

## 6.4 Transnational networks of learning: new ways of knowledge production by farmers and agronomists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Room 202

*Convener: Peter Moser*

*Chair: Michael Kopsidis*

The rapid change and development in agriculture since the eighteenth century is often perceived as the result of a top-down process of knowledge diffusion within nation states ('from the laboratory to the field'). But newly catalogued sources and currently ongoing research strongly suggest that the creation of knowledge in agriculture is a much more complex phenomenon. Transnational networks of socially relatively coherent groups, for example, played a crucial role in the process of learning by different groups within the agricultural sector.

In the eighteenth century, the growing exchange of knowledge among agronomists and other experts on a European level was augmented by many farmers visiting farmers and agricultural institutions in other countries in the nineteenth century. And, in the twentieth century, we can observe, in spite of two world wars and the cold war, an ever-increasing number of direct contacts among the farming population (farmers, farmers' wives, young farmers groups, farm labourers, agricultural politicians, agronomists, etc.) of different societies – almost irrespective of their geographical location or political orientation.

These interactions often lead to the more or less simultaneous appearances of new methods in different surroundings and the takeover, adaption and improvement of new views, techniques and perceptions by practitioners. On the other hand, national or regional idiosyncrasies seldom remained intact, in spite of their growing reputation as being old-fashioned and out-dated in other regions or nations.

The purpose of this session is to discuss the practice of *learning by travelling*: to identify *transnational networks* of learning and to find out more about the modes of knowledge which were spread by this practice – and those which were marginalised.

### 6.41 Peter Moser – Learning by travelling? Farmers and agronomists from Switzerland visiting Great Britain in the twentieth century

This paper focuses on the many farmers, young farmers and agronomists from Switzerland who, mainly in groups, visited farms and agricultural institutions in Great Britain in the twentieth century with the purpose of *learning* from other ways of farming. It first gives an overview of the travelling practice: who went to Great Britain, when and where? It then concentrates on the conclusions which the visitors drew from their experience. How was British agriculture perceived by the participants of the travelling groups? Was Great Britain regarded as a model for the further development of agriculture at home? Which measures, techniques and perceptions in Great Britain were identified as useful, which ones were refused – and why? The paper also deals with the question of whether 'the British way of farming' came into conflict with the cultural and natural surroundings at home and the way(s) of farming the Swiss authorities propagated.

**Peter Moser** (b. 1954) studied (as a mature student) modern history and economy in Bern and Galway. He is a graduate from the University of Bern, where he received a PhD in modern history in 1995. He is the author of 11 books, numerous articles in scientific journals and anthologies as well as the co-author of a documentary film on farmers in Switzerland in the twentieth century. He lectures at different Universities.

In 2002 Peter Moser was founder and since then has been director of the *Archives of Rural History* (ARH) in Bern. The ARH have recovered and catalogued the archival material of more than 150 agricultural and rural organisations and institutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All the catalogues can be consulted online ([www.agrararchiv.ch](http://www.agrararchiv.ch)). Currently Peter is chairman of the *Swiss Rural History Society* ([www.ruralhistory.ch](http://www.ruralhistory.ch)), scientific collaborator of the *Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse* and the *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raums* in St Pölten.

#### 6.42 Juan Pan-Montojo – Spanish agricultural engineers and the international agronomy: reading and travelling before the Great War

The Spanish agricultural engineers, a new career established in 1855, were designed as both a liberal profession and a group of experts that could help the public institutions, with the specific aim of contributing to bridging the technological gap between the Spanish agriculture and European agricultures. From their earliest times onwards, agricultural engineers tried to fulfil this function, which they saw as the clue to legitimizing their existence and gaining access to a higher professional status and to the setting up of a public corps. Reading and translating foreign books, attending the international exhibitions (London, Paris, Vienna, Chicago...), visiting experimental and model farms in France, Belgium or Germany, were some of the activities undertaken by many agricultural engineers. However until the Great War these international contacts remained unsystematic, normally dependent on private initiatives – even though they sometimes received the financial support of the state – and oriented either to the study of labour-saving machinery or to the explanation of foreign institutional models. In the first decade of the twentieth century, coinciding with the creation of the International Institute of Agriculture, new ways of adopting technology and interrelating with experts from other countries were thought of and displayed, a set of changes that would bring about relevant innovations in the 1920s.

**Juan Pan-Montojo** (b.1962) is a graduate in Philosophy and Letters (Modern History), 1986, and Economic Sciences (Economic Sociology), 1987, and doctor in Modern History, 1992, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. He has worked as a visiting researcher in the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, London, in the New School for Social Research, New York, and in the Friedrich-Alexander Universität of Erlangen-Nürnberg. Juan was (1990–7) Lecturer in, and is now Associate Professor of, Modern History at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. He has done most of his research in agrarian and rural history (wine sector, agrarian policies, agricultural engineering, agrarian associations) and history of the public economy (state building, tax reforms, government expenditure). He has published more than 60 articles in specialised journals and is currently co-editor of the journal *Historia Agraria* and member of the scientific committee of *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrasoziologie*.

#### 6.43 Zsuzsanna Varga – Formal and informal networks of learning between East and West: the modernisation of the Hungarian agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s

In my previous work I have explored the process during which Hungarian agricultural co-operatives had gradually departed from the original Soviet *kolkhoz* model. As a result of this process, agriculture became a special domain of Hungarian economy where the market-type and incentive-oriented reforms could come across early and on a wide range. From the late 1960s on, it has been agriculture that has broken new ground in opening towards Western Europe, having imported new and useful technology from that region. In my paper I would like to explore the formal and informal channels through which this new technology from Western Europe, and later from the USA, found its way into Hungarian agriculture. This topic had been largely ignored for political and ideological reasons. Now the opportunity is there; the archives have been opened to research.

In my paper I would like to explore the processes of circulation and appropriation of agricultural technologies between Hungary and Western Europe. What kind of political and professional discussions and debates preceded these transfers? Which were the capitalist countries that became Hungary's major partners? Through which channels did modern Western technology find its way to

Hungarian agriculture and food industry? What was the role the state, the agrarian lobby and the specialists of co-operatives and state farms played in the takeover, the dissemination and the improvement of Western technology?

Finally, the most important question is how importing new technology from the ‘capitalist West’ had changed the character of agricultural labour and the efficiency of the socialist agriculture in Hungary.

**Zsuzsanna Varga** studied History and Russian at the Kossuth Lajos University in Debrecen (Hungary). After finishing university studies she obtained a 3-year PhD-scholarship and started research at the Department of Economic History at the University of Economics in Budapest. She received her PhD in Economic History (Agrarian History) in 1998. Varga held seminar groups on various topics of Hungarian economic and social history of twentieth century at the University of Economics in Budapest and later at the University of Debrecen as well. Since September 2000 she has been teaching at the Department of Modern Hungarian History of the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest as an Assistant Professor. Now she is an Associate professor. Varga’s first monograph with the title *Politika, paraszti érdekérvényesítés és szövetkezetek Magyarországon, 1956–1967* (Politics, the Assertion of Agrarian Interests and Co-operatives in Hungary Between 1956 and 1967) was published in 2001. Her research interests and publications are focused on the history of agriculture in socialist Hungary. Parallel to this work, Varga subtends her research to Central-Eastern European comparative analyses. She reads literature in English, German and Russian. She has spent sixteen months abroad through various scholarships in Russia, Germany and Great Britain. In 2000 the Committee of Agrarian History and Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences elected Varga as a member.