

7.5 Aspects of agricultural productivity in western Europe, 1800-2006

Room 203

Chair: Paul Brassley

7.51 Jean-Michel Chevet – Which specialisation in France in the nineteenth century?

If we have to believe historiography, the French agriculture would have known very early a specialisation, even for the two main productions necessary for human consumption, namely cereals and products coming from the livestock. Admittedly, it is not our intention to deny what the flows of exchanges show and, in particular, the flows supplying the capital. However, some uncertainties remain as for the origin of this specialisation. Does it result, indeed, from a deliberated socio-economic choice? Or, on the contrary, are these flows only effects of nature, specialisation being in this case due to natural environment constraints? Was the total production taken into account to determine what was specialisation? Were any changes noted, in time, showing the formation of these specialisations? Working from departmental examples, selected from Brittany, Normandy and the cereal areas, and using new indices, I intend to demonstrate that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, areas known as stock-breeding areas, such as Finistere for example, did not turn to stock-breeding any more than areas with a cereal vocation. One will also see that, inside zones said to be stock-breeding zones, the nature of the ground leads to think that there is specialisation only because, in this respect, Brittany is far from the performances of Normandy. Using new indices will give another vision of specialisation. As far as possible, I will try to include, for the middle of the XIXth century, a comparison with Norfolk, if the necessary data are available. In addition, it will be shown, that specialisation begins only in the middle of XIXth [century] since it is at that time that in western areas stock-breeding grew more quickly than cereal production while it was the reverse in the Paris basin area.

Jean-Michel Chevet is a researcher at INRA (Institut national de la recherche agronomique) in Bordeaux. He works on economic and rural history from the late eighteenth century to the First World War. He is particularly interested in the comparative history of agricultural growth and labour productivity in Great Britain and France. His publications include 'The effects of the customs duty sliding scale on the wheat prices in England, 1828–1850', in G. Federico et al. (eds), *The integration of commodity markets in history* (1998). Some years ago, he began to work on quality improvements in wine, and this has led him to develop an interest in the history of climate.

7.52 Michael Kopsidis and Nikolaus Wolf – The 'little divergence' in Central Europe: explaining agricultural productivity across Prussia around 1865

The literature on the historical origins of differential economic development, especially the debate on the 'Great Divergence' between Europe and Asia (Pomeranz 2000) has recently sparked new interest in the roots of a 'Little Divergence' across Europe (Allen 2001). Already by the end of the eighteenth century, real wages and living standards were significantly higher in north-western Europe than in the rest of Europe. As demonstrated in Allen (2001) and stressed in numerous other studies on the economic history of Europe (Gerschenkron 1962, Pollard 1981), there was a steep west–east gradient of development visible at least from the early modern period onwards. Differences in agricultural productivity feature prominently in this debate; also because it has been argued that high labour productivity in agriculture was crucial for England's early industrialisation. In an age when countries had to be more or less self-sufficient in food production largely due to prohibitive transport costs for mass commodities, only a high agricultural productivity would allow to keep food prices relatively low whilst freeing labour to the industrial sector. According to Crafts (1985), this transfer of labour resources was a characteristic feature of early industrial development.

In this paper we focus on differences in agricultural productivity in one very large and detailed cross section of one single state, spanning over 1000km from the Rhine in the west to Königsberg (Kaliningrad) in the east. We use a unique dataset compiled by the Prussian statistician and scholar August Meitzen on behalf of the Prussian government which contains very detailed agricultural statistics for more than 330 Prussian counties for around 1865. Based on this source we first document that within Prussia, the differences in agricultural productivity were huge, both in terms of output per labour and in terms of output per land. Next, we investigate several ways to explain those large differences across Prussian counties.

Michael Kopsidis is Senior Researcher at the Leibniz-Institute of Agricultural Development in Central and Eastern Europe (IAMO), Halle (Saale), Germany. In his last book he compared the agricultural development of England 1400-1800 and Northwest Germany 1700-1880 in the light of modern development economics. Currently he is working on two chapters about farming and food chains in Northwest Germany 1750-2000 for the CORN-Rural History of the North Sea Area.

Nikolaus Wolf is Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Department of Economics, Warwick University, UK. He worked on market integration and economic development in twentieth century Poland, grain market integration in the late nineteenth century Habsburg Empire and German economic integration 1880-1939.

7.53 Miguel Martín-Retortillo and Vicente Pinilla – International differences in agricultural productivity in Europe, 1950-2006

Differences in agricultural productivity in European countries have tended to grow wider since the beginning of the nineteenth century up to today. These differences are due to various factors which, in turn, explain differences in income per inhabitant between countries. These factors go from those related to the technology and the production function to the fundamental causes of income differences, such as a country's institutions or geography. The aim of this work is to analyse the relative importance of these factors when it comes to explaining productivity differences in the agricultural sector in Europe.

To this end, we first examine from a theoretical standpoint the factors that explain differences in agricultural productivity. Next, we shall analyse the evolution of European countries' agricultural productivity during the second half of the twentieth century, and the existence or otherwise of convergence processes. The work will conclude with a proposal for an econometric model which will attempt to explain the influence of technological, institutional and geographical variables.

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Vicente Pinilla (Ph.D. in Economics, University of Zaragoza 1990) is Professor in Economic History at the University of Zaragoza, Spain. His research interests lie in international trade in agricultural products, Spanish agricultural production and mountain economies, depopulation and migration. He is author of several books and numerous papers in academic journals on these issues. He is co-editor of the book *Agriculture and Economic Development in Europe since 1870* (Routledge, 2009) and editor of the book *Markets and Agricultural Change in Europe from the thirteenth to the twentieth century* (Brepols, 2009). Recent publications include papers in the *European Review of Economic History*, *Agricultural History Review*, *Journal of Geographical Systems*, *the Annals of Regional Science*, *Applied Economics*, *Rural History* and *Journal of Rural and Community Development*. He was Vice-Rector of Budget and Economic Management of the University of Zaragoza (2000-2004). He held appointments at the University of Bristol, London School of Economics, University of California at Davis, University of Maastricht and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.