

## **HIGHLY CREATIVE PEOPLE IN EUROPEAN HISTORY: New evidence on the importance of location for the emergence of new ideas**

Over the past 1,000 years, good institutions offering personal and economic freedoms, and an open and competitive urban environment have favoured the production and attraction of highly creative human capital. That is the central conclusion of new research to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Manchester in August 2019.

The study by the economists Dr **Michel Serafinelli** and Professor **Guido Tabellini** looks at data on about 22,000 'creatives' – scientists, physicians, writers or visual artists – born in Europe between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The authors begin by showing that creatives are concentrated in certain locations. For example, in the data, Florence was the most important creativity hub in the Renaissance period. This clustering occurs across disciplines; for example, famous creatives born in Vienna in the 18<sup>th</sup> century include composer Arnold Schoenberg, psychologist Melanie Klein, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, architect Otto Wagner, painter Gustav Klimt and physician Ludwig Boltzmann.

These creative locations change over time. In other words, cities that are at the frontier of creativity in one period retain an advantage that persists for a while but not indefinitely.

'It is quite clear from our data that self-governing cities providing more personal and economic freedoms also produced and attracted more creatives', explains study co-author Professor Guido Tabellini from Bocconi University.

The study is mainly based on a large Google-owned historical database on highly creative individuals, which the authors match to historical data on the institutions and populations of European cities with over 5,000 residents. To provide evidence on the effect of local institutions on highly creative human capital, the authors exploit regional waves of institutional change.

'The self-governing status of a city is the most stable predictor of creativity,' says co-author Dr Michel Serafinelli, an assistant professor at the University of Essex.

'Specifically, we estimate that autonomous cities experience about 40% more production of highly creative individuals than the average city in our sample.'

These results are in line with the idea that self-governing cities ('communes') provided a conducive environment for creatives, via a transformation of the local culture, and a change in the incentives.

In addition, the political priority given to protection of the interests of merchants by local governments facilitated the emergence of market infrastructures and exchange networks that could be exploited for creating a market for works of art – Antwerp in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Amsterdam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century exemplify this latter mechanism.

The combination of these positive changes in turn created role models and facilitated social learning.

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