

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20055]

Proposed title of the session

State and Development in the (former) French colonies

Abstract

From the 17th to 20th century, the French colonial empire covered large parts of the world coming only second behind the British. Despite this, the economic history of the French colonies has received relatively little attention so far, with the most important questions unanswered due to lack of data. In 2005, the French parliament came close to adopt a law imposing that the positive role of colonization would be explicitly recognized in French history textbooks; after a strong wave of protests, the law was finally cancelled.

This session calls for exciting original work that shed light on the colonial state, developments during and after colonial rule and the relation between the two. We welcome studies that reflect the large diversity of country experiences.

Opinions on the impact of colonial policies naturally vary, as the colonial state intervened in many areas. What are the main areas? Taxation and public investments in education, health and infrastructure are at the core of the state. Other policies might be as important such as in the areas of trade, agriculture, labour and immigration, the military, church, security and justice. Finally, how did the French colonial administration interact with indigenous structures and polities to shape specific colonial and postcolonial institutions?

French policies need to be judged in light of their influence on living standards. The evolution of living standards of populations during the colonial period, however, remains widely unknown. Hence we call for studies that present estimates of well-being using measures such as GDP, real wages and soft indicators such as literacy, heights and mortality.

We also call for work that studies legacies of French colonial rule. Whether colonizers left an imprint that is still detrimental to economic development is a hotly debated issue. Channels may include institutions and policies.

French colonisation was different from other colonisers. The uniqueness of the French approach can be understood by comparison with other colonisers; hence a comparative perspective is explicitly welcome.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Alexander Moradi (Sussex University [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Prof. Denis Cogneau (Paris School of Economics [France])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Federico Tadei (California Institute of Technology [United States of America])
3. Laurent Heyberger (Université de technologie Belfort-Montbéliard [France])
4. Yannick Dupraz (Paris School of Economics [France])
5. Elise Huillery (Sciences-Po [France])
6. Sandrine Mesplé-Somps (Institut de recherche pour le développement [France])
7. Denis Cogneau (Paris School of Economics [France])