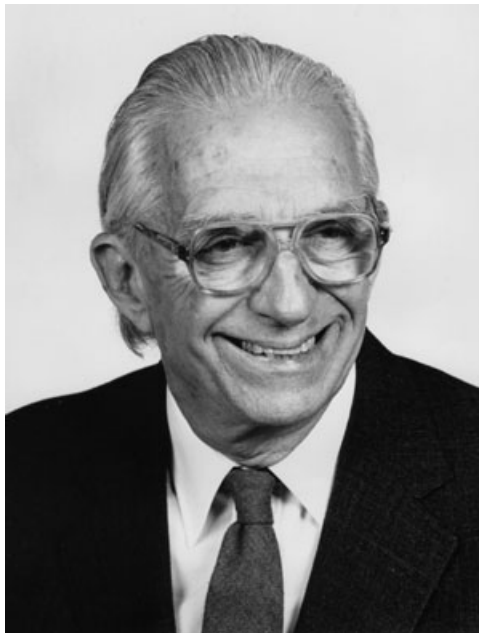




In memoriam: Walter Isard (1919–2010)

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Walter Isard in 1989
Photo courtesy of Peter Isard

Just days before the 57th Annual North American Regional Science Meetings, Walter Isard, Professor Emeritus of Economics and City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, died at age 91 on November 6, 2010 at home in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.

Walter Isard was the founder of the field of regional science and its most prominent early scholar in industrial location theory, methods of regional analysis and general social science theory. With his determined leadership, the interdisciplinary field of regional and urban research flourished in North America, Europe and Asia. Isard encouraged economists, geographers, sociologists and urban and regional planners, and occasionally even civil engineers, to ignore

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disciplinary boundaries, construct theories of urban and regional phenomena and apply methods of analysis to the emerging urban, regional, transportation and environmental policy issues of the mid and late twentieth Century.

Walter Isard was born on 19 April, 1919 in Philadelphia to immigrant Jewish parents. Majoring in mathematics, he graduated with distinction from Temple University in 1939, and then enrolled in the Economics Department of Harvard University as a graduate student. His early research concerned building construction, transportation development, the location of economic activities, and the ensuing cycles of growth and stagnation that characterized the 1920–1940 period. During 1941–1942, he studied at the University of Chicago, where his interest in mathematics was rekindled; there he met another graduate student, Caroline Berliner; they married in 1942.¹ Isard was affiliated with the National Planning Resources Board during 1942–1943, while completing his Harvard Ph.D. During 1944–1945, he served in the Civilian Public Service as a conscientious objector to the Second World War. He was assigned to a state mental hospital; while on the night shift, he translated into English the works of leading German location theorists, including Lösch, Weigmann, Engländer and Predöhl and others (Isard 2003, p. 7).

Following the war, Isard intensified his research on industrial location theory, while a Post-Doctoral Fellow at Harvard, 1946–1948, and serving as a research associate in Wassily Leontief's interindustry research project at Harvard, 1949–1953. He honed his teaching skills at various part-time appointments including the first course on location theory and regional development ever taught at Harvard's Economics Department. In December 1950, at the age of 31, Isard organized a meeting of leading economists, geographers, sociologists and demographers on interdisciplinary regional research, which he later considered to be the birth of the field of regional science (Isard 2003, p. 11).

Ongoing efforts to organize such discussions found a welcome audience among participants of annual disciplinary conferences, and continued intensively throughout the next four years. For the 1954 meetings of the Allied Social Science Associations, held in December at Detroit, Isard organized a conference programme of 25 papers. At the business meeting, 60 scholars in attendance endorsed unanimously Isard's proposal to form the Regional Science Association (RSA).

Isard arranged for the publication of selected papers from those first meetings as the *Papers and Proceedings of the Regional Science Association*, volume 1, 1955, edited by Gerald Carrothers. The Proceedings consisted of the programme of meetings and the minutes of the business meeting, at which the motion to organize the Association was passed. The *Papers* were issued as separate volumes following each of the North American meetings, and subsequently the congresses held in Europe and the conferences held on the Pacific Rim. The final volumes in this 36-year series, volumes 68 and 69, the *Papers of the Regional Science Association*, were issued in 1990. The serial was converted to this journal, beginning with volume 70, in 1991.

During the time the Association was being established, 1953–1955, Isard was associate professor of Regional Economics and director of the section of Urban and Regional Studies at MIT. In 1956, he became a professor in the Economics Department of the University of Pennsylvania and formed the Graduate Group in Regional Science. Two years later, he founded the Regional Science Department at Penn, the Regional Science Research Institute (with Benjamin Stevens) and the *Journal of Regional Science*.

¹ Mrs. Isard died on December 1, 2010 at age 91.

Isard then expanded his organizational objectives to Europe and Asia. During the summer of 1960, he visited several research centers in Europe, and began to organize sections of the RSA. The first European Congress was held in 1961. Sections were subsequently established in many countries, or regions of common language, throughout Europe and Asia as well as North America. During the mid-1960s, regional science summer institutes were held at Berkeley, and in 1970 the first European summer institute took place in Karlsruhe, Germany. Subsequently, summer institutes have been held in Europe every second year. International conferences are now held each year in North America and Europe and every second year in the Pacific region. In 1989, the Regional Science Association was reorganized and its name modified to the Regional Science Association International (URL: www.regionalscience.org). Nearly sixty years after its founding, the association now has about 4,500 members worldwide.

In 1979, at age 60, Isard moved to Cornell University as professor of economics; there he continued to teach, conduct research and participate in seminars well into his 90th year. In 1985, he was elected to the (US) National Academy of Sciences. Isard received honorary degrees from Poznan Academy of Economics, Poland (1976), Erasmus University of Rotterdam, the Netherlands (1978), the University of Karlsruhe, Germany (1979), Umeå University, Sweden (1980), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA (1982), Binghamton University, USA (1997) and the University of Geneva, Switzerland (2002).

Walter Isard's research contributions were large and diverse. His interests in regional and urban phenomena formed during his graduate studies, led to his first major book, *Location and space economy* (1956). Next, he initiated research on the economic and social consequences of atomic power and industrial complexes as well as intensifying his research on methods of regional and urban analysis, including interregional interindustry models, interregional linear programming models, and migration and gravity models, resulting in a second major book with several collaborators, *Methods of regional analysis* (1960), thoroughly updated as *Methods of interregional and regional analysis* (1998). In the 1960s, Isard and his collaborators turned to theoretical pursuits related to individual behaviour and decision-making as well as general equilibrium theory for a system of regions presented in a third major book, *General theory: Social, political, economic and regional* (1969), a collaboration with Tony Smith and others. Isard considered *Spatial dynamics and optimal space-time development* (1979) with Panos Liossatos and others to be his fourth major book. Concurrently with the last two books, he and his assistants undertook a major interindustry study of the Philadelphia region, published as *Regional input-output study: Recollections, reflections, and diverse notes on the Philadelphia experience* (1971). Isard collaborated intensively with his students, assistants and sometimes with faculty; however, there was never any doubt as to who was the driving force behind the publication of the book resulting from that research.

Throughout his career, Isard also pursued policy interests related to conflict management and resolution, disarmament and peace science. He founded the Peace Research Society, later renamed the Peace Science Society, and founded the Graduate Group in Conflict Analysis and Peace Research at the University of Pennsylvania. Several of his books, which number over 25, as well as many of his 300 published papers, concern topics in peace science.

In 2003, on the occasion of the 50th North American Meetings of the RSAI, Walter Isard published his *History of regional science and the Regional Science Association International, the beginnings and early history*, which begins with a memoir of his early scientific activities and the explorations that led to the formation of the RSA. For additional details on the evolution of the Association, see my 'short history of the field of regional science' (Boyce 2004). Today, as we mourn his passing, we remember Walter for his tremendous energy and relentless pursuit of his scientific objectives and their fulfillment. His optimism about science, and what it can accomplish, was pervasive in all of his reflections on the future of our field.

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