

Laureat d'honneur. Speech Ton Dietz, Kyoto, August 9, 2013

Dear colleagues,

Currently I am director of an area studies institute, the African Studies Centre in Leiden, in my home country, the Netherlands. I am doing that as a geographer: trained to connect different perspectives, different levels of scale, different paradigms and being holistic. I am most grateful to the world organization of geographers to honour me with this *laureat d'honneur*. Some years ago, I have been serving the IGU for a period of eight years as the Country representative from the Netherlands. And after that I was active in two capacities, which are both important to strengthen global geography as a relevant discipline, I think. So let me give you my brief thoughts about those two IGU projects. The first one has to do with publication cultures. When I started my career as an academic geographer, as a student in Nijmegen and as a young lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, many Dutch geographers were still teaching and writing in Dutch, and as students we had to read a lot of books and journal articles, in many languages: my own native language, but also French, German and English and some of us even went beyond that. That was in the 1970s. Now, forty years later, geographers who want to climb the academic ladder only seem to be able to do so if they publish one article after another in so-called top-level journals in English. The inventory of geographical journals that I have assisted in setting up and that can be found on the IGU website, shows that there are many, many more relevant journals in our discipline and sub-disciplines, and that many of those are not in English and do not seem to get academic recognition in circles who decide about academic careers. Geography has to play a key role in national education, in regional planning and in environmental governance, where academic knowledge merges with other types of knowledges. But if geographers turn their back to these stakeholders, who are mostly using their national language, geography itself will wither away. IGU HAS to play a role, I think, in fighting against the ever-growing monopoly of knowledge dissemination by commercial publication firms in the English-speaking world.

The second project is even more important, I think. In my country there is an almost complete split between physical geography and human or socio-economic geography. As a result Dutch geographers and geography institutes have largely missed the opportunities of playing key roles in environmental issues. This is true for big global issues like climate change and biodiversity conservation. But it is also true for all those issues that you can connect with sustainable cities. Elsewhere, and in IGU, physical and human geographers are still together. But also there many of the eye-catching scholars dealing with global and urban environmental issues are not geographers. They are biologists or historians or economists. For many years now I have been trying, with some dedicated colleagues, to re-engage geography, a joint geography, with these big environmental issues. Thanks to the enthusiasm and dedication of some Chinese colleagues, two of whom are here today as well, the website Our Sustainable Cities (oursus.org) can become a powerful tool for this reengagement. And it could also develop into a tool for IGU to lead a global movement of inspiration for our sustainable cities, sharing insights, and connecting to relevant key players in business and policy communities, and, through social media, with the general public and the youth in particular. Please join us! Crossing boundaries and connecting people and ideas for inclusive and sustainable development in this world of ours: that is what geographers can and should do!

Let me end with a few words of appreciation. I would like to share this great honour with all those geographers and others who have prepared me for this academic prize. I would particularly like to thank my teachers and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam, including my wife Annemieke, who was trained as a geographer as well. And I would like to thank the IGU Executive Committee for supporting the Journals project and the Sustainable Cities project. Finally, let me thank the German geographers who succeeded to bring geography down to earth in 2012, and the Japanese geographers who brought geography close to heaven in this magnificent city of Kyoto in 2013. Okini! Arigado! Dank!