

2021 Triennial S.I.De.S Conference

**Standard of living and inequalities. A historical-demographic perspective**

Milan (Italy), 2-4 December 2021

The living standards of a population have a considerable impact on demographic behaviours. These have evolved in relation to processes, which have occurred several times over the course of history, and have been accompanied by the increase or reduction of inequalities among countries and/or different social classes. Given its complexity and multi-facet nature, the interaction between living standards and demographic phenomena can be approached from multiple perspectives. The 2021 triennial Sides conference aims to investigate some of these perspectives for past societies and to follow their evolution over time. In this regard, we have identified nine main themes on which we would like to solicit the reflection of scholars.

Authors are invited to send an extended abstract (about 5,000 digits) by 31 May 2021 to session organizers and to S.I.De.S. Secretariat at the following e-mail address [gruiu@uniss.it](mailto:gruiu@uniss.it). An extended abstract should include the following sections: introduction, data/methods, sources and expected results.

Acceptance will be notified by the end of June

**Further information on the conference could be found on the S.I.De.S. website:**

<http://www.demostorica.it/>

## Wages and consumption in the Early Modern period

Organizers: Luca Mocarelli, University of Milano – Bicocca ([luca.mocarelli@unimib.it](mailto:luca.mocarelli@unimib.it)) and Giulio Ongaro, University of Milano – Bicocca ([giulio.ongaro@unimib.it](mailto:giulio.ongaro@unimib.it))

The analysis of living standards and their evolution across time and space, with particular attention to the understanding of the purchasing power of the population of staple goods, has been for a long time at the centre of historical research. Indeed, the investigation of the living standard lays at the basis of debates on the Great Divergence between Europe and China, and on the Little Divergence between the Mediterranean area and Northern Europe during the Early Modern period (Allen, Bengtsson e Dribe 2005; Allen 2001, 2015; Fochesato 2018; Malanima 2013; Malinowski 2016; Pfister 2017; Pomeranz 2000). Consequently, the definition of wages and basket of goods – that is used for the calculation of real wages – has been one of the main research topics for economic historians. The analysis of these data – wages and consumption – has been, however, constantly flanked by a heated debate on the methodologies to use for the construction of the basket of good that is necessary for the definition of the real wages (González Agudo 2017; Rota e Weisdorf 2020); in brief, which goods should be included in the basket, according to the various food (and, broadly, subsistence) needs and habits across time and space?

In addition, the construction of the wage series itself has been recently criticized (Hatcher and Stephenson 2019), mainly because of the limited representativity of the data that have been used until now. There are various reasons behind these limits. First, they are heavily urban-centred, therefore without taking into account the countryside, where the vast part of the population lived; second, they often include only the monetary part of the remuneration, that, however, was certainly not the only one – and sometimes neither the most relevant; third, yearly wages are often calculated according to a number of working days that are not so close to the reality, and especially without taking into account the seasonality of the employments; furthermore, researchers often did not consider the various sources of income that were part of the family budget, even though the family is the best unit of analysis of the living standards and their evolution; finally, almost often databases have been built up including only two levels of wages (specialized and unskilled workers), therefore neglecting the strong diversification that characterized labour market even in the past and, consequently, the levels of the remunerations. Finally, the widespread use of geographically limited datasets, as representative of regions and States, is debatable.

In order to understand the evolution of the living standards across time and space, it is thus necessary to come back on these topics, both from a methodological point of view (how should a basket of goods be built up? How to produce datasets of wages that are as much representative as possible?), and to propose new data that allow comparison between areas and historical periods.

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### **A source for analyzing the relationship between living standards and health of past populations: topographies and medical geography studies**

Organizers: Josep Bernabeu-Mestre, University of Alicante ([josep.bernabeu@ua.es](mailto:josep.bernabeu@ua.es)) and Lucia Pozzi, University of Sassari ([lpozzi@uniss.it](mailto:lpozzi@uniss.it))

The biomedical approach, and more specifically, the use of an exclusively biological explanation of health problems and disease, does not allow to adequately address the relationship between standard of living and health. Explanatory models are needed to provide adequate knowledge of the population's living conditions and habits.

This session aims to recover the historical evidence offered by topography and medical geography studies published between the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century in Italy and others in European countries.

Hygiene evolved throughout the nineteenth century from concern for the geo-climatic environment to the study of social order. The concept of social aetiology for a number of health problems arose thanks to the fieldwork information provided by the authors of these studies and by demographic and health statistics.

Medical topographies, first, medical geography studies, later, as well as public health reports that sought to know the health reality of the environment where they wanted to act, represent, at different chronological moments, some of the methodological instruments that allowed recognition of social aetiology.

From the presuppositions of an ecological explanation of the disease, the environmental and social perspective provided by these works, allowed to know the lifestyles and living conditions of the communities under examination, and to design at the same time the intervention strategies that proceeded to execute in matters of public health, improving their living standards.

The social hygiene movement that broke through European medicine with such force in the central decades of the nineteenth century found in medical topographies and studies of medical geography a suitable instrument for developing the program of hygiene and social medicine. In order to assess and analyze what, in the words of Alfred Grotjahn, was the fundamental objective of the new discipline, studying the social conditions of the environment in which human beings are born, live, work, nourish themselves, reproduce and die.

### **Schooling, educational interventions and standard of living**

Organizers: Marcantonio Caltabiano, University of Messina ([marcantonio.caltabiano@unime.it](mailto:marcantonio.caltabiano@unime.it)) and Gabriele Rui, University of Sassari ([gruiu@uniss.it](mailto:gruiu@uniss.it)).

The session aims to investigate the interaction between the standard of living, schooling, educational interventions in populations of recent and distant past.

The proponents intend to stimulate the discussion on the link between the differences in education levels between communities (with territorial extension that goes from the village to the region, up to the national state), and the standard of living, measured by different indicators such as, for example, life expectancy, health conditions, incomes, assets, food and non-food consumption. We also welcome works that investigate the effect of education and its dissemination on the improvement of living standards over time and, more generally, on the impact of economic and demographic crises and on social transformations.

The session also welcomes research efforts that aim to draw helpful information for the present from educational interventions (both on the adult population and on the school population) implemented in the past in order to deal with health emergencies and or to improve the quality of life of populations in the medium-long run (for example anti-malarial prophylaxis campaigns, workplace injury prevention campaigns, educational interventions to improve household hygiene conditions or nutrition, etc.). Finally, also papers that, from a historical perspective, propose an international comparison of educational campaigns in the health and hygiene sector will be considered.

### **Inequality in the demographic and statistical thinking of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Organizer: Giovanni Favero, University Ca' Foscari of Venice ([gfavero@unive.it](mailto:gfavero@unive.it))

The subject of inequality is central in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for scholars engaged in the new social sciences, from demography to methodological statistics, from marginalist economics to political science. In Italy, the well-known methodological reflections on the measurement of the distribution of income and wealth by Vilfredo Pareto and Corrado Gini went together, between the end of the 19th century and the Second World War, with the reference to a whole series of theoretical considerations on the demographic and social explanations of its unequal distribution, and on its effects on the population and its living conditions.

This session aims at reconstructing the debate on the relationship between demographic phenomena and inequalities, with particular attention to the connection, often implicit but always present, between the different theoretical explanations and the methodological options adopted to empirically measure these phenomena, placing the Italian scientific discussion in the international context.

If the attempts at explaining the emergence of inequality on the basis of biological, demographic or social mechanisms often respond to the need to show its natural character, on the other hand, the study of its effects leads to evaluate what may be the most appropriate measures to control its intensity, opening up a whole series of controversies involving scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. In this way, the elements related to living conditions, observed from different points of view, from housing to health, from nutrition to height, become instrumental to evaluate both the validity of the theoretical hypotheses and the political choices that were pursued and adopted.

Contributions on the thought of individual scholars, on specific controversies or on historical survey projects at local, national or international level are welcome.

### **Mortality and survival: convergence and divergence over time**

Organizers: Alessio Fornasin, University of Udine ([alessio.fornasin@uniud.it](mailto:alessio.fornasin@uniud.it)) and Matteo Manfredini, University of Parma ([matteo.manfredini@unipr.it](mailto:matteo.manfredini@unipr.it))

Within the debate on living standards, the study of mortality and survival has a key role, not only to understand its evolution over time but also to allow comparative analyses across countries and over time. It is now accepted that the standard of living can be measured through a number of indicators – life expectancy at birth, infant mortality, stillbirth, maternal mortality, etc. – and in the session, we

welcome contributions that deal with one or more of these issues, analyzed in relation to either their evolution over time or historical processes of divergence and convergence. We also urge studies that investigate, from a historical perspective, differential mortality within single populations or communities with respect to different social classes and different geographical contexts.

### **Urban housing and living situation: a meeting ground for historical demography and social history?**

Organizer: Michele Nani (michele.nani@ismed.cnr.it)

Recently, an issue of the "Annales de démographie historique" proposed a renewed meeting between historical demographers and social historians on the ground of fertility. In the context of a necessary broadening of the perspectives of historical demography and of an equally necessary "revival" of social history (on grounds other than those indicated by the "cultural turn" perspectives), another possible field of collaboration between population historians and social historians is the research on urban housing and living situation. The city is a particularly fertile ground since, as stated by Lucio Gambi, it brings to the fore how the link between populations and built spaces is not a direct or deterministic link but occurs as a double reflection of the functions and conditions of overall urban life. "Housing and living situation" includes a wide range of problems that may be grouped in three large areas:

- relationship between internal features of house and household and family life (crowding, quality of spaces, informality, cohabitation, work at home, kitchen or cooking characteristics, internal bathrooms, heating);
- "aggregated" level characteristics (type of housing complex, floor and location of the apartment, common areas, social and environmental outline of the street, the block or the neighbourhood);
- broader context (water networks, proximity to unhealthy industries and other environmental risks, presence of services and their relative distance, governmental interventions and social reform).

Housing conditions can interact with the full spectrum of research into historical demography (e.g. fertility, mortality, family and kinship, migration) and social history (e.g. urban transformation, work and professions, health and disease, social networks and struggle).

From a methodological point of view, contributions based on controlled sampling, on comparison, on the nominative/individual method, on micro-historical approaches or on spatial-cartographic perspectives (GIS, but also other ways of representing spatial data), but also critical analyses of the categories and their socio-history, will be particularly valuable, to encourage a renewed dialogue between the most rigorous directions in historical studies.

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### **Living standard, stature and anthropometric measures from a historical perspective**

Organizer: Francesco Scalone, University of Bologna ([francesco.scalone@unibo.it](mailto:francesco.scalone@unibo.it))

The debate on alternative measures of living standards besides purely monetary ones has extended scholarly interest from the economic domain to the anthropometric domain and included indicators, such as height, body mass index and other measurements based on skeletal remains. Through the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, information from archives and archaeological finds has broadened our understanding of the evolution of living standards. This research line has shown how living standards reflect nutritional status, health and survival levels, mirroring physiological capital accumulation across generations and the life course of an individual. In addition, although the genotypic component of height is an expression of genetic heritage, the phenotypic aspects are influenced by historically determined quantities that vary over time (e.g. health and nutritional levels, demographic characteristics and environmental and socio-economic conditions).

The session is open to contributions regarding sources and methods for studying height and other anthropometric measures in past populations. Given the multidisciplinary approach to the topic, the session intends to stimulate a broad reflection on the connections between the biometric, historical, economic and social demographic fields without limiting the investigation to a specific historical period or geographical area.

## **Migration and inequalities in the contemporary age (from 19th to 21st century)**

Organizer: Salvatore Strozza, University Federico II of Naples ([salvatore.strozza@unina.it](mailto:salvatore.strozza@unina.it))

The aim of this session is to provide some pieces of the complex puzzle that makes up the link between migration and inequality from a historical perspective. Living conditions and socio-economic inequalities are some of the main causes of internal and international migrations and, at the same time, constitute essential dimensions in qualifying living standards and the integration of migrants in receiving contexts. Contributions aimed at grasping some of the possible links between migrations and inequalities in contemporary times with regard to internal migrations within Italian territory, Italian emigration abroad, as well as foreign immigration to Italy, are the most requested. But also researches that refer to other countries and specific migratory flows and/or migrant populations are welcome.

## **Population paths and differences in urban and (neo)rural lifestyles**

Organizer: Francesco Zanutelli, University of Messina ([francesco.zanutelli@unime.it](mailto:francesco.zanutelli@unime.it))

Population paths, whether directed towards areas within the national territory or towards extra-national territories, are notoriously associated with processes of change: in individual aspirations, in kinship models, in the economic reconfiguration of the territories of departure as well as those of arrival. These changes are particularly evident in "lifestyles", i.e. in consumption choices, housing and production typologies, and in the modes of sociality that characterize population groups in newly settled contexts.

In this session, we intend to investigate the link between depopulation and re-population (from one territory to another, or of the same territory, considering the different population flows that insist on it in the long term) through the analysis of differences in lifestyles related to demographic transformations. Referring in an open and non-philological way to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "distinction", it is possible to trace in the urban neo-population, and today in that of the so-called "neo-rural", not only a connection between socio-economic class and styles of consumption. The neo-settlement in certain territories (mountainous areas, rural villages, gentrified neighbourhoods, gated-communities, specific urban areas) and the cultural behaviours associated with their symbolic bearing highlight processes of distinction between groups of different origin, age, functions. Moreover, the territory of the new settlement is itself representative either of a distinctive choice in relation to the context of origin, or on the contrary, as an unexpected and undesirable outcome of an imagined different path.

The case studies that the session intends to discuss and compare can be understood as ethnographies that look at the demographic and historical processes related to the phenomenon under investigation from the analysis of the contemporary moment or as historical-demographic investigations that put cultural processes at the centre of the analysis. The desired goal is to advance in the knowledge of socio-economic processes and differentiated symbolic systems that are structured in the territories of neo-population and that in turn redefine them.