

# Community, impact, leadership

## – 50 years of the Regional Studies Association

James Hopkins



# Opening Statement from the Chairman



The Regional Studies Association celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. For all members, staff and those that we partner with, 2015 is a time to both mark the Association's achievements and reflect upon how much it has developed over time.

It is often said that the past is another country, and many of us will struggle to reconcile the Association of 50 years ago, or even 20 years ago, with the organisation that we know today. There has been substantial change, and a considerable evolution in both the context within which the Association operates and in its character.

Any story of change will be littered with pivotal incidents and important themes, and several stand out for us. Perhaps one of the most significant insights to emerge in this publication is the debt of gratitude the Association owes to Professor Sir Peter Hall. As discussed here, Sir Peter was part of the founding of the Association, but perhaps most importantly he took on the challenge of editing our flagship journal *Regional Studies* and oversaw its emergence as a high-impact journal of international standing. Along the way he shaped the Association with his inimitable, high octane style, and attracted a new generation of members, many of whom were imbued with international interests.

All scholarly organisations are subject to the vagaries of changing intellectual fashions and shifts in public policy settings. As noted here, the retreat from regional planning in the UK in the 1970s and 1990s represented a major challenge to the Association, which eventually overcame these challenges by exploring new intellectual and policy boundaries. There are on-going lessons for the current generations of members, and these include the need to anticipate change, the merits of flexibility and adaptability and the need to engage with both policy makers and the broader community.

The internationalisation of the Association is a third major theme evident in this summary of its history. Over 50 years, the Association has moved from a relatively insular organisation with a focus on the United Kingdom and its policies to being a truly international organisation that embraces members in all corners of the globe. The current Board encapsulates this diversity with eight nationalities represented and we recently opened a Division in China, with plans in train to develop in Latin America.

Finally, the story of the Association, drawn together so succinctly within this document, is a story of success with respect to policy impact, membership, geographic reach, academic profile and publications. We should acknowledge and enjoy that achievement, and we should also offer our heartfelt thanks to those who made this success possible: past and present staff, members of the Board, the editors of our journals and book series, our publishing partners such as Taylor and Francis and those who have worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth running of our conferences. But of course, much of this achievement reflects the commitment and engagement of the members themselves, and in many ways this publication is a celebration of all that we can achieve as a community of scholars, practitioners and policy makers who are committed to the wellbeing of regions.

**Andrew Beer, Chairman**

# Foreword



Champagne corks deserve to be popped for any organisation that reaches its fiftieth year with a strong asset base, a rock-solid brand image, rising turnover, membership and output, and new markets opening up around the world. All the more cause for cheer if the organisation is that fragile thing: a learned society. Doubly so if it's based on an interdisciplinary specialism rather than a primary academic discipline. Treble cheers (perhaps) if the society also has a reform agenda and aims to shape policy through research evidence. But that third cheer has to be qualified by results.

The Regional Studies Association was born out of a critique of the postwar welfare consensus. At a time of national aggregate growth and Keynesian economic management, Regional Studies Association members were an awkward squad raising overlooked questions about territorial distribution, spatial externalities, agglomeration economies and uneven development. They wanted planning at real-world scale that was larger than the planning units of local government, smaller (and more cross-cutting) than the sectoral targets of the National Plan.

This pamphlet is drawn from a recent book by the historian James Hopkins, and skillfully compiled with the assistance of Matthew Steele. Hopkins' book shows the Regional Studies Association to be a child of its time, created for the challenges of Britain in the mid-1960s. As the world changed, so did the Association. It responded to the shifting challenges of de-industrialisation, European integration, neo-Liberalism, globalisation, boom and bust. It demonstrated how the Association was able to stay in good health through successive initiatives for membership, branches, publications, networks, conferences and knowledge transfer. All of this is underpinned with the parallel story told from a history-of-ideas perspective about 'regional studies'. Despite initial doubts, this invertebrate, soft-shell concept has successfully fashioned an ecological niche for itself between statistical geography, public policy, Isardian regional science, trade theory, territorial politics, Marxian political economy, New Economic Geography and New Urban Economics.

A celebratory leaflet isn't the place for epistemological musings, enough to say that the paradigms of mainstream social science still struggle to recognise and make sense of territorial difference, leaving a lacuna to be filled. The regional level is still as critically relevant and practically useful in today's neo-liberal environment as it was fifty years ago in the heyday of public sector planning. Small wonder the Association now finds itself promoting its product in China and Brazil.

The seed of our anniversary project was planted by late and much lamented Professor Derek Diamond in an after-lunch speech at the House of Commons on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2006. He recalled the personalities of the early days, the challenges faced by that pioneer generation of Young Turks, their 'diversity and multi-hattedness', and the surprising success of their apparently imprecise topic of 'regional studies'. It was a fascinating glimpse into the collective memory of the Association. Subsequent conversations, over several years, returned to the potential for a commissioned institutional history, given the availability of a complete run of Association archives, and the potential, while it lasted, to tap the direct recollections of early-years participants.

Thanks to Derek's persistence and that of Sally Hardy, we successfully bid for an ESRC PhD CASE award, a collaboration between the University of Manchester and the Regional Studies Association. The candidate selected to undertake the research was James Hopkins, a history graduate of the University of Nottingham previously tutored, felicitously, by Professor Helen Meller - biographer of the founding father of British regional studies, Sir Patrick Geddes. The Association proved doubly interesting, both from the viewpoint of regionalism and as a case-study of what turned out to be a neglected institutional topic, the learned society.

Fifty years on from the foundation of the Association, the main cause of celebration is organisational. It is an exemplary demonstration of how a learned society can bring researchers together and sustain an intellectual community through event-management, publications and networking.

Perhaps the one great failure is on the home front. Fifty years on from its foundation, the Association's original vision of practical regionalism in the United Kingdom seems remoter than ever. That is why we are celebrating fifty years with two and a half cheers. But the Association knows it well. The publication in March 2015 of a pre-election manifesto, *Spatially Rebalancing the UK Economy: The Need for a New Policy Model* by Ron Martin, Andy Pike, Pete Tyler and Ben Gardiner, sets out the challenge with its call for radical reform of the national political economy to rebalance the scales towards the nations and regions outside London.

It is a challenge to the electorate, and political elites, but it is also a direct challenge to the Association to provide intellectual leadership. An agenda as urgent as ever for the decades ahead.

**Michael Hebbert, Bartlett School of Planning, UCL**

# Formation of the Association



## Introduction

The Regional Studies Association was founded in the crucible of intense academic and policy interest in the region in Britain during the 1960s. Its manifestation as an organisation that straddled the academic-policy divide reflected its founding context, though its formation was contested as two distinct approaches sought supremacy for their own vision of the organisation's focus and the development of research on 'the region'.

## The regional problem

In Britain, the 'regional problem' had been recognised in interwar studies, and the Industrial Transfer Act (1928) and the Special Areas Act (1934) had attempted to deal with some of the problems. However, no formal structure existed for regional co-ordination, thus it was reliant upon bottom up, ad-hoc arrangements between local authorities; only during the Second World War were standard regions delineated by Whitehall for wartime administration.

It was the Barlow Report (1940) that first comprehensively acknowledged the regional economic problem and recommended interventionist solutions. A final act of the wartime coalition government was to implement some of Barlow's proposals under the 1945 Distribution of Industry Act. After the war, Labour actively used the 1945 Act and the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act to regenerate depressed regions through population and industrial redistribution.

During the 1950s, however, regional planning became stuck in a system designed in the 1940s and entered a low ebb. The Conservative government from 1951 reaped the benefits of Labour's employment creation policies, and the problems faced by the depressed areas

were temporarily disguised by relatively high employment and lower regional economic imbalances. As a result, the Conservatives were ambivalent about regional policy: they neither utilised the powers available to them to full effect, nor did they explicitly abandon them. Rather they downgraded the policies so that expenditure shrank by almost fifty per cent during the first eight years of the Conservatives versus the last three of Labour. Regional policy seemed to have made little impact on central government thinking and many protagonists feared for its future.

## Britain and the region in the 1960s

By the 1960s, the political, economic and academic context of Britain was ripe for the creation of a new association, one which would focus on understanding and promoting the regional spatial scale.

The re-emergence of the long acknowledged economic disparities between the prosperous south east of England and industrially declining areas in northern England, Scotland and Wales threw renewed spotlight on Britain's 'regional problem'. Harold Wilson's Labour party took up the cause with gusto after their 1964 election

victory, and sought to address economic and social imbalances through rational, systematically evaluated regional policies. The idea of tackling problems in specific regions through policy was not new, however.

## The quantitative turn

During the 1950s, four schools of geography in the United States had demonstrated how productive the frontiers between economics and geography could be: by applying the rigorous mathematical and statistical principles of economics to geographical problems allowed innovative work on topics such as population movement, productivity, and optimum location. To its advocates in Britain, the new methods seemed to allow a new understanding of regions, and the associated theories the potential to create rational and scientific solutions. But others opposed the new approaches, arguing that complex social, economic, spatial and political interactions were reduced to data, and abstract theories used to understand problems and arrive at solutions.

The debate caused an identity crisis concerning whether geography should continue with its traditional core of description and synthesis, or consider itself as a systematic theory-building discipline pursuing a search for laws of location and spatial-order. However, because the new quantitative methods offered methodological sophistication and rational solutions, planners, geographers and policy-makers readily adopted them.

Concurrently, Wilson's government was attracted to the power of 'science' and willing to pursue a more extensive regional agenda; for academics, this was an opportunity to use their expertise to influence policy. However, there was no effective mechanism through which regional researchers, practitioners and policy could exchange knowledge and debate ideas.

## The Regional Science Association

In 1954, the Regional Science Association was established in the USA by Walter Isard, a young and determined economist who had been at

the forefront of developing the new methods and quantitative approaches to questions of space. Out of these approaches he developed a new field, regional science, which the Regional Science Association was established to promote. However, regional science was not without its critics. Some argued that regional questions were addressed as grist for highly theorised mathematical models, and that practical solutions were more of a by-product than a key focus.

Nonetheless, Isard was determined to expand the Regional Science Association and, throughout the 1960s, successfully established sections around the world. As part of this endeavour, Isard began trying to establish a British section from 1961 and he succeeded in attracting several British academics and practitioners. A meeting was arranged for 11<sup>th</sup> July 1964 at the London School of Economics, to form the new section, but Isard's plan did not come to fruition.

## British Group of the International Centre for Regional Planning and Development

Concurrent with the development of the Regional Science Association in the USA, a new British organisation focussing on regional issues developed. On 28th September 1955 a conference held at Bedford College resolved to establish the International Centre for Regional Planning and Development as a pan-European body for research and education on regional issues. A British Group of the organisation was later formed with membership including influential figures such as Sir Patrick Abercrombie, Sir Dudley Stamp, Otto Koenigberger, Percy Johnson-Marshall, Robert Gardner-Medwin and Robert Grieve.

The British Group's underlying principles originated from the work of C.B. Fawcett and Patrick Geddes in employing empirical approaches to regional planning and physical development, and contrasted with the quantitative methods and theories being developed and promoted through regional science. The older generation in this group had been trained in the tradition of the arts and crafts

movement and expressed their concepts with exceptional aesthetic quality. Abercrombie, who had joined the Group shortly before his death, exemplified their approach: his work, such as the Greater London Plan (1944), had been influenced through contact with Geddes, who understood the region as a unit for managing the factors which influenced lives.

Whilst the Group provided a means to connect a diverse range of academics, professionals and government representatives, by 1962 discussions had begun on the usefulness of its continuation. As they had failed to establish a permanent secretariat or publication, the Group did not have the vigour that was originally intended. Meanwhile, the International Centre in Brussels had become inactive. The Group established a sub-committee to discuss its future and it was agreed that whilst there existed a continued need for an organisation to develop knowledge on regional planning, they would either need to substantially reformulate the existing organisation or amalgamate with another.

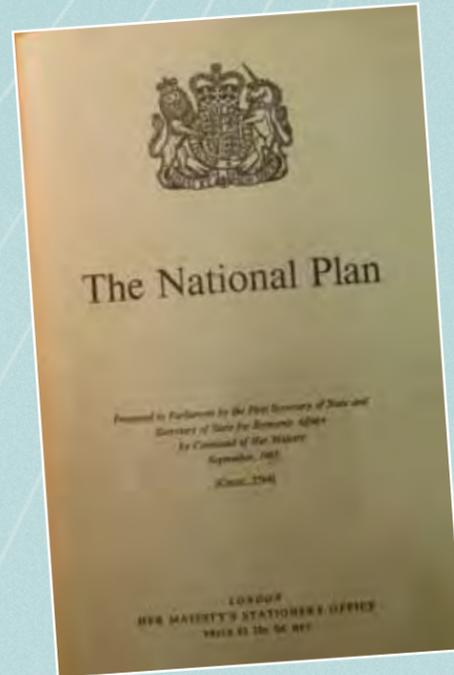


Fig. 1  
1965 National Plan



Fig. 2  
The North West:  
A Regional Study

## The 11<sup>th</sup> July Meeting

The meeting at the London School of Economics on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1964 was crucial in the formation of the Regional Studies Association. It brought together individuals intending to form a British section of the Regional Science Association, with members of the British Group who were in attendance to see whether they might be able to amalgamate with the proposed new organisation. Whilst the attendees from the British Group shared the others' interest in regions, they did not wish to be restricted to the methods and approaches of regional science. They argued for a broader approach, bringing insights from multiple fields and disciplines, something which the Regional Science Association did not seem to offer. A steering group was formed and, after lengthy discussions, it was agreed that a new organisation, independent of the Regional Science Association, should be formed which would be intellectually inclusive and, given the British political context, maintain a strong focus on policy. To reflect its different approach, the name 'Regional Studies Association' was chosen and the new organisation was formally constituted at an inaugural meeting on 9 April 1965.

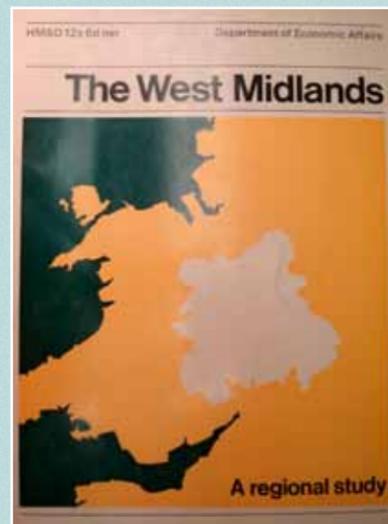


Fig. 3  
The West Midlands:  
A Regional Study

# Establishing the Association, 1965-1979

The 1960s witnessed an intellectual transition in the approach to regional policy and planning as the social sciences were increasingly being employed to understand and address regional problems. At its formation, in 1965, the Association provided a snapshot of this transition.

The Association started a new conversation about regional research, whilst promoting an outlook which cohered with the policies of Harold Wilson's Labour government: at this time, the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) was busy establishing regional planning through the Regional Economic Planning Councils (REPC) and Boards (REPB). These bodies were responsible for producing economic development plans to fit in with the 1965 National Plan - the UK's attempt to create a system of regional economic planning.

Although these plans were abandoned in 1966 as severe economic difficulties took hold, other regional policies were introduced to maximise economic efficiencies whilst ensuring greater social equality; standard regions, for example, allowed for greater co-ordination between the various government departments.

During this period, expenditure on regional aid increased significantly such that the UK's regional economic expenditure was the highest in Europe. With the main political parties committed to extending regional planning, the time was ripe for the Association to consider how regional research could better influence policy.

## The early years, 1965-1970

The experience of the British Group had shown that networking alone was insufficient to make a significant and long-term impact. At its formation, the Association had 170 individual

members, eight student members and nine corporate members, with membership being mostly concentrated in London, the South East, and Scotland.

To support their planned programme of activities, the Association needed to quickly establish a secure income stream. The Steering Committee set about obtaining grants from trusts and foundations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Further, Mrs. Gloria Frankel was appointed to form a permanent secretariat, and a London office was briefly established at 10 Stanhope Gate before operations moved to Newcombe House in 1968.



Fig. 4  
Gloria Frankel

## Conferences and events, 1965-1970

In the early years, conferences and meetings, promoted through high profile advertisements in *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and *The Times* newspapers, were one of the chief means of knowledge exchange and dissemination. The Association had to demonstrate the value of its interdisciplinary approach, and attract influential figures from both the academic and policy world to these events. In this respect, the influence and connections of the Association's

Executive Committee members proved to be a valuable asset. The first conference, held on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1965, succeeded in bringing together a mix of academics from varied disciplines along with those from policy and practice; Peter Self, of the London School of Economics, presented his assessment of 'Regional Planning in Britain' which was later published in the first volume of *Regional Studies*.

Conferences quickly became a space of interaction for influence: local authority officials and academics attended because they represented an opportunity to meet central government figures.

By the late 1960s, the Association's efforts to be acknowledged as a body of learned and practiced opinion had paid dividends with the organisation being actively sought out by government consultations and advisory panels.

### Establishing regional planning courses, 1965-1970

One of the earliest concerns of the Association was that contemporary educational provision for planners did not reflect the growth in regional planning activity: planning courses in the 1960s were heavily focussed on the aesthetic and physical principles of town and country planning. As such, Association members began to introduce regional planning courses aimed at providing students with the kind of skills required

by government. One example is the Urban & Regional Planning Studies Programme at the London School of Economics which is still being taught to this day. Promoted by Association members Peter Hall, Emrys Jones and Peter Self, this interdisciplinary initiative was soon followed with the establishment of regional planning courses at the universities Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sussex, Newcastle, and Manchester.

### Branches, 1965-1970

The ability of the Association's branches to replicate an interdisciplinary approach on a regional scale was particularly important for members living outside London. Given that aspects of the 1965 National Plan were delivered on a regional basis, the Executive Committee considered it crucial for members to organise into regional groups, and bring together academics and practitioners to discuss regional economic development.

Accordingly, branches were established in London, Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West England, West Midlands, East Midlands, Sussex, East Anglia, and South West England. These quickly became the foundations of the Association's activities, and provided a link between the practice and policy communities and those in the university sector.



Fig. 6 – UK geographic spread of branches

Fig. 5 London School of Economics of Economics Planning Course

## Regional and Urban Planning Course

**One year course**

A one year course is now offered by the London School of Economics and Political Science for the London degree of MSc in Regional and Urban Planning Studies.

The course, which lasts one calendar year, (October-September), is based on three terms of intensive teaching – mainly in seminars and class discussions – followed by a written examination, and on an individual or group project produced in the summer vacation under guidance from teaching members of the staff.

The course was introduced in the belief that the growth of economic regional planning, and the development of sub-regional land use planning, had created the need for a new type of planning education, based on the specialist knowledge in the social sciences available at the London School of Economics.

The courses for the degree are offered by three departments whose staff offer a unique range of special interests related to regional planning studies:

Economics	Professor Alan Day
Geography	Dr Bernard Gony
	Dr Peter Hall
	Professor Emrys Jones
Government	Professor Peter Self
	Dr. George Jones
	Mr. David Regan

**Structure of course**

The basis of the degree will be a series of courses:

1. A course in the Economics of planning will deal with such topics as inter-regional economic relationships, transport economics, cost benefit analysis, the urban land market, economic aspects of urban structure and elements of demographic analysis.
2. Administration and planning will consider the history of planning, present day planning administration, the politics of the planning process, the relations of planning to housing and social policies, and theories of the purpose and character of urban and regional planning.
3. Geography and planning will include the concept of the region, methods of survey and analysis, land use and classification, location of economic activity, central place theory and its application, and urban forms and functions.

In these courses, instruction will take the form of a variety of lectures, classes and seminars.

The degree is designed as an intensive one-year full-time degree course with a full programme of reading and classes. Normally only full-time students will be accepted for the course. Occasionally part-time students whose working hours permit them to attend courses in the day-time may be admitted, but would have to take two years over the course.

**Further information and application forms from The Secretary London School of Economics and Political Science Houghton Street, London WC2, England**

**Entry qualifications**

A good First or Second Class Honours degree in relevant subjects will normally be expected from all applicants.

The courses will make use of mathematical and statistical techniques, and all applicants will have to provide evidence of having reached a satisfactory standard in mathematics and statistics before they are examined. Therefore at least 'O' level mathematics will be required. Candidates who have not taken economics as a special subject in their first degree will be required to do intensive preliminary reading in the summer between their acceptance and their admission to the course; reading lists will be supplied on admission. Candidates who do not have the necessary qualifications may be admitted on condition that they take two years over the programme.

**Grant**

It is hoped that the course will be recognised for grant purposes by the Social Science Research Council. Candidates cannot apply direct to the SSRC, but have to be put in for an award by the School.

**Applications**

The closing date for the receipt of applications is 1st March for the following October. Candidates taking their final examinations in the summer following March should apply by this date. Acceptance will of course have to be provisional and subject to examination results.

### Regional Studies, 1967-1970

One of the first goals of the Steering Committee was to establish a quality, peer-reviewed publication to disseminate regional research. Following successful negotiations with Pergamon Press, *Regional Studies* was launched in May 1967 under the editorship of Peter Hall - a major landmark in the Association's development as a learned society.

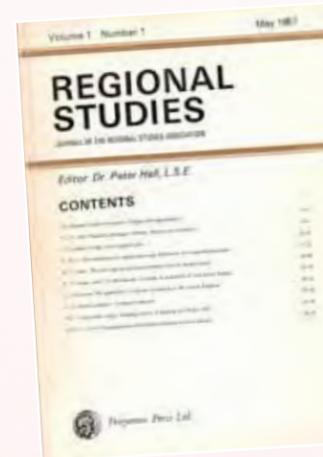


Fig. 7 Cover of first issue of Regional Studies

Whilst *Regional Studies* sought to promote regional research by publishing across conventional disciplinary boundaries, initially Hall struggled to find contributions.

Appeals were made at conferences and in the Association's newsletter for articles, and, soon, the journal became a means of recruitment:

*"[I]t's difficult to recall now how primitive was the state of underlying academic theory and its practical application to urban and regional planning ... I can remember I virtually had to find some papers and shove them in"*  
 – Professor Sir Peter Hall

by demonstrating an interdisciplinary range of articles on regional topics and connecting them to names such as Peter Hall, Gunter Hirsch and Nathaniel Lichfield, the journal convinced postgraduate students and early career academics that this was an organisation worth joining.

Alongside the journal, the Association used its newsletter to provide policy related information in a way an academic journal could not. Published six-weekly, the newsletter provided information

on events, study groups and conferences, and published bibliographies of reading material on the new regional planning machinery.

### Changing policy environment

By late 1969, regional economic planning had dwindled; the closure of the DEA in October 1969 signalled the end of Britain's short-lived flirtation with state planning with a regional element. Despite this, by the 1970s central and local government was better stocked with regionally informed professional planning staff. In future, regional plans were prepared in a tripartite arrangement between central government, the REPCs and local government.

As the Association adapted to this changing environment, it proclaimed a continued need for its work when, in 1973, Britain entered the European Economic Community (EEC).



Fig. 8 Harold Wilson

However, with the return to power of Wilson's Labour party in 1974, a range of institutional innovations, such as the National Enterprise Board, were introduced as the national economy was reconfigured. The result was a 60% reduction in regional policy expenditure between 1975 and 1980. Regional plans and studies continued to be produced, but their recommendations did not receive the same commitment from the government.

### Consolidation difficulties

As the enthusiasm for regional economic planning faded in the 1970s, so too did hopes for an increase in membership. Despite a vibrant programme of activities, the Association was struggling to be financially independent, which led to sombre discussions regarding its future.

As if the situation could not become worse, the Association lost two of its stalwarts: Gloria



Fig. 9 Membership 1966-1980

	UK (%)	North America (%)	Australasia (%)	Europe (%)	Asia (%)	South America (%)	Africa (%)
1967	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1968	70.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1969	94.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	0.0
1970	71.1	21.1	5.3	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
1971	85.2	13.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1972	78.6	17.9	0.0	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
1973	84.4	9.4	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.1
1974	62.5	20.8	10.4	4.2	2.1	0.0	0.0
1975	75.0	20.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1976	60.2	22.9	2.4	9.6	2.4	0.0	2.4
1977	70.2	17.5	5.3	7.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1978	69.1	17.4	6.1	7.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
1979	73.7	15.8	5.3	2.6	0.0	0.0	2.6
1980	53.1	29.7	9.4	6.3	0.0	1.6	0.0

Fig. 10 Geographical origins of authors 1967-1980

Frankel, whose 'boundless energy greatly contributed to the success of the Association', and Andrew Sharman, first honorary secretary of the Association, who had been at the core of the Association's operations since its inception.

By the mid-1970s, however, the Association was feeling slightly more confident. Having relocated its offices to 62 Chandos Place, London, the Association experimented with, and found, ways to make a financial surplus from its conference activities. By 1979, the worst of its financial problems seemed to have been overcome and, along with the success of the journal, the future seemed bright for the Association.

### Regional Studies, 1970-1980

Under Peter Hall's editorship, *Regional Studies* became a journal of significant standing in the field, and fulfilled a different, but complementary, role to the Association's meeting activities: it satisfied members' intellectual consideration of regional issues, whilst making them aware of emerging areas of research.

The Association's branch meetings were valued for their educational value and were firmly focused on local regional concerns. Conversely, the journal attracted international submissions from a diverse disciplinary community and an intellectual range that went deeper into theoretical debates.

Through this early internationalisation, the journal became popular with individuals who were more interested in the theoretical side of regional studies than the Association's meetings. Although some members argued that it was wrong to dedicate significant amounts of the publication to academics that were uninterested in the Association's other activities, the journal was so successful that the early 'trickle of papers became a river and then a flood'.

### Branches and meetings, 1970-1980

*"Over twelve years, Peter had created and sustained a journal of the highest academic standard, which is the basis of RSA's international reputation."*  
 – Geoffrey Cox, Hon. Secretary, 1975-1980

The international impact of the journal led to several attempts to form international branches, yet despite proposals being put forward in France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, and Canada, none came to fruition. Operating almost as independent

organisations, branches needed the same dedicated nurturing and energy to sustain them as the central organisation. The first truly non-UK branch was eventually established in the Republic of Ireland in 1975.

Europe became a target area for the Association to expand its activities and, in February 1979, it formed the European Regional Research Network (ERRN) to 'establish a formal or informal European group of organisations with an interest in the field of European regional research'.

One of the network's first activities was the production of a register, listing individuals across Europe with an interest in European regional research. This was swiftly followed by a conference on 'The financing of Regional Development in the EEC' in Dublin, June 1979, and began the process of establishing the Association in European affairs.

### Maintaining engagement in a changing policy environment, 1970-1980

As the Association attempted to link theory and practice in regional policy and planning, a

common discussion held was whether it should, or could, exert policy influence. To a degree, the extent to which the Association could seek political influence was resolved when, in 1969, it became a registered charity: under the Charities Act (1960) it could not overtly lobby. However, members continued to press the Association to use its activities for influence, leading the Executive Committee to agree that the Association could make public statements, but should avoid becoming a 'pressure-group for particular strategic and political interpretations of regional planning'. Instead, the Association continued to provide a forum for non-partisan consideration of government consultations and policies.

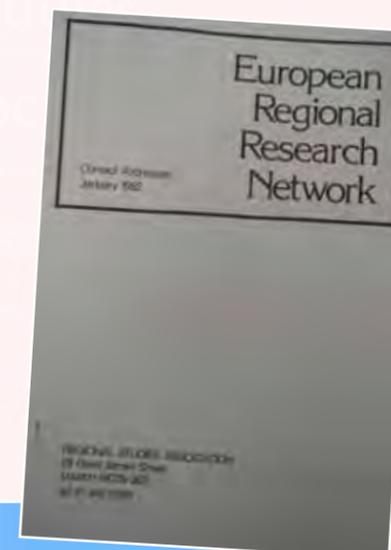


Fig. 11 ERRN Register



Fig. 12 Dublin 1979 conference: 'The financing of Regional Development in the EEC'

# Fundamental change: Neo-liberalism and European expansion, 1980-1996



Fig. 13  
1979 General  
Election:  
Margaret  
Thatcher wins

At the close of the 1970s, the Association's conference entitled 'The Death of Regional Policy' held in Glasgow seemed prophetic. Shortly afterwards, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative administration won the 1979 general election and regional economic planning was challenged like never before as power was drawn to the centre.

## The advent of neo-liberalism

By the late 1970s, the stated interventionism that had dominated regional policy for the past two decades began to decline. Thatcher, and the neo-

liberal right, argued that intervention was slowing wealth creation, stifling enterprise, and exacerbating unemployment; the surviving vestiges of regional economic planning, built up since the early 1960s, were swept aside and regional aid was dramatically cut. These developments presented a very real challenge for the Association. As one member recalled:

Realising that it was essential to keep the regional debate alive, the Association galvanised itself for a struggle.

"...when Thatcher got in, these were very dark hours...there was a very definite assault on the whole idea of planning."  
– RSA Member in the 1980s

## The Association fights back

In response to the Conservative party's approach to regional policy, and coinciding with the relocation of its offices to Great James Street, London, the Association began a sustained period of advocacy in the belief that it was their responsibility to draw together the expertise of the membership in order to challenge the government.

In early 1982, the Association convened a panel of experts to examine the changing regional problem. The resulting *Inquiry into Regional Problems in the United Kingdom* re-imagined what regional intervention should look like in the

"It seems that, like religion, the more regional planning is persecuted, the stronger it bounces back and makes its presence felt."  
– Peter M. Townroe,  
Chairman in Newsletter No. 138,  
September 1985

face of government antipathy, competing inner urban problems, and an economic recovery that would favour some parts of the country more than others.

Alongside the Inquiry, the Association also attempted to influence policy: for example, a formal response to the Department of the Environment's consultation paper *The Future of Development Plans* expressed concern at the devaluation of strategic planning.

This was seen as evidence of the Association fighting back against a political environment which challenged its key interests. As the then Chairman Peter M. Townroe noted:

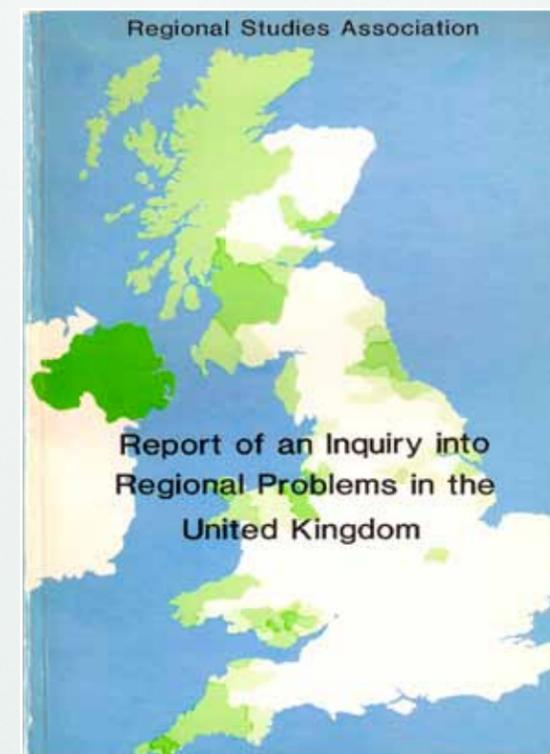


Fig. 14  
*Inquiry into Regional Problems in the United Kingdom* (1983)

## Activities in the 1980s

Despite the less-than hospitable policy environment, the Association's conference programme continued strongly. As in previous years, much of the Association's activity during the 1980s was through the regional branches which continued to provide a forum for academics and practitioners to meet and discuss research and policy.

The branches in Scotland and Wales proved effective at building relationships with government agencies such as the Highland

and Island Development Board and the Mid-Wales Development Corporation; The Republic of Ireland branch presented to the Dáil (Irish Parliament) on economic matters; and during the early 1980s, the West Midlands branch helped the Labour party formulate its strategy for the devolution of powers to the nations and regions of the UK.

## Regional Studies during the 1980s

After Peter Hall, the editorship of *Regional Studies* was passed on to John B. Goddard and, owing to printing and distribution delays, the journal moved to another publisher. Cambridge University Press began publishing *Regional Studies* in 1982 and the benefits were immediately apparent: it was published on time, with an improved appearance and a commitment to promoting the journal in North America.

Under the new contract, the Association became the proprietor of the journal; this allowed it to put the journal out to tender and benefit from more lucrative contracts. The decision to change publisher and take ownership was fundamental to the Association's financial future and allowed it to expand activities.

*Regional Studies* continued to be a site of intellectual conflict, with certain members complaining that the journal was too abstract and analytical, and not concerned enough with a problem-solving approach to real places. Some criticisms were heeded and changes were made to make the journal more representative including, for example, the appointment of a North American Associate-Editor and the introduction of a 'Policy Review' section in 1982 which published short articles examining policy responses to major regional issues.



Fig. 15  
Extract of 'Policy Review' section

### The changing secretariat

As the founding members had anticipated, a permanent secretariat proved vital in maintaining the vitality of the Association through changing circumstances, whilst running the journal, a newsletter, and organising multiple conferences.

In December 1986, the Association appointed a youthful graduate, Sally Hardy (née Parkinson), to the role of Executive Secretary. From her arrival, Hardy's impact was noticeable as she combined a civil-service style of management with a desire for the Association to become more ambitious and efficient. The new Executive Secretary invested considerable time and effort into developing the Association's administration and increasingly adopted the managerial and strategic functions that had previously been the preserve of the Executive Committee. Accordingly in 1989, coinciding with the Association's move to more spacious offices in Micawber Street, London, the post was re-titled as 'Director'.



Fig. 16  
Sally Hardy (née Parkinson)

### Reflections

Thatcher's opposition to regional planning policy continued throughout the 1980s, dividing the nation and provoking social upheavals such as the inner city riots of 1981 and miners' strikes in 1984. From 1984, however, the economy began to recover and unemployment levels

began to fall. Yet the wealth being generated was distributed with gross disparities, and the annual expenditure on regional assistance was significantly reduced.

In order to develop depressed areas, Thatcher's government utilised two mechanisms - Enterprise Zones and Urban Development Corporations. Enterprise Zones aimed to assist depressed urban areas with a simplified planning structure and beneficial fiscal rules. Urban Development Corporations were more authoritarian: funded by central government, they by-passed local planners and aimed at the redevelopment of particular problem areas. These policies directly implemented free market entrepreneurialism, and required local authorities to compete for limited public funds.

Towards the late 1980s, members could see both positive and negative signs for regions: there seemed to be some good news for the depressed regions with signs of increased economic activity, but there remained a strong North/South divide. With opposition politicians canvassing for new policy ideas, the Association decided to take the initiative and reconvened its Inquiry in to the UK's regional problems. Its findings were published in 1992 as *Regional Development in the 1990s: The British Isles in Transition*.

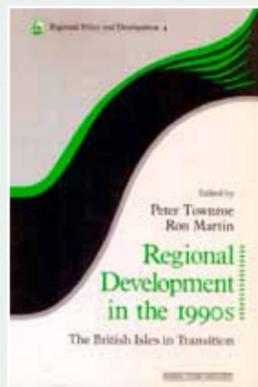
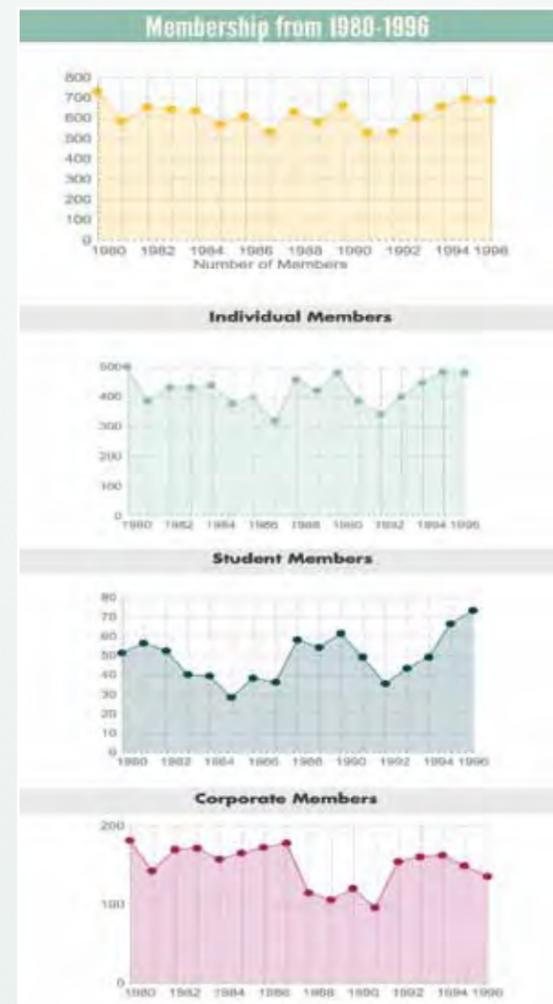


Fig. 17  
*Regional Development in the 1990s: The British Isles in Transition* (1992)

### Reformulation?

Years of government apathy towards regional planning took its toll on the Association and its members. Ostensibly, its activities continued unchanged, but activism on an associational level seemed to be weakening and, by 1991, membership had tumbled to its lowest figure since 1966. Yet, the development of the European Regional Development Fund, political regionalism in Europe, and the impact of the UK's deindustrialisation, all demonstrated that regional studies was as relevant as before.

Fig.18  
Membership 1980-1996



This led to serious questions being asked of the Association's future, and a sustained period of review of its activities followed.

Consideration was given to several different options: reformulating and re-launching the Association under the name 'Institute of Regional Studies' to give it a more powerful image; splitting the organisation into a charity and consultancy company; or becoming a pan-European research organisation. Ultimately, the Executive Committee adopted a policy of incremental change based on the traditional strengths of its publications and meetings rather than revolutionary change.

Interest in regional ideas improved modestly in the early to mid-1990s, triggered by two factors. First, was a growing interest in the region across Europe. Second, the view of regional policy changed. Two years after John

Major's Conservative government had won the 1992 General Election, Government Offices for the English Regions were introduced and there was renewed use of regional forums by local authorities.

A subsequent White Paper, *Regional Industrial Policy* (1995), was seen as a turning point in the government's recognition that co-ordination of regional economic development and spatial planning was necessary, even if its aim was to further national economic productivity rather than simply support regional concerns. The Association began to strike a more positive note as it could once again claim relevance. However, the spirited activism and *esprit de corps* seemed to have become less purposeful.



Fig. 19  
1992 General Election: John Major wins

This was most visible after the Labour party adopted a firm commitment to devolution in its 1992 manifesto: it was left to individual members to assist the party in the development of its regional policy. For those that had worked through the Association to keep regional policy discussions alive through the 1980s, this was indicative of an organisation that wished to be less assertive in actively arguing to regionalism and shaping policy. The primary reason that the Association did not seem to be as focussed on UK policy was that its horizons had broadened, and its gaze was being drawn towards European expansion.

### Europeanisation

Prior to the 1960s, many European states had a unitary political system but thereafter political regionalism had reshaped the territorial structure of Europe so that, by the end of the century, the centralised state was in retreat.

As regional economic policy was being scaled back in the UK, simultaneously it had become an increasingly important feature of the European Community.

Whilst many members perceived the Europeanisation of the Association to be a bold new step, in truth it was always part of its heritage: the British Group had been an element of the pan-European International Centre for Regional Planning and Development, whilst the Association's activities had maintained a distinctly international flavour: the first formally organised international activity was the European Regional Research Network which, having begun in 1978, later merged with the European Urban and Regional Planning Study Group to form the European Urban and Regional Research Network (ERRN).

Several reasons lay behind the Association's desire to expand into Europe. Firstly, membership was at an all-time low; historically, it had always been vulnerable to fluctuations in UK regional policy, and Europe was seen as a way of establishing a more stable membership base. Secondly, a pan-European learned society that could connect scholars, practitioners and policy makers on regional issues did not exist and the Association believed it could create a European network of knowledge exchange and debate on the growing significance of European regional policy. Thirdly, it provided the potential for members to access European Commission research funding. And finally, British scholars were increasingly looking to mainland Europe as a centre of academic work.

The ERRN, having already built a network that cut across disciplines, distance and language, provided the Association with a firm footing from which it could expand its activities. Europeanisation advanced quickly: an East European Section began in 1992; a conference was arranged in Gothenburg in 1995; and greater contact was sought by the Executive Committee with the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy.

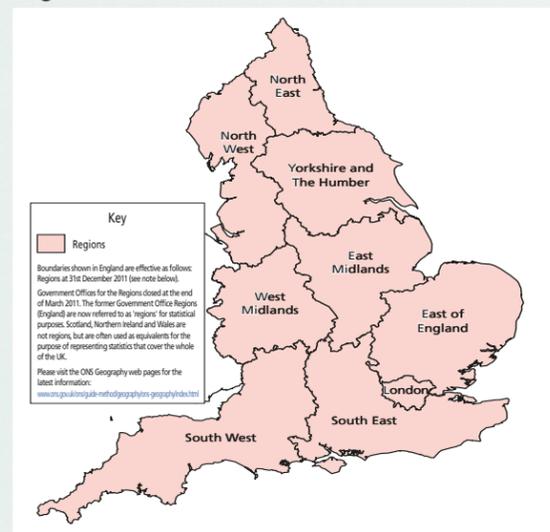
### Activities in the 1990s

The need to protect and develop the Association's income streams had been a key feature of the review and reformulation of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1995, partly inspired by changes to the Charities Act (1993), the Association re-evaluated its constitution

Fig. 20  
Regional Branches in the 1990s



Fig. 21  
Boundaries of the Government Offices for the English Reform



and made changes that were designed to put management decisions firmly in the remit of the Executive Committee.

Such reformulation did not stop the decline of its branches, however, and by the end of the decade most were inactive, never to be resurrected. The need for branches to link individuals on a regional basis had become redundant as institutions, such as the universities, began to organise events on regional scale.

Increasingly, the Association's activities focused on conferences and meetings organised on a national or international scale, and these began to replace the branches as the main face-to-face networking activity.

### Regional Studies in the 1990s

In the 1990s, editorship of the journal changed hands several times and heralded by a further change in the cover design, it moved to a new publisher – namely, Carfax, a small, specialist journal publisher.

The number of issues increased to seven in 1992, eight in 1993, and nine issues in 1997. And to address concerns from members that policy was being underrepresented, from 1993 a section in each volume of the journal was dedicated to 'Debates and Reviews'. Like the 'Policy Review' section introduced in 1982, it allowed shorter papers to appear in a refereed journal. Further, its content was linked to the Newsletter which, in February 1993, was renamed *Regions*.



Fig. 22  
Regional Studies Journal as published by Carfax

Fig. 23  
Extract of 'Debates and Reviews' section

## Debates and Reviews: Editorial

MICHAEL W. DANSON  
*Department of Economics and Management, University of Paisley, Paisley PA1 2BE, UK*

---

At a time when the debate over the form and powers of the regions in the new Europe is intensifying; when regional conflicts within old nation states are reappearing in this and other continents; when the system of local government is being reorganized throughout Scotland, England and Wales with significant impacts on the formation and implementation of planning, business development and other strategic policy areas; when the map of Assisted Areas in the UK is being redrawn; and when we are asked to 'think globally, act locally' to promote sustainable development, it is obvious that the discipline of regional studies is very critical in our attempts to understand the political economy of communities at all levels. The

debates which are of interest should form, to a greater or lesser extent, the basis for all papers. This does not preclude contributors from introducing their own arguments, of course; in fact we would wish to encourage the inclusion of rigorous but provocative pieces. Improving communications amongst those involved in regional studies is a major objective of *Debates and Reviews*.

Papers for submission should follow the same format as for the journal, with contributions normally 2,000–4,000 words. Further details will be sent on request. Final copy date will be in May each year, suggesting a first draft in February/March. Any further information or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the editor.

# A member-services association, 1997-2015

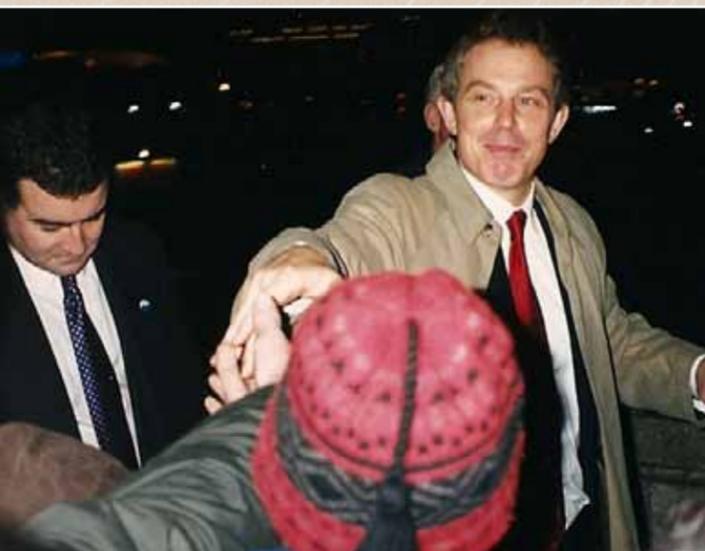


Fig. 24  
1997 General Election: Tony Blair wins

## New Labour to the Coalition Government

When Tony Blair's Labour government was elected with a landslide victory in 1997, regional policies were reinvigorated with proposals ranging from Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to political devolution. For members of the Association with a strong commitment to regionalism, this presented the greatest opportunity to inform UK policy with regional thinking since the 1960s. The Association had far more resources than before, and there was a renewed enthusiasm about what could be achieved.

Fig. 25  
The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)



The RDAs, developed with the significant involvement of Association members, were tasked with using strategically focussed resources to overcome regionally specific economic problems, and help generate economic success. Unlike earlier initiatives, such as the REDCs, the RDAs were able to draw assistance from the EU as well as the UK government.

During their time in opposition, Labour had become adherents to the principles of devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and having made firm commitments in the 1997 manifesto, Scotland was high on the agenda: Thatcher's Conservative administration had alienated public opinion in Scotland with its economic policy and, infamously, the Community Charge debacle.

Legislation for devolution was passed within a week of Labour winning the 1997 election, and the referendum returned a strong 74.3 per cent

'yes' vote. Devolution here, and in Wales and Northern Ireland, took the UK to a new level of decentralisation.

The regional policies of 1997-2010 brought much needed co-operation between national and local government, and made significant inroads to addressing social and economic problems in particular areas. However, despite annual national economic growth of around 2.9 per cent between 1997 and 2007, the wealth was not distributed evenly and the disparity between the North and South was accentuated: national policy often counteracted regional policy.

The 2010 general election returned a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government whose preference for informal development arrangements was formalised in the Localism Act (2011). Regional Development Agencies were replaced with Local Enterprise Partnerships as 'joint local authority-business bodies brought forward...to promote local economic development'. Regional Spatial Strategies were abolished, and decision-making powers on housing and planning were returned to local councils. It seemed like the use of the regional scale had returned to the same lowly status it had held in the early 1980s.

## Activities: development and internationalisation

As the new century dawned, the Association made a significant change to its structure by becoming a company limited by guarantee. This move was motivated by concerns that the Executive Committee, as charitable trustees, were personally liable should any financial losses incurred. That this issue came to the fore at this moment was no coincidence: in 1996 the Executive Committee had been threatened with libel action concerning a paper that had been accepted for publication in *Regional Studies*. At a Special General Meeting in December 2000, a resolution was passed to dissolve the unincorporated charity and reform as a charitable company. The new entity came into being on 1 January 2001 and the Association's assets were transferred. The Director gained the title of Chief Executive and the Executive

Committee became the company's Board. At this time, the Association's office moved from London to the South Coast seaside town of Seaford. The staff team had grown from one member in its early days to seven full time staff at the Association's headquarters, with an additional five staff working remotely on the journals, by 2015.

Following its period of reflection and reformulation in the early 1990s, the Association continued to plan its development strategically. The first formal development plan, which ran from 1996 to 2001, was subsequently replaced by another for 2002-2004 and a five-year plan from 2004. In general terms, these plans aimed at: an efficient management of the Association and financial prudence to ensure stability; the development of the Association as an international body by increasing membership; developing targeted activities for different membership groups and effective networking with organisations with which the Association might work productively.

In 2005, the Association reached its fortieth anniversary. The occasion was marked with a celebratory event at the House of Commons on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2006.

Fig. 26  
The Association's 40th Anniversary Celebration





Around an eighth of the membership was present to listen to speeches by the serving Chair, Les Budd, the Chief Executive, Sally Hardy, and former Chairs Peter Roberts and Derek Diamond. Later that year, the Association unanimously elected Professor Sir Peter Hall as its first President after an Extraordinary General Meeting.

Fig. 27  
Sally Hardy speaks at the 40th Anniversary Celebration



Fig. 28  
Professor Sir Peter Hall

### Membership and status

By 1997, the Association's trajectory towards internationalisation was firmly established; the ERRN was disbanded in 1998 and its work was incorporated into the Association's main activities. The Association also made concerted efforts to internationalise its Board; in April 2012, representation came from South Africa, Australia, Austria, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland, Singapore, Sweden, the USA and Wales.

By the end of 2012, membership had risen 51.7 per cent since 2007; crucially for the Association's long-term health, there was strong growth in student and early career categories. The factors behind this were four fold: first, the Association continued to recruit from a broader geographical area; second, territorial membership price bands based on GDP per capita were introduced along with an early career membership rate; third, the Association

increased its online presence through a new website, and social media sites; fourth, the Association made available a variety of grants and bursaries, such as waivers of conference fees and Early Career Research Grants.



Fig.29 Membership 1997-2015

At the beginning of 2009, the Association introduced the post-nominals 'MeRSA' (Member of the Regional Studies Association) for use by members. In 2010, a fellowship post-nominal 'FeRSA' was also introduced to provide a mechanism for recognition of five-or-more year's continuous membership and approved active participation. By the end of 2012, there were 103 FeRSA members.

### Conferences and events

From the mid-1990s, the Association's annual conference joined the journal in being truly

Frankfurt, Oder



Aix en Provence conference



Gothenburg



RSA Global Conference in Beijing, China 2012

Figs. 30-33  
Selection of various conference images 1995-2003

internationalised. This took the Association's main annual event to Gothenburg, Sweden (1995), Frankfurt/Oder, Germany (1997), and Aix-en-Provence, France (2000).The conference in Pisa, Italy (2003) attracted more delegates than any other event in the Association's history. Members felt that the large international conferences tangibly fulfilled the Association's objective of linking of disconnected parties and assisting in the development of new working collaborations.

In 2008 the Association held its inaugural President's Luncheon, hosted by Professor Sir Peter Hall, at the House of Commons. This free benefit to members became a regular feature with tickets issued on a 'first come, first serve' basis. The Association also introduced awards for Best Book, Best Paper in the Journals, and Contribution To The Field – the latter being first presented to Professor Sir Peter Hall.

In 2012, the scale of the Association's events changed as the International Conference was converted into a European Conference held in Delft, the Netherlands, with an additional event named the Global Conference held in Beijing,

Fig.34  
Professor Sir Peter Hall receives award for 'Contribution To The Field'





Fig. 35  
2012 European Conference held in Delft, the Netherlands



Fig. 38  
2014 Global Conference held in Fortaleza, Brazil



Fig. 36  
2012 Global Conference held in Beijing, China

Fig. 37  
2014 European Conference held in Izmir, Turkey



China. This format was replicated in 2013 with a European Conference in Tampere, Finland and a Global Conference in Los Angeles, USA. The most recent conferences were held in Izmir, Turkey and Fortaleza, Brazil (2014). The 2015 conferences are to be hosted by Piacenza, Italy and Hangzhou, China.

### Branches

Whilst regional branches within the UK continued to decline, by 2005 the Association had built a network of Country Representatives including: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Korea, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, and the USA.

By 2015 the Country Representatives had been renamed Ambassadors and were joined by Argentina, Australia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Estonia, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, and Switzerland.

The Association had also opened Territorial Sections in Hungary, Poland, Scotland, Ireland and Wales with Divisions (larger areas and multi-territory areas) in China, Latin America, NORSA (the Nordic Section of the Association



Ambassadors: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Singapore Slovakia, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the USA.

Fig. 39  
Distribution of Association Ambassadors



Fig. 40  
2013 UCLA Conference

incorporating Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), and Russia. In early 2012, the Association launched a North America project office at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); this resulted in a conference held at UCLA in December 2013.

Furthermore, in 2014, the Association opened its China Division with a launch event held at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In early 2015 the Chinese Project Office of the Association opened to support activity and build collaborations both between Chinese scholars working in regional studies and regional science within China and



Fig. 41  
2014 China Division launch event

with researchers in the rest of the world. In 2015 the Association will launch its Latin American Division at a conference to be held in June in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

### Regions

The newsletter *Regions*, which by now had developed into a glossy, magazine style publication, proved to be a useful asset with its shorter articles and emphasis on policy matters.

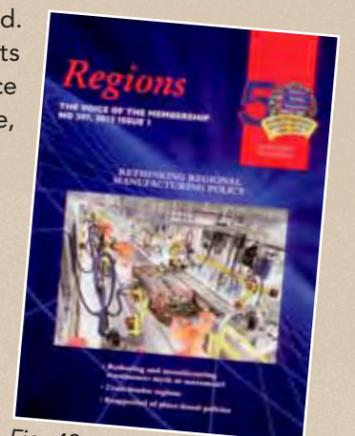


Fig. 42  
Cover of *Regions*



Fig. 43  
Cover of *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association*

Over the course of the late 1990s and 2000s, it featured reports on the RDAs, European regional policy, and news from individual branch areas. It also reviewed publications such as the Association’s 2001 *Labour’s new regional policy: An assessment*, and encouraged personal perspectives to provoke debate on topical policy issues. In 2006, it was re-titled *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association* and was given a new livery.

A new members’ magazine, initially known as the *Student Review*, but later renamed *Regional Insights*, was created in 2009. Focussed on publishing work by student and early career members, it was distributed to all members until 2014 when it was incorporated into the newly launched Gold Open Access journal *Regional Studies*, *Regional Science*. The editorial team remained unchanged offering students and early career researchers a mentored route into the journal with their article processing charge being supported by the Association.

### Regional Studies

Through the late 1990s and 2000s *Regional Studies* continued to disseminate knowledge, creating a repository of work and providing a stable income stream for the Association. The journal also experienced the most profound changes to its operation since it was created; a process made easier due to the relationship it had built up with its publisher. Whilst Carfax and its parent company Routledge were bought by Taylor and Francis in 1998, the Association’s key contacts remained the same.

During the 1990s and 2000s, *Regional Studies* faced two major changes in the publishing environment. The first was the shift from print-only copies of the journal to online publication in February 2000; concurrent with this move, the cover design for print copy was refreshed, and the new look adopted across the range of the Association’s activities. The second was the move towards open access, which offered the potential to radically alter the journal’s global reach.

In 2007, the fortieth anniversary of *Regional Studies* was marked with a special supplement containing the most important and influential articles published throughout the journal history. Owing to its long-term success, in 2012, production was increased from ten issues a year to twelve.

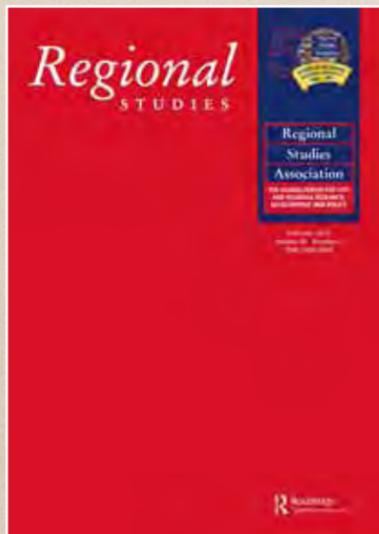
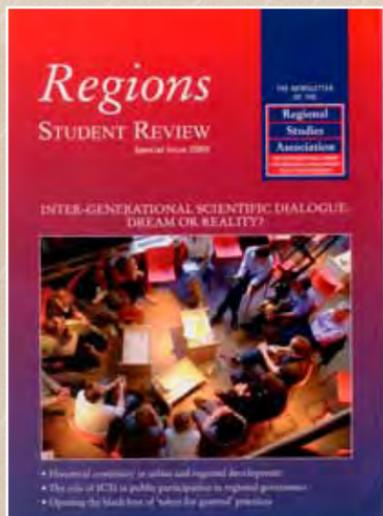
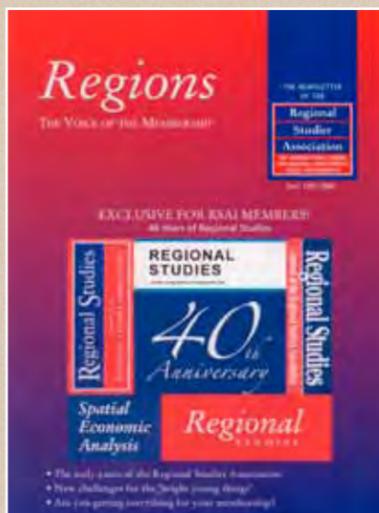


Fig. 46  
Cover of *Regional Studies* journal as published by Taylor and Francis

Fig. 47  
Front Cover of 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of *Regional Studies*



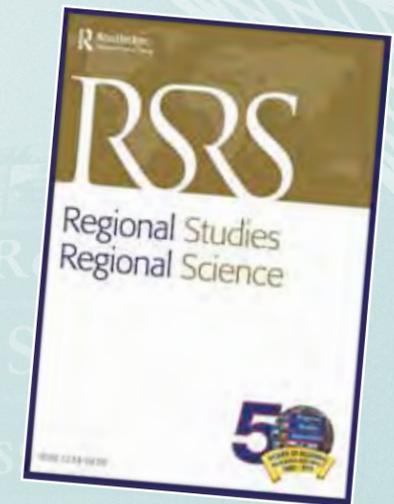
Figs. 44-45  
Covers of *Student Review* and *Regional Insights*



## Further Publications

### Spatial Economic Analysis

In 2006, the Association moved into a period of increased publishing activity with the launch its second journal, *Spatial Economic Analysis*. Now published quarterly, this journal is dedicated to the development of theory and methods in spatial economics and has had a Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) listing from inception.

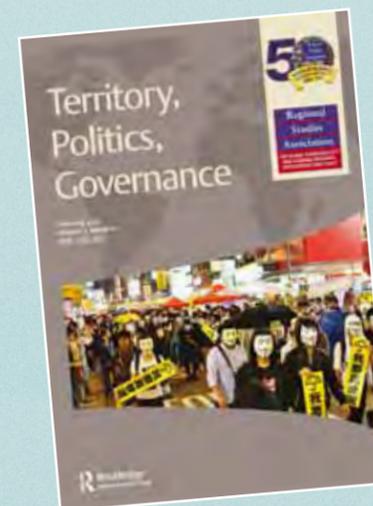


### Regional Studies, Regional Science

Responding to the global publications paradigm shift towards open access publishing, the Association launched *Regional Studies, Regional Science* in 2014. Adopting new practices such as refereeing using a panel approach, the journal includes both short and long articles that might be difficult to place in a conventional journal, and aims to attract both new researchers and researchers from non-traditional RSA territories to the Association.

### Territory, Politics, Governance

In 2013 *Territory, Politics, Governance* was launched. This title is committed to the development of theory and research in territorial politics and the governance of space, and draws together articles previously published elsewhere. With robust download figures and citations, it is expected to join the SSCI listing too.



### Area Development and Policy

This journal will launch in 2016 and will set out to examine the multi-scalar and geographically differentiated relationships between economic organisation, ways of life and work, and their context as they shape places and the relationships between them. Geographically it will concentrate on issues relating to emerging powers and economies in the global South and Eurasia. In launching this journal the Association seeks to offer an important publishing vehicle for its membership in all parts of the world.

## Looking to the future – serving the Membership

Following the 2008 financial crisis, the Association's Board reviewed and refreshed the membership benefits dipping resolutely into its reserves to assist its members as funding cuts took effect.

### Research Funding

Since 2008, three new grant schemes have been launched. The first offers Early Career Grants, whilst two new research schemes were added in 2015 for mid-career members (MeRSA) and established career members (FeRSA) in response to the fact that many larger funders had cut their small grants programmes.

The Association also revised its long running Research Networks Scheme for its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year raising the level of awards available. In 2014, the Association ended its Event Support Scheme, but continues to support its globally popular travel grant and conference bursary schemes.

### Going forward: research, policy and practice

The issue of how the Association should go about bridging the research, practice, and policy divide is a matter of continuing debate. By internationalising, the Association is no longer able to focus on influencing UK policy: the Association is unable to perform this role in every country and, with a membership drawn from across the globe, it would be inappropriate to dedicate a disproportionate amount effort on the UK. Nonetheless, bridging the research-policy divide is still highly valued, and the Association first replaced its focus on the UK with one on European policy.

To this end, Chief Executive Sally Hardy worked hard to align the objectives of the Association with the European Commission. It was as a result of these efforts that the European Commission came to view the Association as a stakeholder in their policy; trust, mutual understanding, and subtlety were crucial in building this opportunity.

The Association and the European Commission now work closely on regional issues: in 2009, the Association co-organised two seminars at the inaugural European Commission Open Days University and, in 2011, the Association jointly hosted a policy conference in Bled, Slovenia which attracted 100 invited academics and 56 invited participants from

the Member State Managing Authorities alongside 12 EU officials. This conference was followed up in early 2015 with an event in Riga, Latvia, which was attended by Director-General for Regional Policy, Walter Deffaa.

Outside of European regional policy, members have continued to use the Association to make themselves and their research known to the policy community. During 2008 the Association worked with HM Treasury and UK Government Chief Scientist to promote closer relationships



Fig. 51  
Chief Executive  
Sally Hardy

between academic and policy communities in order to improve decision-making and support government policy-making. Further, in 2012, it organised two policy events at the House of Commons – the first on High Speed Rail in conjunction with the Royal Geographical Society and the Academy of Social Sciences, and the second on the shift towards 'Localism' with the Smith Institute and from which the Association and Smith Institute published a monograph entitled 'Changing Gear'. Other joint Association and Smith Institute seminars and monographs have included 'Where Next For Local Enterprise Partnerships; (2013) and 'Joining the Dots – Making Healthcare Work Better For The Local Economy (2015).

The Association has sought to operate at a more widely international level through its working relationships with the OECD, United Nations and UN-Habitat, and is a recognised UN NGO. In 2014/15, the Association sent representative experts to both UN Habitat and UN meetings.

### Conclusion

Enthralled with present happenings, we should pause to reflect on why this journey was embarked upon and what the end goal was supposed to be. The Regional Studies Association has achieved much in its fifty-year history and, in many respects, has become a very successful learned society. A new field of enquiry has been established which has had a profound effect upon the way we conceive of the interaction between space, the economy and society. The knowledge generated has been disseminated around the globe and across the academic-practice divide, in particular through *Regional Studies* which has become one of the top journals in its field.

However, some ambitions of the Association's founders have not been realised. In part, this is because the world around the Association, not least the policy environment, has changed and led the Association to diversify its operations away from British policy impact and towards serving an increasingly global community of scholars and practitioners. The Association has morphed from a closely-knit British club seeking to combine knowledge production and dissemination with instrumental aspirations in 1965, to a global organisation focusing on delivering products and services to its members in 2015. As the Association celebrates its half-century, it can rightly take pride in the array of conferences, publications and events that it now offers. But it is also worthwhile reflecting on the spirit of activism in which the Association was formed and how the *esprit de corps* of those earlier years is just as necessary today as it was in 1965.

The world is changing rapidly and the relevance of the nation state in our globalising and connecting transnational world is being questioned as never before. The discussion on the appropriate scale to understand and enact policies for economies, societies and governance is arguably more relevant today than it was at the



Fig. 52  
2011  
Conference in  
Bled, Slovenia



Fig. 53  
2015  
Conference in  
Riga, Latvia

formation of the Association. Supranational governance and global corporations are challenging the hegemony that the nation state held during the twentieth century, and the indiscriminate centralised policy wielded by the nation state seems anachronistic especially as ideas of localism and community initiatives seek to bring economies and democracy to a more meaningful scale. The complexity of scale is perhaps why scholars and policy-makers alike have often turned back to the sub-national scale for an intermediate level that can combine the proximity relevant to the human individual with the scope needed to make a difference. Development and territorial politics remain salient topics.

The Association faces an exciting future. The region, it seems, has never held so much potential. With its global reach and resources, the Association could become a powerful champion for the region, able to draw on the intellects and influence of its members to make a real difference to economies and societies. The direction the Association takes in the next few years will be crucial to what type of organisation it becomes over the next fifty years.

# Appendices

## Regional Studies Association: A History Timeline

- 1955:** The International Centre for Regional Planning and Development (ICRPD) was formed.
- 1956:** The British Group of ICRPD became active.
- 1964:** A decision was taken to establish the Regional Studies Association, and a Steering Committee was formed.
- 1965:** The British Group of ICRPD was dissolved, and the inaugural meeting of the Association was held on 9<sup>th</sup> April. The first conference, entitled *Regional Planning in Britain*, followed on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1965.
- 1966:** The first issue of the Newsletter was sent to members, and a programme of five meetings took place in London. Regional branches were formed in Scotland, Yorkshire and Humberside, and East Anglia.
- 1967:** The *Regional Studies* journal was launched under the editorship of Peter Hall. A programme of seven meetings was held in London throughout the year under the banner of *Approaches to Regional Urban Form*.
- 1975:** The first truly non-UK branch was established in the Republic of Ireland.
- 1979:** The first international event was held in Dublin to discuss *Europe: Its Regions and Their Futures*. The European Regional Research Network (ERRN) was established to connect organisations with an interest in the field of European regional research.
- 1983:** *The Report of An Inquiry into Regional Problems in the United Kingdom* was published subsequent to an examination, by the Association, of the changing regional problem.
- 1992:** Having reconvened in 1988, the further findings of the Inquiry were published under the title *Regional Development in the 1990s: The British Isles in Transition*.
- 1993:** The members' newsletter was renamed *Regions*.
- 1995:** The Association's first International Conference was held in Gothenburg, Sweden.
- 1998:** The ERRN was disbanded and its work was incorporated into the Association's main activities.
- 2000:** *Regional Studies* and *Regions* were made available online for the first time.
- 2006:** Professor Sir Peter Hall was appointed as the Association's first President. *Regions* was re-launched as a glossy magazine with the title *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association*.
- 2009:** *Regional Insights*, a new members' magazine aimed at student and early career members, was launched.
- 2012:** The International Conference was replaced with the Association's first Global Conference, held in Beijing, China, which took place alongside a European Conference held in Delft, the Netherlands.
- 2014:** China Division of the Association established.
- 2015:** Latin American Division of the Association to be launched.

## Chairs of the Association

May 1967 – November 1968.....	John Madge
November 1968 – October 1970.....	Emrys Jones
October 1970 – September 1972.....	Andrew Sharman
September 1972 – December 1975.....	David Eversley
December 1975 – December 1978.....	Derek Diamond
February 1979 – December 1981.....	David Bayliss
February 1982 – December 1984.....	Gerald Manners
February 1985 – December 1987.....	Peter M. Townroe
February 1988 – December 1990.....	Peter Roberts
February 1991 – December 1992.....	Iain Skewis
February 1993 – December 1993.....	Joe Davis
February 1994 – December 1997.....	Mark Hart
February 1998 – December 2000.....	Gordon Dabinett
February 2001 – December 2003.....	Mike Danson
February 2004 – November 2006.....	Les Budd
November 2006 – November 2012.....	David Bailey
November 2012 - .....	Andrew Beer

## Editors of Regional Studies

May 1967 – December 1978.....	Peter Hall
March 1979 – December 1984.....	John B. Goddard
February 1985 – December 1986.....	William J. Morrison
February 1987 – May 1992.....	Jim Taylor
June 1992 – December 1996.....	Peter McGregor
February 1997 – December 2002.....	Mick Dunford
February 2003 – May 2005.....	Pete Tyler
May 2005 – May 2008.....	Andy Pike
May 2008 – May 2013.....	Arnoud Lagendijk
May 2013 - .....	Ivan Turok

## List of Abbreviations

DEA	Department of Economic Affairs
EEC	European Economic Community
ERRN	European Regional Research Network
FeSRA	Fellow of the Regional Studies Association
MeSRA	Member of the Regional Studies Association
NORSA	Nordic Section of the Association
RDA	Regional Development Agencies
REPB	Regional Economic Planning Boards
REPC	Regional Economic Planning Councils
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles

## Further reading:

- Hopkins, J. (2015). *Knowledge, networks and policy: regional studies in postwar Britain and beyond*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Barnes, T. (2004). *The rise (and decline) of American regional science: lessons for the new economic geography?* *Journal of Economic Geography* 4: 107-129.
- Isard, W. (2003). *History of regional science and the Regional Science Association International: The beginnings and early history*. Springer Verlag.
- Wise, M. (1989). *The Origins of the Regional Studies Association*. In: Garside, P. and Hebbert, M. (Eds.) *British Regionalism 1900 -2000*. London: Mansell Publishing Ltd.



Regional  
Studies  
Association

**YEARS OF REGIONAL  
RESEARCH AND IMPACT  
1965 - 2015**

