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Bridging fifty degrees: UCT professor to illuminate ‘why Antarctica matters for Africa’

The University of Cape Town’s Professor Marcello Vichi is set to bring awareness of the significance of Antarctica and Southern Ocean sea ice, as well as their relevance to Afrika. He will unpack this in his inaugural lecture titled “Fifty degrees of separation: Why Antarctica and the polar regions matter for Afrika”.

The lecture will take place on Monday, 21 October at Hahn 2, First Floor, PD Hahn Building on upper campus at 17:00 SAST.

Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are remote and separate from Africa. However, Cape Town is one of five gateways in the globe through which international expeditions depart for Antarctica. Professor Vichi will explain how the polar regions have a significant role in regulating the climate and are necessary for the absorption of heat and carbon in the atmosphere. For this reason, Afrika needs to be aware of the polar sciences and how changes in polar regions affect our “livelihoods”.

Professor Vichi is based in the [Department of Oceanography](#) and serves as director of the [Marine and Antarctica Research Centre for Innovation and Suitability \(MARIS\)](#), an inter-faculty research centre that brings together the interdisciplinary marine sciences at UCT and supports cross-cutting innovation in polar and marine engineering. He joined UCT in 2014 and, after nearly two decades of numerical modelling applications, he turned his scientific interest to the observation of Southern Ocean sea ice and how it is impacted by climate change. He organised and conducted scientific expeditions in the Southern Ocean marginal ice zone on board the icebreaker SA Agulhas II to broaden our perspective on winter processes, and he was the innovator behind the design and implementation of the South African Polar Research Infrastructure (SAPRI), funded by the Department of Science and Innovation.

His research interests lay between the interdisciplinary earth system processes, embracing computer modelling of the global ocean, observations and simulation of sea-ice dynamics and biogeochemistry, Antarctic policies and infrastructures and climate change impacts on marine and sea-ice ecosystems. He is currently a member of the Academy of Sciences of South Africa.

His intentions with his lecture are to bring the “distant near” and possibly move away from a peripheral, descriptive view of the polar regions and broaden the perspective of South/Africans and their role in the planetary climate.

“Sea ice, glaciology and polar sciences in general are novel fields of study in South Africa, traditionally done by Global North countries. UCT is the only institution doing research in this field and, thanks to national investments, it is projected to become a reference centre that can attract further funding and collaboration. It is thus an opportunity for other disciplines to consider their potential contributions in terms of knowledge and professional employment opportunities,” said Professor Vichi.

Details of the lecture are as follows:

Date: Monday, 21 October 2024

Time: 17:30 SAST

Venue: PD Hahn 2, Level 1, PD Hahn Building, Upper Campus

- [Please RSVP to attend the lecture in-person or online.](#)

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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