

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2021

Participant survey report

A report based on the participant surveys for the

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2021

held in Marseille

3-11 September 2021

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IUCN Congress - Participant survey

1. About the World Conservation Congress

The IUCN World Conservation Congress is IUCN's highest-profile event and the highest decision-making body. Held once every four years, the Congress brings together leaders and decision-makers from government, civil society, indigenous peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to global challenges.

The event has three main components – the Forum, the Members' Assembly and the Exhibition and lasts 8 days in total. See [here](#) for more information. The last IUCN World Conservation Congress took place in Marseille, France from 3 to 11 September 2021 and after two postponements due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was designed as a hybrid event. The Congress hosted onsite sessions, hybrid sessions (onsite and online attendees) and fully virtual sessions.

2. Post-Congress Survey

At the end of September 2021, the Congress Unit ran a post-Congress Survey via the Survey Monkey platform. Separate surveys were sent to two different categories of registered participants:

- A survey focusing on onsite participation was sent to all participants attending the Congress onsite - 5200 individuals.
- A survey focusing on online participation was sent to all participants registered as online participants - 3500 individuals.

The surveys were designed and customized to address the specificities of the onsite versus online participation. It should be noted that both surveys were sent to all event attendees, whatever their level of participation in the event. This means that speakers, organizers, and event attendees of each event format, all received the same survey. As a result, it can be expected that responses came primarily from the participants most engaged in the event or to put it differently daily participants or those who only attended a few online sessions were probably less likely to reply to this survey. It is also customary for event surveys to capture mainly the strongest opinions, both the most positive and the most negative ones.

3. Participant survey - Onsite Participation

The onsite participation survey had a total of 683 responses with a completion rate of 89%. This corresponds to a response rate of 13%, which is similar although a bit lower than for the 2016 Congress (16%). The survey was sent via e-mail to all participants on 23 of September and was open for two weeks.

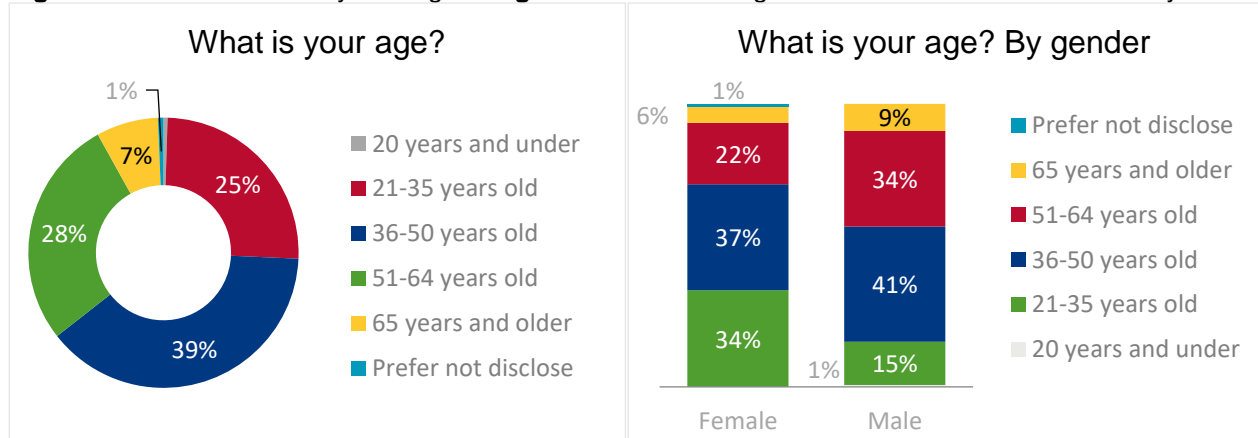
The survey analysis begins with a summary of the respondents' demographics and professional affiliations. It also includes information on the role they played in the Congress. Section 3.2 provides details about their level of participation followed by the analysis of the attendees' perception of the Congress, the Forum, sessions and exhibition hall (section 3.3

to 3.6). The analysis finishes with a review of the feedback of how participants navigated the event and general comments.

3.1. About the attendees

Respondents to the onsite survey were overall evenly distributed by gender (details in Appendix 1 Q26). However, there is a trend that shows there were significantly more women than men ($p < 0.05$) in the age range between 21 and 35 years old while there were significantly more men than women ($p < 0.05$) in the age range between 51 and 64 years old.

Fig. 1. Q25 What is your age. **Fig. 2.** Gender segmentation of Q25 What is your age.



The onsite survey had participants from a wide variety of professional sectors. Most of the respondents had an affiliation with an NGO (43%), followed by government and public entities with 15%, academia with 10%, and business and trade/ industry associations with 8%. The 56 respondents that signalled to be affiliated with another type of organisation are mainly IUCN staff (Figure 3). Survey participants travelled to Marseille in France from a variety of regions. Half of the respondents travelled from within France or West Europe. At the same time, regions like Oceania and Eastern Europe made only 2% of the respondents each, and west Asia only 3% (Figure 4).

Fig. 3 Q23 Which category best describes your professional affiliation?

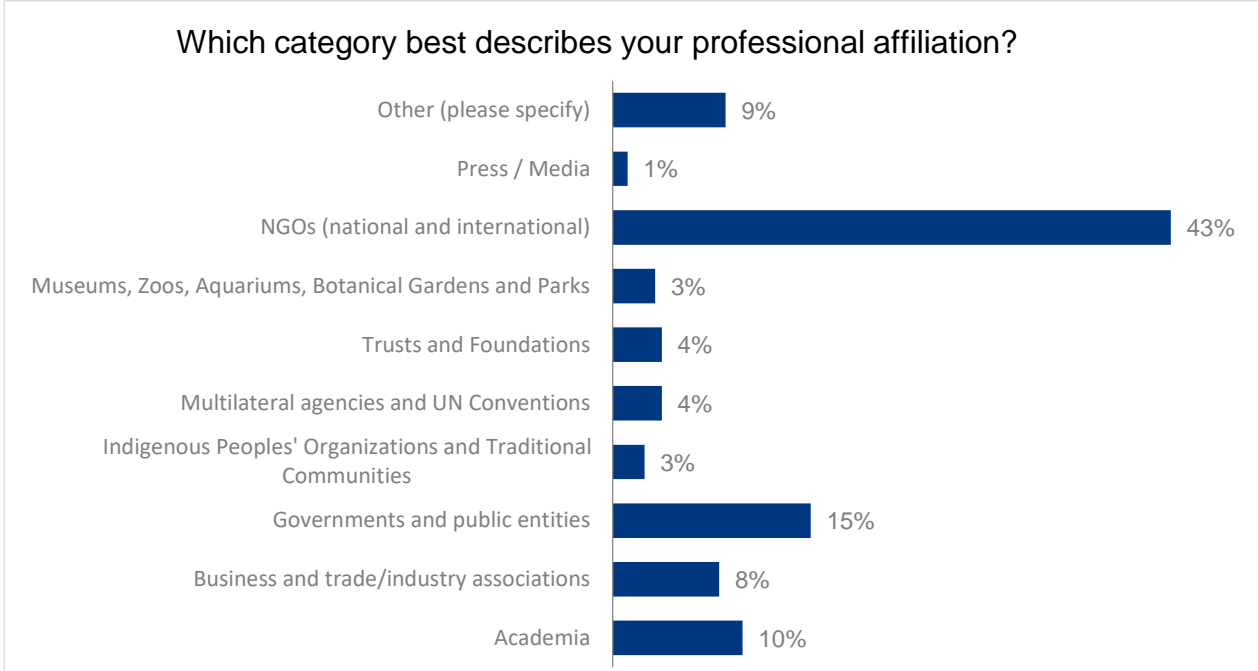
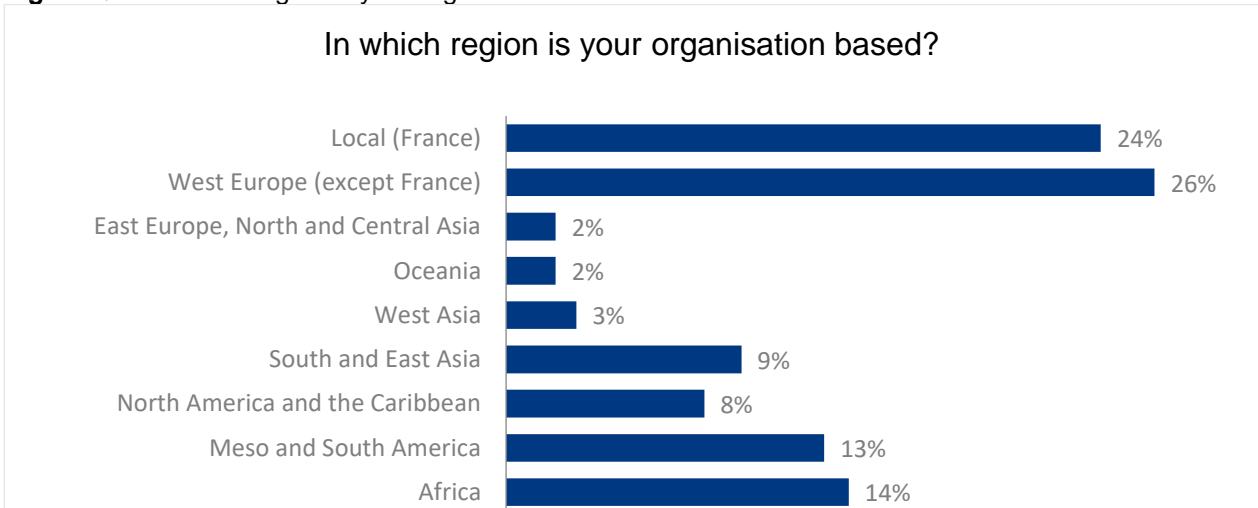
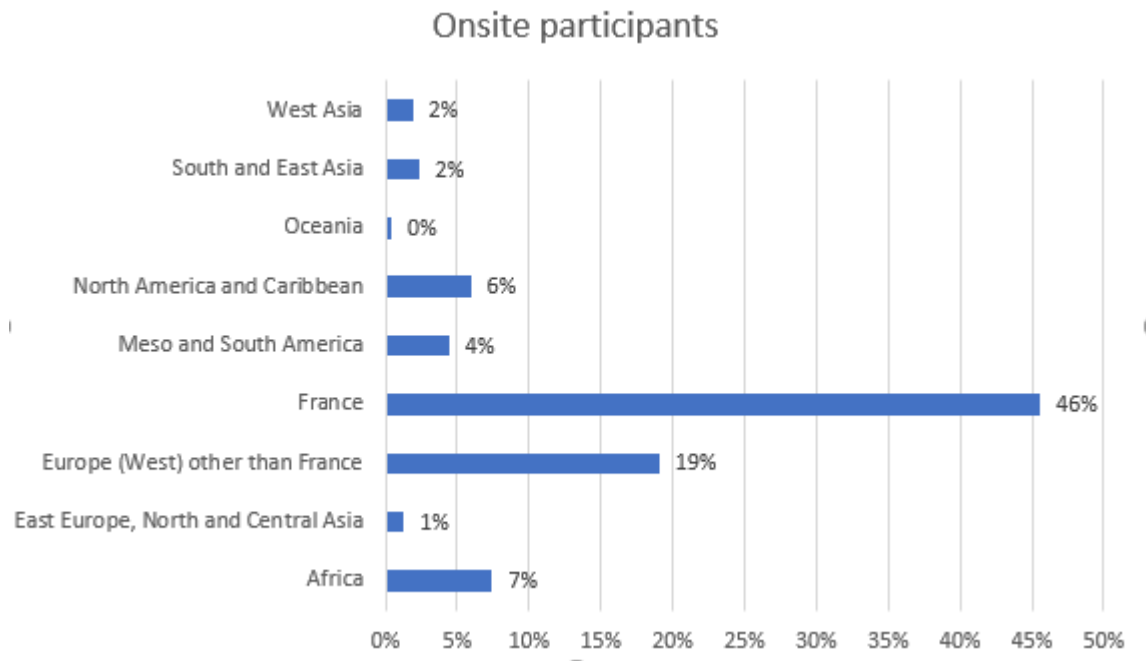


Fig. 4. Q22 In which region is your organisation based?



The actual participation numbers per region onsite were less balanced than the response rates shown in Figure 4. Onsite participation was largely dominated by France (46%) and West Europe (19%) as can be seen in figure 5. The reason why response rates from France and Europe were lower than the actual onsite participation is probably that most daily participants came from this region (60% of participants from France were daily participants) and they would be less inclined to respond to a satisfaction survey. South and East Asia, as well as Meso and South America, had a significantly higher response rate in the survey than actual onsite participation.

Fig. 5. Actual onsite participant numbers per region; source: Congress registration system



The respondents' profiles were spread among the categories established. 44% of the respondents were representatives from an IUCN Member organisation (this question allowed for multiple answers). 22% of the respondents also played a role as speaker, presenter or moderator, and 12% were exhibitors or sponsors (details in Appendix 1 Q21). Almost without exception (92%), survey participants consider themselves as part of the conservation sector.

3.2. About the attendee's participation in the Congress

The event lasted a total of 9 days, and more than half of the survey participants attended the Congress onsite for more than 7 days (Figure 6). The exhibition hall was one the most attended parts of the Congress by respondents, together with the Forum. Out of all respondents, 95% participated in the exhibition hall, 89% participated in the Forum sessions, and 58% participated in the Members' Assembly. Regarding the Forum attendees, the survey shows most of them registered for the full Forum, instead of having only a day pass registration (details in Appendix 1 Q2/Q4/Q5).

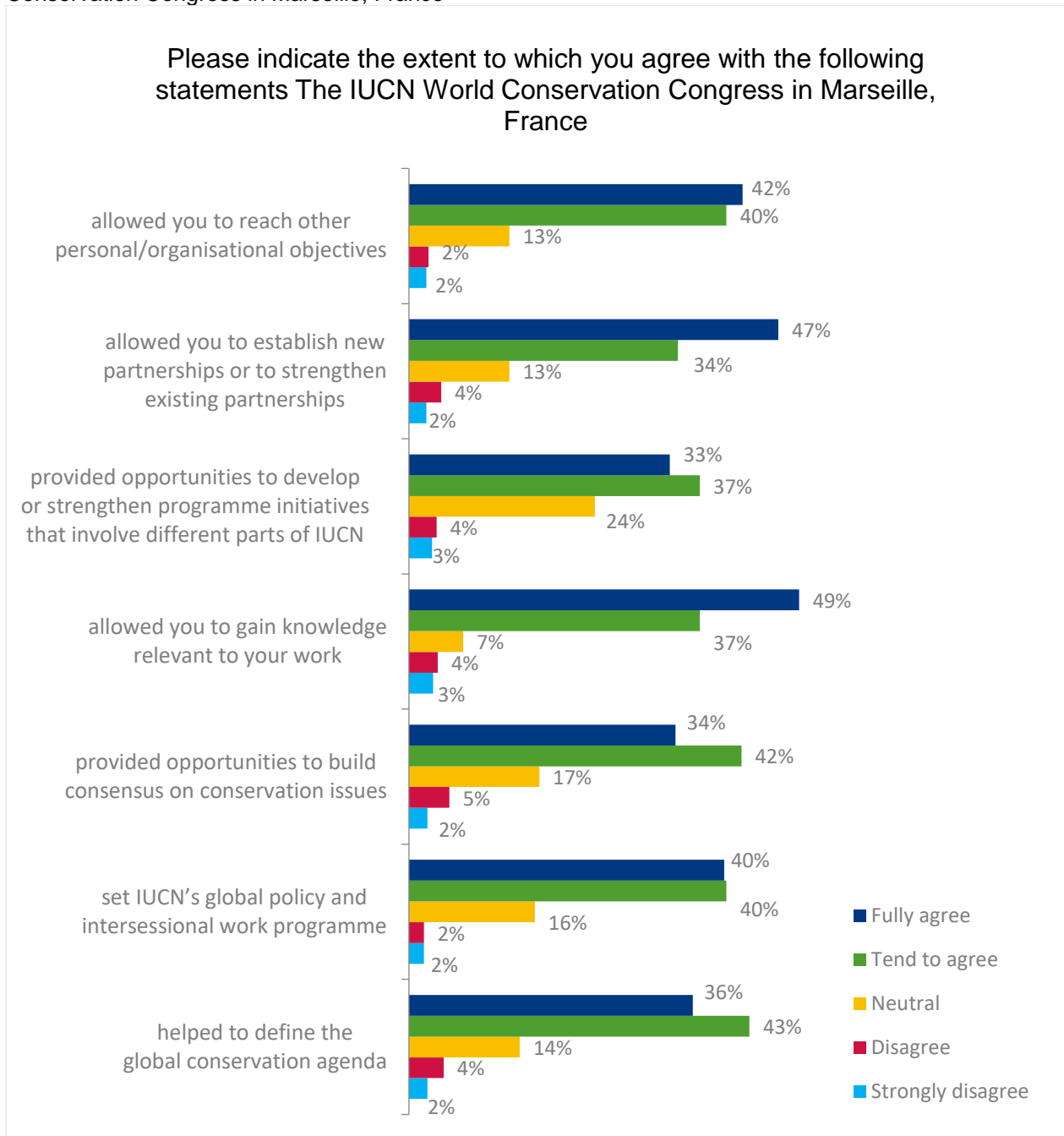
Fig. 6. Q3 How many days did you attend the IUCN Congress?



3.3. Attendees perception of the Congress

In general, survey participants of the onsite Congress perceived it as an opportunity to gain knowledge relevant for their work, as well as a place to establish new partnerships and strengthen existing ones. *“Everything was fine and excellent, I have learned lot and made my expected networking and objectives, especially on indigenous conservation and biodiversity issues”*. Respondents show this event continues to be perceived as important to define the global conservation agenda. It is an opportunity for attendees to build on personal and/or organisational objectives, more than an event to concentrate exclusively on IUCN related initiatives.

Fig. 7. Q1 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements The IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille, France



When evaluating the different parts of the Congress, the Forum was the most valuable component for respondents, followed by the exhibition hall. These, two aspects were also the most attended by survey participants. Other components of the event, like the summits and the closing ceremony, only achieved a 50% attendance of respondents (details in Appendix 1 Q2).

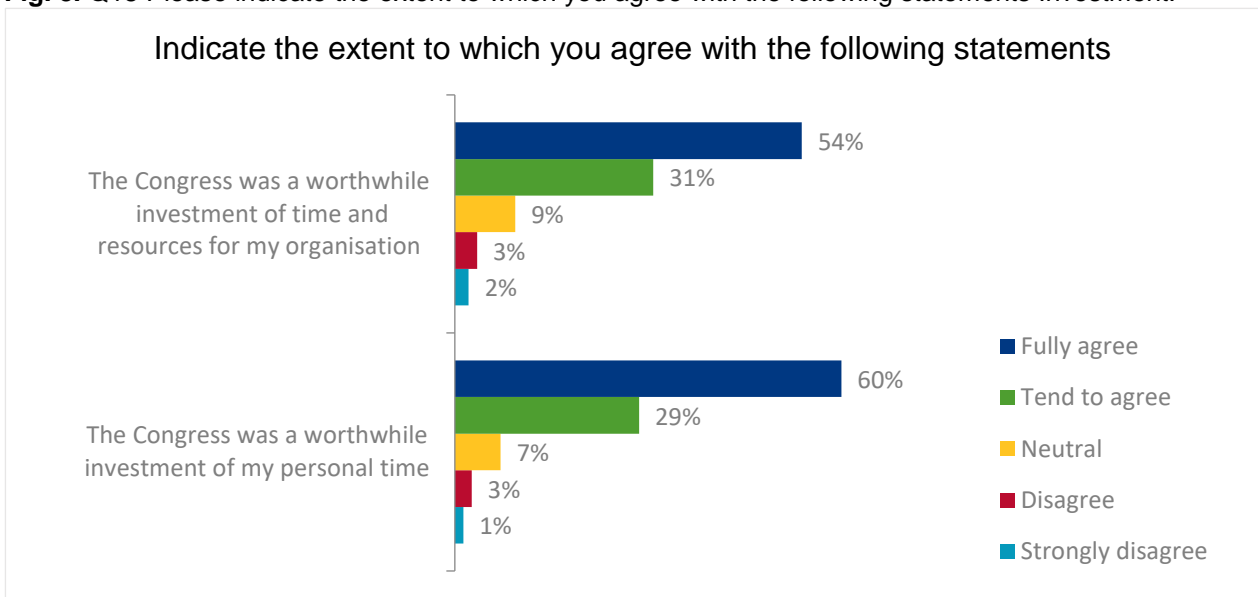
Respondents were divided when asked about the number of parallel events. While 52% of them think there were too many events in parallel, 45% think the number of events was just right (details in Appendix 1 Q7). This topic is one of the top 5 challenges expressed in the respondents' final comments. *"Too many events were organized at the same time. This reduced the benefits and possibilities to learn and exchange with others..."* It is important to

review this subject in detail and to do so in combination with the results from the navigation tools in section 3.6. of this report. Difficulties navigating the program with the app and online tools might have made it more challenging for attendees to organize their agendas. This decreases the feeling of control and satisfaction, especially when they feel they missed some pieces due to agenda clashes, or last minute session cancellations (details in Appendix 1 Q27).

Nonetheless, 89% of respondents agree on some level with the statement that the Congress was a good investment of their personal time. It is important to note that those with a professional affiliation to 'Business and trade/industry associations' show more than twice the average level of disagreement with this statement, reaching 8% compared to the average of 3% (details in Appendix 1 Q18 by business affiliation).

Similarly, 85% of respondents see the Congress as a good investment for their organisations. Looking in detail at responses among the different participant categories i.e. general participant, exhibitor, sponsor, speaker, there were no significant variations in the level of disagreement with any of these two statements. There were variations in the agreement levels with it, but in general, results were very positive (details in Appendix 1 Q18 by participant category).

Fig. 8. Q18 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements Investment.



3.4. Attendees perception of the Forum

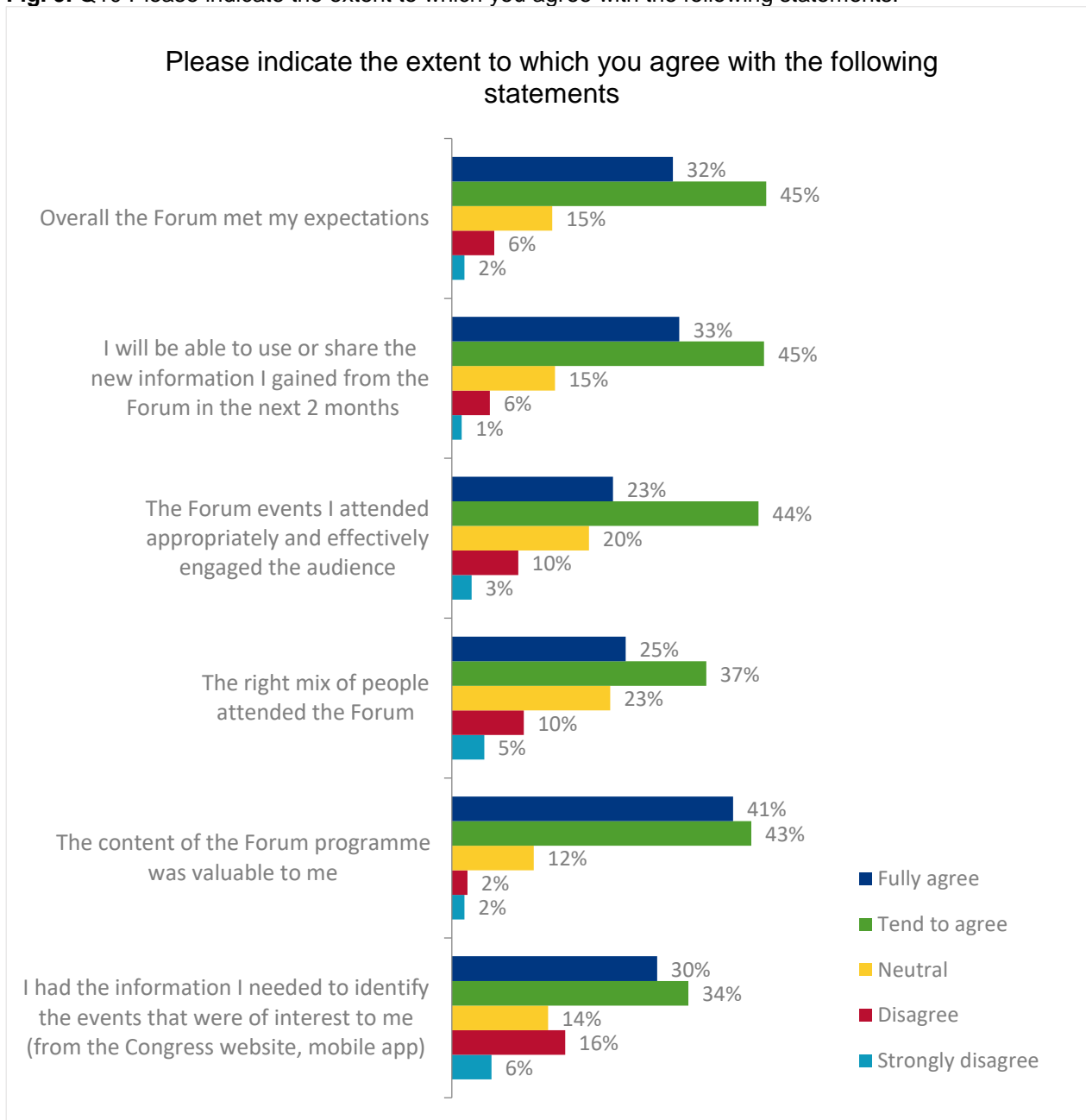
In summary, the great majority of the respondents found that the Forum content was valuable to them. Overall, it met their expectations and provided them with valuable information that they will be able to share in the following two months.

“Thank you very much for the opportunity of being part of the Congress. It was such an amazing experience, hearing from conservation leaders from around the world helped me to understand better the role that we, as youth, must follow from now on”.

Figure 9 shows the level of agreement of respondents around additional statements.

It is important to note that the challenge related to the availability of information to identify the events of interest to attendees (from the Congress website and mobile app) affected 22% of respondents.

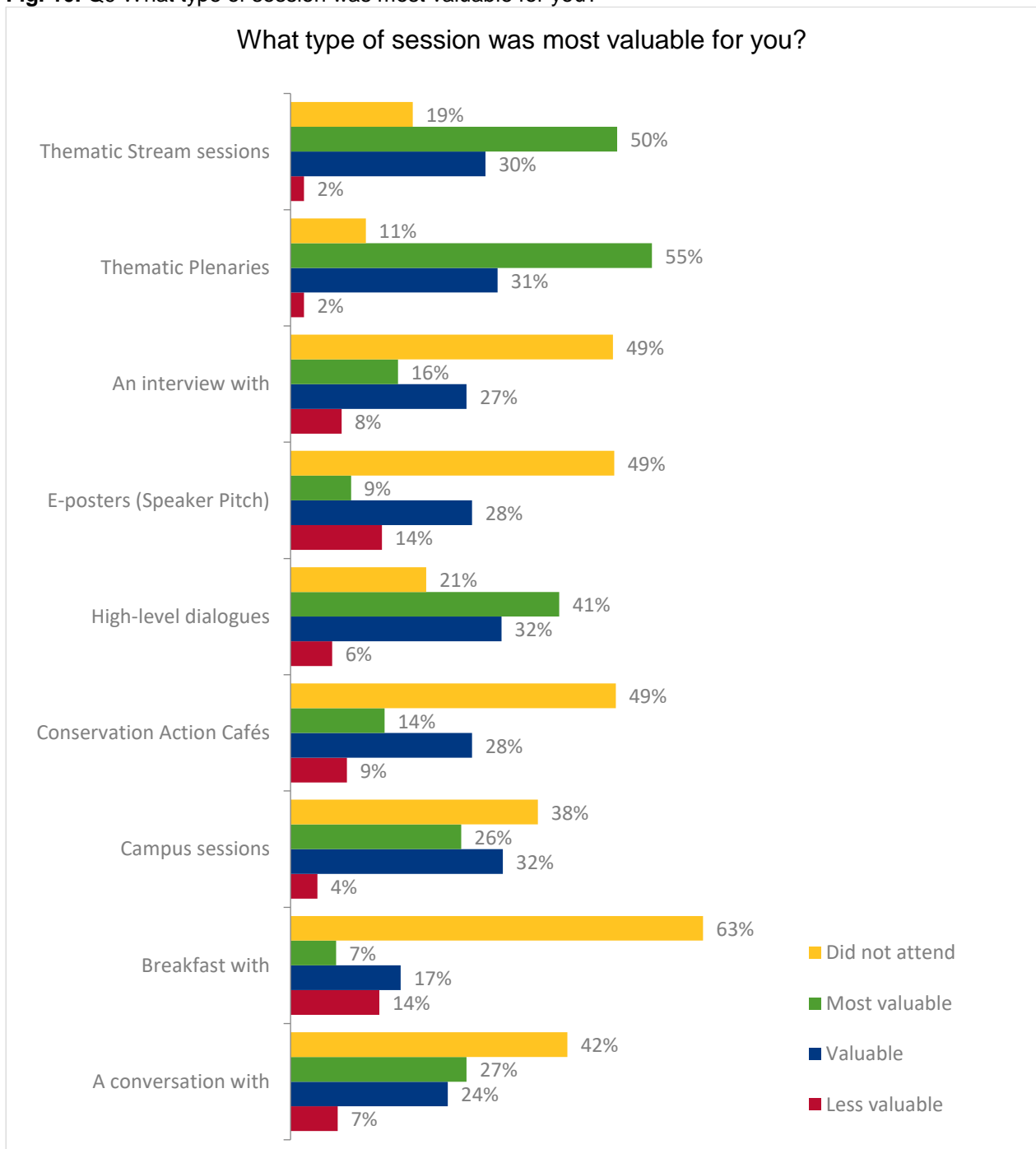
Fig. 9. Q10 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.



3.5. Attendees perception of the sessions

In general, the most valuable sessions for the respondents were the thematic plenaries and the thematic stream sessions, followed closely by the High-level dialogues. Some of the other sessions had lower attendance rates among the respondents, nevertheless, among the attendees for those sessions the content was scored as valuable e.g. 'Campus sessions, 'An interview with', 'Conservation action cafes' and 'A conversation with'. The least attended session was 'A breakfast with' (Figure 10).

Fig. 10. Q9 What type of session was most valuable for you?



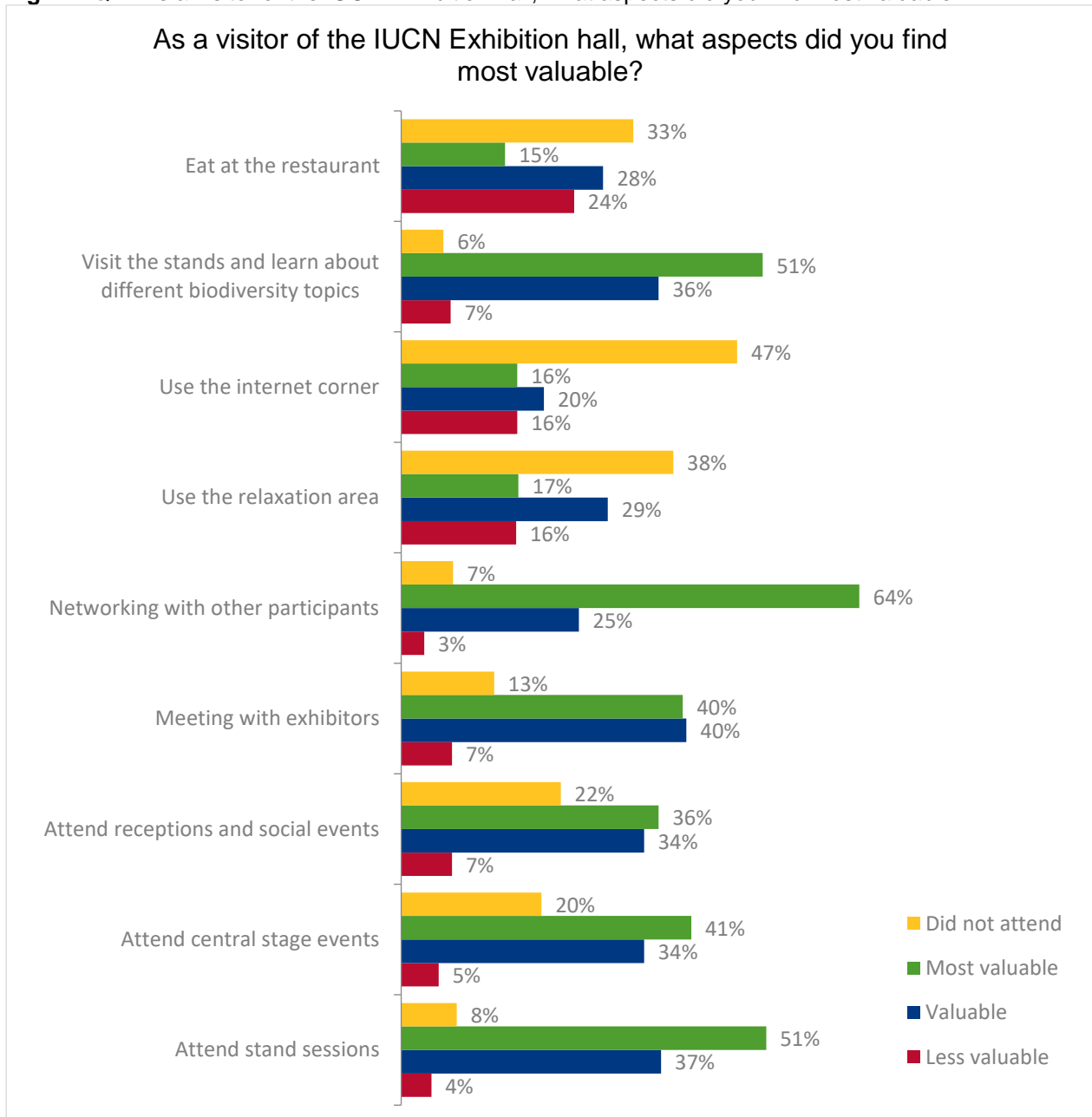
3.6. Attendees perception of exhibition

Almost all respondents visited the IUCN exhibition hall. From all the different experiences available in the hall, the most valuable for survey participants was the space to network with other participants. Attending stand sessions, and learning about biodiversity throughout the different stands was also highly valued by respondents.

The aspect rated as the least valuable by 24% of the respondents was 'eating at the restaurant'. Some of the comments identified through this survey highlighted the importance

of reducing the amount of meat offered, thus increasing the vegetarian and vegan options (Figure 11).

Fig. 11. Q12 As a visitor of the IUCN Exhibition hall, what aspects did you find most valuable?



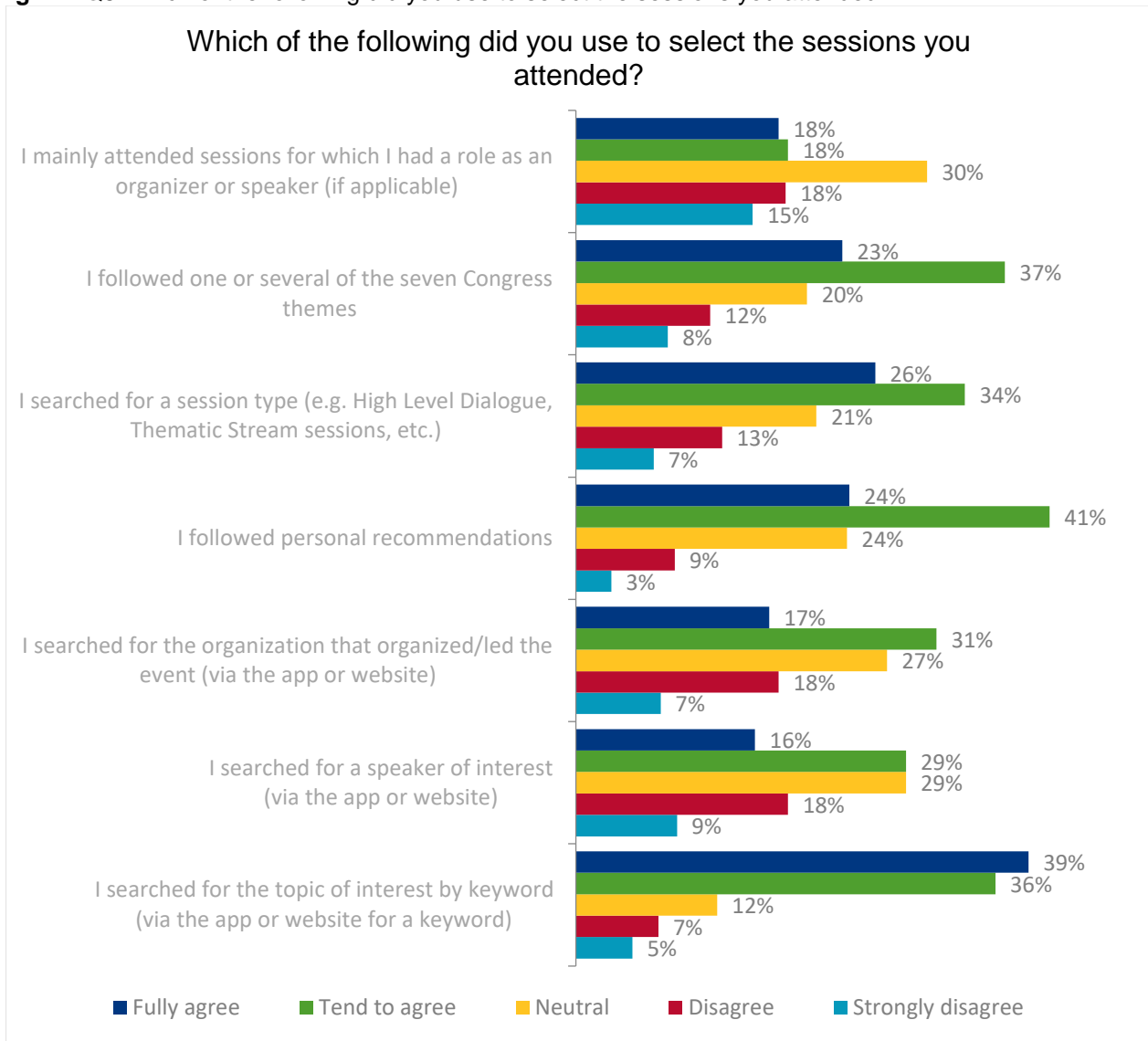
3.7. Navigating the Congress and IT tools usage

There were many ways for participants to select the events they wanted to attend. The use of keywords was very useful for respondents to find events related to their interests, both in the app or the Congress website. The seven themes of the Congress were also a good tool for them. Another option appreciated was to follow the Congress by session type, by just following the high-level dialogues, for example (Figure 12).

One of the respondents commented this. *“It would be interesting if a person registers for certain thematic sessions, an information newsletter could tell him, for example, which other*

sessions are on the same theme (example: the role of civil society in actions for the benefit of Nature; or, which sessions could interest local communities and local governments ...)”.

Fig. 12. Q8 Which of the following did you use to select the sessions you attended?



In addition to the onsite sessions, there were online sessions that visitors could attend through the live and video on demand platform while at the event. 62% of the respondents that were onsite did attend virtual sessions during Congress. For those who decided not to check in to such online sessions, 68% indicated that the busy agenda onsite was the main reason (details in Appendix 1 Q13/Q14).

There are recordings available for the participants to replay most of the sessions after the Congress. 70% of survey participants have indicated they plan to make use of that. This is especially true for the respondents between the age bracket from 36 to 64 years old, who showed significantly more willingness to use the recordings compared to respondents in the age brackets below and above (details in Appendix 1 Q15).

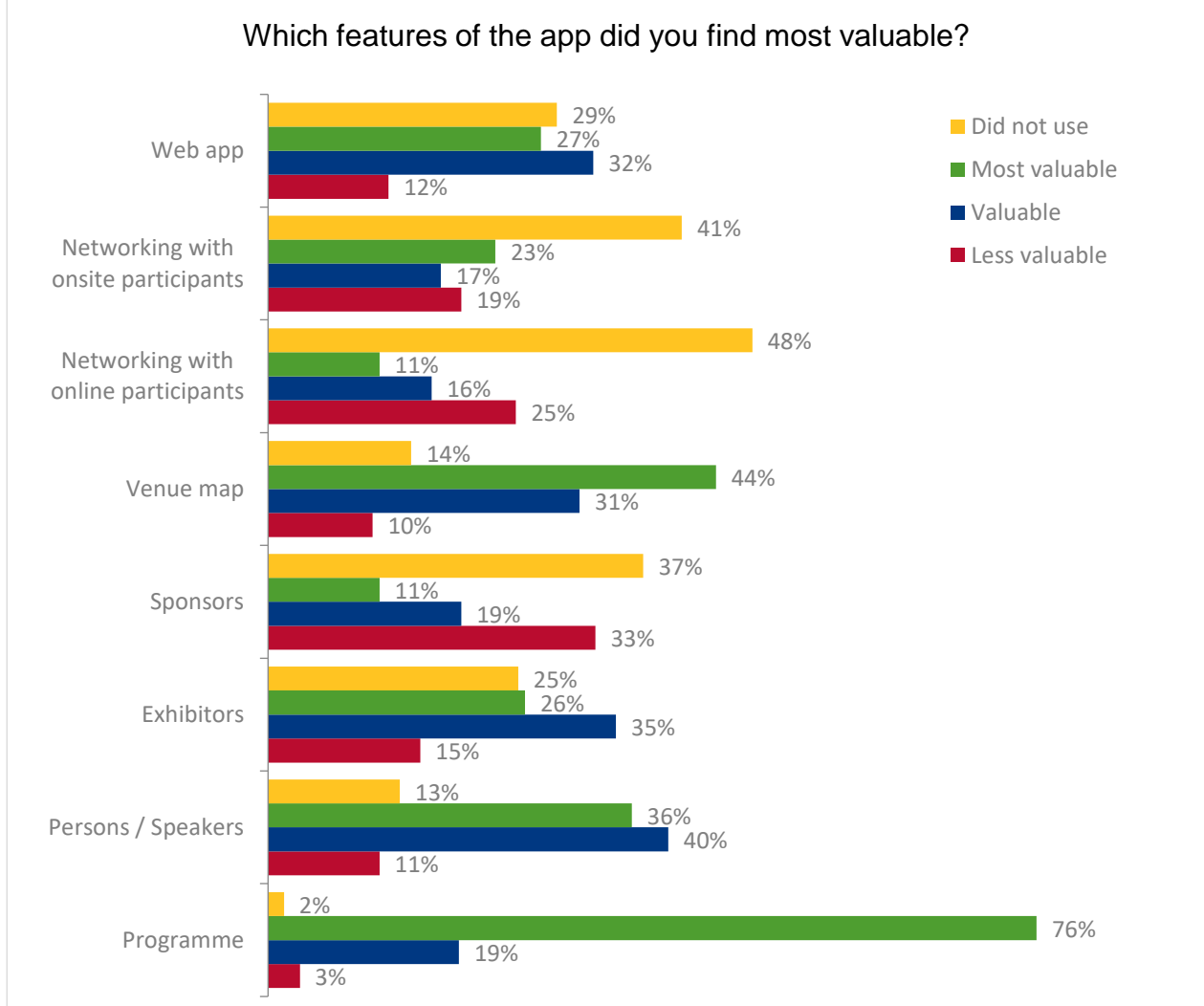
The mobile app was highly used throughout the event by 73% of the respondents, especially the following features: consult the programme, navigate the event with the map and find

information about speakers. It is important to highlight that the app, together with the Congress website, were the most popular topics among the respondents' comments.

The summary of the comments on the app and website revealed:

- The app can be more user friendly (accessibility, functionality, complexity)
- The app can be improved to allow for better networking.
- The app should be made available in advance for users to familiarize themselves with it beforehand.
- Content should be more integrated (app and website)

Fig. 13. Q17 Which features of the app did you find most valuable?

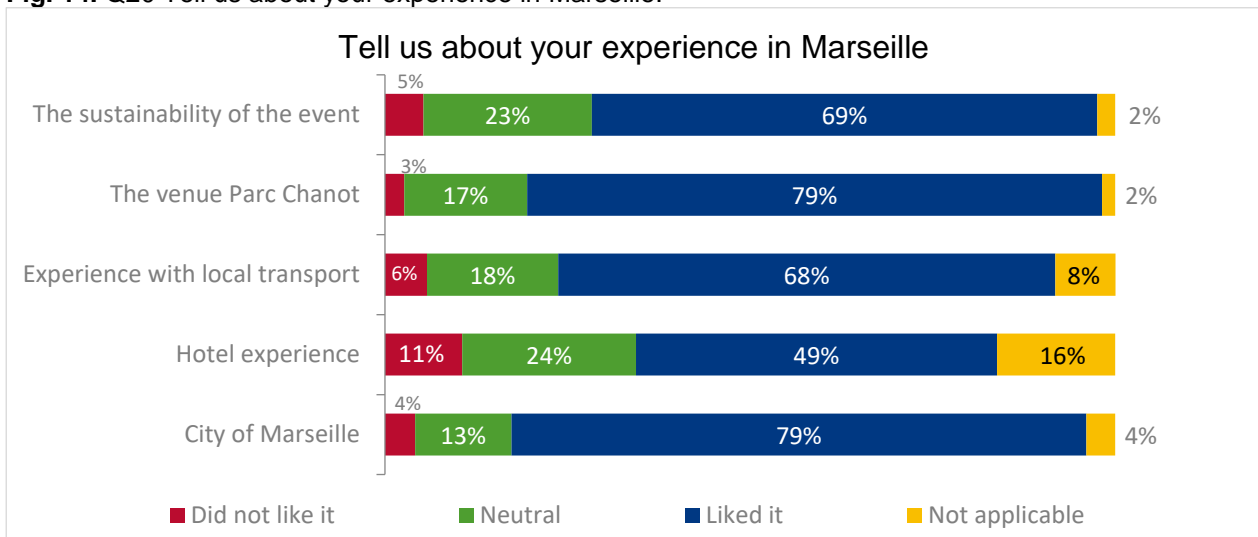


Finally, the survey respondents expressed their high interest in participating again in the event, with only 6% stating they are not planning to attend again. Half of the respondents would attend a hybrid event, while 40% still prefer an onsite only event. An exclusively online event was not a popular option (3%).

In general, the respondents appreciated both the city of Marseille and the Parc Chanot venue. They also expressed their gratitude towards the sustainability of the Congress (Figure 14).

“The sustainability of the event was a great example of how Congress should be managed. It was a great experience for me the entire Congress!!!”

Fig. 14. Q20 Tell us about your experience in Marseille.



3.8. Survey additional comments

A total of 251 comments were received at the end of the onsite Congress survey. 32.3% of these comments have been categorized as positive comments and 9.2% as very negative. In addition to this, the top 5 themes identified throughout the comments were:

- **Online platform & app:** discussing the app and website challenges regarding user-friendliness, the lack of inter-connectivity between the two tools, and a missing feature to allow interaction with the speakers and other attendees.
- **Food:** highlighting limited menu options for vegans and vegetarians compared with other meal choices and the limited amount of food available.
- **Agenda:** discussing overlapping sessions and the feeling of complexity of the events' agenda.
- **Representation and diversity:** Calling attention to the low Asian representatives, language barriers and indigenous participation.
- **Sustainability:** Praising initiatives like water fountains, reusable water bottles and QR codes for brochures online.

See all comments in Appendix 3.

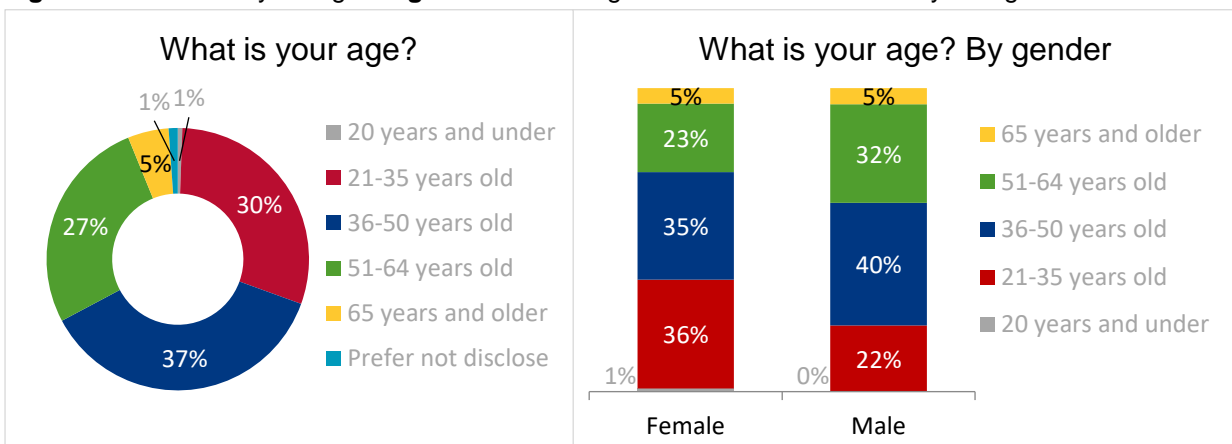
4. Participant survey - Online Participation

The online participation survey had a total of 357 responses with a completion rate of 100%. This corresponds to a response rate of 10%, which is lower than for the previous Congress (16%) and for the onsite participation evaluation (13%). The survey was sent via e-mail to all participants on 23 of September and was open for two weeks. The survey analysis begins with a summary of the information collected about the respondents' demographics and professional affiliations. In addition, there is information on the role they played in the Congress. The following section revises an indicator of their attendance at the different online sessions. After that, there is a detailed evaluation of the respondents' perception of the Congress and the online sessions. The analysis finalizes with the subject of navigating the online event and the respondents' perception of the live stream tools and on-demand video platform.

4.1. About the attendees

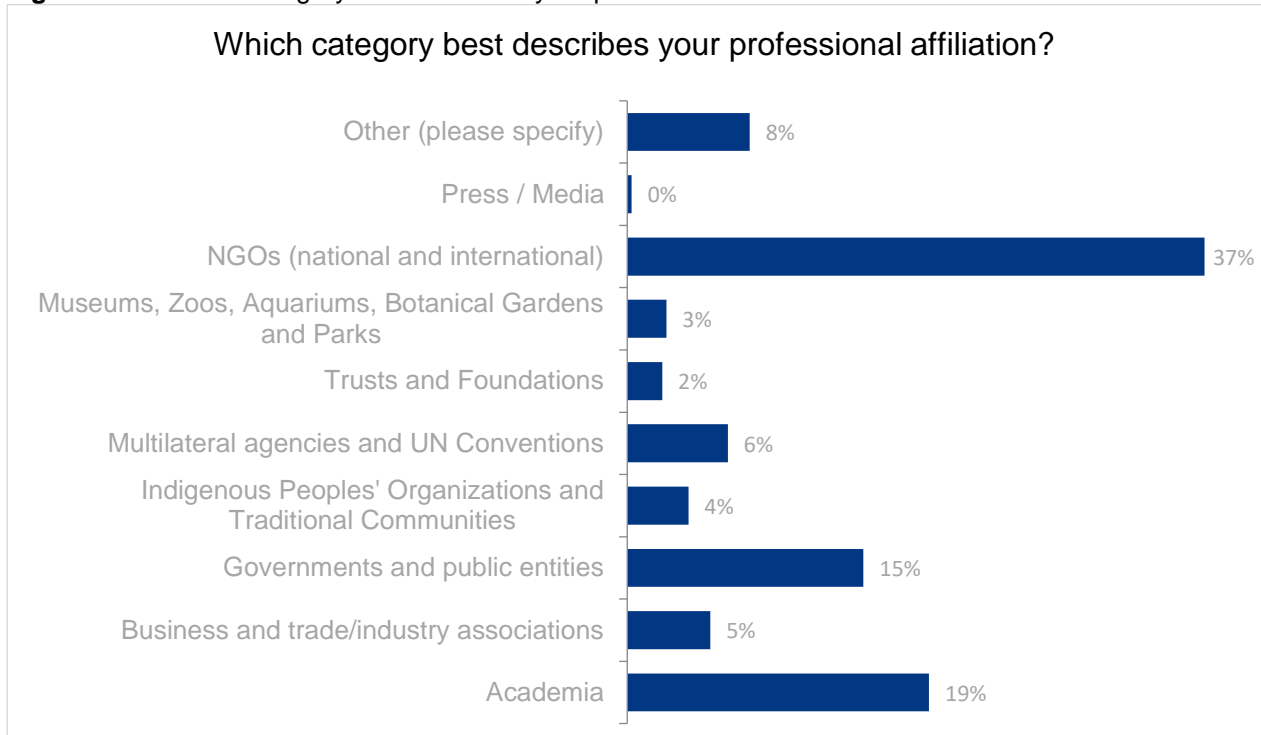
There were slightly more women 55% than men in the online event survey. Compared to the onsite event survey, there were 5% more people in the 21-35 age gap. Furthermore, the gender/age trend seen in the onsite Congress survey continues. There were significantly more women than men ($p < 0.05$) in the age range between 21 and 35 years old, while there were significantly more men than women ($p < 0.05$) in the age range between 51 and 64 years old.

Fig. 15. Q19 What is your age? **Fig. 15.** Gender segmentation of Q19 What is your age.



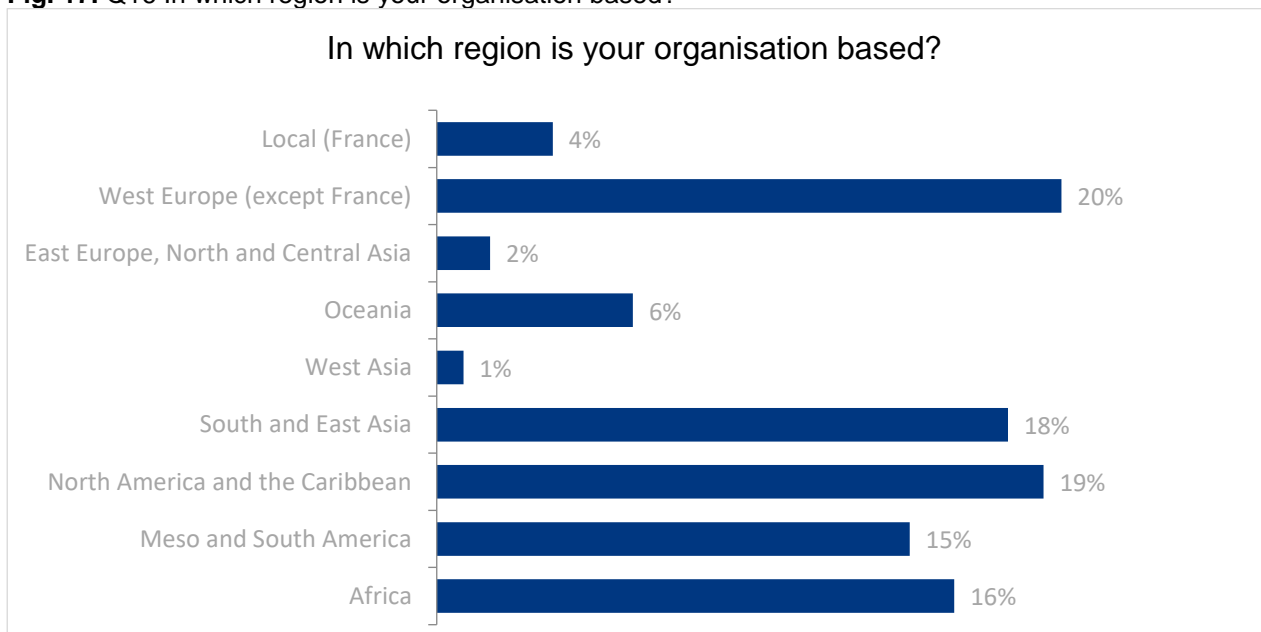
Like in the onsite event survey, most of the respondents to the online Congress survey have an affiliation to an NGO (37%). In addition, there is an increase of 9% in respondents from academia professionals, compared to the onsite survey respondents.

Fig. 16. Q17 Which category best describes your professional affiliation?



Most of the respondents of the online Congress survey came from West European countries, South East Asia, North America and the Caribbean, Meso and South America, and Africa. Representation from East Europe, Oceania and West Asia was the lowest which is in line with the low registration numbers for these regions for online participation (2% vs 1% vs 5%; source: Congress registration system).

Fig. 17. Q16 In which region is your organisation based?



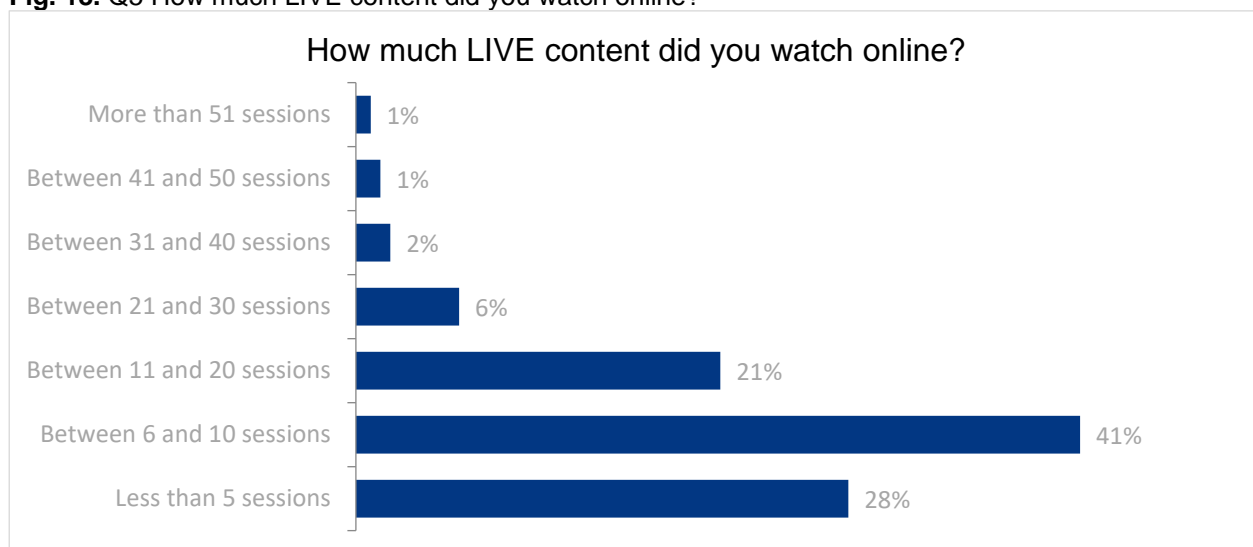
The survey participants' profile was spread over the categories established. 36% of respondents were representatives from IUCN Member organisations (vs 44% for the onsite

survey). However, this question allowed for multiple answers. 33% of respondents were general participants (16% more than for the onsite survey (details in Appendix 2 Q13). Almost unanimously (95%), respondents consider themselves as part of the conservation sector.

4.2. About the attendee's participation in the Congress

There were around 450 sessions available for the online Congress with more than 700 hours of content. 90% of the online survey participants watched less than 20 sessions, 41% of the total respondents watched in between 6 to 10 sessions.

Fig. 18. Q5 How much LIVE content did you watch online?

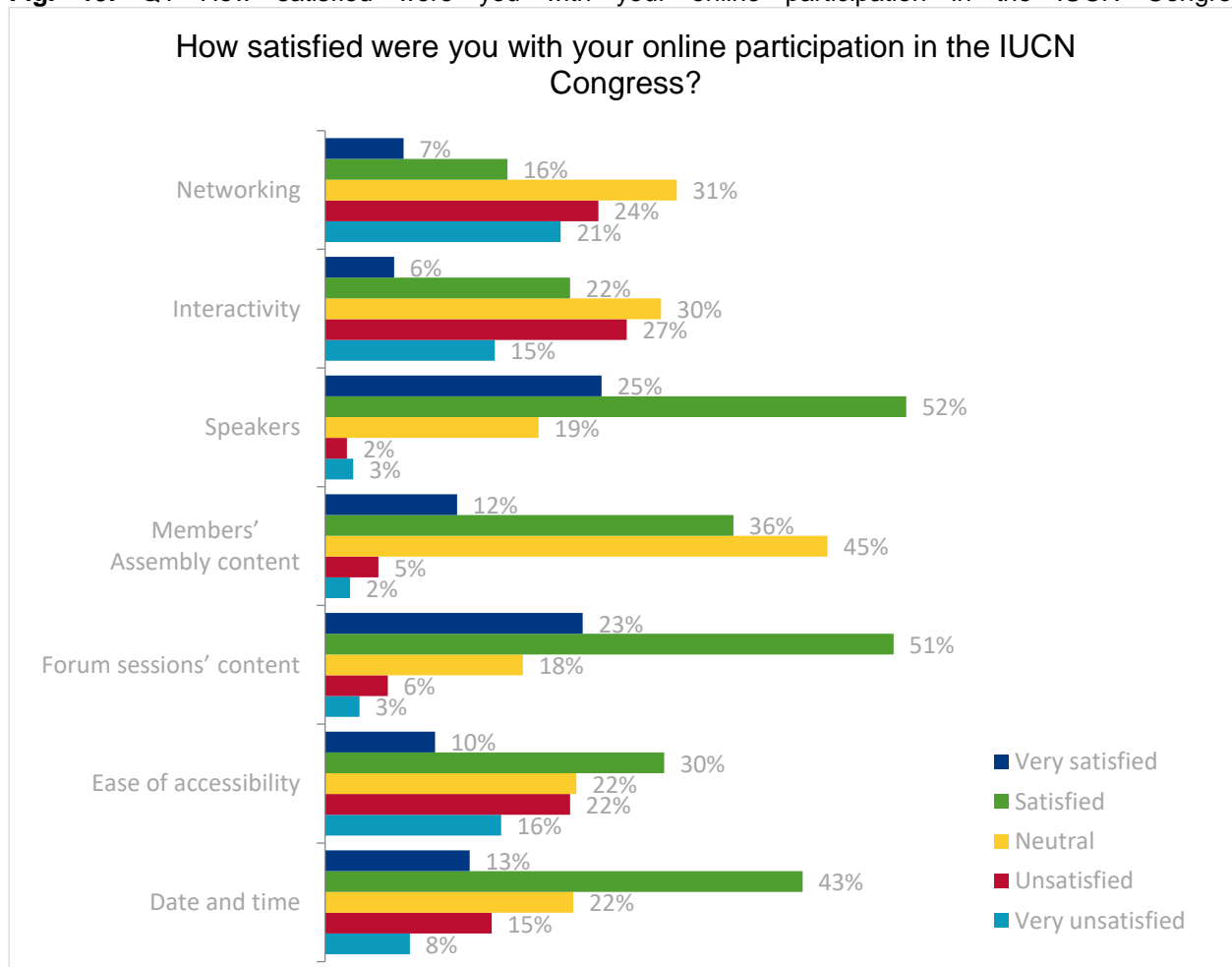


4.3. Attendees perception of the online Congress

Participants of the online Congress survey were satisfied with the quality of the speakers and the content of the Forum sessions. The hybrid proposal opened the doors for many people that could not attend otherwise due the pandemic. *“The opportunity to participate virtually was much appreciated! I hope you keep this format for future Congresses as it democratizes the participation of people that cannot attend in person”*.

As it is to be expected, the online experience visibly affected the respondents' satisfaction regarding networking and interaction possibilities. In addition, 38% of the survey participants were not satisfied with the ease of accessibility to the online content (Figure 19).

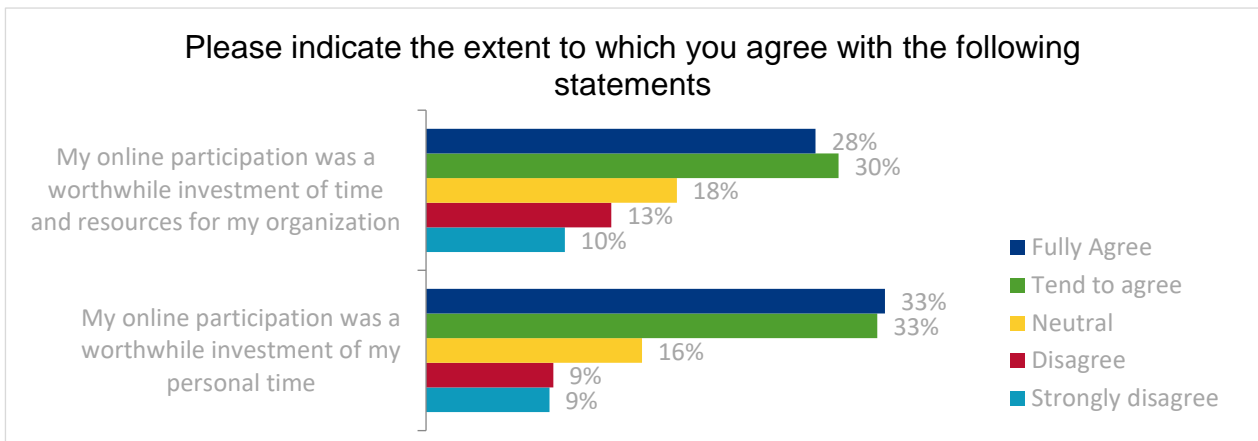
Fig. 19. Q1 How satisfied were you with your online participation in the IUCN Congress?



The overall satisfaction of the online survey is lower than for the onsite survey. Only 58% somewhat agree with it being a worthwhile resource investment for their organisations compared to the 85% who answered the same in the onsite survey. *“The price of the tickets for the Congress was too high for an online event. It hindered participation from low-income participants”*. There were no significant differences in responses to this question from the different participant categories or professional affiliations.

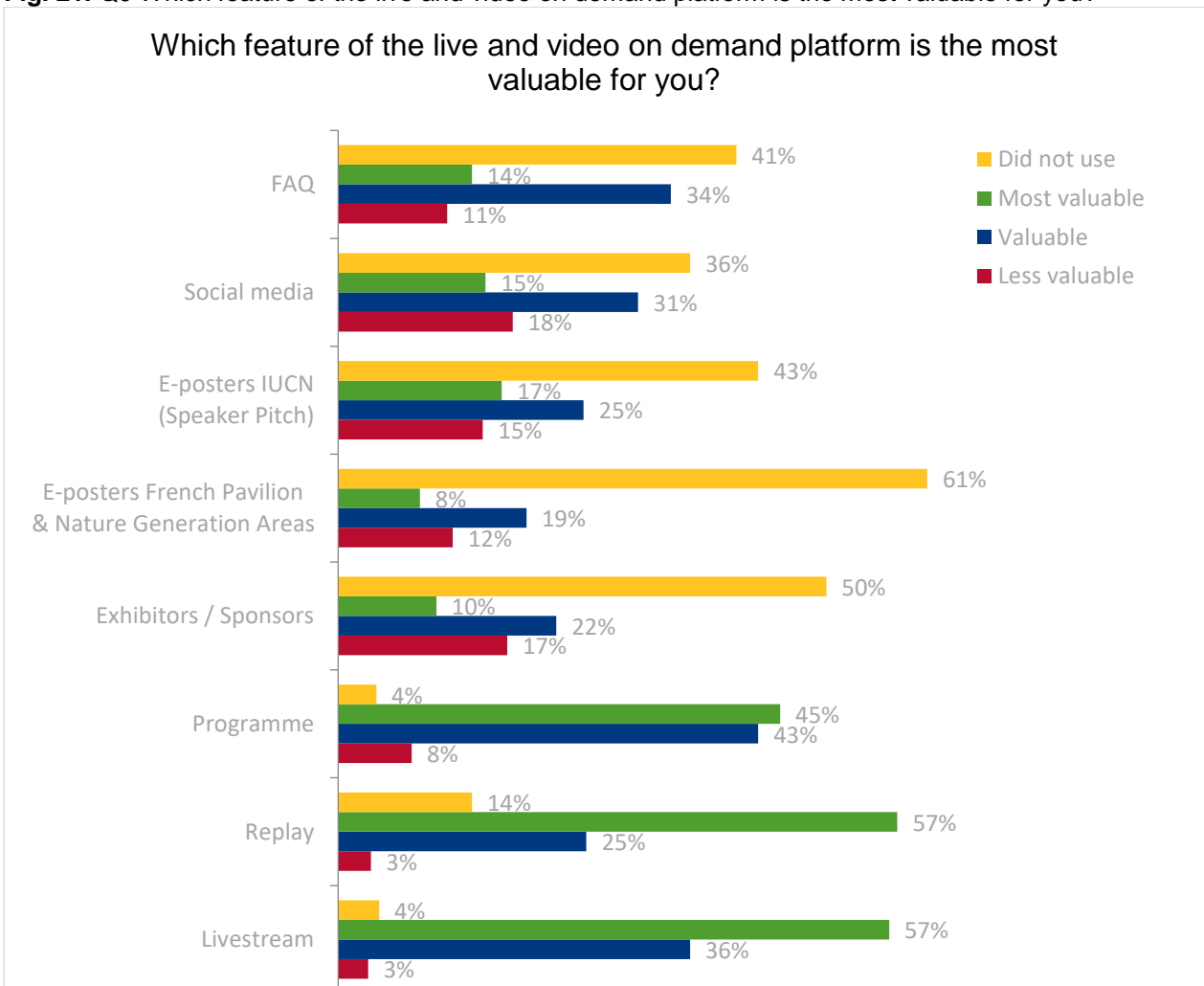
Similarly, 66% of the respondents agree on some level with the fact that the Congress was a good investment of their personal time (Figure 20). This was 23% lower than for the onsite survey. Looking in detail at responses among the different participant categories i.e. general participant, sponsor, speaker; there was significantly more disagreement with this statement amid speakers, presenters and moderators, whose dissatisfaction level reached 16% compared to 9% average (details in Appendix 2 Q10 by participant category).

Fig. 20. Q10 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements



The online platform offered several opportunities for virtual participants: the live stream of the sessions, the access to the programme, and the replay options were the most valuable features for respondents. On the contrary, the e-posters and the exhibitors/sponsors were used by less than half of the survey participants. From the survey comments, it seems that the access to e-posters might have been affected by some complexity in the platform. The same reason might apply to the attendance of exhibition events.

Fig. 21. Q9 Which feature of the live and video on demand platform is the most valuable for you?



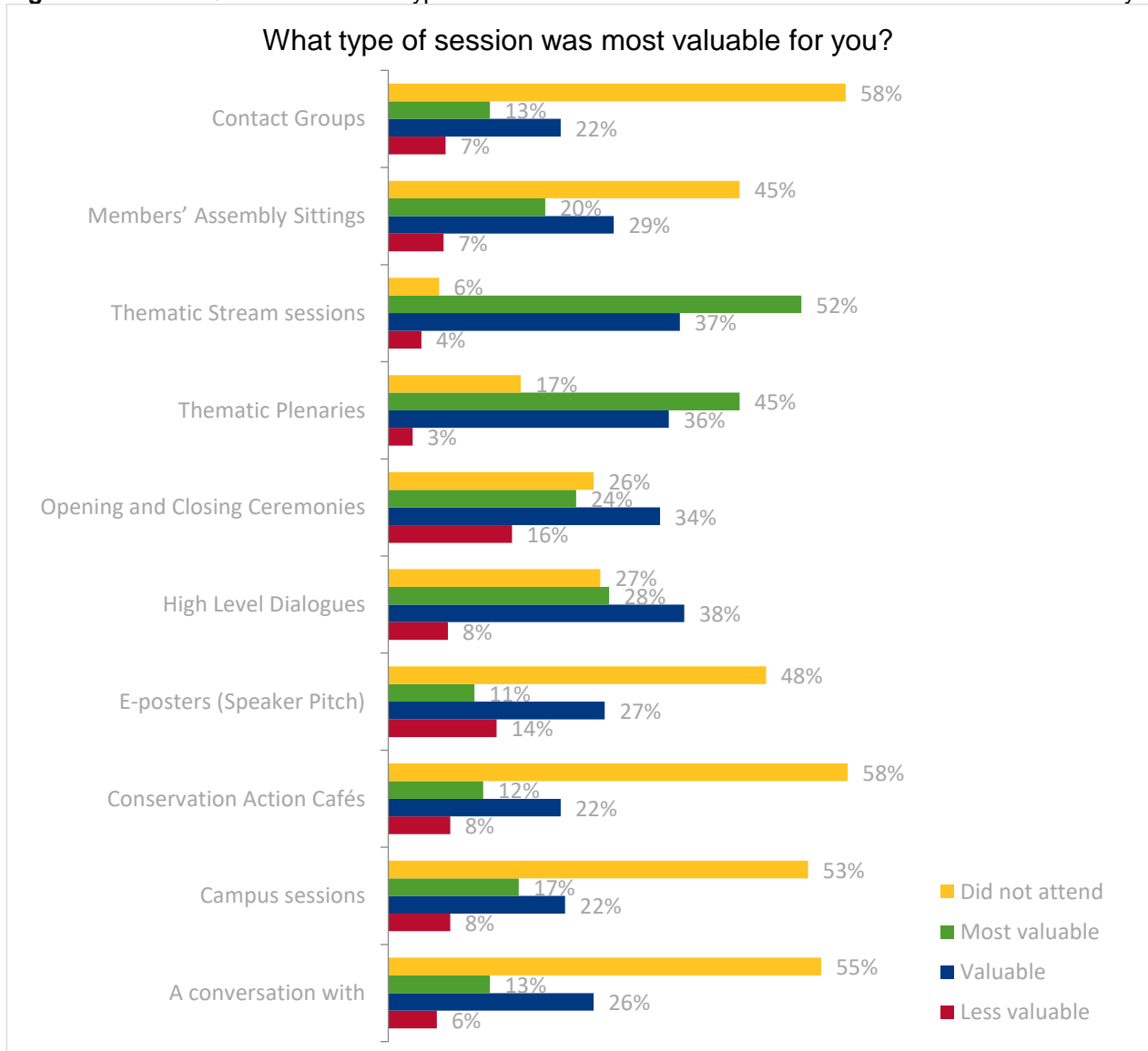
The LIVE and video on demand platform offered more than 700 hours of live streaming and 350 hours of replay. 66% of the online survey respondents felt this was the right amount of content, while 31% thought it was too high. The other 3% thought it was not enough.

When asked if they would participate again in the Congress, 62% of respondents stated they would participate again in either an onsite or online event, 25% would participate onsite only, 8% would participate online only, and only 4% would not participate again.

4.4. Attendees perception of the online sessions

As for the onsite survey, the online survey participants chose the 'Thematic plenaries' and the 'Thematic stream sessions' as their most valuable sessions. Some of the other sessions had lower attendance rates by respondents than for onsite participants. Nevertheless, among the attendees for those sessions, the content was scored as valuable e.g. 'Campus sessions', 'Conservation action cafes', 'Contact groups' and 'A conversation with' (Figure 22).

Fig. 22. Q8 What type of session was most valuable for you?



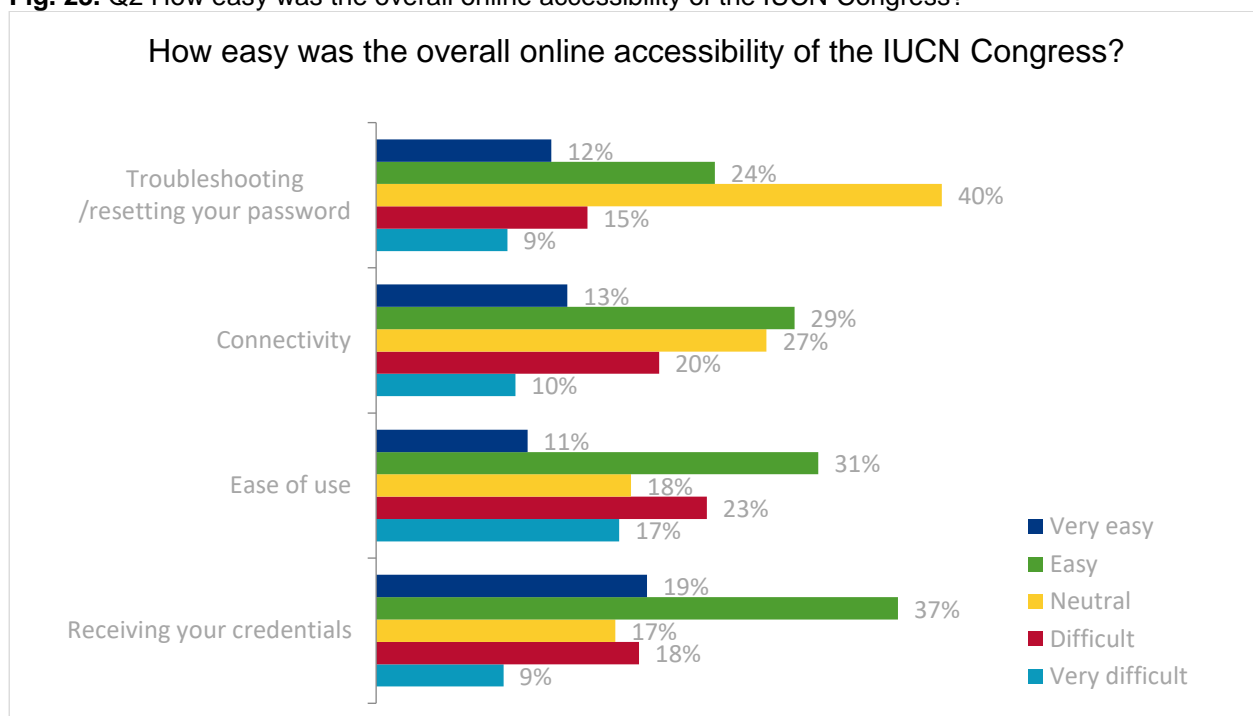
When evaluating the length of the sessions, 94% of respondents agree the sessions should be 90 mins or less. There were several length options between 30 to 90 mins bracket but the most popular was 46 to 60 mins.

Similar to the onsite survey, the opinion was divided regarding the number of sessions available. 49% of respondents from the online survey think the event had the right amount of sessions, 48% thinks there were too many, and only 3% think it there were not enough.

4.5. Navigating the online Congress and streaming quality

The ease of use of the online platform was difficult for 40% of the online survey participants, and 30% found connectivity issues (Figure 23). Nevertheless, the quality of the live stream was generally well rated, with no issues for loading video time, interpretation, sound, and image quality. Probably the main challenge of the LIVE and video on demand platform was its user-friendliness. In addition, several comments from the survey point to a lack of interactive functionality of the platform. *“I wish there were live chats for participants to be able to interact with each other or ask questions to the speaker in person”*. A 44% of online survey participants found it hard to navigate (details in Appendix 2 Q3/Q4).

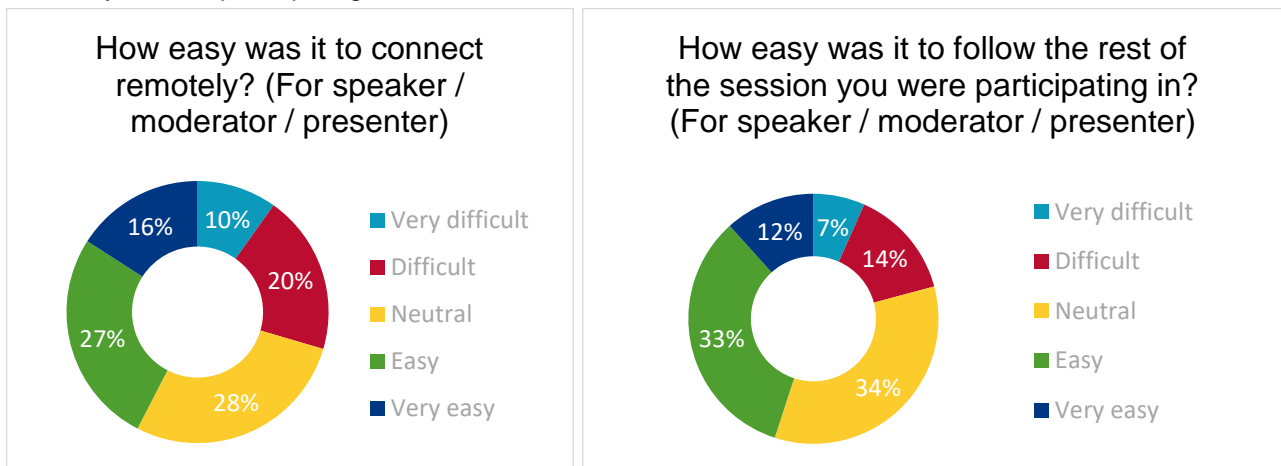
Fig. 23. Q2 How easy was the overall online accessibility of the IUCN Congress?



Some of the most affected by the online challenges where the respondents that attended the Members' Assembly. *“The lack of ability for online participants to intervene during plenary sessions of the Member’s Assembly, or to vote on motions, was very disappointing... These failings reduced inclusivity and transparency significantly”*.

Finally, speakers were asked about their connectivity and how easy it was to follow the rest of the sessions they were participating in. Generally, they rated the connectivity slightly better than participants.

Fig. 24. Q14 How easy was it to connect remotely? **Fig. 25.** Q15 How easy was it to follow the rest of the session you were participating in?



4.6. Survey additional comments

A total of 180 comments were received at the end of the online Congress survey. 23.3% of these comments have been categorized as positive comments and 23.3% as very negative. In addition to this, the top themes identified throughout the comments were:

- **LIVE platform:** main comments relate to challenges regarding website navigability, lack of an efficient search tool to find replays, and no efficient user support. For some of the respondents, the negative online experience led them to ask for a refund and to refuse to join an online-only event in the future.
- **Interactivity:** Emphasizing that online event participants had limited options to interact with speakers and other participants through the online tools available to them. In addition to this, participants of the Members' Assembly saw their ability to discuss and vote on motions significantly compromised.
- **Indigenous people participation:** recognizing the improvements on involving the indigenous communities in the Congress, but noting that there is still room to improve equality and representation of local communities in the Congress in general.

List of appendices

Appendix 1 - Onsite Participation survey all questions

Appendix 2 - Online Participation survey all questions

Appendix 3 - Q27 open comments - onsite participation survey

Appendix 4 - Q21 open comments - online participation survey