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**Changing Land Use Patterns
in Central and Eastern European Countries**

Agricultural Transformation and Land Use in Central and Eastern Europe, Stephan J. Goetz, Tanja Jaksch, Rosemarie Siebert (eds.), Ashgate, Aldershot 2001 p. 340

This volume comes at a moment when the widely understood Central and Eastern European countries (including Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union) are on the point of making important decisions regarding their agricultural/rural policies and land use. Besides re-defining their economic and political identity, countries of the region also need to re-evaluate and decide upon the relationships between land, people and the environment. Opinions on the best path to follow vary greatly, the basic choice being that between intensifying production at almost any cost, or orienting towards a more sustainable form of agriculture and land use. The civilization and development gap separating those countries from Western Europe, creates a unique opportunity to avoid several mistakes committed by the latter, and allows Central and Eastern European countries to take certain shortcuts and implement directly the recent trends in thinking about agricultural policy which suggest that singular reliance on large-scale, industrialized agriculture is no longer feasible.

Over ten years of systemic transformation, and the need to choose the agricultural and land use development path is the major common feature of the countries of the region, which are otherwise very diverse. The differences include historical pre-conditions, the different relative importance of the agricultural and food sectors in national politics, as well as the foreseeable future which is likely to influence policy choices. Many countries of the discussed region are currently finalizing accession negotiations with the European Union; several others are on the same road but slightly behind. For others still, membership in the EU is not foreseen. Given such significant differences, no single, aggregate recommendation can be made for

Central and Eastern Europe. The countries of the region require a case by case approach in order to define each country's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Agricultural Transformation and Land Use in Central and Eastern Europe, a joint work edited by Stephan J. Goetz, Tanja Jaksch and Rosemarie Siebert, does not aim to give any general prescriptions. The major goal of the book, as spelled out by its editors in the introduction, is to describe changing land use patterns in Central and Eastern European countries, along with current agricultural transformation issues. The publication aims to provide background information to all those concerned with addressing questions about appropriate techniques and scales of agricultural production in this part of the world, and moreover, to provide a better understanding of the extent and complexity of the task ahead. The book is designed in a way to serve as a reference tool for researchers and others interested in the land use issues of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as agribusiness leaders seeking to explore potential trading relations with any of these European countries.

The authors, pointing at the significant differences between the countries of the region, their diverse problems and possible answers to them, focus on presenting a clear and current picture of the upheavals and difficulties which the reform countries face. Most of the authors who have contributed to this volume have worked in Central and Eastern Europe, are fluent in one or more of the local languages and have first hand knowledge of conditions prevailing before the transformation process began.

The book is an update and expansion (new chapters are: Chapter 1, 2, 3, 16) of an earlier publication in German *Landnutzung in Mittel- und Ost-Europa** (1996). It presents information about the types and development of land use over time, primarily from the perspective of economic geography in Central and Eastern European countries. Several texts, accompanied by numerous tables, figures and maps, present research from a multi-disciplinary approach, based on the expertise of the authors. The book can roughly be divided into two major parts: chapters 1–3 provide a general, horizontal overview of particular problems in all the countries of the region. Chapters 4–15 provide a country by country analysis. A separate chapter is devoted to forestry as land use.

Chapter 1 examines agricultural transformation in CEE nations within a global perspective, taking into account lessons from past international agricultural development efforts. The national economies of the countries of the region are described, underlying their different stages of development, followed by a comparative description of agricultural economies and rural areas. The conclusion of the chapter stresses the unprecedented scope

* *Land Use in Central and Eastern Europe*.

of the task which the transformation countries faced on their way to a market economy, including the institutional, social and human dimensions. In the search for an answer to the question about what should be done to get agriculture moving in those countries, the author stresses the need for locally targeted research (as blanket solutions do not work across societies and economies), as well as the provision of farmers with basic education in business management and entrepreneurship.

Chapter 2 introduces geographic features of the region such as predominant climates and soils, hydrographic conditions, and other factors defining and limiting land use options. The impressive agricultural potential of the region is stressed out. That is however significantly hindered by soil degradation coupled with other environmental problems, such as water pollution, caused by improper farming techniques and overexploitation. Ecological farming practices are indispensable for the future, which can only be achieved if the current transformation processes in the CEE countries create the necessary political, economic and social preconditions.

Chapter 3 presents social and economic trends in rural areas and consequences of transformation for rural residents, presenting a general picture of natural population movements as well as changes in demographic and socio-economic structures of the rural population. Significant differences among the countries of the region are again stressed out. Attention is drawn to the problem of rising rural unemployment and the ever worsening living standards of the rural population. Structural change has further widened the gap between these countries and Western Europe, and further increase in scope of social problems is likely, which increases the possibility of social conflict.

The specific country descriptions are presented in chapters 4–15. For the purpose of organizing the book, the countries have been discussed in the following groups: the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), selected former states of the Soviet Union (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine) and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). The authors explain such labelling by a wish of grouping together countries with common historical traditions and stages of development and, therefore, similar current transformation challenges and constraints. The appropriateness of such grouping and labelling could, however, be discussed. The lack of a chapter dedicated to Slovenia is surprising.

One of the main topics in the country descriptions is the comparison of land use (as well as the livestock sector) before, on the eve of and after the beginning of the transformation process, depending on data availability. Natural preconditions of land use, sociological aspects, questions of settlement and employment in rural areas as well as ecological problems of each country are addressed, along with economic processes related to land use.

In some country descriptions, depending on data availability, separate sections are devoted to discussions of private farms in terms of their importance for food supplies and as a source of income for the rural population. The original objective for the country chapters, as explained by the editors, was to present descriptive data in a unified and consistent manner. This goal has, however, not been fully achieved, which is explained by the significant differences in data availability and quality of information across the CEE countries, and the lack of uniform data. As a result, the country chapters not only do not follow the same structure, but are indeed quite uneven, with some countries described in great detail, and others barely touched upon.

Chapter 16 dedicated to forestry as land use completes the book. It underlines the importance of forestry for the region, placing the forest resources of the transformation countries into a global picture. It also reviews important differences in historical conditions and traditions surrounding the concept of private property ownership in these countries. The developments in CEE countries with the exception of Russia are described as similar to earlier developments in Western and Northern European countries in terms of changes in forested areas, forest conditions and management criteria. In the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, sustainable forest management practices are already in place and likely to be continued. This is, however, not the case in Belarus, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as Russia, where because of economic difficulties a substantial improvement in forest and wood management will probably not take place in the near future. Most countries, except Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine have taken the first successful step towards free enterprise. The denomination of Central and Eastern European countries within the chapter, which is inconsistent with the one applied in the rest of the book is surprising. While speaking about CEE countries, the author once means only the former states of the Soviet Union — therefore a much smaller range of countries than the one covered by the book, at other times, a much larger region, including the Caucasus and the Balkans. A significant part of the chapter dedicated to forest conditions deals only with Russia, with the other countries barely mentioned.

In the conclusion "Prospects for the future" the editors once again underline the huge diversity of the reviewed countries due to historical preconditions, the different relative importance of the agricultural and food sectors in the national politics, and diverse natural conditions. Despite significant differences, the common feature is the prevalence of small-scale farms pursuing subsistence farming, and the fact that in large parts of rural Central and Eastern Europe, 60 per cent of the population now live below the official poverty level. The choices made by the particular countries in relation to agricultural/rural policies and land use, will be determined by

both those differences and similarities. The fundamental question the editors raise is: what will be the fate of rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe? Is it possible to integrate them into the overall economic and social development process of these nations with a productive and modern agricultural sector as one supporting pillar? Or will they be cut off from the rest of society and marginalized? Unfortunately, the conclusion does not escape some simplistic assumptions, while stating that CEE countries hope that acceptance onto the EU luxury liner will solve their complex economic and social problems, and that western nations may consider using this opportunity to encourage these countries to develop and implement environmentally sound production practices in their agricultural sectors. Although it is hardly arguable that this is a good moment to reorient towards sound agriculture, the proposed method of give and take (we give you membership if you produce sustainably) is hardly applicable less than one year into closing the accession negotiations with many of the reviewed countries. Besides, some farmers (for example in Poland) see membership in the EU rather as a threat than an opportunity, which results in fading support for joining the EU. In other countries, like Estonia, this support has never been high.

In general, the book serves well its role of providing a general overview of changes and present situation of agriculture and land use in the reviewed countries. It clearly and rightly underlines the existent differences between them, and therefore the impossibility of creating one viable model and recommendation on policy choices. This is especially important given the tendency to throw all countries of the region "into one basket", which does not permit to grasp the complexity of the task ahead of them. Because of the significant variety of topics covered in particular chapters, the book can be read in parts, not necessarily as a whole, depending on the particular interests of the reader.