



## **Research project 2017-2019**

### **Economic inequality in pre-industrial societies: causes and effects**

The results of this research project will be presented at Prato during the 51<sup>st</sup> Study Week (May 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

Recent interest in inequality has focused on its real or perceived effects on economic growth and social development, in contrast to past debates which concentrated more on the injustice of income inequality. Both scholars and policy makers are now asking how democratic and inclusive societies can function effectively with high inequality; the OECD has voiced concerns about the negative effects on economic growth, while the UN is worried about the effect of inequality on societal vulnerability. These negative effects may materialize directly in terms of people's participation in the economy, human capital formation, or productive investments, or indirectly, through the growing leverage of the wealthy, the erosion of societal cohesion and resilience, or even outbursts of conflict and unrest.

The insights offered by historical developments have been a major feature of these recent debates about inequality. Especially striking is the scholarly attention paid to pre-industrial periods in assessing the causes and effects of inequality; indeed, few works postulate any fundamental divide between the pre-industrial and industrial periods. This scholarship, however, tends to look at very long, grand developments, generally at a macro-level, often defined as the 'nation-state' of the nineteenth century, a perspective that neglects the essential regional and local organization of the economy in the pre-industrial period. Figures at the level of national statistics by themselves do not say a lot, but an historical approach that contextualizes inequality by reference to social relations, institutions, access to power, and the cultural or religious legitimation of power facilitates a better understanding of the mechanisms that drive inequality and its effects.

The study week consists of four components:

#### **I Sources and methods**

How can we best measure economic inequality in the pre-industrial period? What do the figures assembled on forms of economic inequality actually say? Is it possible to compare levels of inequality?

## **II Causes of economic inequality**

What was the role of privileges, monopolies, markets and market competition, and institutional arrangements more generally in the development of economic inequality? How did such factors as religion, legislation, guild regulation, taxation, communal agriculture, and charity create, legitimize, or mitigate inequality? Were these factors explicitly aimed at reducing inequality or did they only indirectly do so?

## **III Effects of economic inequality on the economy**

How did economic inequality affect welfare levels and living standards? What were the effects of inequality on investments and economic growth? What were the effects of inequality on economic policies?

## **IV Effects of economic inequality on society**

How did economic inequality affect different social groups? What were the effects of economic inequality on social coherence, on social peace, violence and revolts? What were the effects of wealth inequality on political power/ leverage? How did economic inequality affect societal resilience vis-à-vis disasters? How did it affect ecological sustainability, use of natural resources, and human capital formation?

## **Expected results**

The results of the selected research for the project will be presented and discussed at Prato in the course of the Study Week 2019. After the discussion at the Settimana sessions, scholars may complete and revise their texts by 30 June 2019. All contributions received by the institute will be subject to anonymous adjudication before publication.

## **Call for papers**

Scholars are invited to send their proposal by compiling an abstract that will be reviewed by the Scientific Council Committee.

The paper should represent an original contribution and either generally comparative or a specific case-study that speaks to the larger questions set out here.

Papers proposed by projects or collaborative groups that link scholars from different countries and institutions will be assessed with particular interest if they offer a comparative analysis in geographical or diachronic terms across two or more related research themes. We will also consider innovative session formats for these type of proposals.

The completed format must be received at the following address by 15 October 2017:  
Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini"  
Via ser Lapo Mazzei 37, I 59100 Prato, ITALY  
e-mail: [datini@istitutodatini.it](mailto:datini@istitutodatini.it)

The Scientific Council Committee will only take fully completed formats into consideration and will decide whether they have been accepted by January 2018, when authors of the selected proposals will be notified. Depending on the Institute's financial resources, at least 25 scholars will be provided with hospitality at Prato for the Study Week. The Council may also invite up to 20 additional scholars to participate in the project without any right to hospitality or reimbursement.

The Fondazione Datini will award for the Prato conference up to 10 Travel Bursaries to cover travel costs for the conference to the maximum of 250 euros per grant for selected postgraduate doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars who do not hold a full-time academic position. Applicants must send the request for the travel bursary to the Fondazione Datini with their paper by 31 March 2019. The grant will be paid during the conference on the presentation of travel receipts.

The members of the Council are: Erik Aerts (Leuven, President), Laurence Fontaine (Paris, Vice-President), Carlo Marco Belfanti (Brescia, Vice-President), Giampiero Nigro (Florence, Scientific Director), Hilario Casado Alonso (Valladolid), Sergej Pavlovič Karpov (Moscow), Olga Katsiardi-Hering (Athens), Maryanne Kowaleski (New York), Paolo Malanima (Catanzaro), Michael North (Greifswald), Luciano Palermo (Rome), Gaetano Sabatini (Rome).

All submitted contributions must be original and not previously published or translated from previous publications.

The provisional texts of the selected contributions must reach the Fondazione Datini by 31 March 2019. They will be put online (with protected access reserved for the participants of the project and members of the Scientific Committee) in the Institute's webpages before the Study Week in order to allow a deeper discussion of their contents.

At the Settimana participants will offer a summary presentation of their contribution lasting 20 minutes.

The definitive texts of the paper, revised by the authors following the discussion (maximum 60,000 characters) must be sent to the Institute by 30 June 2019.

They will be subject to anonymous adjudication. Texts that pass the assessment stage will be published in a special volume (together with two abstracts prepared by the author) within a year. For the purpose of publication, texts will be accepted in Italian, French, English, Spanish and German. Simultaneous translation from and to Italian and English will be carried out during the Study Week.