

SIETAR Congress – a description

An informal description of what usually takes place at a SIETAR Europa Congress

When and Where?

Congresses take place every two years usually at the end of May. This is usually a good time for academics and most University campuses are available.

We have held Congresses in many locations around Europe – see end of this document for a list of past Congresses. You can also read more about the past events on the SIETAR Website [here](#).

How many attendees?

Most Congresses are attended by around 300 people depending on the location and costs.

Format

Pre-Congress

While the full Congress starts on the Wednesday evening there are usually extra Pre-Congress workshops on the Monday and Tuesday. These workshops are not included in the cost of the Congress and attendees must pay extra for them. They are usually half-day, full day or even two day workshops and sometimes include some form of certification.

Cocktail Party Launch

Actual Congress usually starts on the Wednesday evening with a “cocktail reception” with some of the local important people – politicians and maybe people from the venue particularly if the venue is a university as it often is. This reception used to be only for people presenting at the Congress but in recent years it has been open to anyone attending the Congress who is there on the Wednesday.

Main Congress

The Congress workshops and presentations take place on the Thursday, Friday and part of Saturday. This is the [program for the Lille Congress in 2024](#). Note that the Saturday schedule ended at 12:30 in 2022 but the Saturday session have on occasion gone on longer.

Sunday sessions

At some Congresses there have been events on the Sunday. These can be anything from very informal get-togethers to more paid workshops. There were no Sunday events at the Lille Congress.

“Gala Dinner”

There is always a social event at the Congress usually referred to as a “Gala Dinner”. This used to always happen on the Saturday evening when all presentations are finished but it was switched to the Friday evening at recent Congresses so that people leaving on the Saturday evening could attend. The Friday sessions are usually better attended but many people would prefer to have the event on the Saturday when everyone could relax. When the event is on the Friday it tends to be more low key as many people are presenting or attending events the next day. The Saturday events tend to be more “relaxed”. There have been a few legendary Gala Dinner events and one or two flops.

Formats have been everything from full formal evening wear events with sit-down dinner, a band with dancing to an informal meeting in a bar with loud music.

Film Festival

At most recent Congresses there has been a film festival in parallel with the main Congress. This involves the showing of a film followed by a discussion. The films all have a theme of interest to interculturalists. The discussions are usually very lively. This did not take place in Lille but could be an option for future Congresses

Workshop/Presentation Formats

There is a huge variety of workshops and presentation formats. They can involve anything from a straightforward presentation of material with Q&A to very interactive learning formats. The format is entirely up to the presenter

The slots in the schedule vary in lengths from 30 to 90 minutes.

Where to the Workshops/Presentations take place?

Most Congresses take place in an academic institute or a large hotel with conference facilities. Ideally, and usually, the rooms used are not far from each other so that participants can walk from room to room depending on what they want to attend. It has happened that some Congresses were more dispersed but this creates problems getting to the rooms in time. The Congress in Lille was in a university setting in a newly built venue. The rooms were all close to each other and coffee breaks and lunch will also be right near the rooms.

There is usually a variety of room sizes available from rooms holding 20-30 people up to auditoriums holding 200 people or more. Rooms are allocated depending on format and likely attendance. Some presenters or topics are more popular than others.

Who gets to present?

There is a process whereby people who wish to present make a submission to a committee. The Program Committee, as it is called, will review all submissions and based on the criteria they have put in place will accept or reject a proposal. In recent years one of the criteria has been to favour new presenters. SIETAR has a number of members who seemed to present at every event and feedback from attendees suggested a need for “new faces”. Submissions should of course align with the theme of the Congress although there is usually a lot of latitude around this.

Once there is a list of accepted submissions, the program can then be built. This is a challenging job.

Access to the Program

In the past, attendees were given a printed program on arrival but in recent years the program is entirely electronic. A phone app and website is used to access the program and to allow attendees to create a personal diary.

Some attendees though still like to print out the whole program as they find it easier to decide what slots to attend.

Food at the Congress

The Congress caters for lunch in the middle of the day and supplies coffee and snacks for breaks. Normally attendees decide in advance if they wish to pay for lunch food i.e. they pay extra when they register. Depending on the venue and local catering, lunch can be anything from a full sit down lunch to a paper bag with snacks. Coffee and snacks for morning and afternoon breaks are usually included in the registration fee.

For breakfast and evening meals people make their own arrangements. Usually groups of people go to dinner in the evenings. They have also been known to have a beer or a glass of wine.....

Travel to the Congress

Attendees come from all over the world but mainly from Europe. In the past of course most people flew to the Congress either because they felt there was no alternative, Malta for example, or it is just what they always do.

Clearly people coming from the USA, Japan, Argentina or other distant countries there is little choice but to fly.

Travel at the Congress

This is heavily dependent on the city in which the Congress is held. Valetta for example was not great on public transport and many people resorted to taxis. Lille on the other hand was a paradise for public transport. It should be stressed too that many people avoid using public transport because they don't take the time to work out the "system". Things like where to buy a ticket, can you pay on board, fines, how to find bus stops or stations are often daunting for some people. Some love the challenge, others just want to take a taxi.

Accommodation

At most Congresses attendees will arrange for their own accommodation. The organisers usually provide a list of local hotels that have a Congress reduced rate but at Congresses in the Internet era most people seek out value via other means. It is interesting to note that some attendees like to seek out more up-market accommodation while others are happy with more modest places.

At the congress in Dublin the organising company acquired a range of student accommodations at very reasonable rates which allowed many delegates to avoid the expensive hotels in Dublin.

While most people try to stay close to the venue it has been the case for many attendees that if they book late it is difficult to find somewhere convenient. At the Congress in Malta some people had quite a journey to get to the event but in Lille most people were able to get accommodation close to the venue

Prepared by Joe Kearns, 18th January 2026

PAST CONGRESSES

- Lille, France, May 2024 - Systems: The Ecosystem of Interculturalism
- **Valetta**, Malta, May 2022 - Re-Thinking Interculturalism
- **Leuven**, Belgium, May 2019 - Building Dialogues on Diversity
- **Dublin**, Ireland, May 2017 - 21st Century Waves of Change
- **Valencia**, Spain, May 2015 - Refreshing the Cultural Paradigm: Sharing Stories, Theories and Next Practices
- **Tallinn**, Estonia, September 2013 - Global Reach, Local Touch
- **Krakow**, Poland, September 2011 - Interculturalism Ahead: Transition to a Virtual World?
- **Granada**, Spain, October 2008 - Global SIETAR Congress (Incl. SIETAR Europa)
- **Sofia**, Bulgaria, April 2007
- **La Colle-sur-Loup**, France, September 2005
- **Berlin**, Germany, April 2004
- **Budapest**, Hungary, May 2003
- **Vienna**, Austria, April 2002
- **Stavanger**, Norway, May 2001
- **Brussels**, Belgium, March 2000
- **Trieste**, Italy, February 1999
- **Bath**, United Kingdom, April 1998
- **Poitiers**, France, March 1997
- **Munich**, Germany, June 1996
- **Prague**, Czech Republic, March 1995
- **Jyvaskyla**, Finland, March 1994
- **Bad Nauheim**, Germany, March 1993
- **Colle Val d'Elsa**, Italy, March 1992
- **Haarlem**, The Netherlands, March 1991