, “post-pandemic” international scholar meetings include some virtual participation. However, the modalities of this participation may be more complex and need to be well thought out and prepared based on previous experiences. For example, echoes from international “hybrid” congresses (notably the 2022 Congress Latin American Sociological Association ALAS) are rather negative as many participants “in presential” had limited interactions due to an important number of virtual participants.

Aaron Pitluck, president of RC02, provided a clear and insightful synthesis of the exchanges in his RC, pointing to the complexities of this issue: “We should aspire for an in-person Forum with hybrid-capability, as in Melbourne. However, we need to recognize that this aspiration may be incompatible with our desire to have the Forums in more affordable locations and universities, particularly in the Global South. Therefore, the capacity to host a hybrid conference should be an important but not necessary characteristic when determining a location for an in-person Forum.” “The Research Council could set up committees to consider the main issues of inclusion, increasing participation among young scholars and scholars from the global south, reducing the carbon footprint, and generating creative new hybrid formats (e.g. live stream plenaries and keynotes regardless of the platform either online or in-person).”

The following mention was submitted to vote to the EC:

The call for bids should mention, “The Forum will be mostly presential and organized as such, but with some modality of virtual participation. These modalities will be defined based on an assessment of the 2023 world congress of sociology by the 2023-2027 ISA ECRCC and in strong coordination with the Research Council”.

- ➔ The EC voted to include the first sentence in the bids. It considers that the way the modalities will be defined will depend on the next EC and that the bid for the Forum should not mention it.

3. A backup plan in case of a pandemic or other major issue

Four RCs and two RCC members raised the need for a “B-Plan” in case of major global problems and suggested including it as a request to the candidates: “We need to be prepared to act flexibly in response to a pandemic and world affairs. If we were to open a bid for hosting the 2025 Forum, I think we need to warn the candidates about the uncertainties and ask them to be prepared to have a backup plan.”

This point and its argument were presented to the EC and discussed. During the discussion, I expressed my personal opinion as VP Research:

The COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented us from organizing a World Congress in 2023. We hope the situation won’t get worse in 2025. However, preparing a B-plan remains important. However, I tend to consider that it is not the role of the Local Organizing Committee to anticipate these global risks. The decision to opt for a backup plan will have to be made by the ISA, and in particular by the Executive Committee. Hence, requesting the LOC to anticipate a backup plan in case of an emergency that is not known at this stage would result in an additional burden to an already complex application. My suggestion is to add a sentence in the contract about what may happen in case of international hazards or a new rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, following the practices of other international scholar organizations.

- ➔ The EC voted not to include this point in the call for bids.

4. Points that should be included in the call based on previous ISA experience and opinions expressed by RC/WG/TG

1. A preference for a Forum organized on a university campus rather than in conference centres.
2. The Forum should be held on one site or on very nearby sites, and not spread around the city. Different sites should be within a 5-10 minutes walking distance.
3. The Research Council and the ISA as a whole are very committed to fostering diversity and inclusion among the participants of the Forum. In this perspective, we will pay particular attention to the following items:
 - a. Visa: How open is the country to researchers from the global south? What mechanisms will be implemented by the LOC to help participants who need a visa to get it?

- b. Affordable housing for a part of the participants. It may consist of student dorms, solidarity housing or other initiatives.
- The EC considered that these three points were agreed upon previously and did not need a vote. They will be included in the call for bids.
- 4. The RCC has published some recommendations for adopting greener practices in the organizing of a Forum.
 - The VPR asked the secretariat to inform the candidate about this document and will raise these issues during the ISA Forum host selection process. (No vote needed.)

5. Deliberation and decision modality about the 2025 Forum

RC07 delegate has requested that, “If the EC reopens this question, it should consider a poll to the full ISA membership as the best way to assess preference on this type of matter. However, if such a poll were to be organized, it should not be rushed but only held after a period of deliberation (perhaps on webspace for comments pro/con).”

As it is a legitime concern and opinion raised by a RC, this point was presented and discussed during the EC meeting.

After presenting the argument, I shared the following opinion as VP Research.

I considered that all the elements were gathered for the EC to take a well-informed decision on these topics after two consultations.

- As reported above, the consultations took place. RC presidents and delegates had six weeks to consult their members or board members.
 - The modality of the consultation of the Research Council clearly stated that it was a consultation and that the decision would be taken by the EC.
 - The consultations delivered a clear result: almost unanimous and very enthusiastic support for a presential Forum, both among the EC-RCC and the RCs. Further consultations or a vote by the Research Council would have been set up if the result was more split.
 - Time is scarce to find a host for the 2025 Forum, and even more if we want to beneficiate from Izabela’s experience in the call and selection process.
- The EC was informed about this request and considered itself as well-informed about the consultations that took place and legitimate to take the final decision concerning the online or offline nature of the 2025 Forum.