

The IYPE Triennium legacy (as per 1 October 2009)

As the International Year of Planet Earth Triennium draws to its close, it is opportune to look back on what has been achieved since early 2007. This report describes IYPE legacy items on an international level. IYPE legacy items at national levels will be described in a substantive report for UNESCO and the UN General Assembly, mid 2010. IYPE legacy items are those initiatives that developed during the IYPE Triennium addressing the aims and ambition of the International Year of Planet Earth. Such items may or may not be linked to initiatives that were taken under other umbrellas.

The 80 National and Regional IYPE Committees constitute one of the most important legacies of the IYPE. At national levels, they brought together key players from several, sometimes competing organizations by focusing on a single, joint ambition to raise awareness of the Earth sciences among decision makers and the public. A self-evaluation on the part of the National Committees indicates that this ambition was at least partly accomplished.

Since the onset of the IYPE Triennium in 2007, many thousands of activities all over the globe have taken place. The National Committee of Brazil alone reports over 20,000 science and outreach activities. A significant majority of these were related to education. Thousands of schools worldwide responded to the International Year of Planet Earth according to their own languages and cultures. Again, this is reflected in the results of the National Committees' self-evaluation exercise which shows that 92 % of nations reported at least some degree of success in raising the interest of young people in numerous national activities.

A second IYPE legacy item was the emergence of the Young Earth Science Initiative (YES). Launched in 2007, the YES provides a platform for young professionals in the Earth sciences. Stimulated by the IYPE's Global Launch Event held in Paris in 2008, an event attended by many students and young professionals (see picture below), the YES has grown rapidly. Further expansion eventually led to a formal organizational structure, a network of supporting organizations (including the IYPE) and an invitation from the Chinese government to host the first International YES Conference in October 2009 in Beijing. One month later, another gathering of some 200 students and young professionals from 70 nations will take place under a joint IYPE- YES banner in Lisbon.



100 award-winning students from 50 nations performing the Geo-Song at the Global Launch Event at UNESCO, Paris, February 2008.

At the political level, a flood of public statements made by leading politicians pleaded for implementation of the aims and ambitions of the International Year of Planet Earth, specifically with a view to placing greater attention to science and knowledge of the Earth in the decision-making process so as to build safer, healthier and more prosperous societies. The most common examples of this process took place in the many national launch events, at which politicians spoke in such terms in support of the IYPE, followed by cultural performances by school children, designed to highlight the importance of the Earth and sustainable development for future generations.

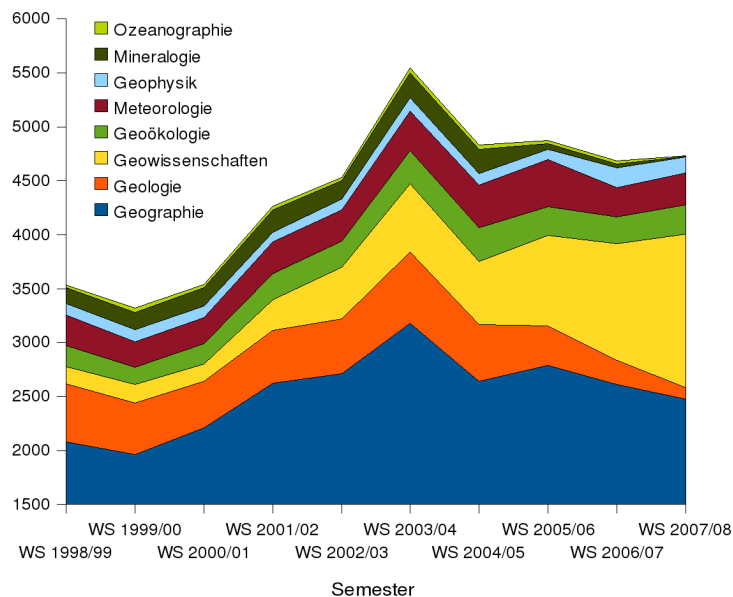
OneGeology is another IYPE legacy of major proportions. This initiative chose to come under the IYPE banner in 2007. The ambition of this global venture is to bring together geological data from all nations on Earth into a digital database that is then translated into one single computer language. The planned outcome is a digital map of the subsurface of the planet that may eventually provide a third dimension to popular geographical websites, such as Google Earth. Since its inception, some 113 national Geological Surveys have embarked on this initiative.

Many more legacy items were generated during the IYPE Triennium. For example, the Via Geo-Alpina initiative involved cross-country geological hiking tours through the Alps. Another successful outcome was the EarthLearningIdea, providing elegant methods using simple materials to assist teachers to explain often complex geological processes. The World Stress Map, produced by ILP and CGMW, is also considered an IYPE legacy item, as is the African Alive Corridors Project. The National and Global Geoparks established during the IYPE Triennium should certainly also be considered IYPE legacies. The production of a series of state-of-the-art scientific books on each of the ten IYPE Themes contributed significantly to a scientific underpinning of the ten IYPE Themes, the first volumes now being published by Springer Verlag (see picture below). Other important outcomes include a UNESCO initiative to assess the state of the Earth sciences in Africa and to develop tools to improve it, and the outlines for an African Forum for Sustainable Development, initiated by the Government of Angola in close cooperation with the International Year of Planet Earth.



Cover of the first book in the IYPE-SPRINGER Series, published in October 2009

Although it is still too early to draw firm conclusions, it appears that student recruitment in University Earth sciences courses has been growing in a many countries since 2007. From those countries where this process was monitored and brought to the attention of the IYPE Secretariat, 65% reported growth, 20% stagnation and only 16% noted declining numbers. A report based on details of these data will be forwarded to the United Nations and UNESCO by the middle of 2010. Although not all such changes can be attributed to the IYPE in the face of other factors (notably recent economic changes and commodity prices), it is likely that the International Year of Planet Earth contributed somewhat to this growth because growth indicators broadly correlates with the level of IYPE activities in specific nations. Furthermore, comparable growth was reported in Germany where a national Year of Planet Earth (Das GeoJahr), in which many public outreach activities proved to be attractive to young people, was held in 2002. The peaks in student course entries (see Figure) match such public initiatives quite closely.



Evolution of student recruitment for the Earth sciences in Germany before and after the German National Year for Planet Earth (Das GeoJahr), in 2002. The spike coincides with the year 2003 immediately following the German event with a strong focus on outreach.

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