

Ernst Langthaler (Institute of Rural History, St. Pölten)

The Food Regime Concept: Strengths and Weaknesses

Proposal to the STS conference's panel 'Key Concepts of Agro-Food Studies' (Graz, 5-6 May 2014)

The concept of the food regime was invented by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael in the 1980s as an application of world-systems analysis and regulation theory to agriculture and food. A food regime is characterized by a coherent and stable combination of a mode of capital accumulation and a mode of regulation at a global scale along the value chain of food production, distribution and consumption. The literature distinguishes three historical forms of the global food regime: the first or 'extensive' regime (1870s–1930s), the second or 'intensive' regime (1940s–1970s) and the third or 'corporate' regime (since 1980s). Despite its strengths in analyzing historical and global formations of agriculture and food, the initial concept also bears some weaknesses, namely the neglect of society-nature relations and the agency of social actors. The proposed paper addresses these problems and discusses possible solutions.