

THE ASSOCIATION OF SPANISH GEOGRAPHERS. TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

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Compared with most similar Associations around the world, the Association of Spanish Geographers (*Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles* - AGE) is characterised by its youthfulness and all-encompassing nature. It was founded in 1975, and today it boasts around 1,050 members - the vast majority of active geographers in Spain.

The decision to establish the AGE was taken at the IV Conference of Geography held in Oviedo in October 1975 with the support of the Association for Scientific Progress. The three earlier Conferences (held biennially from 1961 to 1965) had also been generously supported by the same Association.

In Oviedo, the participants, numbering around 200, recognised the changes which had occurred since the last Congress (Salamanca 1965) and the inadequacies of the organisational framework offered by the Association for Scientific Progress. Spanish Geography had undergone considerable growth both in the number of geographers and in the quantity of research being undertaken; the subject of the Conference (City and Industry) expressed clearly that Spanish society had modernised and that the agrarian regions could no longer constitute the sole geographic concern; finally, the political situation announced the transition to democracy and the end of the Franco dictatorship. Indeed, the democratic constitution was passed three years later following what was an exemplary political process. In Oviedo, in 1975, the need was more than apparent to create a democratic Association for all Spanish Geographers, capable of promoting Spanish Geography. As one of the former presidents stated, the AGE was the spontaneous result of the growth of Spanish Geography.

No other national geographic association existed. The Real Sociedad Geográfica, founded in 1876 as the Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid, adopting its present name in 1901, comprises, by its very nature, members who are not properly speaking geographers and,

moreover, its area of concern is primarily that of the Madrid area. The *Societat Catalana de Geografia*, founded in 1935, is restricted to Catalonia and is concerned with the study of Catalonia. The *Euskal Geografi Elkaroga* or the Andrés de Urdaneta Basque Geographic Institute is more specific still in its aim to promote geographic study and research of the Basque Country.

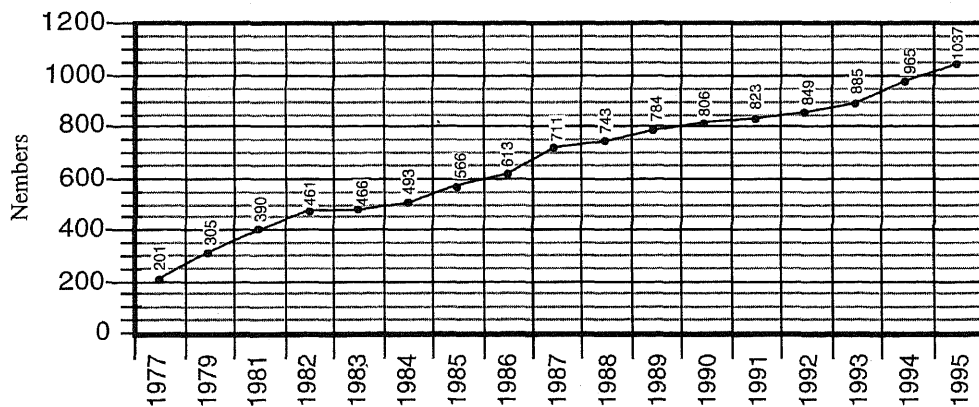
In Oviedo in 1975 a Commission was named under the leadership of the instigator of the initiative, Jesús García Fernández, professor at the University of Valladolid. The AGE was formally constituted on May 30th 1977 and its Statutes were passed in the General Assembly held two years after the decision had been taken to create the Association, on October 7th 1977, at the V Conference of Geography in Granada.

In accordance with the Statutes, the AGE was constituted to promote and develop Spanish geographic research. Its objectives are to encourage academic meetings in order to promote the research carried out in Spain and to contribute to the furthering of Geography; to bring together the diversity of Spanish Geographers before the organisations and conferences with whom direct contact is maintained; to coordinate Spanish Geographers so as to unify actions in favour of Geography within the state as well as to foster relations with other national and international geographic associations.

1. DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANISATION. THE WORKING GROUPS

The unity of the AGE at the state level is quite apparent. This is of some interest if we consider the organisation of the Spanish state into Autonomous Regions, introduced by the 1978 Constitution. In the twenty years since its foundation, the Regional Delegations provided for in the Statutes have not been established, with the exception of one in the Canary Islands. Outside the AGE, the professional associations have formed regional and Autonomous Community associations, but relations with the AGE remain close.

Since its foundation the AGE has grown uninterruptedly, with a noticeable increase in recent years:



The Association is governed by the General Assembly which has sovereign power and elects an Executive, comprising 11 members, and which is partially renewed every two years while the president has a four-year mandate. To date the Executive has sought to reflect the diversity of Spanish Geography, both in its branches interests and its geographical spread.

Since the passing of the Statute, there have been four presidential mandates:

Jesús García Fernández, Professor of Physical Geography at the University of Valladolid: May 30th 1977 to May 23rd 1981.

Ángel Cabo Alonso, Professor of Analytical Regional Geography at the University of Salamanca: May 23rd 1981 to December 18th 1985.

Antonio López Ontiveros, Professor of Human Geography at the University of Córdoba: December 18th 1985 to September 29th 1989.

Joan Mateu Bellès, Professor of Physical Geography at the University of Valencia: September 29th 1989 to September 29th 1993.

Josefina Gómez Mendoza, Professor of Analytical Regional Geography at the Autonomous University of Madrid: since September 29th 1993 (end of mandate: September 1997).

There has been considerable continuity throughout the mandates and a great enthusiasm to fulfil the Association's objectives.

However, in order to illustrate the evolution of the AGE and so as to establish the background for the later discussion, I shall attempt a brief summary of the presidential mandates.

The presidency of García Fernández (which coincided with the Management Commission stage) was characterised by the consolidation of the AGE providing it with a strong legal and administrative structure, by the organisation of specific academic meetings in addition to the biennial Conferences (which after 1985 became Congresses) and by the creation of specific working commissions. The presidency of Cabo Alonso placed emphasis on the international representation of the AGE seeking the presence of the Association on the Spanish Committee of the IGU, founded the Association's Boletín, supported the publication of the Congress Proceedings and interuniversity geography field trips and saw the formation of the first Working Groups. During the presidency of López Ontiveros, the structure of the Association was modernised in keeping with the position of the Working Groups, in an effort to bring the latter into line with those of the IGU and direct intervention was taken in the reform of secondary education and university curricula. Finally, the presidency of Mateu Bellès was characterised by the emphasis given to publications and their dissemination, the establishment of bilateral agreements with other international geographic associations and the reshaping of the model of National of Congress of Geography.

However, alongside these traits which, to some extent, distinguish the four mandates, there have also been common concerns: above all, the fight for a presence worthy of geography in secondary education and the efforts to adapt the associative structure to the professional situation of geography in Spain. Both issues are discussed in more detail below.

The AGE has faithfully complied with its aim to promote academic meetings and, specifically, has organised the National Congress of Geography every two years.

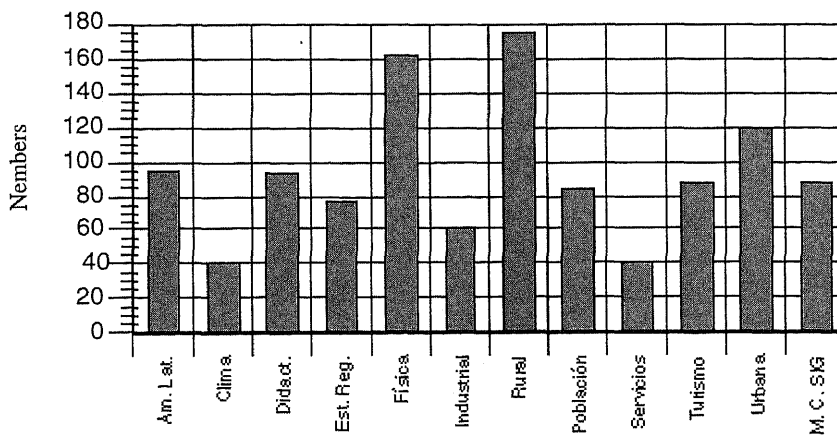
However, the most important feature in the evolution of the AGE has been the appearance, at first spontaneous but later more controlled, of numerous Working Groups.

In accordance with the Statutes, the Working Groups were established for the study of specialist fields within Geography. In general they sprang up from the initiative of groups of different members. They began as specific meetings as was the case of rural geography and quantitative methods; as interuniversity field works as was the case of physical geography; and as colloquies of the geography teachers of the University Schools for Teacher Training to discuss their specific problems. These four initiatives gave rise in the mid-eighties to the first working groups of the AGE: Rural Geography, Quantitative Methods, Physical Geography and Teaching Geography.

In 1986, the AGE decided to establish minimum regulations controlling the Working Groups so as to integrate their operations within the Association, to open them up to all members and whereby they drew up internal regulations based on a democratic system, with elected organisational bodies, fixed fees and the presentation of an annual report of their activities. The payment of Group fees is made through the Treasury of the AGE.

The 12 Groups currently established, followed by their date of foundation (the latter being an approximate date, as in some cases the origins were spontaneous occurring on the fringes of the AGE), the date on which their regulations were ratified and the number of members in 1996 are shown below:

Climatology	1993-1993	41
Industrial Geography	1986-1989	61
Latin-American	1990-1991	95
Physical Geography	1984-1990	162
Population Geography	1986-1989	84
Quantitative Methods, GIS and Teledetection	1984-1989	88
Regional Studies	1993-1993	77
Rural Geography	1984-1989	175
Services Geography	1994-1994	40
Teaching Geography	1986-1989	94
Tourism, Leisure and Recreation Geography	1991-1991	88
Urban Geography	1993-1993	120



Around 800 members of the AGE participate in at least one Group with more than 300 in two. Of the 12 Groups, 10 are sectorial and only one has a regional focus which is in line with other Associations, e.g. the Association of American Geographers. What is also quite apparent is the unevenness in Group size, the appearance of the Climatology Group while another retains the more general name of Physical Geography, and the late establishment of the Urban Geography Group, which was not finally set up until 1993 in spite of earlier attempts.

Nearly all the Groups hold meetings every two years at different locations. Recently, a greater coordination with the general activities of the AGE has been shown.

2. CONGRESSES OF GEOGRAPHY AND OTHER ACADEMIC MEETINGS

Since its foundation, the AGE has taken it upon itself to organise the National Geography Congress every two years. Following the IV Colloquy held in Oviedo in 1975 the following congresses have been held:

- V Conference of Geography. Granada 1977
- VI Conference of Geography. Palma de Mallorca 1979
- VII Conference of geography. Pamplona 1981
- VIII Conference of Geography. Barcelona 1983
- IX Conference of Geography. Murcia 1985
- X National Congress of Geography. Zaragoza 1987
- XI National Congress of Geography. Madrid 1989
- XII National Congress of Geography. Valencia 1991
- XIII National Congress of Geography. Sevilla 1993
- XIV National Congress of Geography. Salamanca 1995

Up until the last Congress, they have been organised by the host university with the support of the Executive Committee of the AGE. In general, they have been structured around the presentation of papers and round tables or monographic discussions, initially striking a balance between physical and human geography. Physical geography was the exclusive domain of geomorphology until the Congress in Palma saw the inclusion of a paper on Vegetation Landscapes, while in 1981 in Pamplona a paper was given on Mountain Climates. Until recently one feature which had remained unchanged was the reference to the regions and concerns of Spanish geography.

The evolution in Geographic research associated with the major territorial, environmental and social changes which have taken place in the twenty years since the foundation of the AGE go some way to explaining the changes introduced in both the structure and the contents of the Congresses. Yet, at the same time, as the Working Groups have been set up the number of specific meetings has increased, which logically and out of necessity has led to the restructuring of the National Congress. An additional factor in this reorganisation are the frequent incursions into international geography, the deep-rootedness of which means that Spanish Geographers are no longer restricted to the study of their own region.

Indeed, in the mid-eighties, it could be seen that the variety of subjects dealt with at the National Congresses together with the proliferation of meetings and workshops organised by

the Working Groups was leading to a potential breakdown with problems in defining the limits and of clear overlap. Faced with this situation, the then President of the AGE, Antonio López Ontiveros, spoke of a squandering of academic endeavour.

There was a danger that the Congresses were becoming increasingly barren with the parcelling out of its contents to the Working Groups.

The Congresses at the end of the eighties and early nineties sought to counteract this process by seeking common ground and by making provisions for Group meetings within the Congress itself. In general the latter continued to be critical of the National Congresses' poor definition of objectives, the excessive range of subjects covered, the length and the fact that the organisation was left too much in the hands of the host university.

In a demonstration of its capacity to respond which, I believe, is an expression of its vitality and unity, the AGE has come up with an organisation for the National Congress, which was established for the first time at the XIV Congress in Salamanca in 1995. In short what is sought is that the specialist Group meetings complement the general Congress. The National Congress is based around a wide-ranging issue of social concern, e.g. in Salamanca the issue was «Regional changes in Spain and Europe at the end of the XX century». The Working Groups are directly involved, together with the Organising Committee and the AGE Executive Committee, in defining and developing the Congress.

The outcome of the Salamanca Congress has, in principle, justified the new organisation established with the idea of unifying rather than dispersing membership, given that more than 500 people attended, including a significant number of researchers from neighbouring disciplines.

The introduction of a theme extending beyond the national borders - in this case the European region - also proved successful and complemented similar moves made at the meetings of various Groups. Mention in this regard should be made of the Rural Geography Group which in the last three Colloquies has included a paper on Latin America.

Finally, in its efforts to bring together the geographers of Spain, at the XIV Congress in Salamanca, in 1995, the AGE paid tribute to the generation of geographers working in the fifties. These geographers were presented with a copy of the book which the AGE had commissioned from Juan Antonio Rodríguez Esteban entitled *La Geografía española (1940-169) Repertorio bibliográfico*, in which their work is summarised.

In addition the Working Groups hold colloquies and research meetings, the enormity of which makes it impossible to list them here. However, by way of illustration, in the case of Physical Geography the group has held 11 field workshops, the Rural Group has held 11 colloquies, Population 5 workshops as has the Industry Group as well as field trips; the Quantitative Methods Group 6 colloquies; and all the others, without exception have held meetings although not in quite the same number given that they were set up at a later date. Yet, indicative of the interest is the fact that the Climatology and Urban Geography Groups both formed in 1993, have already planned their third meeting.

Before the birth of the Groups, during the first Presidency of García Fernández, various research meetings were organised out of which two of the most interesting books which have been published by the AGE emerged: *Los paisajes rurales de España* and *La región y la geografía española*, both published in Valladolid in 1980.

3. DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES: THE AGE'S *BOLETIN* AND *NOTICIAS GEOGRÁFICAS*

The Proceedings of the National Congresses have been published in their entirety, initially by the AGE, later by the respective Organising Committees. Most of the Group meetings have also been published in some format or other. To ensure the widest possible distribution, the AGE has recently signed an agreement with the publishers Marcial Pons.

Though this on its own is not sufficient. One of the greatest difficulties which the AGE has faced time and again is that of the communication with (or among) its membership given their large number and geographical dispersion. The publication of a newsletter was therefore undertaken, a «real flier» as it came to be described by the second president.

In 1984, this newsletter was replaced by the twice-yearly *Boletín de la Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles* (2nd Period). It was divided in three main sections: in-depth research articles, issues for discussion, and general information. When first published it was modest in its ambition, though the objective was set to convert it in a journal which was comparable to or better than those of the best-known Geography associations abroad.

The editors-in-charge of the *Boletín* have each in turn sat on the Executive of Directors: Luis M. Albentosa and Manuel Sáenz Lorite; Albentosa and Carmen Bel Adell; Alfredo Morales Gil and from 1991 until 1995, José María Gómez Espín. Twenty issues have been published to date while issue 21-22 contains this article.

Following the publication of the 13th issue the redesign of the journal was first contemplated, being introduced in the 17th issue, which coincided with the publication of the AGE's *Noticias Geográficas*. The 13th issue was the first dedicated to one region, namely, the Basque Country. From the 14th issue onwards it was decided that the articles would focus on a single theme coordinated by an appointed editor: in this first case the theme was «Environmental perspectives and the disciplinary integration of Geography», with the coordination of Julio Muñoz and Jesús Crespo.

It was issue 17 in the second half of 1993 in which the redesigned journal was launched: monographic, edited by an appointed coordinator and with external referees' reports on the quality of the articles received for publication. The theme and editor are selected by the Management Committee based on the proposals of members and announced with sufficient time in order to receive contributions.

In addition to the monographic articles there is a section which discusses issues in Geography and further sections dedicated to Chronicles and Documents. From issue 17 onwards a new design and lay-out was introduced. The issues published in this new format have focused on Geopolitical conflicts and regional change in contemporary Europe (17); Water supply and use (18); Transport and communication systems in Spain (19); «Land intervention: planning and management» (20).

Thus, the *Boletín* has been brought into line with the journals of other Geographical Associations. The restructuring was made possible by the simultaneous publication by the AGE of *Noticias Geográficas*, which gathers together information of a practical nature, making it more readily available to the Association's members. Since 1992, the newsletter has been published three times a year in April, July and December and has been edited to date by Joan Nogué and Joana María Seguí, both members of the Executive.

Based on the design of the Newsletter of the Institute of British Geographers, *Noticias Geográficas* is divided as follows: AGE Up-date; Working Groups' Up-date; Courses,

Colloquies and Seminars; Comments on Research Meetings; Geographic Documentation Service; New Publications; Geographical Miscellanea. It was first published in January 1992 and has, without doubt, improved communication with the membership. Indeed, both the *Boletín* and *Noticias* are read by the more than one thousand AGE members.

4. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE SPANISH COMMITTEE OF THE IGU

It can therefore be seen that the AGE has dedicated most of its efforts in its twenty years of existence to the coordination and representation of Spanish Geographers. However, while aware of its role within Spain, it has not ignored essential relations with international geography.

Efforts have been made in two directions: on the one hand, to obtain the degree of representation which the AGE feels it merits on the Spanish Committee at the IGU, while on the other, to establish stable relations of academic interchange with the Geographic Associations of other countries. As both aspects are dealt with in another article in this issue, I shall mention only a few relevant details.

The Spanish Committee at the IGU does not reflect the true state of Spanish Geography. According to a longstanding agreement (R:D: 26.12.1922), it falls upon the Real Sociedad Geográfica (RSG) to represent Spain at the IGU. Since 1982, the AGE has called for a share in this representation, which initially led to the setting up of an Extended Committee with a number of representatives from the AGE. An agreement seems imminent whereby this initial stage will be concluded with a presidency which will alternate on a four-year basis between the Presidents of the AGE and the RSG with a permanent shared secretary. Should this be the case, a balanced representation of both associations will have been achieved, in fitting with tradition and the present state of affairs, in addition to fulfilling a longstanding ambition of the AGE.

At all events, an active participation of the AGE membership has been achieved in the IGU. Several reports concerning Spanish Geography have been presented at the IGU during international Congresses. The fourth issue of the *Boletín* presented a directory of the geographic institutions and University Geography Departments to the Congress in Paris. On the occasion of the Washington Congress, together with the RSG, the AGE published the book entitled *Geography in Spain (1970-1990)*, while, finally, this monograph seeks to present the new Spanish reality to our colleagues at the IGU.

Two AGE members, both from the University of Barcelona, currently serve as the respective presidents of IGU Study Groups: Roser Majoral is the chairperson of SG1, *Development Issues in Marginal Regions*, while María Sala is the chairperson of SG3, *Erosion and Desertification in Mediterranean Regions* (MED).

The AGE has signed bilateral agreements with the Institute of British Geographers and the Portuguese Association of Geographers. Members who subscribe to either agreement are considered as being members by Statute and the right to receive publications, attend meetings and join the working groups of the other association.

Links with many geographical institutions in Latin America have been strengthened while the geography of this region, as mentioned earlier, has been introduced to various of the AGE's activities.

5. THE TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY AND THE PROFESSIONAL BODY OF GEOGRAPHERS

The members of the AGE are largely drawn from within education, though with a predominance of university lecturers. This explains the path taken by the Association and explains why a large part of its work has been aimed at obtaining an appropriate place for geography in education.

In the maze of reforms within secondary education carried out by the Ministry of Science and Education, the AGE has defended, above all, the right that a distinction be drawn between Geography teachers on the one hand and history teachers on the other, and, that Geography should not be diluted or trivialised with the pseudo-geographical contents of other subjects. Despite major efforts undertaken in this regard since the foundation of the Association, the desired results have not always been achieved.

The autonomy granted to the Universities by the 1983 University Reform Law has led to wide-ranging curricula reform. The President of the AGE played a highly important role, although his advice was given in his personal capacity, in the recognition of Geography as a university degree in its own right and in the structuring of the degree course and the contents of its branches.

Following the acceptance of Geography as a degree in its own right within the various universities, the AGE has, insofar as it has been possible, performed the task of coordination; facilitating the exchange of information between all parties in the drawing up of curricula, in the divulging of the degrees and in the early stages of teaching. The AGE has also intervened in claiming a presence for Geography in other recently created degree courses, including Environmental Science and Tourism.

However, the professional practice of Geography is not limited just to teaching and in the future it promises to be less so. Of the more than 6,000 graduates who specialised in Geography in Spain today, some 3,000 work in areas which regularly require use of this knowledge: undoubtedly, the majority do so in education (around 1,500) but they are also to be found in public administration, consulting and service companies and, to a lesser degree, in other private companies. Some of these professionals have formed an association to defend their interests.

The establishment of the Geography degree in its own right and hence the definition of the Geography profession, should strengthen the trend towards professional practice in areas other than education: it is estimated that around 1,000 geographers will graduate each year.

This has led the AGE (following its repeated postponement as the time was not considered appropriate) to promote the establishment of a professional body for Geographers (Colegio Profesional de Geógrafos). It is believed that a corporate union, with a sound foundation, is a right which can be of assistance to all geographers but also serve as a law of solidarity in an open, plural society which might contribute to the creation of cohesive forces in a civil society fostering in this way a peaceful and democratic existence.

Thus, in November 1994 the AGE assembly approved a statement of objectives and criteria for the creation of a Colegio de Geógrafos, in which it was established that the professional concern of geographers was territory in its natural and social dimensions.

A Management Commission has been constituted with the participation of the AGE, the RSG, the Associació de Geògrafs Professionals de Catalunya, the Asociación de Geógrafos Profesionales de Andalucía, the Asociación de Geógrafos de las Islas Baleares, the Asocia-

ción Gallega de Geografía among an ever growing number. The AGE presides over the Management Commission of the professional body.

The Management Commission is making a census of professional geographers and drafting the statutes as the first steps in a process which should lead to a bill being brought before parliament. Currently, the greatest problem lies in the parliamentary delay in the passing of a new law regulating professional bodies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

On this its twentieth anniversary the Association of Spanish Geographers, which was founded at a time when democracy was being born in Spain, can be satisfied with its growth and present standing.

It would seem that it has known how to adapt to the dynamism of its multiple research interests while retaining its unity so as to fulfil its purpose of bringing Spanish Geographers together and promoting Geography. The results again are a source for certain satisfaction.

Yet, the Association needs to continue to pursue those ventures which though under way have yet to be brought to completion - among others the due international representation and a greater social recognition for geography. It also needs to ensure that young geographers and recent graduates in the discipline see the Association as a useful, stimulating place for the interchange of academic ideas and as a complement to their professional practice.

What the AGE cannot do, nor indeed should it, is construct a corporate body for the defence and promotion of geographers as teachers or as professionals. What it should seek to do, however, is to contribute to a new organisational structure from within which it strives to provide the best possible understanding of geography, which undoubtedly will in turn be reflected in greater recognition for the professional practice of Spanish geographers.