

RSAI NEWSLETTER

THE REGIONAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

new series 23 - November 2024

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FROM THE EDITORS

The newsletter of the Regional Science Association International (RSAI) appears two times a year and contains information about upcoming conferences and meetings, recent events and publications, and short contributions on current themes.

Mina Akhavan (TU Delft) and Martijn Smit (Utrecht University) form the editorial team. Text contributions for the newsletter are always welcome, and can be submitted directly to Martijn (m.j.smit@uu.nl) or to Mina (m.a.akhavan@tudelft.nl). The deadline for the next issue is 15 April. In particular, short contributions on your current research are most welcome; these can be extracts from articles or reports, or opinion pieces. We also welcome proposals for a piece in the *Center of Excellence* series.

Martijn Smit
Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Mina Akhavan
TU Delft, the Netherlands



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WELCOME

Dear Regional Scientists across the world,

My two-year term as president of the RSAI ends at the turn of the year. How can two years go so fast? Probably because time flies when you are busy – and I really have had two busy and enjoyable years! I have met so many new, fantastic colleagues and visited exciting new places and countries.

The New Year means not only a new RSAI president but also a new executive director. After two terms of fantastic service to the regional science community, Dr. Andrea Caragliu steps down in order to engage in other regional science activities. His importance for the RSAI can hardly be overestimated, and for me as president he has been an indispensable support, regardless of whether it concerned formalities, ongoing matters or strategic issues. I speak for the whole regional science community when I say: Thank you Andrea!

For the first time ever, RSAI will from January 1, 2025, have a female executive director. Dr. Ana Vinuela from the University of Oviedo, Spain, will now assume the mantle of the executive director. Before we started the search process to find a new executive director I was worried. How would it be possible to find someone to replace Andrea? However, when Ana takes over I am not worried anymore.



RSAI MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

All RSAI members have online access to Papers in Regional Science (PiRS) and Regional Science Policy and Practice (RSPP), the journals of the Regional Science Association International. Some recent articles from both journals are highlighted in this newsletter.

Members can log in and access full text articles online. In addition to the RSAI publications, members are offered an opportunity to purchase other regional science journals at reduced rates and participate in the national and international conferences at reduced rates.

To become a member and for details on your membership, contact the Executive Director, Andrea Caragliu at andrea.caragliu@polimi.it, or visit www.regionalscience.org.

A central issue during these two years has been the transition of RSAI's two journals to open access publication. The two editors, Dr. Rosella Nicolini (PiRS) and Dr. Tomaz Dentinho (RSPP) have done a fantastic job during the transition and I want to thank them for their dedicated efforts.

Another, very positive thing when it comes to journals, is ERSA's decision to launch a new journal, Global Challenges and Regional Science, with Dr. Vicente Royuela as Editor in Chief. The journal is published by Elsevier and welcomes high quality scholarship on a broad range of topics dealing with the local (regional, spatial, urban) effects of, and responses to, structural changes caused by global challenges.

January 31, 2025, I hand over the gavel to the new RSAI president Dr. Hiroyuki Shibusawa at the Toyohashi University of Technology in Japan. I wish him, the new executive director Ana Vinuela, the RSAI council and the whole regional science community all the best in their efforts to develop our multi-disciplinary discipline. New forces take over the lead for RSAI this winter, but no matter what the calendar says, it is springtime for regional science!

Hans Westlund

President of the Regional Science Association International



MEET THE FELLOWS: FRANK VAN OORT

GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMICS were rooted in my family: my father was a surveyor involved in mapping and negotiations for the national reparcelling organization, while my mother worked as an accountant. As a child, I was fascinated by various subjects. I devoured books from my father's library on Dutch literature, pored over his maps and atlases searching for interesting places, and became captivated by medieval architecture after visiting a local castle. The first book I owned was *How to Read a Castle*, which I still have in my library—now home to thousands of books on cathedrals, castles, monasteries, and fortifications. Every holiday, our family explored Europe, visiting museums and archaeological sites and thoroughly exploring a specific region each year. Along the way, we immersed ourselves in local history, read novels set in those regions, and sampled local foods. Today, I continue this tradition with my wife, who luckily shares my interests. Together, we're avid readers and book collectors, and our home has become a "book orphanage," akin to *The Cemetery of Forgotten Books* in Barcelona (Carlos Ruiz Zafón, 2001).

Though I considered studying Dutch or English literature, history, or geography, I ultimately chose economics, attending Erasmus University in Rotterdam. I was drawn to Jan Tinbergen's work on inequalities and institutional development and appreciated his method of using mathematical models to quantify economic dynamics. I specialized in spatial and business economics, learning from professors like Jean Paelinck and Leo Klaassen. In my second year, I became a student assistant at the Economic Geographical Institute, then a large research group of about 20 researchers. My work involved programming economic forecasting models in Fortran for projects commissioned by provincial and national ministries, utilizing (in 1992) sizable microdata from the Chamber of Commerce and the Statistics Netherlands labour force survey. My master's thesis focused on regional income inequalities. Even during my studies, I knew I wanted to pursue a PhD, so when the opportunity arose, I embarked on a project titled *Multiregional Modelling of Labour Demand in the Netherlands* at Erasmus University. A colleague candidate concurrently worked on labour supply, and although our projects were intended to interact, they didn't quite align. However, I exchanged valuable tips and feedback in the shared PhD workspace and during courses at the Tinbergen Institute, which is a vibrant research school.

My interests in spatial econometrics and economic systems modelling grew, but the Economic Geographical Institute closed due to budget cuts, and my primary supervisor became unavailable. Around this time, I noticed a job posting for a spatial researcher at the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning in The Hague (Rijksplanologische Dienst, RPD). I applied and got the job, working alongside demographers and economists on spatial planning documents while completing my PhD thesis on agglomeration economies, productivity, and innovation in the evenings. This was the start of a dual work life – something I maintained ever since. I defended the thesis (cum laude) at Erasmus University. My promotors were Jan Lambooy, someone with a wealth of regional-economic knowledge, and Bert van der Knaap, who was more methodologically driven.

I continued at the RPD, though its close

association with policy led to the formation of a new, more independent agency: the Ruimtelijk Planbureau (Spatial Planning Agency). Here, I progressed from researcher to senior researcher to department head while also serving as an associate professor in Economic Geography at Utrecht University's Faculty of Geosciences. Once again, I found myself balancing a dual role. At the same time, I served on the Dutch board of the Regional Science Association and as an editor for *Regional Studies* and the *Journal of Economic and Social Geography* (TESG).

A few years later, the Spatial Planning Agency and the Sustainable Development Agency, a similar national institution, merged into the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), where I stayed. At Utrecht University, I became a professor of Urban and Regional Economics, collaborating with colleagues Ron Boschma and Koen Frenken to help develop the field of evolutionary economic geography that Ron initiated. Koen and I, after becoming roommates, first connected over our respective work on complexity and entropy measurement (Koen) and agglomeration (me), which we soon combined in an article on what we termed "related variety", coined like that after sessions with Ron. Although the journal to which we submitted the article wasn't initially enthusiastic, it was eventually published, marking the start of a rewarding collaboration. I began supervising PhD students in Utrecht and expanded my collaborations with colleagues in planning, entrepreneurship, and development. Eventually, I shifted more of my time from The Hague to Utrecht, becoming a full professor there.

However, my alma mater, Erasmus University, invited me back to Rotterdam. About ten years ago, I accepted a full professorship in Urban and Regional Economics at the Erasmus School of Economics, coordinating research within the Department of Applied Economics. The research groups of strategy and spatial economics align optimally with my interests. I began collaborating with the Institute of Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) at EUR, the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, the happiness research institute EHERO at EUR, and the (post-initial) Master City Developer program. Recently, my focus has included large international, multidisciplinary projects on regional diversification and the impacts of Brexit and Covid-19 on European regional development. I continue to mix microeconomic research (using microdata) with economic systems research (input-output analysis) and applied research for regional and national governments, enjoying the variety and applicability.

Currently, I am exploring a more fundamental approach to researching the quality of life, well-being and inclusive prosperity (known as *brede welvaart* in Dutch), a much-debated policy goal across all governance levels but one that still lacks comprehensive, identified micro-foundations and clarity on the co-evolution and trade-offs between sustainability, inclusion, and profitability. In the near future, I will be coordinating international research on this theme at Erasmus University, further applying my background in Regional Science, where I was recently honoured as a fellow. This new endeavour may require even more dual time management with multiple disciplines, which I look forward to navigating!

*Frank van Oort
Professor of Urban and Regional Economics
Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands.*



ERSA PRIZE IN REGIONAL SCIENCE: SIMONA IAMMARINO

THE ERSAPRIZE in Regional Science is awarded yearly to recognize outstanding scholarly contributions to the field of regional science. It is arguably one of the most prestigious prizes in the broad field and boosts the image of ERSAPRIZE in the European and global scientific world. The ERSAPRIZE, which is based on the recommendation of an international independent jury, has been awarded since 2003 to distinguished European regional scientists.



The ERSAPRIZE in Regional Science 2024 was awarded to Simona Iammarino, Professor of Applied Economics at the Department of Economics & Business of the University of Cagliari, Italy, and Visiting Professor at the Department of Geography & Environment of the London School of Economics (LSE), UK. Simona is also a member of the Board of the LSE-Cañada Blanch Centre, and affiliate faculty member at the Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI) L'Aquila, Italy. She was previously Professor of Economic Geography at the LSE, where she acted as Head of Department (2014-2017) and academic member of the LSE Council (2016-2020).

Her main research interests and major contributions to regional science lie in the following areas: multinational corporations, globalisation and regional economic development; economic geography of innovation and technological change; regional and local economic development and policy. She has published more than 70 articles in major peer-reviewed journals, two co-authored books, around 30 book chapters, and numerous working papers, policy reports and other publications.

Simona is one of the editors of the Journal of Economic Geography, member of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) Executive Group, and a long-standing member of the ERSAPRIZE community. She has a long-term experience in externally funded international research projects, and in consultancy projects for various international organisations (e.g. EU Commission, OECD, United

Nations, ADB, etc.) and numerous government agencies. For further details, Simona's CV is available here: https://web.unica.it/unica/en/ateneo_s07_ss01_sss01.page?contentId=SHD402177

The award was presented on the 30th of August 2024 at the Closing Session of 63rd ERSAPRIZE Congress in Terceira, Azores, Portugal. After the Award ceremony, Simona gave the keynote Lecture on Technological Transitions and Critical Raw Materials, Multinationals, Geopolitics and Spatial Inequality. In her keynote, Simona touched briefly upon her research over the past thirty years, exploring the role of multinational corporations and technological innovation in shaping regional economic development. Her current research projects on Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) bring these three themes together in the context of the ongoing digital and green technological transitions. CRMs are essential inputs and work as an irreplaceable material basis of important new technologies. Simona and co-authors' recent research, revisiting the role of natural resources in technological paradigm shifts, proposes the notion of material-based technological regime underlying innovation in industries crucial to the dual transition.



At the same time, CRM global supply and value chains are subject to significant geopolitical risks and vulnerability; affect the balance in development opportunities – the winners and the losers – among different, often peripheral, places in both the global south and the global north; and determine firms' choices and strategies. The lecture emphasised the urgency of carefully assessing the problems of economic development and geographical equity in the employment of the natural resources crucial for the current technological transitions, with implications for current European Union strategies.



YOUNG SCHOLAR INTERVIEW: KENNETH CASTILLO-HIDALGO

Kenneth Castillo-Hidalgo won the RSAI Young Researchers Prize 2024. He is currently at the Politecnico in Milan. Mina Akhavan interviewed him for this newsletter.

First of all, tell us a little bit about yourself, your background studies, and your current position.

WELL, I'M FROM Chile, originally. I did my bachelor's there in Antofagasta, a medium-sized city in the north. We have a huge impact of mining, and most research done in that area focuses on that. I went to Barcelona and got my master's and PhD in the same department - under the supervision of Prof. Rosella Nicolini. My first motivation for research was understanding the regional effects of mining, given my background.

Then, I got a postdoc position at PoliMi - Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering, which happened by chance. I had plans to go back to Chile, but during the RSAI Congress in Hungary, I heard about this opportunity at PoliMi, and it seemed like a great fit for my future. Here I work on a project on regional dynamization in terms of digitalisation and global value chains. I'm working with Roberta Capello, Giovanni Perucca, and Camilla Lenzi.

As for teaching, both before and during the PhD studies I had the opportunity to teach the youngest students in different bachelor courses. I was in charge of introductory topics on economics, econometrics, and international economics. I really enjoyed teaching. On the one hand, because you are practicing one of the most important skills in academia, which is spreading new knowledge to the young ones. This skill is mostly neglected during most PhD studies, where you are taught how to do research, but you are not formally prepared to teach. I do believe that this is one fundamental pillar of academia, besides research and networking with the environment. On the other hand, I really like teaching because it is when you get the big responsibility of creating new professionals and potential researchers. The university teacher has to have a strong commitment to motivate the young people to be curious about different things and to search for answers. Also, the teacher at college should be able to help students develop critical thinking skills.

What key regional science questions or challenges did your research address, particularly related to the award-winning paper?

The paper comes from my PhD and focuses on the effects of primary activities, like mining and non-mining sectors, on human capital accumulation at the regional level. I'm very happy it received recognition because it was a tough paper to work on. It addresses issues that are not well-covered in regional literature, especially regarding developing economies. Most studies focus on Europe or the U.S., where there is more data, but it's underexplored in developing countries.

That's very interesting. How do you think your work could influence policymakers in Chile, or in similar regions?

Well, in many developing countries, we face centralism, where policies are made from the capital city and don't reflect the specific needs of different regions. Each region has its own challenges and industrial structure, so improving research at the regional level could help policymakers focus on the real issues that arise



locally.

Exactly, it's tricky to influence centralised systems. But thinking about the future, are there any emerging topics in regional science that inspire you? Where do you see yourself contributing in the next 5-10 years?

Right now, I'm focused on global value chains and digitalization, but I'd also like to continue researching primary sector activities and developing economies. Here in Europe, they may not face the same challenges, but there are more resources to develop strong research on these topics.

About emerging topics in regional science: As I mentioned, I am interested in developing deeper on the local impacts of primary sector activities, especially on developing countries. One of the most interesting, emerging topics that I am attracted to is that of the impacts on social capital in the local context. I think that studying how the local productive structures affect the way social networks among people are formed could be crucial to understand why some regions might find it more difficult than others to reach economic development. If a child is surrounded by low-specialization activities or workers, that child will be hardly interested in becoming a highly skilled professional.

Absolutely! What advice would you give to younger scholars or PhD students starting out in regional science?

The most important advice I have is to be aware of mental health. Nobody talks about it, but academia can be very stressful with deadlines and expectations. If you don't take care of your mental health, you won't progress. Second, it's important to build connections with colleagues and supervisors. I was very lucky to have Rosella as a supervisor; she was supportive. Lastly, don't compare yourself to others. Everyone has their own path and timing in academia, and there is no single "right" path.

These are important soft skills that we often overlook in academia, where the focus is usually on technical skills like research and grant writing. Thank you for bringing that up.

Winning this award was a big motivator for me, especially as it came during a personally tough time. It was a reminder that all the hard work was worth it





CENTER OF EXCELLENCE: CAGLIARI'S CENTRE FOR NORTH-SOUTH ECONOMIC RESEARCH (CRENoS)

This issue's Center of Excellence in Regional Science is the CRENoS center in Cagliari, Italy - not by coincidence the current institution of prof. Iammarino, who was awarded this year's ERSA prize (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

ESTABLISHED in 1993 by economists from Sardinia's two public universities—the University of Cagliari and the University of Sassari—CRENoS deals with several themes of economic research. Initially, the Centre concentrated on regional economic dualism, growth, and convergence in Italy and Europe. It emphasised intangible factors such as human capital, technological change, social capital, and institutional quality, all contributing to regional economic performance. Over the years, CRENoS has broadened its research agenda to include a diverse range of theoretical and applied topics, including financial and monetary issues, health and welfare systems, natural resources and sustainable development, and tourism economics.

One of CRENoS's notable early achievements was establishing an extended time series on regional accounts in Italy, encompassing data on GDP, employment, value-added, capital stock, and crime—information previously unavailable from the national statistical office. Similarly, the Centre contributed to a regionalised database on patent activity at the European level.

CRENoS actively participates in international research networks and contributes to projects funded by the European Union and other global institutions. The Centre also organises scientific conferences, seminars, master's courses, and summer schools, with around 80 researchers currently affiliated.

Each year, CRENoS publishes a comprehensive report that analyses the state and outlook of the Sardinian economy. Now in its 31st edition, this report has become a vital resource for scholars, media, stakeholders, and policymakers.



Since 2007, CRENoS has offered a first-level Master's program in European Project Planning (MAPE) for local development in partnership with various public and private organisations. This program provides training on key EU issues, transforming them into actionable policy interventions while examining their regional impact. Although regional economics has always been part of various undergraduate and postgraduate courses, a dedicated course on regional development economics was introduced in 2014. Since 2022, this course has been taught by Simona Iammarino.

*Stefano Usai
Department of Business and Economics, CRENoS
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University of Cagliari*



ERSA'S NEW JOURNAL: GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL SCIENCE

THE LAUNCH OF the new journal Global Challenges and Regional Science (GCRS) addresses a critical need in academic publishing, merging the fields of regional science with the contemporary framework of "grand challenges." This concept has become a key focus within research policy, particularly as societies worldwide face pressing issues like climate change, demographic shifts, and technological transitions. Originating as mission-oriented agendas, grand challenges encourage research that contributes directly to societal needs, emphasizing collaborative, multidisciplinary approaches.

GCRS positions itself uniquely at the intersection of these grand challenges and the foundational principles of regional science. Rooted in understanding the spatial dynamics of human behavior, institutions, and policy impacts, regional science brings valuable perspectives to these complex issues. GCRS aims to fill a gap in research by exploring how location, community, and regional dynamics influence responses to global challenges. With a strong emphasis on innovative, cross-sectoral, and cross-disciplinary approaches, the journal fosters a holistic understanding of these issues through diverse methodological lenses, from qualitative comparative analyses to causal inferences in spatial policy evaluation.

The journal's ambition is to produce impactful, policy-relevant research that informs both scholars and practitioners. GCRS is supported by a balanced

and multidisciplinary editorial board, with scholars from top institutions worldwide, ensuring high-quality contributions. Initial commitments include around 40 papers in the first year, aiming for inclusion in Scopus and future impact factor ratings. Thus, GCRS offers an essential platform for advancing research that bridges academia and policy, fostering solutions to societal challenges on a regional scale.

Vicente Royuela
editor in chief, GCRS



PRIX VAUTRIN-LUD

In November 2024, prof. Ron Boschma, based primarily at Utrecht University, won the prestigious Prix Vautrin - sometimes tongue-in-cheek called the Nobel Prize in Geography. Below we reprint his acceptance speech, with his permission.

WHAT DOES GEOGRAPHY mean to me? I would like to start saying that I feel very privileged to stand here today. I feel deeply honored to win such a prestigious prize, and I thank the international committee for this.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all my bright colleagues with whom I had the privilege to work with over all these years. Without them, I would not be here, it is as simple as that. As you know too well, research is an intellectual activity that can only thrive in a collaborative setting. I was very lucky to have the opportunity to work together with brilliant and inspiring colleagues, such as Jan Lambooy (my dear mentor), Koen Frenken and Pierre-Alex Balland, among many others. I feel very lucky that I have been, and I am still part of a number of excellent research groups at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, Stavanger University in Norway, and Toulouse University in France. They also provided a social environment full of many dear colleagues that became close friends over time. Last but not least, I would also like to thank my family for their love, support and patience.

For this occasion, I was asked to reflect on the question: what does geography mean to me? For sure, it is a question that I did not have to think about for long.

For sure, geography gives meaning to my own life. When leaving secondary school, I had no clue whatsoever what to do next after my graduation. One day, my father took me in his car and drove me to industrial estates nearby where we literally knocked on the doors of companies and asked for any jobs on offer. In this way, I ended up working for a chemical factory for a year, for sure not the most happy year of my life. At that



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time, I met a guy who told me he had studied geography at the university. This sparked my interest in going to the university, which was a world completely unknown to me. So I thought, why not? Clearly, it opened an entirely new world for me, the academic world, where I felt so much at home. This is how geography became my intellectual house.

For me, geography is also a way of looking at the world. During my study Social Geography at the University of Amsterdam, I learned how to look at cities and neighborhoods, and how to see whether these are places of prosperity, social cohesion, political conflicts, tensions or distress. Not only by looking at statistical data, but also by simply walking through neighborhoods and observing people, buildings, shops, and public spaces. Looking for details that might tell a bigger story but that remain unnoticed to those who have not been trained as geographers. During holidays, I still love to do that, visiting cities, neighborhoods or old industrial areas, looking around, trying to understand in what shape they are, how they thrive, and how they reinvent themselves after turbulent times.

There is no need to explain to all of you here what is the importance of applying a geographical perspective. But I still feel strongly this is hardly understood by many other social science disciplines. After completing my study in Social Geography, I did a PhD in Economics at the Tinbergen Institute. There, I learned soon that many economists do not understand the value of a geographical approach, which limits their understanding of economic phenomena. In contrast to many economists, geographers understood already early on, that regions matter, even more in a globalizing world. Another illustration is the Draghi-report on the future competitiveness of Europe that just came out a couple of weeks ago. It turned out that this report by leading economists is almost completely a-spatial! Draghi's plea for a new and active industrial policy in the EU is welcoming, but one wonders why there is no mentioning in the report that such policy is already implemented in many regions in the European Union since 2014 under the umbrella of Smart Specialization policy. More than half of the EU budget is spent on regions in Europe, but no reference to the role of regions at all in the report. In other words, I feel strongly that a geographical perspective is needed more than ever, and geographers have a lot to contribute here.

When doing my PhD in Economics, I also understood that economists did the wrong kind of economics, that is, mainstream or orthodox economics. Therefore, I became intellectually attracted to a lively community of

evolutionary economists that rejected this mainstream thinking that was deeply grounded in many unrealistic assumptions. Evolutionary economics had formulated a promising alternative to equilibrium economics instead, based on bounded rationality and structural change. However, what was lacking in evolutionary economics was a geographical perspective. This is how I found my scientific and intellectual niche, by adding a geographical dimension to the field of evolutionary economics, and by connecting evolutionary economics to research in economic geography and regional studies.

Doing geography also means to me that practicing academic freedom is feasible. For geographers, it is second nature to do inter-disciplinary research, as they understand well that complex phenomena and societal challenges in particular places require multi-disciplinary approaches. This kind of thinking has now become fashionable in social sciences, but we all know it is hard to implement in reality. Geographers could mean a lot here, as they have the capacity to act as bridges between different scientific disciplines and make inter-disciplinary research work. This is also true because the field of geography is essentially more open-minded, at least more open minded than other social sciences where dominant theories, preferred methods and vested interests tend to block crossovers across disciplines and stifle new ideas.

This is what geography means to me in particular: a welcoming and open scientific community that is well-equipped to take up future research challenges. So, all in all, geography is the place to be!

Ron Boschma