



Experience & Expectation ·  
Historical Foundations of Economic Behaviour



Global History Lab  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



German  
Historical  
Institute  
London

## Economic Narratives in Historical Perspective

GHI London, April 28-29, 2022

Economists have recently turned to the role of narratives as a force in economic activity. While this line of research provides an important reminder of the powerful effects of stories and their ability to shape the behavior of economic agents, it offers little insight into the causal processes behind those effects; stories, after all, are complex, cut many ways, and coexist with counterpoints and contestation. And yet, the turn to storytelling and narratives reminds us of the importance of plotlines, character, structure, and that the templates that frame our sense of time do play a role in economic life. We suggest flipping the focus from “narrative economics” to economic narratives to tackle some of the pressing questions which have received scant attention. Instead of looking for a timeless model – itself another story – that links “contagion” narratives to economic fluctuations or the arc of rising and falling, we are interested in the historically contingent processes behind the narratives and their association with assumed outcomes. We want to explore how economic narratives have been formed and constructed in the past, how they have been transmitted and circulated, and how they inform choices and behavior and have yielded social or economic consequences. We understand narratives as attempts to organize and structure time. Our focus, therefore, is on past attempts to establish a temporal sequence of events and by this means create coherence between different observations or experiences. How have notions of, e.g., *rise* and *fall*, *growth* and *decline*, *progress* and *backwardness*, *development* and *underdevelopment*, *cyclical*ity, *crises*, and *recovery* structured economic imaginations and acted upon experiences and expectations? How have they highlighted, increased, or challenged socio-economic gaps between people and regions, and how have they been circulated and contested over time? And finally: How have economists functioned, often unawares, as narrators? In a two-day conference, envisioned as a kick-off to a longer-term discussion, we seek to bring together different perspectives that can illuminate how economic narratives have been constructed and worked across time and space and how they have shaped economic history.

For more information, please contact Jeremy Adelman ([adelman@princeton.edu](mailto:adelman@princeton.edu)), Laetitia Lenel ([laetitialenel@hu-berlin.de](mailto:laetitialenel@hu-berlin.de)), or Alexander Nützenadel ([nuetzenadel@hu-berlin.de](mailto:nuetzenadel@hu-berlin.de)).

## PROGRAM

Thursday, April 28, 2022

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**17:00–18:30 Opening Conversation: William Sewell**

*Commentary: Frank Trentmann*

18:30 Dinner

Friday, April 29, 2022

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**09:30–11:00 Session I: Development/Underdevelopment**

Margarita Fajardo

Vanessa Ogle

Anne Ruderman

Alden Young

*Rapporteur: Jeremy Adelman*

11:00– 11:30 Coffee break

**11:30–13:00 Session II: Crisis/Recovery**

Laetitia Lenel

Tiago Mata

Mary Morgan

*Rapporteur: Mary O’Sullivan*

13:00–14:00 Lunch

**14:00–15:30 Session III: Growth/Decline**

Trevor Jackson

Stephen Macekura

Sebastian Schwecke

Mary O’Sullivan

*Rapporteur: Alexander Nützenadel*

15:30–16:00 Coffee break

**16:00–17:00 Closing presentation: Mary Morgan**

**17:00–18:00 Discussion and Next Steps**

18:30 Dinner

## **FORMAT**

- To foster debate and collaborative thinking on economic narratives, the focus of our conference will be joint discussions centered around three dichotomies or tensions which have structured economic imaginations: development/underdevelopment, crisis/recovery, and growth/decline. Each panelist will have 10 minutes to talk about (1) how would each of you would frame the respective narrative in light of your past or current research? (2) how does your research address, challenge, reformat the narrative? and (3) pose one or two key research questions that would flow from these insights. We encourage discussion without pre-circulated papers or power points slides.
- The individual contributions by the panelists will be followed by 10–15 minutes of discussion among the panelists.
- Afterwards, the floor will be opened for the rest of the session.

## **DETAILS**

### **Conference Venue:**

German Historical Institute London

17 Bloomsbury Square

London WC1A 2NJ

<https://www.ghil.ac.uk>

### **Hotel:**

Grange Clarendon Hotel

34-37 Bedford Place

London WC1B 5JR

<https://www.grangehotels.com/hotels-london/the-clarendon/>