

Epainos Award 2008

This year there were 35 entries for the prize; this was a slightly smaller number than in previous years as the Committee had tightened up the eligibility to ensure that we were seeing the best of new work by our young scientists and not those which had already been reviewed for journals. These were all read by the Jury as well as by the expert reviewers, each of whom provided a detailed report and evaluation. On the basis of these evaluations a short list of 6 papers was determined and these were discussed in detail. The Jury was impressed by the very high standard of the papers this year and we expect that many of these will subsequently be published in high quality journals. However, two papers stood out clearly from the rest and after a further detailed discussion of their respective merits the Jury decided unanimously to award a joint first prize this year to these two papers.

The two papers were:

‘The effects of future retail developments on the local economy; Combining micro and macro approaches’ by Eveline van Leeuwen, Department of Spatial Economics, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands

‘The Bright Side of Gerrymandering: an Enquiry on the Determinants of Industrial Agglomeration in the United States’ by Carlo Menon, Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, UK

These were two contrasting papers, each was innovative but each had a rather different set of merits which helped to distinguish them from the remaining papers. The first paper by Eveline van Leeuwen is a serious attempt to merge, from a bottom-up perspective, microsimulation with social accounting matrix methods. This linked use of two common methods in regional science was felt to be particularly useful. The method is then applied to a topic of genuine inherent policy interest and importance, that of the impact of the introduction of new shopping facilities in different locations, town centre or out-of-town retailing, on a small Dutch town. This produces interesting results, but ones which may differ from the perspective of existing retailers and the town’s residents. Thus we have a study which is simultaneously of methodological interest, which produces empirical results and which has potential policy applications.

The second paper by Carlos Menon tackles a basic problem in regional science, the so-called Modifiable Areal Unit Problem, the apparently unpredictable dependence of results on the size and the shape of spatial units. Instead of lamenting on the problem and then passing on, Carlos tackles the problem head on and suggests a way that useful information can be obtained from these variations in shape and size. The method is then applied to detailed county employment data for the US, in order to calculate the industrial concentration of manufacturing in three differently shaped datasets: first based on commuting-defined Core Based Statistical Areas; secondly using a distribution of 1000 counterfactuals of randomly aggregated counties; and thirdly a random aggregation of non-contiguous Zip Code Areas. Again the paper is not just about the methodology, it is applied to real labour market data and produces some interesting results which challenge earlier work on the labour market determinants of industrial concentration.

Either of these papers would be a worthy winner of the Epainos prize when tested against our criteria; in both cases the Jury felt that these would make publishable papers which would be seen in the future as benchmark papers for methodological development and empirical application to some of the core questions of regional science. It was for that reason that they are declared joint winners and receive a share of the €900 prize together with the certificate and a small memento.

The Jury would like to thank those expert reviewers who devoted considerable care and effort to the preparation of reviews which were of great help in the decision process. Considerable burdens fall on the Secretary of the Committee who has to engage (and pursue) reviewers, circulate papers and reviews and prepare for the Jury meeting, this Henri de Groot does with his usual efficiency and a special mention should be made of this with the thanks of the whole Jury. May I also thank my fellow members of the Jury who have been prepared to take on this onerous task.

Can I encourage all of you under 33 years of age to follow the examples set by this year's winners (and those of you with students to encourage them to submit their work) for next year's EPAINOS award.

Roger Vickerman