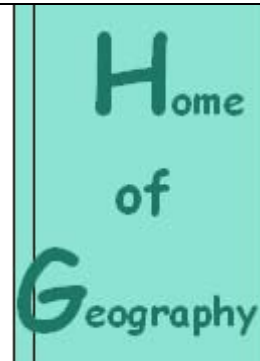




IGU E--Newsletter
Quarterly

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4

April

2006

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Announcements, information, calls for participation in scientific events, programmes and projects, are welcome. Please convey them to <d.bissell@homeofgeography.org>

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SPECIAL: Home of Geography



Message: Roles and visibility of geography in a changing world

A Latin proverb says: *Non progredi est regredi*, meaning “Not to go forwards is to go backwards”. This is the condition in which international geography, represented by the International Union, has been immersed. In 2001 in New York, Kofi Annan gave an inspiring speech to the international geographical community inviting it to collaborate with the UN system, particularly in the framework of the Millennium Goals. Since that cardinal event, the reasons why the IGU, as indeed any scientific community addressing the interaction between society and nature, should optimise its strategy and implement its organisational and operational tools, have been acquiring increasing importance.

As a matter of fact, nowadays, the approach to places and spaces must not only deal with global change but also investigate, and represent, the interaction between society and nature, the interaction between individual spaces and globalising processes, and the role of culture in shaping the identity of places. There is no doubt that many human communities and social contexts have moved from an approach to their existential condition focusing on evolution, i.e. on time, to an approach focusing on the sense and values of places, namely on space, particularly on what Yu-Fu Tuan called *topophilia*. Hence, the increased cultural and epistemological reason of geography.

Individual communities and the media have expanded and intensified their attention to the geographical features of places and their role in day-to-day life. There is a growing demand for geographical information and knowledge, meant as a specific tool to better understand the peculiar conditions of life, and to compare these conditions with those in different social contexts. Hence, the increased role of geography for mutual understanding among cultures.

To tailor its role in such a changing world and reference framework, IGU has increasingly felt the need to optimise its strategy by implementing inter-disciplinary approaches, by widening collaboration with other scientific institutions and inter-governmental organisations and by focusing on education and social communication. The recently adopted memos of understanding with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the Festival International de Géographie (FIG), together with the implementation of the role of the Home of Geography as the Union’s technical secretariat, are — among others, such as the Cultures and Civilizations for Human Development initiative — meaningful signals of a strengthening reactivity to the changing reference framework.

To proceed along this path, an increasingly closer collaboration between National Committees, Commissions and other research bodies, and the Executive Committee is needed. All these bodies are cordially invited to participate in building up such a strategy. The broader and more dynamic such interaction is, the more effective the role and visibility of IGU in the international arena will be.

Adalberto Vallega, President IGU



1) Obituaries for Prof. Niko Berutchashvili and Prof. Serge Antoine

It is very sad that the newsletter begins, for the second following time, with the unexpected announcement of death of two friends, Nikoloz Berutchashvili, that many of us used to call Niko, and Serge Antoine.

In memory of Niko Berutchashvili - Tireless Traveler in Space and Time (1947-2006)



Professor Niko Beruchashvili, Doctor of Sciences (Geography), Chair of the Department of Cartography and Geoinformatics, Tbilisi State University, and Chair of the International Geographical Union's Commission on Landscape Analysis, passed away on March 24, 2006, at the age of 58 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

In the years 1971-1976, Dr. Beruchashvili organized and led a program of year-round observations on the dynamics of landscape at the Martkophi Station. Stationary studies of such intensity - unknown before to the international research community - have enabled scientists to quantify diurnal states of landscape that Dr. Beruchashvili called stexes. On the basis of the station's research data, Dr. Beruchashvili has developed the concept of landscape geophysics whose principal notions are geomasses and geohorizons.

In parallel with research at the Martkophi Station, Dr. Beruchashvili led annual expeditions, both in summer and winter seasons, in the Caucasus and other mountainous regions of the Soviet Union. These expeditions became an inimitable school for hundreds of geographers, many of whom are now shaping the 'face' of this science in the post-Soviet domain.

By late 1970s, Dr. Beruchashvili has formulated the main concepts of spatio-temporal analysis and synthesis of landscape, which became the basis for his post-doctoral dissertation defended in 1981 at Moscow State University and for his landmark monograph, *Four Dimensions of a Landscape* (Moscow, 1986). His methodological concept of landscape synthesis followed a logical sequence: geomass ? geohorizon ? vertical structure ? stex ? natural-territorial complex.

In 1980s, Niko Beruchashvili developed a new direction in landscape science - the ethology of landscapes - which studies their "behavior" as a trajectory of changes of their temporal states. In late 1980s, on the basis of the unique databank of the Caucasus landscapes, Professor Beruchashvili

organized the development of Georgia's first Geographic Information System (GIS).

In the years following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Professor Beruchashvili did his best to maintain active professional contacts with his colleagues in the ex-Soviet states and worked hard to promote the achievements of Georgian geography within the international geographic research community. He actively lectured at the University of Paris and published there in 1991 his monograph, *Géosystèmes et Paysages: Bilan et Méthodes* (jointly with G. Rougerie), which summarized "western" and "eastern" approaches in landscape science. His innovative book *Caucasus: Landscapes, Models, Experiments* (Tbilisi, 1995) can be considered equally as an exhaustive reference on the landscapes of the Caucasus and a software manual for the Caucasus landscapes GIS and modeling package.

Since late 1990s, as the Chair of the National Committee of Georgian Geographers, Professor Beruchashvili was actively engaged in the activities of the International Geographical Union (IGU). In 2004 the IGU General Assembly approved him as the chairman of the newly established Commission on Landscape Analysis. He successfully launched the Commission's activities by organizing its first international conference "Critical Areas in a Landscape: From Theory to Mapping and Management" in Tbilisi, May 2005, and actively planned continuation of these initiatives at the IGU Regional Conference in Brisbane in July 2006. Another major contribution to IGU was educational. Together with colleagues from Mexico and South Africa, he was part of a pilot project on educational materials for secondary school teachers on issues of geography and sustainable development. This resulted in a Teacher's Guide, published in Moscow by the project leader, IGU Vice-President, the late Nikita Glazovski. The success of this pilot effort led to a more comprehensive, ICSU-funded, project to produce teaching and learning materials for capacity building in developing nations, which involved teachers and researchers from 9 different countries and which Niko was one of the founding members of.

In the recent years, Professor Beruchashvili coordinated development and implementation of practical applications of landscape analysis, including such areas as conservation of biological and landscape diversity and sustainable forest management in Georgia, under several projects supported by the Global Environment Facility, World Bank and World Wide Fund for Nature. He and his colleagues developed and successfully tested new techniques of mountain forest inventory on a landscape-ecological basis, with the production of landscape sustainability maps (so-called semaphore maps) for forest management planning.

Professor Beruchashvili authored over 200 research titles in national and international publications, including dozens of monographs, university and secondary-school textbooks. In 2001 he launched *The Caucasus Geographical Journal*.

Niko Beruchashvili was a real "romantic geographer". He could not imagine geography without travel. His exuberant energy, inhuman productivity, vast erudition, openness attracted to him fellow geographers of all countries. His former students now work in universities, research facilities, and international organizations around the world. He succeeded in attracting the attention of geographers to the "fourth dimension" of a landscape - time - particularly in the diurnal states of landscapes. The Caucasus, with its outstanding spatial-temporal contrasts, turned out to be best suited to support this scientific challenge. It would be no exaggeration to say that the main part of Niko Beruchashvili's works is a geographic poem about the Caucasus, written in the language of landscape dynamic states.

Professor Niko Beruchashvili, an outstanding geographer and tireless traveler, will be forever remembered by the community of geographers.

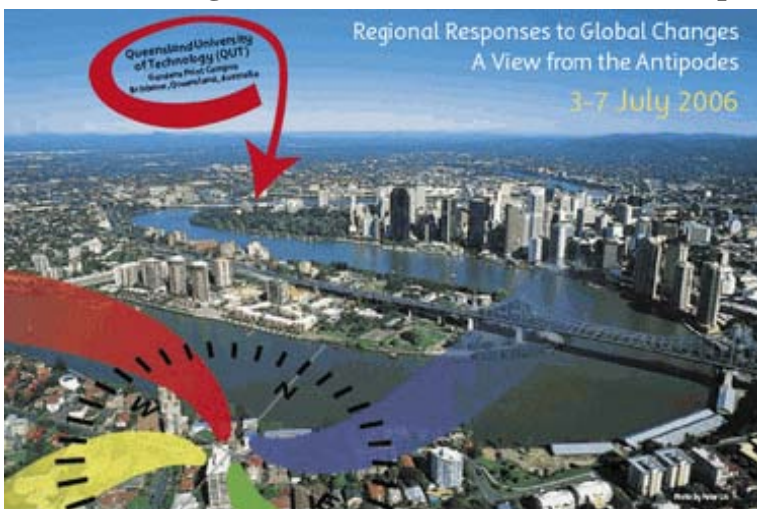
Anne Buttimer (University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland), Nodar Elizbarashvili (Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia), Grigory Isachenko (St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia), Andrey Kushlin (World Bank, Washington DC, Unites States), Margaret Robertson (University of Tasmania, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia).

In memory of Serge Antoine

The Executive Committee of the International Geographical Union is sorrowful about the death of Mister Serge Antoine, Honorary President of the Blue Plan, Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP. The participation of Mister Antoine in the establishment and implementation of the Mediterranean Action Plan, particularly in the transition phase from the 1976 Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution to the 1996, sustainable development-aimed approach, was unanimously appreciated as a fundamental contribution to strengthen collaboration in the Mediterranean region, as well as the interaction between governmental and scientific organisations. The Executive Committee of the International Geographical Union joins me in expressing the deepest sympathy to the Mister Serge Antoine's family, and to the Blue Plan organisation.

Adalberto Vallega, President, International Geographical Union

2) Brisbane Regional Conference: An IGU Workshop



All the geographers attending the Regional Conference are cordially invited to participate in the workshop *The IGU Facing a Changing Framework* that will be held on the morning of Wednesday, 5 July 2006 (location to be announced). It will aim at:

1. presenting and discussing the goals and relevant actions which are going to be operated by IGU in the 2004-2008 term;
2. implementing the IGU actions in the Pacific region.

The event will include two sessions, respectively concerned 1) with the general prospects of IGU and 2) the role of IGU in the Pacific region. The presentations from the IGU Executive Committee are expected to serve as a reference basis for contributions from the participants. The workshop conclusions will be circulated to the IGU and implemented by the IGU Executive Committee and other appropriate IGU bodies.

These are the cardinal organisational features:

Workshop co-ordinator: Ronald F. Abler, IGU General Secretary and Treasurer

Local convenor: Richard Bedford

Date: Wednesday, 5 July 2006.

Venue: To be announced.

Workshop Chairman: Ronald F. Abler

08:30 - Welcome and Introduction

Workshop Chairman: Ronald F. Abler

Session 1- IGU Facing Science and Society

08:40 - *IGU facing changing prospects and challenges*

Adalberto Vallega, President of IGU

09:00 - *Contributions on the role of regional networks:*

- José-Luis Palacio-Prieto and Ana Maria Liberali: The Latin American network;
- Mahmoud Ashour: The Mediterranean network and the Mediterranean Renaissance Programme

Contributions on key subject areas:

- Hiroshi Tanabe: Education
- Woo-ik You: Promotion

09:40 - *Interventions and discussion*

10:20

COFFEE BREAK

Session 2 - IGU in the Pacific: Prospects and Challenges

10:40 - *The IGU in the Pacific region: Networking geographers*

R. D. Bedford, Chair of the National Committee for Geography, New Zealand

11:00 - *Interventions and discussion*

12:00 - *Conclusions*

Ronald F. Abler, Secretary General and Treasurer of IGU

3) 2008: Tunis, International Geographical Congress

In Brisbane, in the framework of the Regional Conference, the 2008 IGC will be presented by the Comité National d'Organisation du Congrès Tunis 2008. A brochure will be circulated.

4) 2010: Tel Aviv, Regional Conference

The 2010 IGU Regional Conference will be held in Tel Aviv, Israel.

The Israeli National Geography Commission, chaired by Aharon Kellerman, approved the following steering committee for the 2010 IGU Regional Meeting, planned for Tel-Aviv.

Daniel Felsenstein – co-program organizer (Hebrew University, Member, Steering Committee of the IGU Geography Commission);

Tovi Fenster – co-program organizer (Tel-Aviv University, Chair, IGU Commission on Gender Geography);

Aharon Kellerman – Chair, and IGU and international contacts (University of Haifa, Chair, IGU Commission on the Geography of the Information Society);

Izhak Schnell – co-local organizer (Tel-Aviv University, Vice-Chair, IGU Commission on Urban Geography);

Michael Soffer – co-local organizer (Bar-Ilan University, Chair, IGU Commission on Local Development).

Promotional materials are expected to be circulated in the framework of the Brisbane IGU Regional Conference.



5) ICSU 2006-2011 Strategic Plan, Part II - STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

The first part of the Strategic Plan adopted by ICSU with reference to the 2006-2012 period was lodged in the IGU E-Newsletter # 3. It was mainly concerned with the ICSU's mission and general features. The second part is lodged below. It is concerned with the teleological and operational approaches to the main chapters of ICSU's, namely environment and sustainable development. The whole text of this fundamental document may be found in, and downloaded from, www.icsu.org in the .pdf format. The IGU research bodies and national committees could usefully evaluate these materials with the aim of tailoring the IGU activity to the ICSU 2006-2011 strategy. They are also cordially invited to address their comments to the IGU President (a.vallega@iol.it) in order to trigger wide discussions on the future of geographical research.

Environment

Over the past decade, the scientific evidence — much of it coming out of ICSU's own research programmes — that deleterious environmental change is occurring, has become irrefutable. The Earth's environment is changing on all scales from local (e.g. air, soil and water pollution) to regional (e.g. acid deposition and land degradation) and global (e.g. climate change and loss of biodiversity). These changes are to a large measure due to human activities and their negative effects are disproportionately felt in poorer countries.

ICSU has an extensive environment portfolio, which was subject to review as part of the Priority Area Assessment of the Environment and its Relation to Sustainable Development (ICSU 2003a). This forward-looking assessment highlighted the need to strengthen links between environmental research, monitoring/Earth observation, integrated assessments and provision of information for decision-making. ICSU is a major global player in each of these areas but needs to assume responsibility for ensuring better integration of the four components in the coming years. The Panel concluded that greater efforts have to be made to increase the involvement the social, health and engineering sciences in investigating human influences on environmental change and assessing the implications of such change for society.

Goal: to ensure a more coordinated and inclusive approach to research on the environment such that the necessary high-quality scientific evidence is made available to policy-makers; and, to develop new international programmes in key areas.

Specific Actions:

Several changes to ICSU structures will be implemented based on decisions by the 28th General Assembly (2005) to ensure a more streamlined and coordinated approach to research on the environment:

The Advisory Committee on the Environment and the Committee on Disaster Reduction will be disbanded;

The responsibility for the Scientific Committee on the Lithosphere will be devolved to the relevant Scientific Unions;

The Federation of Astronomical and Geophysical Data Services will be integrated into the development of ICSU's other data and information activities;

Research collaboration within the ICSU community and with other organizations on questions related to the environment will be strengthened to more fully include the social, health and engineering sciences; and

ICSU will conduct individual reviews of its global environmental change research programmes. Special attention will be given to the development of the Earth System Science Partnership, which brings together the four programmes to address issues that are integral to sustainable development. The links between this Partnership and other ICSU Interdisciplinary Bodies and Members will be considered as part of these reviews.

In addition to the planning and coordination of international research, ICSU is also a sponsor of the three global observing systems (Global Climate Observing System, Global Ocean Observing System and Global Terrestrial Observing System). Since 2003, ICSU has been closely involved in the planning for the development of a coordinated Global Earth Observation System of Systems. This has included taking the lead in identifying needs and exploring mechanisms for the collection of global socio-economic data (ICSU 2004e), which are essential to the international research programmes and other users. • ICSU will ensure that the views of the international science community are taken account of in the implementation of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). In addition, two major new research programmes will be developed as described below.

The International Polar Year (IPY, 2007-2008)

The polar regions are a unique barometer of environmental change and provide important insights into the health of the planet as a whole. The International Polar Year will be bipolar in focus, multidisciplinary in scope and truly international in participation. It will provide a uniquely comprehensive 'snapshot' of measurements for comparison with previous and future records to inform our knowledge of changing planetary processes. A key objective will be the expansion of opportunities afforded by new information technologies to achieve previously unprecedented participation in polar science. The ICSU Executive Board responded to overwhelming interest from scientists and polar and global research bodies by establishing an international Planning Group for IPY in February 2003. The scientific Framework (ICSU,2004d), which was developed in broad consultation with the scientific community, was approved by the 28th General Assembly in 2005. A Joint Committee has been established jointly with the World Meteorological Organization to oversee the implementation of this plan and coordination of activities.

Specific Action:

• ICSU will plan and coordinate IPY 2007-2008 in cooperation with the World Meteorological Organization.

Natural and human-induced environmental hazards and disasters

Every year environmental hazards, such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis, are responsible for thousands of deaths and extensive damage to livelihoods and property. This is

compounded by the increase in human-induced hazards, from pollution through to landslides triggered by deforestation. Whilst the prevalence of hazards varies from one region to another, it is invariably the poorest countries that are least well equipped to cope with their impacts and which suffer most. Like the hazards themselves, scientific research on hazards crosses national borders and is inherently international in nature. However a major challenge for the scientific community is to develop a truly global and interdisciplinary approach to the understanding, prediction, assessment and mitigation of hazards. A key recommendation of the strategic planning exercise (ICSU, 2003a and 2004a), was that ICSU should develop a new international programme in this important area. At the political level, the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, 2005) provides a timely platform on which such a research agenda can be built.

Geohazards is a theme that is of considerable scientific interest to several Scientific Unions and was the major focus of the ICSU Committee on Disaster Reduction. Based on previous work of this Committee, a broad cross-disciplinary

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is one of the most daunting challenges that humanity has ever faced. At all scales, from local to global, scientific and technological knowledge can help provide guidance and new solutions to the economic, social and environmental problems that make current development paths unsustainable.

Of the three pillars of sustainable development (environmental, social, economic), the environment is the one that has been most closely associated with ICSU to date. However, the four major global environmental change programmes are broadening their agendas and working together on projects on carbon, water, food and human health, issues which underpin sustainable development. Additional complementary efforts focused primarily on local-scale analyses are also necessary to enhance the real impact of science on development practices.

At the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), the Science and Technology Community, with ICSU responsible for the input from the science community, pledged to make science more policy-relevant through place-based research that integrates the three pillars of sustainable development and involves active participation of governments and civil society (ICSU 2002c). As part of the follow-up to this commitment, an independent *ad hoc* Advisory Group⁹ was established to advise ICSU and other international organizations on the scientific research priorities for sustainable development. The themes identified by this group as priorities for research and development efforts were:

- Resilience and vulnerability of social-ecological systems
- Sustainable production and consumption
- Governance and institutions for sustainability
- The role of behaviour, culture and values in sustainable development

Addressing these themes effectively requires building new bridges among the natural, social, and engineering sciences. It also requires the active participation of stakeholders from outside of science. Integrating this broad array of perspectives presents a significant challenge for the future. Meanwhile, a continuing focus on sectoral sustainable development issues, such as energy, water and health, is also necessary.

ICSU has also been an institutional partner in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, an international four-year project that was designed to provide decision-makers with the latest

scientific knowledge about ecosystem change and human well-being¹⁰. This major international project helped build local capacities and networks for conducting integrated assessments in a local to regional scale context. Proposals are now being developed for a new set of activities that build upon this valuable local capacity and that further develop the type of place-based participatory research that is needed to inform sustainable development policies and practices.

Goal: to build innovative new approaches for harnessing science for sustainable development, whilst continuing to promote research on specific sectoral issues, such as energy.

Specific Actions:

ICSU will explore, with partners, the creation of an ongoing mechanism for convening interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder dialogues aimed at identifying the new scientific knowledge and technical capabilities that are most needed for meeting the challenges of sustainable development; and

ICSU will also work with partners to develop a follow-up mechanism based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to address additional research needs, to stimulate further sub-global assessments and promote methodological developments to link spatial and temporal scales.

Sustainable energy

Meeting the world's energy needs without considerable negative environmental impacts, is one of the major challenges to sustainable development. Access to reliable and affordable energy is an essential prerequisite for combating poverty, but at present, more than a third of the world's population lacks access to even the most basic energy supplies and services. At the same time, the prodigious use of fossil fuels in industrialized and rapidly developing countries is responsible for an array of environmental and public health threats, ranging from indoor and large-scale air pollution to global scale climate change. Alternatives, such as nuclear and hydro power, are available in some countries but these are not without their own inherent dangers and environmental effects. Vested economic interests and public attitudes to energy sources mean that necessary national and international policies on energy are difficult to agree.

It is widely accepted that the further development of existing and new scientific knowledge and technologies must be a vital component of any long-term strategy to meet the world's energy needs. A recent report from an *ad hoc* ICSU Working Group (ICSU, 2004b) identified specific interdisciplinary areas where further research is required. A number of international bodies have conducted energy assessments. Several ICSU Unions have produced reports from their own disciplinary perspective and the InterAcademy Council has initiated a comprehensive assessment of needs and opportunities related to sustainable energy systems.

In 2001, ICSU partnered with the World Conservation Union to provide input to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (see ahead 7.1.1) when it considered energy and transport (ICSU, 2002d). The Commission will again be focussing on energy in 2006-2007, with ICSU again being invited to provide input. As part of the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, ICSU and the World Conservation Union contributed to the International Summit for Renewable Energies that was held in Bonn, Germany (2004). One outcome from Bonn was a call for the establishment of an International Science Panel on Renewable Energy, as a mechanism to promote R&D on renewable energy technologies. The German government has provided funding to explore this idea further and ICSU has been approached to oversee this effort.

Specific Actions:

An *ad hoc* Planning Group will develop a plan for an International Science Panel on Renewable Energy; and

ICSU will continue to work with international bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, to identify scientific needs in relation to energy and ensure that the best scientific information is available to policy makers.

Human Health

The protection of human health is a central concern of modern society and a major focus of scientific research. The types of health threats faced by different societies around the world vary widely, depending upon a country's wealth, food availability, level of education, public health infrastructure, access to medicines and other factors. For instance, infectious diseases and malnutrition are major threats in many developing countries, while cardiovascular disease and cancer are dominant concerns in wealthier nations. Pollution (of air, water and food), impacts of smoking, alcoholism and traffic accidents are world-wide health concerns and the AIDS pandemic and recent outbreaks of other infectious diseases have illustrated the global nature of many emerging health threats. Over the past century, science has led to enormous advances in public health, including the eradication of several major diseases and increased life expectancy in large parts of the world. Yet there remain a wide array of human health problems that are potentially preventable or treatable with better scientific understanding and application of the necessary resources.

To date, ICSU has not been a major player in international health research and with some justification in that there are many other national and international bodies that focus on health research. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that human health is inextricably linked to the health of our planet and environmental change (areas in which ICSU has undoubted strengths). Similarly, it is difficult to envisage an integrated scientific approach to sustainable development that does not include human health issues. There is a wealth of expertise within the ICSU community on various aspects of health research, which needs to be more fully incorporated into ICSU's existing activities. There is also a need for new partnerships with the clinical research community.

Goal: to ensure that health considerations are duly taken into account in the planning and execution of future activities by building on the relevant strengths of Scientific Unions and Interdisciplinary Bodies.

Specific Actions:

ICSU will establish an *ad hoc* Scoping Group to more clearly define how it might contribute to science for human health, taking into account the ongoing development of two new research initiatives:

Science for Health and Well-Being is an ambitious initiative, bringing together the perspectives of many ICSU Unions in an integrated approach to human health;

Global Environmental Change and Human Health is a new project that is being planned as part of the Earth Systems Science Partnership; and

new partnerships will be developed, as necessary, with the World Health Organization and other bodies, to ensure that any ICSU initiatives are needs based and policy-relevant.

Always more interchange needed

As science develops and opens up new opportunities and challenges, the interchange between different disciplines and countries is critical for defining those areas where early international planning and coordination is necessary. For many emerging areas, international collaboration occurs almost spontaneously. For other topics, some of which may eventually be of greater importance for science and society, additional mechanisms and/or incentives are necessary.

A number of important emerging scientific areas have been identified in the various strategic assessment and consultation exercises that have informed this Strategic Plan. Many of these are appropriate for new international and interdisciplinary initiatives from the ICSU community. Specific topics¹¹, not mentioned elsewhere in this Strategic Plan, include:

Cognitive neurosciences
Complex systems science
Human security and environmental refugees
Molecular biosciences
Nanosciences and nanotechnology
Transgenic crops and animals.

ICSU does not have the resources to initiate major strategic initiatives addressing each of these topics. However, one mechanism by which ICSU can facilitate the development of these areas is by providing seed funding through its grants programme. Further to this, preliminary discussions with the European Science Foundation (ESF) have indicated that it would be interested in co-sponsoring a series of international conferences to explore some of these topics.

Goal: to monitor emerging international research priorities of importance to science and society and to develop mechanisms to ensure that these can be addressed in a timely manner by the relevant members of the ICSU community.

Specific Actions:

ICSU member organizations will be encouraged to work together to develop activities in the areas listed above with direct support from ICSU where feasible, e.g. via the provision of seed funding; and

ICSU will further explore the development of a series of international ESF/ICSU conferences on key areas of interest to science and society. ICSU members and Regional Offices should have an important role to play in any such events.



6) International Year of Planet Earth

The International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) was proclaimed by the United Nations. As is well known the IGU has played the role of founder partner of this initiative. The announcement and call for collaboration from Eduardo F.J. de Mulder, Chair of the Management Team of the International Year of Planet Earth, is reported below:

«It is my great pleasure to announce that the General Assembly of the United Nations, at its Plenary Session of 22nd of December 2005, proclaimed 2008 as the UN Year of Planet Earth by consensus. This UN Year is the core year of the 2007-2009 triennium during which the International Year of Planet Earth (Earth Science for Society) will operate. This will be the first ever UN Year for the Earth Sciences.

The Press Release issued by the UN, is reproduced below.

"By a draft on the International Year of Planet Earth, 2008, which the Committee approved without a vote on 11 November, the Assembly would declare 2008 the International Year of Planet Earth. It

would also designate the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to organize activities to be undertaken during the Year, in collaboration with UNEP and other relevant United Nations bodies, the International Union of Geological Sciences and other Earth sciences societies and groups throughout the world. Also by that draft, the Assembly would encourage Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to use the Year to increase awareness of the importance of Earth sciences in achieving sustainable development and promoting local, national, regional and international action."

The International Year of Planet Earth aims to demonstrate the great achievements made in the geosciences and to urge politicians and decision-makers to apply such knowledge for the benefit of humankind. Now that this IUGS and UNESCO initiative has collected the political support of 191 UN member countries, our fund-raising campaign will begin with approaches to a broad sweep of the private sector including extraction industries, governments, foundations, insurance companies, banks *et cetera*.

The International Year of Planet Earth will soon be incorporated as a legal entity with tax exempt status for donations. It will consist of a Board of Stakeholders (IUGS, UNESCO, Chairs of the Outreach, Science and Development Committees, Founding Partners, Sponsors, donors and regional representatives) and a Secretariat.

The Secretariat will be outsourced, and the call for proposals will be open until 15th of April 2006. We invite all professional geoscientific and other qualified bodies to consider hosting the International Year's Secretariat. For more details, please go to the Year's website: www.yearofplanetearth.org.

National implementation of the Year of Planet Earth is essential for its success. We kindly invite all of you to approach your national IUGS representative, UNESCO Commission or any other relevant geoscience body in your country to start preparations for your own national Year of Planet Earth in connection and cooperation with the International Year's Secretariat. For that purpose you may wish to select 2007, 2008 or 2009, as best suits your national needs. As the preparation for UN proclamation and promotion of the International Year has been the joint responsibility of IUGS and UNESCO and of the Founding Partners, we propose that representatives of these bodies be included in your National Committee. In order to maximize advantages to be gained from the International activities and the services provided by the international Secretariat of the Year's Corporation, as well as adding an international dimension and outreach component to your national activities, we propose to formalize such relations through written agreements. Suggestions for developing national committees for the Year of Planet Earth can be downloaded from the Year's website: www.yearofplanetearth.org.

Calls are open now for submitting *international* project proposals on the outreach programme and on selected science themes. Again, please go to our website for downloading Expression of Interest forms and submit these to the (IUGS) Secretariat.

Finally, I invite you to 'spread the word' about this major global event in the history of the Earth Sciences; never before have all nations of the world explicitly invited our geoscience communities to convey their knowledge to society with a view to having decision-makers and governments make use of that knowledge for the benefit of all humankind. Let us work hard together to ensure that this unique triennium will be the greatest (geo)show on Earth!



7) Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization



(A. Vallega; M. Bousnina, G. Bellezza)

As is well known, last December 14, a Memo of Understanding was signed by Mr Mongi Bousnina, Director of the *Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization*, and the President of IGU. According Article 2 of this document, collaboration will include:

- 1) organization and promotion of scientific meetings;
- 2) organization of joint cultural events all over the world;
- 3) elaboration of joint scientific materials intended to promote geographical knowledge and its teaching in Arab countries;
- 4) promotion of the translation of academic works from and into Arabic;
- 5) development of communication with the media and the public, with a view to enhancing, through geographical knowledge, knowledge of the Other and encouraging cultural exchange among peoples;
- 6) fostering the establishment of ties between ALECSO and IGU on the one hand, and specialized international bodies on the other, with a view to generating a synergy with the aim of strengthening cultural exchanges.

Activity will be carried out following action plans worked out by the Monitoring Committee. This body is co-chaired by Mr Mongi Bousnina and Adalberto Vallega. The other IGU members are Eckart Ehlers, former IGUY Secretary General and Treasurer, and Ali Toumi, Secretary General of the Organising Committee of the 2008 Tunis International Geographical Congress. It is expected that intense collaboration will be held in the framework of the Cultures and Civilizations for Human Development (CCHDC) initiative.

8) Festival International de Géographie (FIG) : 2006 Action Plan

As is well known, in 2005 a Memo of Understanding was signed between the Festival International de Géographie (FIG) and the International Geographical Union. According to that agreement, FIG and IGU jointly strive to:

1. promote a new image of geography throughout the world to enhance the part it plays as a dynamic social science aimed at understanding the complexity of issues faced by human communities on their territories;
2. disseminate geographical knowledge that is accessible to the general public with the help of today's media such as new information and communication technologies;
3. cooperate with the structures dealing with education and geographical training at various levels (international, national regional and local);
4. promote the creation and dissemination of cartography as well as computerized geographical systems, not only in schools and universities, but also towards larger, non-specialized audiences. In particular, they wish to make geographical technologies available to communities and businesses;
5. develop all forms of geography applied to economics, urban planning, health and social issues.

Co-operation is expected to be operated through the adoption of Actions Plans. The 2006 Action Plan, which focuses on the Festival International de Géographie which will be held next September 28-October 3, will include the following initiatives:

Action 1: IGU Meeting point — It will be hosted in the FIG 2006, it will be set up by the Home of Geography, and it will consist of:

displaying IGU materials (flyers, call for sponsorship, call for participation in the 2008 International Geographical Congress, information notes about the Mediterranean Renaissance Programme, *id.* the Cultures and Civilizations for Human Development initiative);

providing information on site by a representative of the Home of Geography/IGU.

Convenor: Giuliano Bellezza, Director of Home of Geography.

Action 2: IGU Press Conference — This event will be convened with the aim of presenting the IGU activity, and calling for participation and collaboration. The presentation will be made by the IGU President.

Action 3: Cultures and Civilizations for Human Development — Some lectures, which have been included in the FIG 2006 programme by the FIG Organising Committee, will be sponsored by the Cultures and Civilizations for Human Development (CCHD) initiative.

Action 4: Cooperation Team (Comité Paritaire de Coordination) meeting — It is meant as a business meeting with the aim of designing the 2007 Action Plan.
Convenors: Laurent Carroué (FIG) and Adalberto Vallega (IGU).

Geographers attending the FIG are cordially invited to participate in the above presented initiatives.



9) Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development (CCHD)

Following the conclusions of the December 2005 Workshop, the *Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development* initiative started up. The following actions were undertaken:

the proposal to the UN to proclaim an international year, together the CCHD Action Plan, were finalised. They may be found in, and downloaded from, the Home of Geography website (www.homeofgeography.org);

the CCHD Management Team and the Regional and the Regional Promoters roster were established;

the Home of Geography assumed the role of the CCHD Secretariat;

a call for collaboration was circulated to the IGU National Committees;

how to make this initiative a fundamental component of the 2008 International Geographical Congress was discussed in Tunis with the Comité National d'Organisation du Congrès Tunis 2008;

actions were undertaken to propose to some Government to propose the UNESCO and the UN General Assembly to proclaim an international year on cultures and civilizations for human development;

the roster of CCHD Supporters was established. Those distinguished colleagues that are inclined to be hosted in it are cordially invited to fill in the enclosed form and to return it to the Home of Geography.

10) Mediterranean Renaissance Programme: Organisational Implementation

Adalberto Vallega was replaced by Mahmoud Ashour, Egypt. In early April, a workshop was held in Cairo in order to implement the programme and, particularly, to tailor it to the 2008 International Geographical Congress. The report of the Cairo event will be lodged in the next IGU E-Newsletter.

Those Colleagues that are interested in collaborating with the programme are kindly invited to contact:

Professor Mahmoud Ashour, programme co-ordinator: (mmashour_99@yahoo.com)

Professor Maria Paradiso, programme secretary (paradiso@unisannio.it).

A workshop was organized by Prof. M. Ashour and held in Cairo and Alexandria on 2nd-4th April 2006, in order to implement the programme and, particularly, to tailor it to the 2008 International Geographical Congress.

The Opening Ceremony started with welcome speeches given by Prof. Safey Abulezz, President of the Egyptian Geographical Society, Prof. Anne Buttimer, Past President of the IGU, and Prof. Mahmoud Ashour, MRP Co-ordinator.



(A. Buttimer, S. Abulezz, M. Ashour)

The first Session, chaired by Anne Buttimer, was dedicated to "Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development", with Giuliano Bellezza, Ali Toumi, Omar El-Farouk and Roberto C. Gatti as speakers.

The argument of the 2nd Session was the Mediterranean Renaissance Programme: speakers of the Session, chaired by Safey Abulezz, were Maria Sala, Mohamed Gaber, Theano Terkenly and Abdul Menem Mahmoud.

Theme of the third Session was "Arid Lands, Humankind and Environment": chair was Giuliano Bellezza, and speakers Nabil S. Embabi, Olaf Bubenzer and Mahmoud Ashour.

Scientific work ended with a field trip along the Mediterranean coast, in the western part of Delta, from Rashid (Rosetta) to the new summer settlements growing from Alexandria westward, at incredible speed.

The complete report of the Cairo event will be soon lodged in the Home website and in the next IGU E-Newsletter.



11) New Commissions: Small Islands

In the framework of the Celebrations of the 1994 UN Barbados Action Plan on Sustainable Development of Small Islands and Small Island States, the project of establishing an IGU Commission on this subject area was conceived by geographers and Adalberto Vallega in the occasion of the Islands of the World VIII International Conference concerned with *Changing Islands — Changing Worlds* (Kinmen Island, China Taiwan, November 1-7, 2004). As a result of those efforts, the project of the Commissions was drafted and it was approved by the IGU Executive Committee. Those colleagues that are willing to participate in this newly established research body, are cordially invited to contact Professor David Chang-Yi (changyi@ntu.edu.tw)

As a result, the IGU approach to oceans, coasts and islands is now implemented by three commissions (Coastal Systems, Marine Geography, and Small Island), and the Oceans 21 programme, which was convened by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the IGU.

12) Lesotho Atlas of Sustainable Development

The *Lesotho Atlas of Sustainable Development* (ISBN 99911-645-02) is an attempt to map the state

of sustainable human development in the country. The atlas portrays, through a variety of 213 maps with analytical text, three critical dimensions of sustainable development, namely, longevity, education and command over resources in terms of specific indicators at the levels of districts, geographical zones, rural and urban areas and at gender level during a specific period of time. From these indicators, a core of composite indices, namely, the Human Development Index (HDI) and poverty deprivation indices have been portrayed at the levels of geographical zones of the country. The atlas provides a telescopic view, through the medium of maps, of the demographic and socio-economic impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic for the periods of 1996 and 2010 for Lesotho. It argues that the unabated spread of the epidemic with deepening poverty will put a brake on reaching the Millennium Development Goals seriously in Lesotho, as in much of Africa.

Copies of the 517 page hardbound atlas published in 2003 are available from author D. M. Bohra for US\$95.00. Orders or inquiries should be addressed to atlaslesotho@yahoo.com or P.O.Box 2852, Santa Clara, CA, 95055 (Telephone +1 408 615 7360).

13) L'Éspace politique: A new geographical journal

Within the National French Committee of Geographers, the commission of Political geography launched out a new online review which name is *L'Espace politique*. This journal's aim is to promote the theoretical understanding of the political space. The articles will be mostly in French and in English too, always with a one-page summary in the other language. The journal will begin in autumn 2006. The IGU Commission on Political Geography supported the initiative.

Geographers interested in the initiative may contact Emmanuelle Chaveneau, Secrétaire de rédaction, 1, rue Marie et Louise 75010 Paris, France – Tel +33.1.47.00.88.62; E-mail: echaveneau@aol.com

14) UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names

The 23rd session of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), meet in Vienna, Austria, 28 March-4 April 2006. The IGU was represented by Cosimo Palagiano, member of the Celimontana Committee, Home of Geography.

15) Researching Poverty and Land Use in Vietnam

Farmers in Vietnam are facing dramatic transformations in their livelihoods through changes in land use and serious environmental challenges, says geography professor Steffanie Scott, back from Vietnam where she helped organize a workshop and study tour in February on land degradation and poverty.

The workshop was co-sponsored by the [International Geographical Union's Commission on Land Degradation](#) and brought together scholars from 11 countries. The event took participants through areas of upland forests and tea-growing to lowland rice paddies and industrial crops, to sandy coastal and shrimp-raising areas, in order to examine the interfaces of livelihoods and land degradation.

Some issues identified on the study tour included soil degradation from eucalyptus plantations and environmental and livelihood vulnerability from conversion of rice paddies to ponds for shrimp aquaculture, which often leads to water and soil contamination.

Scott worked with colleagues at [Vinh University](#) and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences over the past 3 years to organize the workshop. "It was a good chance for the Vietnamese to share some of their knowledge and to profile local conditions in a poor province of Vietnam's north central coast. It also helped to identify opportunities for exchanges and further research." Scott has two graduate students who will be doing field work in Vietnam in the coming year.

Another area of interest for Scott's research is changes in local food systems and impacts on the livelihoods of farmers, such as through the pressures of urbanization on peri-urban agriculture, and food safety regulations. "Because of the [avian flu threat](#), Vietnam put restrictions on who could raise and sell chickens and eggs. Many farmers lost their livelihoods because they were unable to market their products and consumers were afraid to buy chickens and eggs," says Scott.

For more information, visit www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/geography/faculty/sdscott.html



Above: Professor Steffanie Scott checks food labels to see whether food is produced locally or imported. Locally produced food helps support local farmers and food processors.



16) Memorandum of agreement with China

A Memorandum of agreement was adopted by IGU and the *Geographical Society of China*. Collaboration will focus on such topics as:

- sustainable Chinese cities with special reference to megacities in the context of climate change, globalisation, and the interactions of cities with rural areas;
- sustainable Chinese rural systems in the context of climate change and changing Chinese society, with specific reference to land use and land cover change, and interactions of rural systems with cities;

riparian, estuarine, coastal and island management in the context of climate change and globalisation, with reference to anthropogenic pressures;
protection and sustainable use of China's natural and cultural heritage, including Geoparks, *inter alia* by referring to the UNESCO Conventions (1972 Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage, 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions);
promotion of domestic and international tourism in order to value Chinese landscapes and cultural heritage;
monitoring systems and applications of geographical information sciences and technologies in relation to environmental processes and the impacts of global processes on local systems;
geographical education for sustainable development, with specific reference to the production of print and electronic teaching materials that emphasize the integration of physical geography and human geography;
relevant topics being investigated by IGU Commissions and Task Forces; and
other subjects as may from time to time be mutually selected.

Implementation

To launch the co-operation programme:

1. The GSC and the IGU will establish a CGSD Cooperative Working Group consisting of:
 - a. Liu Jiyuan, Lu Dadao, Yu Li zhong from the GSC; and
 - b. Ronald Abler, Liu Changming, and Adalberto Vallega from the IGU;
 - c. to be co-chaired by Lu and Vallega.
2. The Cooperative Working Group will draft a plan of action for the period 2006-2008, identifying:
 - a. the key actions to be taken by each party;
 - b. the results expected from each action; and
 - c. the sources of any necessary funds.
3. The GSC will:
 - a. Assist the IGU in organising meetings that are held in China and its vicinity;
 - b. Offer information and materials on Chinese geography to the IGU Home of Geography;
 - c. Assist researchers working under IGU auspices in China;
 - d. Include links to the IGU and IGU Home of Geography web sites on appropriate Chinese web sites;
 - e. Foster visits by Chinese scholars to the IGU Home of Geography; and
 - f. Participate actively in the IGU Geographic Olympiad.
4. The IGU will:
 - a. Work to enhance the participation of Chinese geographers in international research programmes in which IGU participates;
 - b. Highlight the accomplishments of Chinese geographers in international circles;
 - c. Include Chinese geographers in its collaborative programmes with intergovernmental organisations and the United Nations;
 - d. Augment the roles of Chinese geographers in the International Year programmes with which IGU is affiliated;
 - e. Include information about the CGSD and its programmes in the IGU and IGU Home of Geography publications and web sites; and

- f. Make the assistance and resources of the IGU Home of Geography available to research visitors from China.

17) Olympiads in China

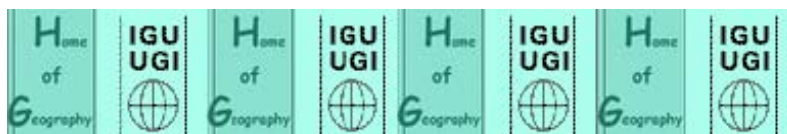
First National Geography Olympiad for Middle School Students in China was held in Guangzhou from 20th to 22nd January, 2006. 20 teams (80 middle school students under 18 years old and 25 geography teachers) from 20 middle schools nationwide participated in the competition. The competition drew on the experience of the international geography Olympiad and the national Olympiads in other subjects and was a great success.

The competition has five parts, the first is the written test, the second is quiz, the third is comprehensive analysis questions, the fourth is experimental simulation, and the fifth is the English questions and need to answer in English.

The organizers are Geography Society of China and College of Geography of Beijing Normal University. Prof. Wang Min, the Executive member of Geographical Education Commission of International Geographical Union (IGU) from college of Geography, Beijing Normal University took charge of the provision of the questions and the evaluation of the competition.

The first class awards were issued to the teams from Keqiao Middle School in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, Shandong Experimental Middle School in Shandong Province and Wuzhou Middle School in Guangxi Province. One of them will represent China to participate in the 6th International Geography Olympiad that will be held in Brisbane, 2006.

The results of this Olympiad provides a solid basis for others to build on in the years to come, and the organizers will continue the National Geography Olympiad on a biannual basis.



Special: Home of Geography

The Celimontana Committee met in Rome, January 14, 2006. Following from earlier discussion within the IGU Executive Committee, part of the meeting focused on the division of responsibilities between the IGU technical secretariat and the Home of Geography. Additional details in the context of the transfer of the IGU Secretariat to Seoul, South Korea effective 1 January 2007, will be provided in the next issue of the IGU E-Newsletter.

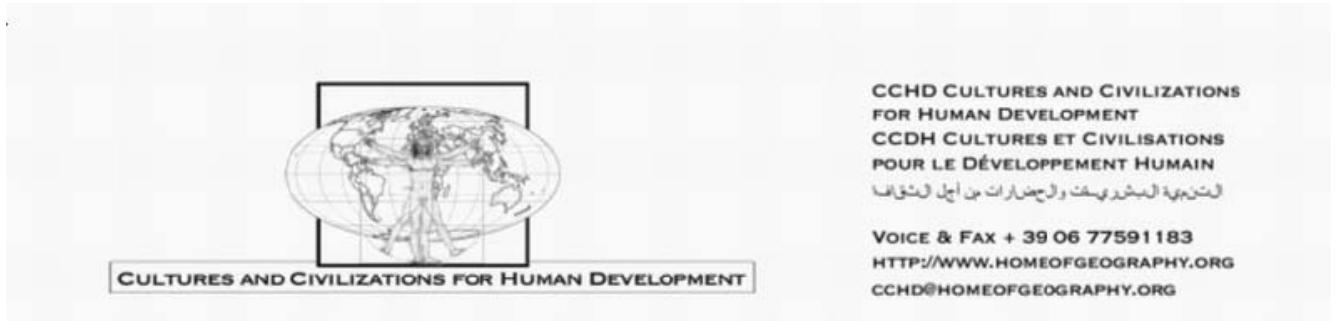
G. Bellezza attended the AAG Annual Conference in Chicago (3rd-7th March), where the Home of Geography shared a booth together with IGU. Information documents were exposed, together with the books published by the Home.

In April (1st-3rd) he has been in Cairo, for the Workshop organised by Prof. M. Ashour (see above, n. 10)

In the Home lot of work is being done to implement the numerous list serve, to keep informed and

updated not only all the bodies of the IGU, but all the Corresponding Members.

We recommend all the people interested in the IGU Program “Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development” to fill the following form, as the probability of our success is directly related to the number of individual supporters (and all geographers are requested to gather adhesion even from non geographers).



I strongly hope that the United Nations will proclaim an International Year on this subject area.

Name, first, middle and family [capital letters]:

Signature

Place and date

Personal details

Title (Prof. Dr. Mr Ms)

Affiliation

Position

Address

Postal Code

State

Country

Tel

Fax

E-mail

Please fill this form in and e-mail or fax it to the Home of Geography, Rome, Italy:

fax: +39 - 06 - 7759 1183

e-mail: cchd@homeofgeography.org

e-mail: d.bissell@homeofgeography.org