



Sufisa-Newsletter No 4 - Quarter 1/2017

Results of the national media analyses



Up-coming event in Summer 2017

The XXVIIth ESRS conference 'Uneven Processes of Rural Change' will be held in Krakow, Poland, July 24-27. The SUFISA-team is organising the working group 'Finance, Institutions and the Governance of European Agriculture - Implications for Sustainable Farming Practices and Food Security'. Authors from different countries submitted their abstracts to our workshop convenor Egon Noe (University of Southern Denmark). Overall, 16 contributions were accepted and will be presented at the conference.

The deadline for uploading the short papers (based on accepted abstracts) is the 1st May 2017.

Early bird registration closes on the 1st April and general registration on the 20th June 2017 .

SUFISA project meeting

The next SUFISA project meeting will take place at the University of Southern Denmark, Esbjerg, between July 3-4 2017.



Photo: SUFISA project meeting in Evora, Portugal, January 2017.



Portugal

Media analysis in Portugal covered two case studies in the Alentejo region: extensive beef production in a Montado (agro-forestry) context and intensive olive oil production. Over 20 different media sources were examined spanning the period between 1992 (McSharry Reform) and 2015 for beef, and between 2002 (construction of the Alqueva reservoir) and 2015 for olives. A discourse-based approach was used. The results indicate a clear dichotomy in the dominance of news between a Neo-classic approach and a critical socio-economic perspective. Opinions and interviews dominate the media examined, with facts mainly restricted to the professional publications examined. It is especially interesting to note the different interpretations of the concept of 'sustainability' that are applied by different media, reflecting their diverse ideological positions and interests.



Belgium

In Flemish popular newspapers, on which this media analysis is based, we observe that regulatory and policy conditions are by far the most reported conditions. On the contrary, socio-demographic issues are seldom reported. A key person in the media debate is Piet Vanthemsche, former director of the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain, as well as of the largest farmers' union. In contrast, farmers are seldom directly heard. The only farmers that tend to get a voice in the press are small-scale farmers. At the sector level, meat and milk are the most mentioned for various reasons: the abolition of milk quota, the manure surplus, the financial situation of pig farmers, illegal practices related to the use of hormones, and the ritual slaughtering of lambs. From 2014 on, the apple and pear sector gained attention, as the Russian embargo had a major impact on the Belgian fruit sector.



Italy

Regulatory and policy conditions are discussed mainly in relation to the bureaucracy burden, taxation issues, restrictive food regulation, as well as European legislation (CAP) and international agreements. Factor conditions are related principally to land, access to raw materials (seeds) and stocks (fish) and availability issues. Demand conditions were identified as low farm-gate prices and unpredictability. The most debated financial issues are a credit crunch for farmers and inadequate finance and risk management. Socio-institutional conditions are discussed in terms of administrative efficiency and the presence of socio-technical innovation systems. Technological conditions are mostly examined in terms of the availability of innovative high-tech solutions that are not fully exploited by farmers. Ecological conditions are considered in relation to global warming and desertification, eutrophication, and extreme weather events.



Poland

The professional education of farmers is stressed in relation to the adaptation of new technologies as well as non-agricultural activities that lead to the implementation of a multifunctional model of rural development. The themes of food safety (quality of food) and food security (quantity of food) are presented. Two modern solutions: GMOs and renewable sources of energy (including biofuels) are discussed. Financial issues are discussed in the context of production-oriented models and in terms of bio-diversity, greening or non-agricultural activities. Policy and regulations are connected with environmental care and ecological farming (including fraud in the form of emerging fictional ecological farms) and preserving the traditional character of Polish agriculture, allowing farmers to resist structural changes. The state should support the process of farm enlargement and improved labour use.



Denmark

The Danish media analysis shows that the SUFISA project coincides with a significant financial crisis and structural development in Danish farming. On the surface, Danish farming is very successful in terms of being efficient and high yielding with a low carbon footprint. However, Danish farming is currently in a financial crisis as farmers on average have a significant debt problem, difficulty generating a sustainable income and challenges raising capital for reinvestment. Furthermore, the analysis indicates a growing debate about future modes of finance and its implications for production strategies, generational succession and the farm economy. Another important theme in the media analysis is the rapidly evolving Danish organic food market (currently with a market share of around 8%) and in the agricultural media emphasis is given particularly to how farmers respond to these new quality demands on primary production.



Germany

The analysis highlights four thematic fields that appear regularly in general media articles in the period 2012-2016: environmental and consumer protection, animal welfare, availability of agricultural production factors, agricultural policy and markets for farm products. The key issues discussed are the price crisis (mainly in the dairy sector), factory farming (in the context of animal welfare), food safety (e.g. mislabelling), the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy ('Greening'), the regulation of organic farming, free-trade-agreements (mainly TTIP, CETA), the diversity of seeds (legal restrictions), land shortage (rising land prices), green gene technology, and the banning of glyphosate. The media coverage illustrates the interrelations between the protection of consumers, environment and animals, and the difficult economic situation of farmers. Sustainability issues in relation to agricultural production are also discussed. The positions differ significantly between the professional media and the public media.



Latvia

The Latvian media analysis identifies key conditions that shape farmers' strategies across a diversity of agricultural sectors in Latvia, with special attention paid to the wheat and dairy sectors. Some of the key external factors for dairy producers are related to the abolition of EU milk quotas, the Russian trade embargo, and price and income volatility. In the wheat sector, the main external conditions faced by farmers have to do with access to international markets, the land market, and producer cooperation. The analysis reveals two dominant farmer strategies in Latvia: agro-industrial competitiveness and rural development, with a political support strategy being equally important but used as a strengthening factor for the main strategy. In the context of the economic crisis, the media also highlight other strategies, such as in-sourcing or performing certain tasks on-farm which previously may have been outsourced or provided by external commercial actors.



Serbia

In spite of a good natural environment, agriculture is faced with a range of unfavourable socio-demographic and economic conditions (rural depopulation, an agricultural budget which varies in both size and structure year by year, an absence of cooperation among food chain stakeholders, significantly constrained agribusiness finance, climate change etc.). The strategies adopted are based both on both a very low risk awareness and underdeveloped individual risk control. The producers argue about the importance of government measures that address sustainability in practice. Existing strategies are seen as follows: (1) traditional approach: diversification and rural economy; (2) "the old story" - state and agricultural subsidies; (3) management quality and skills (training, education and innovation). The most frequently mentioned topics are: generic risk strategies, agribusiness "restructuring", extension and advisory services, risk control instruments/agricultural insurance and price hedging.



Greece

Fishers face both internal and international competition from aquaculture and illegal fishing, while also displaying a limited degree of cooperation which leads to a dependence on intermediaries. Extensive sheep and goat production on the other hand is characterized by poor shelters, a lack of holding licenses, complex legislation, and bureaucracy. The producers in both sectors are ageing and succession is an issue. They all share financial constraints, mainly high operational costs and indebtedness, aggravated by the financial crisis which leaves few opportunities for credit access and "dictates" measures like increases in social security and tax rates. Additionally, they have to cope with regulatory (i.e. landing obligation for fisheries and the absence of an electronic record system for dairy farms) and environmental limitations such as a decrease in stocks and weather.



United Kingdom

In terms of the agricultural sector generally, price volatility was a predominant theme in the articles sampled. Price volatility in media publications is understood to mean excessive price fluctuations and variations in agricultural commodity prices over time. Price volatility is not a new topic: it has featured in media discourses for some time, but particularly since the 2008 credit crunch. The media discourse related to the sustainability of inshore fisheries businesses is mostly debated in regional and more specialised media sources, with much of the discourse framed in relation to the Common Fisheries Policy (e.g. discard bans, marine conservation zones and quota allocations). The milk price that farmers receive and the abolition of the milk quota system were the two prominent issues discussed in the media sources examined for the UK dairy sector, alongside price volatility.



France

The French media discuss three main agricultural narratives: (1) An agroindustrial narrative where competitiveness is the main performance indicator, and where strategies involve increasing the size and capital intensity of farms, inevitably leading to a radical restructuring of the sector; consequent social damage and the very existence of very large farms face a problem of acceptance in the French debate. (2) A narrative of transition in technical systems, from a current unsustainable pathway to a double performance system, able to drastically reduce the environmental impact of farms as well as maintain their economic viability through collective strategies and differentiation. (3) An alternative narrative of complete transformation of the food system, to regain the technical and economic autonomy of farmers, to stop the decrease in the number of farms and to ensure their environmental soundness.

Partners



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Emilija Manić holds the position of associate professor at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade (courses - Economic geography and Geography of tourism). She graduated and gained her Ph.D. at the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade, with main research interests in spatial and regional analysis, GIS application in business, and spatial management in tourism.



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Anna Jastrzębiec-Witowska received her Ph.D. degree from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2010. She specializes in sustainable food systems, the civic aspects of alternative agriculture and the building of sustainable communities and food economies. Her experience includes working with international NGOs and local government in the Dąbrowa County in Malopolska Province, Poland.



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