



5.2 Scientific Sustainability Science Congress 2014

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5.2 Scientific Sustainability Science Congress 2014

Background

IARU hosted in March 2009, prior to the UNFCCC COP 15 Meeting in Copenhagen, the scientific congress: Climate Change: Global risks, challenges and decisions. The congress was highly successful and attracted more than 2500 participants from nearly 80 countries, including 215 journalists, which ensured very significant media attention internationally (over 1800 articles on-line in over 40 countries).

Two products were produced from the congress:

1. A peer-reviewed “Synthesis Report” describing the scientific understanding of climate change, its effects and the options for a societal response in a short report written with the general audience in mind. This report was made available in 8 languages (English, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish). The report was widely used by media and schools in a number of countries in the run-up to the COP 15 and still being downloaded from the University of Copenhagen’s website (<http://climatecongress.ku.dk/pdf/synthesisreport>).
2. An academic book, Climate Change: Global risks, challenges and decisions, published by Cambridge University Press in March 2011. The book was authored by a writing team which included representatives from 5 IARU universities and includes contributions from scientists from 7 IARU Universities. The book has been widely distributed in political and decision-making circles and is already cited.

Thus, the scientific congress hosted by IARU in 2009 has contributed both towards and increased cooperation between scientists working at our universities and towards branding of IARU as an alliance of universities whose research can make essential contributions to society’s decision making process related to tackling global challenges. The University of Copenhagen (UCPH) believes, therefore, that such scientific congresses can be a valuable tool in promoting and achieving the goals of the IARU alliance.

Proposal

On this basis, UCPH would like to propose that IARU for 3 days in 2014 again hold a multi-disciplinary scientific congress where focus is placed on the research necessary to address global challenges. 2014 is proposed as it is 5 years after the first IARU hosted congress and a 5 year cadence seems reasonable if IARU were, at a later date, to decide that such symposia should become a recurrent part of the external IARU profile. In addition, preparation of such a meeting requires at least a 2 year run-up time.

It is proposed that Sustainability Science should be the focus of such an initiative. There are several reasons for suggesting this topic:

- This would allow follow-up and outreach relating to the IARU sustainability initiative
- There is increasing awareness that climate change simply represents a special case of the whole sustainability question. The major challenge facing human societies in the 21st century is ensuring and maintaining equitable access by society to the natural resources we are dependent upon. Climate change relates to the sharing of a common resource in the form of a global atmospheric receptacle for waste greenhouse gases. Questions relating to sharing of global resources (water, phosphorous, land, biodiversity, etc.) are more and more becoming issues of economic and geopolitical interest. Sustainability science encompasses these considerations

and would, thus, be a natural follow up to the Climate Change meeting. There would also be the possibility to continue with other symposia covering different aspects of sustainability science if IARU chose to continue to brand our university activities through such events.

- It is expected that there will be increasing political focus on sustainable development and the knowledge necessary to achieve it in the wake of the UN Rio+20 in June 2012. Thus, it seems likely that there will be a political audience for a sustainability science congress in 2014.

The actual topics to be included in a call for such a meeting would be decided by the Scientific Steering Committee (see below). However, examples of topics for sessions could be: *status for the different efforts underway to value natural resources in economic models, biophysical limits to biomass production and the global market for biomass; the global phosphorous market seen in a geopolitical perspective, ocean governance, etc.*

Congress Site: UCPH is offering to act as the local host and organizer. The UCPH Sustainability Science Centre (www.sustainability.ku.dk) would host the local project group. However, UCPH would also be happy if another IARU-member wishes to take the lead and host the event.

Congress Participation: The 2009 Congress took place in a unique political and media climate under the build-up to the COP 15 in Copenhagen. Thus, it attracted an unusually large number of participants. It seems unlikely that the same conditions will be found in 2014 regarding sustainability. Thus, a smaller meeting is envisioned – 400-500 participants. The target group is scientists from all relevant disciplines and societal decision-makers, including politicians and representatives of business and industry representatives as well as media representatives.

Congress Organization would be modeled on the 2009 Congress with a Scientific Steering Committee with 2 representatives from all IARU Universities and the possibility of inviting observers to the Committee in cases where specific expertise might be missing. UCPH would establish a local organizing committee to handle logistics.

Funding: Request for IARU-funding up to \$ 15.000. Total costs yet to be properly estimated, but costs are expected and planned to be covered by conference fees, sponsorship etc. If the proposal is being endorsed with UCPH as lead and host, then UCPH is willing to take on the financial risk.

Congress Products: to be determined by the Scientific Steering Committee but to include both a popular scientific product that can be used in dissemination to a wide audience/media and a more scholarly product aimed at a wide academic audience.