

Regional sustainability transitions:

New forms of governance

Introduction

“New forms of governance” are new ways of governing the countryside, for example through involving different actors or changing established decision-making processes. In particular, the research addressed how traditional hierarchical organization of governance is being replaced by fluid horizontal networks. Research was conducted in three European sites. They are: the Czech region of White Carpathians (South-East border of Czechia), Plastiras Lake area in Karditsa region, Greece (mountain area in central Greece) and Municipality Elena (central northern Bulgaria).

The Czech case addressed an NGO aiming at sustainable development in the region, through the use of specific regional natural and cultural resources (Tradition of White Carpathians). This strengthened the links between agricultural production and environmental protection. The Greek case (Local Quality Convention Scheme and the activities of regional development agency ANKA) and Bulgarian case (rural tourism and traditional food production and processing through a local certification scheme) both addressed changes in agricultural and food production which were more linked with tourism. In all three cases the farmers are important actors but from the point of view of the new forms of governance, the activities of other actors (environmentalists in Czechia or actors in tourism in Greece and Bulgaria) were much more important. Owing to the importance of non-farming actors in the cases studied, the research focused on how co-activities of farmers and non-farmers influence existing forms of governance.

The research began with an overview of national and regional policies in rural development and literature from previous research about the cases, and continued with the interviews with representatives of regional/local government bodies, regional/local organizations related to the initiatives studied, members of the initiatives, influential people in the locality/region and farmers. The research highlights how the multifunctionality of farming is reflected in the activities of various actors (farmers and non-farmers), and how this influences the forms of governance addressing rural development in general.

Background to research

Because the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is based on two pillars – agricultural market support and rural development – which span agricultural and related activities, the research investigated how the involvement of multiple actors (farmers and non-farmers) is reflected in the origin of the new forms of governance in agriculture, and how such new forms of governance contribute to regional sustainability. The cases reflect the most

common links of agriculture with other activities – with environmental protection (or landscape maintenance in general) and fruit processing in the Czech case, and with the development of non-farming economic activities (diversification) in rural areas in the form of tourism (combined also with local food production and processing) in the Greek and Bulgarian cases. Such an approach in the cluster named “New Forms of Governance” brings together the food production function, environmental function and rural function of the CAP. Such “polyphony” of functions necessitates new forms of governance as compared to single-function oriented rural development.

The initiatives operate in different areas as for their size (Greek about 300km², Bulgarian about 670km² and Czech about 1000km²). The structure of agriculture in the regions is a combination of intensive farming with less intensive agriculture, and small and large farms (although what are considered small and large farm differs between countries: Czech site farms range from 15ha to more than 1000 ha, whereas Greek and Bulgarian farms range from 1ha to 10ha). There are various types of farms in the three regions – organic farms (important growth in the number in Czechia and Bulgaria), conventional family farms, large scale corporate farms in Czechia, subsistence

farms, hobby farms, farms in marginalized areas, and farms in more fertile areas. The population of the regions studied is almost the same in Greek and Bulgarian cases (about 10,000 inhabitants); in the Czech case it is almost 90,000 inhabitants. All three regions studied indicate population decline (slower in the Czech case).

To understand the Czech and Bulgarian cases, the legacy of governance up until 1989 needs to be taken into account. This period might be labelled as policy of inactivity which was, interestingly, found also in Greece prior to the emergence of the initiative studied.

What changed?

There are various factors influencing the transition towards new forms of governance. The most important are co-activities of various actors (mostly farmers and non-farmers). They are also accompanied by some societal trends (e.g. consumer orientation to quality issues) and some technological trends (e.g. retro-innovations and using retro-technologies related to food and landscape maintenance or the presence of dams or lakes in all three cases).



Herd of local breed sheep (indicates the interest of the cluster cases to focus on regional/local resources).
Image: Bulgarian team

Pre-initiative phase: Marginalization and in-activity (from ca 1970s till mid/end 1980s): marked by the inactivity of the population and marginalization of the regions studied. Top-down government policy based on subsidies. Exogenous approach to development with decisions made by external (not local) stakeholders, in-activity is linked with guaranteed subsidies.

- In Bulgaria and Czechia the centralized political system and command economy resulted in productivist large-scale farming without active involvement of the local actors (subordination to central bodies) – until 1989.

- The ‘inactivation’ of a large percentage of Greek farmers, stemming from secure subsidised income – until the mid 1980s.

Initiative emergence phase: social anchoring phase (from ca mid/end 1980s till end of the 1990s/beginning of the 2000s): marked by the societal transition in Bulgaria and Czechia and changes in Common Agricultural Policy in Greece (introducing the second pillar). Experimenting with the elements of existing LEADER approaches in Greece and Czechia and the impacts of the external actors and policies on the origin of the initiatives (these did not originate solely as the result of endogenous factors but were the results of impacts and influences from outside the region).

- The initiatives started in the mid-1980s

in Greece and in the beginning of 1990s in Czechia. In Bulgaria it started in 2000, therefore the Czech and Greek case are older in the terms of transitions and the transition is more “mature” in these cases.

- Newcomers from outside the region/locality (environmentalists in Czechia, new entrepreneurs in tourism in Greece) bring new ideas and a new ethos into the locality. They reflect new views in the society which are typified by “variousness” (not only one possible view) which echoes contemporary world (“polyphony of equal views”).

- In Bulgaria it was not newcomers from outside but EU policy in the accession period which started the road to the initiative.

- Networking bringing together farmers and non-farmers (environmentalists in Czechia and tourist oriented entrepreneurs in Bulgaria and Greece) starts.

Formalization phase: the search for and the implementation of the new forms of governance (first half of the 2000s): further development of the initiatives necessitated higher formalization of their activities (i.e. involving of certain formal organizations and new forms of networking) and introducing specific schemes related to the quality of the products offered by the initiative (the schemes make the initiative different from others):

- In this phase an important role is played by technology. Either existing technological infrastructure is used and developed (the



Organic farming is growing in the areas of study in Czech and Bulgaria (organic bee-keeping in Bulgaria).
Image: Bulgarian team

case of tourism in Bulgaria and Greece), or the retro-innovations and retro-technologies (the case of Czechia) were exploited.

- To finance and to continue the initiative which uses particular technologies, certain organization for funding and efficient management of the activities is needed. These were the regional development agency in Greece, NGO involved in sustainable development in Czechia and new local bodies of public-private partnership in Bulgaria. These are not traditional government top-down organizations but rather networks in the locality that are formalized into the organizations needed for the initiative.

- Hybrid phase of exogenous and endogenous rural development (local laymen are cooperating with ex-local experts).

- Hybrid forms of governance came into being. They connect external support (EU grants, national subsidies) with the activities of local people who try to use the resources of the region/locality in a sustainable way.

Mainstreaming the initiative and problems emerging: recognition of the initiatives and closure to new participants (from mid 2000s): although the initiatives record the success (e.g. growing business results) they also face some problems as they mature. They appear to limit their actions to existing participants, thus excluding people outside the initiative. Thus, on one hand the initiatives are challenging status quo,

whereas on the other hand they attempt to control further change or proliferation of activities involving outsiders.

- The initiative changed the structure of the tourist industry in the Greek and Bulgarian regions studied, and environmental protection and landscape maintenance in Czechia (shift to organic farming, also due to EU support; the development of fruit orchards and fruit processing in the region studied).

- The emphasis on quality through quality schemes coincides with the public discourse (in Czechia combined with retro-nostalgia).

- In Greece after the establishment of the quality scheme, the regional development agency restricted its activities mainly to the members of the “core” network. Similarly, the Czech case influences its “partisans” rather than the whole region albeit it received high recognition and visibility through the visit of Prince Charles.

- The bridges in the networks are not able to disseminate the practices of the initiative and to further involve local people.

- There are some disagreements between the actors in the initiatives recorded. The Czech study found some disagreements between farmers and environmentalists; the Bulgarian study found tensions between the big players and other providers in the tourist industry in Bulgaria, and in the Greek case, between new entrepreneurs (who come to the region with new ideas) and local entrepreneurs in tourism.

Key lessons learned:

- Actors from outside the region (including local people who return following years employed elsewhere) influence the origin of the initiatives, challenging the existing status quo in terms of activities implemented in rural development. The entrance of the actors from outside (the reason for their involvement in originating the initiative) can be the result either of their ideology (the Czech case - environmentalists) or the experience (Greek case - entrepreneurs). In all cases they bring new views, ideas to the locality and develop new networks. They also operate as bridges for existing local networks. It also means the initiative starts with newcomers (who are, however, not primarily newcomers to agriculture).
- Through their activities, the actors in the initiatives address functions of the CAP. The non-farming actors (including actors from outside) are those who highlight environmental protection or rural diversification functions. Farmers continue to focus on the agricultural production function. Such amalgamation of the actors in the initiatives is important to bring farmers and non-farmers together. It also gives higher credibility to the initiatives (it is not only one sector or one social group initiative and therefore has the opportunity for greater public awareness and support).
- Conflicts/disagreements among the farmers and non-farmers in the initiative



Low energy consumption community house in Hostětín (headquarter of the Czech initiative) – the first low energy community house in Czechia (used for summer schools, accommodation, offering local food, (if possible organic), extension and education, municipality cultural events)
Image: Michal Lostak



New organic orchards operated by the initiative and landscape management in general together with new building in the community due to construction of biological plant-root based waste water treatment plant.
Image: Michal Lostak

emerge. This is because of different views and aims (the farmers are mostly more economically driven: sustainability for them means to be economically profitable, whereas the environmentalists prioritise environmental protection which sometimes contradicts farmer interests).

- Horizontal networking which replaces traditional top-down government (often related to being accustomed to subsidies) is an important type of new forms of governance. The networks are important to transmit the information through the actors who are the bridges (mostly the actors from outside). The networks facilitate collective action.
- There is a risk that the networks might become closed, with the initiative only representing and benefiting those already in their associated networks. People outside the network (outside the initiative) are not influenced (i.e. inclusion of some people results in the exclusion of others).
- The initiatives indicate the interest in quality issues related to the regions which are linked with new forms of governance (networking). Every initiative introduced its



The production technology for organic apples cider (press for the fruits). This plant funded from the international grant generates now money used to support other projects (micro-financing). Image: Michal Lostak



Retro-innovations: Two hundred years old kiln to dry the fruits (used even today) – traditional technologies. Image: Michal Lostak

quality scheme (Local Quality Convention in Greece, Label “Tradition of White Carpathian” in Czechia and certification-labelling scheme in Bulgaria). The schemes are oriented to support the use of regional/local resources. They are these regional quality certification schemes influencing the search for the new forms of governance related to networking (the schemes necessitate building trust and networks are important tool to transmit trust).

- Various forms of “anchoring” have been encountered among the cases however most of the links between new and mainstream practices are not strong; this is most visible in the Greek case study. Hypothetically, the incomplete forms of anchoring have deprived the initiatives of internal coherence and strength; in that sense those links are still vulnerable.
- An important role is played by international experience in the case of new EU member states (Czechia and Bulgaria) – the initiatives are influenced by the experience from abroad (EU policy or similar initiatives abroad).
- The Czech initiative developed its own micro-financing mechanism (the money generated through the implementation of the first grant is used to support further small scale grants)
- There are clearly some elements of the LEADER approach implemented by the cases in terms of governance (bottom-up, innovations, integration of various sectors, partnership, cooperation decentralised management and networking), although the Czech initiative does not participate in LEADER approach. This suggests these LEADER elements are more general than only related to this approach.
- After the successful introduction of a novelty and the establishment of a quality scheme (Greece; certification scheme in Czechia), the main actor (the regional development agency) restricted its animating and facilitating activities mainly to the members of the “core” network; the initiative neither prompted the creation of spaces of exchange, nor facilitated a reflexive process and engagement of new stakeholders in joint learning and action. Consequently, the opportunity of the initiative for further learning was

restricted. The Czech case suggests similar development because it addresses mostly those familiar with the initiative and not all people in the region (i.e. they stand apart).

- The initiatives do not directly influence young farmers. They are parallel to the initiative (the structure of the farm (family farm or corporate farm) plays a more important role). New entrants were important in starting the initiatives, but these individuals were not necessarily farmers.
- In the Czech and Bulgarian cases, there was obvious growth in the terms of organic farming in the regions studied.

For further information

See the FarmPath project web-site:

www.farmpath.eu

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