

Comparative Economic Studies: 50 Years of Service to the Field of Comparative Economics

The Association for the Study of Soviet-Type Economies (ASTE) was founded in December, 1958, but already in November of that year it had published the first issue of the “*Bulletin of the Association for the Study of Soviet-Type Economies*” under the editorship of John Hardt. The *ASTE Bulletin* was a rather casual affair, consisting of eighteen 8.5 x 11 hectographed pages stapled together. The first issue contained an announcement of the organizational meeting of the Association and descriptions of several research centers devoted to the study of the Soviet economy and their research programs as well as of some academic conferences and meetings on the subject of the Soviet economy. The next issue, published in May, 1959 contained two brief articles, one on “Linear Economics in Soviet Planning” and the other on “Economic Sources in Soviet Libraries and Bibliographic Centers” as well as short news notes. It is from these modest beginnings that *Comparative Economic Studies*, now celebrating 50 years of publication, sprang. Over the years, the *ASTE Bulletin* maintained its physical appearance, but expanded to carry more articles of greater length and substance.

In the early 1970s, the Association for the Study of Soviet-Type Economies merged with the Association for Comparative Economics to form the Association for Comparative Economic Studies (ACES). The new Association continued the *ASTE Bulletin* under a new name, the *ACES Bulletin*. The merger was clearly beneficial to the fortunes of the *ACES Bulletin*, which gained a co-editor, Robert Campbell, and a new appearance as a “real” journal held together with a binding and cover rather than with staples. Publication was three times a year, the journal carried more and increasingly research-oriented articles, and each issue was over 100 pages in length. Indeed, in 1976, the *ACES Bulletin* was published four times during that year, testimony to the volume of research in comparative economics and the ability of the co-editors, John Hardt and Robert Campbell, to attract good material.

It was at this seeming apogee of its success that the *ACES Bulletin* faced a major crisis. The Association had, for some years, been planning the publication of a new journal, the *Journal of Comparative Economics*. In discussing the launch of the new journal at its meetings in Atlantic City in December, 1976, many members of the Association expressed the belief that the *Journal of Comparative Economics* made the *ACES Bulletin* superfluous and suggested that the *Bulletin* be discontinued. Franklyn Holzman, the Association’s President at the time, proposed to let the market decide the fate of the *Bulletin*. If an editor could be found, and if the *Bulletin* could continue to attract suitable material, the Association would continue to publish it. If these conditions could not be met, then it would be discontinued.

More by accident than through any formal selection process, Josef Brada was appointed as editor starting in 1977. He edited the *Bulletin* through 1986, and, during this time, the journal’s production was moved from the International Development Research Center at Indiana University to Arizona State University, and the Association thus effectively came to control not only the editorial policies but also the publishing and

distribution of the *Bulletin*. Publication continued on a quarterly schedule, with the annual page count growing over 500 pages.

In 1983 the *Bulletin* was twenty-five years old. To mark this milestone, the first issue of the year carried a cumulative index of the previous 24 years, and subsequent issues carried specially commissioned articles celebrating 25 years of research and publication in comparative economics. The 25th anniversary articles included

- David Conn: Comparative Economic Systems Theory: Progress and Prospects
- Michael Ellman: Changing Views on Central Economic Planning: 1958-83
- Ed Hewett: Research on East Europe: The Last Quarter Century
- Deborah Milenkovitch: Self-management and Thirty Years of Yugoslav Experience.
- Robert Stuart: Russian and Soviet Agriculture: The Western Perspective
- Judith Thornton: Twenty-Five Years of Soviet National Income Accounting: From Adjusted Factor Cost to Ultra-Adjusted Factor Cost
- Lynn Turgeon: A Quarter Century of Non-Soviet East European Agriculture
- Peter Wiles: Methodology: In Praise of Ourselves
- Thomas Wolf: East-West Trade: Economic Interests, Systemic Interaction and Political Rivalry

In 1985, the *Bulletin*'s name was changed again. Many of the informal functions of the *Bulletin*, such as the reprint clearing house, professional announcements, etc. had largely been displaced by articles, and thus the Association concluded that the "bulletin" function had largely been superseded, and that a better representation of the journal's function could be provided by its new name, *Comparative Economic Studies*.

William Moskoff replaced Joe Brada as editor in 1987 and served until 1992, followed by Susan Linz, who served from 1992 to 1996. Robert Stuart then served a term as editor from 1996 to 2002. During this time, *Comparative Economic Studies* continued to evolve. There were more articles dealing with China and with systems theory, as well as with other regions of the world that had fallen outside the scope of the "Soviet-type" countries that were the focus of attention of the *ASTE Bulletin*. Methodology also changed, with a greater emphasis on theory and formal econometrics, although *Comparative Economic Studies* continued to publish close analyses of developments in planned economies.

In 2002, Jeffrey Miller took over as Editor, with Ali Kutan and Istvan Szekely as Associate Editors. The larger editorial team reflected the growing scope of the journal as well as the larger volume of material being submitted. Szekely's appointment also reflected other important change in the field. The transition in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union brought with it not only a whole range of new issues, but also the opening up of a more intense "East- West" academic dialogue between economists, and Szekely was the first East European to play a major role in *Comparative Economic Studies*' functioning. Moreover, during his tenure as Associate Editor, he was employed by the International Monetary Fund. Before the transition, international agencies such as the IMF had paid scant attention to the countries that were the focus of *Comparative*

Economic Studies' interests. Now, both the IMF and the World Bank were intensely involved in the region, both requiring assistance in providing policy advice and generating a wealth of new research on the region, and some of this material found its way to the pages of *Comparative Economic Studies*. Partly to reflect these trends, Jeff Miller introduced the concept of a "Practitioner's Corner" where policy makers could discuss important policy issues in a rigorous but open and non-confrontational way.

The other, and equally seismic, change that occurred around this time was the emergence of the internet as major force in the dissemination of knowledge. Journals were increasingly available through the Web, and counting the number of "hits" on line became an established way of evaluating the contributions that a journal was making to the dissemination of knowledge. Because the Association lacked the resources to provide *Comparative Economic Studies* with an effective web presence, the Association decided to establish a partnership with a reputable publisher of scholarly journals who would take over the production and distribution of *Comparative Economic Studies* and provide it with an effective web presence. In 2003, the first issue of *Comparative Economic Studies* to be published for the Association by Palgrave Macmillan appeared, as did the journal's web site. The appearance of the journal was revamped to make it more appealing to readers, and content has grown as well, with as many as 700 pages of material being published each year.

In 2008, *Comparative Economic Studies* will mark 50 years of publication, and to commemorate the occasion, a number of special articles reflecting on the achievements of the field and pointing to new avenues for research have been commissioned and published during the year.