

Subsistence crisis

A **subsistence crisis** is a crisis caused by economic factors (generally high food prices), which in turn may be caused by either natural or man-made factors,^[1] which threatens the food supplies and the survival prospects of large numbers of people (it is considered famine if it is extremely severe and large numbers of lives are lost). A subsistence crisis can be considered genuine if it is visible in demographic data.

It was in France that the notion of a **subsistence crisis** was first formulated by Meuvret in 1946, and greatly popularised by Goubert in 1960 through his influential study of the Beauvaisis in Beauvais.^[2] The theory of subsistence crises, in its contemporary guise, was first formulated by Meuvret in 1946. As an economic historian and specialist in price history Meuvret was struck by the coincidence between high prices and the increase in the number of deaths in the region of Gien in 1709–10. He then posed the problem of the nature of demographic crises, very tentatively at first, since he thought it was a hopeless quest to try to distinguish statistically between phenomena that were so closely associated: namely, mortality through simple inanition (starvation); mortality caused by disease, though attributable to malnutrition; and mortality by contagion, which in turn was linked to the scarcity that helped both spawn diseases and spread them through the migration of poor beggars.^[2]

Examples of subsistence crises

- The one prior to the French revolution, in which two years of crop failures and low yields caused a grain shortage.
- The Great Famine of 1315–1317
- The Great Famine in Ireland. By the mid-1800s, the Irish had been living for decades in extreme poverty which worsened the repeated and total failure of the potato crop, the starvation, which was worsened by the colonial British Empire with ineffective famine relief projects, evictions and emigration under duress, which often led to illness.

See also

- Famine

References

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