


Please cite the Published Version

Beel, David , Crotty, John, Docherty, Iain, McCormick, Jim, Rae, Norman and Stewart, Derek (2020) Ronan Paddison: reflections on a supervisor, mentor, friend. *Space and Polity*, 24 (2). pp. 294-307. ISSN 1356-2576

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1770586>

Publisher: Informa UK Limited

Version: Accepted Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/626158/>

Usage rights:  In Copyright

Additional Information: This is an Author Accepted Manuscript of a paper accepted for publication in *Space and Polity*, published by and copyright Taylor & Francis.

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

Ronan Paddison: Reflections on a Supervisor, Mentor, Friend

David Beel,¹ John Crotty,² Iain Docherty,³ Jim McCormick,⁴ Norman Rae,⁵ and Derek Stewart.⁶

¹ Future Economies, Manchester Metropolitan University: d.beel@mmu.ac.uk

² Independent Scholar: samjon2j@btinternet.com

³ Dean, Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA:
iain.docherty@stir.ac.uk

⁴ Associate Director Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Scotland):
Jim.McCormick@jrf.org.uk

⁵ Independent Scholar: ngd.rae@gmail.com

⁶ Director and Co-Founder, Community Models Limited:
derek.stewart@communitymodels.co.uk

Abstract

This is a composite paper bringing together six personal reflections on being supervised as doctoral students by Ronan Paddison. It contributes insightful and poignant voices of experience to a special issue commemorating the academic contributions – here with wider implications beyond the immediately ‘academic’ – of Ronan Paddison (1945-2019), the founder and for many years Editor-in-Chief of this journal, *Space and Polity*. The six sets of reflections have been authored independently of one another, but their cumulative effect is to demonstrate the depth of ‘hidden’ academic (and related) contribution made by Ronan to nurturing early career academics formally (through the doctoral supervision process) and more informally (in numerous ways and sometimes continuing well beyond the submission and award of a thesis). (*Editorial abstract*)

Ronan as supervisor, by David Beel

In 2005, I joined the then Department (now School) of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow, as a postgraduate student on a 1+3 scholarship to work with Ronan as my primary supervisor. To be honest as a fresh-faced graduate, I had little knowledge of Ronan and his work, having applied on the back of being forwarded the

scholarship opportunity from staff at Hull, where I was then an undergraduate student. Ronan immediately seemed warm in our first conversation on the phone, checking in the first instance if I really wanted the place when I was offered it. I confirmed and that was that, with me quite soon after being on my way to Glasgow to work with Ronan for what would be around four to five years. The following remarks therefore articulate my experiences working with Ronan as my educator, guide and mentor through the Masters and PhD process; and it stands as a reflection upon which was for me a positive and productive relationship.

We joke, not a particularly good joke, about being academically related via our supervisors and, although perhaps this forces the relationship a little far, it does represent the familial nature of supervision. Perhaps this more reflects the age difference between Ronan and I, but, via his encouragement, steering and guidance, there was certainly a parental feel in the way he moved me along through the PhD. With care, compassion but also an appropriate sense of discipline, Ronan gave me a wonderful amount of freedom to follow my own path on working towards my PhD. This obviously has its pros and cons for the student, but it taught me a series of invaluable lessons about doing research or, more accurately, how *not* to do research. Ronan granted the freedom to make mistakes and to find your own way through your research practice. Although this might seem slightly daunting, at least initially, for me it was vital. This freedom gave me an independence and a set of experiences that have helped me ever since to continue my academic career. It also allowed me to maintain my sense of ownership over the process, something that as a postgraduate student you do not fully comprehend until you move to your next form of employment. Early on in my first research job, I found how lucky I had been when I joined a project that had already started and most of the parameters were already in place. Saying that, Ronan's tutelage, once I did become a member of a new research team, gave me the confidence to push that project in directions that I found interesting.

Ronan used our regular supervision meetings as the main process for advancing my thinking, and they would usually follow a similar pattern. We'd discuss the work I'd supplied to Ronan before the meeting, and how from my perspective everything was going to plan, then suddenly, Ronan would drop in a curveball of some kind. I'd be lost as to where it had come from and mentally scrambling round to compute this new theory or perspective. This meant I could sometimes leave meetings a little confused, but what I then found, as I continued to read, was that Ronan was articulating the next significant points in the argument that we had

been discussing. Suddenly, his comments fitted into place and slowly, as I became more knowledgeable around the topic and progressed through the PhD, these curveballs seemed to happen less.

This still doesn't mean I probably didn't frustrate Ronan throughout the process, and I think a couple of times I genuinely annoyed him. Firstly, it was most likely due to my failure to keep to deadlines: this meant that the finishing period of my PhD (Beel, 2011) became a little rushed and also meant a slight switch in the roles played by my supervisors. I quickly became aware of Ronan and Jo's (Jo Sharp) 'bad cop/bad cop' routine. Having pushed my time and their patience, this was their approach for pushing me over the line and it certainly worked. For Ronan, though I imagine this was not his usual terrain as a supervisor, he usually seemed to enjoy playing the 'good cop' in meetings with Jo, much to Jo's irritation. Secondly, there was the time that I made a joke towards the end of a chapter, about David Harvey's take on cultural regeneration being a little 'grumpy'. Ronan was not impressed with this, quite rightly so you might suggest, and he wrote a whole paragraph as to why this was not acceptable and how he was quite a fan of David Harvey and his work. I obviously agreed with the latter point and made sure to not drop any jokes in my work again.

Outside the PhD process, Ronan was somewhat famously renowned for what could be politely termed as *elongated professorial questions* ... One time, in particular jumps out. This was when as Masters students we were presenting to the Human Geography Research Group at Glasgow our planned dissertation topics for the summer. This was, as a Masters student, quite nerve-wracking, presenting for the first time our research ideas to a room of academics. My peer, Stuart (Muirhead), had just finished presenting on his topic, which was focusing on animal and zoo geographies. Ronan jumped in with a story, telling of the times that, as a lad, he rode elephants at Edinburgh Zoo. Stuart looked perplexed and increasingly clammy, as he wondered where this was going, while everyone else chuckled at Ronan's childhood reminiscences. As Ronan continued, though, what seemed like whimsical nostalgia turned to a more serious point in terms of changing animal/human experiences in zoos. This, to me, was a classic Ronan approach, taking something that seemed quite simple, not even that important, but then making a far more profound argument from this basis. Ronan's post-political paper (Paddison, 2005; see also Karaliotas, this issue) invokes a similar strategy, whereby something easily understandable and personal can be used to widen a deeper understanding. Saying that, I still think Stuart has recurring dreams about that day.

Ronan's work has continued to be relevant to me, as I have continued my academic career. This was never more evident than when I began working with Martin Jones in 2015 at the University of Sheffield. In one of our first meetings working on a project about City-Regions, Ronan's work loomed large, in particular *The Fragmented State* (Paddison, 1983; see also McLeod, this issue). Martin immediately jumped to the following passage: 'In Britain and elsewhere, the significance of coordination at a regional level has shown itself most clearly in times of national crisis' (243) as a stand-out point, and we agreed that, in the context of city-region sub nation state restructuring, this passage was as true in 1983 as it was still in 2015. I later learnt that Martin had referenced it in an *Environment and Planning A* paper (Jones, 2001), hence why he recalled it so quickly, but for me it showed the on-going quality and legacy of Ronan's work. Some thirty-two years later and here was Ronan continuing to push my thinking along, as he always has done.

Finally, in my PhD acknowledgements, I stated earnestly how, at the time, I felt the privilege, along with Olga Mausch-Debowska (long-term office buddy) to being one of Ronan's very last PhD students within the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences. This remains a deeply heart-felt feeling with regards to my time spent learning and working with Ronan.



Remembering Ronan, by John Crotty

The following piece is based on a brief address delivered at the Commemoration of the life and work of Ronan Paddison (see Philo, this issue). To maintain both the format and spirit of that address, this text is based largely on the original speech in terms of layout and sentiment, but with some additional material reflecting more widely on Ronan's role as PhD supervisor. However, this is not intended as a detached account: the personal, the human and the professional are counterpointed as an interdependent set of relationships, no one of which is more important than the other. Above all, it is reminiscence, a reflection and a tribute.

I first got to know Ronan in the autumn of 1996; I had just taken early retirement from a long career in local government and, having taken a Master's degree in Urban Studies eight years before, thought it would be useful to study in more depth my experiences in working with

communities within a (partially) devolved local government system. Ronan was recommended by a work colleague who had studied with him, and a meeting was arranged. As I climbed the stony stair (remembered as an undergraduate having taken Geography at Glasgow many years before) up to his office, I did not realise my temerity in presuming that he would agree to take me on as a student (as the other addresses at the Commemoration outlining his academic standing made clear). Nonetheless, I was made welcome and from the beginning Ronan showed both interest and empathy.

In various ways, I was an unusual postgraduate student. Firstly, I was older than my supervisor (by about a year) and that made for an interesting dynamic in the relationship. From the beginning, Ronan treated me as someone with a degree of experience and professional expertise so far as local government was concerned. His own extensive knowledge in that field was always used as a means of carrying the discussion forward, but he was as willing to learn from my experience as impart his to me. As I learned (with some difficulty) the language of the ‘cultural turn’ in the geography of that period and postmodern habits of thought and analysis, it was intriguing to reflect upon who was the teacher and who the pupil – although I never had the least doubt where the academic knowledge (and hence power?) lay.

The second point of difference was that I was what would have been called (in a more genteel age) a student ‘of independent means’. Not inherited means, but as a result of a generous (and by today’s terms almost unimaginable) final salary pension, which enabled me to meet living costs and fund my (part-time) postgraduate fees. This gave me a degree of independence and flexibility, but the downside was that it introduced a dangerous sense of being able to ‘walk away’ – of not being obligated to anyone other than myself. The first year or so of any protracted period of study, particularly given the singular (and single-handed) nature of a PhD, is always the most difficult and lonely part of the enterprise. It was largely due to Ronan’s patience and encouragement that I was able to persevere. In addition, the support and advice of my internal reviewers and fellow PhD students was critical, underlining the importance of the idea of a university as a *community* of scholars, rather than isolated units. Central to this nexus of connections is the role of supervisor, though, who can be involved and detached simultaneously (see below).

The final point was that Ronan was my sole supervisor – this made for an intense and involved relationship, and one in which we got to know one another very well. On the one hand, this allowed for a degree of honesty and mutual respect, but on the other it was probably too comfortable, on my part rather than Ronan's. An element of tension in any relationship can be no bad thing, and the dual system of supervision (the common practice now of having two or more supervisors) allows for contrasting perspectives and perceptions, probably necessary to achieve the optimal result for any postgraduate. That said, Ronan was too good an academic to allow any discussion to stray too far from the goal; but discussions of 'the world, the universe and everything' are still fondly remembered, and it is a tribute to Ronan's breadth of vision and experience that he could discuss these as well as maintain an academic perspective.

When the day of the *viva* finally came, it proved to be an interesting experience. My external supervisor took issue with some of the key points of my thesis (Crotty, 2004), and a detailed and robust discussion ensued; coming from a background where I had to use persuasive argument and deal with contrary opinion, this caused me no particular anxiety. In the end, I passed, but had to submit one short supplementary piece on the distinction between 'participant observation' and 'observant participation'. I did satisfy my examiners, but I am not sure it is a distinction I would care to make today. Indeed (as hinted above), Ronan represented the blurring of this distinction: intensely interested in and identifying with the subject of his research (especially in the field), but at the same time keeping room for objective analysis and critique. This, in my view, made him a more-rounded human being and supervisor.

My address at the Commemoration event concluded with a brief reflection on a famous and apposite Latin text. Although it has come down to us in a medieval Latin form, it seems to own its origins to a Greek philosopher, Chilon of Sparta, who flourished c.500 BC(E), near the beginning of our common European awareness. It is:

De mortuis nihil nisi bonum dicendum est.

Often, *dicendum est* is omitted, but it is this form of the verb that changes the sentence from a mere pious platitude ('about the dead nothing unless good'), into an imperative, a command. So, the translation has to be something like: '*nothing* must be said about the dead unless

good.’ The wealth of good things said in the Commemoration, and the warmth and sincerity with which they were said, spoke volumes about the esteem in which Ronan Paddison was held, both as a teacher and as a man.



Make it well: Remembering Ronan Paddison, by Iain Docherty

It is an enormous privilege to be asked to make this contribution to the ‘Paddison Geographies’ special issue of *Space and Polity*, and to have been able to speak at Ronan’s memorial event at the University of Glasgow in November 2019. The session at which I was invited to speak was subtitled ‘Ronan as a supervisor, mentor and nurturer’. I was lucky enough to be able to call Ronan all these things over the years, for which I am eternally grateful.

First, some important context about how I came to know Ronan. Like many of my contemporaries, I arrived at university as the first generation to go into higher education, and neither me nor my family knew much about what to expect, or to be honest why I was there, beyond it being the done thing if the opportunity was available. The University of Glasgow of those days (the early-1990s) was still a rather conservative institution, drawing the majority of its students from the local catchment. Many did as I did by commuting from home every day. I stumbled through my first couple of years having little of a university ‘experience’, wondering what all the fuss was about.

Then in 1992, having chosen to pursue an Honours degree in Geography more or less by a process of elimination, I walked into a seminar room in the corner of the Glasgow department’s part of the magnificent Gilbert Scott Building for the first session of Ronan’s module in Urban Geography, cities and their politics having been two interests I’d had for some time. Little did I know that what I learned from Ronan in that room was to set me on the career path that I still follow, nor that it would be in that very same room where many of us would gather to remember Ronan’s contribution at his memorial event some 27 years later. I remember that first session vividly. There were 60 or so people in the room from the third and fourth year cohorts. In walks Ronan with just some papers in hand; there was none of the ICT and AV that we now rely on when teaching. But, by the end of the two hours, I thought

to myself, “now I get it! Now I see why I’m here!”. It is no exaggeration to say that probably everything changed for me in terms of my career path and the opportunities that it has afforded me from that moment on.

It is not just that I – like so many others – shared some thematic interests with Ronan. What he was able to do was energise everyone in the class to believe that what interested them in their studies and wider lives was *important*, no matter what those interests or chosen foci might be. It is hard to underestimate the revelatory nature of this to me, and I suspect many other colleagues: as a social scientist working in a university system where other researchers are directly addressing the great challenges of our age, be they climate science, discovery chemistry or artificial intelligence, or demonstrating huge levels of technical skill in acquired languages, musical composition or the myriad other fine arts, it is easy for me, at least, to lapse into ‘impostor syndrome’ and worry about whether our work – my work and those of cognate scholars – is as impactful as we hope it to be. But what Ronan taught me through his wisdom in those undergraduate sessions is that *lots* of things are important – even if they might not seem so at the time – that it is perfectly okay to pursue what *you* think is important, and to have full confidence in your wider contribution, so long as you make it well.

Move forward a couple of years and this nurturing has led to my now sitting in Ronan’s office as one of his PhD students. Ronan’s confidence and support meant that I was now embracing the opportunities of university life more fully, beginning to find a niche for myself in research on transport and mobility. I remember one meeting at which I felt quite chuffed, having submitted an early draft chapter that I thought was really not bad at all. And then Ronan said:

“This is all very good. But what does it *say*? You have to have *something to say*, you know.”

This is the first of my two fondest single memories of Ronan as an academic supervisor and mentor, because it beautifully demonstrates how he could say such important things in the most elegant and understated way. Not only does this shine through in all of his diverse writing over the years, but it exemplifies how Ronan was always the most constructive of critics, and how he had an innate understanding of what it was to nurture people into beginning to find their own way in the game of academic life.

My other fondest memory of Ronan also underlines the sheer humanity of the man. As a supervisor, he was able to gently chastise his students in quite the most beautifully humorous and constructive way. I can clearly picture his distinctive, neat handwriting on a hard copy draft of another of my PhD chapters a year or so later. To cut a 80,000 word long story short, my thesis (Docherty, 1998) was essentially about trains and railways, and where I had taken way too many of those words labouring a relatively unimportant point, Ronan's fine script simply said: "is it *really* necessary to don your anorak here?" It was the innumerable little moments like this spent in Ronan's company over the years that taught me something else that I have tried never to forget: it is important to do serious work, but believing in the value of that work must never lapse into self-importance (something that perhaps many in contemporary academia might do well to remember). Ronan's quiet determination always to do the right thing is evident in these moments; so too was his innate kindness, which I appreciated so very much, especially when I suffered a bereavement at a crucial moment shortly before I was due to submit my thesis.

After my two degrees, I was fortunate enough to be able to work alongside Ronan as a post-doctoral researcher on an interdisciplinary project focusing on some of his lifelong research passions: Glasgow, the wellbeing of its neighbourhoods, improving social justice for its people. For an Edinburgher, Ronan had an encyclopaedic knowledge of his adopted home city of Glasgow and was never afraid to demonstrate it – often mischievously – to people. I remember once assisting him on an Honours field trip to the city centre, and, despite the punishing winter cold by the River Clyde, he kept the class in rapt attention for perhaps longer than was strictly necessary. Afterwards, in one of his favourite pubs, the Clutha Vaults, the arguments about the finer details of the city's changing morphology went on for hours. In recent years, these conversations became all the rarer but more even more valuable: it is to my eternal regret that my friends from postgraduate years and I were unable to arrange our usual pre-Christmas get-together with Ronan in 2018, not knowing that the chance would never come again.

And so to close: in preparing my contribution to Ronan's memorial event, I have reflected upon the fact, that having recently moved to a position in which I am responsible for the postgraduate research programme for an entire institution, it is his words that I rely on most often in considering how best to support the students for whom I am responsible. I now

frequently find myself at induction sessions and other similar events, talking to students about their studies and the path ahead, when those two pearls of wisdom will come into my head:

Whatever you do is important, so do it well.

To do it well, make sure you have *something to say*.

I know that in relaying Ronan's words I will be doing the right thing by my students, as he did by me. I am immensely grateful to have been his student, and to have him as a mentor, and then a friend.

Thank you, Ronan.

~~~~~

**Jim McCormick piece**

~~~~~

Supervisor, mentor and friend: Personal reflections on Ronan Paddison, by Norman G.D. Rae

I first encountered Ronan on a November afternoon in 1997, in the old Gregory Lecture Theatre in the Geography Department of the University of Glasgow, when he spoke at an event for school pupils who would be studying geography the following year. I regret that I cannot recall what he said, and I had no conversation with him, but my initial impressions were good. I don't think I was taught by him until my second year at Glasgow, by the end of which that first impression was confirmed. I enthusiastically chose his Political Geography course option for my third year and then his Urban Geography class in my final year. I suppose it is not uncommon for new students to begin university considering the academics who teach them to be Great, austere figures imparting their wisdom; this soon changes as one comes to realise that they are also fallible, idiosyncratic, sometimes even normal perhaps. In

Ronan's case, what I came to see was a Great figure certainly, but also a humorous, engaging and approachable human being.

When choosing a topic, and consequently a supervisor, for my undergraduate dissertation, my decision was not only based on my interest in Political Geography, which coincided with one of Ronan's particular areas of expertise, but also by my belief that he would be a good supervisor with whom I would be comfortable because I liked him as a person. I was not to be disappointed. From there, Ronan would offer me advice when I was considering what to do after graduating, explaining that a Masters by Research would be more worthwhile than the taught course that I had been considering – just one early example of the way he would take an interest, and offer guidance to me over subsequent years. I developed my research topic for what, in due course, morphed into a PhD, in discussion with Ronan, and he and Jo Sharp would be my supervisors for the next five years.

Having Ronan as a supervisor was an interesting experience. One arrived at his office for an appointment, sat at his small coffee table and waited while he finished what he was doing, all the time marvelling at how he could do anything in there. Papers were piled on every surface, including, sometimes, on cardboard boxes pressed into service as axillary tables. When he was ready, he would make a cup of coffee, place it on his coaster with a map of the London underground on it, and begin to discuss what I had written since our last meeting. Ronan would impart insightful thoughts on the subject, and I would nod sagely while panicking that I wasn't really understanding what he meant.

Afterwards I would retire to my office to try to make sense of it all, including deciphering the detailed notes he'd written about my work. This was a two-stage process: firstly, trying to work out what the words were, and secondly, comprehend what they meant. Not that I can complain too much as my own hand-writing is appalling, as Ronan himself once pointed out, telling me that my exam papers were always recognisable because of it. There was something about the gentle humour with which he would say these things, though, that made it impossible to take offence; it was part of his charm and why he was so likeable. Once I had come to some conclusion regarding his thoughts on my work, I would despair of ever being able to accomplish what he had in mind, convincing myself that I would surely be letting him down with whatever rubbish I would produce. I'm sure that Ronan must have despaired of

me at times, but if I was disappointing him with my ineptitude, he never said so, and he didn't give up on me.

Every supervisor must frustrate their student at times, and Ronan was no different, but for all the feelings of 'why does he keep wanting me to do this?' or 'what on earth does he mean by that?', I could never feel that way for long. Ronan was simply too nice, always ready to provide some new advice, listen to a problem, and be sympathetic to difficulties. When he did have something critical to say it was always constructive, well-meant and supported with advice. His so often cheery demeanour and his unfailing preparedness to do whatever was necessary to support his students made me thankful to have him as a supervisor. Indeed, when I required a period of absence due to illness, Ronan not only made sure all the necessary administrative arrangements were in place for this to go smoothly, but was kind and sympathetic in my recovery and return. Somehow I managed to get the PhD in the end (Rae, 2007), and surely this would not have happened without Ronan's patience, encouragement and unending sufferance.

Ronan was on hand again for further help and advice when I moved on to apply to study a Planning Masters, and then, years later, a Masters in Information and Library Studies. During the latter, I had a very bad experience with a group exercise, with limited help from the course staff, which ultimately led me to require medication for anxiety. As I struggled with the situation, I turned to Ronan. And of course, as ever, he responded with concern, and advice for handling it, which proved useful in getting through and completing the course; more than that, though, was the sense of reassurance that there was somebody who would listen and try to help.

I had kept in occasional contact with Ronan after my PhD, but once he had retired this became more regular, as both I and another of his former PhD students would go to the University and meet him for lunch. This was a social situation in contrast to the primarily academic one where I had previously encountered him, and during this time I got to know him better; he was a font of knowledge on many subjects, as well as a source of many humorous and interesting stories. He was also amusingly forthright in his views, such as his derision for Michael Portillo's railway programmes, for example. I don't imagine that anybody ever loses the feeling that they are the student in relation to their former lecturers,

and I always retained some sense of that with Ronan, but for all his knowledge and achievements Ronan never treated me as anything other than an equal over those years.

As I struggled to find employment, and suffered from anxiety and depression, Ronan, as always, showed concern, enquiring after my health and listening and engaging in what I had to say, but also giving support. He would come up with suggestions, routes into work that I might look at, and projects that I might undertake. He got actively involved, offering me an opportunity to undertake an information management task for the journal *Urban Studies*, and then encouraging me to work with him on some research and writing, leading to a published paper (Paddison and Rae, 2017). Though he led the way on the latter, he was always careful to fully include me; I found it extraordinary when he would ask me for my thoughts on a subject, and it seemed to me incomprehensible that such an illustrious academic would want to know what I thought, but Ronan did. I still had the same worry that when I failed to follow his suggestions, or when I made contributions to the research work, that I would be unable to meet his expectations and disappoint him after all the effort he was making to help me. However, as with my PhD, if he thought so, he never showed it, and continued to do whatever he could to support me.

You will read much here (in this special issue) about Ronan's contributions as an academic, a Great, though certainly not austere, figure who imparted and also advanced knowledge, but I hope I have managed to paint a brief picture of a good-natured, generous, and wise person, who not only discharged his responsibilities towards his students diligently and with sensitivity, but who also went far beyond that offering advice, support, concern, and friendship long after. He never gave up on me for all my inadequacies and problems, and was available for help whether asked or not, or simply for a pleasant chat over lunch. In my mind, Ronan will always be my supervisor, that Great figure I first encountered all those years ago, but he also became a friend. So, he was certainly a Great academic and educator, but more than that though, he was also somebody who cared: he cared about his students, yes, but he continued to care long after his responsibility to them had passed. That may not be as visible as his academic achievements, but it is a fine legacy, and a great example, for any supervisor.



Ronan Paddison: Mentor, teacher, friend, by Derek Stewart

I first met Ronan as a geography undergraduate at the University of Glasgow more than thirty years ago. I was a couple of years older than many of my peers and recall struggling a little to find my way in an academic environment. My grades were fine but my motivation lower. My interest – if any at that stage – was in social science. While Geography was emerging as an Honours option, the focus in the early years of the degree courses had been on the physical and environmental strands of the subject or seeking to apply desk-based models to a much more dynamic and complex reality.

Ronan was pivotal to that changing. If I recall correctly, his early lectures and tutorials were on geostrategies and global power relationships, a fascinating blend of politics, history and geography delivered with real insight and enthusiasm. I never really looked back after that. We moved on to voting systems, public policy, local government politics, the nation-state, and so on. A political and personal awakening that went hand-in-hand. My Honours focus on Political Geography, Urban Geography (both Ronan modules), Urban Planning and Social Geography (you can see the trend) were shaped by those early conversations. My own work included a undergraduate thesis on access to education ‘goods’ in Ontario and Quebec, with Ronan playing a key role in gaining departmental permission to focus on an overseas topic (somewhat frowned upon for an undergraduate in those days if I recall) as well as teeing me up with both contacts and access to facilities at Carlton University in Ottawa.

I graduated in 1990 but was lured back in 1991 to commence a part-time PhD in the changing relationships between central government, local government, and civic society in the UK. Public Choice Theory had underpinned economic policy in the UK for a number of years, and my/our focus was on the extent to which this emphasis was evident in public service planning, labour relations and patterns of service consumption. By the time I submitted my PhD in the late-1990s (Stewart, 1998), the evidence suggested that progress in delivering real choice was limited. Where it did exist, choices were seldom or evenly exercised. As is typically the case, those individuals who were most able to make choices had greater access to opportunity, embedding relative patterns of affluence and deprivation. The social geography of the city (Glasgow) was well-defined, entrenched even, although my less-academic insight suggests that this has changed somewhat in the intervening period.

I've spent most of my career in a public service or business environment rather than an academic one. Despite that, Ronan undoubtedly had the most profound impact on my perspectives, enthusiasm to learn and my subsequent career choices. Without comparison. I was privileged to be invited to attend the Commemoration of Ronan's Life and Work in the Geography Department at Glasgow University in November 2019 (see Philo, this issue). For someone whose career has drifted away from academic life and academic insight, it re-ignited two things that remain with me.

First, the importance of Geography as a subject, providing that spatial perspective to analysis and understanding. My policy, strategy or diagnostic work on a daily basis takes cognisance of patterns and trends on the ground, or the impact of proposals and recommendations on and between communities and individuals. We should be proud of our subject and the added value it brings.

Second, the importance of ideas, and the extent to which they (and their rigorous academic analysis and debate, of course) underpin the decisions we make about our ambitions, values and behaviours. I live a professional life where the focus is on strategies, tactics, actions and costs. It's seldom we take time to see these as 'the business end' of a richer spectrum of policies, theories, perspectives, discourse and (dare I say) truths. This point often eludes us, and we're the weaker for it.

I remain eternally grateful for Ronan's wisdom and conviction. He got me thinking and caring about issues. He encouraged me to stand back from the detail and explore the context, precedents, options and alternatives. He saw each side to an issue and was measured and diplomatic when expressing his views and opinions. He did so with insight, humour and kindness. I'll miss him.



References

Beel, D.E. (2011). *Reinterpreting the museum: Social inclusion, citizenship and the urban regeneration of Glasgow*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <https://eleanor.lib.gla.ac.uk/record=b2869233>

- Crotty, J.G. (2004). *Your place or mine? Issues of power, participation and partnership in an urban regeneration area*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/74048/1/10753958.pdf>
- Docherty, I.W. (1998). *Making tracks: The politics of local rail transport in Merseyside and Strathclyde, 1986-96*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5541/2/1998dochertyphd.pdf>
- Jones, M. (2001). The rise of the regional state in economic governance: “Partnerships for prosperity” or new scales of state power? *Environment and Planning A*, 33(7), 1185–1211.
- McCormick, J.P. (1993). *A tax too far? The impact of the Poll Tax in urban Scotland*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/75587/1/13833370.pdf>
- Paddison R, (1983). *The Fragmented State: The Political Geography of Power*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Paddison, R. (2009). Some Reflections on the Limitations to Public Participation in the Post-Political City. *L'Espace Politique*, 8(2).
- Paddison, R. & Rae, N. (2017). Brexit and Scotland: Towards a political geography perspective, *SocialSpaceJournal*. Available online at: socialspacejournal.eu/13%20numer/Brexit%20and%20Scotland%20towards%20a%20political%20geography%20perspective%20-%20Paddison%20Rae.pdf
- Philo, C. (this issue). Radical geography from the Drumlin: an academic commemoration of Ronan Paddison (1945-2019). *Space & Polity*, forthcoming.
- Rae, N.G.D. (2007). *Reinventing geopolitical codes in the post-Cold War world with special reference to international terrorism*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/26/1/2007raephd.pdf>
- Stewart, D.G. (1998). *Changes in the tri-partite relationship between central government, local government and civil society and its implications for the geography of the city: The effects of developments in public education management on school catchments in the Glasgow Division of the Former Strathclyde Region 1990-96*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. Available online at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/75268/1/13815432.pdf>
- Jones, M. (2001). The rise of the regional state in economic governance: “Partnerships for prosperity” or new scales of state power? *Environment and Planning A*, 33(7), 1185–1211.

