

Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik

Accomplishments and Future Role¹

By Ørjar Øyen²

Introduction

I have been asked to make some remarks about the accomplishments of the Inter-University Centre throughout its 40 years of existence. I accept the challenge – although it's a task too big to be dealt with in half an hour or so at the end of a long day and an interesting and highly stimulating conference. Many themes could be taken up, but I can select only a few. A fair treatment of some issues would require serious research on information that to a large extent is available, although there is much that we don't have – at least not covering all of the 40 years.

Yet, being more relaxed and casual, we can address some more general questions: From what we have done and what we have accomplished, do we have reason to be pleased and content, or should we perhaps take a little time to regret our failures and be sorry that we couldn't do more? How do we fare today? Is there a role for the IUC in times to come?

I would like to structure my remarks as follows: After some observations of the general features of the IUC, I would like to look at a few figures on the steady flow of students and participants through courses and conferences, moving on to the growing need to provide assistance in securing records of achievement, a kind of "take-home" service. I will remark on a particularly significant function of participation, namely, that of being hooked on to scholarly networks, nationally and internationally, and more or less as a historical footnote I wish to remark on one more or less unintended consequence of being in Dubrovnik: the "breathing-hole"-function that lasted up to the time when the Iron Curtain was dismantled and the walls came tumbling down. The pursuit of interdisciplinarity also has remained an objective in

¹ An abbreviated version of this paper was presented on 7 September 2012 at the international conference "The Dream of a Global Knowledge Society" on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik.

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much of the work of the IUC. I could not talk about the challenges and accomplishments of the IUC throughout its history without mentioning the issue of having to cope with paradoxes of maintaining independence and autonomy in the everyday life of the IUC. Shifting the perspective more to the future I cannot say very much, except to refer to our sincere hope that the future of the IUC be guided by needs to make adjustments to changes in the geopolitical environment, in the region as well as on the global arena.

So then, it must be remembered that the IUC has been carried forward by a large group of devoted people, most of all the women and men who have initiated and implemented the large number of programme events, which is the core activity of the IUC, attracting the most important players who have been – and continue to be – the course and conference participants who come from far and near to give life and soul to the IUC. Without them, the IUC would be nothing.

Needless to say, the IUC has a leadership: Council, Executive Committee, Director-General. In everyday life, the heart of the institution has been – and continues to be – in the hands of the good people who carry the burden of running the administration of the IUC – often, or most of the time, under conditions that may have left much to be desired.

Remember, the organisation of the IUC is in essence a collective consisting of its member institutions. But, as one would expect, we have to cope with widely varying degrees of cohesion between the member institutions and the IUC. It may be noted that the IUC as such never was established as a legal entity, neither in the former Yugoslavia nor in the present Croatia. However, for its functioning in the more official sense, particularly in its economic functioning, the centre is anchored in a legal entity called the IUC Association, which is established under the Croatian law of citizens' associations.

All along, the IUC has benefitted from support, economically and otherwise, from national and international sources, organisations, foundations, from our host institution: the University of Zagreb, and now, and for many years, from the Croatian government. I shall return, a little later, to the issue of our predominantly happy relationship with the University of Zagreb and offer praise and gratitude for tolerance and patience making it possible for the centre as a rather unusual construction to survive – for 40 years – and to allow us to look forward to the future with confidence.

All in all, I feel that we have fared well and that, all together, *we*, we in that widely collective sense, have been successful, for which we also have to give credit to our friendly neighbourhood, the city of Dubrovnik, the community into which we have become well integrated and to which we feel we belong.

Saying that, I know that you understand that my views of developments through all of these years and the situation in which we find ourselves today are tainted by my being inclined toward selective perception – a curse of intellectual endeavour, yet probably pardonable under conditions of a festive celebration such as this one.

In times when even academic institutions are required to confirm their *raison-d'être* in terms of goal achievement as units of production there must be some concept

of goal and some idea of how to count results. This is not easy in any regard, as university people all know, and the matter becomes particularly troublesome when it involves issues such as the sharing knowledge, the promoting of friendship, and contributing to mutual respect and understanding across the various boundaries of our world community.

For sure, we cannot quite know how storage centres and linkages in the brains of departing participants in IUC events have been affected by their presence in Dubrovnik. And we cannot well be expected to present proof, neither in qualitative nor in quantitative terms, that the IUC has contributed toward the implementation of goals such as mutual understanding, reconciliation, and peace. We are left to believe and to maintain what we believe to be true – thereby also affirming an essential feature of what we call academic freedom.

A Steady Flow of Students and Participants

Understandably, we cannot always assess our successes and failures in terms of firm measures of goal achievement. Yet, we are nevertheless pleased to point to indicators of the steady flow of students and course and conference participants and organisers throughout the forty years. The following table, prepared by our secretariat, shows recorded participation in courses and conference in Dubrovnik since the first course was held in 1972 and until the end of last year.

IUC ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES 1971-2011

Courses and conferences held in Dubrovnik

Academic Year	No. of Courses	No. of Conferences	No. of Participants
1971/1991	598	266	38881
1991/1992	6		118
1992/1993	11	3	208
1993/1994	13	2	319
1994/1995	9	4	291
1996	26		573
1997	39	9	1852
1998	51	12	2279
1999	36	7	1449
2000	52	6	1681
2001	54	7	1844
2002	60	9	1917
2003	61	9	2198
2004	49	13	1950
2005	50	10	1782
2006	51	8	1713
2007	52	9	1618
2008	53	11	1626
2009	45	9	1901
2010	50	8	1452
2011	45	11	1416
TOTAL:	1411	413	67071

November 2011

The bottom line tells us that by the end of last year the IUC had had 1 411 courses and 413 conferences held in Dubrovnik. Additionally, a few events were organised elsewhere, either in Croatia or in exile to another country, during the war period when Dubrovnik was under siege, and after the destruction of the building.

The right-hand column shows a total of 67 071 participants in courses plus conferences. We know that many of these individuals are repeaters who cannot resist coming back to events at the IUC year after year – in many ways they are the firm backbone of the institution. Also, there is a significant number of airline passengers involved, coming and going – I do not wish to calculate the total emission of carbon dioxide!

There is some fluctuation in total annual participation, within the range of 1 500 to 2 000 plus, but in interpreting the fluctuation we must allow for variations in the types of arrangements, like big conferences or small conferences, for example. Anyway, they all seek accommodation in Dubrovnik. I don't know the average duration of visits, but we easily see that 2 000 people annually, each staying one week, means 14 000 person/nights, presumably spent in Dubrovnik beds.

We see that the number of courses per year has fluctuated around 50, except during the years of war when the activity level locally was down to nearly zero. From these figures, and looking toward the future, I would neither predict rise nor decline – likewise for the number of conferences.

We would like to have a detailed analysis of the underlying circumstances. Who are the participants? From where do they come? What shifts are occurring over time? I am happy to report that the secretariat now secures a set of entries into a data base, so that it will be much easier to monitor the situation and see what the trends and tendencies are. Some of us know that for the 30th anniversary, ten years ago, Peter Fischer-Appelt prepared a detailed collection of data about trends and tendencies. The data are on file in the secretariat. The information ought to be updated and subjected to more careful study.

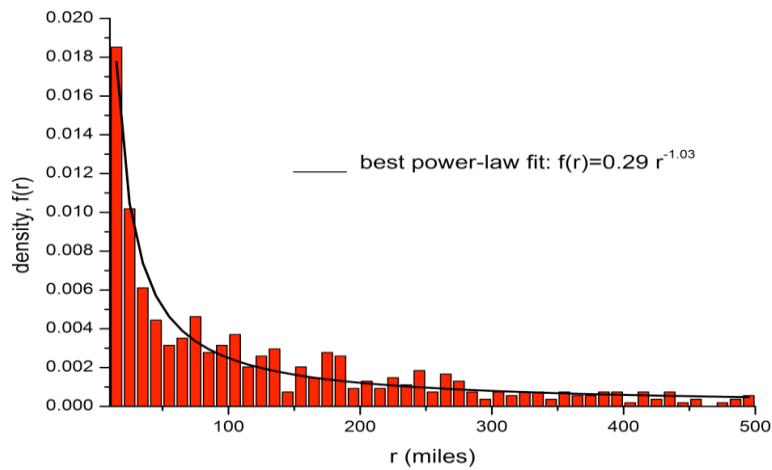
In general terms, and under conditions of homogeneity and “everything else being equal”, there is a relationship between distance and social interaction that may be described by a nice harmonic curve. From the Web, I borrow a fascinating illustration of that point (see below):

In this case, we may note that the regularity is clear even in the case when distance does not involve cost or special effort. In most cases of real life we may note distinct deviations from the harmonic curve, simply because other factors are at work – factors like economic expense associated with distance, cultural similarities or differences, and boundaries or division lines. We know that in any real-life picture of the relationship between distance and social interaction the deviations from the general trend are of particular interest. But be that as it may for the time being!

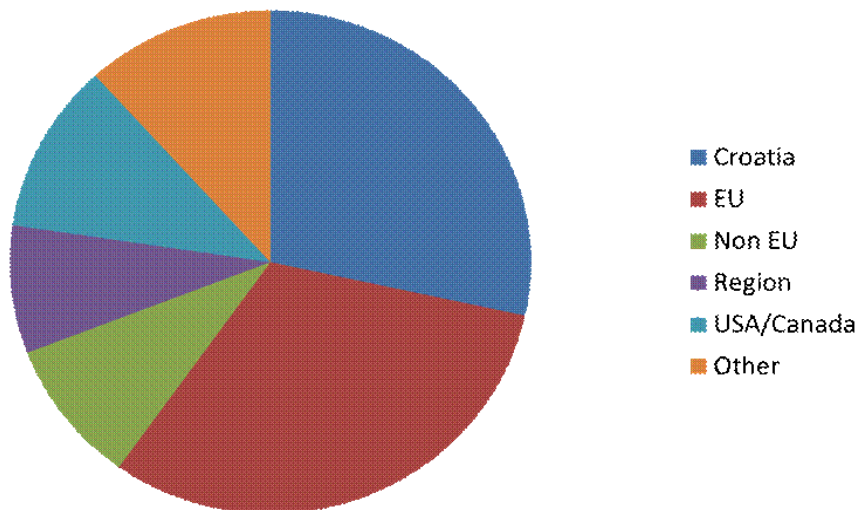
Here, according to this general law of social life, if you wish, it is not surprising that the existence of the IUC in Dubrovnik generates most interaction – and participation – by those nearby. One might even infer policy implications from such observations. Think about it! So, I have another picture to show you.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISTANCE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION: THE GENERAL PICTURE

Here: Physical Distances of Facebook Contacts³



TOTAL COURSE AND CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION BY GEOGRAPHIC AREA, 2011



³ The illustration is taken from a study by Jacob Goldenberg and Moshe Levy: "Distance Is Not Dead: Social Interaction and Geographical Distance in the Internet Era." <http://arxiv.org/abs/0906.3202>

Of course, the boundaries between the categories – or regions – in the figure are somewhat problematic, but I believe the main point is clear enough. The Croatian utilisation of – and, hopefully, benefit from – the IUC as a resource is almost as large as that of the entire European Union. As of 1 July 2013, when Croatia becomes a member of EU, the blue sector may be depicted as red. Could we perhaps anticipate policy implications for the IUC and perhaps a revised role for the IUC in that new context? Anyway, I am sure that as long as the IUC maintains high quality and a good reputation in going about its business, the existence of the institution will be secured, materially and otherwise.

Securing records of achievement

One idea that kept coming up in meetings of the Executive Committee during the first years was that the IUC ought to prepare for the granting of degrees. It was above all Ivan Supek's idea that courses within a particular area could be organised in sequence over some years so that a participant of great perseverance could have the option of receiving a Master's degree. I remember that Ivan Supek was disappointed that his wish did not win support in Council and Executive Committee.

I don't have to elaborate on the issues of why nobody had courage to go along with the proposal. Yet, throughout all the years it was felt that the individual student ought to have the option to bring home a record that might perhaps encourage the home university to add a few points to the individual's official record of achievement. Course organisers from some American universities showed that they could handle the problem. They did so simply by securing authority from the home universities allowing them to provide the necessary and formally acceptable information so that the credit points earned could be added to the individual student's record at the home institution. For example, Florida State University and the University of California Education Abroad Program brought many students and course directors to Dubrovnik. For the participants, the arrangement added to the attractiveness of the IUC.

Later on, measures implemented through educational programmes of the European Union have prompted the IUC to encourage course directors to offer a take-home service for students – and maybe in particular for doctoral candidates – who wish to apply records of achievement at the IUC toward fulfilment of requirements at their home universities. The procedure is in place, but assumes active implementation by the course directors. You may note from the poster announcing the academic programme for 2012–2013 that courses with an asterisk (*) offer ECTS credits.

Being hooked on to scholarly networks

A few of us who are present in this audience have been coming and going for 40 years, and we have seen cohorts of participants coming and going, presumably getting more experienced and mature, and becoming grey-haired as time has passed.

Demography makes its claims. Most of the pioneers aren't around anymore. Fortunately, we see a steady flow of new recruits.

Here, one feature of the work of the IUC is particularly important: We have an array of course and conference events that have been offered under the same heading year after year. The course Philosophy of Science is one such enduring programme offering, having been very actively present virtually since the beginning of the IUC. The Future of Religion is another permanent fixture, offering its 36th course in April of this year. A number of such efforts will continue.

We have the School of Social Work, Theory and Practice, a very stable programme series; this year, in June, no less than eight courses were offered under that school's umbrella. We have the Victimology course, having now come to the IUC for the 28th time.

Another stable element in our programme is the course, plus conference, called Math/Chem/Comp (or, Interfaces among Mathematics, Chemistry and Computer Sciences), having brought 27 appearances to the IUC. The Petroleum Engineering Summer School offered its 33rd and 34th workshop this year. There are several such more or less permanent and stable networks that are finding the IUC in Dubrovnik a good venue – you will find them in the materials that you have received.⁴

Over the years, we have seen how our events at the IUC have played a major role, at the individual level, in opening avenues to participation in national and international networks far beyond the reach of the IUC. I believe the long-lasting programmes that I just mentioned have been outstanding in this regard. We keep encountering people who express gratitude to the IUC for providing the links that became important keys to academic careers at home and internationally.⁵

Serendipity: The Breathing-Hole Function of the IUC

Perhaps, the breathing-hole function of the IUC in Dubrovnik was perhaps an unintended and unrecognised consequence, or what sociologists have called a latent function – as opposed to a manifest function, although we may well believe that Ivan Supek had been alert to the manifest possibility without making it an explicit issue. Yet, all along, the IUC took some pride in seeing itself as playing a special role in a Europe sharply divided and compartmentalised. We were placed in a position where we could benefit from Yugoslavia's leadership role in the group of nations adhering to a declared policy of non-alignment. It was at the I time when the map of Europe

⁴ A more comprehensive overview of programme series offered at the IUC up to its 30th anniversary may be found in Ørjar Øyen and Berta Dragičević, *Beyond Frontiers: 30th Anniversary of Inter-University Centre* (Dubrovnik: IUC, 2002), pp. 29–35.

⁵ The following publication devoted special attention to “witness reports” by a number of key individuals who have contributed to and benefitted from events organized at the IUC: Dragičević, Berta, and Ørjar Øyen, *Fragments of Memories of Life and Work at Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik 1971-2007*. Zagreb: Durieux, 2009.

had a division line running from North to South, when cold wars were at times at the brink of hot wars.

At that time, freedom of movement was restricted or non-existent to many East-European young scholars and highly motivated, knowledge-hungry students. Our location in Dubrovnik gave opportunities for contact that could not otherwise be achieved. Indeed, in the true spirit of this community and its many centuries-long traditions of contact and exchange, in trade as well as culture, people could come to this “free harbour”, from East and West, from North and South, to become acquainted, to develop lasting friendship, to learn from each other, to work together in exploring intellectual puzzles and scientific challenges, and perhaps most importantly: gaining access to international networks of scholarly cooperation.

In this way, the IUC was one of a very few centres that facilitated contact and expanded knowledge of that which was over on the other side of the divide. When the Iron Curtain finally collapsed and when the Berlin Wall was dismantled, it happened also because centres of scholarly contact and exchange, even through the IUC, had benefitted from the privilege of offering an avenue whereby ideas could flow more freely.

Perhaps, this particular feature of the IUC may have been a major motivating factor prompting universities to seek IUC membership and eliciting initiatives in organising courses and conferences in Dubrovnik. Conversely, at a time when the breathing-hole function no longer played such a role, it might well be that some member institutions and some of the more active contributors lost interest in making use of the IUC. Besides, of course, a wide array of new arenas of contact and cooperation appeared.

Pursuing Interdisciplinarity

Another important theme, about which I can make only some rather superficial remarks, is the matter of providing conditions for the pursuit of interdisciplinarity and comparison, often regarded as important features of the agenda of the IUC.

One of the goals envisioned for the IUC, from early on, was to provide conditions for the pursuit of interdisciplinary activities. The founders were rather sure that the environment offered by the city of Dubrovnik would be ideal in the sense of allowing young scholars to make acquaintances and seeking friendship across a multitude of division lines. The friendly social conditions would offer every participant in an IUC event the opportunity to bridge frontiers: cultural, religious, political, north-south, east-west. Above all, requirements of allegiance to one's location on such dimensions would be relaxed in this friendly environment. One would be liberated from the territory or turf claims held in such high esteem by discipline defenders at the home university.

To be sure, the freedom to build bridges, in this sense, is not in itself interdisciplinarity. It is at best a precondition – not always a necessary and sufficient precondition. Or, one could say that the opportunity of just being together is one extreme of a dimension of interdisciplinarity extending to another extreme, to where those who

seek explanation of variation – a typical scientific concern – collaborate freely across discipline boundaries so as to locate sources of variation wherever such sources exist. Example: Explained variation – a statistical term – might be maximised when a social scientist and a biologist feel free – and properly qualified – to pool their explanatory variables.

Thirty years ago, the IUC celebrated its 10th anniversary with an international seminar having as its title “Interdisciplinarity: The Relation between Objective Knowledge, Moral Purpose and Social Practice”. The main organisers of the seminar were Dr. Peter Fischer-Appelt, then President of the University of Hamburg, and the late Vice Chancellor of Bradford University, Ted Edwards. They were both among the founders of the IUC and also were influential members of its governing bodies. Ted Edwards gave the introductory lecture.⁶ As I read the lecture and the seminar records today, I note a strongly felt urgency to promote interdisciplinarity so as to allow permeability between broad domains: On the one hand, that which may be perceived as knowledge secured by careful analysis of empirical data, and on the other hand discipline boundaries of moral, ethical, and political objectives, in a world of cold war and grave dangers resulting from poorly controlled scientific and technological developments. I also note warnings in participants’ statements: keep scientific objectives visibly apart from moralistic and political objectives.

Coping with the Paradoxes of Independence and Autonomy

Let me make some remarks about what we have seen as a fundamental premise of the IUC: being independent and autonomous. How could we succeed, considering the geopolitical circumstances under which the IUC would have to exist? Sure, there are costs of being independent and autonomous.

At the time when Academician Ivan Supek, then Rector of the University of Zagreb, went to Montreal in 1970 to make his proposal to the International Association of Universities, he gave special significance to the assumption that an interuniversity centre, run by its constituent university institutions as an independent and autonomous cooperative venture, must be *free from government control*.

We recall that at that time, a proposal had been made to establish a United Nations University. Supek was among those who feared that a UN university might run the risk of becoming one additional arena for the unfolding of world conflicts, and he offered an alternative: Let the collectivity of universities be in charge. Let those who organise academic courses and conferences be in charge.

Several circumstances worked in our favour. An increasing number of universities from all over the world became associated with the IUC – the membership peaked at around 250 in the 1970-ies. Such a collectivity of academic institutions might well be seen as carrying some strength and potential.

Then, we recall that the city of Dubrovnik had offered a vacant school building as home for a development as visualised by Ivan Supek and the founders.

⁶ *Bulletin of the Inter-University Centre of Postgraduate Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 55–63.

It was assumed that the host institution, the University of Zagreb, would provide means for the refurbishment of the building and support an array of maintenance costs, plus personnel and infrastructure costs. Let me assure you that the assumption was linked to another brave assumption, namely, that the academic and intellectual value of having such an institution in Dubrovnik would provide adequate compensation for the financial expenditures.

Furthermore, it was assumed – or hoped – that as far as the academic policies of the IUC were concerned, the University of Zagreb would graciously stand back and be no more than a member institution on a par with any other member institution. Looking back at this construction, we may well feel that this was a big request. And we may ask: Which university, wherever, would be willing to act as host for the IUC, absorbing a major proportion of its costs, and at the same time be willing to show unlimited restraint in the matter of exerting control over its academic programmes? It has not always been easy. But in the long haul, the wisdom of good people has prevailed.⁷ The model has worked, and a large number of scholars, in various departments of the university, have come to regard the IUC as an important resource.

However, the determination to remain autonomous, independent, and “free of government control”, has raised issues of a price to be paid and sacrifices to be made – or so it may have seemed. For the institution to survive, certain restrictions had to be set and observed. Paradoxically, being free of government control implied a policy under which it was not necessarily a particularly good idea to allow the IUC to become – or to be perceived as – a haven for anti-government campaigns exceeding real or perceived tolerance levels. At some time, when the history of the IUC is to be written, the efforts to cope with this paradox or contradiction will require some attention, I presume.

After all, one might well have good and perfectly legitimate reasons to believe that an organisation of more than a couple of hundred universities might carry some weight in the pursuit of a goal we all shared: intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, democracy, and peace. Not everyone accepted the thesis of adequate restraint. There were those who saw their goals as having a higher value than the survival of the IUC. Right or wrong?

If we take time to assess our achievements over the 40 year’s period, we may well realise that the firm objective of keeping the IUC alive and flourishing, remaining independent and autonomous, at times required diplomatic balancing acts so as not to risk the fate of being wiped of the map. We know that there were those outside the IUC who saw us as an element of threat and who wished us to go away. We know that meetings were held at the IUC when listening devices were stuck under the chairs we sat on. But on the other hand, we know that at a decisive moment, when views were tense, someone in high authority decreed: “leave them alone!” Maybe

⁷ Further details of the symbiosis between the IUC and the University of Zagreb have been described in Øyen and Dragičević, *op.cit.* pp. 21–26.

this was to our credit, or perhaps, as according to the opinion of some, to our discredit? I don't know. But the IUC continued to exist.

I cannot go into any detail, but the records have been kept and remain organised into a good archive. When the building was shelled, burned, and destroyed in December of 1991 – when only the walls remained standing, there were people who managed to save our records, even while the building was burning, and bring them to a safe location.

The geopolitical environment

Of course, changes that occurred in the centre's position in its geopolitical environment brought up needs for revisions and adjustments. There was a steady need to be on the outlook for new ways of meeting changing challenges and at the same time to act so as to maintain core objectives.

However, it could not always be clear how to implement the institution's policy and mission so as to secure survival, given the conditions prevailing in the near as well as in the more remote context. It became a balancing act to be performed in the day-to-day life of the IUC. Today, I could not look in the rear-view mirror to ponder our accomplishments without recognising this dilemma as one of the major features of concerns.

Why so? One reason was the centre's success in attracting universities from around the world to become affiliated with the IUC and to join the membership roster. Our membership peaked, prior to the wars, at around 250 institutions, some of which were among the most highly ranked universities in the world. Not all members were equally influential in implementing IUC objectives. Nevertheless, the input from university leaders and prominent personalities contributed to making the IUC appear – true or false – as a potentially significant institution that could not be neglected, regardless of vantage point.

All of this is now history. To young people of today, the fall of the Iron Curtain has already become a remote event. The cohorts of teenagers whom we see on Dubrovnik's Stradun in the evening no longer have a well-defined conception of the deeply tragic events of two decades ago.

The Future

We all strive to be able to cope with times to come. But the course of times to come is hard to predict. As far as the survival probability of the Inter-University Centre goes, I would be tempted to say: Leave it to the Director General and the Executive Committee, acting in accord with the guiding principles laid down by the founders and IUC Council, to respond responsibly to changing conditions. We have seen, even throughout the last 40 years – a tiny fraction of eternity – how matters unexpected have changed the life condition of people, nations, the world we live in – and not so surprisingly – the IUC. We have learned, sometimes the hard way, that the occurrence of unexpected events is an indisputably certain expectation.

We saw a divided Europe, and here in Dubrovnik, in a corner of Europe, we worked together to face our futures and to carve out a place that more or less intend- edly came to serve the diffusion of knowledge and understanding across and beyond frontiers. One division line – one frontier, the Iron Curtain – disappeared. Then, the Balkan wars caused great loss and destruction and brought about dramatic upheav- als in the geopolitical environment. We saw quick efforts toward repair and reco- very, and the IUC faced a future of new challenges. In retrospect, it seems clear that the membership of the IUC took note of the new situation and readjusted its particip- ation in and support of the centre in Dubrovnik. Some of the more active supporters of the IUC withdrew from membership and looked for partnership arrangements elsewhere. Others remained on the membership roster as more or less sleeping part- ners. At the same time, many institutions entered as new members – hopefully seeing the potential of new possibilities – while the IUC took initiatives that underscored its future emphasis on challenges emerging from the more regional problems of acade- mic development.

The Iron Curtain disappeared and the breathing-hole function of the IUC waned. Many boundaries – political, cultural, religious, ethnic – remain or make their ap- pearance in new shapes and forms. The perimeter of the European Union will in all likelihood develop as a real frontier – so will the boundaries of the Schengen coun- tries of Europe. The Mediterranean is a wide ocean but also a dramatically active link between Africa and Europe, between South and North. In geographic terms, the IUC has its location in the neighbourhood of the troubled and turbulent Middle East. Based within this geopolitical context, the IUC will need to pay close attention to the definition of its role and its challenges, while at the same time maintaining its obligation to knowledge development within the global circuit of scientific pursuit.

Some developments in the geopolitical environment may be predicted with re- lative certainty. Croatia will soon be a member of the European Union. For the IUC, this may not necessarily have dramatic consequences. But it could – and I believe should – lead to a situation where the IUC came to assume a clearly defined role. I am not in a position to give advice as to how such possibilities might be approached. A dramatic redefinition of the future role of the IUC may not be called for, but one thing can be said with certainty: the IUC ought to find a way of securing a more pre- dictable budgetary basis for its functioning. Maybe on the other side of the current economic crisis there is a firm place for the IUC?