



The Oxford Handbook of Historical Political Economy
Jeffery A. Jenkins (ed.), Jared Rubin (ed.)
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197618608.001.0001>
Published: 2022 **Online ISBN:** 9780197618639
Print ISBN: 9780197618608

The Oxford Handbook of HISTORICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

CHAPTER

Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Historical Political Economy

Tracy Dennison, Scott Gehlbach

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197618608.013.2> Pages C2.P1–C2.N4

Published: 26 January 2023

Abstract

Historical political economy sits at the intersection of history and the social sciences. To many, this intersection feels like a yawning divide. Differences in methodology and in research aims make it difficult for historians and social scientists to communicate, much less collaborate. Yet successful collaboration is possible, especially if one considers forms of cooperation beyond traditional co-authorship. Team projects can exploit historians' familiarity with sources and social scientists' comfort with data. Joint efforts to summarize the state of a field can bring depth and balance to the study of history. Workshops, journals, and blogs can provide opportunities for social scientists and historians to learn from each other. By bringing together different forms of expertise, interdisciplinary collaboration helps to shine new light on existing problems in historical political economy while opening new avenues of research within and across the disciplines.

Keywords: [historical political economy](#), [history](#), [social sciences](#), [interdisciplinarity](#), [collaboration](#)

Subject: [Political Economy](#), [Political Institutions](#), [Politics](#)

Historical political economy (HPE) is a field of study that comprises (at least) three separate disciplines: history, politics, and economics. As with any such interdisciplinary endeavor, there are inevitable challenges in collaborating and communicating across disciplinary boundaries. Differences in method, in theory, and in motivating questions conspire to harden those boundaries and erode the commensurability necessary for a common dialogue (Kuhn 1962).

Such challenges are particularly pronounced in the relationship between history, on the one hand, and the social sciences, on the other. Even as the decades-long divergence between economics and political science has begun to reverse, the mathematicization and quantification of the social sciences, coupled with history's cultural turn, have made it more difficult for historians and social scientists to learn from each other. When scholars in one "camp" approach a topic that has traditionally been the preserve of the other, the response is not even defensiveness but rather indifference, with neither side compelled to acknowledge the work of the other. It sometimes seems that historians and social economists each practice their own HPE.

That said, it is easy to exaggerate the divide. In fact, it is too easy—it lets historians and social scientists both off the hook, when in fact engagement across the disciplines is critical to good research. In what follows, we argue that historians and social scientists have different but complementary skills: historical and social-scientific research illuminate distinct aspects of a shared experience. Interdisciplinary collaboration brings these skills together. In so doing, it forces researchers to think harder about the questions they are asking, and about how to best interpret their findings; it expands the frontiers of our knowledge and suggests new avenues of inquiry. We acknowledge the formidable obstacles to such collaboration, but we insist that they are not impossible to surmount, especially if we consider forms of cooperation beyond traditional co-authorship.

By way of example, we often point to our own field of study—the historical political economy of late Imperial Russia—though we also cite precedents from others of inquiry. Our awareness of the divide between history and the social sciences is not abstract; we have ourselves witnessed more than one conversation about "the relationship." We have, nonetheless, seen enough examples of successful collaboration to understand what is possible. Those examples point the way to a renewed and truly interdisciplinary historical political economy.

Understanding the *Methodenstreit*

The tension between history and the social sciences is not new. It goes back at least as far as the nineteenth-century central European "*Methodenstreit*" between mathematically inclined economists and their historically minded colleagues (Tribe 1995). These tensions have flared up repeatedly ever since and remain present to this day (Postan 1939; Coleman 1995; Ogilvie 2007). In the contemporary academy, this divide has been exaggerated by increasingly sharp disciplinary boundaries and the self-selection of scholars with distinct backgrounds and tastes into the various disciplines. The differences that result are as much cultural as they are methodological.

Disciplinary cultures, like other cultures, can be difficult to observe and evaluate from inside. Those who have been acculturated tend to take the rules and norms entirely for granted; we are rarely asked to articulate to ourselves why we do things *this way* and not *that way*. It's not so much that we are intolerant of other approaches, it's that we tend not to engage them in ways that force us to be explicit about why—or in what circumstances—we think one approach might be preferable to another.¹ This raises the costs of interdisciplinary engagement, both by making disciplinary research inaccessible to outsiders (since so many methodological choices are implicit and unquestioned by insiders²) and by making it difficult for those acculturated in one set of practices to productively question and critique others. On those occasions when historians and social scientists are forced to engage with each other's work, they often struggle to articulate their concerns. Their comments end up sounding dismissive: historians assert that "those numbers can't be used that way" and social scientists deride textual evidence as "anecdotal." Such uninformed responses only harden existing attitudes and exacerbate the divergence.

While it is true that most historians do not understand econometric technique and most social scientists do not know how to analyze texts, these aren't actually the main obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration—they are just the most readily apparent. Many of the disagreements that motivate the *Methodenstreit* concern more fundamental questions: What can be measured, what constitutes evidence, and how we should think about causation in historical context? These disagreements give rise to stereotypes: the social scientist who wants to measure everything, thinks only numbers are “empirical,” and believes her regression model captures all that is important—the historian who finds measurement morally suspect, worries about the whole concept of “evidence,” and thinks searching for historical causes is pointless (because everything is inextricably related).

Such caricatures enable historians and quantitative social scientists to go on ignoring one another. But when serious discussions do happen across disciplinary lines—usually around specific projects or questions (more on this shortly)—the stereotypes quickly unravel. It turns out that historians aren't that bothered about measuring changes in population or GDP or land allotment sizes, though they are worried about attempts to measure things that they know are very tricky to define and isolate, like the effects of cultural norms or those of an institutional system. And few social scientists would argue against the idea of multiple causes—indeed, any social scientist trained in modern methods of causal inference would maintain that the whole point is to find some plausibly exogenous source of variation in a single “treatment” variable, so as to bracket the role of other factors. Historians are trained in source criticism, which makes them skeptical of social scientists' treatment of data; they view it as inattentive to the messy reality of how digitized records first entered the archives. Social scientists are trained in econometric technique that enables them to correct for measurement error and isolate the role of some variable of interest.

Behind the skepticism on both sides is a lack of understanding of what each is trying to do, of the questions that motivate research, and why these questions are considered important. At a fundamental level, these questions differ in their approach to the specific versus the general. Historians aim to understand a particular society in its historical context, whether that be seventeenth-century English Puritans, the court of Maria-Theresa, or the village of Montailou. Their knowledge comes from immersion in a specific period, a specific region, a specific stratum of society, and often a specific language. It follows that it is far more natural for historians to think in terms of “sources” than “data.” Qualitative, textual information is as important as the quantitative in helping the historian to build a picture of a historical phenomenon or locality. The historian reads sources with an eye not only to what is present but to what is missing—and how to interpret the silences. Not least, she is attentive to the language used: How do villagers in a society without formal mechanisms for assigning property rights articulate conflicts over property? Do they use possessive forms of speech, do they talk of “rights” or “trespass” or “theft,” and can this language help us better understand their property regimes?

The historian's expertise is often hidden from view. It is easy to imagine that anyone who can read can do history, that it is a matter of learning “the facts” and arranging them to tell a compelling story. But which facts and how to interpret these in the larger context? Unlike many social scientists, historians tend to return to the same periods and the same places in their research. Their tools are languages, a knowledge of sources, and a deep understanding of a specific subject. Yet with this expertise comes a cost: an emphasis on depth often leads to skepticism about breadth. Historians tend to eschew more general explanatory frameworks, making it challenging to engage across different subfields of history, never mind across disciplinary lines.

In contrast to historians, social scientists are far more comfortable with the general. This takes various forms. When considering evidence that spans space or time, social scientists speak of “stylized facts,” that is, broad generalizations that abstract from particular detail. Thus, for example, Paine and Lee (2022) document the divergence in revenue collection between Western and non-Western countries in the early twentieth century—a pattern that they use to motivate a model of investments in fiscal capacity. When social scientists do restrict attention to a particular time and place, they often use the historical context to explore broad theoretical conjectures. A study of local institutions of self-government in imperial Russia (the *zemstva*), which offered political representation to recently freed serfs, therefore sheds light not only on governance in Russia in the era of the “Great Reforms,” but also on bigger, more general questions in political economy, such as when autocratic elites transfer power to excluded groups (Castañeda Dower, Finkel, Gehlbach, and Nafziger 2018). On occasions when existing theory provides no good explanation for some empirical phenomenon, social scientists offer new theory, thus contributing to the “library of mechanisms” (Guala 2005) used to understand the world (Gailmard 2021).

In an ideal world, these two forms of expertise would come together naturally: social scientists' comfort with theory and data as the perfect complement to historians' ease with historical context and textual sources. After all, historians and social scientists share a set of goals in historical work: to understand history for its own sake, and to use history to understand the present (Charnysh, Finkel, and Gehlbach 2023).³ Yet here again disciplinary culture creates obstacles to intellectual exchange. Social scientists are increasingly accustomed to team production, with multiple authors on the typical paper. Historians, in contrast, tend to work alone. This, in turn, relates to the mechanics of research in the respective disciplines: data collection and analysis are more naturally shared across members of a team than is the process of reading and interpreting archival texts.

None of this would matter if historians and social scientists were able to fully exploit gains from intellectual trade, with each building on what the other has done (Gehlbach 2015). But even getting historians and social scientists to read each other's work can be a challenge. It is true that social scientists are far more likely to curl up with a good history book than a historian is to peruse the latest issue of the *American Political Science Review* or the *American Economic Review* before going to bed,⁴ but this is not a reliable gauge of genuine interdisciplinary engagement. A social scientist working in the field of HPE is clearly interested in history, but is she interested enough to do a deep dive into a larger historiography or to struggle through a book filled with unfamiliar jargon and analytical categories to find the bits that are relevant to her project? This seems about as likely as that a historian will push past the mathematical notation and "sociological gobbledygook" in much of social science.

Self-selection reinforces the problem. The sort of young scholar who a generation ago might have gravitated toward comparative politics—interested in the world, good with languages, skeptical of the mathematical methods employed by her Americanist colleagues—today is more likely to choose a career as a historian. Even small differences in comparative advantage can generate large differences in preferences about the proper nature of historical work, as investment in skills and the acculturation described above mold scholars into different "types."

All of these obstacles are real. There have, nonetheless, been periodic attempts to bring together history and the social sciences—though not always historians and social scientists. In political science and economics, the *Analytic Narratives* project sought to marry historical description and rational-choice theorizing (Bates et al. 1998; see also Skarbek and Skarbek 2022). With the benefit of hindsight, this was a sort of proto-HPE that emphasized formal theory over statistical inference. It was not always well received, with the authors of *Analytic Narratives* criticized for lack of fidelity to the facts; for considering overly restrictive game forms; for failing to fully incorporate uncertainty, emotions, and other relevant factors in decision-making; and for much more (e.g., Carpenter 2000; Elster 2000). Perhaps the authors were simply ahead of their time—or perhaps true interdisciplinarity requires active collaboration across disciplinary lines.

In what follows, we present three cases of what we understand to be successful interdisciplinary collaboration—settings and research agendas in which historical and social scientific expertise were effectively brought together. We draw substantially on our own experience as members of a community of scholars working on Imperial and Soviet Russia, though we also lean on the example of others. Our examples are different in nature: the first is a kind of asynchronous collaboration, the second is interdisciplinary co-authorship, and the third is "institutional" collaboration. What these examples have in common is an overriding sense that the divide between history and the social sciences is not so large as one might imagine. Together, they demonstrate that interdisciplinary collaboration can be intellectually rewarding to those who are willing to make the investment.

Collaborating across the Divide

Intergenerational Collaboration

A first example of successful collaboration between historians and social scientists is notable for the fact that the historians and social scientists did not actually know each other. They were, in fact, representatives of different generations and political-economic systems—the historians working in the USSR during the Khrushchev Thaw, the social scientists building on their research five decades later in North America. This spatial, temporal, and ideological distance notwithstanding, the research that emerged from this collaboration is a model for what can be achieved when methodological complementarities are exploited.

Soviet historians, working in a Marxist tradition, had long been interested in the “peasant movement” that preceded the Bolshevik Revolution. Beginning in the 1950s, a team of historians drew upon various archival records to document peasant resistance from 1795 to 1917. The primary research output from this project is a multivolume publication—*Krest’ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii* (The Peasant Movement in Russia, with various editors)—that combines an incident-by-incident chronicle of thousands of events and transcriptions of important primary documents. Numerous subsidiary publications build on the context provided by this investigation to explore important historical events, including especially the emancipation of Russia’s serfs in 1861 (e.g., Zaionchkovskii 1968).

Social scientists, of course, are also interested in political unrest. Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen (2015; see also Finkel and Gehlbach 2020) saw in the Soviet data and the context of Imperial Russia’s so-called Great Reforms an opportunity to test key theories of the relationship between reform and rebellion in autocratic states. Drawing on four volumes of *Krest’ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii* that dealt with the period before and after emancipation (Okun’ 1962; Okun’ and Sivkov 1963; Ivanov 1964; Zaionchkovskii and Paina 1968), Finkel et al. assembled a data set of nearly four thousand events across fifty-five provinces from 1851 to 1871. Although the initial goal of the project was to understand the effect of reform (emancipation) on unrest, subsequent work (Castañeda Dower, Finkel, Gehlbach, and Nafziger 2018) examined the impact of unrest on reform (peasant representation in district *zemstvo* assemblies, created by further edict in 1864).

From a social scientist’s perspective, it is nearly the ideal interdisciplinary collaboration. The archival work on which the chronicle is based is well beyond the reach of the best-funded social scientist. It takes a historian’s understanding of sources to pull together even a single entry in the historical record, such as that depicted in Figure 1. Where does one begin to look for mentions of peasants refusing to plow their fallow fields in response to the loss of land following emancipation? What records does one investigate to corroborate such evidence? How does one understand the incentives of those who recorded such information? These are the skills of a historian—or, in this case, a five-year plan’s worth of historians.

Figure 1.

Ранее 29 июня — 6 июля. Симбирская губ. Отказ вр.-об. крестьян деревень Канрова, Недремаловки, Протопоповки, Перетяжкиной и с. Шатрашавы Буинского у. в имениях Сабаниных, Горемыкина, Пятницкого и Чертковой запахивать свои паровые поля из-за отрезки хорошей земли; была введена военная команда.
ЦГИА, ф. 1291, оп. 52, 1862 г., д. 117, л. 1—6, 13—16; ЦГАОР, ф. 1109-И, 4 эксп., 1862 г., д. 223, л. 21—27; ЦГВИА, ф. 395, оп. 299, ОА, 1862 г., д. 362, л. 49—50, 101—101 об., 108—109 об., 117—117 об.; Левашев, стр. 54.

A typical chronicle entry.

Yet it is hard to know what to make of this mountain of evidence, without some exercise in aggregation. The authors of the chronicle attempted something along these lines, with tables in the final volume that summarized events in cross-tabular form. The resulting counts (e.g., by region and year) are the sort of “raw data” that have been used in a few papers, including Finkel, Gehlbach, and Kofanov’s (2017) separate work on rural unrest during the 1917 Russian Revolution. It is better than nothing, but it is not the same thing as being able to aggregate up from the original chronicle entries.

By way of example, consider those same accounts of nineteenth-century peasant rebellion. Some of these are quite substantial, involving multiple estates and thousands of participants. Others are more isolated acts of resistance—not quite “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1987), but the sort of thing that would have flown below the radar, if not for the idiosyncratic presence of a local observer. One wants to ensure that any statements about temporal or geospatial patterns of peasant rebellion are not sensitive to the inclusion of such “small” events. Hence the importance of the raw event data: we can check robustness to counts of “large” events only.

Aggregating up from the raw event data can also address other forms of measurement error. A particular concern in Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen (2015) is the relative incidence of unrest among serfs and “state peasants” (peasants who lived on state lands) before and after Tsar Alexander II’s emancipation of the serfs in 1861. As part of the emancipation process, “peace arbitrators” (Leo Tolstoy was one) were tasked with negotiating settlements between landowners and former serfs. It is conceivable that acts of peasant rebellion during this period would have been better documented on estate lands than on state land, given the temporary presence of peace arbitrators on the former but not the latter. Thankfully, the Soviet

historians who assembled the event data were meticulous about documenting the archives on which each chronicle entry is based (these are listed at the end of the entry depicted in Figure 1). As an alternative aggregation, Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen (2015) therefore restrict attention to events drawn from the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (TsGAOR), which are primarily disturbances recorded by the tsarist political police—that is, not peace arbitrators.

The picture of peasant rebellion that emerges from this collaboration is more complete, the conclusions more confident, than would have been possible had the project ended in the 1960s. Still, this is not full interdisciplinarity. The Soviet historians working during the Khrushchev Thaw were writing for other historians. Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen were writing mostly for other social scientists. The two groups are separated by theory and method as well as by generations.

Nonetheless, in this experience there is the seed of a model that could support interdisciplinary collaboration in real time. One can imagine groups of historians and social scientists teaming up to identify, digitize, and analyze archival records. Historians' sensitivity to sources would impart meaning to those documents that are collected. Social scientists' comfort with data would serve to summarize that information in useful ways. The motivating questions would be substantially distinct, but through collaboration there might be some convergence of interests.

One recent example of a collaboration along these lines involves the calculation of new estimates of GDP per capita for the Russian Empire (Broadberry and Korchmina 2022). Here the econometric expertise of the economist (Broadberry) and the historian's knowledge of archives and historical context (Korchmina) have been combined to investigate Russia's place in debates about the "little divergence" in Europe. New sources of information about population, grain yields, prices, and incomes in the two centuries before the Russian Revolution of 1917 have been identified in the archives and used to create measures of long-run economic growth. The findings raise interesting new questions about how to interpret Russian history, challenging the existing views of historians and social scientists on serfdom, tsarist-era reforms, and industrialization.

Interdisciplinary Co-authorship

Our second example differs in various respects from the first. In this case, a historian (Dennison) and an economist (Alexander Klein) collaborated on an interdisciplinary "state of the field" project, bringing together findings from history and the social sciences to create a historical account of economic divergence in Eastern Europe over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Dennison and Klein's (2021) charge was to produce a chapter for the *Cambridge Economic History of the Modern World* on the economic history of Eastern Europe since 1870. This was a complicated task for several reasons. First, the notion of "Eastern" Europe (insofar as there is any agreement on what that is) did not remain constant between 1870 and the present. The past 150 years have seen multiple changes in borders, as old empires collapsed, new ones appeared, and military conflicts repeatedly altered old territorial boundaries. Two world wars, plus the Russian Revolution and ensuing civil war, complicate the task of calculating growth indices for the twentieth century. Until very recently, data for the Soviet Union and its satellite states were not readily available, and the methods and approaches employed by Western scholars (in both history and the social sciences) were unknown to their East European counterparts, leaving large gaps in the relevant literatures. Not least, it was necessary to construct a general narrative that could accommodate a number of different societies, each with its own peculiar circumstances and specific historical contingencies.

Many of the disciplinary concerns outlined earlier in the chapter came into play. For instance, the historian first had to be convinced that there were reasonable ways of dealing with the problem of border changes and gaps in the data that could be explained and defended (to herself and to readers). Moreover, both had to agree on a historical narrative that was consistent with the data as well as the historiography of the region. As a starting point, the project used the quantitative social science literature (to which Klein had contributed with novel work on national income accounting for parts of eastern Europe), as this was the more recent economic history of the region. Both that and the historical literature emphasized institutions and historical political economy, so these emerged as key themes, helping to ensure that the survey would be accessible both to social scientists and to historians.

From the perspective of social science, it was important to incorporate as much quantitative evidence—and cite as much of that literature—as possible. The resulting chapter offers a synthesis of existing research on Central and Eastern Europe and incorporates recent studies for countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia, where data had been less reliable or altogether left out of prior work (especially for the twentieth century). Estimates from this synthesis show no evidence of convergence in the growth trajectories of Eastern and Western Europe; in fact, they suggest that divergence had roots deeper than the twentieth century. Disaggregating long-term growth performance by sector (agriculture, industry, trade) provides a much more nuanced portrait of regional development across the period, offering new insight into such topics as the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the rise of new political regimes, the possible effects of nationalism and protectionism, the role of state corporatism, and the political economy of coercion and corruption in the Soviet empire.

The macroeconomic approach that this synthesis required is especially challenging for a historian—it is not an obvious arena for cross-disciplinary collaboration. Nonetheless, there are parts of this project where the two forms of expertise were brought together very effectively. Perhaps the best example concerns inequality, which arises in the context of the Soviet command economy. On the quantitative side, Gini coefficients for eastern Europe are substantially lower than those for the West in the same period. On the surface, it appears that communist regimes achieved greater equality, though at much lower levels of income. But the more qualitative work of historians has revealed hidden inequalities in the Soviet system— aspects for which it has been difficult to get systematic, reliable data, because so much economic activity was illicit. These include unequal access to power and money (to better jobs and promotions), to basic goods (food, housing), and to services (decent medical care, entrance to special schools and universities, travel). Historical accounts offer evidence (often from textual sources) of corruption, the importance of social networks for obtaining goods and services that markets did not provide, and the disproportionate effects of inequality on women and other groups.

It is worth emphasizing that this collaboration also fell outside the boundaries of traditional co-authorship. The participants were charged with writing something together, but they were relieved of the pressure to agree on a research question and, more importantly, a research design. It was not necessary to find common ground on methodology or on an approach to existing sources and data. Instead the collaboration focused on ensuring that the most salient findings from each side of the disciplinary divide were used to create a coherent narrative about the history of this region. This cooperative approach helped to bring greater breadth and balance to the account of history in ways that are less likely when only one disciplinary perspective is represented.

This promise is borne out in other instances of interdisciplinary scholarship. One recent example is a study of the wool market in medieval England (Bell, Brooks, and Dryburgh 2007). In this case, new light is cast on medieval economies by taking sources with which medievalists were already well acquainted—advance contracts for wool from ecclesiastical and lay archives—and analyzing them using the theoretical tools of economics. In bringing together expertise in the archives of the late medieval English period with tools from modern financial economics, the authors offer a fresh take on an old subject. They present advance contracts for wool (by way of example) as relatively complicated financial instruments, suggesting that local economies and long-distance trading relationships were both more sophisticated than often portrayed. Interestingly, there are few econometric pyrotechnics here (medieval data do pose considerable constraints!) but a great deal of qualitative evidence from primary texts. The contribution from financial economics is more of a conceptual toolkit that enables us to see these documents in a different way, revealing new information about the society that generated them.

A similar approach can be found in Rosenthal and Wong (2011), who combine expertise in economics and history as well as knowledge of two very different historical societies and their archives. Their comparative study of the politics of economic development in Europe and China incorporates deep knowledge of local sources and historical context, some economic theory, and findings from a large secondary literature. The interdisciplinarity brings something extra to their comparison; it makes the research collaborative in terms of both methodology and regional expertise, and it allows for a more suggestive reinterpretation of existing narratives. The same can be said for Pincus and Robinson (2014), who reexamine institutional change in the context of England's Glorious Revolution—a “critical juncture” famously explored by North and Weingast (1989) but also examined by many historians, including especially Pincus (e.g., Pincus 2009). In their case, political-economic theory illuminates the relative importance of *de jure* and *de facto* institutional change

following the Glorious Revolution, with the latter rather the former proving to be the mechanism through which English governance was reshaped after 1688.

Institutional Collaboration

The examples discussed so far concern implicit or explicit collaboration on particular research projects. In this section, we describe an alternative, more institutional form of collaboration that can help to realize gains from trade between historians and social scientists.

We begin by recounting the recent history of institutional collaboration in our own field. In November 2017, historians and social scientists gathered for a panel at the annual meeting of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) on “Number Trouble”—a response to a contentious debate on quantitative studies of history in the *Slavic Review* earlier that year. The discussion that followed illustrated the work to be done if there was to be productive conversation across the disciplinary divide. Swedish economic historian Martin Kragh was the first to suggest a mechanism to facilitate that conversation: a pair of panels at the 2018 meetings, one in which social scientists would present and historians would comment, the other with the opposite configuration. The willingness to participate was heartening, and the inaugural sessions were so successful that similar panels have been organized in subsequent years.

On the heels of this initiative, Gehlbach organized a Summer Workshop in the Economic History and Historical Political Economy of Russia in Madison, Wisconsin, in May 2019. The workshop aimed to build on the interdisciplinarity that the ASEEES sessions had so successfully harnessed, but to push it further with a “Clio-style” conference, where papers would be pre-circulated and then read and discussed by all participants. The aim was to force historians and social scientists—graduate students, postdocs, faculty—into dialogue about each other’s work. This, too, has become an annual event, through which a core group of participants and a growing community of junior scholars have come to know, and learn from, each other.

What has made ASEEES panels and the workshop so successful is the combination of realistic expectations and a hospitable, collegial environment for discussion and (friendly) disagreement. There is no expectation that historians will be turned into social scientists, or vice versa. There is no explicit aim of co-authorship or joint research or even that all of one’s comments and suggestions will make it into the next version of the paper or book manuscript. The meetings bring together researchers from different disciplines to share their own expertise and learn from that of others. The rapport that has been built through repeated engagement has created an atmosphere where questions can be raised, criticisms offered, and suggestions proffered in ways that are helpful and productive—making the work of historians and social scientists better. In the best cases, these discussions have helped to identify misunderstandings (related to the use of quantitative methods or textual analyses), to clarify methodological disagreements, and to think about ways to make our work more accessible to researchers in other fields.

Such institutional collaboration is, of course, not unique to the study of Imperial and Soviet Russia. In 2002, Ira Katznelson and Gregory Wawro organized a Congress and History Conference to bring together an interdisciplinary group of Congress scholars in common dialogue; twenty years later, the annual conference continues. Perhaps illustrating the sort of intellectual exchange that might follow from the Russia initiatives described earlier, Katznelson and Wawro have worked to understand the ways in which historical and quantitative methods can be bridged, a project culminating in their important monograph *Time Counts: Quantitative Analysis for Historical Social Science* (Katznelson and Wawro 2022). In similar fashion, Katznelson and Barry Weingast led a group of scholars working in historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism to explore “points of intersection” in the study of endogenous preferences (Katznelson and Weingast 2005).

There have also been efforts in recent years to overcome the increasing narrowness of academic journals by creating new venues for work in fields that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Two notable examples are the *Journal of Historical Political Economy* (edited by Jeffery Jenkins) and *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics* (edited by Marc Flandreau, Julia Ott, and Francesca Trivellato). Both consider articles from historians and from social scientists (not necessarily writing together), so long as the work relates to the journal’s field (HPE) or theme (capitalism).

Not least, there is the Broadstreet Blog, organized by Jeffery Jenkins in 2020. This is an interdisciplinary space that brings together political scientists, economists, historians, and sociologists with a common

interest in historical political economy. Representatives of different disciplines present the latest research in HPE, discuss the econometric challenges of working with historical data, share knowledge about sources and archives, and address the challenges of working across disciplinary divides. Behind the scenes, a smaller group of disciplinarily diverse editors makes the blog work. They share ideas and knowledge, offer comments and criticisms on each other's posts, and maintain what is effectively a running interdisciplinary conversation about historical political economy.

Conclusion

We are not naive about the increasingly divergent trajectories of history and the social sciences, nor about the challenges that genuine interdisciplinary engagement poses. But we are optimistic, because we have observed, in some important cases, a willingness to talk across interdisciplinary lines and an interest in engaging with each other's work. True, traditional forms of collaboration, especially co-authorship, are difficult: journals have become more specialized, and criteria for tenure and promotion discourage interdisciplinarity. Nonetheless, as our examples make clear, it is still possible. And there are many other ways to collaborate: large team projects that bring together historians and social scientists to identify and analyze sources for a specific society under a broad theme; articles or chapters for reference volumes that pair historians with social scientists to discuss the state of the field; and conference panels, workshops, journals, and blogs that provide historians and social scientists an opportunity to discuss recent work in their respective disciplines.

The current academic landscape rewards specialization and obscures latent demand for cooperation across disciplinary boundaries. Even so, researchers on both sides of the divide continue to see returns to investment in interdisciplinary work. By exploiting the complementary expertise and perspectives of social scientists and historians, we increase our chances of getting things right; our research projects are more thoughtfully and intentionally designed; our work is founded on the most robust findings from *all* the relevant literatures. And it is fun! For many of us, one of the best aspects of historical political economy is the opportunity to learn from scholars in other disciplines. This chapter shows the many ways that is possible.

Works Cited

Bates, Robert H., Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast. 1998. *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Bell, Adrian R., Chris Brooks, and Paul R. Dryburgh. 2007. *The English Wool Market, c. 1230–1327*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Broadberry, Stephen, and Elena Korchmina. 2022. "Catching Up and Falling Behind: Russian Economic Growth, 1690s–1880s." CEPR Discussion Paper 17458.

Carpenter, Daniel. 2000. "Commentary: What Is the Marginal Value of Analytic Narratives?" *Social Science History* 24, no. 4: 653–67.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Castañeda Dower, Paul, Evgeny Finkel, Scott Gehlbach, and Steven Nafziger. 2018. "Collective Action and Representation in Autocracies: Evidence from Russia's Great Reforms." *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 1: 125–47.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Charnysh, Volha, Evgeny Finkel, and Scott Gehlbach. 2023 (forthcoming). "Historical Political Economy: Past, Present, and Future." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Coleman, Donald. "History, Economic History, and the Numbers Game." 1995. *Historical Journal* 38, no. 3: 635–46.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Dennison, Tracy, and Alexander Klein. 2021. "The Socialist Experiment and Beyond: The Economic History of Eastern Europe since 1870." In *The Cambridge Economic History of the Modern World: Volume 2: 1870–Present*, ed. Stephen Broadberry and Kyoji Fukao, 74–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elster, Jon. "Rational Choice History: A Case of Excessive Ambition." 2000. *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 3: 685–95.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Finkel, Evgeny and Scott Gehlbach. 2020. *Reform and Rebellion in Weak States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Finkel, Evgeny, Scott Gehlbach, and Dmitrii Kofanov. 2017. "(Good) Land and Freedom (for Former Serfs)." *Slavic Review* 76, no. 3: 710–21.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Finkel, Evgeny, Scott Gehlbach, and Tricia Olsen. 2015. "Does Reform Prevent Rebellion? Evidence from Russia's Emancipation of the Serfs." *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 8: 984–1019.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Gailmard, Sean. 2021. "Theory, History, and Political Economy." *Journal of Historical Political Economy* 1, no. 1: 69–104.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Gehlbach, Scott. 2015. "The Fallacy of Multiple Methods." *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 25, no. 2: 11–12.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Guala, Francesco. 2005. *The Methodology of Experimental Economics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Ivanov, Leonid, ed. 1964. *Kret'sianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1861–1869 gg: Sbornik Dokumentov*. Moscow: Mysl'.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Katznelson, Ira, and Gregory Wawro. 2022. *Time Counts: Quantitative Analysis for Historical Social Science*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Katznelson, Ira, and Barry R. Weingast. 2005. *Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection Between Historical and Rational*

Choice Institutionalism. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

North, Douglass, and Barry R. Weingast. 1989. "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England." *Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4: 803–32.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Ogilvie, Sheilagh. 2007. "‘Whatever Is, Is Right’? Economic Institutions in Pre-industrial Europe." *Economic History Review* 60, no. 4: 649–84.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Okun', Semen, ed. 1962. *Kret'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1850–1856 gg: Sbornik Dokumentov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi Literatury.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Okun', Semen, and Konstantin Sivkov, eds. 1963. *Kret'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1857–mae 1861 gg: Sbornik Dokumentov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi Literatury.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Paine, Jack, and Alexander Lee. 2022. "The Great Revenue Divergence." *International Organization*.

Pincus, Steven C. A. 2009. *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Pincus, Steven C. A., and James A. Robinson. 2014. "What Really Happened during the Glorious Revolution?" In *Institutions, Property Rights, and Economic Growth: The Legacy of Douglass North*, ed. Sebastian Galiani and Itai Sened, 192–222. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Postan, M. M. 1939 [1972]. "The Historical Method in Social Science: An Inaugural Lecture." Reprinted in *Fact and Relevance: Essays in Historical Method*, ed. M. M. Postan, 22–34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent, and R. Bin Wong. 2011. *Before and beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Scott, James. 1987. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Skarbek, David, and Emily Skarbek. 2022. "Analytic Narratives in Political Economy." *History of Political Economy*.

Tribe, Keith. 1995. *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse 1750-1950*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Zaionchkovskii, Petr. 1968. *Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Rossii*. 3rd ed. Moscow: Prosveshchenie.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Zaionchkovskii, Petr, and Esfir' Paina, eds. 1968. *Kret'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1870–1880 gg: Sbornik Dokumentov*. Moscow: Nauka.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Notes

- 1 Undergraduates, who tend to select into a field because they have found classes in that area especially exciting and interesting, are typically left on their own to consider the relative merits of different approaches to the study of history. Ideally, courses in economic, political, or social history would address comparative methodological approaches with a view to other disciplines, but this is hardly possible without regular, sustained engagement across disciplinary boundaries.
- 2 Decisions, for instance, about quantitative versus qualitative studies—not decisions internal to disciplines such as the proper identification strategy or whether to choose one set of archive documents over another.
- 3 As discussed earlier, a third goal—to use history as a setting to explore theoretical conjectures—seems to be more idiosyncratic to social scientists.
- 4 The narrative structure most historians employ to present their research findings means that historical works are, at least superficially, more accessible to other audiences than work in the social sciences.