

Call for research papers 2024-2026 Trade associations in the economy of pre-industrial Europe (12th–18th centuries)

In the 21st century, the theme of trade associations, which had an important place in the European historiography of the late nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, is experiencing a new lease of life. Rather than presenting itself as a historical question that has been exhaustively explored, the question of the role of professional unions in the economies and societies of medieval and modern Europe, in fact, demonstrates considerable vitality, attracting the attention of scholars from different backgrounds and interests and fuelling a lively debate, focused above all on corporations (Horn 2015; Prak et al. 2020; Ogilvie 2021). The wide dissemination of trade associations throughout pre-industrial Europe and the multiple functions they assumed in different periods and contexts also make them a particularly suitable subject for a comparative and diachronic discussion, a subject that has never been directly addressed in the Datini Weeks, although it has sometimes emerged in meetings dedicated to other topics.

The analysis that is intended to be developed in the LVII Week does not have as its object a dominant model or type: on the contrary, its primary objective is to document the different forms and local and regional variants of professional-based associationism: not everywhere, in fact, did the existence of trade groups result (or initially result) in the formation of corporations, understood as essentially autonomous structures for the management of the interests of trade groups recognised by the public power. Between "free" work and "corporate" work there were large intermediate spaces where both recognised non-corporate associations moved, such as trade fraternities, in which the professional dimension was intertwined with the religious and solidarity dimensions, and informal and semi-legal groups but which in the eyes of the local authorities presented "the same advantages as official trade organisations, guaranteeing the regularity of production and employment practices, limiting disputes and allowing representative interlocutors in case of conflict" (Kaplan-Minard 2004).

In Catalonia, for example, during the thirteenth century, professional unions (*oficios*) experienced considerable development, and equipped themselves with their own leaders, who were responsible for controlling all aspects of the production process and representing the interests of the associates. In the following half century, then, the progressive transformation of the *oficios* into corporations began to take place, starting with the textile trades of cities such as Perpignan and Barcelona (Riera i Melis 1993). In Castile, on the other hand, corporate institutions based on the Catalan model seem to have formed only during the Kingdom of the Catholic kings; nevertheless, it has now been established that organised trade groups existed since the mid-13th century, although it is not easy to understand their exact nature, also due to terminology that oscillates between the use of the terms "fraternity" and "trade" (Menjot 1994; Monsalvo 2002). In Italy, the situation of the Centre-North, where the presence of corporations in the proper sense was widespread, definitely differed from that of the South, where trade groups assumed a corporate physiognomy only in the middle of the fourteenth century in the Kingdom of Naples and at the beginning of the fifteenth century in that of Sicily (Franceschi 2017).

In France, since the late Middle Ages, the *métiers jurés* were joined by trade fraternities and also professional communities created on the basis of custom. Their existence continues to be

documented in the modern age, when the *compagnonnages* also became more clearly evident. It was another way of "forming an organisation", a kind of corporatism without corporations, which in any case ensured that each association had its own perimeter of activity and intervention. Thus, in the seventeenth century, the wheat merchants of Paris, who did not have a corporation, had a fraternity and above all a strong organisation and specific privileges (Sewell 1980; Garrioch 2018). Also in English cities, in addition to the corporations themselves, at least two other types have been identified: informal and temporary associations of workers of the same trade created to pursue a specific objective and unofficial and sometimes clandestine communities of specialised employees (Rosser 1994; Lis-Soly 1994).

Not only was the world of trade groups not rigid in models and immovable, it was not even confined to cities or minor centres: between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, in fact, in various regions of central and eastern Europe, numerous areas of proto-industrial production were organised into corporations or pseudo-corporate associations which in Württemberg – to give an example relating to the German context – took the form of district organisations (Ogilvie 2019).

The subject under consideration, due to its multidisciplinary nature, can be investigated from different angles, including the political/institutional perspective and solidarity/welfare and ideological/cultural perspectives, angles that can certainly enter the framework of reference of the interventions. The key questions, however, concern the role played by trade associations in defending the interests of the categories represented, in the disciplining of the world of work, in the relationship with female labour and above all in economic growth through policies in relation to the market, the formation of human capital, and the protection of quality and technical progress.

The reports proposed for the Datini Week must touch on one or more of the following topics:

1. Definitions and typologies

- Given that in pre-industrial Europe there were different types of trade associations, is it possible, within specific spatial and chronological coordinates, to identify common characteristics and differences? Is it also possible to capture organisational changes over time?
- What were the conditions that guided or determined the choice in favour of a certain form of association?
- How were the associates internally structured? Who governed them and how? How did they operate from an economic point of view?
- What forms did relations with public authorities take?
- In what cases, and for what reasons, did the authorities not grant authorisation for the formation of professional associations? In what cases and for what reasons did they decree its suppression?

2. Representation and defence of interests

- Of which professional category(ies) did the association represent the interests?
- The setting of the conditions for entry into the trade group: protection of members from competition, mechanism for balancing demand and supply of work or lobbying privilege?
- Organised trades and working monopoly: an effective privilege?
- To what extent were professional associations able to mediate internal conflicts between individuals and groups (between locals and foreigners, between different specialisations,

between members of different status) and to manage disputes with other trade organisations?

- The fight for the recognition of new associations by the public authority: could the conflict itself be a form of defence of interests?
- What was the space in which the authority of this or that type of professional group was exercised: a city? A city and its county? A kingdom?
- What was the role of the companions?

3. Trade associations and gender

- Corporations, trade fraternities, other professional communities: what differences existed in the reception of women?
- Exclusion: what were the determining factors?
- Inclusion: of whom, under what conditions and with what prerogatives?
- Was there a female self-exclusion strategy? For what reasons?

4. Human capital formation

- If it is true that there is a positive correlation between training, qualitative improvement of human capital and economic development, what actual role have organised trades played in the selection and qualification of new masters?
- Were there alternatives to corporate apprenticeships?
- How much did the need to use apprentices as labour interfere with the completeness of the training course?
- How widespread were the learning verification systems and what did they consist of?

5. Trade and market associations

- What were the main tools through which the trade organisations kept the prices of the products made and sold high?
- What means were used to lower the cost of labour and raw materials used?
- Is it possible to demonstrate that organised trades exploited their position of privilege or monopoly not to regulate, but rather to adapt the mechanisms of supply and demand to their advantage?

6. Quality protection

- What were the real drivers of regulation in this area? The exclusion of competitors' goods that could reduce associates' profits? A genuine interest in the quality of the items produced and marketed? The willingness to fight against fraud that damaged the group's reputation, undermined consumer trust and narrowed the market?

- Did the issuance and reiteration of standards to protect the quality of raw materials used, work processes and finished products, as well as all goods offered for sale, have a real impact on quality standards? Or was it first and foremost a way to continually reaffirm the *potestas statuendi* of the group?

- Were brands and quality certifications sufficient guarantees for consumers? And did they really protect producers and sellers from imitations and falsifications?

- How important were the control systems based on the inspection of production and sales sites, the existence of whistleblowers and spies and the threat of severe sanctions?

7. Trades, innovations and technical progress

- At least as far as corporations are concerned, the relationship with innovations has often been reduced from historiography to the alternative between opposition and stimulus. Beyond the foreseeable variety of responses in different contexts, can a different attitude be identified depending on the type of trade organisations, for example between commercial associations or with the dominant participation of merchants-entrepreneurs (such as those of the textile industry) and organisations formed by artisans and retailers?

- Faced with the granting of privileges and licences to specialists and "inventors" by public authorities, what space for speech, negotiation, and intervention was reserved for trade groups?

- The "trade secrets" or the "tricks of the trade", in all types of trade communities represented a form of consolidated knowledge to be carefully protected so as not to give competitors the possibility of improving. Was repression towards those who disseminated such information, perhaps moving them directly to other places, always the norm? Or were there, over time, attitudes of greater flexibility?

8. Trade associations on the market

- What was the role of trade associations as buyers of properties?

- What is their contribution to the commissioning and the art market?

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Expected results

The selected papers will be presented and discussed at Prato in the course of the Study Week 2026. After the discussion at the Settimana sessions, scholars should complete and revise their texts **by 30 June 2026**. All contributions received by the Institute will be subject to anonymous adjudication before publication.

Call for papers

Scholars are invited to send their proposal by compiling an abstract that will be reviewed by the Executive Committee.

The paper should represent an original contribution and be either generally comparative or a specific case-study that speaks to the larger questions set out here. Participants who are pursuing a PhD, should have completed it before the start of the conference.

Papers proposed by projects or collaborative groups that link scholars from different countries and institutions will be assessed with particular interest if they offer a comparative analysis in geographical or diachronic terms across two or more related research themes. We will also consider innovative session formats for these type of proposals.

The completed format must be received at the following address by **31 December 2024**:

Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini"

Via Ser Lapo Mazzei 37, I 59100 Prato, ITALY

e-mail: datini@istitutodatini.it

The Executive Committee will only take fully completed formats into consideration and will decide whether they have been accepted at the beginning of 2025, when authors of the selected proposals will be notified. Depending on the Institute's financial resources, at least 25 scholars will be provided with hospitality at Prato for the Study Week. The Executive Committee may also invite up to 20 additional scholars to participate in the project without any right to hospitality or reimbursement.

The Fondazione Datini will award for the Prato conference up to 10 Travel Bursaries to cover travel costs for the conference to the maximum of 250 euros per grant for postdoctoral scholars who do not hold a full-time academic position. Applicants must send the travel bursaries form to the Fondazione Datini with their paper by **10 April 2026**. The grant will be paid during the conference on the presentation of travel receipts.

The members of the Executive Committee are: Philippe Bernardi (Parigi, President), Michael North (Greifswald, Vice-president), Giuseppe Petralia (Pisa, Vice-president), Angela Orlandi (Firenze, Scientific Director), Erik Aerts (Lovanio), Hilario Casado Alonso (Valladolid), Markus Denzel (Lipsia), Franco Franceschi (Firenze), Maryanne Kowaleski (New York), Gaetano Sabatini (Roma Tre).

All submitted contributions must be original and not previously published or translated from previous publications.

The provisional texts of the selected contributions or at least a detailed synthesis must reach the Fondazione Datini by **10 April 2026**. They will be put online (with protected access reserved for the participants of the project and members of the Scientific Committee) on the Institute's web pages before the Study Week in order to allow a deeper discussion of their contents.

Authors who fail to send their provisional texts to the Fondazione that day, can not be included in the final programme. In absence of the author the synthesis will be read during the conference.

At the Settimana participants will offer a summary presentation of their contribution lasting 20 minutes. Simultaneous translation from and to Italian, English and French will be available during the Study Week.

The definitive texts of the paper, revised by the authors following the discussion during the Settimana (maximum 60,000 characters) must be sent to the Institute by **30 June 2026**. They will be subject to anonymous adjudication. Texts that pass the assessment stage will be published in a special volume within a year.

For the purpose of publication, texts will be accepted in Italian, French, English, Spanish and German.

Authors who are not writing in their native language are advised to have the language of their text vetted and corrected *before* submitting their paper for the assessment stage since one of the requirements for publication is that the grammar and writing style meet high academic standards.