

**European Research Council
SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME-"Ideas" Specific programme**

United We Stand

The dynamics and consequences of institutions for collective action in pre-industrial Europe

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“Description of Work”

Summary of the project

Europe’s economic development in the centuries leading up to the Industrial Revolution, continues to fascinate scholars. In recent debates, institutionalised forms of collective action have been put forward as a key feature of Europe’s precocious development. This project examines that connection between institutions and economic development in detail. It also harks back to the origins of such institutions, teasing out the impact of changing family patterns that emerged in Western Europe in the Late Middle Ages, which are often described as ‘the European Marriage Pattern’. Together with such factors as the absence of a strong state, and a helpful legal framework, the weakening of family relations may have created opportunities for other, non-kin social organisations to emerge, explaining the strength of institutions for collective action in this part of the world.

Interactions between economic growth, marriage patterns and collective action institutions will be examined on several levels. A European wide-analysis, using specific indicators for institutional development and demographic patterns, should help clarify our understanding of their temporal and geographical co-evolution. Regulations for several types of collective action institutions will be analysed for Western Europe (the Low Countries and England) and Southern Europe (Italy and Spain) to study the impact of household constitution and marriage patterns on institutional arrangements. A third level of the project, to be subdivided in an urban and a rural study, will look into the application of such regulations in everyday practices, through the analysis of several case-studies of guilds, commons and *beguinages* in the Low Countries. Finally, a small sub-project is added to promote the dissemination and exchange of the project’s data among the wider academic community. Several events will, moreover, be organised to stimulate debates about the topics raised by the project. In this way, the project aims to help understand Europe’s specific development trajectory in the centuries preceding Europe’s dominant role in the world economy (and world politics) during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The project's emphasis on micro-level behaviour of households and their willingness to cooperate in collective action institutions, and these institutions' impact on economic development, is expected to cast a new light on the determinants of economic growth. Although the data are historically and geographically specific, the long-term perspective is bound to produce results that will be applicable to a much wider range of cases, including contemporary developing countries.

Extended Synopsis of the project

Research questions and state of the art

The objective of the proposed project is to unravel the complex relationships between economic development, the emergence and resilience of collective action institutions and changes in household formation in pre-modern Europe. Bringing these three elements together in a single analytical framework will contribute to three debates that are currently high on the agenda of the historical discipline: the Great Divergence debate (why was the Industrial Revolution in Europe rather than China?), the debate on the European Marriage Pattern (what has been the impact of the emergence of the European family on development?), and the debate on institutions for collective action (what were the long term effects of the genesis of guilds and similar institutions on economic development?). The project will contribute to empirical work in each of these three areas and, perhaps more importantly,

will analyse these questions in conjunction. The ‘triangular approach’ favoured by this proposal is expected to test and refine established views and produce new hypotheses on the development of pre-modern societies, in particular in Europe.

In these three debates, it has been argued that the socio-economic, socio-political and demographic structures of Europe, and in particular of the region around the North Sea, were in some respects different from those found in other parts of Eurasia. These differences in structures and institutions can, perhaps, help us to understand why the Industrial Revolution occurred in the West, and not in ‘the Rest’. The project focuses on two developments in particular: changes in demography and family formation, and the socio-political structures of ‘corporate collective action’ which played a large role on the political economy of pre-modern Europe. With this research project the interaction between changes on the micro (marriage patterns), meso (collective action) and macro (economic development) levels of European societies will be studied, which may help to explain the development path that ultimately led to one most significant episodes in world history, the Industrial Revolution. The central research question can be summarised as: To what extent have institutions for collective action, such as guilds, commons, *beguinages*, emerged in response to autonomous changes in the family structure, and to what extent have they—in turn—contributed to economic development in the long run? This question is based on a combination of a number of propositions that have been advanced in (recent) literature.

First of all, it is claimed in recent literature that **Europe witnessed an exceptional development of institutions for cooperation and collective action from the late Middle Ages onwards**. Building on the studies by Ostrom (1990) and Greif (2006), recent European-wide and global comparisons have suggested that Europe since the late Middle Ages experienced a bottom-up movement of new collective action institutions. With a previously unknown intensity Europeans created social ‘alliances’ that were not primarily based on kinship, but on other common characteristics such as occupation or domicile. In the urban context, organisations such as craft guilds and fraternities can serve as examples (Reynolds 2002). For the countryside, most attention has so far gone to the communes (Blickle 1986). It is not so much the actual formation of such types of collective action that is striking, nor do their institutional characteristics make Europe in this period particularly exceptional. Rather, it is the high density of the new collective action institutions that sets Europe apart from other continents. This ‘silent revolution’ was a bottom-up phenomenon, in which large numbers of ‘ordinary people’ participated (De Moor 2008). The movement was primarily based on at first tacit, later written agreements between princes and their subjects, both villagers and townsmen, most of which were the outcome of peaceful negotiations. Whereas much of the historiography on collective action focuses primarily on short-term demands for change in the form of riots or protest demonstrations (as in the work of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), this proposal draws the attention to the institutionalised, more routine forms of collective action and thereby broadens the application of ‘collective action’ as a tool for socio-economic analysis.

A second, closely related proposition claims that **pre-modern Europeans could avail themselves of a broad and variegated set of institutions for collective action**. Perhaps the craft guilds are the best-known, but they display many similarities with, for instance, water-boards, *beguinages*, rural commons, and urban communes. Whereas the historical literature tends to discuss each type of institution for collective action separately, this research project tackles them all at once, taking the fact that they have some institutional features in common (cf. De Moor 2008) as the starting point for the analysis. All these institutions used collective action as a method to create economies of scale and to avoid risks—both natural and market-related, and to restrict outsiders from accessing scarce resources. Commons, for instance were created for the collective management and use of natural resources. These institutions limited the impact of harvest failures due to unpredictable weather, floods, or diseases, while on the other hand they saved on investments in, for example, fencing and drainage systems. These institutions, moreover, created social security provisions for their members, as can be seen in the guilds’ their provisions for widows and orphans of guild masters. Besides commons and guilds as the most well-known types of such institutions, there are other forms to be considered as well. The *beguinages*, in the literature sometimes labelled ‘female guilds’ emerged in the Middle Ages as more or less independent corporations of single women. Apart from their similarities with guilds in terms of economic activities, the beguines found a comparable advantage in terms of safety (risk

avoidance) and the sharing of resources. Similar arguments can be made for water-boards and friendly societies or journeymen boxes. The cooperative strategy allowed the members to share the costs that arise from uncertainty. Collective action helped to tackle problems that neither individuals, nor family relations were able to solve, simply because their resources were inadequate.

Political scientists have made extensive studies of the internal workings of similar institutions in modern societies, mainly in Third World countries. These studies show that self-governance is an important key to the resilience, i.e. long-term survival of these institutions (Ostrom 1990). I will combine such theories with long-term historical data on collective action institutions like craft guilds, commons, *beguinages*, and water-boards. These institutions often existed for hundreds of years, and some have survived until the present. A study of the causes of their longevity, combined with data on economic development, will provide a better understanding of the impact of a particular type of institutions on economic development in the very long term.

The emergence and growth of corporations was possibly—as has been suggested quite often but never clearly demonstrated—connected to a weakening of family ties in Europe. Mitterauer (2003) argues that more ‘open’ forms of social organization than systems based on kinship or tribal relations might have played a part in the development of these institutions of collective action, and particularly its corporate form. Societies organised around strict family lineage, tribal structures, or clans, may not have provided enough ‘space’ for the development of collective action. This suggests that changes to the family structures set in motion a whole train of events that put Europe on its specific trajectory of collective action and economic development, whereby family solidarity was gradually replaced by other forms of solidarity. This also throws new light on the functions of the new institutions of collective action that emerged: these institutions (such as guilds) were to some extent substitutes for family solidarity, in the form of arrangements for widows and orphans of member, funerals etc. The decline in parental authority, the creation of nuclear households away from the paternal household and increasingly gender-balanced relationship between generations and within the household, altogether resulted in considerably weakened family ties, in comparison with multi-generation households and patri-local and arranged marriage systems elsewhere. These changes had an impact on collective action institutions. Guilds, for instance, not only responded to the consequences of the changes in family relations, with services such as poor relief, but they could emerge precisely as a form of “artificial family” (Black 2002) because the traditional family system had weakened. The same might have been true for other similar institutions, but this has not been studied at all so far. On the basis of this literature we come to our **third proposition, that the rise and growth of collective action institutions was influenced by changes in family systems and household structure.**

Linked to this proposition is another claim found in the literature, stating that **the European Marriage Pattern has led to less patriarchal and more ‘democratic’ relationships between generations and sexes and has hence contributed to economic growth in Western Europe.** The ‘weakening family ties’ were the result of a long-term process that started in the Middle ages, and that would eventually lead towards the emergence of what has been termed ‘the European Marriage pattern’, which I have studied together with Van Zanden (De Moor & Van Zanden, 2006, 2009). In our opinion, the European Marriage Pattern, as first described by Hajnal in 1965, was characterised by neo-locality, free-choice of marriage partners, late marriages, and high percentages of singles, both for men and women. It emerged as a pattern within Western European society from the late Middle Ages onwards. These characteristics led to, on the one hand, more ‘democratic’ relationships within the households, both between the sexes and the generations, in combination a decline in the parental authority, and, on the other hand, to a loosening of family ties. In Southern Europe, where there is little sign of an EMP-like pattern; families remained largely organised in a patriarchal, patri-local way. The first consequence in turn influenced the way in which children of different sexes were treated within households: women received (nearly) equal opportunities in terms of education and labour market participation. They could enter the labour market as labourers as educated as their male peers, and this—as we argue—has influenced the economic development of Western Europe significantly. The relatively equal position of women within the household—from childhood onwards—moreover increased the stock of human capital of European societies significantly, giving them a head-start on the path to economic growth. Recent studies have shown that societies with marriages based on consensus tend to invest more equally in the education of both boys and girls (Edlund 2006) than those

with arranged marriages. In a number of papers De Moor and Van Zanden (2006 and 2008) have already tested this idea for the Low Countries, where indeed the rise of the EMP led to strongly increased investment in both young men and women, as a result of which from the 15th century onwards this was the European region with the highest level of literacy and numeracy. The project sets out to develop these propositions for other parts of Europe as well.

The PI aims at bringing together the above formulated propositions into a novel, coherent study of the role of collective action institutions, marriage patterns and economic development. Notwithstanding the suggestions made by other historians, sociologists, economists, demographers and anthropologists that there are connections between these institutions and structures, these three factors have not been studied in connection before, nor has sufficient empirical evidence been collected to test and refine these propositions. This new approach will require us to borrow a number of methodological instruments from other disciplines. By doing so, it will also enable us to connect historical debates to those in other sciences, especially of political scientists working on the functioning and design of institutions, of sociologists focusing on problems of collective action and cooperation, and of economists researching the mechanisms behind economic development. Each of these focuses are highly relevant for present-day political and economic issues. Although present-day institutions are often the result of changes over several centuries, knowledge about these historical processes is often hardly integrated into debates on present-day institutions. The interdisciplinary approach of our project will offer unique opportunities to apply our knowledge about an historical problem to present-day issues.

Methodology

To answer the main research question of this project, we will, on the one hand, analyse the sequence of these events, and their regional distribution, and on the other hand investigate the structural implications of this interaction. For the first part, a combination of process-tracing (Mahoney 2003) and regional comparisons will allow us to identify patterns of causation on a European macro-level, with current nation states as the central geographical units, for the pre-industrial period starting in the year 1000. A total of **three data sets for specific variables, to be used as indicators for those developments**, will be collected within **Work Package 1**: a dataset (A) on the economic development of individual European countries, Dataset B on the evolution of the various collective action institutions in a range of European countries, and Dataset C on the evolution of marriage patterns in those same European countries. The second and third datasets should allow us, through process tracing and comparison, to identify connections between the emergence of EMP and of collective action institutions. Combined with the first dataset we will be able to measure impact on economic development. Depending on the type of data, the datasets will reach from the year 1000 to 1800. Data for the period 1000-1400 will probably be limited, and it is possible that more indirect indicators will have to be used for that period. For the first two data collections, on economic development and institutions, we will be able to rely heavily on the results of several other projects the PI is involved in, such as the project ‘Data Infrastructure for guilds and other forms of corporate collective action’, funded by the Dutch National Research Council NWO. The major effort in this part of the project will be the selection, collection and analysis of data on the European Marriage Pattern. Although we are—since the intense debates that started in the early 1980s—quite well informed about the regional and temporal impact of various aspects of the EMP, there is still a lack of data on a variety of crucial aspects. For this project, however, we require a large number of data on indicators such as gendered labour market participation rates, widows’ remarriage rates, and legal indicators such as inheritance rights for men and women. These indicators are as such interesting additions for our understanding of the distribution of certain types of marriage patterns, but, crucially, also necessary to understand the emergence of collective action institutions. The analysis of the chances on remarriage of widows, for example, provides us on the one hand with an indicator of the position of women as autonomous economic actors, while at the same time this connects to the policies of collective action institutions like the craft guilds. A specific analysis model that links economic parameters to the changes on meso- and micro-level will be designed, on the basis of the model developed by Bosker, Buringh and van Zanden (Bosker et al. 2008).

Parallel to the study of the broad developments that are being studied in WP1, three more WPs will concentrate on the understanding of how these causal mechanisms actually worked on the level of the institutions, and within a variety of these institutions, both in town and countryside. The structural implications of these mechanisms will be researched by looking into the functioning of these institutions, both 'in theory' and 'in practice'. Each of these phenomena spread via certain mechanisms and may or may not interact with each other while doing so. Understanding these mechanisms requires a more 'vertical' analysis of the actual functioning of institutions, in different contexts and circumstances. This can be done via **systematically scrutinising the way in which institutions were set up, and how this was later adjusted to changing circumstances (WP 2)**. Understanding the regulations of institutions for collective action is also a key-aspect of the links between macro-changes and the day-to-day functioning of those institutions. First of all, the evolution of rules and sanctions over time can often be read as a reaction to external changes. Many institutions for example restrict the conditions for access during the 16th century and this may be related to demographic growth and political changes in that period. What is written down in terms of rules, in various action fields (access, use, and management) and how misbehaviour is sanctioned, defines the limits of what the members of an institution can do on a daily basis. Secondly, institutions can also influence the economy and society, in particular if they manage to survive long periods of time. Resilience of institutions has by political scientists and sociologists been attributed to factors as self-governance and political embeddedness (Ostrom 1990). Finding out how these institutions were regulated on the basis of these and other factors, will help us to further our understanding of what makes an institutions resilient.

The next level of analysis therefore is **a number of case-studies which should refine our understanding of the actual functioning of these institutions of collective action (WPs 3 and 4)**. This research will focus on the Low Countries, where the connections between household formation, collective action institutions, and economic development will be investigated in great detail. Due to the availability of sources, the focus of the parallel Work Packages 3 (urban institutions) and 4 (rural institutions) will be restricted to the 17th and 18th centuries. The case study-approach will help to refine our analysis of the impact of household formation on the constitution of collective action institutions. Furthermore, the study of the daily practice of several types of collective action institutions will allow us to get a sense of the extent to which the regulation of these institutions was also followed in daily life. Understanding the 'translation' from rule into real life offers us one more angle from which to analyse the institutionalisation process that Europe went through in pre-modern times. Hereby WP 3 will concentrate on the urban institutions, especially guilds and *beguinages*, while WP 4 will focus on the rural institutions, in particular commons and rural guilds.

WP5 will be aimed at **intensifying the use and exchange of data on marriage patterns, collective action and economic development**. As an academic whose projects are mainly funded by the government, I am convinced that we have a moral obligation towards allowing other researchers in our field –and also non-academics- access to our own data collections. Intensive collaboration among scientists, via the exchange of both knowledge and data, is, in my opinion, the most effective and efficient way to high-quality research (as was also explained in De Moor & Van Zanden 2008). For the NWO-infrastructure project (see above), a collaboratory website has been designed, and this will be expanded with this ERC-research line, in order to create the facilities for the team members to exchange information. This will enhance the interaction between the research team members. Besides, the data will be made freely available to the public partly during the research, and partly after the research (depending on the progress of the researchers' publications).

WP 6 consists of **bringing the research results to the academic community** by means of two thematic conferences which will be organised on two important themes of the project. First of all, a meeting of the experts in the field of the European Marriage Pattern will be organised to explore the influence of this mainly demographic phenomenon on economic development, in year 3. A second meeting will focus on how institutions put their regulation into practice, in year 4. A selection of the papers presented at these conferences will be offered as a special issue to top-journals in the field, and edited by the PI and (at least) one of the other researchers involved in the project. The PI also plans to organise the Biennial conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) in Utrecht in 2014, at the very end of the project (but this has no implications for the ERC-budget).

Research Environment

The PI is currently part of the permanent staff—as an assistant professor—of the *Social and economic history* unit of the Research Institute for Culture and History of the Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University, led by Professors Jan Luiten van Zanden and Maarten Prak. This research unit has over the past decade become one of the world's leading research groups in social and economic history, with a clear focus on the relationship between economic development and institutional development for the period since the Middle Ages until today. The group works on a number of closely related research projects, which are funded for an important part by non-university resources, mainly NWO (Dutch National Research Council) and Dutch business partners. The focus of the group's research efforts is on the institutional development of capitalism since the late Middle Ages. The group is particularly interested in “bottom-up” institutions, such as networks of employers and the related ‘civic culture’, urban guilds and rural commons, families and firms, unions and co-operations. The researchers of the unit are very productive and deliver high quality outcomes. The group is also an active participant in several other international programmes: the Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area-network, the Global Economic History Network, the InterUniversity Attraction Pool Project on City & Society. The research group will also host the next World Economic History Conference in 2009 (www.wehc2009.org).

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