Thinking big: constructing, defending and advertising key research ideas

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REGIONS IN FOCUS: A ‘NEW REGIONALIST’ INTERPRETATION OF ENGLAND’S NORTHWEST

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1. WHY THINK BIG?
It is estimated that …

- 1.8 million articles published each year, in about 28,000 journals (2007).
- As many as 50% of papers are never read by anyone other than their authors, referees and journal editors.
- 90% of papers published are never cited.

- *Regional Studies* – as many as 50,000 full text downloads per quarter / 200,000 per annum.
Publishing research is a big investment of time / resources / effort
SO THINKING BIG / STANDING OUT IS A GOOD THING ... RIGHT?

You have to think anyway, so why not think big?

Donald Trump
Think big … but don’t oversell

Remember, most research / writing only sets out to make a small, incremental contribution to knowledge and understanding.
2. CONSTRUCTING KEY RESEARCH IDEAS
q – r theory (after Ellison, 2002)

q : the inherent interest and importance of a manuscript; its originality and significance.

r : the rigour of the work; its methodological competence and the quality of the data, analysis and interpretation.

- To be published a paper must have
  - sufficient r (i.e. the findings are justifiable) such that it withstands critique.
  - sufficient q (i.e. it is interesting and important) such that others will read and use it.
Low q

I think we've got enough information now, don't you?

All we have is one "fact" you made up.

That's plenty. By the time we add an introduction, a few illustrations, and a conclusion, it will look like a graduate thesis.

Low r
q-r theory continued...

- **q** (interest & importance)
- **r** (the rigour of the work)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>High</td>
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Probability of getting published

High

Low
Introduction and possibly also literature review (but use a different name)
- It should be clear what the research question is and why it needs to be answered

Problematisation
Aim
Justification of aim

Specific focus
Should demonstrate:
1. what we know,
2. what we don’t know
and hence
3. what we should do

Methodology
Case study
‘Data’ sources
‘Data’ analysis

Discussion
Evaluation of research questions
Relate to the wider literature
Show we now know something

Conclusion
Summary of what we now know and why
this new knowledge matters

The symmetry of paper writing

Demonstrate the q

Demonstrate the r

Supplementary Material
Methods
Data

Results
Systematic account of findings

Literature

Supplementary Material
Methods
Data
Do current metrics provide the answer?

Yes … to WHAT and WHERE questions
Yes/No … to WHO, HOW and WHY questions
1. Why do those who look not read?
*Usually there is an obstacle putting readers off (most likely the title or abstract).*

2. Why do those who read not use?
*Usually the work does not engage the reader (most likely because it fails to go beyond saying “I set out to research this, this is how I did it, this is what I found.”) … but also other users – e.g. students.*

**Improving ‘impact’**
1. Increase the number at the start of the process (looks), and/or
2. Minimise the rate of attrition from looks, to reads, to users

The former puts a premium on **visibility**; the latter a premium on **quality**.
2. DEFENDING KEY RESEARCH IDEAS
ADDRESSING REVIEWER COMMENTS

BAD REVIEWS ON YOUR PAPER? FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES AND YOU MAY YET GET IT PAST THE EDITOR:

Reviewer comment:
“The method/device/paradigm the authors propose is clearly wrong.”

How NOT to respond:
× “Yes, we know. We thought we could still get a paper out of it. Sorry.”

Correct response:
✓ “The reviewer raises an interesting concern. However, as the focus of this work is exploratory and not performance-based, validation was not found to be of critical importance to the contribution of the paper.”

Reviewer comment:
“The authors fail to reference the work of Smith et al., who solved the same problem 20 years ago.”

How NOT to respond:
× “Huh. We didn’t think anybody had read that. Actually, their solution is better than ours.”

Correct response:
✓ “The reviewer raises an interesting concern. However, our work is based on completely different first principles (we use different variable names), and has a much more attractive graphical user interface.”

Reviewer comment:
“This paper is poorly written and scientifically unsound. I do not recommend it for publication.”

How NOT to respond:
× “You #&@*% reviewer! I know who you are! I’m gonna get you when it’s my turn to review!”

Correct response:
✓ “The reviewer raises an interesting concern. However, we feel the reviewer did not fully comprehend the scope of the work, and misjudged the results based on incorrect assumptions.”

www.phdcomics.com
3. ADVERTISING KEY RESEARCH IDEAS
Galbraith (1974: 150)

the function of advertising is to "create desires – to bring into being wants that previously did not exist."
Importance of the title

“City Region – Atlantic Gateway”

“Rethinking city-regionalism as the production of non-state spaces: the case of Peel Holding’s Atlantic Gateway Strategy”

“The missing middle: new institutional geographies of higher education”

“New institutional geographies of higher education: the rise of transregional university alliances”

Wood For Trees
(can’t see what matters because of incidental stuff in the way)
Which journal?
### Urban / regional studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Impact Factor</th>
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<tr>
<td>City: Analysis of Urban Issues, Culture, Theory, Policy, Urban</td>
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### Planning

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<td>Spatial Economic Analysis</td>
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### Economics / economic geog.

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<td>Economic Analysis</td>
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### Politics / political geog.

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<td>Government and Policy</td>
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### Urban design

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Increasing Impact Factor (prestige?)
Methods
Debates and commentary

From competitive regions to competitive city-regions: a new orthodoxy, but some old mistakes

John Harrison*

Abstract

Under the titles of ‘global city-regions’ and the new ‘city regionalism’ there has been a growing support for a resurgence of city-regions within economic geography. While sympathetic to the general tenor of the new city-regionalism, this article argues for a more synthetic approach to understanding the significance of the city-region. It is argued that the same inherent weaknesses that undermined the previous new regionalist orthodoxy within economic geography, have been collapsed into the present focus upon the scale of the city-region. The article concludes by looking at the broader implications of this for the future of economic geography.

Keywords: Economic geography, regions, city-regions, England
JEL classifications: R11, R58
Date submitted: 18 December 2006    Date accepted: 12 February 2007
## 80 / 20 rule

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<tr>
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<td>82%</td>
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<td>0 – 4 citations</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% 5 + citations</td>
<td>7%</td>
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THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING ...
Queue jumping

- 2006-2008: new regionalism
- 2007-2010: new city-regionalism
- 2011-: getting ahead of the game?
In their 1989 book, Richard Knight and Gary Gappert write:

“THE TITLE OF THIS VOLUME, Cities in a Global Society, is rather presumptuous because it anticipates the global society; but it is less presumptuous than the original title, “Global Cities”, which implies that global cities already exist” (p. 11).
“[Regional] studies are always done for a purpose, with a specific view. Whether territorial, political, cultural or whatever, there is always a specific focus. One cannot study everything, and there are multiple ways of seeing a place: there is no complete ‘portrait of a region’. Moreover, … ‘regions’ only exist in relation to particular criteria. They are not ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered; they are our (and others’) constructions.” (Allen et al. 1998, 2)
“This concept of the city-region, like all concepts, is a mental construct. It is not, as some planners and scholars seem to think, an area that is presented on a platter to suit their general needs. The extent of the area they need will depend on the specific purpose for which it is required. The concept of the city-region can only be made specific and definable, as a geographic entity, by reference to the precise and areal extent of particular associations with the city.” (Dickinson 1967, 227)
City Region and Regionalism (1947) “This book is not about planning”

City and Region: A Geographical Interpretation (1967) “This book, like its predecessor in this series (City Region and Regionalism, 1947), is not about planning”
FINAL THOUGHT
AAG 2008: 4 sessions

AAG 2013: 3 sessions

RGS 2011: 3 sessions

2014 Workshop

2015 Conference
IS IT ABOUT THINKING BIG AT ALL …?
Yes and no

- Are we asking the right questions?
- Can we answer the “so what” question?
- You can do a lot with very little

BE PASSIONATE

ASPIRE, HAVE AMBITION

ENJOY IT