

ISPN 2019 press release

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The Department of South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies (University of the Free State, South Africa), and the Joint ICA/ICU Commission on Toponymy hosted the Fifth International Symposium on Place Names at the Mont D'or Hotel in Clarens, Free State on 18-20 September 2019.

This symposium forms part of a series of bi-annual symposia organised by the Department of South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies in order to promote research on place names in Southern Africa amongst local scholars, international researchers and government officials. It is the only event of its kind in our region.

Place names are symbolic markers of cultural identities, power relations and human relationships with the environment. As such, they are also expressions of (shared) cultural and linguistic heritage. This role cannot be understood without thoroughly exploring the origin and meanings of place names and considering their role in society. The vision of the International Symposium on Place Names is to continue promoting the sharing of local as well as international expertise and collaboration on all aspects of place names.

Each symposium covers a specific theme within place name studies. This year, the focus was 'Recognition, regulation, revitalization: place names and indigenous languages'. The first symposium was held in 2011. The symposium became an international occurrence when the Joint IGU/ICA (International Cartographic Association and International Geographical Union respectively) Commission on Toponymy came on board in 2015. This symposium, which focused on 'Place names, diversity and heritage', was held in Clarens in the Eastern Free State.

The two keynote speakers of this year's event were Prof Peter Jordan, Institute of Urban and Regional Research, Austrian Academy of Sciences, and Prof Charles Pfukwa Executive Dean at the Bindura University of Science Education in Zimbabwe,. The delegates mainly hail from the SADC region, but there were participants from overseas as well. We also had speakers Prof Theodorus du Plessis, Mrs Susan Lombaard and Miss Emily Matabane, all authors is from the University of the Free States Department of South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies, enlightening us about Place names the Deaf way

The International Symposium on Place names 2019 was a huge success and we are looking forward to the next one in 2021!

