

CALL FOR PAPERS

What has transition taught (or not) to economics

June 29-30, 2006, Amiens (France)

An international workshop of

The European Association of Comparative Economic Studies (EACES)

in collaboration with

CRIISEA, University of Picardie

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The radical systemic transformation of the former socialist countries has put in the agenda a number of crucial questions for all branches of economics. The uncertainty, variety, complexity, heterogeneity, irreversibility and contingency of the process question the validity of traditional analytical tools and reasoning. Now, it is established that intentions and purposeful behavior matter but even pre-designed reforms carry unpredictable elements (open-ended dynamics). What has economic theory learned and not learned from the transition?

More particularly, the following issues call for special attention:

- *The emergence and evolution of institutions.* The systemic change represents a radical modification of the rules regulating the relations among different groups of interests and it seems to be of asymmetric nature; it leads to winners-losers configurations concerning the access to and distribution of resources. Do institutions (laws and enforcement, property rights, money and monetary regimes, governance...) embody contradictory

social interests? If so, power configurations, groups of interest, coalitions and conflicts should play an important role into the diffusion and adoption of new rules shaping a cumulative and endogenous process.

- *The links between politics and economics.* In this process, social, political and economic crisis have contributed to the emergence of a critical mass of actors converging towards new rules by modifying the gains, losses, perceptions, beliefs and strategies. Often, economic actors have pursued political strategies, aiming to modify their set of opportunities or that of their competitors by orienting, affecting and influencing governmental action in order to create specific non-market advantages. Furthermore, sub-national government issues, federalism and local powers have largely influenced the economic variables. In general, links between economic and political activity seem to be a constituent element of the transformation process.

- *The role of organizations and the theory of the firm.* The approaches aiming to explain the *raison d'être* of a capitalist firm (and to justify its superior efficiency) do not always offer an appropriate framework to make the major features of post-socialist firms intelligible. Both price co-ordination and organizational authority are, in some cases, undermined by implicit or explicit stakeholders' bargaining in fuzzy property conditions. Often, insiders are owners as well, and strangely enough prefer their managerial (or employee) rather shareholder status. Their objective function, far from maximizing, seems to incorporate multiple variables depending, among others, on extensive networking and mutual commitment, cooperative and selfish behaviors being combined.

- *The nature and forms of capitalism.* A by-product of the vanishing of most socialist economies is the relative decline of comparative economic systems analysis and, accordingly, of theories of capitalism. Furthermore, the endogenous dynamic of economic science (extreme specialization, dominance of partial equilibrium analysis, etc.) contributed to evacuate the necessary theorizing of capitalist systems. Yet this very issue was crucial in the past offering a systemic and dynamic view of capitalism and socialism. Thus it seems interesting to revisit the history of economic thought, to build on these approaches and regenerate the contemporary research agenda.

The imperfect understanding of a non-deterministic process as well as the diversity of paths of change raises once more the question of historical specificity. Yet nomothetic approaches remain almost exclusively the sole legitimate method in economics. Is economic theory able to learn from concrete historical experiences? Is the usefulness of inductive or abductive reasoning not underestimated? Is comparative analysis not an important mode of theorizing? Are other epistemic approaches called for?

In addition, mediations are required to link the local empirical theories with more abstract ones. In this way, some lessons may be drawn from 'local' transition findings, which are too often marginalized in the field of economic science as applied economics or area studies. At this point, a further methodological question can be raised: at which level is transition to be analyzed (micro, meso, macro or multilevel analysis)?

Besides, it raises the issue of another transition process: the transition to socialism. Some parallels can be drawn between the ways both transitions were conceptualized. Common 'blind alleys' of research may appear too. Further experiences of major socioeconomic change could also be mobilized in a comparative perspective.

The main goal of the workshop is to engage a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the economic reasoning and tools concerning the analysis of the systemic transformation, and implying to take into account, among others, the influence of political and sociological dimensions upon the economic process. The papers should associate as tightly as possible these empirical, theoretical and methodological issues.

Working language: English

Publication: The organizers engage themselves to publish selected papers of the workshop in an academic journal (JEL refereed).

Submission conditions: An extended abstract of about 800 words must be sent by e-mail (DOC, RTF or PDF format) to Agnès Labrousse (agnes.labrousse@u-picardie.fr). Submissions will not be considered if received later than **February 28, 2006**. Extended abstracts should resemble the introductory section of the paper, including motivation for the research and related literature. In addition, enclose a single and informative page with the following information: Title of paper, name(s) and surname(s) of the author(s), organizational affiliation, mail address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address, JEL codes, key words (up to six).

* Authors of accepted papers will be informed on **March 30, 2006**.

* The full paper (up to 7.000 words) should be sent, not later than **June 1, 2006**.

Text: Times New Roman 11, single space, justified, margins 2.5 in all directions. Title 16 bold centered, authors 14 bold centered, affiliation 12 italics centered, footnotes, headings 14 bold, first subheadings 12 bold, second subheadings 12 italics. References: Harvard style, authors in capital letters, journal or book in italics. Format DOC, RTF or PDF.

Conference fee: No EACES members – 250 €, EACES members – 150 €, Students – 100 €

Conference fee covers: Documents, coffee breaks, lunch and diner for the 29th and the 30th of June 2006, as well as participation in the cultural activities.