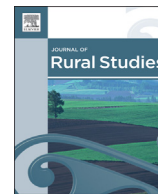




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The role of multi-actor governance in aligning farm modernization and sustainable rural development

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ABSTRACT

The Common Agricultural Policy can be seen as a partial success story because it has resulted in increased food production at reasonable prices for consumers. However, its main focus was on agricultural productivity and economic growth. Although recent CAP reforms have led to better integration of agricultural and rural policies there is a need for more recognition of the role of multi-actor governance in aligning farm modernization with sustainable rural development. In this paper we explore how multi-actor governance systems are being implemented and the limiting and enabling factors involved. Our analysis is based on eleven case studies carried out as part of the trans-disciplinary RETHINK research programme. In this paper we first identify five strategies that we interpret as responses to the challenge of reconnecting farm modernization and sustainable rural development. Based on the experience within these strategies we discuss six vital conditions that cut across these different strategies: they include the role of informal networks, effective coordination, polycentricity, bottom-up initiatives, agency and trust and transparency. Although most of these conditions are recognized by the scientific world, in practice they are rarely translated into effective policy strategies to support territorial development.

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1. The evolution of agricultural and rural policies at the European level

Since the 1960s, the scope of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been steadily expanding. The original emphasis of the CAP was on tackling structural problems in the agricultural sector by supporting productivity (Platteau et al., 2008). Structural policy for the agricultural sector focused on farm enlargement and rationalization (Wilson, 2001; Wilson et al., 2007). The agricultural sector was considered to be the engine of

growth of rural economies and consequently, rural and agricultural issues were considered to be virtually synonymous. It was assumed that agricultural and rural objectives could be pursued through a single set of policies designed to improve the economic performance of agricultural sectors (Shucksmith, 2010; Ward and Brown, 2009). Policy was implemented top-down through centralized planning and was inspired by a vision of the 'provider-state'.

The modernization of the agricultural sector has resulted in a sufficient food supply and a professionalization of the agricultural sector. However, it also had negative consequences for the economy, the environment, and rural communities (Galdeano-Gómez et al., 2011; Knickel, 1990; Van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003). The modernization paradigm has been criticized as distorting development disconnecting agriculture from rural development. The focus on intensification narrowed the role of agriculture in the rural area to food production. For example, small scale landscape elements lost their agricultural function and the importance of farm labour for the local rural economy reduced significantly

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(Galdeano-Gómez et al., 2011; Kristensen et al., 2014). It has been argued that the focus on intensification have stimulated the development of increasingly large farms in agriculturally favoured areas and led to land abandonment and the marginalization of farms in less-favoured areas (FAO, 2006; MacDonald et al., 2000). Hence, it has been cast as a destructive form of development: income and investment support for farmers has not resulted in the socio-economic development of rural areas, or the maintenance of the social structures and environmental qualities necessary to maintain vibrant rural areas (Knickel, 1990). Finally, it has also been interpreted as a dictated development, devised by external experts and planners from outside rural areas (Ward, 2002). In other words, the measures intended to support the modernization of European agriculture have not simultaneously steered rural society towards more sustainable development (Mettepenningen et al., 2012). Critics of modernization have argued the case for redesigning agriculture and rural policy so it aligns more closely with other global, economic, social, policy and environmental trends (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008; van der Ploeg et al., 2000).

Since 1992, three successive rounds of CAP reforms have resulted in a shift away from a single focus on production to also include competitiveness, sustainability and rural development (Messely, 2014). After the introduction of the agri-environmental measures in the MacSharry reform in 1992, the Cork Declaration of 1996 recognized the declining economic role of conventional agriculture in marginal rural areas and the need to find other rationales for public subventions (Lowe et al., 2002). The declaration set out an agenda of more 'place-based' development, strengthening the LEADER approach (Wilson et al., 2007), and formed the basis for the establishment of the Second Pillar focused on rural development (Lowe et al., 2002). This pillar, institutionalized in the Agenda 2000 reform, sought to encourage rural initiatives and support farmers in diversifying, improving their product marketing and restructuring their businesses (Delgado et al., 2003). It was therefore a first attempt to realign agriculture with rural development.

2. From top-down policies to governance and partnerships

Point five of the Cork Declaration¹ specifically is about the governance of rural development and emphasized the importance of *vertical coordination* for rural policy making. This view was incorporated into the European Rural Development Regulations (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1257/1999, paragraph 14). Vertical coordination takes place through multi-level interactions involving both, state and non-state actors. It embraces decentralized decision making and encourages bottom-up approaches (see Andersson and Ostrom, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Knüppe and Pahl-Wostl, 2012). Vertical cooperation therefore stimulates increased levels of self-governance, that is a mechanism of mutual interaction and adjustment of actors and their related networks (Ostrom, 1990).

In addition, and closely in line with the Cork declaration, the OECD (2006) developed 'The New Rural Paradigm' advocating a *multi-sectoral, territorial approach* where the government's role is to invest in capacity building and endogenous rural development (Shucksmith and Rønningen, 2011). In other words, rural policy making will also need increased forms of *horizontal cooperation*, taking place through interactions between different sectors both at economic and political level. Horizontal cooperation shifts the focus towards territorial development with multi-disciplinary approaches (Cairol et al., 2009; Faludi, 2009).

This change in favour of more participatory rural development

with increased forms of horizontal and vertical coordination led to a greater reliance on framework approaches towards rural policy (Rogge et al., 2013) and the increased involvement of stakeholder 'partnerships' in the design and implementation of policy (Dwyer, 2011; Shortall, 2008). Under this approach government becomes an enabler of processes in which stakeholder partnerships help to develop and oversee strategic directions. This is in line with most other policy spheres, which are moving towards more engagement of stakeholders in developing and implementing governmental objectives: a shift from 'government' to 'governance' (Curry, 2001). Governance as a general term refers to the act of governing both, in the public and/or private sector (Emerson et al., 2011). Within the context of collective action, Ostrom (1990) considers governance as a dimension of jointly determined norms and rules designed to regulate individual and group behaviour. More specifically, governance is 'a set of coordinating and monitoring activities' that enables the survival of the collaborative partnership or institution (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 49). It is characterized by the multitude of actors involved, vertically including international, national and the local actors, and horizontally including NGO's, businesses, citizens, different policy departments and other governmental bodies (Loft et al., 2015).

Multi-actor governance allows for a better adaptation to local, and changing circumstances, increases the possibilities of capturing added value, increases the legitimacy and transparency of policies, empowers local people (see e.g. De Vries, 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2003; McGinnis, 2005; Pahl-Wostl, 2009) and supports territorial development reconnecting agriculture and rural development (Bryson et al., 2006). But there are disadvantages too, such as a lack of capacity and authority to make this work, the potentially high costs involved and the danger of ending up with fragmented and inconsistent policies (Benz and Eberlein, 1999; Herzberg, 2005; McGinnis, 2005; Meynen and Doornbos, 2004; Wiskerke et al., 2003).

The previous paragraphs reveal a gradually changing view about the governance of agricultural and rural development. However, two aspects of this seem still to be under-appreciated. First, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the *connections* between agriculture as a social-ecological and economic system and the development of rural areas. The dynamics of change in agriculture and rural development are closely related and to understand them we need to adopt a systems approach (Darnhofer et al., 2010; Sinclair et al., 2014). Second, there is still no sufficient appreciation of the role that *multi-actor governance* can play in fostering synergies between farm modernization and sustainable rural development. To foster these synergies, governance should be adjusted so that there is more vertical, and horizontal coordination.

This raises a number of questions: first, to what extent is this new approach to governance of rural areas really taking place? Second, how much does it actually contribute to moving towards a new rural development paradigm? And third, is it actually creating a resilient agricultural sector? This is a key point since, 'restat[ing] and position[ing] [the] land-based agricultural production is a central dimension in achieving rural sustainability goals' (Marsden et al., 2002, p. 810).

Despite the existence of many structural barriers, there is a wide range of experiments and initiatives by farmers, consumers and other stakeholders, all of which imply a rethinking of modernization. They are based on a holistic view of agriculture and seek to align agricultural practices to the prevailing local and regional ecosystems and to use local and regional resources sustainably (Chappell and LaValle, 2011). Many of these initiatives implicitly or explicitly question the economic 'imperative' and demonstrate that there are viable alternatives. In this paper we look at eleven case studies, undertaken as part of the European research project

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/cork_en.htm.

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