

**THE COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF ECONOMIC GROWTH
AND STRUCTURE**

**Suggestions on Research
Objectives and Organization**

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, INC.
1959

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**Relation of National Bureau Directors to
Publications Reporting Conference Proceedings**

Since the present volume is a record of conference proceedings, it has been exempted from the rules governing submission of manuscripts to, and critical review by, the Board of Directors of the National Bureau. It has, however, been reviewed and accepted for publication by the Director of Research.

(Resolution adopted July 6, 1948 and revised November 21, 1949)

P R E F A C E

Last year the National Bureau brought together two distinguished groups of economists and government officials to exchange views on the direction and organization of research in the important area of comparative national economic growth and structure.¹

This report makes available to the many persons concerned with this significant area of research the ideas and information gathered together in the conferences and in subsequent less formal discussions among individuals. The first part is based largely, though not exclusively, on the discussion at the conferences, and on memoranda prepared by a number of participants for use at the conferences. The value of this publication is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of these memoranda in a second part, printed here with the kind permission of the authors. It should be recognized that the memoranda are informal statements prepared under considerable pressure of time, but the reader will, I am sure, find in them many interesting suggestions that could be incorporated only briefly or not at all in Part I.

The problem area on which the discussion was focused was defined broadly to include differences as well as similarities among countries in patterns of growth and structure, and the related factors. It was felt also that an exploration of this general area should concern itself with the methods and data needed to deal with the scientific problems involved; take note of work already done and in progress; and consider the research needs and possibilities with an eye to their ultimate contribution to the resolution of significant questions.

As with other exploratory reports issued by the National Bureau,² the object of the report is to help stimulate interest and guide research activity in the important area covered by it. It should be regarded simply as suggestive, and not as a formal program of research or statement on research principles, methods, or organization.

To avoid misinterpretation, it may be desirable to underscore the informal character of this report by noting, first, that an exploration —

¹One meeting was held in Princeton on June 27-28, 1958; the other, in Washington on July 21, 1958. The list of participants follows this preface.

²*A Program of Financial Research* (1937); *Research in Securities Markets* (1946); *Research in the Capital and Securities Markets* (1954); *Suggestions for Research in the Economics of Pensions* (1957).

especially when carried on under pressure of time — cannot be expected to yield suggestions that are always consistent. The reader will find it worth his while to contrast certain of the positions taken. Second, it is natural for enthusiasts — and in substantial degree, those whose views are presented here would wish to count themselves in this class — to dwell on the merits of the particular problems, procedures, and forms of organization that appeal to them. When it comes to the practical problem of making a choice, alternative programs within and outside the field covered in the present exploration that are mentioned only cursorily here, or are not discussed at all, will need to be brought within the range of consideration. Third, suggestions such as are set forth here can be of assistance mainly in choosing a program. Those who set up an organization or embark on a project will want to formulate more adequately than was done here the course to be followed. Fourth, no one method, approach, or mode of organization to deal with the problems discussed here can be considered necessarily superior to others. It is hoped that scholars and institutions with various opinions on these matters will find the report useful in planning their research.

A further word might be added about method. One of the points brought out in some of the memoranda and in the discussions at the meetings is the importance of qualitative considerations in studying the origins and process of economic growth. Since a good deal of emphasis was also placed on quantitative studies, there might appear to have been a fundamental difference in attitudes toward methodology. But in this respect the views are not, I think, inconsistent. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are complementary: to make sense of what figures show, qualitative considerations must always enter; and the import of qualitative factors is better seen in the light of measurement of their effects.

One suggestion made at the meetings relates to the formation of a standing Conference on Comparative Economic Growth and Structure, which might hold meetings to discuss both methodological and substantive questions. Comments and suggestions from individual scholars and organizations here and abroad on the desirability of such a conference will be welcome. So, also, will information on research under way or in prospect.

We are greatly indebted to the participants in the conferences, all of whom joined in the discussion and many of whom critically reviewed the report. No one of them, of course, is to be held responsible for all the views and opinions set forth. I should mention, also, that because the present volume is primarily a record of conference papers and proceedings, it has not been submitted to the Board of Directors of the National Bureau for approval.

Special acknowledgment is made to the authors of the memoranda reproduced in Part II of this report; to Raymond W. Goldsmith, who organized the meetings and prepared Part I of the report; to Walther P. Michael, who served as secretary of the conferences and assisted in the preparation of parts of the report; to Simon Kuznets, who gave wise

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Director of Research

June 1959

**Participants in Conferences on Comparative
Economic Growth and Structure**

Princeton Meeting — June 27-28, 1958

Washington Meeting — July 21, 1958

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