

International Year of Global Understanding

Progress Report March 2012

Since my last report end of June 2011 a considerable number of steps could be taken. Some of them I reported in short e-mails. Now I would like to give a more comprehensive overview over the process in the last couple of months.

In my last few e-mails, I mentioned the quite complicated, and for a while very promising, process of obtaining **Monaco's** support for the UNESCO application. With the considerable assistance of Ulrich Beck, we obtained Klaus Töpfer's support. He is not only the former director of UNEP, the co-chair of the German energy ethics commission and recently a serious contender for Germany's presidency, but also a member of the board of directors of the Prince Albert II Foundation. He initially agreed to write a letter of support directly to Prince Albert II (which he sent to me to preview), but thereafter considered presenting the YGU himself at the Foundation's board of directors meeting at the end of September. To support this meeting, I went to Monaco and was given permission to present the project to the Foundation staff at its headquarters. Unfortunately, Klaus Töpfer was ultimately unable to attend the meeting. Without the Foundation's support, the political administration didn't believe it had the capacity to take a leading role in the process. Nevertheless, Klaus Töpfer offered his support for the further process and he is a personal sponsor of the IYGU. Last Friday, the director of the German Research Foundation, Matthias Kleiner, who is the other co-chair of the German energy ethics commission, which is leading Germany's energy politics towards a more sustainable future, also offered his personal support.

At the **IGU Regional conference in Santiago de Chile** (November 13 to 18) I conveyed the latest progress to the Executive Committee. Before I expand on this, I would like to mention that the EXC of the IGU accepted the following time table for the IYGU process at the end of this meeting: Aiming at the UNESCO application process in 2013 and preparing the necessary steps for this this, first of all, implies a search process to find an applicant country; second, the preparation of a substantial number of relevant brochures/publications; third, the preparation of the resolution text. This decision was taken after a detailed report of the application process's progress during the summer of 2011 to the late autumn. The presentation of the IYGU to the community of geographers present at the regional conference made it possible to familiarize them with the initiative's aims and claims and to invite them to participate in the different working groups, especially at the level of the regional action centers. In this respect, Irasema Alcantara Ayala confirmed that Mexico City would act as the regional center for the Americans. In addition, the first contacts were made for the implementation of regional centers for Asia and Africa.

Last December we obtained the support of **four ICSU Unions** (Remote Sensing, Geo-Physics, Radiometry, and Geology). We will try to obtain further support in order to gain the support of the entire ICSU as an umbrella organization. We drew up a list of Unions that could substantially help with the process and that 'naturally' relate to the IYGU. We hope to obtain support from at least some of them in the next two months or so. It would not only be great to go through to the end of this process successfully, but also to obtain the official

support of the ICSU as a whole. Together with the ISSC and CIPSH, we would then have the support of the three topically most important scientific international umbrella organizations.

After my return from the Santiago de Chile conference, I started preparing the French version of the brochure. After it had become clear that Monaco would not play a leading role in the political process of the YIGU initiative, I immediately started networking again to find a leader for the political application process. I first made contact with the **Moroccan government** before Christmas. These contacts were confirmed in early January. A first version of the French edition of the brochure was ready shortly after mid-January (see attachment). From January 24-29 I was in Rabat and Marrakesh to meet two secretaries of state with the rank of ministers, a representative of the Mohammed VI Foundation (see <http://www.fm6e.org/en.html>), and the group of people who had established the contact to discuss the next steps. We agreed to meet the Moroccan foreign and environmental ministers in their ministries at the end of March/early April and, we hope – as announced – the King's sister, princess Lalla Hasnaa, who is the president of the Mohammed VI Foundation.

Mid-February I wrote a letter to the foreign minister of **Brazil**, explaining the project and asking for support (see attachment). Luiz Oosterbeek (a member of the YIGU Scientific panel) was very active in Brazil. A colleague of his, Ingelore Scheunemann of the Ibero-American network for technical development, had already convinced the foreign minister of the YIGU's value. The latter was ready to learn more about the initiative and signaled his strong interest. In addition, Luiz managed to obtain at least 4 positions to present the YIGU at the **Rio+20** conference in June 2012). Luiz, Armin Reller, Ed de Mulder, and I will therefore present the YIGU at this very prominent conference. The Thuringian minister of economy, labor and technology will talk about the YIGU's potential regional and local impacts. All the mentioned speakers contributed to a book on 'Integrated Landscape Management' (ILM) that Luiz Oosterbeek edited and which will be presented at the Rio+20 Conference. These contributions establish the link between ILM and YIGU.

Through Adama Samassékou (member of the YIGU Steering Committee), we are still in touch with **Mali** and its ministry for the environment, but nothing much has happened there since the end of December. This may change once the French version of the brochure is ready.

Ron Abler chaired the jointly organized special session at the **AAG in New York** (January 24-27, 2012), presenting the YIGU at the largest meeting of geographers by far. In terms of AAG standards, the session was well attended. Ron presented the route the YIGU has taken, while I presented the core aspects of the YIGU, the state of the process, and the possibilities of joining and contributing to the initiative. John Pickles, a member of the YIGU's scientific panel, commented on the presentation and put geographers' responsibilities under globalized living conditions into perspective. The audience questions and remarks in the subsequent discussion mainly addressed the political process and the global south not being adequately represented in the steering committee and the scientific panel. However, there were no suggestions regarding who else could be asked to join the initiative.

Thanks to the initiative of Wo-ik Yu (see my e-mail of November 11, 2011), former secretary general of the IGU and now minister of reunification in the Korean government), Ron Abler and I had the opportunity to meet the First Secretary, San Deok Na, at the **Republic of**

Korea's permanent mission to the UN, as well as his successor, on Tuesday February 27 for slightly more than half an hour. In a very friendly atmosphere, we presented the core elements of the initiative, the time frame to obtain a proclamation of the year 2015, the potential support by other countries, and the project's financial background. We agreed that it would be very helpful to obtain feedback from the Korean mission within the next two or three months to coordinate further steps. We mentioned that we would be very grateful if Korea could take the lead in this initiative's political application process, supported by all the major international science organizations and a rather impressive number of internationally leading natural and social scientists. We also expressed our conviction that to have the IYGU accepted would be a historical step in many respects, not only for the International Geographical Union, but also for the integration of the social and natural sciences into sustainability research.

During the AAG, I also had a very promising chat with Robert Rojek, editor in chief of the Social Sciences and Geography section at **Sage Publisher**. I told him about the IYGU and our idea of publishing six books/brochures on the global impact of everyday actions in specific fields (eating, drinking, etc.) twice. I showed him the brochure and the potential authors involved in the project. He became really interested in the project. According to him, all the potential authors are 'his' major authors and he is therefore very interested in becoming involved. In the meantime, I have sent him a detailed draft of the potential book publications and their potential market.

Before leaving New York and the AAG meeting, I wrote a letter (including 2 brochures and flyers) to Jeffrey Sachs, who is the director of the **Earth Institute of Columbia University** (New York), special advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former director of the UN Millennium Project, and special advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals, inviting him to join the IYGU team or to become one of its patrons. He gave a very impressive keynote lecture at the AAG, which followed the line of argument developed by the IYGU almost fully. His answer is pending.

At the Berlin conference '**Co-Designing Knowledge**' (March 7-9, 2012) organized by the German Global Climate Change Commission (the Commission that refused to support IYGU in the internal German decision process to UNESCO in May 2011) and co-sponsored by ISSC and ICSU, most papers were very much in tune with the basic structure of the IYGU and TIERS (see below). It was possible to familiarize the participants with the IYGU, to get in touch with the director of the German Research Foundation, Matthias Kleiner and, finally, to get – as already mentioned – his support. In addition, this conference offered the opportunity to invite a considerable number of people to the conference linked to the ICSU-funded project 'Transdisciplinary Intercultural Ecological Research for Sustainability' (TIERS), which will take place June 8-10, 2012 in Jena. TIERS reflects the IYGU's theoretical framework. Its steering committee comprises Heide Hackmann, Margaret Robertson, Ron Abler, and Gordon McBean (all members of the IYGU steering committee), while I'm the project's director as submitted in the name of the IYGU to the ICSU's Grant Programme 2011 in early December 2010.

A few days ago I received – on the basis of contacts established in Santiago de Chile – an invitation from the national 'Geographers' Association in **Taiwan** to meet with them at the end of April 2012 and to discuss the possibility of installing a regional action center of the

IYGU for Asia in Taipei. If this plan is realized, only the regional center for Africa would be pending.

Finally, I managed to gain **financial support** from the Thuringian regional government and – on March 15 – also from my university. Last autumn's anticipated support by the ministry had to be revised due to quite substantial budget cuts that were accepted in the last parliament sitting in December 2011. The latest confirmed decision is to support the IYGU until further notice. We can therefore continue our efforts as planned in the 2011 meetings, although we now only have money for a half-time time secretariat and not a full-time one. The duration of the funding will of course depends heavily on the political application process's success. As I interpret the decision taken by ministry and University, this means that we will have financial support until March 31, 2013, which will cease if we haven't found a country to take the lead in the UNESCO application process.

The IYGU seems to be in good shape and the plan is now to be ready for the UNESCO process in 2013 when there will be a request to declare the UN Year 2015 as agreed at the executive committee meeting in Santiago de Chile. Many doors are open to reach this goal and I hope that we will soon walk through one of them. In any case, we have to start with the production of the brochures/books very soon. I will contact the editors designated at the Jena meeting of the steering committee's scientific and outreach panel in May 2011.

Benno Werlen
Executive Director IYGU

Jena, 03-18-2012