

8.3. Rural history and „reenactment history“: Challenges, questions, opportunities. Part II: Rural development and oral history projects

Panel organiser: Sayre, Laura, National Institute for Agronomic Research, France

This panel brings together historians and others interested in “agricultural history reenactment” — defined here as projects and situations in which various aspects of agricultural heritage are explored, invoked or put to use for specific contemporary ends. Living history farms and other kinds of agricultural museums; “protected geographical indications” attached to specific foods and modes of production (Gruyère cheese, Welsh beef); antique tractor clubs and other enthusiasts’ groups, competitions and festivals; the preservation of traditional crop varieties and livestock breeds with an eye to future agricultural resilience; the reconstruction of traditional agricultural landscape systems within international rural development efforts; reality television series focused on traditional foods and farming practices — all these and more testify to the enduring appeal of at least certain elements of agricultural history for both popular and scholarly constituencies. Critical analysis of these phenomena, however, is spread across a variety of academic fields (public history, rural sociology, anthropology, archaeology, media studies), while the idea of “reenactment history” remains marginal within the academy, seemingly tainted by its association with popular entertainment. This panel proposes to rehabilitate a notion of agricultural history reenactment as a unifying framework for considering a wide variety of contemporary (or indeed historical) efforts to come to terms with, reinterpret or otherwise make use of the rural and agricultural past as a means of contending with the present (and future) of food and farming. As such, it will engage directly with the conference’s aim to discuss the future of rural history in an increasingly urbanized world: agricultural history reenactment appears to gain in popularity as the number of people directly engaged in agriculture falls, an inverse correlation that raises the stakes for historical integrity within reenactment projects. Questions to be addressed include: Why is agricultural history reenactment at once so popular and yet so curiously overlooked? What are its strengths and limitations as a means of constructing, contesting and conveying historical information? What role does agricultural history reenactment play in the maintenance of national and regional identities rooted in rural images, activities and landscapes?

Chair: Sayre, Laura, National Institute for Agronomic Research, France

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 1100 – 1300 // Session 8 – Room A-122

8.3.1. Agro-sylvo-pastoralism in Albania: From past to present

Bernard, Claire, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier, France

Lerin, François, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier, France

Agro-sylvo-pastoralism in the Balkan countries, and especially in Albania, is a crucial issue for regional rural development, agricultural policy and biodiversity conservation. These Mediterranean countries once possessed large pastoral resources and low productivity forests. Sustainable use of these resources and the maintenance of traditional agrarian systems are under pressure due to shifts toward market-oriented agriculture, more intensive modes of production and rural depopulation, in turn leading to the abandonment of land and pastoral practices, afforestation and a loss of agro-biodiversity. In Albania, pastoral systems are disappearing after a period of profound change linked to agricultural modernisation under the communist regime. Nevertheless, a variety of fragmentary agro-sylvo-pastoral systems survive. Our paper makes an evaluation of the literature on pastoralism in Albania as part of a larger project seeking to identify and develop agro-biodiversity products in Albania. An understanding of landscape variations in association with social and political history (including land-use policies) enables a broader view of contemporary Albania’s agro-sylvo-pastoral activities. Our goal is to use historical sources to identify the remaining attributes, tangible and intangible, of earlier agro-sylvo-pastoral systems now embedded in new contexts. Recognition of the cultural origins of agro-biodiversity, based on historical studies, may encourage the use of alternative approaches to biodiversity conservation, including the post-modern reinvention of traditional land management activities linked to specific products.

8.3.2. Meadows and pastures in the Italian Alps: New opportunities for traditional agricultural systems

Lorenzini, Claudio, University of Udine, Italy

Ambrosoli, Mauro, University of Udine, Italy

Agricultural changes in Italy during the 20th century have been studied from a variety of research perspectives, including those of cultural, economic, social and environmental history. Still, these studies rarely consider the “reenactment” phenomena currently



at work within Italian agricultural production. This paper seeks to analyze the continuous and discontinuous features of livestock management systems and transhumance in the Italian Alps. Summer Alpine pasture is one of the most peculiar and ancient forms of transhumance, and is still practiced throughout the Alpine space, particularly for cows. At the same time, dairy farm management in this region has seen remarkable changes in recent decades, including a shift toward artisanal cheese production in which producers seek to provide high-quality products in combination with the tourist attractions of the mountains. The growing interest among young people in Alpine dairying is both a cause and a consequence of these changes: today, shepherding is for many people a choice in the face of economic crisis, instead of a constraint, as it was in the past. Contemporary transformations have been studied not so much by historians as from other perspectives, including anthropology and documentary filmmaking. The outcome is a “constructed” image of the Alps and of the shepherd’s work, with roots in ancient practices, one of the reasons claimed for the choices of young shepherds. These transformations find references and influences both in the establishment of ethnographic museums in the Alps and in critical consumers’ movements such as Slow Food.

8.3.3. „Rude, rough and lawless“: Reinterpreting the field woman’s story through scholarly research and performance art

Hunt, Abigail, University Centre Peterborough, UK

Martin, Nicola, University Centre Peterborough, UK

Blair, Annie, University Centre Peterborough, UK

In November 2012 we were approached by an Education Officer at the East of England Showground looking for contributors to an educational program titled ‘Grow your own Potatoes’. The program will offer Peterborough primary school children the opportunity to find out where the potatoes they eat come from, how they are grown and harvested, and how they are processed in local factories. We proposed a live performance exploring women’s roles in the growing and harvesting of potato crops, based on historical

research carried out by Abi Hunt for her doctoral thesis. The thesis argued that women working in agricultural gangs during the 19th and 20th centuries, including those working the Lincolnshire potato crops, were a “hidden workforce”, necessary to the agricultural economy but largely ignored due to disapproval of physical labor in mixed-sex groups. As a result, female gang workers’ stories went largely unrecorded and certain assumptions about their behavior and character became an accepted historical narrative. The research sought to address this issue through the use of non-traditional approaches to historical research. The performance challenges traditional ideas about female agricultural gang workers, seeking to communicate this new historical narrative to primary school children. Our paper will reflect on this experience, including: 1) background on the historical research; 2) reflections on the creative process of turning historical writing into an engaging performance; 3) an examination of the impact of the performance on the audience’s perception of the past.

8.3.4. Landscape and Youth: An oral history project on local knowledge and landscape

Strohmeier, Gerhard, Alps-Adria University Klagenfurt, Austria

Sieber, Andrea, Alps-Adria University Klagenfurt, Austria

“Landscape and Youth” focuses on the relationship between local knowledge and landscape with regard to the cultivation and manufacturing of flax in the Lesachtal, Austria. Very little traditional knowledge about flax has been documented in written form in this area, although flax was an important element of subsistence farming here up until the 1960s. Remnants of this form of land use are still visible today, such as the Brechlstube and the oil mill in Maria Luggau. Oral history interviews offer a way to resituate these landscape elements within the local cultural history of the Lesachtal. This paper describes a project in which students from the Neue Mittelschule Lesachtal and the HLW Hermagor were instructed in oral history techniques, and then interviewed older local inhabitants about the traditional cultivation and processing of flax and its significance in daily rural life. The interviews were used to reconstruct the spatio-temporal dynamics of land use and its socio-economic context. The students also used the interviews to create self-guided audio tours for the region, which provide an acoustic archive of hands-on agricultural know-how with regard to flax, support further socio-scientific investigation of the landscape and have practical value for locals and tourists. A documentary film has also been produced. Flax is now cultivated at the local monastery garden and crafting techniques have been revitalised for demonstration at the Brechlstube. The resulting interactions between humans and landscape will be analysed with regard to cultural and group-specific meaning in the context of place-identity.

Participants

Ambrosoli, Mauro

Mauro Ambrosoli is a professor of modern history at the University of Udine, where he was also director of the history department from 2001 to 2011. He is the author of *The Wild and the Sown: Botany and Agriculture in Western Europe, 1350 to 1850* (1997), among many other publications. His research has ranged from textile markets in early modern Piedmont to political and scientific networks in the Napoleonic era. More recently he has been studying agricultural modernization, with particular attention to the transformation of European commons and the spread of urban green belt orchards and commercial vegetable gardens.

Bernard, Claire

Claire Bernard holds degrees from the Paris School of International Affairs (2009) and AgroParisTech (2011), and is currently working on a PhD in Environmental Management, with a focus on biodiversity conservation and enhancement. Her intervention-research on a development project in Northern Albania, funded by the French Global Environmental Facility, seeks to understand what strategic actions are needed to support environmentally sound development in disadvantaged areas.

Blair, Annie

Annie Blair has been a Performing Arts university lecturer. She gained a first-class Honours degree from Anglia Ruskin University, and then completed an MA in Research in Education with the Institute for Education at Warwick University in 2011. In 2006 she spent a year as a specialist theatre workshop practitioner for the Peterborough and Fenland MIND charity, and in recent years has undertaken drama project work for the National Health Service and other institutions. Her interests include student engagement, life-long learning, community theatre, theatre-in-education, and oral story-telling.

Hunt, Abigail

Abigail Hunt has a degree in Archaeology from the University of Liverpool, a Post Graduate Diploma in Heritage Studies from Nottingham Trent University, and a PGCE from the University of Northampton. She submitted her PhD thesis to the University of Lincoln in January 2013. Abigail Hunt worked in museums and heritage tourism for eight years, specializing in project management before joining the University Centre Peterborough five years ago. She is currently the Higher Education Manager at the Centre. Her research areas are modern agricultural history and the teaching of transferable skills in both the learning environment and the workplace.

Lerin, François

François Lerin is a social scientist and senior scientific administrator with the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier, a division of the Centre International de Hautes Études Agronomiques Méditerranéennes. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Paris X-Nanterre. His primary research topic is the multi-scale analysis of international agro-environmental programs and local implementation contexts, with a focus on pastoralism and agro-biodiversity. He has conducted field work in the Balkan countries and the south of France, and is currently coordinator of the BiodivBalkans project.

Lorenzini, Claudio

Claudio Lorenzini is a researcher in Early Modern History at the University of Udine, where he previously received a degree in Cultural Heritage Preservation (with a thesis in cultural anthropology) and a PhD in history (with a thesis on the timber trade in the western Alps during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). In 2006-07 he was a field researcher with the “Kinship and Social Security” project coordinated by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology; in 2008, he participated in the National Register of Historical Rural Landscapes project coordinated by the University of Florence.

Sayre, Laura

Laura Sayre is a post-doctoral fellow at the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Science for Action and Development Department, based in Dijon, France. She holds a PhD in English from Princeton University, where her dissertation, *Farming by the Book: British Georgic in Prose and Practice, 1697-1820*, a study of eighteenth-century British agricultural writing, was awarded the Agricultural History Society’s Gilbert C. Fite Award. She is the co-editor of *Fields of Learning: The Student Farm Movement in North America* (2011), and is currently working on an edited book on agricultural reenactment history.

Strohmeier, Gerhard

Gerhard Strohmeier is a regional and urban sociologist and vice-director of the Institute of Intervention Research and Cultural Sustainability at Alps-Adria University Klagenfurt in Vienna. From 2002 to 2012 he was head of the Institute for City, Region and Spatial Development at Alps-Adria University Klagenfurt. He has held international fellowships in Australia, Sweden and the United States and has played a leading role in a number of major interdisciplinary research initiatives focused on cultural landscapes, including the Landscape and Youth project.