

CHRONICLE

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Report on the 2014 Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

London, August 27–29, 2014

The Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) was held at the London headquarters of the RGS and the nearby Imperial College in Kensington this year. The conference theme was ‘Geographies of co-production’. The title refers to the challenges that emerged in research and teaching activities as a result of a range of new encounters, such as commercialisation, engaged arts, open innovation, participatory social science and public engagement. The conference provided opportunities to analyse the challenges of multi-disciplinarity and the opportunities of creating new understandings by using different perspectives.



Interior from the London headquarters of the Royal geographical Society

The main panel session brought together leading scholars, among others Katherine GIBSON, Uma KOTHARI, Patricia NOXOLO, Nik THEODORE, Wendy LARNER, Keri FACER and Jane WILLS to discuss what co-operation means for universities, academics and knowledge itself. The covered topics included the political economy of co-production; co-production and the politics of post-colonialism, feminism and anti-racism; issues of success, quality and legacy. The chair's plenary lecture was given by Vinay GIDWANI (one of the most prominent Marxist geographers working on issues like work, poverty, agrarian change in India) on the topic of 'Value struggles: ethno-geographic notes on waste work in urban India'. He analysed the importance of emerging informal need economies to urban livelihoods and urban living and he examined the poverty, injustice and struggle in neoliberal urban India.

These were only a selection of highlights - this year almost 1,800 participants contributed to over 380 panels and sessions. Several topics were discussed in these sessions, among others, issues of international development, climate change, transnational education, urban political ecology, the different perspectives of (urban) sustainability, geopolitics, social and environmental justice and many more.

One of the most inspiring presentations at the conference was given by Uma KOTHARI who analysed the new actors in the changing environment of international development. These included celebrities, armed forces, philanthropists and international volunteers. Her research especially focused on how these volunteer actors form and forge new global connections and alliances.

Many of the sessions reflected the issues related to the current economic crisis, such as the session called 'Geographies of forced eviction'. The session raised the attention to a 'crisis' urbanism in the Global North characterized by new forms of social inequality, increased housing insecurity and violent displacement. It also aimed at considering what geographers can offer to inform understanding of, and action against this foremost human-rights violation.

The RGS publishes its own book series and organizes 'author meets interlocutors' sessions at the conference. This year one of the most interesting books was Marisa WILSON's 'Everyday moral economies: food, politics and scale in Cuba'. The panel session was held by the author and the reviewers of the book (with human geography and Latin American studies backgrounds). 'Everyday moral economies' is a fascinating combination of human geography and anthropology. Using a geographical understanding of politics of scale with anthropological sensitivity of daily life, Marisa WILSON reveals in her study how contradictions between food-as-commodity (within the globalized neoliberal markets) and food-as-entitlement (within a planned economy) are resolved in everyday social practice.

Prior to the first day of the conference, a conference training symposium had been hosted by the RGS Postgraduate Forum and it provided training and networking opportunities for postgraduate students attending the conference. The workshop also helped postgraduates to meet other delegates and get to know the venue before the start of the conference. The first part of the workshop was led by Nicola THOMAS and it focused on the ways in which postgraduates can develop strategies, ideas and actions for making the most out of the conference in terms of professional career development (e.g. networking strategies). The second part of the symposium focused on strategies for engaging with critical reading, writing and self-editing processes. The workshop was organised and led by Gavin BRIDGE.

Every year more and more Hungarian delegates attend the RGS Annual International Conference but this year there were only two participants from Hungary. Márton LENDVAY, who obtained his Master's degree in geography at Eötvös Loránd University, currently a PhD student at Aberystwyth University (Wales) analysed how a resilient economy is created

in a Hungarian agricultural community. Using empirical research, he argued that small farming community members are moving away from the institutions and services provided by the state and seek alternative and local solutions of adaptations instead. The other Hungarian presenter was Noémi GONDA who is pursuing her PhD degree in Environmental Science and Policy at the Central European University. Using a feminist political ecology framework, she examined farmers' gendered experiences of climate change in two rural communities in Nicaragua. She argued that gender roles and relations are not static and they are significantly changing under the effects of climate change in Nicaragua. These changes are linked to climate-related migrations, modifications in the production systems and development interventions.

To conclude, the conference provided an intellectually very stimulating environment for geographers and other social scientists as well, thanks to the many thought-provoking panel and paper sessions and the interdisciplinary and international character of the conference. The next Annual International Conference of the RGS will be held at the University of Exeter from 2 to 4 September 2015, where hopefully several Hungarian delegates will take part as presenters, chairs, convenors or discussants.

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