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MY CONNECTIONS WITH THE IAL

I was aware of the existence of the International Association for Lichenology (IAL) much earlier than I had any official contacts with the organisation. Hans Trass, my mentor in lichenology, had been receiving the International Lichenological Newsletter since 1968 (vol. 2), kindly mailed to Tartu by Vernon Ahmadjian and later by Ernie Brodo. Occasionally we managed to send a few lines about Estonian lichenologists and their work to the Newsletter and were extremely happy when these short reports were published. Every piece of international communication was of great value in those days, especially if you were restricted to scientific prospects solely within the Soviet Union.

A real breakthrough came in 1992 when Ingvar Kärnefelt and his team organised the IAL2 at Båstad (Sweden). Ingvar managed to arrange scholarships for about a dozen people from the Soviet Union to participate in the grand event. Lev Bjazrov, Oleg Blum, Sergey Kondratyuk, Mikhail Zhurbenko and others, including myself, were among the invited and fully financed participants. It was an enormous adventure and unforgettable experience for all of us who came from the USSR. A gathering of more than two hundred lichenologists seemed truly impossible as all earlier meetings in which we had participated had brought together a maximum of twenty lichenologists... When we met the people whose names were familiar to us from the front covers of lichen handbooks—e.g. Ernie Brodo, David Galloway, Aino Henssen, Josef Poelt and Isao Yoshimura—you realised that even our greatest idols were made of flesh and blood.

At the time, phylogenetic analysis was still in its infancy. Our own phylogenetic tree of cetrarioid lichens, although generated with the help of a computer (which was borrowed from Erast Parmasto), was actually drawn by hand. A funny moment came when Josef Poelt—the great master of old-school morphological identification—presented a ‘cladistic’ overview of Swedish lichenologists depicted in the form of an evolutionary tree... That IAL meeting influenced my further life profoundly.

Twelve years later, in 2004, the team of lichenologists in Tartu had the task to organise the next IAL meeting, the IAL5. The countdown for it began in 2000 during the IAL4 in Barcelona, where the organiser and venue of the next symposium was for the first time in the history of the IAL decided by vote. All present members were to choose between the Estonian team and Tartu, and Tom Nash and California, USA. Somehow the Estonian team gained the upper hand. I think that the novelty of our country and its previous isolation from foreign visitors was the main reason for this.

So it was quite clear that we wanted to advertise Estonia in the best possible way, and so we started to think about the organisation of the symposium right after the IAL4. The IAL Council that served in 2000–2004, led by Pier Luigi Nimis as President, was fantastic and in my personal opinion the best of all times. Pier Luigi took the preparations for the next symposium very seriously. First, he visited Tartu in November 2001 to get acquainted with the possible venues of the congress. Then, in March 2002, he invited the Council to a meeting in Venice to discuss the design of the forthcoming event. All Council members (except Jack Elix) participated in the meeting: Ernie Brodo as Vice President, Leo Sancho as Secretary, François Lutzoni as Treasurer, Christoph Scheidegger as Assistant Treasurer, Martin Grube as Editor and Rosmarie Honegger, Gintaras Kantvilas and myself as members-at-large, while Andres Saag took part in the discussions as a co-organiser.

At this meeting, some key concepts for the organisation of IAL symposia were formulated which have been used in every IAL since, e.g. scientific sessions during the symposia are not the responsibility of a single person, but of a group of specialists (we called such a group ‘a triumvirate’ containing a Convener, a Chairman and a Poster-Chairman); posters must have a prominent position during IAL symposia and poster displays stay open until the end of the event; and congress fees should be as low as possible, and even lower for the students. The Council also decided to introduce a new award, the Sylvia Sharnoff Education Award, which was dedicated to the memory of Sylvia Duran Sharnoff, a remarkable lichen photographer and co-author of the magnificent book *Lichens of North America* (2001).

Those who participated in this extraordinary Council meeting in 2002 still remember not only the fruitful discussions on IAL issues, but also the unique city of Venice with all its amazing details and our President acting as a member of the local community. Martin Grube wrote later about those three days in Venice: "... the phantom Nimis coming out of the fog, with a cigarette between his fingers, and slowly fading away again in the fog, with the glowing cigarette as the last light left. I think all people of the IAL Council still have dreams about Venice." We still do.



The IAL Council (2000–2004) in Venice in March 2002 (from the left): Martin Grube, Christoph Scheidegger, Leo Sancho, Tiina Randlane, Pier Luigi Nimis, Francois Lutzoni, Irwin Brodo, Rosmarie Honegger, and Gintaras Kantvilas (*Photo: Andres Saag*).

The IAL5 Symposium 'Lichens in Focus', held in Tartu in August 2004, was a success. There were exactly 250 registered participants from 36 countries. Six scientific sessions (both oral and poster sessions) took place, as well as three discussion sessions. Altogether 65 lectures and 153 posters were presented. One pre-congress and two post-congress excursions were organised which resulted in the collection of 30 species of lichens and lichenicolous fungi new to the country. We have described the atmosphere at the IAL5 as follows: "It was unbelievable but true – you could meet a lichenologist on every street corner in the city centre of Tartu during dinner breaks, or in the Gunpowder Cellar and the Wilde Pub every evening (or perhaps even at night time). The concentration of lichenologists in the population of Tartu (which had somewhat diminished due to the summer holidays) was surely the highest of all times and could also be perceived visually – our blue bags represented the most popular trend of all bags worn at that time in Tartu."



Participants of the IAL5 in the Concert Hall of Tartu, August 2004 (*Photo: Rein Toom*).



IAL5 welcome party in the Botanical Garden of the University of Tartu, August 2004 (*Photo: Rosmarie Honegger*).

The Local Organising Committee of the IAL5 (<http://www.eseis.ut.ee/ial5/5s/orgs.html>) consisted mainly of young and enthusiastic lichenology students of the time. Now, 15 years later, they (the so-called red-caps, as we had agreed that the local organisers would wear red baseball caps during the event to be easily identified) – Inga Jüriado, Piret Lõhmus, Ede Leppik-Oja, and Ave Suija – are not

young students any more, but researchers in their prime. All of them finished their PhDs and all of them continue to study lichens.



Red-caps – student members of the Local Organising Committee of the IAL5 (from the left): Heini Hyvärinen (a voluntary helper from Finland), Piret Lõhmus, Ave Suija, Katrin Kolnes, Inga Jüriado, Lauri Saag (Photo: Rosmarie Honegger).

I think that I can declare on their, but also on my own, behalf that the IAL is not just an ordinary society that formally unites people who work in the same field. The IAL is a community where you can not only find scientists with the highest lichenological expertise, but also lifelong friends who share similar ideas.

Tiina Randlane

THE SYMBIOSIS WITH AN ASSOCIATION

I served the IAL as an editor in the years 2000-2004, between the meetings in Barcelona (IAL4) and Tartu (IAL5). It was an exciting period when the association just revised the constitution, and when sequence data became standard in different branches of lichenology. Remembering the history of IAL, I became suddenly aware that the first IAL meeting coincided with the start of my own scientific career. When the first IAL meeting took place in Münster in 1986, I had just started my diploma thesis (on lichenicolous fungi), but as innocent as I was, I only took notice of the meeting after the publication of its proceedings volume. I saw a fascinating compilation of the diverse topics of interest at that time, which aroused my appetite for more. This was the time when ultrastructural studies using TEM were popular and welcomed cutting-edge technology to solve problems of lichen systematics. Nevertheless, I still was at a stage to squash hymenia to observe ascus tholus structures (with my finger tips stained in Lugols solution) and to prepare TLCs to get hubble insights into lichen diversity. I also missed the IAL2 meeting in Southern Sweden as well, but was told about that very exciting meeting when our master and teacher Josef Poelt (I worked on his Himalaya collections at that time) came back with a medal around his neck. At that time, I tried my first steps using molecular methods in Graz using a machine that flushed water at different temperatures to run a PCR. After a training in the US, where I met important lichenologists, I could also invite some of the colleagues to Austria who helped a lot to engage lichenology students.