

# Obituary: John (Jack) Parr: (1941-2023)



*By Leslie Budd and Mike Danson*

**John Parr** (1941-2023) was a highly influential urban and regional economist whose career significantly contributed to developing regional science and regional studies. Everyone who came into contact with John (or Jack as he was known to many) testified to his intelligence, insights, warmth and support for developing newer and younger colleagues. All these attributes were underpinned by a dry sense of humour and conviviality that was demonstrated in conference attendees seeking out the hostelry John had chosen to socialise in. For many of us, he was a very good friend and mentor who made a major difference in our lives and careers.



### ***John Parr***

John was brought up in London and attended University College London, where he graduated in Economics in the early 1960s. From there, he travelled to America for post-graduate studies at the University of Washington, where he came under the influence of Charles Tiebout. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania, working with Walter Isard, one of the influential founders of regional science. John returned to the UK with his appointment at the University of Glasgow, where he later became a Professor in the Department of Urban Studies, of which he was a stalwart in every sense. Upon retirement, he was appointed Emeritus Professor and then returned to his alma mater as an Honorary Professor in the Bartlett School of Planning. He was one of the very first to be elected as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, recognising his active participation in the field, particularly as Chair of the British and Irish section of the Regional Science Association International and a member of the Regional Studies Association for 37 years.

A prodigious and prolific writer, John's text always corresponded to his view that the English language is a beautiful thing and his usage was clear, elegant and always thought-provoking. This was always reflected in his handwriting which he continued to use for his papers until late in his career when he was persuaded to buy a laptop, which he used with two-fingered aplomb. Woe betide any editor 'correcting' his style, John used proper punctuation and comprehension, confirming a good grammar school upbringing. John's papers across the whole spectrum of his career remain very influential and widely cited in key areas of regional science and studies: some of which can be regarded as seminal. Among

others, they include central place theory; cities and regions; spatial structure of city and polycentric regions; growth poles; agglomeration economics; regional trade; local government, devolution and regional policy, many of which were published in *Regional Studies*.

Regular meetings at the Skinners Arms in Kings Cross, London, were one of my (Les) personal pleasures, discussing the world and swapping recent papers. The last ones John gave me were published in 2012 and 2022 and covered: the evolution of local government in England, centre-size distributions comparison, and Singer's urban size paper and Pareto distribution. John was a regular attendee at the (Ubiquitous) Chip in Glasgow and Tennent's in Byers Road, where I (Mike) met up with him again in November to reminisce and let him know of my own, and by extension, many others, appreciation of his invaluable role as a friend and mentor.

Since his passing, the overwhelming message from the academic community has stressed his kindness, intellect, breadth of knowledge and understanding of history, politics, and people and his dedication to helping early career researchers and colleagues. A gentleman scholar whose mentoring and friendship brought light and joy to many, he will be terribly missed. John's wife of 49 years, Pamela, died in 2014; he is survived by his two daughters, Sheila and Anne.