

## A short report about the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy Athens, 4-10 August 2013

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### 1. Introduction

The World Congress of Philosophy is a global meeting of philosophers held every five years in a different country under the auspices of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP). The FISP is a non-governmental world organization for Philosophy, established in 1948 and its main objectives are the following (<http://www.fisp.org>):

- *to contribute directly to the development of professional relations between philosophers of all countries, freely and with mutual respect;*
- *to foster contacts between institutions, societies and periodical publications dedicated to philosophy;*
- *to collect documentation useful for the development of philosophical studies; to sponsor every five years a World Congress;*
- *to promote philosophical education, to prepare publications of global interest and to contribute to the impact of philosophical knowledge on global problems.*

The FISP-members are philosophical societies and other similar philosophical institutions at national, regional and international levels (<http://www.fisp.org/members.html>). Among its approximately one hundred members, three-quarters are national and one-quarter international societies. FISP is a member of CIPSH, le Conseil International de Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (ICPHS in English). CIPSH, also a non-governmental organization, consists of thirteen World Federations and constitutes the link between these Federations and UNESCO (<http://www.cipsh.org/htm/presentbis.htm>).

**Table I.** List of World Congress of Philosophy location and year (1900-2013).

Location	Year	Location	Year
Paris, France	1900	Mexico City, Mexico	1963
Geneva, Switzerland	1904	Vienna, Austria	1968
Heidelberg, Germany	1908	Varna, Bulgaria	1973
Bologna, Italy	1911	Düsseldorf, Germany	1978
Naples, Italy	1924	Montreal, Canada	1983
Boston, USA	1926	Brighton, UK	1988
Oxford, UK	1930	Moscow, Russia	1993
Prague, Czech Republic	1934	Boston, USA	1998
Paris, France	1938	Istanbul, Turkey	2003
Amsterdam, Netherlands	1948	Seoul, South Korea	2008
Brussels, Belgium	1953	Athens, Greece	2013
Venice, Italy	1958	TBA (China?)	2018

The first International Congress of Philosophy was held in Paris in 1900 on the occasion of the “Universal Exhibition”. Among the participants were Henri Bergson, Maurice Blondel, M. Cantor, L. Couturat, H. Poincaré, and Bertrand Russell.

These conventions became firmly established after the Second World War. Each World Congress is sponsored by one of the member societies, which assumes responsibility for the organization of that Congress. The purpose of these events is to contribute to the development of professional relations between philosophers of all countries, promote philosophical education, and contribute to the impact of philosophical knowledge on global problems.

## **2. The structure of the Congress**

The XXIII World Congress of Philosophy had the motto «Philosophy as Inquiry and Way of Life» and was held mainly in the facility of the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens (4-10 August 2013).

Four plenary lectures:

- Philosophical method.
- Philosophy and the sciences.
- Pnyx Special Session: Philosophy as practical wisdom.
- Philosophy and public life.

and five special Symposia:

- Plato’s Academy Special Session: The relevance of Ancient Greek philosophy today.
- Kallirrhoe (Saint Fotini) Special Session: Eros.
- Philosophy and religions.
- Technology and the environment.
- Art and cultures.

have set the general orientation framework of the Congress. Hundreds of invited or contributed papers have been presented related to, more or less, numerous aspects of contemporary Philosophy-related thinking (cf. <http://www.wcp2013.gr/files/items/6/644/programmejuly29.pdf>).

Finally, two unique in the history of the World Congress of Philosophy highlights, should be mentioned. The official Opening Ceremony, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, in Odeum of Herodes Atticus, under the shadow of Acropolis and the Special Session in the recently excavated Aristotle’s Lyceum, made exceptionally accessible, for the first time to the public, that is, for the Congress delegates.



Figure 1. Views from the opening Ceremony in Odeum of Herodes Atticus,



Figure 2. Views from the special session in the recently excavated Aristotle's Lyceum.

### **3. Statistical processing of indicative data related to the Congress**

There is no doubt that in all World Conferences, the most important aspect is the provided possibility for mutual interaction with hundreds of colleagues with different cultural and social background. Therefore, such a conference constitutes a kind of mirror, reflecting, more or less reliably, the «state of the art» in the subject matter of the conference.

Especially a huge conference, as the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy, organized every 5 years and covering a broad spectrum of ideological, political, social, economic and spiritual aspects of almost every human activity, is the most appropriate statistical sample to obtain a glimpse of the main course and the major topics, of the collective advanced thinking worldwide.

It is the aim of this short report, to attempt a little-bit deeper insight in the «state of the art» of Philosophy and the «affiliated» disciplines, as reflected on the data included in the digital program, as provided by the organizers (<http://www.wcp2013.gr/files/items/6/644/programmejuly29.pdf>).



A prima-vista statistical processing of these data, allows for an approach, concerning first, the spatial distribution of Philosophy-related research activities world-wide, second, the leading figures and the cardinal issues, attracting the interest of this scientific community and finally, an approximation of the course, today and in the near future, of philosophical global thinking.

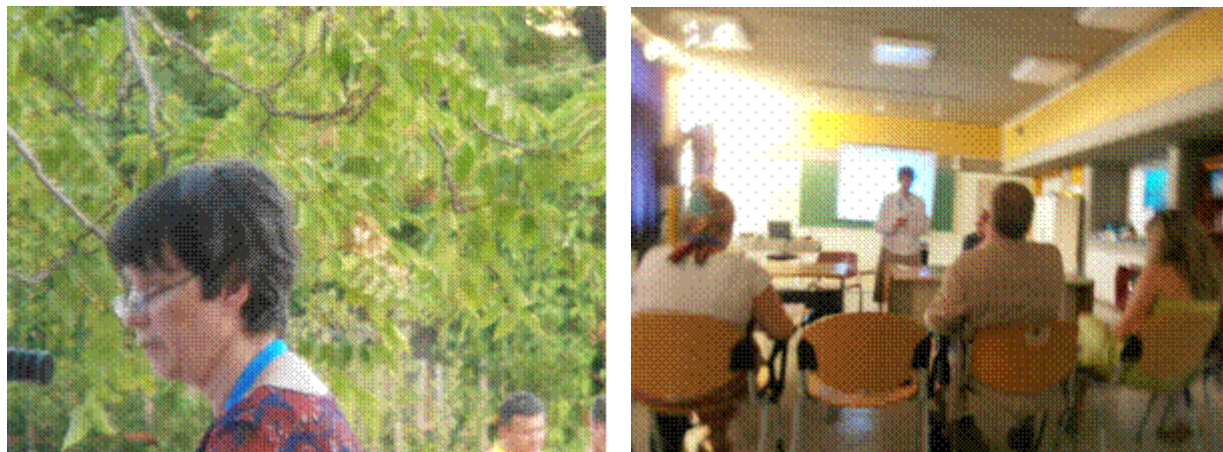


Figure 3. Open-air and in-class multilingual lecturing and opinion exchange.

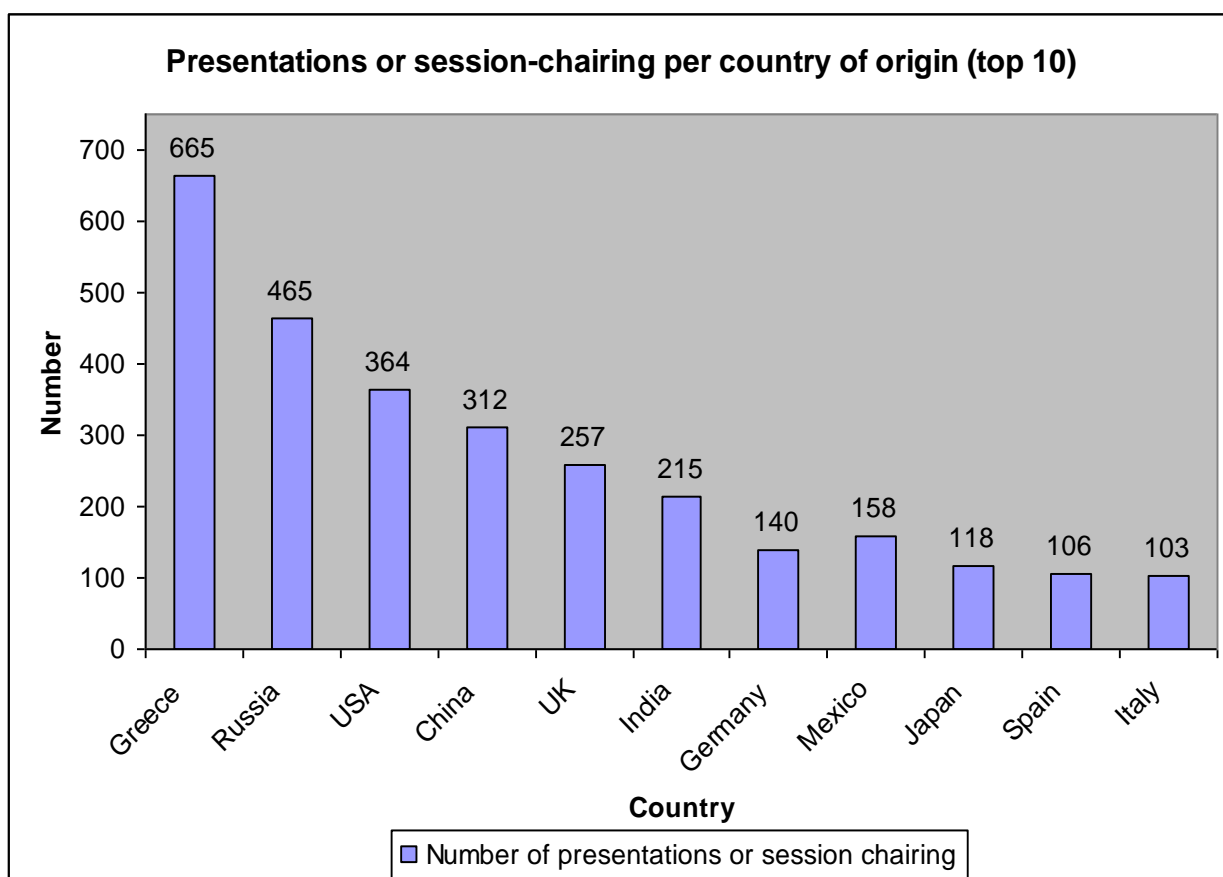


Figure 4. Number of presentations or session-chairing per country of origin for the top-10 countries (host-country Greece is omitted in the counting).

The number of presentations of delegates from a country and their participation in session-chairing, is an indicative, reliable, however not absolute indices, for the development level of Philosophy related research activity and education, in this country. Obviously, other factors, such as country population, financial aspects, vicinity to the host-country etc. are also important, because they influence the scholars' mobility and, thus, the number of submitted papers and chairing invitations.

Figure 4 displays the more or less expected top-10 «traditional» countries, concerning Philosophy relevant activities, ordered by the number of presentations or session-chairing of per country of origin. The host-country Greece has been omitted in the counting.

The second group of countries includes 21 countries with over 20 presentations or session-chairing, following the top-10, presented in Figure 5. This group of countries includes:

- First, «traditional» countries, concerning Philosophy related activities, such as Canada, France, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland etc.
- Second, «emerging» countries that have combined economical growth with an increasing presence in the international scientific community, including also Humanities, such as Brazil, Turkey, Argentina, S. Korea, Taiwan, S. Africa, Vietnam etc.

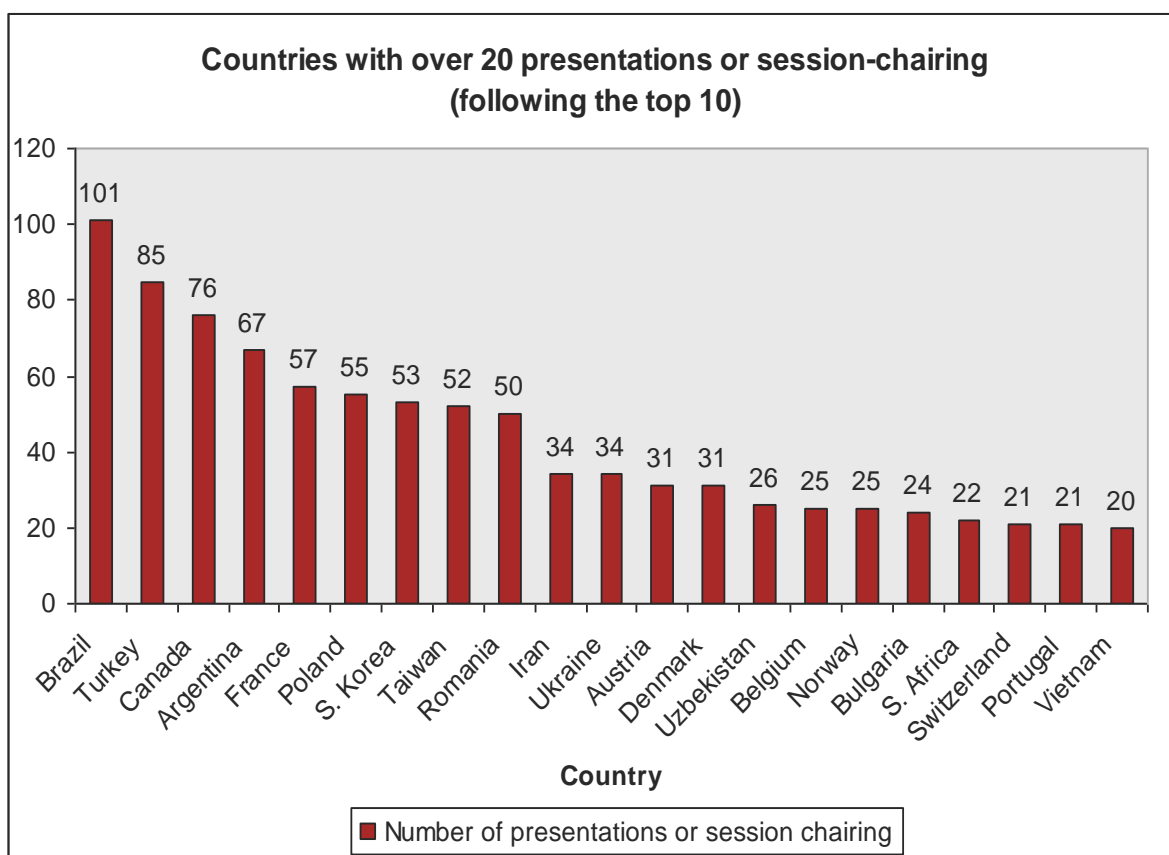


Figure 5. Countries with over 20 presentations or session-chairing.

Iran is an interesting case, as it is one of the few countries (followed by Nigeria), with strong Islamic influence and orientation (Turkey is traditionally considered as a «secular» society) that have been really actively represented in the XXIII WC of Philosophy. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been represented rather symbolic, since the economically strong and UAE, Qatar, Bahrein etc. did not appear at all.

There is no doubt that political, social and economical changes are somehow and somewhen reflected also in the ideological level. The sensible philosophically trained scholars are the first to receive these changes and incorporate them into their current specific research activity that will be presented in Journals and Conferences.

We have examined the spatial distribution of Philosophy-related research activities world-wide and the next step is to locate, which are the leading figures in Philosophy that still attract the interest of the scientific community.

Figure 6 displays the quite indicative frequency of major Philosophers appearing on a paper's title, presented in some of the numerous sessions of the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy. It is not really a surprise to see that Aristotle and Plato still attract the interest of the global philosophical community, more than any other great scholar for the last almost 24 Centuries. There is a good reason for that. The cardinal questions asked and the primary answers given in their monumental work, are still a vivid source of inspiration and motivation for thousands of contemporary «workers», trying to reformulate questions and answers in the modern reality procedures.

The third personality still attracting numerous researchers is Immanuel Kant, who is widely considered to be a central figure of modern philosophy. In a transitional world, changing rapidly, Kant's arguing that human concepts and categories, structure our view of the world and its laws, might sometimes seem controversial, however, the absence of reason is definitely becoming source of immorality... Ethical aspects become vital and contemporary scholars try a new interpretation of the «Ethics Grand-master» legacy, leading to useful conclusions for personal and collective use.

The three great «Mystae» Budda, Confucius and Socrates follow, a fact that reflects partially the advance of the East-West philosophical dialogue that was a key issue during the Athens Congress. The rest places are dominated by European philosophers (16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries), from Spinoza to Heidegger, with Marx following Socrates (!), concerning the indicative frequency of Philosophers appearing on a paper's or session's title.

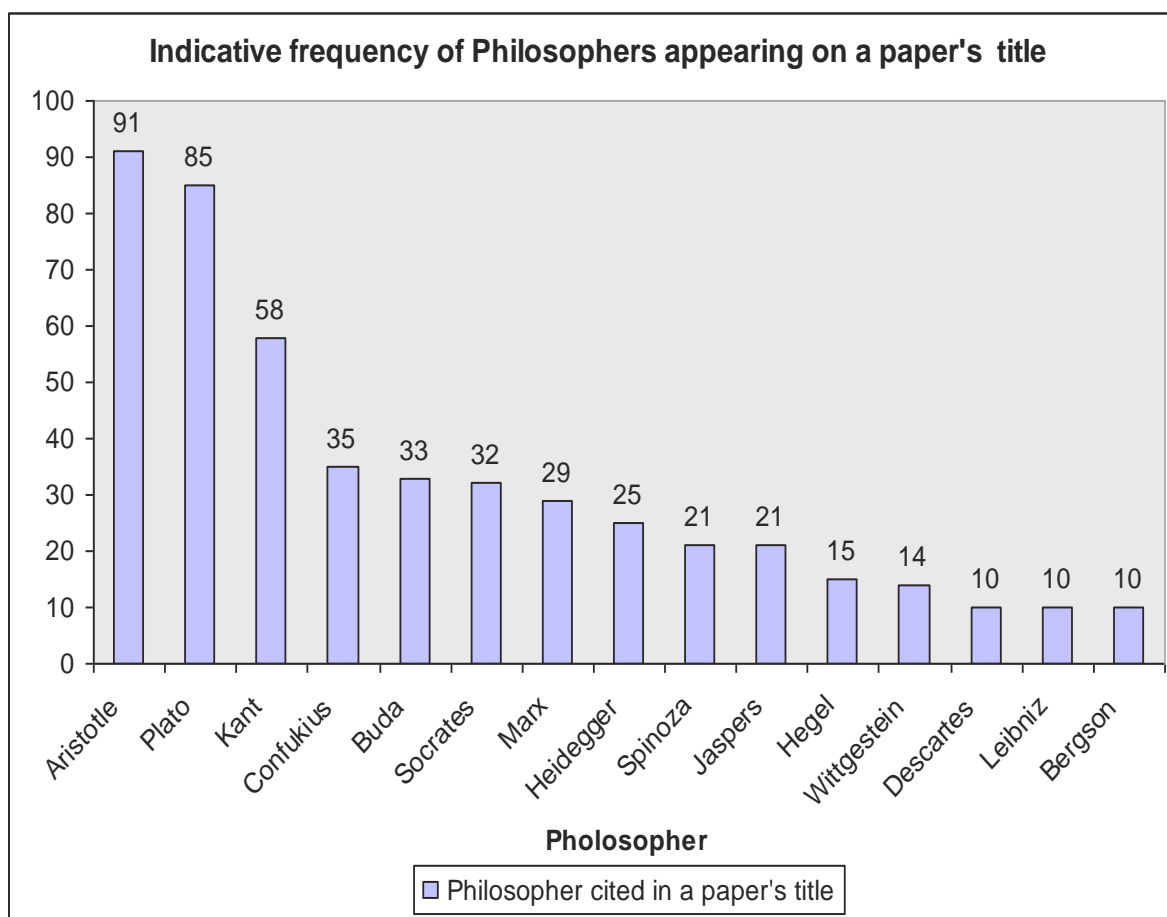


Figure 6. Indicative frequency of Philosophers appearing on a paper's title.

The results from the statistical evaluation presented in Figure 6 are consistent with the ones in Figure 7, presenting the indicative frequency of major topics appearing on a paper's or session's title. The leading topics are ethical/moral issues, corroborating the mutual interaction between crucial social and economical changes and the need for individual and collective «codes of contact». Further, ethical/moral issues are relevant in scientific and technological subject matter, for instance in contemporary Medicine, where numerous and multifarious issues are raised, concerning diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

Logic is taking the second place, among the interests of philosophical research presented in the Conference and is related to the incredible involvement of mathematical and computational methods, in Science, Technology and Everyday-life necessities. New questions are arising, concerning for example «Artificial Intelligence» and appropriate answers, concerning the human-machine relation, are expected from the scholars, for the new generation that grows with the perspective to massively remain far from the «main-stream» for a life-time.

A new societal architecture needs also a new approach in formal and life-long education, therefore, it is no surprise that education is number three, concerning the indicative frequency of major topics appearing on a paper's or session's title.

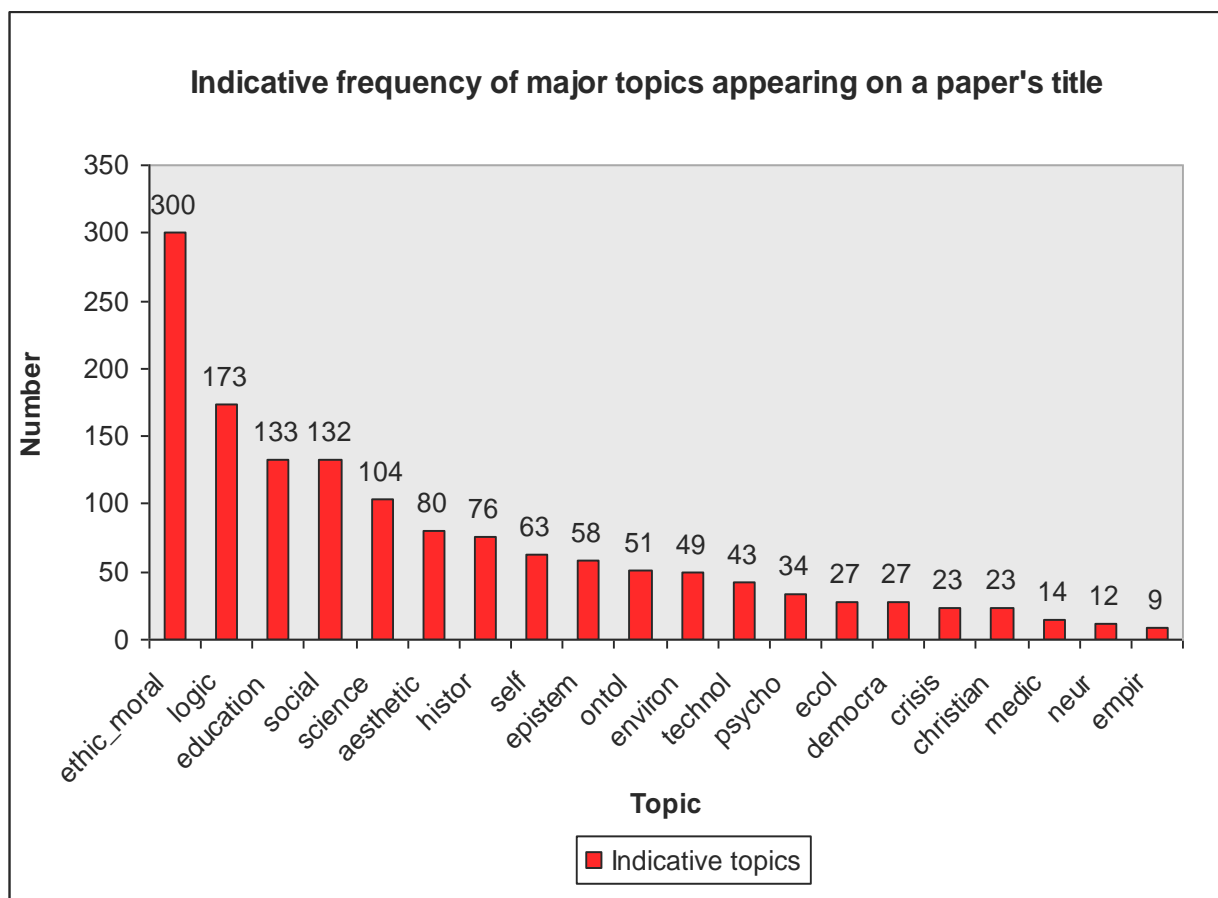


Figure 7. Indicative frequency of major philosophical topics appearing on a paper's title

Social and Natural Sciences, Aesthetics, History, Psychology, Epistemology, Environment and Ecology, Technology and Political Philosophy are following. It is not a coincidence that these disciplines should constitute the kernel of contemporary Education for all young people worldwide, for the decades to come, if we want to prevent the marginalizing of the majority of earth's population.

The contribution of Philosophers and «allied» Scientists, towards such a necessary, however, tremendous change is both, necessary and inevitable. The presence of thousands of young Delegates from all over the world, their mutual interaction for a week, under Attica's blue sky and hot sun, surrounded by the ruins of the society which gave birth to Democracy, Philosophy and Culture, constitutes a global Amfiktyonia, probably more effective than the UNO, and creates an experience that will escort and encourage them for ever, where ever they live, what ever they do...





Figure 8. The fare-well time has come...

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

The fare-well time has come... A huge event like the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy Athens, 4-10 August 2013 has had, as you might expect, its difficulties, a missed bus, a displaced session or a long line to take food, or even an authoritarian chairman... But all these are peanuts.

The event was a unique experience, both, for as living in Athens, without appreciating our tough but only one of its kind environment, and our guests, whose excitement and admiration, might remind and teach us, that we have to revise a lot, in our everyday life, in our academic misery, in our relationships and numerous other issues, that we have forgotten for a long time...

The transitional time we are living demands a lot... The fact of the Congress is that Philosophy and the “allied Sciences” should form an interdisciplinary front to support the emerging translational global society, to overcome the gap of poverty, of functional illiteracy, of indifference and of greed that divides the world in numerous fragments.

We are the heirs of a glorious past; however, we must participate again in the creation of a perspective, based on the values of our legacy and we should adapt ourselves to the needs and the challenges of the present and the near future. That is, we should not be just inheritors, but we have to become their successors...

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Athens, August 13<sup>th</sup> 2013