

Fascism and Modernity Revisited

Agricultural Development in German-Annexed Austria, 1938-45

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Outlook

- I Introduction: Fascism and (agro-)modernisation
- II Case study: Niederdonau, 1938-1945
- III Conclusion: Which agro-modernisation?

In my presentation I would like to stress three points:

- first, the relation of Fascism and (agro-)modernisation in theoretical terms;
- second, an empirical study on agricultural development in Niederdonau, a province of German-annexed Austria, 1938-1945;
- third, an assessment of agro-modernisation from my field of research.

Fascism und modernisation

‚classical‘ notion of modernisation: development towards *democratic, industrialised* und *individualised* society

→ ‚barbarism‘ as *opposite* of ‚civilisation‘

→ Nazism = ‚antimodern‘

criticism of discourse of modernity (,1968‘ ff.)

discourse of postmodernity (,1989‘ ff.)

‚reflexive‘ notion of modernisation: ambivalence of societal development

‚barbarism‘ as (possible) *part* of ‚civilisation‘

→ Nazism = alternative modernity

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I am not talking about Fascism in general; my focus is on its specific German variety, namely Nazism. Much of the confusion about the ‚(anti-)modern‘ character of Nazism comes from unclear notions of modernisation. Thus, we should first of all clarify what we mean by ‚modernisation‘. The ‚classical‘ notion of modernisation claims that the development of modern societies is oriented towards *democracy, industrialisation* and *individualisation*. Accordingly, ‚barbarism‘ (e.g. the Holocaust) is considered the opposite of ‚civilisation‘ and vice versa. From this point of view, Nazism is essentially ‚anti-modern‘.

However, this notion of modernisation has been questioned by the criticism of the discourse of modernity (in the aftermath of ‚1968‘) and by the discourse of postmodernity (in the aftermath of ‚1989‘). This all has given rise to a ‚reflexive‘ notion of modernisation, emphasising the ambivalence of societal development. Accordingly, ‚barbarism‘ might be a part of ‚civilisation‘. From this point of view, Nazism can be considered an alternative form of modernity – a ‚third way‘ besides the ‚liberalist‘ West European and the ‚socialist‘ East European forms of modernity.

Varieties of (agro-)modernisation

Classification of Nazism as being ‚antimodern‘ is a shortcoming; not if, but *how* (agro-)modernisation evolved is at stake!

		position of Nazi decision-makers?	
		intentional	functional
range of (agro-)modernisation?	total	modernisation as a ‚great leap‘ (Zitelmann 1980s)	unintended ‚revolution‘ (Schoenbaum 1960s)
	partial	modernisation in ‚small steps‘ (Bavaj 1990s)	unintended consequences of Nazi rule (Mommsen 1970s)

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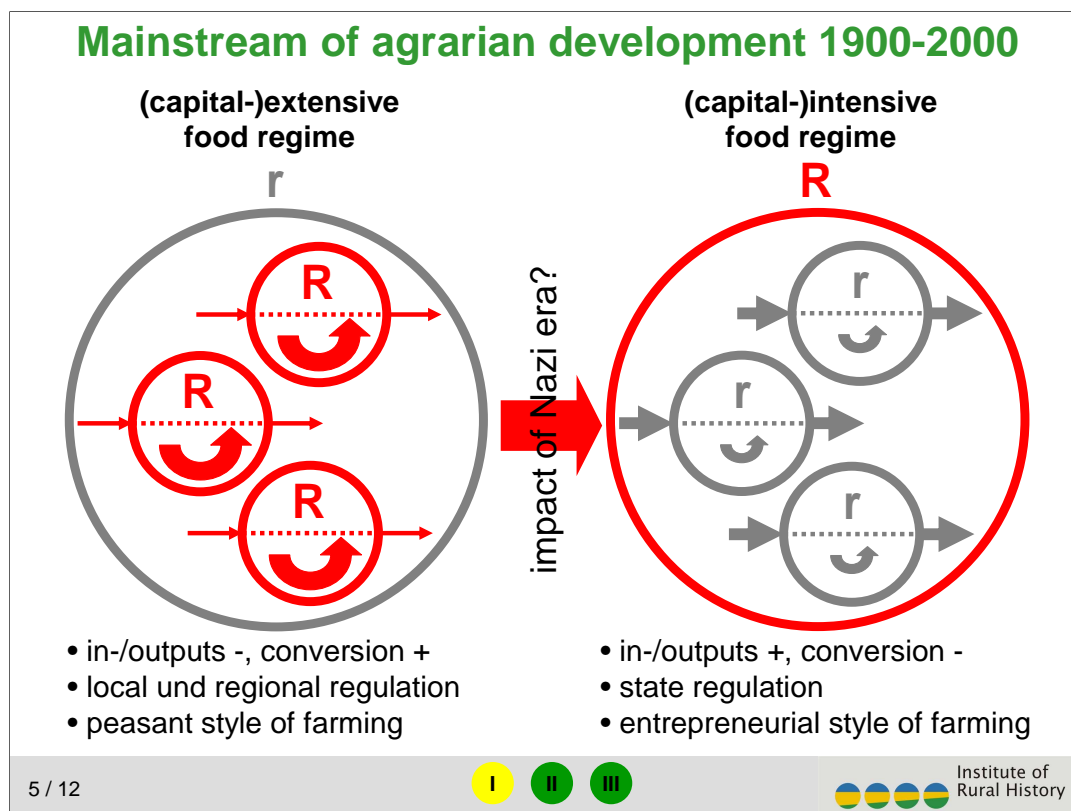


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If we adopt a ‚reflexive‘ notion of modernisation (and I think this makes much sense), then the classification of Nazism as being essentially ‚anti-modern‘ turns out to be a shortcoming. The crucial question is not if, but *how* modernisation(s) evolved. Consequently, the notion of ‚the modernisation‘ is being replaced by varieties of modernisation. These varieties are ordered along two axes, as a review of the debate about ‚Nazism and modernisation‘ from the 1960s onwards suggests: first, the position of the Nazi decision-makers, i.e. whether the modernisation of society was *intended* or an unintended *function*; second, the range of modernisation, i.e. whether it affected society *partially* or *totally*. This makes four positions which I am going to illustrate by examples:

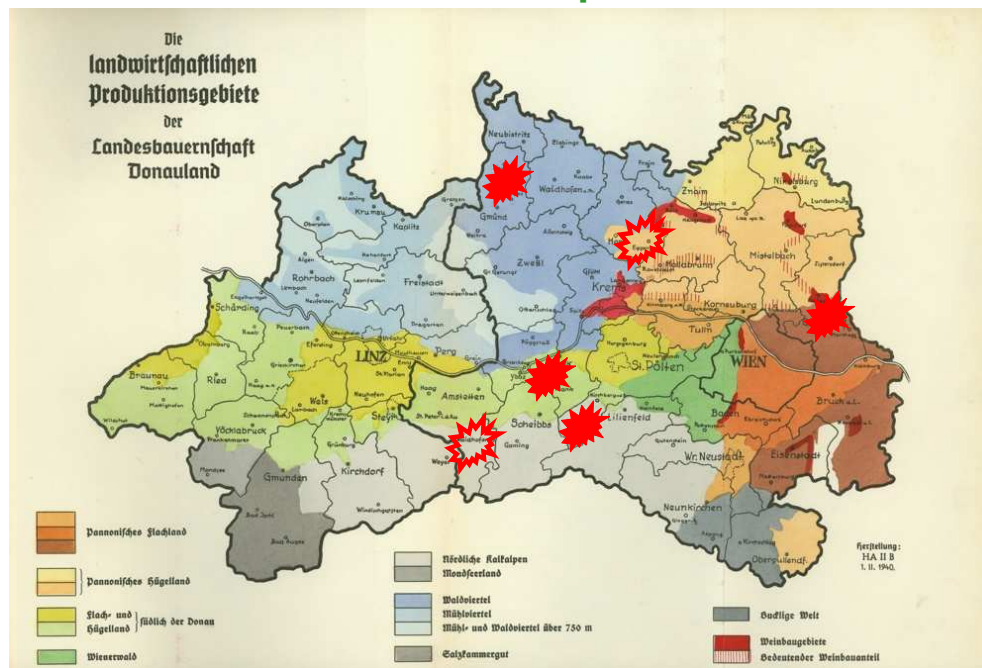
- In the 1960s, David Schoenbaum was one of the first emphasising the ‚modern‘ character of Nazism; however, this ‚social revolution‘ took place against the Nazi leaders‘ ‚anti-modernist‘ intentions.
- In the 1970s, Hans Mommsen conceded some modern developments in the Nazi era; but he classified them either as unintended consequences of the Nazi rule or as ‚pretended modernisation‘.
- In the 1980s, Rainer Zitelmann caused a stir by claiming that Hitler and other Nazi leaders were ‚revolutionaries‘ in the sense that they aimed at fundamentally transforming German society according to modernist visions.
- In the 1990s, Riccardo Bavaj argued that, though many Nazi leaders followed modernist visions, their efforts affected only parts of the society.

I do not want to enter this debate by judging who is ‚right‘ or ‚wrong‘; I would rather like to treat these varieties of modernisation as a heuristic framework for my own study on agricultural development in German-annexed Austria.



Before I come to my study, I would like to clarify what I mean by agricultural development. One – if not *the* - crucial aspect of agricultural development in twentieth century Austria was the transition from a capital-extensive to a capital-intensive food regime. My focus is on three aspects: resource flows, agricultural regulation and styles of farming. The capital-extensive agrosystem in the early twentieth century was characterised by low inputs and outputs with high internal conversion (e.g. cheese-making from self-produced milk), considerable regulation at the local and regional scale (family, kinship, community etc.) and peasant styles of farming (e.g. relative autonomy vis-à-vis state and markets). The transition to a capital-intensive agrosystem in the course of the century involved high inputs and outputs with low internal conversion, state regulation and entrepreneurial styles of farming. Thus, the question arises: Which impact had the Nazi era on this transition? Acceleration, deceleration or none?

Niederdonau 1938-1945: comparative case studies



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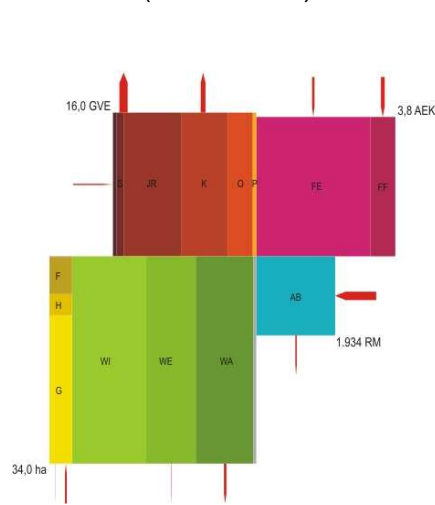


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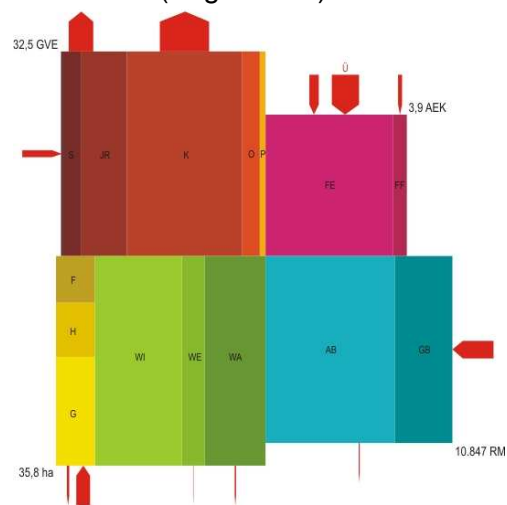
I do not want to bore you any longer with theory and come to the empirical part of my presentation. Recently, I have completed a comprehensive study of agricultural development in a province of the Third Reich from an actor-centred perspective. It focuses on the Austrian province of Niederdonau, the rural hinterland of Vienna. This map shows the main agricultural 'production zones' of the provinces of Oberdonau in the west and Niederdonau and Vienna in the east. The brown shaded areas in the east of Niederdonau show the Pannonian flat and hilly land (including the red coloured wine-growing areas); the grey shaded areas in the south show the Alpine and Sub-Alpine regions; the blue shaded areas in the north show the highlands; and the green shaded areas in between show the flat and hilly land south to the river Danube. My study comprises quantitative and qualitative studies of regional and local cases located in different 'production zones'; these cases are being compared according to similarities and differences. My following observations about resource flows, agricultural regulation and farming styles are grounded in this study.

Resources: high-input high-output farming

average farm in Ybbsitz 1941
(actual state)



average farm in Ybbsitz 1946
(target state)



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Let us first have a look on agricultural resources as exemplified by one of the most ambitious projects of Nazi agricultural policy. Due to war priorities, the project of overall technical modernisation of the countryside was postponed to the time after the 'final victory'. However, a few local pilot actions labelled 'communal construction' were implemented in mountainous areas. In short, 'small steps' were considered to prepare the 'great leap'.

How did this project affect local farming systems? This figure depicts the actual state of the average farming system in the commune of Ybbsitz in 1941. Each square represents one sort of resources: the lower left square stands for the cultivated *land*, the upper left square for the *livestock*, the upper right square for the *labour force* and the lower right square for the *machinery*. The red arrows illustrate the directions and amounts of money flows. The question about the impact of the 'communal construction' on the local farming system can be answered by comparison with the target state in 1946:

- First, whereas land and labour force hardly increased, the livestock doubled – mostly due to the expansion of dairy cows – and the machinery quintupled.

- Second, though farm size nearly stagnated in absolute terms, the relations between different uses of land changed considerably: Arable land increased at the expense of grassland; moreover, pastures were converted into meadows. As a result, land was used more intensively afterwards than before.

- Third, farm inputs such as mineral fertilizer, seeds and fossile fuels strongly increased; so did farm outputs such as dairy products and meat. Consequently, circular flows of resources were more and more redirected to factor and product markets.

- Fourth, according to the calculations, formerly unprofitable farms were expected to make profits in the end. Thus, the farm as a target of labour assignment was transformed into a source of monetary income.

All in all, the 'communal construction' action aimed at transforming mountain agriculture towards high-input high-output farming; however, these plans were only partly realised.

Styles of farming: the 'rational farmer'

Ölfruchtanbau - lohnt sich!
Baut mehr Ölfrüchte - aber nur dort, wo sie hinpassen!

Rücklieferung von Ölkuchen als hochwertiges Kraftfutter

Gute Preise gefüchete Abnahme zusätzlicher Prämien insgesamt 44 RM je dz

In einem Jahr soviel Geld wie in zwei Jahren!

Körnerertrag	Reinfett
18 Dz =	65 Dz
Ölkuchen	Reinfett über Milcherzeugung
11 Dz =	1 Dz
Gesamtertrag = 7,5 Dz	

Durchschnittsertrag an Weizen nach Raps beträgt:

Raps u. Rübsen
Jan Feb März Apr. Mai Juni Juli Aug. Sept. Okt. Nov. Dez.

Zwischenfrüchte
Kohlfröhen

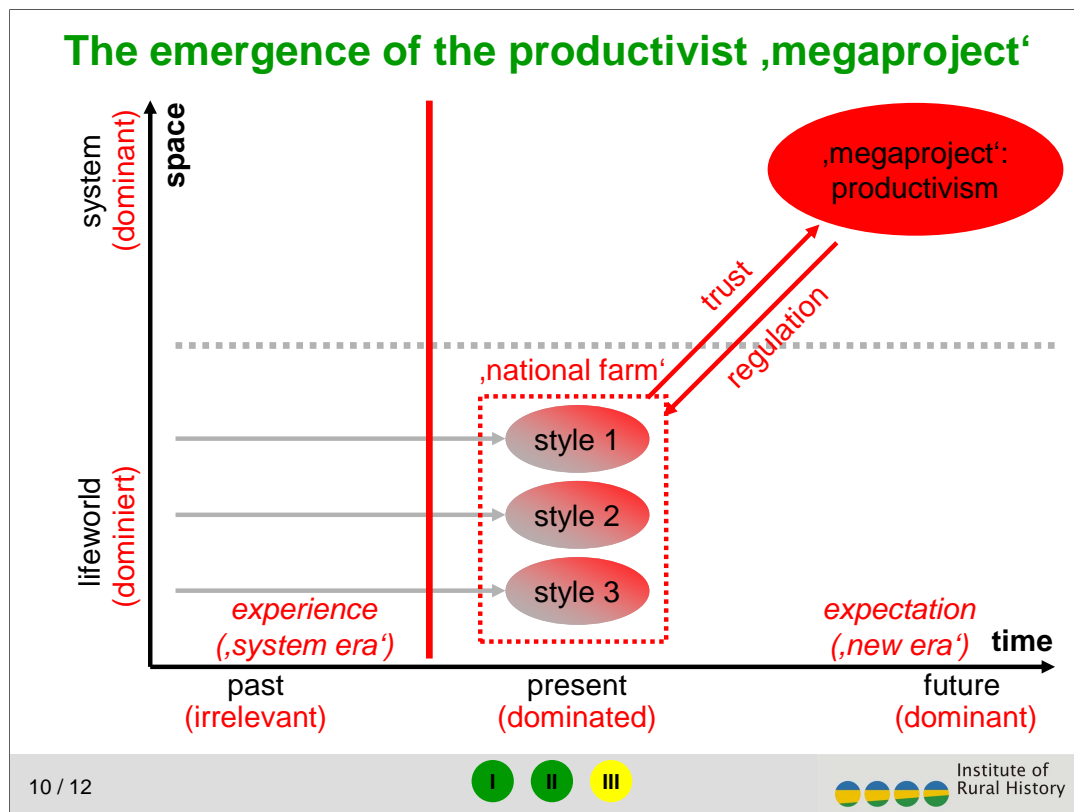
Source : Wochenblatt der Landesbauernschaft Donauland 19/1940

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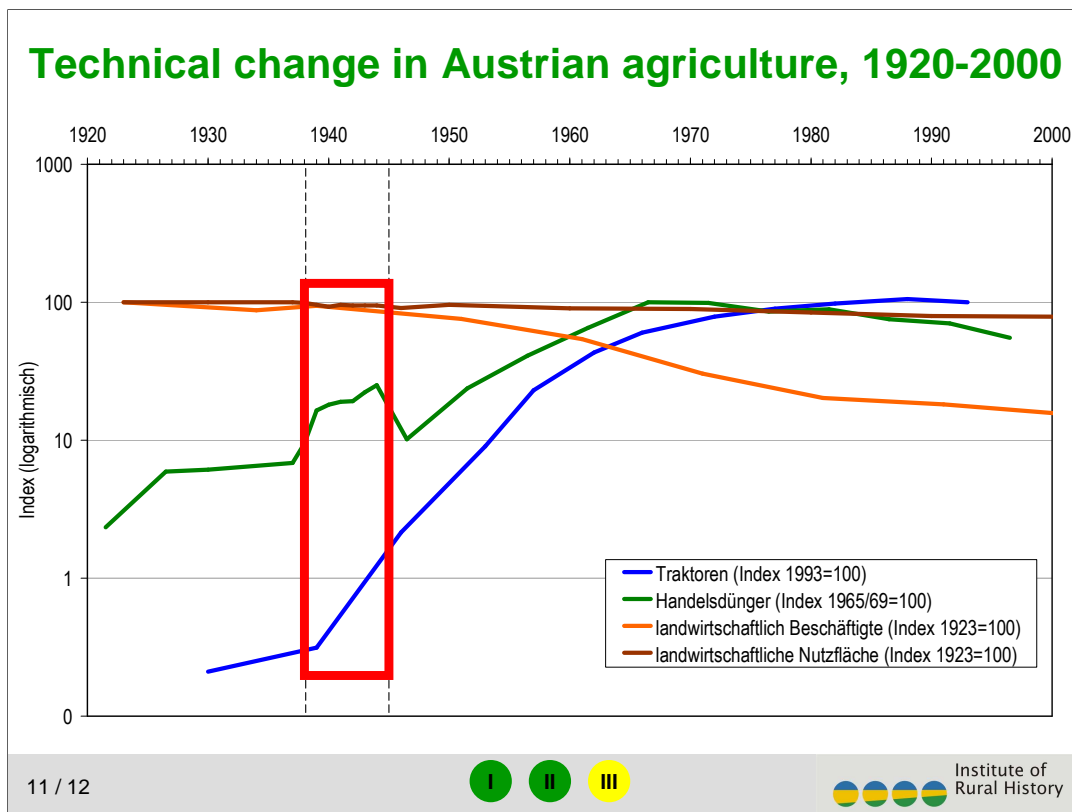


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Thirdly I am showing you a comic strip published in a popular farmers' journal as an example of the re-ordering of farming styles. According to the conventional wisdom, the Nazis promoted the 'blood and soil' ideology. This ideology idealises the 'peasant', driven by extra-economic motives such as the provision of a 'racially' pure community (both at the levels of the family and the German 'people'); furthermore, it condemns the profit-oriented 'farmer'. However, the discourse of the state-led production campaign expressed in this picture turns the ideological hierarchy of 'peasant' and 'farmer' upside down: It praises the 'rational farmer' who decides to grow oilseeds due to precise calculation of costs and benefits (e.g. high prices and bonuses as depicted in the upper right picture). This discourse appeals to farm holders to subject themselves to the subject-position of the 'rational farmer'. As I have shown in my study, a particular group of well-equipped farmers in favourable areas actually responded to this appeal by considerably increasing the acreage devoted to oilseeds. Thus, the style of farming 'rationally' (in the agronomic sense) was not only promoted by the agrarian apparatus, but also adopted by a part of the farming community.



As I suppose that you are fed up with empirical details, my conclusion shifts back to theory. All in all, I would argue that Nazi agricultural policy promoted the temporal and spatial reordering of agricultural regulation in the 1940s, oriented towards a ,megaproject‘. Let me outline the emergence of this ,megaproject‘ very roughly. The Nazi agrarian apparatus developed the idea of the ,total reordering‘ of Austrian agriculture as a state-led future project; it became the vanishing point of agricultural regulation. Regarding the temporal dimension, the present was increasingly subordinated to the future, while the past lost much of its relevance. Regarding the spatial dimension, regulation at level of the local and regional lifeworld was more and more subordinated to regulation at the level of the political-economic system. The ,megaproject‘ set a boundary between the ,space of experience‘ (*Erfahrungsraum*) and the ,horizon of expectation‘ (*Erwartungshorizont*); the inscribed message read: ,The world will be other than it was till now.‘ Guidance by the ,megaproject‘ evolved not totally top-down, but (at least partially) bottom-up, fuelled by the actors‘ trust in science-based knowledge. As a consequence, individual styles of farming were integrated into an overall agrosystem, a kind of ,national farm‘, guided by agronomic experts. The ,megaproject‘ pointed towards intensified, specialised and concentrated – in short, *productivist* – farming, framed by the ideology of the superiority of the German ,race‘. Though this ideal was not fully realised before 1945, some aspects of it attracted the visions of agricultural decision-makers, agronomists, teachers, extension staff and ,progressive‘ farm holders after 1945.



Did the emergence of the productivist ‚megaproject‘ at the institutional level have an impact at the level of technical change? The answer to this question is: *yes – but*. Yes, we can observe a considerable move towards the substitution of machinery (blue line) and artificial fertilizers (green line) for labour (orange line) and land (brown line) in the years 1938 to 1945. *But* this shift in capital intensity was rather modest compared to the technical change in the postwar era. Though in the Nazi era the substitution of mechanical and biological technology for land and labour took off, a ‚technological revolution‘ of Austrian agriculture occurred not before the 1950s.

Which agro-modernisation?

		position of Nazi decision-makers?	
		intentional	functional
range of agro-modernisation?	total	Modernisation as a ‚great leap‘	unintended ‚revolution‘
	partial	modernisation in ‚small steps‘	unintended consequences of Nazi rule

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Let me finally evaluate the empirically-based theory of the emergence of the productivist ‚megaproject‘ in the light of the varieties of modernisation outlined in the introduction. Agro-modernisation in German-annexed Austria was a multi-faceted phenomenon; however, two emphases can be observed according to my findings: First, most decision-makers of Nazi agricultural policy *intended* to modernise Austrian agriculture which they considered to be backward compared to the rest of the German empire. Second, diverse Nazi projects of agro-modernisation affected the agrosystem not totally, but only *partially*. All in all, the Nazi era was no ‚great leap‘ of agro-modernisation at all, but an irreversible step along the pathway to agricultural productivism in postwar Austria. Thus, I would consider the Nazi era not an ‚agricultural revolution‘, but rather a pre-revolutionary ‚watershed‘ (*Sattelzeit*) of Austrian agricultural development in the twentieth century.