

3.5 Exploring farming styles

Room 203

Convener: Dr Ernst Langthaler

Chair: Peter Moser

Discussant: Paul Brassley

The proposed session aims at exploring a new approach to the ‘great transformation’ of agriculture in twentieth century Europe as exemplified by Austria from the 1940s to the 1980s. By adopting the holistic concept of *farming styles*, an actor-centred approach to agricultural development at multiple levels has been chosen. The contributors outline the potential of the concept as well as its limits; furthermore, they present the design and mid-term results of a current three-years research project at the Institute of Rural History in St Pölten.

3.51 Dr Ernst Langthaler – Exploring farming styles: theory, methods, sources

The concept of *farming styles* as outlined by the Dutch rural sociologist Jan Douwe van der Ploeg offers an actor-centred approach to agricultural development. As opposed to conventional agronomic models, farmers do not move their farms along given production functions; in contrast, they create new ‘functions’ through their everyday work. A farming style refers to a socio-technical network linking elements of the natural and social world: first, the way farming is individually and collectively conceived (symbolic level); second, the way farming is negotiated between actors at household, local, regional and supra-regional levels (social level); third, the way farming is carried out as an everyday practice (material level). The exploration of farming styles in the transition to the ‘productivist’ food regime from the 1940s onwards encompasses three project modules: Module I has already investigated media discourses on farming as represented by farmers’ journals (see the paper by Ulrich Schwarz); module II has already classified farming systems by multivariate analysis of farm data (see the paper by Rita Garstenauer and Sophie Kickingner); module III will reconstruct life stories of farming families as expressed by oral narratives.

Ernst Langthaler studied history at the University of Vienna (master 1995, PhD 2000, habilitation 2010), currently senior researcher at the Institute of Rural History in St Pölten, lecturer at the University of Vienna and the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna and guest professor at the University of Innsbruck, fields of research: farming styles, agrosystems and food regimes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.

For his publications, see <http://www.univie.ac.at/ruralhistory/langthaler.htm>.

3.52 Ulrich Schwarz – Exploring farming styles: analysis of an Austrian farmer’s journal, 1940s to 1980s

Exploring the question ‘how farming should be done’ as represented by the farmers’ journal *Bauernbündler*, images about what is considered to be the ideal ‘peasant’ or ‘peasant woman’ emerge. These images are linked with sets of general strategies (e.g. how to run a farm ‘properly’) as well as guidelines to deal with particular situations (e.g. how to cope with animal diseases). By analysing these representations, the order of the press discourse can be reconstructed. This discursive order regulates a symbolic space: a web of various subject-positions (the ‘progressive entrepreneur’, the ‘good mother’, the ‘omniscient expert’ etc.). Within this discursive realm the readers position themselves as subjects, i.e. they identify with some positions or differentiate from others according to their socio-economic positions. The paper outlines how this discursive space is reproduced and transformed in relation with the political-economic framework of agricultural ‘productivism’.

Ulrich Schwarz studied history at the University of Graz and the University of Vienna (master 2008), currently researcher at the Institute of Rural History in St Pölten and PhD student at the University of Vienna, fields of research: farming styles, discourse analysis and writing as a practice in twentieth-century rural Austria.

For his publications: see <http://www.univie.ac.at/ruralhistory/schwarz.htm>.

3.53 Rita Garstenauer and Sophie Kickinger – Exploring farming styles: analysis of farm records in two Austrian regions, 1940s to 1980s

The paper discusses the usefulness of the farming style concept for a micro-level assessment of agricultural development under the ‘productivist’ food regime in a rural and a sub-urban region. Serial records of about 1000 farms provide data on various aspects (family and farm members, land use, livestock, machinery, yields etc.) that allow us to reconstruct farming systems as socio-technical networks. With aid of multivariate statistics (e.g. correspondence analysis), each farm unit can be located within a multi-dimensional socio-economic space for the respective year. By linking these spatial positions year by year, a multitude of farm developments paths become apparent. Our focus on agricultural development at the farm level highlights different directions and speeds of change. Within this framework of slowed or, at times, accelerated change, farming styles may provide relative continuity. They usually follow a practical logic (*calculus*) linking past experiences (investments, specialisations, knowledge transfers and so on) with future expectations.

Rita Garstenauer studied history at the University of Vienna (master 2002) and at the European University Institute at Fiesole (PhD 2008), currently researcher at the Institute of Rural History in St Pölten and lecturer at the University of Vienna, fields of research: social and economic history of twentieth century rural Austria and popular autobiography.

For her publications, see <http://www.univie.ac.at/ruralhistory/garstenauer.htm>.

Sophie Kickinger studied landscape planning at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna (master 2008), currently researcher at the Institute of Rural History in St Pölten and PhD student and lecturer at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna, fields of research: rural and spatial change in Austria and subsistence economy.

For her publications, see <http://www.univie.ac.at/ruralhistory/kickinger.htm>.