

Report on the 12th Conference of the IASC

The 12th IASC international conference “Governing shared resources: connecting local experience to global challenges” was hosted by the University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham, England, with organizational support provided by the CCRI. For England, the weather was remarkably good, and the week resembled an extended tea party, though without the Mad Hatter present.

A total of 502 people from 71 countries attended the conference that was spread over 5 days. A total of 420 papers were given in 87 Panel sessions were delivered in 11 sub-themes. There were also two book launches, six policy fora, eight field trips, four pre-conference workshops and a series of ‘master classes’ run for students. In addition there was a drop-in presentation skills clinic, two round tables and four keynote speakers.

The opening ceremony, complete with tea and cakes, was held on the afternoon of Monday 14th June in the large outdoor pavilion set up the week before in the grounds of the Park Campus. The Brookfield Youth Jazz Band set the tone with a selection of classic jazz tunes followed by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Patricia Broadfoot, who opened the conference and welcomed the delegates to the University.

A total of 246 delegates attended four workshops that were held on the first day of the conference. Workshops were run on Introduction to commons, New Commons, Research Design, and UK Historic and Contemporary Commons. The Research Design workshop, which focused on qualitative methods, and the Introduction to the Commons workshops were particularly popular. The level of interest was particularly pleasing and more could be offered in future, perhaps with advanced courses spread over two days, which may be attractive to delegates and especially postgraduates.

Three keynote addresses were given:

- Bakary Kante (UNEP) “The difficulties of managing global commons”
- Lord Carey of Clifton (former Archbishop of Canterbury) “From Global Commons to Global Community”
- Judy Ling Wong (Black Environment Network)

All three keynote speakers were excellent and addressed the key themes of the conference. Speeches were stimulating and thought provoking. In addition Elinor Ostrom (Indiana University) and Ruth Meinzen-Dick (President of the IASC) gave presentations at the conference dinner. The Conference dinner was held in Cheltenham Town Hall and was attended by 350 delegates, complete with musical entertainment from a local band called SwingFromParis.

On Thursday 17th July over 300 delegates attend one of eight Field trips to destinations ranging from Gower Peninsular, Severn Estuary, New Forest, Forest of Dean, Shropshire Hills, Somerset Levels, Cotswold Hills and The Bodleian Library, Oxford. The trips looked at range of resources being managed in common including upland pasture, fisheries, woodland and the management of multi-functional shared resources as well as the management of new commons through copyright and intellectual property rights.

There were two very successful round table discussions were organised on the subjects of ‘Social Learning’ and ‘Sustainability and Authority, Property and Democracy’.

A total of six policy fora were organised on the following topics:

- Marine policy
- Community forestry
- Creating a political voice for the commons
- Clash of the Commons
- Contested commons: from conflict to peace
- History and archaeology of town commons

Those attending enjoyed the opportunity for some focused and in-depth discussion on the selected topics. The timing of these fora in the late afternoon gave delegates some choice in terms of relaxing or engaging in further discussion.

The conference received good evaluations, especially in terms of its intellectual & academic stimulation and overall rating of the venue itself. Nevertheless there were some things that could have been improved upon and together with the IASC we will look to ensure that these are passed on to the organizers of the next conference.

Delegates suggested that several innovative features worked well. For example, conference abstracts and the programme were provided to delegates on a memory stick that can be used for a long time to come. Also a large number of papers were delivered through the use of ‘aqua vitae’ sessions held each afternoon. These required delegates to deliver their papers in under seven minutes, thus focusing attention on the ‘essence’ of each reported study and allowing more time for discussion. The evaluation suggests that this is an innovation that should be retained and developed further. The Master classes for graduate and postgraduate student helpers were well appreciated by those who spoke at them and who attended. Again this is important if the community of commons researchers is going to continue to grow.

The conference ended with closing ceremony entitled ‘Forgetting the words, grasping the ideas’. The ceremony included short presentations from six delegates who provided their own personal perceptions of what they had gained from the conference. Presenters included one of the student helpers that had benefited from the Master classes, young researchers, and older, more experienced members of the IASC. This provided a unique insight into how the conference had influenced the thinking of a range of participants from different countries and backgrounds.

At the closing ceremony Professor Nigel Curry, Director of the CCRI presented awards for conference papers and presentations. These cash awards were funded by the Countryside and Community Trust, which is based in Cheltenham.

Awards for best presentations

The following persons won prizes for quality of presentations:

Standard Panel sessions

Lamin Jammeh	Department of Forestry, Gambia
Doris Marinez-Melgar	Environmental Studies Centre, Guatemala

'aqua vitae' sessions

Hemant Gupta

Dhrupad Choudhury

Forest Survey of India, India

International Centre for Integrated Mountain
Development, Nepal

Awards for best papers

Paper that does the most to improve understanding of linkages between local and global commons

“Bylaws and their critical role in natural resource management: Insights from African experience”

Helen Markelova and Brent Swallow

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

Paper that provides the best case study analysis

“Multi-Stakeholder Governance in Land and Forestry in Uganda: Conflict Mitigation, Scale, Knowledge and Collective Action”

Joseph Bahati, Abwoli Banana, William Gombya-Ssembajjwe

Makerere University, Faculty of Forestry and Nature Conservation, Uganda

Paper that does the most to improve understanding of governance issues

“Towards an Eclectic Theory of the Internet Commons”

Justyna Hofmokl, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Financial support came from a range of organisations, notably the IDRC, but also Ford Foundation, Christensen Fund, Ernest Cooke Trust, Forestry Commission, Natural England and Defra. Funding from IDRC, Ford and Christensen enabled a total of 124 delegates to attend the conference. Support from the Ernest Cooke Trust enabled 5 key speakers to be funded. The Forestry Commission, Natural England and Defra funding was linked to policy events or workshops and assisted with speakers or refreshments at these events.

The Organizing Committee would like to thank the IASC, for all its support in making the conference a success. In particular we would like to thank both Michelle Curtain and Laura Wisen for all the long hours and hard work they put in. This event would not have been successful without the dedicated support from a large number of people at the University of Gloucestershire. This includes the Deputy Chancellor Paul Hartley, who chaired our project board ensuring support from all sectors of the University, Dave Harden who gave unstinting assistance for technology support, Cheryl Higgs who managed the event on behalf of the University, Chris Marshall and team who looked after the food side of things, Ian Pain and his staff who allowed us to take over their Student Union for a week. Many people within the CCRI also deserve to be thanked. Most notably Gill Parker and Chris Donohoe, who fielded almost all of the delegate enquiries and who, along with our virtual friend ‘Rebecca’, made up the conference secretariat. They worked consistently long hours over several months. Thanks also go to Nick Lewis who arranged materials and put together the delegate bags; Steve Sweetman, of Frontier printers, who waited to the very last

minute for all our changes before he printed the programmes; and all of our student helpers who worked all hours during the conference week.

Last and by no means least we would like to thank all the delegates for their patience and understanding, as result we were able to enjoy the event much more than we had dared hope.

John Powell and Chris Short, CCRI
2008 Conference Co-Chairs