

# Living off the Land?

## A century of land ownership and leasehold distributions in early modern Holland (1580-1680)

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### Introduction

Recently, research into preindustrial inequality in Europe has received increased attention by scholars, finding mostly rising inequality over long periods of time (Alfani, et al., 2022; Nigro, 2020, to name a recent few). Since Kuznets, rise in inequality has been largely related to economic growth, and even though the mechanisms are largely still unclear, many recent contributions suggest similar conclusions (Ryckbosch, 2016; Alfani & Garcia Montero, 2022).

Though significant, the recent literature on preindustrial inequality has several problems:

- Most of the contributions do not rely on long-term serial data, creating issues with representativity
- Therefore, they cannot distil mechanisms directly influencing inequality
- Inequality numbers are usually taken at face value, neglecting the effects for the people involved.



### Results

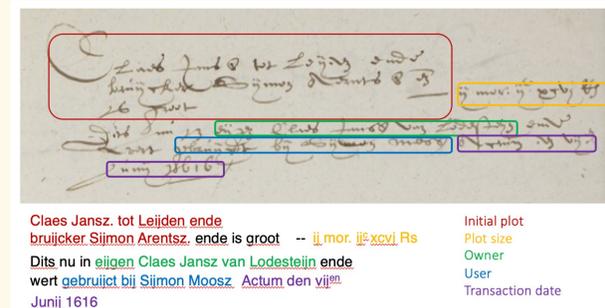
Thus far, the current project has resulted in data for two of the four localities: Koudekerk and Warmond. The y-axis indicates Gini coefficients, and the x-axis indicates time in years. The thick lines indicate ownership inequality, whereas the thinner lines indicate inequality among leaseholds.

For Warmond 1580-1648, we see an overall rise in land inequality, with a particularly heavy spike between 1616-1620. In Koudekerk, we found reasonably stable land inequality between 1580-1624, which is followed by a gradual decline between 1624-1648, after which inequality levels sharply restore and then stabilize.

For both localities, leasehold inequality follows almost identical trends to ownership inequality, yet structurally on a lower level.

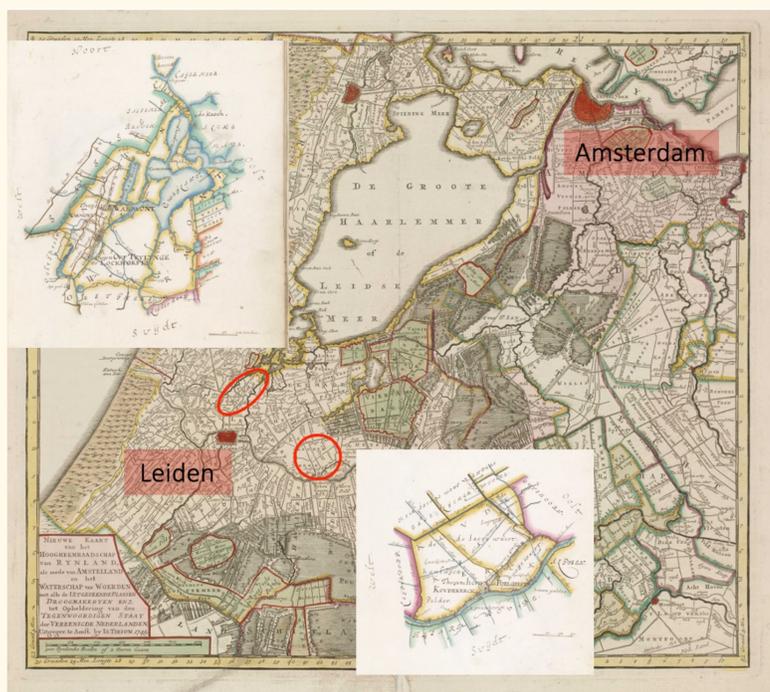
### Case study

The current project attempts to add to the state of the art by investigating land inequality in early modern Holland. It provides an interesting case study for rural preindustrial inequality research, as it is known as the first modern economy (de Vries & van der Woude, 1997) and is associated with transition to agrarian capitalism (Brenner, 2001). Distribution of land ownership has long been the at the centre of the literature on the economic development of early modern rural Holland, yet long-term serial reconstructions of land ownership have not been produced.

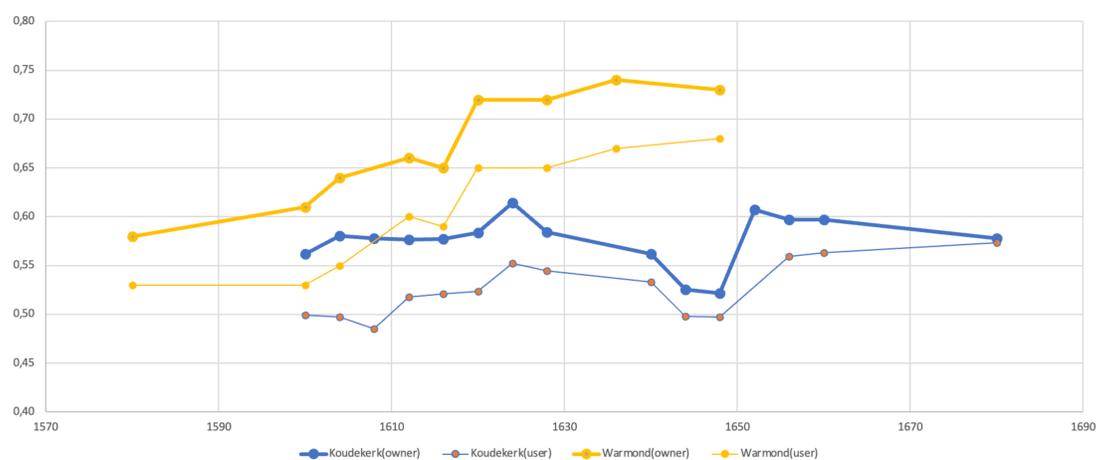


### Sources

Long have the water boards of Rijnland kept land registers for taxation purposes, known as *morgenboeken*. As a rule, the records recur for every leap year between 1544-1832 for 60 *ambachten*, although for some localities the books have been better kept than others. The records state the names of owners and users of the 1544 book, the new owners and users, plot sizes, and with a bit of luck, the date the transaction was signed (see image). The books also hold other types of information about the individuals in it, such as their place of residence, their status or occupation, whether they are widows or heirs, and sometimes, whether the plot has been acquired through market purchase or inheritance.



### Land inequality Koudekerk and Warmond, 1580-1680



### Conclusion

- Ownership inequality structurally higher than usership—but similar trends
- Trajectories differ even across localities in close proximity
- What causes fluctuations? Much to be done still: social distribution, plot sizes, top shares, etc.

### References

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