

# AN ANTIPODEAN ADVENTURE AS AN ANALYTICAL APPLIED HUMAN GEOGRAPHER

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I grew up in Armidale, a medium size town on the New England Tablelands region in New South Wales, Australia. My father was the Bursar at the University of New England, then at the University of Sydney. One of Dad's best friends was Ellis Thorpe, head of the Department of Geography at the university. His enthusiasm for geography was contagious. As a second year high school student at 13, I was taught geography by Mal Logan, who was to become one of Australia's great human geographers and eventually the Vice-Chancellor of Monash University. From that early age I was 'hooked' on geography.

In early 1960, at the age of 16, I commenced studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of New England, following the completion of my Leaving Certificate in which I had gained first class honours in geography with the fourth highest grade in the state. That achievement was due in no small part to my 'raiding' Ellis Thorpe's copious library and reading wonderful books (e.g., Russell & Kniffen (1951); Cressy (1951); Zimmermann (1951); and Finch, Trewartha, Robinson, & Hammond (1957).

At the University of New England I undertook a double major in geography, plus minor studies in geology, economics/economic history, and history. Over the next three years my lecturers in human geography included Ellis Thorpe, Eric Woolmington, Herb King, Ted Chapman, John Holmes, and Peter Smailes; and Reg Golledge was my tutor.

At that time, geography was largely a descriptive field with much of the teaching focus on studying regions. But the enlightened lecturers we had introduced us to exciting and challenging concepts, theories, and methods

including central place theory and settlement systems, location theory, gravity models, and ecological systems, as well as, the traditional regional geography courses on Europe, North America, Latin America, and Monsoon Asia. There was a considerable emphasis on field work—including an annual week long field trip—and on cartography and map interpretation. But what really captured my interest was the literature we were introduced to in spatial theories, including the work of von Thunen, Christaller, Losch, Weber, Reilly, Zipf, and Alonso.

I spent three years teaching geography and economics in high school in Melbourne, and decided to take the advice of my then mentor Eric Woollmington to enroll as an external studies student in a Litt.B degree in geography at New England. Eric insisted I do a reading course in what he referred to as ‘this new fangled field’ of statistical geography (Gregory, 1963) and following up leads in various journals, and seeking out the other books that were coming out in the mid 1960s as part of the ‘quantitative revolution’ in geography.

In 1965, I was lucky enough to get an appointment as a senior tutor in the Economic Geography Department at the University of Melbourne. Mollie Bayne was Department Head, and Bob Kent-Wilson and Cliff Woods were other senior members of the staff. Mollie Bayne, who was nearing the end of her career, ensured I was provided with access to a small amount of research money which helped me undertake the statistical modelling necessary to complete the thesis for my Litt.B.

At the 1967 ANZAAS Congress (a large one-week long annual conference covering all disciplines, sadly now long gone) I attended a public lecture by Bill Williams, a taxonomist from the CSIRO Division of Computing Research, and was fascinated by the power of the new hierarchical and divisive classificatory procedures. I talked to Williams, who took me for a beer and offered for me to bring my data to Canberra where he would run it through The MULTCLASS and MULTBET procedures. This enabled me to totally re-work my thesis research to produce typologies of pattern of immigrant settlements in Melbourne. The experience of the contact with Bill Williams was profound in opening my mind to the benefits of looking to other disciplines to enhance spatial analysis research in geography. That thesis research was later published (Stimson, 1970a, and Stimson, 1970b), and it set me on a path of research applying multi-variate statistical analysis to the analysis of socio-spatial data.

In 1968, I took a tenured lectureship in the School of Social Science at the new Flinders University of South Australia in suburban Adelaide. Murray McCaskill was the professor and head of geography at Flinders and had

attracted a talented team of young academics. My colleagues in geography included Les Heathcote, Patricia Burnett, Alaric Maude, Clive Forster, Graeme Hugo, Stuart Fraser, and Ken Bardsley.

During this time, I had become more and more enthusiastic about the emergence of geography as a 'spatial science.' For me the most influential people were: Peter Haggett and Richard Chorley, and their wonderful books on models and analytical approaches in geography (Haggett, 1965; Chorley & Haggett, 1967); and on new frontiers in geographical teaching (Chorley & Haggett, 1965); Torsten Hagerstrand's work on innovation waves and migration (Hagerstrand, 1952; Hannerberg, Hagerstrand, & Odeving, 1957); Brian Berry's multi-variate analysis of the performance of nation's as an appendix in the Ginsberg (1966) *Atlas of Economic Development*; King's book on statistical geography (King, 1963); and Harvey's (1969) tome, *Explanation in Geography*.

The other big influence on me during this time was the emergence of behavioural analysis in human geography led by people such as Julian Wolpert (1965), Peter Gould (Gould & White, 1974), Larry Brown (Brown & Moore, 1970) Bill Clark (Clark 1969), and Reg Golledge (Golledge, 1967; Cox & Golledge, 1969; and Moore & Golledge, 1976). I began my Ph.D. research inspired by their writings with my thesis investigating the relationship between social space, preference space, and residential location behaviour in Adelaide (Stimson, 1978).

Also of influence was David Smith and his work on social well-being and welfare geography (Smith, 1973, 1977), which was the inspiration for my first major book (Stimson, 1982).

I sometimes refer to my Flinders years from the mid-1970s as an era of 'sales and service' in my career. In collaboration with a number of colleagues from various disciplines in the University we developed an outward orientation to government and industry to attract research funds and mix mission research with research methods. Initially that started with a series of grants from the Commonwealth Hospital and Health Services Commission for survey-based investigations of consumer access to health services, and the impact of new initiatives to develop community health centers in both suburban and regional urban areas.

During the 1970s I became more convinced that human geographers needed to work in multi-disciplinary teams and use rigorous quantitative methods to address challenging socio-spatial issues to develop a better 'evidence base' to inform public policy.

Two periods of sabbatical leave during the 1970s were instrumental in my becoming more orientated towards the use of survey methods to collect

primary data to investigate aspects of human spatial behaviour. In 1976 at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan, I developed an on-going professional association and wonderful friendships with the late Charles Cannell and with Robert Marans which continues to the present day.

After my sabbatical at the University of Michigan in 1976, I came back enthusiastic to establish a survey research operation, and I received support from the Vice-Chancellor at Flinders. For the next seven years I was Director of the Centre for Applied Social and Survey Research (CASSR). We collaborated with people in the South Australian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to establish a multi-stage spatial sampling frame in South Australia, and undertook a lot of social survey research data collections. This covered diverse fields such as evaluating health services access and delivery, residential location decisions, entertainment behavior, voting behavior, and the impact of vessel buy-back schemes on fisheries and fishing port communities. And in association with the Sample Survey Center at the University of Sydney, we ran a number of national workshops in survey research methods with senior researchers from the Survey Research Centre in the ISR at the University of Michigan, with a book on survey interviewing being an outcome (Beed & Stimson, 1985).

One of the encouraging things that happened at this time was our ability to form small multi-disciplinary research teams and have success in winning competitive funding from the Australian Research Grants Scheme. An outcome of this and one of the most successful enterprises in which I was involved during the 1970s was the production of a socio-economic atlas (Stimson & Cleland, 1975), which has been reprinted several times, and attracted immense interest from the press, business, and the community in general.

The days of 'sales and service' were immensely rewarding, and I was now on a path for the rest of my career as a research entrepreneur, team leader, manager. Ever since, I have been firmly wedded to working in a research team context, interacting with, and learning from colleagues in many different disciplines.

During the 1970s there began to emerge what has become a succession of '*isms*' that have sought to progressively question and at worst undermine the 'scientific standing' that geography had acquired as a result of the quantitative revolution. This began with the Marxist critiques and progressed with the rise of feminist studies, and is more recently represented with the spread of post-modernism.

These '*isms*' (and especially post-modernism) I regard as having set the discipline back, and to have severely detracted from the standing that

human geography has gained as an analytical science as a result of the 'quantitative revolution.'

In retrospect my reaction in the 1970s to the beginning and subsequent proliferation of these '*isms*' in human geography was well founded, and the decision I made to become closely aligned with the Regional Science Association International (RSAI) proved to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. I was part of a small group of researchers from mainly geography and economics that helped establish the Australian and New Zealand RSAI, and since the 1970s, I became increasingly involved with RSAI internationally. RSAI has become something of a haven for analytical applied geographers to rub shoulders with regional economists and other scientists involved in regional/spatial modeling and analysis, while the professional associations in geography have become less and less attractive to and useful for human geographers of that ilk. For my part, the involvement in RSAI has led to a series of international collaborations in research resulting in the publication of a number of books with regional scientists in addition to jointly authored journal papers. Those books include, for example, Gibson & Stimson (1989), and Stimson, Stough, & Roberts (2002/2006)

But the real advantage that I have gained from a long and deep involvement in RSAI has been the opening up of new possibilities to the study of applied and policy issues using spatial tools of analysis through the multi-disciplinary nature of regional science.

A further 'sideways' adventure for me was a decision in the early 1980s to leave Flinders University after 15 years to become Director of the Australian Institute of Urban Studies (AIUS) based in Canberra. This membership organization drew participation from across academia, government agencies, and business, and it was supported in part through a number of grants in-and-from the commonwealth and state governments. AIUS pursued a rolling program of conducting research into issues of national significance in urban studies, and it represented Australia at UNCHS/Habitat meetings.

Being Director of AIUS for almost three years was instrumental in widening my perspectives on policy research, and in developing a keener understanding of the roles of the business sector in urban and regional development and how that might be enhanced through the application of analytical approaches in human geography. This was particularly valuable in honing my ability to design applied research projects that had policy and/or business relevance as a means to raising research funds. It was also instrumental in making me realize how much researchers with analytical skills in spatial science could make a worthwhile contribution in addressing issues of public and business concern. This was represented, for example, in the three

major national projects I helped develop and oversee conducted by AIUS while I was Director, namely: an investigation into the operation of the private rental housing sector in Australia; a study of the impacts of foreign direct investment into urban real estate in Australia; and the development of a national program of research and training in local economic achievement. The last of those involved Edward Blakely (a professor in regional development and planning from UC Berkley) coming to Australia for a year, which provided the basis for our on-going research collaboration. And the second led to a program of research, funded by the Australian Research Council, conducted throughout the 1990s in collaboration with Maurie Daly, then Professor of Geography at the University of Sydney, on the regional development impacts of foreign investment in Australia.

In 1985 I was asked to become Head of the School of Administrative Studies at the Canberra College of Advanced Education, later to become the University of Canberra. This move into the role of a faculty Dean opened doors to important new management experiences, and being located in the national capital and given the public sector association of the degree programs offered by the school, it provided me with a diverse set of experiences interacting with the public policy and public administration process at the federal level. Even though the school did not have a geography program, I was able to see the way spatial perspectives could contribute to the public policy formulation, program implementation, and management processes, and in particular in the area of program evaluation.

The five years I spent in this role of dean involved me in restructuring the school into a new Faculty of Management with a focus on the public sector. In addition to my administrative responsibilities, I was able to collaborate with colleagues in a program of research in housing policy, and through the activities of the Australian Centre for Local Government Association I continued working on a series of local economic and community development. The faculty was also involved in programs on Urban Finance in Management with the World Bank.

During the 1980s I was able to continue some academic research in behavioral geography in collaboration with Reg Golledge, and we published the first of our books (Golledge & Stimson, 1987), to be updated and published a decade later as *Spatial Behavior: A Geographic Perspective* (Golledge & Stimson, 1997).

In 1990, I decided not to pursue a second term as Dean of the Faculty of Management at the University of Canberra, opting to take up an invitation from the then Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Sallyanne Atkinson, to become Director of *The Brisbane Plan* project. This was a foray as a geographer into

the area of public policy and planning in what was a high public profile investigation. It involved collaboration with the State Government, other local authorities, business groups, and the community sector, in developing a 20-year strategy plan for the development of Brisbane, Australia's third largest city. This was an opportunity for me to put to the test many of the theories, methods, and approaches developed in analytical applied geography into the complexities of the operation of a major city, and the strategic issues that need to be addressed for its future development, planning, and management.

I made some significant contributions to the planning processed in the 'sun belt' growth metropolis known as the Brisbane-South East Queensland region. This was undertaken in my role as Professor of Urban Studies at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), with the chair initially being sponsored by the Brisbane City Council.

During the seven years I spent at QUT, I was one of a group of urban researchers in Australia to win the national competition in 1993, to establish the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The AHURI head office was established in the Melbourne CBD, and I ran a secondary office in QUT in Brisbane. Kevin O'Connor from Monash University and I coordinated the urban research program of AHURI, and my office undertook the development of the international program.

Both the housing and the urban research components of AHURI focused on applied policy research. We were able to leverage the core government funding with corporate, other public agency, and ARC competitive research funding, which resulted in a steady stream of good quality analytical applied policy research over the ensuing seven years. One of the projects O'Connor and I had responsibility for was the publication each year of a series of Monitor reports on Australia's capital cities, which benchmarked their performance on a range of indicators and evaluated the urban growth and development process. The work we did in the urban program was to lead to a collaborative research project funded by the ARC with O'Connor and Maurie Daly, which produced a book (O'Connor, Stimson & Daly, 2001).

In 1997, I was 'head hunted' to join the University of Queensland (UQ) and establish a program of research into urban and regional analysis. Initially that also involved UQ joining AHURI as another node. About half of the staff and graduate students, and most of the research funding, came over with me from QUT to UQ. I was given an on-going chair as Professor of Geographical Sciences and Planning and have taught in the School of Geography, Planning, and Architecture ever since.

The move to UQ has been the culmination of my academic research career and has been probably the most productive period of competitive

research funding and publication I have had. Focus of the research programs continue to involve teams of researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds, and there is still an applied policy focus to some of the research program, particularly the four components: the measurement and evaluation of urban quality of life; the modelling of urban and regional socio-economic transformation and performance (Baum, O'Connor, & Stimson, 2005); the development of retirement housing and the residential relocation decision choice process for retirees; and the development of a large scale urban model for the South East Queensland region.

All of these have been supported by competitive research grants from the ARC, the last one has industry support from the Queensland Treasury, and the second has had support from the peak industry association and has resulted in three books, one of which is widely used in the retirement village industry (Stimson, 2002). A feature of the research program developed and implemented by UQ has been the way that research has been firmly embedded in spatial information technologies and the development of an 'evidence base' to demonstrate the application of spatial analytic methods to address significant societal issues.

When the ARC announced in 2003, that it was to establish a number of national research networks in Australia, a group of social scientists from 18 universities successfully bid for the establishment of the ARC Research Network in Spatially Integrated Social Science (SISS), with UQ as the host institution. I was the leader of the bid and became the Network Convenor. It now has almost 300 researchers from some eight disciplines in those universities, and about 30% are early career researchers and graduate students. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is a member.

So what might I derive from the above discussion of my antipodean adventure over the last four decades as an applied analytical human geographer?

It seems to me that a key factor is to be open to becoming engaged with researchers from other disciplinary backgrounds; to work in multi-disciplinary teams to bring to bear spatial analytic approaches to address issues of policy and business significance; and to be proactive in promulgating the potential contributions that can be made by geographers.

I would recommend that the designers of curricula place a heavy emphasis on the teaching of spatial theories in human geography, drawing on the work of regional scientists, to ensure that students are well skilled in the spatial methods, tools, and techniques of spatial analysis and modelling, the design of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis, and the use of GIS technologies. Those skills are in high demand in



the jobs market place, and it is a sad reality that so many graduates from human geography programs today are ignorant of analytical spatial theories and methods, and unskilled in the use of spatial information technologies. This shortcoming renders them rather useless for many employers.

What should be the domain of human geography is now being usurped by some smarter operators in other academic structures such as departments of geomatics. Only a firm commitment in human geography programs to an applied analytical paradigm can overcome the current malaise in the discipline and re-establish it as a science. This can also be better achieved through a strong commitment in geography schools to integrating both human and physical geographic perspectives into curriculum design and to encourage recognition of the power that a synthesis incorporating those perspectives may bring to addressing some of the major socio-economic and environmental challenges that confront contemporary society.

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