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Bulletin

International Association for Landscape Ecology

THE IALE COUNCIL CHAIR'S REPORT 2007

By Jesper Brandt, brandt@ruc.dk

What is the IALE Council?

The IALE council consists of an elected representative for each formalized regional IALE Chapter (in May 2007 there were 12 representatives) and the members of the IALE Executive Committee (9 persons, one of whom is also a regional representative). In addition to the 20 ordinary members, several "contact members", without voting rights, are affiliated with the Council representing chapters that have been recently formalized or under formalization, but have not yet submitted an elected representative for the Council.

The Council works as a background group for the Executive Committee, but also as a second chamber, expressing the regional interests and concerns in collaboration with the IALE Executive Committee. The Council makes recommendations to the Executive Committee and through the IALE Nomination Committee, chaired by the chair of the Council, the Council is involved in the preparation of the election to the Executive Committee.

The history of the IALE Council

From 1982 to 1991 the Council was the basic democratic institution in IALE, formed as an association of representatives from all the independent regional chapters of Landscape Ecological Societies. The Council formally elected the IALE Executive Committee. By the revision of the IALE Statutes in 1991 individual membership in international IALE was instituted with optional membership in one or more regional chapters as the normal option. Correspondingly the Executive Committee was subsequently elected directly by the international IALE members, not indirectly by the representatives of the Council.

The new structure resulted in a greater efficiency of the

international association and the representation within the IALE Executive Committee, however has also resulted in a loss of influence of the regional chapters, as well as a decline in the effort develop new regional chapters and coordinate the activities of existing regional chapters.

The Council met during the Congresses in Toulouse (1995) and Snowmass (1999), but the Council has not been active since.

The re-establishment of the IALE Council

During the last years the Executive Committee of IALE has worked hard to re-establish the IALE Council. Since no formal meeting of the Council was held in connection with the IALE Congress in Darwin 2003, the Executive Committee asked the former chairman of the Council (Jesper Brandt, elected in 1999), to continue as chairman and to develop a formal description of the work to be performed by the Council. To ease the process, the chairman of the Council was invited to all meetings in the Executive Committee, and during the last years the re-establishment of the Council has been on the agenda at all meetings.

As a primary condition for a re-establishment of the Council the following goals have been established:

1. All elected ordinary members of the Council should be elected according to rules consistent with the statutes of IALE (that is; directly elected by the members, not indirectly by a local E.C. and not IALE-appointed or self-appointed regional contact persons),
2. There should be more elected ordinary members of the Council than members from the Executive Committee, to ensure that the Council will not automatically be overruled by a united Executive Committee.

...continued from page 1 (IALE Council)

These goals were approached in the summer 2006, and the re-established Council started its work in the late autumn 2006.

How does the Council work?

The Council will meet physically during the Congress of IALE, where a chair of the Council will be elected and plans for the coming period discussed and decided upon. The Council will also meet physically in conjunction with international meetings between the Congresses, but only for consultations, and not to make formal decisions, as all members may not be able to attend.

All communication and formal decisions by the Council will be made electronically. For each meeting, a commented agenda will be distributed together with a response form, making it possible for the members to comment (and eventually vote) on each item on the agenda. The deadline for response (at least one week, but preferably more) will be followed to make it possible for each member to discuss and/or contact other members before the deadline for decision. The chair collects the responses and produces the minutes from the meeting. These minutes are then distributed before the next meeting.

Items handled by the Council 2006-2007

The re-established Council has begun to follow this protocol since the autumn of 2006. The limited period of functioning has nevertheless proved to be productive, providing a needed link of the activities and interests of the regional chapters with the Executive Committee and involving a broad representation of members in the daily work of IALE. Only the most important items considered by the Council are mentioned below.

Revision of the IALE Statutes

In collaboration between the chair of the Council and the Executive Committee a revision of the statutes has been prepared. A provisional proposal was circulated and commented on by the Council before being finalised for a secret ballot among the members. The most important change in the statutes concerned IALE Working Groups that will be established to study and report findings on issues of concern related to landscape ecology. The new statutes allow non-IALE-members to join Working Groups related to IALE, with the intention of enhancing cooperation with other organisations: Consequently, in the future Working

Groups will report directly to the Executive Committee, while their formal representation in the IALE Council will be discontinued, freeing them to invite non-IALE members. An elected rapporteur from each Working Group will report the Executive Committee and, therefore, should be an IALE member.

Preparation of the election to the Executive Committee 2007-2011

In the preparation of nominations of candidates for the Executive Committee 2007-2011 the Council discussed possible nominees in collaboration with the nomination committee, with special attention to ensure sufficient nominations for each position. Although we were only able to meet the goal of a minimum of two nominations for four of the six vacant positions, we consider it a good result compared to earlier nominations: A well-functioning Council will without doubt have a positive influence on the future nomination process, due to the broadening of the active network. The election was the first web-based election in IALE, which proved to be a success by raising the voting level to approximately 20 %. The organisation of the election however revealed problems that should be resolved before the next election, primarily those related to a better coordination of timing and accuracy of the updating of the regional membership lists.

New fee structure and the relation between fee structure and the budget of IALE

The Council has agreed with the new structure proposed by the treasurer, providing a membership fee structure based on the economic ranking of countries published by the World Bank. However, this fee structure has raised some concerns. For instance, 1/3 of IALE members currently come from lower income countries, and if this segment grows, it might have adverse effect on the economic sustainability of the society. The Council has also recommended a long-term (at least 4 years) membership fee policy, to ease the planning and budgeting for the regional chapters, many of whom normally integrate the regional and international fee into a single membership payment.

Although the Council is not responsible for the budget of IALE International, the Council has an interest in the efficient use of the membership fee and the balance between expenditures of the Executive Committee (i.e., business meetings, the IALE Bulletin, the Directory etc.) and supplementary expenditures to support the development and

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coordination of regional activities. The Council also has an interest in the membership fee structure, with the goal of developing an equitable balance of income and allocation of resources.

Items handled by the Council 2006-2007 - to be continued in the coming period

More transparent and comparable information on the work of the regions

To stimulate the development and success of regional-level organisation promoting landscape ecology the Council should provide more accessible information on the work of the regions. This has briefly been discussed in the Council. Some information might be collected through the web-sites of the different regional chapters, but to make such reports more accessible and comparable, new initiatives are needed. It has been proposed to produce short (one page) regional reports giving information on how the regions work during the year, with emphasis on both successes and failures, and a couple of examples have been initiated. Also the IALE Bulletin could invite specific regional chapters to report on their activities, to give inspiration for other chapters.

Approval or rejections of regions

Approval or rejection of new applications for a regional chapter is a core of the democracy of IALE at the regional level. It has also been an Achilles heel for IALE since the very beginning: As scientist we are often primarily engaged solely with our individual contribution to the scientific development, and not always inclined towards engagement in the basic democracy of our association. To stimulate the formation of new regional chapters and to emphasize the international character of the association the first years of IALE was dominated by a long list of contact persons appointed by the Executive Committee. Not all these appointments resulted in new regional IALE-chapters, and in several cases it was even counterproductive by preventing other interested members in the region to become involved.

Although new chapter formation is a burden, it is an essential requirement for the international association to ensure that the democratic rules for the regional organisations are observed by the foundation and obeyed by the practise of the regional chapters.

As a part of the reconstruction of the IALE archive the retiring Executive Committee and the chair of the Coun-

cil have initiated a collection of existing basic documents from the regions and formulated rules for the formal acknowledgement of the formation of new regional chapters. The Council is naturally involved in this process, since approval of new regional chapters is a constituting part of its duties. It should be a goal for the coming period to develop and implement a smooth and realistic system of approval of new regional chapters.

A volunteer network for improving translation into English

It is an important challenge for IALE as an international association to ease the member's access to publication of landscape ecological research in internationally reviewed journals almost uniformly published in English. The Council has discussed a proposal to set up a volunteer network for improving the English in manuscripts to be submitted for publication. A list of conditions has been outlined, details specified and a draft implementation plan is presented later in this Bulletin for discussion at the Council meeting in July. The intention is to recommend the coming Executive Committee to appoint a Vice-President as responsible for the development of such a network.

Additional themes for the following period

Voluntary and paid work for IALE

IALE is a non-profit organisation basically financed through the voluntary efforts of its members. Especially the regional officers and the officers elected for the IALE Executive Committee invest a considerable amount of time in the administration and development of the organisation. Since international scientific cooperation is considered a part of a scientists working obligations and since many science-based organisations can take advantage of the international networking made by their academic staff, work for IALE is often naturally supported by IALE-officers professional institutions. However much of the IALE-based workload assumed by the IALE officers is not a part of their normal professional work, but constitutes a considerable voluntary effort.

IALE international will cover minimal travel and accommodation costs related to business meetings, but will always also try to keep these expenditures as low as possible, by combining such business meetings with other events (conferences, seminars, guest lectures etc.) that might lower the costs by support through other sources.

Other costs should only be covered with clear reference to the statutes and the budget.

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The Council acknowledge the enormous effort done by the Executive Committee to run IALE as an international association. However, we also wish to emphasize that the work done at the regional level is just as crucial for landscape ecology at the international level, and can be just as much in need for financial support as the work done at the central level. The Council therefore keep an interest in following the budgeting of IALE-international to ensure, that the limited funds are used in an efficient and balanced way for the support of the association at all levels.

A European IALE

During the last term a considerable effort has been undertaken to develop a frame for the organisation of landscape ecologists at a European level. A European IALE should not be seen as an alternative to the national chapters of IALE within Europe, all having important functions at the regional level, but as a strong instrument for landscape ecology at the European level. So, the Executive Committee of IALE, at its meeting in May 2007 in Grenoble, expressed the opinion that 'A European IALE should involve setting up standards and a procedure for recognising the necessary procedures for implementation of landscape ecological principles and associated best practices.' This implies not only a strong European organisation of IALE members, but also a close cooperation with groups and organisations not affiliated with IALE through any membership. The new revised statutes of IALE, promoting working groups based on cooperation with other groups outside IALE related to the application of landscape ecology, should be used to find practical ways of combining the common interests of European IALE-members and the outside world's interest in implementing landscape ecological principles and practise at the European level. This will be an important challenge for the Council in the coming period, also by providing experience for other super regional collaborations with similar ambitions. In principle all 'superregions' might need a certain formalised organisation, e.g. by the decision on the location of super-regional IALE-conferences between the congresses. Like other regional chapters, the establishment of superregions has to be confirmed by the Council. It is however probably not possible to establish any general model on how and by whom such a superregion should be initiated.

Election of a Council chair for 2007-2011

A standard point at the agenda of the Council meeting at the IALE Congress is the election of a chair of the Coun-

cil. Although Jesper Brandt expects to stay in the Council as a representative for the Danish section of IALE, he will not stand for election as chair for another term.

The job is attractive: It is voluntary and non-paid, and connected with a considerable amount of work, if the goal - to coordinate the common effort of the regional chapters and their mutual influence on the development of international landscape ecology - is to be pursued successfully. The related rich international networking makes it an interesting job delivering many inspiring opportunities.

As retiring chair of the Council I would like to thank the old Executive Committee for an excellent cooperation during the period of the re-establishment of the IALE Council. I also want to thank all the members of the Council for their patient involvement in the rather complicated process of re-establishing the Council. Finally I welcome the new Executive Committee, hoping that the re-established Council can offer a strong dialogue on the many scientific and organisational challenges for landscape ecology in the coming years.

Roskilde, May 2007

Jesper Brandt,
Chair of the Council

