



The Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights Commission of the International Geographical Union

La Commission aux Droits et Connaissances des Peuples Indigenes



Quadrennial Report (2008-2012) on the Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights Commission Produced by Acting Commission Chair, Brad Coombes, 24 January 2011

The commission was formed in 2006 with three main goals: to create a network amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous geographers; to encourage and mentor young academics, particularly Indigenous scholars; to encourage and foster geographic research for and with Indigenous communities. Although financial restraints and the politics of being an Indigenous organisation have prevented us from meeting in 2011 (refer to comments in 2(c) and 2(d), below), the work of the commission has been extended in new ways during the last four years and we are confident that our mandate is being fulfilled.

1. Membership

The Commission's steering committee has been stable for several years, but – despite many attempts – we have not yet secured membership from South or Central America. Attendance at the IGU Regional Conference at Santiago de Chile provided an opportunity for networking with potential candidates, some of whom were interested in becoming involved. One steering committee member has recently withdrawn because of commitments within his own country and a suitable candidate for replacing him has been approached.

a) Commission Steering Committee

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NB. One position on the steering committee has recently been vacated and a potential replacement has been approached.

b) Commission membership

On the basis of individuals who are registered with our email list-serv, the Commission's membership is currently 168 – it has increased by 15-20 members for each of the last four years.

Aotearoa/New Zealand	35
Australia	37
Austria	1
Canada	15
Finland	2
Ireland	2
Israel	1
Indonesia	1
Norway	3
South Africa	1
Sweden	3
Taiwan	8
United Kingdom	7
United States	52

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2. Meetings 2008-2011

a) **2008: Plymouth, Massachusetts, USA (April 2008)**



*Field trip to Plymouth Plantation
(Photo: Renee Pualani Louis)*

This meeting was held before the 2008 conference of the Association of American Geographers in Boston, and was organised jointly with the Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers and the Native Canadians Study Group of the Canadian Association of Geographers. Thirty-six researchers attended and activities included meetings with the Aquinnah and Mashpee bands of the Wampanoag Nation. Reflecting local priorities, discussion centred on the identity politics of tribal struggles for recognition in land claims processes and articulation of more appropriate methods for representing the history and archaeological treasures of Indigenous peoples. Participants also discussed the necessity of a journal in the field of Indigenous geographies and the need to promote more ethical approaches to Indigenous research.

b) **2009: “Indigenous Urbanization Internationally: Population, Community and Identity.” Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada (October 2009)**

This conference was organized jointly with the Department of Native Studies and the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan along with the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and non-Status Indians and the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre. The commission traveled to various Indian and Métis organisations on the first day of the meeting to learn about the struggles, activism and social work of the Indigenous urban population.



Function at a Friendship Centre (Photo: Evelyn Peters)

Participants were impressed with the way those organisations had self-organised to deliver social support and other services to their people. A two day research symposium followed, with academic presentations on the identity of, population dynamics in and social provision for Indigenous urban communities in North and Central America, Oceania and Southern Africa. The organiser of the symposium, Professor Evelyn Peters who is a steering committee member of the IPKRC, secured a book contract for an edited volume with the University of British Columbia Press (refer to section 4). Many of the presenters have since contributed chapters for the book.

c) **2010: Taumutu Marae, near Christchurch, New Zealand (July 2010)**

In 2010, the IPKRC intended to hold a meeting prior to the IGU Regional Conference in Israel. However, the call for a boycott by Indigenous academics in Israel and Palestine could not be ignored by members of the commission and the meeting was cancelled. As a replacement, a three-day symposium was held before the joint conference of the Institute of Australian Geographers and the New Zealand Geographical Society.



Our welcome onto the marae (Photo: Brad Coombes)

42 individuals stayed at Ngati Moki Marae, Taumutu, for at least one night, with several others visiting during the day. As a large number of graduate students attended, several of our discussion sessions were dedicated to aspects of PhD scholarship and the ethical dimensions of research with Indigenous peoples. Representatives of the local tribe, Ngai Tahu, attended, with discussion focusing on the comanagement and restoration of nearby Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. On the last day, we visited the administrative complex for Ngai Tahu,

where the Chair and others from its Runanga (Council) spoke about Maori economic development, the use of GIS in claims settlement and relationship building for environmental enhancement.

d) 2011: Inari, Finland, and Santiago de Chile (cancelled)

The Steering Committee of the IPKRC intended that their annual meeting for 2011 would be at the Arctic Centre in Finland. However, that meeting was cancelled because of difficulties brought about by the financial crisis which affected Finnish universities in that year. Attention then switched to the possibility of a meeting with Indigenous communities in Chile, prior to the IGU Regional Conference in that country. While organising a field trip for the pre-meeting, it became obvious to all involved that the strong association of the Regional Conference with the Chilean military was abhorrent for the Indigenous peoples of Chile, as well as for those social scientists who work with Mapuche and Pehuenche communities. It was resolved not to organise specific sessions or events, with the decision to attend left to the conscience of individual members. Some did so, but most IPKRC members who had earlier expressed interest in a pre-conference meeting decided that the conference's venue and emphasis were inappropriate and did not attend. Given the mandate of the IPKRC to work with Indigenous communities and academics, the choice of venue for both the 2010 and 2011 regional conferences has produced ethical difficulties for this commission. We do not suggest that the IGU avoid such destinations, but more could be done to promote appropriate engagement with local peoples and that may require greater negotiation of venues and discussion of rights before individual commissions organise pre-meetings or conference sessions.

3. Networking

a) Collaborations with other Commissions and Task Forces

The last major collaboration of this nature was with the IGU's Islands Commission in 2007.

b) Collaborations with other international bodies

The IPKRC has observer status with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. As is evident in section 2, we have collaborated with a number of national geography organizations including the Association of American Geographers and its Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group, the Canadian Association of Geographers, the New Zealand Geographical Society, and the Indigenous Issues Study Group of the Institute of Australian Geographers.

c) Cooperative efforts with the ISSC and ICSU

None to date.

4. Publications

Although the last special issue of a journal which was comprised of articles written solely by members of the IPKRC was in 2007 (*Geographical Research* 45(2)), steering committee members have encouraged publication by members in their role as guest editors for a number of recent special issues of relevance to Indigenous geography (for instance, *Journal of Rural Studies* 25(4), 2009).

A book is soon to be released and is comprised of presentations delivered at the Saskatoon meeting of 2009 (refer to section 2(b)). “*Indigenizing Modernity*” – *Indigenous Urbanization in International Perspective*. Eds E Peters and C Anderson. UBC Press.

A special Indigenous issue of *GeoJournal* was accepted for publication in 2010 and will be released shortly. The articles are derived from presentations to the IPKRC’s 2007 symposium in Taiwan. It is entitled *Indigenous Geographies as challenge and invitation* and is edited by Klaus Frantz and Richard Howitt. The special issue is comprised of these articles:

Geography for and with indigenous peoples: indigenous geographies as challenge and invitation (by Klaus Frantz and Richard Howitt)

Knowledge, power, and tribal mapping: a critical analysis of the “return of the Truku People” (by Chun-Chieh Chi and Hsang-Te Chin)

Mind maps of the Maori (by Mere Roberts)

Property rights, land tenure and the racial discourses (by Maano Ramutsindela)

Playing the Indigenous card? The Shetland and Orkney Udal Law group and aboriginal rights (by Michael Jones)

The Salt River Indian Reservation: land use conflicts and aspects of socioeconomic change on the outskirts of Metro-Phoenix, Arizona (by Klaus Frantz)

Culture, Religion and Economy in Southwest USA: Zuni Pueblo and Laguna Pueblo (by Andrea Grugel)

The indigenous ecotourism and social development in Taroko National Park area and San-Chan tribe, Taiwan (Chen Yi-Fong)

Sustainable Indigenous futures in remote Indigenous areas: relationships, processes and failed state approaches (Richard Howitt)

Place-based learning and knowledge: critical pedagogies grounded in Indigeneity (Jay T. Johnson)

Recognising that Indigenous geographical research has expanded in recent years, but that it had not always been published in a unified or accessible manner, three steering committee members approached *Progress in Human Geography* in 2010 to enquire about the possibility of three progress reports on Indigenous Geographies. The editors welcomed this initiative, membership of the IPKRC provided many references to new and emerging publications, and the first review has been released online at

<http://phg.sagepub.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/content/early/2011/12/12/0309132511431410.full.pdf+html>

The Commission regularly updates its membership through use of a dedicated website:

<http://www.indigenousgeography.net/ipkrc.shtm>

5. Archival Contributions

None to date

6. Continuation

The current steering committee was polled about the issue of continuation. Members were unanimous about the need for further work in this area and they were committed to contributing to that work.

a) Name of commission

To continue as previously: Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights Commission

b) Statement of mission

Although we believe that we have satisfied our mandate which was negotiated in 2006, we also maintain that potential for further progress remains in our present mission statement, so it is proposed that it is retained:

To create a network within geography which allows Indigenous and non-Indigenous geographers working with and for Indigenous communities to share their research and experiences with each other and the discipline as a whole.

To encourage and mentor young scholars, particularly Indigenous scholars, in pursuing geography as a career.

To encourage and foster geographic research for and with Indigenous communities with the long-range goal of bringing the research needs of these communities to the attention of the discipline.

c) Steering committee

As stated in section 1(a), only one of the present steering committee is no longer in a position to participate. As that was only recently communicated, we have not yet identified a suitable replacement, but potential candidates have been approached. For a full list of the proposed membership of the steering committee for 2012-2016, please refer to section 1(a).

d) Provisional work plan

As has been the case in the past, it is proposed that the commission's work be focused, though not exclusively, on annual meetings. These meetings have been proposed, with work towards the first two meetings in an advanced state of completion:

2012: **Cape Town, South Africa:** this meeting will coincide with the Society of South African Geographers' Conference. Delegates will explore the contested meaning of indigeneity in Africa and how that complicates land rights and community development.

2013: **Hokkaido, Japan:** this is a pre-conference meeting which will be held before the IGU's Regional Conference in Kyoto. Several of the IPKRC's steering committee have already worked with local academics who are contributing to the implementation of Ainu rights in Japan. The meeting will emphasise conservation, sustainability and Indigenous resource use.

2014: **Winnipeg, Canada:** it is proposed that the 2014 meeting consider the topic of Indigenous community development. Winnipeg, and the province of Manitoba in general, are well suited to site such discussions as there are many novel approaches to service provision and alternative development by Indigenous peoples which have been implemented there.

2015: possibly in Lund, Sweden, as a pre-conference meeting to the IGU Regional Conference in **Moscow**. The IPKRC is interested in a joint meeting with one of the other IGU commissions which is positioned to critique the relevance of *marginality* as a geographical concept. Collaboration with the IGU Commission on Gender and Geography has been suggested but no approaches have yet been made.

Special issues and publications. Since establishment of the IPKRC in 2006, it has become evident that edited volumes, special issues of journals and scholarly works associated with our meetings are important for progressing the careers of our membership, especially as many of our members are early career academics. We intend to complete more of this work over the next four years and, ideally, will associate each of our meetings with a book contract or similar commitment. Two more progress reports have been commissioned for *Progress in Human Geography*, with the same three authors as for the first (refer to Section 4).

Academic exchanges. Financial restraints are a common cause for concern amongst Indigenous academics, who are less often located in mainstream universities or in countries where access to travel funds are common. Not surprisingly, therefore, the IPKRC's earlier intent to engage in cross-nation supervision of graduate students and to fund student or early career academics to participate in international research opportunities and conferences has been frustrated. The IPKRC has assisted some students with accessing overseas Indigenous communities, and at least one instance of cross-nation supervision has emerged, but there have been few other opportunities. Current financial circumstances will likely persist for several years, further limiting the possibility for cross-nation interaction outside of our annual meetings. Nonetheless, if funds or opportunities become available, we would like to extend activities of this nature.

e) Scholarly impact

The steering committee for the IPKRC maintains that it has had a significant impact on Indigenous research in the field of geography. It is difficult to determine whether the IPKRC is partly responsible for or, rather, is merely a product of the renaissance in Indigenous geography over the last 5-7 years, but the two are related. The network of associated researchers has benefitted in terms of career development because the commission has provided an outlet for publication and interaction which is seldom to be found in the home nations of participants. Indigenous geographers are frequently isolated within culturally homogenous departments and often feel that their interests are on the margins of theoretical enterprise within their universities. Hence, the capacity of the IPKRC to bring together Indigenous researchers and others who work with Indigenous communities is an important form of outreach for the IGU. Likewise, although the commission's collaborations with local communities have been fleeting and somewhat superficial because they are tied to annual meetings which are in different places each year, we suggest that they nonetheless represent a point of difference in the work of IGU commissions. A genuinely transnational and passionate network of participants has been brought together by the work of the IPKRC and it is important that such work continues in order to capitalise on its recently established capacities.