



IGU-Commission C20.21
“Global Understanding”

Chair: Benno Werlen

Commission Report 2020

In August 2020, the IGU Commission C16.18 on Global Understanding was successfully extended until 2024. As part of the extension of the Commission, the Steering Committee was also reconstituted. I am very pleased that four new colleagues have agreed to serve on the Commission. The Steering Committee is now even more diverse in regional, generational, and gender regard. Its four new members also bring in fresh expertise and new topics.

Due to the Corona pandemic, most activities of the commission have been performed in form of online conferences, workshop and committee meetings in 2020. Despite these difficult circumstances in the six months of running time of the commission, a quite considerable number of important results could be achieved, and the newly constituted steering committee set a challenging agenda for the years to come, encompassing two main fields: Global Understanding of the urbanization process, and Global Understanding as a basic concept for the implementation of the SDGs.

Benno Werlen (Chair)

2021-03-05

A. Membership

I Steering Committee

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II Corresponding Members

The commission's newsletter has a total number of 1,495 subscribed contacts. Nationalities are as follows:

Argentina	6
Australia	13
Austria	14
Belgium	21
Brazil	32
Canada	13
Chile	5
China	20
Czech Republic	8
Denmark	6
Finland	6
France	33
Germany	279
Hongkong	9
India	9
Israel	4
Italy	21
Japan	36
Korea (South)	10
Luxembourg	6
Netherlands	13
New Zealand	7
Norway	8
Poland	9
Portugal	10
Russia	11
South Africa	211
Spain	11
Sweden	11
Switzerland	32
Taiwan	22
United Kingdom	32
Unknown	566

B. Meetings and Events

UN & WAAS Conference “Global Leadership in the 21st Century. Strategies for Transformative Global Leadership”, June 15-19, 2020

Benno Werlen delivered two presentations on Global Understanding at the UN & WAAS (World Academy of Art & Science) Conference “Global Leadership in the 21st Century. Strategies for Transformative Global Leadership”. The presentations were held in the panels on “Civil Society and Youth: New Strategies for Transformative Impact” and “Master Degree Program for Global Transformative Leadership”.

UNESCO MOST/BRIDGES Online Workshop, July 6-7, 2020

The paper “Global Understanding as a Research Paradigm” was given by Benno Werlen at a UNESCO online workshop within the MOST/BRIDGES program, an alliance under the auspices of the human and social science sector of UNESCO. The presentation focused the basic program of a possible UN Science Decade of Global Understanding.

Online Conference “Humanities and Social Sciences for Sustainability” October 21-22, 2020

The online conference “Humanities and Social Sciences for Sustainability”, organized by Benno Werlen, was held from October 21-22, 2020 at the virtual Dornburg Palaces (Jena, Germany). Under the auspices of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 24 speakers and discussants from all parts of the world debated new strategies to strengthen humanities and social sciences perspectives in sustainability research and policies. The conference offered a broad variety of topics relevant to different groups, from researchers in the social and natural sciences and the humanities, to decision-makers in science policy, leaders of scientific institutions, or social activists and artists. The online event was broadcast live and attracted almost 1.000 views during the two days and dozens of comments and questions in the digital live chat. Partners of the conference included the German Commission for UNESCO, the World Academy of Art & Science (WAAS), the Academia Europaea, The Club of Rome, the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH) as well as the International Geographical Union.

One of the conference’s recurring key topics were the epistemological limits of many of the established approaches to sustainability research. Mamphela Ramphele, Co-president of The Club of Rome, called for a shift from the current paradigm of universality to a “pluriversal perspective.” This change of perspective towards pluriversality could help overcome the top-down logic of current sustainability strategies and promote culturally and regionally differentiated paths to global sustainability. Another thematic focus was the production and the role of knowledge in processes of social transformation. In particular, the problem of co-production of knowledge together with non-scientific actors was discussed. There was a great consensus that in order to address concrete social problems successfully, a shift from the role model of the expert (authority) to the participant on equal footing (authenticity)

is necessary. Furthermore, it was pointed out that (scientific) knowledge alone is not sufficient for motivating far-reaching change. Amongst other things, art was discussed as a way to create resonance among the broad public and foster understanding for the need to change everyday practices. Finally, a series of papers drew attention to the current conditions of multi- and transdisciplinary research. It was suggested that funding policies, career tracks, or publication systems should be reorganized in order to increase funding of research beyond established disciplinary silos, and beyond the boundaries of Academia. Given the cultural and social nature of the sustainability crisis, the social sciences and humanities need to be given greater weight in transdisciplinary research projects, the discussants argued.

The results of the conference will be summarized and published as the “Jena Declaration” in early 2021. In addition to the IGU and individual signatories, support from CIPSH, WAAS, The Club of Rome, and the Academia Europaea is sought for the declaration.

C. Networking

Collaboration with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

The commission established a new collaboration with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) on the topic of knowledge mobilization. Benno Werlen (commission chair) together with Karsten Gaebler (commission secretary) and Joanne Kauffman produced the thought leadership paper "Future Knowledge Mobilization for Deep Societal Transformations" on behalf of SSHRC and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. The paper was published as part of a whole series on knowledge mobilization that addressed topics such as open education, geographically embedded knowledge, or intercultural and international research with Indigenous and rural peoples. The project undertaken by Werlen, Gaebler and Kauffman developed guidelines for knowledge mobilization based upon a series of interviews with experts in the field of transdisciplinary sustainability science and science policy. The results will not only stimulate debate on how to successfully disseminate scientific knowledge and co-develop sustainable futures but also on ways to promote diversity in knowledge production and foster more inclusive perspectives.

Fellowship of the World Academy of Art & Science (WAAS)

On June 29, 2020, commission chair Benno Werlen was appointed as Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS). Under the motto "Leadership in thought that leads to action," the Academy brings together more than 700 scholars and artists from all fields to address global challenges and "serve the common good of all humanity." In the past decades, the Academy has emerged as an important voice of transdisciplinary, socially responsible research. The fellowship will be used to facilitate a closer cooperation of the commission with UN Organizations in the fields of education and research, as well as strengthening the awareness for the need of geographical perspectives for the big challenges of the present.

Collaboration with the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH)

The commission chair Benno Werlen was appointed as member of the scientific committee of the European Humanities Conference (EHC) 2021, scheduled for May 5-7 online from Lisbon. The EHC is co-organized by CIPSH and UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Program. The contribution includes a programmatic proposition entitled 'Alliance for Global Understanding – A new Mindset to Sustainability', also presented in form of a short video to the general public.

D. Publications

I Publications

Vintar Mally, Katja (2020): The environmental price of socio-economic development: worldwide trends from 1990 to 2016. In: European journal of geography 11, 2, pp. 137-153.

Vintar Mally, Katja (2020): The performance of European Union countries in decoupling socio-economic progress from environmental impacts. In: Dela, 54, pp. 105-123.

Werlen, Benno; Kauffman, Joanne; Gaebler, Karsten (2020): Future Knowledge Mobilization for deep societal transformations. In: Canadian Commission for UNESCO (Ed.): Imagining the future of Knowledge Mobilization. Perspectives from UNESCO Chairs, pp. 113-126.

Werlen, Benno & Blumenthal, Howard (2020): "Global Understanding, Education, and Sustainability." In: UNESCO Education Sector (Ed.): Humanistic Futures of Learning. Perspectives from UNESCO chairs and UNITWIN networks. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 87-90.

II Commission website

<https://iguglobalunderstanding.jimdofree.com>

E. Archival Contributions

None to date.