

Working Group 4. State and rural societies

The members of the Working Group 4 have met in the morning and afternoon of Tuesday, June 28. They have also exchanged e-mails in the subsequent days and finalized the topics and dates of their future workgroup meetings (hereafter called workshops).

The members of the Working Group 4 core are : Giuliana Baggioli (Italy), Leo Gronberg (Finland), Jozsef Kovacs (Hungary), Socrates Petmezas (Greece), Georg Fertig (Germany) and Nadine Vivier (France). Peter Moser (Switzerland) was unable to attend, but formally expressed his will to actively join the group.

All members of the WG4 have agreed that this WG should give priority to the contemporary period of heavy and sustained intervention of States and International Institutions in the rural societies and in the agricultural markets. It will thus link our common research project with the more urgent practical needs of the European Instances that financed our COST A35 program. This will be of course done *without any compromise* with the purely academic and scientific nature of our common research project.

Our subject of interest is the **“State and rural societies : Intervention and interaction”** [provisional title]. We have adopted a common question set and general outline that will be addressed by the three successive workshops. Andreas Süter (University of Bielefeld, Germany), Nadine Vivier (Le Mans University, France) and Peter Moser (Leiter Archiv fuer Agrargeschichte-Bern, Switzerland) will organize, in their turn, these workshops on :

- 1) the modern era (16th to the early 19th century) [**A.Suter, September 2006**],
- 2) the early contemporary period (late 18th - early 20th) [**N.Vivier 2007**] and
- 3) the 20th century (since the interwar period) [**P.Moser 2008**].

Every organiser will specify the aspects of this complex relationship that the workshop he/she organises will cover in detail and in priority, although they are all part of a common research project. The workshops will give emphasis on the common methodology and questionnaire (on the “problematique”) about the rationale, intentions, reaction to and impact of State (and institutional) intervention in the rural world from the time of the rise of centralized state apparatuses to the mature industrial era in Europe. The general questionnaire will thus be “operationalized” for each period in a different way but the overarching “problematique” will remain the same in all three workshops. The exact titles and call of papers for each one of the three workshops will be specified later.

In all workshop we intend to examine both the theoretical framework(s) and the practical means by which the expanding States and Institutions (both political and “scientific”) in Modern Europe have apprehended the enviroing rural societies and economies, assessed their character and dynamics, projected the “necessary” and inevitable trajectory towards modernization. The large variety of means by which Institutions have named, mapped, counted, registered the countryside and its population will be examined and put in perspective. In each national (or regional) example some of the means (cadastre, political arithmetic & statistical censuses, centralized systems of rational administrative questionnaires and descriptions, etc.) had more importance than others. The diffusion of scientific knowledge and cultural techniques or implements and machines through agricultural schools and model farms (or even the example of large “progressive” landowners”) must be included in the means of institutional intervention into the rural societies. Land reforms and land amelioration projects through public (and/or private) investment were other means of public intervention. In a later age fiscal incentives, preferential tariffs, cheap credit and specific market intervention were privileged means of intervention.

These institutional attempts to map and evaluate the (culturally alien) rural world were commanded both by the “paternalistic” and benevolent concern to *understand* and *civilize/modernize* the (“underdeveloped”) rural hinterland and by the clear political will to domesticate the peasantry and impose/reproduce the political-seigniorial and urban-commercial domination upon it. The local rural societies have

not been solely the passive recipients of these attention and dominating initiative of the observing Institutions and power centres. They (as communal entities or as particular social classes, groups of interest and local power-holding instances) have responded and reacted, trying to keep in check or neutralize the intervention of the external power institutions and, even, to use it for their own sake and private or collective interests.

Of course the local, regional and national variations in the European continent impose a comparative approach, based on this general outline, to understand regional variation of the final targets and operational means which the “statal” (national and international) institutions used to intervene in peasant (rural) societies. The differentiating factors in each national/regional case will be pinpointed and the historical roots of the “patterns” of public intervention (and even of private intervention, as a counter point to the public one) exposed. The local social groups, power constellations and institutions exerted their role and gave infinite variations in this never ending confrontation/interaction between state and peasant society. The long-term outcome of this confrontation/ interaction between “statal” institutions, social classes and peasant societies will be evaluated and (hopefully) explained or interpreted.

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