

International Sustainable Development Research Society



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**Annual report of the International Sustainable
Development Research Society (ISDRS): 2018-19**

25 June 2019, Nanjing, China



Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide members an overview of ISDRS activities during the year since the last conference (June, 2018, Messina, Italy), with a focus on the activity of the President and Board assistant. It also provides a summary of our accounts for the calendar year 2018.

2018 was marked by a very successful conference in terms of both the number of delegates and the experience. Notably, however, most conference delegates did not join the Society.

In January 2019 the offices of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer all changed hands, with the previous president taking on the new role of past president. A substantial proportion of the board is due for re-election this year.

A positive outcome of the conference was the opportunity to be connected to the United Nations, EU Parliament Office in Washington DC, and two US universities through a visit facilitated by the EU Association, which was initiated through the University of Messina. However, in general ISDRS could do much better at making use of dissemination opportunities that are available at little or no cost to the society.

Prepared by the president with input from the Assistant and exec.

Dr Pauline Deutz, President ISDRS
Hull, UK, June, 2019



Mission

- To generate research and knowledge about sustainable development. As a research society, we have an obligation to facilitate the work of those who labour to create new knowledge regarding sustainable development, as broadly defined.
- To disseminate knowledge about sustainable development. Consistent with knowledge generation, the Society also obligates itself to the task of spreading knowledge worldwide for the benefit of those with a similar interest.
- To educate others about sustainable development. Sustainable development places multiple and urgent demands upon global and local societies who will eventually determine the degree to which the Earth's resources are sustained. Thus, the ISDRS feels compelled to become involved in the practical work of sustainable development.
- To establish an information exchange for sustainable development. Given the proliferation of sustainability entities and venues, the Society will strive to provide a coordinating role for linking all these efforts together.

Executive Committee and Board

In January 2019 the following changes occurred to the executive of ISDRS:

Role	Previous holder	2019-2020 holder
President	Walter Vermeulen	Pauline Deutz
Vice president	Pauline Deutz	Peter Dobers
Executive secretary	Rupert Baumgartner	Volker Mauerhofer
Treasurer	Martina Keitsch	Sigurd Vildåsen
Communications Officer	Olawale Olayide	Olawale Olayide (due for re-election end 2019)

The Society is very grateful for the services of the previous post-holders, and especially of the previous president, who continues to provide support as past president. This large scale transition has resulted in a significant process of learning various roles and in some cases the related software accompanying. The board assistant has provided a critical continuity. Changing the named persons with the DNB (Norwegian bank where ISDRS' has its account) and the change of the official address of the Society with the Norwegian authorities were complicated processes, still not complete in the latter case. We need to keep in mind that these roles will all change hands together at the end of 2021. In the meantime, the communications officer is serving the second of a two year term of office.

ISDRS board membership

After the 2018 conference, an election committee was formulated to identify and approach potential board members with a view to promoting an increase in diversity. The exercise was successful in that we had the largest ever suite of candidates, which was for the first time larger than the number of places available. Four new members were elected to the board at the end of 2018: Roberta Salomone, Cecilia Solér, Janaina Macke and Marc Wolfram. In addition, Rupert Baumgartner was re-elected for a final term of office. In terms of diversity, three of the new board members are women, and two are from outside Europe (Brazil and South Korea). This is helpful, but as three women and a non-European man were amongst those leaving the board

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at the end of 2018, it does not constitute a major step forwards. This year we have provided some financial support to board members not from high income countries (as defined by the World Bank) to attend the conference.

A large number of board members are due for re-election this year (Table 1). Some are completing a three year term of office; others are the first cohort with the new two year term (but three terms are allowed instead of the previous two terms of three years each). Members elected at the beginning of 2018 on the new two year term of office will be due for re-election at the end of 2019, as this is the usual timing of board elections. Their present term of office will run to end December 2019. Some members are not eligible for further election (unless elected to an exec position). Olawale Olayide's first term of office as communications officer is completed this year. He is eligible for re-election to this post two more times.

Table 1: Composition of the board

	Name	Function	(Re-) election?
1	Pauline Deutz	President	P 19-20; PP 21-22
2	Peter Dobers	Vice-president	VP 19-20; P 21-22; PP 23-24
3	Volker Mauerhofer	Secretary & PhD student workshop	Not whilst secretary
4	Sigurd Vildasen	Treasurer	Not whilst treasurer
5	Olawale Olayide	Communications officer	Due for re-election as Communications 19-20
6	Walter Vermeulen	Past-president	Term finishes 2019
7	Joachim Spangenberg	Chair best paper award	Re-election 2019
8	Marlen Arnold	Co-editor newsletter	Re-election 2019
9	Roberto Merli		Re-election 2019
10	Francisco Comín		Re-election 2019
11	Alexandra Franklin		Re-election 2019
12	Kua Harn Wei		Re-election 2019
13	Eduardo Wills		Re-election 2019
14	Tomás Ramos		Term finishes 2019
15	Rupert Baumgartner		Term finishes 2020
16	Roberta Salomone		Re-election 2020
17	Cecilia Solér		Re-election 2020
18	Janaina Macke		Re-election 2020
19	Marc Wolfram		Re-election 2020
20	Richard Welford	Hon. Member	Life membership

Charlotte Mummery continues as the assistant to the board, having begun in March 2018.

Membership

Across the range of individual memberships, the total number of members has increased since last year (see table 2 below). The number of followers (registered on the website but not paying) has increased less than last year. This may reflect a change in policy: we are encouraging but not requiring followers on LinkedIn to sign up on the website. The idea is to use social media to reach out beyond the

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membership, with the expectation that some of those people will choose to sign up but potentially a great total number will have an awareness of the Society. In contrast to last year, the number of Green Members has decreased over the last 12 months, but the number of Green + members has increased. The numbers are too small to draw much conclusion from this, though may signal improved capture of members who are renewing slightly after their membership has lapsed, and who had been automatically downgraded to Green. There is still work to be done around how membership is recorded, especially how we record people who are members through an institutional membership. Individuals have to sign up via the website, but thereby become hard to distinguish from paid individual members although they do not have the same voting rights (discussed below under institutional memberships) Board members are recorded as a distinct category of membership. However, as we record board members separately, it may be more helpful to count them as Green + and have information therefore as to whether they are non-/OECD.

Table 2: Membership levels from 2017-2019

2017 (until 06-2017)	OECD	Non-OECD	Total
Followers	1731		1731
Green	39	53	92
Green ⁺	14	12	26
Board Members	15		15
Institutional Member	7*	3*	10*
Total (paying individual)	55	78	(133 + 1731=) 1864

2018 (until 06-2018)	OECD	Non-OECD	Total
Followers	2362		2362
Green	49	46	95
Green ⁺	9	3	12
Board Members	21		21
Institutional Member	8*	3*	11*
Total ** (paying individual in bolt)	69	59	(128 + 2362=) 2490

2019 (until 06-2019)	OECD	Non-OECD	Total
Followers	2439		2439
Green	47	28	75
Green ⁺	22	9	31
Board Members	20		20
Institutional Member	5*	2*	7*
Total ** (paying individual in bold)	79	47	(126 + 2439=) 2565

* Note: these are the number of institutions, not associated individuals. The individual members that are part of an institutional membership are represented as Green (+) Members.

** Note: Total assumes 10 board members are OECD and 10 non-OECD – this overstates the number of non-OECD members and in future this should be recorded as their actual residence.

Potential changes to membership

Despite our considerable efforts since 2013 to separate membership from the conference (thereby enabling people to remain members if they have to miss a conference) a significant proportion of delegates (2/3 in Messina) prefer to register as non-members. This is despite the clearly signalled fact that non-members' conference fee costs more than combined membership fee and members' conference fee. Reasons for avoiding joining could include a general dislike of joining organisations; a desire to experience the conference before deciding on membership; or the potential to have one's institution pay the non-members conference fee, whereas people might have to personally pay their membership costs. Financially in the short term the tendency to not join works in our favour, but it would arguably be better for the development of the Society to widen the circle of members.

Points to discuss:

Convert the non-member conference rate to 'conference plus membership'; whilst keeping the lower member conference rate for people who are members;

Simplification of the membership scheme by removing the distinction between Green and Green + members.

Institutional memberships.

This [membership](#) entails the membership of a group of people who are part of an institution.

One person at the institution is designated ambassador and has the same rights as an individual member. Other members (as Table 1) should (but do not necessarily) sign up via the website. They gain access to members' areas of the website, can nominate and vote for the best paper. But they cannot participate in board elections or stand for election themselves.

The number of institutional members dropped from 11 last year to nine (including free memberships for this year's and next year's hosts, and one for whom their current status is uncertain. A number of previous institutional members appear not to have renewed. Some (most?) institutions who benefited from a free membership as conference host have not continued their membership.

Points to discuss:

Should we allow all people who are members through an institution to have the rights of individual members? They, or more likely, their institution, has saved some money, but these people are thereby permanently green members and may feel disenfranchised.

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Financial information

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During 2018 an online accounting system was introduced (Zoho). The system is linked to our DNB and paypal accounts and automates several aspects of accounting that were previously entered manually to an excel spreadsheet. However, some complications have arisen from this, such as matching Zoho's classification of our income and expenditure categories to those in the budget plan, and in particular managing the transfer of the closing balance of the Hong Kong account. The Hong Kong account had to be added manually to Zoho and proved very difficult to remove once the account closed, and the money transferred to DNB in Norway. In addition, although we no longer have three primary currencies, there are still regular transfers between euros (most of our receipts and payments), and Norwegian Kroner (NoK, the currency of the back account). Transfers from paypal are subject to currency conversion and fees. For these reasons, along with the transfer of responsibility for the accounts from the past president to the new treasurer, we have not yet been able to fully reconcile the budget for last year.

However, we can state the following.

For the DNB account (NoK¹):

Balance 31/12/2017: 353 068.71

Total income 2018: 687,356.75

Total paid 2018: -296,469.43

Balance 31/12/2018: 743 956.03

The amount credited to the account includes the closing balance from HK (282,838.91 NoK) and the €11,916.83 for 2017 conference fees was received in 2018, though it is potentially misleading to see that as part of the income for 2018. Compared to the budget planned for 2018, in practice we received less from membership (both individual and institutional), but significantly more than predicted for the conference (reflecting the preference of conference delegates to come as non-members, and the lack of expansion of institutional memberships).

Major categories of income and expenditure relating to activities during the year are shown below (Table 3):

¹ Although obviously variable, the euro-Kroner exchange is in the range 1:9-10.

Table 3: Income and expenses related to 2018 activity

Category	Income €	Expense €
Individual membership	7,435	
Institutional membership	2,000	
Conference fees 2018	23,168.00	
Total	32603	
Assistant to the board (1 day per week)		6,751.10
President (1 day per week for 7 months)		13,605.00
Admin/banking costs		389.89
Website/conference applications		7,555.84
Journals		1,452.46
Exec/board expenses		935.24
Total		30689.53
Balance	1913.47	

Communications

The quarterly newsletter, going to all members and followers, was continued consistently with four issues released in 2018 (table 4). The editorial committee continued with overseeing and supporting the making of the quarterly newsletter. As indicated earlier, the ISDRS Twitter and Facebook platforms were used more than previously for promotional purposes, and for eliciting feedbacks from readers. With slightly increased membership (including followers), we should be able to significantly increase and improve on our outreach without much expense.

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Table 4: Newsletter statistics 2018-2019

	2018				2019
	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3	Issue 4	Issue 1
Total sent	1752	1824	1836	1877	2119
Newsletters opened	245	272	263	227	259
	13.9%	14.9%	14.3%	12.1%	12.2%
Clicked on links in text	133	95	66	58	136
Unopened	1507	1552	1573	1650	1860
Unsubscribe	2	5	4	4	2

Although the number of subscriptions to the newsletter have continued to rise, the proportion opened is slightly lower than last year, and significantly lower than the year before. Number of recipients unsubscribing remains low, though a significant number are rejected as undeliverable, suggesting that people are not



updating the email address registered with ISDRS. Work is underway to improve the look of the newsletter and include more up-to-date features such as interactive menus. This is made possible by ISDRS now owning its own website.

The ISDRS LinkedIn group has decreased from **2108** members in 2017 to **2089** in 2018, however increased to **2278** in 2019. This is as a result of the change in policy regarding LinkedIn requests mentioned above; requests are now accepted with a follow up message with directions to ISDRS website to sign up as a follower or member. The impact of this policy change will be monitored through 2019 to determine if this has any impact on membership numbers. However, the benefits of the change may be difficult to measure, as depends on how much attention the LinkedIn followers pay to what they see there.

The Facebook membership count is increasing from **1176** in 2017 to **1402** in 2018 and to **1475** by June 2019. The slower percentage increase (compared to 2017/2016) could be that there were fewer paid promotions. These paid advertisements have been successful in reaching people in 2017, particularly in relation to the costs of only a few Euros. A few paid promotions were used in 2018, however the interactions from Facebook followers was considered less useful compared to LinkedIn and Twitter. The goal is still to increase this number further over the upcoming year. The ISDRS New Professionals Group has 38 followers (2019). This could also be a target for promotion in 2019-2020, if this is justified by the usage of the page.

Similarly, the number of Twitter followers increased from **206** to **315** people between June 2017 and June 2018 and to **402** by June 2019. The total number of tweets was **301** with **86** likes. There has been a greater focus on Twitter and LinkedIn in 2019, compared with 2018. The growth of LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter reflects the potential to get more promotional value when pursuing this more actively. We could do much better with Twitter, however, if members (especially board members) were more supportive of each other in terms of 'liking' and retweeting messages, and targeting tweets they send @ISDR_society. The assistant can retweet these messages so that our Twitter followers will see them, and ideally retweet to their own followers. There is little point in posting Twitter messages if there is not a collaborative effort to disseminate them. Members with smart phones are encouraged to have Twitter on their phone; it is possible to have more than one account (e.g., personal and project). Comments can be added, or original Tweets composed if desired, but simply liking and retweeting takes only seconds.

Main ISDRS activities

The most important activities of the ISDRS during the year were the following:

Conferences

In 2018 ISDRS was hosting its 24th conference in Messina, Italy. The conference was very successful with over 330 participants. A wide range of presentations was enjoyed in parallel tracks in addition to interesting and well attended plenaries, which were imaginatively designed to bring together the themes of the conference (theory and practice of sustainability). The social programme (including regional music and food; and tours that benefited from excellent weather). We thank Roberta Salomone, Andrea Raggi and their team for their hard work, not least the great effort that was made towards the sustainability of the conference itself. Continuing the trend from previous years, it is noticeable that approximately 2/3 of delegates chose not to take up ISDRS member, despite the fact that membership + members' conference fee is cheaper than the non-members' conference fee. The first Best Paper

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Award was presented at the closing ceremony of the conference.

Topic groups

ISDRS has Topic Groups, which are clustered in 9 Themes closely related to the UN-SDG's. In total we have 33 Topic Groups. These Groups are also represented during our conferences, where they form the tracks in which authors can submit their abstracts. Scholars in these Topic Groups collaborate in exchanging experiences, identifying new developments and facilitating discourse at the conferences, including writing of Calls for Papers. It is difficult to assess the activity of these groups outside of the conference. Undoubtedly members are active, as reflected in the newsletter, but this does not translate into items for the website. Too many topic groups have only a skeletal website. This is problematic as we need the website to look not just credible but impressive for anyone who might be interested to join.

Routledge: Under our sustainable development research series contract with Routledge: so far one book has been awarded a contract is in preparation (Keitsch and Vermeulen, transdisciplinarity: writing/editing stages), a second is advertising for contributions (Skjærven, gender and sustainability); others have made enquiries.

As a result of our connection with Routledge, the then president and vice president (now past president and president, who are the series editors) have accepted invitations to join the advisory board of Routledge's Sustainable Development Goals initiative (to be launched July 2019).

Report of President's activities

As the presidency passed from Walter Vermeulen to Pauline Deutz at the start of 2019, this section of the report focuses on activities since then. Board members are referred to the outgoing president's report of January 2019 for the prior interval. Walter Vermeulen has taken up the new post of past president, in which capacity he has provided instruction/advice to exec as requested.

To date in 2019 year the president has spent on average slightly more than one day per week on ISDRS. Income has not been claimed for this time, which has been divided approximately as follows:

Networking activity

US trip: April 2019 As a result of connections between the EU Association (NGO promoting EU-US cooperation) and the University of Messina, ISDRS had the opportunity to build connections and give presentations to four US institutions. Four board members (Pauline Deutz, Peter Dobers, Tomás Ramos and Roberta Salomone) travelled to the US and in various combinations gave talks at NYU Stern Business School and Global Health Programme, United Nations, Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, and the EU Parliament Association in Washington DC. Contacts were made at George Washington University, though no formal presentations were given. Additionally, Zengwei Yuan, as chair of the 2019 conference, would have joined the expedition, but did not receive a US visa in time. Leading the communications and preparations around this trip, time spent away, conducting follow up communications and preparing publicity on return has accounted for up to 14 days for the president. This was a hefty investment of time; the time contribution for the vice president and other board members who also participated was less, but not by a great deal. Notably, although audiences were interested in ISDRS, the real enthusiasm was for the research presented. Given those attending, presentations revolved around the circular economy, with a focus on life cycle analysis,

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sustainability assessments, governance and (less directly related) community and stakeholder engagement.

Financially this was very good value for ISDRS, as the vice president was paid for by his institution, the board members out of their own research monies and the president's costs were also met partly out of research money and only partly to be claimed from ISDRS. ISDRS paid 1500 to cover most of the expenses of Giuseppe Sergei of EU Association, who facilitated the trip. He worked extraordinarily hard on our behalf. To make the most of the trip, we need to keep in touch with the institutions visited, to follow up on additional contacts and opportunities as well as contemplating a return visit next year or the year after.

Other networking

There are various ongoing communications with journals, potential partner organisations (in some cases led by other board members): probably one day total over the six months.

ISDRS is officially a partner to the project '[Evolving a circular plastics economy](#)' at the University of Hull. Joachim Spangenberg led a workshop in Hull on behalf of ISDRS in January 2019. Walter Vermeulen is on the advisory board of the project.

Journal relationships

Wiley: Our contract with Wiley for access to the ERP journals expired at the end of last year. Because of a change of staff at Wiley, there was delay from their side in proposing the terms for renewing the contract. There have been some hold-ups since in both sides, but we have responded in detail to proposals, making suggestions of our own which have been discussed with the Wiley and ERP representatives. We are expecting their written response soon. This has taken on the order of 2.5-3 days since January.

Conference

A significant amount of time has been taken up in communication with the hosts in Nanjing and on related issues (PhD workshop, travel for board members). This is estimated to average two hours per week, or approximately one week out of the last six months. Discussion over the contract for next year's conference (led by the vice president) has taken a noticeable but much smaller amount of time.

Gaining familiarity with the budget, membership data, contributing to the newsletter, discussions relating to the best paper competition, communications about the website, and other routine matters (including meeting with the assistant on average slightly less than once per week): 4 days total.

Role of the assistant

The assistant's role has developed substantially. In addition to the accounting matters, website/communications (notably including the formatting of the newsletter), of previous assistants, Charlotte Mummery has two items of greater responsibility. The best paper award was new last year, and now continues under the leadership of Joachim Spangenberg. Charlotte undertakes a lot of the work, however (communications with panel members, nominees/winners, publishers, preparing the website, setting up the voting and analysing the votes, preparing the certificates for the winners). In addition this year she has had a lot of activity around payments for the conference, which are coming to us rather than to the host. We knew that this would create work, but it has been more awkward than expected (e.g., communications between delegates the host and ISDRS). Future years will be easier as we know better



what to expect and can devise procedures accordingly. But these items together mean that at least for the first six months of the year, the assistant's job is two days per week rather than one.

The newsletter is edited by Olawale Olayide and Marlen Arnold. Charlotte circulates announcements, receives and compiles contributions as well as finalising and circulating the newsletter. There is also work on the website and social media. Ideally there should be more work on those things, if members sent news items/updates more often.

Sigurd Vildåsen (Treasurer) oversaw the transition of signatories at the DNF with the change of president, vice and treasurer, and is overseeing the official re-registration of the Society in Norway. He shares the approvals through the DNB online bank account with the assistant and is gaining familiarity with the book keeping programme Zoho.

However, much of the day to day financial transactions, monitoring and preparation of the accounts for audit have been done by the assistant. The accounting duties are more onerous and complex than in the past. We have a lot more transactions now, receiving the conference payments (both through paypal and the bank); there are transactions costs, payments for the website and software behind it (membership management, and we now exceed the limits of the free newsletter capability). She has made travel arrangements and/or arranged reimbursements.

Website: we do finally we own our website, which took quite some effort from the previous president. This also took considerable effort from the assistant to establish the website in our name (and therefore at now at our cost). Now that the website account is in our hands, Charlotte also has control over the various ISDRS emails. Changing board/exec membership will be much more easily dealt with in the future. We are grateful to the previous owner of the website who established the domain name initially and paid the costs for several years (although was offered payment by the society).

The website is in need of some development – though primarily it needs content and this has to come from board members as representatives of topic groups. However, assuming the willingness of board members (or others) to supply content, there would be a significant amount of work for Charlotte to do in the coming months.