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 generations and families had unequal access to locally and externally acquired knowledge, as well as unequal abilities to produce and acquire new knowledge through formal and informal networks such as learning by doing, schools, extension programmes, media, etc. These two sessions, organised under the same umbrella, aim at unravelling the development of what can be called “cultural 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 resulting from the interventions of governments, scientists and commercial firms resulted 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, film, 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 Brasley (University of Exeter), Yves Segers and Leon Van Molle (University of Leuven), Daniel Lanero and Lourenço Fernández Prieto (University of Santiago de Compostela), in cooperation with the CORIN network.

Chair: Brasley, Paul, University of Exeter, UK


10.1.1. Agricultural literature in Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon countries c. 1700-1800

Myrdal, Janken, Section of Agrarian History, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

This paper presents statistics on the annual publication of agricultural literature in Scandinavia (Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark, Norway, Sweden-Finland, Iceland) and in Anglo-Saxon countries (England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, North America) during the 18th century. Two different types of databases are used. One includes every article based on two bibliographies for the Danish and Swedish kingdoms of the 18th century. These bibliographies are among the most extensive we have from Europe. The second database covers books on agriculture: the English Short Title Catalogue compared with the catalogue of the Swedish Royal Library. The number of articles (in Sweden) is ten times as large as the number of books, and the distribution according to subjects and over time somewhat different. Theoretically this investigation will be related to Jan Luiten van Zanden’s concept “knowledge economy” (Zanden: The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution, 2009). Van Zanden uses overall numbers for literature. The intention here is to go much more into detail for one of the most important givens in economic literature of the 18th century. The topics that are discussed in this publications will be analysed: when was plowing on the agenda; when did manure come into the focus of the discussion, etc? A preliminary discussion about the writers will also be made, and it possible which audience they tried to reach. As much of the literature was produced in learned societies, the question of “knowledge networks” is essential.

10.1.2. Julien Gabriel Sugi’s agrarian knowledge

Hermont, Laurent, EHES-CRH, France

The aim of this paper is to define the different levels of knowledge of a farmer of the Bassein Parissien in the first half of the nineteenth century. Julien Gabriel Sugi was married in Valentine Savigne Chartier on June 21, 1830. After his marriage, he kept a diary for almost 30 years. The material is quite confusing and reflects the poor level of knowledge of Julien Gabriel. Despite this poor level, the diary is very interesting for two reasons. First, there are very few sources like this in the North of France during the first half of the nineteenth century. Second, Julien reported a lot of information at a variety of levels. Some of these levels could reveal links with “savant knowledge” while others were related with “popular knowledge”, etc. It seems that Julien quoted in his diary the information he collected from various sources as he read them. Furthermore, it is not possible to know exactly the schooling of Julien. In the first part of the paper we will try to better understand the social and economic background of Julien. In the second part we will determine the type of sources (religious, schooling, agronomic, popular, etc.) from which Julien gained his knowledge, and we will show that this diary is probably a way by which his knowledge has been spread.

10.1.3. Learning to farm: the diffusion of the agronomical knowledge in the Eastern Lombardy from the Napoleonic age to the WWI

Tedeschi, Paolo, University of Milan Bicocca, Italy

The paper illustrates how the diffusion of agrarian knowledge in the Eastern Lombardy during the first half of the 19th century helped the development of production and yields in the countryside. Initially the diffusion of knowledge in agronomics and the regulation of agricultural sciences and technologies were based on the results of new experiments and studies made moreover by nobles and priests. Then new agrarian schools were founded for training of a new class of peasants having the knowledge to grow the lands of use through the use of modern innovations (as agronomic machines, chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds). At the end of the 19th century the Cattedra Ambulante was created too: it organized lectures, courses, evening classes, trainings and also some special itinerant offices where farmers and breeders received information and advice about all innovations in agronomics and zootechnics. The knowledge network concerning the use of these innovations also promoted the diffusion of agricultural machines and the use of cooperatives in the countryside. The assemblies and conferences organized for their members were the occasion for illustrating the productive system and agrarian machines. Furthermore, the cooperatives allowed peasants to buy seeds and fertilizers at a cheap price and they had the money for buying or renting new seeders, reapers, ploughing machines, etc. The knowledge network concerning agronomics gave information on innovations and it created the conditions for a better agricultural knowledge in the countryside: learning to improve farming and so crops and the quality of rural life.

10.1.4. The contribution of human capital to agricultural growth in Germany, 1870-1939. Research strategy

Albers, Hakon, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany

This research explores the importance of human capital for agricultural growth in Germany 1870-1939, and aims at contributing to the discussion on the shift towards sustained growth. During the 1800-1810, agricultural production stagnated due to a lack of agricultural technology. Changing agricultural knowledge and techniques were one of the principal reasons for the increase in agricultural output that occurred since the eighteenth century. Theoretically this investigation will be related to Jan Luiten van Zanden’s concept “knowledge economy” (Zanden: The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution, 2009). Van Zanden uses overall numbers for literature. The intention here is to go much more into detail for one of the most important givens in economic literature of the 18th century. The topics that are discussed in this publications will be analysed: when was plowing on the agenda; when did manure come into the focus of the discussion, etc? A preliminary discussion about the writers will also be made, and it possible which audience they tried to reach. As much of the literature was produced in learned societies, the question of “knowledge networks” is essential. A variable measuring human capital, e.g. number of pupils per county, shall be refined using weights deduced from analysis of taught knowledge.