

English historiography. Her deft portrayal of urban communal health as a dynamic, moving balance based on constant (re)negotiation and of biopolitics as a meeting point of order, health, and morality leaves us with a much clearer sense that the medieval past is perhaps not quite so foreign as it has seemed.

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Yves Segers and Leen Van Molle (eds), *Agricultural Knowledge Networks in Rural Europe, 1700-2000* [Boydell Studies in Rural History, Vol. 2.] (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2022). 262 pp. ISBN 9781783277124.

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The spread of knowledge and subsequent technological development have allowed, since the eighteenth century, an optimization of all the productive phases in the agricultural and rural sector, such as soil preparation, sowing, adding manure and fertilizers, irrigation, harvesting and storage. Agricultural growth may be linked therefore to the spread of knowledge, know-how, and expertise in this field, resulting in augmented scale economies, a price reduction of agricultural products, an increase of food quality, and an overall improvement of life quality. Knowledge is the unravelling of reality to the human comprehension: it is dynamic, multifaceted, and capable of being transferred. Knowledge as a whole is composed both of theory and practice and every part is mutually necessary. However, the spread of knowledge is often hampered when the holders of theoretical knowledge fail to pass it on to the holders of practical knowledge and vice versa.

How did knowledge create, spread, and immobilize from the early eighteenth to the late twentieth century in the European agricultural context? The introduction of this book, written by Yves Segers and Leen Van Molle, offers a riveting interpretation of the phenomenon of knowledge diffusion in the agricultural sector from the eighteenth century. After defining the concept of knowledge and social networks, the editors propose the methodology of “knowledge networks”, as a framework applied to different historic case studies, to investigate the circulation of both theoretical and practical knowledge. A great emphasis is placed on the concept of network and social network analysis, as a useful tool to study social structures and the social

relationships among single members. As a matter of fact, networks' stakeholders tend to have interactions such as information exchange, meetings, scientific collaboration, social support, and so forth. Although it might be challenging to conceptually combine the concepts of networks and knowledge, this book provides a clear description of the framework and methodology used to investigate this phenomenon.

The authors of this volume contribute to the explanation of the diffusion of agricultural knowledge in different ways, each providing different case studies and points of view. Before the eighteenth century, knowledge in the agricultural sector was transferred from generation to generation, as farmers could not afford to invest in collecting knowledge and information. Janken Myrdal, Pierre-Etienne Stockland, and Verena Lehmbrock clarify, each with different approaches, how the importance of agricultural knowledge increased in society from the eighteenth century onwards. People working in the primary sector gained great relevance for networks and institutions, such as government bureaucracies, political parties, commercial firms, and so on. In his contribution, Myrdal illustrates that between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, publications on agricultural science increased remarkably both in Anglo Saxon and in Scandinavian societies. In his chapter, Stockland, presents the case study of Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau, a French agronomist of the eighteenth century, who managed to create a network of French naturalists with the aim of supporting the campaign against insect pests. This knowledge network promoted the spread of knowledge through observations, experiments, public demonstrations, and the circulation of comments and reports. Stockland explains how Du Monceau, being the leader of this network, succeeded in strengthening the alliance between farmers and scientists, enhancing in this way the spread of knowledge. Zsuzsanna Kiss, in her case study, analyzes how Hungarian agricultural societies played the role of disseminators of new values in the agricultural sector. The National Society for Agriculture aimed at modernizing Hungarian agriculture through fairer land distribution. However, to achieve this objective, a capillary spread of knowledge was necessary. Therefore, the national societies established regional societies which were represented in institutional settings, creating a stronger bond between core and peripheral allies.

Sarah Holland draws attention to the importance of town-based and regional networks, such as the agricultural society of Doncaster. Agriculture knowledge was dispersed in a top-down manner, with

large farmers, landlords, and agronomists holding the majority of the knowledge. Nevertheless, the introduction of the progeny testing station is not the result of a top-down scientific implementation, as illustrated by Steven van der Laan in his contribution. Miguel Cabo and Lourenzo Fernández Prieto analyze the difference between the agricultural press and the agrarian press. The first comes from public, semi-public, and professional associations, containing scientific and technical publications; the second consisted of all the issues and publications edited by farmers' unions and rural residents. However, the boundaries between the two types of publishing are difficult to grasp, as the agrarian press took articles from the agricultural press, acting as "interpreters" and making knowledge more accessible to farmers. Miguel Cabo and Lourenzo Fernández Prieto highlight in this way how easily knowledge networks can be combined.

Despite the formation of knowledge networks in the European agricultural sector, knowledge still remained restricted to a small number of people among the elite. The barriers to knowledge were significantly reduced by converting scientific knowledge into a language comprehensible and applicable to agricultural workers. The vulgarization of scientific agricultural knowledge lowered the social distance between farmers and the elite of agricultural experts. Regional and national governments gave financial and political support to farmers unions and, more importantly, began to invest a large amount of money in agricultural education, research institutions, along with a committee of consultants who offered onsite visits and bespoke professional advice. Laurent Herment provides the correspondence of the director of the Public Agricultural Services of Oise Department in France. This state agronomist strategy was to approach large and important farmers directly, as he knew them personally; then he reached the bigger group of small farmers indirectly through farmers' unions and cooperatives, using a more comprehensible language.

Authors of this volume also highlight how the crisis after World War I was taken as an opportunity for change and innovation. Dries Claeys and Yves Segers illustrate how livestock farming in the Belgian context changed in order to outweigh the disastrous damage of World War I. The ministry of agriculture, the farmers organizations, and the livestock farmers worked together to restore the national livestock by introducing improved and innovative breeding practices. To do so, the Belgian government invested in the creation of networks, initiatives, and research centers, promoting the diffusion of agricultural knowledge.

In this context, livestock consultants played a key role in the process of narrowing the gap between the world of scientific knowledge and that of agricultural practice. For instance, as explained by Paul Brassley in his contribution, the UK's National Agricultural Advisory Service was composed of 1,500 practitioners and specialists who worked closely with farmers organizing site visits, lectures, seminars, shows, and customized advice.

The authors of this volume give much prominence to the argument of the gap between science-based agricultural knowledge and practice-based agricultural knowledge. Since the eighteenth century, the relationship between the holders of theoretical and practical knowledge has not proven to be very efficient. Hence, what emerges from this book is predominant top-down knowledge communication: from experts and scholars to farmers and agricultural workers, from government to farms. Through the analysis of individual case studies, this book presents an intriguing viewpoint on how the expansion of 'knowledge networks' – serving as social environments for the transfer, exchange, promotion, approval, and rejection of knowledge – contributed to the gradual closing of this gap. Author's contributions provide exhaustive insights into the diffusion of agricultural knowledge in different European space-time contexts, even though case studies regarding southern Europe, specifically Italy and Greece, which may also be of interest to readers, are not taken into consideration.

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Joris Oddens, *Op veler verzoek. Inclusieve politiek in Nederland (1780-1860)* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2023). 324 pp. ISBN 9789024462476.

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Jorris Oddens promoveerde een decennium geleden op een geschiedenis van het eerste verkozen parlement van Nederland, de Nationale Vergadering, 1796-1798. In deze met de D.J. Veegensprijs bekroonde dissertatie, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, was veel aandacht voor de wijze waarop de leden als volksvertegenwoordigers optraden en in hun openbare vergaderingen een nieuwe politieke cultuur ontwikkelden. In het nieuwste boek van Oddens, *Op veler verzoek*,