

Cultural Differences in the Perception of Non-Commodity Functions of Agriculture: A Case Study for Mountain Farming in South Tyrol

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Abstract - This paper reports the results of representative surveys of farmers (n=343) and the general population (n=1020) in the autonomous province of South Tyrol (Italy), conducted for the purpose of exploring perceptions of the multi-functionality of mountain farming. Results show a generally high acceptance of the non-commodity functions of mountain farming in South Tyrolean society, with the cultural landscape function being the most widely accepted throughout the population. Differences within the population can be identified for functions of cultural heritage, which is ranked highest by farmers, and nature protection, ranked highest by the Italian-speaking population. Farmers give a lower ranking to those functions, which are connected with a stronger influence of society on the allocation of land.¹

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The aim of this study is to address views of farmers and the general population with respect to non-commodity functions of mountain farming in the autonomous province of South Tyrol, the northernmost province of Italy. The landscape in South Tyrol is characterised by the Alps and alpine valleys. Mountain farming is important with about 86 % of the total provincial area being located at an altitude of over 1000 meters above sea level. About 90 % of the farmers' arable land (woodland not included) is pastureland, of which about 27 % is permanent (Agricultural census 2000: Autonome Provinz Bozen, 2002a: 63, 73; 2003: 76).

69.2 % of the total inhabitants of South Tyrol (around 430,000) belong to the German-speaking population; 26.5 % to the Italian population; and 4.4 % speak Ladino (2001 census: Autonome Provinz Bozen – South Tyrol, 2002b: 43). In the capital town of the province, i.e. Bozen/Bolzano, the language distribution of the German and Italian-speaking populations is the opposite of the rural areas. On the other hand, the mother tongue of almost 100 % of the farmers is German. Language is presumed to represent culture, which therefore leads to the assumption of differing preferences and perceptions with respect to mountain farming and its non-commodity functions by ethnic groups.

MATERIAL

In Central European regions, including South Tyrol, a broad view of agriculture and its multi-functional character is widely shared among policymakers and scholars (Hovorka 2007; Lehmann 2002; Sinabell, 2001; Huylensbroek and Durand, 2003; Zander et al 2005), not only including functions relevant for the ecology and nature protection, but also for cultural and social sustainability. On the basis of such a broad view of multi-functionality, the following nine non-commodity functions of agriculture were chosen to be included in the design of two surveys, one of farmers (n=343) and one of the general population (n=1020) in South Tyrol in 2005:

Preservation and maintenance of landscape – Maintenance of traditional culture – Allocation of land for protection of nature and the environment – Allocation and maintenance of recreational land – Construction and maintenance of local paths/roads – Safeguarding against natural disasters (e.g., avalanches, mudslides) – Provision of social services (e. g. childcare, care-giving for elderly people) – Protection of water resources – Services on behalf of the local community (e.g., snow removal).

On a five-point Likert-scale the respondents rated the importance of these functions between VERY IMPORTANT and TOTALLY UNIMPORTANT. The research design for the survey of farmers (n=343) included quota sampling for region and farm size. The personal interviews were conducted at the farms. The 1020 personal interviews with respondents from the non-farming population were carried out in towns all over South Tyrol and were done on the basis of a quota sample for towns, language groups, sex and age. Due to the small percentage of Ladino-speaking people in the sample (1.5 %), the statistical comparisons are only made between the German and Italian-speaking groups.

SELECTED RESULTS

The high level of statistical significance in comparing perceptions of the importance of non-commodity functions of agriculture amongst farmers and the two main ethnic groups in the non-farming population in South Tyrol mainly stems from differences amongst the farmers and each of the two other groups. In table 1, functions are presented in order of greatest difference between farmers and the gen-

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eral population (both language groups) in the category VERY IMPORTANT.

Table 1. Perceptions of the importance of non-commodity functions of mountain farming by farmers and the two main ethnic groups in South Tyrol (2005).

Function	Group	n	Importance (%)	
			very important	rather important
Maintenance of traditional culture	Farmers	343	71.1 %	22.4 %
	German	692	48.8 %	36 %
	Italian	287	42.9 %	33.4 %
Preservation and maintenance of landscape	Farmers	343	95 %	5 %
	German	694	70.5 %	24.1 %
	Italian	287	65.9 %	29.3 %
Construction and maintenance of local paths/roads	Farmers	343	66.9 %	23.5 %
	German	691	44 %	34,3 %
	Italian	287	41.8 %	32.8 %
Allocation of land for protection of nature and the environment	Farmers	335	23.3 %	39.1 %
	German	690	46.6 %	34.3 %
	Italian	286	57.7 %	29 %
Safeguarding against natural disasters	Farmers	341	70.4 %	22.3 %
	German	692	53 %	31.9 %
	Italian	285	50,5 %	33 %
Provision of social services	Farmers	341	53.7 %	29.3 %
	German	690	24.9 %	33.6 %
	Italian	282	22.3 %	31.6 %
Services on behalf of the local community	Farmers	183	53.7 %	29.3 %
	German	689	36 %	33.8 %
	Italian	282	35.5 %	38.7 %
Allocation and maintenance of recreational land	Farmers	341	17.3 %	34.9 %
	German	693	32.9 %	36.5 %
	Italian	286	37.1 %	36.4 %
Protection of water resources	Farmers	216	63.9 %	31,1 %
	German	692	59.8 %	30.1 %
	Italian	281	51.6 %	34.2 %

categories VERY IMPORTANT and RATHER IMPORTANT only, group differences in all functions of highest significance: $p \leq .001$ (Kruskal-Wallis H).

DISCUSSION

The high ranking of non-commodity functions with respect to traditional culture and landscape by farmers might be closely connected to the traditional family farming value system.

In comparison with the general population, farmers only ranked two functions, i.e. "Allocation of land for protection of nature and the environment" and "Allocation and maintenance of recreational land" lower in importance than the other groups. To the farmers, these functions may represent a certain

influence of society on their property rights and their power of decision-making with respect to land. Here, conflicting opinions of farmers and the general population can be identified, which indicates possible future areas of conflict regarding public financial support for farmers fulfilling certain non-commodity functions.

In contrast to the assumption at the outset of the study, i.e. obtaining results with a significantly higher ranking of functions by the German-speaking non-farming group based on higher levels of affinity to rural life and farming, it is rather surprising that these differences were not as great as expected. There was only one difference found between the two language groups of the general population on a very high level of significance. The function "Allocation of land for protection of nature and the environment" was ranked VERY IMPORTANT by 58 % of the Italian-speaking community, followed by 42 % of the German-speaking general population. Finally, farmers rank this function lowest for very important at about 23 %. It should be noted that this is the function, which is the least important of all nine functions to the farmers. This group pattern of ranking would seem to be based on a declining sense of connectedness to mountain farming, as well as rising urbanity.

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