

International Students of History Association
International Board 2004/2005



Policy Paper 2004/05

What to do with ISHA in 2004-2005?

Goals

Driving back from Pula to The Netherlands, suddenly the International Board of ISHA, we brainstormed a bit on the things we hoped to achieve. Shortly, we'll try to:

- Get our finances at order, trace as good as possible what happened to ISHA money past years and start a financial administration, and improve our financial situation
- Get other sources of income next to the membership-fee
- Have a decent administration and relevant contact information for all ISHA sections
- Get a bunch of new sections involved
- Have a good website, that looks good enough to represent our organisation to people that know nothing about us
- Improve communication between members, IB and ISHA people in general
- Get a degree of continuity into the organisation, prevent information getting lost or forgotten, make it easier for boards to follow each other

Communication

The current website of ISHA isn't exactly a beauty to behold, nor very informative. Therefore we want to have as soon as possible a new one online. It will be regularly updated on ISHA events. More important, it will have a few new features: a (necessarily small) picture gallery with the nicest pictures we have from (recent) seminars and conferences, as well as a public forum. The forum can be used to talk about general (academic) stuff, announcements for upcoming activities, discussions on ISHA policy, questions, etcetera. When done, our new website is supposed to inform ISHA people on the organisation, improve ISHA communication, look attractive and interesting to people might interested in joining us and organisations thinking about giving us money, and host some banners for sponsors as well.

Main source of communication for ISHA is the ISHA-list. We will continue to use it in the future, for it's a very easy way of communicating with everybody in the ISHA community at once. Unfortunately the list is being spammed a bit recently, we'll try to fix that. But we do need it, for we can't use the online forum for everything (you can't post a begging to people "please write a paper for next seminar" on the same site with which you want to impress possible sponsors).

And of course there is the normal, old-fashioned and rather boring mail. You know, with a postman, mailbox, stamps and all that. Every now and then, we do need it as an organisation though. To send carnivals, invitations and journals to people, you need to have an address. That's why we want to gather as soon as possible all address information of all (active) sections, so we can make a decent administration, to replace all the different and not updated ones we have now.

Finances

We'll try to find secondary sources of income for ISHA next to the membership fee. Sponsorship seems a real possibility, a lot of international students organisations have that. The fact that we're a history organisation makes it harder of course (not really a science with a lot of money involved), but there definitely are possibilities. The one we are checking out at

the moment is if universities who offer English-taught Master-programs might be interested in advertising in Carnival or on our site. If we get positive reactions, we can try at more universities in Europe. We'll also check out how expensive it'll be to print ISHA T-Shirts and other merchandise, to sell those at seminars at conferences. Won't be a huge source of income, but nice for promotion and just fun to have, and if we can make some money with it, that always comes in handy. Also Carnival might be able to sustain itself, see next point. Last but not least, since we are officially a Swiss organisation, we might be able to get funding from a Swiss organisation, foundation or whatever (but finding all this out is more something for our Swiss councilmembers).

Carnival

What and how exactly has to be decided together with this year's editor Ivan and his section Zagreb. What we want to try as IB is in any case to "fix" the format and lay-out of carnival a bit more, so that in the future all issues will look more or less like they belong to each other (also see "continuity"). Other ideas we have are to include every issue one or two articles written by university teachers to improve the academic level a bit, or to issue a Carnival round a certain theme, to increase coherence. We hope to have at least two issues of Carnival next year.

As far as the financial part goes, we hope that Carnival will be self-sufficient. Being a concrete project, it should be relatively easy to find funds for it (especially compared with finding money for a rather abstract organisation). Maybe it can even be turned into a potential source of income if we can find some sponsorship.

Promotion & new sections

Aim is of course to grow, so we should start approaching students at universities where history is taught but where there isn't yet an ISHA section. The website will be a way to promote ISHA in a more or less "passive" way, for the more active spread of the ISHA-word we'll make some flyers and brochures with info, pictures etc. Spreading these can be done in various ways. They can be distributed more or less randomly, both by sections and officials. Every section should have some of this promo stuff available, so when somebody of that section goes on an exchange program, or visits a university nearby they can promote ISHA. This can also be done by through other personal contacts, maybe even by professors who teach at another university; in any case there are plenty of possibilities to promote ISHA and those brochures and flyers should make it easier (also see "what we expect...". Further we'll make a list of cities where there was a section the past years, to see if we can reanimate them. Later, we might compose a list of all universities in Europe where history is taught, so we can spam them systematically ;-). But this is more a long term project.

We also can use contacts with other organisations to expand, see next point.

Cooperation with other organisations

Cooperation with other organisations like our own can be beneficial for ISHA. In any case we'll try to get in contact again with CLIOHnet, a big European history organisation. Contacts in the past looked like they might could be useful for us, and we for them. They

might be able to interest people in us in regions where there is no ISHA, we can do the same for them. They need more activities, we can organise activities but lack the money. We might be able to help each other, we'll wait with contacting them though until we have our new site up and everything looks fine again.

A lot of countries have national history organisations, something like ISHA but on a national level. If we can get into contact with them, we might be able to get to a lot of people at once, stimulating several sections to be created simultaneously.

Continuity

ISHA has a rather short memory, rather obvious since the majority of the ISHA people is only involved in the organisation for a few years. Consequence of this is that if something is done in a certain way for a few years in a row, it is considered "normal" by most people, since it is done this way as long as most folks can remember. That's why it is very important to do things "the way it should" for a few years in a row. So basically, if a council and an IB do what they are supposed to for a few years, everybody will expect those things to happen; if a newsletter is sent for a year every 6 weeks, people will expect that newsletter, if a draft-budget and policy paper is presented at the beginning of a new academic year for a few years, ISHA people will expect that, if the council is very active through mail and forum, commenting, giving advice and doing things, people will expect it after a few years, maybe even less. And well, people SHOULD expect all these things!

Also, there could be advantages if the members of the IB are located in each other's vicinity. So when looking for suitable candidates for the IB, special attention could be paid on trying to find people located in the same region. We think this would be desirable since it's hardly possible to run an organisation with all board members hundreds or even thousands kilometres from each other. In that situation you can only have a maximum of a few meetings between the IB each year, which is much too few, as the only other communication possible is through the internet (slow) and telephone (expensive). Further, an IB that is located at one section has that section to back it up with volunteers and facilities. Also people who see each other on a regular basis can motivate each other when motivation of one of the members should flag noticeably. Nevertheless, of course every motivated individual in ISHA is welcome to stand up for election, regardless of location.

Also there should be much more documentation in ISHA. At the moment we have the Statutes and the Standing Orders (that probably only about a dozen of people have read, and that's rather optimistic). We should produce some more text about how things are done best, like "what to do as an IB member", "what to do being in the Council", "How to organise a seminar/conference". Short documents about relevant subjects like this should ensure, when read, that people don't make the same mistakes twice or invent the wheel several years in a row.

Another part of this "continuity thing" is as well that our website should be easy to update, so that anybody with some basic web-building skills can continue to work on it in the following years.

Advantages of membership

We want to make it more attractive for a section to be a “member” instead of an “observer”, or plainly said, we want them to pay their membership-fee. Unfortunately, there is at the moment little reason to do so; besides the right to vote, as important as that is though, a member has no advantages above an observer. In any case we want to arrange that members get significantly more issues of Carnival than observers. Also we want to host email-addresses for those sections that pay their fees, for example zagreb@isha.org or helsinki@isha.org. Other advantages are still being thought about.

What we expect from the Council & individual sections

Well, to be honest, we expect quite a lot. Because we as IB can do a lot of work, but in the end if we're the only one who are moving, ISHA as an organisation isn't going anywhere. Yeah, we can and will do a lot, run the organisation, keep in touch with the whole ISHA community, make budgets, websites, information-leaflets, flyers and all that crap, find sponsors, lobby with sections to please do some things we think are necessary, work intensively in promoting ISHA in our own country, etcetera etcetera bla bla bla. But next to these things an IB can do very little. It can not organise activities, it cannot publish Carnival (we can't in any case, maybe some future IB will), it can't travel all over the world to spread the word of ISHA. But these tasks can be done with a lot of people, from the sections and from the council.

First of all ISHA needs the sections to organise seminars and conferences. Without these, there is no ISHA and there is no need for ISHA... the whole idea is after all to travel, to meet and to exchange views. As great as it is to travel around Europe for very little money and enjoy ISHA in this way, if everybody is only willing to visit and nobody is willing to organise, the party is over quite soon. So sections should take their responsibility and those who have the recourses to organise something and haven't done so recently/aren't busy organising one now should really consider it. And of course, each year we need the volunteer for Carnival as well, often this turns out to be a complete section as well. And last but not least, sections need to promote ISHA in their region. As earlier described, we will have some promo-material in near future, it's up to the sections to spread it though, at least partially.

For the Council, they have a pretty good job-description in the statutes. Their normal tasks are helping us with all kind of stuff, trying to find folks interested in having some function in ISHA next year, giving us comments and advise when we ask and when we don't ask for it. And well, we will definitely ask for their help several times, for example, once we have completed the list with old sections and we're going to send letters and info about us to these universities, we'll ask the council to take a part of the sending. And of course, for from council-members goes the same as for other ISHA-individuals: if they have the chance to promote ISHA in their region, they should.

And to conclude, we expect to see as many of you as possible on next year's events, to exchange some thoughts on history as well as other stuff and have a good time together; after all, that's why we're doing this in the first place!

János Betkó, Dominic Tegelbeckers & Maarten Pillen,
International Board 2004-2005