

# Overlapping Generations Model

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# Introduction

Two approaches for modeling the household sector

1. households live forever (**infinite horizon**)  
tractable
2. households live for finite number of periods (**overlapping generations**)  
can talk about questions where demographics matter

# Why choose OLG?

## 1. Demographic structure matters:

- ▶ Social security and tax analysis (pioneered by Auerbach and Kotlikoff 1987)
- ▶ Human capital: schooling followed by on-the-job learning (e.g., many papers by Heckman and his students)
- ▶ Income or wealth inequality (e.g., Huggett 1996; Huggett et al. 2011)

These are usually computational many-period models.

## 2. Analytical tractability:

Usually two period OLG models.

E.g., Aghion et al. (2002), Galor (2005), Krueger and Ludwig (2007)

## What we do in this section

How to set up and solve an OLG model

Show that the equilibrium is **not efficient**

- ▶ households may save too much.

“Social security” can prevent overaccumulation

We can make households “infinitely lived” by adding altruistic **bequests**.

## 2. An OLG Model Without Firms

## 2.1. Model Setup

We start with the simplest possible model.

- ▶ the only agents are households

We go through the standard steps:

1. Describe the economy: demographics, endowments, preferences, technologies, markets
2. Solve each agent's problem
3. Market clearing
4. Competitive equilibrium

We discuss why we make various modeling choices.

# Demographics

Time is discrete and goes on forever.

- ▶ why discrete?
- ▶ why forever?

At each date  $t$ ,  $N_t$  new households are born.

- ▶ Cohort size grows at constant rate  $n$ :
- ▶  $N_t = N_0(1+n)^t$

Each person lives for two periods (young, old).

At each date there are  $N_t$  young and  $N_{t-1}$  old households.

- ▶  $N_t/N_{t-1} = 1+n$

# Endowments, Preferences

## Endowments

- ▶ At each date, there is one good.
- ▶ Each young receives endowment  $w_t$  (goods).

Preferences:  $u(c_t^y) + \beta u(c_{t+1}^o)$ .

- ▶  $u$  is strictly concave
- ▶  $\beta > 0$  is the discount factor.

Putting anything other than consumption and leisure in preferences is frowned upon (in macro, but not in applied micro).

Why?



# Technology

Endowments can be stored.

Storing  $s_t$  goods today yields  $f(s_t)$  goods tomorrow.

- ▶  $f$  is strictly concave and increasing
- ▶ the simplest consumption / saving decision
- ▶ should we index  $s$  by  $t$  or  $t+1$ ?

Resource constraint:

- ▶ Output = consumption + investment
- ▶  $Y = C + I$
- ▶ Closed economy: saving = investment;  $S = I$

$$\underbrace{N_t w_t + N_{t-1} f(s_{t-1})}_{Y_t} = \underbrace{N_t c_t^y + N_{t-1} c_t^o}_{C_t} + \underbrace{N_t s_t}_{S_t = I_t} \quad (1)$$

# Technology

## Resource constraints

Technological constraints that describe the set of feasible choices.  
Contain only quantities (no prices).  
Often identical to market clearing conditions.

# Markets

Goods are traded in competitive spot markets.

- ▶ the price of the good is normalized to 1 for all  $t$   
(why can we do this?)

Households can issue one period bonds with interest rate  $r_{t+1}$ .

- ▶ zero net supply

We are done with the description of the environment.

Next step: solve the household problem.

## 2.2. Why Is this Model Interesting?

This is a simplified version of **Auerbach and Kotlikoff (1987)**

The simplest model with meaningful consumption / saving decisions.

If we had no production (endowment economy), saving would not be feasible.

Labor supply is fixed.

- ▶ Limits usefulness for tax analysis.

We could omit the bonds (they won't be traded anyway).

- ▶ But it gives us an easy interest rate.

# What can we do with this model?

Not much!

We can analyze (paper and pencil) how certain taxes affects savings.

- ▶ Auerbach and Kotlikoff (1987) do that, but in a slightly more complex model.

Mostly, a model like this is useful as a starting point.

- ▶ Add features so that interesting questions can be studied.
- ▶ E.g., Aghion et al. (2002), Galor (2005), Krueger and Ludwig (2007)

## Digression: What makes a good model?

Should a model be “realistic” or “unrealistic?”

Should it be simple or complex?

# A Missing Market

A theoretical insight:

- ▶ Even though there is a bond market, **intergenerational** borrowing and lending is not possible.

The reason:

- ▶ The young at  $t$  cannot borrow from the old because the old won't be around at  $t+1$  to have their loans repaid.
- ▶ If households live for more periods, the problem becomes weaker, but does not go away.

An asset that stays around forever solves this problem

- ▶ e.g., money, land, shares

## 2.3. Solving the Model

To solve for the equilibrium, we go through the standard steps:

1. Describe the economy (done)
2. Solve the household problem.
3. Market clearing conditions.
4. Define equilibrium.



# Household Problem

We now get to step 2: solve each agent's problem.

The budget constraints are

$$\begin{aligned}w_t &= c_t^y + s_t + b_{t+1} \\ c_{t+1}^o &= f(s_t) + b_{t+1}(1 + r_{t+1})\end{aligned}$$

Why are there no prices for bonds and  $s$ ?

## Lifetime budget constraint

There really is only one constraint that the household cares about:

*At what rate can one exchange  $c_{t+1}^o$  against  $c_t^y$ ?*

Substitute out bonds:

$$c_{t+1}^o = f(s_t) + (1 + r_{t+1})(w_t - c_t^y - s_t) \quad (2)$$

The relative price of old vs. young consumption is the interest rate.

Lifetime budget constraint:

$$w_t + \frac{f(s_t)}{1 + r_{t+1}} - s_t = c_t^y + \frac{c_{t+1}^o}{1 + r_{t+1}}$$

Present value of income = present value of spending.

# Lagrangian

$$\begin{aligned}\Gamma = & u(c_t^y) + \beta u(c_{t+1}^o) \\ & + \lambda_t \{ [w_t - c_t^y - s_t] - [c_{t+1}^o - f(s_t)] / [1 + r_{t+1}] \}\end{aligned}$$

FOCs:

$$\begin{aligned}u'(c_t^y) &= \lambda_t \\ \beta u'(c_{t+1}^o) &= \lambda_t / (1 + r_{t+1}) \\ f'(s_t) &= 1 + r_{t+1}\end{aligned}$$

In words...

# Interpretation

What does this say in words:

$$f'(s_t) = 1 + r_{t+1} \quad (3)$$

# Permanent Income Hypothesis

General insight: the household does things in two steps

1. Maximize lifetime income.
2. Optimally distribute consumption over time.

We see the reason from the lifetime budget constraint:

$$w_t + \frac{f(s_t)}{1 + r_{t+1}} - s_{t+1} = c_t^y + \frac{c_{t+1}^o}{1 + r_{t+1}}$$

Maximizing lifetime income (the LHS) gives the FOC

$$f'(s_t) = 1 + r_{t+1} \tag{4}$$

## Euler equation

$$u'(c_t^y) = \beta (1 + r_{t+1}) u'(c_{t+1}^o)$$

### Interpretation:

Give up 1 unit of consumption when young and buy a bond.

Marginal cost:  $u'(c_t^y)$

Marginal benefit:

$(1 + r_{t+1})$  units of consumption when old  
valued at  $\beta u'(c_{t+1}^o)$

## A general point

The household decides sequentially:

1. Make choices to maximize lifetime income (here: choose  $s$  and  $b$ )
2. Use the Euler equation to decide how to allocate that income over time  
so that marginal utility is “equalized” across periods (adjusting for the incentives to postpone consumption to earn interest)

This remains true when the household lives for many periods.

# Household Solution

A vector  $(c_t^y, c_{t+1}^o, s_t, b_{t+1})$  which satisfies

- ▶ 2 FOCs (an EE and the foc for  $s$ )
- ▶ 2 budget constraints.



## 2.4. Market Clearing

Goods:

Bonds:

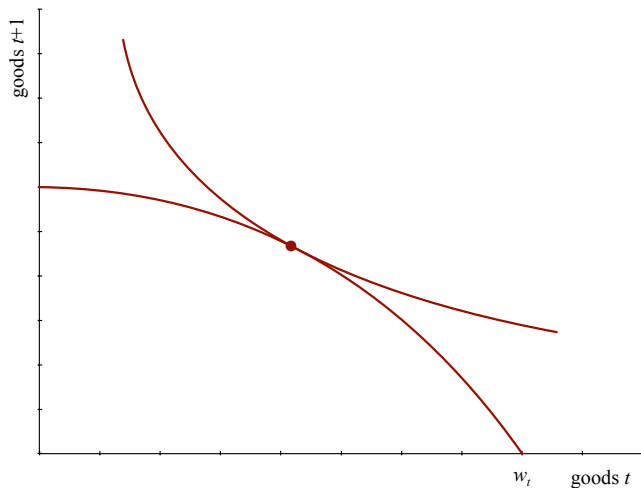
# Equilibrium

A CE is an allocation  
and a price system  
that satisfy:

We are done with the definition of equilibrium.  
Next step: characterize equilibrium.

# Characterization

There is no trade in equilibrium ( $b_t = 0$ )



### 3. OLG Model with Firms

## Model with Firms

The model is modified by adding firms who rent capital and labor from households.

The endowment  $w$  is now interpreted as labor earnings.

Households supply one unit of labor inelastically to firms when young.

Capital depreciates at rate  $\delta$ .

This is a standard setup in many macro models.

# Why This Setup?

Firms:

- ▶ they actually don't matter (see below)
- ▶ having firms makes it easier to think about wages and interest rates.

Firms don't own anything:

- ▶ tractability: firm problem becomes static

Labor supply is of course often a choice.

## 3.1. Model Elements

- ▶ Unchanged: demographics, preferences
- ▶ Endowments:
  - ▶ at  $t = 0$  each old household owns  $k_0$  units of capital
  - ▶ each young has 1 unit of work time
- ▶ Technology

$$\underbrace{F(K_t, L_t)}_{Y_t} = C_t + \underbrace{K_{t+1} - K_t(1 - \delta)}_{I_t} \quad (5)$$

- ▶ constant returns to scale
  - ▶ Inada conditions
- ▶ Markets:
  - ▶ goods (numeraire), capital rental ( $q$ ), labor rental ( $w$ )

# Capital and timing

At the start of period  $t$ :

- ▶ the economy is endowed with the capital stock  $K_t$

During  $t$ :

- ▶ labor  $L_t$  and  $K_t$  are used to produce  $Y_t$
- ▶ households eat  $C_t$  and save  $S_t = Y_t - C_t$
- ▶ fraction  $\delta$  of the capital stock disappears

At the end of  $t$ :

- ▶  $K_{t+1} = (1 - \delta)K_t + S_t$  is taken into  $t + 1$



# Notes

## Representative household

- ▶ All households are the same.
- ▶ So we talk as if there were only 1 household, who behaves competitively.

## Perfect substitutes

- ▶ One unit of  $C_t$  and be made into one unit of  $K_{t+1}$
- ▶ That's why there is no price of  $K$

## The household **owns everything**

- ▶ The firm rents capital from the household in each period
- ▶ That makes the firms' problem static (easy)
- ▶ It is usually convenient to pack all dynamic decisions into 1 agent
- ▶ Who owns the capital makes no difference - why not?

# Welfare theorems

Roughly speaking:

*If all markets are competitive and there are no externalities or distortionary taxes  
then*

*Any competitive equilibrium is Pareto optimal.*

Though there is a technical wrinkle that derails efficiency in this model...

## 3.2. Households

Budget constraints:

$$\begin{aligned}w_t &= c_t^y + s_t + b_{t+1} \\ c_{t+1}^o &= e^o + (s_t + b_{t+1})(1 + r_{t+1})\end{aligned}$$

$e^o$ : any other income received when old (currently 0)

Why are there are no profits?

We imposed the same rate of return on bonds and capital – why?

## Lifetime budget constraint

Combine the 2 budget constraints:

$$w_t - c_t^y = (c_{t+1}^o - e^o) / [1 + r_{t+1}]$$

or

$$W_t = \underbrace{w_t + \frac{e^o}{1 + r_{t+1}}}_{\text{p.v. of income}} = \underbrace{c_t^y + \frac{c_{t+1}^o}{1 + r_{t+1}}}_{\text{p.v. of consumption}} \quad (6)$$

$W_t$ : present value of lifetime earnings

# Permanent Income Hypothesis

The lifetime budget constraint only depends on  $W_t$ , not on timing of income over life.

$$c_{t+1}^o = (1 + r_{t+1}) (W_t - c_t^y) \quad (7)$$

Therefore, the optimal consumption path only depends on  $W_t$ .

This is a somewhat general implication that has been tested many times. example:

- ▶ One example: Hsieh (2003) [Nice example of using a natural experiment to test a theory.]

Overall, the evidence seems favorable.

# Lagrangian

$$\Gamma = u(c_t^y) + \beta u(c_{t+1}^o) \\ + \lambda \{W_t - c_t^y - c_{t+1}^o / [1 + r_{t+1}]\}$$

FOCs:

$$u'(c_t^y) = \lambda \\ \beta u'(c_{t+1}^o) = \lambda / (1 + r_{t+1})$$

In words...

# Households

Euler:

$$u'(c_t^y) = \beta(1 + r_{t+1})u'(c_{t+1}^o)$$

Solution: A vector  $(c_t^y, c_{t+1}^o, s_t, b_{t+1})$  that satisfies 2 budget constraints and 1 EE.

We lack one equation! Why?

# Consumption theory basics

The Euler equation + present value budget constraint are the essence of the theory of consumption.

- ▶ The Euler equation gives the “slope” of the age-consumption profile.
- ▶ The budget constraint gives the level.

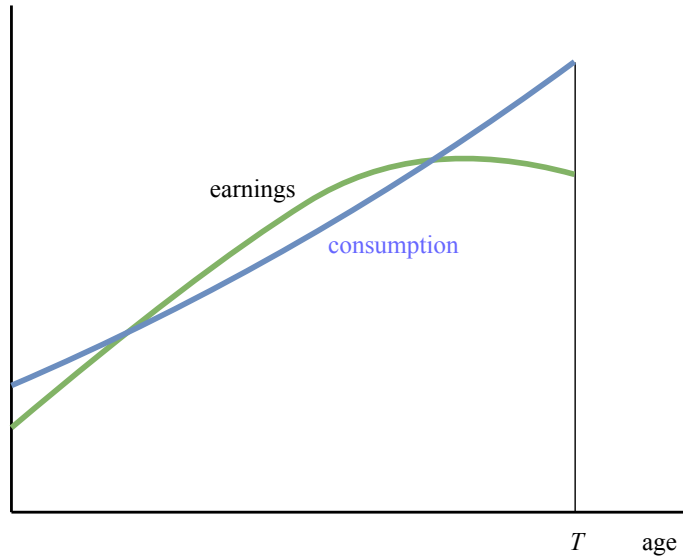
E.g., log utility:

- ▶  $u'(c) = 1/c$
- ▶  $c_{t+1}/c_t = \beta(1 + r_{t+1})$

Intuition: the effect of shocks... (graph)



## Consumption and shocks



# Testable implications

Strong, testable implications

- ▶ all households have the same consumption growth rate (with CRRA preferences)
- ▶ when income is received over the life-cycle does not matter

The theory seems hopelessly simplistic.

But it gets better when income is stochastic (we study such models later).

### 3.3. Firms

Firms maximize **current period** profits taking factor prices  $(q, w)$  as given.

$$\max F(K, L) - wL - qK$$

Note: When firms own something (e.g., capital), they solve an intertemporal problem.

FOCs:

$$q = F_K(K, L)$$

$$w = F_L(K, L)$$

The **solution** to the firm's problem is a pair  $(K, L)$  so that the 2 FOCs hold.

# Firms

A wrinkle: We assume constant returns to scale.

The size of the firm is indeterminate (why?)

The FOCs only determine  $K/L$  (not  $K$  and  $L$  separately).

## Firms: Intensive form

It is convenient to write the production function in **intensive form**:

$$\begin{aligned} F(K,L) &= LF(K/L,1) \\ &= Lf(k^F) \end{aligned}$$

where  $k^F = K/L$  and

$$f(k^F) = F(k^F, 1)$$

## Firms: Intensive form

Now the factor prices are

$$F_K = \frac{\partial Lf(K/L)}{\partial K} = Lf'(k^F)(1/L)$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} F_L &= \frac{\partial Lf(K/L)}{\partial L} = f(k^F) + Lf'(k^F)(-K/L^2) \\ &= f(k^F) - f'(k^F)k^F \end{aligned}$$

Therefore:

$$\begin{aligned} q &= f'(k^F) \\ w &= f(k^F) - k^F f'(k^F) \end{aligned}$$

Important:  $q$  is the rental price of capital, which differs from the interest rate  $r$ .

### 3.4. Equilibrium: Market clearing

Capital rental:  $N_t s_t = K_{t+1}$

Labor rental:  $L_t = N_t$

Bonds:  $b_t = 0$

Goods: resource constraint

Note: The saving of the young is the entire capital stock next period.

- ▶ Undepreciated capital goes to the old who do not save.

# Competitive Equilibrium

An allocation:  $(c_t^y, c_t^o, s_t, b_t, K_t, L_t)$

Prices:  $(q_t, r_t, w_t)$

That satisfy:

1. Household: 3
2. Firm: 2
3. Market clearing: 4

We have 9 objects and 9 equations – one is missing.

We need an accounting identity linking  $r$  and  $q$ :

- ▶ The household receives  $1 + r_{t+1} = q_{t+1} + 1 - \delta$  per unit of capital.
- ▶ Therefore,  $r = q - \delta$ .



## Competitive equilibrium

We could also write everything in terms of  $k^F = K/L$  and drop  $L$  from the CE definition.

Then

- ▶ Capital market clearing:

$$s_t = \frac{K_{t+1}}{N_t} = k_{t+1} (1 + n) \quad (8)$$

- ▶ Goods market clearing:

$$f(k_t^F) + (1 - \delta)k_t^F = c_t^y + c_t^o / (1 + n) + k_{t+1} (1 + n) \quad (9)$$

# Reading

- ▶ Acemoglu (2009), ch. 9.
- ▶ Krueger, "Macroeconomic Theory," ch. 8
- ▶ Ljungqvist and Sargent (2004), ch. 9 (without the monetary parts).
- ▶ McCandless and Wallace (1991) and De La Croix and Michel (2002) are book-length treatments of overlapping generations models. Very good for understanding the basics.

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