

The Finnish Great Depression: From Russia with Love[†]

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Understanding economic depressions has long been one of the central challenges in macroeconomics. Their massive costs as well as disagreement over their causes and propagation are subject to continuous debate. We examine the Finnish Great Depression of the early 1990s to shed new light on important transmission mechanisms that can drive depressions through disruption of international trade relationships. Our analysis of the Finnish Great Depression can also be useful for understanding the macroeconomic implications of large structural shocks affecting trade arrangements and the terms of trade in other countries, particularly in the case of the transition economies of Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the 1991–1993 period, Finland experienced the deepest economic contraction in an industrialized country since the 1930s and the deepest recorded peacetime recession in Finnish history. As illustrated in panel A of Figure 1, between 1990 and 1993, real GDP declined by 11 percent, real consumption declined by 10 percent, and investment fell to 55 percent of its 1990 level. The declines are even more dramatic when measured as deviations from trend. Using this metric, value added in the private sector fell about 20 percent below trend. Over the same period, Finland experienced a quadrupling of unemployment, from 3.5 percent to a peak of 16.5 percent, and the stock market lost 60 percent of its value.

We argue that a major cause of the Finnish Great Depression was the costly restructuring of the manufacturing sector and a sudden, sharp increase in energy costs caused by the demise of the Soviet Union. The barter-type trade arrangement between the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Finland skewed Finnish manufacturing production and investment toward particular industries and effectively allowed Finland to export noncompetitive products in exchange for energy imports at an overvalued exchange rate. The collapse of the USSR provides a unique natural experiment for which we know with precision the timing, nature, and size of the exogenous shocks that hit the Finnish economy. Furthermore, unlike previous

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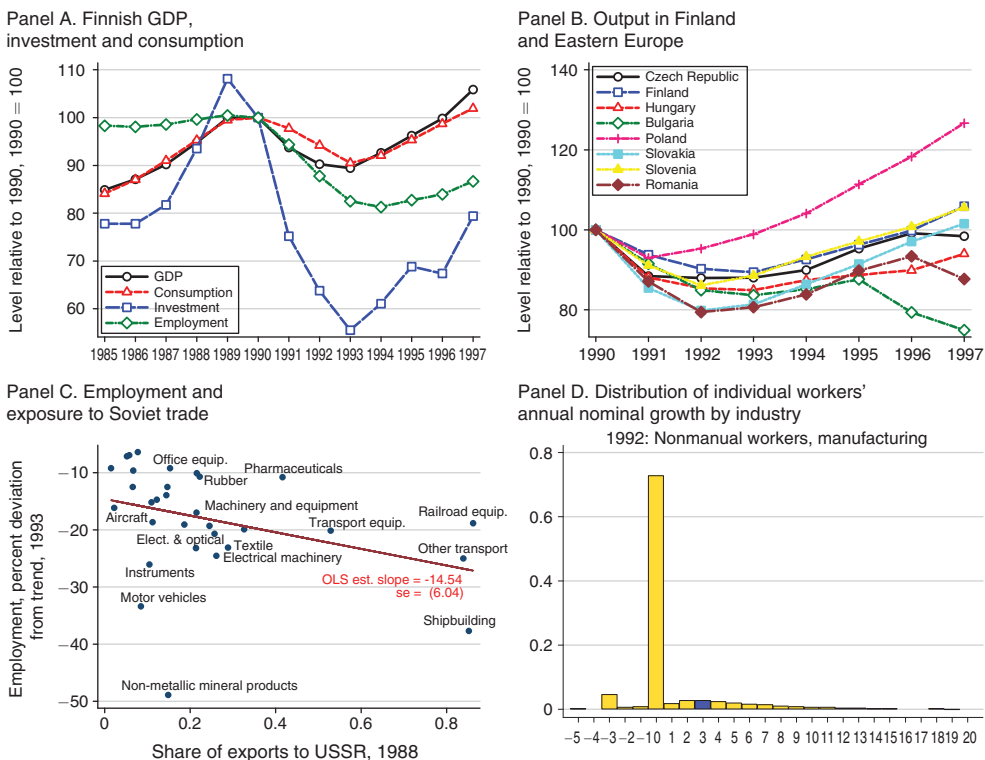


FIGURE 1. MACROECONOMIC DYNAMICS IN FINLAND

Notes: Panel A: Data are from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2010a). Panel B: Data are from United Nations Statistics Division (2010). Panel C: Deviation from trend for employment (Source: STAN OECD 2010b) is computed as the log difference between actual value of employment in 1993 and predicted value for the trend estimated on 1980–1989 data. For shipbuilding and railroad equipment industries, the deviation is computed as the difference between employment in 1993 and 1989 because these industries had volatile time series. Panel D: Vertical axis measures fraction. Horizontal axis measures percent change in annual nominal wages. The bar in blue indicates the level of inflation. Figures for additional industries, types of workers, and years are reported in online Appendix D.

Source: Böckerman, Laaksonen, and Vainiomaki (2006).

analyses of earlier depressions or downturns in developing economies, we have access to high-quality economic data at different levels of aggregation and frequency.

We develop and calibrate a multisector dynamic general equilibrium model that accounts for the key features of the Finnish Great Depression. The model captures the economy’s response to the two shocks caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union: the sudden loss of the market for specialized exports to the USSR and the surge in the relative price of imported energy. The model generates large declines in aggregate output, consumption, and employment, and replicates the dynamics of the sector devoted to manufacturing goods for export to the USSR, the sector producing goods for the rest of the world, and the nontradables sector. Our simulations suggest that downward wage rigidity coinciding with a contraction in demand for nontraded goods observed in Finland played a key role in the amplification of the downturn produced by these shocks.

We validate our analysis in several ways. First, the model does well at reproducing the dynamics of macroeconomic variables in a previous episode of a sudden

rise in energy costs, the oil price hike of the 1970s. In addition, we compare the experience of Finland in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union with that of Sweden. The Swedish economy is widely regarded as sharing many of the same structural features that characterize the Finnish economy, and it went through a similar economic downturn in the early 1990s (including currency and banking crises). Sweden, however, had only a negligible trade relationship with the Soviet Union. Hence, this comparison provides us with a natural experiment in which one country (Finland) was hit by the two shocks triggered by the Soviet collapse and the other (Sweden) was not. Our findings from this comparison support the model's quantitative predictions, because the downturn in Sweden was much milder and of shorter duration than in Finland. Finally, we document that Finnish manufacturing industries exposed to Soviet trade experienced a deeper contraction than those that were not.

The impact of the shocks caused by the collapse of Soviet trade on Finland is interesting in its own right, but it is especially compelling in light of the similar experiences of the Eastern European transition economies (TEs). Panel B in Figure 1 plots the dynamics of real GDP in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Finland. The figure captures the familiar “U-shaped” path for output characteristic for TEs (Blanchard and Kremer 1997, Roland and Verdier 1999). The remarkable feature of the figure is that the adjustment path for Finnish GDP in the post-1990 period is virtually identical to those observed in TEs.¹ Finland experienced the full force of the shocks induced by the collapse of trade with the USSR, but as a western democracy with developed capital markets and institutions, faced none of the institutional adjustments experienced in TEs. Thus, by studying the Finnish experience we can isolate the effects due solely to the shocks caused by the collapse of trade with the USSR from the other burdens of adjustment borne by TEs. To the best of our knowledge, these results provide the first quantitative assessment of the significance of these shocks for explaining the downturn in these economies. To the extent that these shocks, combined with standard macroeconomic reallocation costs and frictions, can account for the depressions in TEs, the role of other factors such as institutional transformations may be smaller than previously thought.

Other studies have offered alternative explanations of the Finnish crisis. One view is that the origins of the Finnish depression were largely financial, working through the banking sector and ultimately triggering a twin currency-banking crisis (see, e.g., Honkapohja, Koskela, and Paunio 1996). There is little doubt that financial factors played a role in the persistence and amplification of the crisis—yet, Finland was already two years into the depression at the time of the banking crisis and the large depreciation of the Finnish markka. Still, we do find that a large and unexpected hike in the real interest rate, which we view as a proxy for the financial shock that Finland suffered, enhances the ability of our model to

¹In an early contribution, Rodrik (1994) explored the possible impact of trade on output in transition economies. He estimated that the collapse of trade with the USSR could account for a 7 to 8 percent decline in GDP in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and a 3.5 percent decline in Poland. At the time he wrote his article, it was too early to characterize the transition path and U-shaped pattern of output resulting from the loss of trade. Thus, his analysis was necessarily static while we emphasize the dynamic effects. Nonetheless, his work suggested that trade was an important factor in understanding the dramatic decline in output in the early 1990s.

match important features of the macro time series, particularly the size of the investment collapse. Another view of the Finnish depression argues that labor tax hikes and negative productivity shocks may have been the culprit (Conesa, Kehoe, and Ruhl 2007). It is difficult, however, to find evidence of large tax hikes in available tax rate estimates and policy documents of the time. Also, as we argue below, a decline in measured productivity may be a symptom rather than a cause of contraction in a multisector economy.

In the next section, we lay out the key facts about the Soviet-Finnish trade relationship. In Section II, we develop a dynamic model of the Finnish economy. In Section III the model is calibrated using Finnish data before the collapse of Soviet trade. Then we hit the model economy with the shocks caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, as once-and-for-all unanticipated shocks in a deterministic environment, and compare the model's dynamics with the dynamics observed in the data. In Section IV, we evaluate alternative explanations of the depression. In Section V, we discuss how our conclusion for Finland can be extended to transition economies. We make concluding remarks in Section VI.

I. Finnish-Soviet Trade

We argue that five factors—factors shared with other countries in the socialist bloc—contributed to the deep economic contraction that occurred in Finland following the cancellation of its trade arrangement with the Soviet Union in December 1990. First, the share of total exports to the USSR was large, and a number of manufacturing sectors were particularly dependent on Soviet trade. Second, exports to the USSR were produced to Soviet specifications. Once the Soviet market collapsed, these goods had no alternative market. Third, the trading arrangement involved the exchange of Finnish manufactures for Soviet oil at an overvalued exchange rate. This meant that Finland simultaneously experienced both the collapse of a major export market and an effective increase in the price of energy. Fourth, the loss of trade with the USSR was largely unexpected. Finally, the rigidity of wages in Finland meant that the adjustment to the trade shock resolved itself primarily through increased unemployment, rather than an adjustment in wages.

A. Soviet Trade Share

The Soviet Union was Finland's largest trading partner until the collapse of the Soviet regime, accounting for roughly 20 percent of Finnish exports during the 1980s. Among the sectors with heaviest Soviet-trade exposure were textiles, textile products, leather, and footwear, with Soviet exports accounting for 29 percent of exports and 34 percent of value added. Machinery and equipment also had significant Soviet exposure at both the aggregate and disaggregated levels. The sector with the heaviest exposure was transport equipment, and this exposure was further concentrated in shipbuilding (85 percent of exports designated for the USSR and 225 percent of value added) and railroad equipment (86 percent of exports to USSR and 103 percent of value added). While some manufacturing sectors were particularly specialized in goods destined for the Soviet market, no sector was fully isolated from the loss of Soviet trade.

B. *Specialized Products for the Soviet Market*

Finnish exports to the USSR were typically specialized for the Soviet market and did not compete directly with products traded in western markets. To assess the degree of specialization of the goods destined for the USSR, Kajaste (1992) computes the share of Soviet exports at the four-digit level of CCCN classification and finds strong concentration of trade. Conditional on exporting a good to the East, more than 80 percent of all exports of this good went to socialist countries. At the more detailed 7-digit level, Kajaste identifies 133 items with a Soviet export share exceeding 90 percent. These items constituted approximately 40 percent of exports to the USSR. Kajaste also reports that because of the highly specialized nature of goods traded with countries in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the collapse of trade with the eastern markets was compensated only to a very limited extent by redirecting trade to the West. The extent of specialization was such that firms' capacity developed for trading with the USSR became virtually obsolete overnight.^{2,3}

For industries that sent a significant share of their exports to the USSR, the loss of Soviet exports caused total exports to fall, suggesting that the goods were not redirected to other countries. Panel C in Figure 1 illustrates that at the industry level there is a strong negative correlation between export shares to the USSR in 1988 and deviations of employment from trend in 1993. After the collapse of trade with the USSR in December of 1990, entire industries had to be reorganized (see Sutela 1991 for case studies). Even for industries that had some export recovery (e.g., shipbuilding), the loss of the Soviet market was painful as it involved major transformations in product lines. The strategy of "icebreakers for the communists, luxury liners for the capitalists" meant that production facilities specialized for Soviet production had to be shut down.

C. *Overvalued Terms of Trade*

Trade between Finland and the USSR was governed by a series of five-year, highly regulated trade agreements, similar to the agreements between the USSR and its Eastern European allies. These agreements established the volume and composition of trade between the two countries. By the late 1980s the trade arrangements had evolved into a barter of Finnish manufactures for Soviet raw materials, principally crude oil. Trade was to be balanced annually, though arrangements were periodically made to allow for temporary imbalances.⁴ The five-year trade agreements established explicit quotas for the export of manufactures to the USSR. While the volume of

²The fact that Finnish exports to the USSR would have little success in the West was clearly understood at the time. Urho Kekkonen, President of the Republic and an active promoter of economic cooperation with the Soviet Union, wrote on November 20, 1972: "We must of necessity maintain a relatively large trade with the West, but of much importance is the fact that we are able to sell to the Soviet market in the main such goods that would be very difficult to market into the West" (cited in Sutela 2005).

³Another important aspect of trade with the USSR was industry concentration. The five largest exporters accounted for 39.9 percent of all exports, the 50 largest for 78.7 percent, and the 116 largest for 90 percent (Sutela 2005). This concentration of the Finnish-Soviet trade resembles trade within CMEA. Given this concentration, economies of scale were often cited as an important source of profitability in the Finnish-Soviet trade.

⁴See Mottola, Bykov, and Korolev (1983), and Oblath and Pete (1990) for more details on the Soviet-Finnish trade.

exports was established by the bilateral trade agreement, the specific quantities and unit prices of the items to be exported were established through direct negotiations. Trade associations conducted the negotiations, applied for export licenses from the Finnish government, and distributed the rights to export among their members. A key condition of the export license was an 80 percent domestic content restriction.

More than 90 percent of imported oil and 100 percent of Finland's imported natural gas came from the USSR. In principle, the rate of exchange of Finnish goods for Soviet energy was to take place at world prices. The value of crude oil was easy to observe and was set at the dollar price of crude oil on the world market and then converted to rubles using the official ruble-to-dollar exchange rate. The market value of Finnish exports to the USSR was less obvious. The evidence suggests that over time the rate of exchange (goods per barrel of oil) tilted in Finland's favor. For example, interviews and surveys with managers and industry experts suggest that exporting to the USSR was a lucrative business for Finnish firms (Kajaste 1992). Precommitment to the five-year contracts eliminated exchange rate and business cycle risk for firms. Kajaste (1992, p. 29) concludes that "[Soviet] exports seem to have been exceptionally profitable."

A more formal measure of the premium associated with exporting to the USSR is the markup on Soviet exports relative to similar goods destined for western markets. Using data from the 1980s, Kajaste (1992) estimates the markup using unit prices of Soviet and non-Soviet exports and finds that the prices of exports to the Soviet Union were at least 9.5 percent higher than those for exports to western markets. We replicate this analysis using trade data at the five-digit level of standard international trade classification disaggregation for 1990 and find an even larger markup of 36 percent. This markup suggests that if a Finnish industry redirected its Soviet trade to other countries, its goods would be competitive only if sold at a 10 to 36 percent discount.⁵ Hence, the Finnish economy was subsidized by overvalued prices of Finnish manufactures bartered for Soviet oil so that the effective price of Soviet oil was at least 10 percent cheaper than its market price.

D. *The Unanticipated Collapse of Trade*

It seems remarkable ex post that Finnish firms, and indeed the world at large, were caught short by the implosion of the USSR. To be sure, trade flows to the USSR had fallen off in the late 1980s. Part of the decline was an endogenous contraction resulting from falling oil prices. The decline was also a consequence of the reforms under Perestroika, which attempted to decentralize Soviet decision-making but made it difficult for Finnish firms to identify those with real authority on the Soviet end.

⁵There are several reasons why the USSR was willing to overpay for Finnish goods. First, neutral Finland was the key source of modern Western know-how for the USSR. Other countries had much tighter export controls against the Soviet bloc that were designed to block the transfer of technology. Second, the USSR used the Finnish-Soviet trade as a lab for testing various forms of capitalist and socialist cooperation and as a guarantee of peaceful coexistence. For example, Urho Kekkonen, the Finnish prime minister and president for three decades, wrote in 1974, "...our whole stable foreign policy course demands that we do keep the Soviet markets" (cited in Sutela 2007, p. 139). Third, the Soviet subsidy was aimed at maintaining political status quo in Finland where left parties played an important role. A former leader of Soviet intelligence in Finland once wrote, "One can go to any lengths in thinking, if Kekkonen was a Soviet 'agent of influence,' but hardly anybody denies that the Finns had a president who pumped enormous amounts of economic benefit from Soviet leaders against short-term political concessions ... and thus Finnish standards of living increased" (cited in Sutela 2007, p. 160).

The expressed belief that the trade arrangement with the USSR would persist, however, appeared in government reports, interviews with policymakers, and corporate forecasts. Even after the announcement that the trade contracts were to be canceled, a representative of the central bank suggested that it was still possible that the system would be reformed, and not fully dismantled. The private sector was equally surprised by the collapse of the Soviet trade.⁶

The collapse was quick and deep. On December 6, 1990 the Soviet authorities informed their Finnish counterparts that all trade arrangements were cancelled without any transitional period. Imports of oil from the (former) USSR fell from 8.2 million tons in 1989 to 1.3 million tons in 1992. Finnish exports to the (former) USSR tumbled down by 84 percent over the same period.⁷

E. *Rigidity of the Labor Market*

To fully understand the reaction of the Finnish economy to the shocks caused by the collapse of Soviet trade, it is important to examine the Finnish labor market, which is notable for its high degree of unionization. In the early 1990s approximately 85 percent of workers belonged to unions and almost 95 percent of workers were covered by collective agreements (Böckerman and Uusitalo 2006). Since most employers are organized in federations, the wage bargaining normally starts at the national level. If a federation or union rejects the nationwide agreement, it can negotiate its own terms. Collective agreements stipulate the wages for different levels of job complexity, education, etc. in a given industry. Typically, agreements allow for upward wage drift if firms perform well. Although the government does not have a formal role in the bargaining process, the government usually intermediates negotiations.⁸ Not surprisingly, Finland is often classified as a country with highly centralized wage setting (e.g., Botero et al. 2004).

Unions did not agree to cut nominal wages in 1992–1993, which were the peak years of the depression. Instead, wages were frozen at the 1991 level (see online Appendix D). Panel D in Figure 1 reports the distribution of wage changes in 1992 for individual nonmanual workers in manufacturing. Strikingly, the fraction of workers with no wage change reached 75 percent. Thus, the national agreement was binding for a broad array of firms and workers. Given that inflation was quite moderate in the 1990s and there was a positive drift in the nominal wages (which corresponds to the right tail of the distribution of wage growth in panel D of Figure 1), real wages fell only to a limited extent. These findings are consistent with Dickens et al. (2007), who cite Finland as a country with one of the greatest downward wage rigidities.

⁶Nokia, a major exporter of telecommunications technology to the USSR, forecast strong sales to the Soviet Union for 1991. Actual sales in January and February of 1991, however, came in at just 2 million markka (\$469,000 US) instead of the projected 121 million markka (\$28.1 million US), forcing the company to dramatically change its business plan (Haikio 2001, p. 76).

⁷Allowing economic agents to learn in 1990:III or 1990:IV that the trade will collapse in one or two quarters does not materially change our results.

⁸See Snellman (2005) for a more detailed description of the wage bargaining process in Finland.


II. A Model of the Finnish Economy

In this section we develop a model of the Finnish economy that captures the key features of its trading relationship with the Soviet Union and the Finnish labor market. These features include the volume of trade, the composition of trade, overvalued terms of trade, low elasticity of substitution between goods destined for the Soviet market and western markets, and rigid labor markets.

We model the Finnish economy as a **small open economy with three sectors**.⁹ Sector 1 (non-Soviet sector) produces a traded good consumed at home and sold abroad in western markets. Sector 2 (Soviet sector) produces a good that can be consumed at home or sold exclusively to the USSR. Sector 3 (services) produces nontradables. Our baseline functional forms and parameters produce equilibrium allocations consistent with the Finnish economy prior to the Soviet trade collapse.¹⁰

A. Households

The representative household chooses a lifetime plan for consumption and labor allocations to maximize utility, taking all goods and factor prices as given. The utility function is $U \equiv \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t U(G_t, L_{1t}, L_{2t}, L_{3t})$, where G is a consumption aggregator over four consumption goods and L_{jt} for $j = 1, 2, 3$ is the labor supplied to each sector. The consumption aggregator is given by $G_t = C_{1t}^{\xi_1} C_{2t}^{\xi_2} C_{3t}^{\xi_3} C_{4t}^{(1-\xi_1-\xi_2-\xi_3)}$ where ξ_j are weights in the consumption aggregator, C_{1t} is the consumption of the non-Soviet traded good produced by sector 1, **C_{2t} is the consumption of the good produced by the sector with Soviet exposure**, C_{3t} is the consumption of services, and C_{4t} is the consumption of a good imported from the western markets.

We follow Greenwood, Hercowitz, and Huffman (1988) and assume a period utility function $U(G_t, L_{1t}, L_{2t}, L_{3t}) = \frac{1}{1-\sigma} (G_t - \sum_{j=1}^3 \frac{\chi_j}{1+\eta} L_{jt}^{1+\eta})^{1-\sigma}$ where $1/\sigma$ is the elasticity of intertemporal substitution, $1/\eta$ is the **Frisch elasticity of labor supply**, and χ_j is the scale of disutility from working in sector j . Note that under this assumption households can adjust their labor input in each sector. The utility from each type of leisure is not perfectly substitutable, however, so a decrease in labor input in sector 2, which will occur in response to the collapse of export to the Soviet Union, will not translate into a one-for-one increase in labor supply in the other, expanding sectors. In this sense, labor is sector-specific and hence wages are not generally equalized across sectors.¹¹ Total employment is defined as $L_t = L_{1t} + L_{2t} + L_{3t}$.

⁹The “small open economy” assumption means that Finnish exports faced a perfectly elastic demand curve in foreign markets, which seems to be a reasonable approximation because Finnish goods had relatively small market shares in their main foreign destinations.

¹⁰Online Appendix C shows that our results are robust to relaxing several assumptions of the baseline setup. In particular, we introduce habit persistence in consumption, vary the elasticities of substitution between sectoral labor supplies, allow for adjustment costs in investment and labor, allow for less-than-unitary elasticity of substitution between capital and labor, and introduce imperfect substitutability of labor supply across sectors.

¹¹Since we examine the behavior of the economy up to 1997, assuming sector-specific labor supply for seven years is not generally appealing. We believe this assumption may be sensible for two reasons, however. First, in online Appendix C, we show that if we allow imperfect substitution of labor across sectors, the results are similar to the results in baseline specification. Second, Koskela and Uusitalo (2004), Ilmakunnas and Maliranta (2001), and others document that the unemployment rate in Finland increased and stayed high because of changes in the sectoral demand for workers, a dramatic rise in long-term unemployment, strong unions, generous unemployment/pension benefits, increased share of elderly in the composition of unemployment, and considerably decreased rates of labor flows (churning, job reallocation, etc.). Furthermore, the Beveridge curve for Finland strongly and persistently

We assume that households are exclusive owners of domestic firms. Households face the following budget constraint:

$$\begin{aligned} & w_{1t}L_{1t} + w_{2t}L_{2t} + w_{3t}L_{3t} + (q_{1t} + d_{1t})K_{1,t-1} \\ & + (q_{2t} + d_{2t})K_{2,t-1} + (q_{3t} + d_{3t})K_{3,t-1} + R_tB_{t-1} \\ & = B_t + q_{1t}K_{1t} + q_{2t}K_{2t} + q_{3t}K_{3t} + C_{1t} + p_{2t}C_{2t} + p_{3t}C_{3t} + p_{4t}C_{4t}, \end{aligned}$$

where w_{jt} is the wage rate in sector $j = 1, 2, 3$, B_t is a one-period bond denominated in units of the world tradable good and traded in international markets at the gross world interest rate of R_t , q_{jt} is the price of capital K_{jt} in sector j , d_{jt} is the dividend rate on capital in sector j , and p_{jt} is the relative price of goods in sector j (we take good 1 as numeraire so $p_{1t} = 1$).

B. Firms

Firms in all three sectors use inputs of capital, labor, and energy (E) to produce the final good in that sector. The problem faced by the representative firm in each sector is to choose inputs to maximize profits **taking factor prices as given**. In sector $j = 1, 2, 3$, the representative firm maximizes:

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{\Pi'_{s=0} R_s} \left(p_{jt} Q_{jt} - p_t^E E_{jt} - w_{jt} L_{jt} \right. \\ & \left. - p_{jt} \left\{ K_{jt} - (1 - \delta) K_{j,t-1} + \frac{\phi}{2} \left[\frac{K_{jt}}{K_{j,t-1}} - 1 \right]^2 K_{j,t-1} \right\} \right), \end{aligned}$$

where δ is the rate of depreciation of the capital stock, ϕ is a capital adjustment cost coefficient, and p_t^E is the relative price of energy.

Production functions are given by $Q_{jt} = \min \{ a_{jE} E_{jt}, (L_{jt}^{\alpha_{Lj}} K_{j,t-1}^{1-\alpha_{Lj}}) \}$, for $j = 1, 2, 3$, where a_{jE} is the energy requirement in sector j , and α_{Lj} is the labor weight in the capital-labor aggregator. **We assume that energy and value added are perfect complements because the ability of firms to substitute away from energy is very small in the short run**. At an optimum, no input is wasted, so $Q_{jt} = a_{jE} E_{jt}$. Value added is defined as $Y_{jt} = p_{jt} Q_{jt} - p_t^E E_{jt} = (p_{jt} - p_t^E / a_{jE}) Q_{jt}$ and the corresponding value-added function as $Y_{jt} \equiv F_j(L_{jt}, K_{j,t-1}, p_{jt}, p_t^E)$. Note that for simplicity the three sectors do not have direct linkages via input-output relationships.

shifted to the right in the early 1990s, which is often interpreted as a sign of increased mismatch between vacancies and unemployed.

C. Market Clearing and Equilibrium

In sector 1, output is consumed, invested in that same sector (since investment I is also sector-specific), or exported: $Q_{1t} - C_{1t} - I_{1t} - X_{1t} = 0$, where X_{1t} measures net exports of the non-Soviet good. These are exports of goods to western markets in exchange for energy imports, M_t^* , purchased at a world relative price p_t^* , and for imports of good C_{4t} purchased at world relative price p_{4t} . Hence, the non-Soviet balance of trade is $TB_t = X_{1t} - p_t^* M_t^* - p_{4t} C_{4t} = B_t - R_t B_{t-1}$.

In the Soviet sector, output is consumed by domestic consumers, invested in sector 2, or sold to the Soviet Union in exchange for energy: $Q_{2t} - C_{2t} - I_{2t} - X_{2t} = 0$, where X_{2t} measures export to the USSR. To capture the clearing system in the Finnish-Soviet trade, we assume that trade with the Soviet Union is balanced at all times: $p_{2t} X_{2t} - p_t^S M_t^S = 0$, where p_t^S is the barter price of energy contracted with the Soviet union for a quantity M_t^S of energy imports. The values of p_t^S and M_t^S are fixed, since they were set by the five-year agreements between Finland and the USSR.

We assume that Finland produces no energy domestically and energy is not storable so that imports of energy are equal to domestic consumption of energy: $M_t^* + M_t^S - (E_{1t} + E_{2t} + E_{3t}) = 0$.

In sector 3 domestic production equals domestic absorption: $Q_{3t} - C_{3t} - I_{3t} = 0$.

We follow Shimer (2010) and model the rigidity of the labor market as a slow adjustment of wages in each sector $j = 1, 2, 3$: $w_{jt} = \theta_j w_{j,t-1} + (1 - \theta_j) w_{jt}^D$, where the parameter θ governs the degree of wage stickiness and w_{jt}^D is the reservation wage given by the household labor supply. One interpretation of these wage dynamics is that trade unions take the wage in the previous period as a starting point in bargaining (“status quo” wages) and gradually change the wage to increase the employment of union workers. Specifically $\theta = 1$, corresponds to complete real wage rigidity, while $\theta = 0$ corresponds to complete real wage flexibility. Regardless of θ , we set $w_j^D = w_j$ in the pre-Soviet-collapse steady state. Given the wage, clearing in the labor market is demand-determined (i.e., by finding the labor allocation that satisfies the labor demand condition and the settled wage).

An equilibrium of this economy is defined by sets of intertemporal sequences of allocations $\{L_{1t}, L_{2t}, L_{3t}, C_{1t}, C_{2t}, C_{3t}, C_{4t}, I_{1t}, I_{2t}, I_{3t}, Y_{1t}, Y_{2t}, Y_{3t}, E_{1t}, E_{2t}, E_{3t}, Q_{1t}, Q_{2t}, Q_{3t}, X_{1t}, X_{2t}, B_{jt}\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ and prices $\{p_{2t}, p_{3t}, w_{1t}, w_{2t}, w_{3t}, q_{1t}, q_{2t}, q_{3t}\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ that solve the household’s problem and the problem of each representative firm, and that satisfy the market clearing conditions, for given initial conditions $\{K_{10}, K_{20}, K_{30}, w_{10}, w_{20}, w_{30}\}$ and sequences of exogenous variables $\{p_t^E, p_t^S, M_t^S, p_{4t}, R_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$. In our quantitative analysis we focus on equilibria that start from initial conditions calibrated to match the Finnish economy at a stationary equilibrium just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with the sequence of exogenous variables set to reflect the sudden increase in the cost of energy and the collapse of the market for exports to the USSR. The precise specification of these initial conditions and shocks is described in the next section.

III. Quantitative Analysis

A. Detrending and Definition of the “Soviet” Sector

Since our study does not focus on either long-run growth or regular business cycles, but rather on macro dynamics around the Great Depression episode, we filter

the data in the following way. First, we express a data series in log first differences and compute the average growth rate over 1975–1986. Then we use this estimate of the growth rate to extrapolate actual series (in levels) for the post-1990 period to construct a forecast, or counterfactual, of the macro dynamics that would have been observed without the Finnish Great Depression during the 1990s (see online Appendix B for more details). Deviations from the predicted trend are interpreted as the dynamics resulting from the depression. We will compare these deviations with the dynamics produced by the model.

One of the challenges in mapping the model to the data is that the pervasiveness of Soviet exports throughout the manufacturing sector makes it difficult to separate out a “Soviet” sector from a “non-Soviet” sector. The “Soviet-exposed” sector will be defined in the data as a weighted index of industrial sectors. We define ω_{it}^X as the share of exports of industry i at time t to the USSR in total exports of industry i . Let Y_{it} be, e.g., value added in industry i at time t . Then we compute value added in the Soviet-exposed sector as $Y_t^S = \sum_i \omega_{it}^X Y_{it}$ and correspondingly the non-Soviet-exposed sector is $Y_t^{NS} = \sum_i (1 - \omega_{it}^X) Y_{it}$. We treat services as a separate sector producing nontradable goods. We allow the weights ω_{it}^X to change over the 1989–1992 period. The relative size of the Soviet sector will therefore decline automatically as trade with the USSR collapses. Since our model does not include the government sector, which is governed by different objectives and did not experience any major changes during the depression, we adjusted the data to exclude the public sector.

B. Calibration

We calibrate the model at quarterly frequency to match macroeconomic aggregates in the year 1989. The discount factor is $\beta = 0.99$, which, given that output per capita grew approximately two percent per year in Finland before 1991, implies an annual real interest rate of six percent per year, consistent with the 6.1 percent per year real lending rate in Finland before 1991. We choose an intertemporal elasticity of substitution of $\sigma^{-1} = 0.5$. Hall (2007) and Kimball and Shapiro (2010) provide evidence indicating that the elasticity of labor supply at the macro level is about one in the United States. In line with this evidence, we set $\eta = 1$. The results of the model are not sensitive to reasonable variations in σ and η . Under our assumption of Cobb-Douglas preferences over the four types of consumption goods, $\xi_1, \xi_2, \xi_3, \xi_4$ can be computed from data on consumption expenditures by sector. We find that $\xi_1 = 0.15$, $\xi_2 = 0.04$, $\xi_3 = 0.54$, $\xi_4 \equiv 1 - \xi_2 - \xi_3 - \xi_4 = 0.27$.

Turning to the production side of the model, the parameters α_{Lj} can be determined from labor compensation in value added so that $\alpha_{L1} = 0.57$, $\alpha_{L2} = 0.63$, and $\alpha_{L3} = 0.63$. The quarterly depreciation rate of capital, δ , is the same across sectors and set to match an annual depreciation rate of ten percent. We assume small to moderate adjustment costs in capital stock ($\phi = 1$). Without loss of generality, we define units of oil in such a way that the unit price of oil before the collapse of the Soviet Union is equal to one (i.e., $p^E = 1$). Because energy and value added are Leontief complements, the energy requirement in the non-Soviet sector is given by $a_{1E} = p_1 Q_1 / (p^E E_1)$. Since we know the cost structure (specifically, expenditures

on energy), we can compute the energy requirement for the non-Soviet sector as the ratio of cost (value added plus energy expenditures) to energy expenditures. For the non-Soviet sector, this ratio is equal to 21.56. For other sectors, we cannot make this calculation directly because it depends on prices determined at equilibrium. We can impute the relative prices using cost shares for labor, capital labor ratios, and relative wages, and then compute energy intensity for the Soviet and service sectors: $a_{2E} = 37.84$ and $a_{3E} = 47.51$. Since more than 90 percent of energy was imported from the USSR, we assume that in the pre-Soviet-collapse period no energy was imported from other countries. The disutility weights on labor χ are set to match the sectoral share of employment (i.e., L_j/L) in each sector.

These parameters pin down the ratios of macroeconomic variables relative to total output and the allocation of factors across sectors (see Table 1). The model captures the ratios of aggregate consumption, investment, and exports to output. At the sectoral level, parameters are chosen to match consumption, labor, and energy allocations. The model slightly overstates the size of the non-Soviet sector relative to the size of the service sector.

The final parameter to be calibrated is the extent of wage rigidity, which affects the transition dynamics, but not the steady-state allocations. As we have discussed above, wages in Finland are downwardly rigid and wage adjustment in the early 1990s was very slow. Indeed, we do not observe large movements in real or nominal wages in Finland over the 1990s. In light of these facts, we set $\theta_j = 0.96$, which is just a notch higher than $\theta = 0.95$ calibrated in Shimer (2010) for the United States. This calibration is consistent with a variety of facts. For example, between 1991 and 1998, output and wages fell by 17.8 and 6.5 percent below trend, respectively. If we exclude the recession of 1991–1993, employment and the labor force grew at about one percent per year. Assuming that the economy was on the balanced growth path before the start of the recession and after 1997, wages must have decreased by 17.8 percent – $(7 \text{ years} \times 1 \text{ percent/year}) = 10.8$ percent to get on the balanced growth path. Wages closed only 60 percent of the required fall ($6.5/10.8 \approx 0.60$) after 7 years. Hence, the implied speed of adjustment θ at the quarterly frequency should be about 0.96–0.97. We also report results for alternative values of θ .

C. Simulating the Effects of the Soviet Shocks: Benchmark Results

We now use the calibrated version of our model to show that the shocks caused by the loss of Soviet trade can result in a significant reduction of output, similar to the decline observed in the data. We model these shocks as a once-and-for-all unanticipated event at $t = 0$ in a deterministic environment. As we explained above, this event produced two shocks for Finland. First, Finland lost one of its major export markets. Because of the specialized nature of trade with the USSR, Finnish firms could not redirect trade to other countries easily. We model this shock as a permanent drop in Soviet oil imports M_t^S to zero for all $t > 0$, which implies that exports to the USSR X_{2t} also vanish for all $t > 0$. The second shock was the end of the Soviet Union's provision of subsidized energy for Finland. Evidence in Section II suggests that this subsidy was at least ten percent of the world oil price. Thus, we assume that the second shock was equivalent to an increase in the oil price from $p^E = 1$ to $p^E = 1.1$ for all $t > 0$. We hit our model economy with these shocks as of the initial

TABLE 1—DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR SOVIET, NON-SOVIET, AND SERVICE SECTORS

	Soviet sector		Non-Soviet sector		Service sector	
	Data	Model	Data	Model	Data	Model
<i>Panel A. Sectoral statistics</i>						
Labor cost share	0.630	0.630	0.570	0.570	0.630	0.630
Share of employment	0.055	0.065	0.233	0.259	0.712	0.676
Share of value added	0.056	0.083	0.269	0.456	0.675	0.507
Share of exports in total exports	0.175	0.151	0.815	0.849	—	—
Ratio of energy cost to value added	0.049	0.029	0.052	0.049	0.035	0.025
<i>Panel B. Aggregate statistics</i>						
Consumption to value-added ratio	0.705	0.719				
Investment to value-added ratio	0.295	0.281				
Export to value-added ratio	0.211	0.228				
Energy cost to value-added ratio	0.042	0.034				

Notes: The table reports moments of the data for sectors constructed as described in online Appendixes A and B. Ratio of energy cost to value added computes the ratio of the cost of imported energy to value added in a given industry. We use the input-output table for 1989 to allocate of the cost of imported energy across sectors.

date $t = 0$ and compute the transitional dynamics leading to the new post-Soviet-collapse stationary equilibrium.¹²

Figure 2 plots actual and simulated responses for key macroeconomic variables measured as percent deviations from the precollapse steady state.¹³ The baseline model comes close to capturing the depth of the output drop: the peak-to-trough decline in output is 17.2 percent in the model and 21 percent in the data. The model produces a more sudden drop in output than observed in the data—the trough is reached in 1991 in the model versus 1993 in the data—and output in the model also recovers more quickly. Seven years after the shock, output in the model settles at roughly 10 percent below trend, while output in the data remains depressed at 20 percent below trend. A similar result emerges for the dynamics of consumption and employment. The simulated series both decline by about as much as in the data (about 20 percent below trend), but both reach their troughs a year earlier than in the data. Similarly, after seven years, both settle at a level that is below trend, but not as far below trend as the actual data. Note that with very rigid wages ($\theta_j = 0.99975$), the model can generate large, persistent declines in output, consumption, and employment similar to what is observed in the data seven years after the shock.¹⁴

The model predicts a 26 percent decline in investment over 1991–1993 and a recovery to about 12 percent below trend. The actual collapse in investment was more severe in both the short and the long run. In the model, the recovery of investment reflects the fact that given our functional form assumptions and calibrated parameter

¹²Following Mendoza and Tesar (1998), we address the dependency on initial conditions of the steady state of net foreign assets by combining a shooting algorithm with log-linear approximations around the post-Soviet-collapse steady state. We set the initial condition $B_t = 0$ because, in the Finnish national income and product accounts, the 1980–1990 average net exports (or current account) to GDP ratio was close to zero.

¹³Model series are aggregated from quarterly frequency to annual frequency to compare with the dynamics in the data.

¹⁴In our model, all prices (except real wages) are entirely flexible since our objective is to use the standard international real business cycle framework. One can expect, however, that introducing sticky prices in the model could reduce the degree of real wage stickiness required to generate persistent and large contraction as well as comovement across sectors. Given that in our model prices are flexible, one can interpret our results as providing a lower bound on how much the collapse of the trade shock can explain the depression. We thank one of the referees for this observation.

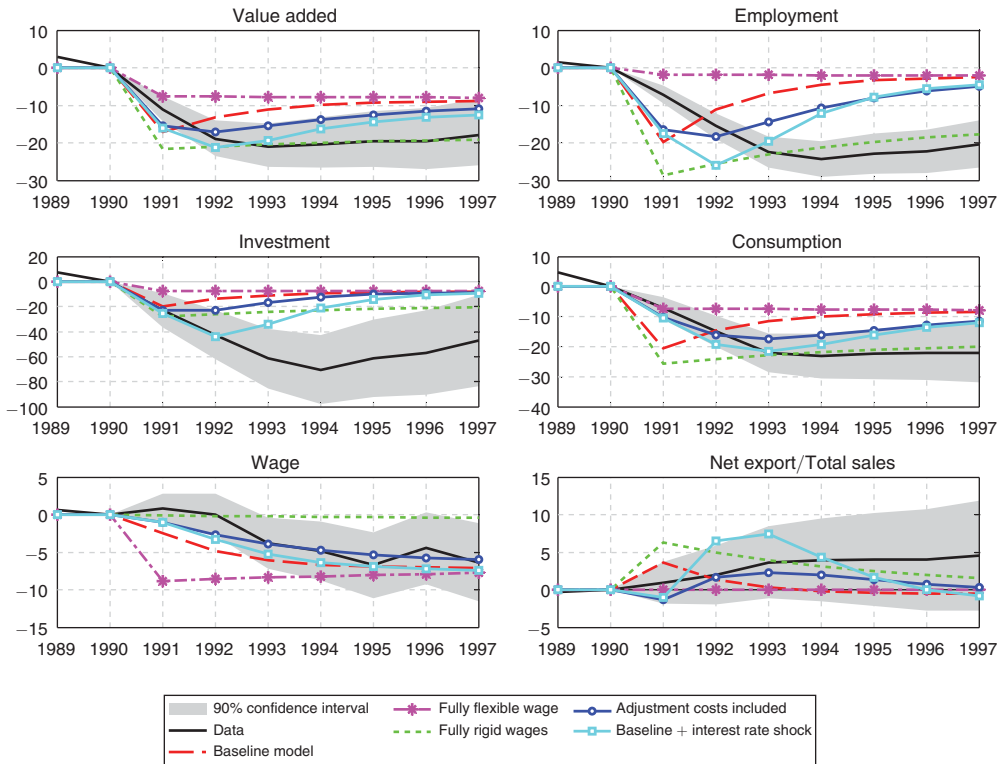


FIGURE 2. MACROECONOMIC AGGREGATES: DATA VERSUS SIMULATED RESPONSES, PERCENT DEVIATIONS FROM TREND

Notes: The figures plot percent deviations from trend in the data and simulated model series. Scenario “fully flexible wages” sets $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0$. Scenario “fully rigid wages” sets $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0.99975$. Scenario “adjustment costs included” presents the response of the economy when, in addition to capital adjustment costs, the following is included: habit formation in consumption ($h = 0.8$), quadratic investment adjustment costs ($\psi = 0.5$), quadratic labor adjustment costs ($\lambda = 1$) and wage adjustment is set to $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0.98$. See online Appendix C for more details on specification of these frictions. Scenario “baseline + interest rate shock” presents the response when the model economy (with all adjustment costs included) is hit with the Soviet shock in 1991:I and two percent interest rate shocks in 1991:IV and 1992:II. The shaded region shows 90 percent confidence interval (consistent with unit root tests, each series is assumed to be a difference stationary process).

values, the capital-to-output ratio (and hence the investment-to-output ratio) is fairly insensitive to changes in the price of energy, relative prices, and wages.¹⁵ Hence, the postshock steady-state level of aggregate investment is fairly invariant to the Soviet shock. If utilization of capital required energy (as in e.g. Finn 2000), the relative price of capital would be higher in the post-Soviet-collapse period and the decline in investment larger and more persistent.

The model also captures well some of the features of the adjustment of net exports. The ratio of net exports to gross output rises by about five percentage points shortly after shocks hit the model economy, but this is a transitory surplus. The data show a surplus of similar magnitude, but it builds up more gradually and is more persistent than in the model.

¹⁵Specifically, in the steady state $K_j/Q_j = [(1 - \alpha_{Lj})\beta(1 - p^E/(a_{jE}p_i))]/(1 - \beta(1 - \delta))$, which follows from the first-order condition for capital in sector j . Since a_{jE} is relatively large, one needs large variation in p^E and p_i to change capital to output ratio significantly.

TABLE 2—CONTRACTION OF OUTPUT: DATA VERSUS SIMULATED PATHS

	Contributions of spending components to output drop				Contribution of shocks to output drop		Alternative scenarios	
	Total (1)	Consumption (2)	Investment (3)	Net export (4)	Loss of trade shock only (5)	Oil price shock only (6)	Hold service sector fixed (7)	No wage rigidity (8)
Data								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-20.6	-11.2	-13.6	4.2				
Output drop after 7 years	-17.0	-13.3	-8.3	4.6				
Model								
Baseline								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-17.2	-14.7	-5.5	3.1	-14.5	-2.7	-6.4	-8.3
Output drop after 7 years	-8.9	-6.1	-2.2	-0.6	-7.2	-1.7	-4.6	-7.9
Higher markup, 30%								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-22.8	-20.0	-7.5	4.7	-14.5	-8.3	-10.0	-11.8
Output drop after 7 years	-12.2	-8.9	-3.3	0.0	-7.2	-5.0	-8.3	-11.0
More rigid wages, $\theta = 0.99$								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-20.5	-18.1	-7.2	4.6	-17.2	-3.3	-6.9	-8.3
Output drop after 7 years	-13.4	-10.0	-3.6	0.2	-11.0	-2.4	-6.0	-7.9
All adjustment costs included								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-17.0	-11.9	-6.5	1.4	-14.5	-2.5	-6.4	-8.2
Output drop after 7 years	-10.8	-8.6	-2.5	0.3	-9.0	-1.8	-5.2	-7.9
Additional interest rate shock								
Output drop (peak to trough)	-21.1	-13.9	-12.5	5.2	-18.5	-2.6	-9.2	-9.8
Output drop after 7 years	-12.4	-8.9	-2.8	-0.8	-10.5	-1.9	-8.1	-8.2

Notes: “Loss of trade shock only” scenario assumes that the price of oil is the same before and after the collapse of the USSR. “Oil price shock only” scenario assumes that the volume of trade with the USSR does not change but the price of oil increases. “Hold service sector fixed” scenario assumes that the service sector is fixed at precollapse levels and does not respond to shocks. “No wage rigidity” scenario assumes that $\theta_j = 0$ for all j . The case “Higher markup, 30%” sets the size of the oil price increase equal to 30 percent. The case “All adjustment costs included” augments the baseline model with internal habit formation, quadratic labor, and investment adjustment costs (see online Appendix C for more details on specification of these frictions). The case “Additional interest rate shock” presents the response when the model economy (with all adjustment costs included) is hit with the Soviet shock in 1991:I and two percent interest rate shocks in 1991:IV and 1992:II.

Table 2 compares the model’s predictions for the output drop under different scenarios. Each cell of the table shows the maximum output drop as well as the output decline seven years after the initial shock. Reading down each column, the table shows the results for different parameter values relative to the benchmark: increasing the markup on Finnish exports to the USSR from 10 to 30 percent, increasing the rigidity of wages, and adding other frictions to the model (habit formation in consumption and quadratic labor and investment adjustment costs; see online Appendix C for more details on specification of these frictions). Reading across the table, each column shows i) the decomposition of output contraction into contractions in main spending components (columns 2 through 4); and ii) the predictions for output resulting from different shocks to the model economy. Column 5 shows the output drop when the shock is the loss of trade but the energy subsidy is not removed. Column 6 performs the opposite experiment—the only shock is a spike in the price of oil, with no loss in Soviet trade. Column 7 examines the drop in output when the shock is assumed to have no effect on the demand for services. Finally, column 8 shows the results in an economy with fully flexible wages.

Beginning with the third row, we find that a higher markup on Finnish exports to the USSR (effectively a bigger shock to the price of oil) deepens the output drop in both the short and the long run. Imposing more rigid wages (fourth row) relative to

the benchmark (second row) similarly produces a larger drop in both the short and the long run. Adding further frictions to the model economy (the second to the last row of the table) has minimal impact on the depth of the output drop, but slows the recovery of output after the shock.

A comparison of columns 5 and 6 can be interpreted as a decomposition of the Soviet trade shocks into the effects induced by the reallocation of factors away from the Soviet goods industry and the effects of the loss of the energy subsidy. It is clear that factor reallocation costs account for most of the drop in output. The bigger the markup, however, the bigger the preshock subsidy to energy, and the more severe the economic contraction when the subsidy is removed.

The results in column 7 illustrate the pivotal role played by the service (nontraded) sector. When all goods are tradable, the collapse of Soviet trade puts pressure on factors to shift from the Soviet to non-Soviet sector. This happens for two reasons: first, because the relative price of the Soviet goods falls, and second, all of Finland's energy needs now have to be financed by exports of the non-Soviet good. Sector 2 contracts, sector 1 expands, and aggregate output drops by 5 to 6 percent. A higher markup on exports and more rigid wages contribute to the output drop, but the two-sector model (i.e., when the service sector is held fixed) cannot come close to the data.

Another critical ingredient for generating a deep contraction is wage stickiness. With flexible wages, the maximum contraction is less than half of that in the baseline model (compare columns 1 and 8). It is the combination of imperfectly flexible wages and a collapse in the demand for nontradables, however, that leads to a large amplification of the Soviet trade shock. In effect, the nontraded goods sector is struck by two negative shocks. First, the increase in the price of energy increases the cost of production. Second, the income effect from the collapse of Soviet trade reduces the demand for nontraded goods. These two effects together lead to a decline in the relative price of nontraded goods and output. Both of these negative shocks are larger the more rigid are wages because more rigid wages force firms to cut employment rather than adjust the wage, the price of nontradables falls more, and the income effect is larger.

Figure 3 provides suggestive evidence that these sectoral dynamics were an important part of the Finnish depression. Consistent with the data, the benchmark model predicts a large contraction of output in the services sector (especially with rigid wages). Likewise, the model predicts a 9.5 percent fall in the relative price of the nontradables (the benchmark case), which is close to the 13 percent decline in the data. The model does not, however, capture the full decline in the non-Soviet sector.

In summary, there are two key determinants of a deep contraction: wage stickiness and dynamics in the service sector. To the extent our results depend on adjustment of real wages being sufficiently slow, which is supported by the evidence presented in Section II, our findings echo the results in Cole and Ohanian (2004). Since habit formation and labor/investment adjustment costs improve the fit of the model, our subsequent analysis incorporates these additional frictions.

D. 1974 Oil Price Shock

A useful cross-check on the performance of the model in explaining the recession in the 1990s is to ask how well this framework can reproduce dynamics in

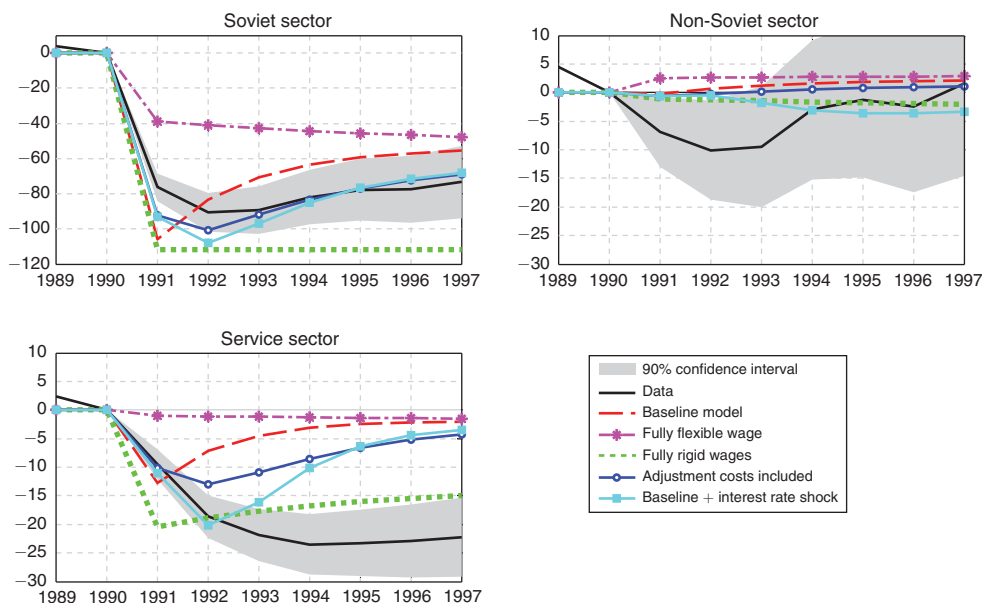


FIGURE 3. SECTORAL DYNAMICS: DATA VERSUS SIMULATED RESPONSES OF VALUE ADDED, PERCENT DEVIATIONS FROM TREND

Notes: The figures plot percent deviations from trend in the data and simulated model series of value added in the Soviet, non-Soviet, and service sectors. Scenario “fully flexible wages” sets $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0$. Scenario “fully rigid wages” sets $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0.99975$. Scenario “adjustment costs included” presents the response of the economy when, in addition to capital adjustment costs, the following is included: habit formation in consumption ($h = 0.8$), quadratic investment adjustment costs ($\psi = 0.5$), quadratic labor adjustment costs ($\lambda = 1$), and wage adjustment is set to $\theta_1 = \theta_2 = \theta_3 = 0.98$. See online Appendix C for more details on specification of these frictions. Scenario “baseline + interest rate shock” presents the response when the model economy (with all adjustment costs included) is hit with the Soviet shock in 1991:I and two percent interest rate shocks in 1991:IV and 1992:II. The shaded region shows 90 percent confidence interval (consistent with unit root tests, each series is assumed to be a difference stationary process).

response to previous episodes of energy price shocks. We examine in particular how the model fares in accounting for the macroeconomic dynamics in Finland after the 1974 oil price shock. Like the collapse of Soviet trade, this shock produced a large increase in energy costs for Finland. Unlike the Soviet trade collapse, however, it did not cause a major dislocation in Finland’s economic structure and sectoral factor allocations. In particular, during this episode Finland continued to import subsidized energy from the USSR in exchange for specialized exports. Thus, if in this 1974 oil price shock experiment the model dynamics are still consistent with those observed in the data, the conclusions derived in the previous subsection are more credible. In this exercise, we keep the model calibrated as before. The only modification we make is to energy intensity, which we set 25 percent higher than in the baseline calibration, because the Finnish economy was more energy-intensive in the 1970s than in the early 1990s.¹⁶ Since Finland was also less unionized in the early 1970s, we also consider faster wage adjustment with $\theta_j = 0.9$ for all j .

¹⁶The ratio of energy consumption (in millions of tonnes of oil equivalent) to GDP (in constant 2000 prices) in 1973 was 25 percent larger than the same ratio in 1989.

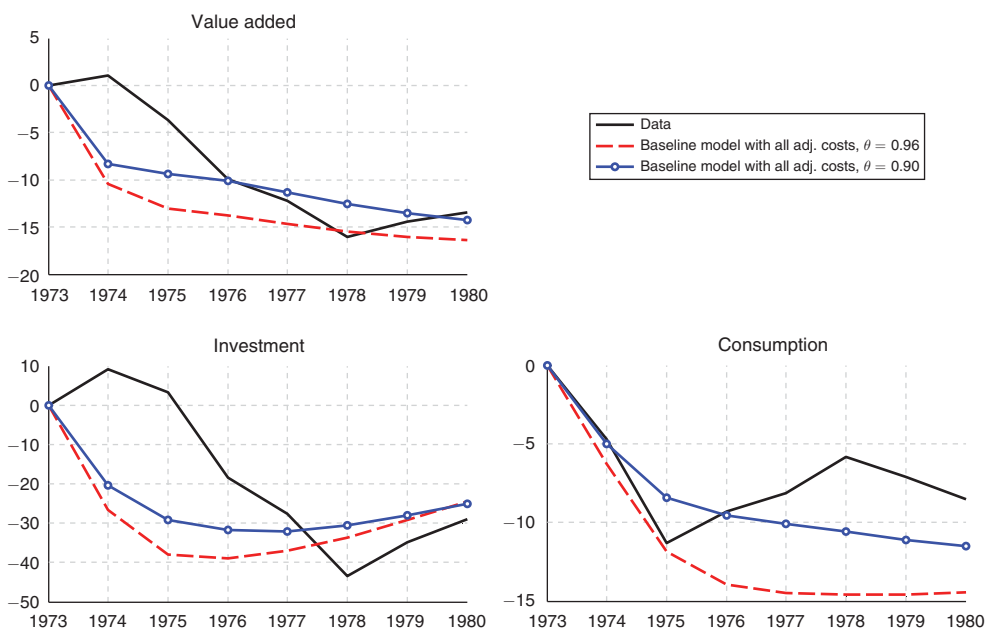


FIGURE 4. OIL PRICE SHOCK IN 1974, PERCENT DEVIATIONS FROM TREND

Notes: Solid line is the deviation of real GDP, real consumption, and real investment from the respective time trends estimated on 1950–1973 data. Real GDP, real consumption, and real investment (in 2000 prices) series are taken from Penn World Tables. The deviations are adjusted to be zero in 1973. The broken line and the solid line with circles are the model impulse responses to 109 log points increase in the price of oil. Model parameters are calibrated according to their baseline values. See text for further details.

Although most economies experienced the oil price shock early in 1974, the shock to the Finnish economy was somewhat delayed because the oil price in the Finnish-Soviet trade was a moving average of the world price. Hence, we assume that the shock to the world price occurs in the first quarter of 1974 and hits the Finnish economy in the last quarter of 1974. To calibrate the size of the shock, we compute the unit price of imported oil in 1973 and 1974 and find that the (log) change in the price was 109 percent.

Figure 4 plots the model's transitional dynamics in response to the oil price shock and the dynamics of actual output, consumption, and investment. The model broadly matches the response of the Finnish economy. The model also predicts that exports to the USSR expanded in response to the oil price shock and output in the Soviet sector expanded relative to output in the non-Soviet sector. These theoretical predictions are consistent with anecdotal evidence (e.g., Sutela 2007) on sectoral dynamics in Finland after the 1974 oil price shock.

IV. Alternative Explanations of the Depression

A. Productivity and Tax Shocks

One theory of the Finnish Great Depression is the “tax and productivity” hypothesis of Conesa, Kehoe, and Ruhl (2007), which argues that the depression was caused

by adverse total factor productivity (TFP) and labor tax shocks. Note that, as argued in Finn (2000), our oil price hike works like a technology shock since an increase in the oil price reduces firms' profit margins (provided there is a sufficiently small substitutability of energy input). Although the effect of the oil price shock on measured TFP is relatively small in our model, the trade shock leads to a significant decline in measured TFP with dynamics that resemble the path of measured TFP in the data (Figure 5, panel B). Intuitively, with sector-specific factors, changes in sectoral demands drive a wedge in returns on inputs across sectors in the short run. In contrast, the standard approach to TFP accounting assumes that returns are equalized across sectors, which can overstate the contribution of inputs in relatively unproductive sectors such as the Soviet sector in our model, and hence can show a decrease in aggregate-measured TFP even when TFP at the sectoral level does not change. What Conesa et al. interpret as a TFP shock could be partly capturing the energy price and trade shocks in our model.

We can also reconcile Conesa et al.'s labor tax-like effects with our analysis by interpreting those effects as taking the place of the wage rigidities in our model. In an equilibrium without labor frictions, the wage received by workers is equal to their reservation wage; i.e., $w_{jt} = w_{jt}^D$. If wages are rigid, the reservation wage is not generally equal to the wage actually received. Furthermore, in a downturn, workers are willing to accept jobs at lower wages, but with inflexible wages there is a difference between current market wages and the reservation wages, in particular $w_{jt} > w_{jt}^D$. Since firms stay on their labor demand curve, they cut employment. In light of these arguments, we can reconcile decreased employment (as observed in the data) with fully flexible wages (as assumed by Conesa, Kehoe, and Ruhl 2007), if we interpret this situation as if there was a "labor tax" shock. In other words, one can interpret $w_{jt} > w_{jt}^D$ as arising from a labor tax τ such that $w_{jt} > (1 - \tau)w_{jt} = w_{jt}^D$ where the after-tax wage is equal to the reservation wage.

While both labor tax hikes and wage rigidities can have similar theoretical effects, we were unable to find actual evidence of significant changes in tax rates in the Finnish press and legislation of the early 1990s. In addition, various measures of the tax burden on labor earnings exhibit little variation over this period (see Figure 5, panel A). If anything, marginal rates of the personal income tax in Finland fell in the early 1990s. For example, the top bracket tax rate fell from 51 percent in 1988 to 43 percent in 1990 and further to 39 percent in 1991. By contrast, we documented earlier strong evidence of labor rigidities, including wage stickiness. Hence, the empirical evidence suggests that labor frictions may be more relevant than tax shocks. Overall, we agree with the view of Conesa, Kehoe, and Ruhl (2007) that productivity and wage-wedge movements are necessary to explain the dynamics of macroeconomic aggregates. We interpret these movements as symptoms rather than causes, however, and argue that the Soviet trade shock is the fundamental force behind these movements.

B. **Financial Shocks**

Another competing explanation of the Finnish Great Depression is the "financial view," which attributes the depression to the major financial crisis experienced in Finland in 1992. According to the financial view, financial liberalization during

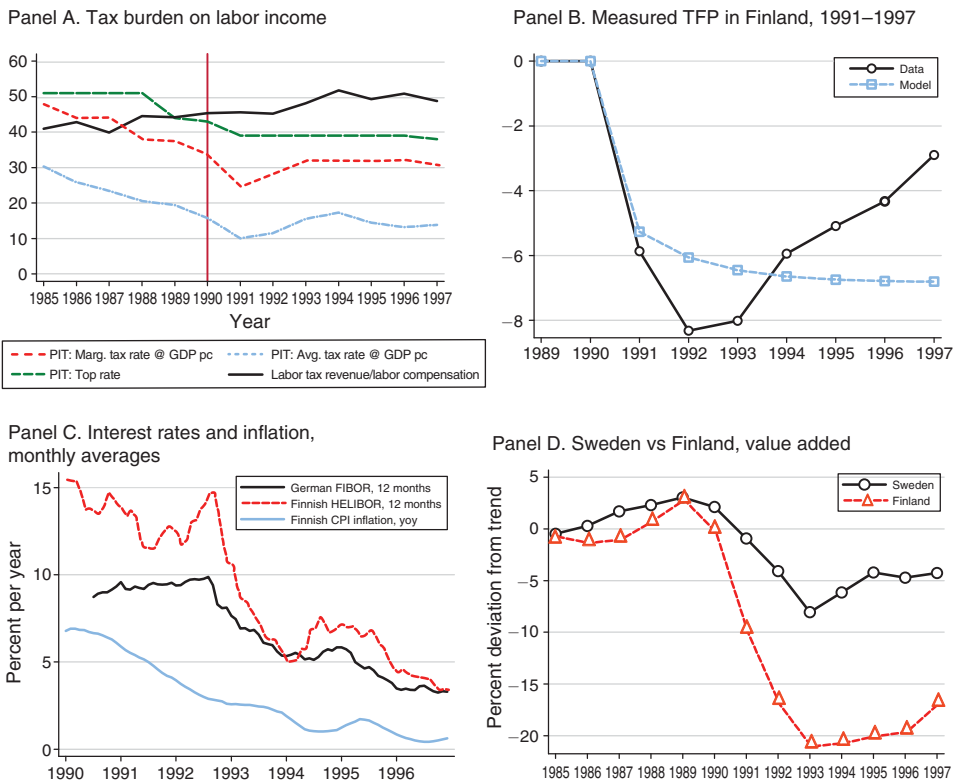


FIGURE 5. ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Notes: Panel A reports the tax burden on labor income. *GDP pc* means income equal to GDP per capita. Panel B plots total factor productivity (TFP) measured according to standard growth accounting applied to aggregate series in the data (taken from Conesa et al. 2007) and impulse responses of aggregate series in the model. The method is described in Conesa et al. (2007). Data TFP series are normalized to zero in 1990. Panel C plots the path of nominal interest rates (12 months) in the Finnish (HELIBOR) and German (FIBOR) interbank markets and the Finnish consumer price index (CPI) inflation rate (year on year). Interest rates are monthly averages of daily rates. Panel D reports percent deviations of output from time trend for Sweden and Finland. The trends are estimated separately for each country on the 1975–1989 sample.

Sources: OECD (2010a, c); Peter, Buttrick, and Duncan (2010).

the 1980s resulted in an overexpansion of credit, an overvalued stock market, inflated real estate values, and a large stock of debt. A downturn in the economy in the early 1990s due to the loss of the Soviet export market and a slowdown in European growth triggered both a speculative attack on the currency and a credit crunch. Clearly these factors played a role but they can also be interpreted as a byproduct of the financial-sector effects of the Soviet trade shocks that first caused a severe collapse of the real economy. Indeed, troubles in the Finnish financial sector seem to have followed the collapse of the Soviet trade rather than preceded it.¹⁷

¹⁷Real domestic credit, which had increased at a steady pace since the late 1970s, began to fall in 1991:I and the exchange rate experienced a first initial depreciation in 1991:IV, with a full currency collapse in 1992:IV. Real GDP began contracting in the last quarter of 1990. In a comprehensive analysis of the banking crisis and credit crunch in Finland, Vihriälä (1997) concludes that collapse of lending is better explained by a decline in firm and household balance sheets and creditworthiness than by a contraction in supply of credit.

This interpretation of the financial sector as “following” the real economy can be rationalized if we assume that financial variables responded to real developments as in a classic cash-in-advance setup. Hence, the severe retrenchment in consumption and investment expenditures due only to the Soviet trade collapse could have caused a proportional collapse in demand for real balances, which, under a managed exchange rate and a set level of foreign reserves, could have been large enough to trigger a currency crash.¹⁸ If we consider also the possibility of financial amplification via a working-capital or a financial accelerator channel, these developments could have fed back into the real economy and enlarged the magnitude and duration of the recession.

We can gather a sense of the extent to which a credit crunch can explain the depression by introducing into our framework an exogenous, persistent increase in the world interest rate that arrives as a large, unexpected shock. This is similar to the approach followed in some of the literature using quantitative dynamic stochastic general equilibrium models to examine the dynamics of financial crises (e.g., Gertler, Gilchrist, and Natalucci 2007). We focus, however, mainly on the effect of interest rate shocks operating via the opportunity cost of capital and the intertemporal cost of borrowing, abstracting from financial accelerator or Fisherian debt-deflation mechanisms that the financial crises literature emphasizes.

Panel C in Figure 5 shows the path of the nominal interest rates in Finland (HELIBOR) and Germany (FIBOR) as well as the Finnish CPI inflation rate. **Note that nominal and real interest rates in Finland were high well before the start of the recession. These high rates were largely driven by increased interest rates in Germany as the Bundesbank raised interest rates to fight inflationary expectations fueled by the German reunification.** The spread between the Finnish and German interest rates, however, has two important spikes in 1991:IV and 1992:II. At these times, the Bank of Finland raised the interest rate to defend the Finnish markka from speculative attacks. These defensive measures increased quarterly averages of the HELIBOR by about two percent.

We introduce the interest rate shock by assuming that, in addition to the Soviet shock, the model economy is also hit with these two-percent increases in the world interest rate in 1991:IV and 1992:II. The serial correlation of the interest rate shock is set to 0.8, which is approximately the persistence of the interest rate in Finland.

Figure 2 contrasts the responses of the macroeconomic aggregates to the combination of the Soviet and interest rate shock with the responses to only the Soviet shock. The interest rate shock further amplifies the depth of the recession, which helps the model to match the data. The effect of the interest rate shock is particularly dramatic for investment, which falls by another 20 percent on the top of the 22 percent drop in investment caused by the Soviet shock. This additional decrease in investment helps the model to match the composition of the contraction in output.

¹⁸Our theoretical framework is formulated in terms of real variables and thus nominal devaluations are beyond our model, but we can explore how an increase in the price of imported goods affects the dynamics of macroeconomic aggregates. Specifically, we shock the price of the imported good (C4) by two devaluations: 12 percent in 1991:IV and 13 percent in 1992:IV (the timing and the magnitude of devaluations of the Finnish markka). Overall, these shocks help to generate more prolonged deviations from trend (in part because shocks occur well after 1991:I, when we hit the model economy with the Soviet trade shock) but our qualitative and largely quantitative results are similar to the baseline set of results. More results are available upon request.

For example, decreases in consumption and investment contribute similar amounts to the aggregate contraction of output, which is close to the contributions of consumption and investment in the data. We conclude from these results that a credit crunch indeed is a useful complement to our story, especially for matching the dynamics of investment.

C. *Sweden versus Finland*

An alternative way to assess the importance of the collapse in the Soviet-Finnish trade in accounting for the Finnish recession and to validate our baseline simulations is to compare the output dynamics in Sweden and Finland. Both countries had similar institutions (including regulated labor markets with high downward wage rigidity; see Botero et al. 2004 and Dickens et al. 2007 for detailed comparisons) and experienced a similar and almost simultaneous sequence of events (including currency and financial crises) and policy responses in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the only major difference being that Sweden had miniscule trade with the USSR.¹⁹ We see Sweden as a counterfactual for what could have happened to Finland if it did not trade so much with the USSR, and use this natural experiment to evaluate the predictions from our model.

Panel D in Figure 5 plots the time series of percent deviations of output from time trend for Finland and Sweden. At the trough of the recession the output drop in Finland was about 21 percent from trend, while for Sweden it was 8 percent below trend. If we take the difference as a measure of the contribution of the Soviet trade collapse to the Finnish depression, then the magnitude of the contribution is broadly in line with impulse responses in our model. Hence, the observed difference between output paths in Sweden and Finland is consistent with our argument that the decline of the Soviet-Finnish trade explains a significant fraction of the downturn in Finland.

V. Extension to Transition Economies

There is ample evidence indicating that the trade and energy price shocks faced by the TEs of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were at least as severe as those experienced by Finland. The practice of overpricing machines exported from CMEA countries to the Soviet Union and underpricing raw materials (mainly energy) exported from the Soviet Union to CMEA countries is well documented (e.g., Marrese and Vanous 1983). Orłowski (1993), Krasnov and Brada (1997), and others find the same pattern for intra-USSR trade. Rodrik (1994) and others document that goods exported from CMEA countries to the USSR were tailored to Soviet specifications and could be sold in the West only with large discounts. Finally, as observed in Rodrik (1994), the sharp increase in unemployment rates across transition countries is *prima facie* evidence that wages were inflexible. Given that the size of distortions was greater in former CMEA countries than in Finland (e.g., greater

¹⁹ Comparing the developments in Sweden and Finland between 1985 and 2000, Jonung, Kiander, and Vartia (2009) observe that the two countries behaved as if they were “economic twins.” Jonung, Kiander, and Vartia (2009, chapter 9) also discuss the connection between crises in Scandinavian countries in the early 1990s and Asian crises in the late 1990s. Although there are some parallels with the Asian crises, the crisis in Finland is distinctive in having an important trade shock.

subsidy from USSR and greater specialization of trade with the USSR), one can expect that standard macroeconomic factors can explain the bulk of downturn in economic activity in transition countries even if wages in these countries were more flexible than in Finland.²⁰

In Gorodnichenko, Mendoza, and Tesar (2009), we replicate our quantitative analysis for Poland and Hungary, which embody two different strategies of adjustment in transition. Poland allowed a quick and deep adjustment of real wages, while in Hungary real wages had gradual and modest adjustment. Given the Soviet trade shock, our model can explain the bulk of the output contraction and the timing of the trough for both economies. The magnitude of the decline in the model depends on the speed of wage adjustment. In line with our model's prediction that greater wage inflexibility leads to deeper downturns, the model has a better fit to the data for Hungary when we use a higher value of θ , which is consistent with the fact that Hungary had a slower wage adjustment than Poland. Even for relatively flexible wages, the Soviet shock accounts for at least 50 percent of the contraction in these countries.²¹

We also conjecture that misallocation of resources in the former Soviet Union could have played an important role in the dramatic output decline in Russia and other former Soviet republics in the early 1990s. Indeed, an enormous fraction of the Soviet economy was militarized (15–20 percent of GNP according to various estimates, e.g., Steinberg 1992) and had only limited ability to switch production to nonmilitary goods. A tremendous shift in demand toward consumer goods meant a gigantic transfer of resources, which was probably even more painful and costly than in other countries in the socialist camp. In other words, the shock was internal rather than external. In addition, many relatively energy-poor Soviet republics (e.g., Ukraine) had to buy oil and gas at higher prices that, when combined with the loss of demand from other Soviet republics, resembles the shock experienced by other Eastern European countries and Finland.

VI. Concluding Remarks

We argue that the Finnish Great Depression can be explained to a large extent by two exogenous shocks produced by the collapse of the Finnish-Soviet trade: the surge in energy prices and the sudden redundancy of the Soviet-oriented manufacturing industry. Since the identification of these shocks is particularly clear-cut, this natural experiment clearly illustrates the behavior of a small open economy in response to large exogenous shocks affecting energy costs and sectoral factor allocations. We find that two important features of the Finnish economy contributed to amplification of the initial shocks into a Great Depression: rigid real wages and the collapse of demand for nontraded goods.

²⁰ Akerlof et al. (1991) also argue that high and inflexible real wages contributed to long and deep contraction in East Germany after the German reunification.

²¹ More generally, we find a strong negative relationship between real wages and employment in transition economies. In other words, countries with smaller declines in real wages experienced a larger contraction of employment between 1989 and 1995, which is consistent with our argument that incomplete adjustment of real wages could have contributed to the depth of downturn in transition economies. See Gorodnichenko, Mendoza, and Tesar (2009) for more details.

Our model can also be extended to account for the main features of the early 1990s adjustment observed in Eastern European transition economies, which displayed output dynamics and shocks to energy costs and sectoral factor allocation induced by the collapse of trade with the USSR similar to those observed in Finland. **This similarity is particularly striking and calls for a reinterpretation of the sources of deep recessions in transition economies since Finland, in contrast to transition economies, had a well-functioning system of markets, courts, and other institutions.** Although we cannot rule out alternative explanations for contractions in transition economies, the quantitative responses to the shocks triggered by the collapse of Soviet trade can account for a large share of the contraction in transition countries and Finland. This important finding suggests that alternative explanations such as institutional transformations could have had a smaller effect than previously thought. **The Finnish experience can also shed new light on the post-WWII contractions after rapid changes in the composition of aggregate demand (e.g., disarmament in the US after the Korean War).**

The depression in Finland led to dramatic changes in the Finnish economy (e.g., increased export orientation, the rise of Nokia and the telecommunications industry, a fall in unionization rates) and policy (e.g., adoption of inflation targeting, reduced taxation, and more decentralized wage setting). Analyzing the effects of these changes is beyond the scope of this paper. The depression of the 1990s, however, as well as policy responses during the depression and its aftermath, have been highly informative for policymakers and academics about how a country can turn around after a deep contraction and how policy should be directed to prevent or minimize the consequences of adverse shocks. Further analysis of the Finnish experience is a fruitful avenue for future research.

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