

International Geographical Union T12-01 Olympiad Task Force

Annual Report for 2012-13

A. Membership

The steering committee of the Olympiad Task Force is made up of the co-chairs, the past, present and future Olympiad Local Organisers and three seconded members. With the rotation of Olympiad Local Organisers, the membership changes annually as future Olympiad Local Organisers replace past ones. The rotation is an important component in the mentoring role of the Task Force and is important in the preparedness of future Local Organisers. The current steering committee is:

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The Task Force has 90 corresponding members. They come from 40 countries which either participate in the International Geography Olympiads or are actively planning to do so in the near future: Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, China-Beijing, China-Hong Kong, China-Macau, China-Taipei, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tunisia, Turkey, UK and USA. One representative from each country participating in the Olympiad makes up the International Board, which has responsibilities in the conduct of the Olympiads.

In 2012 and 2013 a number of countries sent teams to the Olympiad for the first time: China-Macau, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nigeria, Turkey and USA. We are pleased that the participation from less developed countries is increasing, as this is one of our goals.

B. Meetings

a. Meetings Organised in 2012-2013

Two International Geography Olympiads have been organised during 2012-13:

- 9th International Geography Olympiad, Cologne, Germany, 21 - 27 August 2012. Participation was 196 students, leaders and official observers, plus members of the Local Organising Committee and volunteer assistants.
- 10th International Geography Olympiad, Kyoto, Japan, 30 July - 5 August 2013. Participation was 194 students, leaders and official observers, plus a large number of members of the Local Organising Committee and volunteer assistants.

In conjunction with the Olympiads, there have been four meetings of the Olympiad's International Board. These are the equivalent of Task Force Business Meetings. Approximately 40 people participated in each of these meetings.

b. Summary of Meetings

2012 International Geography Olympiad

The 2012 Olympiad was hosted by the Geographical Society of Germany (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geographie) and the Institute for Geography of the University of Cologne. It was a great success with 32 countries sending teams. Dr Dorothea Wiktorin and her staff from the University of Cologne were superb local organisers.

The Olympiad tests are made up of three elements: a written response test, a multimedia test and a fieldwork test that includes a mapping task and a decision-making exercise. In 2012, the fieldwork related to urban renewal along the banks of the Rhine River. Ten students from eight countries were awarded gold medals at the IGU Congress Opening Ceremony. Gold, silver and bronze medals were well spread across participating countries with 28 of the 32 teams winning at least one medal. The top three countries in the team rankings were 1st Singapore, 2nd Romania, 3rd Poland.

Olympiad teams have always given presentations on a geographical issue in their own country and this has evolved into poster presentations. In Cologne students presented on a water-related issue. At Cologne, the 'cultural function' held at previous Olympiads (where students performed an item

from their own culture) was replaced by an 'intercultural function'. University students, who in the lead-up to the Olympiad had been trained in techniques in inter-cultural communication, facilitated workshops with the Olympiad students. This was an amazing high-energy experience for both the students and the audience invited to see the outcome.



Mexican and Nigerian students exploring Cologne

2013 International Geography Olympiad

The 2013 Olympiad was held in Kyoto, from 30 July to 5 August 2013. The Local Organising Committee included colleagues from a wide range of Japanese Universities and was ably led by Professor Yoshiyasu Ida from Tsukuba University. The Committee provided a wonderful atmosphere and a testing set of experiences for young geographers from 32 countries. The venue in the northeast of Kyoto was near the Silver Temple and the terminus of the fascinating Biwa Canal.

This was the first Olympiad to be held on the annual schedule requested by the IGU Executive. Two or three countries were unable to obtain the necessary funding to participate in 2013, but are intending to come again in 2014. The addition of countries competing for the first time meant that the number of teams was the same as in 2012 and the Task Force was pleased with this outcome. We expect to see an increase in participation in 2014.

As usual, the competition contained three elements: a written response test, a multimedia test and a fieldwork test. The fieldwork site was in Fushimi, an urban community of 280,000 people in the southeast of Kyoto. Historically, Fushimi used high quality ground water in saké production. The production of saké was supported by excellent water transport options for Fushimi, Kyoto's principal inland port. In recent years flood hazard has affected the community, and consideration of this issue was also part of the fieldwork exercise.

Eleven gold medals were awarded to students from seven countries during the opening ceremony of the IGU Conference. As in Cologne, 28 of the 32 teams won at least one medal. The top three countries in the team rankings were 1st Romania, 2nd Croatia, 3rd Singapore.

The programme included poster presentations by the students. Teams chose a geographical issue from their home country that related to the theme of the IGU Conference, "Traditional Wisdom and Modern Knowledge for the Earth's Future". The more formal aspects of the programme were

complemented by cultural and social activities, local trips to explore the city, and a one-day sight-seeing excursion.



**A Mongolian student performing at the cultural function
In Kyoto**

C. Future Meetings

The Task Force plans to conduct International Geography Olympiads annually, as requested by the IGU Executive. Planning is already under way with the Local Organising Committees for these future Olympiads:

- 2014 – Kraków, Poland, 12-18 August
- 2015 – Tver Oblast, Russia, 12-18 August
- 2016 – Beijing, China, 15-21 August (to be confirmed)

2014 International Geography Olympiad

The 2014 Olympiad will be hosted by the Polish Geographical Society's Geography Olympiad Committee and the Pedagogical University of Kraków. The Local Organising Committee is chaired by Mr Tomasz Sawicki and preparations are well advanced. Invitations to countries to send teams have already been distributed and applications are due in January.

2015 International Geography Olympiad

The 2015 Olympiad will be held 190 km outside of Moscow in Tver Oblast, but will include time in Moscow. The chair of Local Organising Committee is Dr Alexey Naumov from Moscow State University. Preparations are well in hand and the venue bookings have already been made. Premier-Minister Medvediev has indicated his support of the Olympiad and the Local Organising Committee has held discussions with the Russian Ministry of Education and Science.



**Members of the Olympiad Task Force and the 2014 Local Organising Committee
on a site inspection in Kraków**

2016 International Geography Olympiad

The 2016 Olympiad will be in Beijing immediately prior to the IGU Congress. In Beijing the Task Force is working with key members of the Local Organising Committee, Prof Wang Min and Dr Wei Dongying from Beijing Normal University. The first planning meeting and site visit was organised in November, 2013.

C. Networking and Communication

We are grateful that the Executive and IGU supported the inclusion of \$5000US for the Olympiad Task Force in future Memoranda of Understanding with Local Conference and Congress Organising Committees. However, until this takes effect we remain concerned about funding and the impact on the Task Force workload. We agreed that the Task Force would use the protocol devised to guide LoCs, noting that planning should begin at least 18 months before the Regional Conference or Congress date. We also planned to have a Task Force delegation visit the LoC and (where possible) to check the fieldwork site, accommodation and facilities (Henk Ankone performed this function for the Task Force with the Cologne event). In the context of these constraints, much of the networking and communication of the Task Force in 2012-2013 has been through these channels. The Task Force has also worked with delegates in geographical education from a number of existing and potential Olympiad participants.

Networking with participating countries around the Kyoto LoC

In 2012-2013, the Task Force was in regular contact with countries participating in the 2013 Olympiad and with the Kyoto LoC for the Olympiad. Three separate visits to Kyoto were made by Task Force members; accommodation was confirmed and the site of the field work was visited long before the event. Negotiation about questions and format of the Field Work Test began in Cologne and continued on a monthly basis. This networking contributed to the successful 2013 Olympiad.

Networking with participating countries and the Kraków LoC (in association with Changes, Challenges and Responsibilities, 18-22 August, 2014)

The initial presentation of the Kraków Local Organising Committee was at the International Board meeting of the iGeo in Kyoto. Representatives from 35 countries were present. Tomasz Sawicki chairs the Kraków LoC with local facilitation organized by Professor Wiktor Osuch at the Pedagogical University of Kraków. The Task Force has been in contact with LoC members regularly since three members of the Task Force met with the LoC on 21-25 September, 2013. The Task Force is happy with the fieldwork site, and with progress on developing a set of tests for the Olympiad; we are working closely with the Local Organising Committee. The available accommodation and facilities at the Pedagogic University of Kraków are also at a very good standard. The Task Force website about Kraków (<http://www.geoolympiad.org/fass/geoolympiad/2014/>) generates regular inquiries from international communities interested in participation.

Networking with the LoC for the Moscow Regional Conference (in association with Geography for Culture and Society for the sake of our Common Future, August, 2015)

The Task Force is talking to IGU colleagues in Moscow about the presentation that they will make at the iGeo International Board meeting in Kraków. The chair of the Moscow LoC is Alexey Naumov, Professor of Geography at Moscow State University. The Task Force will arrange a visit to the facilities and field areas that will be used by the 2015 Olympiad before the Kraków meeting.

Networking with the LoC for the Beijing Congress (in association with the IGU Congress to be held in August, 2016, and the likely UN International Year of Global Understanding)

Lex Chalmers, co-chair of the Task Force, visited Beijing in November 2013. He observed the selection process for the 2014 China Olympiad team, and reported positively on the quality of the students, the standards of the tests and the available technology. The Task Force also heard about the options for fieldwork in 2016, and Lex visited one of the likely test sites.

Networking with the International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU) initiative

The Task Force is actively pursuing links to the IYGU through the Geographical Education strand in the IYGU programme. The Task Force feels that the IGU Olympiad has a role in the IYGU through its involvement with young people, intercultural education and the major processes that influence local actions to effect global change, and we will work with our International Board members to promote the linkages between the Olympiad and the goals of IYGU. We are interested in involving other Commissions on our IYGU planning for 2016, and the Task Force visit to Beijing in November 2013 sought to establish links with IGU Commission programmes and the sites of potential fieldwork in the Olympiad. The Local Organising Committee of the 2016 Olympiad supported this visit.

The Task Force relies on its website and email list to communicate with the geographical community. The Task Force itself has not produced any publications. However, articles on countries' participation in the Olympiad appear in the newsletters, journals and websites of many national geographical education organisations.

D. Archival Contributions

The website of the Olympiad Task Force (T12.01) is found at www.geoolympiad.org. The site is maintained by the University of Waikato. The home page is shown below. The site explains what the geography Olympiad is, with reference to the history stretching back to the 1996 Olympiad in the Netherlands. One key set of pages is found under the Statutes tab. The statements found here describe the key activities and processes of the Task Force. The second important set of pages is under the Test Guidelines tab, where the locations and details of the component tests (Written Response Test (WRT), Multimedia (MM) and the Field Work Test (FWT)) are described.

A digital screen shot of each of the pages will be provided for the IGU Archive. Such a process has the support of the Task Force for reference and research purposes.



The INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHY OLYMPIAD (iGeo)

iGeo

The International Geography Olympiad (iGeo) is a competition for the best 16 to 19 year old geography students from all over the world. Four students represent each country in a series of Geography tests in (generally) a four-five day program. An adult Team leader and International Board Member accompany each national team. The official language of the iGeo is English.

WHAT IS iGEO?

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Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Future iGeo's

2015: Moscow, Russia
2016: Beijing, China

See what iGeo is about in this video made by Werner Wallert at the 2006 iGeo, Tunisia

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