

# Farm succession in Austria and Japan – a comparative analysis of patriarchal patterns, their changes and challenges

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**Abstract** - Family farming is until now the predominantly form of agricultural production in Japan and Austria. In both countries farm succession was following for a long time patri-linear patterns which means that the farm property and the status of the farm were given for many generations from fathers to sons. Nowadays this patriarchal system of succession in agriculture has become fragile for many reasons. At the beginning the traditional patterns of farm succession in Austria and Japan will be analysed from a gender-sensitive perspective. In a further step the changes and problems with farm succession will be discussed. Life course examples from Austria and Japan will illustrate the changes in the succession patterns in terms of societal values, qualification and (rural) labour markets. Finally a comparison between the status quo, changes and challenges of farm succession in Austria and Japan will be carried out.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Austria and Japan are highly developed countries with a small percentage of gainfully employed persons in agriculture (Austria 5.1%, Japan 4.8%) and the share of agriculture in the gross value added is very low (Austria 1.7%, Japan 1.2%). The agricultural structure is small scaled (Austria 18.8 ha, Japan 1.36 ha) and the portion of part-time farming and pluri-active farm families is very high. These days it increasingly becomes a bigger problem to recruit successors for family farms in rural areas or islands. Declining incomes in agriculture, higher educational level, job opportunities outside the farms and trends to individualism are influencing the life course selection of the young farm generation. Have these multiple options led to more gender-equality in the farm succession process? Have the gender-specific expectations of parents changed or are they still favouring sons as potential successors? Which role play politics and agricultural administration in this process of farm succession and do they address the manifold challenges?

## METHODS

The comparison of the farm succession patterns in Austria and Japan was based on a multilevel research design. To explore the life course selection of

family members and how the farm successor will be selected, the *life course approach* was applied. The life course approach is based on the concept of human development which considers individuals developing throughout their life. (Tsutsumi, 1999) Therefore *in-depth-interviews* with farm families in Austria and Japan were conducted. The interview partners in Austria (Burgenland, Lower Austria and Salzburg) were identified by snowball sampling and represent the big variety of farming in Austria (01 - 04-2008). The interviews in Japan were made with farm families who are executing the "Family Management Agreement" which represents a working and living "contract" between the members of the farm family (08-2006 – 03-2007). Furthermore *expert interviews* with "farm succession experts" of the chambers of agriculture in the Austrian provinces were carried out [E1-E9]. The fact, that farm succession is an exploring research field from a gender-sensitive point of view, the main questions were (i) changes in the gender of the farm successor, (ii) changes in the contents of "farm transfer contracts", (iii) arrangements concerning households of the old and young generation, (iv) services in the process of farm succession from the chambers of agriculture.

## FARM SUCCESSION PATTERNS IN AUSTRIA

On account of the topography different kinds of agricultural settlement and succession patterns have been developed during the centuries. In most parts of Austria the "closed" succession of a farm was practised ("Anerbensitte"). In most cases the eldest (Majorat) or the youngest (Minorat) son of the farm family was the successor. Predominantly, the farms were transferred patri-linear from the father to the son and daughters were only succeeding the farm in exceptional cases.

Nowadays the most important legal instrument to maintain closed estates in agriculture in times of generational change is the "farm transfer contract". With this contract the family farm is handed over through anticipated succession. The heir has to pay off the siblings and has to take care of the old generation. The so-called "Ausgedinge" had the purpose to supply the old generation with food or meals, with (pocket) money and care if the old farmer/farm women get sick. In the meanwhile the old-age pension (1.1.1970; 1992 for farm women) and the health insurance system in agriculture are developed

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and for this reason now the contents of the "farm transfer contracts" are rather limited in comparison to former times.

#### FARM SUCCESSION PATTERNS IN JAPAN

The Japanese traditional family institution, so-called "Ie" in Japanese, kept material and spiritual family properties such as lands and equipments, which have been expected to be succeeded over the generations. The traditional ideal of the Ie system designated the eldest son as an heir, and expected his family to live with his parents under the same roof so that it has a stem-family household structure. The successor was supposed to assume the headship, and therefore the responsibility of taking care of his aged parents. The successor's wife was also expected to be an appropriate daughter-in-law for her husband's parents.

After World War II, the current Civil Code abandoned the Ie system. The inheritance system was changed from a solo-favouring system to an even-favouring one. Therefore, the institutional background, which guaranteed generational family-farm succession, was abolished. During the period of the Japanese hyper-economic growth from 1955 to 1973, the number of family farm successors has been decreasing dramatically because of industrialization and urbanization. Family Agreement Farming since 1964 was one of the characteristic measures for keeping young successors involved in their family farm. Although the Family Agreement was a father-son contract for seeking a democratic family relationship and modernizing farm management, such a contract among family members did not suit the traditional farming family and went out of use.

In 1995, the Family Agreement was renamed as the Family Management Agreement. It aims not only to improve the technical and management skills of farmers but also to carry out partnership within farming families and to empower farming women under the policy toward developing a gender-equal society. Since 2003, the Japanese government introduced the system of certified farmers who can receive subsidies. On the assumption that farming women sign the Family Management Agreement, they can become certified farmers sharing this qualification with their husbands.

#### COMPARISON OF FARM SUCCESSION PATTERNS FROM A GENDER-SENSITIVE POINT OF VIEW

The course of one's life is a chain of events dependent on age and determined by when and what event one experiences. There is a characteristic developmental task for each life stage. In this study, farm successors' developmental tasks of four consecutive life stages were compared, i.e. (i) Occupational selection and educational course, (ii) Family formation, (iii) Living arrangement and family role-allocation, (iv) Inheritance and parents' retirement. The main findings from this comparison are as follows:

(i) Educational systems are different between Austria and Japan and therefore the timing of initial engagement in vocational training and occupational selection is also different. In Austria, farm succes-

sors choose their occupation according to their own interests under the guidance of their parents in their early teens. Emotional factors of occupational selection gave a chance for females to become a farm successor. On the other hand, Japanese students generally choose their occupation in their late teens by themselves. Conventional factors play an initial role in the occupational selection of farm successors. Because of the declining birth rate, daughters without brothers increase, and this makes farm succession insecure. In many Austrian regions the patriarchal succession patterns have changed and also daughters are increasingly designated as farm successors.

(ii) In Japan, legal marriage is common. Children are born between legal married parents because illegitimate children have much social disadvantage in the future. For the former generation, an arranged marriage for a farm successor was prevalent. However, in favour of more Western ideals of love match, the difficulty in forming a family for a male farm successor is a serious problem. On the contrary in Austria, children may be born among an unmarried couple. A single-mother's child is provided with medical insurance and social insurance by the government. It is not unusual that the orders of life-events are childbirth, marriage and co-habitation.

(iii) In Austria, although the husband's parents live in the same premise, each couple lives independently nowadays. However, the division of labour in daily life is still gender-oriented. In Japan, the degree of co-residence with the husband's parents is high. The most commendable effect of the Family Management Agreement is the democratizing of family life and family relationships.

(iv) In Austria, the landowner's name is transferred to the successor when the manager begins to receive a pension by signing a farm transfer contract. Moreover, there are the co-owner and the co-manager systems. However, in Japan, the landowner's name is changed from the father's directly to his eldest son's after the father's death, and therefore even the mother-in-law has no chance of inheriting family properties. Before the father's death, only the farm management right is transferred to the successor.

#### CONCLUSIONS

According to the question if the patriarchal patterns in farm succession are changing and which challenges are coming up, the answer would be: In the last years more women are entering in the management of family farms in Austria and in many regions daughters become increasingly farm successors. In Japan the patriarchal farm succession pattern is still alive. If there is no male heir the family farm is rather closed down than a daughter becomes the farm successor.

#### REFERENCES

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