

Introduction to the 50th Anniversary Edition of *The Economic and Social Review*

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The first edition of *The Economic and Social Review* was published fifty years ago in October 1969. We are happy to mark the anniversary of the journal with this special edition to reflect both its history and ongoing vibrancy in contributions to academic research and policy debate. The edition contains a mix of papers with some looking back on the contributions published over the years in a subset of the many fields that have appeared and others examining some current issues of debate within the social sciences. Ireland has gone through profound economic and social change over the past fifty years and the papers in this edition show how the *Review* has documented and analysed many aspects of it.

The journal's launch came at a time when the Irish economy was going through a period of fundamental change as it moved away from the inward-looking policies of the previous decades which had been associated with chronic economic underperformance and high volumes of emigration. The new, more outward-looking stance of economic policy brought with it a greater importance for the role of economists and social scientists, and for research in these broad fields.

Along with documenting and explaining the evolution of the Irish economy and society, the journal's contents over the years reflected changes in the professional fields of those publishing the research. Greater availability of data and technological advancements are evident in the granularity at which many questions have been investigated in more recent years and in the focus on isolating causal relationships. That said, state of the art techniques for the time are evident in the very first edition of the journal which included an econometric study of education statistics by the eminent statistician R.C. Geary, albeit with a dataset small enough to be included in full in a four-page Appendix to the paper.¹ Contributions to

¹ <http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/68787>

advances in statistics and econometrics were regular features of the early years of the journal.

Although the approaches and techniques evolved considerably, many of the topics under examination have been perennial as several of the reviews of specific topics published in this edition showcase. What may appear to be a recent phenomenon of interest in health or behavioural economics was already being developed in one of the first papers published by the journal which examined smoking rates amongst teenagers.² This links to the strong policy focus of many of the papers published in the journal since its inception which was given more formal recognition with the establishment of a dedicated policy section in 2009.

This policy orientation of much of the research published along with the broad coverage of research fields across social sciences have been key factors in the continued success and relevance of *The Economic and Social Review* over the past fifty years. Against the backdrop of sometimes dramatic fluctuations in the Irish economy and criticism of the economics profession in the years around and following the global financial crisis, this achievement should not be understated.³ All involved in the journal over the years believe that its contents have shown the usefulness of economics and social science in understanding, and perhaps improving, the economy and society. We hope this contribution can continue well into the future.

Let us remember that we are not seeking economic progress for purely materialistic reasons but because it makes possible relief of hardship and want, the establishment of a better social order, the raising of human dignity, and, eventually, the participation of all who are born in Ireland in the benefits, moral and cultural, as well as material, of spending their lives and bringing up their families in Ireland.

T.K. Whitaker

Quoted in Anne Chambers: T.K. Whitaker: Portrait of a Patriot (2014)

² <http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/68792>

³ The position that economics has not kept pace with issues of international policy importance (such as climate change) has been made in many forums, including a recent speech by the President calling for a re-thinking of economics: <https://president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/re-thinking-economics-the-role-of-the-state>