

Regional, local, urban and rural history as nearby spaces and places: Historiographical and methodological reflections

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to review the almost 50 years of formal regional and local history research practices in South Africa under the umbrella of a variety of rural and urban trends, themes and phenomena. This revisit of research practice is not approached from the traditional angle of critically debating the visibility of the research in historiography through publications (it is, after all, an extraordinarily broad field of study to cover, which may not correctly serve each author in the broader and/or local history). Rather the focus is on analysing where and when regional or local history in South Africa got its momentum and how historians have broadly assessed their progress and future in presenting and carrying out regional and local history research. International influences on historians and other academics in the humanities and social sciences which surface are also discussed. The reader is also exposed to a concise exposition of modern-day efforts in the field of integrative research that have been necessary in regional and/or local history research for decades. Local research methodologies used in the past have been combined with integrative methodology models to create an integrative multidisciplinary research methodology required for carrying out regional and local research in modern-day practice. Because no single definition of the concepts of local and regional history exists, its meaning in literature is first thrashed out to strengthen understanding of the term and the approach to it in this discussion. This debate, among others, was inspired by, and is part of, the commemoration of the journal *New Contree's* 35 years of existence. The journal's involvement in the dissemination of regional and urban history, especially during the early part of its existence, is discussed. It is hoped that this article's review of the past will inspire South African historians to revisit regional, local, urban and/or rural spaces and places in South Africa. This could be done perhaps with the view to strengthening the methodologies used in regional history studies and to ambitiously embrace possibilities for engaging in a variety of integrative research from bottom-up and top-down perspectives. This may be the only way to progress towards inclusive regional histories as contributions to the understanding of regions.

Keywords: Local history; Regional history; Urban history; Rural history; Methodology; Historiography; Integrative multidisciplinary research; Local ecohealth research; Environment; Humanities; Social sciences; History from Below; HSRC; *Contree*; *New Contree*.

Introduction

At various times, leading South African historical societies have looked back on the past with the intention of revising, reconsidering and reiterating important messages from the past as well as recommending some form of disciplinary renewal.¹ After “The Tiger in the Grass” years,² which appears to have been an ideological, political and racial work and perhaps also had something of a language connection, historians again gradually began to focus on the discipline itself and its shortcomings, and began taking note of methodological trends abroad.³ The relevance of historical research that serves society also received more attention.⁴ The debates and thoughts of the late 1960s and 1970s led to the snowballing of regional history. The Institute for Historical Research (IHR) at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Pretoria, which was founded in 1969, established a section for the study of regional history. At this stage the writing of local history in the United States and elsewhere blossomed.⁵ On 1 April 1975 the dream of the IHR was realised, which was followed by the initiative of the HSRC to strengthen this effort through, among other things, the founding of the journal *Contree*,⁶ which later was renamed *New Contree*.⁷

Because academics and others appear to feel uncomfortable with the concepts local and regional when referring to this kind of study (and specifically studies related to regional history), I will briefly discuss my understanding of local, regional, urban and rural history as “roots” of the same “tree”. The purpose of this article is also to give a concise analytical review of the approximately 50 years of formal regional and local history research practice in South

1 See J Carruthers, “The changing shape and scope of southern African historical studies”, *South African Historical Journal*, 62(2), 2010, pp. 384-393; JS Bergh, “Historiese verenigings en tydskrifte in Suid-Afrika: Verlede, hede en toekoms”, *Historia* 38(2), November 1993, pp. 33-49; SP Olivier, “Die onderrig van plaaslike geskiedenis”, *Historia*, 13(4), 1968, pp. 237-245.

2 A reference to historian Rodney Davenport’s observation in the late 1970s of historians experienced as deeply divided and a reflection of a troubled society. See TRH Davenport, “The Tiger in the Grass”, *South African Historical Journal*, 9, 1977, pp. 3-12.

3 Compare J Carruthers, “The changing shape and scope of southern African historical studies”, *South African Historical Journal*, 62(2), 2010, p. 385; ELP Stals, “Ewewig”, *South African Historical Journal*, 16 (1984), pp. 1-5.

4 MCE van Schoor, “Kleio, hulle gee ons klippe vir brood...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 11(1), 1979, pp. 1-11; FA van Jaarsveld, “Stedelike geskiedenis as navorsingsveld vir die Suid-Afrikaanse historikus”, Publication Series B3, Die geskiedenis van die Afrikaner aan die Rand (RAU, Johannesburg, 1973), pp. 1-80.

5 C Saunders, “What of regional history? Towards a history of the Western Cape”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, pp. 131-140. Saunders refers to the USA, Australia, Canada, France and Britain.

6 CM Bakkes, “Editorial”, *Contree*, 1, January 1977, p. 2. *Contree* is an old French word for country, area, region or environment. See Editorial [CC Eloff], *Contree*, 20, July 1986, p. 1.

7 JS Bergh, “Historiese verenigings en tydskrifte in Suid-Afrika: Verlede, hede en toekoms”, *Historia*, 38(2), November 1993, p. 44.

Africa under the umbrella of a variety of rural and urban trends, themes and phenomena. This debate in its entirety was, among others, initiated as part of the 35-year anniversary of the journal *New Contree* in January 2012.

The discussion in this article progresses from the traditional to a modern-day methodology of dealing with certain aspects of regional histories, such as the health history or wellbeing history in a wider context of locality or environment than just physical health. The integrative multidisciplinary research methodology for doing regional and local research required for modern-day practice is briefly introduced.

Conceptual differences between regional, local, urban and rural history

Although each of the concepts under this sub-heading can be related to a micro or macro (broader) regional history in a particular space, and could be the “proud owner” of its own conceptual clarification,⁸ all these areas of research share commonalities which hardly make them separable when referring to or studying a specific region’s history.⁹

For example, in the United States the conceptual appreciation of regional history appears to be more geographically understood:¹⁰

... regional history occupies an ambiguous position within the larger field of United States history. Since the late 1950s, systematic revisionism that applies the approaches and insights of a wide range of social sciences to key issues of social and political change has revolutionized the field. Much of the intellectual excitement in American history has involved the definition, or redefinition, of thematic fields such as social history, family history, or urban history, and the analysis of processes such as class formation, labor force socialization, or the definition of gender roles. The usual arenas for testing hypotheses are specific localities, or the nation as a whole, rather than traditional multistate regions. Important summary volumes on historical writing about the United States have been organized around periods or thematic fields, rather than regions.

8 In the USA even “historic districts” are clearly defined. See RE Datel, “Preservation and a sense of orientation for American cities,” *Geographical Review*, 75 (2), 1985, pp. 125-141.

9 See examples of conceptual clarifications (available at: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/regional>; <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/locally>; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rural>; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/urban>).

10 C Abbott, “United States regional history as an instructional field: The practice of college and university history departments”, *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 21(2), May, 1990, p. 200.

From the arguments Abbott raises, it is clear that regional and local history are differentiated, although their differences are not at all explained. He remarks:

... Indeed, the variability of regional definition is, itself, evidence of the vitality of the field. Unlike the stable and enduring South, the American West has always been defined in terms of growth and change. Perhaps for this reason, western specialists also seem the most flexible of regional historians in their willingness to entertain alternative regional definitions ... has also served to encourage a regional approach...

Regional history as a field of teaching *per se* is a long-standing discipline in the United States, and by 1990 no fewer than 11 respected journals serviced the regional histories of the country.¹¹ In 2001 Susan Armitage¹² observed that in the US:

Regional history has been enjoying a resurgence lately. In western history the combined forces of environmental history and ethnic history have produced the perspective we call The New Western History. Environmental history directs attention to areas that share similar physical geographies, while the presence of large racial ethnic populations in specific locations ...

This particular trend is currently finding its way into South Africa through the need for research into indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories and the environmental status of, for example, industrialised areas.¹³

In Europe, British local history research and teaching gained momentum from 1947 onwards at Leicester School, especially through the rural research studies of Finberg and Skipp¹⁴ from 1952, who shared their ideas on the definition of at least local history. The use of the word “region” as a synonym in arguments, especially by Finberg, is rare. Based on the well-known approach of Arnold Toynbee¹⁵ to research on civilisations, Finberg gives the following

11 C Abbott, “United States regional history as an instructional field: The practice of college and university history departments”, *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 21(2), May, 1990, pp. 197-217.

12 SH Armitage, “From the inside out: Rewriting regional history”, *Frontiers - A Journal of Women's Studies*, 22, 2001, pp.1-2.

13 See ES van Eeden., “Considering environmental history within the transdisciplinary methodology as research focus for today and tomorrow”, *Interdisciplinary Science Review*, 36(4), December 2011, pp. 314-329; P Denis, “Oral history in a wounded country”, JA Draper (ed.), *Orality, literacy and colonialism in Southern Africa*, Semeia Studies vol. 63 (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster publications, 2003), pp. 206-216; D Morris, “Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the teaching of history: Case studies in a museum archaeology context”, McGregor Museum Kimberley, 2005, pp. 1-8 (available at <http://www.museumsonc.co.za/aboutus/depts/archaeology/pdf/IKS.pdf>, as accessed on January 2012).

14 G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 67.

15 See the 12 volume “magnus opus” of the British historian AJ Toynbee, *A study of history*, (Ilmamaa, 2003), pp. 960.

definition:¹⁶

The business of the local historian then, as I see it, is to re-enact in his own mind, and to portray for his readers, the Origin, Growth, Decline and Fall of a local community.

Finberg also included the study of local communities and national history (as localised history) in his definition. For Finberg, the knowledge of the professional local historian had to be wide and well grounded as it is a requirement for understanding the relationships between national and the local, and vice versa, and the implications for each other.¹⁷ Finberg's colleague Victor Skipp, a researcher in the field with extensive experience of local history study, stated the following about local history, with which one can easily associate:¹⁸

In the last resort, the boundaries of local history – or any other kind of history for that matter – are artificial. All history is one – like existence itself, a seamless garment ...

In 1998 George and Yanina Sheeran revisited the work on local history carried out by Finberg and others at the Leicester School half a century previously, but without attempting to define what local was. It was rather an effort to understand the definition of local history through the historiography and methodology of local history. Interesting trends they reported were the activities by historians on community history and popular local history.¹⁹

In the present-day international scenario regarding the simplicity or complexity of the definition of regional history, the Finnish philosopher and historian Sulevi Riukulehto recorded his thinking about historiography:²⁰

The new regionally oriented directions in historiography are so recent that no generally recognised orthodoxy has yet been adopted. The various elements from localism to globalisation can still be seen in the first works written under the label of regional history.

One of these “first works” referred to by Riukulehto is a book edited by Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall, titled “An agenda for regional

16 HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history. Objective and pursuit*, p. 18.

17 See HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history. Objective and pursuit*, p. 10 and G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 68.

18 VHT Skipp, “Local history: A new definition and its implications”, *Local Historian*, 14, 1981, p. 328.

19 G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 65-85.

20 S Riukulehto, “The concept of region in regional history”, (paper presented, Regional Studies Association annual International Conference 2010), (available at: www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/2010/may.../Riukulehto1.pd., as accessed on 30 April 2010), pp. 1-7.

history,”²¹ which has received some attention. It is regarded as the first major book written under the label of regional history in which the concept “regional” is more favoured than “local”. Regions are also referred to as either geographical, socio-cultural or economic. Riukulehto adds that administrative and discursive²² phenomena may also lead to an entirely different map of regions that makes the structure or form of a region simple or complex.²³

Armitage’s critique of the vagueness of the definition of “regional” used in the US by 2001, together with some shortcomings in the historiographical approach to regional history in the past,²⁴ are shared here (as it was no different in South Africa by 2012):

Even when it is possible to agree on regional boundaries, further problems arise with the term. Historians owe the particular usage of the term regionalism to Frederick Jackson Turner, and like Turner’s more famous theory, the frontier thesis, the legacy is ambiguous. Following Turner’s commanding lead, subsequent historians used the concept of region both confidently and sloppily, assuming that some thing or things in the region bound people together in ways that superseded cultural and racial boundaries. This assumption of general regional commonalities, while recognizing differences between regions, ignored conflicts and differences within regions. In effect, then, regional historians wrote only the history of the dominant cultural group and not that of subordinate ones, ignoring class, race, gender, and other differences.

Although the shortcomings outlined by Armitage were given some attention by some researchers, especially of urban and rural histories²⁵ in South Africa since the 1970s, research in fields and themes within the broader regional area lies fallow and still requires the active attention of historians. Limitations in the field of regional history in South Africa include, for example, the proper recording of regional and township settlement of Africans all over South Africa since the 20th century, based on a research methodology for studying regional/local history.²⁶

21 B Lancaster, D Newton and N Vall (Eds.), *An agenda for regional history* (Newcastle, Northumbria University Press, 2007), pp. 324.

22 The author refers to “discursive” as the secondary elements or phenomena not relevant to the main discussion.

23 S Riukulehto, “The concept of region in regional history” (available at: www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/2010/may.../Riukulehto1.pdf), as accessed on 30 April 2010), pp. 1-7.

24 SH Armitage, “From the inside out: Rewriting regional history”, *Frontiers - A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 22, 2001, pp.1-2.

25 See J Carruthers, The changing shape and scope of Southern African historical studies, *South African Historical Journal*, 62(2), 2010, p. 385; SP Lekgoathi, “An accessible history of rural society”, a review on the publication of P Delius, “A lion amongst the cattle”, *South African Historical Journal*, 37(1), 1997, pp. 214-217.

26 Based on the author’s personal experience and knowledge of regional/local history in South Africa.

Debates internationally reflect the greyness of the concept, and the sharing of ideas in the approach to the concept “region” in regional history through interdisciplinary research has been on-going in Europe.²⁷ In this regard the Finnish philosopher and historian Sulevi Riukulehto²⁸ argues:

What is a region? There exist competing views concerning the definition and criteria of a region ... Such a branch as regional history does not really exist yet in the family of human sciences. But there should exist. In the past decade a growing number of scholars in the humanities and social sciences have turned their attention to space as a means of understanding historical processes. Specific conferences are arranged concerning the meaning of space. [For example in April 30, 2010 at Berkeley] Finally, after the twenty-years of linguistic turn, historians and other history-oriented scholars have deliberately risen such terms as “region”, “space” and “territory” into the focus of historiography, too. The turn to space has connections with the various forms of history from below, such as the traditions of local history, micro-history and family history. In all these directions of historiography the role of space must have been taken into account in a new way. [Olofsson and Öhman] The specific features of the place – the forum where history is made – may be decisive to historical analysis ... The spatial turn also has connections to the general globalisation analysis and the wave of regionalism in the world. The regionalist paradigm is stressing the importance of place in explaining success and failure and the need for endogenous growth strategies [Hise; Klieman; Frisvoll and Rye; Gerber and Gibson].

The argument by Riukulehto (and the references he cites) regarding the historical value of research on regions is endorsed, and more so his introductory remarks on the absence of regional history having been done in the humanities (as part of History as a discipline in a research and teaching context).²⁹

27 Compare P Aronsson, “The old cultural regionalism – and the new”, AG Green and AJ Pollard, *Regional identities in North-East England, 1300-2000* (England, Boydell Press, 2007), p. 182; T Granier, “Local or regional identity in early medieval Latin Southern Italy”, B Lancaster, D Newton and N Vall, *An agenda for regional history* (UK, Northumbria University Press, 2007), chapter six; C Phythian-Adams, “Differentiating provincial societies in English history: spatial contexts and cultural processes”, R Tittler, *Portraits, painters and publics in provincial England, 1540-1640* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 153; G Gerber, C Gibson, “Balancing regionalism and localism”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 3, 2009, pp. 633–648; A Jackson Andrew, “Local and regional history as heritage, The heritage process and conceptualising the purpose and practice of local historians”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4, 2008, pp. 362–379; LW Manuel, J Scoggins, “Why regions? Why now? Who cares? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 3, 2009, pp. 269–296.

28 S Riukulehto, “The concept of region in regional history”, (paper presented, Regional Studies Association annual International Conference 2010), (Available at: www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/2010/may.../Riukulehto1.pdf, as accessed on 30 April 2010), pp. 1-7.

29 In South Africa the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg’s National Research Foundation Programme in “Local histories & Present Realities” that has been running in 2012 and earlier, is the only effort at providing histories of the region with a structured voice in a structured research or/and curriculum programme currently that the author is aware of.

The concise definition of regional history that Donald Worster and Patricia Limerick offer complements the environmental (Worster) and cultural (Limerick) sides of regional history that should and could (according to both authors) be adapted and applied to other countries on other continents:

[Worster]:³⁰ The history of the region is first and foremost one of an evolving human ecology. A region emerges as people try to make a living from a particular part of the earth, as they adapt themselves to its limits and possibilities. What the regional historian should first want to know is how a people or peoples acquired a place and, then, how they perceived and tried to make use of it.

[Limerick]:³¹ Western history has been an ongoing competition for legitimacy – for the right to claim for oneself and sometimes for one’s group the status of legitimate beneficiary of Western resources. The intersection of ethnic diversity with property allocation unifies Western history.

Published works by the dozen (internationally and locally) follow an approach to local and/or regional history under the umbrella of many names (which confirms that researchers exercise personal freedom in defining and understanding a region or local area).³² The following are but a few examples: In 2003 Carol Kammen of the United States published a guide for local historians titled *On doing local history*. Harm de Blij as well as the renowned writer Dolores Hayden both published works titled *The power of place*. The term “place” generally appears to be extraordinarily popular for scholars in their titles. Yi-Fu Tuan, on the other hand, prefers to refer to the local history he discusses as *Space and place* (2001). David E Kyvig and Myron A Marty in 2010 published their *Nearby history: Exploring the past around you* to exchange research ideas in North America on family and community history. Another is Joseph Anthony’s *Rethinking home: A case for writing local history*, which was published in 2002.

30 Compare D Worster, *Under western skies: Nature and history in the American West* (USA, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 292.

31 Compare PN Limerick, *The legacy of conquest: The unbroken past of the American West* (USA, Norton, 1987), pp. 396.

32 See for example from a local perspective C Bundy, “Amafelandawonye (the Die-hards). Popular protest and women’s in Herschel District in the 1920s.”, Chapter 7, W Beinart & Colin Bundy, *Hidden struggles in rural South Africa: Politics & popular movements in the Transkei & Eastern Cape, 1890-1930* (USA, University of California Press, 1987), pp. 326; I Hofmeyr, “The narrative logic of oral history”, *African Studies Institute* (University of the Witwatersrand, African Studies Seminar Paper), May 1988, pp. 1-19 (especially pp. 17); B Nasson, *Abraham Esau’s war: A black South African War in the Cape 1899-1902*, *African Studies Series*, 68 (UK, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 272.

The oldest contribution that I was able to find to a discussion in South Africa on what the definition of local history should and could be, is that of S P Olivier. His insightful contribution was published in an edition of *Historia* in 1968.³³ Olivier's understanding of local history is associated with *omgewingsleer* (directly translated it means environmental studies), but he explicitly associates it with *plaaslike* (local *cum* regional *cum* city *cum* town) history, and he envisages integrative teaching of the multidisciplinary nature of local environments (the peoples, the working place and the living place). Although his discussion does not include explicit references to capturing the local history-writing trends of the time, Olivier refers to several international authors in his arguments. One such author is a renowned geographer of the 1930s and 1940s, James Fairgrieve,³⁴ who appears to have had a pivotal impact on Olivier's thoughts regarding local and regional research and implementing them in the thinking and teaching of history in South Africa. According to Fairgrieve, the conceptual understanding of local studies include the following:³⁵

Local studies form the basis of the whole structure of geographical knowledge (historical and civic knowledge). For no systematic geographical (historical or civic) account of any area, whether it be a "natural" region or one defined by political boundaries, or a whole can be taken until the writer (learner) has at his disposal a multitude of facts and the chief source of these facts is in local regional studies ...

The richness and variety of the sources in local history is stressed by both Fairgrieve and Olivier.

Most of the time the concept of regional history in South African historical research (popular and academic) has, since the 1970s, been used as inclusive of regional, local, urban and rural histories.³⁶ For example, in January 1977, the historians dealing with regional history in the newly established journal *Contree* defined this field as follows:³⁷

33 See SP Olivier, "Die onderrig van plaaslike geskiedenis", *Historia*, 13(4), 1968, pp. 237-245.

34 See J Fairgrieve and E Young, *Real geography: Visiting South America, Australia and New Zealand, Book 1* (Philip, UK, 1939 and 1948 editions); J Fairgrieve, *Geography in school* (UK, University of London Press, 1949), and whose work were still very respected in the 1960's.

35 SP Olivier, "Die onderrig van plaaslike geskiedenis", *Historia*, 13(4), 1968, pp. 240-241.

36 Histories in a local or regional, or urban or rural context, most of the time relate to a specific, geographically local context which includes a community and relates to most socio-cultural aspects of the specific environment, and also cover oral history as opportunities to compile information that may not be stored or findable in any regional or national archive. Compare HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history, objective and pursuit* (David & Charles, Great Britain, 1967, pp. 1-43; 128).

37 CM Bakkes, "Editorial", *Contree*, 1, January 1977, p. 2 and indirectly confirmed by AG Oberholster, "Streeksgeskiedenis en die historikus", *Contree* 6, Julie 1979, p. 29.

Regional history studies the past from a local angle, is interested in the smaller community and the activities of ordinary people in their own environment. After all, true history is the story of change which occurs through the interaction of major determining events and the rhythm of the small, prosaic, almost unobtrusive course of daily life.

PL Scholtz followed shortly afterwards by similarly deliberating on what regional history is.³⁸ Nine years later – and with a look in retrospect – these blurred micro-divisions as varieties of local, urban and regional histories were confirmed by an editorial in *Contree*:³⁹

The last decade saw 20 numbers being published, comprising more than 600 double-columned pages. Almost 80 per cent of the 95 articles, reviews and short communications deal with hamlets, villages, towns, cities and regions, while the rest mainly relate to aspects of theory and methodology of research into regional history.

The editorial in 1987 for the first time directly refers to the definition of regional/local history. It concludes that it is difficult to “arrive at a precise ... definition of local and regional history”.⁴⁰ Then, without citing Finberg and Skipp’s 1967 publication on local history, the editorial quotes several passages from this publication to emphasise the difficulty regarding the definition and other features of local history practice at the time. One can only assume that the *Contree* editorial agreed with the understanding of local history according to Finberg and Skipp, which itself is a vague explanation of the “traditional”⁴¹ research methodology they endorsed.

Andre Wessels’ definition of regional and local history, in his review in the same 1987 edition of *Contree* of the journal’s first years as a publication established to cover urban and regional history, perhaps provides insight into the understanding of historians in general regarding its practice. Wessels acknowledges the broadness of the definition, but adds that it can also be associated with environmental history,⁴² which includes urban history, local

38 PL Scholtz, *Streeksgeskiedenis – ’n fassinerende mikrokosmos* (Belville, Publikasiereeks van die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland, A26, 1978), pp. 1-7. Also see the thinking of Scholtz covered in the understanding of A Wessels, “*Contree – Die eerste tien jaar*”, *Contree*, 21, Januarie 1987, p. 26 and ES van Eeden, “Die geskiedenis van die Gatsrand vanaf die vestiging van die Trekkergemeenskap omstreeks 1839 tot die proklamering van Carletonville in 1948” (MA., PU vir CHO, 1988), pp. x-xi.

39 CC Eloff, “Editorial”, *Contree*, 20, July 1986, p. 2.

40 Editorial, *Contree*, 21, January 1987, p. 3.

41 G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 67.

42 This integrative nature of regional and local history thinking is shared by basically all historians dealing with this kind of history research. See for example G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 68.

or town history and rural history.⁴³ Apart from this effort, the voices of those practitioners of regional and local histories in South Africa, who based their contributions on *Contree/New Contree* regarding the conceptual clarity, methodology and historiography of regional/local history, were never fully heard from the founding years of the journal up to 2011.

In a very simplistic way, the definition of regional history studies in South Africa in the past four to five decades remained a very grey and broad one. Although it could be said of academia internationally that they at least still occasionally debate regional history conceptually, methodologically and historiographically, this is currently is not the state of affairs in South Africa, and should be reconsidered.

Going local in South Africa: Some historiographical reflections

Historiographical pointers to the practice of local history in South Africa are represented in trends that are particularly evident in ideas from the French Annales School from the early 20th Century, some British historians (such as Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson and Gareth Stedman Jones), the British “History Workshop Model”, which concentrates on the lives of ordinary people, the American “New Left” group and the German Alltagsgeschichte. These international trends are discernible in the thoughts and methodologies of the so-called Afrikaner nationalists – the liberal, radical and revisionist historians in South Africa.⁴⁴ The thoughts on local history of HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp,⁴⁵ for example, contributed to the author’s personal academic understanding and thinking of local and regional history in her early years as a researcher. However, if these two practitioners of English local history have ever categorised themselves as being part of the American “New Left” or have

43 A Wessels, “*Contree* Die eerse tien jaar”, *Contree*, 21, Januarie 1987, p. 26.

44 R Samuel (ed.), *People’s history and socialist theory* (Londen, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), pp. 141; TRH Davenport, “History in South Africa in the 1980’s: Why bother about it?”, *South Africa International*, 19(2), 1988, p. 102; K Smith, *The changing past: Trends in South African historical writing* (Johannesburg, Southern Publishers, 1988), pp. 164-170; C Saunders, *The making of the South African past: Major historians on race and class* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1988), pp. 169-170, 184; R Samuel, “Local history and oral history”, *History Workshop*, 1, 1976, pp. 199-204; FA van Jaarsveld, “Demokratisering in die geskiedwetenskap: Van ’n elitegeskiedenis van bo tot ’n alledaagse geskiedenis van onderaf”, *Historia*, 32(1), 1987, pp. 34-42; FA van Jaarsveld, “Geskiedenis van die alledaagse lewe – ’n Nuwe stroming in die Duitse sosiale geskiedskrywing” *Historia*, 35(1), 1990, pp. 3-12; P Bonner, I Hofmeyr, D James and T Lodge (eds.), *Holding their ground: Class, locality and culture in nineteenth and twentieth century South Africa* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 318.

45 HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history. Objective and pursuit* (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1967), p. 130.

associated themselves with the thinking of the French *Annales*, or the British “History Workshop Model” or the German *Alltagsgeschichte*, has escaped me in my naïve thinking, knowledge and exposure as a young historian (and fortunately or unfortunately still does).

Broader regional and local history covers a variety of themes in which human involvement and human interaction are stressed. An icon of South African history practice, FA van Jaarsveld,⁴⁶ supported disciplinary cooperation between history and other disciplines in the 1970s as an addition to the development of history’s expanding focus and fields of research. The then emerging fields of social history⁴⁷ and local history⁴⁸ in South Africa,⁴⁹ for example, paved the way for history researchers to become more aware of regional social trends that allow closer interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary research opportunities because of the varieties of knowledge and insight required to conduct quality research in local history, which also includes environmental issues.⁵⁰

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, regional history research, as initiated by the HSRC, developed alongside the ideas of the History Workshop Group of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), supported as “history from below”.⁵¹ In essence, the research approach by this Group was to emphasise history from below, which meant that the everyday experience, role, input and knowledge of communities in certain environments and/or activities

46 FA van Jaarsveld, “Geskiedenis en relevansie”, *Historia*, 24(1), 1979, pp. 14-18; FA van Jaarsveld, “South Africa as an industrial society”, *Historia*, 34(1), 1989, pp. 95-99.

47 See FA van Jaarsveld, “Oor die opleiding van geskiedkundiges Deel 1”, *Historia*, 16(2) 1971, pp. 74-88; FA van Jaarsveld, “Oor die opleiding van geskiedkundiges, Deel 2”, *Historia*, 16(3) 1971, pp. 146-160; DJ van Zyl, “Geskiedenis as vak en wetenskap: Nuwe uitdagings”, *South African Historical Journal*, 19(1), 1987, pp. 1-5; A Grundlingh, “Herhistorisering en herposisionering: Perspektiewe op aspekte van geskiedsbeoefening in hedendaagse Suid-Afrika”, *Historia*, 46(2), November 2001, pp. 315-318.

48 Compare WM Macmillan’s *Complex South Africa, an economic footnote to History* (London, Faber and Faber, 1930), in which he points out the lack of social history in South Africa as quoted by FA van Jaarsveld, “Oor die onderrig van sosiale geskiedenis en riglyne vir sy metodiek”, *Historia*, 17(2), 1972, pp. 118-133. Van Jaarsveld has also mentioned examples of social history, such as PJ van der Merwe’s *Die noordwaartse beweging van die boere voor die Groot Trek, 1770-1842* (The Hague, WP van Stockum & Zoon, 1937).

49 C Eloff, “History from below...”, Paper, 13th SAHA Conference, Unisa, 22-25 January, 1991, p. 12.

50 ES van Eeden, *Impressions on conducting and reporting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary environmental research in South Africa – a historian’s perspective* (Inaugural lecture 07/2010, Platinum Press, NWU, Vaal Triangle Campus, March 2010), pp. 1-44; Elize S van Eeden, “Environmental history within a revitalised integrative research methodology for today and tomorrow”, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 36(4), December 2011, pp. 314-329.

51 Compare for example this approach to history with PJ Blok, “Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk” [seven volumes] as discussed in his inaugural lecture in 1894 in Leiden titled: *De Geschiedenis als Sociale Wetenschap*. Blok interprets social history as: “De geschiedenis der menshelijke maatschappij” as quoted in FA van Jaarsveld, “Oor die onderrig van sosiale geskiedenis en riglyne vir sy metodiek”, *Historia*, 17(2), 1972, p. 119.

should be utilised or acknowledged in the scientific research process.⁵²

In 1977 Dr CM Bakkes of the HSRC in South Africa rightly noted in the very first edition of the journal *Contree* that the “past as an object is so rich and vast that time and again the historian feels constrained to divide it into compartments.” But eventually the content that considers the world, the African continent and South Africa in specialised fields such as economic, social, military and cultural history do have the ability to be branched off, each with its distinguishable research methodology and focus. Bakkes also accurately observed that this was not the case in regional history studies, because this way of history research recognises the unity of history⁵³ (and thus covers all the aforementioned fields), although it has to be narrowed down first before progressing towards being “united” again in a collective effort as regional historical studies. It furthermore complements bottom-up history, but does not ignore top-down activities and trends.⁵⁴

Because regional history does not exist in isolation of other disciplinary activities in regions, regional historians also have a challenging obligation to associate with experts from other disciplines in related and unrelated sciences. In the early years of *Contree*, this multidisciplinary association was acknowledged:

The vast majority of the articles were written by professional historians; contributions by geographers, archaeologists, cultural historians, economists, museologists, educationists, amateur historians and other dilettanti have also been published.

Up to this stage and time, to the best of my knowledge very little has been published historiographically and methodologically on the progress and status of regional history in South Africa,⁵⁵ and debates on how to methodologically address local histories, or how to progress to regional histories were, and still are, non-existent.

52 See for example B Bozzolli (ed.), *Town and countryside in the Transvaal* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983).

53 CM Bakkes, “Editorial”, *Contree*, 1, January 1977, p. 2.

54 Also compare Bakkes’ view with the contribution of ES van Eeden, “Using a transdisciplinary approach for environmental crisis research in History”, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 6(1), July 2010, pp. 191-208; ES van Eeden, “Land Reform in South Africa: Questions and politics with regard to land claims as officially proposed: A case study of the farm Deelkraal IQ142, North West Province”, *South African Historical Journal*, 57, May 2007.

55 FA van Jaarsveld also confirms this statement in FA van Jaarsveld, “South Africa as industrial society”, *Historia* 34(1), May 1989, p. 98.

A first observation as an acknowledgement of bottom-up trends in regional histories was made by Dr Callie Eloff, former researcher at the regional division of the HSRC. He has categorised several publications produced between the late 1970s and 1990 as related to “history from below” (for example, the Wits History Workshop contributions with Belinda Bozzoli as editor, and the contributions of Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, William Beinart and Colin Bundy as well as the publications of Wilmot James and Mary Simons). Oddly enough, he never did the same historiographical exercise with the ongoing activities and research associations then by the regional division of the HSRC.⁵⁶

The first meaningful and critical comment on regional studies in the country came from Christopher Saunders in 1990 while he was reviewing the publication under the editorial guidance of Wilmot James and Mary Simons, titled “The angry divide”, and covering local and regional histories of the Western Cape. Apart from stating, like Van Jaarsveld, that the country was lacking substantial contributions in regional history when compared to smaller states internationally (he was referring to urban, rural and particular areas), Saunders also criticised the intentions of Revisionist historians in the 1970s for focusing on the social consequences of the Witwatersrand and its gold-mining industry, and not because of any concern for writing a regional history. Saunders states:⁵⁷

For all their brilliance, Charles van Onselen’s Studies in the social economic history on the Witwatersrand were also limited in range, as ‘Studies’ implies, and did not address issues of regionalism. The same is true of the papers in the three volumes in the Wits History Workshop series, despite the claim made by Belinda Bozzoli, after she pointed out the focus of the second workshop had moved from the townships on the Rand to ‘town and countryside’ ... Bozzoli’s reminder of the importance of the specific regional dimensions of, say, capital accumulation, resistance or culture, was a useful one but it was not followed up ...

Saunders applauds, for example, the contributions of AH Brookes, C de B Webb, A Duminy and B Guest on their versions of the history of Natal, and

56 CC Eloff, “History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 50-51.

57 C Saunders, “What of regional history? Towards a history of the Western Cape”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, pp. 131-140. Saunders refers to the study of C van Onselen, *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, Vol I, New Babylon*; and *Vol II, New Nineveh* (published in 1982). Also see other reviews on the C van Onselen publications by L Vail, *African economic history*, 13, 1984, pp. 194-195 and R Gray, “The industrialisation of South Africa: A review article”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29(1), January 1987, p. 402.

criticises the other provinces of the time for falling short in this regard.⁵⁸

Furthermore, by the 1990s *Contree* as a journal for South African urban and regional history had been criticised by Saunders for being “parochial and narrow in focus”.⁵⁹

The Division for regional History at the Human Sciences Research Council has divided the country into as many as twenty-eight regional [areas], but *Contree* has not significantly furthered the study of the history of those regions as such.

The Division of Regional History at the HSRC in fact advanced regional research in, for example, the Northern Cape and the Free State⁶⁰ with a limited capacity of researchers. They also intellectually supported research elsewhere⁶¹ before finally stopping after just more than a decade of formally pioneering such research. Inevitably, they had to pass on the journal *Contree*, which they had started for urban and regional history, to the former Rand Afrikaans University (now the University of Johannesburg (UJ)). The historians of UJ, and the University of the North-West (from 2004 known as part of the the North-West University or NWU),⁶² were willing to take on this additional editorial task. Therefore the furthering of regional studies (the critique by Saunders) actually became a “task” that *Contree* (later *New Contree* under the editorial leadership of UJ and then NWU) should have broadened and have inspired.

58 C Saunders, “What of regional history?...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, p. 133. Saunders was in a position to efficiently criticise regional histories done in the Western Cape because of his experience with research done in the region. See T Strauss and C Saunders, *Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula post 1806: A working bibliography* (Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1989), pp. 141.

59 C Saunders, “What of regional history?...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, p. 134.

60 Whilst CC Eloff and A Oberholster have produced a few scientific articles, and have produced histories on parts of the Free State, it was researcher Piet Snyman who was more active in publishing regional research in the Northern Cape. See PHR Snyman, “Ontstaan en groei van Postmasburg”, *Contree*, 13, 1983, pp. 4-26; PHR Snyman, “Daniëlskuil – Die tronk mite”, *Contree*, 17, 1985, pp. 21-24; PHR Snyman, “Die Langeberg-Rebellie en die totstandkoming van Olifantshoek”, *Contree*, 19, 1986, pp. 16-26; PHR Snyman, “Die rol van sendelinge, die owerheid en ekonomiese faktore in die ontstaan van Kuruman, 1886-1913”, *Contree*, 22, 1987, pp. 5-14.

61 To the author’s knowledge both Drs CC Eloff and PHR Snyman were involved in co-guiding postgraduate students from various universities at the time.

62 The Northwest University Campus at Mafikeng/Mahikeng from 2004 became part of the newly formed University of the North-West, which includes the Potchefstroom Campus and the Vaal Triangle Campus (known as the PU vir CHO under the pre-2004 dispensation).

A local flavour in historical journals

From *Contree* to *New Contree*

Despite the fact that the origin of the name *Contree* is not mentioned or explained in the first edition of the journal, its meaning probably relates to the Latin word *Contrée*, and which could in French refer to either land, region or country. It could be said that the “scientific” phase of *Contree* started when historians at UJ took responsibility for it in 1992. At this stage neither the HSRC’s Division for Regional History nor UJ were very explicit in their welcoming and farewell editorials on how they tried to run or would have liked to proceed with the journal’s acclaimed urban and regional focus.⁶³ After some years, they did emphasise in the editorial policy that *Contree* was intended to provide an “outlet for the products of urban or regionally oriented research”. They also added: “As such it covers a wide field of research and accommodates a variety of disciplines”.⁶⁴

Responsibility for the journal in the meantime passed in 1996 to NWU’s Mafikeng Campus, which was when its name change to *New Contree*. This was very much connected to South Africa’s new dispensation⁶⁵ and new history, and an apparent need to expand the celebrated definition of “*Contree*” to include a wider audience. It was accomplished by accepting deliberations on broader themes of national importance and by supporting scientific contributions in the crossing of disciplinary boundaries through sections on “voices” in the journal (such as a South African voice, a local and regional voice, an educational voice, a woman’s voice, an environmental voice, etc.). This approach catered for the full meaning of *Contree* (namely land, region and country). Gradually the micro voices of “local and regional” historians in *New Contree* became fewer and fewer as the other voices, not necessarily related to a particular local area or region, started dominating the content of editions.⁶⁶

63 See CC Eloff, “*Contree* – the end of an era ...1”, *Contree*, 30, October 1991, p. 40; HJ van Aswegen, *Contree*, 31, April 1992, p.4; “Editorial”, *Contree*, 38, December 1995. p. 3.

64 Anon., “Editorial Policy”, *Contree*, 35, June 1994, p. 3.

65 See J Bottomley and T Gouws, “The new history, the new South Africa, the *New Contree*”, *New Contree*, 39, August 1996, pp. 4-9, which probably also ties in with Bill Nasson’s thinking in “New history for the new South Africa”, which served as a review for the work of John Pampallis, titled *Foundations of the new South Africa* (MML, Cape Town, 1991), *South African Historical Journal*, 26(1), 1992.

66 At this stage Prof Christopher Saunders of the University of Cape Town, which criticised *Contree* for being narrow in focus, formed part of the Editorial Division, and probably endorsed the new editorial approach. See *New Contree*, 39, August 1996, p.2.

When NWU's Vaal Triangle Campus officially took responsibility for *New Contree* in 2007, the newly nominated editorial committee recommended that the broad and disciplinary integrative name of *New Contree* should be further clarified with a subtitle, namely: "*New Contree. A journal of Historical and Human Sciences for South Africa*". It is indeed true that this consideration, and previous decisions to change the original name of the journal, have slowly paved the way for scientific discourse to move away from just being very local or perhaps focused on broader regional history, or with an explicit historical focus or as a journal being produced only by historians. No history journal in South Africa vigorously promotes historical dialogue that is multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary, and *New Contree* of the time aimed (and currently still aims) to fill this space. With the addition to its name, the journal unobtrusively acknowledged regional and local history research and furthermore acted in support of the methodologies associated with this kind of research.

Despite Saunders' criticism at the time (as mentioned in the previous Section) that *Contree* in the HSRC years was parochial in focus, he appears not to have been against parochialism as an inevitable methodological requirement for eventually progressing towards representative or broader regional studies.⁶⁷ This way of thinking about regional historical studies is not disputed but fully endorsed.

Other historical journals with a local or regional focus

South African historians have approximately 15 history-related journals⁶⁸ which welcome their research, although many other journals also accept historical research papers if their vision and guidelines are respected. In what way they all endorse research related to local areas and broader regions is not yet clear. The frequency of research related to a local area or to a broader region has been calculated in a random way by browsing through four South African history journals that are historically based and also based on the understanding of the concepts of local and/or regional as outlined in this discussion. They are by no means "complete sets" of a local or a broader regional-related history. Mostly an aspect of an area is discussed.⁶⁹ The journals explored that were

⁶⁷ Compare C Saunders, "What of regional history?...", *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, p. 138.

⁶⁸ JS Bergh, "Historiese verenigings en tydskrifte in Suid-Afrika: Verlede, hede en toekoms", *Historia*, 38(2), November 1993, p. 45 mentions 13 already in 1993, but since this statistics must have slightly changed.

⁶⁹ Some place names that appear in the articles may have changed after 1994.

published in the period 1990–2011⁷⁰ are the *South African Historical Journal* (SAHJ); *Historia*; *New Contree*; and the *South African Journal for Cultural History* (abbreviated in this discussion as the SAJC). They are listed in random order.⁷¹

Table 1: Number of broad regional and/or local history articles by province published in four of South Africa’s history journals, 1990-2011

JOURNAL	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape
<i>(New) Contree</i>	5	3	6	4	1	0	2	2	5
<i>Historia</i>	0	0	4	1	1	2	0	0	0
<i>SAHJ</i>	3	4	4	6	0	0	0	2	4
<i>SAJC</i>	7	11	11	4	3	6	0	4	16
TOTAL	15	18	25	15	5	8	2	8	25

(New) Contree contribution: 23.14%

Historia contribution: 0.36.61%

SAHJ contribution: 19%

SAJC contribution: 51.23%

Table 1 shows that a very limited number of articles have been published on the local histories of some provinces. It is very clear that results of local research from Gauteng and the Western Cape have so far been disseminated well through these journals, followed by the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Publication of research on North West province and Mpumalanga is below average, with Limpopo and the Northern Cape representing only between one and four per cent of the total publications.⁷² The number of regional-focused articles published in these journals also differs in percentage and scope. A more extensive study may reveal editorial preferences for specific so-called schools of thought.

It is further obvious from Table 1 that the SAJC has accepted many regional and/or local research contributions for publication. Although the journal’s focus is predominantly the cultural history residing in buildings, monuments, dwellings and other infrastructural developments, place names, clothing and myths, the journal succeeded (even before 1990) in providing space for many fields of local-related histories. As far as the other three journals are concerned, the published local and/or regional contributions can mostly be categorised

70 Before 1977 (the founding date of the journal *Contree*) most historical journals occasionally published research that was labelled narrow – such as local and/or from a broader regional angle.

71 The articles listed in each of the provinces are not given in any specific order. See a broader list in “Exploring local histories in the knowledge, use and appreciation of heritage and history in History curricula”, *Yesterday & Today*, 5, 2010, pp. 23-50.

72 It maybe speculated that the limited academic representation of research institutions on tertiary level in these provinces contribute to the poorly perceived research output.

into the following divisions or themes (in no particular order):

Slavery; tribal history; town history/development; health history; poverty; economic history; oral history; political history; municipal/local government history; concentration camps; rural areas and farming communities; local personalities in township development and political activities; local missionary histories; development of buildings; street names; social and recreational histories; local environment histories; local gender histories; local company/institutional/corporate and society histories; local military involvement in national wars; place name histories; educational histories; settlement histories; communication histories; family histories; clothing; language history (cultural); urbanisation.

Many reasons could probably be put forward as to why some provinces do not receive enough attention from historians and some historical journals, which should receive consideration by researchers as suggested by Freund.⁷³ To progress towards a broad collective and representative regional history, the existing and future micro or narrow local contributions must be thematic and trend inclusive. It is not possible to produce such regional histories⁷⁴ owing to the poverty of representative research and lack of sufficient research publications that cover many themes, fields and perhaps angles of historical thought.

Approach to “narrow”-focused historical research in South Africa

Considering that local, “narrow”-focused studies only started gaining momentum in South Africa from the late 1960s, followed by activities and thoughts on how it should be done and what should be done in the next decade (the 1990s when the critique by Saunders was published), it was perhaps then much too early to critically assess the status of regional history in the country. Political instability and newer (although locally-related) research trends such as industrial, social, economic and environmental histories from an ordinary person’s perspective, contributed towards a move away from the “narrow” to an all-inclusive local history. Perhaps a lack of awareness of the

⁷³ B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, pp. 30-31.

⁷⁴ P de Klerk in 2009 suggested that a regional approach may provide a fuller and more nuanced perspective on regions than is currently the case in, for example, the Western Cape rural areas and the Karoo. See P de Klerk, *Streeksgeskiedskrywing en koloniale verhoudinge: Die Wes-Kaapse platteland en die Karoo*, *New Contree*, 58, November 2009, pp. 1-35.

possibilities of its future value in a broader collective regional study could be a reason). Also a lack of guidance in the methodology or methodologies of conducting such an all-inclusive, “narrow-directed” local history study may have led to the production of many histories of towns, cities and districts that do not necessarily contribute to the understanding of the national and broader trends. Such histories may even be labelled as trivial and of limited value, and only of interest to the locals of a specific area.⁷⁵

Several research initiatives have been rated as pioneering urban histories in Cape Town, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, according to the list of published books referenced as examples by Freund.⁷⁶ However, they mostly complement the contributions of historians at historically English universities or situated at universities in other countries. An historiographical review of, for example, local and broader regional contributions by historians at historically Afrikaans universities are almost absent from the sparse published historiographical debates on local or regional histories.⁷⁷ Contributions to local histories by Afrikaans and language groups other than English still require critical exposure and assessment to fully value their focus and impact from the 1970s to the present. Whereas aspects such as race, class and gender in regional and local history studies mostly “captured” the attention of historians from the 1970s to the 1990s at the Universities of Cape Town, the Witwatersrand (the History Workshop activities included), Natal and Rhodes, several studies by, for example, the Universities of the Free State, Pretoria, Stellenbosch and North-West University focused on recording the entire development of towns, cities or regions according to a theme or a set of themes.⁷⁸

75 See for example C Saunders, “What of regional history?...” , *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990 and the perspectives on rural history by C Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry* (London, Heinemann, 1979; 2nd ed., Cape Town, David Philip, 1988), pp. 276.

76 B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, pp. 22-24, 26.

77 Freund tries to pay tribute to a sparse few local/regional history and literature contributions in the early years in as far as they contribute towards the visibility of the Afrikaner in the development of urban areas. See B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, pp. 29-30.

78 See for example MS Appelgryn, *Johannesburg: ontstaan en eerste bestuursreëlings, 1886-1899* (Pretoria, UNISA, 1984), pp. 152.; H Bornman, *Carolina, 1886-1986* (Stadsraad, Carolina, 1986), pp. 72; L Changuion, *Pietersburg: Die eerste eeu, 1886-1986* (Pretoria, Stadsraad van Pietersburg, 1986), pp.306; Anon., “Warrenton, 1884-1984” (Warrenton, Stadsraad, 1985), pp. 1-16. It could be a worthwhile exercise to record and analyse the regional/local history publications and postgraduate studies from all the provinces in South Africa to determine the contributions and shortcomings.

Apart from the 1990 discussion by Christopher Saunders⁷⁹ and much later by Pieter de Klerk⁸⁰ in 2009 on what regional historical studies could and should be, the focus by Bill Freund, on the other hand, has been urban history. He acknowledges the categorising of urban history in South Africa as an initiative from the 1970s and that it is “perhaps locale”. He also stresses the reality that very specific research interests/phenomena draw people to study a specific theme in a specific place.⁸¹

Personally I have a particular interest in economic phenomena ... this is really what has drawn me to urban history ... The ‘specificity of place’ is very significant in my work, by contrast with economic historians who believe simply in the application of universalising macro- and micro-economic propositions to the data of the past ...

Freund also made some suggestions as to where to take history in a post-apartheid dispensation from its rural⁸² and urban⁸³ research contexts (see below in the discussion on methodology). De Klerk in turn argues that the 17 studies in some Western Cape areas and the Karoo, which he has explored, have many shortcomings. He suggests that there is a strong need for more research in the field of regional history with a focus on the colonial relations between the different races. Trends in the growth and change of communities as an offering in regional research have often been suggested: a proposal which has been embraced.⁸⁴ Also in a broader context, a few researchers have explored the value of regional and/or local history in, for example, global,⁸⁵ educational⁸⁶ and environmental⁸⁷ contexts. Furthermore, it should be noted that the South African Historical Society intends to have a regional angle (geographically defined) for its conference discussions in 2013.⁸⁸

79 C Saunders, “What of regional history?..”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, pp. 131-140.

80 P de Klerk, “Streeksgeskiedskrywing en koloniale verhoudinge: Die Wes-Kaapse platteland en die Karoo”, *New Contree*, 58, 2009, pp. 1-37.

81 B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, pp. 19-31.

82 B Freund, “Rural struggles and transformations”, *South African Historical Journal*, 19 (1), 1987, pp. 167-173.

83 B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, pp. 19-31.

84 Compare HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history. Objective and pursuit* (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1967), pp. 1-5, 10; B Freund, “Rural struggles and transformations”, *South African Historical Journal*, 19 (1), 1987, p. 170; C Abbott, “United States regional history as an instructional field: The practice of college and university history departments”, *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 21(2), May, 1990, p. 200.

85 A van der Vlies, “‘Local’, ‘global’ reading and the demands of the “canon: The case of Alan Paton’s ‘Cry the beloved country’”, *South African historical Journal*, 55(1), 2006, pp. 20-32.

86 H Ludlow, Using local history to apprentice undergraduate students into the practices of the historian, *South African historical Journal*, 57(1), 2007, pp. 201-219.

87 Compare ES van Eeden, “Using a transdisciplinary approach for environmental crisis research in History”, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 6(1), July 2010, pp. 191-208.

88 The South African Historical Society theme for the 2013 conference, is titled: *All for one? One for all?: Leveraging national interests with regional visions in Southern Africa.*

To conclude this section, Freund's remark made several years ago that urban and other micro-historical studies should be revised in the context of a post-apartheid South Africa is still valid (see the following section on methodology). The critique by Saunders of the need for more substantial and representative regional historical studies is also valid. To be able to carry out regional-level studies of quality and inclusivity, the possibilities must be explored of narrow-focused local research according to themes, trends and phenomena, as well as integrative participatory research through multidisciplinary efforts in themes requiring more expertise than that which only regional and/or local historians can offer. Community-inclusive regional research studies (including the founding, development, change and current status in many fields and phenomena) will be meaningful to a wider audience than only the research community or local community.⁸⁹

Methodological thinking in regional history research for modern-day practice

The local impact of some trends abroad

Concerning discussions and contributions on the historiography and methodology of regional and/or local history in South Africa (whether urban or rural), a few published contributions by historians were identified. Many historians regard the social and cultural study of PJ van der Merwe in 1937 on Namaqualand as a deep investigation of local history.⁹⁰ It could be accepted that the work of the French Annales School in those years probably had an influence on his motivation to do this kind of research.⁹¹

As mentioned earlier, the first practitioners who formally carried out local history research in the United Kingdom,⁹² specifically at the University College of Leicester (HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp and later WG Hoskins), made the

89 Compare the debate among University of the Western Cape history scholars in their particular region. See "Doing history differently", 2006 (Available at: <http://www.uwc.ac.za/index.php/module=cms&action=showfulltext&id=gen20srv23N...>, as accessed in January 2012), pp. 1-4.

90 Van der Merwe's contribution is also mentioned as a pioneering contribution when dealing with local environmental history research. See B Freund, "Urban history in South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, p. 20; P Steyn and A Wessels, "The roots of contemporary governmental and non-governmental environmental activities in South Africa, 1654-1972", *New Contree* 45, 1999, pp. 77-80.

91 PJ van der Merwe, *Die noordwaartse beweging van die Boere voor die Groot Trek 1770-1842...*

92 Compare, for example, K Tiller, *Review of local history since 1945*, *The Local Historian*, 36(1), February 2006, pp. 64-66; E Lord, "Review article: What is regional history?", *The Local Historian*, 39(1), February, 2009, pp. 69-72; L Munby, D Huw Owen and J Scannel, *Local history since 1945: England, Wales and Ireland* (London, Socialist History Society, 2005).

following remark about these older histories (which also could apply to many local history contributions in South Africa):⁹³

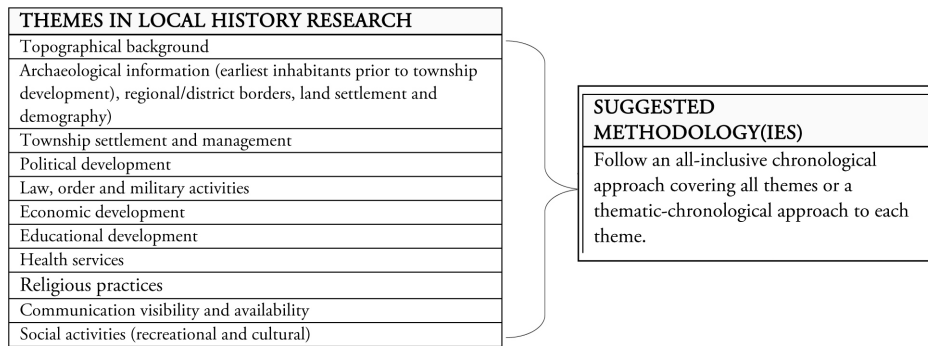
The reasons why so many of the older local histories fail to satisfy us are now clear. The writers were content to heap up all the facts they could discover, without order, art or methodology, and with no criterion for distinguishing the trivial from the significant...

Old-style or traditional local history was exemplified by dull, parochial chronicles featuring an elitist conservative approach. Explicitly concerning the old-style local history methodology, Sheeran and Sheeran⁹⁴ further add:

Methodologically, they [Finberg and Hoskins on old-style local history] objected to the antiquarian, fact-collecting tradition, the lack of order and method, and the overdependence on documentary sources. Philosophically, they criticized the lack of a 'central unifying theme' which would serve to distinguish local history as discipline...

Probably as a contribution towards distinguishing local history as a discipline, a basic research methodology framework for local history was developed by Victor Skipp.⁹⁵ This framework (and adapted versions of it) has been followed by some postgraduate scholars in South Africa (See Figure 1):

Figure 1: An research methodology model for local history proposed by Victor Skipp in 1981



According to this model, the local history researcher has to follow a narrative and descriptive approach that should include a strict analytical methodology, not forgetting to be comparative as well. The Skipp model suggests that the historical development of all fields locally, namely the political, the economical,

93 HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history. Objective and pursuit*, p. 19; WG Hoskins, *Local history in England* (London, Longman, 1958).

94 G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, "Discourses in local history", *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, p. 67.

95 VHT Skipp, "Local history: A new definition and its implications", *Local Historian*, 14, 1981, pp. 325-391.

the cultural etc., could be equally studied in one research project. The variety of fields could also be studied separately and independently.⁹⁶ Skipp did not provide any extensive description or suggestion(s) of how to approach each of the locally identified fields of research if it is researched and discussed as a separate entity. Neither is it clear from Finberg's suggestion regarding the "origin, growth, decline and fall" of the local area as to what could or should be critically assessed (and how) in each field, theme or phenomenon of a local area or region. This framework as a methodology, which was also indirectly acknowledged by the HSRC's regional section in the 1970s and 1980s, was not regarded as a practise that would necessarily serve as a means to progress towards developing an analytical regional history.⁹⁷

Because research in local and regional histories was a developing field in its infant stages in the 1970s and 1980s, some historians in South Africa followed their own intuition as far as the methodology was concerned, while others preferred to engage with specific local themes that also served a purpose during the Apartheid years in South Africa. It is an unfounded impression that historians at Afrikaans universities in the pioneering years of local/regional history research were following a research methodology that deliberately concentrated on elitist or top-down research on regions and townships in a way "typical" of Afrikaner nationalist historians. Because the leadership of most municipalities was still predominantly white at the time (and often requested, and sometimes even financially supported such research), it is to be expected that the recording of an area's history and township development would feature a white-centric, top-down history of development.

The way local history research developed internationally was no different. Pioneering publications of a local area or region's development may have a tendency first to feature the activities or presence of the elite or dominant leadership, unless a very specific theme is the focus of the research methodology.⁹⁸ To address a specific theme in a local history, as suggested in the Skipp methodological framework in Figure 1, the outline in Figure 2 could serve as a guideline.⁹⁹

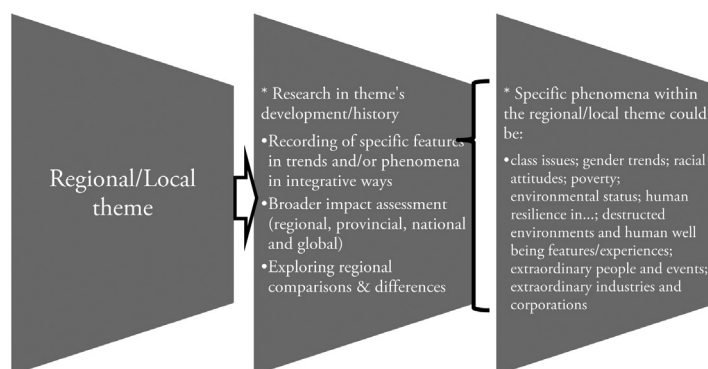
96 VHT Skipp, "Local history: A new definition", *The Local Historian*, 14(6), 1981, p. 329. By 2011 this Journal was still having a strong visibility in the UK. See local.historyonline (available at: www.local.history.co.uk).

97 Impressions based on a study of the model and use of the model itself by the author.

98 From the author's own experience of regional/local history research in South Africa, and based on knowledge from the previous section and the historiography of South Africa. See for example J Carruthers, *Sandton, the making of a town* (Randburg, Celt Books, 1993), pp. 80.

99 Suggestions by the author based on many years of practising regional/local history.

Figure 2: Suggestions for a research framework in a theme-specific discourse on regional/local histories



Within the “history from below” research approach¹⁰⁰ to a regional/local theme or phenomenon, the development and status of, for example, race, gender, class, capitalism, racism, poverty, industry’s impact on the environment, etc., featured much more than studies¹⁰¹ in which the methodological ideas of Finberg and Skipp were accommodated.¹⁰² It may therefore be speculated that historians at the historically Afrikaans universities from the late 1970s to the 1980s and 1990s focused more on recording all knowledge (thus the historical development in all the thematic fields in local history research as outlined, for example, in the Skipp model shown in Figure 1),¹⁰³ especially regarding white communities, than the historians and/or human and social scientists at historically English universities (of whom some followed a “history from below” research approach).

In the “history from below” methodology, some researchers concentrated on tracing or identifying trends in local areas regarding the everyday experiences

100 See the discussion of CC Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 38-60.

101 Compare FA van Jaarsveld, “Demokratisering in die geskiedwetenskap: Van ‘n elitesgeskiedenis van bo tot ‘n alledaagse geskiedenis van onderaf”, *Historia*, 32(1), 1987, p. 42; C Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, p. 39.

102 For example, in the Johannesburg area where the Wits History Workshop operated and supported a “History from Below” methodology, it has to be noted that several English and Afrikaans histories (in the Skipp fashion) had already been recorded as serving at least as a contextual basis for applying a more focused but extensive research methodology in thematic recordings of histories of ordinary people. See for example J Shorten, *The Johannesburg saga* (Johannesburg, City Council, 1970), pp. 1159; ELP Stals, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad* (Pretoria, Haum Opvoedkundige Uitgeveery, 1978).

103 See for example ES van Eeden, *Carletonville van pionierstreek tot goudspens* (Knowledge Tec, Pretoria, 1995); PF van der Schyff (red.) en ES van Eeden, *Bothaville en sy mense* (RGN Drukkers, Pretoria, 1994); WGH en S Vivier, *Hooyvlakte. Die verhaal van Beaufort Wes: 1818-1968* (Nasionale Boekhandel, Kaapstad, 1969), pp. 230.

of local people¹⁰⁴ in very specific themes or phenomena as mentioned earlier.¹⁰⁵ In this regard the History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand claims to have started doing research which in the seventies and eighties focussed more on the status, position and economic (as well as political) struggles of voiceless black people in white regulated mining areas and industries in the Johannesburg area. Eloff and others observed that the “history from below” practitioners were more specific in their way of doing research in an area on ordinary people, namely the “nameless, the oppressed, the victims of historical structures and processes, the neglected, the forgotten, the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised, the unemployed and those who slipped through the net of history.” Others were more specific in explicitly referring to Africans in all these instances.¹⁰⁶ Oral history recordings of ordinary people in such communities (as a people’s history) were a dominant aspect of the research methodology followed, which was not always regarded as the foremost way of doing research on local history. Their subjectivity, simplicity and politicising of the past were said to feature too predominantly in “history from below”.¹⁰⁷ In addition to these observations, one could add that the predominant emphasis on a thematic phenomenon (as in “history from below”) did not necessarily serve a broader framework of contributing to or progressing towards regional/local history (as for example the framework suggested in Figure 2).

Aside from the negative aspects, there were also positive aspects of the “history from below” methodology. Callie Eloff of the former Regional Research Division of the HSRC made the following positive remarks (freely translated into English):¹⁰⁸

With regard to methodological ‘innovation’, the ‘history from below’ approach has been influential: previously neglected dimensions of the

104 In the discussion by C Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 38-60 reference to ordinary and “small people” and writing on their “everyday life” is made.

105 C Saunders, “What of regional history? Towards a history of the Western Cape”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, pp. 131-140.

106 C Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 40-41; B Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, townships and protest: Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979), pp.342; C Saunders, “Towards understanding South Africa’s past: Reflections on recent developments in history writing in English”, *South Africa International*, 19(2), 1988, p. 67; L Callinicos, *A people’s history of South Africa, vol 2: Working life* (Belville, University of the Western Cape, 1987), p. 7.

107 L Callinicos, “Popularising history in a changing South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 22-37; CC Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991; C Saunders, “What of regional history? Towards a history of the Western Cape”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, pp. 131-140.

108 CC Eloff, “‘History from below’: ‘n Oorsig”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 54-55.

historical science came into their own. For example, the collection and use of oral information, participatory activities to provide a 'customary colour' to history, supporting multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research, focusing on a total all-inclusive approach towards the past...

Within this scope of recording and discussing possible research methodologies in regional histories in South Africa, it is of value to know that Eloff's research methodology of "history from below" *per se* also totally fit the methodological shoe in regional history research, as it never would have been or should have been done otherwise. Perhaps the most important aspects of Eloff's discussion as a regional historian is that he supported some aspects of the methodological approach in the "history from below" perspective, and advised in those early years that it should be ensured that this kind of history departs from a solid methodological basis. In essence then, Eloff's view also means that he saw in "history from below" some traces of the methodology in regional history that should be embraced rather than avoided.¹⁰⁹

There is a conceptual variety of a "history from below" research methodology. One perspective that explains more about a possible research focus as part of the methodological approach is offered by the German historian Alf Lüdtkke:¹¹⁰

At the center... are the lives and the sufferings of those who are frequently labelled, suggestively but imprecisely, as the 'small people'... It involves their work and non-work..., housing and homeless, clothing and nakedness, eating and hunger, love and hate. Beyond this, certain thematic emphases have emerged, such as the history of work, of gender relations, of the family, and especially of popular cultures. Thus attention is no longer focused on the deeds (and misdeeds) and pageantry of the great, the masters of church and state.

Although the "everyday experiences" of "ordinary" people according to the many varieties of the "history from below" approach cannot be regarded as the ultimate perspective and ideal methodological framework for doing local history studies, it could and certainly should be considered as complementary to local history studies in which the "ordinary people" concept is also acknowledged but is supposed to be approached from the top down as well as from the bottom up. The contribution of a "history from below" approach according to the definition of e.g. Alf Lüdtkke (see above) which provides the conceptual opportunity of being racially and culturally all-inclusive, should be

¹⁰⁹ CC Eloff, "History from below: 'n Oorsig", *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, pp. 54-60.

¹¹⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s some German historians were active supporters of a "history from below" approach. See the quote on Lüdtkke by G Eley, "Labour, history and social history", *Alltagsgeschichte...*, *Journal of Modern History*, 61 (2), 1989, p. 322 as in C Eloff, "History from below: 'n Oorsig", *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 25(1), 1991, p. 40.

valued as part of a methodologically structured regional/local history research procedure. In such a process research progresses towards a representative inclusivity to contribute, ensuring a holistic view of a regional/local theme and its broader relatedness and/or differences.

Progressing towards a regional/local history research methodology framework

When the HSRC started a division for urban and regional studies in 1977, no specific methodological guidelines for research practices in regional/local history were provided on white and black, although their opinions sometimes surfaced when responding to the research trends of the time. This is in part evident from the historiographical outline as given previously, and also features in the local history research methodology applications discussed in the previous Section as outcomes of international exposure.

With some effort it may be possible to identify a select group of South African historians studying regional/local history and to pin down their rationale for applying specific methodological approaches. The contribution of Peter Delius on rural history, titled *A lion amongst the cattle*, reviewed by Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, serves as an illustration:¹¹¹

The author strives to recover the lives and agency of ordinary people, but not at the expense of the discussion of the overpowering structural forces inhibiting the choices open to rural communities. But, while societies in the reserves have been fundamentally reconfigured by the intersecting forces of racism and capitalism, their struggles have in turn helped to reshape the particular nature of both rural and urban society. Delius is concerned with the interplay between the dynamics of local level society and wider processes of change ... Using a combination of archival and oral sources ...

Any study of a region's history would be poor if it were conducted without including interviews of the local inhabitants (ordinary people) and the leadership (the "top down" people), and consulting the local archival sources available. If the interviews are not properly used within a broader contextual setting – with acknowledged standard and/or recognised secondary sources to confirm and expand on regional/local trends – the historiographical value of

111 SP Lekgoathi, "Delius's a lion amongst the cattle. An accessible history of rural society", *South African Historical Journal*, 37(1), 1997, pp. 214-217. To cover the Delius methodology of rural history which he conducted, Lekgoathi also mentions that Delius in later studies also undertook a gender analysis.

regional/local histories will be dubious.¹¹²

In fact, in modern-day idiom, such a representative history as referred to earlier even requires a further consideration before it can be reflected accordingly: its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (thus integrative) possibilities demand that an additional angle in its methodological considerations be considered as progressing towards an inclusive research approach in regional/local history.¹¹³ Not that pondering on the various disciplinary angles to local history research is new, (and because most disciplines in any case deal with local communities in some way). Finberg in 1952 already reminded those dealing with local history research that local historians interrogate many other disciplinary fields.¹¹⁴

Freund in 2005 stated that a new approach to research in urban areas should be considered, as the old way (prior to 1994 and in the heyday of “history from below”) was no longer sensible.¹¹⁵

Probably the obvious point at which to start is to take up the present problems of the South African city and the discourses relating to those problems in policy circles. The decline of the city centre, the relationship of the private sector to the public sector, the arguments in favour of urban densification, the city and the changing nature of global capitalism, urban environmental issues: these are all important touchstones which could cause us to go back to the drawing boards and rediscover historical problems and themes. Obviously race would not disappear nor would apartheid, but they would be differently configured ... Policy issues might also point us in the direction of situating South African urban history within a comparative context ... many American universities offer multi-disciplinary and intellectually

112 Compare ES van Eeden, “Exploring local histories in the use and appreciation of Heritage and History in history curricula”, *Yesterday&Today*, 5, Oct. 2010, pp. 23-50; ES van Eeden, “Whose environment? Whose nature? – a trans-disciplinary discussion on some inhumane actions in the destruction and construction in nature – case study, the Merafong municipal region”, South Africa: International conference on human kind and the intersection of nature and culture, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 2, November 2006, pp. 409-430.

113 ES van Eeden, “Considering environmental history within the transdisciplinary methodology as research focus for today and tomorrow”, *Interdisciplinary Science Review*, 36(4), December 2011, pp. 314-329; ES van Eeden, “A practical exploration of the feasibility of Integrative Multidisciplinary research from a broad ecohealth perspective in South Africa”, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 7(2), December 2011; ES van Eeden, “Using a transdisciplinary approach for environmental crisis research in History”, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 6(1), July 2010, pp. 191-208.

114 HPR Finberg, “The local historian and his theme”, (inaugural lecture at the University College of Leicester, 6 November 1952), in HPR Finberg and VHT Skipp, *Local history: Objective and pursuit*, pp. 10-13.

115 B Freund, “Urban history in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 52(1), 2005, p. 27. Freund also endorses more research associations with Africa.

committed programmes in Urban Studies, something entirely lacking in South Africa ...

The views and suggestions by Freund could certainly be digested within the broader regional/local history too.

The aspect of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research, mentioned earlier by Eloff and also in this context by Freund, should not be overlooked from a recent-day perspective. Given the present environmental complexities of each human-defined local area and/or geographic region, it has actually become a requirement for disciplines to put their research strength into understanding and analysing the state and requirements of a local area. From this integrative effort the regional/local historian could record or be part of the recording of an all-inclusive local history (an area, district or region), more broadly defined as regional history.¹¹⁶ It is not possible for one individual to provide true meaning to a regional historical study because of the wide thematic field that must be covered to produce all-inclusive research of a richer value.

To further carry out “good” regional history research then (thus Saunders), requires that an area must have some geographical unity, often (but not necessarily) brought under a single political framework for a considerable period of time. By the early 1990s Saunders was of the opinion that historians had not attempted “to transcend discrete studies limited to relatively small periods or areas”, but that some studies appeared to at least have a regional dimension.¹¹⁷ If Saunders is understood correctly, he indirectly challenges historians to invest more in the micro approach of doing research on areas but with a definite vision or focus to eventually capture a collection of research outcomes related to a region in a major regional study. This suggestion is endorsed. In South Africa we have reached the stage in regional/local historical research where we can rise to the challenge of this suggestion and opportunity in at least the regions (and their districts) of some provinces that already possesses a rich history.¹¹⁸ To stimulate further debate in this direction, ideas for an extended research framework for regional/local history are provided

116 Compare this possibility with some thoughts abroad, such as that of SH Armitage, “From the inside out: Rewriting regional history”, *Frontiers – A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 22, 2001, pp. 1-2.

117 C Saunders, “What of regional history?...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 22(1), 1990, p. 135.

118 ES van Eeden, *Carletonville van pionierstreek tot goudspens* (Knowledge Tec, Pretoria, 1995) could be regarded as an example of progressing towards the broader local dimension by reflecting on its impact on South Africa. Yet this region’s incompleteness in some phenomena and trends requires some serious revisiting and integrative multidisciplinary input before any reference to being an all-inclusive regional study can be made.

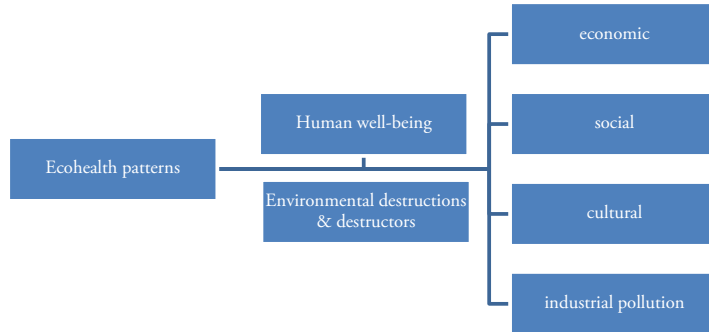
in Figure 3, and a thematic example is given in Figures 4 for integrative multidisciplinary research locally:

Figure 3: An extended research framework (departing from the original Skipp model) for progressing from micro/narrow varieties of regional/local history research to a more collective regional understanding of space and place

Fields of study	Themes of study	Considerations in studies	Outcomes of studies for the region	Research methodology
<u>Regional history;</u> <u>Local history;</u> - Rural - Urban - Family - Community - People - Place - Space - Area - Heritage - Development	- Settlement patterns; - Local governance & management patterns; - Urbanisation; - Social structures and patterns; - Political trends; - Demographic patterns; - Infrastructural features; - Industrialisation; - Economic trends; - Agricultural patterns; - Ecohealth patterns; - Human well-being; - Education development; - Communication patterns; - Heritage and tourism development; - Spiritual practices; - Law, order and military impacts - Land - Conservation...	- Growth and change - Indigenous knowledge systems; - Race (all-inclusive and/or specific); - Class (all-inclusive and/or specific); - Gender (all-inclusive and/or specific); - Identity; - Relations (e.g. colonial); - Poverty; - Environmental destruction and/or remediation; - Regionalisation; - Globalisation...	Analysing growth and change Recording the physical experience Reflecting the psychological experience of people (e.g. sense of space & place) Practising the integrative multidisciplinary experience towards all-inclusive knowledge Gaining regional, national and global insights Awareness of differences and similarities	- Recording knowledge systems; - Philosophical; - Archaeological; - Social; - Multidisciplinary; - Perspectives from the bottom up and top down

The collective part will only be able to feature to its full extent in collective regional/local studies produced by historians and other experts in academia and related professional institutions. Theoretical considerations and methodological development, including their refinement/renewal, will be possible if regional/local studies in history depart from existing theoretical approaches in the discipline of History and within its wider academic connections.

Figure 4: An example of approaching an integrative multidisciplinary theme in regional/local history



The quest for proper training to accommodate new research trends has been repeatedly pursued. In 2004, Katz *et al.* remarked:¹¹⁹

As historians become increasingly spatial in their analysis, area studies theorists and programs may be helpful partners, while history departments can offer area studies programs, many of which have historical foundations, [as] historical training for their students. And, like history, many area studies programs are moving toward the humanistic disciplines.

In integrative multidisciplinary studies, one should always embrace one's academic roots and accommodate their research tools in, for example, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research environments. Ignorance of disciplinary roots will lead nowhere.¹²⁰

Conclusion

The main aims of this discussion were to historiographically inform and methodologically deliberate on regional/local histories from international, South African and regional/local perspectives. An endless debate on how to

119 See Katz in the publication of *The Committee on Graduate Education of the American Historical Association* (compilers: T Bender, PM Katz, C Palmer), *The education of historians for the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 1-222; JE de Steiguer, *The origins of modern environmental thought* (University of Arizona Press: Tucson USA, 2006), p. 202.

120 S Pyne, "Environmental history without historians", *Environmental history*, 10(1), January, 2005, pp. 72-74; P Sabin, "The ultimate environmental dilemma: Making a place for historians in the climate change and energy debates", *Environmental history*, 15(1), 2010, pp. 76-93; ES van Eeden, "Considering environmental history within the transdisciplinary methodology as research focus for today and tomorrow", *Interdisciplinary Science Review*, 36(4), December 2011, pp. 314-329.

define regional/local history was not the major focus. It was rather decided to accept its vague outline and produce an understanding of what kind of research could be regarded as inclusive of regional/local history. The intention was not to stir up other debates, but rather to provide a digestible framework as a point of departure for understanding, debating and doing regional/local history research, especially in South Africa.

In South Africa current historical debates on regional/local histories are very limited. The publication of all-inclusive regional/local studies is equally limited. The few published studies do not always feature integrative and inclusive research as a means to progress towards a broader understanding of regions and/or local areas. A lack of theory or failure to consider the theoretical connections in regional/local history in South Africa and worldwide is another serious shortcoming. In commemorating the 35th year of the existence of the journal *Contree/New Contree*, this and other shortcomings in regional/local history research in South Africa were identified yet again.

Pioneers in local history in the UK by 1998 were arguing the shortcomings and positive features of local history:¹²¹

A philosophical base for local history, which would fulfil our desire to engage in “real” history might, it could be argued, be found in the new realism which has emerged in both the sciences and social sciences...

... at a popular level, the subject is one of the largest growth areas of historical endeavour ... it is perhaps this very popularity and groundswell of success that has led to the lack of critical and unproblematized approach to the subject...

Part of the reason for the shortcomings could be that historians at tertiary institutions mostly operate as solitary subject groups, further strengthened by the locked-in approach to regional/local foci. The only opportunities for debate are at specific conferences and tertiary seminars (which not everyone can attend due to time and place constraints). No national regional/local history discourse (except for the local research activities of the Wits History Workshop group) is in place to enhance research on specific local/regional histories (theory and methodology). The regional/local value of doing integrative multidisciplinary studies in a particular area should also be considered. This could be done perhaps with the view to further strengthening methodologies in regional history studies and to ambitiously embrace possibilities for

121 G Sheeran and Y Sheeran, “Discourses in local history”, *Rethinking History*, 2(1), 1998, pp. 82-83. In South Africa local history as a “discipline” does not feature on its own. This is not supported by the author.

engaging in varieties of integrative research from bottom-up and top-down perspectives. This may be the only way to progress towards inclusive regional histories as contributions to understanding regions. Theory and methodology will be the connections that bind regional/local historians to research and discussions, and may provide insight to a wider area and audience.

It could be a worthwhile exercise to record and analyse the regional/local history publications and postgraduate studies from all the provinces in South Africa to determine their contributions and shortcomings. Debates on local history are necessary to avoid the comfort area of not been exposed to a process of self-examination. In South Africa this lack of debate in essence started and ended with Saunders in 1990, although Freund and De Klerk contributed to some debate in 2005 and 2011 respectively on some very selective shortcomings of regional/local history studies at the time. Historians and historical journals in South Africa should revue their thinking on regional/local histories. Involvement in a popular journal reflecting micro and macro local environments should also be contemplated.