

**Report of the South African National Committee (SANC) of  
the IGU to the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Geographical Congress,  
Beijing, China, 21-25 August 2016**

It is a pleasure to present to the Quadrennial Report of the South African National Committee (SANC) of the IGU to the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Geographical Congress, Beijing, China, 21-25 August 2016. South African geographers have continued to make notable strides in participating in IGU activities. The Year 2016 is a milestone as the Society of South African Geographers celebrates a century of Geography teaching and research at tertiary level in South Africa. This Report presents an overview of the activities of the SANC and the Society of South African Geographers (SSAG). There is a symbiotic relationship between the SANC and the SSAG, and a significant overlap in membership.

**Terms of Reference: SANC of IGU**

- To inform all South African geographers of the IGU research programmes and related matters. Where possible to direct South African geographical research to fit in with the appropriate commissions and study groups. To also keep geographers in the Republic of South Africa informed of important decisions taken by the Union.
- To advise the national adhering body to ICSU, the National Research Foundation (NRF), on matters relating to its membership of the IGU.
- Through the Secretary to be kept informed of the activities of the IGU.
- To make recommendations to the NRF on the most effective method of national co-operation and integration with the activities of the IGU.
- To make recommendations on delegates to attend General Assemblies of the IGU and to seek and advise on sources of funding if these are not otherwise available.
- Ultimately to expand representation on IGU Commissions and Study Groups.
- To liaise with ICSU-SA and other national committees associated with Geography (e.g. INQUA, IUGS, IGBP and ICA).

**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE IGU: 2010 - 2016**

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### **South Africans on IGU Commissions**

Professor ME Meadows, University of Cape Town, Secretary-General and Treasurer, IGU

Professor Brij Maharaj, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Global Change and Human Mobility

Professor Maano Ramutsindela, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Knowledges, and Commission on Political Geography

Dr Teresa Dirsuweit, UNISA, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Cultural Geography

Prof Sanette Ferreira, University of Stellenbosch, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Tourism, Leisure and Global Change

Prof Werner Nel, University of Fort Hare, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Geomorphology and Society

Professor Roddy Fox, Rhodes University, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Marginalization, Globalization and Regional and Local Response

Professor Andre Horn, UNISA, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Urban Geography

Professor Gordon Pirie, University of Cape Town, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Geography and Transport

Professor Thandi Nzama, University of Zululand, Steering Committee Member, Commission on Geoheritage

### **IGU Commission Meetings in South Africa**

The Commission on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Knowledges and Commission on Political Geography held a meeting in conjunction with the Society of South African Geographers' Conference at the University of Cape Town in June 2012.

The IGU Urban Commission Conference - *Life in a changing urban landscape*, hosted by the Department of Geography, Environmental Management and Energy Studies (University of Johannesburg) and The Department of Geography (University of Stellenbosch), 21 – 26 July 2013. The Organizers of the Conference called for papers that offer provocative, insightful and novel ways of looking at an ever changing urban landscape on the following themes:

- Technological innovations and creative activities in cities
- Contested social spaces
- Creating sustainability
- Dilemmas of aging cities
- Increasing insecurity

- Urban heritage and conservation
- Urban governance
- Complex urban systems.

Peer-reviewed papers presented at the conference were published: Kotze, N., Donaldson, R and Visser, G. (Eds.) Living in a Changing Urban Landscape, Proceeding of the IGU Urban Geography Commission, Johannesburg & Stellenbosch, South Africa.

### **Society of South African Geographers**

The Society of South African Geographers is a democratic, non-partisan, non-racial and non-sexist scientific organisation. Its objective is to advance the research and educational activities of all South African geographers by:

- collectively representing the interests of South African geographers regionally, nationally and internationally;
- encouraging and supporting high quality research and teaching in Geography;
- providing a national geographic information resource for geographers and interested groups;
- stimulating awareness of geographic and environmental matters through academic collaboration with other intellectual communities and accountable interaction with the public at large.

The Society achieves these objectives by

- publishing and effectively disseminating scholarly research results in The South African Geographical Journal and other occasional publications,
- through the organization of prestige lectures,
- by encouraging regional and special interest group activities,
- by organising a biennial conference, and
- by performing other services such as representing geographers on various official Department of Education subject groups.

Membership of the Society is open to all who share its objectives.

The Society recognizes the achievements of its members through several types of award inter alia, the Jubilee Bursary (for an Honours Degree student), the Bronze Medal (for outstanding Masters' Degree thesis), the Gold Medal (for outstanding service to the geographical community in Southern Africa) and the Fellowship (for outstanding and sustained scholarly contributions).

The Society also provides seed funding to support the Annual Conference of South African Geography students.

The SSAG also paid the affiliation fees of the

### **Research Output**

The South African academic/research Geography community is relatively small, numbering about two hundred. Nevertheless, this is a vibrant and dynamic community, publishing their research in national and international journals and edited book collections that reflect the range of IGU Commissions. The list of published papers can be downloaded from the SSAG's website <http://www.ssag.co.za/#> (under Reports).

### **South African Geographical Journal**

The Society of South African Geographers (SSAG) in partnership with Routledge Taylor and Francis Group publishes the South African Geographical Journal which is peer-reviewed, twice per year – and with additional special editions on occasions. About 350 local and international institutions subscribe to the Journal. The Journal is also distributed to all members of the Society at no cost. The South African Geographical Journal considers publication of original material on all aspects of Geography, both physical and human, with particular relevance to southern Africa. Material published includes peer-reviewed research papers, review articles on specific topics of geographical interest and short research notes, and book reviews. The major requirement for publication is the significance and value of the work for the development for Geography and geographers.

## **SSAG Conferences**

The SSAG hosts a Geography Conference on a biennial basis. The 2012 Conference was held at the University of Cape Town in June, and the 2014 Conference (also in June) at the University of Fort Hare. The Society will hold its Centenary Conference in September 2016 at Stellenbosch University, where the Society was founded.

South African Geography also prides itself in that annually, for the last 41 years, Geography students have held their own Conferences, with some support from the SSAG. In alternate years, the Students' Conferences are held with the Academic Conference to foster greater student-academic interaction.

## **'SSAG' Centenary – Origin and Growth of Geography Discipline<sup>1</sup>**

Geography in South Africa achieved a very important milestone with the centenary of teaching Geography at University. The introduction of Geography as an academic discipline at the tertiary level in South Africa preceded the establishment of Universities and Geography Departments (Stellenbosch University the first in 1920), and the South African Geographical Society which a twenty-nine-year-old Scot, James Hutcheon, established in 2017 at the University of the Witwatersrand. The teaching of Geography in South Africa commenced in 1914 at Victoria College (the forerunner to Stellenbosch University), albeit by non-geographers. According to Barnard (2016) the earliest geographers who exclusively lectured Geography at universities were James Marnoch Hutcheon (1888-1921), who was appointed to the South African School of Mines and Technology (after 1922 known as Witwatersrand University) in 1917; Petrus Serton (1888-1963) at Stellenbosch in 1920; Francis Plummer (1892-1970) at the Transvaal University College (after 1930 the University of Pretoria) in 1923; and William John Talbot (1908-1995) at the University of Cape Town in 1936.

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from: Visser, G., Donaldson, R., and Seethal, C. 2016. Introduction. In G. Visser, R. Donaldson and C. Seethal (eds.), The Origin and Growth of Geography as a Discipline at South African Universities: Early 1900s to 2016. Stellenbosch: Sun Media.

Four phases in the establishment of the South African Geography Departments can be identified. The first can be seen as the founding phase that led to the establishment of the pioneer Departments (three Afrikaans and one English-speaking) at Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Free State and Witwatersrand in the early 1920s.

The second phase extends from the 1930s up to the implementation of the historically white universities (in the 1960s) in terms of the state's apartheid policy. The second phase constitutes the strengthening and consolidation of Geography Departments at four types of tertiary institutions: the English-speaking Universities of Cape Town, Rhodes and Natal; the establishment of the first Geography Department for black students only (at the University of Fort Hare); the introduction of Geography at the Country's only distance education Institution (University of South Africa); and the institution of a Geography Department at the Afrikaans-speaking Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education.

The third phase saw the establishment of Geography Departments at the new Historically Black Universities (HBUs) within the apartheid policy frameworks that enforced separate development at all levels of society, including higher education. Apart from Fort Hare, the HBUs had their origins in the structuring of apartheid higher education as propagated under the provisions of the Extension of Universities Act of 1959. This Act led to the establishment of five rural-based Universities (and Geography Departments) in the former Homelands: The University of the North in Lebowa and a campus in Qwa Qwa; University of Zululand in Kwadlangezwa; University of Transkei in Umtata; University of Bophuthatswana in Mafikeng and the University of Venda in Thohoyandou. In addition, three urban racially-based Institutions were established: the University of the Western Cape in Belville, Cape Town for coloured students; the University of Durban-Westville in Durban, for Indian students; and the multi-campus mixed tuition mode Institution of the University of Vista with campuses in seven centres (Bloemfontein, Daveyton, Mamelodi, Port Elizabeth, Sebokeng, Soweto and Welkom) and one distance education campus in central Pretoria. In 1951, the National Party government established a Military Academy at Saldanha Bay (near Cape Town) where Military Geography was taught. In the 1970s the Rand Afrikaanse University (RAU) was established to cater primarily for the needs of Afrikaners in Johannesburg.



The final phase reflects the post-apartheid era, with a number of Departments from various Institutions merging to reflect a radically re-imagined higher education landscape, posing different and new challenges for disciplines in a radically changed national context. In addition, there was the establishment of an international University in Johannesburg in the form of a branch campus of the Australia's Monash University. The most recent Geography Department is at the University of Mpumalanga (UM) (which was established in 2014). Geography will be offered at UM within the School of Biology and Environmental Science, beginning in January 2017. Importantly, Geography was also taught as a discipline within the Faculties of Education at some tertiary Institutions.

Many themes of University Geography teaching were evident in different institutions. First, many Geography Departments concentrated on training students to become Geography educators, and for service in local governments, the former regional services councils, in the Bantustan Homelands and in provincial government. Second, in the 1990s, the Geography Departments repositioned themselves and adapted their focus to greater "industry relevant" and applied courses and programmes, such as environmental and resource management, Geographical Information Systems and Remote Sensing, climate change and sustainability.

The post-apartheid era has also witnessed an increased number of international geographical scholarly exchanges at the individual level, via collaborative research partnerships, and through attendances at international conferences, such as the International Geography Union meetings and Commissions, and the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Conventions. South African Geography has – since its inception - been characterized by paradigmatic shifts from Regional Geography to Spatial Science, Radical Geographies (Critical Geographies), and Cultural (Postmodern Geographies) and Feminist Geographies – all in tandem with the international developments. Moreover, in the midst of the 2015-2016 University students' protests – epitomized by the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign - South African geographers are being increasingly challenged to reflect more seriously on, and embrace, the decolonization and the Africanisation of the Geography curriculum.

## **The Future**

The challenges facing Geography and geographers in South Africa include the following:

- i) Increasing SAAG membership (including students and educators);
- ii) Supporting the development of emerging academics and researchers; and
- iii) Increasing the public profile of the discipline and associated career opportunities.

However, geographical activities cannot be confined to ivory towers and they have implications for praxis beyond. There is a need for progressive geographers to put their talents at the service of disadvantaged groups outside the confines of the university. The ultimate challenge for Geography in South Africa is to maintain and sustain a critical intellectual agenda; survive as a discipline in an era of commodification, restructuring and institutional mergers; engage in socially relevant research that is sensitive to the stresses and strains of transformation; to ensure the Africanisation of the discipline, both in terms of institutional and organisational structures, as well as the curriculum. The responsibility of the university is to provide the space for critical intellectuals to develop and ideas to flourish in what some have described as the discipline for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



**Professor Brij Maharaj**

**Chairperson: SANC-IGU**

**4 August 2016**

# Celebrating a Century of Geography in South Africa



**The Society of South African Geographers 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference,  
Stellenbosch, 25 - 29 September 2016**

The first South African university lecturer in geography, James Hutcheon, was appointed to a position in the then South African School of Mines and Technology (later the University of the Witwatersrand, Wits) in 1917. A hundred years later, in 2016, there will be over 150 scholars teaching geography at 16 university departments across the country. The Society of South African Geographers (SSAG) invites you to join us in celebrating a century of geography teaching and research at tertiary level in South Africa by attending this historic occasion to be held at the STIAS conference centre in Stellenbosch (50km from Cape Town).

In the 2001 SSAG *State of the Discipline Report* it was said that disciplines of learning are at the base of human development and that they make fundamental contributions in determining the quality of human society. Their acceptance, role and continuity are determined by the relative contribution they make to development in both material and non-material contexts. At the 2016 SSAG conference we will celebrate, rethink and reinterpret the multiplicity of facets of geography, both in a historical and contemporary South African context. The five-day conference will host geographers (academics and students) from around the world and feature the following:

- Keynote presentations from distinguished South African and other international scholars and researchers
- The latest research: - Presentations and posters by geography scholars and students from around the world who have a special interest in South African geography
- Exhibit hall: Booths and exhibits showcasing recent publications and new geographic technologies
- Workshops: A writing workshop for emerging academics
- Field trips: Attendees also will have several options to explore the rich human and physical geography of the Cape Winelands and the Cape Town metropolitan region through informative field trips and excursions during and after the conference
- Special events

More information about the conference, such as the timeline and key deadlines for registration and submission of abstracts, how to organize a special session and specific conference themes, will be announced in December 2015. Bookmark: [www.ssag.co.za](http://www.ssag.co.za) or get on our mailing list: [SSAG2016@sun.ac.za](mailto:SSAG2016@sun.ac.za)