

6.2 Can we talk about an ‘industrious revolution’ in southern Europe?

Room 104

Convener and Chair: Julie Marfany

Some time ago now, Jan de Vries proposed the concept of an ‘industrious revolution’ as a means of describing and defining some aspects of the origins of the industrial revolution. A key characteristic of this ‘revolution’ was the dynamic role played by the household economy, both in terms of production and consumption. The focus on the importance of the household economy in the early modern period represents an important shift away from the focus of much work in agrarian history, which has focused more on large estates, often because these have left more detailed sources.

De Vries’s concept, however, is explicitly limited to north-west Europe, where he sees the predominance of the nuclear family as providing greater flexibility and autonomy. By definition, therefore, southern Europe remains excluded from such a process. In this session, the aim is to debate the usefulness of the concept of the ‘industrious revolution’ but particularly in the context of rural southern Europe. Indeed, some recent studies of consumption patterns for this area suggest extending the debate would be worthwhile. It would be a shame if, as has happened on other occasions, for example, with the very concept of an industrial revolution, a too-restrictive formulation of the concepts used to define complex processes of economic and social change were allowed to limit the potential for comparing change in different historical contexts.

6.21 Rosa Congost and Eulàlia Esteve – Little land but many forks? Analysing consumption patterns among Catalan smallholders over the second half of the eighteenth century

Population growth in eighteenth-century Catalonia resulted in a rise in the number of smallholders, known in the north-east of the region as *treballadors*. What is less clear is whether the rise of this group should be seen as a sign of growing poverty in this region. *A priori*, we might assume that wage labourers and smallholders, in an area traditionally dominated by self-sufficient family farms, would be more vulnerable to poverty. However, the study of land markets, including in this instance emphyteutic transfers, the credit market, inventories *post mortem* and marriage contracts from the second half of the eighteenth century, reveals not only striking changes in the social structure, but also, in some areas, a more favourable situation for these smallholders, revealed by changing consumption patterns, forcing us to revise the hypothesis above in favour of a more dynamic role for these supposedly more humble groups.

Rosa Congost is professor of economic history at the University of Girona and a researcher at the Centre de Recerca d’Història Rural. She is the author of numerous works on landed property and social relations in rural Catalonia. In recent years, she has promoted a focus on comparative history. She is currently principal researcher for the Grup d’Història de les Societats Rurals (at the University of Girona) and on the project HAR 2008-02960/HIST ‘Dinàmiques socials i canvi històric en societats rurals: l’anàlisi des grups i les desigualtats socials’.

Eulàlia Esteve is a PhD student at the Centre de Recerca d’Història Rural at the University of Girona. Her thesis investigates the evolution of social inequality and different groups in the Girona region for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, using inventories *post mortem* and marriage contracts.

6.22 Gérard Béaur – An industrious revolution in the Parisian countryside? The case of Brie in the eighteenth century

It has been argued that an industrious revolution happened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was a prelude to the Industrial Revolution. This industrious revolution was characterised by a rise in demand for market-supplied goods even though real wages were

decreasing. Was this really the case? Our proposal includes some thoughts about such changes which occurred in an agricultural region: the Brie, near Meaux, some 50km from Paris. We have little evidence about wages in Brie but some solid assumptions about their evolution and many indicators for the standard of living. The paper will use these data to assess whether there really was an industrious revolution in this area.

Gerard Béaur is a researcher at the CNRS and director of studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. His research has centred on rural social history from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. His publications include *Histoire Agraire de la France au 18e siècle* (Paris, 2000). He is the principal researcher on the project GDR 2912 of the CNRS Histoire des Campagnes Européennes (HCE) and 2005–09 Chair of the COST action A35 Program for Study of European Rural Societies, financed by the EU with the participation of twenty EU countries.

6.23 Julie Marfany – Was there an industrious revolution in Catalonia?

This paper suggests a somewhat different picture for central, proto-industrial Catalonia than that described above by Congost and Esteve. It explores the decision-making processes of households in a proto-industrial community, Igualada, and the constraints to which these households were subject. It investigates which activities households were engaged in, particularly new activities such as commercial viticulture and proto-industry, and how the opportunities provided by the growth of these new sectors influenced the demographic behaviour of households, especially the question of when and whom to marry. The argument engages critically with Jan de Vries' concept of an industrious revolution. Catalan households showed similar propensities to households elsewhere in the intensification of labour inputs over the eighteenth century. However, Catalonia was more like east Asia than north-west Europe in that such industrious behaviour was not accompanied by changes in consumer behaviour and improvements in welfare to the same extent as in the latter region. While some changes can be discerned, this paper argues for other motivating factors behind the industrious revolution, such as forced commercialisation and poverty. Where the argument really takes issue with de Vries, though, is with his claims for the superiority of the nuclear family of north-western Europe over the more extended family structures prevalent in southern Europe. This study argues that the picture was far more complex than de Vries suggests. Not only could the extended family be as dynamic as the nuclear family when required but, more importantly, the distinction between the two types is overdrawn.

Julie Marfany is currently a university lecturer in economic and social history at the University of Cambridge. Her PhD investigated the relationship between demographic change and proto-industrialisation in Catalonia over the long eighteenth century. Since then, her research has broadened to include patterns of land use, production and consumption in the household economy and poverty. She has just completed a monograph on the transition to capitalism in Catalonia. Her publications include 'Is it still helpful to talk about proto-industrialisation? Some suggestions from a Catalan case study', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* (forthcoming) and 'Proto-industrialisation, property rights and the land market in Catalonia, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in Phillipp Schofield and Gérard Béaur (eds.), *Property rights, the land market and economic change* (forthcoming).