

## Seventh Biennale of Rural History Conference (EURHO)

9-12 September 2025, Coimbra (Portugal)



### **CALL FOR PAPERS:**

Session 31 - Agricultural tractors, social change and rural communities in 20<sup>th</sup> century

**Deadline:** 20/01/2025

**Submit your proposal here:** <https://ruralhistory2025.org/call-for-papers/>

### **Abstract:**

Agricultural tractors have played a central role of the great agriculture technology transformations in 20th century. Although the international agrarian historiography has made progress in understanding the mechanisation of agriculture from an institutional and market perspective, the effects of mechanisation in peasant community's reproduction strategies have yet to be discussed in depth and in international comparison. Thus, the main question of this session is: How did agricultural tractors change peasant communities' reproduction strategies in 20th century? This question is directly related to the Marxist hypothesis of social change, which it is often pointed out that social relations are closely linked to productive forces. So, when productive forces change, peasants change their mode of production, and when their mode of production changes, all their social relations change. Therefore, we expect to discuss the hypothesis that links the diffusion of agricultural tractors with the final crisis of peasant reproduction in the 20th century. For this reason, we will also discuss how agricultural tractors have shaped new social relations and new socials classes differentiations for 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Agricultural tractors are an industrial innovation aimed at saving labour. But we also know, both from agroecology and from the peasant economy theory, that peasant innovation strategies are not always aimed at saving labour. This is especially true in agriculture with family labour based. On the other hand, we know that in the intensive

organic and solar energy-based agriculture that dominated the world until the first third of 20<sup>th</sup> century, many agricultural tasks required large investments of labour from human and animal energy-base source. For this reason, peasant reproduction strategies were often directed towards innovations that reduced human physical effort, but not towards those that completely replaced it. Moreover, we know that fertilisation needs, and structural nitrogen deficits required livestock, so the complete substitution of animal traction for agricultural tasks was not appropriate either. However, all this changed, especially after the Second World War, which the rise of agribusiness, new marketing techniques to make agricultural tractor desirable and, overall, innovations needed to make it cheap, easy to use and adaptable to many types of land and agricultural work. The peasant had to face up to this change, which structurally overtook them. As a result, many things changed: ways of working, gender roles, generational roles, marriage policies, community hierarchies, sociability, leisure, etc. Many changes in reproduction strategies that, in a long-term perspective, became known as *Le Fin des Paysans* era in late 20th century.

We would like to receive proposals working on different perspectives (social, economy, environmental, gender, culture, sociology, anthropology) addressing the same question: How did agricultural tractors change peasant communities' reproduction strategies? We encourage the submission of proposals that promote in-depth, pluralistic and from below analyses, and dealing with the 20th century and any territory, both Global North and South. The latest aim of this session is to publish the papers as a special issue in a high-ranking journal or as a book in a well renowned international editorial.

**Organizer:**

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