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ASSESSING BUSINESS EXPECTATIONS IN AGRICULTURE

The Case of West Pannonia Region, Hungary

PhD Thesis Summary

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1. The Backgrounds of the Research

Six years after the enlargement of the European Union (EU) and because of the coming join to the euro zone, balanced economic growth is a key element for Hungary. Important problems are emerging in the integrated economy of the EU, these problems are caused by the effects of the differences coming from the developed and less developed member states. In the last years several decisions were made to enhance the close-up of less developed regions with giving different subsidies. The economic growth indicators of the member states were significantly influenced by the establishment of Monetary Union and the introduction of the euro. The boom and bust situation in the world economy, the world prices of commodities, the situation of the main competitors and partners – the US, Far Eastern countries, and the commitments for international agreements (WTO) are all influencing the economy, especially agriculture. The continuous and numerous changes in Hungarian agriculture makes difficult and important at the same time the analysis of business cycle factors.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the mostly regulated policies of the EU. In the early times CAP's main aim was to enhance agricultural production and productivity. Further aims were to stabilize the markets, to close up farmers' income, and to provide food for consumers in a reasonable price. To implement these aims, financial solidarity, common market and community preference principles were coupled as measures.

From 1st May 2004 Hungary is also a member of the EU, so the reforms of the CAP are directly influencing the development possibilities of agriculture and rural areas. Hungary has excellent facilities for agricultural production. With the effective management of structural tensions and problems, the conditions of a competitive agriculture can be established. The development of agriculture combined with the development of further enterprises can be the base of a liveable and attractive countryside.

For that, significant sources were/are available before and after the EU accession. From 2002-2004 the SAPARD Programme, from 2004-2006 Agricultural and Rural Development Operative Programme (ARDOP) and National Rural Development Plan (NRDP) assured financial sources beside the purely state financed agricultural and rural development subsidies. The contribution of the different programmes to agricultural and rural

development is measurable with the regional distribution and value of successful projects in different objective areas, through implemented investments. Experiences emerged so far, could be very useful in the future, considering the preparation of the next programming documents for Structural Funds, so as to the available sources could be used in the most effective way.

Appr. 5 billion euro (equals to appr. 1300-1400 billion HUF) is available for Hungary in the budget cycle of 2007-2013, for agriculture and rural development. The structural changes can be continued, rural areas can be economic-socially developed with the effective allocation of these sources. For this, the New Hungary Rural Development Strategic Plan and the New Hungary Rural Development Programme (NHRDP) were completed which will basically determine the development possibilities of agriculture and rural areas in the next few years. There is a serious responsibility at the same time to use these sources in the most effective way.

2. The Aims of the Research

The aims of the research were divided into three groups:

1.) Based mainly on secondary sources, to analyse briefly the economic growth indicators (especially in agriculture) of some EU member states, especially Hungary. During the research I wanted to investigate other authors' results on the trends of GDP, agricultural employment, external trade balances and investments, the effects of EU enlargements. The analysis of other member states' economic growth before and after their EU accession can be useful for Hungary's post accession economic growth as well. The start of the research coincided with Hungary's EU accession, so pre- and post accession data were available for the analysis.

2.) Another aim of the research was to summarize and evaluate the available financial sources for agriculture and rural development in Hungary within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU and to review the methodology of the evaluation of Structural Funds' effectiveness. I wanted to investigate transfers (subsidies) as financial sources of investments which establish the economic growth. I wanted to analyse the foregoing results through the implemented investments (SAPARD, ARDOP, NRDP, NHRDP), so to facilitate the effective use of former experiences in the next programming period (2007-2013). I wanted to investigate how different subsidies influence indirectly (through investments) the performance of agriculture. Comparing analysis were executable among Hungary and former and new member states with similar agricultural potential (e.g. Slovenia, Poland, Austria).

3.) Further research direction was drawn up to analyse the business expectations of farmers. It seemed worth to investigate how the subjective estimation can be described by the participants in the economy and how business expectations connect to the volume of investments and so to economic growth. During the primary research I wanted to emphasize such empiric investigations using a questionnaire among the farmers in the West Pannonia Region in Hungary. Beside the investigation of agricultural investments I wanted to determine the motivation factors of farmers in the Region. Using a statistical model my aim was to discover the internal correlations between the features of the investigated population and their investments. I wanted to recognize the situation of farmers, the background of their economic decisions, because they are the target group of

agricultural legislation of the EU and Hungary. The actuality of the research was given: more than 3 years after Hungary's EU accession the farmers are mostly over the 'learning period', their business expectations can be said more established.

3. Hypotheses

During the research the following hypotheses were drawn up, which were investigated by empiric research based on primary data and using other authors' results, secondary data:

- The join to the EU results positive changes in the accessing country's economic growth indicators, in short term

- The financial sources within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU contribute significantly to farmers' investments, so to the output of agriculture. The available subsidies play an important role in the implementation of agricultural investments.

- There is a positive correlation between the investigated farmers' income and the sum of their investments. Income significantly determines the volume of investments.

- There is a further positive correlation between:

  - the investigated farmers' income and their business expectations,
  - their business-, market-, profitability-expectations and the planned volume of their investments, and between
  - the different types of expectations of the farmers in the analysis.

4. The Methods of the Research

4. 1. European Union subsidies for Hungarian agriculture

One of my aims with the thesis was to summarize and evaluate the available financial sources for agriculture and rural development in Hungary within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU and to review the methodology of the evaluation of Structural Funds' effectiveness. I wanted to investigate the results of the allocation of transfers (subsidies) as financial sources of investments which could be very useful in the future, considering the preparation of the next programming period. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate how different subsidies influence indirectly (through investments) the performance of agriculture.

During the research work I used Hungarian and European Union statistical data as secondary data source and different programming documents. To analyse the allocation of financial sources and the regional distribution of the implemented investments, I used the releases of the Hungarian paying agency (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency – MVH) with completion of other authors' research results. To the introduction of farmers' experiences about application for subsidies I used interviews in the West Pannonia Region of Hungary. Besides, mainly descriptive and simple statistical methods (distribution analysis) were applied.

Since 1990 PHARE (as a pre-accession programme), from 2002-2004 the SAPARD, from 2004-2006 ARDOP and NRDP assured financial sources for agricultural and rural development. From 2007 the sources of NHRDP are available which is financed from the European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund. This Programme makes available for Hungarian agricultural and rural development much more financial sources as former programmes together. The first years' experiences of the Programme were the base of investigation.

Beside the trends in the agricultural investments in national level I wanted to examine an economically important region, West Pannonia Region as an example. The focus of the research was to investigate how investments are determined by the motivations and business expectations of farmers living in that Region.

4.2. Questionnaire survey among farmers in the West Pannonia Region

302 farmers in the West Pannonia Region were in the sample of the own research. The population was determined on the base of Census 2005 by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and on the base of farmers applied for direct payments, registered by the MVH. KSH recorded 1082 farming companies and 77812 private farmers in the Region. MVH registered 208806 farmers who applied for direct payments in 2005, from that 99869 cultivated more than 5 hectares. These numbers in the West Pannonia Region were 15457 and 8535. The population of the own research was formed by farmers (companies and private) who were registered by the MVH, applied for direct payment and cultivated more than 5 hectares in 2005. Considering the typical crops (cereals, oilseeds) grown in the Region, this 5 hectare equals appr. to 2 ESU (European Size Unit), Farms over 2 ESU represent the majority of Hungarian agricultural production and land use. 2 ESU farm size is the bottom of a 'viable farm' (Dorgai et al, 2004). The research results cover this population. The simple and random sampling was carried out by proportioning, based on the size of cultivated land (Babbie, 2001; Somogyi, 2002). That meant 302 farms in the sample (questioning ratio: 3,5%). The questioning was carried out individually, by phone and in mails.

The questions were configured in the following sections:

I. Basic data of the farm: year of establishment, activities, number of employees, age of the farmer, form of farming

II. Land ownership and land use: total area cultivated (ratio of own land and rental), crops, animals, changes in the land use after the EU accession, connections of land prices and rentals, motivations of land use, effect of direct payments on land rent)

III. Subsidies: the opinions about EU support system, participation in Sapard, ARDOP, NRDP, NHRDP programmes, effects of direct payments on the investments, expectations of subsidies, approach to subsidies

IV. Investments: investments since 2004, value of investments and income, motivations of investments, backgrounds of financing, planned investments

V. Business expectations: preparation for the EU membership, business-, market- and profitability-expectations

Statistical methods applied for the data analysis:

1. Correlation analysis with cross tables, calculation of association coefficients

Cross table analysis was carried out to analyse the correlation between farmers' business-, market-, profitability-expectations and the planned volume of their investments and the correlation between the different types of their expectations. The method is suitable to analyse the frequency distribution of two, non-metric variable. The method was used to analyse the correlation between the income and preparation for the EU membership as well.

The aim to count association coefficients is to concentrate the correlation described by the data of crosstabs into one number. The 'Cramer V' association coefficient comes from the dividing with the possible maximum of the χ^2. The value of the 'Cramer V' is always between 0 and 1. It is 0 only when the variables are independent; it is 1 when variables are totally dependent. The closer it is to 1, the stronger the association is (Kerékgyártó et al 2008).

2. Correlation and regression analysis

Correlation analysis is a method used for measuring the strength of the correlation between the examined variables. Regression analysis describes the correlation with a function. The method was used to describe the dependence of income and investments of the farmers in the sample.

The initial, two-variable linear regression model was:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta * x_i + u_i$$

where i = 1,...n (n is the number of observations),
α and β are unknown coefficients (α is the coefficient counted to the constant value, the so called *regression constant*, its value is the meet of the function with the axis 'y'; β is the so called *regression coefficient*, that is the slope of the function)
x_i is the exogen, independent variable (regressor),
y_i is the endogen, dependent (response) variable,
u_i is the mean zero error

The aim of the regression model is to estimate α and β parameters.

The *coefficient of determination* (r^2) is a measure of the global fit of the model. Specifically, r^2 is an element of [0, 1], it is often interpreted as the proportion of response variation "explained" by the regressors in the model. Thus, $r^2 = 1$ indicates that the fitted model explains all variability in y, while $r^2 = 0$ indicates no 'linear' relationship.

The value of *correlation coefficient* (r) is 1 in the case of an increasing linear relationship, −1 in the case of a decreasing linear relationship, and some value between -1 and 1 in all other cases, indicating the degree of linear dependence between the variables. The closer the coefficient is to either −1 or 1, the stronger the correlation between the variables.

Data were analysed by SPSS 16.0. software.

5. The Results of the Research

Investigating the macroeconomic indicators of economic growth (based on other authors' results) it's proved that the EU accession resulted positive changes in the case of few countries. Countries joined to the EU in 1973, showed economic growth after their EU accession. In the case of Ireland the growth was extraordinary. The economy of the countries joined to the EU in the '80s shows a recession in the early '80s and '90s. Hungary is member of the EU since 1st May 2004, which resulted advantages and disadvantages in agriculture. According to the analysis of the German Statistical Office, the economy of the EU-10 countries (joined to the EU in 2004) performed a 22,5% average growth, counted on fix prices. The highest growth was in Slovakia (35,8%), the lowest was in Hungary (9,9%). The growth in Poland was 23%, in the Czech Republic it was 25,6%. The economic growth in the EU-15 was much less, 8,3% on average (Öt esztendő a kibővült Európában, 2009). The sources of pre-accession and Structural Funds contributed significantly to the economic growth.

The sources in SAPARD, ARDOP and NRDP served the start of the structural changes in Hungarian agriculture, but they were far not enough for the necessary changes. The experiences of the programmes show that the country is able to allocate these financial sources: the need for these subsidies was much higher than the available sum. The main aims and priorities were mainly fulfilled, however in some priorities significant disproportions were observable.

The results of the research (based on questionnaire survey) show that significant part of the farmers, mainly the smaller ones, felt unready for the EU accession. Considering the complexity of Common Agricultural Policy, that could have caused serious problems. However, the answers of the farmers show moderate optimism, they plan investments and further development of their farms. At the same time it's obvious that their decisions are considered and rational. Most of them tries to take advantage from the subsidies, if their size and available other sources make possible.

Moderate land market was provable in the Region; most of the farmers said that the possibilities to buy a land narrowed after EU accession. The expectations show further increase in land prices and rental prices. Because the Hungarian Land Act doesn't make possible for companies to buy land,

the 'private buying' is widespread: when the owners of an agricultural company buy the land for themselves and then let it.
Almost ¾ of the farmers in the sample said that EU accession and the growth in the direct payments caused a significant increase in the land rent prices. Half of the answering farmers said that this increase was between 25-50%.

After the EU accession the increase in rural development subsidies and direct payments was significant in the case of Hungarian farmers. 81% of the farmers said that the new subsidy structure is favourable than the former one, before EU accession. The high ratio of positive opinion is not surprising, because farmers (primarily crop producers) get much more direct payment than before 2004. The subsidies for machinery development in July 2009 seemed to be the last one in the period of 2007-2013. After the abolishment of such kind of supports, farmers have to use other external sources (credits, loans, leasings, etc.) to implement machinery investments.

21% of private farms and 69% of companies implementing investments availed investment subsidies. 12% of farms under 100 ha used investment subsidies, while this number in farms over 100 ha was 69%. Slight optimism was observed: 55% of the answering farmers plan to apply for investment subsidies in the next years.

According to the statistically proved hypothesis there is a positive correlation between:
1. the investigated farmers' income and their business expectations,
2. their business-, market-, profitability-expectations and the planned volume of their investments,
3. the different types of expectations of the farmers in the analysis.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The financial sources within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU contribute significantly to farmers' investments, so to the output of agriculture, the available subsidies play an important role in the implementation of agricultural investments. The four axis of the NHRDP assures appr. 1300 billion HUF in the period of 2007-2013, half of that money is for agricultural modernization, for structural change. The success of the Programme is based on farmers' decisions and expectations. Based on the research results it is observable that most of the farmers in the West Pannonia Region plan further development of their farms, they want to implement investments. The thesis contributes to the survey of their motivations in the background.

The main aims of the questionnaire survey were to analyse the investments of farmers, to determine the influencing factors and financial backgrounds of investments, to determine the correlation between the investigated farmers' income and the sum of their investments. The results of the research show: the bigger the farm size is, the more the investments are financed by investment subsidies. The subsidies are rather utilized by bigger farms. Economies of scale can be one reason for that; there is no point to apply for a smaller subsidy because of the administration burden and additional costs. Interviews show that smaller farms think that they have less chance to win subsidy than bigger ones.

According to the research results there is a positive correlation between farmers' income and the volume of their investments, but other factors can also significantly influence the realized investments. The coefficient of determination (r^2) value was 0,566 in the model which means that investments are explained more than 50% by the income; the others are random or out-of-model factors. The value of correlation coefficient was 0,753 which shows a strong correlation between the income and the value of investments of the farmers in the model. The value of residual deviation was high which shows the siginificance of random factors determining investments.
Based on farmers' income, the statistical model is suitable for determining and forecasting the investments, so it can contribute to the successful implementation of rural development programmes, to the improvement of farmers' competitiveness.

The expectations of farmers were moderately optimistic. 16% of the farmers have negative expectations, 1/3 of them expect stagnation and half of them expect betterment. The answers were greatly influenced that farmers spent only three years within the EU. Their market situation was significantly influenced in the first years by the EU accession, especially in the field of grain selling within the framework of the intervention system.

Income didn't influence the expectations about the EU membership. 75,8 % (and 76,6 %) of the farmers with less than 10 million HUF (and more than that amount) of income said that their business situation will improve with the EU membership. These high ratios reflect a bit 'over-expectation', three years after the accession a smaller ratio of farmers described positively their business, marketing and profitability situation. The present situation of farmers has a greater influence on their investment decisions as their expectations.

7. Theses

The aim of my thesis was to investigate business expectations and agricultural growth, the primary database for the empiric research was formed from the farmers in the West Pannonia Region. A wide range of research directions could be drawn up to analyse the business expectations of farmers. It seemed worth to investigate how the subjective estimation can be described by the participants in the economy and how business expectations connect to the volume of investments and so to economic growth. Beside the investigation of agricultural investments I wanted to determine the motivation factors of farmers in the Region. Using a statistical model my aim was to discover the internal correlations between the features of the investigated population and their investments. I wanted to recognize the situation of farmers, the background of their economic decisions. Another aim of the research was to summarize and evaluate the available financial sources for agriculture and rural development in Hungary within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU.

Based on the results of the empiric research, the analysis of secondary data, complementing with other authors' results and connecting to the hypotheses in the chapter 1.3. of the thesis, the following theses were drawn up:

1. Secondary data analysis show that EU accession had a positive effect on several accessing country's economic growth indicators, in short term.

2. The financial sources within the framework of the pre-accession and Structural Funds of the EU contributed significantly to farmers' investments, so to the output of agriculture. The allocation of SAPARD (before 2004), ARDOP and NRDP (from 2004-2007) was successful and there is a huge demand for the sources of NHRDP (2007-2013): half of the 7 years budget was claimed in the first two years. The experiences of the programmes show that Hungary is able to allocate these financial sources: the need for these subsidies was much higher than the available sum. Beside farmers' expectations, the available subsidies play an important role in the implementation of agricultural investments.

3. Positive correlation was proven between the investigated farmers' income and the sum of their investments. Based on primary research data the regression model showed that farmers' income significantly determines the volume of their investments. A positive correlation exists between the income and the investments (the explaining power of the model was 56%), but other factors can also influence the implemented investments.

4. There are further positive correlations between: the investigated farmers' income and their business expectations; their business-, market-, profitability-expectations and the planned volume of their investments; and between the different types of expectations of the farmers in the analysis. Based on the strength of correlation, the influencing factors of the investment decisions were ranked. There is a medium strength correlation between the estimation of current profitability and income. The estimation of current business situation and marketing possibilities show weaker correlation with the income. The weakest correlation is proven between the expectations of business situation and profitability.

   The factors influencing investment decisions (ranking starts from the strongest proven correlation which is statistically close to medium strength):

   1. the current profitability of the farm
   2. the estimation of current business situation
   3. the expectations of future profitability of the farm
   4. the market expectations
   5. the expectations of future business situation

8. Further Research

The research however delivered several new results, further research fields are emerging:

- More detailed analysis would be worth to analyse macroeconomic indicators in agriculture, because the content limits of the thesis and the emphasize of primary research didn't make it possible
- The evaluation of agricultural and rural development programmes from the Structural Funds is an important task (especially the mid-term evaluation of NHRDP and the programme preparation and its ex ante evaluation for the 2013-2020 programming period)
- The primary research reflects the features of the West Pannonia Region, it is not representative for the whole country, however it can contribute to specific agricultural business cycle researches.
- The results of the questionnaire in the primary research rather show a 'snapshot', the index calculation as a classic business cycle research method was not realizable, but it would be worth to carry out. The dynamics of changes in expectations can be provable with the regular application of the survey.
- Further research fields can be the comparative analysis of business expectation indices. Special business expectation survey among only agricultural enterprises compared to other business expectation surveys would give aspects for several new ways of analyses.

The measurement of the extern effects of agricultural production is a very actual research topic nowadays in Europe-wide. The recognition and estimation of the public goods delivered by agriculture and these confirmed by scientific results will easy the social acceptance of the allocated financial sources for agriculture. These are my planned research topics for the future.

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