

The International Union of Physiological Sciences. IUPS Editorial VIII

The 36th International Congress of Physiological Sciences took place in Kyoto, Japan this past summer. The general consensus is that the Congress was a great success, but what are the criteria for success? A comprehensive physiological congress must attract a substantial number of participants from all around the globe because only in this way can the enormous effort expended in assembling a programme, reflecting the whole breath of the physiological sciences, be justified. The Kyoto Congress had more than 4,000 registered participants, which makes it one of the larger IUPS Congresses. Considering that this Congress was held during one of the worst recessions in recent years, this is quite an achievement. However, the satisfactory attendance hides one important point, which has become apparent when looking back over recent IUPS Congresses, namely that these events to an increasing extent rely on a substantial "home base." Roughly half of the participants in the Kyoto Congress were from Japan. Similarly, the 2005 San Diego Congress, which was held together with Experimental Biology, was very large because of the very substantial number of US participants. On the other hand, several congresses that were not based in countries with large and well supported physiological societies—and therefore inevitably could not have large numbers of local participants—turned out to be relatively small. This clearly is an important factor that has to be taken into account when the sites of future congresses are selected.

Size is not, of course, the only or even the most important criterion for success. The quality of the scientific presentations and the extent and depth of the discussions are what really matter. Unfortunately these cannot be evaluated precisely, and since nobody can attend all or even a majority of the sessions scheduled at an International Congress, evidence is inevitably anecdotal. Nevertheless, based on substantial amounts of feedback, both oral and written, it is my impression that there was a very high level of satisfaction with the Kyoto Congress. The credit for assembling such an outstanding program must go to Yoshihisa Kurachi, who as Chair

of both the International Scientific Program Committee and the Local Program Committee did a truly brilliant job. The practical organization of the Congress was also very effective. Kyoto's International Conference Center proved to be an excellent venue with very good facilities. All the participants I spoke with were impressed by the ease and speed with which it was possible to move from one parallel session to another; a very important point for a large, wide-ranging congress. Finally, the Organizing Committee led by the Congress President, Yasushi Miyashita, produced an excellent social programme with very impressive and highly disciplined performances mostly by astonishingly able youngsters from regional schools. The Opening Ceremony was a grand occasion, which was dignified by the presence of the Japanese Crown Prince, who addressed the large audience in impeccable English. This provided an excellent opportunity for a response from the new IUPS President, Denis Noble, who in a very elegant address, the text of which is reproduced on the IUPS website (<http://www.iups.org>), displayed his very considerable skills as a great orator.

As always, the Congress itself was preceded by the IUPS General Assembly (GA). The main tasks of IUPS GAs are to take final decisions with regard to the continuation of the principal IUPS activities. Thus the 2009 GA, composed of representatives from all over the world, had the final say in the election of the new IUPS Executive Committee and Council that will direct the Union until the next Congress in 2013. The GA also had to make decisions with regard to the sites of the next Congresses. In San Diego in 2005, the GA voted in favor of having the 2013 Congress in the UK. However, according to the rules and customs of IUPS, this decision had to be ratified by the 2009 GA after hearing a more extensive report from the UK Physiological Society about the plans for this next IUPS Congress. Bridget Lumb and David Eisner, from the UK's Physiological Society, presented attractive plans for the Congress, and the GA happily confirmed the decision to hold the 37th International Congress of Physiological Sciences in

Birmingham, England in 2013. The major excitement at this year's GA was the question about the site of the 2017 Congress. This was a particularly difficult decision because IUPS had received three extremely strong bids from Brazil, Canada, and China. The GA heard very impressive presentations from these three countries explaining the plans for congresses in 2017 in Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, and Beijing, respectively, and it was therefore no surprise that there had to be two rounds of voting. Ultimately, Brazil emerged the winner. The extraordinarily effective and charming presentation for Brazil, made by Benedito Machado, undoubtedly helped Brazil's case. IUPS is proud to announce that the 2017 IUPS Congress will be held in South America, after an interval of more than 50 years since the first South American Congress in Buenos Aires in 1959, and for the very first time in Brazil.

There were no surprises with regard to the election of the new Officers and Council. As Chair of the IUPS Nominations Committee, I was happy that the slate I presented to the GA was unanimously approved. I believe that IUPS has elected a superb Council for the next 4 years and specifically has an extraordinarily gifted and experienced Executive Committee. The new President, Denis Noble, was Secretary General of IUPS from 1994 to 2001 and Denis also—more recently—chaired the Long-Range Planning Committee. My successor as Secretary General, Walter Boron, who takes up his position on January 1st, 2010, did a superb job as Chair of the International and Local Scientific Program Committees for the very successful 2005 Congress in San Diego and has also been—and continues to be—an excellent editor of the very journal in which this editorial appears. The two new Vice Presidents are also very experienced in international meeting organization. Yoshihisa Kurachi, as already mentioned, has been the main driving force behind the superb 2009 IUPS Congress in Kyoto, and Xian Wang was the main organizer of the very successful Beijing Joint Conference of Physiological Sciences held in 2008 (1). Our excellent Treasurer Malcolm Gordon was already in post in the previous Council period and was re-elected in Kyoto.

Apart from the concrete tasks of running international congresses and publishing, together with the American Physiological Society, the increasingly successful and visible journal *Physiology*, IUPS also has the

duty to promote physiology in all regions of the world. IUPS therefore tries to have a visible presence at major regional meetings. This autumn, there has been a number of important events in Eastern Europe, and it has been very encouraging to witness the development in the physiological sciences in this part of Europe. It was a pleasure for me to speak at the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd Serbian Congress of Physiology held in Kragujevac in September and to present the Opening Lecture. The Serbian Society is making great progress, and its President, Dragan Djuric, has written a report of the Kragujevac Congress, which can be found on the IUPS website. Later this year, FEPS (the Federation of European Physiological Societies) is holding its 2009 meeting in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, and I am looking much forward to this meeting. Some centers in Eastern Europe have always been well connected to the international community, even in the days of the Iron Curtain. The Bogomoletz Institute of Physiology in Kiev, Ukraine has long been recognized as an outstandingly successful research institution in which pioneering work on Ca^{2+} channels was carried out (2), where proton-activated channels were discovered in 1980 (for recent review by Oleg Krishtal, who made the original discovery, see Ref. 3), and in which large numbers of very talented investigators received extraordinarily good training. This has been to the great benefit of world physiology, since many of these investigators now hold significant positions of scientific leadership

throughout the world. In October of this year, the Bogomoletz Institute celebrated its 75th anniversary with an international symposium on "Molecular Mechanisms of Intracellular Calcium Signalling." This coincided with the 85th birthday of Platon Kostyuk, a former IUPS Vice President (1989–1993). It was my great pleasure to give an Invited Lecture on this occasion and, on behalf of IUPS, to extend greetings and congratulations to Platon, Oleg Krishtal, and the institute.

IUPS has the duty to defend physiological research worldwide, wherever there is a threat. This autumn it has become apparent that there are potentially serious problems at the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC), where continuing employment of some of the most excellent physiologists with the highest international standing appears to be doubtful due to unwarranted political interference (4). The IUPS Council therefore issued a statement on October 1st, 2009 calling on the Venezuelan government to reconsider the future of IVIC and specifically to support those scientists who are doing scientific research of the highest international standards. This statement is prominently displayed on the IUPS website.

This is my final IUPS Editorial because I complete my 8 years of service as IUPS Secretary General at the end of 2009. I wish my successor, Walter Boron, all possible success in his work for IUPS over the coming years and thank all the current and past officers of IUPS with whom I have been working since the beginning of 2002 for excellent col-

laboration. I have had close and very productive relations with the two Presidents under whom I have served, namely Allen Cowley from 2002 to 2005 and Akimichi Kaneko from 2005 to 2009, and thank them for their trust. I extend special thanks to Irene Schulz, who completed her 8 years as IUPS Vice President in Kyoto this past summer for a particularly close and cordial collaboration, and to Walter Boron and Yoshihisa Kurachi for exciting, and also very fruitful and pleasant, interactions during the preparations for the 2005 San Diego and 2009 Kyoto congresses, respectively. This year also marks the end of Sue Orsoni's work for IUPS. As Executive Secretary, Sue has for many years been crucial to the operation of IUPS and has been administering the affairs of our Union with great insight and efficiency. Sue will be greatly missed. I am personally grateful to Sue for all her hard and effective work for IUPS and for many pleasant social interactions over the years. I am sure that all friends of IUPS will want to wish her all possible happiness in her retirement. ■

References

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