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Agglomeration and Human Capital Spillovers: Identification and Spatial Scope

Paul Verstraten

The invention of agriculture, about 10,000 years ago, enabled people to settle in one place. Ever since this milestone in human history, cities have played a key role in economic development. The spatial concentration of people facilitated the emergence of complex economic phenomena, such as the division of labor, trade, entrepreneurship and the rapid exchange of ideas. It is the main objective of this dissertation to contribute to our understanding of the functioning of cities. To this end, the dissertation employs detailed panel data on individual wages and cross-sectional data on house prices in the Netherlands. To account for endogeneity issues, I use a wide range of tools such as a quasi-experiment, individual fixed effects, and historical and geological instruments. The main questions that are addressed are the following. What is the spatial extent of agglomeration economies? Why do wages grow faster in urban areas? What is the scope of the external return to higher education? How does accessibility influence house prices? The dissertation ends by drawing implications for public policy.

Paul Verstraten (1990) obtained an MSc in Economics at Tilburg University. After his graduation, he started working as a researcher at the CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, and he is still employed there today. His main areas of expertise are urban economics and transportation. From 2017 to 2019, he was affiliated with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and focused on completing his PhD dissertation.

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