

COST action A 35 Progressore
Programme for the Study of European Rural Societies

With the support of CORN (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area),
CNRS GDR 2912 (Sociétés Rurales Européennes),
Centre de Recerca d'Història Rural de la Universitat de Girona (projet
MEC:HUM2005-04731),
FCSH-UNL (Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas - Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

Second Workshop of Working Group 1 – Landed property

Call for papers

Social Embeddedness of Property Rights to Land in Europe

Lisbon, Universidade Nova de Lisbon

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (FCSH-UNL)

June 1-3 2007

Co-Ordinators:

Rosa Congost (Universitat de Girona)

Rui Santos (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Institute of Historical Sociology)

COST is an intergovernmental European framework for international cooperation between nationally funded research activities. COST is sponsoring a series of conferences in the framework of the 'Project for the study of European rural societies' (PROGRESSORE: COST action A 35).

This workshop will focus on the social use of juridical and customary institutions defining property rights and legitimate ways to allocate and exchange them, focussing especially on social change in the appropriation of land, brought about by:

- *Changes in the ways existing institutions were used by social actors and groups:* How did social relations and agency reshape the allocation effects of stable juridical and customary frameworks of property rights? By which actors and groups (e.g. status and occupational groups, social classes, urban vs. rural groups, gender)? By what means and channels (e.g. changes in market participation, in inheritance practices, in the appropriation and uses of communal land)? With what consequences in the stratification of rural societies?
- *Juridical-political changes in property rights and allocation procedures* (e.g. agrarian reforms, inheritance law reforms, market reforms): What changes? How, by whom and with what objectives were they put in place? How did they alter the existing structure of property rights and their distribution? Which actors and groups

took advantage of them and by what means? With what consequences in the stratification of rural societies?

We aim to bring together research dealing with these subjects in concrete historical European contexts, from the Middle Ages to the present day.

The call for papers is open to research in all disciplinary fields, provided that papers contribute to the historical understanding of change in European rural societies and its social and economic outcomes (see [keynote text](#) below for more detailed definitions).

Papers will be especially welcome that present some or all of these characteristics:

- Comparative outlook;
- Analysis of long term processes in the social use of property rights;
- Analysis of transitional processes in the allocation and appropriation of property rights, such as agrarian reforms, juridical framework changes, contractual changes, changes brought about by EU policies, and post-socialist transitions;
- Empirically grounded contribution to theoretical debate.

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.

Working languages: English and French. Final papers written in either language will be accompanied by detailed abstracts in both languages. Presentation and discussion will take place in either language.

Submission dates:

November 30, 2006: deadline for abstracts (200-500 words, in English or French)

January 31, 2007: selection of papers by the scientific board

April 30, 2007: deadline for full conference papers (7,500-10,000 words, in English or French as first language) and final abstracts in both languages (1,000-1,500 words)

June 1-3, 2007: Workshop in Lisbon, FCSH-UNL

Please send proposed title and abstract to:

proprirights07@gmail.com

Scientific board:

Gérard Béaur, Jean-Michel Chevet, Eric Thoen, Bas van Bavel, Matts Morell, Phillipp Schofield, Richard Hoyle, Karsten Rasmussen, Rosa Congost, Rui Santos

Travel and accommodation:

Travel and accommodation costs will be reimbursed for accepted communicants from participant countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom), according to COST rules. Because of budget constraints, **please let us know if your home university or research centre can take charge of your travel costs.**

Whatever their juridical definition, the real contents and outcomes of property rights, contracts and allocation institutions such as real-estate and lease markets, inheritance systems, etc. depend on social relations and strategies that appropriate them and may redefine their outcomes in different ways.

Historical literature is rife with examples, both of existing frameworks of property rights and their allocation being used to bring about real social change in the appropriation of land (e.g. emergent strata within rural communities, urban investors, commercial groups, agro-industry corporations), and of changes in the institutional frameworks (e.g. agrarian reforms redistributing, collectivising or de-collectivising land property, law reforms abolishing or instating types of contracts and property rights, market reforms facilitating, hindering or prohibiting specific kinds of transactions, inheritance law reforms changing the rules for intergenerational allocation of land, political restrictions to land use for market regulation or environmental purposes) leading to new social appropriations of land, or to strategies to reproduce prevailing appropriations within the changed frameworks. Such examples can be drawn from virtually every period in history and all across the European space, from seigniorial to EU policies, from enclosure acts to socialist revolutions and post-socialist transitions.

The aim of the workshop is to bring together different theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, which can contribute to a systematic understanding of the social embeddedness of property rights to land, of the ways these and their social appropriations have changed in European history, and with what social outcomes, from the Middle Ages to the present. The problems to be addressed can be subsumed under two broad sets questions:

- 1) *To what extent are existing property rights frameworks barriers to social and economic change, and to what extent are they elastic to such change? How does social change reshape the workings and the functions of existing property rights and of the institutions that allocate them? Which social actors or groups are involved in changing the appropriation of existing property rights, with what strategies and to what effects?*
- 2) *How do changes in the institutional frameworks of property rights and their allocation impact on social change? How and by whom are the new sets of property rights and / or the new rules for their allocation appropriated, and to what purpose? What strategies are put in place in rural societies to cope with such changes, either*

leveraging their social change potential or reproducing prevailing structures within the new frameworks?

As working definitions, we assume that property consists of socially acknowledged bundles of rights to perform actions using resources; that rights over one resource are divisible in different bundles and by different owners; and that contracts (sale, rental, etc.) are transactions of bundles of property rights, varying in the range of transferred rights and the duration for which they are transferred. Concerning land, while their specific contents may vary widely, the juridical forms of these bundles of rights can be typified in broad categories, e.g. full ownership, emphyteusis, lease tenancy, etc. According to the kind of actor who detains the rights, property may be individual, familial, communal, corporate, seigniorial, etc. These rights are institutionalised in juridical and / or customary frameworks that enshrine their definitions, contents and restrictions imposed on them. Restrictions to property rights can be imposed not only by law and the state, but also by custom and by other agents endowed with social power to redefine the *de facto* contents of rights, either by imposing (e.g. restrictions on the allowed uses of land, production quotas) or lifting them (e.g. by changing land uses against previous customary or legal bans). Such restrictions may also be transacted, as e.g. in the State attributing subsidies to farmers for giving up the use of land for specified crops.

Property rights circulate between individual or collective actors, distributing entitlements to the use of resources throughout society by way of institutional devices regulating their allocation. These institutions are diversified (e.g. real estate or lease markets, inter-family transfers such as dowries and inheritance, reciprocity systems, political redistribution systems, rules of participation for individuals or families in collective property, etc). Diverse allocation channels may interfere with each other (e.g. family norms and devolution systems may interact with market transfers, political redistribution may create new markets, collectivisation may entail substitutes for intergenerational transfers, etc.)

Alongside the juridical and institutional definitions of property rights and allocation devices, one must therefore ask the question of how they are socially appropriated, that is, how social actors and groups use them for their purposes. The same set of rules may well generate different games and outcomes if new players emerge, or if existing players construe their stakes and moves differently. Conversely, changes in the rules may create new games, but the outcomes will be different according to who the players are, their stakes, their resources and strategies.

Because of its very complexity, the interplay of property rights and allocation institutions with social structures in rural societies – indeed with social structures at large – will not be amenable to simple answers, rather it poses an extremely interesting field of questions concerning social change in the countryside, with wide implications on how rural societies evolved, what they are today and what their futures will be.

Rosa Congost
Rui Santos