

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## ‘Super Bowl of the world conference circuit’? A network approach to high-level science and policy conferencing

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### Abstract

Elite conferences, such as the Nobel Symposia organized by the Nobel Foundation since 1965, have often put a premium on the uninhibited exchange of ideas rather than the broad exchange of information. Nobel Symposium 14, *The Place of Value in a World of Fact* (1969), combined this ethos with the ambition to engage with ‘world problems’ that were thought by many at the time to constitute a global crisis. This paper examines the relationship between the Nobel Foundation’s ideal of scientific neutrality/objectivity and the ‘neutral activism’ in Swedish 1960s foreign policy. Furthermore, it investigates the social networking that preceded and followed the symposium, arguing that these processes were more important for the symposium’s impact than the actual meeting. They formed channels through which it was able to influence other larger meetings, like the 1972 UN conference on the human environment, and contributed to the creation of international organizations, most importantly the International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study. This suggests that the common historiographic focus on science meetings as events should be complemented by analytical perspectives that also view them as processes.

In an age of worldwide cooperation and growing interdependence, international conferences have become more and more indispensable. Their real importance, though, cannot be fully perceived by merely reading programme schedules or browsing through printed proceedings [*sic*], because the impact and the continuing influence of such meetings may be and very often is decided on the sidelines of the official event. Such conferences are planetary marketplaces, global ‘piazzas’, where the latest information is traded, associations are formed, friendships are struck and plans are hatched. For three to five days a certain hall in a certain town becomes a kind of world capital for this or that group of intellectuals full of intense and even hectic life. If you visit the place only a day after the event, the provisory metropolis has vanished, its inhabitants have dispersed and the organizers, who had worked like donkeys for many months, weeks and finally almost twenty-four hours a day for the success of the conference, begin to ask themselves, Was it worth all the trouble?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jungk, ‘Preface’, in Robert Jungk and Johan Galtung (eds.), *Mankind 2000*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969, pp. 9–10, 9.

We had frequently said, and we meant it, that the Stockholm Conference would prove to have been a success even if it never took place. Preparing for it was the vital thing.  
Peter Stone<sup>2</sup>

A few days before Christmas 1970, Carl-Göran Hedén, a Swedish microbiologist at the Karolinska Institute, wrote to his friend and colleague, Pennsylvania emeritus professor Stuart Mudd, about some common concerns.<sup>3</sup> They were of different generations, Hedén born in 1920 and Mudd in 1893, but were both active in promoting the use of scientific expertise in areas of global concern such as the ‘population explosion’, conflict resolution, education, biological weapons and the environment.<sup>4</sup> In 1960, Mudd had helped found the World Academy of Arts and Science (WAAS), of which Hedén would later become president. Hedén’s letter exemplifies the wealth of issues that were of concern in the network to which they both belonged. He brought up a ‘world-university’ project sponsored by WAAS and the complicated relationship between it and similar schemes by the theoretical physicist Abdus Salam, for example, who promoted a UN world university. He discussed the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, a Swedish initiative that came to fruition in Stockholm in 1972. He also considered the likelihood of future developments after recent conferences in New York (WAAS) and Stockholm (Nobel Symposium 14), for example collaboration between the Nobel and Rockefeller Foundations.

This three-page letter – chock-full of titbits concerning people, organizations and meetings – exemplifies what is of concern in this paper. First, the network character of a new kind of activism that had emerged in the 1950s, and especially from the mid-1960s, centred on the notion of a global crisis characterized by a variety of so-called world problems. An early example of this movement was Pugwash (see Waqar Zaidi’s paper in this special issue). But around 1970, as the nuclear threat (temporarily) seemed to diminish, the perceived crisis came to be more associated with a variety of other recent concerns, such as global inequality, the generation gap and the environment.<sup>5</sup>

By networks, in this context, I mean personal contacts between some scientists, intellectuals and policy makers that indirectly and sometimes formally included the institutions to which these people belonged. The importance of such informal structures – often designated ‘social networks’ – has been widely recognized in the literature.<sup>6</sup> One tight Cold War intellectual network has been described thus: ‘Theirs was a world of conferences ... but it was also a world of stable nodes, institutions where these individuals

<sup>2</sup> Peter Stone, *Did We Save the Earth at Stockholm?*, London: Earth Island, 1973, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Carl-Göran Hedén to Stuart Mudd, 21 December 1970, Carl-Göran Hedén’s archive, Karolinska institutet, Stockholm (subsequently CGH), box ‘Korr 1970–, M’.

<sup>4</sup> J.R. Porter, ‘Stuart Mudd, a microbiologist at U. of Pennsylvania is dead’, *New York Times*, 8 May 1975, p. 42; Sam Nilsson and Tommy Jonsson, obituary of Carl-Göran Hedén, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 12 July 2009, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Audra J. Wolfe, *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Kindle edn, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018, Chapter 6; Jon Agar, *Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, Kindle edn, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, Chapter 17; Agar, ‘What happened in the sixties?’, *BJHS* (2008) 41(4), pp. 567–600; Jenny Andersson, ‘The future of the Western world: the OECD and the Interfutures project’, *Journal of Global History* (2019) 14(1), pp. 126–44; Mattiias Schmelzer, *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Economic Growth Paradigm*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 258–66; Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002 (first published 1999), pp. 143–8.

<sup>6</sup> Two examples are Paul Erickson, Judy L. Klein, Lorraine Daston, Rebecca Lemov, Thomas Sturm and Michael D. Gordin, *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality*, Kindle edn, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013; Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

met face-to-face, conversed, and argued'.<sup>7</sup> As such networking often involved the creation of new contacts beneficial for the dissemination of knowledge and the launching of new initiatives, Mark Granovetter's well-known concept 'the strength of weak ties' is a useful point of reference; one aspect of weak ties is that they make fresh social and intellectual capital available to a group where members are already intimately connected with one another but have different and perhaps not so strong links with other groups.<sup>8</sup>

Hedén's letter exemplifies how established networks interacted and engendered new ones within the framework of an international 'conference landscape' (see also Jenny Beckman's paper in this issue) that in its turn was closely associated with a myriad of international organizations – inter-governmental or non-governmental – that had mostly emerged after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> The importance of informal aspects of such meetings was stressed by Robert Jungk in the introductory quote to this paper, which is taken from a book representing this very phenomenon. That the real action takes place on the 'sidelines' has long been a commonplace in descriptions of science conferences. The quote from Peter Stone, however, concerning the 1972 UN conference on the environment, pinpoints a less well-known dimension of conferencing, which will be the key focus of this paper. Conferences, notwithstanding Jungk's conclusion above, were not isolated events. In many cases they were only a stop along a trajectory that began years before a meeting and could have extended and consequential aftermaths. As Mike Heffernan *et al.* have pointed out, there is good reason to 'move from analyses of conferences as momentous events to conferencing as a process'.<sup>10</sup> Put differently, conferencing needs to be contextualized – not necessarily to understand particular meetings better, but because they are a key to identifying and charting the broader movements of which they form a part.

Robert Darnton has famously argued that if we want to grasp the mentality of a particular set of people from a distant historical period, we should investigate aspects that seem especially confounding to modern ways of thinking. Darnton's method was cultural contextualization through historical anthropology.<sup>11</sup> I argue that a similar logic is applicable to the taken-for-granted phenomena which accompany international science conferences: this paper will demonstrate this methodological approach through close scrutiny of the context of one meeting in particular to better understand the social structures of which it was symptomatic. I will focus more on actions and on relations between actors than on their cultural framework, though aspects of that will also be discussed.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Erickson *et al.*, *op. cit.* (6), loc. 303.

<sup>8</sup> Mark S. Granovetter, 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology* (1973) 78(6), pp. 1360–80. A social-networks approach to scientific collaboration has been developed in Sven Widmalm, 'Ett vetenskapligt nätverk: The Svedberg och hans lärjungar', in Ylva Hasselberg and Tom Pettersson (eds.), *'Bäste Broder!' Nätverk, Entreprenörskap och Innovation i Svenskt Näringsliv*, Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2006, pp. 152–79; Widmalm, 'Forskning och industri under andra världskriget', in Widmalm (ed.), *Vetenskapens sociala strukturer: Sju historiska fallstudier om konflikt, samverkan och makt*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2008, pp. 53–95.

<sup>9</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004; Sandrine Kott, 'Cold War internationalism', in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, Kindle edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 340–62.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Heffernan, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg and Benjamin J. Thorpe, 'Towards a historical geography of international conferencing', in Heffernan, Hodder, Legg and Thorpe (eds.), *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 11–36, 29–30.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Kindle edn, New York: Basic Books, n.d., pp. 11–16, Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cultural aspects are discussed in Sven Widmalm, 'The place of humanities in a world of science: Nobel Symposium 14 and the vanishing humanist', in Anders Ekström and Hampus Östh Gustafsson (eds.), *The Humanities and the Modern Politics of Knowledge: The Impact and Organization of the Humanities in Sweden, 1850–2020*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022, pp. 178–204.

My analysis, focused on a Nobel symposium in 1969, is founded on the voluminous documentation concerning its planning, evaluation and consequences held in the archives of central actors – most importantly the Nobel Foundation. For the execution and the reception of the symposium itself, which is covered in more detail in another publication, press reporting is an important additional source.<sup>13</sup>

### The ‘call girls’

Hedén was a leading force in the organizing committee for Nobel Symposium 14, on The Place of Value in a World of Facts (15–20 September 1969). This was not least due to his position within a wide international network in his own discipline and with organizations and individuals that like him were engaged in science and policy issues related to several world problems. Analysing Hedén’s correspondence gives one the sense that he, along with other members of his network, was constantly in motion. In fact, Arthur Koestler satirized this class of people in his novel *The Call Girls* (1972), written with Nobel Symposium 14 in mind.<sup>14</sup> Hedén himself commented jokingly on his travel habits, as in this letter to his compatriot Georg Borgström, another academic activist engaged in issues surrounding overconsumption and food shortage at Michigan State University:

I think that my calender [sic] during the last few months might even compete with yours. First I went to Moscow for discussions with the State Committee on Science and Technology ... Then I had to go to Genève [sic] in order to pave the way for WHO-funding of a second symposium on Rapid Methods and Automation in Microbiology ... Then I led a round table discussion on ‘Socio-economic and ethical implications of enzyme engineering’ in Saltsjöbaden ... following which I participated in a [sic] NSF round table in La Jolla on enzyme engineering in relation to the power and food problems. From this I have just returned and will leave again for China and Japan in a few days.<sup>15</sup>

In a letter written at the same time to conference *habituée* Margaret Mead, Hedén declined yet another invitation because his capacity for conferencing had, understandably, been ‘pretty well saturated’.<sup>16</sup> He regretted not getting to see Mead, however (they were on first-name terms) – which exemplifies the admixture of personal and professional interests and feelings that cemented social networks like theirs.

By classifying people like Hedén, Borgström and Mead as ‘call girls’ (they come when you call), their seriousness of purpose is underestimated. Rather they should be seen as participants in the emergence of a global issue-driven network of people and institutions that attempted to merge policy and science in ways that could ameliorate the failings of so-called modernization theory, according to which the dissemination of liberal values would ensure progress in the West as well as in the developing world.<sup>17</sup> Part and parcel of such a vision was, as Audra Wolfe has emphasized, the idea that science could somehow offer neutral territory on which nations could meet. This ‘key value of USA cultural diplomacy throughout most of the Cold War’ became much less convincing after the 1967 revelation of CIA sponsorship of scientific exchange activities; however, as I (and Jenny

<sup>13</sup> Widmalm, op. cit. (12).

<sup>14</sup> Alexander King, *Let the Cat Turn Round: One Man’s Traverse of the Twentieth Century*, London: CPTM, 2006, p. 350.

<sup>15</sup> Carl-Göran Hedén to Georg Borgström, 11 September 1974, CGH, box ‘Korr 1970–, B’.

<sup>16</sup> Carl-Göran Hedén to Margaret Mead, 19 August 1974, CGH, box ‘Korr 1970–, M’.

<sup>17</sup> Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, Chapters 6–7.

Beckman in this issue) will discuss, even after this incident, Sweden could still claim to be neutral scientific ground.<sup>18</sup>

The natural habitats of real-life academic ‘call girls’ were the airport lounges and the conference halls; they forged personal and institutional ties wherever they saw fit, ‘roam[ing] the world uncontrolled – lecturing, teaching, consulting, planning and organising’, as one of them put it.<sup>19</sup> Their preferred *modus operandi* was that of social networking – considered to be much more efficient than formal collaboration for the purposes of lobbying or launching new initiatives that might result in new organizational structures.

### Nobel Symposium 14

Since their inauguration in 1901, the Nobel Prizes have probably been the most famous awards outside entertainment and sports, in the global North and beyond. Their legitimacy relies on what is sometimes called the ‘Nobel system’ – a network of elite institutions and individuals centred on the Nobel Foundation.<sup>20</sup> Since 1965, Nobel Symposia – small meetings in the fields defined by the prizes, but sometimes with a broader scope – have been part of this system.

This idea for a series of symposia originated in the early 1960s with Arne Tiselius, who as Nobel laureate biochemist and former president of the Nobel Foundation was a pillar of the Nobel system possessing a wide international network. They were aimed at ‘a strictly limited number of elite participants personally invited to discuss a given acute set of problems’, with the overall objective of supporting ‘progress’, in the spirit of Alfred Nobel’s wish to reward work ‘to the benefit of mankind’.<sup>21</sup> In 1966 it was decided also to sponsor broader ‘cross-cultural’ symposia that would bridge the divides between prize categories representing the sciences, the arts and politics.<sup>22</sup> The first and most ambitious one of this kind was Nobel Symposium 14, which would involve thirty-seven speakers, among whom nine were, or would become, Nobel laureates. The meeting also comprised invited participants who did not give papers, including around ten students. The broad theme was the promotion of science as a solution to world problems, in the context of the decline of trust in science and a broader challenge to Western value systems – hence the presence of radical students representing a social movement exemplifying both these tendencies.<sup>23</sup>

Tiselius had explained the general idea behind Nobel Symposia in a memo of 1965. First, the growing intensity and urgency of scientific communication had led to an increase of ‘congresses, conferences and symposiums ... that is, arrangements which provide direct personal contact’. From this perspective, it was ‘widely recognized’ that international symposia with a small number of invited participants were a ‘particularly

<sup>18</sup> Wolfe, *op. cit.* (5), Chapters 6, 8, quote on p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> This was the self-characterization of Symposium 14 participant Alexander King, King, *op. cit.* (14), p. 348.

<sup>20</sup> Gustav Källstrand, ‘More than a prize: the creation of the Nobel system’, in Nils Hansson, Thorsten Halling and Heiner Fangerau (eds.), *Attributing Excellence in Medicine: The History of the Nobel Prize*, Brill: Leiden, 2019, pp. 39–58.

<sup>21</sup> *Nobel Symposia*, Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1967, p. 5. Leaflet in the Archive of the Nobel Foundation at Centre for Business History, Stockholm (used by permission; subsequently ANF), F4b, vol. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the ‘consultation committee’ (*samrådskommittén*) for distributing funding from the Bank of Sweden Foundation, 15 March 1966, S7, ANF, F4b, vol. 1.

<sup>23</sup> For more general information about the symposium see Widmalm, *op. cit.* (12). A list of participants is in Arne Tiselius and Sam Nilsson (eds.), *The Place of Value in a World of Facts: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Nobel Symposium, Stockholm, September 15–20, 1969*, Stockholm, New York, London and Sydney: Almqvist & Wiksell and John Wiley & Sons, 1970, pp. 9–10. The list is not complete as names of some ‘observers’ are missing. About social movements and science in this period see Agar, *Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, *op. cit.* (5), Chapter 17.

effective arrangement'.<sup>24</sup> This was because the exclusiveness of such meetings would make possible 'free and frank discussion' about the 'very latest results'; or, as the Nobel Foundation's CEO Nils Ståhle put it, 'complete discretion and freedom of expression'.<sup>25</sup> The Nobel Symposia should become a 'rendezvous for the international elite' in science, culture and the 'promotion of peace'.<sup>26</sup>

A cross-cultural Nobel symposium focusing on 'atomic research' was first suggested by the literary Swedish Academy.<sup>27</sup> It was, however, thought by the scientists on the board of the Nobel Foundation that the market for this particular world problem was saturated (not least through Pugwash), and that the symposium should instead engage with a bundle of the general crisis symptoms that the Club of Rome would shortly designate 'the problematique'.<sup>28</sup> Global inequality, the dangers of new technology, the alienation of youth and other examples of the problematique were discussed during the symposium's planning stage and dealt with during the meeting, where Alexander King was a participant (Aurelio Peccei would participate in a follow-up workshop and a follow-up Nobel symposium).<sup>29</sup> Two general questions that received particular attention by the organizers were the need to coordinate scientific knowledge to make it an efficient problem-solving tool, and the tension between knowledge and values (the latter were thought to sometimes distort a full appreciation of the utility of science).<sup>30</sup> This rather technocratic agenda was captured by the symposium title, *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, and also by a slogan printed at the end of the symposium volume: '*Sagesse oblige*'.<sup>31</sup>

Early on the question of the symposium's place in the conference landscape came up. The organizers were aware that their agenda was not exactly original as there had been many similar meetings in the recent past and there were more in the planning stage. Pugwash and the UN environmental conference have been mentioned, and there were several other meetings on world problems hosted by various UN agencies, not least UNESCO, on the horizon.<sup>32</sup> The futurological movement and various think tanks spawned similar meetings, often stamped with the moniker 'the year 2000'.<sup>33</sup> Was another one really necessary? It was decided that two main reasons made it so. First, the cross-cultural approach – merging the sciences, politics, and the arts and humanities – was deemed sufficiently original to make Nobel Symposium 14 stand out. Second, the Nobel brand was thought to give it an extra-high profile.<sup>34</sup> In the landscape of problem-oriented meetings, Nobel Symposium 14 was perceived as a kind of 'intellectual summit conference' (as the

<sup>24</sup> Arne Tiselius, 'memorandum' dated April 1965, Uppsala University Archive, Department of Biochemistry, Arne Tiselius: The Nobel Foundation (subsequently ATNF), F13:1.

<sup>25</sup> Tiselius, op. cit. (24).

<sup>26</sup> Tiselius op. cit. (24).

<sup>27</sup> Widmalm, op. cit. (12).

<sup>28</sup> [Hasan Özbekhan], *The Predicament of Mankind: Quest for Structured Responses to Growing World-Wide Complexities and Uncertainties: A Proposal*, Section I (1970), pp. 12–16.

<sup>29</sup> 'List of participants' in Torgny Segerstedt and Sam Nilsson (eds), *Man, Environment, and Resources: In the Perspective of the Past and the Future* (Nobel Symposium 29, 1974), Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, s.d., pp. 9–10; Nobel-Rockefeller Foundation Workshop, 14 December 1970, list of participants, ANF, F4b:8.

<sup>30</sup> Widmalm, op. cit. (12).

<sup>31</sup> 'The place of value in a world of facts: report to the Nobel Foundation on Symposium 14 by a reporting group appointed by the organizing committee', in Tiselius and Nilsson, op. cit. (23), pp. 493–6, 496.

<sup>32</sup> Iriye, op. cit. (9), pp. 44–9, 87–94, 118–22.

<sup>33</sup> Jenny Andersson, 'Planning the American future: Daniel Bell, future research, and the Commission on the Year 2000', *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2021) 82(4), pp. 661–82; Andersson, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the 'symposium committee' (*symposiekommittén*) of the Nobel Foundation, 30 September 1968, ANF, F4a, vol. 2. This committee decided which proposals for symposia should be funded. About the Nobel brand see Karl Ragnar Gierow to the Board of the Nobel Foundation, 11 February 1966, ATNF, F13:5; minutes



*Christian Science Monitor* put it) where a small group of world leaders in their respective fields would thrash out problems of global concern.<sup>35</sup>

However, the Nobel brand was both an asset and a cause for concern: might it become tainted through the association with contested policy issues?<sup>36</sup> Here Swedish post-war foreign policy must be considered, as this was often promoted as a corrective to political divisions during the Cold War, including those in science. It is often said that Sweden was neutral during the Cold War, but this is a shorthand for the much earlier doctrine of Swedish non-alignment that aimed to preserve neutrality in the case of war. Nevertheless, the idea(l) of ‘neutrality’, founded not only on doctrine but also on a long history of peace, has shaped views on Sweden’s role in Cold War Europe and globally, particularly with respect to US and Soviet imperialism and not least decolonization. Christine Agius has argued that neutrality was central to national identity during the era of Social Democratic hegemony, from the early 1930s to the 1970s, and that in the post-war period the country differed from, for example, Switzerland, in that it promoted ‘a specific type of active neutrality, one which ... was interested in translating Social Democratic norms and values to the international arena’.<sup>37</sup> As Jenny Andersson has pointed out, Sweden thrived in the early post-war years on the widespread idea that it represented an almost utopian modernity. Science and social science were seen as integral to this conception of the ‘Swedish model’, in which it was possible to maintain the appearance of non-political science, particularly (as noted earlier) after the 1967 exposure of the CIA’s clandestine cultural policies.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of neutrality had long been important for the status of the Nobel Prize itself as it suggested a connection between political and scientific impartiality.<sup>39</sup> Cold War Swedish neutrality in science is exemplified by the fact that long-established science relations with the US and Western Europe were complemented, in the mid-1960s, with a programme of research exchange between Sweden and the USSR.<sup>40</sup> It shone through in the inauguration in 1964 of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) – the architect of which was renowned internationalist Alva Myrdal – when Prime Minister Tage Erlander emphasized that Sweden’s ‘key position on the political

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of the ‘organizational committee’ (*organisationskommittén*) of Nobel Symposium 14, 30 September 1968, ANF F4b, vol. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Robert C. Cowen, ‘Youth at Nobel Symposium rap elders on “value gap”’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 7, 10 October 1969. The expression quoted was used in both instalments of this two-part article. From unpaginated clippings in the clippings archive of the Nobel Foundation, Stockholm; used by permission.

<sup>36</sup> Nils Ståhle to Tore Tallroth (general consul, New York), 7 March 1966, ANF, F4b, vol. 1; comments by Hedén in Nils Ståhle, ‘Anteckningar från sammanträde med den tvärkulturella arbetsgruppen inom Symposiekommittén’, 19 January 1968, ANF, F4b, vol. 3; Nils Ståhle to Arne Tiselius (‘highly confidential’), 2 March 1965, ATNF, F13:1 – warning that Parliament might politicize Nobel affairs.

<sup>37</sup> Christine Agius, *The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality: Challenges to Swedish Identity and Sovereignty*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, Chapter 4, quote on p. 90. On neutrality and science and technology see Per Lundin, Niklas Stenlås and Johan Gribbe, *Science for Welfare and Warfare: Technology and State Initiative in Cold War Sweden*, Sagamore Beach, MA: Watson Publishing International, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Jenny Andersson, ‘Nordic nostalgia and Nordic light: the Swedish model as Utopia, 1930–2007’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* (2009) 34(3), pp. 229–45.

<sup>39</sup> Sven Widmalm, ‘Science and neutrality: the Nobel Prizes of 1919 and scientific internationalism in Sweden’, *Minerva* (1995) 33, pp. 339–60; Widmalm, ‘Hitler’s boycott: cultural politics and the rhetoric of neutrality’, in Hansson, Halling and Fangerau, op. cit. (20), pp. 59–77.

<sup>40</sup> There seems to be no literature concerning these agreements. An agreement on technical and industrial collaboration between Sweden and the UUSR, including the organization of symposia, was signed on 19 September 1966; it had been preceded by a similar agreement concerning fundamental research. See ‘Samarbete Sverige–Sovjet om teknisk forskning’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 20 September 1966, p. 7; ‘Svensk-ryskt forskaravtal’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 September 1966, p. 18. I am indebted to Martin Emanuel for having provided me with unpublished material on these agreements.

world map' would ensure respect for the institute's research.<sup>41</sup> Among the Nobel symposium organizers, at least Carl-Göran Hedén – involved in SIPRI – seems to have been a die-hard supporter of neutral activism, even suggesting the removal of the UN headquarters from New York to southern Sweden.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that active or activist neutrality, shaped under Swedish Social Democratic hegemony with no strong opposition from other parties, was not really politically neutral but rather signified the foreign-policy ambition to act independently of East–West and North–South polarization, often promoting what is sometimes identified as progressive causes. At Nobel Symposium 14, neutral activism was promoted as an intervention in the perceived crisis, in that it offered an arena for thrashing out problems relating to North–South as well as East–West tensions. In this way, the concept gained a foothold in the Nobel Foundation,

At the same time the foundation was wary lest too overt a political engagement tarnish its scientific credibility. Such an ambivalence marked the reaction to a 1968 proposal from George Woods, then president of the World Bank. With the blessing of his incoming successor, Robert McNamara, Woods suggested that the Nobel Foundation, as a well-respected 'non-political' entity, should support the creation of a 'grand assize' to help diminish the economic disparities between industrialized countries and the Third World.<sup>43</sup> In response, the CEO of the Nobel Foundation, Nils Ståhle (a seasoned professional diplomat) wrote that they should have nothing to do with this: 'Our job is to award prizes – not to take initiatives in support of plans no matter how worthy'. This was described as an important principle of the foundation. But at the same time Ståhle, as well as Arne Tiselius, did think that Nobel Symposium 14 could 'incorporate representatives of a "grand assize" for Third-World aid' and give it a 'Nobel spring-board'.<sup>44</sup> Woods was hence invited, but declined to attend the symposium. He was replaced by German banker Wilfried Guth, who gave an account of a report he had helped prepare based on Woods's initiative, which effectively provided a platform for an American-led post-colonial agenda at the meeting.<sup>45</sup> Thinking politically, as the organizers most certainly did, it should be noted that the symposium did also offer a platform for a range of political tendencies – from the right-wing biologism of Konrad Lorenz via leftist but established critics of Western policies and lifestyles like Gunnar Myrdal, Linus Pauling and Margaret Mead, to official representatives of Soviet science Mikhail Millionshchikov and V.A. Engelhardt, and a group of student radicals some of whom were Maoists.<sup>46</sup> The political symbolism of making Arne Tiselius – embodying Swedish neutrality and the presumed impartiality of the Nobel Foundation – president of the meeting, with the Pugwashees Pauling and Millionshchikov as vice presidents, could hardly have escaped anyone.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> [Heng], 'Viktigaste forskningsinstitutet i världen har startat i Stockholm', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 28 August 1966, p. 14. The article quoted Alva Myrdal, who quoted Erlander's statement from two years earlier. On Myrdal and social-science internationalism see Per Wisselgren, 'Decentering Cold War social science: Alva Myrdal's social scientific internationalism at UNESCO, 1950–1955', in Mark Solovey and Christian Dayé (eds.), *Cold War Social Science: Transnational Entanglements*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 287–313.

<sup>42</sup> [Barbara], 'Politikern en plastkirurg som opererar utan att se', *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 April 1967, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> George D. Woods to Marcus Wallenberg, 6 March 1968, ANF, F4b, vol. 3; Marcus Wallenberg to Nils Ståhle, 27 March 1968, ANF, F4b, vol. 3.

<sup>44</sup> [Nils Ståhle] to Marcus Wallenberg, 5 April 1968, ANF, F4c, vol. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Wilfried Guth, 'The task of the Commission on International Development (Pearson Commission)', in Tiselius and Nilsson, op. cit. (23), pp. 353–7; Lester B. Pearson et al., *Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development*, New York, Washington and London, Praeger Publishers, 1969.

<sup>46</sup> Widmalm, op. cit. (12).

<sup>47</sup> *Nobel Symposium 14: The Place of Values in a World of Facts. A Symposium on Alfred Nobel's Ideals in the Light of Changing Values*, Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1969, flyleaf. Arne Tiselius's copy is in ATRNA, F13:4.



This approach may have been in line with the neutral activism of Swedish social democracy, but there were limits to such an identification. For example, in order to boost the political visibility and prestige of the symposium, an invitation to PM Tage Erlander was proposed, but not accepted. An earlier incident in August 1968 had demonstrated the issues that could arise when politicians engaged with international meetings: Erlander had been invited to inaugurate a Nobel symposium on biological systems but had abruptly pulled out after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>48</sup> In that context, his advisers had decided that welcoming Soviet participants to Sweden was inappropriate. Nils Ståhle thought this was ‘a memento for the future, not to have politicians acting in connection with Nobel matters’.<sup>49</sup> As we will see, similar problems of keeping a distance between the foundation and politics arose with respect to some invitees.

## Networking

To help make decisions about invitees and themes for sessions, the organizing committee involved established networks and, in the process, extended them. Carl-Göran Hedén and Arne Tiselius were well connected internationally, as was the Nobel Foundation’s CEO Nils Ståhle – who was very active in the symposium preparations, although not a member of the organizing committee. August Schou and Karl Ragnar Gierow, respectively director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and perpetual secretary of the Swedish Academy (of literature), provided more limited interfaces with the worlds of politics and literature. The organizers were greatly helped by committee secretary Sam Nilsson, a physicist in his thirties with experience from CERN, and a very diligent letter writer, traveller and communicator.

Networking was not haphazard but organized. Individuals and institutions were approached through personal letters or official announcements about the symposium issued at intervals during the planning stage. The announcements were also used to advertise the symposium in the international press.<sup>50</sup> Importantly, an advisory board, six ‘wise men’ who would participate in the symposium, was enrolled. These were physicist Abdus Salam, molecular biologist Joshua Lederberg, biochemist Jacques Monod, microbiologist Ivan Málek, UN official Ralph Bunche and writer Arthur Koestler. This group represented the ambitions of the symposium in various ways – their eminence in respective fields, their geographical distribution and their political commitment. Málek and Koestler were Central European critics of Soviet communism (the former, importantly in 1969, a Czech), Monod had stood on the Paris barricades in May 1968, Bunche was a veteran of the US civil rights movement, his compatriot Lederberg was a spokesperson for anti-racist genetics and abortion rights, and Salam was a promoter of scientific exchange between developing countries and the West. Except for Málek and Koestler these were all or would become Nobel laureates. As a group they fitted the mould of social-democratic ‘neutralism’.

Some individuals were sought out more actively – such as diplomats, and experienced organizers of similar meetings, like Pugwash, which was sounded out by Tiselius during their meeting in southern Sweden in 1967.<sup>51</sup> Among the advisers Salam and Koestler were approached in person, the former during a Nobel symposium on theoretical particle

<sup>48</sup> Nils Ståhle to Sam Nilsson, 10 February 1969, ANS, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Nils Ståhle, memo to the Board of the Nobel Foundation, 23 August 1968, ANF, F4c, vol. 1; Ståhle to Sam Nilsson, 10 February 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Edwin S. Schanze (the New York Academy of Sciences) to Sam Nilsson, 23 April 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11; the organizing committee of Nobel Symposium 14 to ‘Dear Sir’, November 1968, ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Birgit Segerborg to Nils Ståhle, 25 August 1967, ANF, F4c, vol. 1.

physics in Stockholm in 1968, the latter at his abode in Alpbach in the same year. That meeting is documented in correspondence from Gierow which casts light on how this type of networking functioned in practice. Koestler, for example, provided Gierow with lists of participants in two projects he was involved with – a symposium on reductionism in the life sciences and a book on ‘alternatives to violence’. Gierow and Koestler relied heavily on those lists, particularly with respect to the humanities, as they concocted a draft programme for the Nobel symposium.<sup>52</sup>

## Representativity

The elitism of the symposium was reflected in discussions concerning whom to invite. Hopes were high that world leaders and ‘celebrities’ could be attracted.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, ‘over-Americanization’ was seen as problematic as one aimed for ‘geographic distribution’ as well as ideological and cultural diversity.<sup>54</sup> Several directors of UN organizations, as well as U Thant himself, were invited, as were African leaders Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere.<sup>55</sup> It became obvious, however, that the extant networks accessed by the organizers were not very helpful when it came to finding candidates from the developing world. A striking example are the comments by ‘wise man’ Joshua Lederberg, conscious of the Nobel Foundation’s ambition to adapt to various ‘biases’, as he put it, and to avoid the symposium being ‘grossly overdominated by Americans’.<sup>56</sup> Lederberg indicated that one representative each from groups like American blacks or women would suffice to achieve the kind of ‘universality’ that the organizers were after. He discussed several names in these categories but was ‘discouraged’ with how few from Africa and Asia he could come up with.<sup>57</sup>

The inability to attract leading representatives for developing-world interests, or women, was reflected in the symposium participants. There was one person each ‘representing’ the black civil rights movement, the female sex, South America and the continent of Africa, but two from Asia – one Indian and one Japanese (plus the Pakistani Abdus Salam, stationed in Italy). Among these only the two North Americans, Ralph Bunche and Margaret Mead, lived up to the wished-for celebrity status (from a Euro-American perspective) while simultaneously accentuating the symposium’s ‘over-Americanization’. Stähle thought Lederberg actually worsened that problem by suggesting such a great number of participants from the US himself.<sup>58</sup> This illustrates the fact that the organizers’ networking was path-dependent.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Ragnar Gierow to Arne Tiselius, 14 May 1968, ATNF, F:13:5 (attached are suggestions concerning arts and humanities speakers and themes); ‘Committee for “Alternatives to Violence”’ (synopsis of the book) and ‘Alpbach symposium – June 5–9, 1968’ (programme for Koestler’s symposium), both in ANF, F4c, vol. 1. Cf. Arthur Koestler and J.R. Smythies (eds.), *Beyond Reductionism: New Perspectives in the Life Sciences*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970; Larry Ng, *Alternatives to Violence: A Stimulus to Dialogue*, New York: Time Life Books, 1968.

<sup>53</sup> Nils Stähle to Sam Nilsson, 20 November 1968, ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>54</sup> August Schou to Sam Nilsson, 19 August 1968, and the symposium organizers (unsigned copy) to Ralph Bunche, 30 March 1968 (on cultural diversity), both ATNF, F13:5; Carl-Göran Hedén to Arne Tiselius, 21 March 1968 (on US dominance), ATNF, F13:5; Stähle, op. cit. (53), quote; Nils Stähle to August Schou, 8 May 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11; August Schou, ‘Angående det planlagte “tverrkulturelle symposium”’, 29 January 1968 (on cultural diversity), ANF, F4c, vol. 1.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Science, Arts and Peace – a conference on Alfred Nobel’s ideas in the light of our predictable future’ (unsigned and undated draft programme with preliminary title, including U Thant and other UN officials among the speakers) and ‘Diskussionsunderlag för tvärkulturellt Nobelsymposium’, dated 8 March 1968 (another draft programme with UN officials), both in ATNA, F13:5; Kenneth Kaunda to Sam Nilsson, 25 April 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11; Joan Wicken to Sam Nilsson, 22 February 1969 (no from Julius Nyerere), ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Joshua Lederberg to Sam Nilsson, 4 October 1968, ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Lederberg, op. cit. (56).

<sup>58</sup> Stähle op. cit. (53).

In the end no key political figures from the West or the developing countries attended the symposium. Nyerere, Kaunda and U Thant politely declined; Bunche withdrew in the last minute for health reasons; the UN was asked to but did not send any 'observers'.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, suggestions that Robert McNamara, Andrej Sakharov and someone from the People's Republic of China should be invited came to nothing. Diplomats dissuaded the organizing committee from approaching McNamara, who was not acceptable to either Russians or student radicals. Likewise, the Cultural Revolution made Chinese invitations problematic. Sakharov was invited but did not reply. The USSR was – after science-diplomatic negotiations by Hedén in Moscow – represented by two establishment characters, including Mikhail Millionshchikov, who was not only Speaker of the Supreme Soviet but a leading figure in the Pugwash movement.<sup>60</sup> No one invited from the visual arts or music came either. It is hence fair to say that the attempt to stage a global summit of scientific, political and cultural leaders failed. However, when the conference is considered part of a process rather than as a singular event, its long-term significance becomes obvious.

### Collaboration

In a report to the Nobel Foundation by Arne Tiselius and Sam Nilsson after the symposium, it was claimed that the massive media attention around it had created an expectation that similar meetings should be organized in the future.<sup>61</sup> A continuation of Nobel Symposium 14 had been discussed already at the planning stage.<sup>62</sup> In mid-1968, a partnership was struck up with the World Academy of Arts and Science – an organization launched in 1960 with the ambition to 'integrat[e] science with ethics and universal values' and now working towards the establishment of a world university, conceived as a network of academic units that would promote the causes endorsed by WAAS.<sup>63</sup> There was Swedish involvement with WAAS from very early on. Its second 'plenary meeting' was held in Stockholm in 1963; Carl-Göran Hedén was member of the group responsible for the world university where his department at the Karolinska Institute was among the first three 'co-operating centers'. Several among the other Nobel symposium organizers became members of the WAAS during the planning process, as did a number of the speakers.<sup>64</sup>

There was, in fact, an effort to coordinate Nobel Symposium 14 with the WAAS conference on Environment and Society in Transition in New York in 1970. The idea seems to have been hatched by Hedén and symposium participant Boris Pregel, a uranium and radium merchant turned science administrator who was president of the American Division of WAAS.<sup>65</sup> During discussions between members of the Swedish organizing committee and WAAS official John McHale – a pop-art pioneer and futurologist – in Stockholm

<sup>59</sup> Guy B. Gresford to Sam Nilsson, 3 June 1969, ATNF, F13:5. Gresford declined an invitation to participate as a UN observer. There were no UN observers present as far as documentation shows.

<sup>60</sup> Evangelista, *op. cit.* (5), *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> Arne Tiselius and Sam Nilsson, untitled report on Nobel symposium dated 14 January 1970, ANF, F4c, vol. 12.

<sup>62</sup> 'Diskussionsunderlag', *op. cit.* (55).

<sup>63</sup> Carl-Göran Hedén to Arne Tiselius, 24 September 1968, ATNF, F13:5. Information on the early history of WAAS comes from Garry Jacobs *et al.*, 'Retrospective and reflections of WAAS@60', *A Planetary Moment*, 15–19 February 2021, at [www.researchgate.net/publication/349290715\\_A\\_PLANETARY\\_MOMENT\\_Retrospective\\_and\\_Reflections\\_on\\_WAAS60\\_DONATO\\_KINIGER-PASSIGLI\\_Vice-President\\_WAAS\\_IVO\\_SLAUS\\_Honorary\\_President\\_WAAS](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/349290715_A_PLANETARY_MOMENT_Retrospective_and_Reflections_on_WAAS60_DONATO_KINIGER-PASSIGLI_Vice-President_WAAS_IVO_SLAUS_Honorary_President_WAAS), p. 5 (quote; emphasis in the original); see also <https://worldacademy.org/content/history> (both accessed 6 January 2022).

<sup>64</sup> WAAS-Newsletter (1968–9) 8–9, ATNF, F13:4. Information about officials, new fellows and proposed fellows is on the back of the cover of the newsletter and on pp. 40–4.

<sup>65</sup> Hedén to Tiselius, *op. cit.* (63); Boris Pregel to Arne Tiselius, 2 June 1969, ATNF, F13:4.

in April 1969 it was decided to invite a category of around ten 'overlap persons' who would attend both meetings.<sup>66</sup> The basis of the collaboration would be this loose group rather than any kind of formal arrangement. Social networks, what Hedén called relations on the 'personal level', were seen as more efficient than formal ones as public commitment might be difficult for institutions eager to guard their autonomy (emphasized by Hedén and extremely important to the Nobel Foundation).<sup>67</sup>

The overlap persons were approached in a letter explaining the benefits if they attended both meetings.<sup>68</sup> 'A scientific meeting', Hedén explained, 'has impacts on three levels: on the participants, on science, and on society'. The first and second levels were most important if activities came 'to an abrupt end' after proceedings had been published. But Nobel Symposium 14 aimed to achieve 'effects' on the third level, which required 'special efforts'; this was the reason for coordinating the conferences. Hence programmes were matched so that they would supplement each other without directly overlapping, coordinated through 'a small body of individuals – participating in both conferences' in order 'to keep the ball rolling'. Hedén underscored that special emphasis would be put on 'the emergence of a worldwide intellectual community, along the lines of the World University concept'. This reasoning apparently was effective as about a dozen symposium participants also joined the WAAS conference.<sup>69</sup> The comments by Hedén show how systematic was the approach to networking by the symposium organizers and that it was deliberately and strategically extended beyond the immediate needs of symposium planning.

The WAAS conference was larger than the Nobel symposium, but its orientation was similar.<sup>70</sup> Both advocated a cross-disciplinary approach to a similar set of global issues that in both cases were described as 'world problems' and as symptoms of a general crisis.<sup>71</sup> Both adopted a rather technocratic or at least scientific approach to problem solving. In the WAAS conference prospectus it was stated that its audiences were on the one hand 'highly specialized professionals' and on the other 'governmental and international associations'.<sup>72</sup> The conference in spring 1970 was described as 'micro' and aimed at the former group; a conference of around 1,500 participants and described as 'macro' was aimed at the latter and planned for later.<sup>73</sup> As contacts between Stockholm and New York developed, Nobel Symposium 14, however, came to be presented as the first step in this series, smaller and even more elitist than the WAAS 'micro' conference. As we will see, it was the UN environmental conference in 1972 that, in the eyes of the Swedes, came to be seen as the third step in this progression.

The UN conference was initiated in the late 1960s by a few Swedish Social Democratic politicians, importantly Inga Thorsson, and the UN ambassador Sverker Åström. At this point in time environmental issues had moved to a high position on the political agenda

<sup>66</sup> The Swedes were Hedén, Ståhle and Nilsson. John McHale to Boris Pregel, 25 April 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11; Nils Ståhle, 'P.M. ang. Tvärkulturellt möte i U.S.A.', dated 10 April 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 8.

<sup>67</sup> Hedén to Tiselius, op. cit. (63) ('person-planet').

<sup>68</sup> Carl-Göran Hedén, 'Dear Sir', 21 May 1969, ATNF, F13:4.

<sup>69</sup> *Environment and Society in Transition: Scientific Developments, Social Consequences, Policy Implications*, ATNF, F13:4. This undated programme (Tiselius's copy) contains a preliminary list of participants but seems otherwise to be at a final stage. The list is on pp. 10–16.

<sup>70</sup> WAAS-Newsletter, op. cit. (64), p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> 'Memorandum on conference and post-conference objectives' (undated and unsigned typewritten WAAS document), ATNF, F13:4.

<sup>72</sup> 'Environment and society in transition: scientific development, social consequences, policy implications', p. 4. This is an undated printed prospectus for the conference preceding the programme quoted above, *Environment and Society in Transition*, op. cit. (69), and with the same title. ATNF, F13:4.

<sup>73</sup> 'Environment and society in transition', op. cit. (72), p. 6.

in many countries. Environmentalism joined the anti-nuclear and anti-Vietnam War movement in casting a shadow over science-and-technology optimism, seeing it as a cause of world problems as well as – perhaps – a solution to them.<sup>74</sup> Åström, not a card-carrying Social Democrat but left-leaning (and suspected to be a Soviet spy by the Swedish security service), worked in tandem with the biochemist Hans Palmstierna, who provided him with scientific documentation and functioned as an efficient ‘diplomat-scientist’.<sup>75</sup> Palmstierna was a Social Democrat. As Sweden’s most influential environmental activist (and, like soon-to-be PM Olof Palme, a protester against US involvement in Vietnam) he was also an adviser to the government on such issues. The Swedish initiative in the UN hence fitted within the general framework of Social Democratic neutral activism.

It was Åström who initially connected the Nobel Foundation and those planning the UN conference, arguing that Nobel Symposium 14, and possibly other symposia, would provide the UN organizers with needed background knowledge. In May 1969, after a meeting with Åström, Sam Nilsson wrote that he ‘was very attracted by the thought that the Nobel symposium is seen as part of a wider chain of events that can reach a certain culmination with the environmental conference 1972’.<sup>76</sup> Just as with the WAAS collaboration, it was emphasized that contacts should be informal and personal, and Åström suggested the formation of a small action group for this purpose.

In a report to the organizing committee in April 1969 Sam Nilsson connected the dots between the initiatives launched so far, embedding the Nobel symposium in a much larger context. It should, he wrote, be seen as part of the preparations for the UN conference. A ‘second step’ in these preparations would be the WAAS conference. Both these collaborations were presented in the symposium programme under the caption ‘Coordination with other meetings’. A third step would be ‘preparatory conferences’ at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Villa Serbelloni by Lake Cuomo, where promising contacts had already been established with the help of – among others – Åström (see below).<sup>77</sup>

## Effects

Considering the prestige involved and the high expectations, the symposium itself was relatively shambolic. This was partly due to the students who, as the organizers had expected, challenged the very concept of an elitist clique setting out to solve world problems. Their critique, however, got much more media attention than the organizers had anticipated.<sup>78</sup> Another reason was probably that the elitism of Nobel Symposia, founded on the idea that they constituted an exclusive space for the uninhibited exchange of ideas, was ill-suited to the organizers’ ambition to reach some sort of consensus around broad and vaguely defined issues. This was difficult to handle for some participants – Linus Pauling, Konrad Lorenz, Arthur Koestler, Gunnar Myrdal, for example – who instead grew quarrelsome or exercised hobby horses. According to science journalist Daniel S. Greenberg, who thought the symposium was lacking in substance and likened it to a

<sup>74</sup> David Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden: A New History of Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Paglia, ‘The Swedish initiative and the 1972 Stockholm Conference: the decisive role of science diplomacy in the emergence of global environmental governance’, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2021) 8(2), at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00681-x>; Sverker Åström, *Ögonblick från ett halvsekel i UD-tjänst*, Stockholm: Bonnier, 1992, pp. 155–76.

<sup>76</sup> Sam Nilsson to Nils Ståhle, May 5 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Birgit Segerborg, ‘Noteringar i anslutning till sammanträde av organisationskommittén för Nobelsymposium 14’, 23 April 1969, ANF, F4b, vol. 5, ‘ett andra steg’, ‘förberedande konferenser’; *Nobel Symposium 14*, op. cit. (47), p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Widmalm op. cit. (12).

'Super Bowl of the international symposia circuit', an American participant said that he could 'whip up a better discussion of values among the juniors on my campus'.<sup>79</sup> Among participants one criticism was that discussions had not engaged enough with world problems on a practical level.<sup>80</sup> A common way to generate impact from meetings with a sociopolitical agenda was to issue a resolution or a manifesto, as for example with the UN environmental conference. In the case of the Nobel symposium the model of a 'manifesto conference' was considered but not adopted because it was not believed by the organizers that the Russians would agree to anything like that. Backstage, however, some concrete results were achieved.

According to the previously mentioned report by Arne Tiselius and Sam Nilsson, there was a general consensus among the participants that the next practical step for tackling world problems should be the organization of problem-oriented and cross-disciplinary meetings for technical experts (similar to what is discussed in Jessica Reinisch's contribution to this special issue).<sup>81</sup> Many among the participants, it was claimed, were willing to provide detailed suggestions for such meetings. Extensive coordination with other initiatives of this kind was also discussed, though seen as problematic. Tiselius and Nilsson claimed that they had received around fifteen such requests but suggested only three for consideration, all sponsored by participants in Symposium 14.<sup>82</sup> Participation in select conferences supported by established networks was the way forward, they said, as personal contact 'is often the most efficient form of coordination of initiatives as continuous developments can then be discussed to the mutual benefit of the organizers'.<sup>83</sup> This exemplifies the elitist *modus operandi* of the Nobel Foundation, and its dependence on social networking.

As a result of the discussions among the symposium participants they issued a 'plea' (*vädjan*) to the Nobel Foundation (with copies sent to the Swedish minister of education and the Bank of Sweden Foundation, which funded the Nobel Symposia) that it would consider organizing a string of new symposia on issues which they suggested.<sup>84</sup> By way of illustrating what the group might come up with, four examples were given: the 'emergence of new viral diseases', nutritional requirements depending on genetic make-up, how to buffer the 'shocks of new technology', and the genetic engineering of crops.<sup>85</sup>

The foundation did act on the 'plea', but not by adopting the suggested list. Instead, they proceeded with a collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation initiated around four months before Nobel Symposium 14, which was connected with preparations for the UN environmental conference. In January 1970, Nils Ståhle met with Sverker Åström and provided him with a summary of the symposium discussions and a copy of the plea for a continuation.<sup>86</sup> The object of the meeting was to decide on a model for collaboration with the UN conference, including workshops sponsored by the Rockefeller and Nobel Foundations. They agreed that the Nobel Foundation should not decide topics for

<sup>79</sup> D.S. Greenberg, 'Nobel symposium: Super Bowl of the world conference circuit', *Science* (3 October 1969) 166 (3901), pp. 92–3, 92.

<sup>80</sup> John Robinson Pierce, 'Reflections on the Nobel symposium, the place of value in a world of facts', 6 October 1969, ANF, F4c, vol. 11. Pierce wrote that several others shared his views.

<sup>81</sup> Tiselius and Nilsson, *op. cit.* (61).

<sup>82</sup> These were organized by John McHale (the WAAS meeting), Yujiro Hayashi and Constantinos A. Doxiadis.

<sup>83</sup> Tiselius and Nilsson, *op. cit.* (61).

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of the 'symposium committee' of the Nobel Foundation, 22 September 1969, §4, ANF, F4a, vol. 2.

<sup>85</sup> 'Continuation of meetings under the sponsorship of the Nobel Foundation', supplement to the report, dated 20 September 1969, which was printed in Tiselius and Nilsson, *op. cit.* (31), ANF, F4b, vol. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Nils Ståhle, 'P.M. ang. Nobel Symposia och FN:s miljövårdskonferens 1972', a memo on the relationship between Nobel Symposia and the UN environmental conference, dated 20 January 1970 and addressed to Arne Tiselius, Sam Nilsson and Ulf von Euler (the Karolinska Institute), ANF, F4c, vol. 12.



new symposia at the request of the UN conference organizers, but that such matters should be treated informally through individual contacts, which is what happened.

In spring 1970 the Nobel Foundation resumed discussions with Rockefeller concerning 'selective collaboration' on 'small, high-level conferences on important contemporary concerns'.<sup>87</sup> Tiselius – again arguing in favour of the social-network model – suggested a small meeting involving the 'wise men' advisers for Nobel Symposium 14 to decide which topics were suitable for a more focused meeting that could feed into the planning process of the UN conference.<sup>88</sup> In 1971 a first workshop, under the title *Contacts, Co-operation and Collaboration*, would be held at the Rockefeller Foundation's Villa Serbelloni.<sup>89</sup> In the workshop programme it was pointed out that the topics discussed at Nobel Symposium 14, in particular North–South relations and also environmental problems, were extremely complex and that the many proposals for action in this area by various organizations were difficult to evaluate. Hence a new Nobel symposium in 1973 should be dedicated to that question. It was described as a 'follow-up' to Nobel Symposium 14, as well as a kind of evaluation of the UN conference that would take place in 1972. In this way, it was hoped, the Nobel Foundation could act as a 'catalyzer for better co-operation'.<sup>90</sup> Nobel Symposium 26 on *Coordination in the Field of Science and Technology* was held in Oslo 1973 with half a dozen people from Nobel Symposium 14 participating.<sup>91</sup> Nobel Symposium 29, on *Man, Environment, and Resources* (1974) also derived its agenda from Symposium 14 and from the UN conference, with key participants (Barbara Ward, Maurice F. Strong) from the latter attending. Both symposia hence exemplify the medium-term effects of the intellectual agenda and network deriving from Symposium 14.

The International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study (IFIAS) was a more lasting and tangible result of Nobel Symposium 14, in particular of the partnership between the Nobel and Rockefeller Foundations that was manifested by Serbelloni workshops in both 1971 and 1972. During these meetings, IFIAS's organization and mission were moulded. IFIAS would implement the idea to promote and coordinate research in areas associated with world problems (now including climate change).<sup>92</sup> The legacy of Nobel Symposium 14 and the network it had generated also marked the organization of IFIAS. It was inspired by the WAAS world university's network model, with its core being a small 'executive secretariat' that coordinated activities of a membership consisting of research institutions and a wider group of associates, including many individual advisers as well as 'corporate affiliates'.<sup>93</sup> IFIAS further disseminated its organizational template by providing input into the planning of the UN University – a pet scheme of Abdus Salam's – launched in Tokyo in 1973.<sup>94</sup>

Formally inaugurated in 1972, during a meeting at Salam's physics institute in Trieste, IFIAS was located at a royal palace outside Stockholm, led by Sam Nilsson and with Nils

<sup>87</sup> Minutes of the 'organizational committee' of Nobel Symposium 14, 19 March 1970, ANF, F4c, vol. 12; minutes of the 'symposium committee' of the Nobel Foundation, 28 January 1970, §4, ANF, F4a, vol. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Minutes of the 'symposium committee', op. cit. (84).

<sup>89</sup> Minutes of the 'symposium committee' of the Nobel Foundation, 3 November 1970, §6, ANF, F4a, vol. 2.

<sup>90</sup> 'A joint Nobel–Rockefeller Foundation workshop, Villa Serbelloni, March–April 1971', unsigned memo dated 3 November 1970, ANF, F4a, vol. 2.

<sup>91</sup> August Schou and Finn Solie (eds.), *Coordination in the Field of Science and Technology: The Role of the Specialized Agencies of UN*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974.

<sup>92</sup> Sam Nilsson, 'Are scientists and technologists prepared for international coordination?', in Schou and Solie, op. cit. (91), pp. 30–39.

<sup>93</sup> See organogram Nils K. Ståhle, Sam Nilsson and Per Lindblom, *From Vision to Action*, Toronto: IFIAS, [1988], p. 23; lists of members etc. pp. 90–6.

<sup>94</sup> Ståhle, Nilsson and Lindblom, op. cit. (93), p. 6; Nilsson, op. cit. (92), p. 34.

Stähle as chair of the board (soon to be replaced by Alexander King). Like the International Foundation for Science (also created in 1972, situated in Stockholm, and indirectly connected with Nobel Symposium 14; see Jenny Beckman's paper in this issue), the scope of IFIAS's ambitions was global, with a focus on so-called Third World issues. Its location was said to be especially appropriate because of Sweden's neutrality.<sup>95</sup>

This is not the place to describe IFIAS's broad range of activities, but it is worth pointing out that one of the organization's most important early contributions was, already from its inception, to put the spotlight on climate change. In 1974 a workshop in Bonn issued what became known as the Bonn Statement on climate change, which was said to have influenced national policies in the early phase of climate-change awareness; several projects on this theme were later supported by IFIAS.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Investigating the social and institutional networks surrounding a high-profile meeting like Nobel Symposium 14 enables us to map otherwise hidden parts of the evolving science and policy conference landscape, particularly with regard to the techniques that were employed to 'keep the ball rolling', as Carl-Göran Hedén put it. The conference landscape of which the Nobel Foundation became a part – and helped shape – was oriented towards global problem solving. Politically, the foundation's intervention should be understood as a scientific version of the neutral activism which characterized Swedish foreign policy from the 1960s to the end of the Cold War. The foundation aimed to uphold their ideal of political impartiality in order not to tarnish the reputation for objectivity on which the status of the scientific Nobel Prizes particularly rested. At the same time they decided to make a science-based (and somewhat cross-cultural) intervention into ongoing discussions of world problems – to make science better coordinated and politically more relevant. Throughout the planning, execution and aftermath of the symposium the Nobel Foundation therefore connected with many policy makers and policy-oriented scientists; it would benefit from their social capital, for example, in launching new symposia and organizations that, to their mind, would help coordinate research on world problems. Here a few such instances have been discussed – with a focus on conferences in New York in 1970 and Stockholm in 1972. Mention has been made of other Nobel Symposia that resulted from the foundation's turn towards supporting problem-oriented and cross-disciplinary research. Others could have been cited as well – for example Small States in International Relations (1970) or The Changing Chemistry of the Oceans (1971).

There was a homology between the oft-expressed ideal of personal networking and the ideal of elite symposia. In both cases formal aspects of collaboration were described as an obstacle to getting things done, practically or intellectually. The efficacy of the Nobel Foundation's social networking can be judged from the leverage obtained when it was linked with organizations like WAAS, the Rockefeller or the UN, but also by the failure to attract high-level participation concerning post-colonial issues. It has, however, also been shown that the effects of Nobel Symposium 14 and similar gatherings should not be judged only from what transpired at the meetings – which in this case was not much other than an unusual amount of publicity – but from what initiatives were developed before, during and after, a time frame encompassing years or even decades. Hence the context which this case study has unravelled is on another analytical level than the case itself – organizationally, geographically and temporally. From the point of view of

<sup>95</sup> Stähle, Nilsson and Lindblom, op. cit. (93), p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> King, op. cit. (14), pp. 352–5; Stähle, Nilsson and Lindblom, op. cit. (94), pp. 31–7; *IFIAS 1972–1992*, Toronto: IFIAS, 1992, p. 2; Hedén's copy in CGH, box 'F, IFIAS, vol. 3'.

the history of conferences, where focus is often on single events, the latter point is especially important.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> On temporalities see e.g. Helge Jordheim, 'Multiple times and the work of synchronization', *History and Theory* (2014) 53(4), pp. 498–518.

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