

# ***International Geographical Union Union Géographique Internationale***

## **2012 Annual Report**



### **The International Geographical Union (IGU)**

The IGU was founded under the auspices of the International Research Council in 1922 in Brussels, having been conceived some years earlier in Paris. Its debut as a formal, continuing organization was preceded by ten International Geographical Congresses, the first of which was held in Antwerp in 1871. Early congresses addressed such specific topics as the international standardization of the prime meridian for mapping and agreement on the world's time zones. In later years up to 1922 the congresses became more general in scope, establishing commissions to address salient facets of geography and cartography. The IGU was established as part of the broader organization of international science that occurred in the early decades of the last century. The IGU was a founding member of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and remains an active member of that organization, in addition to its membership in the International Social Science Council (ISSC).

Today's IGU is comprised of a General Assembly, 41 Commissions, a Task Force, one Special Committee, and the IGU Executive Committee. IGU membership is by country, and the general assembly consists of a delegate from each member country. The assembly normally meets every fourth year at an IGU Congress and indeed met in 2012 in Cologne, Germany (see below). Commissions and task forces are, respectively, the research and action components of the IGU. The IGU Executive Committee and General Assembly form commissions, task forces, and special committees in response to the changing needs of international geography. The elected executive committee guides the IGU between the IGU's International Geographical Congresses (held every four years) and Regional Conferences (held every fourth year midway between congress years).

Aside from their substantial participation in the Cologne International Geographical Congress, most of the IGU's commissions were active in other meetings and in developing publications during the year in question (see below). The IGU Executive Committee keeps its community informed via the quarterly *IGU E-Newsletter*, which launched as a new series in 2012. The IGU relies mainly on dues from member countries to support its operations, supplemented by grants from outside organizations (especially ICSU) for specific projects and donations. Dues payments fluctuate from year to year depending on national funding cycles. Payments for 2012 similar to those of 2011 and, despite increased expenditure on issues relating to the Congress (e.g. an extensive travel grants programme) a modest surplus of income over the year's expenses was achieved.

- *IGU Secretary-General Mike Meadows*

### **32<sup>nd</sup> International Geographical Congress, Cologne, Germany, 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

From 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012, the IGU held in Cologne (Germany) its 32<sup>nd</sup> International Geographical Congress. It was the largest in the almost 150-years history of International Geographical Congresses and gathered 2865 participants from 90 countries. The number of

participants was limited mainly by the results of abstracts' peer review by a special International Scientific Committee. It included well known experts from all over the world. Its creation and a rigorous selection policy were one of numerous innovations in the organization of the Congress.

The relatively large participation of geographers from the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America was particularly important because they have so often been under-represented at the IGU events. The programme of the Congress included a special meeting of about 60 participants from 12 African countries aimed to promote cooperation of African geographers with IGU Commissions and Task Forces.

The motto of the Congress was «*Down to Earth*». It had a double meaning. On the one hand, it indicated the relevance of its main theme: the relation between sustainable development and the processes of globalization, urbanization, climate change, biodiversity and “green” economy. The importance of this theme was stressed by Professor *Ann Glover, Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission*. Her emotional greetings at the opening ceremony provoked a vivid reaction of participants. She called them “to shout” about the results of their studies. On the other hand, the motto underlined the intention of organizers to make the Congress open, cheaper and accessible for everybody. Indeed, for the first time since many years its venue was a university, and not an expensive congress hall, and it was entirely organized by German geographers and students-volunteers, and not by a special company.



*Co-chairs of the Local Organising Committee, Professors Frauke Kraas and Dieter Soye at the opening ceremony of the Cologne International Geographical Congress*

The scientific programme of the Congress was much diversified and included more than 400 sessions organized “from the top” - by IGU Commissions and “from the bottom” – on the initiative of separate scholars who submitted their propositions to the International Scientific Committee. All IGU Commissions held in Cologne their business meetings. Every day two keynote lectures were offered by leading academics and practitioners. They were devoted to such problems as “Society and Environment”, “Risks and Conflicts”, “Urbanization and Demographic Change”, etc.). These proved to be massively popular with the delegates – indeed, the largest university conference hall could not accommodate all those who wished to attend them although all of them were streamed live on the internet and, indeed, can still be uploaded at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/IGCCologne2012?feature=watch>

A pre-Congress conference discussed the development of geography in Europe. A number of special sessions concerned the needs of practitioners, and others devoted to the main IGU projects and

initiatives such as the *International Year of Global Understanding*, *Sustainable Cities* and the *World Data Base on Geographical Journals*.



*Congress delegates at one of the poster sessions*

Particular attention was paid to geographical education and young scholars. School teachers came to the Congress for a full day of sessions and lectures. The programme “School at the IGC and the IGC at school” was supported by the federal and regional ministries of education and sponsored a series of lectures of well-known geographers at high schools of North Rhine–Westphalia. As usually, the Congress hosted the World Geographical Olympiad which reunited 128 high school’s pupils from 32 countries. Its agenda consisted of written and multimedia tests and a field tour. Besides that, the participants of the Olympiad had to prepare a presentation on water resources and problems of water use. The winners were honoured by high officials at the opening ceremony of the Congress.



*Olympiad winners receive their medals at the opening ceremony of the Cologne Congress.  
Scholars from all over the world participated in the pre-congress ‘iGeo’ competition.*

The Youth Forum embraced a number of interactive workshops on such important themes as “The Management of a Research Project”, “Publications in English: Where, When and How?”, “The Art of an Academic Text”, “Steps of a University Career” and so on. But the main event of the Youth Forum was the day devoted to poster sessions which passed in an informal environment and attracted the attention of many participants of all ages. Special grants for young scholars established by IGU and the Local Organizing Committee contributed to the success of this Forum.

The Congress traditionally included an exhibition of geographical literature, maps, atlases and multimedia products with the participation of some world known publishing houses and companies. All major national geographical societies and associations prepared books, collections of papers and CDs on the development of geography in their countries.

A part of each Congress is the IGU General Assembly held once every four years. It considered the results of the Executive Committee’s work in 2008-2012, the main directions of IGU activity for next four years and elected the new President and three Vice-Presidents. The General Assembly confirmed the next Congress will be in Beijing in 2016 and, in the meantime there are three Regional Conferences (in Kyoto, 2013, in Krakow, 2014 and in Moscow, 2015). The Assembly also decided that the city of Istanbul will host the 34<sup>th</sup> International Geographical Congress in 2020 and that, on the occasion of its centennial, IGU will organise in 2022 an extraordinary Congress.

- *President Vladimir Kolossov*

## **IGU General Assembly, Cologne**

The General Assembly was held as part of the proceedings of the International Geographical Congress and was attended by delegates from 48 IGU Member Countries. The meeting was chaired by outgoing President Ron Abler who reminded the assembly of the ‘Priorities’ document that had been developed following the Tunis congress and widely circulated. The IGU Executive Committee had concluded a long discussion of how the IGU should position itself, geographers, and geography for the coming years. In addition to continuing its core functions of convening meetings, promoting research, placing geographers in key international positions, and recognizing outstanding achievement with its awards, the committee focused on four priorities:

- Working with local hosts to upgrade the IGU’s congresses and regional conferences.
- Upgrading the quality and utility of the IGU web site to make it a premier resource for geographic information and contacts for the global geographic community;
- Taking more vigorous steps to recruit young scholars. Too many geographers encounter the IGU only in mid- or late career.
- Finding additional sources of sustainable funding for IGU operations. The IGU now operates on an average annual budget of about €75,000, which barely covers its basic operating expenses. To be more effective in promoting geography, the members of the IGU Executive Committee must continue to attempt to find additional sources of funding while also reducing the expenses of executive committee operations. To that end, the committee has experimented with holding one of its meetings virtually and will endeavor to continue this practice.

In a question from the assembly, the President was challenged to offer a view as to how successfully the outgoing committee had been in addressing these priorities. President Abler responded that he felt that, with the exception of the fund-raising issue, there had been progress



on the other fronts. With regard to the website, the representative for France suggested that it could host a 'glossary' of geographical terms that would be useful in particular for those who did not use English as a first language. There were several comments, including those representing Finland and the Netherlands, relating to the difficulties faced by national committees in persuading their members as to the value of IGU membership. President Abler responded by informing the assembly as to the important role that IGU plays within the international scientific (through ICSU) and social science (through ISSC) communities but that there were undoubtedly improvements that could be made in getting this message across more frequently and efficiently to IGU national committees. President Abler also agreed to suggest that the incoming executive committee should again explore the possibility of affiliate membership for Geography Departments and Societies.

## **Report of the President for the Period 2008-2012**

Outgoing President Ron Abler summarized the major activities of the IGU over the inter-congress period. IGU Commissions and Task Forces maintained good productivity with respect to meetings and publications during the period, with very few exceptions that are evident in the executive committee's recommendations regarding the continuation and retirement of commissions and task forces. President Abler noted the excellent leadership that had characterised the IGU in the past and that this had assisted greatly over the last four years which had proved an exciting and exhilarating period. Highlights of this term of office had been the development of the International Year of Global Understanding proposal through the efforts in particular of the Commission on Cultural Geography, the launch of the newly designed IGU website and related facilities, and the initiation of the Sustainable Cities project. There is a strong sense that the IGU is in good shape and is particularly well placed within ICSU and ISSC to facilitate participation in the major global research agendas relating to the environment. President Abler commented on the issue of the frequency of regional conferences, which – commencing in 2010 - are now annual through to 2016. He remarked that judgement on the wisdom of this or otherwise would only be possible with hindsight; suffice for now to say that the conferences in 2010 and 2011 had been good, although not without controversy due to their locations (Tel Aviv, Israel and Santiago, Chile, respectively). Concern over the location of conferences had led the executive committee to present a special session at the Cologne congress entitled 'Contested Lieux de Mémoire' and it was hoped that open debate and discussion of the problems around some meeting venues would have a positive effect. The President then expressed his sincere thanks to members of the executive committee with whom he has had the pleasure of working and appreciated their unfailing diligence; he remarked that he was looking forward to continuing to work with the new committee in his capacity as Past President.

## **Report of the Secretaries General and Treasurers for the Period 2008-2012**

Professor Woo-ik Yu was Secretary General from the conclusion of the Tunis Congress in August 2008 until, following his enforced resignation due to career commitments, Professor Mike Meadows was elected to the position in August 2010. The IGU Secretariat was relocated to Cape Town towards the end of 2010 and continued to operate at minimal cost to the IGU. Outgoing Secretary-General Yu had made a generous personal donation to the IGU to help smooth the transition. The finances of the IGU are now fully based in Cape Town and, despite South African exchange control regulations that necessitate the funds being held in South African Rand, the revenue and expenditure arrangements are proving satisfactory.

Secretary-General Meadows introduced the assembly and made a brief demonstration of the newly established Journals Database which is now fully accessible from the IGU website at [www.igu-online.org](http://www.igu-online.org) and which, through the kind intervention of Professor Ton Dietz and

colleagues at the University of Amsterdam, now provided information on more than 1,000 Geography journals from across the globe. Meadows is committed to further improving the quantity and quality of journal information in the database which, he hoped, would prove to be a very valuable resource for geographers seeking ways to make their publications more accessible.

The situation regarding publication of the IGU Bulletin was now largely back on track. During the inter-congress period, volumes dating back to 2004 had been published and, indeed, the volumes covering 2007-8 and 2009-10 were available to the assembly and would be mailed to the usual circulation list following the congress. The 2011-12 issue would be published at the beginning of 2013, whereafter it was expected to resume annual volumes. Vice-President Bellezza produces the IGU e-Newsletter several times a year and this is made available electronically to, among others, all national committees, commissions and task forces via their appropriate contact persons. In addition, the IGU website is regularly updated with news items.

The IGU's financial status is stable. As of 31st December 2011, the IGU had cash on hand of US\$ 183,164. The IGU operates on a cash accounting basis and has no liabilities, so the cash on hand represents the organization's entire net worth.

## **Election of the 2012-2016 IGU President and Executive Committee Members**

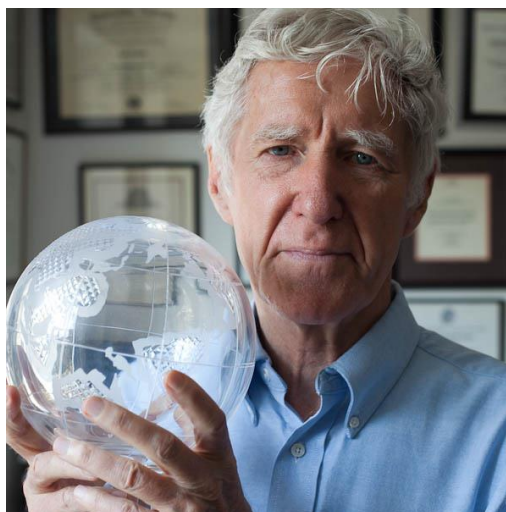
Nominations for vacancies on the IGU Executive Committee were solicited from the chairs of national committees in July 2011 to be received at the IGU Secretariat no later than 31 December 2011. One nomination was received for president (Vladimir Kolossov, Russia) and ten individuals were nominated for four vice presidential seats on the IGU Executive Committee. In the secret ballot, Kolossov was elected President 2012-2016 through the Beijing International Geographical Congress. The election for four Vice President vacancies resulted in Professors Singh (India), Soyeze (Germany), Droogleever-Fortuijn (The Netherlands) and Saarinen (Finland) duly being elected.



*Newly elected President of the IGU, Professor Vladimir Kolossov of the Russian Academy of Sciences addresses the audience at the Cologne Congress*

## IGU Honors and Awards

President Abler announced the IGU awards to be conferred in 2012 as follows: *IGU Planet and Humanity Medal*: Mr Lester Brown, President and Senior Researcher at the Earth Policy Institute in Washington, DC USA. *IGU Lauréat d'Honneur*: Larry S. Bourne (Canada), Mohammad S. I. Makki (Saudi Arabia), Janice J. Monk (USA), and Hiroshi Tanabe (Japan).



*Lester Brown, President of the Earth Policy Institute and recipient of the IGU's highest award:  
The IGU Planet and Humanity Medal (photo credit: [www.isaachernandez.com](http://www.isaachernandez.com))*

## IGU Executive Committee Meetings and Decisions

The 2012-2014 IGU Executive Committee consists of eleven elected members:

### **President**

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### **Past President:**

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### **Secretary General and Treasurer:**

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### **First Vice President:**

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The IGU Executive Committee held three meetings in 2012, viz. Beijing, China, in March, Cologne, Germany in August and in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, in October, The approved minutes of the 2012 IGU Executive Committee meetings are made available via the IGU E-newsletters at: [www.igu-online.org](http://www.igu-online.org)

## **International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU)**



One of the IGU's current key initiatives is to establish a UN International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU) in 2016. Global action towards resolving the problems arising from global social and climate change requires a global level of understanding. This initiative aims to bridge the gap in awareness between local actions and global effects. IYGU aims to facilitate understanding of global processes, to encourage everyone to make daily decisions in light of



global challenges and to contribute to bottom-up initiatives that connect individual, local action to global sustainability. The IYGU intends to strengthen collaboration between natural, social, and cultural sciences, to identify how local actions yield results on a global scale, and to empower individuals to manifest local-scale change with global effects. It should enable people to move from simply knowing about sustainability to actually living sustainably. Human actions play a part in creating such worldwide challenges as climate change. However, human actions must also bring solutions. If individual people are aware of what their day-to-day routines mean for the planet, they can take appropriate action. Therefore, the IYGU prompts a transdisciplinary perspective, starting from the logic of everyday actions rather than from traditional scientific disciplines, learning firstly how human actions produce ecological problems and then seeking appropriate science-based solutions. Consequently the IYGU focuses on actual embodied individual human activities performed by each person, each day, everywhere in the world. This IGU initiative has already obtained the support of ISSC, ICSU, and CIPSH as well as significant private sector partners. The project is being led by Professor Benno Werlen, chairperson of the IGU Commission on the Cultural Approach in Geography. More information about this is available at: <http://global-understanding.info/>

### **The IGU Journals Database**



There are many journals globally that deal with the broad church that is the discipline of Geography. In recent years the domination of major publishing houses in the scientific journal market has become much stronger and it is clear that many geographical journals are published that have a much lower profile and yet could provide a very valuable resource for geographers – researchers and teachers alike - in particular national or regional contexts. It was for this reason that the IGU embarked on a project to establish a searchable global database of geographical periodicals. Information, including contact details, impact factor (where appropriate) and website addresses of more than 1000 journals from more than 80 countries worldwide are now available online (follow the link from the IGU homepage at: [www.igu-online.org](http://www.igu-online.org))

### **Sustainable Cities: The IGU ‘OurSus’ Project**



Cities are growing everywhere. As complex organisms, they are all different, yet face similar challenges in terms of sustainable features, such as green R&D, environment-friendly consumption, green campaigns, challenges, and education, etc. Initiated by Prof. Ton Dietz in 2010, the IGU organized a group of volunteers to develop a global sustainable information network, GSCIN to tackle such challenges.

The voluntary group, as a subsidiary of the Research Center for Internet Information Services (ReCIIS), Hunan University, China, works in light of the fact that China is shifting to a low carbon economy and society. China is one of the fastest growing economies in the world with more than 10% annual growth rate over the last 30 years. This high economic growth, accompanied by tremendous pressure from constantly deteriorating pollution scenario and intensifying ecological degradation in recent years has made China's traditional development models clearly futile. Therefore, transformation of the economy and society to a low carbon one is necessary according to China's leadership. China is expected to soon develop into a society which is not only environmentally sustainable, but also creates favorable conditions for more job opportunities, greater resource efficiency and energy security, enhanced food security, and better health outcomes for its people; a society which is in line with China's own Xiaokang (well-being) vision, is well balanced and moderately prosperous.

ReCIIS, also the undertaker of Hunan Official Web Portal has brought together the best minds in website design and language processing. It has developed two pilot websites [www.oursus.org](http://www.oursus.org) and [zh.oursus.org](http://zh.oursus.org) (*OurSus* refers to sustainability for all) as the project's collaborative platform. The websites adopt location-based services (LBS), social networking services (SNS) and a mass collaboration system (MC). They were successfully launched at IGU 2012 Assembly in Cologne in August.

## Communication and Outreach

The main communication tools of the IGU are its quarterly newsletter, compiled by Vice-President Giuliano Bellezza and its website, maintained by Secretary-General Mike Meadows. Four issues of the new series of the e-Newsletter were published in 2012 and can be downloaded from the website by following the newsletter link from [www.igu-online.org](http://www.igu-online.org)



## Forthcoming IGU Conferences

August 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> 2013, Kyoto, Japan Regional Conference



*Members of the Kyoto Regional Congress in Cologne and preparing to welcome IGU delegates to Japan in August 2013*

18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2014, Krakow, Poland Regional Conference

20<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015, Moscow, Russia Regional Conference



August 2016: People's Republic of China International Geographical Congress, Beijing

More details at [www.igu-online.org](http://www.igu-online.org)