

INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL UNION
INTERNATIONAL UNION OF THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

COMMISSION ON THE HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

NEWSLETTER 16

DECEMBER 1996

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At the recent IGU world congress in The Hague, the General Assembly voted to renew the Commission on the History of Geographic Thought for another four-year term. There is no question that the impressive list of the Commission's accomplishments to date played an important role in the positive decision for renewal. Speaking on behalf of the Commission as a whole, I would like to take this opportunity to thank most warmly those who have devoted their efforts to achieving this success, and in particular the past two chairpersons of the Commission Keiichi Takeuchi and Anne Buttimer. Professor Buttimer, who is the outgoing chair, made a comprehensive presentation to the Congress, in which she outlined the past activities of the Commission. An abstract of this paper is included in this Newsletter.

Also included below is a statement of the objectives of the new Commission, which correspond to those adopted by the Executive Committee. Taking full advantage of its past accomplishments, the Commission will turn its attention in the upcoming period to those aspects of geographic thought which are central for the IGU and for the development of geography. I hope that the programme of future conferences listed below will be read as an invitation for everyone to take part in a fruitful international collaboration.

Vincent Berdoulay

Planned conferences (provisional list):

"Religion, Ideology, and Geography," Poland, July, 1997.

"Technology and Geographic Thought," IUHPS, Liege, 1997.

Pre-congress symposium and Regional Conference of the IGU, Lisbon, 1998.

Symposium on geographical archives, Leipzig, 1998.

Symposium devoted primarily to the problems of developing countries (date and place to be determined, Africa, 1999).

IGU Congress, Seoul, 2000.

Anne Buttimer's State-of-the-Art Lecture in Den Haag, August 1996

Geography lies at the heart of scholarly traditions in many world civilisations, inviting enquiry into the nature of the universe and the dynamics of planet Earth, prompting exploration and adventure, the naming and claiming of territory, and the fabrication of theories about relationships between human societies and their environments. As academic discipline and formal course in universities and schools, geography has acquired other histories, few uncontested. During its disciplinary period, geography has continued to mirror the fluctuating fortunes of nations and empires, «fitting» itself within nationally-defined structures of pedagogy and research, while also remaining attuned to the changing paradigmatic winds blowing within Big Science internationally. Tensions between scholarly integrity and the structural imperatives of disciplinary identity have at times led to an ignoring of the lived geographies of everyday life, and those inscribed in taken-for-granted lifeways, landscapes and built environments. The IGU Commission on the History of Geographical Thought has in recent years explored varieties of geographical knowledge - academic (scientific), official (applied), and popular (folk) - probing their origins, modes of articulation, and implications for the construction of images - of self and the other, of "home place" and "other's space", of "nature", "gender", "culture" and "environmental concern". It has also opened enquiry to a wide cross-cultural range of voices - including those at the cutting edge of research conducted by other IGU Commissions and Working Groups - thereby affirming the central aims of the IGU, i.e., to promote better communication and mutual understanding among practitioners of geography throughout the world.

Objectives 1996-2000

Rationale for the Commission's programme:

The current and often violent conflicts linked to the political and cultural fragmentation of the world invite us to a renewed study of the plurality of the ways of conceiving the human occupation and use of the earth, as well as of the means of making these views compatible. How has geographic thought conceptualised cultural diversity, biodiversity, and the global perspective and how has it tried to reconcile diverging points of view? The progressive consciousness of the global scale of environmental issues commands that the great intellectual streams of modernity be revisited: How has geographic thought cut across these issues? What has helped or prevented its contribution to them? What can be its potential contribution for finding appropriate approaches? How has geographic thought dealt with the approach of other disciplines in relationship with these issues?

Overall theme:

"Ideas and contexts in the history of geographic approaches to global diversity, fragmentation and change".

Interrelated objectives:

- To clarify the antecedents of current geographic discourse on global change and diversity.

- To revisit the relationship of geographic approaches to these issues with those of other sciences and/or great intellectual streams which have played a role in structuring our views of the world.

- To specify the strength and weaknesses of the institutional settings whereby geographic thought is produced in relationship to global change and fragmentation.

- To continue the global, cross-cultural investigation of geographic thought, and to provide the IGU as a whole with this reflective view on the practice of geography. Special attention will be given to the renaissance of geographical thinking.

Main means:

- Symposia will remain a major activity, as they have proved successful in attracting scholars from a wide variety of cultures. With this concern in mind, the Commission will keep its bilingual policy and it will renew its efforts to find additional funding for the participation of younger colleagues from poorer countries.

- The Commission will continue its publication policy, especially its selection and reworking of symposia contributions in order to produce well balanced, high academic level volumes.

- As illustrated in its initiative for a joint session at The Hague Congress, the Commission will explore more opportunities for joint sessions or symposia with other commissions on specific topics of common interest.

- In order to develop cross-disciplinary cooperation and to promote geography among other sciences, the Commission will strengthen its ties with the IUPHS (International Union for the Philosophy and History of Science), of which it is also a standing commission.

- In order to develop cooperation with other IGU commissions, and since all aspects of geography must pay some attention to its historiographical-philosophical base, the Commission will also endeavour to organise contributions to conferences and symposia in various places around the world. The Commission's contribution may take various forms, e.g., participation of a few specialists, lists of potential contributors, useful references.

- Sub-committees will be created within the Commission, with the purpose of furthering specific tasks.

Commission meetings at the International Geographical Congress in Den Haag (August 4, 1996):

The integration of the work of the Commission into the general programme of the Congress (instead of taking place at a separate satellite meeting) was something of an experiment, and was felt to have had both advantages and disadvantages. The theme of the Congress: "Land, Sea and Human Effort", led to the holding of a joint session with Commission 17 (Marine Geography) which was valuable. On the other hand the History of Geographical Thought sessions attracted a number of papers marginal to the main work of the Commission, and which some delegates felt came under the headings of Historical or Cultural Geography. As is often the case at major international meetings, many papers had to be packed into all-too-short sessions, with the result that delegates had little time - in some cases only 12 minutes - to present their material. Nevertheless the range of topics was wide and stimulating.

Several important works were published to coincide with the Congress, all with the active involvement of Commission members. The history of the IGU has been carefully reviewed in: *Geographes face au monde:*

L'Union Géographique Internationale et les Congrès Internationaux de Géographie, edited by Marie-Claire Robic, Anne-Marie Briand and Mechthild Rössler, with an introduction by P Pinchemel (Editions L'Harmattan). A complementary study is provided by G.J. Martin in the IGU Bulletin (vol. 46, p. 5-27): "One hundred and twenty-five years of Geographical Congresses and the formation of the International Geographical Union: or from Antwerp to the Hague". Another book was released at the Congress: *Geography and Professional Practice*, edited by V Berdoulay & J A van Grinkel, in the Netherlands Geographical Studies series.

A significant event of the Congress was the presentation of the state-of-the-art lecture on the History of Geographic Thought by Anne Buttner. In this, Anne reviewed the history and work of the Commission since its formation in 1968. Illustrating her discussion with photographs of its activities, publications based on meetings, and other memorabilia, she distinguished three phases in the "growing-up" of the Commission: Foundation (1968-'77), Consolidation (1978-'87), Expansion and Diversification (1988-1996). The debt of the Commission to the late Professor Walter Freeman was acknowledged.

The main sessions had been organised by Joost Hauer and Vincent Berdoulay. In this short summary it is impossible to list all the papers (over 30) given in the Commission's sessions, and it is invidious to make selections. A brief indication of some of the main themes is all that can be given. A session on «Academic, official and folk geographies and the nature/culture theme» attracted papers from France, New Zealand, India, Poland and the UK. The theme "Institutions, ideology and geographic thought", covered a diversity of topics including: the role of women in the IGU, the ecological approach, environmental determinism in South Africa, and links between religion and geography. Another session, headed «Professional practice and geographical thought», also ranged widely, including mentions of the application of geographical ideas to practical problems in the USA, the Netherlands and elsewhere. As always, the notion of "Integration and geographical thought" attracted interest with seven papers, exploring the theme as seen from a variety of countries, including the USA, Russia, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Poland.

The combined session with the Marine Geography Commission was also wide-ranging, the title being "Images of the sea: maritime cultures, geopolitics and seapower". It included images of the sea from the points of view of Italian fascism, Atlantic France, the Maories and Europeans in New Zealand, and the Torres Strait Islanders of northern Australia.

Several themes crossed from session to session. It was interesting to note how, in a secular world, religious ideas continued to be explored by geographers. The relationship between art and the appreciation (or understanding) of the environment was mentioned by several speakers. And while the lives and work of particular luminaries continue to be discussed (both Ratzel and Vidal de la Blache were mentioned), broader, philosophical issues occupied the attention of many other scholars.

While the majority of papers were given in English, a number were presented in French, and some of the discussion took place in that language. By this means, the Commission has kept on benefitting from contributions coming from various ways of thought.

Patrick Armstrong, Western Australia