

John & Pat Hume Doctoral Awards 2025-2026

Department: Economics
Supervisor: Prof David Cuberes
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Title of Research Area:

Urban economics and welfare

Description of research areas supervisor is willing to accept applications in:

A common concern is the large disparities in city population sizes within a country, which can lead to significant challenges. The World Development Report (2019) highlights how the quality of life in mega-cities in less developed countries is often poor. While much of the focus has been on developing countries, where many of the world's largest cities are located, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised broader questions about the benefits and drawbacks of extremely large cities, even in wealthier nations. In some countries, there is also a growing concern over the rapid depopulation of rural areas. This research proposes using general equilibrium urban models to design policies that improve a country's overall welfare by better managing urban growth. I am particularly interested in examining the urban systems of several European countries. The model I envision requires specific data, so the choice of country will depend on the availability of that data. The model would include key factors such as productivity, amenities, congestion, and governance in each city. City-level data would be essential for evaluating various counterfactual scenarios and policy options. For instance, it could be used to assess the effects of policies that aim to equalize productivity across cities, boost productivity in less productive cities, or control the size of the largest cities, thereby affecting the national economy and welfare. Understanding how cities of different sizes and characteristics function is crucial for addressing issues such as regional inequality, rural depopulation, the decline of smaller cities, and environmental concerns. This research is particularly significant because similar model-based studies have been conducted only in a few countries, including the USA, China, Mexico, and Spain, making it a valuable and timely area for further exploration.

How supervisor research areas align to Maynooth University research priority areas:

This research project supports Maynooth University's Strategic Plan 2023-28 by focusing on research excellence, offering innovative solutions, and providing practical policy insights. Given the current challenges in Ireland's housing market, such as high prices and a severe housing shortage, this project aligns with the university's goal of contributing to policymaking. It provides a useful framework for the government to analyse the effects of various policies aimed at redistributing resources between cities and regions in European countries, including Ireland, depending on data availability. In this way, the project directly contributes to the university's strategic focus on addressing real-world issues through research that has a clear impact on society. END