

## Progress Report 2009

Updating of the last development in advance of the Seoul meeting:

- The 'Laboratory of Enlightenment' gave us its full support following my November presentation. This organization is the connection to the broader Humanities community in Germany. We are jointly applying to the Culture Ministry of the Thuringian State Government for funding.
- Meetings with humanities and social science representatives at various organizations are underway. I have met with Dr. Thomas Wiemer at the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: German Research Council) and with the leaders of ANR's (France's Agence Nationale de Recherche) Social Sciences and Humanities section. I also plan to meet Prof Dr. Helga Novotny at the European Research Council (ERC) before approaching the International Social Science council (ISSC). I am able to undertake these latter two contacts as a member of panels within these important research bodies: 'society and environment' (ERC) and 'humanities and social sciences' (ANR).
- In February, I visited Ed deMulder in Utrecht for a very informative conversation with lots of advice and extremely helpful tips based on his experience with the International Year of Planet Earth. Especially helpful were the procedures he outlined for getting countries' support as required for UNESCO and ECOSOC. He also emphasized the importance of publicity materials in convincing supporters. We agreed that he will present the experiences of the Planet Earth-Initiative on conference in Jena on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. Unfortunately the date had to be cancelled and to reschedule for June or early July. I will invite members of the Executive Committee as well as representatives of the local government and the German community of geographers and geoscientists to this important public start-up meeting, as soon we are able to fix location and exact date.
- In early March I spoke with Dr. Katerina Stenou, Director of UNESCO's Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue. She advised me that the term 'United Nations' should not appear in the initiative's title until the General Assembly has formally proclaimed the year. Our conversation highlighted the importance of gathering a broad coalition of supporters, in terms of both states and organizations, in order to gain UNESCO's support. Dr. Stenou also suggested that our initiative emphasize the physical aspects in the context of global understanding. All in all she sounded very interested, although she needs – according to my impressions - to see broader support for the initiative before she will really 'open the door'.
- The regional secretariat network is growing. In Santiago de Compostela, the secretariat has is financially supported by the USC and the Regional Ministry of Investigation and Development. The Seoul and Moscow offices are, of course, under very able leadership of Woo-Ik and Vladimir. We have not yet received confirmation of the offices in Canada or Rome. A full slate of secretariats would be very helpful for the initiative's promotion. In addition, we are discussing a South Asian secretariat with Vatsal Bhatt, and exploring whether he or Prithvish Nag would be able to lead it.
- As you are aware, our presentation at the AAG meeting in Las Vegas generated interested and interesting discussion about future possibilities for the initiative. Private conversations with Dr. Johannes Karte from the DFG, Anssi Paasi, Allen Scott, Ron Martin, and other individuals yielded promising leads. I am also very glad for the opportunity you and I had to develop strategy for contacting international science organizations.

- The most important meeting was of course meeting with Ron for over two hours. We could discuss all the past and future steps and I was able to explain (in more detail than it is possible to do it here in written form) why we need now broader support from the community of geographers, morally and financially. Morally we need a formal declaration of support from as many national IGU-committees as possible in order to demonstrate substantial international support to UNESCO (Dr. Stenou). Financially we need the support to cover the costs for flyers and brochures that present the meaning, the content and the aims of the IGU-initiative in short to convince the further supports we need. In addition we discussed the strategies to get support from International council for Science (ICSU) and International Social Science council (ISSC). Without their support, it will be difficult to get UNESCO's support. We have already prepared the letters to be send to the presidents of this two crucial institutions. Hopefully the Executive Committee of IGU can approve these letters.

We have considerable 'new business' and upcoming events to report as well.

Our website is up and running at [www.global-understanding.info](http://www.global-understanding.info). Over the next few weeks, a considerable amount of information will be added to it, so that this will be a central publicity and information node. A professionally-designed brochure is also ready for the printer, but cannot be reproduced until we have the means to pay for it. That situation is detailed in a formal request for funds emailed to Woo-Ik also attached here.

On June 5 I will take part in the London School of Economics' conference on The Politics of Climate Change. Hosted by Lord Anthony Giddens and the Global Governance Network, the conference is designed to provide an interface between government and academia. I expect to meet with representative of the Clinton and Gorbachev Foundations, ministers from European and US governments as well as think tank representatives. I hope to gain support and to start cooperation for a stronger integration of the physical aspects into 'global understanding' as well as financial support from the mentioned foundations.

On 8-10 June 2009 I will take part in the conference The Great Transformation: Climate Change as Cultural Change, in Essen, Germany. As this conference brings together major thinkers on connections between climate change and shifts in market economy, democracy, cultural identity and global cooperation, it should be a fruitful site to find partners for the International Year. The conference is hosted by the Wuppertal Institute, one of the leading institutes on the topic of climate change worldwide. I hope to get strong support from German institutions in the field of ecological political action, and most importantly to meet Prof. Klaus Toepfer, until 2006 executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). His support could be the door opener at UNESCO and ecological actions.

Both of these meetings are designed to clarify the connection between ecological and cultural elements, and to move away from reductionist approaches to the environment. They are, therefore, promising hunting grounds for partners for our initiative.

Besides the financial support and interdisciplinary interest, it is also important that we demonstrate to UNESCO that the international year is supported by countries across the globe. For this reason we would like to ask the leaders of every national commission within the IGU to send us a brief letter outlining their support. This is not a pledge of any further action, but a simple memoranda encouraging further development of the initiative. A letter that you could send to the commission leaders is attached here. It includes a sample text that they can copy and paste.

As already mentioned, the final appendix is a draft of the letter we discussed for you to send to ICSU and the ISSC asking for their involvement in the international year.

Plans to contact the International Red Cross, the International Olympic Committee, Google and ArcInfo are on hold until we have the appropriate publicity materials. Our advertising agency estimates that the annual cost of designing, mailing, and distributing these materials will approach €20 000.

## APPENDIX 1: Letter/Reply to/from the presidents of the national committees

Dear

The IGU is working to bring about an international year of Global Understanding. This year will focus on globalization in its cultural and physical aspects. We hope to have the United Nations make a declaration affirming this year at the next possible General Assembly meeting. To help bring this about we need the support of each and every national commission.

The UN is, of course, an organization of states. In order to gain its support, we must demonstrate that we already have support from around the globe. I am therefore requesting each National Commission of the IGU write a formal letter of support for the International Year of Global Understanding. These letters, once compiled, will demonstrate the global reach of and support for the project. This formal support does not obligate you to any operational expenditures, but will significantly assist the progress of our international union.

You may use the following text for your letter, revise it, or write your own letter of support as you wish. Please use official stationery for your letter.

Dr. Benno Werlen  
The Initiative for an International Year on Global Understanding  
c/o Lehrstuhl fuer Sozialgeographie  
Loebdergraben 32  
D-07743 Jena  
Germany

[IYUN\\_IGU@uni-jena.de](mailto:IYUN_IGU@uni-jena.de)

Dear Dr. Werlen,

I am writing to you as the leader of the International Geographers' Union's national commission in *my country* to express my support for the IGU's international year of Global Understanding. The international research and public awareness activities will directly support the efforts of our national-level commission. Increased international cooperation resulting from the research agenda on connections between cultural and physical aspects of globalization will be extremely useful for our purposes. The public awareness campaigns bringing attention to the complex effects of globalization's processes at every level of individuals' lives will likewise prompt changes beneficial to our population.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

R. Abler