

Epainos Award and Young Regional Scientist Sessions (EAYRS) 2011

I was talking yesterday to my friend Dani Shefer who put his arm around my shoulder and told me, with his usual irresistible grin: “Andrés, the more I come to the ERSA conference, the less people I know “. He was, as always, right. The composition of ERSA has changed radically over the last decade. My first Congress during my stint as secretary of the ERSA was in 2001 in Zagreb. I remember it fondly. It was a beautifully organised conference by a very enthusiastic and dynamic Local Organising Committee. But ultimately, notwithstanding the important organisational logistics, it was what we may now describe as a ‘boutique’ conference. 250 participants is one quarter of the number of delegates in what has been a memorable conference, by an excellent and daring Local Organising Committee in a very welcoming city, such as Barcelona.

The growth in participants has not come from the traditional constituents of ERSA. The annual ERSA conference has gone from being – without the aim of offending anyone – a meeting for middle-aged men in suits, who, for all those joining the conference for the first time, looked very much alike, to a much more diverse and, in many ways, dynamic meeting. The large expansion of the number of participants has brought an increasing number of delegates from far afield and, in many cases, from outside Europe. A particularly welcome development has been a significant increase in the number of women making a major contribution to the conference. And the number of young scholars has not ceased to increase year on year. Given that Richard Florida was one of our keynote speakers (and you may notice that I have learnt in this conference that dressing in a Richard Florida style may help make an impact), we can safely say that, undoubtedly, our conference now clearly has the three Ts: there is more technology – a sign of the times – there is more tolerance, and there is certainly more talent. In brief, the conference has become much more diverse and creative. Welcome to the *Creative* conference.

A clear sign of this is represented by the Young Scientists Sessions. It is not just that there are more young scientists coming every year to the ERSA Conference, but that the quality of their contributions keeps on improving. This year the Epainos Prize Committee has evaluated 24 papers

by young scientists. The majority of these papers, according to the referees who looked at them, were of exceptional quality. They show that our young scientists not only excel in their command of complex econometric and statistical methods, but also that they are asking themselves very important and policy-relevant questions and reaching exciting answers and conclusions at a time when answers to challenges are more needed than ever.

In this respect, selecting a paper to be awarded the Epainos Prize has proven extremely difficult. Phil McCann, the secretary of the Prize Awarding Committee, in the end had to talk to every single one of the referees and look himself at the papers, in order to be able to discriminate among what is a very strong field. Our thanks go to the referees (many of whom were former Epainos Prize winners themselves) who have done an extremely thorough and conscientious job in reading the papers, incurring a very high opportunity cost. I am sure that having to read scientific papers in Barcelona, while they could be strolling along the Ramblas, visiting the Sagrada Familia or simply enjoying seafood in the Olympic Port was probably not their idea of how to spend their free time in the city. But referee they did and some were even grateful for it. The Committee wishes very much to recognise this generous and uninterested support and hopes it will remain so in the future, despite increasing pressures on all of us.

From the five or six papers that stood out, in the end, one had to be chosen, and chosen it was.

So, the ERSA Epainos Prize 2011 goes to:

Tiago Freire, of the Department of Economics of the National University of Singapore, for a paper entitled "Skill wage gap in Brazil: 1980-2000". In this paper Tiago Freire addresses the question of how migration affects the distribution of income across individuals in a society. He takes the case of Brazil and, using the Brazilian census from 1980 to 2000, he looks at the impact of rural-urban migration on city wages. Tiago instruments for a change in the ratio of high- to low-skilled workers, with rural-urban migrants, using rainfall shocks in rural areas. The paper concludes that migration

leads to an 8.5% decrease in the wage gap between high- and low-skilled workers during the period 1991 to 2000.

Tiago's paper represents everything that is good at ERSA conferences. It not only epitomises the internationalisation of ERSA conferences and their role as the largest regional science gathering in the world – it is, after all, a paper written by a Portuguese, based in Singapore and on a Brazilian topic – but also it represents path-breaking research, which can have important regional policy implications.

Many congratulations to Tiago Freire.

I am sure that next year in Bratislava the array of young scientists will continue to demonstrate the dynamism and vibrancy of ERSA and the excellent health that our discipline enjoys. So, I will ask you all, and especially the young scientists, to step up the good work, as the current circumstances – as was mentioned by Commissioner Hahn yesterday – give us a unique window of opportunity to have a greater say on policy and to influence the development of cities and regions across the world and, most of all, the quality of life of their citizens.

Andrés Rodríguez-Pose

Barcelona, 2 September 2011