



IGU Flagship project OURSUS



Ton Dietz and Qiu Li to the President and Executive Committee of IGU

Report about the OURSUS activities and debates in Beijing; and Plan for the near future.

Leiden/Hangzhou, September 2016

iGEO

On 18 August OURSUS Chair Ton Dietz and OURSUS secretary Qiu Li participated in the jury of the poster competition of the iGEO Olympiad and selected the best posters out of 45 country posters highlighting one or more sustainable city initiatives in these countries. For all posters for which we received a digital version (33 so far) the OURSUS team in Changsha developed a section in the iGEO Special Report on the oursus website:

<http://www.oursus.org/index.php?app=special&mod=index&act=diy&id=76> . It covers 23 European cities, six from Asia, one from Africa, two from Oceania and one from South America.

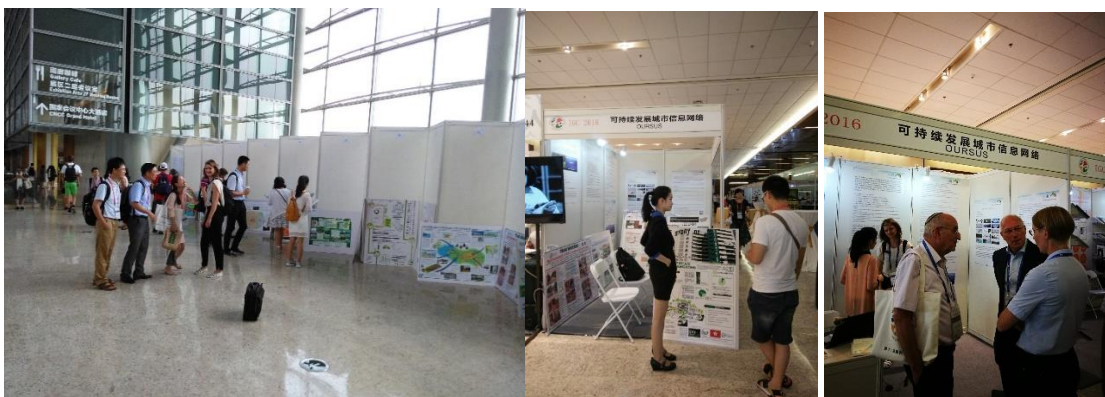


Winners were Rotterdam (the Netherlands Team), Kaduna (the Nigeria Team), Singapore (the Singapore Team) and Copenhagen (the Denmark Team). These posters clearly show the 'oursus spirit': urban sustainability is not only a responsibility of municipal (and central) governments, but also of citizens, citizen movements/NGOs, businesses, and the education sector, and urban sustainability needs a multi-faceted, and geographical approach!



OURSUS AT THE EXHIBITION

During the conference OURSUS was very visible in the exhibition area. Oursus volunteers Ma Xiao and Wangqi talked to a lot of visitors and gave hand-outs and postcards about oursus. In the exhibition space we could also show some of the posters made by iGEO teams, which attracted a lot of attention.



THE OURSUS AFTERNOON

On Monday 22 August we had organized two sessions, one about 'Chinese and international experiences' and one about 'the way forward'. We had 30 and 45 visitors at these sessions, plus the oursus core team (Qiu Li, Fu Rong, He Weihua, Lin Miao, Ma Xiao and Ton Dietz).

During the first session Qiu Li gave an overview of the oursus ideas about the roles geographers could play ("from fragmented knowledge to integrated issues in urban sustainable development communication: rethinking the popularization of science for geographers"), followed by three presentations about China: Ma Xiao about Beijing, mainly focusing on transportation issues, Huang Wanlin about recent Chinese experiences with the 'sharing economy', facilitated by the smartphone revolution, and Jinhui Jia about the necessary integration of four facets of urbanization: population, land, economic and social development, with illustrations from Chinese cities.



Lianne Hulsebosch then presented her analysis about 250 ‘sustainable city initiatives’ in the municipality of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. As an intern of the University of Amsterdam’s Urban Studies Programme, she had experimented with putting various types of ‘oursus’ input about Amsterdam on www.oursus.org (please have a look).

Anjana Mathur Jagmohan (also on behalf of Arya Jagmohan) presented a case study about the growth of solar energy in Indian cities, and particularly Delhi.

Andy Goetz (also speaking for Richard Knowles) presented the perspective from the Transport and Geography Commission of IGU, and the many linkages of the work of that commission with the oursus themes.

Ton Dietz presented an overview and interpretation of sustainable city initiatives in Africa. The paper can be found on the oursus website (under Cape Town), but also on <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/42108>

Finally, Brij Maharaj, from the University of Kwazulu-Natal, ended the first session of the afternoon by giving a critical reflection about the ‘sustainable city’ mantra in the South-African context, where the relatively high positions of some South African cities on the ‘sustainability rankings’ reflect what is happening in its relatively wealthy areas, neglecting the poverty, unhealthy living conditions, and lack of environmental care in the poor neighbourhoods. Geographers should not only support (environmental) sustainability, but also inclusive development.



After the break, the oursus afternoon continued with a presentation about many sustainable city initiatives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, by Mohammed Makki (his poster could also be seen during the meeting of the Executive Committee with the Commission Chairs, on Thursday).



Alexander Murphy showed the many linkages between the discipline(s) of geography and the topics, which are generally seen to be covered under the umbrella term 'sustainable cities'.

Virginie Mamadouh (Political Geography Commission) presented her views about the politics and imaginations of sustainable cities and the way (political) geographers study the state/non-state connections and the recent expansion of multi-level and multi-actor institutions dealing with sustainability issues in cities.



Then we moved to geography education. Joop van der Schree showed the obvious importance of sustainability issues (including sustainable city issues) in current geography education, and in the Commission on Geography Education, and he gave examples about what his students prepared for the oursus website (student and teachers' guides about sustainable city issues). Lex Chalmers (co-Chair of the Olympiad Taskforce) introduced the posters made by the iGEO teams and showed the visions of the youth on sustainable futures in a large variety of cities in the world. Wei Dongying explained the poster about Beijing transport, made by the China-Beijing iGEO Team, and Henk Ankoné talked about the experiences of the iGEO teams doing fieldwork in Beijing about aspects of sustainability.

The room was full of iGEO posters, and, chaired by IGU Vice President Dieter Soyez, twelve IGU Country Chairs or their representatives gave 'pitches' about the poster of their country: Aleksandar Lukic for Croatia, Tadeusz Siwek about the Czech Republic, Henrik Toft Jensen about Denmark, Mihkel Kangur about Estonia, Alfred Colpaert about Finland, Dieter Soyez about Germany, Batchuluun Yembuu about Mongolia, Zoltan Kovacs about Hungary, Henk Ankoné about the Netherlands, Mike Roche about New Zealand, Jelena Luković about Serbia and Céline Rozenblat about Switzerland. Céline, also Chair of the Urban Geography commission also gave commitments from her Commission about future collaboration.



The oursus session was also visited by IYGU-Chair Benno Werlen, and we agreed to work together. Ton Dietz summarized the ideas for the next period, which will be discussed in the following sections.

OURSUS MEETINGS

Oursus presented itself both at the General Assembly meeting (on the Tuesday) and at the meeting of the Executive Committee with the Commission Chairs (on the Thursday). We asked and received support for developing the English-language website of oursus (www.oursus.org) as a global tool for geographers (and others) to exchange information, study material, and products of research, teaching and 'outreach' about sustainable cities. In fact the oursus website and approach is unique in the way it offers a podium to the world's geographers to present their findings, ideas and experiences with sustainable city issues in general and in their own urban environments. Unlike the very active Chinese-language website (www.oursus.org/cn) the experimental existing website in English so far did not receive a lot of inputs beyond the Changsha team of volunteers, and recently the input about Amsterdam. It was also clear that the English-language website needed a different approach. A new website was developed and tested, showing three major entries ('experiences', 'special reports' and 'cities'). A sophisticated 'tag system' was developed, which enables searches on the website, and which links a large variety of specialized topics to the seven main 'rainbow' colours of oursus, seven different elements of sustainable city approaches: transport (red), buildings (orange), energy (yellow), water (blue), vegetation and fauna (green), waste (indigo) and lifestyles/governance issues (violet).



We agreed that the oursus team will approach all country chairs and all relevant commissions with 'hands-on' requests to experimentally contribute to the new oursus website. That will be done as soon as that new website is fully operational.

The oursus core team had a separate discussion with IGU Vice Presidents Joos Droogleever Fortuijn and Dieter Soye (on Tuesday), to prepare an open 'strategic meeting' (on Wednesday) that attracted people who wanted to discuss contributions to oursus in the near future. That was an encouraging discussion and made us decide to continue our joint efforts. We also decided to ask for a status as IGU Task Force during the next four years. This will also enable the input of geographers representing the most active cities. Reaching out to 'sustainable city geographers' will also be done together with the IYGU team.



COLLABORATION IN CHINA

IGU-China and the Secretary of the GSC, Prof. Zhang Guo You have always been dependable supporters of the oursus project and of the oursus core team in Changsha. For 2016 and 2017 GSC again committed financial and organizational support. During the IGU Congress the oursus core team also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Geography and Sustainable Development Education Center of Beijing Normal University (Wang Min and Wei Dongying, and their staff). It is the intention to link examples from existing Chinese-language textbooks made by this Center (and widely used in Chinese geography education) with the oursus website, to co-develop further 'experiences' and 'special reports' (for the Chinese-language website) and to work towards examples of specific Chinese city special reports on the English-language website of oursus. At the same time the geographers of BNU will use oursus material about China and the rest of the world in their 'teaching of teachers' curriculum and other training and online activities, not only in Beijing but in China as a whole. Prof. Wang Min will join the oursus coordinating group, that currently consists of Prof. Ton

Dietz (chair) Dr Qiu Li (secretary), and Dr Fu Rong (director of the Changsha team of the University of Hunan; and currently Assistant to the President of Inner Mongolia Normal University). We agreed that the oursus coordinating group will jointly try to get external funding for additional oursus activities and contributions.



IGU COMMITMENT AND THINGS TO DO

So far the Transport and Geography, Political Geography, Urban Geography, and Geographical Education Commissions, as well as the Olympiad Taskforce have committed themselves to co-develop the oursus website. And with the other IGU Flagship project, IYGU, we will work together. We also had discussions with members of other IGU Commissions and Task Forces (e.g., Transformation Processes in Megacities, Geomorphology and Society, and Local and Regional Government) and we will explore practical and visible ways to co-develop oursus cases, and special reports. With relevant National Chairs of IGU we want to explore experimental input (at least one city experience and hopefully later at least one city special report per IGU country). The iGEO posters of 45 countries are already an obvious 'easy start' of some of these 'sustainable city views'. We will approach all iGEO country teamleaders, show them what has already been done (see the special report of iGEO at the oursus website) and what can be done next.

We will also develop an easy and fast 'method' handout, to enable all geographers to upload cases/experiences. But we would also like to see that geographers take the lead in making 'special city reports', which can also be called 'sustainable city views', and make introductions to their city as the opening elements of the combined (selected) specific experiences.

If geographers have taken the lead in expanding the oursus website, and showing the many examples (or 'best practices') of sustainable city initiatives in many of the world's cities, we plan to approach other parties (businesses, NGO's, and City Governments) to contribute, also financially. We still hope that this will also result in some contributions to the IGU Solidarity Fund. That is how it once started....



Global Sustainable Cities