

STS Conference - Special Session 5: Key Concepts of Agro-Food Studies (OrganisatorInnen: Petra.Braun@jku.at / Markus.Schermer@uibk.ac.at / Ernst.Langthaler@ruralhistory.at)

The embeddedness concept - mapping the ecological embeddedness of food supply chains

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The concept of embeddedness has not only gained much prominence in economic geography, economic sociology, rural sociology or institutional economics, but also in agro-food studies. It is applied to conceptualize the socio-cultural context of production and the territorial/geographical nexus of food systems to local ecologies and practices. This presentation will have a particular look on the ecological embeddedness of the Austrian food system both on the national level and in a regional case study. By a first attempt to measure and map ecological embeddedness, the author intends to contribute to the operationalization of the embeddedness concept, which is characterized as ambivalent, fuzzy and dynamic (see e.g., [Goodman, D., 2003. The quality 'turn' and alternative food practices: reflections and agenda. Editorial. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19 (1), 1–7; Markusen, A., 1999. Fuzzy concepts, scanty evidence, policy distance: the case for rigour and policy relevance in critical regional studies. *Regional Studies* 33, 869–884; Hess, M., 2004. 'Spatial' relationships? Towards a reconceptualization of embeddedness. *Progress in Human Geography* 28 (2), 165–186]). The focus on conventional food chains provides a contrast with the growing body of embeddedness studies concentrating on alternative food chains. The author concludes that for both conventional as well as alternative food chains, the mode of ecological embeddedness or the degree of a food chain's commitment to particular landscapes could become important factors for the maintenance, enhancement and capture of ecological value.