

# In Memoriam of Paul Benneworth



It is with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of Paul Benneworth on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Paul was a long-time friend of the Regional Studies Association, a great contributor to our journals, including Regions eZine, and our governance and he will be greatly missed. Paul passed away in his sleep and our thoughts are with his family and in particular his wife and two children.



***A message from Sally Hardy, RSA CEO***

Paul obtained his first degree in human geography from Oxford University and his PhD in economic geography from the University of Newcastle where he also held an ESRC Post-doctoral Fellowship and was appointed to a Research Councils UK Academic Fellowship in Territorial Governance of Innovation in the Knowledge Economy. Most recently, Paul was a Professor of Innovation and Regional Development at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. He was also a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente in the Netherlands where he remained to supervise and support his students.

Paul's colleagues at the University of Twente were quick to publish a tribute to Paul including some of his key professional appointments and we don't seek to replicate that here. What we do wish to do is to remember and celebrate Paul's close and long-standing links with the RSA.

Paul joined the Association in 1998 at the beginning of his career as a student doing his PhD in Newcastle at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, which is itself a long time Corporate member and close ally to the Association.

Paul first interacted with us as a regular attender at our events and conferences. He was always confident and articulate. He was also thoughtful and thought provoking. He made friends within the RSA staff team and began to be involved in strategic thinking, and subsequently, he served on the RSA Board for three years as the Student representative and was then re-elected when his editorial service began.

Paul was more than a thinker, it was one of the most appealing sides of his character that he was also a "doer". He was a ready volunteer and hard worker. Paul furthered his active membership of the Association when he became Editor in Chief of the Association's then printed version of its newsletter - Regions. He edited Regions from 2004 until 2007. He spent time then developing ideas around capacity building for early career researchers - a life long passion for him and attested to by the number of younger researchers who have reached out to the Association in distress about his passing, and saying that he had been a key part of their early career.

From 2009 until 2013 Paul led a team editing the publication Regional Insights.

This publication sat alongside *Regions* for many years and was distributed to the membership twice a year. It published the work of early career researchers and a considerable amount of editorial mentoring effort lay behind it. The idea had been to create a publishing venue for early career researcher's first articles. As the world of publishing moved more online and open access became more established, in 2014 the Association launched gold open access journal *Regional Studies, Regional Science*.

An important part of this new journal was the Early Career Mentored Paper section with Editor in Chief, Paul Benneworth. The Association's Board had recognised the strength of *Regional Insights* and incorporated it within a formal journal and also put the money behind it to pay the article processing charges for all early career researchers whose papers were accepted. Paul led this section of the journal from 2013 until 2016 when he passed the baton to Marcin Dąbrowski, one of the current editors of the Early Career Mentored Paper section. With upwards of 15 articles published a year during Paul's editorship he, and his team of co-editors launched the publishing careers of many researchers.

Paul remained a close friend of the Association throughout his career. He published prolifically, with around 300 articles and 8 books to his name, and his research legacy will not be forgotten. For those of us that knew him however, it is his personal enthusiasm and drive that will continue to stand out, and his generosity to those at the start of their careers.

We now think of his friends and in particular of his young family.

For a full obituary visit his University website.

### ***A message from David Charles***

It's hard to believe that our wonderful friend and colleague has passed away so suddenly and untimely this week. I knew Paul for 24 years and worked with him in one form or another over almost all of that period. His loss is a huge personal blow for his family and friends, but also an enormous loss to the academic community in terms of his insights, creativity, commitment to supporting young researchers and the genuine affection he inspired in others.

Paul grew up in Tynemouth on the outskirts of Newcastle and went to school at the Royal Grammar School near to Newcastle University but then went off to

Oxford University to study geography, where he was awarded a first-class degree. He returned to the North East, initially taking a research job with Northumbria Police whilst registering for a PhD at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies in Newcastle University. He quickly switched in early 1996 to a research post in CURDS working with me on a range of North East based projects, and also undertaking his PhD part-time.. Paul was an incredibly productive researcher from those early days: out interviewing local firms, pulling together all kinds of data and preparing reports for a range of local and regional agencies. He became one of the essential people in CURDS for any local project we got involved in. Assembling a huge body of material his PhD drew on a variety of such studies to examine the extent to which the North East economy was modernising, using sectoral case studies from electronics, pharmaceuticals and IT services.

Paul had wide interests, but would also delve deeply into those things that captured his interest. An early obsession, covered in his thesis, was a small electronics firm on Tyneside called Joyce Loebel which had spun out around 40 firms over the years, and Paul tracked down various spin off firms and people involved in the business to develop the case study as almost an investigative piece of business history, published in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* in 2004. Paul's PhD was awarded in 2002, and he won a one-year postdoctoral fellowship from the Economic and Social Research Council to develop publications from the thesis and to set out on his journey as an independent researcher. A key paper from this project was his 2004 *Urban Studies* paper with Nick Henry on 'Where is the value added in the cluster approach? Hermeneutic theorising, economic geography and clusters as a multiperspectival approach'.

Around this time though Paul also began to get involved alongside me in projects related to universities, such as the Regional Mission project for the Higher Education Funding Council for England, liaising with regional HE associations in England to co-create a set of regional reports on university regional engagement, together with a national report and a benchmarking tool for assessing regional impacts. This led into work he did with OECD on the contributions of HE to regional development, including a much-cited paper with Peter Arbo. Paul always had a deep interest in policy and policy lessons, and a policy review paper in *Regional Studies* in 2001 on science and technology policy in the UK regions was developed from evidence we had submitted to a House of Lords committee.

His two interests in universities and regional innovation came together in 2004 in an ESRC project 'Bringing Cambridge to Consett' looking at university spin offs in peripheral regions, which included a comparison between the North East and Twente in the Netherlands and began his relationship with the university of Twente and its region. Two papers in European Planning Studies resulted: a comparative paper on the two regions in 2005 and a Newcastle case study, the 'seven samurai' paper in 2006. From 2004 Paul had also been awarded a Research Councils UK academic fellowship which funded his research with the aim of transitioning to a permanent academic position. From this point Paul became an established project leader, with for example a project for NESTA in the UK on regional innovation leadership and an ESRC project on universities and disadvantaged communities, both in 2007.

The connection Paul had developed with Twente led him to a move away from his home region to a senior researcher job at the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies in Twente in 2009. At Twente he led on a variety of large higher education research projects including HERAVALUE, "Measuring the societal impacts of universities' research into arts and the humanities" and Eunivation: measuring the contribution of universities to European territorial innovation capacity. His publication rate was prodigious, with books on 'University engagement with socially excluded communities', 'Universities and regional development', 'The impacts and future of arts and humanities research' and 'Universities and regional development in the periphery'. He published papers in a wide range of journals with a diverse set of co-authors, often helping junior colleagues at an early stage in their careers.

Paul took to life in the Netherlands, moving to a small village in the Twente region with his wife Leanne. Paul had started learning Dutch at Newcastle when he first began comparative work with Twente and became very proficient. His colleagues at Twente recall how he integrated into the local community. He had always been a keen cyclist, and colleagues in CURDS remember how he used to arrive in his cycling lycra in all weathers, so cycling to work in Twente was second nature.

More recently, Paul was a central figure in the RUNIN Marie Curie network, led by Stavanger and covering seven countries, and was heavily involved in the writing of the bid over three submissions before it was funded from 2016. He provided huge support to the 14 PhD students in the project and led on the theme

of places and territories. The training week he led in Twente was amazing in the way he got regional partners involved, organised focus groups and led the PhDs to make recommendations to the region that were enthusiastically received.

In 2019 Paul was appointed to a well-deserved professorship of innovation and regional development at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, where he was leading a novel PhD programme on Responsible Regional Innovation (RESINNREG). He had started winning new research projects in his new base with a project on a Nordic perspective on the public value of social sciences and humanities research, and participation in big multi-partner networks on Responsible Research and Innovation Ecosystems at Regional Scale and Releasing User Power for Responsible MedTech Innovation. In the last few weeks he was involved in major new project proposals and was working on a proposal the day before he died as well as supporting RUNIN PhD students in their future plans.

Paul had married his wife Leanne back in Newcastle, they were both from the 'coast', and there was even a joint paper in 2002, before they married, on sustainable development and new English regional governance. In the Netherlands their children Theo and Martha were born, and when Paul took the post in Bergen he moved the family back to Whitley Bay. Paul always retained a deep affection and bond with the coastal strip north of the River Tyne, even contributing articles up to this year to the local magazine for Whitley Bay football club. He was passionate about sport, playing rugby in his youth as well as football, and just as passionate about the development of the North East of England, and his engagement with policy. He wrote a monthly column on economic development and policy issues in the Newcastle Journal newspaper, the main local morning paper, even whilst living in the Netherlands, often reflecting on the view of the region from abroad.

Paul made an enormous contribution to the literature and to the next generation of researchers, but at 46 he had at least half of his career still ahead of him. He was universally liked and respected, and was down to earth with no airs and graces, usually with a smile on his face, and an excellent companion whether over a beer or discussing theory on a panel. He was a great scholar and true original. I am one of a great many who will miss him enormously. Our thoughts go out to his wife Leanne and their two children.

***A message from the RSRS Early Career Section editors: Marcin Dąbrowski, Sabrina Lai, Marijana Sumpor, Rhiannon Pugh & Declan Jordan***

On 12 of May 2020 we found out that Paul Benneworth passed away. This news shocked and saddened us deeply. Paul was our colleague in the Regional Studies, Regional Science editorial team and a friend to many of us. His excellent scholarly work on innovation and regional development is well known to the readers of the publications of the Regional Studies Association. Anyone who befriended him or worked with him also knows how delightful, cheerful, smart and caring a person he was. What may be less widely known is how much Paul was dedicated to supporting early career researchers, beginning their journey through the often rough world of academia. Paul was absolutely convinced that early career researchers deserved a specifically-designed platform that would help them learn the rope, and practise the art and craft of academic writing while trying to make their first steps towards academic independence. With this in mind, Paul has played a crucial role in setting up Regional Insights journal providing a forum for early career authors researching regional issues. This journal later transformed into the Early Career Section of RSRS , which Paul led for a couple of years. Over the years, Paul worked tirelessly mentoring numerous authors (and editors), many of whom have since then developed brilliant academic careers and became highly visible in the Regional Studies Association's community. It goes without saying that Paul will be hugely missed by our community. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.