INTEGRATED RURAL ECONOMY IN EARLY MODERN WESTERN SLOVENIA

Aleksander Panjek, University of Primorska, Slovenia

ABSTRACT

The paper concentrates on the region located between the eastern Alps and the northern Adriatic that was part of the Habsburg lands in the early modern centuries, and is nowadays part of western Slovenia. It is a mountain area comprising Alpine and sub-alpine as well as Karstic environments.

A striking characteristic of the region under observation is that the early modern peasant economy structurally integrated agricultural with non-agricultural income sources, especially from trade, transport, smuggling etc. These features are comparable to peddling and the connected migration practices as sources of additional income, characteristic for the Alpine area (e.g. Fontaine, 1996), but in our case the peasants show a much larger variety of additional activities that allowed them to structurally overcome Malthusian constraints. Like other European peasant populations have been (recently) shown to do, in doing so they show a remarkable degree of economic “agency” (e.g. Sreenivasan, 2004) and even “industriousness” (de Vries, 2008). Researches on the market-oriented activities of the rural population in the Eastern Alps clearly show their tight connection with forms of credit based on land as a source of financing.

On this basis, the paper proposes the definition of “integrated rural economy” for a system characterized by a structural integration of agricultural and different non-agricultural sources of income (both from the secondary and tertiary sectors) in the rural population as a whole as well as within the peasant households (integrated peasant economy).

The paper addresses the following question: What prompted the western Slovenian peasants toward what appears to have been, as I expressed in an earlier work, a “general mobilization on the market”? And, in relation to this: “Which were the forms of market participation? The last part of the paper is dedicated to a systematization of the different activities within an integrated rural economy. In relation to these, some considerations about rural credit practice are made. The next question, which in our case is only possible to be articulated at this stage of the research, but not yet to be given an answer, is: “What is the relation between market-oriented activities and the social stratification within rural society?”
INTRODUCTION

The Slovene historiography has a relevant tradition in agrarian history. For some decades in the past century it has even monopolised a significant part of the interest towards economic (and social) history. The times as well as the characteristics of most part of the Slovene agrarian historiography were in line with the prevailing tendencies at the European level, since it coincided with the period and reflected the characteristics prevailing in the European agrarian historiography: it flourished in the Sixties until the end of the Eighties, it consisted mostly in research with a local and regional dimension as well as national overviews, it included a work with encyclopaedic approach\(^1\), while its results were mostly not suitable for a comparative approach at an international level; actually such an approach was mostly not even attempted by Slovene historians, just like elsewhere in Europe\(^2\).


In the last decades and especially years it is possible to notice a renewed interest towards agro-historical research and a switch of focus in it, since the research topics are not anymore concentrating on the “immobile” structural characters of agrarian economy and society, and on the quantitative, technological and technical aspects of agriculture facing Malthusian constraints. The most recent developments in European historiography explicitly speak about a “new rural history” that openly looks for and applies different approaches and research topics, allowing a deeper and clearer insight into rural society and economy and their inner transformations, before and during the industrialization process. Social and cultural transformations (bringing along so far relatively “hidden” economic consequences) that are not necessarily measurable with agricultural output rates, but may help explain and better understand, for example, industrialization. This renewed research focus comprehends an emphasis on the necessity of a comparative approach at an inter-regional, inter-national and also cross-border level.

Not least as a comparative contribution, in this paper I will try to apply some interpretations emerged within recent historiography, to one of the most striking, long lasting characteristics in the Slovenian agrarian history, that is the structural integration of different income sources in the rural economy, and to propose its contextualization within a European comparative perspective.

1. EXTRA-AGRARIAN RURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE SLOVENE HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

The analysed area of western Slovenia is a territory that at that time was part of the Habsburg hereditary lands and roughly coincided with the Habsburg provinces of the Duchy of Carniola (Kraška/Krain) and the County of Gorizia (Gorica/Görz), which belonged to Inner Austria (Innerösterreich).

In western Slovenia the size of peasant farms was mostly small, unless in the higher mountains, where they were comprised of large alpine meadows. In such a situation, given the meagre conditions that the karstic (from Karst) land offered to agriculture, and given the scarcity of arable land in the Alpine area, it is reasonable to suppose that the majority of the peasant population could not make its living from agriculture alone. Although detailed research on the self-sustainability of peasant farms is rather difficult to undertake, such an interpretation is supported by contemporary sources, as well as historiographical literature,

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3 THOEN, Erik, CORN: a step forward towards a ‘new rural history’. In: THOEN – VAN MOLLE, Rural History in the North Sea area, p. 33-34.
that I’ll try to sketch as follows, without any pretension of exploiting all the mentions and information existing in the literature and the primary sources.

Already J.W. Valvasor, a member of the English Royal Society, in his monumental description of the Duchy of Carniola (1689) mentioned the peasants’ need to obtain incomes from outside their farms as one of the striking economic and social characteristics of the region. As early as 1552 the provincial estates of Carniola claimed that “in particular in Carniola and Karst the peasants could not remain on their farms without trade and their transport activities”. According to Ferdo Gestrin (a renowned Slovenian economic historian), around the year 1600 “the involvement of the countryside in the market economy and the dependence of a major part of the peasant population on it was such, that the process of commercialization could not be stopped”. In proving the importance that non-agricultural income had for the rural population, it is also relevant to recall his observation that demands and complaints regarding trade and transport were a constant in all the major peasant uprisings in Slovenian lands.

Let’s now make some examples of additional activities in which the rural population of western Slovenia was engaged.

In his description of the mountain villages of the Upper Carniola (Gorenjska) and their economy in the second half of the 17th century, Valvasor reports the peasants “exploit their land at best”, while mentioning non-agricultural activities he concentrates on coal and iron mining and production. In some cases he mentions the specialization of entire villages in a particular rural industry, such as the production of sieves, all kinds of wooden flatware, or matrasses. For example in the village of Bohinjska Bistrica, that was “located among high snowy mountains” and could rely on a “small and good, but cold cultivable area”, there were “a lot of miners that dig iron mineral, or anyway find their subsistence in the mining activity”. In another village they found their living in the production of matrasses, an activity that engaged men, women and children, who went “selling their matrasses to Styria, Carinthia, and in the whole of Carniola, they go to every village market”. Another one, Bitnje, “the biggest village in Carniola, measuring a good German mile in length”, was “inhabited by manufacturers of sieves who manufacture sieves’ bottoms with horsehair, and in general in the Holy Roman Empire they are called Sieber. The same peasants also breed many beautiful horses, which they drive to be sold in Udine, in Italy”. In the villages located at the foot of the hills, in the area connecting the lowlands and valleys with the mountains, and in the surroundings of the regional capital town Ljubljana in particular, he noted there were “many carriers that use packhorses”.

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6 VALVASOR, Johann Weichard, Die Ehre des Hertzogthums Crain. Laibach – Nürnberg, 1689.
5 VALVASOR, Die Ehre, I, p. 117-121.
Let’s now move west, closer to the border with the Republic of Venice. Being a borderland, in this area smuggling was rife. Even Braudel comprehended the area between Venice and the hereditary territories of the Austrian Archdukes, and the mountains in particular, among the Mediterranean areas where “banditism” was widespread, and the area under our observation was part of it. The head of the archduke’s customs office in the Gorizia County, in 1608 reported to the Chamber in Graz that “the diverse smugglings that take place in this open land have no end, but are committed by daredevil people who, with the time, slip through armatamanu more and more, using secret practices and tricks”. Along the whole border with the Republic of Venice between the Julian Alps and the Adriatic Sea the local peasants engaged in trafficking with cattle, partly home-grown and partly bought in Carniola. In 1634 the manager of the tollhouse in Trbiž/Tarvisio wrote to the Carinthian provincial estates that the Predel-pass road was largely ‘used by the peasants and cottagers of nearby jurisdictions, with their horses so small and weak that sometimes they could barely carry three or four buckets of wine in order to find some subsistence and satisfy their overlord’. At the end of the 16th century, people from the Vipava valley and the Karst were reported to sell “the most diverse cloth” in Gorizia, while at the end of 17th century the population of the mountain areas exchanged “linen, lard, grease, iron, nails, sickles and other similar goods” for wine in villages, located in places of connection between highlands and lowlands. Another good that involved peasant transporters (and smugglers) was sea-salt, that from the Adriatic coast (Piran, Koper, Trieste, Duino) flowed towards the inland.

In this area, the activities related to trade flows leading to Trieste were particularly important for ‘numerous cottagers’ between the inland borough of Postojna and the Adriatic coast.

In brief, throughout the early-modern period, a significant part of the population of the western Slovenian countryside continued to trade their own produce and other goods on the local and neighbouring markets, carrying them on their shoulders, with donkeys, horses, and carts, establishing autonomous flows and entering middle-range ones, both legal and illegal (smuggling). Smuggling was in fact widespread, too. The concentration of peasants and cottagers active in transport was particularly noticeable in villages along main roads and

12 Near Bovec, along the Soča/Isenzo road that connected Gorizia to Carinthia.
15 For this and many other examples, see Gestrin, 1991.
in areas connecting highlands and lowlands. Apart from transport and trade it’s possible to notice their involvement in different industrial activities, too, as in some cases we have mentioned the specialization of entire villages in a particular industry, such as the production of sieves, wooden flatware, matrasses, and their engagement in iron mining or production.

This peasants’ characteristic in the Slovene area is very well known in the Slovene historiography. In the older literature it is mostly understood under the definition “peasant trade”. With good justification it is mentioned in the newer historical overviews, among which Peter Štih has recently offered one of the clearer definitions, representing a step towards a contextualisation of this phenomenon within a European frame: “The specificity of the peasants in the Slovene area was more in the fact, that they – as carriers and cart drivers, but also as middlemen-traders and craftsmen – combined their work on the farms with non-agricultural economy. It is difficult to say what part of the peasants engaged in these activities, nevertheless there’s no doubt about the fact that they were widespread. For this reason many among them were peasants to a lesser extent than the average kind of European peasants”.

2. QUANTIFYING THE EXTRA-AGRARIAN ACTIVITIES OF THE PEASANTS: AN ATTEMPT

What follows is an attempt to quantify the non-agrarian income sources of the peasants in Western Slovenia in the early modern period. The first attempt of this kind was made by the Ferdo Gestrin. Such an attempt encounters significant obstacles in the primary sources and in the existing literature, since we do not dispose of micro research on the income structure of peasant households for the analysed period, while sources on which such an analysis could base on are difficult to find, if not to identify.

Since I cannot go into a methodological digression here, I’ll point out only the following. In this area the “written culture”, accounting included, was quite to very week (not only in the rural society but even in the noblemen households) and the use of notaries and notary documents was rather rare. The same situation makes it difficult to research the credit practices, as we will see further on. Another possible source to take into account, as proposed already by Gestrin, are toll registers and tariffs – I’ve tried to use them in the past, but they are of limited use if not combined with other kind of sources, since they allow

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18 Ibidem.
to identify single names of people, for whom we may assume the rural/peasant origin, but not much more\textsuperscript{19}.

What it is possible to do at this stage of research is to trace a rough quantification on a macro level – that is at the level of single feudal manors, or more of them, basing on the structure of their rent-income, quite like Gestrin has done, but without taking into account other quantifications (state taxes, smuggling, the number of households in the whole of Slovenia), since these estimates seem too rough and unreliable to me, at least at this point of research.

I would like to point out a weakness of this method: we will base the quantification on the ratio between tributes in nature and tributes in money of the feudal manors, assuming that the peasants had to earn this money in order to be able to pay their duties in money. But the estimate we will get does not take into account (at least) the following: the additional income necessary because the peasant agrarian income was not enough to reach subsistence; the varying and growing amount of State-taxes that had to be paid; the toll tariffs that had to be paid; other possible and likely expenses that were necessary or may occur. This means that only a part of the peasants’ expenses in money are taken into account in our attempt to quantify their activity on the market, so that the quantification I will provide undoubtedly represents an underestimation.

\textit{Graph 1. An approximation of the structure of peasants’ expenses}

\textsuperscript{19} PANJEK, Über die südliche Grenze Kärntens...
Table 1. Money income in the land rent across manors in South-Western Slovenia (Alps and Karst)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manor</th>
<th>Money income in the land-rent of manors</th>
<th>Total land-rent value (in gulden)</th>
<th>Ratio between money income and total land-rent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senožeče 1615</td>
<td>235.88</td>
<td>817.37</td>
<td>28.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwarzenegg 1618</td>
<td>455.78</td>
<td>2,427.30</td>
<td>18.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socerb 1620</td>
<td>156.28</td>
<td>601.51</td>
<td>25.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duino 1637</td>
<td>1,362.45</td>
<td>3,193.94</td>
<td>42.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reifenberg 1624</td>
<td>752.67</td>
<td>3,490.66</td>
<td>21.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vipava 1624</td>
<td>1,152.91</td>
<td>4,702.94</td>
<td>24.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolmin 1633</td>
<td>2,729.31</td>
<td>5,086.07</td>
<td>53.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,845.27</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,319.79</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.69</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The calculation includes all kinds of land-tributes, corvees-labour services excluded.

Table 2. Money income compared to total rent across manors in South-Western Slovenia (Alps and Karst)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manor</th>
<th>Money income in the rent of manors</th>
<th>Total rent (in gulden)</th>
<th>Ratio between money rent and total rent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senožeče 1615</td>
<td>799.48</td>
<td>1,427.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwarzenegg 1618</td>
<td>753.28</td>
<td>3,146.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socerb 1620</td>
<td>959.40</td>
<td>1,436.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duino 1637</td>
<td>3,101.52</td>
<td>5,899.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reifenberg 1624</td>
<td>1,057.00</td>
<td>4,641.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vipava 1624</td>
<td>1,502.91</td>
<td>5,683.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolmin 1633</td>
<td>6,998.59</td>
<td>11,026.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,172.18</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,261.89</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.61</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basing on the calculation on the figures from the major feudal manors that I have analysed in the past, it is possible to conclude that the tributes in money paid by the peasants to their landlords ranged somehow between 20 to 50 %, with an average that is possible to define as one third (table 1). This means, that one third of the peasants tributes to the landlords were paid in money, money that the peasants had to find on the marked, mainly through extra-agrarian activities.

According to what I have just written above about the underestimation to which this calculation leads, we may take into consideration the ratio between the landlords’ money-incomes and the total rent of the same manors, including court fees, tolls etc. (table 2). In this case we may see that nearly one half of the value of the annual incomes of some major manors in the area was in money. Although a part of the money came from tolls and fees
paid by people who were not subjects of the manors (‘foreign’ peasants, merchants, traders etc.), the amount of the tributes in money confirms that the peasants’ activity on the market in quest for additional income was quantitatively significant.

To make a bit clearer what the amounts in money cited in the tables represent, if converted in wheat the money income in the land rent of all concerned manors (table 2) would equal, at current prices of that time and region, about 1713 hl of wheat. (NB. The area covered by these manors is significantly smaller than the whole of Western Slovenia).

3. EXTRA-AGRARIAN ACTIVITIES OF THE SLOVENE PEASANT AND THE EUROPEAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

At this point I’ll try and make a step forward in the conceptualization of this characteristic of the rural economy in the western Slovene area. As first we will pose the following question: What prompted the western Slovene peasants toward what appears to have been, as I expressed myself in an earlier work, a “general mobilization on the market”?

Their involvement in a mixture of industrial, commercial and transport activities was undoubtedly a necessity: the acquisition of extra-agricultural income made it possible both to achieve a level of subsistence and be able to pay their feudal, provincial, ecclesiastical and State rents and dues. But the fact that it was a necessity does not yet necessarily mean it was a passively-accepted solution. On the contrary, the multiplication of households beyond the level of subsistence provided by land alone indicates that the rural population counted on, and exploited the possibility of access to alternative activities as sources of additional income. In this respect, the proximity of the towns of Ljubljana, Trieste and Gorizia and of the border with the Republic of Venice with its coastal towns in Istria, and Udine and Cividale in Friuli, as well as the existence of a consolidated network of long-distance commercial flows and legal or illegal local streams crossing the countryside, represented a sort of promise of employment. The recourse to non-agricultural forms of activity allowed the rural population in western Slovenia to overcome the limits set by environmental conditions and the monopoly over land maintained by the nobility, as well as technological limitations. Furthermore, non-agricultural income sources represented an element in a more complex and comprehensive economic strategy by the rural population, in which one part of their subsistence was provided by the farms and the other by by-employments, ranging from cross-border smuggling to working as day labourers. Since the phenomenon did not seem to subside throughout the early modern era, and continued even later, it may be considered to be a structural element of the rural economy in this area.

\[20\] PANJEK, Terra di confine, p. 166.

I will try and put these characters in relation to some works in European economic history of the last two decades, without any attempt or pretension of completeness, but rather concentrating on similar characters and some useful conceptualisations.

The features shown in the western Slovene area are comparable to peddling and the connected migration practices as sources of additional income, characteristic for the Alpine area\textsuperscript{22}, but in our case the peasants show a much larger variety of additional activities that allowed them to structurally overcome Malthusian constraints. Like other European peasant populations have been (recently) shown to do, in doing so they show a remarkable degree of economic “agency”\textsuperscript{23} and “industriousness”\textsuperscript{24}. The system we may observe in western Slovenia is also very much in line with the “overall characteristics of the early modern Alpine economy”, which has already been defined as an “integrated economy”\textsuperscript{25}. And such an “integrated economy” undoubtedly takes a lot of “agency” and “industriousness”. Although I do not intend to necessarily mean that the latter was in our case directed to acquiring consumer goods or satisfying modern consumer needs in the early modern Slovene or Alpine rural society, I believe that this concept may be applied to such an economy, too.

On these basis I think it is reasonable to speak of an “integrated rural economy” for preindustrial western Slovenia, meaning a system characterized by a structural integration of agricultural and a variety of different non-agricultural sources of income (both from the secondary and tertiary sectors) in the rural population as a whole, as well as within the peasant households – in the latter case we may more properly speak of an “integrated peasant economy”.

Without going into too much detail now, what might be a specificity of our area is the important role of transport and trading activities - that is of the tertiary sector - among non-agricultural sources of income.

4. INCOME SOURCES IN AN INTEGRATED RURAL / PEASANT ECONOMY

I will now try to draft a scheme of the integrated rural and peasant economy, taking into consideration the activities that bring to an increase in income, in comparison to the sole ‘basic’ agricultural production, distinguishing them by economic sector. In doing so, I will combine the distinctions made by Coppola for the (southern) Alps and by de Vries for


\textsuperscript{24} DE VRIES, The Industrious Revolution.

already with a first look at the table it is possible to determine that most of the activities, mentioned at a European and Alpine level, were present in the western Slovene area, too. This means that in our area the diversity, diffusion and density of these activities were comparatively significant. Of course by saying this I don’t intend stating that all of the mentioned activities were evenly spread throughout the western Slovene area, since existed

\[26\] COPPOLA, Equilibri economici e trasformazioni nell’area alpina; DE VRIES, The Industrious Revolution, p. 71, 73-121, 169.
local peculiarities, specificities and also specializations. Their presence, combination and role could moreover vary in time, at the local level as well in the whole area, not least as a response to the wider economic conjuncture or change. The single typologies should also be referred to different social strata within the rural population (more about this further on). Nevertheless it is undoubtedly possible to affirm that in the western Slovene area, being a much smaller space if compared to the Alpine area or the whole of Europe, a lot of different extra-agrarian activities, and even the vast majority of them, was present and widespread among the rural population.

Gauro Coppola has defined very clearly the fundamental characteristic of the alpine of rural economy system. His starting point is the ascertainment that, because of the conditions and characteristics of the alpine agriculture, “at a macro level, related to the total number of the population”, the Alpine area suffered from a “chronic alimentary deficit, especially of grain”, Coppola suggested that if such a “system stands”\textsuperscript{27}, “it means that the income integrations from other activities and sectors are of much greater importance than the cultivation of the fields alone”. But what I would like to stress here, is that he writes of a “complex balance, sometimes differentiated in space and time as far as the density of the single components [activities] is concerned, and with significant processes of substitution of its decreasing or weaker elements [income sources]”\textsuperscript{28}. Or, to be even more clear, he concludes that in the Alpine economy “the organic complementarity of the production sectors, the safeguard and the integration of the resources, the processes of substitution of the more fragile and weakened portions of the whole” have, as a result, “a system, that is able to grant proportionate processes of income formation” and, what is very important for us here, “adjustments to the changes in market conditions” – “here, the forms of integration acquire primary support functions, granting the solidity of the context”\textsuperscript{29}.

I find of fundamental importance the fact that the integrated rural/peasant economy was a system, characterized by maintaining a balance between many and very different income-sources, a balance that was flexible enough not only to be able to react and adjust to changes in market conditions, but even to wider changes in the ratio between population number and available (natural and market) sources of income. Activities could be adopted or abandoned, increased or decreased, and their relative importance in the peasant household’s income structure could change in time (and space, of course). But in any case did the additional income sources maintain their fundamental role.

\textsuperscript{27} Unlike Coppola I don’t see the “peasants’ proletarisation phenomena” as a sign that the system doesn’t “stand”: on the contrary I find that if people ‘without land’ can stand in an Alpine or sub-Alpine area and make their living there, this can be seen as a sign that the integration of different income-sources is even more effective. Furthermore, as written above, I believe that the multiplication of households beyond the level of subsistence provided by land alone indicates that the rural population counted on, and exploited the possibility of access to alternative activities as sources of additional income. In brief, I don’t see necessarily a contradiction.

\textsuperscript{28} COPPOLA, Equilibri economici e trasformazioni nell’area alpina, p. 213-214.

\textsuperscript{29} COPPOLA, Equilibri economici e trasformazioni nell’area alpina, p. 221-222.
I also think that “integrated rural economy” and “integrated peasant economy” are concepts that (probably) may be applied to other Alpine (and extra-Alpine) regions, as well.

5. MARKET-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES, RURAL CREDIT, AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: SOME OPEN QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

At this stage of the research it is only possible to articulate, but not yet to give answers to the question about the relation between market-oriented activities and the social stratification within rural society. The situation is similar for the question about the relation between rural credit and market oriented activities as well as between credit and rural social stratification. Nevertheless I will try to outline some hints on these aspects.

The presence of rural credit and its effects on the process of peasants’ indebtedness and impoverishment in Slovenia has been studied and demonstrated for the period between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. It has been put into relation with the process of capitalistic development and the connected commercialization in agriculture, which was made possible not least by the abolishment of all feudal bonds over the land (Grundentlastung) in the Habsburg lands since 184830. Moreover, the industrialization process has diminished the peasant’s access to additional income, since the railway excluded them from transport, while agrarian produce and industrial products with a better quality-price ratio than the one provided by the domestic peasant producers could now be found on the market. This caused the so-called “ruralisation” of the Slovenian countryside, meaning that the rural population was more depending on the sole income from agriculture – and this may well have been an additional cause of indebtedness, especially if we consider how much it depended on extra-agrarian incomes in the preindustrial integrated peasant economy system.

But in my point of view rural indebtedness was far from being a new phenomenon of the industrialization period, since it was certainly present in preindustrial times, as well. To give only an example, when some peasants’ farms in the alpine valley around Tolmin were to be sold as a penalty for active participation in the wide peasant uprising in 1713, no buyer could be found, not least because the same farms were too indebted. This indebtedness may well be the consequence of failing to pay feudal dues, but it may partly also be the result of credit for participating in market-oriented activities. It is in fact well known that in the Venetian Alpine and pre-Alpine territories just across the Habsburg border (Carnia, Slovene Venetia), rural credit on land was a widespread phenomenon, and in many cases the peasants there indebted themselves (by granting with their land or houses) in order to gain the capital

necessary to exercise the activity of mobile (migrant) merchants, that is pedlars\textsuperscript{31}. To this purpose the selling plus credit instrument called \textit{livello francabile} was widely used. It worked like this: A contract was signed between two parties; the seller (that needed credit, liquidity) sold some of his land to a buyer (owning the capital), who at the same time leased the same land back to the same seller for an annual rent; this rent represented the interest on the capital, while the debt could be extinguished by paying back to the buyer the amount he had given.

The problem is that in the Habsburg lands the use of notaries was very rare, so that we do not have at disposal the huge amount of notary documents that can be found in the archives containing material from the Venetian Republic. The type of sources we may work upon therefore represents a serious problem for a (systematic) research on rural credit mechanisms in the Habsburg lands before the 18\textsuperscript{th} and especially 19\textsuperscript{th} century. I would nevertheless like to give one interesting example. During the first phases of modern urban development of the city of Trieste, following the declaration of the free port and freedom of navigation in the Adriatic by the Hasburgs, a man called “Master Matija Colja Carpenter” in 1769 obtained a loan of 500 \textit{ducati} with which he built a house in the new part of the city of Trieste. The loan giver was Jožef Mohorčič, head of the village community of Naklo in the Schwarzenegg feudal estate, some 30 km away\textsuperscript{32}. This fact shows the existence of interesting social networks (it is possible to assume that the loan receiver came from the same village), but at the same time that in the rural environment the practice of credit was present, that it was possible to give (and get) even such considerable amounts on credit (that sum corresponded to value of around 140 hl of wheat), and that in the rural society it was thinkable to finance through credit such an investment in the nearby developing town.

In a similar way, not much can be said at this point of research about the relation between market oriented activities and rural social stratification. While the historiographical literature stresses that the peasants with very little or virtually no land (cottagers etc.) in particular were active in transport and other non-agricultural activities, on the other side we know that also better situated peasants were involved in it, and that the leaders of the peasant uprisings in many cases belonged to the upper strata of the rural population. Since the uprisings in Slovenia always included complaints about new dues or restrictions to the trade and transport activities in the countryside, we may assume that also the wealthier among the peasants had significant interests in market oriented activities.

But to have a more precise insight on both issues further focused research has to be done. And the research should at this point be directed to the micro level, onto single households. This is important for the questions related to rural credit, as well as for what the integrated peasant economy is concerned.

\textsuperscript{31} A very good insight in the relation between rural credit based on land as a mean to finance the peddling activity of the rural population of the Carnia mountain area is to be found in FORNASIN, Alessio, \textit{Ambulanti, artigiani e mercanti. L’emigrazione dalla Carnia in età moderna}. Verona 1998.

\textsuperscript{32} PANJEK, Aleksander, Chi costrui Trieste ...; source in: AST, \textit{Intendenza}, b. 32, f. 4-20.
LITERATURE


