

THE B.I.O. AND THE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY FOR THE BIO-ENVIRONMENT

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On the following pages is sketched a proposal for the first stages of development of the International University for the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.). This proposal closely follows the ideas outlined by Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis in a number of publications. A key element in her ideas has been the need for assessment, research and communication at a world-wide level.

Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis' organisation, the B.I.O., is particularly well-placed for taking the initial steps to bring to life the vision of an international centre of excellence in the area of multi-disciplinary environmental studies. It draws its trustees and directors from a very wide range of expertise, including public service, industry, commerce and the academic community. It has, from its inception, been committed to a multi-disciplinary approach, and to engaging with the widest possible range of points of view.

In order to develop the idea of an international university further, it is necessary to consider what the first steps should be. In writing what follows, I have envisaged making a proposal to funding agencies such as the EC, the Rockefeller Foundation, and various industrial and commercial trusts. What follows is a programme of development which could build from modest beginnings to a significant achievement within a relatively short time.

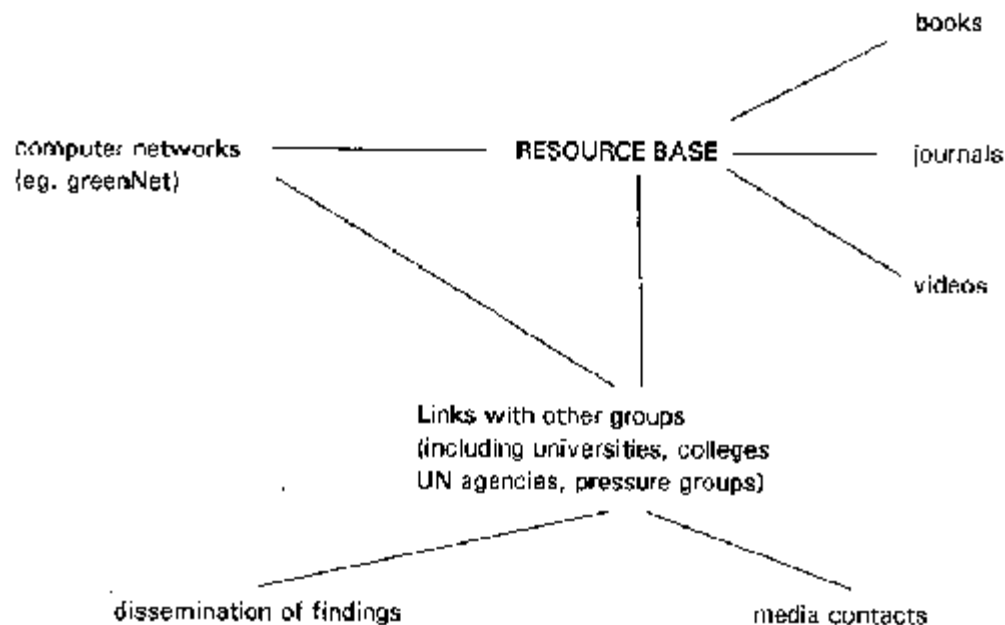
From the point of view of the B.I.O., it would be important to aim for ways of developing wide public awareness, including media-awareness of the issues we confront in as short a time as possible. For this reason, I have outlined a progression towards the establishment of the I.U.B.E. which begins with the provision of a resource base and clearing house, and then moves on to establishing an education centre for the provision of short courses, workshops and thematic research programmes. However, it would be possible to reverse these initial steps, especially if the available funding were not sufficient to enable the resource centre to be set up.

From the point of view of those donating funding, the proposals that follow have the advantage of building up momentum over time, so that the establishment of an interpretive centre would represent a consolidation of other achievements.

The B.I.O. has existed for some time now, having been officially incorporated in 1986. It has shown its ability to attract support from a wide range of distinguished people in many walks of life. It already has built up considerable momentum, and is thus ideally placed for overseeing, the development and realisation of the concept of an International University for the BioEnvironment.

The I.U.B.E. as a resource base

As a resource base, the I.U.B.E. can function as a clearing house for information and education between public sector agencies, industry and environmental groups. The resource base can be envisaged in the following schematic form.



Links with the media would enable very widespread dissemination and discussion of environmental and policy issues. Establishing a resource library and computerised data-base would provide valuable service to government, public sector agencies, educational institutions, the media and interest groups.

By establishing dialogue between the widest possible variety of agencies and groups, the resource centre would enable progress to be made in overcoming two great hurdles to progress in environmental conservation: failure of communication between different academic disciplines, and divergent cultural perceptions. The B.I.O. could thus have a significant mediating role.

Groups and agencies with which links might be established initially include several United Nations organisations, Worldwatch, World Resources Institute, WWF, IUCN, Greenpeace, Global Co-operation for a Better World, Environmental Awareness Trust, and universities offering degree programmes in Human Ecology or related areas.

The I.U.B.E. as an educational centre

The first phase of educational development for the I.U.B.E. could be to establish a number of short courses (e.g. summer schools), workshops and thematic research programmes. Depending on the level of sponsorship and funding available, the short courses could either be self-financing or provide some income to finance further development of the I.U.B.E. Again, a schematic representation of this element of the I.U.B.E. development might look like this (note proposals given are purely illustrative at this stage):

Short courses. These could be offered as units which would be helpful to administrators, teachers and other educationalists, business people and others who wish to deepen their understanding of the problems of human development and environmental conservation. A key feature of the I.U.B.E.'s provision would be its commitment to multi-disciplinary approaches and the integration of theory and practice. Modular units might include:

1. Introduction to human ecology – the ecology of human populations and their interaction with their bio-physical environment.
2. Environmental systems – introduction to central concepts and discoveries in environmental science and ecology, geared especially to those who lack a background in the biological sciences, and including field study.
3. Conservation management – the fundamentals of sustainable utilisation of land and other resources, with special emphasis on threatened or fragile habitats, and including a study of policy and political issues.
4. Environment, ethics and politics – a survey and investigation of the cultural, philosophical and political background to environmental problems, and discussion of methods of tackling outstanding problems.
5. Urban policy – a study of the problems posed by managing urban development to minimise adverse environmental impacts while improving human life quality.

Workshops. These would involve bringing together groups of people from very different backgrounds for the purpose of tackling specific issues. The aim would be to use a variety of methods such as paper presentation, preliminary research, 'brainstorming', etc., to produce policy recommendations on live issues like, for instance, the use of bio-technology, or ways of increasing bio-diversity in the industrial countries for transmission to target conferences, UN bodies and the media. For example, two workshops that could be targeted on the 1992 Brasil Conference on Environment and Development are one on global warming and another on conservation of bio-diversity.

Thematic research. The IUBE could also become the focus for original research programmes focused particularly on the areas that are neglected by traditional 'single-discipline' academic research. Such areas might include:

- The ethics of genetic manipulation.
- Politico-legal dimensions of transboundary pollution.
- National autonomy and international peace-keeping.
- Bio-regional identity and economic interdependence.
- Common perceptions and divergent worldviews.
- Population, food security and human rights.

The I.U.B.E. and its interpretive centre

Assuming that the other I.U.B.E. activities are located in a single place, it could become the site of a centre-open to both the general public and to more specialised groups-which would use the latest technology, special displays and specially-created environments to bring strikingly to life the facts of human history in relation to the atmosphere, land, other species and water. Depending on its location, the centre could include specialist treatment of, for example, one of the following:

- The oceans and the seas.
- Air, atmosphere and climate.
- Urban communities and the environment.
- Some other theme relevant to the locale.

If the I.U.B.E. were established in connection with an existing academic institution, it might be possible to draw on its expertise in formulating plans for the interpretive centre. However, with a number of leading museums now making an attempt to give the environment some prominence in their displays, it will be important to learn from the best available practice and then take steps to innovate further. To do this will require close co-operation with other groups, particularly those which have as part of their own remit the establishment of such a centre as, for example, in the U.K. where the Environmental Awareness Trust has recently been established for this purpose. As in all these endeavours, there is need for co-operation rather than competition.

By seeking to establish the I.U.B.E. in this way, the B.I.O. will be entering into synergistic relations with other bodies around the globe dedicated to exploring the possibilities for finding ways out of our current predicament.

Costings

It is impossible to be precise about costings, since a great deal may depend on the generosity of various potential benefactors. For example, the donation of a building or suite of rooms to establish the Resource Centre would enable that phase to go ahead purely on the basis of the costs of establishing a secretariat, employing a resource librarian and buying equipment and materials. However, a guess at the costs may be outlined as follows (all in US\$):

	Annual	5 year total
Resource Centre	100,000	500,000
Short Courses, workshops etc.	50,000	250,000*
Interpretive Centre	800,000	4,000,000**
Grand total	950,000	4,750,000

*Assumes that income is not used to offset the cost of the courses, and that tutors will be supplied with transport, accommodation and salary.

**Assumes a basic building cost of 3 million US\$ with running costs escalating over the five years.

Professor **Andrew Brennan** holds degrees in philosophy from the Universities of Saint Andrews, Calgary and Oxford. He joined the Stirling Philosophical Department in 1970, and since then has been a visiting fellow in philosophy at Princeton University and visiting Professor at Calgary. He presently edits the Scots Philosophical Monograph Series and the MacMillan Studies in Contemporary Philosophy. *Analysis*, *Nus*, *Enquiry*, *Synthese*, and other philosophical and educational journals, have featured his articles. *Conditions of Identity and Thinking about Nature* are two of his books which were published in 1988. He was recently awarded a grant from the Carnegie Trust for research into comparative educational practice and theory in Zimbabwe.