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The Formation of Agricultural Governance. The Interplay between State and Civil Society in European Agriculture, 1870-1940

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This book addresses the fundamental question of how the rural world and European states had to organise and cooperate to modernise agriculture during the period from 1870 to 1940, a timeframe marked by economic crises and social transformations that challenged the stability and viability of the European agricultural sector.

The publication clearly explains how certain crises, such as the agricultural depression from the 1870s to 1890s, the First World War or the Great Depression of the 1930s, profoundly affected agriculture. These crises prompted the rural world to organise, giving rise to agricultural organisations such as landowners' associations, cooperatives, and unions, aimed at defending the interests of the rural population and promoting the modernisation of the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the impact of these crises compelled European states to intervene in the agricultural sector through government bodies, such as Ministries of Agriculture or scientific institutions, in order to ensure food security, improve rural living standards, and modernise agriculture.

The book's basic ideas, which constitute the common thread throughout the publication, are: firstly, to explain how the agricultural sector and the European rural world organised themselves increasingly efficiently to face the challenges of this intense period. Secondly, to show how agricultural organisations acted as intermediaries, helping the rural world to interact with European states in order to modernise agriculture. This constant interplay between the state and the rural world eventually evolved into a system of agricultural governance, which intensified after the Second World War.

This work is necessary to understand how the state transitioned from a liberal, non-interventionist stance to increasing involvement in agriculture, as well as to comprehend how the European rural world mobilised, organised itself, and interacted closely with European states to cope with economic crises, industrialisation, globalisation, and state-formation.

The book, published by the prestigious Belgian publishing house Brepols, is organised as a collection of eleven papers that an-

alyse the organisation of the rural world and its interplay with the state across several European countries, covering different regions and case studies for approximately the same period (1870-1940). Each paper is written by a different author, bringing together a diverse group of experts and thus providing readers with a comprehensive perspective on the formation of agricultural governance in Europe.

The first paper, which serves as the book's introduction, was initially published at the Society for the Study of Agrarian History (SEHA) in April 2022. It is signed by the editors of the book: Jordi Planas, Anton Schuurman, and Yves Segers. The introduction provides an overview of the organisation and cooperation between the state and the rural world across Europe from 1870 to 1940. The authors highlight the ongoing interplay between the state and the agricultural civil society, emphasising the significant role of agrarian associations in demanding state intervention, implementing agricultural policies, politicising rural areas, and promoting education with the goal of modernising agriculture.

The second paper, authored by editor Anton Schuurman, analyses the case of the Netherlands during the period 1840s-1930s. It shows how, despite being a country with a liberal government lacking a national agricultural policy and having a disorganised agricultural society marked by religious diversity, the Dutch agricultural sector managed to organise itself, secure state involvement in agriculture, and successfully modernise the agricultural sector through its interplay with the state.

The third paper, written by Paul Brassley, examines the case of the United Kingdom, specifically England, during the period 1870-1940. Brassley, building on a solid theoretical foundation, demonstrates that although the English agricultural sector succeeded in organising itself and the state provided some support to agriculture, English agricultural policy was consistently shaped by commercial interests rather than agricultural needs.

Nadine Vivier presents a rigorous analysis in the fourth paper, in which she examines the origins and expansion of comices in France between 1860 and 1914. Vivier demonstrates that comices were a key element for the modernisation of agriculture, the dissemination of agricultural knowledge among the rural population, the defence of professional interests, and the interaction between the state and rural society.

The fifth paper, written by editor Jordi Planas, compares the formation of winegrowers' organisations in France and Spain, as well as their respective interactions with the state at the beginning of the twentieth century. The author meticulously and convincingly demonstrates how the different outcomes resulted from the unequal organisational capacities of winegrowers in each country, and from the distinct roles played by the state in each case.

Dimitris Angelis-Dimakis, author of the sixth paper, examines how cooperatives evolved from being tools employed by the Greek government to implement agricultural policies between 1900 and 1936, into independent organisations that challenged those very policies and defended the interests of the peasantry, actions that led the government to intervene in order to limit their influence.

Tony Varley, author of the seventh paper, presents a coherent argument demonstrat-

ing how two members of the Anglo-Irish Protestant gentry, Parnell and Plunkett, sought to compensate for the decline of the landowner elite by attempting to reorganise Irish agriculture through cooperative movements, implementing land reform, and fostering the emergence of a middle class of farmers.

In the eighth paper, Miguel Cabo and Juan Pan-Montojo analyse the formation of a European agrarian movement that aimed to protect agriculture between 1870 and 1939. They show that agrarian political parties developed and became key to the interplay between state and agricultural society, but only in countries where pre-existing agrarian organisations were unable to defend peasant interests.

In the ninth paper, Carin Martiin investigates the Swedish milk and dairy sector in the 1920s and 1930s. She concludes that the interplay between agricultural organisations, such as the Swedish Milk Propaganda Association, and the state was fundamental to the socio-economic development of rural areas, as well as to the transition from a liberal to a state-regulated milk and dairy sector.

The purpose of the tenth paper, written by Juri Auderset, is to examine the modernisation of Swiss agriculture and the reorganisation of relations between the state and farmers through the improvement of cereal cultivation, especially wheat, during the period 1880-1940. The author meticulously demonstrates how the interplay between agricultural organisations, farmers, scientific institutions, and the state was key to implementing food security policy and modernising agriculture.

The book concludes with the contribution of the editor, Yves Segers, in the eleventh paper. In a thorough manner, Segers illustrates how the interplay between the state, scientists, and civil society organisations, such as the breeding syndicates, was fundamental to both the development of the state program for improving livestock in the province of Flanders and the formation and development of a livestock knowledge network during the interwar period.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to acknowledge the initiative that led to this work, which will be of interest to those seeking to understand the reasons behind the involvement of European states in the process of agricultural modernisation, as well as the organisation of the European agricultural sector and its interplay with national states. As with any scientific work, there are limitations; however, the possible limitations identified here highlight and suggest new paths for future research, which will be valuable for further understanding the formation of agricultural governance.

Bibliography

Planas, Jordi; Schuurman, Anton; Segers, Yves. 2022. *The formation of agricultural governance: the interplay between state and civil society in European agriculture, 1870*-1940. Sociedad de Estudios de Historia Agraria (SEHA) Working Paper, No. 2204, pp. 1-18. http://hdl.handle.net/10234/197091

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