

Distinguished Professor Etienne Louis Nel (University of Otago)



Nominated and cited by Prof. Tony Binns and endorsed by Prof. Michael Roche and Dr Ann Pomeroy

Over a career spanning some 35 years, Etienne Nel has made an outstanding contribution to Geography and Development Studies internationally and in New Zealand. The early part of his career was largely based at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, but since January 2008 he has been in the School of Geography at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.

A substantial element of Etienne's research and writing has focused on uplifting disadvantaged communities, through his significant work on Local Economic Development (LEO) in post-apartheid South Africa, to his more recent research on investigating regional inequalities and the problems facing small and often isolated towns in New Zealand. He has advised numerous government departments and organisations, such as the World Bank, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, most notably on LED policy and poverty alleviation strategies in South Africa, and through his recent research in connection with his New Zealand National Science Challenge Research Project, '*Harnessing the Hinterland*', which examines current policy and possible future strategies for addressing regional inequalities in New Zealand.

Internationally, Etienne has played a key role in bodies such as the International Geographical Union (IGU), the Regional Studies Association, and has served on various Editorial Boards for well-respected academic journals such as *Applied Geography*, *Urban Forum and Local Economy*. For over 5 years he has been the Australia and New Zealand Commissioning Editor for the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. He was awarded a prestigious Fellowship by the Regional Studies Association. He played an instrumental role in re-shaping the work of the IGU's Marginal Lands committee (CO4-27) during his nine years as Chair of the Commission between 2004 and 2012. The activities and publications emanating from this Commission flourished under his chairmanship.

Meanwhile, his highly respected research and teaching in South Africa were recognized with the Award of a Life Fellowship by the South African Geographical Society in 2016. He has held Visiting Fellowships at several universities in South Africa (Johannesburg, Rhodes and Free State) and the UK (Northumbria).

Since coming to New Zealand in 2008, Etienne has been able to further develop his work on Local Economic Development and small towns, and he has been invited to advise numerous governmental and non-governmental bodies. He has made a very significant and valued contribution to the New Zealand Geographical Society, being at times Branch President, and always a strong supporter and committee member of the Otago Branch. In his role as Managing Editor of the NZGS flagship journal *New Zealand Geographer* (2012-2018), Etienne strengthened the position of the journal both domestically and internationally and coordinated a very effective Management Team and Editorial Board.

Etienne has an outstanding publishing record, with no fewer than 11 authored and edited books, over 50 book chapters and some 130 articles in refereed international journals. Recent books include Marais, L., Nel, E.L. and Donaldson, R., 2016, *Secondary Cities and Development in South Africa*, Routledge; Chand, R., Net., E. and Pelc, S., 2017, *Societies, Social Inequalities and Marginalization: Marginal Regions in the 21st Century*, Springer; Potter, R., Binns, T., Elliot, T., Nel, E. and Smith, D., 2017, *Geographies of Development* (4th ed.), Routledge; Binns, T., Lynch, K. and Nel, E., 2018, *Handbook of African Development*, Routledge.

He is well-known internationally for his expertise in investigating regional inequalities and local development strategies and is frequently called upon to review submissions to a wide range of academic journals. He has been invited to be Guest Editor of several journal issues. Most recently, in December 2019, Etienne edited a Special Issue of the *New Zealand Geographer*, titled: "*Rediscovering Regional Development in New Zealand. Reflections on local and regional development challenges and opportunities*".

Etienne is very highly regarded in his teaching, with his supervision thus far of 18 PhD students and well over 100 Master's students, many of whom undertook their Master's degrees by research. Student evaluations of Etienne's teaching are unfailingly highly positive, and students particularly appreciate his friendly and supportive attitude in lectures and small group tutorials. Etienne is also immensely supportive of his colleagues as a mentor and guide.

At Otago University, Etienne is currently Head of School and, since his appointment twelve years ago, he has played an active role in committee business across the University, as well as undertaking valuable work with local community groups. Significantly, he was elected Chair of Dunedin's Fair Trade Committee for 5 years (2009-2013), working to raise the profile of fair trade issues in the city and among the academic community.

In conclusion, Etienne Nel is a highly regarded practitioner in his field, who has made some impressive contributions to scholarship both globally and nationally, and especially through his teaching, research and other activities here in New Zealand.