

Reports from conferences and meetings

International Symposium : *Languages and visions of Landscapes and Territory* Miraflores de la Sierra (Spain), 5-8 February

The International Symposium « Languages and visions of landscape and territory » was held in Madrid last February 2009. It was organized jointly by the *History of Geographical Thought Working Group* of the *Association of Spanish Geographers (AGE)* and the *International Geographical Union Commission on the History of Geography*, formerly named *Commission on the History of Geographical Thought*. It was the first meeting driven by the *IGU Commission on the History of Geography* since its recent renewal and renaming, approved during the *IGU Conference* held at Tunis in August 2008.

The Symposium coincided with the IVth Colloquium of the aforementioned Spanish Working Group, which was created, in its turn, in 2001. It was held at “La Cristalera”, a residence and a conference hall owned by the *Autónoma University of Madrid* in the village of Miraflores de la Sierra, which is located in the foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama, 50 km North of the city of Madrid. A Committee made up by professors and researchers from *Autónoma* and *Carlos III Universities of Madrid* was responsible for the Symposium’s local organisation.

Likewise, Professor Nicolás Ortega-Cantero (*Autónoma University of Madrid*), current chairman of the *AGE Geographical Thought Working Group*, and Professor Jacobo García-Álvarez (*Carlos III University of Madrid*), current chairman of the *IGU Commission on the History of Geography*, were in charge of the scientific coordination of the meeting.

Two special lectures were given throughout the Symposium, one at the very beginning, and the other one at the closing ceremony. There were twelve paper sessions, in which forty-eight communications were presented and discussed by fifty participants coming from ten different countries. Two excursions, closely related to the main topics of the Symposium, took place into the Sierra de Guadarrama and the historic city of Toledo.

The opening lecture was given by Professor Vincent Berdoulay (*Pau University*), who was the Chairman of the *IGU Commission on the History of Geographical Thought* between 1996 and 2004. He lectured on the topic *L'histoire de la géographie au défi de la prospective: patrimoine, mémoire et enjeux iconographiques*.

The communications presented at the Symposium were organized around two thematic axes, having the same number of participants, and carried out in parallel sessions. The first thematic axis was devoted to languages of landscape and territory, emphasizing three essential realms: cartography, rhetoric and iconography; whereas the second one focused on connections between landscapes and territories, and the building of identities and places of memory. As a complement to the working sessions, an ending lecture was given by Professor Eduardo Martínez de Pisón (*Autónoma University of Madrid*), who dealt with the history of the scientific and cultural discovering of the Sierra de Guadarrama and with the ongoing process of turning this natural space into a National Park, within which Prof. Martínez de Pisón has played a fundamental role. On the occasion of the Symposium, a business meeting of the *IGU Commission on the History of Geography* did also take place, in order to work out the guidelines for the next three years. It was the first Commission’s business meeting since the recent renewal of its Steering Committee, and some members of the preceding Steering Committees took part in it too.



The Symposium participants at the Mirador de los Robledos (Rascafría), during the excursion into the Sierra de Guadarrama (photo by Paloma Puente-Lozano)

The results of the Symposium were very positive, because, among other reasons, the high quality of the lectures and communications, most of which will be published soon in a book, as well as the cordial atmosphere, affection and intense relationship among participants, who were all accommodated in “La Cristalera” residence. Many of us will also recall for a long time the special beauty of the Sierra de Guadarrama’s landscape during these days, due to a particularly strong snowfall, one of the biggest in this region over the last ten years, which everyone had the chance of experiencing during the excursion carried out on February 7th. Finally, the Symposium turned out to be very successful in its purpose of relaunching the UGI Commission on the History of Geography’s activity, and working out its future guidelines, full of encouraging projects.

The next Symposium of the UGI Commission on the History of Geography will be taking place in the Regional Conference of Tel Aviv, in July 2010, with the guiding topic “Geography, civilizations and cultural identities in historical perspective”.

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