INDUSTRY AND IDENTITY

The Migration Linkage Between Economic and Cultural Change in 19th Century Britain*

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Abstract

Canonical modernization theories argue that industrialization fosters the adoption of common identities through labor migration. We study this process in England and Wales during the Second Industrial Revolution. Using microdata on individuals' names and migration decisions, we document convergence towards a common identity—as predicted by modernization theorists—but also significant local identity preservation. To understand these patterns, we develop and estimate a quantitative spatial model in which migration and cultural identities are inter-dependent. Different components of economic modernization had different effects on identity change. Falling migration costs homogenized peripheral regions. In contrast, industrial development led to heterogeneity, increasing the overall prevalence of the culture of London, while also creating local identity holdouts. Locations preserved their local culture when industrialization limited out-migration and peripherality limited in-migration. Modernization can promote both homogenization and persistent local identities, crucially depending on the spatial distribution of industrial activity.

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