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Balancing Between Autonomy and Dependence

Family Farming and Agrarian Change in Lower Austria, 1945–1980

Ernst Langthaler[1]

Conventional View: Peasants Into Farmers

"The most dramatic change of the second half of this century, and the one which permanently cuts us off from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry,"[2] Eric Hobsbawn states in his famous world history of the twentieth century, *Age of Extremes*. There is no doubt that rural society after the Second World War experienced a dramatic change;[3] however, the issue of "de-peasantization" raises serious concern, above all with regard to tendencies of "re-

[1] This article is a result of the research project *Faming Styles in Austria, 1940s-1980s* (FWF P20922-G15) which was conducted at the Institute of Rural History in St. Pölten from January 2009 to December 2011 (director: Ernst Langthaler, collaborators: Rita Garstenauer, Benjamin Schiemer, Ulrich Schwarz and Sophie Tod). I would like to thank the project collaborators for providing first drafts of the final report; furthermore, my thanks go to Alexander Mejstrik (Geometric Data Analysis) and Reinhard Sieder (Documentary Method) for methodological consulting, as well as Inge Fink of the University of New Orleans English Department for the expert translation from German into English.

[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), 289.

[3] See Ernst Langthaler, „Landwirtschaft vor und in der Globalisierung," in *Globalgeschichte 1800-2010*, eds. Reinhard Sieder and Ernst Langthaler (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010), 135-69.

peasantization" in the neo-liberal era.[4] The answer to the question whether the peasantry in Europe and other parts of the world rapidly passed away from the mid-twentieth century onwards or whether it has somehow survived – or even been reborn – depends on how we define the "peasant". According to Eric Wolf, "peasants" are neither "primitives" nor "farmers". What distinguishes them from "primitives" is their subordination to political and economic forces such as bureaucratic nation-states and capitalist markets; what distinguishes them from "farmers" is their focus on agricultural production for household self-consumption rather than entrepreneurial engagement in factor and product markets.[5] Hobsbawm's dictum of the "death of the peasantry" obviously follows this definition; the storyline goes something like this: the majority of subsistence-oriented "peasants" disappeared through *proletarization* of land-owning families, i.e. they became wage labourers; the residual minority disappeared through *accumulation* of land and capital, i.e. they became commercial "farmers" (in capitalist countries) or "production cooperatives" (in socialist countries), both closely tied to the agribusiness complex.[6] The conversion of "peasants" into "farmers" in the second half of the twentieth century has also been widely adopted by Austrian historiographers; to quote a recent handbook, "aus Bauern wurden agrartechnisch orientierte Farmer."[7]

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[4] See Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization* (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2008); idem, "The Peasantries of the Twenty-First Century: the Commoditisation Debate Revisited," in *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 1-30.

[5] See Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 2-3.

[6] See Henry Bernstein, *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change* (Halifax and Sterling, VA: Fernwood and Kumarian, 2010).

[7] Ernst Hanisch, *Der lange Schatten des Staates. Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1994), 100. However, other passages of the book argue more ambivalently (ibid., 61): „Es war weniger der Typus ‚Bauer', der verschwand – auch wenn er sich mehr in Richtung ‚Farmer' und ‚Nebenerwerbsbauer' entwickelte –, es war die ländliche Unterschicht, Knecht und Dirn, die von den anderen Sektoren aufgesogen wurde." On agricultural development in twentieth century Austria in general see Ernst Bruckmüller et al., *Geschichte der österreichischen Land- und Forstwirtschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2002-03).

The master narrative of post-war agrarian change, rooted in the debates on the "agrarian question" (*Agrarfrage*) in Europe from the late-nineteenth century onwards,[8] is to be questioned from different angles. First of all, the storyline of rural "class differentiation"[9] does not fit perfectly with empirical data on agrarian change in post-war Austria. As late as 1960, most of the agricultural area consisted of small and medium family farms; nearly two thirds of the farm holders managed less than 10 hectares.[10] Though the concentration of farmland slightly rose in the following decades, the decline of the number of farms, as well as the increase of the agricultural area per farm between 1960 and 1980, was far below average compared to other industrialized countries (Table 1). In addition to the empirical evidence, the theory of the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) reveals that the master narrative outlined above undervalues or even ignores the fact that individual and collective actors' agency vis-à-vis the political and economic forces of agrarian "structural change" (*Strukturwandel*) played a crucial role.[11] Proponents of both empirical and theoretical considerations argue against conceptualizing agrarian change in post-war Austria as a one-way street to accumulation and proletarization, according to the dictum "get big or get out" (*Wachsen oder Weichen*).[12] We had better re-conceptualize agrarian change with regard to

[8] See Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (Winchester, MA: Zwan Publications, 1988 [1899]).

[9] See Bernstein, *Agrarian Change*, 104-12.

[10] See Österreichisches Statistisches Zentralamt (ÖSTAT), ed., *Republik Österreich 1945-1995* (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1995), 176.

[11] See Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[12] The phrase "get big or get out" was coined by the US-American Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson in the 1950s. One of his successors in the 1970s, Earl Butz, proclaimed in a similar way: "adopt or die". See Paul Roberts, *The End of Food: The Coming Crisis of the World Food Industry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 120. On the synonymous German dictum *Wachsen oder Weichen* see Hermann Priebe, *Die subventionierte Unvernunft: Landwirtschaft und Naturhaushalt (*Berlin: Siedler, 1985), 86.

the many ways in which farming systems[13] and their corresponding farming styles[14] developed in the spectrum between productivist and non-productivist thought and action.[15] In short, the crucial question with regard to agrarian change in post-war Austria is not why the peasantry passed away, but why relatively large fractions of it survived longer than they did elsewhere. The search for an answer inevitably takes us to a more realist notion of farming families beyond the ideal-typical dichotomy of "peasant" and "farmer".

Table 1: Agrarian change in selected industrialized countries, 1960-80

Country	number of farms (in 1.000)			agricultural area per farm (in hectares)		
	1960	1980	index (1960=100)	1960	1980	index (1960=100)
Austria	397	303	76	10.2	12.1	119
Denmark	194	120	62	16.1	24.3	151
France	1,994	1,262	63	17.3	25.2	146
Germany (FRG)	1,618	928	57	8.8	14.2	162
Italy	4,294	3,532	82	4.3	5.0	116
Japan	6,057	4,661	77	1.0	1.2	117
The Netherlands	301	143	48	7.7	14.2	185
Spain	3,008	2,134	71	10.9	14.8	135
UK	396	281	71	50.2	65.7	131
USA	3,711	2,227	60	118.6	193.2	163
Total	21,970	15,591	71	26.2	35.7	136

Source: own calculations according to Hayami and Ruttan, *Agricultural Development*, 457–465; the figures for Austria have been corrected according to ÖSTAT, ed., *Republik Österreich*, 175.

This actor-centered concept of agrarian change, which is both empirically and theoretically grounded, has far-reaching methodological consequences: rather than aggregated data

[13] See John S. Caldwell, "Farming Systems," in *Encyclopedia of Agricultural Science*, vol. 2, eds. Charles J. Arntzen and Ellen M. Ritter (San Diego: Academic Press, 1994), 129-38.

[14] See Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The Virtual Farmer: Past, Present and Future of the Dutch Peasantry* (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2003), 101-41.

[15] See Geoff A. Wilson, *Multifunctional Agriculture: A Transition Theory Perspective* (Wallingford and Cambridge, MA: CABI publishing, 2007), 271-320.

referring to abstract entities (communes, regions, nation-states etc.), we need disaggregated sources tracing everyday practices of concrete actors. Moreover, we need to analyze these sources with the aid of mixed methods, therefore exploring both quantitative and qualitative aspects of agrarian change. This is the methodological design the following case study adopts. It draws on two sets of sources: first, a series of farm files (*Betriebskarten*) with farm-level data (land use, livestock, machinery, labour force, yields etc.) from the 1940s to the 1980s;[16] second, a couple of narrative interviews with farm owners of both sexes from different generations.[17] Both sets of sources refer to two regions in the province of Lower Austria, broadly covering the spectrum of agricultural landscapes in post-war Austria: the Mank region in the hilly and mountainous area between the northern fringe of the Alps and the Danube valley and the Mödling region in the basin south of the city of Vienna. A combination of quantitative (Geometric Data Analysis)[18] and qualitative methods (Documentary Method)[19] enables the assessment of agrarian change from different perspectives, long shots as well as close ups. The results of this investigation call for a revision of the picture of agrarian change in post-war Austria as outlined by conventional historiography.

[16] See Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv (NÖLA), inventories *Bezirksbauernkammer Mank* and *Mödling*, boxes *Hof- und Betriebskarten*. The farm file surveys 1944/46, 1952, 1959/69, 1970/71 and 1982/83 of ten communes in the two regions were fed into an Access database (subsequently Farming Styles Database) from which 3.561 datasets of farming units were exported to be analysed with XLSTAT.

[17] Twenty-seven narrative interviews with former, current and designated owners of family farms of both sexes were conducted in the regions of Mank and Mödling during winter 2010/11. The quotations refer to the transcriptions of the digital recordings which were analysed with Atlas.ti.

[18] See Brigitte Le Roux and Henry Rouhanet, *Geometric Data Analysis: From Correspondence Analysis to Structured Data Analysis* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004).

[19] See Ralf Bohnsack, Iris Nentwig-Gesemann und Arnd-Michael Nohl, eds., *Die dokumentarische Methode und ihre Forschungspraxis: Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung,* 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007).

Long Shot: Family Farming Systems

The farms we investigated in the Mank and Mödling regions can be ordered with regard to their similarities and differences in a multi-dimensional space of agrosystems: the more they resemble each other, the closer they are; the more they differ from each other, the further apart from each other they are. The most important spatial dimension, first and foremost a representation of the choice of region, indicates the embedding of agrosystems into their natural environment; it marks the advantages and disadvantages of the farms' locations with regard to topography and traffic infrastructure, as well as the resulting focuses of land and livestock use. The farm holders in the Mödling region, such as those in the community of Guntramsdorf, find themselves in a relatively advantageous location. They enjoy a warm, dry climate with a growing season of more than 250 days; the hilly terrain, as well as the proximity to the Vienna market, supports an intensive use of the land for viticulture, root cropping, and grain farming. Areas like the community of Plankenstein in the Mank region, which are located higher up in the mountains and further away from the railroad line, are situated less fortunately. The cool and moist climate, a growing season of barely more than 200 days per year, topographical inclines that can be extreme in some cases, and a tentative connection to the traffic infrastructure force the mountain farmer to use the land more extensively through grassland farming and forestry; the considerable number of cattle and dairy cows is proportional to the weight of feed grown on the land.[20] All in all, the first dimension of the space of arosystems includes the natural and transportation-related conditions, which curtail the farm holders' leeways with regard to land and livestock use.

[20] On the natural and transport conditions as well as land and livestock use in the two regions see Erik Arnberger, ed., *Atlas von Niederösterreich (und Wien)* (Vienna: Freytag-Berndt und Artaria, 1951-58), fol. 12 (relief), 14-21 (climate and phenology), 22-23 (soil types), 66-94 (agriculture and forestry), 106-110 (railways and streets).

The second dimension concerns the embedding of agrosystems into the social environment, the years and decades of the "farm expansion" (*Betriebsaufstockung*), as contemporary jargon would have it, of the farms' resource base through factor markets. The farm holders go about expansion in two ways: initially, they increase the machinery, especially tractors, in absolute numbers and relative to the farmland. This capital intensive or "internal expansion" goes hand in hand with an extensive or "external expansion" through farm enlargement,[21] which comprises both agricultural area and livestock.[22] Farm expansion through factor markets for capital, land, and livestock extends to product markets through the agro-industrial processing of cash crops, such as sugar beets in the Mödling region and fed cattle in the Mank region. In short, the second dimension of the space of arosystems consists of the bundle of interdependent aspects of capital intensification, farm concentration, and specialization,[23] which restrict the farm holders' leeways and push them toward market-dependency.[24]

While the first two dimensions of the multi-dimensional space describe the external relationship between agrosystems and the natural and social environment, the third most important spatial dimension refers to internal connections: the internal integration of the

[21] On the definition of „external" and „internal expansion" (*innere* and *äußere Aufstockung*) see Hansueli Herrmann, *Bauern im Wandel: Agrarischer Strukturwandel, bäuerliches Verhalten und bewusstseinsmässige Verarbeitung am Beispiel einer Agglomerationsgemeinde* (Küssnacht ZH) 1945-1980 (Zurich: Chronos, 1990), 59-60. Accordingly, "internal expansion" means more intensive uses of land and livestock; "external expansion" means farm enlargement. Additionally, we have also included the machinery in this definition.

[22] See Robert Eastwood, Michael Lipton and Andrew Newell, "Farm Size," in *Handbook of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 4, eds. Prabhu Pingali and Robert Evenson (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2010), 3323-97; Prabhu Pingali, "Agricultural Mechanization," in *Handbook of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 3, eds. Robert Evenson and idem (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 2779-2805.

[23] See Brian Ilbery and Ian Bowler, "From agricultural productivism to post-productivism," in *The Geography of Rural Change*, ed. Brian Ilbery (London: Longman, 1998), 57-84.

[24] See van der Ploeg, *Virtual Farmer*, 55-57.

farms' resource flows.[25] Small-scale agrosystems with a low rate of integration—viticulture in the Mödling region, part-time farming in the Mank region—form a contrast to large-scale farming, which integrates arable with stock farming, often in combination with the employment of farmhands, a system characteristic of the community of Achau in the Mödling region and the community of Bischofstetten in the Mank region. Farms with strong internal integration boast many resources: they grow lots of grain, especially bread grain; they raise cattle and horses; they employ many workers, especially male and female farmhands. Quality complements quantity: these resources are internally renewed through the production of organic manure to fertilize plants, through the production of food crops to feed humans and animals, through the breeding of horses, fed cattle, and dairy cows, and through the recruitment of workers through networks of family, kinship, and neighborhood. Despite its self-sufficiency, large-scale mixed farming is market oriented as a large surplus of plant and animal products, including cash crops such as sugar beets, are sold. However, the self-controlled (re-)production of much of the farm's material and energy base through the internal recycling of resources makes it less dependent on the market and thus the state and increases the farm holders' rooms of maneuver.[26] Up until the middle of the century, the owners of such large-scale farms were often regarded (by themselves and others) as „gentlemen farmers" (*Herrenbauern*), whose autonomy derived from their local and regional status as owners of land and horses and as employers of the rural population, as well as from their reserved attitude toward supra-regional dependency on political-economic forces.[27]

[25] On the debate on „integration" as a couterpart of „industrialization" in the 1970s see Hans Bach, *Landbau und Umwelt: Industrialisierung der Agrarwirtschaft oder integrierter Landbau*, Schriftenreihe des Institutes für Raumordnung und Umweltgestaltung 6 (Linz: Trauner, 1978).

[26] See van der Ploeg, *Virtual Farmer*, 55-57.

[27] On the type of the „gentleman farmer" (*Herrenbauer*) see Norbert Ortmayr, „Ländliches Gesinde in Oberösterreich 1918-1938," in *Familienstruktur und Arbeitsorganisation in ländlichen Gesellschaften*, eds.

The three most important dimensions of the multi-dimensional space—(un-)favorable location, farm expansion, and internal integration—come together to determine the character of a farming system: the external relationship with its natural and social environment and its internal dynamics.[28] Seen from this perspective, an agrosystem is an area of tension where the "powers of one-sidedness" (*Kräfte der Einseitigkeit*, e.g. topography and traffic infrastructure), the "powers of multi-sidedness" (*Kräfte der Vielseitigkeit*, e.g. the equilibrium of fertilizer, feed, and work) and the "powers of economic development" (*Kräfte der Wirtschaftsentwicklung*, e.g. technological innovations) interact with each other.[29] Each one of these aspects determines the corridors between non-productivist and productivist thinking and acting: on the one hand, the better the location of a farm, the more independent it is from markets, and the more it is internally integrated, the more leeways the farm holder has to manage his or her resources. On the other hand, an unfortunate location, increased dependence on markets, and weakened internal integration restrict the opportunities for farm development.[30] In a historical perspective, it seems that that from the mid-1940s to the 1980s, the trend toward market-dependent farm expansion increased while internal integration declined; as a result, the farm holders' rooms of maneuver must have constricted during this time. However, this is still a rough sketch; fine grained views of the space of agrosystems give a more detailed picture (Figure 1).

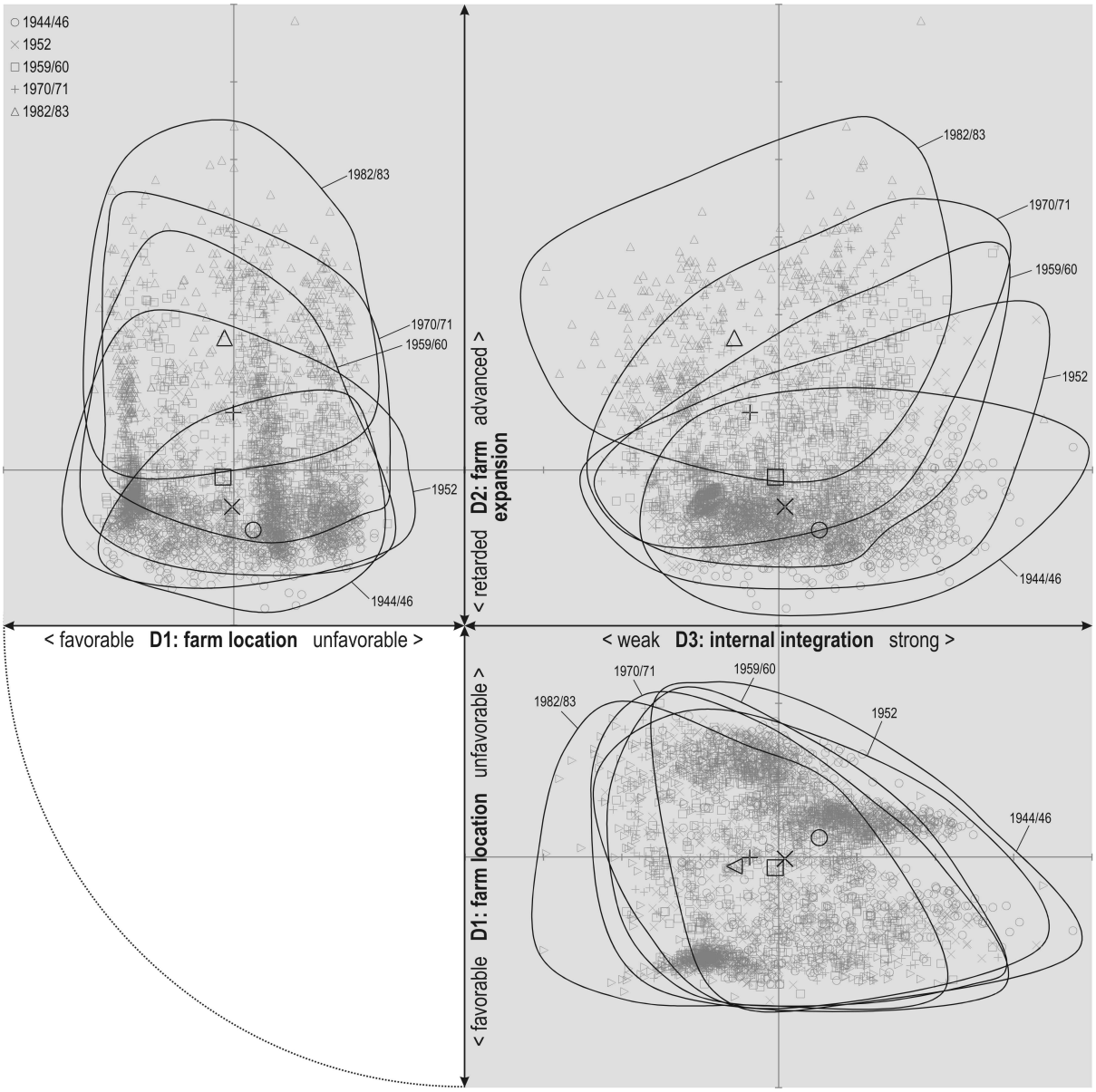
Josef Ehmer and Michael Mitterauer (Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), 325–416; Karl Kaser and Karl Stocker, *Bäuerliches Leben in der Oststeiermark seit 1848*, vol. 2: *Die verspätete Revolution* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1988), 50-57.

[28] See Ernst Langthaler, „Agrarsysteme ohne Akteure? Sozialökonomische und sozialökologische Modelle in der Agrargeschichte," in *Grüne Revolutionen: Agrarsysteme und Umwelt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,* eds. Andreas Dix and Ernst Langthaler, Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes 3 (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), 216-38.

[29] See Bernd Andreae, *Betriebsformen in der Landwirtschaft* (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 1964), 16-31.

[30] See van der Ploeg, *Virtual Farmer*, 55–57.

Figure 1: The space of agrosystems in the regions of Mank and Mödling, 1944/46–1982/83



Source: Principal Components Analysis (data matrix: 60 variables over 3.561 investigations) based upon the Farming Styles Database.

Let us start with the field that is suspended between the first and second dimension and that shows the three-dimensional space of agrosystems from the front; it shows the interplay between (un-)fortunate location and farm expansion. The diagonals refer to the ideal-typical horizons of farm development: the *viable farm* (*entwicklungsfähiger Betrieb*), the focus of the agrarian-technocratic discourse in the 1960s, is to be found on the upper left; its opposite, the

vulnerable farm (*Notstandsbetrieb*), on the lower right; the *developed farm in an unfavorable location* on the upper right; the *underdeveloped farm in a favorable location* on the lower left.[31] The cloud of dots refers to the real expressions of farming systems; its margins—the corridors of the pathways of farm development—shift in several stages: in 1944/46 we see a regionally balanced distribution, with the farms in the favorable Mank locations sticking out with regard to size and mechanization. By 1952, we see a significant imbalance in favor of technologically developed medium-sized and large farms in the plains and hills of Mödling; by 1959/60, this balance has increased further, probably as a result of the active real-estate market in the Vienna region. By 1970/71, and consecutively by 1982/83, the catch-up development of Mank farms, especially those in favorable locations, established some balance. However, increasing farm expansion and the resulting dependency on factor and product markets narrowed the leeways for farm development, especially in unfavorable locations; this is shown in the columnar compression of farms toward the top. On the other hand, farms less oriented toward mechanization and expansion found additional room to move; this can be seen in the even distribution at the bottom. All in all, the distance between the "pioneers" and the "laggards" of the productivist transition increased through the decades.

The field suspended by the third and second dimension opens the side view of the three-dimensional space; here the relationship between internal integration and farm expansion becomes clear. The diagonal lines refer to *internal expansion* on the upper left as the productivist horizon per se; the *old peasant economy* as its opposite on the lower right; *external expansion* on the upper right; and the *old smallholder economy* on the lower left. Between these ideal types, the dots, which indicate the real characteristics of agrosystems,

[31] On the "viable farm" (*entwicklungsfähiger Betrieb*) as an ideal of Austrian agrarian structural policy in the 1960s and 1970s see Melanie Kröger, *Die Modernisierung der Landwirtschaft: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Agrarpolitik Deutschlands und Österreichs nach 1945* (Berlin: Logos, 2006), 301-311.

show an apparently paradoxical interplay: on the one hand, the large mixed-farming operations expanded most aggressively from the 1950s on; their quantitative and qualitative resources gave them a head start in the first phase of their campaign for mechanization. On the other hand, through the decades, they slowly but steadily moved away from the agrarian mixed-farming profile. However, the growing gap between self-controlled, labor-intensive internal and dependent, capital-intensive market integration did not lead to „get big or get out"; the productivist vanishing point of maximal expansion and minimal internal integration remained an elusive ideal. On the contrary, many farms managed to navigate the widening gap between these issues; those with moderate to strong internal integration accumulated the most land, livestock, and machines.

The field formed by the third and first dimension shows the three-dimensional space of agrosystems from above; here internal integration and farm location work together. The diagonals indicate the ideal types of *part-time farming in unfavorable locations* on the upper left; *full-time mixed farming in favorable locations* on the lower right; *mixed farming in unfavorable locations* on the upper right; and *specialization in favorable locations* on the lower left. The dots from the years in which the data was collected show an extremely uneven, triangular distribution of real agrosystems. As early as 1944/46, an almost impenetrable barrier restricted the possibilities for expansion for Mank farms in mountain locations; during the next decades, as technology replaced human and animal labor, this barrier moved slowly in the direction of weakened internal integration. The integration of arable farming and animal husbandry, which gave a good deal of autonomy to medium-sized and large farms in the plains, did not thrive in the mountains. The farms' dependency on unfavorable topography and transportation infrastructure limited their room to maneuver, but not completely. Mountain farming families sought to strengthen internal integration—and

thus their ability to control their own resources—by growing feed and breeding young cattle. In addition, the integration of individual family members in the commercial-industrial market partially compensated for the farm's unfavorable location as a part of the wages was re-invested in the family operation.

Close Ups: Family Farming Styles

The overview of the space of agrosystems has revealed the ways in which farms developed. In two case studies, I will now examine the paths taken by farming actors in their daily work, and the management styles they used, in greater detail.[32] In the mid-1940s, the Huber[33] family farm in Plankenstein in the Mank region, situated about 500 meters above sea level and twelve kilometers from the next train station, showed typical characteristics of a mountain farm: 18.3 hectares of arable land—six tenth pasture, three tenth fields, and one tenth forest—and 11.4 units of livestock—twelve heads of cattle, including two oxen and six dairy cows, some pigs, sheep, and two dozen laying hens—put the farm in the medium-sized category. While labor-saving machines were lacking, the couple did all the manual labor with two farmhands, one male, the other female; occasionally, day laborers would help out. Annually, the farm produced about twenty hundredweights of hay, 6,000 liters of milk, and occasionally some wood for the market; the rest of the production, including three to four pigs for slaughter, served the needs of the people and animals on the farm. Until the beginning of the 1950s, the farm had retained its shape: it had become a family enterprise, consisting of the farm holder's wife—the farm holder, an alcoholic, had died prematurely—, two sons, and a daughter. The production of rye and oats had increased, and two draft horses

[32] Criteria of selection were, first, the continuity of farming from the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s and, second, the agrosystemic diversity of the cases.

[33] The actual name was replaced by a pseudonym.

had joined the oxen in the stable. In all other ways, however, the use of land and livestock and the—very modest—amount of machinery were the same as they had been at the end of the war.

However, in 1954, a disastrous fire that consumed the house and barn severely tested the family's improvisational skills. In this emergency situation, the neighborhood network showed its mettle: man and beast found shelter in neighboring farms; and the neighbors lent the family machines and tools for daily tasks. In the meantime, the farm owner planned the reconstruction of the buildings, supported by the son who was designated to take over the farm. Because the insurance money did not cover the cost of reconstruction, the family had to take out a mortgage. Besides the client and the builder, the reconstruction of the stable involved other people—neighbors, presumably, who took a lively interest—as the later wife of the heir to the property remembers: „The Schmoll [builder] had been planning a larger farmstead. […] the others cried out and said, you can never pay for that. […] Now he has made the whole thing smaller." To a farmer's daughter from the more technologically advanced plains, the mountain world she had married into seemed to be hopelessly behind the times. Her perception of the backwardness had its effects: rebuilding the stable smaller for twelve heads of cattle and two horses turned out to be an obstacle later on; "in ten years, it was too small."[34] This story illustrates the ambivalent nature of personal networks in the countryside: they provide a family with vital resources in emergency situations, but also control the extent of the investments.

By the end of the 1950s, the farm, now at the point of being handed over to the heirs, showed subtle signs of change: the family had slightly expanded the amount of farmland at the cost of pasture land; the livestock had increased by adding more dairy cows, pigs, and chickens;

[34] Interview with E. D. on 27 January 2011, transcription, 75.

small machines, among them an electric motor, had been added. Overall, however, the farming system resembled the one of two decades ago very closely. The change in management started in 1960, when the "machine-crazy"[35] adult son and his wife took over the farm. The young couple changed the use of the land completely: they significantly increased their farm by leasing fields; they increased pastureland—especially meadows—at the cost of farmland; on the remaining farmland, they grew wheat and barley because oats were no longer needed once they stopped keeping horses. Moreover, they doubled their herd of dairy cows, increasing it to 12 cows. The expansion of land and livestock was driven by the acquisition of machines, and especially of a tractor by means of a low-interest loan, a move derided by the neighbors. Together with a tube milking plant, a manure spreader, a forage wagon, and other machines, they created a fully mechanized grassland farm. The farm holder's wife explains the connection as a 'chain' between mechanization and expansion: „the machines had to be paid for, didn't they? Now you had to increase your livestock, […] you had to make more money."[36] In short, the tractor, like a Trojan horse,[37] smuggled in the need for farm expansion.

In the 1960s, growth took off on the Huber farm. Besides the quantity of resources, the quality of using them counted as well. Because the farming couple were careful about keeping their stables clean, they escaped the epidemic of bovine tuberculosis, which forced their neighbors to renew their livestock. Soon, however, the farm had reached the limits of its expansion: the additional cattle filled the stable to capacity and forced its eventual enlargement; in addition, there was no more pastureland available for lease, which would

[35] Interview with M. H. on 15 February 2011, transcription, 27.

[36] Interview with E. D. on 27 January 2011, transcription, 37.

[37] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Wie die Kultur zum Bauern kommt: Über Bildung, Schule und Politik* (Hamburg: Junius, 2001), 16

have served as fodder for the cattle. The "chain" between mechanization and expansion grew taut and threatened to choke the farming family. To earn additional income, the man took a job in the timber industry and offered other farmers his machine services for a fee. In addition, his family tried to limit their expenses as much as they could; because, as his wife tells it, money was a "rare commodity", she made her daughters' clothes herself.[38]

However, the problem of expansion could not be solved by means of working part-time jobs and limiting consumer expenses. The family sought the advice of an expert; and the advisor from the chamber of agriculture, who had already brokered the loan for the tractor, had a solution: "internal" instead of "external expansion". He advised the farm owners to join a cattle-breeding syndicate to increase the dairy cow's productivity through breeding methods. This brought higher yields in their own stable but also insured that their young livestock sold at top prices (Figure 2).[39] This course of action determined the management style of the farming couple, which has, by now, become middle-aged, until the beginning of the 1980s: they expanded their pastures yet again by leasing more land; they expanded their livestock, especially young female cattle for breeding; they purchased a still more powerful tractor, in addition to other machines. The fully mechanized, expanded farm, specializing in dairy production and the breeding of dairy cattle, became a sign of economic advancement for its owners, an accomplishment that seemed even more glamorous in contrast with the bleak 1950s. The farm holder's wife, now grown old, proudly summarizes their accomplishments: in 1960, she and her husband started out with seven heads of cattle; three decades later, they handed over 50 heads to their daughter and son in law. However, the economic gain came at

[38] Interview with E. D. on 27 January 2011, transcription, 12.

[39] Interview with E. D. on 27 January 2011, transcription, 93.

a great social cost; they paid for their advancement with "work"—a term indicating increased effort and a lower standard of living.[40]

Figure 2: Franz Huber presenting one of his breeding cows at an auction of cattle, 1972

Source: Huber private collection, Plankenstein.

Let us now turn to Guntramsdorf in the Mödling region, where the gentle slopes of the Vienna Woods meet the Vienna Basin. There, at about 200 meters above sea level, close to the railroad, the Meier[41] family owned a "beautiful farm". 48.8 hectares farmland—almost all of it best arable land with a patch of pasture—and 15.9 units of livestock—four horses, twelve heads of cattle, among them five dairy cows, eight breeding and feeding pigs, one sheep and a dozen chickens—formed a sizable basis of resources. After the owner of the farm

[40] Interview with E. D. on 27 January 2011, transcription, 40.

[41] The actual name was replaced by a pseudonym.

had lost his life at the end of the war, under circumstances which were never fully explained, his son, with the help of the widow and a daughter, managed the farm; they employed two male farmhands. A sizeable number of machines stood at the ready—tractor, reaper-binder, electrical motor, etc. Even though we lack exact numbers as to the farm's market production, we assume that it consisted of a mix of bread grain and milk as sources of income; the modest number of pigs indicates that they were probably used to feed the multi-person household. At the beginning of the 1950s, the young farm leader took a decisive step in the direction of cash-crop production: he increased the farm's arable land by several hectares, promoted the production of grain and especially barley, (re-)introduced sugar beets, and greatly expanded his livestock, especially the number of dairy cows and pigs. At the same time, he more than doubled the number of machines; he purchased a second tractor and the first combine (Figure 3). His sister had already got a small vineyard; as a result, she could no longer work on her brother's farm. So he employed a milker in addition to the two farmhands and, at peak times, hired four day laborers to get the work done. This "big leap" was followed by a period of high-level consolidation until 1959/60: even though a vineyard was added, the overall area of the farm declined slightly; in the fields, sugar beets replaced potatoes and fodder beets entirely; the livestock, despite the focus on feeding horses and pigs, had declined because the family no longer kept dairy cows; a number of machines were added.

The expansion and consolidation of the farm in the late 1940s and 1950s, to a great extent, was the result of the farm owner's aptness at applying his resources with maximum added value to the product markets: by renting out his machines' labor and transportation services outside of the farm, such as in the reconstruction of factories destroyed by the war, he brought in additional income; the sale of wine, milk, and meat to local distributers, to customers in the farm-owned pub, and to consumers in the largely urban and industrialized

region made even better profits. Deftly, the farm owner took advantage of market regulations, which were more rigid with regard to grain and milk than to meat; he focused on the areas with the largest negotiation margins, without however giving up any of his other endeavors. The great gusto with which he negotiated business deals face-to-face with his business partners is still part of the stories he tells today: „in the old days, we sat down together, the butcher and I, and made deals. I demanded this much, he demanded that much. Then we found out who was the better tactician."[42] The division of labour with his mother and sisters at first, then with his wife, who managed the house and stable, as well as hiring farmhands for the field work, which was already mostly mechanized, allowed the young farm owner to pursue his passion for market activities. His virtuosity in finding profitable opportunities on the product markets served an important function besides his intentions of finding a "good bargain", namely to limit the risks on the factor markets. For example, he financed his large machine purchases not through expansive bank loans but paid for them with his accumulated savings. His son sums up his father's strategy: „we never took out a loan to buy a machine. If we didn't have the money, we waited a year, didn't we? And if we had the money, we made sure to get the best product on the market at the time. And then we used it for a very long time."[43]

At the beginning of the 1970s, it became clear that the consolidation of the 1950s was but a moment of rest before another „leap forward": the cultivated area —almost entirely arable land for bread grain, barley, and sugar beets; the rest vineyards—had grown some more. The livestock had almost doubled to about 5,000 hens through the addition of an egg farm—the source of the oldest daughter's income—and a pig feeding plant with over 100 pigs; as the

[42] Interview with F. G. on 14 December 2011, transcription, 13.

[43] Interview with F. G. jr. on 14 December 2011, transcription, 13.

retired farm holder puts it today, the lucrative business of selling eggs and pork to corporate and private clients "drove away" the farm's cattle in the long run.[44] In order to manage this enormous expansion with two full-time workers, the married couple, and the help of the growing children, the farm owners pushed toward the full mechanization of the farm, which now boasted four tractors. In addition, they tried to minimize the risk of debt by not taking out loans for new purchases and by using machines as long as possible.

Figure 3: Franz Meier with members of his family operating the new tractor-drawn combine, around 1952

Source: Meier private collection, Guntramsdorf.

Farm and family were inextricably linked in the Meier's management style. The accumulation of land served the purpose of providing a living for the five children—vineyards and lots on which to build their homes for the daughters, farmland for the sons. Up

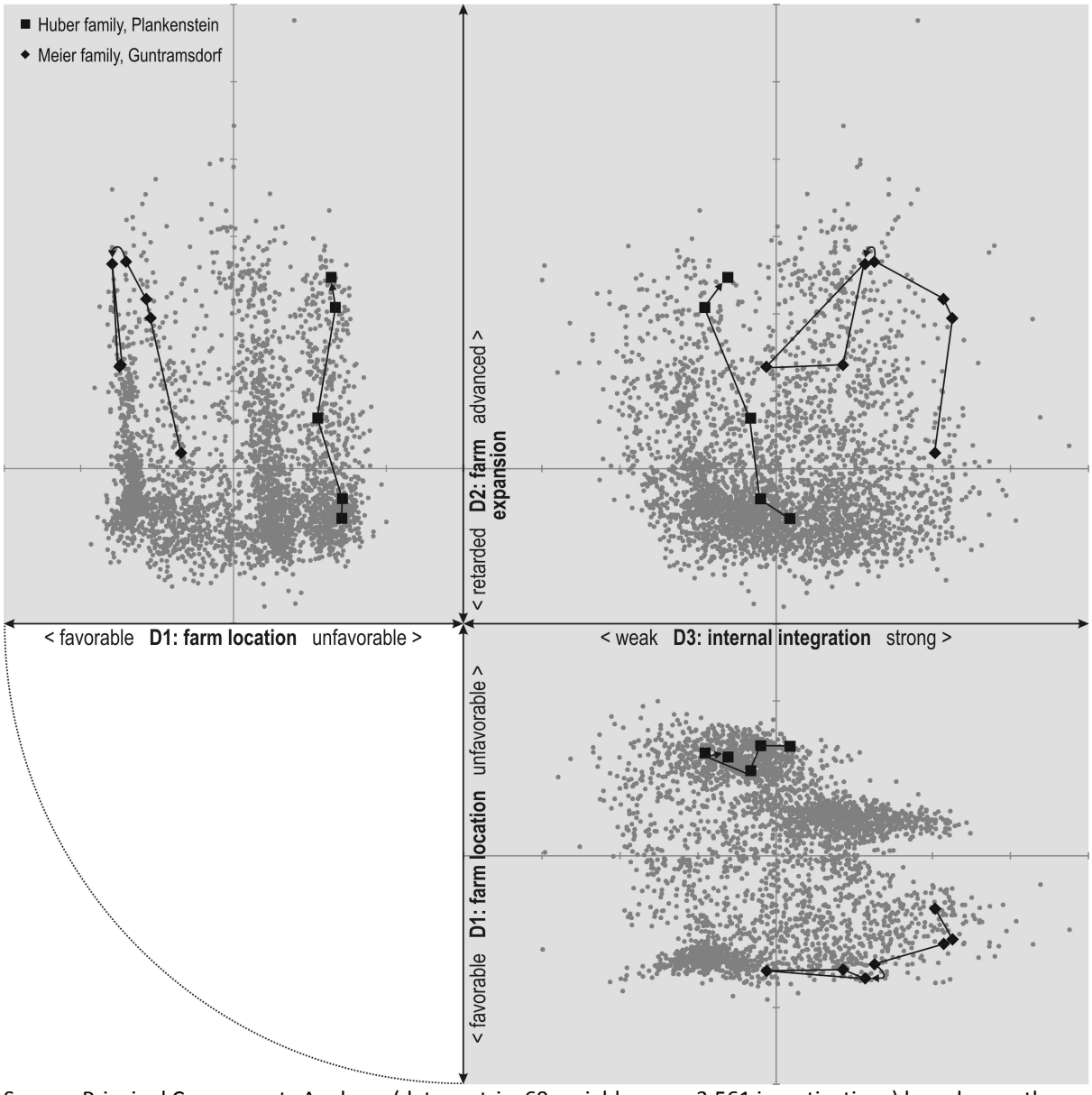
[44] Interview with F. G. on 14 December 2011, transcription, 21.

until the early 1980s, the Meier dynasty had divided its land into three operations to save on taxes: the father still managed the central farm with 41.4 hectares of arable land—mostly grain and sugar beet fields, some vineyards—and 20.1 units of livestock—laying hens and feeding pigs. The oldest son owned a grain and sugar beets farm without any livestock of 19.1 hectares, half of which was leased. The second-oldest son managed an equally livestock-free wine and grain farm of 4.9 hectares, most of which was leased. The three formally independent operations were held together by the informal net of cooperation between the father and his two sons, especially with regard to machine usage. This network was strongest in the first two of the three operations; they practically formed a unit with a fluent change of generations in farm management. So far, this last act of a decades-long family farm development lets us conclude that the Meiers made no difference between farm economy and family politics; they considered making a profit in the markets not as an end in itself but as a means to equip the family members with resources that would produce work and income.

The Huber and Meier family farms took different paths in the space of agrosystems (Figure 4). The Huber farm was located in a relatively unfavorable place (dimension 1). However, the farm grew steadily, first through “external” and then through “internal expansion”, accommodated by increasing mechanization; the “big leap” in this direction happened in the 1960s, when the young farming couple made drastic changes in farm management (dimension 2). In the course of expansion, the farm’s initial medium degree of internal integration diminished slightly (dimension 3). By comparison, the Meier farm started out with better location and traffic conditions (dimension 1). The accumulation of land, livestock, and machines in the late 1940s and 1950s was followed, in the 1960s, by a clear turn in the direction of specialized egg and pork farming, a trend that was continued in the 1970s in the division of the farm between the father and his two sons (dimension 2). The initially high

internal integration of the cattle-heavy farm diminished rapidly in the course of the decades (dimension 3). Of course, the two cases do not represent all farms, especially not those that ceased to operate in the course of time; but they show different styles of farming—labor-based internal expansion in the case of the Huber farm, family-oriented market sovereignty in the case of the Meier farm. These styles probably influenced the thought and action in other cases where the family managed to continue the existence of the farm over decades.

Figure 4: Development pathways of the Huber and Meier farms, 1944/46-1982/83



Source: Principal Components Analyses (data matrix: 60 variables over 3.561 investigations) based upon the Farming Styles Database.

Revised Picture: Resilience Through Hybridity

The crucial question this article tried to answer is why the peasantry – which was rhetorically sentenced to death by the advocates of liberal or socialist modernization from the late-nineteenth century onwards and by current mainstream historiography – survived the post-war agrarian change in Austria in higher numbers than in the rest of the industrialized world. A long shot of a number of family farming systems in two Lower Austrian regions and two close-ups of farming styles of two land-owning families have revealed the actors' everyday struggle for survival (as seen from the point of view of practice theory)[45] or the resilience of their farm-household systems (as regarded from the perspective of systems theory).[46] Accordingly, for explaining and understanding the actor-induced resilience of family farming systems, two flows of resources have to be taken into account: first, the external upstream and downstream flows of commodities from and to markets; second, the internal (re-)production of a self-controlled resource base (Figure 5).[47] The resilience of the family farming system depends on the relation between these resource flows and the corresponding "modes of ordering"[48]: the more subordination to factor and product markets gains hegemony, the more class differentiation between accumulation and proletarization takes effect; vice versa, the more the farm's self-controlled resource base is strengthened, the more the family members are able to cope with unfavourable conditions of the political-economic system in their life-worlds. Accordingly, the resilient family farming system in bureaucratic

[45] See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

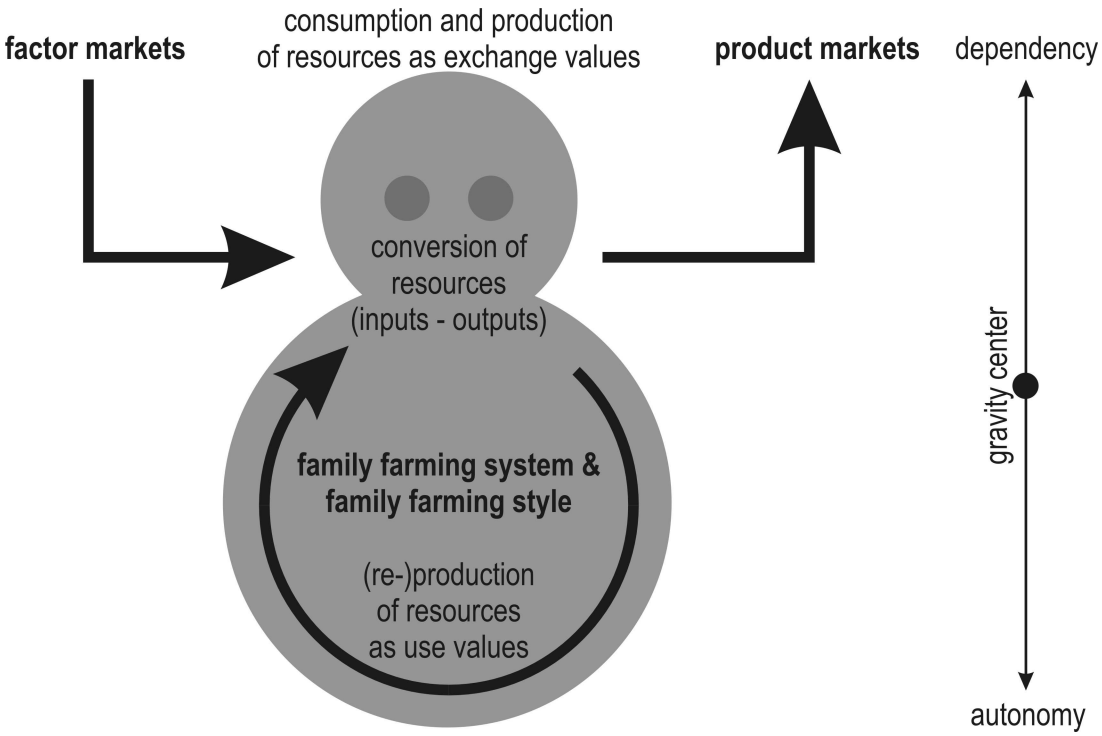
[46] See Fikret Berkes and Carl Folke, eds., *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[47] See van der Ploeg, *New Peasantries*, 152-57.

[48] On the distinction between (static) "order" and (dynamic) "ordering" see John Law, *Organizing Modernity* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

and capitalist environments resembles a *Stehaufmännchen*; metaphorically speaking, *family farms wobble, but they don't fall down*.

Figure 5: Style-specific resource flows in the family farming system



Source: own design adapted from van der Ploeg, *New Peasantries*, 153.

We must not attribute the ability of family farms to survive under unfavourable conditions to a time-transcending "peasant's essence"; on the contrary, the resilience of the family farming system is permanently being (re-)constructed in everyday life by the actors' farming styles as shown by the Huber and Meier families, as well as by other case studies.[49] Our studies have revealed a multitude of strategies suited to reduce market dependency in favour of family autonomy: first, strategies with regard to the family as an inter-personal network include,

[49] In our research project eight cases of family farming systems in total have been reconstructed on the basis of narrative interviews and additional sources.

among others, the negotiation of a collective "orientating pattern"[50] of farm management and family life in order to gain a sufficient degree of acceptance by the individuals of the household; the flexible application of family labour, especially that of female members,[51] in order to save transaction costs; the permanent or at least temporary reduction of the family's standard of living in order to save expenses for consumer goods; the gaining of income outside of the farm to reduce the dependency on farm income; co-operation with local and regional actors in order to activate social capital. Second, strategies with regard to the self-controlled resource base of the farming enterprise comprise, among others, working carefully with organic and inorganic resources in order to minimize the risk of animal diseases, crop failures and mechanical breakdowns; adapting to the ecological niche of the farm location in order to enhance co-production between man and nature; integrating different branches of farming in order to gain synergy. Third, strategies with regard to factor and product markets comprise, among others, avoiding too much debt from investment credits in order to maintain the leeway of decision-making; diversifying the produce in order to counterbalance price fluctuations; marketing products directly to consumers in order to add value. All these strategies tend to deepen the gravity center of the family farm, therefore decreasing market dependency and increasing family autonomy.

The most crucial feature of these family farming styles is their hybrid character, which overcomes the dichotomy of "peasants" running household and "farmers" managing enterprises. The Hubers, Meiers and others run households and manage enterprises at the same time. On the one hand, they acquire technology and other commodities from factor

[50] See Ralf Bohnsack, „Orientierungsmuster," in *Hauptbegriffe Qualitativer Sozialforschung: Ein Wörterbuch,* eds. Ralf Bohnsack, Winfried Marotzki and Michael Meuser (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2003), 132-33.

[51] On the role of rural women as providers of flexible laborforce see Ingrid Bauer, „Zwischen Goldhaube und Telehaus: Modernisierung der Geschlechterverhältnisse im ländlichen Raum," in *Salzburg: Zwischen Globalisierung und Goldhaube*, eds. Ernst Hanisch and Robert Kriechbaumer (Vienna: Böhlau, 1997), 210-39.

markets and deliver food and other commodities to product markets; on the other hand, they manage to control market dependency to a certain degree by maintaining a self-controlled resource base. This combination of strategies lets them keep the balance between dependency and autonomy. Thus – and most ironically – these farming families can successfully act like "farmers" because they successfully act like "peasants". Needless to say, maintaining the balance between dependency and autonomy is neither always harmonious nor necessarily successful; it may involve severe conflicts, and it may eventually fail.[52] However, the cases of the Hubers, Meiers and others highlight a crucial aspect of Austria's peculiar path of post-war agrarian change: besides other factors,[53] it is the hybridity of family farming styles that increases the resilience of family farming systems in the challenging environment of post-war "organized capitalism".

[52] As a case study emphasizing the "decline of the peasant economy" see Christa Müller, *Von der lokalen Ökonomie zum globalisierten Dorf: Bäuerliche Überlebensstrategien zwischen Weltmarktintegration und Regionalisierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1998), 88-139; a more differentiated account is provided by Thomas Fliege, *Bauernfamilien zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Eine Ethnographie bäuerlicher Lebensstile* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1998).

[53] See Kröger, *Modernisierung*, 395-418.