

Woodland Peasants

Ecological Adaptation in an Austrian Peasant Community 1870–1938

Norbert Ortmayr

Ortmayr, Norbert 1989: Woodland Peasants. Ecological Adaptation in an Austrian Peasant Community 1870–1938 – *Ethnologia Europaea* XIX: 105–124.

Woodland-peasant adaptation in Austria meant small and medium sized farming units, small proportions of servants and day-labourers, a relatively small necessity to recruit extrafamily labour. Kinship and neighbourhood were the dominant principles of social organization. Patron-client relations played a comparatively marginal role. Family-labour and exchange-labour between kinsmen were the dominant forms of labour recruitment, generalized reciprocity the dominant exchange principle. Woodland-peasant adaptation was the product of ecological and cultural factors. The ecological factors were medium altitude (400–600 m), rough climate and poor soil. The cultural factors were the manorial system till 1848; compared to eastern Europe a relatively weak form of peasant dependency; the Austrian path to modernization in the field of agriculture (contrary to the English or Prussian paths to agricultural modernization, large numbers of medium and small-sized peasant units survived, which maintained their predominantly precommercial character until the Second World War) and undivided land inheritance, which prevented fragmentation. In Austria the woodland-peasant society was, apart from the Alpine societies with divided land inheritance, the only type of rural society that represented a peasant society in the real sense of the word: Peasant domination and a small proportion of rural lower classes. This type of rural society was a great contrast to the “servant-societies” of Alpine Austria and the “day-labourer societies” of the lowlands. In the two latter societies the peasants had become a minority from the 18th century at the latest; the rural lower classes dominated quantitatively.

Dr. Norbert Ortmayr, Department of History (University of Salzburg), Rudolfskai 42, A-5020 Salzburg.

1. Introduction

The following case study of an Austrian woodland-peasant community in the 19th and early 20th century investigates the connections between natural resources, rural social structure and the local exchange system.

This form of social-historical research has not a very long tradition in Austria. The ecological approach to social and economic history, contrary to Scandinavian research, has received attention only in the last few years. This is all the more surprising, when we consider that Austria is very suitable for research into the question of the ecological conditions of ru-

ral social structures. Austria is characterized by a variety of natural areas and various types of regional economies.

The Alpine regions dominate Austria, claiming 65% of the entire country. They are economically characterized by extensive agriculture, dominated by cattle breeding and forestry. Until the 19th century mining played an important role in some Alpine regions, as did various forms of marginal adaptations such as peddling and other forms of seasonal labour. The Austrian lowlands were characterized by intensive agriculture; mostly the cultivation of corn, in the east of the country vineyards, combined with cattle breeding. A further regional

unit is formed by the "Wald-und Mühlviertel" areas. It is characterized by less intensive agriculture, consisting of a mixed economy of the cultivation of corn – mostly rye – and cattle breeding. The following case study was carried out in this area, in the community of Maria Langegg. Large parts of the Wald- und Mühlviertel were also characterized by the cultivation of flax because of the soil conditions and climate. Till the 19th century this area was one of the classical regions of protoindustry in Austria. A further reason why Austria is particularly suitable for the ecological approach is that the individual agrarian regions are characterized by differences in inheritance patterns, feudal past and the degree of market integration. Indeed, nature alone is never the single determining factor of regional social structures. Besides nature, legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors helped to form local social structures. The interaction of ecological and cultural factors in Austria provides very good material for research.

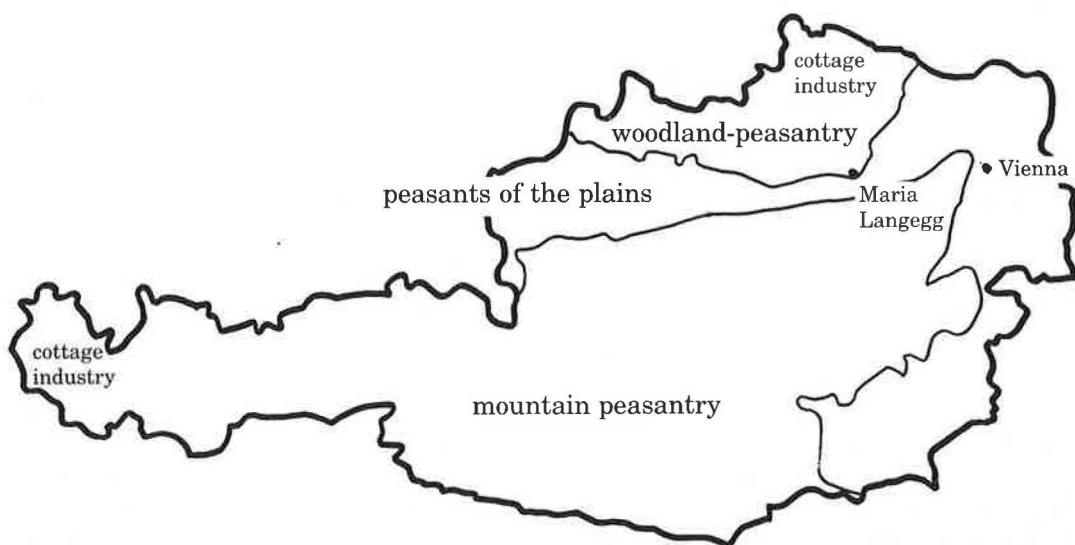
Historical-ecological works of the new social and economic history in Austria could continue the research of the American anthropologists who carried out a number of community studies in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Even though a few anthropologists were working in Austria, the focal point of research was the

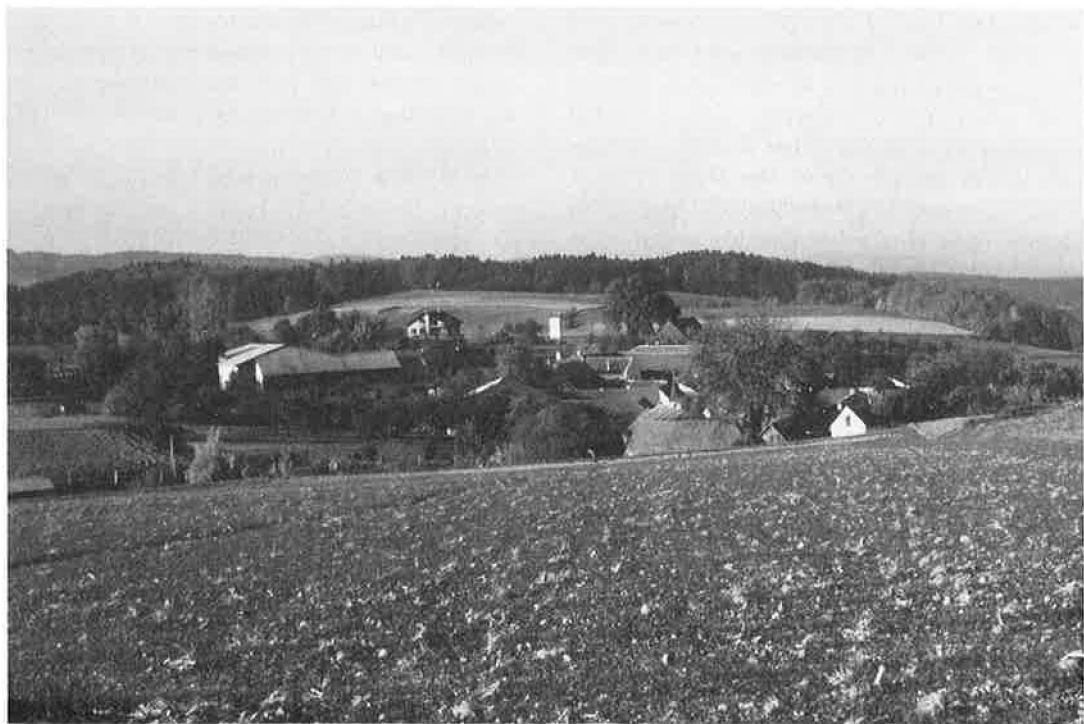
Alpine regions of Switzerland, Italy and France. Besides Netting's work on Törbel (Netting 1981), the research of J. Cole and E. Wolf on the ecology and ethnicity of an Alpine valley is of a pioneering nature (Cole-Wolf 1974).

In the field of the new social and economic history in Austria, Michael Mitterauer was the first to investigate the effects of the ecological conditions on rural family structures (Mitterauer 1986). In a further work I investigated the connections between age at marriage, proportions never married, population development, illegitimacy and the ecological-economic conditions (Ortmayr 1988). In the present study I examine not only rural family structures under their ecological conditions, but also the whole local social structure as well as the local exchange system. I am pursuing the work of Scandinavian ethnologists on peasant ecotypes and local exchange systems (Löfgren 1977, Klepp 1982, Stoklund 1976).

2. The locality

The Maria Langegg parish lies in the mountainous highlands of the Dunkelsteiner Wald, south of the Danube between Krems and Melk. In 1900 the parish consisted of 642 inhabit-





Woodland farms in the Dunkelsteiner Wald.

ants, spread over eight villages. The main village Langeegg was typical of those villages that arose around monasteries. It was dominated by the monastery and surrounded by houses of day-labourers and local tradesmen. The villages of the area (belonging to the same parish) had quite a different socio-economic structure: they were relatively egalitarian communities, made up of small holdings, with only a small lower class of rural day-labourers and local tradesmen.

Maria Langeegg gave the impression of being a peaceful world, relatively free from any events of great political importance. The central village was a traditional place of pilgrimage in a romantic setting. A burst of tourism, starting in the 1920s, brought a considerable number of summer guests to the village who went there to recover from the stress of city life. The political unrest of the 1920s and 1930s did not seem to penetrate the backward mountain areas of the Dunkelsteiner Wald. Whereas in the neighbouring wine-growing communi-

ties, the fronts between the Social-Democrates and Christian-Socialists became more serious and in the nearby town of Krems the social-democratic and national-socialist youth took part in bloody street battles, the picture in Maria Langeegg showed no signs of such political-social conflict. During the period between the wars every election was dominated by the Christian-Socialists, who received at least 85% of the votes. And the reports about Maria Langeegg in the "Kremser Zeitung" always painted the same picture: only reports on personal tragedies, accidents, hail storms, lightning, strikes, deaths and marriages.

Was Maria Langeegg and the Dunkelsteiner Wald really such a different world from the communities in the lowlands? The people in the wine-growing areas at the foot of the Dunkelsteiner Wald talked of the "Woidler" (Wood-people), when they were referring to the inhabitants of the Dunkelsteiner Wald. "Besengäu" (the broom land, because the people produced brooms during the off-seasons) was another

designation for the Dunkelsteiner Wald area (Häusler, Melk). There are in any case clear signs that the people of the Dunkelsteiner Wald were seen by the people of the lowlands as a distinctive group. What then was so special about the people of the Dunkelsteiner Wald? In what way were they different from the inhabitants of other farming areas? How did the specific surroundings of the Dunkel-

steiner Wald produce a special social structure? In short: there were considerable differences which consisted in the population density, in the economy, in the social organization as well as in the local exchange system. The people of the Dunkelsteiner Wald had to adapt themselves to the specific surroundings of their area by means of a special social structure.

3. Monastery, woodland peasants and lumberjacks

Let us try to define the different groups of the local society:

Table 1: Economic sectors

Population	Agriculture and forestry	%	Trade	%	Others	%
551	407	74	69	12.5	75	13.5

Source: Census 1934

Table 2: Quantitative division of social types in the individual economic sectors (1875)

A) Agriculture and forestry		
1. Self-employed		
a) Peasants	51	
b) Cottagers	13	
2. Working family members over 12	92	
3. Peasant women, cottager women	67	
4. Servants, landholder's stewards	55	
5. Day-labourers, lumberjacks	29	
6. Supported (elderly, children under 12)	153	
7. Total	460	
B) Producing trades		
1. Self-employed	16	
2. Journeymen	3	
3. Labourers	4	
4. Supported and working family members	56	
5. Total	79	

C) Tertiary sector	
1. Self-employed	13
2. Servants	5
3. Employees	4
4. Supported	39
5. Total	61
No occupation given	
Total Population	
625	

Table 3: Quantitative list of the individual social types (1875)

1. Peasants, peasant women	104
2. Peasant children over 12 (including cottager children)	92
3. Servants	55
4. Day-labourers, lumberjacks	29
5. Cottagers, cottager women	27
6. Self-employed tradesmen	16

Source for table 2 and 3: Soul description 1875

The tables 1–3 show that:

- 1. The parish consisted of a relatively high proportion of agrarian population compared with a low local craft work force.
- 2. The quantitative division of single social types shows a clear tendency in favour of the peasant groups (peasants, peasant women and peasant children) and relatively

low proportions of rural lower classes (servants, day-labourers). From its own social structure, Maria Langeegg was in fact a “peasant society”, contrary to other agrarian regions where the proportions of the rural lower-classes were considerably higher than the peasant population. The



Farm houses along a street in Maria Langegg.

self-employed dominated in both the tertiary and the secondary sectors.

3. Maria Langegg presented a type of local society, dominated by occupations in which most of those working were related. On a purely quantitative level it can be seen that kinship was the decisive organizing principle of the economic system.

3.1. Woodland peasants

In 1838 the peasants of Scheiblwies, one of the small villages in the Maria Langegg area were described in a contemporary topographical report as follows:

Scheiblwies. A village consisting of 15 houses, with the next main poststation Melk, three hours away. The inhabitants are woodland-peasants, running medium sized farms; as local craftsmen, there are only one weaver and one coach builder. They live off the land and cultivate nothing other than winter corn, oats and potatoes. Cattle breeding is of little importance; the cattle were fed in the cowshed. The

surroundings were relatively flat, the ground cold and damp and the climate harsh, but the water was good (Schweickhardt).

During the next hundred years there was no fundamental change in the conditions, apart from a moderate intensifying of farming. The peasants of Maria Langegg were small peasants. Besides agricultural production the majority of them had an additional source of income. The forest offered a lot of opportunities. Many peasants worked as broom and basket makers. The name "Besengäu" for the area of the Dunkelsteiner Wald derived from this rural part-time occupation. The production of brooms and baskets did not only satisfy local needs, but also supplied the people of the bordering agricultural regions.

The transportation of wood offered another opportunity to earn an extra income. Large parts of the Dunkelsteiner Wald were owned by the local manor or the local monastery. The wood was felled in the winter months and

transported by the farmers on their oxen-carts to the Danube. A few peasant sons worked as lumberjacks in the manorial forest in winter. It was also common in summer for peasant children to be taken on as day-labourers by other peasants. The production of gravel was another widespread form of rural wage labour. Charcoal burning and weaving played a merely marginal role at the beginning of the 20th century. A few peasants also owned small vineyards in the Wachau and so in winter they supplemented their income by selling the wine.

The peasants of Maria Langegg combined agriculture and forestry, the production of local crafts and wage labour. Thus they differed considerably from the farming specialists of the lowlands. The peasants of Maria Langegg could be classified more as "jacks of all trades" than as farmers (Cole-Wolf 1974).

3.2. The rural tradesmen

In 1925 the carpenter Josef Lindner from Schenkenbrunn wrote to the provincial government of Lower Austria asking for tax relief. In his letter, he presented his economic position in detail.

"Esteemed Provincial Government of Lower Austria! I am a cottager, my livestock consists of 2 cows and 2 to 3 pigs. To keep this livestock I leased till autumn of the last year 1.5 Joch (1 Joch = 0.57 hectares) arable land and meadow from the Schenkenbrunn community. The land that I was leasing was taken away from me and given to the bull-keeper of the community.

In 1924 I bought, with money which I had for the most part borrowed, the following:

- 1. Two fields of not quite 1.5 Joch. In 1925 I acquired with money, the total sum of which was borrowed:
- 2. 1.75 Joch of fallow fields for the sum of 1.900.000 Kronen.
- 3. A garden somewhat smaller than 0.5 of a Joch for the sum of 9.000.000 Kronen.

I am also a carpenter, but because I have nothing to do with such work the whole year, I am not in a position to pay such high taxes.

Yours faithfully
Josef Lindner
Schenkenbrunn 23, Post Mautern"

Let us summarize the main points of relevance from the letter:

- 1. Josef Linder considered himself to be pri-

marily a cottager and the work as carpenter was of secondary importance.

- 2. He was occupied essentially with subsistence production, which he expanded during the depression by buying more land. Here we have a basic characteristic of all rural tradesmen: dependence on the land. The tradesmen owned their own land or rented small pieces of land from the peasants.

We can differentiate socially and economically between two groups of tradesmen:

- 1. Tradesmen with less means of production. These include cobbler, tailor, carpenter, peddlars of pilgrimage souvenirs, grocers and coachbuilders. Mixed sources of income as well as a life of near poverty were characteristic for this group.
- 2. Tradesmen with substantial means of production. Among these are the classical rural tradesmen, working for local demand, such as miller, smith, baker, butcher, vendor and landlord, who served the needs of the place of pilgrimage. The last mentioned group formed the classical village bourgeoisie. They were no longer bound to the peasants by day-labour or tenancy and enjoyed a lot of respect in the parish. For this reason, some are to be found in the communal council lists. This model of social differentiation is also reflected in table 4 which represents the social position of the tradesmen.

Table 4: Social position of tradesmen (1875)

Trade	Total	As lodgers
smith	2	0
weaver	1	0
tailor	3	1
cobbler	4	2
shopkeeper	3	2
coachmaker	1	1
cooper	1	0
baker	1	0
miller	2	0
landlord	7	0

Source: Soul description 1875



Cottages of day-labourers in Maria Langegg.

3.3 Rural wage earners

In Maria Langegg there could be found three classical types of preindustrial wage-earners. On the one hand there were the masons and carpenters, and on the other hand the lumberjacks and the rural day-labourers who worked for the monastery or the peasants of the area. None of these groups correspond to the Marxist type of worker who possesses nothing but his labour. The majority of them owned small pieces of land for cultivation as well as their own houses. Therefore the worker family was not only a unit of reproduction but also carried out productive functions to a greater degree. The rural day-labourers and the rural tradesmen with fewer means of production shared certain common characteristics in their pattern of ecological and economic adaptation (Löfgren 1976). First of all, their economy was based on the combination of different forms of income. Day-labour was combined with all kinds of trades just as lumberjacking was combined with day-labour. All possible resources,

even the most marginal, were exploited to their limit. The day-labourers' children picked berries and mushrooms and sold them to the pilgrims and holiday makers. In summer and on days of pilgrimage in September many Langegg cottagers let their living quarters and they themselves slept in the barn.

A further structural characteristic was the striving to maintain as high an agricultural production as possible to insure themselves against hardship. This resulted in a form of dependence on the monastery or the peasants. A peculiarity of the rural lower classes in Maria Langegg seemed to be that in comparison with the rural lower classes of other agricultural regions they had more cash at their disposal. On the one hand this was a result of lumberjacking and the abundance of day-labouring in the monastery and on the other hand the additional source of income from pilgrims and early tourism. This phenomenon was supported by demo-economic relief due to rapid emigration since the late 19th century. It can

be found in the sources dealing with lodging conditions that the rent was paid in money and not with labour.

3.4. Summary

1. The local society only accounted for a relatively small amount of labour division. The peasants were often wage earners and also the wage earners were often landowners. Day-labour was not class-specific differentiated. The individual economic sectors were too interwoven, so that there was no natural division into classes of owners and employees.
2. Peasants, like rural lower classes, were designated by the typical form of mixed income.
3. Topographically Maria Langeegg was divided into villages in the surroundings with peasants of a relatively equal status, a relatively small number of lower classes and the main village with a large amount of rural lower classes.

4. Characteristic groups and social strata

So far the division of local society into groups of people of similar characteristics has been sufficient. Now we briefly want to look at a possible model of social stratification. The criterium that differentiates social strata from characteristic groups is that of the social evaluation of certain characteristics. Social strata are characterized not only by common objective living

Table 5: Structure of farming units in Maria Langeegg (1951):

0-5 hectares:	25.4%
5-20 hectares:	47.3%
20-100 hectares:	25.2%
over 100 hectares:	2.1%
	100.0%

conditions but also by a similar subjective evaluation on the part of their contemporaries. A general strata-model should differentiate between the peasants (including the farming landlord, the smith and the miller), the Langeegg village bourgeoisie (shop owners) and the rural lower classes (day-labourers, servants of lower class origins and rural tradesmen with only little means of production). In this three-level strata model there is no room for the monastery as a separate household, divided itself, and for a few individual households (hunters' lodge, school house).

5. Ecotypes and social structure

How did the social structure develop? Can it be explained by the demands of the natural environment on the population of Maria Langeegg?

If this is the case, then similar environmental conditions in other communities must have resulted in a similar social structure. And this was indeed the case. At least it can be proved exactly by the example of the communities of the juridical district Krems. Krems consisted of two different ecological zones or areas of production, as it is called by the agricultural econ-

Table 6: Structure of farming units in the two areas of productions in the juridical district Krems:

a) Area of production IV:		
0-5 hectares:		22.2 %
5-20 hectares:		57.6 %
20-100 hectares:		20.19%
over 100 hectares:		0.01%
		100.00%
b) Area of production VIII:		
0-5 hectares:		71.9%
5-20 hectares:		25.8%
20-100 hectares:		1.5%
over 100 hectares:		0.7%
		100.0%

Source for table 5 and 6: Agricultural Census of farming units (1951).

Table 7: Comparison of the two rural adaptations in Maria Langegg.

	Woodland peasantry	Monastery-economy
Resources	forest, pasture cultivated land	forest, pasture cultiv. land, pilgrimage and early tourism
Structure of farming units	small scale	large scale
Social structure	relatively homogeneous small peasant society, small lower classes, no village bourgeoisie	highly stratified society, large lower classes, village bourgeoisie, monastery as a separate household divided internally

omists who have attempted to mark out agrarian zones in Austria: these are the area of production IV (Wald- und Mühlviertel) and the area of production VIII (Lowland and hills of Lower Austria). Maria Langegg now belongs to the area of production IV. Table 5 shows once more the socio-economic structure of Maria Langegg: two estates, few large peasants, large proportion of small peasants and a relatively small strata of cottagers. Table 6 shows that the structure of farming units and the social structure found in Maria Langegg, was typical for all those communities that belonged to the area of production IV.

The most important environmental conditions of the area of production IV were the higher altitude, the rough climate and less fertile soil. Better environmental conditions for agricultural production were to be found in the area of production VIII, the lowlands and hills of Austria. In this area there was a completely different structure of farming units and a completely different social structure, the most important of which was the very high proportion of cottagers.

Now a clear connection between environmental conditions and the rural social structure in the juridical district Krems could be found. How did this come about?

The explanation is to be found in the economic form of the individual area of production and in the corresponding form of labour organization (Mitterauer 1986). The agriculture of Maria Langegg was characterized by mixed economy with less intensive form of cattle breeding and corn production due to the specific environmental conditions. Cattle breeding required a permanent labour force working

throughout the year. This was recruited on the one hand from the peasant families themselves and on the other hand from servants. The small size of the peasant units and less intensive cattle breeding resulted in the small proportion of servants in Maria Langegg. Corn production, on the other hand, required a seasonal labour force of day-labourers. The small sized peasant units and less intensive corn production meant that the peasants needed only little seasonal labour. The dominantly small peasant economy produced little demand for seasonal labour. Therefore a broad class of cottagers and lodgers could not develop.

The character of natural resources required a certain pattern for exploitation of the resources. There was not an innumerable variety of patterns for the exploitation of natural resources but only a few that could be compiled into types, ecotypes. The dominant pattern of exploitation of resources in Maria Langegg belongs to the ecotype of the woodland peasant. It was a peasant adaptation and it represented the dominant pattern of adaptation in the Mühl- und Waldviertel. It consisted of a specific social structure and also, as will be seen later, a specific exchange system.

In table 8 the most important characteristics of the woodland peasant are summarized and compared to two other ecotypes. Ecotypes are not only products of nature but are also determined by cultural influences as can be seen in the example of the economy and social structure of Maria Langegg. The central village of Maria Langegg, Langegg, did not conform to the dominant pattern of exploitation found among the woodland peasants of the area. The soil conditions, altitude and climate of the cen-

Table 8: Rural ecotypes

	peasants of the plains	woodland peasants	peasants of the mountains
	“Körndlbauer” day-labourer societies	“Waldbauer” peasant societies	“Hörndlbauer” servant societies
– Population density	high	low	low
– Settlement patterns	large villages, hamlets, single farms	single farms, small villages	single farms, small villages
– Peasant economy	farming alone	farming and additional subsistence	farming and additional subsistence
	emphasis on arable farming	less intensive forms of agriculture highly differentiated exploitation of forest resources	emphasis on animal husbandry
	high degree of differentiation in the size of farms (many cottagers, less middle and large peasants) numerous village trades high degree of labour division between the households	low degree of differentiation (high rates of small peasants, few cottagers) few village trades low degree of labour division between the households	low degree of differentiation (middle and large sized farms, few cottagers) few village trades low degree of labour division between the households, high degree of labour division within the peasant households
Forms of labour recruitment	day-labour, servants, family labour, few cooperative labour between peasants	family labour, cooperative labour, few servant- and day-labour	servant-, family labour, few day-labour
Social organization	highest rates of day- labourers (lodgers, cottagers) high rates of servants (20% of the whole population) wage labour is class- specific	small rates of day- labourers small rates of servants (5–10%) wage labour is not class- specific (peasant children, lodgers and cottagers)	small rates of day- labourers highest rates of servants (20–40%) wage labour is not class- specific
	servant labour is to a high degree class-specific	servant labour is not class-specific	servant labour comes to a high degree from outside the village
Household organization	differentiation between small sized households of rural lower classes (centrifugal household type) and large sized peasant households (centripetal type)	few differences in household size between peasants and lower cl. dominant small sized households	dominant large sized peasant households
Cooperative labour (harvest, threshing)	large work groups (dominant non kinsmen) formal organization	small work groups (dominant kinsmen) informal organization	
Suprafamily ties	dominant vertical, polyadic (patron-client relationship)	dominant horizontal, dyadic (colleague contracts)	
Patterns of godparenthood	differences between peasants and lower classes: peasants choice kinsmen lower cl. choice non-kin peasants	no differences between peasants and lower classes: godparents are kinsmen	
Dominant exchange principles	balanced reciprocity	generalized reciprocity	
Principles of social organization	kinship, neighbourhood and patron-client relationship	kinship and neighbourhood	
Agrarian regions in Austria	central parts of Lower and Upper Austria, Flachgau, parts of Burgenland, parts of South and East Styria	most parts of Wald- und Mühlviertel	Alpine regions with undivided land inheritance (Pinzgau, Pongau, Lungau, Upper Styria, Carinthia,...)

tral village were completely identical with those of Maria Langegg's surroundings. Still there is a completely different social structure: high proportion of lower classes and tradesmen. The high proportion of tradesmen can be explained by the function of Langegg as a center of religious and other activities (pilgrimage, early tourism). The high proportion of day-labourers and lumberjacks can be explained by the division of property. The larger part of land was controlled by the Langegg monastery and the Arnsdorf estate. The farming of the monastery as well as of the estate produced a large demand for rural wage-earners, day-labourers and lumberjacks. The central village of Maria Langegg presented a completely different pattern of exploitation of resources; it was not a peasant but a manorial pattern of adaptation. Environmental conditions had made possible two ecotypes. Influences from the past feudal structure formed the respective ecotypes (cf. table 7).

In the definition of ecotype, presented so far, the division of property plays a central role and is a central component of the forming of ecotypes. Furthermore, ecotypes are not static but products of permanent processes of adaptation. From the late 19th century onwards basically three developments set new demands on Maria Langegg's economic adaptation:

1. The permanent decrease in population from the last third of the 19th century onwards. Between 1880 and 1923 Maria Langegg lost a fifth of its population; the central village Langegg almost a third (table 9). Therefore pressure on the local food stuff resources decreased significantly. An interesting development took place: whereas on the one hand from the late 18th century onwards a permanent increase in population led to continual changes in the rural ecotypes and the local societies were further polarized, from the late 19th century onwards a process of deproletarianization can be observed.
2. At the same time, as the pressure on the food-stuff resources was decreasing, early tourism provided new sources. This boom was to be seen clearly in the communal council lists. From the late 1890s onwards there were constant applications for the set-

Table 9: Population development of Maria Langegg 1869-1971:

	central village Langegg	area	total
1869	131	551	682
1880	133	563	696
1890	139	544	683
1900	114	528	642
1910	104	499	603
1923	99	485	584
1934	97	454	551
1951	95	415	510
1961	65	424	489
1971	74	413	487

Source: "Ortsrepertorium" of all census from 1869 onwards (Vienna 1871,...). Maria Langegg's area consists of the following 7 villages and hamlets: Geiersberg, Plaimberg, Nesselstauden, Scheiblweis, Schenkenbrunn, Paltmühle and Wolfenreith.

ting up of extra stalls for pilgrimage souvenirs. In Langegg new inns were opened; in 1914 there were five.

3. In Maria Langegg the relatively late arrival of mechanization did not seem to create as many redundances as had been the case in other agrarian regions. The demo-economic development between 1880 and 1938 did not change the local ecotypes but stabilized them. The decisive change should have taken place after 1945, then, however, the old ecotype of the woodland peasant was replaced by the worker peasant.

6. Group formation in the local community

Up to this point the research has concentrated on the individual characteristic groups and social strata. It is now necessary to look in more detail at the social groups. Social groups are different from characteristic groups and social strata in that the group members are connected through everyday social contact. House and community were doubtlessly the basic type of group formation in local society. Between these two units, however, there was a variety of less formalized social and economic units, units which have not been dealt with in previous research because they are not re-

flected in the main sources of historical demography and family history; i.e. the census lists. These sources are very household orientated – the information has been collected for certain purposes, such as taxation and population census – and thus tend to give the household a far more prominent position in the social landscape than it actually had, as O. Löfgren pointed out. He also noticed that a certain type of household with a specific size and structure could only be viable because there existed a complex system of social and economic units between house and community: ties to kins, neighbours and other households both inside and outside the village community (Löfgren 1981,3).

Two such social units should be analyzed in more detail; namely godparenthood and the interdomestic work groups constituted by exchange labour and wage labour.

6.1. Family and household

In general in preindustrial societies, there were two types of household organization: a centripetal type and a centrifugal type. Both complemented each other. The centrifugal type of household organization was typical of lower class households. It functioned as a “base of operation” (Löfgren 1981,6) from which the

household members departed to perform different tasks such as day-labour. Despite the households being split up very often for longer periods, they still functioned as an economic unit, in which the household members shared their incomes totally or partially. The peasant household corresponded to the centripetal type of household organization. The peasant house was the “centre of economic activities” (Löfgren 1981,69) into which additional labour was often recruited.

The formation of the household members of both types was different structurally. As a rule, a married couple was at the head of the peasant household, the children not in line of inheritance stayed in the house till marriage because their labour was required; often servants - usually youth from rural lower class households – had to be integrated into the peasant household to support the family work force. The elderly remained in the house as necessary labour in the process of production.

The lower-class household was headed either by a single person or a married couple. It was not necessary that a married couple should be at the head of the lower-class household. As a rule the children stayed in the house till the age of 12 or 14 and then changed over to a peasant household as servants. The centripetal type resulted in larger households than the

Table 10: Choice of godparents (1900–1930)

<div>godparents parents of the godchild</div>	peasants	rural lower classes	tradesmen with essential means of prod.	others	total
peasants	244 81%	18 6%	15 5%	24 8%	301 100%
rural lower classes	40 26%	62 40%	4 3%	47 31%	153 100%
tradesmen with essential means of prod.	18 64%	1 3%	5 18%	4 15%	28 100%
others	10 29%	3 9%	1 3%	20 59%	34 100%
total	312	84	25	95	516

Source: Parish registers 1900–1930.

Table 11: Places of origins of godparents (1900–1930)

Total	517
from Maria Langeegg	283
from Gansbach (nearby market)	36
from towns (Vienna,...)	55

centrifugal type. The lower-class household was to a lesser degree a family economic unit than the peasant household.

These two types were also represented in Maria Langeegg, but compared with the ideal types described so far, displayed a few differences. It was noticeable among lower-class households that the children stayed longer in the parental home (Ostravsky 1979). There are three explanations for this:

1. The availability of sufficient non-domestic work opportunities in the form of day-labour at the monastery or wage-labour in the manorial forest.
2. The peasant could employ only a few servants.
3. Because of the physical closeness of life in the villages, servant work did not always have to be integrated into the peasant household.

A peculiarity of the peasant household was a relatively small number of servants. This had two consequences:

1. Relatively few differences in the average number of household members between peasant and rural lower-class households (peasants: 6,79; rural lower classes: 5,9; tradesmen with essential means of production: 7,6; others: 5,5).
2. In the peasant household the household members were usually related, because only few non-related persons (servants, lodgers) lived there; and in the lower-class household the children lived longer than usual with their relatives. In the local society of Maria Langeegg people primarily had experiences with relatives, parents, brothers and sisters. And it was also these experiences which influenced people in choosing godparents and partners in economic cooperation.

6.2. Godparenthood

The pattern of choosing godparents in a local society demonstrates how this society is constituted. Knut Weibust mentions two basic characteristics of godparenthood: on the one hand, godparenthood was ritually formed and sanctioned. It was fully institutionalized and differed thus from informal bonds like friendship. On the other hand, it was voluntary and differed from consanguine bonds, and it was their voluntary nature that gave this institution its flexibility and utility (Weibust 1972, 110). It can be assumed that, because of this flexibility, the individual pattern of choice of godparents provided an answer to the demands of the local social system. Table 10 shows the relatively weak bonds between lower classes and peasants. A sample showed that even when the lower classes chose peasants as the godparents of their children, they were usually relatives. The cultural rule was that godparents were chosen from the brothers and sisters or close relatives. The pattern of godparenthood relationships between peasants and non-related day-labourers, as seen in other agrarian regions was seldom found in Maria Langeegg (Ortmayr 1986). In Maria Langeegg blood relationships were stressed by godparenthood. This pattern of choosing godparents reflected the small need for extrafamily labour. Every godparenthood relationship strengthened this relationship and in doing so excluded others. The day-labourers in Maria Langeegg could not, however, exclude relations to peasants because they sometimes worked for many of the peasants and therefore depended on most of them.

Table 11 shows the social consequences of permanent migration. The social network expanded more and more into the towns. Relatives, who had migrated to the towns and had risen socially, often served as godparents. They also seemed to be more powerful patrons than the peasants of Maria Langeegg.

6.3. Exchange labour and wage labour

The picture of the autarky of the peasant household in preindustrial times belongs to the classical topoi in scientific literature. Best known are probably Karl Marx's works on the

Table 12: Size and structure of the work parties at threshing (about 1930).

	size of the working group	members of the peasant household	extra-family kinsmen	neighbours day-labourers
Scheiblwies 12	8-9	3	4	2
Scheiblwies 7	9	3	4	2
Nesselstauden 1	7	3	1	3

French smallholders, their isolated method of production and their lack of cooperation. In his Mexican field work G. M. Foster came upon extreme individualism, lack of cooperation and a large degree of mutual mistrust. He considered these characteristics to be typical of all peasant societies (Foster 1965). In a study on a southern Italian agro-town, Banfield coined the phrase "amoral familism". He sees the interests of the peasants as being concentrated exclusively on the family, while they were not willing to cooperate with others (Banfield 1958). This picture of individualistic behaviour and peasant atomistic social structure was confirmed by some anthropologists, but criticized severely by others (Gregory 1975).

The circumstances were indeed too different regionally to allow such forms of generalization. Small peasant methods of production and fragmented land ownership seem to come closest to Foster's ideal type.

The theory of the lack of every form of cooperation can not be applied to the Austrian agrarian society. Nevertheless, the forms and extent of cooperation between peasants and rural lower classes varied a great deal regionally. The degree of demand for extrafamily labour (servant-labour, day-labour, exchange-labour) formed the type of local society (Mitterauer 1986).

A closer look at the conditions in Maria Langegg shows that economic cooperation took place in various forms.

1. Between peasant units in the form of day-labour, exchange labour and festive labour.
2. Between peasants and rural lower-classes in the form of day-labour and labour-as-rent ("Abarbeit").
3. Between the monastery and the rural lower-classes as day-labour and labour-as-rent.

Re 1: Exchange labour:

Peasant units that required additional labour exchanged an equal amount of working days with relatives or neighbouring peasant families. Two types existed: a) Individual exchange labour: A and B each work 6 days for C. C then works 6 days for each A and B. But A and B do not work for each other. b) Group exchange-labour: A, B and C work as a group on the farm of each one in turns (Moore 1974).

The classical cases that made additional extra-family labour necessary were the hay and corn harvests and threshing. Typical of the Maria Langegg peasants was that they needed only a little additional labour in all three cases. Only a few larger peasants hired day-labourers (cottagers and peasant children) for the hay and corn harvests. Threshing presented a similar case as long as it was still done by hand. Threshing by hand took place in winter and as a rule the members of a household provided sufficient labour. This, however, changed completely with the advent of mechanization. In Maria Langegg hand-threshing was replaced relatively late by the threshing machine. (The first report of a horse-capstan threshing machine can be found in a monastery bill of 1907; from 1914 onwards the peasants changed over in several stages.) The new threshing machines reduced the time of work to 3-6 days, but required about 6-10 labourers, who could no longer be recruited from the peasant household alone. In this case 2-4 peasant units had to cooperate in that they exchanged the labour free of charge.

Table 12 may be summarized as follows:

1. The labour groups at threshing were an adaptive strategy of local society to the demands of early mechanization.
2. Compared with the peasants of the plains the working groups in Maria Langegg were

relatively small (8–9 people compared with 20–30 people in the lowlands).

3. The dominant type of exchange labour was that of individual exchange-labour; it was organisationally less demanding and met the local needs.
4. Each work group was different in its formation. The size of the peasant holding, the household cycle, as well as some personal factors determined the quantitative allocation of the individual roles in the work group (family members, servants, relatives, neighbours, friends, day-labourers). This shows again a basic characteristic of the system of agricultural production in Europe, namely its enormously high degree of flexibility (Goody 1976). For the specific form of help needed for threshing various connections could be mobilized. A further rule of formation was the clear dominance of relatives as cooperation partners. Mostly they were married brothers or sisters of the peasant or peasant wife.
5. It was often the practice to mix exchange labour and hired labour (Erasmus 1956,447). In this case the day-labourers had to do the work that was not covered by exchange labour. This situation came about because peasants with farms of varying sizes and consequently varying duration of work cooperated at threshing. For example, a peasant with a farm of 15 ha needed 4 days for threshing, whereas a peasant with 10 ha needed only 3. When both cooperated the larger peasant had to provide the smaller peasant with labour for three days and vice versa this smaller peasant was obliged to help the larger one for 3 days. The latter, however, required 4 days for threshing and consequently had to hire a day-labourer for the fourth day.
6. The work groups were not static but, like the domestic groups, experienced a developmental cycle.

The second form of cooperation between peasant units was festive labour. It took place in specific cases of emergency as well as the building of houses. All the villagers or as many as were needed cooperated. They were not paid by the household that had requested their help

but were treated to a plentiful meal. It was also common that the host of a festive-labour group provided music and dancing after the work (Erasmus 1956,449).

Structural differences between exchange labour and festive labour concerned not only the degree of obligation to reciprocity but also the quality and quantity of the food and drink provided for the labourers. In the case of exchange labour the obligation to reciprocity was very strict and as a rule the meals consisted of everyday dishes. Often the labourers returned to their own houses to eat. In the case of festive labour the festival meals served satisfied the obligation to reciprocity. An obligation to reciprocity of the work done did not exist to the same degree because cases of emergency and building did not occur so often. It was expected that non-relatives helped but relatives were obliged to come.

A further structural difference consisted in the size of the work groups. Exchange-labour groups were usually smaller than festive-labour groups.

Re 2 and 3:

The local economy of the peasant surroundings of Maria Langegg had less day labour to offer. Less intensive corn cultivation and the small size of the peasant units resulted in a lower climax of work, and these, in general, could be dealt with by the peasant household or by exchange labour. For this reason there were few day-labourers, be it cottagers or lodgers, in the peasant surroundings of Maria Langegg. Families living from purely agricultural day-labour were not to be found at all; day labour was found only in combination with forestry work. The common pattern of family division of labour was that the women did the day labour and the men the lumberjacking. In peasant surroundings day labour was not usually paid for with money; the day-labourers worked for the local peasants in exchange for farm products, the right to use small plots of land (mostly for the cultivation of potatoes) and services like horse transport (*"Abarbeit"*, in the following: *"labour-as-rent"*). In the central village of Langegg day labour and labour-as-rent were the dominating forms of mobilization of labour.

Table 13: Intergenerational professional mobility of sons (1885–1929).

father son	peasants	rural lower- classes	tradesmen with essential means of production	others	total
peasants	115 94 %	3 2,5 %	3 2,5 %	1 1 %	122 100 %
rural lower-classes	30 30 %	54 55 %	5 5 %	8 10 %	97 100 %
tradesmen with essential means of production	2 14 %	1 7 %	9 65 %	2 14 %	14 100 %
others	8 20 %	7 17,5 %	1 2,5 %	24 60 %	40 100 %
total	155	65	18	35	273

Source: Parish registers 1885–1929.

The monastery controlled most of the land and needed a large number of day-labourers besides the servants to carry out the agricultural work.

7. The local society – a class society?

Max Weber's concept of class society differentiates between the propertied classes (Besitzklassen) and the working classes (Erwerbsklassen) on the one hand and the social classes on the other. When looking at the characteristic groups it becomes clear that the relatively low degree of local division of labour and low interregional integration did not allow a complete differentiation between purely propertied classes and purely working classes in the local society. The peasants were not only owners of means of production, but also wage labourers, if only to a small extent and the rural wage labourers were not completely separated from the possession of means of production. The investigation of social class formation comes to a similar result. By social class Max Weber understands a large group based on similar economic and social conditions. Other similarities were life styles, patterns of behaviour as well as a specific interaction among the members of the group and similar values. Social class constitution is also influenced by the process of mobility, in which individuals or families shut

themselves off from other groups and in so doing formed a recognizable social group. An investigation of intergenerational mobility, a classical method of the empirical determination of social class, is now required. Table 13 shows that in comparison with other groups the peasants were more of a self reproducing class. 94% of peasants of Maria Langeegg were themselves peasant off-spring. The case was quite different as regards the rural lower-classes: 31% of them were peasant off-spring and 55% rural lower-class off-spring.

Social interaction was structured in the following way: Rural lower classes just like peasants, also had godparenthood connections as well as kinship and neighbourhood connections to the whole social spectrum of local society. In the local society of Maria Langeegg the dominant principle of social organization was kinship and locality and not class. On the other hand, class formation was always associated with interregional integration. Till the early 20th century class formation among peasants and rural lower-classes was also delayed by the lack of interregional integration.

Table 14

type of labour	exchange principle
day-labour	market
labour-as-rent	balanced reciprocity
festive labour	generalized reciprocity
exchange labour	balanced or generalized reciprocity

8. Exchange systems and exchange principles

It must be possible to typify local societies according to their exchange system as well as their exchange principles.

Maria Langegg's local society had two different exchange systems. The exchange system of the surroundings was dominated by exchange labour among the peasants. Day labour and labour-as-rent did, however, play a minor role quantitatively. In Langegg it was the reverse situation. The exchange system was dominated by day-labour and labour-as-rent on the part of the monastery day-labourers.

The exchange of goods and services conformed to certain principles. In literature three principles are usually named: reciprocity, redistribution and the market principle.

The market exchange produced the fewest social consequences. It is exchange based on the principle of supply and demand. The social aspect of the connection was of less importance. The economic exchange had priority. Ideally the obligation expired with the completed transaction. This was different in the case of reciprocity, where as a rule the social connection had already existed before the transaction. The exchange partners were permanently connected. Several transactions resulted in a mutual long-term basis of trust. The exchange was based on the idea that all the exchanged goods and services were balanced in the long term and not in one single transaction. M. Sahlins developed three main types of reciprocity which are also applicable to the case of Maria Langegg (Klepp 1982,88):

1. Generalized reciprocity
2. Balanced reciprocity
3. Negative reciprocity.

In the case of generalized reciprocity goods

Table 15

	exchange system
peasant surroundings of Langegg	dominant family- and exchange labour
the main village Langegg	dominant day-labour and labour-as-rent

and services were exchanged that were not necessarily of the same value, and the transaction did not have to take place at once, but only at a specific time. This exchange principle was typical for domestic exchange and amongst close relatives. The transaction is not concerned primarily with a pure economic exchange, but with the long-term goal of forming and maintaining permanent, close, social interaction. This principle is also the main characteristic of balanced reciprocity. In balanced reciprocity, however, goods and services of an equal value were to be exchanged. In the case of negative reciprocity each of the partners tried to conclude the deal to his advantage and at the cost of the other.

The decisive structural contrast between market principle and reciprocity, between modern wage labour and pre-modern working connections is that in the first case the mutual obligation is finished off with payment and in the second case there is a chronic imbalance. Pre-modern working connections were characterized by lasting obligation and commitment. In pre-modern working relations the social connection had priority over the economic one.

The principle of every exchange is always the exchange of material and immaterial goods. Immaterial aspects, such as respect, loyalty, expression of friendship, are of greater importance in reciprocity relationships than in market exchange. And these immaterial goods can, however, never be equally exchanged; in this case, as in balanced reciprocity the debt continues to exist.

In general, it is believed that day-labour as free wage-labour complies with the pure market principle. In practice, however, day-labour was also characterized by this chronic imbalance. This was a result of two factors. The first



The landscape of the woodland farmer.

factor was the mixture of wage labour and labour-as-rent. A rented field meant a debt of a year – from the time of agreement in autumn until the summer of the next year when the day-labourer worked for the peasant. Labour-as-rent can be seen as a strategy on the part of the peasant and monastery to remove the pure market principle. The second factor was that day-labourer relationships were always more than pure exchange relations. In most cases peasant/day-labourer relations were organized as patron-client relations. Also the monastery besides providing work, took on some paternalistic functions. Despite this, it must be mentioned that patron-client relations in Maria Langeegg, seen in a purely quantitative view, were not the decisive principle of social and economic exchange. They were also not so strong or religiously guaranteed through godparenthood as was the case in other Austrian agrarian regions (Ortmayr 1986). In Maria Langeegg day-labour did not produce the same amount of cliental bonds as in the lowlands.

To which exchange principles did exchange labour between the peasants comply? Both the principles of balanced and generalized reciprocity are possible. Balanced reciprocity can be found in the case of exchange labour between non-relatives and generalized reciprocity between relatives. In the surroundings of Langeegg generalized reciprocity was the dominant exchange principle because exchange labour was primarily recruited from kinship.

9. Summary

Agricultural organization in Maria Langeegg required comparatively little extrafamily labour. The result was a concentration on the family and the greater importance of family and kinship connections. Choice of godparents and economic cooperation show that kinship was of great importance. Kinship was the main principle of social organization, generalized re-

ciprocity the dominant exchange principle. A wide range of socio-cultural characteristics were the direct result of this configuration.

1. The whole of society was so moulded by the kinship model that kinship roles were also transferred to non-relatives. Only in this way can the inflationary use of kinship terminology occurring frequently in oral reports be explained. "Veda, Moam, Göd, Godl" (Cousin, godfather, godmother) were terms that could often be heard in the villages of Maria Langegg. They were also used as a form of address when there was no real or spiritual kinship. Often they were a pure expression of deference.
2. In Maria Langegg relatively few expressions of community solidarity outside family and kinship could be found. The peasants are described as poor and envious and cooperation between neighbours seems to have been small. On the whole most peasants did not act as generous patrons of the rural lower-classes. The institution of the second harvest (Nachlese) of fruit and corn as well as ritual begging on certain festive days – both were classical institutions of local social insurance in other agrarian regions – were not to be found in Maria Langegg at all. Many of the customs (presents given by relatives and neighbours to the mother at the birth of her child, gift-giving between godparents and godchild,...) often investigated by ethnologists, were not of common occurrence in Maria Langegg. This does not mean, of course, that solidarity was absent or weaker in Maria Langegg. It indicates simply a different structure of solidarity. Solidarity was found in Maria Langegg, but only within family and kinship. The behavioural patterns, so often mentioned, such as envy, pettiness, neighbourly help only in cases of utmost necessity, a lack of customs, a small amount of generosity shown the non-related day-labourers by the peasants can be seen as the lack of work organizational necessity to stabilize extrafamily relations.

References

The field work in Maria Langegg was done in 1983–1987. I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance from the "Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung".

For help in translation I would like to thank Dagmar Gehmacher, Keith Johnson and Tom Ragle.

Sources

- Kremser Zeitung 1900–1938
 Seelenbeschreibung der Pfarre Maria Langegg 1875, Diözesanarchiv St. Pölten.
 Franz Schweickhardt von Sickingen. Darstellung des Erzherzogthums Österreich unter der Enns, 10. Band, Wien 1938.
 Aktenbestand der niederösterreichischen Landesregierung 1905–1930, Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Gruppe 22.
 Pfarrmatriken von Maria Langegg 1860–1937, Diözesanarchiv St. Pölten.
 Gemeinderatsprotokolle der Gemeinde Geiersberg, Gemeindearchiv Bergern.
 Rechnungsbücher des Klosters Maria Langegg 1870–1907, Diözesanarchiv St. Pölten.
 Ergebnisse der land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Betriebszählung vom 1.6.1951, Wien 1953.
 Ortsrepertorium 1869 ff, Wien 1871 ff. Ortsverzeichnis von Österreich 1923 ff, Wien 1930 ff.
 Ergebnisse der österreichischen Volkszählung vom 22.3.1934, Wien 1935.

Literature

- E. C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Glencoe 1958.
 J. Cole and E. Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*, New York 1974.
 Ch. J. Erasmus, *Culture, Structure and Process: The Occurance and Disappearance of Reciprocal Farm Labor*, in: *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12, 1956.
 G. M. Foster, *Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good*, in: *American Anthropologist* 1965.
 S. T. Freeman, *Studies in Rural European Social Organization*, in: *American Anthropologist* 75, 1973.
 B. L. Gröger, *Of Man and Machines: Co-operation among French Family Farmers*, in: *Ethnology* 20, 1981.
 E. Fel and T. Hofer, *Tanyakert-s, Patron-Client Relations, and Political Factions in Atany*, in: *American Anthropologist* 75, 1973.
 J. Goody, *Production and Reproduction*, Cambridge 1976.

- W. Häusler, *Melk und der Dunkelsteinerwald*, Wien 1978.
- A. Klepp, *Reciprocity and Integration into Market Economy: An Attempt at Explaining Varying Formalization of the "Dugnad" in Pre-Industrial Society*, in: *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1982.
- O. Löfgren, *Historical Perspectives on Scandinavian Peasantries*, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9, 1980.
- O. Löfgren, *Peasant Ecotypes. Problems in the Comparative Study of Ecological Adaptation*, in: *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1976.
- O. Löfgren, *Family and Household: Images and Realities. Cultural Change in Swedish Society*. Paper prepared in advance for participants in Wenner-Gren Foundation Symposium, October 8–15, 1981.
- M. Mitterauer, *Formen ländlicher Familienwirtschaft*, in: J. Ehmer und M. Mitterauer, *Familienstruktur und Arbeitsorganisation in ländlichen Gesellschaften*, Wien 1986.
- M. P. Moore, *Co-operative Labour in Peasant Agriculture*, in: *Journal of Peasant Studies* 2, 1974/75.
- Rob. Mac Netting, *Balancing on an Alp: Ecological Change and Continuity in a Swiss Mountain Community*, Cambridge 1981.
- H. Norddølum, *The "Dugnad" in the Pre-Industrial Peasant Community*, in: *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1980.
- N. Ortmayr, *Ländliches Gesinde in Oberösterreich 1918–1938*, in: Ehmer-Mitterauer 1986.
- N. Ortmayr, *Marriage Patterns in Rural Austria (19th/early 20th century)*, paper for the "Conference on the European Peasant Family and Economy"; University of Minnesota, Oct. 7/8, 1988.
- N. Ortmayr, *Späte Heirat*, in: *Zeitgeschichte* 1989.
- S. Silverman, *Agricultural Organization, Social Structure, and Values in Italy: Amoral Familism Reconsidered*, in: *American Anthropologist* 1968.
- B. Stoklund, *Ecological Succession: Reflections on the Relations Between Man and Environment in Pre-Industrial Denmark*, in: *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1976.
- Knut Weibust, *Ritual Coparenthood in Peasant Societies*, in: *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1972.