

Special issue

## Economic history of Europe: New approaches, new topics

## Historia económica de Europa: nuevos enfoques, nuevos temas

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This special issue of *Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research* brings together articles from young scholars who have earned their doctorate during the last five years. The purpose is to give voice to a new generation of academics, to encourage the publication of articles on emerging issues, and to provide the ground for new approaches on old debates. Being the invited editors for this journal, we did not limit the submission to any specific topic or period, although we insisted that authors should analyze problems that were common to the European continent. In this way, we follow a similar approach to a growing number of economic historians who have abandoned the narrow boundaries of national states when approaching complex problems and developing interpretive frameworks. In return, we favoured articles that resorted to comparisons, models and generalizations, but also to those that paid attention to specific episodes that refute unidirectional and ahistorical paradigms.

The collected works address a diversity of topics, such as fertility, mortality, human capital, income inequality and the institutional design of the patent system. Demography is the central topic of two articles. Vanesa Abarca undertakes an ambitious exercise to reconstruct mortality and natural growth in Burgos from 1650 to 1850. This work is of special importance as it gathers data from 55 localities, thereby presenting the first representative results of a Spanish province during this period. Also, it should be appreciated that this article is part of a larger project coordinated by the Grupo Complutense de Historia Económica Moderna (GCHEM). The results provide a valuable insight on the demographic evolution of Castile during the modern era, as the author reveals the existence of a sustained drop in mortality rates in the long-term that, in turn, would foster the natural growth of population.

Ralph Hippe and Faustine Perrin contains in their article the first systematic study on the relation between fertility and human capital during the period of 1900 to 1960. The demographic transition and the decline of fertility have been for a long time a recurrent

topic of historical demographers, but until recently human capital had hardly been considered as an explanatory factor of this process. In this work, Hippe develops this study (measuring human capital in terms of elementary, secondary or tertiary education), and adds gender differences as another key variable. His work is also an excellent example of the possibilities offered by expanding the scale of analysis. The author studies the entire European continent, disaggregates the results at a regional level, and synthesizes an extraordinarily detailed database in a very effective way. His conclusions illustrate a very revealing dynamic on the long-term trends affecting fertility and education: the regions with the lowest rates in both variables in 1900 experienced a reversal of fortunes, with relatively higher ratios in 1960.

In the third article of this special issue, Erik Bengtsson addresses the problem of inequality. Over the last few years, this problem has gained renewed attention due to the growing criticisms of the Kuznets paradigm and, particularly, due to the reassessment of the factors that have driven the increase (or decline) of inequalities in history. By comparing the evolution of wages with the GDP per capita, Bengtsson's article is largely indebted to the methodology proposed by Williamson, but also to the more recent research of Robert Allen, who points to the relative stagnation of wages in the early stages of the industrial revolution. The three countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) that form part of this case-study point to a similar development, with wages underperforming until the 1870s, and later followed by higher wage growth rates. Nonetheless, the author also emphasizes that population growth and emigration were two key variables in fostering the transition from one scenario to the other.

Finally, David Pretel presents an interesting article on the institutional design of the Spanish patent system during the nineteenth century. As the author points out, patents should be understood as a fundamental part of a country's legal framework (along with property rights or corporate laws) that encourages (or slows down) economic development. Analysing the Spanish case in comparative perspective, Pretel shows the paradoxical evolution of this country. Although Spain's peripheral position in the world economy should have led to the creation of a framework that would enable the rapid

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transfer of foreign technology, in practice the Spanish patent system did not serve this purpose. Instead, lawmakers chose to protect domestic industry and, besides, regulation proved to be ineffective due to poor compliance and the weak diffusion of results.

Overall, the articles in this special issue offer new and relevant results to the academic community, while also raising new questions and research horizons. Clearly, it is a good time for Economic History.