

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20119]

Proposed title of the session

Population density and long-run economic development

Abstract

The session would provide a launch-pad for a comparative history of population density in the long-run processes of economic development. Historically, there have been large and important disparities in population densities between different parts of the world. Data on population levels are abundant in many countries over time periods for which other basic socio-economic data are absent or unreliable. However, thus far, work on comparative global economic history has focussed almost exclusively on per capita measures (GDP/per capita and real wages) or ratio measures such as the distribution of the labour force or output by sector, which has, unintentionally, served to strip out differences in population densities. Spatial patterns of population density allow inferences to be drawn about local and regional occupational structures, since any areas with unusually high population densities are unlikely to be predominantly agricultural in nature. Comparing population numbers and densities across space and time poses none of the methodological problems of comparing average incomes or occupational structures.

Current expressions of interest suggest we will be able to map population densities, at national and sub-national levels, for all of Europe, most of the Americas and much of Asia (India, China and Japan) from the C18th or C19th to the present. The call for papers may allow us to extend coverage to the African content. This session seeks to use data on population densities in three key ways.

Firstly, occupational structure, sectoral output shares, GDP per capita and real wages by no means provide a full description of an economy. Two countries with similar characteristics across these variables but radically different population densities are necessarily very different economic entities. Systematic data on historical population densities will bring out key differences and similarities across the globe.

Secondly, spatial variations in population density within a country provide powerful clues to its economic development. In agricultural societies spatial variation in population densities is likely to be modest and explicable by physical factors such as soil quality, altitude and so on. But, as the non-agricultural component of an economy grows, populations and production typically become less evenly distributed over space. This goes beyond a simple process of urbanisation as some rural areas may develop high population densities as with proto-industrial textile production. Alternatively, regional population growth consequent on the expansion of secondary sector production for distant markets may focus, as in England or Belgium, on areas with deposits of coal and iron.

Thirdly, this approach goes beyond the focus on industrialisation in a narrow sense, be it proto- or factory-industrialisation, to shed light on broader developmental processes. Increases in the spatial variation of population density within a country are likely to have been a consequence of inter-regional, or rural-urban migration or transport development, or all three. In short, the population density-focussed approach should shed fresh light on complex interrelationships between urbanisation, transport development, changes in migration, occupational structure and sectoral shares of output in relation to long-run economic development.

Some preliminary mapping of population densities can be found at www.europa.udl.cat/WEHC

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Leigh Shaw Taylor (Cambridge University [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
 2. Prof. Jordi Marti-Henneberg (University of Lleida [Spain])
-

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Tsukasa Mizushima (University of Tokio [Japan])
3. Masanori Takashima (Hitotsubashi University [Japan])
4. Eric Buyst (University of Leuven [Belgium])
5. Mustafa Kabadayi (Istanbul Bilgi University [Turkey])
6. Richard Zijdemann (Utrecht University [Netherlands])
7. François Moriconi-Ebrard (Université d'Avignon [France])
8. Max Satchell (Cambridge University [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
9. Paul Warde (University of East Anglia [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
10. Tokihiko Settsu (Hitotsubashi University [Japan])
11. Osamu Saito (Hitotsubashi University [Japan])
12. Jordi Marti-Henneberg (University of Lleida [Spain])
13. Marc Badia-Miro (University of Barcelona [Spain])