



Pluralism of agricultural advisory service providers – Facts and insights from Europe



Andrea Knierim ^{a, b, *}, Pierre Labarthe ^c, Catherine Laurent ^c, Katrin Prager ^d, Jozef Kania ^e, Livia Madureira ^f, Tim Hycenth Ndah ^{a, b}

^a Universität Hohenheim, Institute of Social Sciences in Agriculture (430a), 70593 Stuttgart, Germany

^b Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 15374 Müncheberg, Germany

^c Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA SAD), 16 Rue Claude Bernard, 75005 Paris, France

^d The James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH, Scotland, United Kingdom

^e University of Agriculture in Krakow, Institute of Economic and Social Sciences, 31120 Kraków, Poland

^f University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD), (CETRAD), 5000 801, Vila Real Portugal

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 July 2016

Received in revised form

13 July 2017

Accepted 19 July 2017

Available online 29 July 2017

Keywords:

Agricultural advisory services

Privatisation

Farmer-based organisation

Farmer-advisor ratio

Extension evaluation

Europe

ABSTRACT

Agricultural advisory services (AAS) have regained importance for policy makers worldwide and especially in the European Union (EU), because of increased attention to food production and related innovation processes in rural areas. However, a systematic overview of AAS in the EU is missing, and there is a lack of evidence about their diversity and organisational pluralism. With this paper, we systematically explore the variety of advice providing bodies in Europe regarding organisational features, characteristics of service provision and the targeted client groups. The results show a pluralism of organisations that is a widely represented phenomenon across the EU. It implies a variation of service provision quality and targeted clients within and among countries. Moreover, we identify groups among the farming population that apparently are not served by any type of provider. We conclude on impacts of organisational pluralism and especially privatisation of AAS for various client groups, and point out further research needs with the evaluation of AAS performance in general and the potential of farmer-based organisations in particular.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Agricultural advisory services (AAS) involve entire sets of organisations that enable the farmers to co-produce farm-level solutions by establishing service relationships with advisers so as to produce knowledge and enhance skills (Labarthe et al., 2013:9). AAS have regained importance for policy makers because of increased attention to food production and related innovation processes in rural areas (The Royal Society, 2009; OECD, 2015; World Bank 2012). Globally food security and the preservation of renewable resources are two major concerns in agriculture, while in Europe there is an additional public interest in agriculture-related ecosystem services and provision of public goods. This multifaceted understanding dates back to the widely promoted

concept of 'multifunctional agriculture' from early 2000 (OECD, 2001; Laurent, 2000) where agricultural multi-functionality was considered as resulting from the manifold interdependencies among agricultural commodity and non-commodity outputs that vary with the diversity of natural and agri-structural conditions across Europe (Zander et al., 2007). One instrument used to politically acknowledge and strengthen the relationship between these dimensions was the coupling of direct payments to farmers to the provision of societal and environmental services under the Cross-Compliance Regulation in 2007 (EC European Council 2003). As a supportive measure, the same regulation made the establishment of farm advisory services (FAS) mandatory for all EU member states by 2007. The objective was to provide adequate technical support to help the farmers reach cross-compliance goals. These drivers resulted in renewed interest in AAS, which was then expressed by subsequent regulations (EC European Council 2009; EU European Parliament and Council 2013) and the new rural development strategy underlying the recent Common Agricultural Policy reform (CAP) (EU 808/2014). The historically grown, path-dependent

* Corresponding author. Universität Hohenheim, Institute of Social Sciences in Agriculture (430a), 70593 Stuttgart, Germany.

E-mail address: andrea.knierim@uni-hohenheim.de (A. Knierim).

institutional constellations in each EU member state play an important role because the national and subordinate regional authorities are responsible for designing the respective advisory system and thus determine the services offered. Thus, AAS are characterised by a considerable diversity throughout Europe (ADE, 2009). Alongside, there is a growing interest among the private sector to engage more actively in the (commercial) provision of advice to farmers e.g. on standards and procedures related with product quality and farm accountability (Fulponi, 2006; Kidd et al., 2000). Other groups of organisational actors emerge in the field of natural resource management and biodiversity conservation; various non-governmental and hybrid organisations engage by developing schemes to raise farmers' awareness of societal concerns (Klöpper, 2005; Sutherland et al., 2013; Schomers et al., 2015). In addition, farmer organisations, such as agricultural chambers, co-operatives and other professional associations, which have traditionally contributed to advice provision (although limited to their members), are still active (OECD, 2015; Hoffmann et al., 2000).

We distinguish between the diversity of AAS and the pluralism of the service providers. The diversity of AAS refers to the aggregated set of organisations at a national level. Therefore, we speak about the diversity of AAS when comparing advisory systems between countries. In contrast, we use the term 'pluralism' to allude to the political dimension of organisational variety (within a country or region) that originates from the manifold interactions, such as competition and conflicts as well as negotiation and cooperation, taking place between the various organisations and interests groups within a democratic society (Woyke, 2013). In the case of agricultural service providers, these organisations may stem from 'public', 'private' and 'semi-public or civil-society' spheres, utilise different funding sources, be based in various societal sectors and operate at distinct governance levels (Rivera and Sulaiman, 2009; Feder et al., 2011). Over the last two decades, this pluralism has evolved with the variety of professional actors that have entered into the AAS 'landscape' encouraged by privatisation and decentralisation measures where they complement and replace public service providers (Rivera and Cary, 1997; Kidd et al., 2000; Alex et al., 2004; Labarthe and Laurent, 2013a; Sutherland et al., 2013). There are contradictory assumptions about the consequences of such pluralism: Some authors expect pluralism to lead to a better response to the multiple demands of farming communities, and to meet these demands at a lower cost due to increased competition amongst private providers (Kidd et al., 2000). Garforth et al. (2003) labelled this 'creative diversity', stating that it offers a rich source for clients to meet their needs. Other authors remain sceptical and question how vulnerable groups such as small scale farmers would be served in institutional environments that promote privatised AAS (Kidd et al., 2000; Rivera and Alex, 2004) and the decrease of state involvement. Also, this pluralism poses a coordination challenge in the wider agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) (Knierim et al., 2015), especially through the privatisation of service provision where it is likely coupled with a weakening of private advisors' linkages to knowledge sources (Knuth and Knierim, 2013) and leaves different categories of the farming population at a disadvantage (Labarthe and Laurent, 2013b).

In summary, there is a clear political assumption that AAS have an important role to play in progressing towards economically competitive and environmentally sustainable agricultural production and more broadly, successful rural development (Renting et al., 2008; Knickel et al., 2009). However, the pluralism of service providers in this process is a controversial issue. Is it really an advantage? This paper discusses this assumption. Our overall research interest is to advance the state of knowledge on AAS diversity in the EU and the understanding how it is shaped by the pluralism of

service providers. The cross-cutting analytical question is thus whether increased pluralism of providers results in better access to services for different groups of the farming population. On this basis we intend to empirically contribute to the discussion initiated by Kidd et al. (2000) on the impacts of AAS reforms and in particular of privatisation. Moreover, we relate our findings to the recent broader discussion of AAS as parts of the agricultural knowledge and innovations systems (AKIS) that focusses on coordination and governance challenges among organisationally distinct actors (Knierim et al., 2015; Knuth and Knierim, 2016).

The paper is based on a unique and comprehensive dataset of AAS in 27 European countries, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collected between 2013 and 2014 in the EU-funded FP7 project PRO AKIS ('Prospects for farmers' support: Advisory services in the European AKIS; www.proakis.eu). It also draws on a number of empirical studies at European level (e.g. ADE, 2009; Ingram and Morris, 2007; Klerkx and Jansen, 2010; Klerkx and Proctor, 2013; Knuth and Knierim, 2013; Labarthe, 2009; Labarthe and Laurent, 2013a; Prager et al., 2016; Sutherland et al., 2013). Although most of the available studies focus on one or a small number of countries only (with the notable exception of ADE, 2009), they provide valuable information on specific aspects of AAS.

In the following section, we present the conceptual framework used to systematise the diversity of AAS and the pluralism of agricultural service providers. Next, we outline the methodology which includes an online survey and key informant interviews. In the result section, we present findings on the organisational expression of AAS diversity and providers' pluralism, on the nature of services and the access to services for different groups of farmers. The two last sections discuss the implications of the findings and conclude with an outlook on further research needs.

2. Key concepts to systematically address agricultural advisory services

In the literature, AAS are usually conceived with a 'system approach' meaning that they emerge as a result of the interplay of various components (Faure et al., 2012; Hoffmann et al., 2009; Nagel, 1997). In this section, we propose to reduce this complexity to a selection of operational determinants and address the diversity of AAS with three key concepts: (i) the variety of the organisational models of the providers that coexist within the AAS, (ii) the service provision activity and (iii) the clients or users targeted, with their needs and interests (Hoffmann et al., 2009; Faure et al., 2012). Therefore, we first develop a typology of service providers, before specifying conceptually how to describe the service provision activity in terms of an organisation–advisor–client relation. Third, we propose a way to differentiate clients targeted by AAS.

2.1. Objectives and organisational models of AAS providers: a typology

With respect to the differentiation of AAS providers, some authors only opt to distinguish the two categories 'public' and 'private', where private includes both profit and non-profit oriented organisations (Kidd et al., 2000; Rivera and Cary, 1997). Such a dichotomy has to be broadened according to other author groups. For example, the authors of the FAS evaluation (ADE, 2009) propose to differentiate between (i) public bodies, (ii) private bodies (comprising profit and non-profit enterprises), (iii) chambers of agriculture and (iv) semi-public bodies. Here, agricultural chambers are highlighted as a unique feature representing "the entire profession through elected colleges that reflect the diversity of farmers and farmers' associations of a given region or area" (*ibid*

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6459931>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6459931>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)