

Call for Papers  
to Session 229  
on the XVIth World Economic History Congress, Stellenbosch, 9-13 July,  
2012:

THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL ECONOMICS AND CAUSATION IN HISTORY

Session Abstract:

A broad theoretical and empirical literature asserts that "good institutions are the spark for long-run economic growth and development. Advisors in developing and transforming economies typically rank property rights high on national agendas. The assertion is in large degree based on supposed evidence drawn from the rise of the West and the East, and it has been given a theoretical outfit by distinguished scholars in economics and economic history (Acemoglu et al; North). Yet recent experience in developing and transition economies indicates that "knowing the right institutions" does not show how to implement and enforce good institutions, let alone how good institutions would actually emerge. And secure property rights have characterized many places early, such as England and Song China in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or China and Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, without the shocking growth experienced from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on.

The new take by economists and other social scientists on the importance of history or historical events in determining current economic performance is to be welcomed. But questions may be raised whether "historical institutional analysis is becoming a new and unexamined orthodoxy, and whether its scientific foundations in historical fact are secure, and whether it is a good model for a future science of history and economics. It leans on what are thought to be sophisticated techniques fed with microlevel historical data that is often marginally relevant to the scientific questions involved. Can this approach, severely comparative-static as it now is, handle the long-term dance of custom and incentives, ideas and motives? Will it enrich or get in the way of a deeper understanding of macro-processes? The questions remain open.

It is timely, therefore, to step back, and to scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages of the new paradigm. The session aims at providing an opportunity to critically engage, to outline possible synergies or alternative pathways, factual errors and methodological puzzles. The core of the discussion will be the theoretical and methodological implications of adopting an institutional framework to explain the march of history, and the use of history to explain present-day institutions. We thus welcome papers that critically explore the existing attempts in the field as well as papers exploring alternative research avenues.

Contributions are expected to be original pieces of work. A pre-congress workshop will be arranged in Lund, Sweden on February 6-7, 2012.

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