Rural History 2019, 5th biennial conference of the European Rural History Organization (EURHO), Paris, France, 10 to 13, September 2019

Panel: Rural Epistemologies in Dialogue: The Production of Knowledge in Peripheral Regions in the 19-20th Centuries

Organized by Corinne Geering and Dietlind Hüchtker, Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig, Germany

Modern society has been characterised as knowledge based. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, access to education, the popularisation of science, and mechanical labour have transformed knowledge into a valuable resource. In the case of rural actors, middle class and government-initiated reforms aimed to make knowledge appear unidirectional, as a product of centre-periphery relations. Rural people were the subjects of modernization and education, not producers of knowledge. However, recent research has highlighted the role of rural-based producers in scientific knowledge, in particular the way indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge has contributed to agricultural science and botany. This panel expands such histories, with a focus on rural actors outside of agriculture and husbandry. Instead, the papers in this panel discuss the epistemologies of rural entrepreneurs, craftsmen, physicians, teachers, lawyers, and members of various social and political organizations. While knowledge in these fields is still primarily associated with state centres and urban civil society, this panel instead addresses the formation, adaptation and ruptures of modern rural epistemologies that occurred in interaction with central initiatives.

The individual papers discuss the mutual production of knowledge in the fields of education, medicine, health and sexuality, craftsmanship and land property among others in Central Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case studies of these papers, knowledge serves as a prism to focus on processes of interaction rather than the passive notion of unidirectional enlightenment. Thus, the panel addresses the following questions: How did rural epistemologies shape political, social, and economic structures? How were rural people overshadowed by more resourceful actors from the centres? What caused cleavages and conflicts? By discussing these and other issues, this panel seeks to deepen the understanding of modern practices of knowledge in the countryside.

Contributions:

Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz, Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany: On the Concepts of Sustainability and Social Justice: Pioneer Women in Agriculture and the Production of Knowledge around 1800

Corinne Geering, Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig, Germany: Reclaiming Rural Skills: Traditional Handicraft and Educational Mobility in Modern East Central Europe

Dietmar Müller, Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig, Germany: Knowledge and Legal Cultures: Land Registers in Habsburg and Post-Habsburg Regions

Matthias Kaltenbrunner (University of Vienna, Austria): Betwixt and Between: A Schoolteacher in Rural Western Ukraine

Luciano Maffi, University of Genoa, Italy, and Martino Lorenzo Fagnani, University of Pavia, Italy: Epistemological Dialogue in Rural Communities of the Po Valley, 19th-20th Centuries. Schools, Fairs and Reinforcement of Sanitation

Manuel Trummer, University of Regensburg, Germany: Science, Folklore, Identity: Rural Physicians as Agents of Modernization in Mid-19th Century Bavaria

Dietlind Hüchtker, Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig, Germany: Body Knowledge: Youth and the Countryside During the People’s Republic of Poland

Joanna Rozmus, University of Vienna, Austria: Chair

Dobrochna Kałwa, University of Warsaw, Poland, and Tatiana Voronina, University of Zurich, Switzerland: Discussants