Journal of the History of Economic Thought,
Volume 48, Number 3, September 2026

MAURO BOIANOVSKY: AN EXEMPLARY SCHOLAR

BY
FELIPE ALMEIDA
AND
JOHN BERDELL

This study introduces the late Mauro Boianovsky (1959–2024), one of the most distinguished historians of economics of his generation. Drawing on interviews and correspondence with his colleagues, co-authors, former students, and his sister, the study offers a portrait of his academic trajectory and intellectual contributions. It examines Boianovsky's connection to Brasília and the University of Brasília, his training as an economist/historian of economics, and his engagement with colleagues and the broader history of economics community. The study aims to provide a lasting record of a remarkable scholar and to make the significance of Boianovsky's contributions accessible to future generations. As the introduction to this symposium, it also briefly presents the other papers included in the collection.

On February 21, 2024, the community of historians of economics experienced a profound loss with the passing of Mauro Boianovsky (1959–2024). Although the field of the history of economics has faced the loss of prominent figures before, Mauro's death resonated with particular intensity. This was not only because he was among the most distinguished historians of economics of his generation but also because he passed away at a relatively young age, remaining an active and deeply engaged member of our community at the time of his death. While other tributes—such as that of Rogério Arthmar (2025), Alexandre Cunha (2024), Hans-Michael Trautwein (2024), and the contributions gathered in this symposium—highlight the significance of Mauro's scholarly achievements, our objective here is to shed light on another dimension of his legacy. We aim to offer insight into how Mauro navigated intellectual and academic spaces, and how he interacted with colleagues, co-authors, and students. To this end, we conducted

Felipe Almeida: Department of Economics, Federal University of Parana, Brazil. Email: felipe.almeida@ufpr.br; John Berdell: Department of Economics, DePaul University, United States. Email: jberdell@depaul.edu. The authors are grateful to the many individuals who generously shared information and recollections about Professor Mauro Boianovsky during interviews, namely: Adriana Amado, Alexandre Andrada, Joaquim Andrade, Ricardo Araújo, Daniella Boianovsky, Daniela Freddo, Celia Lessa, Keanu Telles, and Flavio Versiani.

ISSN 1053-8372 print; ISSN 1469-9656 online/26/03000328-335 © The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of History of Economics Society.
doi:10.1017/S1053837226101448

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

interviews and exchanged correspondence with Mauro's colleagues, co-authors, former students, and his sister.[1]

The Boianovsky family's arrival in Brazil followed a common trajectory among European immigrants during the first half of the twentieth century. Seeking a better life, many European families settled in southern Brazil, attracted by opportunities for both labor and land (Seyferth 1986; Lehr and Cipko 2015). The Boianovskys established themselves in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state (Arthmar 2025). Mauro was born in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, on April 12, 1959. Nevertheless, it was Brasília that had the greatest influence on his life and intellectual development (a point to which we will return later). Mauro first moved to Brasília in 1971, when his father accepted a position as a professor at the University of Brasília (UnB). His father, David Boianovsky, was a specialist in medical sciences and a prolific scholar. He served as secretary of the Ministry of Labor, where he was responsible for developing improved nutritional standards for industrial workers, and also acted as an international consultant to the Brazilian government on health policy. Mauro's mother, Rosa Boianovsky, worked as a librarian at the Brazilian Congress Library (Arthmar 2025).

Mauro's family appears to have been an important source of inspiration for him. Like his father, he became a prolific scholar and a professor at the University of Brasília. He was also a devoted library user, frequenting the very environment where his mother had worked. During his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge, he was known among fellow students for his constant presence in the library. While Mauro was a professor at UnB, the university library created a recognition award for its most frequent user. Mauro received this distinction several times. Although the award was designed merely to encourage greater use of the library—and although Mauro had received far more prestigious accolades—he was always deeply proud to be acknowledged in this way. According to some of his colleagues, friends, and sister, Mauro's unwavering commitment to his profession may be traced back to his deep connection with the Jewish identity, which instilled in him a strong sense of discipline and a profound appreciation for intellectual and artistic pursuits.

Returning to Mauro's relationship with Brasília: The city was founded in 1960 as part of a broader state-led initiative to unify the country, to establish a central link between Brazil's regions, and to promote, through this newly created space, social, political, and esthetic values that could express the richness and diversity of Brazilian culture (Holston 1993, ch. 3; Bomeny 2016). As a pragmatic outcome of this vision, the capital of Brazil was relocated from Rio de Janeiro to the newly constructed city in the sparsely populated central-western region: Brasília. The UnB was established in 1962, and its foundation was deeply embedded in the modernist ethos of building a new society from the ground

[1] Between June and September 2025, we conducted interviews with several of Mauro's colleagues at the University of Brasília, including Adriana Amado, Alexandre Andrada, Joaquim Andrade, Ricardo Araújo, Daniela Freddo, and Flavio Versiani. Andrada offered reflections based on his collaboration with Mauro as a co-author and their time as colleagues. We also interviewed Keanu Telles, a former student of Mauro's, and Celia Lessa, a former colleague from the Fluminense Federal University—the institution where Mauro began his academic career. Mauro's sister, Daniella Boianovsky, also kindly agreed to share her perspective. To broaden our understanding, we exchanged emails with Jorge Thompson Araujo (a PhD candidate at Cambridge during the same period as Mauro) and Rogério Arthmar (a co-author of Mauro's). We are deeply grateful for the time, generosity, and thoughtful contributions of all those who participated in interviews or corresponded with us. Naturally, any errors or inaccuracies in this text remain solely our responsibility.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use , available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

up, rooted in the faith in reason's ability to mold a renewed Brazil (Bomeny 2016). When the Boianovsky family moved to Brasília, both the city and the university were still in the process of being built.

In its early years, the UnB built several faculty residences to provide housing for its academic staff—an uncommon practice in Brazil. Owing to his father's new position, Mauro spent his teenage years and part of his early adulthood living on the UnB campus. At that time, Brasília, still a newly constructed city, offered few entertainment options for young people. As a result, the university campus became an important social hub for them to gather and interact. It was in this same setting that Mauro lived again after returning from his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge—a place he cherished deeply. He lived just a five-minute walk from the Department of Economics and remained the library's most frequent user. Being a professor was a defining aspect of Mauro's life, and being a professor at UnB carried particular significance. The campus was more than a professional space for him: It was integral to the construction of his identity.[2] Mauro was consistently described by colleagues and members of the history of economics community as a rigorous scholar—an attribute he displayed from an early age. According to his former professors, Flavio Versiani and Joaquim Andrade, Mauro's academic rigor was evident even during his undergraduate years. Versiani recalled an instance in which Mauro received an A- on a test and, concerned that the grade reflected a shortcoming, approached him to clarify whether he had failed to meet expectations. In a subsequent assessment, Mauro earned an A+. He eventually received A+ grades in nearly all his courses, with the notable exception of physical education.

Mauro completed his BA in Economics at the UnB in 1979. In 1984, he was appointed as an assistant professor at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF), located in Niterói, a city just eight miles from Rio de Janeiro. During this period, Mauro resided in Rio de Janeiro and commuted to UFF. The most direct and commonly used route between the two cities is the Rio–Niterói Bridge. Mauro typically crossed the bridge to get to work—except on rainy and windy days. Designed to sway slightly in response to external conditions, the bridge's movement made Mauro quite uneasy. On such days, it was not uncommon for Professor Boianovsky to cancel his classes. While living in Rio de Janeiro, Mauro took advantage of his location to pursue a master's degree at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, which he completed in 1989. Around this time, an uncle introduced Mauro to what would become one of his greatest passions: jazz. He remained on the faculty at UFF from 1984 to 1996, though he lived in Rio de Janeiro until 1990, when he relocated to the United Kingdom to begin his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge.[3] While on leave from UFF to pursue his PhD abroad, Mauro was contacted by one of his former professors, Joaquim Andrade, regarding the possibility of transferring to the UnB. Such a transfer was possible because both UFF and UnB belong to the Brazilian Federal System of Universities. Aware that a position would soon become available at UnB, Joaquim suggested that the university

[2] When Mauro became ill, he was deeply concerned about not having to retire from UnB due to his health condition.

[3] Some of the information presented in this paragraph was obtained from Mauro's CV on the *Lattes Platform*. The *Lattes Platform* is Brazil's national academic information system, providing a centralized and standardized database of the curricula vitae of researchers, professors, and students. An English version of Mauro's CV is available at: http://lattes.cnpq.br/9530550790953653.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

could formally allocate it to UFF as part of the arrangement to facilitate Mauro's transfer. With the agreement of both departments of economics and Mauro himself, the transfer was completed, and Mauro joined the faculty at UnB in 1996.[4]

At the University of Cambridge, Mauro quickly earned a reputation as an exceptional student—among the top in his cohort, achieving the highest marks—and as a mature and self-directed researcher. Even before arriving in Cambridge, he was already recognized as an expert on the writings of Knut Wicksell. He found in Geoff Harcourt a highly compatible supervisor, someone who combined a strong technical foundation in capital theory with the intellectual openness to support Mauro's independence. A noteworthy episode during his time at Cambridge—one that would later become emblematic of his dedication to scholarship—was Mauro's decision to teach himself Swedish in order to access Wicksell's untranslated works. Despite not having formal fluency in the language, he was able to identify and engage with key passages in Wicksell's original texts. Mauro's discipline was not limited to his academic pursuits. He also adhered to a strict diet, avoiding alcohol and fatty foods for health reasons—an uncommon trait among Brazilian graduate students at the time, who were often seen as a lively and festive group. Mauro, by contrast, was a reserved individual, which may have contributed to the perception that he stood apart from the typical Brazilian profile.

Mauro's relationship with Alexandre Andrada provides a clear example of his reserved personality. Andrada, a colleague at UnB and co-author, noted that it took considerable time before Mauro shared personal details—such as the fact that he had a daughter and a son. Similarly, many of Mauro's colleagues—and much of the history of economics community—only gradually came to learn that he was Jewish. According to Daniela Freddo—a colleague of Mauro's who also took one of his classes during her PhD studies—one had to "break the ice" on personal matters before Mauro felt comfortable speaking about them. Once that initial barrier was crossed, however, he would discuss family and other personal topics as openly as any other subject. Mauro was similarly discreet regarding romantic relationships. He might mention visiting a particular place with a girlfriend, but he seldom, if ever, elaborated on the nature of the relationship.

In terms of Mauro's interactions with members of the history of economics community, he cultivated relationships in a distinctive and deliberate manner. As noted by Trautwein (2024), there was a widely shared perception—particularly among Brazilian historians of economics—that Mauro would initially "test" individuals he did not yet know to determine whether they were, in his view, serious scholars. Once he was satisfied with their intellectual commitment, Mauro would readily open up and engage with them. In these interactions, he was often highly supportive and sincerely encouraged others to pursue their research agendas. Conferences were especially meaningful to

[4] The account of Mauro's transfer to UnB was provided by Joaquim Andrade. However, an alternative narrative also circulates: Mauro's PhD was taking longer to complete than the period of academic leave granted by UFF, which placed him in a difficult situation with the institution. According to some of Mauro's colleagues, the extended timeline may have resulted from his efforts to pursue a dissertation of particularly high academic rigor. Recognizing the exceptional potential of their former student, Versiani and Andrade—both of whom had taught Mauro during his BA—intervened. Joaquim approached Mauro with the possibility of transferring to UnB, where he could be granted additional time in Cambridge to complete his PhD. At the time, Versiani was serving as head of the Department of Economics at UnB and took the initiative to contact UFF to negotiate Mauro's transfer.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

Mauro—not only as venues to present his work but also as important opportunities for social connection. As soon as a conference program was published, Mauro would typically reach out to colleagues in the history of economics community to plan social activities such as dinners, museum visits, or evenings at jazz clubs.

Mauro's connection with part of the history of economics community was often forged through co-authorship. His collaborators consistently described him as a rigorous scholar. Arthmar characterized Mauro as stoic, persistent, erudite, and meticulous. Trautwein (2024) notes that Mauro was a prolific writer who frequently adopted what he termed an "archivological" approach to research—choosing topics that often emerged serendipitously while he was engaged with archival materials from other projects. In his later years, Mauro increasingly co-authored with younger scholars. As with his interactions more broadly within the community, he often began these collaborations by "testing" the scholar through the co-writing of a working paper. If he perceived a strong sense of commitment and intellectual seriousness, Mauro would fully support the project, which eventually culminated in a published article.

As an active member of the history of economics community, Mauro played a leading role in prominent scholarly associations in the field, including the History of Economics Society (HES), the European Society for the History of Economic Thought (ESHET), and the Latin American Society for the History of Economic Thought (ALAHPE). He served as president of the HES in 2016–17 and as a council member of the ESHET from 2006 to 2010. Throughout his career, Mauro was a regular participant in HES conferences, attending annually from 1993 to 2005, as well as in 2007 and 2009, and again from 2015 to 2023. During this latter period, he did not attend the 2020 conference, reflecting a brief delay in his transition to virtual participation during the period of social isolation brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. Elected president of the HES in 2015, Mauro organized the HES 2016 conference and, in the following year, delivered his presidential address while serving as president.

With respect to ESHET conferences, available records indicate that Mauro attended at least sixteen meetings, although this number is likely an underestimate.[5] Within ESHET, he played a central role in fostering connections among Latin American historians of economics and was instrumental in promoting the ESHET Latin American Conferences. Held between 2011 and 2015, these meetings served as the foundation for the creation of

[5] Reconstructing Mauro's participation in conferences is not straightforward, as his CV on the *Lattes Platform* lacks consistency across sections. The section on "full-length papers published in conference proceedings" ("*trabalhos completos publicados em anais de congressos*") records conference participation only up to 2007, whereas other sections—such as "conference abstracts published in proceedings" ("*resumos publicados em anais de congressos*") and "conference presentations" ("*apresentações de trabalho*")—include additional conferences held after that date. As a result, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether his record of conference attendance is complete. To address these limitations, we supplemented the CV data with information gathered from the websites of the HES and the ESHET. For the HES, it was possible to recover additional information beyond that reported in the CV. In the case of ESHET, however, the incomplete availability of conference programs online required some inference. Based on the available records, we estimate that Mauro attended ESHET conferences from 1996 to 1999, in 2006 and 2007, and from 2011 to 2023, excluding 2013 and 2020. The data were collected from the HES and ESHET websites (https://historyofeconomics.org/conferences/past-conferences-assa-session/ and https://www.eshet.net/list-of-past-conferences/) between April 20 and 22, 2026.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

the Latin American Society for the History of Economic Thought.[6] Mauro thus played a pivotal role in the organization of the history of economics in Latin America. Notwithstanding his strong international presence, Mauro remained deeply committed to the Brazilian academic community, as reflected in his sustained participation in national conferences. The Brazilian National Economics Conference is organized into thematic areas, with Area 01 dedicated to the history of economic thought and methodology. Mauro attended at least twenty-five editions of this conference.[7]

Mauro also played a significant role in organizing conference sessions. A revealing example dates to 2022, when he contacted the president of the National Association of Graduate Programs in Economics, the association responsible for the Brazilian National Economics Conference, to inquire about plans for a special session commemorating its fiftieth anniversary in 2023. Disappointed to learn that no such initiative was being considered, Mauro found it inconceivable that the association would overlook its own history on such a milestone. He therefore took the initiative to organize the session himself, inviting several senior scholars who had served as presidents in the association's early years. At the same 2023 conference, he also organized a session celebrating the 300th anniversary of Adam Smith. Regrettably, due to illness, he was unable to attend either session.

Mauro maintained a positive relationship with his colleagues, which can be attributed in part to (1) his tendency to avoid conflict, and in part to (2) his modest and low-profile demeanor—despite being among the most accomplished scholars in his field. One hypothesis regarding (1) is that Mauro was so deeply focused on his research that he regarded departmental disputes as distractions from the academic path he was committed to pursuing. As for (2), an anecdote shared by Versiani offers a compelling illustration: At a time when email was not yet widely used, the Department of Economics at UnB received a fax. To identify its intended recipient, the message was read by some of Mauro's colleagues. It turned out to be a letter from Paul Samuelson, congratulating Mauro on a recent publication. It was only at that moment that many of Mauro's colleagues became aware of the true significance of his scholarly contributions. Mauro himself never highlighted his achievements or sought special recognition. He never experienced any

[6] Mauro attended four of the five ESHET Latin American Conferences, being absent only from the 2013 meeting. It was during one of these conferences that the Latin American Society for the History of Economic Thought was formally established, with Mauro among the signatories of its founding minutes. At that same occasion, it was decided that ALAHPE would assume responsibility for organizing history of economic thought conferences in Latin America, which would thereafter be held on a biennial basis. Mauro remained actively involved, attending the subsequent conferences in 2017 and 2019. The information on the Latin American conferences was retrieved from the ALAHPE website, where the list of events is available (https://alahpe.org/eventos-en/), and the founding minutes can be accessed through the corresponding document page (https://alahpe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ata-de-Fundacao.pdf). Both sources were consulted on April 21, 2026.

[7] As with ESHET, the available records for the Brazilian National Economics Conference are incomplete, as not all programs are accessible online. Drawing on the information that is available, together with data from Mauro's CV, we estimate that he attended the conference in the following years: 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1989, and 1986. This list should be regarded as indicative rather than exhaustive, as Mauro may have participated in additional conferences not captured in the available records. The data were collected from the official conference website (https://en.anpec.org.br/previous-editions.php?r=encontro-2025), accessed on April 22, 2026.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

difficulties with colleagues. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of his interactions with students.

Mauro did not enjoy an easy relationship with his students. This was largely due to the fact that the same scholarly rigor that defined his research also shaped his approach in the classroom. Tensions arose from a mismatch of expectations: Mauro demanded more from his students—more reading, deeper engagement—than they expected, and many felt that his standards were excessive. Nonetheless, students readily recognized the depth of Mauro's knowledge of economics. As a supervisor of master's and doctoral dissertations, he maintained the same level of rigor found in his teaching and research. Even so, supervision rarely led to serious conflict, generating only minor and routine disagreements. His advisees often commented on the direct and outspoken style that characterized his mentorship.

Given Mauro's long-standing reputation as an outstanding scholar, it is unsurprising that he developed his own methodology for study and research. What may be more surprising, however, is that this method was entirely analog. This aligns with his broader personal disposition—Mauro was, in many respects, an "analog person," often struggling with the technological demands of daily life. We are not referring to complex tasks such as computer programming or artificial intelligence development; rather, Mauro faced difficulties with seemingly simple tasks like replacing printer toner or requesting a ride via Uber. These limitations occasionally led to misunderstandings, as he relied more heavily than others on administrative staff at UnB and on colleagues within the history of economics community. At times, this gave rise to the mistaken impression that he was overly dependent or even a freeloader. In truth, Mauro was quite the opposite—he disliked being a burden and valued self-reliance. His analog approach was especially evident in his research routine. Mauro read exclusively from printed materials, marked them with Post-it notes (never using highlighters), annotated them in pencil, and kept extensive handwritten notes in dedicated notebooks. As a prolific researcher, he amassed a considerable collection of these notebooks, which served as a personal archive of his intellectual journey. Mauro was truly one of a kind, and he is profoundly missed!

Beyond the introduction, the symposium brings together four papers that explore Mauro Boianovsky's contributions to the history of economics. Roger Backhouse expands upon Mauro's account in "Paul Samuelson's Ways to Macroeconomic Dynamics" by situating Samuelson's work not only within the tradition of formal mathematical modeling of dynamics (as developed by Ragnar Frisch and Jan Tinbergen) but also within the broader intellectual lineage of theories of market adjustment and imperfect competition rooted in Alfred Marshall. Hans-Michael Trautwein examines Mauro's early and enduring engagement with Knut Wicksell's economic theory, emphasizing how this engagement shaped his scholarly formation and later contributions to the history of economic thought. Maurício Chalfin Coutinho discusses Mauro's role in shaping the history of economics in Brazil, focusing on his extensive studies of Celso Furtado and Latin American structuralism. Coutinho argues that, unlike most Brazilian commentators, Mauro situated Furtado's thought within a broader international context, connecting his ideas to global traditions of postwar development economics and offering comparative insights that enrich our understanding of structuralism and Furtado's legacy. Victor Cruz-e-Silva provides a bibliometric overview of Mauro's writings, empirically identifying two central domains of his scholarship: the history of macroeconomics, with

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448

Knut Wicksell as a key reference; and the history of development economics, shaped largely by Evsey Domar, Celso Furtado, and the Latin American structuralist tradition.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

Arthmar, Rogério. 2025. "Mauro Boianovsky (1959–2024)." *History of Political Economy* 57 (2): 183–198.

Bomeny, Helena. 2016. "Universidade de Brasília: filha da utopia de reparação" [University of Brasília: Child of a utopia of reparation]. *Sociedade e Estado* 31 (Sept.): 1003–1028.

Cunha, Alexandre Mendes. 2024. "Mauro Boianovsky (1959–2024)." *History of Economic Thought and Policy* 1 (1): 131–134.

Holston, James. 1993. *A Cidade Modernista: Uma Crítica de Brasília e Sua Utopia* [The modernist city: A critique of Brasília and its utopia]. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Lehr, John C., and Serge Cipko. 2015. "The Ukrainian Cultural Landscape in Canada and Brazil: A Century of Change and Divergence." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 47 (4): 171–204.

Seyferth, Giralda. 1986. "Imigração, Colonização e Identidade Étnica (notas sobre a emergência da etnicidade em grupos de origem européia no sul do Brasil)" [Immigration, colonization, and ethnic identity (notes on the emergence of ethnicity among groups of European origin in southern Brazil)]. *Revista de Antropologia* 29: 57–71.

Trautwein, Hans-Michael. 2024. "Mauro Boianovsky (1959–2024)." *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 31 (2): 369–373.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 23:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837226101448