

## **From Tel Aviv 2010 onwards**

After the three different presentations (EXC, Commissions Chair, and Plenary Session) of the multiple aspects of the IYGU at the IGU Regional Conference in Tel Aviv, July 12-16, things moved very rapidly in the intended direction. Although the presentation at the Festival de Géographie early October in Saint Dié was not the most successful event imaginable, all other steps taken were in the right direction, although their speed and pace could sometimes have been steadier. The most important actions from IGU Regional Conference to the present are the following.

In Tel Aviv, the general outline of the IYGU's scientific program was accepted. The scientific program is aimed at using a few universal everyday practices to develop a better global understanding of the new geographical conditions, in order to promote research on sustainability across disciplines, and to solicit support for the "Grand Challenges in Sustainability" research agenda jointly initiated by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the International Council for Science (ICSU), two of the major international scientific union councils. In addition, consensus was reached that the application of the IGU Initiative for an International Year of Global Understanding will be submitted at the UN General Assembly through UNESCO and affiliated institutions. To do so, a flyer was produced in English and French. At the same time, the fund-raising process for the financial support of the secretariat could successfully be completed.

To obtain a correct, updated, and reliable picture of the path to be followed inside the UN system, Prof. Manuel Fröhlich, a political scientist, international organization specialist, and member of the "German Society for the United Nations," has been contacted. He and the former president of the German UNESCO commission, Prof. Hüfner, advised me to directly get in touch with German UNESCO Commission to get specific advice. Following this route, I met the director of the science division of the German UNESCO Commission on October 7, 2010 in Bonn to discuss the IYGU program, its supporters and potential sponsors, and the further steps. The road map that was designed at that meeting included the following steps: preparation of the UNESCO application text; if possible presentation of the application by the to UNESCO's Executive Board at the first preparatory meeting of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in May 2011, or at the latest at the second meeting in September 2011. The UNESCO decision would then be envisaged for the General Conference in October/November 2011 in Paris. To be a candidate for this decision, the first condition is to obtain the support of the majority of the members of the Executive Board of UNESCO and its electoral groups.

To broaden the scientific basis of IYGU, an application for the "ICSU Grants Programme 2011" was prepared by the executive director. The project, "Transdisciplinary Intercultural Ecological Research for Sustainability (TIERS)" will identify, collate, compare, and disseminate examples of integrative research on coupled social/natural systems and their applications to environmental policies from a broad array of cultures and traditions. A mix of young and seasoned scholars from different language and culture realms, from the natural, behavioral, and social sciences and from engineering and the humanities will meet for four

days to present the latest relevant research in their respective specialties to environmental policy makers. The papers and conclusions from the conference will be reported in a special issue of a major environmental journal and will buttress ICSU-ISSC plans for a decade devoted to global sustainability research. Teaching modules based on the conference presentations will be prepared for use in schools. The project was submitted by December 1, 2011. It was evaluated very positively by the ICSU "Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR)" early April 2011 and was funded at the maximum amount that the ICSU awards. The proposal has been qualified as "very innovative in making a strong effort to bridge the interface between society/nature and science policy, emphasizing the role of cultural factors in the use of resources, environment transformation and sustainable development."

The IYGU already obtained the ISSC's formal support in the summer of 2010 through its president Prof. Gudmund Hernes. This formal support was approved by the General Assembly of the ISSC during December 8-12, 2010 in Nagoya (Japan), where the programmatic outline of the IYGU and the "Grand Challenge" program's integration into it were presented. The general assembly of the ISSC approved the formal support and made the IYGU one of its six major programmatic projects for the next four years. In the joint symposium of the ISSC and the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH) on "Changing Nature – Changing Sciences? The Challenges of Global Environmental Change for the Social Sciences and Humanities," I presented the IYGU's epistemological and methodological background and its possible common points of interest for these international sciences organization. This presentation was highly appreciated by the Nobel Prize laureate Prof Yuan-Tseh Lee, the president elect of the ICSU. In the meantime, he offered his full support for the IYGU. Right after these two presentations, the quite successful constitution process of the Steering Committee was taken one decisive step forward. This process was guided by the principle of attaining a rather equal continental and disciplinary representation, as well as a gender and age representation.

After returning from Nagoya, a first version of the programmatic IYGU outline was produced and the constitution process of the Steering Committee was completed. On this basis, an extended IYGU outline was produced and the formulation of the application text for UNESCO could be finished in time by mid-February 2011.

The fund raising during that period was a rather complicated issue and still is, especially regarding the organization and implementation of the necessary meetings of the Steering Committee and the different boards (scientific and outreach).

Despite these complications, we were able to prepare for the Weimar Meeting of the Steering Committee; it was attended by 12 members.