

**Economic Geography Forum 18th of September, 2002,
School of Geography, University of Nottingham**

Once every year there comes a time for the postgraduates in Economic Geography to climb out from underneath their primary or secondary data or crawl away from the pub to present their wares. Loose-fitting pants and casual shirts were the call for the day; attire suiting the informal atmosphere, which is synonymous with the postgraduate research group. As it was in Newcastle last year, so it was in Nottingham this year, where the stage was given to young researchers not just to practice their presentation skills but also to learn from each other and those more knowledgeable. Nevertheless, this annual forum also serves as a social event; walking away from one you can feel so much the better that you are not the only fool that has taken on the monumental task of a PhD in the area of economic geography.

Chaired by Dr Michael Samers and introduced by Professor Andrew Leyshon, there were 8 papers presented in all. Owing to their diversity I feel it best to give a few sentences to each:

With the unenviable task of warming up the crowd, Jane Holgate from Queen Mary, University of London presented first. Concentrating on ethnic exclusion in trade unions, Jane focused on black workers in the southeast of England. She highlighted the worrying decline of their numbers in trade unions. With the number of black workers on the increase, her focus was their marginalisation in trade unions. Making use of case studies, Jane highlighted the lack of strategic thinking on behalf of trade unions in relation to the implications of organising amongst black workers according to their needs. A draft paper of her work was also circulated. She set a high standard for those who followed.

Martin Buttle from the University of Birmingham rose to that task. Martin's chosen topic is 'Ethical investors and the social economy' and comes at a time when investing in any other sort of economy seems rather precarious. His paper proved very interesting. With an interesting insider/outsider ethnographic approach to his work, Martin relayed to the forum the increasing importance of community development finance initiatives and social banks to the social economy of the UK.

Sarah Hall from the University of Bristol took on the investment topic, but from a different but equally attractive angle. Almost diametrically opposed to the paper that went before - her focus was on the less ethical side of investing. With specific reference to the city of London, Sarah explored the social, cultural and political aspects of investment banking. Also armed with a draft paper, her take on different voices and the cultural embeddedness of investing proved to be a very nice slant on an equally interesting topic.

In a change of pace, Rachel Murphy brought us through the geography of single pregnant women. Her work challenges some of the prevailing conceptions of single mothers-to-be in Britain. In an ardent critique of how society has 'pigeon holed' women in such a predicament Rachel brought home some truths. Again I felt envy burgeon at Rachel's

appealing ethnographic approach which translates itself into some very interesting research. Also, kudos must always be given to someone who uses the Daily Mail as a source of secondary information!

Lukewarm, over-brewed coffee - the usual plague of conferences in this country - followed a question time in which saw the presenters both learn more from the more experienced members in the crowd and hold their own. Sarah Brennan from the University of Liverpool started the ball rolling again after the break. As part of her work on the ESRC sponsored 'Pathways to Integration: Tackling Social Exclusion on Merseyside' project, Sarah explored the role of children in local regeneration. Using mental mapping as a heuristic device, she compiled and correlated the 'views' of school children of differing ages and socio-economic backgrounds in the Merseyside area. With some of the maps drawn by the children on-hand, Sarah provided a more tangible insight as to what was deemed important by the children. A good presentational style gave a coherent voice to those, who according to many, should be seen but not heard.

Julian Clarke was the second presenter playing on 'home ground'. Julian's work looks at the growth of call centres across the UK, with specific reference to certain sectors (financial) and regions (Midlands). Julian nicely contextualised his work within the global trends of call centres becoming increasingly mobile and at the same time more automated. His work is not simply that of pure economic realities in a spatial context, for he also considered other issues like the monitoring (shirking constraints), varying degrees of management, and the role of gender in the call centre environment.

Speaking on the geographies of mutual aid was Richard White from the University of Leicester. This interesting piece of work attempted to take account of deeds/work done outside the formal economy. In a sense Richard started by trying to formalise the informal. He talked of simple favours exchanged among family and friends and carried the concept of mutual aid to the level of national policies on social exclusion. Looking at the social embeddedness of economic exchange, Richard argued that by paying greater attention to the informal coping strategies behind mutual aid, we could create a more socially inclusive economic space. Making use of some interesting statistics on what would be a rather hard to quantify subject area complimented a good presentation - copies of the overheads used were also circulated, so even without a full paper people still have something to remember you by.

Mike LaBelle from the University of Bristol rounded up the presentations with his paper on the US energy sector and the collapse of Enron. I was quite anxious to see Mike's paper because I am always impressed by people who seem able to present on such topical issues. I was not let down. Mike's work is more broadly based on energy policy in the US, something he held up for its sordid ways. Mike's politico-economic study looked at the financial crisis surrounding the collapse of Enron in the context of the obvious failure of the deregulated US energy market and its ability to clear. Being the last paper of 8, a lively presentation was needed and was duly provided.

Questions to the four second half presenters were again admirably dealt with, and in due time to let most of us go across to the pub to find ourselves in a more familiar environment in which to converse. A one day forum which everyone enjoyed, where people learned more, not just about the work of others but also their own was had. A day where presentation styles were sharpened and hopefully confidence and belief in their work instilled. It is without doubt something that every post-graduate in economic geography must get to at least once.

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Thanks must again be offered to Michael Samers and Paul Benneworth for their time spent organising, and also thanks for attending and participating to:

Jonathan Beaverstock	Loughborough University
Sarah Brennan	University of Liverpool
Martin Buttle	University of Birmingham
Angus Cameron	University of Leicester
Julian Clarke	University of Nottingham
Neil Coe	University of Manchester
Louise Crewe	University of Nottingham
James Faulconbridge	Loughborough University
Shaun French	University of Nottingham
Sarah Hall	University of Bristol
Jane Holgate	Queen Mary, University of London
Dave Land	University of Bristol
Andrew Leyshon	University of Nottingham
Rachel Murphy	University of Nottingham
Amy Proctor	University of Hull
Adam Swain	University of Nottingham
Adam Tickell	University of Bristol
Richard White	University of Leicester