

Governance Structures for the Multifunctionality of Agriculture in the EU - Bottom-up View of Local Stakeholders in Europe

Introduction

Multifunctionality has gained increasing attention in both policy and research over the last few years. The most relevant policy initiative for the programming period 2000-2006 in terms of multifunctionality is Regulation 1257/1999, while LEADER+ is of particular interest due to its innovative approach to governance. In order to improve governance structures it is necessary to find out what the governance situation is at the regional level and how regional stakeholders assess the multi-level governance system. So far, there is little empirical evidence regarding the way local stakeholders perceive governance processes in the EU in terms of rural development.

Aims

- The aims of this study were:
- to identify the governance structures relevant to the multifunctionality of agriculture
 - to determine the strengths and weaknesses of regional implementation of the second pillar of the EU Common Agricultural Policy
 - to develop recommendations for good governance in rural development policy

Methods

As part of the EU research project MEA-Scope, in 2004 and 2005 a structured qualitative stakeholder survey was carried out in the

following case study regions: River Gudenå (Denmark), Ostprignitz-Ruppin (Germany), Tuscany (Italy), Wielkopolska (Poland). Interviews were conducted with a total of 29 stakeholders, all with different backgrounds, including local, regional, and national administration, regional tourism, LEADER project co-ordination, agriculture, research and small and medium rural enterprises. The results of this survey were analysed using a summarising qualitative content analysis, and transformed into a set of recommendations to improve governance for rural development at different policy levels.

General strengths and weaknesses of EU rural development policy

The strengths and weaknesses identified by the stakeholders were:

Category for strengths and weaknesses	Ostprignitz-Ruppin, DE	River Gudenå, DK	Mugello, IT	Wielkopolska, PL	Across all countries
Advice for project holders		+			+
Bureaucracy	-		-	-	-
Centralisation				-	-
Complex regulations	-	-			
Costs			-		-
Effects on farmers' attitudes	-				-
Flexibility		-			-
Geographical coverage	+			+	+
Information flows				+/-	+/-
Involvement of local stakeholders	-	+	+	-	+/-
Monitoring system		-		-	-
Political direction	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
Portfolio of measures	+	+		+/-	+/-
Situation for new Member States				-	-
Lack of targeted policies		-			-
Way of programming	+		+	+	+

↔ indicates a strength expressed by a stakeholder in the relevant case study
↔ indicates a stated weakness in this area



Recommendations for good multi-level governance

EU	Level			
	National	Regional	Local	
				Allocation of competences
	X	X		Enhance regional financial competences in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and fiscal federalism
X	X	X	X	Strengthen the competences of local actors. Innovative bottom-up approaches are available which could complement the LEADER initiative (e.g. regional rural development committees)
X	X	X	X	Increase the financial leeway in weak rural areas for more effective delivery of cohesion objectives
				Communication
X	X	X		Improve the flow of information to the regional and local level
	X	X	X	Improve the communication infrastructure (telecommunication, Internet), particularly in the new Member States
			X	Create networks between rural areas
X	X	X	X	Implement staff exchange programmes between levels and regions
X			X	In order to increase the acceptance of EU policy in the regions, the benefits of EU funds must be communicated more effectively
				Capacity building
X	X	X	X	Train local actors. Enhance their knowledge, skills and attitude
				Sectoral / territorial policies
X	X	X		Follow a more territorial approach rather than a sectoral approach
				Bureaucracy
X	X	X		Make efforts to fight superfluous bureaucracy at EU level and in Member States and regions.
X	X			Radically simplify the rules, guidelines and regulations for rural development policy
				Portfolio of measures
X	X	X		Improve coordination between policies and measures, in order to avoid contradictory policy objectives
				Political direction
X	X	X		Preserve the general political orientation of rural development policy
	X	X		The RDPs need to address the needs of the rural population
	X	X		Infrastructure is a key problem for rural areas and must therefore be addressed more thoroughly by RDPs.
				Research
X	X	X		Intensify research on the mechanisms of governance



Involvement of rural stakeholders in regional governance processes

The interviewees pinpointed a set of ways to become involved and to influence rural development policy at a local level. The two major ways to do this are to become active in a local political party or to join an organisation or association. These ways were identified by stakeholders in all the case-study regions. Among the associations suggested were environmental, farmers', tourism, civil and hunters' associations.

Level of information of rural stakeholders regarding EU rural development policy.

The survey results indicate a lack of information of local stakeholders on EU rural development policy. However, knowledge of LEADER proved to be advanced in every case study. This may indicate the important role that LEADER+ plays for local stakeholders. Policy knowledge on SAPARD was assessed only in the Polish case study, as the only new Member State in the survey. As SAPARD played a central role in accession policy up until 2003, the group of stakeholders was familiar with the details of this instrument.

Implementation of EU rural development policy at local level

There was a general acceptance of EU rural development policy among the stakeholders in Poland, Italy and Denmark. In the German case study, some discontent was expressed with regard to the mode of implementation and the following critical points were raised in several areas of governance:

Criticism concerning the implementation procedures of EU rural development policy	Ostprignitz-Ruppin, DE	River Gudenå, DK	Mugello, IT	Wielkopolska, PL
Ineffective measures			X	X
Lack of advice	X			
Lack of innovation		X		
Poor communication		X		
Poor coordination of policies	X	X		
Resources in the regions not sufficient	X			
Too strong top-down approach	X			
Weak link between urban and rural areas	X			

*X indicates critique by the stakeholders interviewed

How did the latest reforms of rural development policy at EU level compare with our findings?

The latest reforms of EU rural development policy demonstrate the intention at EU level to establish good governance structures. However, not all points of critique expressed by the stakeholders interviewed

have been addressed by the latest reforms. Furthermore, as our recommendations show, good governance is a multi-level concern and not the responsibility of the Commission alone.

None the less, according to the results of the stakeholder survey, the actual policy reforms can be seen as a step in the right direction towards good governance in EU rural development policy.