

# A welcome to Regions e-Zine by Mark Tewdwr-Jones



I am delighted to write this editorial for Regions having had the honour of becoming Chair of the Regional Studies Association last November.

I am sometimes asked by people, outside higher education “What exactly are regions, and why do you study them?” My answer is intended to encourage people to focus on the issues. Cities and regions the world over are all different but are experiencing similar problems and challenges. Just think of what we all want: more and cheaper homes, better transport, cheaper energy, well paid jobs, access to green spaces, improved health and well-being, more sustainable and resilient places, and of course effective governance and buoyant economies. These issues, the drivers of change, are all present in one shape or form in regions. And they all overlap each other. But their degree of importance will be different in different places, and we need to accept that investment (or the lack of) sometimes creates very uneven and unequal development and change.

Think also of how regions begin to address those challenges. What about

economic growth, labour markets and skills, territorial strategies or policy processes that can be harnessed to begin to make a difference? Consider also the political and government structures that form a framework for intervention, alongside business investment decisions and community activism that all play a significant part in shaping the future of regions and cities. These are all critical choices.

Regions, and the challenges they face, are not static. They constantly change and oscillate from one day to another. But regional institutional and government structures are much more difficult to change quickly to address the drivers of change as they affect individual places. The challenges cannot be addressed by any single discipline or professional body. If we are going to understand, analyse and help create more sustainable cities and regions, we need to consider: what research needs to be undertaken and at what scale, what evidence needs to be collated, how do we advise those taking decisions, what sort of institutional process can be shaped to best effect, and what sort of region emerges?

This is the purpose of the study of regions. It is a complex story of history, geography, economics, planning, politics, the environment, technological change, and society, brought to bear in individual places.

The Regional Studies Association, a learned organisation that has a long and illustrious track record in facilitating and communicating research on changing regions, is a broad family of multi-disciplinary researchers, policy advisors, and business investors, all of whom are interested in cities and regions. But, critically, the RSA is also an organisation that is global and innovative, addressing current and emerging challenges, by disseminating ideas and providing a forum for critical debate. The RSA is not afraid to question, criticise, provoke and communicate new ideas, to meet and lead the highest standards of academic excellence in the process.

Under my chairmanship, I would like us all to consider how we step-up our role as communicators, advisors, and critical friends, at a time when cities and regions the world over require fresh thinking, new knowledge, and heightened skills.

My predecessor, Andrew Beer, performed a brilliant service to the Association, strengthening the organisation financially, globally and intellectually, and I would like to thank Andrew for all the hard work he put in to his role over the six years;

his will be a tough act to follow. And while I am offering thanks, could I also take this opportunity to thank Ivan Turok for his five years as Editor in Chief of *Regional Studies*, and welcome David Bailey as the new Editor and Jennifer Clark as Deputy Editor. I would also like to take this appropriate opportunity to thank Frank Peck, Gail Mulvey and Ignacio Cabras for their work on *Regions* and welcome in the new team of Eduardo Oliveira, Julie Tian Miao and Michael Taster.

*Regions* itself has moved from strength to strength over the years. In the new online format, we have created a community-wide access to the Association through *Regions*, allowing the potential for greater readership and contributions. This will allow more flexibility in what we can publish beyond traditional articles, including vods and pods and colour infographics. The values of both the Association and *Regions* are to be a leading and impactful community but, at the same time through our online presence, allow for more experimentation, and open up debates with policy and practice communities. We believe that the overall readership will increase and, in turn, will help bring more people into the RSA who share our values and aspirations.

I am delighted that this first online issue is aimed specifically at early career researchers - I will not admit how many years (decades!) ago it was that I was an early career researcher, but I recall that it was both an exciting and highly daunting time, trying to find both my feet and my voice in a publishing context full of 'big names' and stellar careers. Irrespective of our experiences, we all recognise the importance of creating research, publishing, and policy interaction opportunities for people at the start of their careers. I am proud that *Regions*, and the Regional Studies Association more generally, is playing a leading and supportive role in making that happen.



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