

International Geographical Congress (IGC) in Tunis, August 12–15, 2008

Over recent years, the IGU has supported UN initiatives on “Sustained Development” and others that fell into the integrative ecological perspective field, placing the emphasis on natural living conditions and geo-scientific perspectives. Undoubtedly, the field of integrated research is one of geography’s core competences, and has been recognized as such by the wider public over recent decades. But these initiatives and subsequent research initiatives neglected the cultural dimension in the (problematic) transformation process of nature and in general. This is the starting point for an IGU initiative for a UN International Year, emphasizing the cultural dimension more strongly, as well as the new geographical conditions under which we live for the first time in human history: the globalization of everyday lives.

The main guidelines for this enterprise can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the title of the international UN Year initiated by the IGU should focus strongly on geography’s competencies. It should address all parts of geography, physical as well as human geography. The second point concerns the “logic of action,” meaning to change from a top-down structure of organization to a bottom-up logic. The main goal is to focus on the *cultural dimension of geographical living conditions in the age of globalization, including the cultural aspects of the transformation of natural living conditions.*

These guidelines were subject to intensive discussions at the 31st IGU Congress in Tunis during August 2008. Two special sessions addressed the question of the orientation of the IUNY, the different research topics on which the IUNY should focus, and the different forms of outreach these core dimensions should have. In the first session (Wednesday, August 13, 14.00-15.30), the present state of discussion of the “IGU Initiative for an International UN Year” was the core element of the presentation. The design of the organizational structure, the topical key dimensions of the research programs, etc. were presented and discussed with the aim to consolidate and improve the suggested concepts. In the second session (Thursday, August 14, 14.00-15.30), there was a panel discussion on the “IGU Initiative for an International UN Year” – chaired by the General Coordinator of the IGU initiative Prof. Benno Werlen – in which the members of the Executive Committee of the IGU and members of the management team of the IGU initiative participated, namely Prof. Ron Abler, Prof. Anne Buttner, Prof. Vladimir Kolosov, and Prof. Bruno Messerli.

All human and physical geographers, the presidents of National Committees, chairs of all the IGU Commissions, and especially all persons interested in participating actively (topical working groups, management team, etc.) were cordially invited!

All in all, the initiative’s new structure has been welcomed. In addition, two other suggestions for the title have been made: an IY of “Globalization and Cultural Identity” and an IY of “Cultures of Sustainability.” A decision was made to integrate these topics at least into the programmatic outline of the IGU initiative.

Ron Abler has been elected as president of the IGU.

The full-time secretariat started to function right after the Tunis meeting on October 1 in Jena (Germany). Finally, Prof. Eduardo de Mulder, the general coordinator of the IY of Plant Earth, is prepared to give his wholehearted support to the IGU initiative.