

9.7. Knowledge networks in rural Europe, 1700-2000. Part I

Panel organiser: Segers, Yves, Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History, University of Leuven, Belgium

The diffusion of various forms of knowledge and know-how in the countryside, both to increase agricultural production and food quality and to improve the quality of rural life, was without any doubt one of the most striking processes of change in the rural areas of Europe during the last three centuries. However, regions, farming communities and farming families had unequal access to locally and externally generated knowledge, as well as unequal abilities to produce and acquire new knowledge through formal and informal networks such as learning by doing, schooling, extension programmes, media, etc. These two sessions, organised under the same umbrella, aim at unravelling the development of what can be called “agricultural and rural knowledge networks” in Europe. Both sessions will address the production and diffusion of agricultural science and agricultural technology. Changing agricultural knowledge and techniques were one of the principal reasons for the increases in agricultural output that occurred since the eighteenth century. Many of the technical changes resulted from the activities of governments, scientists and commercial firms outside the agricultural industry itself. Others came from pioneering farmers. Guiding questions for these sessions are: How did these knowledge networks operate: top-down, bottom-up or two-way communication? What was the role of public and private actors (government, state agronomists, farmers’ organisations, commercial firms, media, the church, etc.)? Who had access to which knowledge? To whom was the available information addressed (men, women, youth; professional farmers or rural dwellers)? Which knowledge was adopted or rejected and why? How efficient was the degree of agricultural extension initiatives? Did inclusion or exclusion from knowledge networks influence power structures? Which channels were used to diffuse knowledge (education, newspapers, radio, films, television, journals, books, lectures, advertisements, expositions, agricultural shows, etc.)? To what extent was knowledge, generated outside Europe, imported in Europe, for instance from the U.S. and European colonies? Or vice versa? To what extent did knowledge networks globalise? These sessions are organised by Paul Brassley (University of Exeter), Yves Segers and Leen Van Molle (University of Leuven), Daniel Lanero and Lourenzo Fernandez Prieto (University of Santiago de Compostela), in cooperation with the CORN network.

Chair: Fernández Prieto, Lourenzo, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 1400 – 1600 // Session 9 – Room A 019

9.7.1. Knowledge networks in rural Europe: theories, concepts and historiographies

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Knowing is very vague a concept, although it seems to refer much more to the city than to the rural environment, to theory than to daily practices, and to those who produce science and transmit its derivatives via intensive educational programs than to the doings and dealings of the masses. But historical research has undermined this rather static and top down understanding of knowledge. Its production and circulation are never detached enterprises, but socially situated and intentional. What is recognized as knowledge has perhaps less to do with facts and proofs, than with interaction, communication in time and space, negotiation and creative methods of transmission. The introduction to both sessions regarding knowledge in the countryside wants in the first place to focus on recent theories, interpretative models and concepts that can help to elucidate the mechanisms of knowledge diffusion in rural Europe in the past, such as the theory of the ‘two cultures’, the diffusionist model, the actor-network theory, and the concepts of ‘trading zones’, ‘cultural amphibians’ and ‘cross-border workers’. In the second place, it aims at introducing the reflection on the sites of rural knowledge, its bearers (individuals, groups, institutions, media,...) and consumers, and the informal and formal structures that shape its networks.

9.7.2. Agrarian press and its contribution to technical change in Galicia, 1900-1975

Cabo Villaverde, Miguel, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

An astonishing number of periodicals was published in Galicia during the first third of the XXth century targeting the rural population. They played a key role in the political, cultural and socio-economic transformation of the countryside. Historians everywhere use this press as source but they seldom regard it as a subject on its own. This paper will deal mostly with the agrarian press, meaning press edited by agrarian organizations or aiming the peasantry as primary target, but we will also pay attention to the role played by journals published by state institutions and its interaction with the former. Both were trying to make a breakthrough in a milieu

where illiteracy and oral tradition still had an important weight, so that these periodicals had to find resources and an appropriate style to overcome the cultural gap. The Civil War of 1936-1939 dramatically changed the conditions under which the agrarian press had thrived and under the Francoist regime just a handful survived and almost all of the publications targeting the rural folk were State-sponsored. The agrarian press had an impact in many fields (educational, political, modelling a new image of the peasantry...) but our paper will focus on aspects regarding technical change. By offering a common ground to technicians and farmers, these journals helped both of them to overcome their mutual mistrust and so made a significant contribution to the spread of innovations in the countryside.

9.7.3. Diffusion of agricultural science and technologies: the innovation system in Galicia (Spain), 1880-1936

Fernández Prieto, Lourenzo, HISTAGRA Research Group, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain
Soto Fernandez, David, University Pablo de Olavide Sevilla, Spain
Cabo Villaverde, Miguel, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain
Lanero Táboas, Daniel, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

The aim of this paper is to analyse how the Spanish agrarian innovation system was built between 1880 and 1936 (Spanish Civil War starting point), paying special attention to its implementation in Galician rural world (Northwest Spain). We will specifically focus on the Technological Advice System (how it worked at that time) and in which way innovations were “received” by peasants. Galician agriculture showed important increases in productivity during this period that confirm the spread of new techniques in a seemingly traditional agrarian economy. Peasants headed this process, defying some of the assumptions of the technological innovation classical patterns. Our paper will deal with three main innovations: 1) Livestock breeding and the creation of a new cattle breed: “Galician red”; 2) The general adoption of threshing machines by Galician peasants in the framework of an agrarian economy based in livestock breeding and selling to national and international markets; 3) The Galician case as an example of pioneer diffusion of hybrid maize in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s.

9.7.4. Technical change and knowledge networks in Great Britain 1945-1980s

Brassley, Paul, University of Exeter, UK

It is widely recognized that the years between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1980s saw the introduction of a range of important new technologies into British agriculture – pesticides, new crop varieties, artificial insemination, mechanisation, for example - and the increased adoption of existing output-increasing technologies such as artificial fertilisers. The development and impact of these changes has been explored by several historians; what has not been so widely explored is the process by which farmers and farm workers became aware of new technologies and competent in their use. It was a multi-dimensional process involving a series of stages from the creation of a scientific infrastructure designed to produce technical change through to the eventual adoption and use of a new technology by the farmers and their employees. To connect the initial and final stages required a variety of educational, advisory, and communications systems involving considerable energy, expertise, and expenditure, and the efforts of large numbers of often highly trained workers. This paper seeks to explore the dimensions of this system in the United Kingdom and to consider its impact and efficiency. Was it an effectively organised network for producing rapid innovation and adoption, or a costly and bureaucratic appendage of the agricultural industry?

Participants

Brassley, Paul
Paul Brassley is a visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter, UK. Since 2009 he has been working there on a project to investigate the process of technical change in English agriculture between 1935 and 1985. He has previously produced studies on rural issues in the Second World War, the interwar period, and the late nineteenth century. His most recent book (edited with Yves Segers and Leen Van Molle) is War, Agriculture and Food: rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s (Routledge, 2012).

Cabo Villaverde, Miguel
Miguel Cabo Villaverde is Lecturer at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain). He has co-chaired the Rural History network within the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) in 2002, 2004 and 2006. His main fields of interest are associations and collective action in the rural world, Spanish political history between 1874 and the Franco dictatorship, and nation-building processes. He has written a number of articles and books on these topics.

Fernández Prieto, Lourenzo
Professor Lourenzo Fernández Prieto is a member of the HISTAGRA Research Group, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. He published about technological innovation in agriculture (1992): Labregos con ciencia. Estado sociedade e innovación tecnolóxica na agricultura galega (1850-1939); about the Spanish state innovation system (2007): El apagón tecnológico del franquismo, and various papers about rural society changes in journals such as Historia Agraria, Studia Historica, Ayer, Historia Social, Recerques, Grial,... Preparing Agriculture in the age of Fascism, with Juan Pan-Montojo and Miguel Cabo.

Lanero Táboas, Daniel
Daniel Lanero got his PhD in History at the University of Santiago de Compostela. He is currently postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Contemporary of the University of Santiago and Scientific Manager of HISTAGRA research Group. His fields of

interest are Agrarian History and Social History of the Rural world from a comparative perspective, focusing on the Francoist dictatorship and the early years of the Democratic period. He has been invited researcher at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais of the University of Lisbon, the University of Bologna and the London School of Economics and Visiting fellow at King’s College London. He has written or edited an ample number of publications in both Spanish and international journals and publishing houses.

Segers, Yves
Yves Segers is professor of rural history and director of the Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History at the University of Leuven, and professor of Economic History at Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel (HUB). His research focuses on agricultural and rural history in Belgium and Europe since 1750 and the development of food systems.

Soto Fernandez, David
David Soto holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the University of Santiago de Compostela with a thesis entitled “Productive transformations in contemporary Galician agriculture. From organic agriculture to the green revolution”. In 2007 he became Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the University Pablo de Olavide of Seville. His main research focuses on the analysis of Agrarian History from the environmental perspective. His work has focused on the study of sustainability of agricultural systems and evolution of environmental conflicts.

Van Molle, Leen
Leen Van Molle is full professor of social history at the University of Leuven, Department of History, research group MoSa (Modernity & Society 1800-2000). She is chair person of the Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History, University of Leuven. Her research focuses on Belgian and comparative social history of Europe from 1800 to the present, especially rural history, the rural-urban divide, the construction of social identities, co-operative saving and lending, gender and the methodology of oral history. In 2005 she was visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia).