International Geographical Union
Minutes of the IGU Executive Committee Meeting
Zoom EC Meeting
Thursday, 15th October, 2020

Welcome, Meeting Logistics and Introductions

The online meeting was chaired by President Mike Meadows, who welcomed EC members, Secretary-General R.B. Singh, Past-President Yukio Himiyama, First Vice-President Iain Hay, Vice Presidents Nathalie Lemarchand, Elena dell’Agnese, Bojie Fu, Ruben Lois-González, Barbaros Gönençgil, Céline Rozenblat, Holly Barcus, along with, Assistant Secretary-General Pankaj Kumar. The Executive Committee meeting commenced at 10h00 GMT on Tuesday, 15th October 2020.

Adoption of the Schedule and Agenda

The agenda was duly adopted.

Minutes

Minutes of the IGU Executive Committee Meeting, held online on 15th September 2020, previously circulated and corrected via email, were approved. Lemarchand agreed to produce a French translation.

Organization and Operations

4.01 IGU Strategy and Priorities 2020-2024

Meadows presented via Powerpoint his perspectives on the IGU strategy and priorities for the period 2020 to 2024. He noted that, according to the IGU Statutes, the purposes of the International Geographical Union are as follows: to promote the study of geographical problems; to initiate and coordinate geographical research requiring international co-operation and to promote its scientific discussion and publication; to provide for the participation of geographers in the work of relevant international organizations; to facilitate the collection and diffusion of geographical data and documentation in and between all member countries; to promote meetings of the International Geographical Union, regional conferences between the International Geographical Congresses, and other meetings in furtherance of the objectives of the Union; to participate in any other appropriate form of international co-operation with the object of advancing the study and application of geography; to promote international standardization or compatibility of methods, nomenclature, and symbols employed in geography.

In reflecting on this set of purposes, Meadows went on to note that most of these purposes have traditionally been a focus and that, with the possible exception of the point about facilitating the collection and diffusion of geographical data and documentation (which point is not entirely clear), IGU does appear to at least attempt to fulfil most of its obligations. He presented a brief summary of the most prominent tasks in relation to the question, ‘what does IGU do?’ as follows: organizes regular Congresses/Regional conferences/Thematic conferences and IGU-branded meetings; promotes research and teaching in the discipline principally through its Commissions and Task Forces; connects with and attempts to extend its international footprint through its national membership and via national geographical associations; promotes education, specifically through its adoption of the International Charter on Geographical Education and through the work of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education and the Olympiad Task Force; is active in its membership of ISC (and through this with the GeoUnions specifically and other unions in general) and /CIPSH; through its promotion of research publications, via the Commissions and in developing publication series with both Springer and Edward Elgar, publishes the IGU Bulletin approximately biannually, and the biennial IGU e-Newsletter; engages in public promotion of discipline: in particular through its involvement in the Festival International de Géographie and the Night of Geographie/La Nuit de
Géographie; administers awards to deserving candidates via its Honors and Awards Committee; engages from time to time in special projects, such as IYGU, GeoSus and IGU Journals Project; communicates its activities and connects with the membership and community at large via the website, various social media platforms and email. Meadows noted that there are essentially four constituencies with which we need to communicate, viz. IGU Commissions and Task Forces, IGU National Committees and the broader community of geographers, external bodies including ISC (and related unions) and CIPSH, and those bodies that have major political influence in setting the global scientific context and agenda, such as UNESCO.

Meadows went on then to reflect on four issues in relation to the work of the IGU as follows: What do we do well? What do we do less well? Where and how can we improve? What is missing (what should be doing that we are not)? In considering the first of these questions, Meadows noted that, in his view, IGU is reasonably successful in organizing its Congresses, Regional Conferences, and Thematic Conferences. Singh noted that the IGU brand is also prominent in other conferences globally, especially the regular meetings that are held in India which help to promote the IGU name. Himiyama also suggested that, given the current restrictions on travel due to COVID-19, IGU should consider supporting (and even adding our logo where appropriate) other scientific meetings that are being held online and often free of registration fee – a situation that is likely to prevail for some time in the future and one that IGU can take advantage of. Meadows commented that most Commissions and Task Forces are active in promoting research, education and outreach in the discipline, some very strongly so, and that these bodies lie really at the core of IGU activities. The regular formal review of Commissions and Task Forces, together with the annual Commission Excellence Award help to keep this element of IGU work strong. IGU-related publications (including of course Commission and Task Force research outputs and the various publishing house series, are effective and enjoy a strong reputation. IGU also provides a suitable platform for geographers to participate in international bodies and that we regularly make nominations to, for example, ISC and related committees, albeit not always successfully so. IGU external relations are generally good among the communities associated with organizations such as ISC, CIPSH, and a number of other bodies, including various geographical associations (such as AAG, RGS/IBG among others). Singh noted the strong reputation we have within the UNGGIM. The public profile of IGU, while very limited, is supported by La Nuit de Géographie/Night of Geography initiative and by our improved relationship with FIG. IGU does have the Planet and Humanity Medal and Lauréat d'honneur awards but it the potential role of awards in promoting IGU may have been underestimated and the IGU Honors and Awards Committee has been tasked with making recommendations as to how this may be improved.

In terms of what IGU does less well, Meadows reflected on the limited geographical footprint of membership in Africa and pledged that he would endeavour to improve this situation over the next four years. Lois-González noted that he has recently had very promising discussions with geographers in Mozambique that may yet lead to a membership application from that country. The distribution of countries of domicile of chairs of IGU Commissions and Task Forces also indicates very major gaps across Africa, while the situation regarding steering committee members is somewhat more equitable. In terms of communication, Meadows indicated that he is particularly keen to improve this aspect of the IGU work. The website has an attractive design, but its structure, accuracy and currency require work and, as pointed about by Hay, Rozenblat and Kumar among others, it is difficult to navigate around. IGU engagement with social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, are all in need of more focused attention. In terms of accuracy and completeness, the IGU email database needs to be updated, an ongoing task of course. The IGU e-newsletter has been faithfully produced over many years by former Vice-President Bellezza but there are indications that a facelift is in order and the ongoing confusion over the branding ‘Home of Geography’ in relation to IGU needs to be addressed. The IGU Bulletin has fallen well behind its publication schedule. There was some discussion as to whether or not this needs to be published at all but Meadows noted that the Bulletin serves as a formal record of IGU activities and events, and Himiyama noted its importance as a historical archive. It was agreed that we should continue to publish the Bulletin biannually but that in future perhaps a pdf version circulated via email and posted on the website would suffice. Either way, it is imperative that the next issue (for 2017 and 2018) be produced as soon as possible. In terms of what IGU could or should be doing, Meadows raised a
number of possible developments. The matter of governance (i.e. who is eligible to cast a vote in the General Assembly) has recently been raised, as indeed has the issue of membership categories and whether or not it would be feasible or desirable to open up individual membership. Lemarchand pointed out that individual membership may result in complications as national membership subscriptions are sometimes collected or subsidised via individual contributions. In any case, without a permanent, paid secretariat, it would be very difficult to administer individual membership. This of course begs the question as to how IGU could increase its funding base to facilitate paid secretarial assistance; the current funding model is certainly not suited to such a possibility. Meadows raised a few other possible initiatives, such as encouraging Commissions and Task Forces to operate a research/publication mentorship programme, whether we should develop an even stronger focus on education, the possibility of a series of online IGU lectures or webinars, whether we should try to coordinate our efforts more precisely on common themes (e.g., the UN SDGs), or develop other strategic projects. Meadows noted that he is very keen to improve communication overall, especially with traditionally non-anglophone communities.

In order to facilitate progress and demonstrate the work of the IGU, Meadows then proposed a list of key ‘portfolios’ and that EC members, or groups of EC members, take responsibility for these. Meadows suggested the following portfolios with responsibilities as indicated:

- Congresses/conferences
- Treasury
- IGU Congress and Conference travel grants
- Commissions and Task Forces
- Commission review and Excellence Award
- National Committees
- Databases/record keeping etc.
- IGU annual report
- Elections/National Committee applications etc.
- General correspondence
- Website and other social media
- Publications (Series)
- IGU e-Newsletter
- Bulletin
- Awards
- External relations (including ISC, CIPSH, CODATA, UN-GGIM, AAG, RGS/IBG, ICA etc.)
- French/Spanish outreach/translation
- FIG/Night of Geography/International Day of Geography
- IGU publicity brochure
- Governance
- IGU Journals project

Following discussion, the following allocations were agreed:

Conferences/conferences (Meadows, Singh, EC members as appropriate)
Treasury (Barcus, Meadows)
IGU Congress and Conference travel grants (Barcus, Meadows)
Commissions and Task Forces (Singh, Kumar; others as per list approved at EC meeting of 15.09.2020)
Commission review and Excellence Award (dell’Agnese; with Lois-González, Gönençgil, Hay)
National Committees (Singh, Kumar; others as per list approved at EC meeting of 15.09.2020)
Databases/record keeping etc. (Singh, Kumar)
IGU annual report (Singh, Meadows)
Elections/National Committee applications etc. (Singh, Kumar)
General correspondence (Singh, Meadows)
Website and other social media (Rozenblat, Kumar, Hay, Meadows)
Publications (Series) (Singh, Hay, Meadows)
IGU e-Newsletter (Rozenblat, with former V-P Bellezza)
Bulletin (Singh, Kumar)
Awards (Himiyama*)
External relations (all, as per attached Appendix 1)
French/Spanish outreach/translation (Lemarchand, Lois-González, Rozenblat)
FIG/Night of Geography/International Day of Geography (Lemarchand, Gönençgil)
IGU publicity brochure (Meadows)
Governance (Hay, Lemarchand)
IGU Journals project (Fu)

* This is a change from previous agreement that Singh be the principal liaison with the chair of the IGU Honors and Awards Committee

Discussion followed in which the suggested allocation was accepted. Meadows noted that the intention was that those indicated would report back on their respective portfolios at future EC meetings and that much of the work on these should take place in the background via email, occasional Zoom meetings etc. Although the suggested arrangement does not constitute a new strategy per se, Meadows noted that the hope that it will at least streamline operations and ensure that there will be operational improvements in those areas highlighted as requiring attention. Himiyama noted the particular importance for the IGU of the SDGs, Education for Sustainable Development, and Future Earth and that these are symbolic of the policy context within which we operate. It was agreed that IGU should emphasize these three issues in our operations and to try to ensure that they develop in an integrated way. Meadows concurred that these three broad issues provide an important framework for geographers and agreed to compile a short briefing document on the IGU Strategy in which he would highlight their significance.

Other Business

Lemarchand noted that FIG for 2021 is confirmed and that the theme is "Body" and the invited "country" is 'Europe(s)'. She further noted that the newly elected President of the International Cartographic Association is Professor Phillippe de Maeyer, who is also the former chair of the Belgium's National Geography Committee.

Date of next meeting

Given that it will not be possible to hold a face-to-face meeting in Santiago di Compostela, Spain, in November, as originally agreed, Meadows would circulate a Doodle Poll to schedule two online meetings. The agenda for these meetings would focus on the usual operational items but that the upcoming Congresses in Istanbul and Paris would be given sufficient time during the meeting to ensure their full consideration.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12h00 GMT on 15th October, 2020.