

# More Water, more Prosperity?

## Land Concentration Processes in Irrigated Areas and its Implications for Food Sovereignty.

### A Qualitative Case Study from Rural Catalonia.

Elena Louisa Alter

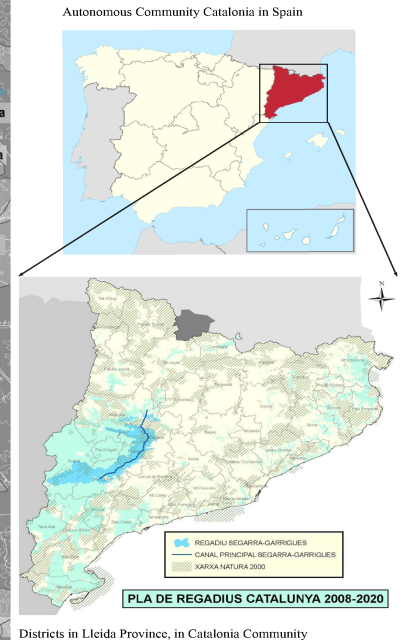
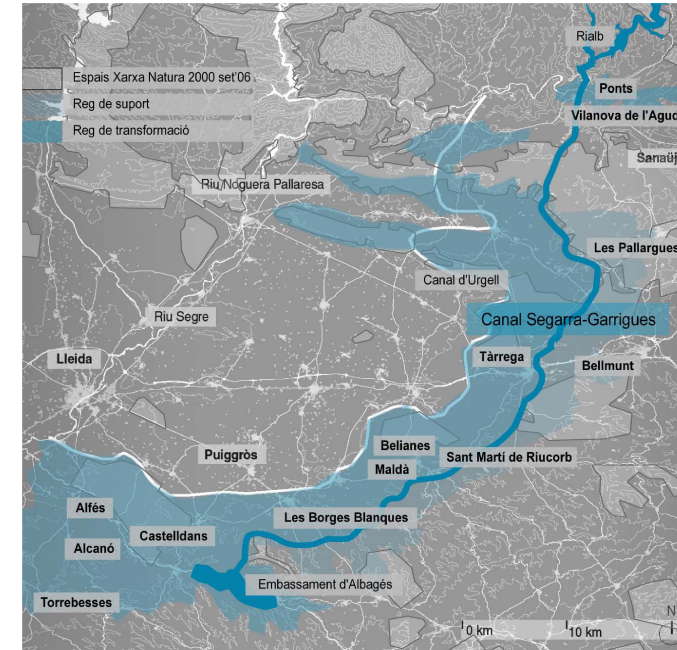
#### Research Questions:

- What are the socio-ecological conditions that underlie land concentration processes in rural Catalonia?
- How does the installation of the Segarra-Garrigues irrigation canal contribute to land concentration processes and favour agribusiness expansion?
- How are farmers' and rural community members' – their livelihoods, work and the landscape in which they live – affected by land concentration processes and what are the implications on food sovereignty in the Lleida region?

#### Literature & Methods:

- Literature review (Critical Agrarian Studies, Social and Political Ecology) on (1) Drivers and implications of land concentration in Europe and (2) Theory of Food Sovereignty (movement, principles);
- 20 Qualitative semi-structured interviews supplemented by direct and participant observation; data analysis: Qualitative Content Analysis by Mayring.

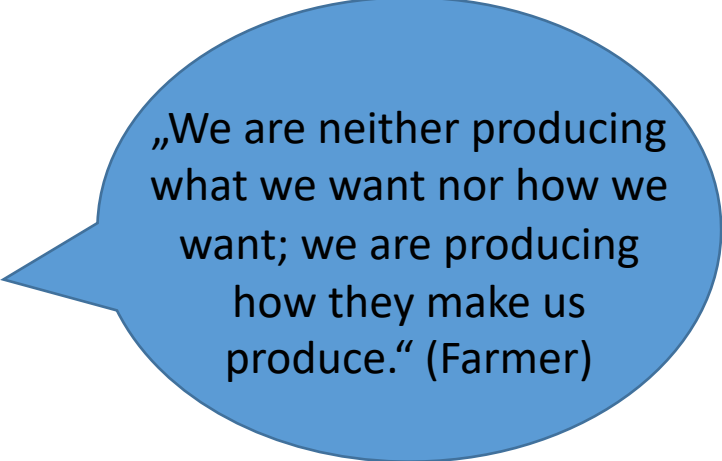
Audience: Interesting for rural communities and farmers, researchers and policy makers.



## Results:

### 1) Socio-ecological conditions underlining farmland concentration

- On-going consolidation of an intensive, export-oriented agricultural system
- Lack of viability of small farms and rising living costs
- Land abandonment (particular in drylands) and lack of generational replacement



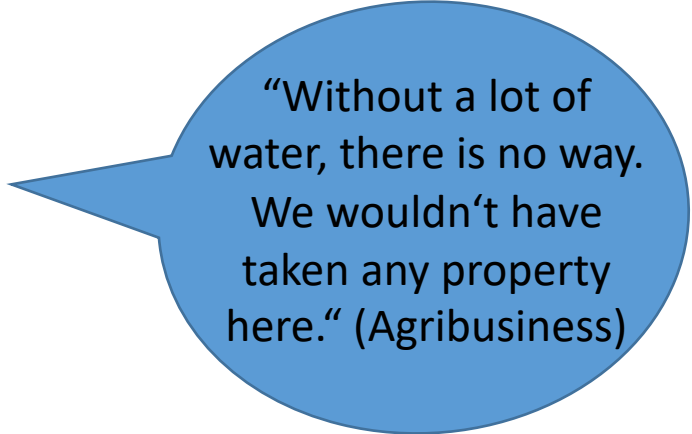
„We are neither producing what we want nor how we want; we are producing how they make us produce.“ (Farmer)

### 2) Land concentration and irrigation: Who benefits?

- The installation of irrigation in Spain rests upon a (historical) narrative of rural development and the idea that irrigated agriculture is a way to reach a territorial equilibrium; the Segarra-Garrigues canal project was promoted as a measure to solve some of the problems the region is facing (e.g. land abandonment).

#### **Factors that influence who benefits from the project:**

- Irrigation model
- Acces to water
- Access to land
- Management of and participation in the project
- Access to capital
- Access to higher education and scientific knowledge



“Without a lot of water, there is no way. We wouldn't have taken any property here.“ (Agribusiness)

**My study suggests that mainly agribusinesses profit from irrigation instead of small farmers, as the planification and characteristics of the canal (e.g. high shares of water, lack of political power of farmers, newest technologies which require specific knowledge to handle them, high water and installation costs) are rather aligned to the necessities and capabilities of agribusinesses than to those of small-scale, predominantly old farmers.**

### 3) Socio-ecological implications undermining food sovereignty

### 4) Food sovereignty alternatives

#### 1. Growing power of agribusinesses and increasing pressures on farmers related to commercialisation & trade

[financialisation of agriculture, speculation with commodities (e.g. almonds, livestock), decrease & volatility of prices, lack of bargaining power, negative effects for rural economies]

#### 2. Restricted access to local resources

[Difficulties to access land, increasing land speculation, limited access to water (e.g. because of water and installation prices)]

#### 3. Changing production models

[Intensification & export-orientation, crop changes, loss of collective memory of cultivation methods of drylands, alteration of traditional landscapes]

#### 4. Growing disenchantment with politics and lack of participation and perceived self-efficacy of farmers

[Little influence in political decision-making processes, burdens of political engagement and organisation among farmers, distrust in political leaders, emergence of social movements]

#### 5. Deterioration of social and labour conditions of farmers and farm workers

[lack of services and infrastructures, feeling of inferiority, lack of recognition in society, financial & psychological burdens for farmers, violation of labour & human rights of migrant workers]

- **Enhancement of smaller projects of direct and local commercialisation**

- **Support of local economies**

- **Embrace ecological and Mediterranean cultivations**

- **Create land banks**