



Conference Report: IAG/NZGS Conference 2014, 30 June – 2 July, Melbourne, Australia

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The Institute of Australian Geographers and the New Zealand Geographical Society held a joint conference at the University of Melbourne between the 30th of June and the 2nd of July 2014. These two organisations organise a joint conference of this nature every four years, with the last one held in Christchurch in 2010. This last conference was in collaboration with the University of Canterbury's Department of Geography.

Lincoln University was represented at the conference by lecturer Ronlyn Duncan, recent Masters graduate Fiona Myles, Waterways senior tutor Julie Abbari, and New Zealand Geographical Society post-graduate representative Nick Kirk. Ronlyn, Fiona and Julie all presented research at the conference.

Key note addresses were held on Monday and Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoon. A field trip was arranged to the Yarra Valley for Tuesday afternoon. Their presentations were organised into a series of one hour time slots, with each presenter allocated 10 minutes to address their topic. Due to the large amount of topics being presented in this small timeframe, it was difficult to gain an understanding of the entire conference.

The size of the conference is a reflection of the breadth and depth of research presented, with broad conference themes reflecting the current state of geographical research. Keynote speaker Noel Castree supported this trend, as opposed to trying to compartmentalise and rigidly define the discipline. Conference topics included

sustainability in the anthropocene, urban geographies, economic geographies, gender, emotion and effect, climate change mitigation, cultural geographies and natural hazard research.

The post-graduate day on Sunday was so well attended that the planned tour of Melbourne's graffiti art was cancelled due to the high numbers. Post-graduates were instead invited to a question and answer session with various high profile geographers such as Michael Watts and Jamie Peck. The geographers shared their expertise on the ever changing nature of academia and academic praxis. Experienced researchers were of the opinion that the discipline was developing more rapidly than it had in the past.

The Canterbury region featured in Professor Eric Pawson's keynote address, as he discussed the effects of the 2010/11 earthquakes on teaching at the University of Canterbury. Pawson argued that the "earthquakes affect[ed] different communities in different ways – [with the] response not geographically bounded". Pawson identified the Student Volunteer Army, and his own students' engagement with redevelopment issues in the centre and east of Christchurch as positives that came out of the disaster. In concluding, Pawson argued that "a new humane campus can co-exist within [the] modern neoliberal framework for universities". Pawson believed architecture was of great importance for learning.

Following Pawson was Lauren Rickards, who presented on the anthropocene and the theories triggering a range of assessments about the

future. Rickards' presentation engaged with scenario planning and other techniques of futurism to explore how narratives of an intensively human shaped world will be generated. Rickards presentation was particularly inspirational, and built on recent calls within geography for a greater focus on future(s) research (Anderson and Adey, 2012).

Ronlyn Duncan presented in a session discussing the methods and politics of decentralising environmental governance. Duncan discussed the difficulties of setting nutrient limits for freshwater water quality in New Zealand. Duncan highlighted that farmers clearly want good water quality but have quite a different understanding of the issues than scientists or policy makers. Therefore, scientific limits set through policy will be disputed by farmers and are unlikely to be wholeheartedly embraced. Even if farmers agree with the limits and the science, the economic realities of modern farming might prevent them from taking the required actions to meet those limits. Duncan's paper was well received and the session informative and engaging.

Julie Abbari presented a talk on 'starlight preservation and cultural wellbeing' in a session on indigenous participation in natural resource planning. Abbari discussed how starlight is a natural resource of cultural significance to Maori, due to the stars and constellations being used as navigational and weather forecasting guides and seasonal markers in mahinga kai (food gathering) practices. Protection of this natural resource, in effect, protects the indigenous knowledge and cultural practices connected to it. Application of the Resource Management Act 1991 to protect starlight visibility by preventing light pollution is therefore consistent with its mandate to enable communities to provide for their cultural wellbeing.

In a session on the social and spatial lives of policy, Fiona Myles presented findings from her thesis research which examines the introduction of water measurement regulations through the theoretical lens of co-production. In particular, Myles focussed on how new identities were constructed with the introduction of these regulations. With the session finishing earlier than expected, Myles' presentation unexpectedly

became the topic of a 15 minute discussion amongst the session attendees that proved to be both challenging and enlightening.

REFERENCES

Anderson, B., Adey, P. (2012). *Future geographies. Environment and Planning A, 44(7), 1529-2535.*