

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20041]

Proposed title of the session

Catching up now and then - do historical perspectives on developing-country dynamics still make sense?

Abstract

In recent decades, a number of developing countries have grown at a significantly higher rate than the world average, while others are falling further behind. Shifts have taken place in the world income hierarchy. The aim of the session is to discuss what Economic History has to offer towards an understanding of current-day catching-up dynamics.

Over the last half a century, Economic History has made important contributions to the literature on the dynamics of catching up (for instance, Gerschenkron 1962, Akamatsu 1962, Ohkawa and Rosovsky 1973, Abramovitz 1986). Gerschenkron sketched an analytical framework that considers the diversity in mechanisms and processes at work on the road towards modern economic growth. According to Gerschenkron, the process was conditioned by country specific circumstances stemming from the relative backwardness itself; there are no absolute prerequisites, instead there is variation rather than imitation with regard to catching-up dynamics. An alternative hypothesis of catching up was coined by Akamatsu in terms of the theory of the “flying geese”. In this theory, spillovers, emulation and the division of labor predicted the sequential development pattern of many Asian countries that were following, and caught up with, the “lead goose” Japan. In other words, regional integration and dynamics conditioned the catching up process in Asia.

Much of the literature and debate has naturally focused on a few, often successful, Asian cases. However, given the diverse experiences in the developing world over the last decades, we want to broaden the scope to include not only Asia but also other regions. Consequently, the session wants to encourage discussions on the following broad questions: When, and under what circumstances, does backwardness become an advantage and when does it continue to be a disadvantage? Is the importance of “social capability” forwarded by Ohkawa/Rosovsky and Abramovitz still the crucial mechanism? Can Gerschenkronian or Akamatsunian approaches deepen our understanding of the ongoing development or do we need other approaches? Does catching up follow a certain pathway or are there many possible routes to development? Are there any lessons to be drawn from former catching-up cases or are there other dynamics at play? With this in mind, do historical perspectives still make sense?

We invite submissions that discuss catching-up dynamics – both successes and failures – in the light of economic-historical frameworks that have implications for our understanding of the prospects for developing economies of today.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Martin Andersson (Lund University [Sweden])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
 2. Dr. Tobias Axelsson (Lund University [Sweden])
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III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Tobias Axelsson (Lund University [Sweden])
3. Lee Alston (University of Colorado, Boulder [United States of America])
4. Gareth Austin (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva [Switzerland])
5. Luis Bertola (Universidad de la República, Uruguay [Uruguay])
6. Anne Booth (SOAS, London University [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
7. Christer Gunnarsson (Lund University [Sweden])
8. C. Peter Timmer (Harvard University [United States of America])