

Typologies of farmers: a literature review

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Abstract - Typologies in qualitative research function as models and are a means of structuring or grouping data within an object field. The data of those people who are investigated are divided into different, empirically grounded, types. The purpose of typologies in agricultural research varies from study to study, from country to country and through time. One of the main questions in any research into farming styles is: "Why does management on farms differ?" Although the circumstances for two farms may be comparable, there are differences in the way farmers distribute their production factors. This paper reviews and critically discusses the literature regarding farmers' values, goals and attitudes and the typologies that have been established. It characterises the typologies, in particular with regard to environmentally friendly farming behaviour, and it discusses the potential of conducting such a study in Austria.

INTRODUCTION

Since typologies are always a way of reducing complexity, they simplify reality and therefore offer only information and interpretation up to a degree. This does not necessarily mean that typologies can only describe social phenomena: often they also explain and predict them. Based on this classification, 'internal homogeneity' (i.e. within a type the individuals should resemble each other as much as possible) and 'external heterogeneity' (i.e. the types should differ from each other as much as possible) should be achieved. Typologies are thus a means of structuring information which has been empirically gathered (Kuckartz, 2010). In the area of agricultural research, typologies often help to understand better the heterogeneity among farmers. By constructing styles or types, one can take into consideration different aspects such as management styles, decision-making processes, values, goals and attitudes which farmers hold and factors that influence them. Often typologies attempt to explain, which believes or mind-sets may potentially lead to what kind of behaviour or which styles are better prepared to survive under changing conditions.

ANALYSING DIFFERENT TYPOLOGIES

The literature included in this review was chosen for various reasons. One is that it was cited fairly often and is therefore of high relevance for the scientific community (Van der Ploeg, 1994). Other reasons are that it has a particular relevance for Austria (Schmitzberger et al., 2005), or that it uses the Q-methodology, since this will be the method we are going to use in subsequent research steps (Fairweather and Keating, 1990; Brodt et al., 2006; Davies and Hodge, 2007).

By means of his farming styles concept Van der Ploeg (1994) offers a holistic and broad picture of the heterogeneity among dairy farmers in the Netherlands. What is important to mention with regard to the farming style approach is that in his view the individual decisions (embedded in a social surrounding and a specific region) are the main drivers for development. In his work he links underlying belief patterns with the actual practice on the farm, whereby he identifies several types which offer the opportunity to explain these various developments.

For Austria the work of Schmitzberger et al. (2005) offers a detailed analysis of different farming styles with regard to their effects on biodiversity. A total of 84 interviews were used to classify the farmers, which resulted in eight distinct types for Austria (Yield optimiser, Traditionalists, Innovative, Support Optimiser, Idealist, Part-time farmer, Forced farmer and the Social farmer). The classification was made through group discussions by agro-sociologists, based on the different kinds of collected data. Four of the types were of major importance. Connecting the farming styles to their respective biodiversity features on the farm, the authors assessed 21 farmers from three main types for whom data on biodiversity was available. Their findings show that there are clear differences between the types concerning the biodiversity level on the farms. Compared with the other studies cited in this article, this is the only one which investigates directly an indicator of environmentally friendly farming, whereas the other studies merely look at the values and goals of farmers but not if they are pursuing the aim or behaving according to their stated values.

Already in 1990 Fairweather and Keating published a study on "goals and success from the farmers' point of view". This and the following studies are of importance for our work, since for constructing

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the different types Q-methodology² was used. On the basis of this methodology the authors detected three distinct types or management styles (Dedicated Producer, Flexible Strategist and Lifestyler). In particular, the Lifestylers were denoted as farmers who value the environment and who commit to dedicating more resources to that part of the farm than the other two types do. It should be noted that only two out of 45 statements belonged explicitly to the area of conservation, whereas the main part comprised management statements. They state that "any of the three types might survive or not, depending on the circumstances" – which is clearly similar to the work of Van der Ploeg.

In their study of the arable farming community in the UK, Davies and Hodge (2007) also used Q-methodology. Focusing on farmers' environmental perspectives, they detected five types among the farmers (Environmentalists, Progressives, Commodity Conservationists, Jeffersonians and Yeomen). The highest concern about nature was found amongst the Environmentalists, who have lexicographic preferences with regard to conservation, whereas the Progressives tend to think that how agriculture is practiced today guarantees the good condition of agricultural land. The next two groups are characterised by their strong financial focus. Thus their approach to conservation comes either after meeting financial targets or as having an ambivalent perspective on the issue. The Yeomen are defined by their limited interest in "judging everything in financial terms". They are characterised, as with the Lifestyler in the study by Fairweather and Keating, by their view of "farming as a way of life" and environmentally friendly behaviour as integral to their management system. Through their study, Davies and Hodge show that the different types are very complex and that many parallels as well as differences exist among the various types. According to their results, it is not possible to just divide farmers into the categories "environmentally friendly" and not "environmentally friendly" but instead farmers place divergent emphases on respective goals and there exist several ways to reach these goals.

Finally the study of Brodt et al. (2006) of wine grape and almond growers in California presents a typology which comprises three types of evaluating goals and values amongst farmers using Q-methodology. They revealed the Environmental Steward, who is interested in farming in "co-operation with nature" and who prioritises conservation over yield maximisation. The Production Maximizers, on the other hand, emphasise yields and quality of production. The group of Network entrepreneurs is characterised by their strong focus on off-farm activities and social interactions

CONCLUSION

The studies analysed show that farmers' interests and emphases vary considerably in particular with regard to environmental aspects. Some detected

types value co-operation with nature *per se* and are therefore open to environmentally friendly farming methods, while other types even with financial incentives do not fully adopt these methods. The profit or production maximisation type can be found in most of the studies. But nevertheless the four last typologies identify farmers whose values are not only based on economic or financial factors. Infact some view the work on the farm as a kind of lifestyle or see it as their duty to maintain certain environmentally friendly production methods in their farming strategy.

Comparing the different typologies and types with each other is on the one hand difficult, since the purposes of the studies are different and agricultural structure differs among countries but on the other hand, the description of the respective types offers some possibilities to draw plausible parallels between the farmers of different areas.

The farm typology research shows that typologies improve the understanding of the tension field between economic viability and common good increasing behaviour. For Austria, a typology using Q-Methodology will explain in detail the underlying belief structures of farmers. It will be possible to understand and describe why farmers favour environmental sound production methods because the subjectivity of the respective farming type will become visible.

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²Q-methodology is used to study the subjectivity of persons. Participants are asked to rank certain statements in relation to each other. Afterwards these so-called Q-sorts are interpreted and classified according to an inverted factor analysis that reveals distinct types (van Exel and de Graaf, 2005).