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Annual Conference 2006

Welcome from the chair of conference

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I should like to welcome all of you to the 2006 conference which, for the third time, is held in London. This is one of the larger of the annual conferences in recent years and I am delighted to welcome speakers and other participants from a wide range of institutions, disciplinary backgrounds and nations.

The theme of the conference this year is **global social justice and sustainability**. There seems little need to justify this theme as it becomes increasingly clear as the twenty first century progresses that we continue to live in a world marked by inequality and injustice, torn apart by poverty, war, disputes over the right to own, control and use resources, by religious, ethnic and racialised conflicts and marked by differences in living standards and quality of life both within and between societies based on class, gender, age and other social distinctions.

... It is also clear that the key issues of our times are inextricably spatial issues as climate change, global warming, the inequitable use of resources by the world's richest nations, the global movement of capital and labour, the development of new technologies, pandemics and new diseases that may jump the species gap transform, recut and remake spatial divisions within and between power blocs, nation states, regions and communities in the general context of 'globalization'.

New theoretical responses to these changes are emerging as the ways in which spatial difference matters are being addressed in a wide range of disciplines. The ubiquitous rhetoric of globalization is being critically addressed across numerous disciplinary and academic borders and older versions of versions of internationalism and international social justice are being rethought by geographers and others, wedded to frameworks that insist on the articulation of the local within larger frameworks as an ethical project.

In this conference an exciting range of plenary and study group sessions will address questions of justice, sustainability, global environmental change, migration, identity and belonging and local and global connections of many different types, drawing on a range of perspectives and a wide variety of substantive issues. As Chair of Conference I am delighted to extend a particular welcome to my guests Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality and Haleh Afshar, Professor of Women's Studies at the University of York, as well as to the other plenary speakers from within and outside our discipline. In the next few days, there is a veritable feast of plenary sessions, sponsored by study groups and by journals, discussions, papers and conversations, ranging across our splendidly diverse discipline. Furthermore, four field visits permit the exploration of different aspects of London's rich history geography. Whatever your interests or position, I hope that this conference will provide intellectual (and bodily) sustenance, opportunities to meet old and new friends and colleagues and the beginnings of new forms of collaboration.

Finally as conferences don't organise themselves, I'd like to give special thanks to all the staff of the RGS who have been involved in different ways in organising the event and to the 'conference team' of Keith Richards, Katie Willis, David Pinder, Catherine Souch, Kathryn Thomson and David Over. Lorraine Craig left the RGS in March for a new job at Imperial College. We never thought we would manage without her, but we did!



Linda McDowell, University of Oxford