

STRUCTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE SHORT-TERM POSITIVE CHECK IN CROATIA, SLAVONIA AND SRIJEM IN THE 18TH-19TH CENTURY

SUMMARY

We examine the effects of structural changes on the Malthusian short-term positive check in Croatia during a period characterized by significant intermittent military activity and dramatic shifts in social structure. Information comes from the work of Krivošić in northwest Croatia, various ecclesiastical newspapers, and the work of Hammel and of Čapo in the parish records of central Slavonia, covering approximately 1780-1890, covering 25 parishes. We analyze the elasticity of mortality with respect to annual fluctuations in the price of grain. The price of grain is taken as a proxy for grain supply. Studies of such effects in many countries and periods show that mortality increases in the short term in response to grain price increase (thus to grain shortage). The strongest mechanism is probably increased mobility in search of food or work, thus enhanced exposure to infectious disease. The present analysis confirms these usual outcomes.

This analysis also shows that important structural differences in society and over time had an effect on the strength of mortality response. Populations in Civil Croatia responded more sharply than in Military Croatia, we presume because they were more exposed to economic stress and competition, especially with their feudal landlords. Increasing land shortage, withdrawal of labor from agriculture because of mobilization, and the reduction in peasant income through imposition of feudal dues or indebtedness following emancipation all seem to intensify the mortality response.

In a general way the worsening of conditions for the peasants, despite emancipation but perhaps because of the gradual inclusion of Croatian agriculture in a worldwide grain market in which other producers modernized more rapidly, is reflected in increased vulnerability to price shocks and shortages as manifested through the mortality response.

Keywords: historical demography, Croatia