FONDAZIONE
Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. DATINI"
PRATO

Call for research papers 2025-2027
The role of foreign communities in the economic growth of pre-industrial Europe and Mediterranean Area (13th-18th centuries)

The results of this call for research papers will be presented at Prato during the 58th Study Week
(9-13 May 2027)
deadline for submission of proposals: 1 November 2025

During the long period from the 13th to the 18th century, a crucial role in the economic development of Europe and the Mediterranean area and in their integration into a single trading area was played by a variety of foreign communities operating within urban and mercantile contexts as well as in rural areas. These communities did not necessarily identify themselves as minorities in the ethnic, linguistic or religious sense of the term, but were made up of groups of individuals who, for professional and/or economic reasons, resided permanently in cities or regions other than those of their origin and whose legal status was often ambiguous; they were not citizens, but neither were they mere foreigners just passing through.

The LVIII Study Week focuses on these foreign communities during the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. These communities could be characterized by their high qualifications, in which case, they brought capital, skills and innovation, or they could be composed of unskilled workers, in which case they were filling the gap left by the insufficient supply of local labour. But in both cases, these communities contributed significantly to the creation of a transnational economic culture that anticipated many aspects of modernity. Their mobility and ability to adapt to different socio-economic contexts and their role in the production and circulation of goods and techniques, as well as ideas, make these communities a key element in understanding European interdependence before the industrial era. The history of European capitalism, far from being merely national, had its roots in a complex interplay of mobile populations, sometimes undefined in legal terms, but always economically central.

The demographic and urban growth in the Middle Ages, together with the expansion of long-distance trade, encouraged the circulation of people, goods and professional skills. In this context, cities became centres of attraction for specialised groups: bankers, craftsmen, merchants, lawyers and notaries who found opportunities for profit and institutional protection outside their region of origin. These were individuals or entire groups who maintained transregional links, creating family and business networks capable of transcending political and cultural boundaries. A prime example is the Lombard bankers who were active in the main European financial centres from the 13th century onwards. While maintaining a strong regional and linguistic identity, these operators settled for long periods in cities such as Paris, London or Bruges, where they acted as lenders, money

changers and financiers to individuals or sovereigns. Their legal status was often regulated by special agreements (franchises, letters of privilege), which allowed them to operate without enjoying full citizenship. At the same time, urban development required on one hand a growing number of workers for the construction industry, many of whom entered the sector without any previous experience; on the other hand, economic development stimulated agricultural production and contributed to a rising demand for rural labourers.

Another crucial aspect in this process was that of international trade networks, which required complex logistics, mutual trust and in-depth knowledge of local political and legal conditions. Large international fairs, such as those in Champagne in the 13th century or in Lyon and Frankfurt in the following centuries, were catalysts for foreign communities. Tuscan, Catalan, Flemish and German merchants met there, often organised into merchant nations, with their own self-governing structures, internal regulations and representatives to the local authorities. These communities not only promoted trade but also introduced innovations in commercial practices, such as bills of exchange or limited partnerships. They were also a vehicle for cultural exchange: merchants were often multilingual, bringing with them lifestyles, fashions, ideas and practices that contributed to the cultural homogenisation of the European elite.

In addition to merchants and bankers, skilled craftsmen constituted another fundamental group of foreigners. Many key sectors of the pre-industrial economy – textiles, metallurgy, printing, construction – benefited from the contribution of foreign workers who moved to meet the demand for specific skills or because of religious persecution, such as the migration of Huguenot artisans to England. The mobility of these workers was often encouraged by city or princely governments, which granted privileges, tax exemptions or housing to attract outside skills. A case in point is that of the Flemish craftsmen called to Italy in the 15th century to improve the quality of textile manufacturing. Similarly, the spread of printing in Europe in the 15th century was greatly facilitated by German printers who settled in Italian, French and Iberian cities, creating new productive communities. Again, these were individuals who were legally foreign but economically and socially deeply integrated into local circles. Following epidemics and natural disasters, princes and local governments sought to encourage the transfer of foreign populations to repopulate cities and countryside, both to keep wages down, which would otherwise rise due to labour shortages, and to restore sufficient production of basic consumer goods.

Another area of great importance in this regard was the legal and academic culture. Medieval universities were veritable international crossroads, where students and professors grouped together in nations according to their geographical origin. These groups often had an institutional role, contributing to the self-government of the universities themselves. Many Italian jurists, for example, found employment in the courts of northern Europe as consultants, diplomats or notaries, forming genuine transregional professional networks. The same was true for foreign notaries, doctors, architects and engineers, who were often employed on a long-term basis by cities, principalities or religious institutions and were characterised by a very homogeneous European education, which facilitated their integration into legally and linguistically diverse contexts. For example, the splendid baroque churches in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were created in the 17th and 18th century by Italian and Saxonian architects. Although formally excluded from full citizenship, they participated significantly in the intellectual and professional life of their host societies.

The presence of all these foreign communities was not without tension. The ambiguity of their position – between economic integration and legal exclusion – made them vulnerable in times of political or economic crisis. There were moments of expulsion, discrimination or targeted taxation. However, their resilience was often guaranteed by the strength of their economic networks and their ability to adapt. It is important to note that many European cities, especially those with a strong mercantile vocation, developed specific institutions and rules to regulate the presence of these groups: mercantile courts, foreign consulates, and corporate codes that provided spaces for the gradual integration of the so called "useful foreigners". The Hanseatic cities, for example, had precise statutes to regulate the presence of "useful foreigners", recognising their status as resident guest (*Gast* or *Beisasse*), a legal category granted to foreign merchants and craftsmen who settled on a long-term basis: they did not have full citizenship, but enjoyed political and fiscal privileges, as well as limited protection and rights.

In turn, Hanseatic merchants formed foreign communities outside the Baltic Sea area; in the Kontors of Bruges, London, and then Antwerp (13^{th}-16^{th} centuries), they formed distinct groups with their own statutes, internal judges and structures (such as the *Oosterlingenhuis*, the 'House of Germans') and, although they were hosted and integrated into the local economic fabric, their role was crucial in the trade of linen, wheat, spices and salt, even though they had neither citizenship nor full political autonomy. Another example is the Kontor in the Russian city of Novgorod, where a German merchant community operated according to special rules, with its own *Oldermann* or governor, and in a well-defined urban space. Essential for the trade in salt, furs, wax and honey, this community is an interesting case of a legally autonomous but economically interdependent settlement. Vice versa, there were Russian "churches" (in fact, merchants' enclaves) in neighbouring Livonian cities.

The role played by skilled craftsmen and technicians who migrated from Germany and Flanders to the East in the fields of linen processing, beer production and shipbuilding was also significant. For example, between the 15th and 17th centuries, Flemish craftsmen skilled in linen and cloth weaving were employed in Danzig, Elbing, and Stettin, often on special contracts or protected by municipal privileges. They were not full citizens but enjoyed 'protection' because of the know-how they brought with them, while Dutch workers in the shipyards of Hamburg and Stettin contributed to the development of Baltic shipbuilding techniques between the 16th and 17th centuries. Here too, these were legally distinct communities but socially integrated into the productive sector.

On the other side of Europe, the port cities and commercial centres of the Mediterranean were home to foreign communities made up of merchants, bankers, craftsmen and professionals who enjoyed ad hoc statutes, with their own institutions and special conditions of protection granted by the local authorities. Because of this special legal status, they often became privileged intermediaries for trade throughout the Mediterranean.

Also worth mentioning are the communities of Tuscan and Genoese merchants in the western Mediterranean: in the 13th-16th centuries, Barcelona, Palermo, Naples, Valencia and Palma de Mallorca were home to communities of Tuscan merchants active in the trade of wool, silk, spices and metals, or as moneylenders, money changers and financial agents. In Avignon, seat of the papacy in the 14th century, bankers from Lucca and Siena operated the papal collection system. Although foreigners, they were indispensable for the collection and transmission of money. In Venice, in the 15th century, Dalmatian, Greek and Levantine glassmakers were employed in the production of artistic glass, many of whom resided in

Murano under special legal conditions (they were not Venetian citizens but were protected and bound to the city). In Granada, after the Reconquista, Italian and French craftsmen were employed in textile manufacturing and the construction of hydraulic systems. They were migrant technicians, encouraged by tax exemptions. There were also numerous communities of Christian merchants in the Maghreb and along the southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean.

The papers proposed for Datini Study Week should address one or more of the following topics:

1. Legal Status and Integration of the Foreign Communities
- What legal categories (e.g. *Beisasse*, *Gast*, resident foreigner, etc.) regulated the presence and economic activities of non-citizen groups in different regions and cities?
- To what extent were foreign communities integrated into local economic, legal, and social structures?
- How did statutes, privileges, and exemptions shape their status and economic opportunities?

2. Professional Communities and Economic Functions
- What roles did foreign bankers, merchants, craftsmen, jurists, and skilled artisans play in the economic life of pre-industrial societies?
- How were professional skills and know-how transferred through these communities across regions?
- To what extent did foreign professional communities contribute to the formation of transregional labour markets?

3. Networks and Mobility
- How did family, commercial, or professional networks facilitate mobility and transnational economic integration?
- What were the spatial and institutional configurations of these networks (e.g. *fondaci*, *kontore*, *nations*,etc.)?
- How did these networks adapt to phases of political fragmentation, war, or crisis?

4. Conflict, Competition, and Resilience
- How were foreign communities affected by xenophobia, protectionist policies, or fiscal discriminations?
- What strategies did they adopt to survive or adapt in times of political or economic upheaval?
- How did local populations and institutions perceive and respond to the presence of "useful foreigners"?

5. Cultural and Technical Transfers
- How did foreign groups contribute to the diffusion of commercial techniques, legal knowledge, artistic skills, or technological innovations?
- What was the role of multilingualism and intercultural competencies within these communities?
- Can the influence of foreign communities be traced in urban development, trade practices, or institutional change?

6. Comparative and Transregional Approaches
- How did the presence and role of foreign communities differ between the Hanseatic area and the Mediterranean?
- What regional patterns can be identified in the recruitment, regulation, or integration of foreign groups?

- What are there the most significant phases of change in the status or functions of these communities between the 13th and 18th centuries?

7. Institutional Mediation and Governance

- What role did consulates, tribunals, or local authorities play in regulating foreign communities?
- How did foreign communities organize themselves internally by mean of guilds, consuls, statutes, etc.?
- In what ways did institutions mediate tensions between foreign groups and local populations?

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

1. General Studies and Comparative Approaches

- Abulafia, David, *Il grande mare. Storia del Mediterraneo*, Milano, Mondadori, 2013.
- Ascheri, Mario, *Lo straniero: aspetti della problematica giuridica*, in G. Rossetti (ed.), *Dentro la città. Stranieri e realtà urbane nell'Europa dei secoli XII-XVI*, Napoli, Liguori, 1989.
- Barbero, Alessandro, *Le migrazioni medievali*, in P. Corti (ed.), *Storia d'Italia, Annali*, 24, *Migrazioni*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996.
- Böninger, Lorenz, *I tedeschi nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, in L. Tanzini, S. Tognetti, *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo italiano. Competenze, conoscenze e saperi tra professioni e ruoli sociali (secc. XII-XV)*, Roma, Viella, 2016.
- Bottin, Jacques, Calabi, Donatella, *Les étrangers dans la ville. Minorités et espace urbain du bas Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1999.
- Braunstein Philippe, *Les Allemands à Venise (1380-1520)*, Roma, École Française de Rome, 2016.
- Calabi, Donatella, Lanaro Paola (eds.), *La città italiana e i luoghi degli stranieri (XIV-XVIII secolo)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1998.
- Cavaciocchi, Simonetta (ed.), *Le migrazioni in Europa. Secc. XIII - XVIII. Atti della venticinquesima settimana di studi dell'Istituto F. Datini (Prato, 3-8 maggio 1993)*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1994.
- Costa, Pietro, *Civitas. Storia della cittadinanza in Europa*, vol. I, *Dalla civiltà comunale al Settecento*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1999.
- *Forestieri e stranieri nelle città basso-medievali: atti del Seminario internazionale di studio (Bagno a Ripoli – Firenze, 4-8 giugno 1984)*, Firenze, Salimbeni, 1987.
- Greif, Avner, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Ormrod, W. Mark, Lambert, Bert, and Jonathan Mackman, *Immigrant England, 1300-1550*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019.
- Trivellato, Francesca, *Renaissance Italy and the Muslim Mediterranean in Recent Historical Work*, in "The Journal of Modern History", 82, 2010, pp. 127-55.
- Trivellato, Francesca, *Renaissance Florence and the Origins of Capitalism: A Business History Perspective*, in "Business History Review", 94, 2020, pp. 229-51.

2. Trade, Networks, and Mobility

- Cordes, Albrecht, *Spätmittelalterlicher Gesellschaftshandel im Hanseraum*, Köln, Böhlau, 1998.

- Guidi Bruscoli, Francesco, *I mercanti italiani e le lingue straniere*, in Lori Sanfilippo, I., G. Pinto (eds.), *Comunicare nel medioevo. La conoscenza e l'uso delle lingue nei secoli XII-XV*, Roma, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, pp. 103-31.
- Harreld, Donald J., ed., *A Companion to the Hanseatic League*, Leiden, Brill, 2015.
- Jacoby, David, *Commercial Exchange Across the Mediterranean*, Aldershot, Variorum, 2005.
- Jenks, Stuart, Wubs-Mrozewicz, Justyna, *The Hanse in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2012.
- Lopez, Robert S., *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Orlandi, Angela, *Trascender las fronteras. El papel de los mercaderes florentinos en el intercambio económico y cultural (siglos XIV-XVI)*, in *Las fronteras en la Edad Media Hispanica siglos XIII-XVI*, Editorial Universidad de Granada e Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 2019, pp. 569-82.
- Reyerson, Kathryn L., *The Art of the Deal: Intermediaries of Trade in Medieval Montpellier*, Leiden, Brill, 2002.
- Valérian, Dominique, *Marchands latins et sociétés portuaires dans le Maghreb médiéval*, in Cédric Quertier et al. (eds.), *Arriver en ville*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2013, pp. 213-23.

3. Bankers and Financial Actors

- Abraham-Thisse, Simone, and Vandewalle, André (eds.), *Les marchands de la Hanse et la banque des Médicis: Bruges, marché d'échanges culturels en Europe*, Oostkamp, Stichting Kunstboek, 2002.
- de Roover, Raymond, *Money, Banking and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges*, Cambridge (Mass.), Mediaeval Academy of America, 1948.
- Goldthwaite, Richard A., *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

4. Communities and Urban Institutions

- Angermann, Norbert, and Friedland, Klaus (eds.), *Novgorod. Markt und Kontor der Hanse*, Köln, Böhlau, 2002.
- Dollinger, Philippe, *La Hanse: XIIe–XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Aubier, 1988.
- Mollat, Michel, *Les pauvres au Moyen Âge. Étude sociale*, Paris, Hachette, 1978.
- Squires, Catherine, and Mal'kov, Anton V., *Novgorodskaya skra: izdanie, perevod, issledovaniya*, Moskva, YASK, 2020.
- Jahnke, Carsten, *"Homines Imperii" und "Osterlinge": Selbst- und Fremdbezeichnungen Hansischer Kaufleute im Ausland am Beispiel Englands, Flanderns und des Ostseeraumes im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, in "Hansische Geschichtsblätter", 129, 2011, pp. 1-57.

5. Labour, Craftsmanship, and Technical Mobility

- Addobbati A., *Facchinerie. Immigrati bergamaschi, valtellinesi e svizzeri nel porto di Livorno (1602-1847)*, Pisa, Edizioni Ets, 2018.
- Bellavitis, A., Frank M., Sapienza V., Garzoni. *Apprendistato e formazione tra Venezia e l'Europa in età moderna*, Mantova: Universitas Studiorum, 2017.
- Bisgaard, Lars, et al., ed., *Guilds, Towns, and Cultural Transmission in the North, 1300-1500*, Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, 2013.

- Böninger, Lorenz, *Gli artigiani stranieri nell'economia e nella cultura fiorentina*, in F. Franceschi, G. Fossi (eds.), *Arti fiorentine. La grande storia dell'artigianato*, vol. II, *Il Quattrocento*, Firenze, Giunti, 1999.
- Casarino, Giacomo, *L'immigrazione a Genova di maestranze e apprendisti dell'alta Lombardia (XV e XVI secolo)*, in "Bollettino di demografia storica", 19, 1993.
- Dreher Simon, Mueller Wolfgang (eds.), *Foreigners in Muscovy: Western Immigrants in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Russia*, London, Routledge, 2023.
- Epstein, Stephen A., *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Greve, Anke, *Hansische Kaufleute, Hosteliers und Herbergen im Brügge des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M., Lang, 2012.
- Ogilvie, Sheilagh, *The European Guilds. An Economic Analysis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019.

Expected results
The selected papers will be presented and discussed at Prato in the course of the 2027 Study Week. After the discussion at the Settimana sessions, scholars should complete and revise their texts by **30 June 2027**. 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 Executive Committee**.**

The paper should represent an original contribution and be either generally comparative or a specific case-study that speaks to the larger questions set out here. Participants who are pursuing a PhD, should have completed it before the start of the conference.

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 **1 November 2025**:
Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini"
Via Ser Lapo Mazzei 37, I 59100 Prato, ITALY
e-mail: datini@istitutodatini.it

The Executive Committee will only take fully completed formats into consideration and will decide whether they have been accepted at the beginning of 2026, 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 (accommodation and 10 euro meal tickets) 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 postdoctoral scholars who do not hold a full-time academic position. Applicants must send the travel bursaries form to the Fondazione Datini with their paper by **10 April 2027**. The grant will be paid during the conference on the presentation of travel receipts.

The members of the Executive Committee are: Philippe Bernardi (Parigi, President), Maryanne Kowaleski (New York, Vice-President), Giuseppe Petralia (Pisa, Vice-President),Angela Orlandi (Firenze, Scientific director), Erik Aerts (Lovanio), Hilario Casado Alonso (Valladolid), Markus Denzel (Lipsia), Franco Franceschi (Siena), Gaetano Sabatini (Roma).

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

The provisional texts of the selected contributions or at least a detailed synthesis must reach the Fondazione Datini (Datini Foundation) by **10 April 2027**. They will be put online (with protected access reserved for the participants of the project and members of the Scientific Committee) on the Institute's web pages before the Study Week in order to allow a deeper discussion of their contents.
Authors who fail to send their provisional texts to the Fondazione that day, can not be included in the final programme. In absence of the author the synthesis will be read during the conference.

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 2027**. They will be subject to anonymous adjudication. Texts that pass the assessment stage will be published in a special volume within a year (together with two abstracts, one in the language of the essay and the other in one of the official languages of the Institute: Italian, English, French, Spanish and German). Simultaneous translation from and to Italian, English and French will be available during the Study Week.

For the purpose of publication, texts will be accepted in Italian, French, English, Spanish and German.

Authors who are not writing in their native language are advised to have the language of their text vetted and corrected *before* submitting their paper for the assessment stage since one of the requirements for publication is that the grammar and writing style meet high academic standards.