

Regional journals in geography: a vision for the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on journals in geography and the production of geographical knowledge by considering a hitherto neglected issue - the role of regional journals of geography. Initially, an overview is provided which considers issues such as the status of the regional journal within the discipline and its fortune relative to the changing concerns of geography in the late 20th Century. A case study of *The Manchester Geographer* then critically appraises this particular journal's contribution to geographical knowledge. Finally, and in conclusion, some suggestions are offered which it is believed would ensure that regional journals such as *The North West Geographer* perform a useful and unique role in the production of geographical knowledge in the 21st Century.

Keywords

Journals, geographical education, regional geography, north west England, *The Manchester Geographer*, *The North West Geographer*.

Journals in geography

Geography's practitioners have traditionally shown concern for their discipline and its place within and beyond the academy. The most obvious expressions of pedagogical interest in the discipline are the long-standing and on-going academic debates on the fundamental questions of 'what is geography - art, science, or humanity?' and 'what do geographers do?' (Kropotkin 1889; Hurst 1985; Haggett 1990; Cloke *et al* 1991). Many other disciplinary issues have also been subject to the careful scrutiny of geographers, e.g. equality of opportunity within the discipline (McKendrick 1996), the quality of learning experience (Bradford *et al* 1994), the career and personal development of geography students (Unwin 1986) and the ethics of corporate sponsorship for our learned societies¹. This healthy debate is fostered through EMail discussion groups, regular gatherings of practitioners in meetings, seminars and conferences, disciplinary and sub-disciplinary newsletters, specialist research groups and, of course, through the pages of disciplinary journals such as the *Journal of Geography in Higher*

Education, *International Journal of Geographical and Environmental Education*, and the *Journal of Geography*. Indeed, the journals of geography are not merely the forum for debate over disciplinary development and orientation; they have also been the subject of critical comment and analysis. Ethical responsibilities of Editors (Brunn 1989), the active and pivotal role of the journals in the production of geographical knowledge (Curry 1991), the impact of specific journals on the wider discipline (Turner 1988), networks of relations between journals (Gatrell and Smith 1984), internationalism in geographical scholarship as expressed through journals (Dade 1983) and critical or informative journal reviews by their Editors (Wrigley 1983, Sparks 1992, Brunn 1995, Biddle and Alpin 1996) are among the many issues pertaining to geographical journals that have been discussed.

This paper contributes to the debate on journals in geography and the production of geographical knowledge by considering a hitherto neglected issue - the role of regional journals of geography. Initially, an overview is provided which considers issues such as the

status of the regional journal within the discipline and its fortune relative to the changing concerns of geography in the late 20th Century. A case study of *The Manchester Geographer* then critically appraises this particular journal's contribution to geographical knowledge. Finally, and in conclusion, some suggestions are offered which it is believed would ensure that the regional journal performs a useful and unique role in the production of geographical knowledge in the 21st Century.

Regional journals in geography

It is not at all clear that the regional journal is accepted as a genre of publication within the discipline. Thus, when Johnston (1992) introduced the journals of geography to students of the discipline his four-fold classification (popular, general, specialist sub-disciplinary and specialist for practitioners) did not distinguish the regional journal apart from other journals. Instead, Johnston notes that many general geographical journals (he cites *Irish Geography* and *Scottish Geographical Magazine*) are published by learned societies which are concerned with a particular geographical area. In contrast, Lee and Evans (1984, 1985) distinguish between regional (e.g. *China Geographer*) and state-wide journals (e.g. *Illinois Geographical Society Bulletin*) in their analysis of American geographers' evaluation of geographical journals.

In this paper a regional journal is understood to be a journal that is committed to furthering an understanding of a specific (typically local) area. It may also be concerned to provide an outlet for local academics to publish their work and to interpret wider issues from a regional perspective (e.g. for *The North West Geographer*, engaging with debates of global economic restructuring with a particular concern as to how the north west of England is affected by and effects change). The regional journal cannot simply be defined by virtue of a place referent in the journal title. For example, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* aspires to be a journal of international repute (Lee 1996) and not 'merely' a journal concerned with the geography of Britain, or British geographers' work. The regional journal is

concerned with human, physical and people-and-environment issues - it is not a journal for 'human' geographers as has sometimes been assumed (Collins 1994 in Table 1). While traditionally published on behalf of learned societies, regional journals are also published by individual geography departments (e.g. *Swansea Geographer*), consortia of geography departments (e.g. *East Midland Geographer*) and by commercial publishers (e.g. *Australian Geographer* is published by Carfax on behalf of the Geographical Society of New South Wales). Finally, the 'regional' scale has varied from cities (arguably *The Manchester Geographer*), to sub-national geographic areas (e.g. *Pennsylvania Geographer*), national contexts (e.g. *Geographical Review of India*) and beyond (e.g. *Pacific Viewpoint*). To some extent, the descriptor 'regional journal' is a metaphor, i.e. representative of all journals primarily concerned with a particular place, whatever their geographical scale of concern. It is an appropriate metaphor given its connotations with regional geography as a genre of geographical enquiry. However, it is also significant that the region is the geographical scale of concern for the majority of place-focused journals. There is clearly diversity within the sector, but there is also a common concern to further geographical understanding of a particular area. It is prudent to note that a journal's status may change through time. For example, the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* under the editorship of Professor Allan Findlay is currently fostering a more global disciplinary perspective, and as Freeman (1984) observed, the forerunner of this journal and *The Manchester Geographer - The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* - was primarily concerned with 'overseas' territories, particularly the continent of Africa².

What appears to be less variable is the low regard with which regional journals are held by members of the geographical community. Lee and Evans' surveys of American geographers' rating of American geography (1984) and foreign geography and non-geography journals (1985) is particularly useful as an indicator of attitudes toward the regional journal. First, these were comprehensive surveys involving

Table 1: Ranking of Geography Journals

Lee and Evans (1985)

American Geographers' Ranking of Foreign Geography and Non-Geography Journals.

<i>Top ten</i>		<i>Bottom ten</i>	
1	Science	56	Journal of Geography in Higher Education
2	Geological Society of America, Bulletin	57	Ekistics
3	Journal of Atmospheric Sciences	58	Geographical Magazine
4	Journal of Sedimentary Petrology	59	Irish Geography
5	Journal of Ecology	60	Revista Geográfica
6	Ecology	61	Canadian Geographic
7	Journal of Climate and Applied Meteorology	62	Pioneer America
8	Water Resources Research	63	Geographical Research Forum
9	Nature	64	Caribbean Geography
10	Earth Surface Processes and Landforms	65	Geographical Review of India

Collins (1994)

Human Geographers'
Ranking of Human
Geography Journals

1	Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers
2	Annals of the Association of American Geographers
3	Environment and Planning 'X'
4	Progress in Human Geography
5	Geografiska Annaler B
6	Antipode
7	Geography
8	Area
9	Journal of Geography in Higher Education
10	The Manchester Geographer

Physical Geographers'
Ranking of Human
Geography Journals

4
1
2
5
3
6
8
7
9
10

Physical Geographers'
Ranking of Physical
Geography Journals

1	Water Resources Research
2 =	Earth Surface Processes and Landforms
2 =	Journal of Glaciology
4	Hydrological Sciences Journal
5	Hydrological Processes
6	Journal of Hydrology
7 =	International Association of Hydrological Sciences Publication
7 =	Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie
9	Catena
10	Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers

Human Geographers'
Ranking of Physical
Geography Journals

9
2
1
7
6
5
3 =
3 =
10
8

Source: Collins, D.N. (1994) and Lee, D. and Evans, A. (1985)

Notes: See text for details of Lee and Evans (1985) methodology. Collins's results arise from a Department of Geography, University of Manchester exercise which aimed to inform the publication strategies of staff for Research Assessment Exercise 1996. Each respondent (member of teaching staff) ranked each journal in order of perceived quality, with separate lists for human and physical geography. These individual ranks were summed to produce a departmental ranking from 1 (highest quality) to 10 (lowest quality).

assessments of ninety-nine different geographical journals. Second, the regional journal is an established part of the geographical literature in America. Finally, their surveys permit an estimate of the extent to which familiarity with a journal and regional affiliation are associated with assessments of journal quality. Their objectives in undertaking such research were three-fold: to assist geographers identify suitable publication outlets, to facilitate evaluation of published work in journals, and to provide feedback to journals. Their work is conceived as applied and not merely esoteric, although it has not passed without criticism (Gaile 1985; Peet 1985). A similar methodology was applied for both studies. For example in 1984, five hundred geographers with doctorates were selected from the Association of American Geographer's guide: 58% responded with a completed questionnaire (289). Respondents were invited to assess the quality of scholarship in a list of journals on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), with a non-response option for those unable to judge. The sampling frame permitted respondents to be classified according to many variables (e.g. gender, rank) and therefore to gauge whether any of these variables were associated with quality rankings. Some results from the 1985 survey are reported in Table 1.

Two findings are of particular significance here. First, in both surveys, regional journals were judged to be of lower quality and to have less impact (a index of quality and familiarity) when compared to specialist and general disciplinary journals. If these results are interpreted according to the authors' stated objectives, then the advice that should be proffered to academics is not to send manuscripts to regional journals as they publish work that is not widely read and that is, on the whole, of lower quality than that published in other genres of geographical journal. Second, Lee and Evans (1994, 1995) found no evidence of internal (intra-region) support for the quality of scholarship in regional journals. For example, geographers from California were no more likely than geographers from other parts of America to think more favourably about the *California Geographer*. Similar work by Collins (1994) with

members of the Department of Geography at the University of Manchester reaffirm these findings, with *The Manchester Geographer* uniformly rated poorly by both human and physical geographers alike (Collins 1994 and Table 1). While the principles and practice of such simplistic rating schemes are open to criticism, the rankings are nevertheless indicative and confirmatory of the status accorded to regional journals among practitioners of geography. 'To be avoided if at all possible' seems to be the unanimous verdict!

The status hierarchy of geographical publication has taken on added significance in recent years within the context of UK geography. 'Where we publish' is now more important than 'how much we publish', and perhaps even 'what we publish'. Successive Research Assessment Exercises (Smith 1995) have placed a premium on scholar's standing in the geographical community, the surrogate of which has been the standing of the journals in which we publish. International journals are what we aspire to, national journals are acceptable, while regional publications are regarded as an indicator of mediocrity. Exercises such as those undertaken by Lee and Evans (1984, 1985) and Collins (1994) reaffirm and reflect wider debate and publication strategy in the discipline at this moment in time. Performance indicators are placing pressure upon the regional journal; however, it is the decline of regional geography that has created the conditions necessary to transform the performance indicator challenge into a threat. Despite attempts to reformulate regional geography (Johnston et al 1990), there can be no doubt that a premium is now placed on systematic specialist knowledge in the discipline of geography (Gregory 1994). Regional journals are at odds with contemporary trends, struggling to adapt to a new era of geographical knowledge, perhaps even hankering for a by-gone era. It is with this understanding of a genre of geographic publication under threat, that attention is now turned to the 'demise' of *The Manchester Geographer*, the regional geographical journal which was the forerunner to *The North West Geographer*.

The Manchester Geographer: a case study

A journal is essential for the prosperity of the Manchester Geographical Society.

Fleure, H. (1934-5)

The Manchester Geographical Society was formed in 1884 (Brown 1971). As Fleure later remarked, the publication of a journal has been of central importance to this particular geographical society. In its earliest form, *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* was an unqualified success with early editions totalling as many as 466 pages (Freeman 1984) and with other learned societies basing their house style on the Manchester publication (Brown 1971). Yet the history of *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* is less illustrious and is chequered with years of non-publication and re-launch, and downscaling in light of budgetary pressure. Furthermore, for much of its history it was far from being characteristic of a regional publication. Its regional significance was in that it furnished the Manchester business elite with commercial knowledge of overseas territories (Brown 1952-4, Leigh 1980). Early moves towards a regional focus were evident in the 43rd volume (produced for the 1928 IGU at Cambridge University) which aimed to produce a collection of authoritative papers that dealt with the north west of England. However, its status as a regional journal was cemented in 1980 with the relaunch of *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* as *The Manchester Geographer* (TMG) and an explicit Editorial commitment to the dissemination of geographical knowledge on the north west of England. As established by H.P. White in the first edition:

The objectives are to provide an on-going journal which will be a valuable source of information and comment on the Geography of the Region and its environmental, urban, social and economic problems; and to provide an outlet for North West Geographers for the publication of their work.

White, H.P. (1980, 5)

This explicit commitment to regional knowledge was introduced in an era when regional geography was being displaced from mainstream geographical inquiry by more systematic geographies.

Input and output - who published in The Manchester Geographer and what geographies did they create?

Sixty-six articles were published in *The Manchester Geographer* (TMG) between 1980 and 1993, with contributions from sixty-two authors. Figure 1 profiles the authors and the geography of their work. Two findings are of particular significance; TMG provided a publication outlet for senior staff (two out of every five authorial contributions³ were from either senior lecturers, readers or professors) and it was the repository for work produced by non-university geographers (one third of all articles originated from outside the traditional university sector)⁴. The juxtaposition of these variates is interesting; traditionally the 'quality' of a journal is gauged by the scholarship of its authors, which in turn is approximated by the eminence (rank status) of the academic and the eminence of the institution from which s/he originates. Quite simply, and no disrespect intended, a journal with more contributions from Professors of Geography from the University of Manchester will be regarded more favourably than a journal with more contributions from temporary lecturers from St. Martin's College, Lancaster. Yet, as Figure 1 suggests, it is difficult to estimate the quality of TMG on such criterion. It performed 'strongly' on one indicator and 'badly' on the other. Leaving aside the problem of aggregation, there are more fundamental objections that may be levelled at such crude attempts to ascribe 'quality' to journals. For example, whereas for some the status of TMG may be raised with the knowledge that highly respected geographers such as Peck (1992) and Dicken (1992) have contributed to earlier editions, for others the status may be compromised by contributions from non-academics (Skovgaard 1982), academics from 'lesser' institutions (e.g. Crewe CHE - Jones 1981) or scholars of 'junior' rank (e.g. Gardiner 1993). While these shorthand perceptive devices for ascertaining journal quality may ultimately be flawed, they are still widely used and thus cannot be ignored.

The 'geography' of the contributions to TMG is also significant. The journal was

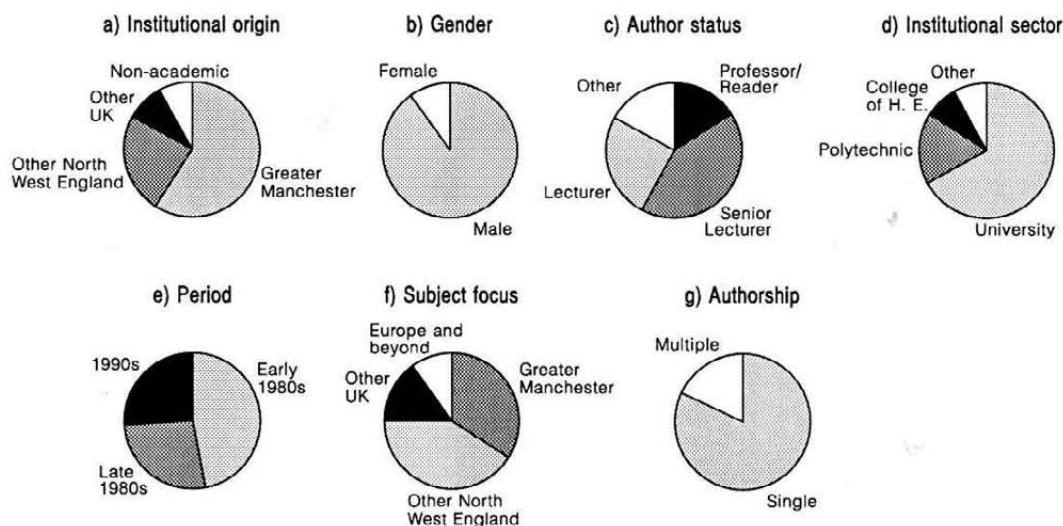
predominately, but not exclusively, a forum for north west geographers to publish their work (83% of authorial contributions were from north west geographers). However, there were fewer contributions from north west geographers outside Manchester than from the Manchester-based institutions (24% and 59% respectively). In terms of geographical subject focus, 75% of articles addressed a subject in the region. However, in contrast to the geography of authorship, Manchester subject matter is less significant; 34% of papers focused on Manchester and 41% on the wider north west region. *TMG* was without question a regional journal. These authorial and subject focus geographies are consistent with the objectives of the journal as described above. That these editorial objectives were fulfilled is even more apparent when the geographies of subject matter and author's institutional affiliation are cross-tabulated (Table 2).

Three groups of author can be identified. First, there are the geographers from the city of Manchester. This group were more likely to

contribute 'local' knowledge (on the city of Manchester) and also, relative to academics outside Manchester, 'global' knowledge (beyond the bounds of the UK). While this may seem paradoxical, it is in fact entirely consistent with the objectives of the journal, i.e. this group generated local knowledge (for the journal) and the journal provided an outlet for publication of their work (which is not confined to the region). The second group of contributors were academics from outside Manchester. This group used the journal as an outlet to publish work on the wider north west region, and to a lesser extent, on the wider national context within which the north west is embedded (UK). Finally, non-academics used the journal in much the same fashion as Manchester geographers. The geographies of each group may be different, but each is entirely consistent with the objectives of the journal as introduced by White and reaffirmed by successive editors of the journal.

These geographies take on added significance when the inputs and outputs of *TMG* are considered in an historical context (Tables 3

Figure 1: Profile of work published in *The Manchester Geographer*.



Source: *The Manchester Geographer*, volumes 1-14.

Notes: 78 authorial contributions from 62 authors in 66 papers, 12 of which were jointly-authored, with the remaining 54 authored by one writer.

Parts a, b, c and d refer to the percentage of authorial contributions, parts e, f and g refer to the percentage of papers.

Table 2: Geographical focus on papers published in *The Manchester Geographer* according to the institutional affiliation of the author.

Institution of author	Percentage of papers				Cases
	Geographical Focus of Paper				
	<i>Greater Manchester</i>	<i>Other North West England</i>	<i>Other UK</i>	<i>Europe and Beyond</i>	
<i>Greater Manchester</i>	49	18	21	12	39
<i>Other North West England</i>		75	25		12
<i>Other Academic</i>		60	40		5
<i>Not Academic</i>	40	20	20	20	5

Source: The Manchester Geographer, volumes 1-14.

Notes: Three articles had no specific 'geographical focus', i.e. Park (1981), Perry (1985) and Shimwell (1983).

Institution of author is credited to the principal author in multi-authored papers.

and 4). It would be erroneous to give the impression that *TMG* sustained a single character since its inception in 1980. As Figure 1 noted, the early years were much more productive ones in terms of the number of editions published; they were also characterised by greater regularity of publication and more contributions per issue. Furthermore, in later years the journal became more of a forum for Manchester issues (Table 3) and more of an outlet for the publication of work by geographers from Manchester (Table 4). In the 1990s, 90% of articles were from Manchester geographers and 79% of subjects addressed issues in Manchester. This 'localisation' of the journal may be perceived (negatively) as growing insularity by some, or (positively) as a sharpening of focus by others; whatever our interpretation, the changing focus of *TMG* is a reality. As Table 2 demonstrated, the two geographies are inter-related, a point which must be born in mind if in the attempt to recast the journal an objective is to return the journal to its original position as a journal of the wider north west region.

Impact - how useful was The Manchester Geographer?

Assessing the impact of a journal, or parts thereof, is by no means unproblematic. Citation counts have been used to provide a quantitative estimate of the impact of authors (Bodman 1991), departments (Turner and Meyer 1985) and

journals (Whitehand 1984). The basic tenet is to measure 'impact' by the number of citations a paper subsequently receives in (a set of) academic journals. The procedure and the principles of citation analysis have been subject to intense debate (Haigh 1975). Of particular note here is that citation analysis does not measure the impact of articles outside the publication arena. A journal, or parts thereof, may provide useful teaching resources for academics, without this 'impact' ever being measured by citation indices. This may be particularly true of regional journals in that a key objective is to generate local knowledge from and for scholars of geographers interested in a particular area. A survey of teachers of geography in north west England which aimed to estimate the extent to which *TMG* served the needs of 'geography' in the region (as a case study of regional journals as a teaching resource) would be a useful contribution to local knowledge and citation analysis debate. Furthermore, the range of journals surveyed by the ISI is very limited; only thirty-five geographical journals are actually reviewed for the purpose of citation counts^{5,6}. As in-journal citation rates are high (Gatrell and Smith 1984), the 'impact' of journals not surveyed by the ISI is significantly underestimated. Once again, an analysis of citations within *TMG* would be a useful contribution to knowledge (specifying key texts of regional importance) and citation analysis theory

Table 3: Institutional affiliation of contributors to *The Manchester Geographer*.

Date of publication	Percentage of papers				Cases
	Institution of author				
	Greater Manchester	Other North West England	Other Academic	Not Academic	
Early 1980s	35	43	11	11	37
Late 1980s	71	14	5	10	21
1990s	90		10		20

Source: *The Manchester Geographer*, volumes 1-14.

Notes: Each contribution to each article is counted in the table. Therefore, for example, as Chris Law (University of Salford) has contributed to four articles in *TMG*, he counts four times for Greater Manchester in the table; the jointly authored paper by Cooper and Jackson (1982) would produce one count for Other Academic (Cooper was based at Dorset IHE) and one count for Other north west England (Jackson was based at Liverpool CHE).

Table 4: Geographical focus on papers published in *The Manchester Geographer*.

Date of publication	Percentage of papers				Cases
	Geographical Focus of Paper				
	Greater Manchester	Other North West England	Other UK	Europe and Beyond	
Early 1980s	11	48	26	15	27
Late 1980s	35	45	10	10	20
1990s	79	21			14

Source: *The Manchester Geographer*, volumes 1-14.

Notes: Three articles had no specific 'geographical focus', i.e. Park (1981), Perry (1985) and Shimwell (1983).

(estimating the extent to which non ISI journals are prejudiced by exclusion from citation counts)⁷. Despite 'gaps' in knowledge, citation analysis serves a useful function, if interpreted with due care, as a crude indicator of the impact of a journal on the wider geographical community.

TMG did not fare favourably on these citation counts. Only nine of the sixty-six papers that have been published in the journal have been cited subsequently by articles in ISI journals, three of which were self-citations, none of which were cited in more than one other academic paper, and in total, only seven 'external' authors cited *TMG* articles in their work (Table 5). This level of citation is low, even allowing for the bias in citation index compilation that was discussed above. Even *TMG*

contributions by established figures in geography, e.g. Dicken (1992), and authors of growing reputes, e.g. Peck in Peck and Emmerich (1992), were not cited among the wider geographical community. This suggests that either the contributions (even by eminent figures) were not of a high standard, or that the contributions were of local interest and, by implication, of little interest to the wider geographical community, or that the journal was not entering general circulation.

Turning to *TMG*'s 'citation classics' (!), it is useful to trace the citations to the source article in order to consider how knowledge generated in *TMG* was used. Three functions have been served by these papers. First, the journal served a foundation function in the development of geographical knowledge. On one hand, it served

Table 5: Papers published in *The Manchester Geographer* that were cited in ISI indexed publications.

<i>The Manchester Geographer</i> papers cited beyond the journal	Citer	Journal	Year
Lee, M.P. and Vincent, P.J. (1981) The first recognition of loess. Vol. 2.2	Pye, K.	Progress in Physical Geography	1984
Cooper, C.P. and Jackson, S. (1982) Tourism in the Isle of Man: historical perspectives and contemporary problems. Vol. 3.2	Self-citation	Annals of Tourism Research	1989
Rodgers, H.P. (1962 - in 1984) Victorian areas in Manchester. Vol. 5	Johnston, R.J.	Journal of Geography	1987
Jones, P. (1985) The impact of groundwork projects on the urban fringe areas in the North West of England. Vol. 6	Self-citation	Scottish Geographical Magazine	1987
Law, C. (1985) The spatial distribution of offices in metropolitan areas: a comparison of Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester. Vol 6	Daniels, P.W.	Progress in Human Geography	1986
Law, C. (1986) The uncertain future for the city centre: the case of Manchester. Vol 7	Daniels, P.W.	Progress in Human Geography	1987
Law, C. (1988) From Manchester docks to Salford Quays: a progress report on an urban redevelopment project. Vol. 9	Self-citation	Geography	1994
Cundill (1981) The history of vegetation and land use of two peat mosses in south-west Lancashire. Vol. 2.2	MacKay, A. W. and Tallis, J.H.	New Phytologist	1994
Bristow, B.R. (1982) An artisan elite residential district in Preston. Vol. 3.2	Pearce, C.G. and Mills, D.R.	Quarterly Journal of Social Affairs	1986

Source: Author's data search on SSCI, SCI and AHCI.

individual authors by offering a publication outlet for a baseline paper which is part of a larger project. For example, Cooper and Jackson's paper from 1982 provided an overview of tourist developments on the Isle of Man, which they cited in a subsequent article which examined the life cycle of tourism on the island. Foundation knowledge has also been generated for the wider discipline by the publication of local examples of more general phenomena (which could just as easily have been provided in an article from other parts of the country). For example, Law's 1985 paper on city centre redevelopment in Manchester, which was cited

by Daniels (1987) in his overview of services research in geography.

One step further than the local paper that proves to be of wider significance, is the paper that considers an outstanding geographical feature from within the region; the north west becomes significant in a national context by virtue of the example. For example, Law's (1988) review of the Salford Quays redevelopment, which he subsequently referred to in 1994 (Law 1994) is a case in point. The redevelopment is not 'merely' of local significance; Salford Quays was one of the earliest wholesale redevelopments of the time; a leading edge development

which was of wider significance. Similarly, Lee and Vincent's 1982 paper on loess in the region was not only a local example of a more general phenomenon, it was one of the few areas in the UK where this loess could be examined. As Pye (1984, 178) remarked,

... true loess only occurs in a few isolated pockets chiefly along the South coast ... and in northwest England.

Lee and Vincent's paper, of a geographical feature of the region, proved to be significant in the broader context of UK geography. The complementarity of the regional and the generic, or national scale of analysis is evident through these two examples.

Finally, the journal has served as an outlet for innovative papers on issues which may be evident beyond the region, but the significance of which has first been alluded to in the pages of *TMG*. Daniels (1986, 33-41) described Law's early paper on the spatial distribution of offices in three metropolitan cities as "... one of the few studies of research on offices ...". Even more telling is Johnston's commentary on the interest of geographers in urban politics, a theme with which geographers devoted increasing attention to in the late 1970s. According to Johnston,

One recent development has been the growth of interest in urban politics and its relation to social geography ... An early study of such conflict over neighbourhood protectionism was Peter Collinson's (1963) description of the building of a wall by the residents of a middle class Oxford suburb to exclude those from a neighbouring council estate. Only a few scholars have followed this lead (Rodgers 1962, Saunders 1979, Robson, 1982).

Johnston, R.J. (1987, 22, emphasis added)

Although Johnston commends Rodgers for early work in this field, he portrays this work as following the lead of earlier workers, yet Rodger's article in 1962 predates Collinson's work in 1963. This is indicative of the need for regional journals to take their literature to wider audiences; cutting edge work will be lost on the wider community, or at best, reach them after mainstream journals have engaged the issue, unless proactive distribution strategies are formulated.

The obvious value of *TMG* publications discussed here should not obscure the overall

point that the journal had a minimal impact on the wider geographical community. Yet, these examples are indicative of the potential that regional journals afford, and of the contribution regional journals could make to the wider geographical community. These issues are now taken up more directly in conclusion.

Conclusion: the future of regional journals in geography

The role of the regional journal in the production of geographical knowledge is far from assured. Widely regarded as inferior to the specialist, or generalist journal in a climate in which publication in quality journals is becoming an obsession, the regional journal does not even have a strong basis of support from within its host region. The case study of *The Manchester Geographer* (*TMG*) was examined in greater detail; *TMG* became increasingly more localised and its contributions were not impacting on wider debate within the discipline. Yet the 'demise' of the regional journal need not be terminal, both in the north west of England and beyond. It is for this reason that the Manchester Geographical Society decided in 1997 to re-launch its regional journal as *The North West Geographer* (*TNWG*).

The regional journal could be used to support the development of the discipline in its heartland. At the most elemental level, the act of publication establishes an 'imagined community' of scholars, through which closer co-operation and mutual learning may result. For example, the Manchester Geographical Society fosters links between the (Higher Education) departments of geography in Manchester, links which have recently born fruit in an inter-institutional fieldwork initiative for the city of Manchester (McKendrick and Perkins 1996, Gardiner, McKendrick and Perkins 1997). *TNWG* holds out the possibility of fostering such links among the wider geographical community of north west England. To this end, it would be helpful to critically appraise the pedagogical value of *TNWG* by, for example, investigating its utility as a learning resource for students and teachers of geography. *TNWG* should also be used as a forum for critical debate on the current

status of geography within the region. In this the age of the performance indicator in higher education, *TNWG* would be an appropriate forum to debate the citation index rankings of all geographers within the region - including specific comment on the writings of young academics and scholars who are respected by their peers for their contributions to the discipline, but who do not feature on the international ranking lists (e.g. Flowerdew, Foody, Gatrell, Gould and Thomas). What contributions are north west geographers making to the wider discipline? For teaching, it would be useful to consider the migration patterns of students into the region; who comes to the north west to read geography and what are the implications of this for the diet of geography we provide? These are merely illustrative examples, rather than a definitive list, or an invitation to tender! The key point is that *TNWG* could and should be used to serve the interests of the institution of geography in north west England.

More generally, how then might the regional journal contribute to the wider discipline in the years ahead? By definition it will continue to serve as a publication outlet for authors from that region and for publication of material about that region. But is that a worthwhile goal *per se*? The decline of regional geography implies that there will be less of a ready made market for such papers and the drive toward publication in quality specialist or international generalist journals means that there is less impetus on the part of authors to seek publication in a recognised regional journal. One argument in favour of the regional journal is that the production of regional knowledge is worthwhile in spite of these contemporary trends. If there is a corpus of interest in a particular region, or if there is a shared sense of purpose among academics from a particular region, then maintaining a regional journal is still a worthwhile endeavour. Nevertheless, this argument consigns the regional journal to the margins of the discipline's publishing network. Yet there is another argument in favour of a regional journal that is entirely consistent with contemporary concerns in academia. Regional

journals have a regular readership of people interested in that region, including not only academics from within the region, but also others with 'connections' with that region, i.e. those with family ties, former residents, vacation visitors, former students, etc. This latter group is particularly significant given the concern among institutions to attract overseas students given their higher fee band payments. The regional journal could serve the academy by sustaining an interest in the geography of an area and the work of geographers from that region among former students and linked institutions. Regional journals, perhaps through journal exchange, could serve a useful function by maintaining and strengthening links between geographers from different parts of the globe. Given the concern of western institutions to foster and reap the rewards from such links, then the regional journal may be a useful tool to this end.

Third, the regional journal could establish a niche in academic publishing. That is, the regional journal seems an appropriate place to publish local case studies of more general phenomena. In part, this casts the journal as a research-based teaching resource, i.e. producing local geographies that enable the scholar of geography to interpret more general trends in a familiar context. However, the information flow need not only be 'down' the publication hierarchy to the regional journal from the specialist or generalist journal on high. Rather, detailed investigations of specific case studies of more general issues often throw into sharper focus the limitations of the general rule. There is thus a need for an information flow from the regional journal to the authors who only publish in specialist publications.

A fourth possibility is that the regional journal could establish a niche as a lower-order induction publication for authors not established within the wider discipline. Once again, this is an example of how the regional journal could serve the needs of the wider discipline without being threatened by it. This goal would at first appear acceptable given the contemporary demands of the market place for publication from candidates for academic tenure. However,

the danger is that once cast as a 'lesser' publication, then there may be less tendency to value the publication, and contents thereof. Nevertheless, the regional journal has the potential to capture the 'paper mountains' of doctoral, Master and even first degree theses that have made useful and original contributions to local knowledge, but that, for whatever reason, remain consigned to the dusty shelves of the academic library. The regional journal can capture this lost literature without having to cast itself as a junior-rank publication.

Finally, the regional journal could set its stall by encouraging more thematic editions, thereby meeting the demands of the specialist audience, but in an entirely original way. Manuscripts within theme editions typically share a thematic focus, but explore this topic in disparate geographical contexts. Where the thematic focus is tightly defined, such a collection is likely to be effective in developing knowledge of the 'theme' and to be demonstrative of the necessity of a geographical perspective, e.g. the collection of twelve papers in *Geography* on regional development in the UK (Geography 1995a,b). The depth of knowledge generated on one aspect of the 'theme' is the strength of such collections: Where the theme is more loosely defined, theme editions have typically comprised a set of papers on different aspects of the same general theme, e.g. the collection of five papers in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* explored issues as diverse as cultural politics, sense of place and regeneration strategies in geographical contexts that spanned Singapore, Liverpool and Derwentside (Leyshon *et al* 1995). The breadth of knowledge on the generic theme that is generated is the strength of such collections. Regional thematic collections have the potential to marry the strength of both these genres by exploring a range of issues (breadth) and the interconnections between these issues in a shared geographical context (one form of depth). Alongside the academic value of such an enterprise, comes financial rewards. Specialist regional editions of the journal can be marketed to readers in much the same way as edited collections of papers in books.

All of these visions rely on effective communication flow between 'the journal' and 'the reader'. Thus, overseas students, departments with which the universities in the host region have links, scholars working within a field on which the journal publishes a theme edition, prospective postgraduate authors and students of geography outside higher education must be informed of developments within the journal and updated regularly on its progress. In part, this can be facilitated through existing disciplinary mediums. For example, ensuring that contributions are catalogued on GeoBase and GeoAbstracts. However, as geographers are increasingly turning to cross-disciplinary mediums as a source of reference, i.e. inter-disciplinary journals and generic abstracting journals, then such a strategy alone is insufficient to ensure that regional journal contributions are drawn to the attention of the geographical community. Furthermore, even if geographers are aware of a relevant publication within the journal, then the absence of ready access to the journal may discourage potential users of this information from following up the reference. What is therefore required is an altogether more proactive approach toward disseminating information of regional journals and their contents. For example, offering authors an 'active distribution strategy' of offprints whereby the journal sends offprints to (say) ten authors nominated by the author, or using the myriad of sub-disciplinary newsletters and EMail mailing lists to inform selective audiences of particular contributions to the journal which may be of interest to them. Journal editorial responsibilities must extend beyond the manuscript production process to encompass a more holistic view which involves consumption as well as production of geographical knowledge.

Turning to TNWG, it is hoped that each of these possibilities can be blended together to create a journal that is ready to address the needs of geographers in the years ahead. The journal will continue to serve as a publication outlet on the north west region and as a publication outlet for north west geographers. The possibility of journal exchange - targeted in the first instance with English speaking societies and with

societies from regions with which local Geography departments have established contacts - is being explored. It may also be productive for the Society to award each overseas Geography graduate from the region one years free subscription to the journal after graduation. The journal will also encourage the publication of material that feeds from and to cutting-edge debates in the wider discipline and sub-disciplinary parts thereof. All current post-graduates in the region have been informed of the existence of the journal and have been asked to consider publishing their work within its pages; this is already bearing fruits. Finally, over the next twelve months readers can look forward to special editions on 'Agricultural Restructuring' and the 'Sounds of Manchester'. But underlying all of these changes is a more proactive approach toward publicising and marketing the journal. Publication in *TNWG* will not be considered an end (dead end) in itself - the articles will be brought directly to the attention of key workers in the specialist field and indirectly to the attention of workers in the sub-disciplinary field.

Charting new directions for the regional journal is the first stage in ensuring that this genre of geographic publication serves a useful function for the wider discipline in the 21st Century. It is a pressure placed upon the regional journal that it cannot afford to ignore. However, the irony of the current publishing climate in

academic geography must not be allowed to pass without comment. In an era when the academic geographer is concerned to problematise knowledge and challenge the classifications on which much our understanding of the world is based, it is truly ironic that we have intensified the status hierarchy among our geographical journals and are content to use the journal title as a surrogate for quality; to deterministically ascribe behavioural traits to individuals on the basis of their gender, class, ethnicity, age, etc. is deemed bad practice, yet we are content to deterministically ascribe 'quality' on the basis of publication in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* and to bypass contributions in journals such as *The North West Geographer*. The irony is exacerbated in that this paradox has emerged in an era when information flows in academia are more fluid than ever before; there is no barrier to communicating knowledge of a journal's contents to the wider audience of geographers. Abstracting journals, newsletters, EMail discussion groups and networks abound. We need to look beyond the title of the journal and delve into the pages within to judge scholarship. Yet, until we are prepared to practise what we preach, until we are ready to problematise the status hierarchy of geographical publication, then the Editors and managers of the regional journal must work a little bit harder to assert its rightful position within the discipline of geography.

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Notes

1. Shell Oil's maintenance of commercial interests in Nigeria in spite of recent human rights atrocities perpetrated by the Nigerian Government has provoked many Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS) to propose a motion to renounce the company's sponsorship of the RGS - refer to the November 1996 edition of *The Geographical Journal* for further details.
2. The genealogy of the learned publication of The Manchester Geographical Society is as follows: 1885-1962 as the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, 1980-1993 as *The Manchester Geographer*, and 1997- as *The North West Geographer*.
3. In counting authorial contributions each contributor to each article is credited. Therefore, for example, as Chris Law (Salford University) contributed to four articles in *The Manchester Geographer* he counts four times for Greater Manchester in the location of author (institution) pie chart of Table 1.
4. The traditional university sector refers to institutions which had achieved university status prior to the reclassification of Polytechnics and some Colleges of Higher Education in the 1990s. In the context of Manchester, the descriptor refers to UMIST, Salford and the Victoria University of Manchester, but not to Manchester Metropolitan University.
5. The following journals are identified by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) as the 'geographical journals' surveyed in the compilation of their citation indices; American Cartographer, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Applied Geography, Arctic, Arctic and Alpine Research, Area, Australian Geographer, Canadian Geographer, Cartographic Journal, Economic Geography, Geodinamica Acta, Geoforum, Geografiska Annaler Series B, Geographical Analysis, Geographical Journal, Geographical Review, Geographische Zeitschrift, Geography, International Journal of Remote Sensing, Journal of Biogeography, Journal of Geography, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, Journal of Historical Geography, Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft, Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing, Political Geography Quarterly, Professional Geographer, Progress in Human Geography, Progress in Physical Geography, Scottish Geographical Magazine, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, Soviet Geography, Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geographie, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers and Urban Geography.
6. The ISI disciplinary classification of journals underestimates the number of journals that Geographers would recognise as 'journals of geography'. It should be noted that the following journals are also reviewed by the ISI; National Geographic Research (Multidisciplinary Sciences), Urban Studies (Urban Studies), International Journal of Urban and Regional Research (Urban Studies), Environment and Planning A,D (Environmental Studies), Regional Studies (Environmental Studies) and Earth Surface, Processes and Landforms (Geosciences).
7. There is also evidence to suggest that TMG articles contributed to key regional texts. For example, Taylor *et al's* (1996) comparative study of life in Manchester and Sheffield makes reference to the work of Law (1986, 1988), Peck and Emmerich (1992) and Tupling (1984, reprint of 1935)

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