

Topics in Human Capital

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The development of Economic History at the University of Stockholm 1970-1982

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During the 1940s, the issue of economic history as an independent discipline at universities was examined by the state. As a result, four preceptors and a professorship were established. The professorship went to Stockholm University and Ernst Söderlund in 1949. In 1969, he resigned and was succeeded by Rolf Adamson. In this conference paper, I will focus on the development of the department of economic history at University of Stockholm between the years 1970-1982, during the radical student era. I am using an extensive archive material, gathered by Ph D Rolf Henriksson, together with other source material produced by the department. The main research question is: How did the department meet the students' demands and to what extent did the students influence the departments' teaching methods and the content of the courses? The Conference paper is part of a larger planned project on the creation and development of economic history at Stockholm University between the years 1949 and 1982. The planned publication of the project is set for 2024, 75 years after the professorship was established at Stockholm University.

Celestial enlightenment: eclipses, curiosity and economic development among pre-modern ethnic groups

Anastasia Litina, University of Macedonia

This paper revisits the role of human capital for economic growth among pre-modern ethnic groups. We hypothesize that exposure to rare natural events drives curiosity and prompts thinking in an attempt to comprehend and explain the phenomenon, thus raising human capital and, ultimately, pre-modern growth. We focus on solar eclipses as one particular trigger of curiosity and empirically establish a robust relationship between their number and several proxies for economic prosperity: social complexity, technological level and population density. Variation in solar eclipse exposure is exogenous as their local incidence is randomly and sparsely distributed all over the globe. Additionally, eclipses' non-destructive character makes them outperform other uncanny natural events, such as volcano eruptions or earthquakes, which have direct negative economic effects. We also offer evidence compatible with the human capital increase we postulate, finding a more intricate thinking process in ethnic groups more exposed to solar eclipses. In particular, we study the development of written language, the playing of strategy games and the accuracy of the folkloric reasoning for eclipses.

State intervention, education supply and economic growth in nineteenth-century France

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In this article, I explore the association between the rise in education and economic growth during the nineteenth century. To do so, I rely on a quasi-natural experiment, the Guizot law of 1833, which made mandatory for each French municipality over 500 inhabitants to open and fund a primary school for boys. This law constitutes the first coercive measure on schooling supply undertaken by the French state. By implementing a regression discontinuity around the 500-inhabitant threshold defined by the law, I identify a positive impact of primary instruction on the subsequent growth of municipalities. The outcomes are consistent with the hypothesis of a productivity-enhancing effect of education. State intervention and education policy therefore contributed to shape the development path of French municipalities. More generally, these findings point out a positive impact of basic education on growth during the century of industrialisation and modernisation.