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Obituary

Peter R. Odell (1st of July 1930-12 April 2016)

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For Energy Policy

Obituary Peter R. Odell (1st of July 1930 – 12 April 2016).

After a long and highly productive life as an energy economist, Prof. Dr. Peter Randon Odell passed away on April the 12th in Ipswich, England. He leaves behind his wife, Jean, and four children and their families. After studying and doing his PhD at Birmingham University (Odell 1954) and a fellowship at the Fletcher School of Law in Boston (US), he spent three years at Shell as an economist, before he moved back into academia taking up a position as lecturer at the London School of Economics.

Odell was appointed as a professor in Economic Geography at the *Nederlandse Economische Hogeschool* in Rotterdam (later the Erasmus University) in 1968 where he eventually founded and became the director of the Centre for International Energy Studies (EURICES) in 1982 allowing him to focus fully on his lifelong fascination for energy studies.

Peter Odell's work was unique because of his genuinely multi-disciplinary scientific studies of the availability and use of energy resources at both a local and global level. His grounding in economic geography provided the crucial basis for his analyses and insights, bringing in spatial aspects often ignored by mainstream energy economists. These included taking into account the geographical location of the sources of energy, the distance and physical access to markets, the impact of (new) modes of transport, and the local and regional spill-over effects of exploration and production activities combined with the demand for particular energy resources (Odell 1963).

At the same time, he also incorporated the notion of local differences in economic and energy policies, their institutional shape, social aspects of energy use and production as well as exploration strategies and technological development. He then took all that and put it in a historical, contemporary or forward-looking perspective, depending on the issue at stake.

Local and global developments and the interaction between them played a key role in his analyses: The world shaped the context for local opportunities (or the lack thereof) in terms of energy supply and consumption. Over time, he built these interactions at the local level into a dynamically evolving global picture amid shifting international and (geo)political relations. Odell was highly aware of the specific impact of these determinants and incorporated them in his analyses of the energy system.

It was this use of a multidisciplinary approach together with the use of a variation of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis (often supported by Ken Rosing) that allowed Odell to get a grip on the complexities of the oil and gas markets and the way they developed. He used this approach as the basis for his magnum opus *Oil and World Power* - a bestseller published between 1970 and 1986 which ran to eight revised and updated editions and was translated into 13 languages (Odell 1970, 1986).

He also carried out numerous studies on local energy issues, including the development of North Sea oil- and gas production (Odell & Rosing 1974, 1976, 1977) the energy mix and policies in Europe (Odell 1973, 1988; Correljé & Odell 2000), Latin America and third world countries (Rees & Odell 1987), the continuous expansion of the number of oil and gas producing regions around the world and the evolution of the global energy market (1984, 1992, 1997).

These studies were published in a diversity of academic journals as well as books covering subjects ranging from energy studies and geography to politics and history. He was widely published in industry periodicals and many of his insights also helped inform the general public through his numerous contributions to the mainstream media, across magazines, newspapers, radio and TV.

His work earned him widespread recognition and he was inundated by and accepted invitations from academic and professional institutions all over the world to carry out research and teach. His insightful and often controversial interpretation of local issues within the broader regional or global context, made him a popular and much-sought after advisor to national governments, international organisations, including OPEC, industry and the financial sector. At times, this saw him become embroiled in fierce debates with the very people who came to him for advice when his insights and suggestions ran contrary to their views and preferences.

Illustrative is the debate, published in *Energy Policy* in 1977/78, in which Odell and Rosing (1974, 1976, 1997, 1978) demonstrated that the estimates of North Sea oil reserves, as presented by the oil companies (see Wall, Wilson & Jones (1977, 1978) was way too low. The positions taken in this debate are representative for later discussions, in which Odell's much more dynamic view on the availability of energy resources was generally played down by industry and governments and, of course, particularly the peak-oil movement. And, the story goes on, as can be observed today.

Peter Odell also actively contributed to the development of the knowledge infrastructure in the field of energy studies. He was a regular contributor to *Energy Policy* from its very inception in 1973. He was a member of the editorial board of *Energy Policy* and a range of other leading journals. He was highly involved with the International Association for Energy Economics (IAEE), founding the Benelux branch of the association which he also chaired. The IAEE honoured him in 1991 for "outstanding contributions to the subject and its literature". In 1994, The Royal Scottish Geographical Society awarded him its Centennial Medal for his research on North Sea oil and gas. He was also recognised in 2006 by OPEC with a lifetime achievement for all his work as an energy analyst.

After his retirement from the Erasmus University, in 1991, he renewed ties with the London School of Economics where he began teaching again (1992). He also set about collecting his most important work into two vast volumes; one on global issues (2001), the other focussing on Europe (2002).

Much of his analyses, and particularly the underlying methodology, is still relevant to understanding today's energy issues. In 2004, he published his last book entitled *Why Carbon Fuels Will Dominate The 21st Century's Global Energy Economy* (2004). But he continued to advise and teach and in 2011 his last published work appeared: *Managing the UK's Remaining Oil and Gas Resources: a Future Role for the State?* (2011)

Peter Odell's death deprives the world of an authentic, outspoken and highly dedicated scholar who provided important and lasting insights in the academic, as well as, the public debate on energy issues, both in the Netherlands and abroad. Over time, he made an immeasurable contribution in inspiring, educating and (in)forming many students, now working as academics, policy-makers or in industry. I gladly count myself among them.

A funeral service took place on April 21st, 2016 in Ipswich.

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