

Obituary

PROFESSOR CLEMENT ALLAN TISELL (1939-2022): A TRIBUTE

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Professor Clement Allan Tisdell was a distinguished academic and an unrelenting prodigious researcher. Above all, he was a friend and a wonderful human being. He died on 14 July 2022 at the age of 82. Born on 18 November 1939 near the New South Wales country town of Taree in Australia, Tisdell was the oldest of ten children (five boys and five girls) in a highly cohesive and supportive family. He had a very humble upbringing during which he attained an intimate familiarity with rural life, the countryside and nature, and a strong sense of belonging to the local community (Lodewijks, 2007), which continued to the very end of his life. No accolade could distract him from this path of simplicity and common sense.

From his very early days, Tisdell was fascinated by critical assessment, competing views and appropriate referencing. This permeated throughout his professional life. Lodewijks (2007) and, Dollery and Wallis (1996) provide an excellent portrayal of the trajectory of his intellectual profile over six decades, which typifies deeper roots and stronger branches. Tisdell developed a deep interest in biology, history, and economics while at school.

Perhaps his interest in science, history, and economics, together with his upbringing in a cohesive rural society in harmony with the nature, played a crucial role in his life-long passion for inclusive socioeconomic progress while protecting the environment – in short, sustainable development. Thus, he did not hesitate to say yes to the request to serve on the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Asia Pacific Sustainable Development Journal* even in his old age.

Tisdell graduated with first class honours and a university medal from Newcastle University College, then part of the University of New South Wales, Australia, in 1960. His honours thesis titled “The implications and effects of policies employed by the N. S. W. Milk Board to solve the N. S. W. milk supply problem of the last two decades”

influenced the topic for his PhD thesis titled “Price uncertainty, production and profit” completed at the Australian National University in 1963. The PhD thesis was published as a book titled *The Theory of Price Uncertainty, Production and Profit* by the Princeton University Press in 1968.¹ A key feature of his thesis work was that most findings, if not all, were published in refereed journals such as *Australian Economic Papers*, *Economic Record*, *Metroeconomica* and, most importantly, *Econometrica*. This “publish as you do your thesis” philosophy was the fundamental principle guiding his supervision of PhD students. Most of these students have demonstrated high research productivity while completing their theses. He explained implicitly and explicitly several benefits of this approach. First, a student can see that his or her research stood up to academic scrutiny. Second, it enhances the thesis quality, which subsequently is likely to attract a commendatory assessment of the examiners. Third, it lays the foundation of his or her professional reputation while at the same time enhancing job market prospects.

Upon completion of his PhD, Tisdell went into academia with a lectureship at Australian National University where he became a reader in economics at the age of 26. He left the university in 1972 for the University of Newcastle to take an appointment as a professor of economics where he transformed the Department of Economics into an entity with a formidable research profile. It was just like a homecoming for him. This gave him an opportunity to extend the frontiers of economic applications to environment, and biological sciences. After finishing his tenure at the University Newcastle, Tisdell, took up an appointment as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics at The University of Queensland in Brisbane in 1989 where he established himself a pioneer of environmental, ecological and natural resource economics. In Brisbane, he delved into development economics, bounded rationality and human values in addition to the areas of ecology, environment and natural resource.

Professor Tisdell was a towering figure in the true sense of the term, which many of us would struggle to emulate. In June 2022, RePEc (Research Papers in Economics) ranked him in the top 1 per cent of the world’s economists of all time for academic impact. His academic publications, which he undertook well past his retirement continued to be widely cited (for example, see Tisdell, 2020a). He was also one of those rare economists who has continuously published in academic journals for more than 60 years. It is even rarer for an academic to publish in one economic journal for 50 years. He first published in *Economic Analysis and Policy* only one year after the journal’s inception (Tisdell, 1971), and his last publication in that journal was in 2021 (Alauddin, Tisdell and Sarker, 2021). He was an academic who actively supported Australian-based journals and enthusiastically supported their rise in

¹ Based on the retrospective preface to his honours thesis (18 July 2018).

academic rankings. He very fittingly wrote the lead article introducing *Economic Analysis and Policy* to mark 50 years of its existence in 2020 (Tisdell, 2020b).

Some of works (such as Duncan and Tisdell, 1971) clearly impressed the British philosopher Jon Elster (Elster, 1979, p.60), who compared them to those of “Descartes’ adduced theory of instant rotationality” (Dollery and Wallis, 1996, p. 21).

Tisdell was a very versatile economist who applied economics to a wide range of topics including among them (Lodewijks, 2007):

- Ecological, natural resource and environmental economics.
- Tourism economics and leisure studies.
- Economic development in general and, Asia-Pacific countries/regions.
- Social policy, including gender issues, socioeconomic issues associated with globalization, poverty and social disadvantage.

These are on top of his main areas that include:

- Those focusing on knowledge limitations and the presence of uncertainty (information economics), thus developing microeconomic theories and applying them to policy issues. Subjects covered include the operation of market systems, the economics of decision-making, managerial economics, science and technology policy, bounded rationality, and evolutionary economics.
- Textbooks on microeconomics and basic economics.

Many works of Professor Tisdell embody, political economy, concerns with ecological, environmental, biodiversity and socioeconomic issues. They contain a clear theoretical structure and painstaking empirical work followed by a set of practical and implementable policy proposals for achieving sustainable development.

Professor Tisdell was untiring in his academic endeavours, supporting mentoring and encouraging many throughout his long and distinguished academic career. This magnificence not only profoundly influenced them but has left a lasting legacy. He was devoted to his trade from the time he was a fledgling academic until the very end of his life – a time spanning six decades. His research created a strong bond between the classroom and the real world. One of his recent papers was on the COVID-19 virus. which has already attracted hundreds of citations and downloads (see Tisdell, 2020a).

In the past three to four years his physical presence at The University of Queensland School of Economics became less frequent. However, he would prepare handwritten

drafts of papers, and diagrammes which he would bring to the university once or twice a week for Evelyn (his research assistant) to type and draw.

Professor Tisdell assisted numerous students and colleagues from all over the world. He had a vast network of contacts, which he maintained until the end of his life. Ten days before he passed away, despite his ill health, he drove into the university to meet at a restaurant with some of his contacts. On the way back from the restaurant, while struggling, he even managed to go back to his car to get some lemons he had brought from his garden for Evelyn. He took great delight in quite simple things. Every paper he published gave him great joy. His laughter was infectious. This was the professor's nature from the day I first met him until the last time I saw him, at the hospital shortly before he died.

Tisdell always treated his colleagues and students with respect and dignity. As a teacher, his main *Mantra* always was analytical rigour, critical thinking, and a punishing work ethic. One of his extraordinary strengths was the use of diagrammes to explain and illustrate complex issues in the most intelligible and understandable manner to reach a wider audience reminiscent of ' *A Geometry of International Trade* by James Meade. His mastery of illustrations was par excellence.

The high research productivity of Tisdell was derived from three sources: (a) his brilliant mind to conceptualize an issue and pursue it with single-minded determination; (b) demonstrated ability to create a network of national and international collaborators across disciplines; and (c) his extraordinary skill to motivate his PhD students to become an army of highly productive researchers. Of the three, (a) is by far the most important factor contributing to his success as a researcher of truly international standing.

Professor Tisdell will be sorely missed by those who personally and professionally knew him and by the wider academic community. It is a great delight to note that The University of Queensland has honoured this great academic for his indelible contribution to the institution by creating the Clement Allan Tisdell Chair in Economics.

As mentioned earlier, his sustained interest in nature protection, wildlife, biodiversity and so on may have been influenced by his unpretentious upbringing in Taree (his birthplace) and his familiarity with rural life. Accordingly, when he was in Bangladesh and in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, he always felt at home; no doubt these areas reminded him of his rural upbringing.

Tisdell was always a man of positive philosophy. In the 38 years that I have been associated with him, I never saw him lose his cool, nor did he ever demonstrate negativity. He was a man exploring new ideas and ways in which problems could be solved in the most effective and logical manner

I would never know, but daresay he might have been subconsciously influenced by the following stanza from a poem² :

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

However, I am sure that Professor Tisdell did not take the call of Wordsworth: “Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books” seriously, as he lived with books, writing and his love for nature throughout his brilliant career!

Professor Tisdell, may you rest in peace.

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NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

A former PhD student of Professor Tisdell at the University of Newcastle (1985–1988) and a colleague at The University of Queensland (1990–2022), Dr Mohammad Alauddin, is Honorary Associate Professor, Economics, The University of Queensland, Australia; published widely on development, environment, sustainability, agriculture, climate change, and education including three books, and 75 articles in leading field journals funded by ILO, ARC, ACIAR and US Department of Commerce.

² “The Tables Turned” (1798) by William Wordsworth, an English poet of the Romantic Age.

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