

third Workshop of Working Group 2– The management of rural land

CALL FOR PAPERS

“Production and productivity in European agriculture in a historical context”

Lund, Sweden,

June 13-14, 2008

This workshop on rural management of land will focus on levels of agricultural production and productivity, as well as causes for change in these levels. Within this part of the COST-action, two earlier workshops have been held. The first one dealt with the impact of markets and commercialisation on the management of land, while the second workshop dealt with the management itself, focusing on specialisation in production. Following this, the third workshop will take the final step and estimate if, and how much, economic and institutional changes together with natural conditions, affecting the management of land, resulted in changes in production and productivity. In this way we make possible as well causal explanations of the development of production in agriculture, as cross-country comparisons of this development.

A proposed model of explanation is that basic factors affect the way land is managed and thereby the level of production. These basic factors consist of natural conditions such as climate, topography and soil conditions. There are also economic and institutional factors affecting land management, e.g. traditions, inheritance systems, property rights, proximity to urban centres, population density, transport costs and trade restrictions. Together these factors affect farm sizes, technology, choice of crops and degree of specialisation. Hence, changes in the basic factors create incentives for altered management which eventually would lead to changes in production and productivity.

Estimating historical production is in most cases a complex task. Researchers have used different methods and different sources and still the production development before the 20th century is highly uncertain for most countries and regions. One example of this is the extensive research in progress on British agricultural productivity, from the high Middle Ages until the 19th century that so far has left us with interesting but, to a great extent, contradictory results. One aim of the workshop is to present estimates of production and productivity from different parts of Europe.

Moreover, in order to explain variation in production and long term growth we have to consider the development of technology and farming methods, but also the broad rural context and its connections to markets and urban life. A number of questions regarding development of agricultural production and productivity must therefore be asked:

- What role did cultural context and traditions play in the management of land, and thus for the development of production? Has local conditions outplayed its role and, if so, how, and when, did the transformation to universal seeds, techniques and management of land take place?
- How profitable were different forms of land management? Were there economies of scale in pre-industrial agriculture?
- What kind of institutions and institutional settings promoted growth and which ones were obstacles to growth?
- How does specialisation and diversification affect growth in production and productivity?
- What was the role of the markets and how did peasants react to price incentives?

The call for papers is open for researchers in all disciplinary fields interested in this specific topic. The workshop covers the period from the high Middle Ages to the present day for all parts of Europe, and regional empirical analysis or comparative studies of regions are preferred. The workshop will consist of about 16 papers and paper-givers are expected to send in proposals (abstracts) to the co-ordinators via e-mail no later than *December 15th, 2007*. Travel and accommodation for the selected participants will be financed by the COST-programme of the European Science Foundation. The workshop will generate one volume in a series of volumes focusing on the European rural society.

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