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Article

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Special Issues at REGION

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Starting a new academic journal is not an easy task. The production function of researchers has as inputs many hours of work, with the output being a small countable number of publishable pieces. Consequently, every researcher must evaluate carefully where to submit their output for publication. From time to time we see calls for papers or receive invitations to contribute to Special Issues. Is that a good outlet for our papers? It is likely our papers will capture a more specialized audience if published in a Special Issue and consequently, one can expect these papers to be more frequently cited. Nevertheless, as contributions to Special Issues are usually published all together, faster papers are held up until the last paper of the volume is accepted for publication.

Every scientific discipline surely has its own characteristics and probably this way of wrapping papers into special issues can be a good idea or a bad strategy depending on the domain. What is the situation in Regional Science? Are Special Issues a good way to advertise our research? To answer this question, I have collected information about six journals¹ linked to the Regional Science Association International (Papers in Regional Science and Regional Science Policy and Practice) or to ERSA sections (Journal of Regional Research – Investigaciones Regionales, Review of Regional Research – Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft, Scienze Regionali and Spatial Economic Analysis) over the last ten years (2007-2016). All six journals are indexed in Scopus and one can trace the citation record of every paper. I have discarded editorials, notes and articles in press. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the citations of the 1,114 considered papers. As can be expected, Papers in Regional Science, the flagship journal of RSAI, is the publication with most citations and published papers. The modal citation is zero, although younger publications (such as Regional Science Policy and Practice) tend to collect less citations.

Every journal except Regional Science Policy and Practice had at least one Special Issue in the analysed period. Figure 1 shows that papers published in Special Issues accounted for 29% of papers published in 2014, while in 2016 they represented a mere 10%, confirming an absolute decline since the maximum number in 2014.

To find out whether contributions to Special Issues attract more citations, I have regressed the citation against a dummy for every journal, the publication year and a dummy for the label Special Issue. Table 2 summarises the results. On average, papers published in Special Issues are significantly more cited than regular papers. This is particularly true for articles published in Papers in Regional Science, while we can only find parameters that are not significant for the other journals. Of course, one could

¹I have collected the full period for Journal of Regional Research – Investigaciones Regionales, Review of Regional Research – Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft, Papers in Regional Science and Spatial Economic Analysis. For Scienze Regionali we consider papers published since 2012 and for Regional Science Policy and Practice since 2015. Investigaciones Regionales and Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft both added English terms to their names. For reasons of space and formatting I use the traditional names of these two journals in the tables below.

Table 1: Citation records in Regional Science journals

Cites per paper	Investigaciones Regionales	Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft	Papers in Regional Science	Regional Science Policy and Practice	Scienze Regionali	Spatial Economic Analysis	Total
0	127 (50.6%)	36 (40.4%)	80 (18.1%)	20 (76.9%)	60 (58.3%)	11 (5.4%)	334 (30%)
1	50 (19.9%)	12 (13.5%)	60 (13.5%)	4 (15.4%)	21 (20.4%)	39 (19.3%)	186 (17%)
2-5	64 (25.5%)	31 (34.8%)	124 (28%)	0 (0%)	13 (12.6%)	79 (39.1%)	311 (28%)
6-10	7 (2.8%)	9 (10.1%)	72 (16.3%)	2 (7.7%)	1 (1%)	33 (16.3%)	124 (11%)
11-20	3 (1.2%)	1 (1.1%)	60 (13.5%)	0 (0%)	5 (4.9%)	21 (10.4%)	90 (8%)
21-50	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32 (7.2%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.9%)	15 (7.4%)	50 (5%)
51-100	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	13 (1%)
>100	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	6 (0.5%)
Total Papers	251 (100%)	89 (100%)	443 (100%)	26 (100%)	103 (100%)	202 (100%)	1,114 (100%)
Total Citations	338	199	4,355	19	233	1,776	6,920

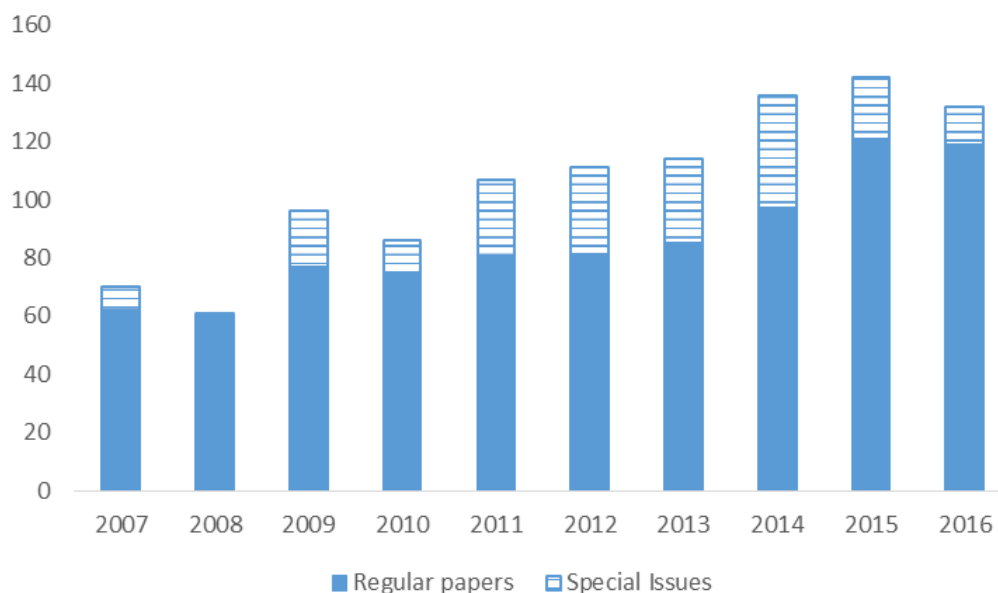
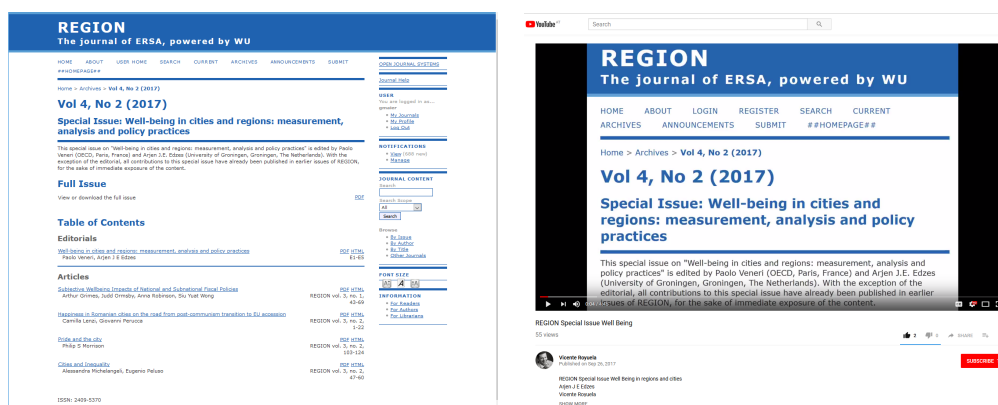


Figure 1: Papers published in regular volumes versus Special Issues

account for several other dimensions, such as the number of authors, the length of the papers, and even the quality of authors (for instance adjusting by the h-index of every author). Still, this brief exercise indicates that Special Issues do matter and on average have a positive impact on the number of citations.

In traditional journals, this positive effect of Special Issues comes at a price. With strict limits for the numbers of pages or issues per year, allocating space to a Special Issue crowds out regular contributions. Successfully refereed articles are bypassed by the Special Issue and must wait even longer in the journal's backlog for proper publication.

REGION is particularly active in the promotion of Special Issues, since the electronic format allows us to reap the benefits while avoiding the drawbacks. We expect Special Issues to attract high quality papers and to subsequently further improve the standards of the journal. Of course, we are too young to be included in the more important indexing databases, and consequently it is not easy to capture the impact of our editorial policy on citations. With our editorial policy, we try to maintain the advantages of Special Issues while avoiding the disadvantages. Since REGION publishes only electronically, there are no page or issue constraints in place and therefore, no regular papers are crowded out. Moreover, we apply the policy that once a paper – regular or special issue – is accepted,



(a) Special Issue

(b) Interview with Arjen J.E. Edzes

Figure 2: Special Issue on “Well-being in cities and regions: measurement, analysis and policy practices” (Click the figure or subheading to follow the respective link)

it gets published immediately. Consequently, faster authors are not held back by the slower ones. Once the last Special Issue paper is published, we bundle them and a volume editorial together into a separate volume advertising the published papers, which are referenced to their original issue: “all contributions to this special issue have already been published in earlier issues of REGION, for the sake of immediate exposure of the content.” We believe that authors, special issue editors as well as the journal benefit from this policy.

Right now REGION has published its first Special Issue as Volume 4 number 2 on “Well-being in cities and regions: measurement, analysis and policy practices”, edited by Paolo Veneri (OECD) and Arjen J.E. Edzes (University of Groningen) and we have also published papers from several other Special Issues and some new calls are open. We welcome new proposals!

Table 2: Citation patterns by journal and publication year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	All	All	Investigaciones Regionales	Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft	Papers in Regional Science	Regional Science Policy and Practice	Science Regionali	Spatial Economic Analysis
Special Issue		4.7829*** (1.203)	0.1977 (0.344)	-1.2381 (2.061)	8.7997*** (2.437)		-1.0603 (1.290)	4.46286 (4.269)
<i>Journal - Reference category: Investigaciones Regionales</i>								
Jahrbuch für Regionalwissenschaft	0.0258 (1.868)	1.1081 (1.875)						
Papers in Regional Science	9.4484*** (1.200)	9.8664*** (1.196)						
Regional Science Policy and Practice	5.7092* (3.340)	6.7039** (3.325)						
Science Regionali	4.9786*** (1.808)	5.1728*** (1.796)						
Spatial Economic Analysis	8.0222*** (1.444)	8.5429*** (1.440)						
<i>Year: reference category 2007</i>								
2008	-5.2375** (2.594)	-4.7192* (2.579)	-0.6518 (0.715)	-0.6111 (1.452)	-11.3065** (5.318)			1.9545 (7.565)
2009	-9.4496*** (2.327)	-9.8094*** (2.312)	-1.1333* (0.631)	-1.2540 (1.505)	-16.9445*** (4.457)			-9.3690 (7.474)
2010	-3.4825 (2.386)	-3.5919 (2.370)	-1.6476** (0.729)	-0.5556 (1.408)	-12.8016*** (4.445)			4.8045 (7.250)
2011	-11.1299*** (2.275)	-11.7634*** (2.264)	-1.6722*** (0.612)	-2.8111** (1.373)	-22.2874*** (4.448)			-6.9414 (7.260)

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Table 2 – continued from previous page

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	All	All	Investiga- ciones Regionales	Jahrbuch für Regio- nalwissen- schaft	Papers in Regional Science	Regional Science Policy and Practice	Science Regionali	Spatial Economic Analysis
2012	-12.3583*** (2.275)	-13.0731*** (2.266)	-0.5134 (0.653)	-1.3111 (1.373)	-22.7681*** (4.542)			-10.9830 (7.403)
2013	-14.8453*** (2.259)	-15.4928*** (2.249)	-1.4003** (0.664)	-2.8611* (1.452)	-26.5940*** (4.385)		-1.6714 (1.938)	-14.9005** (7.275)
2014	-14.7971*** (2.199)	-15.5848*** (2.193)	-1.9430*** (0.643)	-1.5397 (1.505)	-29.6592*** (4.267)		4.6759*** (1.651)	-13.8461* (7.260)
2015	-17.2499*** (2.209)	-17.4027*** (2.194)	-1.7443*** (0.643)	-3.2778** (1.574)	-29.0208*** (4.350)		-1.7717 (1.614)	-16.4567** (7.403)
2016	-18.1116*** (2.215)	-18.0576*** (2.199)	-2.5220*** (0.632)	-3.6111** (1.452)	-31.3905*** (4.267)	-1.5833* (0.869)	-1.8122 (1.917)	-15.6455** (7.250)
Constant	12.7788*** (1.932)	11.8381*** (1.933)	2.7143*** (0.470)	4.1111*** (0.996)	31.0208*** (3.484)	1.5833** (0.601)	2.3380* (1.335)	17.5455*** (5.823)
Obs	1,055	1,055	243	85	414	23	103	187
R ²	0.171	0.183	0.100	0.155	0.219	0.137	0.211	0.126