
1.4 Anti-productivist agriculture: organicism and gardening Room 202

Chair: Dulce Freire

1.41 Erin Gill – Anti-science bias and New Age religion in the early Soil Association: how the post-war British organic movement amplified its alienation from mainstream farmers and agricultural scientists

The UK public's recent – and, perhaps, now stalled – love affair with organic food has been widely heralded and debated. What has attracted far less attention is the fact that increasing public consumption of organic food has not been matched by sharp increases in conversion to organic production by British farmers. While in 2008, 90 per cent of British households reported buying some organic food, less than 4 per cent of agricultural land (just over 675,000ha) is under organic production. The gulf between the public's and farmers' embrace of organic food contrasts with the experience of many other northern European nations, including Germany, Denmark and Sweden.

This paper will argue that *some* of the reasons why the UK organic movement has failed to transform agricultural production are related to the nature of the UK organic movement, as it emerged into public view after the Second World War. I will present evidence to support the contention that the movement's largest and most successful organisation, The Soil Association, neglected and alienated the UK farming community, agricultural scientists, policy makers and, eventually, many important figures within the nature conservation movement. The paper will raise questions about the likely negative impact of the early Soil Association's recurring anti-science bias and many of its members' acceptance of unconventional, 'New Age' religious beliefs.

Erin Gill is in the final stages of writing her doctoral thesis, which focuses on the career of Lady Eve Balfour (1898), the founder and first leader of the Soil Association. Following a period during which she pursued doctoral research on a full-time basis, thanks to a studentship awarded by Aberystwyth University, she has returned to work as an environmental journalist. Erin currently edits the journalistic output of *Environment Analyst* (www.environment-analyst.com). She has also taught history undergraduates on a part-time basis, devising two courses (*Using Letters and Diaries for Historical Research*, a seminar-based course focusing on developing students' basics skills in archival research, and a lecture course entitled *Environmental Protest in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain*). She has written book reviews for *Economic History Review*, *Agricultural History Review*, *Environment and History* and various magazines aimed at the wider public.

1.42 Brunhilde Bross-Burkhardt – Development and practice of organic gardening in Germany since 1945

Organic gardening is of increasing relevance in private gardens in Germany, especially in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. After the war there had not been a practicable conception for it. Personalities like Ewald Könemann, Gertrud Franck and Alwin Seifert were the first to develop methods of companion planting, composting, organic fertilisation and poison-free plant protectives. Important influences came from England by Sir Albert Howard and Maye E. Bruce. In Germany organic gardeners for many years from the beginning were being ridiculed and segregated. They even had to face hostility. Since the 1980s organic gardeners are supported by a new generation of ecologists who put the private garden in relation to nature in its entirety. Since then organic gardening has become a strong movement which acts upon the society in Germany and increases awareness for ecology. Private gardening and farming developed in common until organic farming guidelines were introduced in the 1980s which led to an emancipation of private organic gardening. There are no strict rules for gardening. Every private garden owner may cultivate the soil at his discretion as long as he does not violate environment protection laws.

Brunhilde Bross-Burkhardt, living in Langenburg, Germany, is a graduate engineer of agronomy and a member of the 'Arbeitskreis für Agrargeschichte'. She studied agriculture at the Universities of Hohenheim and Kiel. She was publisher and editor in chief of the magazine *Boden und Gesundheit (Soil and Health)*. Mrs Bross-Burkhardt is dedicated to documenting and supporting traditional rural life, farming and gardening, because of their beauty and efficiency. She is trying to help preserve and reestablish traditional methods as they are most likely to offer the best chance for sustainable food production in harmony with natural systems. Mrs Bross-Burkhardt works as a journalist and book author for publishing houses specialised in agricultural and gardening topics in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. In her books she concentrates on the development of organic cultivation and gardening, the history of garden culture in general and botany. She gives lectures and guides excursions to sites of traditional gardening and farming. Currently she is writing her doctoral thesis at the Humboldt-University in Berlin about the history of private organic gardening in South Germany since 1945 (conclusion in spring of 2010).

1.43 Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen – Re-ruralisation: urban farming and the comeback of gardens in the urban and rural space

Subsistence farming, which has been ignored in the past as a kind of informal women's economy, is coming back into public awareness. Rural smallholder farming, the so-called 'private home economy', was the guarantee of food security in Eastern Europe under Socialism. Socialistic policy allowed this small-scale farming in order to keep the peasants on the countryside. The countryside, however, makes a comeback in the city in the form of urban migration, as in Africa. Entire populations in African cities feed on wild vegetable gardening on vacant land, with municipal support in slums or model settlements. Intercultural gardens, community gardens or guerrilla gardening are, in North America and in Europe, awakening the interest of the media. The new movement for self-produced vegetables often accompanies common efforts to preserve vacant spaces within the cities. Especially in the US facing an enormous rate of hidden unemployment, city administrations discover the 'next big trend' as crucial for the 'food factor', as well for the fight against hunger and against obesity. Gardens help to improve our thinking about a healthy nutrition, about the 'ecological footprint' of food production in sustainable cities. Stopping global climate change is a task for cities as well as for the countryside. It may indeed turn out to be a fortunate accident of history, if the new awareness of the necessity of an overall 're-ruralisation' makes its comeback this time coming from the cities.

Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen (PhD) is 'Privatdozent' at the Free University of Berlin as well as a free-lance researcher, journalist and garden activist. She is the founding member of the working group, 'Small-Holder Agriculture' ('Arbeitsgruppe Kleinstlandwirtschaft'), founded in 1997 at the Department of Agriculture and Gardening of the Humboldt-University in Berlin where she was teaching. She has organised three international conferences on small-scale farming in the urban and rural space worldwide, in Freiburg 1998 and in Berlin during the summers of 2000 and 2001. She has been involved since in the areas of 'food security', urban agriculture and community gardening, and has carried out research in the USA and in Germany, in Poland and in Eastern Africa. She has published various books and articles about community gardening and food security.

1.44 Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz – Nature as resource: everyday life and socialisation during the twofold transition at the end of the twentieth century in eastern Germany: ethnological perspectives on the conflict around sustainable methods of production

This paper discusses the conflict between ecological and traditional farming methods in a variety of rural communities in the Uckermark, a region in Mark Brandenburg. The following two aspects of the problem will be investigated:

1. What forms of culture and lifestyle emerge within the framework of sustainable farming, and what are the effects of these patterns, which first develop within small communities, on the larger social context; what are the national and international networks that play a role in this respect ?

2. The rural regions of East Germany are affected by an above-average level of unemployment. Does ecological farming offer the opportunity to extend new and emerging employment opportunities in agriculture to these Eastern European regions? How are agrarian production, landscape management and environment protection developed in rural areas of East Germany which undergo an overall process of social transformation ?

This paper suggests new theoretical perspectives drawn from ethnology and cultural ecology in order to investigate the social conflicts arising from the interplay of history, culture, social organisation and natural environment. Furthermore, the heuristic relevance of the concept of modernity for the study of cultural, social and economical transition processes in Eastern Europe will be discussed.

Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz is head of the Regional Institute for Folklore Studies of Berlin-Brandenburg at the Department of European Ethnology at Humboldt-University Berlin. She has widely published in the areas of methodology and historiography in Folklore Studies and in Anthropology. Her particular interest is in the agency of individuals and social groups in transformation societies. She has undertaken long term anthropological research on the transition of rural areas in eastern Germany and near the polish border. She is currently researching and teaching in the following areas: history of anthropology and Folklore Studies, historical anthropology, anthropology of rural societies, history of migration and forced labour in Berlin and Brandenburg, museums and the politics of exhibitions.