



Call for research papers 2022-2024
Social Mobility in pre-industrial societies: tendencies, causes and effects
(13th-18th centuries)

The results of this call for research papers will be presented at Prato during the 55th Study Week (12-16 May 2024)

Over the last few years, preindustrial social mobility has been the object of growing interest among economic and social historians. In part this is due to the relevance of the topic for society today in which, across much of the West, social elevators have slowed down or have stopped entirely, so reflecting on social mobility has become essential. And in part, this development arises naturally from the abundant recent research on economic inequality (a topic to which the 2019 Datini Study Week was dedicated), which has shown, for example, how a situation of high and growing inequality coupled with easy upwards mobility is radically different from one of high and growing inequality, but no or little social mobility.

Research on social mobility has been following its own track, particularly in terms of methodology. While some scholars have tried to devise quantitative methods that make use of readily-available information to provide some hint at general tendencies in the very long run, others have favoured a more traditional approach, collecting new archival data for the preindustrial period and adapting to historical sources the established analytical tools developed by sociologists for the study of modern societies (social mobility matrixes, etc.). The presence of very different approaches to the study of social mobility, approaches that currently coexist but rarely talk to each other, confirms the usefulness of proceeding to constructive debates about the sources and the methods that can be used to study this topic. We also need to compare the evidence obtained by means of different methods, without forgetting the important contribution of more qualitative research, which is potentially able to make fuller use of the historical sources and to contribute significantly to a more complete picture.

Due to this variety of approaches, the Datini Study Week will embrace a broad (but not generic) definition of social mobility to include not only the change from a well-defined social-economic condition to another equally well-defined (and measurable) one, but also the process through which individuals, families and social groups re-define their position regarding hierarchies of wealth, access to the political system, and knowledge. The prestige coming from these and other significant features of the societies under scrutiny also merits attention.

Papers proposed for consideration at the Datini Study Week should touch upon one or more of the following topics:

1. Sources and methods

Which sources are available for studying social mobility in preindustrial times? Which measures and methods are better suited to exploit them fully? To which degree it is possible to compare the results obtained by using different sources and analytical approaches?

2. Social mobility, economic growth and economic inequality

Is there any sort of systematic correlation, in the long run or at least during specific (and clearly identifiable) historical phases, between social mobility, economic growth and economic inequality? And to which degree could this correlation be given a causal interpretation (and what would the direction of causality be)? More generally, what were the consequences, for the economy and the society at large, of higher or lower social mobility in different historical contexts, defined by a growing or a stagnant economy and by different levels and tendencies in economic inequality?

3. Social mobility, geographic mobility and demographic dynamics

It is a well-known feature of preindustrial societies that geographic mobility (including, but not limited to, migration from rural areas to cities) could be a crucial step in a path of social-economic upward mobility. The rate of geographic mobility also reflects general demographic dynamics: for example, because rural over-population tended to expel people, acting as a “push” factor out of the countryside, or because large-scale mortality crises (such as major plagues) opened physical spaces and economic opportunities within cities, acting as a “pull” factor towards them. More generally, the complex interrelation between demographic dynamics, geographic mobility and social mobility is worthy of specific study.

4. Interaction between social mobility and the evolution of family structures and inheritance systems

In preindustrial times, there was considerable variation in family structures and in inheritance systems across different parts of Europe and the world. These features of society might have affected deeply social mobility – for example, was social mobility favoured by the presence of more egalitarian inheritance systems or, paradoxically, did primogeniture lead to higher mobility by forcing younger sons and daughters to look for alternative careers not to lose (and possibly improve) their social-economic status?

5. Dynamics of downward mobility

When we think about “social mobility”, we tend to assume that we are referring to upward mobility – while in fact, movements upwards the social ladder were usually matched by downwards movements. And yet, histories of success tend to attract greater attention, partly because they often generate a more abundant historical documentation. By focusing specifically on downwards mobility, it might be possible to highlight new relevant aspects of preindustrial societies and economies.

6. Social success and social demotion: perception and self-representations

When did social promotion (or demotion) become something actually perceived by those who experienced it, and by those who observed the process from the outside? Was there any visible sign which marked a change in social-economic status, and was this regulated by identifiable social

conventions? Additionally, how did those involved in the process of mobility tend to describe and represent the process?

Expected results

The selected papers will be presented and discussed at Prato in the course of the Study Week 2024. After the discussion at the Settimana sessions, scholars should complete and revise their texts by 30 June 2024. 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 2022**:

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 2023, 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 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 2024**. The grant will be paid during the conference on the presentation of travel receipts.

The members of the Executive Committee are: Erik Aerts (Leuven, President), Michael North (Greifswald, Vice-President), Paolo Malanima (Catanzaro, Vice-President), Giampiero Nigro (Florence, Scientific Director), Philippe Bernardi (Paris), Hilario Casado Alonso (Valladolid), Olga Katsiardi-Hering (Athens), Maryanne Kowaleski (New York), Giuseppe Petralia (Pisa), Gaetano Sabatini (Rome Tre).

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 2024**. 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 2024**. 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 and English 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.