

Call for papers for the Workshop in Rome Spring 2008

“Property rights to land, social structures, environment and sustainable development”

COST action A35, PROGRESSORE - Workgroup 1 (Landed Property)

In recent decades, interest in the interaction between man and environment has been growing, also because of acute environmental problems. Historical research can help analyzing these problems and clarifying their causes. Research into economic and social history has put forward property rights – particularly rights to land - as a main constituent of social structure and a main determinant of the development of rural economy and society. Since social relations to a large extent determined the use and formation of the land, the cultural landscape and the environment, property rights to land formed an important factor in the interaction between man and environment. This workshop aims to systematically investigate the link between these elements, in order to better understand their mutual interaction.

This workshop will deal with the mutual interaction between property rights to land and environmental development, investigating this interaction in a dual way:

- how did and does the environment, and the way it is socially perceived, influence the formulation of property rights to land and their social management?
- how did and does the specific organization of these rights, i.e. their formulation and their social management, affect the environment, both in a positive and a negative way?

The particular formulation of property rights could encourage reclamation or embankment or the formation of varied farming landscapes, thus stimulating a positive development. On the other hand, the particular formulation and its social management could, and can, also lead to deforestation, erosion and have negative environmental consequences, thus eroding the basis for sustainable development, that is - in our definition, the possibilities for creating social agro-systems which allow, or reversely do not allow, for the very same systems to be perpetuated or to further develop without endangering or negatively affecting the basis for a balance between rural economic development and environment.

This approach will thus allow us to better understand the human role in environmental change as well as deterioration, and to judge how specific property regimes affect the possibilities for sustainable development.

Delimitation

The workshop will deal with the pre-industrial and industrial periods, roughly from the 11th to century up to the present. It is not assumed on beforehand that the pre-industrial and industrial periods show fundamental differences in this respect; rather the workshop will question this assumed difference and investigate continuities.

The workshop will concentrate on long-term developments, with a preference for comparative analysis. Although it is evident that the papers can be focused on local case

studies, and use the results of empirical research, all papers must place the results in the light of longer term developments and be linked up with the issue of the possibilities for sustainable development.

Linking up with the other workshops of Workgroup 1, the workshop will concentrate on land, i.e. on property rights to land and environmental changes in land, leaving out property rights to and pollution of water and air, for instance. Also, the workshop will concentrate on the rural, agrarian economy, leaving out disturbances in the environmental equilibrium in an urban setting.

Possible topics

Specific topics to be addressed are:

- the role of soil and landscape in the choice and formulation of various property arrangements
- the role of water management needs (control, drainage or irrigation) in the choice and formulation of various property arrangements
- the role of physical environmental problems in the changes of property rights to land, e.g. in coastal areas due to compression of peat or rising water tables, in mountain areas due to climatic changes
- the role of property rights and their social management in reclamations, embankments
- the role of common rights on land and communal organization in ecological sustainability
- the role of property rights and their social management in systematic deforestation, erosion, salinization, soil exhaustion and the emergence of sand-drifting
- the role of property rights to land in determining the effects of peat-winning and mining on the sustainability of agriculture
- the role of property rights and their social management in fundamental changes of the landscapes, such as enclosures, 'bocage' and land re-allotments, and vice versa

Practicalities

This will be the last of three conferences to be held by the Working group 1 on the historical dimensions of "Landed property", operating within the wider framework of the COST action for the study of European rural societies Progressore (COST action A 35). The conference will be co-sponsored by CORN.

The organizers of the workshop invite all people interested in presenting a paper on these topics, within the chosen framework, to submit an abstract of the paper. Papers will be especially welcome that present some or all of these characteristics:

- Comparative outlook;
- Analysis of long term processes;
- Empirically grounded contribution to more general issues or even theoretical debates.

Up to 12 papers will be selected according to standard patterns of academic quality and relevance to the topic, taking into account geographical representation in compliance with COST rules, as well as a balanced distribution of topics over the medieval, early modern

and modern periods. The organizers especially welcome papers on southern and eastern Europe.

The deadline for proposals is 1st of November 2007

Location: Belgian Institute (Academia Belgica) in Rome
Via Omero, Roma, Italy

Date: 22 - 24 May 2008

Thursday 22th: 15 h-19.30h opening and first sessions

Friday 23th: 10h-19.30h sessions

Saturday 24th 9.30 h- 13.30h. sessions and closing

Note: The participants are expected to stay two nights on the expenses of COST and CORN, namely Thursday and Friday night.

Organizers: Erik Thoen (Universiteit Gent, Belgium) &
Bas van Bavel (Universiteit Utrecht, the Netherlands)