



# Thirty-five years of R(S)UE: A retrospective <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a quantitative retrospective of thirty-five years of *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, from Volume 1 (1971) to Volume 35 (2005). In doing so, the paper follows the intellectual development of the journal through its different editors by comparing their editorial statements with the actual changes in the characteristics of articles they selected for publication.

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## 1. Introduction

Thirty-five years may be the appropriate age to evaluate what one has achieved halfway into life and think about what comes next. At least this was the opinion of Dante when he wrote his *Divine Comedy*, a midlife metaphorical account of past experiences and future prospects. *Mutatis mutandis*, this issue of *Regional Science and Urban Economics* presents a similar, though less poetic, effort — one we hope is occurring much earlier than the mid-life of the journal.

While other contributions in this issue look toward the future, the aim of this paper is to take a look back and provide a quantitative retrospective of thirty-five years of *Regional Science and Urban Economics* (henceforth, RSUE), from Volume 1, dated 1971, to Volume 35, dated 2005. To be precise, the original name of the journal was *Regional and Urban Economics*, which was replaced by its current name in 1975 for editorial reasons we will also discuss.

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The paper follows the intellectual development of the journal through its different editors by comparing their editorial statements with the actual changes detectable in the articles they selected for publication. In particular, Section 2 discusses the editorial turnover. Section 3 presents the characteristics of the articles we have chosen to analyze and their classifications. Section 4 provides descriptive information on those characteristics and Section 5 summarizes the main facts that emerge from their analysis. Finally, Section 6 concludes, arguing that the overall intellectual trajectory of the journal is characterized by a consistent and conscious drive towards improving the analytical methods of spatial economics. Such a drive has its roots in the first editorial statement of RSUE and may explain the frequent perception of RSUE as the most technical of the journals in the field of regional and urban economics.

## 2. Editors and editorials

The scientific interests of the editors play a key role in shaping a journal. It is therefore interesting to begin with an overview of the editorial boards that have managed RSUE and their editorial statements at the time they took responsibility.

When the journal was founded, as *Regional and Urban Economics*, in 1971, the editors were Jean H.P. Paelinck (Netherlands Economic Institute, Rotterdam, Netherlands), Aaron Fleisher (MIT, Cambridge, USA), and Nikolay N. Nekrasov (Council for Studying Productive Forces, Moscow, USSR). The editorial statement (Paelinck, 1971) described the articles in the first issue as ranging “from theoretical–operational over the pure econometric field to the more applied econometric exercises.” It suggested that “the various models presented might be useful at one stage or another of regional economic analysis, parameter estimation, and planning” and stressed the importance the editors attached to improving the analytical methods of spatial economics.

In 1975, Åke Anderson and Walter Isard (both at the Regional Science Department of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA) took over the editorial responsibility. At that time, the name of the journal changed to *Regional Science and Urban Economics*. The rationale for this change can be found in their editorial statement (Anderson and Isard, 1975): “This journal is devoted to the presentation of major advances in Regional Science, a truly interdisciplinary science, which has developed very rapidly in the last twenty-five years. The new editors desire that the interdisciplinary character of Regional Science be fully reflected in this journal through contributions by those trained as economists, quantitative geographers, planning analysts, and other regional scientists. The journal is also designed to deepen the foundations of Regional Science, the creation of new theories and models and their application to forecasting, planning and policy. [...] Homogeneity of the journal is also a necessity, which we wish to ensure by concentrating on contributions that employ formal methods from mathematics, econometrics, operations research and related fields.” Accordingly, the inclusion of the word “science” in the name of the journal served the purpose of accomplishing a transition from Regional Economics to Regional Science, perceived as a richer interdisciplinary field built on a variety of cultural backgrounds and research techniques.

In keeping with the statement of the founding editors, issues had to be analyzed at a high level of generality using formal methods of investigation. However, contributions were also required to focus on immediate or potential uses in terms of forecasting, planning, and policy design at the regional and urban levels.

In 1980, Urs Schweizer (University of Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany) became the managing editor of RSUE, with Anderson and Isard still serving as co-editors. The editorial policy remained substantially unchanged until 1987 when John M. Quigley (University of

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