

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## **The contribution of the commons.**

### **The effect of collective use and management of natural resources on environment and society in European history.**

Workshop in Pamplona-Iruñea (Spain)

Universidad Pública de Navarra (Navarre Public University)

November 6-7, 2009

Collective ownership and resource management is currently an important research topic among historians, anthropologists, legal experts, economists, sociologists and political scientists, not in the least as a consequence of the challenges the world is facing regarding the management of natural resources. New research explicitly addressing the issue from one angle or another, as well as the existence of specifically focused research groups and networks show the omnipresence of this issue today. Historical analysis of common land regimes has over the last decade witnessed a clear shift in focus from the study of the abolition process of commons towards the analysis of the inside logic of their functioning and its implications in terms of collective identity. By doing so, historians have engaged increasingly in interdisciplinary debates on the sustainability of property rights regimes and have progressed in the application of methods and approaches from other disciplines to evaluate the functioning of commons. The growing interest of the social sciences in the so-called new commons has also given historical research new perspectives, in particular regarding the study of other natural resources than (wood)land. Therefore, this workshop does not only focus on common land in all its variations but also on other forms of collectively owned, used and managed natural resources, such as irrigation and drainage systems, fishing grounds etc.

Despite intense privatization efforts in Europe and the Americas since 1750, collective ownership use of natural resources is still omnipresent. The customs that have survived may not be merely dismissed as marginal relics of times gone by in run-down areas. The drive and vitality of communal customs in some regions and their compatibility with economic growth

reveals a complex process of historical change. Their prolonged lifespan and the huge variety of communal modes defined by user type, access rules, limitations and prohibitions, etc, also invite researchers to appraise the efficiency of communal systems in adapting to different social and ecological environments. Despite the fact that these modes of cooperation have been able to offer their users advantages in terms of scale, sustainability and overall use of land, they are not exempt from social conflict nor do they guarantee a sustainable use of resources.

This meeting aims at assessing the effect of commons on the surrounding environment and society. Despite the reputation common property regimes have earned as being an inefficient way to manage natural resources both in economic and social terms, there are ample examples of communities of commoners that have shown their ability to adapt to changing contexts, and have been a driving force behind a balanced environmental and social development. Such issues have been well-studied in other social sciences, and can offer a source of inspiration for historical research.

The specific issues we expect to deal with in this workshop are the following:

**1. Common Land and Environment: to what extent do property rights matter for sustainability?**

We especially welcome papers that analyze different combinations of property rights (including both collectively and privately owned property), showing the way in which respective resources are managed and in which their property regimes affect the sustainability of these resources. This topic may be addressed either by studying the design of the regulating mechanisms of commons, or by studying the historical practices that enabled the maintenance of such a balance or have led to its deterioration.

**2. Common property, social cohesion and social capital**

One of the issues this meeting will address is the role of common land regime contributes in creating greater social cohesiveness. For this purpose, we suggest analyzing its relationship with the creation and proliferation of “social networks” and its contribution to the formation of “social capital”, through the redistribution of opportunities, both of a tangible (access to land and resources) and intangible nature (education, health, reputation). From this viewpoint it also makes sense to analyze participation in the decision-making mechanisms within the local

political sphere and the relationship of the community with external political agents (the Feudal Domain, The Crown, the Nation-State).

The organizers encourage in particular submissions that introduce new historical source material and novel ways of using historical sources, inspired by other social sciences. The organizers welcome in particular quantitative and long-term studies, that are also able to connect historical developments to current evolutions. All abstracts and papers will have to be submitted and presented in English.

Paper abstracts have to be submitted by the 31<sup>st</sup> of April. The final papers are due by the 15<sup>st</sup> of October. Travel and accommodation expenses of the (main) authors of the selected abstracts will be reimbursed. A selection of the best papers will be considered for publication as part of a special issue for a relevant peer-reviewed journal in the field (in English).

Organizing Committee:

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