

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20087]

Proposed title of the session

“Cities and Economic Development: From the Dawn of History to the Present” in homage to Paul Bairoch

Abstract

In 1988, Paul Bairoch published his seminal book “Cities and Economic Development: From the Dawn of History to the Present” in which he describes the evolution of urban systems from the Neolithic to the present. In the preface to his book, Bairoch writes: “The history of urbanization is without doubt one of the most exciting aspects of the adventure of humanity. When and how were cities born? Does each civilization have a distinctive form of city? How large were urban population in traditional societies? What was the impact of colonization on urban systems? Did the Industrial Revolution favor urbanization? Has urbanization favored innovation and economic development? Does the urban explosion in the Third World constitute a handicap or an opportunity from the viewpoint of development?”

Twenty-five years later, these questions remain very relevant, and unanswered. Two centuries ago, one person in ten lived in a city. Today, it is one in two people. However, little is known about the relationship between urbanization and economic development. The development, urban and economic history literatures have nevertheless moved forward on these issues, thanks to increased data collection efforts, the use of Geographic Information Software (GIS), and econometric advances. In the absence of historical income data at a fine spatial level, city growth has also been used as a proxy for local economic growth, causing a renewed interest in the collection and use of historical urban data. Cities appear to have positive long-term effects on economic development, which contributes to path dependence in spatial development. While agglomeration effects must account for this path dependence, the literature is still debating whether cities matter because they simply reduce physical transportation costs, or because they facilitate human capital accumulation or the diffusion of new technologies.

The proposed session will bring together researchers who study the long-term economic effects of cities, or use cities as a measure of local economic development in the absence of reliable historical income data. The objective of the session is to have as many papers as possible on various historical contexts, in order to improve our understanding of the relationship between urbanization and economic development across space and time.

There will be three papers on Europe (Bosker on medieval Europe; Dittmar on early modern Europe; Hanlon on Industrial Europe), two papers on Africa (Jedwab and Moradi on colonial Africa; Jedwab and Storeygard on post-colonial Africa), two papers on Asia (Zhang on medieval China; Rothenberg on post-colonial Indonesia) and two papers on the Americas (Caicedo and Maloney on colonial Latin America; Lutz on the urban history of Los Angeles).

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Mr. Remi Jedwab (George Washington University, Department of Economics [United States of America])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Maarten Bosker (Department of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam [Netherlands])
3. Jeremiah Dittmar (Department of Economics, London School of Economics and American University [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
4. Walker Hanlon (Department of Economics, University of California-Los Angeles [United States of America])
5. Alexander Moradi (Department of Economics, University of Sussex [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
6. Adam Storeygard (Department of Economics, Tufts University [United States of America])
7. Alex Rothenberg (RAND [United States of America])
8. Junfu Zhang (Clark University [United States of America])
9. Felipe Valencia Caicedo (London School of Economics & UPF [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
10. William Maloney (The World Bank [United States of America])
11. Byron Lutz (Federal Reserve Board in Washington D.C. [United States of America])