



The Small Voices of Geographers-in-the-Making: Undergraduate Dissertations (1950s-present) as Historical Sources

Speaker: Dr. Mette Bruinsma
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Chair: Professor James D Sidaway
Department of Geography, NUS

Date/Time: Friday, 3 February 2023, 3.30pm

Place: AS2-02-03, Earth Lab

Abstract

Historiographies of geography often emphasise the works of established geographers and generally overlook the many contributions of student-geographers, even though this latter group makes up the majority of the disciplinary community. By acknowledging these students' first independent research projects, written down in undergraduate dissertations, the existing narrative about the history of geography is complemented, and partly reshaped, by these many 'small' knowledge productions of novice geographers. By exploring undergraduate dissertations, questions about the fields of history of geography, history of academic education and sociology and geography of knowledge production are brought together.

One collection of undergraduate dissertations, ranging from 1954 to 2014, forms the empirical heart of my research. By taking an object-oriented approach, this singular collection, from one discipline and one institution – University of Glasgow (UK) - is explored as a composite intellectual, social and cultural source. My research provides insights into the knowledge productions and research experiences of many generations of undergraduate geography students. Besides this intellectual approach to the dissertation archive, this project focuses upon the social and spatial networks that student-geographers are working in and with, and how these networks sometimes offer opportunities, and other times challenges, for their knowledge production. Exploring the social and spatial elements of dissertation research demonstrates the 'situatedness' of knowledge productions, shining a light too on changing educational practices and traditions.

Having close-to-complete collection of dissertations (from the 1950s onwards) stored and archived is relatively unique: luckily the National University of Singapore holds a similar archive to Glasgow University. I am looking forward exploring the local disciplinary traditions and educational experiences and to discuss geographical knowledge-making at NUS with Geography staff and students.

About the Speaker

Having completed a BA degree in Philosophy and a MA degree in the History and Philosophy of Science (both at Utrecht University, the Netherlands), Mette Bruinsma worked as an educational policy maker at the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University. Here, she became fascinated by geography's 'struggles' concerning disciplinary identity and the diversity in methods and concepts used by the discipline. In 2017, she moved to Glasgow (Scotland), to start a PhD project funded by The Leverhulme Trust. Her PhD focused on undergraduate geography education and geography's disciplinary history. This project was supervised by Chris Philo, Hayden Lorimer and Cheryl McGeachan. In 2021, Mette passed her Viva, moved back to the Netherlands, and pursued her academic career in the Cultural History research group at Utrecht University as an Assistant Professor.

ADMISSION IS FREE – ALL ARE WELCOME

CONVENORS:  [Prof Henry Yeung](#)  [Prof Lu Xi Xi](#)  [Prof Elaine Ho](#)  [Dr Miles Kenney-Lazar](#)

ENQUIRIES: Sakinah – 65163559