

## When Protoindustry Collapsed Fertility and the Demographic Regime in Rural Eastern Belgium During the Industrial Revolution

*George Alter & Michel Oris & Muriel Neven* \*

**Abstract:** The story of the Demographic Transition is often told as a contrast between a dynamic urban-industrial sector and a static and traditional countryside. Rural areas are viewed as bastions of stability that resisted the transformative economic and cultural forces emanating from urban centers. This stereotype ignores the transformation occurring within the rural sector, in both its relationships with the urban-industrial world and its own internal economy. Looking at their demographic regime, especially the fertility pattern, we see that to a large extent, inhabitants of East Belgian countryside were able to cope with rural deindustrialization, population pressure and urban industrial development. It is not reasonable to see their late transition to low marital fertility as a lack of adaptive capacities, when they showed exactly the contrary throughout the century.