

RGS-IBG Social and Cultural Geography Research Group

Annual Report 2011

Summary

- As of 19th December 2011 the group membership email list stands at 526 members. This is up from 459 members last year.
- The SCGRG was £2037.32 in credit on the 19th of December 2011. This is a planned reduction of around £1000 from December 2011.
- In the calendar year 2011, the group sponsored and co-sponsored 11 themed sessions (some with multiple slots) at the RGS-IBG conference in London.
- Supported by the RGS Research Group Grant, the SCGRG ran a very successful event on 'Geography and the New Empirics' at the RGS in January 2011.
- Through its 'events fund' the SCGRG was able to provide bursaries for SCGRG members to attend the workshop on the 6/7th of January on 'Space and Irigaray' (6/7th January) organised by Sarah Cant (Oxford Brookes) and Rachel Colls (Durham). There were no subsequent applications to this fund.
- The second annual undergraduate dissertation prize was awarded to Jessica Potts, University of Durham and Mary McLaren, University of Exeter.
- The SCGRG has continued to improve its online presence and communication with its members via the dedicated website <http://scgrg.org/>, a Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Rgs-Ibg-Social-and-Cultural-Geography-Research-Group/122405437827911> and a new Twitter account https://twitter.com/#!/SCGRG_RGS.
- At the 2012 RGS/IBG conference, the SCGRG will be sponsoring 6 paper sessions as well as organising one panel session on 'Social and Cultural Geographies in a Time of Crisis' and one interactive event on 'Social and Cultural Geographies of Impact'. The group will also be co-sponsoring two plenary events.
- The committee would like to thank everyone who has contributed ideas, information and their energies to the group's activities for 2011.

1. AGM and Committee Membership 2011

The AGM was held at the RGS-IBG Conference, at the RGS, on Thursday 1st September 2011, 13.10. The meeting was well attended. The minutes of the meeting are available on-line at <http://scgrg.org/meetings/>. In addition to meeting at the summer AGM, the committee also met at UCL in December 2011 to review session submissions for the AC2012 and plan SCGRG events for this conference.

There were several changes to the committee at the summer meeting. The committee thanked Alex Tan who is stepping down after two years as postgraduate representative. Elaine Ho had to interrupt her committee work and Chris Bear was appointed Acting Treasurer (by Chair's action). This post will be reviewed at the next AGM in 2012.

New appointments were confirmed for Sarah Mills (as membership secretary, taking over from Chris Bear), Mia Hunt and Rebecca Sandover (joining us as new postgraduate reps), and Hannah Macpherson (joining as committee member). The committee welcomed the new members and thanked the existing committee for their work over the last year.

The current full committee is as follows:

- Gail Davies (Chair) (secretary 2006-2009, chair 2009-2012)
- Russell Hitchings (Secretary) (2006-2009, secretary 2009-2012)
- Chris Bear (Acting Treasurer) (committee 2009-2011, treasurer 2011-2012)
- Sarah Mills (Membership Secretary) (2011-2014)
- Jo Norcup (Education co-ordinator) (2009-2012)
- Emma Roe (Dissertation Prize co-ordinator) (2006-2009, 2009-2012)

- Mia Hunt (Postgraduate Representative) (2011-2012*)
- Rebecca Sandover (Postgraduate Representative) (2011-2012*)
- Ben Anderson (2006-2009, 2009-2012)
- Kate Boyer (2009-2012)
- Harriet Hawkins (2009-2012)
- Elaine Ho (2007-2010, 2010-2013)
- Owain Jones (2010-2013)
- Hannah Macpherson (2011-2014)
- Amanda Rogers (2009-2012)

* According to RGS rules, postgrad representatives are appointed on a one-year basis, but we hope these individuals might consider re-election to a longer term.

The group had a large influx of new committee members in 2009, and there will be a large number standing down in 2012, including Gail Davies (chair) and Russell Hitchings (secretary). A key task for 2012 will be to plan for succession and appoint a new chair and secretary. The website will be used to advertise these vacancies early in 2012.

2. SCGRG Event on 'Geography and New Empirics'

This was a SCGRG flagship event for 2011, organised by Chris Bear, Harriet Hawkins, Amanda Rogers and Alex Tan. It was held from 20th-21st January 2011 at UCL and The Royal Geographical Society, London. It targeted postgraduates and new researchers, assisting their development of theoretically informed empirical research, and providing a forum for the discussion and presentation of emerging research issues. The conference is archived, with presentations and contextual reading at <http://www.scgrg.org/geography-and-the-new-empirics/>

Context:

The SCGRG has a tradition of developing conferences and events that offer a focused and exploratory space for early-career researchers to engage with key issues of concern in the sub-discipline. Building on the epistemic issues raised by the research group conference, 'Reinvigorating the Social in Social and Cultural Geography', Brighton, held in January 2009, this workshop addressed a set of issues around the 'doing' and 'dissemination' of research across the sub-discipline via the theme of 'Geography and the New Empirics'. Designed for early-career researchers from across Social and Cultural Geography, the workshop was aimed at understanding the issues raised by contemporary research practice and conceptualisation, providing a forum for the discussion and presentation of emerging research issues, as well as to offer informal networking opportunities.

The conference was organised by a planning committee consisting of Chris Bear, Harriet Hawkins, Amanda Rogers, Alex Tan, with additional assistance from Gail Davies and with the involvement of the full SCGRG committee. The conference was organised over two days at the Royal Geographical Society and at University College London. The research group supported the conference with £700 from its own funds, as this was considered an important flagship event for the group. This money, together with £450 from the Royal Geographical Society, was used for low-wage travel and accommodation bursaries, and for the costs of speakers and organizers. A small attendance charge was made to cover the cost of catering. We would like to thank Catherine Souch and her team for all their help and generosity in supporting the conference, and to acknowledge and thank the RGS for the additional financial support they provided.

Event and Outcomes:

Recent years have seen a renewed engagement with the empirical, witnessing the emergence of research methods and dissemination activities that engage theory and practice in new and innovative ways. These approaches have included: participatory methods; performative research; engaging with more-than-human entities; forms of creative address; as well as interdisciplinary and beyond-the-academy working practices. Undertaking this kind of research

has, arguably, created a shift in the form and nature of the 'empirical', leading to a series of challenges surrounding how we make sense of, work with, and write about these contemporary forms and expanded volumes of qualitative and quantitative data. This conference provided a forum within which to think about and discuss the challenges and benefits of this contemporary research climate and its impacts across the sub-discipline of Social and Cultural Geography.

The two-day workshop attracted 48 people from across the UK and the US at a range of different stages of their careers, mixing post-graduate paper presentations with staff from within and beyond geography who sat on the interdisciplinary panel that closed the event. The presence of the SCGRG committee greatly enhanced the ability of the convenors to ensure that the event was able to meet its aims.

The workshop had two overriding aims: 1) to engage postgraduate and early career researchers in the processes of rethinking the empirical in geography, and 2) to develop these engagements across the full scope of work in social and cultural geography, exploring links between these otherwise disparate ways of working with the empirical, and the increasing demands of interdisciplinary and collaborative research. In order to achieve these aims, the workshop consisted of the following activities:

- DAY ONE: 4 Researcher-led workshops at UCL on:
 - Generating and Gathering data in the face of excess
 - Experimentality, encounters and ethics
 - Collaborating and distributing expertise
 - Interpretation and the challenge of making sense

- DAY TWO: Post-Graduate and Early Career Researcher paper sessions on:
 - Research encounters and Processes
 - Creative Practices and experimentalism
 - Working with people and things

- A keynote (Dr Alan Latham, UCL) and an Interdisciplinary Panel to close the event (Prof. Celia Lury, Sociology Goldsmiths; Prof. David Demeritt, Geography, Kings; Dr Ben Anderson, Geography, Durham; Dr Malcolm Fairbrother, Geography, Bristol).

The feedback from attendees was very positive. They appreciated the opportunity to present and share experiences of current research, as well as contextualise these in relation to contemporary theoretical debates around the changing status of 'the empirical'. The event was considered formative for the research practices of many of those involved. However, given the range of projects involved, and the early stage of many of the research projects discussed, there are currently no plans to develop the seminar proceedings into a formal publication. A record of the event has been posted on the SCGRG website, with supporting presentations and papers at <http://www.scgrg.org/geography-and-the-new-empirics/>.

Funding and Bursaries:

The RGS awarded £450 and the SCGRG invested £700 of its own resources into the conference, and we charged participants a small amount (£15) to cover catering at the conference. The three key costs for the event are 1) catering, 2) speakers and committee travel, and 3) participant bursaries.

The largest cost is catering (£922.80 for the full day catering at the RGS), the SCGRG provided funds to keep these costs reasonable for all participants, and provided a full subsidy for invited speakers and the organising committee. The remainder of the SCGRG support for this event, together with the money from the RGS, covered travel for invited panellists and members of the SCGRG running group discussions, as well as travel bursaries for Michael Gallagher (University of Edinburgh); Hilary Ramsden (University of the West of England); Lucy Rose (University of Exeter, Cornwall Campus); Matt Wilkins (University of Exeter), Julia Walker (Southampton University), Fiona McConnell (Newcastle University).

3. RGS Annual Conference, London 2011

The SCGRG had an unprecedented number of applications for conference sponsorship for 2011, and was not been able to sponsor the majority of session proposal submitted to us. We can only speculate on why this was, but the conference theme – on The Geographical Imagination – might have been a contributing factor. There are also a growing number of postgraduate and postdoctoral students organising sessions which is positive for the discipline, but rather overwhelmed our decision-making processes.

The final list of sponsored session was as follows:

Sole sponsor

- (Re)Imagining Materialities (1 session)
- Geographies of Humour and Humorous Geographies (2 sessions)
- Mobile Geographies of Art: Bodies, technologies and transnationality (2 sessions)

Co-sponsor

- 'Emerging from the dark': explorations into the experiences of the night (4 sessions)
- Emerging geographies of animal-technology co-productions (1 session)
- Exhibitionary Geographies and the Post-Museum (1 session)
- Geographical perspectives on the British Diaspora
- Geographies of Friendships (4 sessions)
- "Getting lost on the way to Farmville": Virtual, mobile and online spaces of interaction (1 session)
- Meteorological Imaginations: Towards geographies of affective practices of weather, atmospherics and landscapes (3 sessions)
- Moving Geographies: Film and Video as Research Method (3 sessions)
- For further details of these sessions see <http://www.scgrg.org/conference/>

The group was pleased to provide day passes for five research group guests:

- Miriam Burke is an independent artist, contributing to the session on 'Art – Science and the Geographical Imagination'. Miriam has been working collaboratively with the glaciologist Professor Peter Knight from Keele. Her paper will draw out the value of art-science collaborations to the historical and contemporary study of physical.
- Jane Dyson is an independent anthropologist, contributing to the session on 'Geographies of Friendships'. Jane works ethnographically on friendship, focusing on girls' work in the Indian Himalayas. Her work was recently published in the American Ethnologist (July 2010).
- Ben Gallan, from the Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER), University of Wollongong, Australia, is contributing to the session on 'Emerging from the dark': explorations into the experiences of the night. Ben is PhD student working on temporality, cultural infrastructure and the right to the city.
- Ralph Hoyte is an independent artist, contributing to the session on 'Art – Science and the Geographical Imagination'. Ralph works as a performance poet, and will be presenting a paper on his recent project SATSYMPH. Satsymph is a collaboration with composer Marc Yeates and coder Phill Phelps which will allow people to create their own "satellite symphony" through an iPhone app.
- Nicola Triscott is the director of London-based Art-Science organization Arts Catalyst. She is contributing to the session on 'Art – Science and the Geographical Imagination'. Nicola will be talking about the work of the Arts Catalyst and taking part in a panel addressing the relationship between art and geopolitics in the book Arctic Geopolitics.

4. RGS/IBG Annual Conference 2012 Edinburgh

The RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2012 takes place at the University of Edinburgh from Tuesday 3 to Thursday 5 July 2012. The chair of conference is Professor Chris Philo (University of Glasgow). The conference theme is 'Security of Geography/Geography of Security'.

The SCGRG are organizing two 'in-house' events for this conference:

- **Social and Cultural Geographies of Impact:** An innovative interactive session exploring the emerging social and cultural geographies of 'impact'. Whilst currently understood (or conceived) in terms of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), this session aims to unpack and expand understandings and conceptualizations of impact, generating discussion and debate through two innovative sessions. Overall, this session seeks to generate a critical forum for discussing, debating, supporting and listening to ideas about 'impact' as we navigate through the current landscape of geography in higher education and research institutions.
- **Social and Cultural Geographies in a Time of Crisis (discussion panel):** How should social and cultural geography respond to a world that is either in crisis or where various events and situations are now framed in terms of crisis? How do social and cultural geographers understand the material and imaginative geographies of crises? And how does responding to crisis demand or invite social and cultural geographers to change their habits of thinking, research and action? The panel will explore these and other options in a bid to think through what social and cultural geography might do in a time of crisis and how its existing practices of thinking and modes of research can engage with the contemporary condition.

We are delighted to be sponsoring the following submitted paper sessions:

- Ludic Geographies (2 sessions)
- More-than-human geographies: from coexistence to conflict and killing (2 sessions)
- Home Unmaking (2 sessions)
- Licensing spaces, things and people (2 sessions)
- 'Policing' geographies: engendering securities and insecurities (2 sessions)
- Writing and doing human geography research in Greece during a turbulent decade (1 session)

Finally, we are delighted to be co-sponsoring two conference Chair's plenary sessions (details TBA):

- (In)secure spaces
- (In)secure peoples

For further details of these sessions see <http://www.scgrg.org/conference/>

5. SCGRG 'Events Fund' 2011

The SCGRG makes small sums of money available to members, supporting ideas and events proposed by its wider membership. The aim is to encourage proposals from SCGRG members for a modest resource to support the organisation of conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops, reading meetings or other academic activities and events that advance research in social and cultural geography. There are two deadlines for applications each year: the end of February and the end of August. Applications for amounts over £300 should normally be submitted prior to the summer AGM at the RGS/IBG conference. The amount of funding allocated each year depends on Research Group resources. Session organisers were asked to provide feedback on the sessions and the following reports were received.

One event was supported in 2011. The SCGRG made a small number of bursaries for available to SCGRG members to attend a two-day workshop exploring different modes of spatial engagement within the writing and philosophy of Luce Irigaray. The workshop was organised by Sarah Cant (Oxford Brookes) and Rachel Colls (Durham) and was funded by Oxford Brookes Central Research Fund and the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group (RGS-IBG).

There were no further submissions to this fund, despite some informal approaches outside the deadlines. We have discussed the reason for the lack of proposals coming forward for the events fund. There has been some feedback that the amounts on offer are too small. In view of potential forthcoming financial pressures on the group, we are reluctant to increase the amounts available, but will continue for a further year prior to review, perhaps with some further discretion over amounts and dates. For 2011, the committee agreed to use the funds to support conference costs for an invited plenary speaker in one of the co-sponsored SCGRG plenary sessions.

The next deadline for applications to this fund is the end of Feb 2012.

6. Undergraduate Dissertation Prize

From 2010, the SCGRG has offered an annual prize of £100 for the best Undergraduate Dissertation in Social and Cultural Geography and £50 for the Runner-Up. In total we received 18 submissions for the prize, which was administered by Emma Roe. These spanned the breadth of social and cultural geography interests and we look forward to continuing with the prize in 2012.

The dissertation award prize winners for 2011 was Jessica Potts, University of Durham, for her dissertation entitled 'We are not here, we are not there': Young Refugees' and Asylum Seeker's Negotiations of Identity and Belonging'. The committee praised the study for its high level of theoretical engagement, its excellent empirical analysis and its methodological innovation. The committee felt it made a significant and original contribution to academic debates on identity and belonging in social and cultural geography.

Mary McLaren, University of Exeter, was highly commended for her dissertation entitled 'Constructing distant geographies of care: the example of Fairtrade in Horsham'. The Committee thought it was an impressive and sophisticated study, written in an eloquent and clear style, engaging with challenging issues and debates. It deftly weaved existing literature with original research findings. The findings were based on high quality, in-depth multi-method qualitative research. The Committee felt that the research was both engaging and innovative and nicely developed ideas within the existing cultural geography literature on fair trade.

Both prize-winners also received a year's personal subscription to the journal *Social & Cultural Geography* published by Taylor & Francis. We are grateful to Taylor and Francis for this support. We are also grateful for both students for allowing us to post full copies of their dissertations on-line.

7. Financial reporting

The two main incomes items for 2011 were the subvention and the participant fee for the New Empirics Conference (mainly used to cover catering costs). The main expenditure items were catering and speakers travel expenses for the Geography and the New Empirics conference, for which the SCGRG also received a RGS Research Groups grant, which cleared in late 2010.

Other items of expenditure included committee costs for an AC2012 planning meeting in December 2012, the dissertation prize and bursaries for the 'Salty Geographies' conference (held in 2010) and the 'Space and Irigaray workshop' (held in early 2011).

Research Group financial reporting form

Research Group Name

Social and Cultural
Geography

Period

1.1.11-19.12.11

Receipt and payments account

INCOME

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|
| RGS-IBG subvention (paid Nov 2011) | £500.00 |
| RGS-IBG grant(s) | 0 |
| Other grants | 0 |
| Subscriptions | 0 |
| Conference income (fee for New Empirics Conference) | £405 |
| Meetings income | 0 |
| Royalties | 0 |
| Interest | £0.59 |
| Other income (please give details) | 0 |

EXPENDITURE

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Committee expenses (Dec 2011 AC2012 planning meeting) | £123.8 |
| Conference costs (New Empirics catering and travel costs) | £1297.25 |
| Meetings costs | 0 |
| Newsletter costs | 0 |
| Grants and awards (£150 dissertation prize; bursaries) | £486.05 |
| Other costs (postage) | £9.84 |

Total payments

£1916.94

Net surplus/deficit

-£1011.35

Opening balance(s) - 1st January 2011

£3048.67

Closing balances – 19th December 2011

£2037.32

Closing balances comprised of:

treasurer account

£2037.32

deposit account

It would help if you gave the additional information for BACS payments

Address of branch where accounts are held

The Co-operative Bank

Account number(s)

65292523 00

Sort code

89299

Name of treasurer

Christopher Bear

Email address of Treasurer

ckb@aber.ac.uk

Phone number of Treasurer

01970 622592

The SCGRG has been slowly seeking to reduce its relatively large reserve. This has been reduced steadily, but significantly over the past two years. We are agreed this could comfortably be reduced to around £1000/£1500, increasing the group's activities in the short term, but also leaving the group flexibility to respond to requests for support and build other group activities over the longer term. The fall in overall balance for 2011 is planned and as detailed in the 2010 annual report.

However, we would also note that the RGS/IBG subvention is now less than our potential yearly commitments. We have two annual deadlines for applications for support from the SCGRG (total potentially put aside £600), and we have the recurrent commitment of the undergraduate prizes (£150). The subvention has fallen from £650 in 2009 to £500. We therefore may need to review alternative ways of balancing our potential income and outgoings over the longer term.

The December bank statement will be forwarded to the RGS as soon as it is available.

Dr Gail Davies, Chair SCGRG, 19th December 2011