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**Sesión plenaria:
Tesis doctorales en curso**

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Título de la tesis:

Common lands and economic development in 19th and early 20 century Spain

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Justificación del tema

Traditional historiography has positively regarded privatization of the communal regime as a precondition to foster economic growth. This line of enquiry argue that private property rights are required in order to trigger investment and innovation and also that common property regimes lead to overexploitation of the resources. However, the negative view surrounding the communal regime, whose paradigmatic example is the 'tragedy of the commons', has been challenged by a new wave of empirical research that considers common property regimes to be efficient and sustainable, thus reevaluating the role that common resources had for the local communities that managed them. What would be essential therefore is not whether property rights are private, public or communal but whether they are properly defined and enforced.

In order to contribute to this long-standing debate, my research exploits historical evidence drawn from 19th century and early 20th century Spain. Common lands were a key component in the organic-based Spanish preindustrial economy. However, the transformations caused by the transition to capitalism, and the emergence of a new liberal state, triggered their gradual dismantling throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. What makes the Spanish case especially interesting is that the importance of the privatization process was geographically diverse and while some regions completely dismantled the communal regime, others managed to preserve a large stock of common lands, thus turning the Spanish experience into an ideal case study on which to base my research.



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Metodología y fuentes

Combining primary and secondary sources, I have collected a quantitative and a qualitative panel data set at the provincial level at three different time-periods (1860, 1900 and 1930). The information gathered has allowed me carrying out a comparative study of the historical data at the provincial level using econometric techniques with the aim of analysing the forces behind the privatisation of the communal regime and how this process affected economic development.

Resultados

The first chapter of this dissertation examines the diverse persistence of the communal regime and the reasons behind these dissimilar paths. The results of this analysis diminish the significance of market signals and show how the social and environmental conditions interacted to limit, or promote, the dismantling of the common lands. Apart from the greater need of resorting to the commons if agricultural production wanted to be increased in dry regions, the results stress that high levels of inequality in the access to land played a key role in promoting enclosure.

The rest of this thesis is aimed to study how the persistence or the dismantling of collective resources shaped economic development. In order to do so I focus on four different aspects: agricultural productivity, biological living standards, educational attainments and social capital. Firstly, in order to analyse the effect caused by the privatisation of communal resources on agricultural development, apart from knowing the stock of common lands and the agricultural output at the provincial level, I gather information on the different inputs affecting the level of agricultural output in 1900 and 1930. Given their role as provider of pasture, the link between common lands and livestock is also included in the analysis. Focusing on cross-regional differences during the period between 1900 and 1930 assures that the potential ultimate effect of the developments taking place throughout the 19th century is taken into account. The results



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show that, on average, the different stock of common lands did not explain the differences on the levels of output per worker between provinces.

Given that the dismantling of common lands was a measure that affected almost every aspect of social and economic life, the impact of privatization on economic development is not only examined in terms of agricultural efficiency, but also considering its effects on a wider array of economic outcomes. On the one hand, the commons constituted a source of complementary income by providing pasture to support livestock, wood, and fuel, among other products, including the possibility of temporary cropping. These services, especially important for the bottom part of the distribution, were not subject to market mechanisms, so quantifying their effect in terms of wages or income per capita becomes a hazardous task. Instead, the potential impact of these collective resources on standards of living is measured using life expectancy and heights. The empirical analysis not only shows that commons were at least as beneficial as private lands before 1860, but also that the persistence of these collective resources from then onwards was related to higher life expectancy and heights, particularly during the second half of the 19th century.

On the other hand, during the 19th century, municipalities were responsible for the provision of elementary education and their financial capacity was crucial when it came to fund schooling expenditures. Spain experienced a delayed and geographically uneven spread of literacy, resulting in very poor average levels of human capital. The monetary income derived from the cession of user-rights on the commons actually constituted a fundamental component of the municipal budget. Given that, municipalities were responsible for the provision of elementary education, their financial capacity was crucial in the funding of schooling expenditures. This section of my dissertation thus tests whether enclosure affected the evolution of human capital. Framed within the transition from restricted to universal literacy, common lands appear to have positively



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contributed to achieve significantly higher levels of both schooling expenditure and literacy rates.

Lastly, the dismantling of collective practices attacked the social fabric that knit the community together. The link between the institutions formed around the use and management of collective resources and social capital is also explored. Common lands, and also irrigation communities, provided dense networks of continuous social interactions that facilitated the diffusion of information and the building of mutual knowledge and trust, thus potentially favouring cooperative behaviour. The emergence of agricultural cooperatives in early 20th century Spain is used in the last chapter of my dissertation as the testing ground for this hypothesis. The results show that higher stock of collectively-managed resources in 1900, employed as a proxy for social capital, is positively associated with the fraction of the rural population involved in agricultural cooperatives in the 1920s.

Summing up, my research shows that the dismantling of collective practices in 19th century Spain had unintended consequences for economic development by negatively affecting the possibility of resorting to cooperation mechanisms different from the market. Not only did the privatisation of common lands did not significantly foster agricultural productivity, but also this process did negatively affect other dimensions of these rural societies: it reduced the standard of living of a significant share of the population, deteriorated the finances of local councils and attacked the social ties that held the community together.