



Surveillance and state-making through EU agricultural policy in Hungary



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the implementation of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and agri-environment measures in particular have been used to increase state oversight into rural affairs and land use in Hungary. The governmentalities of the agricultural sector through Europeanisation include stringent inspections and controls as part and parcel of accountability drives around the disbursement of subsidies. Agricultural surveillance mechanisms and processes are recounted here as holistic, perpetual and immediate, composed of the remote, administrative, as well as embodied physical encounters. Through ethnographic engagement with the Hungarian state's interactions with its farmers during inspections, the forms and consequences of neoliberal governmentality are given life in a post-socialist context. I elucidate the numerous subjectivities involved in these encounters, and how bureaucratic and administrative requirements underlie the rise of private consultants, where social capital and informal networks are of great importance for the successful navigation of the agricultural system. On the part of farmers, subsidies' accountability systems were lived as unjust, giving rise to speculation around the 'real' intended purposes of agri-environment legislation, which in turn undermines the expert authority of the state and heightens skepticism towards the European 'project'.

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1. Introduction

"Here the Corncrake¹ is God Almighty, but I know that that's not why my land is included in this... it's so they can keep an eye on us out here, on the border of nowhere, behind God's shoulders," [Farmer NCs²-35, 2012]

In this paper I unpack the new technologies of the state for the management of the rural Hungarian countryside, demonstrating how land-holders farming in the most marginal of land areas are being "kept an eye on out there". I bring into dialogue the processes of hierarchically imposed agricultural laws and policies originating from the European Union (EU) (Knill and Tosun, 2009) with the lived experiences of farmers and street-level bureaucrats charged with their implementation to explore the 'making' of the state from the ground-up, and to probe the methods and processes of surveillance and audit.

Within the context of the EU, this making is pertinent towards both the nation-state and the wider European 'project' (Delanty,

2006). The effects of agricultural practices stemming from Europeanisation are particularly marked in post-socialist Hungary, where positive integration of European laws are tempered by divergent domestic state interests (Knill and Lehmkuhl, 2002; Zellei, 2001; Gorton et al., 2009). Socio-political restructuring of the agricultural sector occurs through multi-scalar, somewhat path-dependent trajectories aiming for participation in and integration with global markets alongside nuanced local "ways of doing things" (Bulmer and Radaelli, 2004, p. 4) that are in constant friction with externally expected or desired normative procedures and regulatory forms (Potter and Tilzey, 2005; Smith, 2007; Verdery, 2003). These normative procedures comprise the normative Weberian 'ideal type' bureaucracy of the EU that is "depersonalized, rationalistic, rule-bound behaviour" with a separation between "the bureau from the private domicile of the official; it divorces official activity from the sphere of private pursuits and attitudes" (Kamenka, 1989, p. 1).

The normative procedures and practices required to realise the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) agri-environmental measures include substantive criteria that enable a rationality of government that provides (and mandates) states with new opportunities for surveillance and accountability. Recent geopolitical scholarship has highlighted the spatialising practices of EU policy, such that

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¹ *Crex crex*.

² Northern Cserehát, Hungary.

planning becomes a political technology of territory for European interests and discourses to be normalised within Member States (Luukkonen, 2014; Moisisio and Luukkonen, 2014). Central and Eastern European (CEE) accession states have been depicted to vie for rapid compliance with EU environmental and agricultural agendas, with domestic conservation concerns becoming of secondary importance as territories are re-defined, re-scaled and re-contextualised to be “European” (Kay, 2014). However, to complicate such unidirectional depictions of EU hegemony and imposition, due attention needs to be given to the grounded sites and interfaces of implementation. National and local political and landed interests, formal and informal, influence and modify the application of EU agricultural policies (Clark and Jones, 2009; Moisisio et al., 2013; Zellei et al., 2005). Europeanisation does not stop at the codification or “downloading” of law (Börzel, 2002), and thus is never uncontested or homogenous. Although pre-2004 Hungarian governments undertook one-way harmonisation with EU laws and policies despite no influence in their original design (Caddy, 1997), in today’s Hungarian political landscape this is a source of continued and growing strong nationalist discourse across the political spectrum and basis for resistance against European regulation (Gille, 2010).

In this paper the implementation of the ‘greened’ CAP will be examined through the lens of neoliberal governmentality through an explicit engagement with the tools of the state and their effects on individual farmers. The features of an ‘audit culture’ (Power, 2003a, 2003b), which includes emphases on accountability, quantification, the use of indicators, mappability, the rise of privatised agents in the form of accountants and consultants, are all prevalent in the new European agricultural system and are the cornerstone to the operationalisation of agri-environment measures. The “disciplining” of farmers through the application of constant surveillance and auditing (or the threat of it) occurs in this case within a society that operates still (and arguably increasingly) via social networks and cronyism (Magyar, 2014) alongside neoliberal aims to ‘remake’ farmers into ‘responsibilised’ business individuals.

Justification for audit culture and the increased bureaucratisation of farming has occurred through discourses around accountability. Accountability has rhetorical significance in times of austerity, when public expenditure undergoes ever-greater scrutiny (Streeck and Schäfer, 2013). Calls for accountability provide strong foundations amongst local populations for legitimising surveillance and inspections (c.f. Gupta, 1995), though it is a fuzzy concept, a potential “synonym for many loosely defined political desiderata” such as transparency, equity, efficiency, good governance and the like (Bovens, 2010, p. 946). At its best it is associated with public accountability where accountability is a virtue (Bovens, 2010), which in this case is to keep farmers ‘honest’ with taxpayers’ money. Farmers in receipt of agricultural subsidies must be held to account and monitored for compliance, but *how* this occurs amidst unique socio-political contexts matters.

The farmers who participated and contributed to this research overwhelmingly found the inspections process associated with agri-environment schemes to be a negative one, focused around discipline and punishment through sanctions that they tied to the current economic woes and political climate of the Hungarian state (and Europe more generally), and not towards engendering a more desired ‘green’ farming practice. My focus on surveillance and inspections arose during a broader ethnographic study in response to these perceptions (Kovács, 2014). However, it must be noted that farmers’ resentment of state inspections arise from their own interests and agendas that get in the way of the ‘seeing’ ambitions of the state (Taylor and Van Grieken, 2015). Farmers are highly entrepreneurial, with localised and diffuse experiential knowledge that they use, develop and convert for the benefit and profit of their businesses (Morris, 2004, 2006);

laying out entire business strategies for audit impinges on personal and professional privacy. Acceptance of conservation goals arises from localised attitudes as well as trust vis-à-vis the state at its proposed and realised role in regulation (Juntti and Potter, 2002; Taylor, 2010). These attitudes to the role of government in society temper farmers’ acceptance of being subject to government oversight, even when they are the recipients of public money. Recognising these complexities, through relaying the experiences of a differential set of farmers I seek to draw attention to how practices of surveillance and inspections are translated and implemented and in turn impact the agricultural sector because of these very personal and place-laden social internalisations. They also give rise to questions to both farmers and the wider state of what *would* constitute acceptable and appropriate forms of surveillance and monitoring?

Ongoing research in agri-environment schemes is vast and crosses many disciplines. Extensive reviews have found biases in favour of Western Europe and to ecological or economic assessments of how successfully schemes operate as ‘incentives’ (Riley, 2011; Uthes and Matzdorf, 2013). A ‘cultural turn’ in the study of agri-environment seeks to capture and understand the social role or perceptions of farmers as embedded within wider contexts (Wilson, 2001; Morris, 2004; Burton et al., 2008; Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011), wherein geographers have examined farmers’ reasons for scheme participation and their attendant, changing conservation or ‘stewardship’ values (Morris and Potter, 1995; Wilson and Hart, 2000; Siebert et al., 2006; Riley, 2011). Building on this wide scholarship, this paper uses the tools of social anthropology to look at the grounded actions of a diffuse state during agricultural inspections. These inspections provide a standardised interface that is predetermined to an extent by the EU, but realised by Member States (Beckmann et al., 2009). As a result of privacy protection measures research on compliance and surveillance in this field are very limited due to limited data availability (Schmit et al., 2006).

In the following section, I review neoliberal governmentality and notions of responsibilised subjects to outline why ‘mundane’ practices matter. The new arts of government which constitute these intersect with the ‘making’ of states from below, and in the second review I outline anthropologies of state encounters and the ‘lived realities’ of life in post-socialist states, particularly during this period of Europeanisation. This is followed in Section 4 by an outline of the EU’s CAP and agri-environmental measures, after which I introduce the methods and analysis undertaken for the empirical data. In Section 6 I outline how the Hungarian state has put in place an ever-expanding cross-institutional surveillance network for the oversight of farming territories that were previously far from its purview. In Section 7 I build on Foucault’s conception of power as de-centred from the state – as diffuse, not top-down (Rose, 1993) – that results in a varied experience of the state amongst farmers, where local relationships ‘count’ strongly towards enabling farmers to cope with the new agricultural system. In the final empirical section, I highlight farmers’ agency and their active recognition and awareness of the processes of which they are a part: their responsibilisation and their constant intellectual engagement (individually and communally) with the state’s intentions as a result of their encounters with the state’s representative and thus its ‘behaviour’.

2. Neoliberal governmentality, the state and agriculture

Governmentality refers to the arts of government to know “how to govern” (Dean, 2009). To Michel Foucault, liberalism and neoliberalism were not only ideologies but a form of political rationality for the “conduct of conduct...activity aiming to shape, guide or

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