

The NEHA (*Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief*, *Niederländisches Archiv für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*) was founded in 1914 as a joint operation of Dutch business and science. It was an initiative of Nicolaas Willem Posthumus (1880–1960). Posthumus held the first chair in economic history in the Netherlands from 1913. At that time Dutch Public Archives were hesitant to collect business archives. NEHA filled this gap, and started collecting business archives. The *Wirtschaftsarchive* in Köln and Basel served as examples. Originally, NEHA was situated in The Hague, between the Dutch economic hubs of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In 1932 a department of NEHA, the EHB (*Economisch-Historische Bibliotheek*, Economic History Library), was opened in Amsterdam. It would build a specialized collection of more than 100 000 volumes on general and Dutch economic history.



Prof. N.W. Posthumus

Posthumus had a broad perspective of economic and business history, which also included

trade unions. His 1908 dissertation on the Leiden cloth industry was very broadly conceived, discussing production and trade, labour relations and technology. NEHA's collection profile similarly included publications and archives of trade unions and other organisations related to the labour movement. By 1934 more than 30 such archives had been collected.

At the beginning of the 1930s two independent developments made the establishment of a separate institute for labour and social history desirable. First, the fast growing social-historical collections present in NEHA demanded a separate approach. Second, the political situation in Central and Eastern Europe was rapidly worsening. Hitler's seizure of power and developments in the Soviet Union threatened people of all convictions within the labour movement, as well as their collections. With financial assistance from the *N.V. De Centrale Arbeiders-Verzekerings en Depositobank* (Central Workers Insurance and Deposit Bank) insurance company, which had links to the social democratic labour movement, Posthumus established the International Institute of Social History (IISH, *Internationales Institut für Sozialgeschichte*) in 1935.

Over time IISG grew to be much larger than NEHA. In the 1970s it became clear that NEHA had collected very important business archives but lacked the means to make them accessible to the public. Therefore these archives have been placed on loan with the National Archives as well as provincial and municipal archives all over the Netherlands. At that time, both NEHA and IISH were located in merchant houses along the main canals of Amsterdam, but in the 1980s, this proved insufficient. The two institutes moved to a converted cocoa warehouse in 1989.

Here the operations of IISH and NEHA became gradually more integrated. Today, although NEHA is still formally a separate entity with a separate board, the practical operations have merged almost fully. Handling of purchases, conservation, and the reading room are shared, but NEHA still has its separate collection policy and its own research programme. Merging activities where is possible comes quite naturally these days. For



The converted cocoa warehouse in Amsterdam, home to NEHA since 1989

years, NEHA published an economic history yearbook, the *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische-, bedrijfs- en etechniekgeschiedenis* and a bi-annual bulletin. At the initiative of the respective editorial boards, these merged in 2004 with the Dutch review for social history (*Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*) to form the *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*.

International activities

Many NEHA activities were and are primarily targeted toward the economic history of the Netherlands and its former colonies. However, already in the 1920s Posthumus acquired the Velle collection, consisting of European Medieval and Early Modern business documents. Posthumus himself was actively involved in an international research project, the International Scientific Committee on Price History, aimed at bringing together early modern price data. For this project NEHA collected international price currents, ephemeral and vulnerable source material on prices.

This international activity got a new lease on life with the recent turn towards global history. The IISH had from its inception been more international. It was formed to rescue non-Dutch and highly international collections like the manuscripts of Marx and Engels and the papers of the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. It therefore is well known among social historians internationally. When a separate research department was formed

at the IISH, led by Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden, it devoted itself to a large degree to the international comparative history of work and labour relations. Jan Luiten van Zanden, at that time IISH research fellow, professor of economic history at Utrecht University and presently chair of the NEHA board developed a programme of global economic history in the past decade (available from www.iisg.nl/staff/jvz.php). In another example of natural merging of IISH and NEHA activities, both programmes developed similar approaches to collecting data.

Both global labour history and global economic history require of comparative data that cover both a large number of different societies and economies and a large time span. Examples exist of this data being collected by an individual scholar. The life work of Angus Maddison comes to mind (www.gdpc.net/maddison/). However, given the huge amount of work involved in collecting such data, which often have to be gleaned from original sources, a collaborative project is more practical.



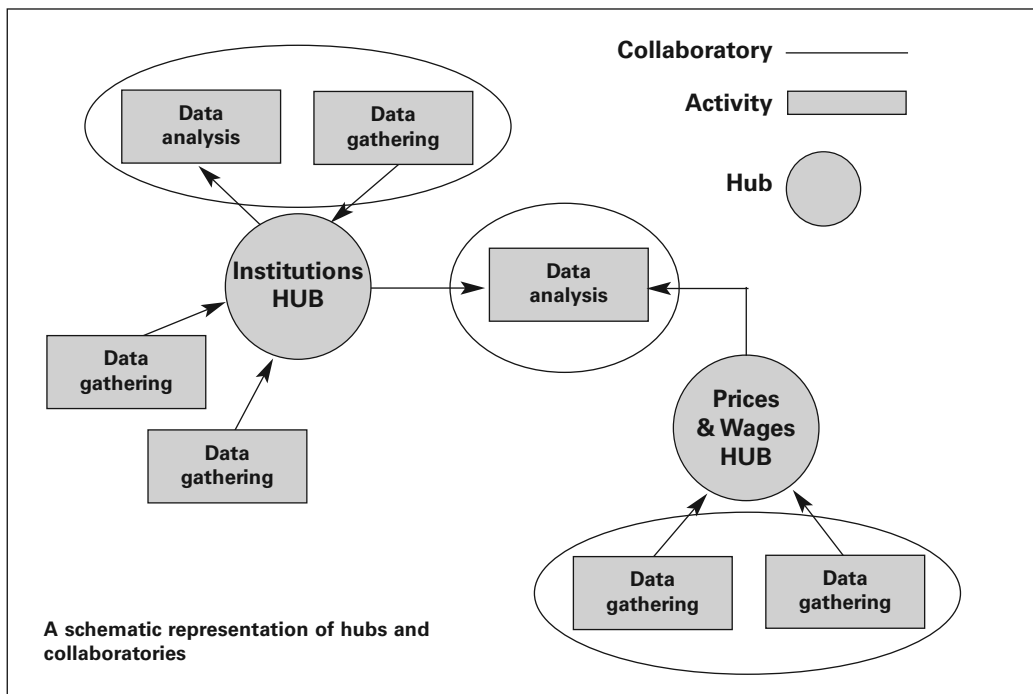
A price current from the NEHA collection

The International Scientific Committee on Price History was such a project, and nowadays the Internet forms a natural basis for collaborative data collection projects. Examples are international groups of scholars collecting data on wages and prices (www.iisg.nl/hpw/) or labour relations (<https://collab.iisg.nl/web/LabourRelations/>). Since the days of the International Scientific Committee international contacts have become much easier, both because travel has become easier and cheaper, and because digitalisation and the Internet have made intensive exchange and collaboration possible and even easy without meeting in person. To these technical developments could be added political ones: over the last two decades the opening up of archives in Russia and China and the increase of scholarly contacts between historians in those countries and the West has made real scholarly exchange on a global scale feasible for the first time in three generations.

These collection practices involve what we call a collaboratory, an international group of scholars collaborating and using a common digital work space to exchange their results. The website

where they combine their data and make them available to the scholarly community we call a hub.

This form of collaboration serves several goals. First many historical data are collected for one specific research purpose, and then rest on the collector's hard disk for the rest of its technical life. However, these data can be re-used by other historians. Archives and libraries can perform a valuable service by making this data available for the academic community. Secondly, through the collaboration all contributing scholars get access to data to compare their individually collected data with. Thirdly, if the collaboration process is intense, historians will become aware of differences between the data collected, and will resolve issues standing in the way of comparison, thus making the data better comparable. Fourthly, the publication of good source material is a goal in itself. Online and open access publication of electronic data serves historians – and other scholars – best. There are added advantages: when it becomes common practice to publish the data used in publications online, the academic community will be better able



to gauge the quality of underlying data and therefore of scholarly arguments.

Global comparisons and huge questions

The substantive background to these collection activities is the appearance of a number of questions that have gained prominence over the last two decades. The most poignant of these is the debate on the Great Divergence, triggered by the work of Kenneth Pomeranz and others. Why, if not by 1800, then certainly by 1400, China was economically as developed as the West, was the West first to establish industrialisation and sustained economic growth? This is arguably the most important question in economic history at the moment. It is the present form of the question what caused the Industrial Revolution, but with the added advantage over the earlier debate, that the comparative approach makes it easier to distinguish which explanatory variables

When investigating economic growth, economic historians have proposed a number of explanations. Among the explanatory variables suggested, are:

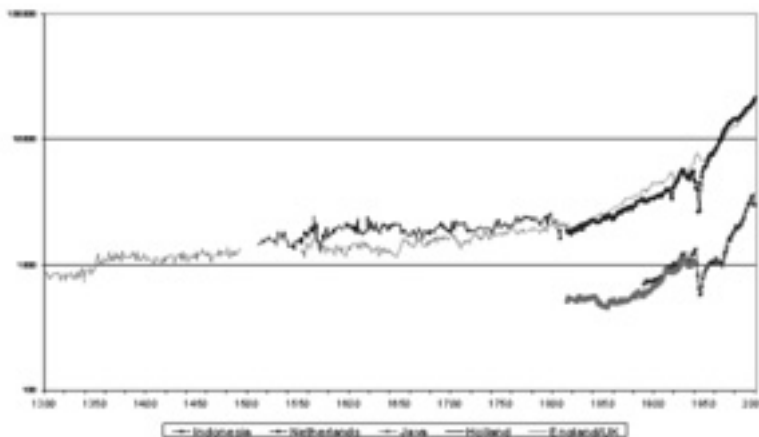
- good economic institutions (which stimulate entrepreneurship, limit rent seeking, promote investment, guarantee that producers reap the profit of their work, etc.);
- an advantageous geography (access to cheap transport over water, or to fossil fuels);
- culture (stimulating entrepreneurial behaviour, or the labour force participation of women);
- human capital (rising productivity).

To explain economic success globally and in the long run, we therefore need long term data on a world scale for both GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and other indicators of economic success (e.g. the Human Development Index, which takes into account desirabilities beyond income) and all plausible causes for their development. Among the

causes we can distinguish between proximate and ultimate causes. Proximate causes are those economic indicators which directly influence economic performance, like human capital or relative wages and prices. Ultimate causes are institutions, cultural, geographical or demographic factors, which may have influenced economic performance in an indirect way.

Funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

(NWO), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and Utrecht University, over the next couple of years a group led by Jan Luiten van Zanden will establish at IISH/NEHA a hub with data on economic performance, proximate and ultimate causes, called Clio-Infra. The data will be collected by thematic groups of specialists working on different countries, brought together by postdoc researchers. These will be based at



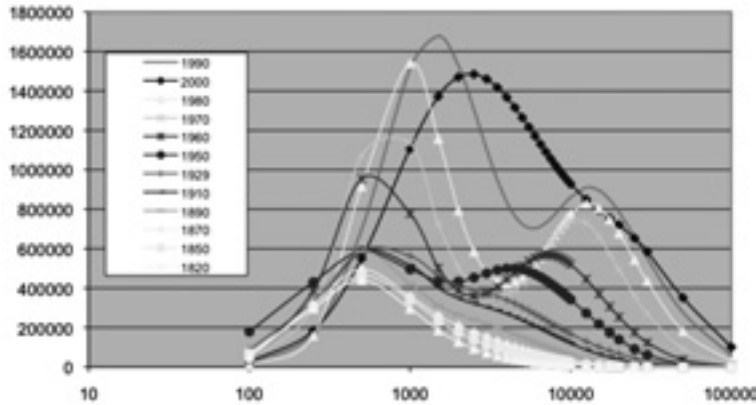
GDP per capita in the long run: the West (Britain and the Netherlands) vs. the Rest, in this case Java/Indonesia

really made the difference. But the debate is not really just between the West and between a number of other possible candidates for economic leadership. Both in the West and in the rest of the world, there are huge differences in economic growth and prosperity that also demand an explanation. The more general question is then: why have historically some countries grown to be so rich, while others have remained or become so poor?

Utrecht, Groningen and Tübingen universities and at IISH/NEHA. Data related to economic perfor-

back in time to 1500 (for a further description of the project, see www.clio-infra.eu/).

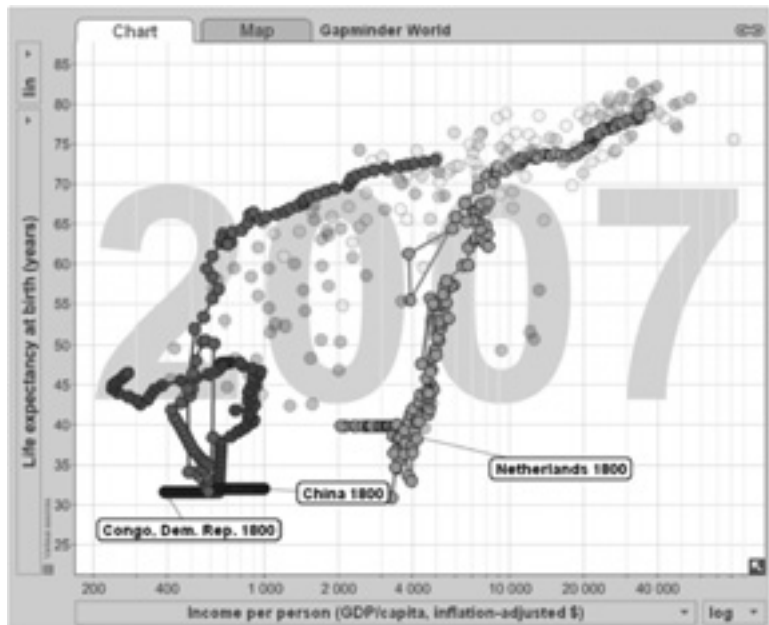
At the central portal of the project we will make available, from 2014, data on all these fields. Meta-data will give information on the source and reliability of the data presented. Scholars will be able to work with the data online or download it. They will be allowed to combine datasets and to visualise data. How visualisation helps to evaluate data and pose new questions will be clear when we plot



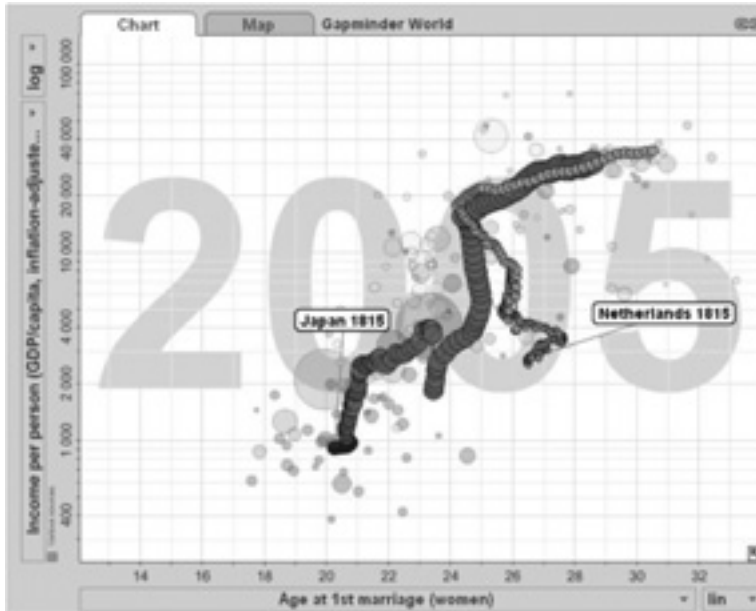
Global income inequality, 1820-2000

mance will be collected on GDP and its components, real wages, heights (as a measure of economic well-being) and quality of life. Among the data on proximate causes collected will be data on prices, wages, income distribution, taxation level, labour relations, skill, and education as well as male, female, and child labour force participation. Data on migration will be collected in a related project. Data collected related to ultimate causes will include institutions, constraints on the political executive, state structure and stability, central banks, family systems, guilds, religious preferences, urbanisation and geography. Data will be collected in all cases for a group of 25 large countries and the period from 1800. Where the data allows, we will include other countries and move

global income inequality over the 1820–2000 period for example. For the first century, this graph has the form of a normal Gaussian curve, but this changes with the crisis of the 1930s. From the 1950s to the 1990s the curve has two tops.



Per capita income and life expectancy at birth, China, Congo, Netherlands, 1800 - 2007 (Gapminder)



Per capita income and age at first marriage, Japan and the Netherlands, 1815 - 2005 (Gampinder)

Only recently, with the economic emergence of China and India, the distribution has become normal again.

As mentioned, the central portal will also offer (innovative) ways to visualise the data. We are currently discussing possibilities with the designers of Statplanet and Gampinder, which offer attractive visualisation options.

As data can be shown in motion, developments can be illustrated very graphically. Well known data thus come to life. In the illustration we see how Gampinder can show the differences between an early and a late developer, and a country where sustained income growth has not yet started.

But if we combine less expected data, as we are bound to do when working with the institutional explanatory variables, we are in for more surprises. In the illustration we combined per capita income and age at first marriage in Japan and the Netherlands for the 1815-2005 period. This is, of course, one of our cultural and institutional explanations. The reasoning behind it is, that it is a good thing for economic growth if women are active in the economy and their creativity, for instance as entrepreneurs, is put to use. This leads us to

predict higher growth figures in societies where women are relatively free. One measure for female freedom is age at marriage, as very early marriages will mean that women have had little say in selecting their spouses, and will have had limited opportunity to receive higher education. As expected, we see a difference between Japan and the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, with the lower female marriage age and lower GDP in Japan. Dutch historical literature for this period stresses the limited opportunities of women,

with the dominance of the male breadwinner model, limited education and no political rights for women. The global comparison leads us to formulate the question whether the late average age at first marriage of Dutch women still represented at least a relative degree of freedom. However that may be, from the 1960s the gap between Japan and the Netherlands closed in both respects.

Clio-Infra hopes to make these and countless other relations available for analysis and visualisation, continuing a tradition of collection up to date national and international data for economic history, started a century ago by N. W. Posthumus.

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Anmerkungen

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