

# Use R!

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# Use R!

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Roger S. Bivand • Edzer J. Pebesma  
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# Applied Spatial Data Analysis with R



Springer

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Ewie

Voor Ellen, Ulla en Mandus

A mis padres, Victorina y Virgilio Benigno

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## Preface

We began writing this book in parallel with developing software for handling and analysing spatial data with R (R Development Core Team, 2008). Although the book is now complete, software development will continue, in the R community fashion, of rich and satisfying interaction with users around the world, of rapid releases to resolve problems, and of the usual joys and frustrations of getting things done. There is little doubt that without pressure from users, the development of R would not have reached its present scale, and the same applies to analysing spatial data analysis with R.

It would, however, not be sufficient to describe the development of the R project mainly in terms of narrowly defined utility. In addition to being a community project concerned with the development of world-class data analysis software implementations, it promotes specific choices with regard to how data analysis is carried out. R is open source not only because open source software development, including the dynamics of broad and inclusive user and developer communities, is arguably an attractive and successful development model.

R is also, or perhaps chiefly, open source because the analysis of empirical and simulated data in science should be reproducible. As working researchers, we are all too aware of the possibility of reaching inappropriate conclusions in good faith because of user error or misjudgement. When the results of research really matter, as in public health, in climate change, and in many other fields involving spatial data, good research practice dictates that someone else should be, at least in principle, able to check the results. Open source software means that the methods used can, if required, be audited, and journaling working sessions can ensure that we have a record of what we actually did, not what we thought we did. Further, using `Sweave`<sup>1</sup> – a tool that permits the embedding of R code for complete data analyses in documents – throughout this book has provided crucial support (Leisch, 2002; Leisch and Rossini, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statistik.lmu.de/~leisch/Sweave/>.

We acknowledge our debt to the members of R-core for their continuing commitment to the R project. In particular, the leadership and example of Professor Brian Ripley has been important to us, although our admitted ‘muddling through’ contrasts with his peerless attention to detail. His interested support at the Distributed Statistical Computing conference in Vienna in 2003 helped us to see that encouraging spatial data analysis in R was a project worth pursuing. Kurt Hornik’s dedication to keep the Comprehensive R Archive Network running smoothly, providing package maintainers with superb, almost 24/7, service, and his dry humour when we blunder, have meant that the useR community is provided with contributed software in an unequalled fashion. We are also grateful to Martin Mächler for his help in setting up and hosting the R-Sig-Geo mailing list, without which we would have not had a channel for fostering the R spatial community.

We also owe a great debt to users participating in discussions on the mailing list, sometimes for specific suggestions, often for fruitful questions, and occasionally for perceptive bug reports or contributions. Other users contact us directly, again with valuable input that leads both to a better understanding on our part of their research realities and to the improvement of the software involved. Finally, participants at R spatial courses, workshops, and tutorials have been patient and constructive.

We are also indebted to colleagues who have contributed to improving the final manuscript by commenting on earlier drafts and pointing out better procedures to follow in some examples. In particular, we would like to mention Juanjo Abellán, Nicky Best, Peter J. Diggle, Paul Hiemstra, Rebeca Ramis, Paulo J. Ribeiro Jr., Barry Rowlingson, and Jon O. Skøien. We are also grateful to colleagues for agreeing to our use of their data sets. Support from Luc Anselin has been important over a long period, including a very fruitful CSISS workshop in Santa Barbara in 2002. Work by colleagues, such as the first book known to us on using R for spatial data analysis (Kopczewska, 2006), provided further incentives both to simplify the software and complete its description. Without John Kimmel’s patient encouragement, it is unlikely that we would have finished this book.

Even though we have benefitted from the help and advice of so many people, there are bound to be things we have not yet grasped – so remaining mistakes and omissions remain our sole responsibility. We would be grateful for messages pointing out errors in this book; errata will be posted on the book website (<http://www.asdar-book.org>).

Bergen  
Münster  
London  
April 2008

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