Congrès AFSP Paris 2013

ST 6 "Politiques publiques et démocratie"

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Managing major policy change – German farmers, the DBV and CAP-reform

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Abstract

Our paper explores how economically highly dependent clients of a public policy and their representatives react and adapt to major objective and tool changes in the medium to long term. We will study the implementation of the 2013/14 EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform in a highly agricultural area in Lower Saxony (Germany). The reform continues the "greening" process set in motion 1992 to change the CAP's objectives and instruments. The change implies a new way to see the clients and requires political and social change (especially in self-image towards a role as regional steward and custodian). Our research will focus on this last point: How have farmers' self-image and their evaluation of EU-policy (CAP and others) evolved under the guidance of their representatives: the Deutsche Bauernverband (DBV) and its affiliates?

Introduction

What happens when a public that has come to rely upon a public policy faces dramatic changes of this public policy? How will those who represent this public act? How will change (of attitudes and practices etc.) happen? And will there be in the end a new public with new representatives or will there be some continuity?
This situation could be the beginning of a political nightmare, but it is not that rare: Old policy is regularly completely overhauled when social demands change alongside issue coalitions and relevant actors. Such a change is rarely looked favourably upon by those who represent the public concerned with old policy as they have adapted to the old framework. They might try to resist, but what if change cannot be resisted or undone? How to manage change and what are the long term perspectives?
These are some questions concerning the working of policy feedbacks upon established groups and their representatives. Our paper will analyse the way a very strong corporatist actor in an established policy area with strongly dependent clients has reacted. We will do so through an analysis of the impact of its actions on the base.
We will study the implementation of the "Greening" of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a reform cycle that has been set in motion in 1992 and comes to its height with the 2013 CAP reform. Our study was conducted in a highly agricultural area in Lower Saxony (Germany) with economically strong, intensive meat production.
The agricultural clients' self-image has been shaped by CAP for over half a century and thus presents an interesting case of a long feedback loop (Anderegg 1999, Mettler & Soss 2004). The CAP has generally treated farmers as entrepreneurs and achieved a fairly good fit between treatment and self-image (Bruckmeier & Ehlert 2002). The recent reforms change the CAP's objectives and instruments, which imply a new way to see the clients (based on the delivery and preservation of public goods) and require social change (especially in self-image towards a role as regional steward and custodian).
This major change occurs in a field with a very strong corporatist actor: the Deutscher Bauernverband (DBV) which represents virtually all of Germany's farmers. The DBV has historically been a very important European actor (Ackermann 1970) and has an extremely dense and active base. It is thus most likely to have enough organisational resources to manage change.
We will first develop our theoretical framework in the context of policy feedback research and the complex model of European democracy before we turn to our practical framework in agricultural policy and especially the CAP leading into explanation of our fieldwork and model. We will then proceed to give a thorough account of our findings followed by a brief discussion of their impact on our theory and model.

Theoretical Framework

Our research will rest upon the angular stone of the theory of policy feedbacks, e.g. the influence public policy has on the public and their politics, with the complex model of democracy as secondary pillar and some elements of neo-corporative theory as cap stone.

As Mettler and Soss show in their condensed review (2003) of policy feedback, research policies are of importance well beyond their material content. Public policies not only determine problems, policy goals and the scope of governmental action but also, and most importantly, they determine the target population and strongly influence its social status (especially in case of social policy). Mettler and Soss insist on the social prestige or stigma that can be created and the influence it may have on self-image and further ability to organise and mobilise. They especially stress the importance of high prestige achieved by policy for influencing politics well beyond the initial policy arena based upon their respective works (Mettler 2002 on the G.I. Bill, Soss 1999). In a later

work Soss (2005) develops this point further: By making the benefits received under a welfare policy an earned right, it is possible and probable to turn clients into citizens especially if they initially were legally or socially disenfranchised.
Although their work and review constitute major contributions to the field, two important questions remain unanswered: First, Mettler and Soss remain squarely focused on welfare policy and civil rights legislation. These are the most important fields for enfranchising the public, but in recent decades civil rights issues have been pushed from the political forefront and welfare policy has generally revolved around retrenchment of existing programmes (cf. Pierson 1994), which Mettler and Soss only briefly allude to by reminding that stigmatized groups were created in the debate. It remains to be seen how policy feedbacks work elsewhere, especially in closely related distributive and redistributive policy fields. The second major issue is that they concentrate only on the creation of groups and the initial attribution of status. Ulterior modifications of policy content without creating new publics (as any change of perimeter is) seem to be non-existent. This is particularly important as they call for research in the area of mediation of feedbacks and transmission processes from policy to public which in case of group creation seems at least partially redundant to existent research while group evolution might be more promising. In this context it is useful to recall the Skocpol's model of policy feedback (Skocpol 1992:58) that explicitly presupposes multiple policy cycles and multiple feedback loops. This multicyclical model cannot revolve around a perpetual redistricting of group boundaries and status, but must at some point involve groups that are affected but not redrawn by policy and have to adapt and return to the cycle.

“How would an established group in a distributive or redistributive policy field outside welfare cope with a new policy?” is a catchy question, but it only makes sense if the new policy is further determined as a major change. The continuation of policy as a simple extension of the initial, creative policy cycle would not fit that description. Hall (1993) created an analytical framework to distinguish three forms of policy change based on the elements of policy evolution: First order changes keep the instruments of a policy but alter the settings (clear continuation), second order changes keep the goals and rationales of a policy but change the instruments (between continuation and reform) and third order changes involve changing instruments and the rationales of public policy (major reform). The latter are changes of philosophy and social goals and according to Hall they are always results and starting points of major change in the political and social field. Most of policy feedback research is focused on these landmark changes (as Mettler and Soss showed) but mainly as a creative process and not a modifying process. Much less is known of such a change happening with the involvement of established social groups that are not directly reshapened as a result of the policy and are neither authors of this change. The adaptive pressure of such a paradigmatic shift on policy orientation and self-image is formidable and the process of transmission of such a shock within an existing group has the opportunity to highlight the processes Mettler and Soss omitted but also called to be investigated.
Schneider and Ingram's (1997) work showing the importance of policy in shaping the perception citizens have of the state, as policy is often the only direct contact a citizen has, should be kept in mind. A sea change of public policy also redefines the link between public and state, potentially up to the point Piven and Cloward (1977) and Edelmann (1964) argued, that the expressive (paradigmatic and normative) value of the new public policy may impact the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the target population.
We can thus define three areas of need for adaptation following a third order change in public policy: evaluation of policy content, impact on self-image and construction of new legitimacy.

The issue of policy legitimacy especially arises in the context of our analysis as the third order change of public policy we seek to investigate is an external shock and not heralded in by evolution within the target population. Cook, Jacobs and Kim (2010) point towards the influence sound information and communication can have on programme evaluation and legitimacy based on research on US Social Security. For less personalised policies (most fields outside welfare)

communication can be a major problem.
To better grasp the issues and options for constructing legitimacy we will need to dwell deeper in the specifics of our research: It is focussed on agricultural policy in Germany. Agricultural policy is a highly Europeanised policy (cf. inter alia Rieger 2000, Oskam, Meester & Silvis 2011) and generally well organised with strong corporatist traditions especially in Germany (Ackermann 1970, Heinze 1992, Rieger 2007). Following the complex model of democracy (Scharpf 1970) the European political process can be analysed as a specific multilevel network of policy actors (Scharpf 1999, Schmidt 2010) which serves as producer of legitimacy by organising access to and scrutiny of a political system devoid of classic legitimacy (Schmitter 2001). The absence and impossibility of a European public sphere particularly precludes any form of legitimate European inputs as no real European discourse on the model of national democracies is possible (Gerhards 1993, 2001, 2002). Schmidt develops the concept of throughput legitimacy that draws upon the process itself (a concept Scharpf hinted at without naming it): By including other actors (organised interests and other NGOs) the political process can build upon their legitimacy with their constituency in order to become legitimate. It remains unclear how this legitimacy is sustained in prolonged political processes and what impact inclusion in one public policy cycle has on further cycles. Especially the efforts needed to remain able to supply legitimacy while accepting complex compromises should not be underestimated. Grande (1985) gives useful insights into the working of the Austrian Labor Union Federation (ÖGB), one of the purest neo-corporatist organisations and the only one with a rate of unionisation at least remotely resembling the *Deutsche Bauernverband* DBV (evaluated at still well over 90% by Heinze 1992 and Bruckmeyer, Ehlert et al. 2002). Based on Teubner's (1979) model of interaction of organisational apparatus and members and of internal group competition he particularly stressed the transmission of decisions to accept a compromise top-down, the importance of steered interest aggregation and the safety valve of expressive forms of legitimation based on formalised and sterilised dissent. He also shows the complexity and importance of balance between central authority and safety valves of organised dissent airing.
In our case of highly Europeanised and corporatist policy process legitimacy can be assumed to result from two processes: first, the participation of legitimate organised interest in the process and second, information flow to the concerned public on policy content to build accountability and thus legitimacy. In the absence of a functioning European public sphere and without direct communication abilities of European administrations the sole actor to be sure to reach the target public is the corporatist interest group. This role doubles its corporatist logic that requires the manufacturing of internal assent to a compromise to remain a credible and powerful player in future negotiations. The DBV is thus confronted with a compounded version of the classic corporatist dilemma: enforce a (potentially painful) policy decision without endangering its legitimacy as spokesperson of the base plus de facto being the only channel of detailed communication on the public policy. It has to subtly quench internal debate (and dissent) and at the same time promote the content of policy.
Apparently, the DBV has succeeded at this seemingly impossible task for the last fifty years in mostly incremental processes, but how effective is it in case of this external shock on the CAP? Our study will try to shed some light in this evolution. We will assess the efficiency the DBV has achieved over the past ten to twenty years in the outcomes of its actions (bringing about the substantial changes required by the new CAP: modify self-image to concur with policy goals, elaborate a position for further development) and in its processes (remaining a corporatist actor for future negotiation to legitimate the policy process) and thus be able to evaluate the importance of policy feedbacks in the field of European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Practical Framework

Agricultural policy in Europe and especially the CAP has a long tradition of being a hybrid field. While in its effects it is a redistributive policy closely resembling conventional welfare policy (Knudsen 2009, Sheingate 2001) its political language, process and bargaining system has been one of distributional policies on the model of industrial policy (Grant 1997). The dual identity led to a split corpus of research that only rarely takes into account both aspects (Sheingate 2001 is one of the rare exceptions). As we are mostly concerned with policy goals and paradigms, we will concentrate on this research but have to keep in mind that the aggregate and individual level effects are not purely distributive but largely redistributive (on this aspect cf. Knudsen 2009: 266-303).
The importance of interest groups and the high level of corporatist arrangement was noted from the outset of the CAP (Ackermann 1970, cf. also Jobert & Muller 1987:80-100) and it is rated as one of the fields with the highest entry barriers, thus assuring a relatively stable bargaining system (Sheingate 2001). This stability and the national experiences of corporatist arrangements for all major actors pave the way for a stable corporatist arrangement on the European level as all actors can assume repeated bargaining. It should be one of the most likely areas for feedbacks of policy on itself and on politics and justifies taking a closer look at it when trying to expand the scope of feedback research.
The paradigmatic turn of the CAP was engaged in June 1992 with European Council Regulation 2078/92 on "agricultural production methods compatible with the requirements of the protection of the environment and the maintenance of the countryside". It is not the first major turn in CAP goals, but it is the most thorough. The main objectives of the CAP since its inception in 1957 were initially to secure agricultural self-sufficiency in Europe and then to align the development of the agricultural sector on the industrial sector in terms of capital usage (modernisation) and income parity (distributive and redistributive). While the major reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s had great impact on the instruments and settings, no real sea change occurred before the 1992 policy cycle. Only the achieved self-sufficiency was less prominent in current affairs and the modernisation aspect was more present in the 1980s (as it promised less expenses through a more efficient agriculture). The farmer was considered as an entrepreneur who needed help in getting his business up to date and up to speed, the key goals were efficiency and productivity: produce more at lesser cost and with less workforce (cf. Grant 1997, Hill 2012). 2078/92 introduced a very different vision. As the balance of power shifted in agricultural policy from producers (and fiscal specialists that promoted most of the instrument changes during the 1980s according to Sheingate 2001) towards environmentalists aided paradoxically by business interests, which had vested interests in the GATT that always risked collapsing due to issues with the old CAP structure (cf. Grant 1997, Bruckmeier & Ehlert 2002, Daugbjerg & Swinbank 2010), the most important goal of the CAP was modified and thus was the image of the farmer. A negative image of the farmer as a polluter promoted by parts of the environmentalists was associated with the historic entrepreneurial stance of the CAP. The new policy paradigm has given birth to a fresh positive ideal-type of the farmer as the steward and custodian of rural landscapes in a form romanticism not unknown to environmental circles (Goulet 2010). This image could be usefully integrated into a new tool system that was acceptable to GATT and WTO and the environmentalists on the basis of decoupling subsidies from production and the introduction of side-conditions of sustainability on these subsidies (cross-compliance). The resulting system is justified on grounds of ecological responsibility and maintaining traditional landscapes while at the same time only barely modifying the total amount spent on CAP (Sonnleitner 2011). The farmer was in for a major role change and the subsidies have been gradually transformed into a form of salary for good keeping of the land (Sorrentino, Henke & Severini 2011). This conservationist turn in CAP is coming to a conclusion with the upcoming 2013 reform but already left its marks as about 80% of direct CAP expenses have already been decoupled in 2011 (Sonnleitner 2011:65). Our study is thus situated at the end of the transition period in a certain mirror position to Bruckmeier & Ehlert (2002) who conducted their fieldwork at the beginning of the reform process.

Fieldwork and Model

Our fieldwork was conducted in the highly agricultural region of Vechta in Lower Saxony. It is Germany's major meat producing area, especially pork and poultry, (for a detailed analysis cf. Böckmann 1998). The DBV maintains a tightly knit network of its subdivisions and can honestly claim to organise the whole agricultural world. Meat producers are not considered the most powerful group within the DBV (at least since Ackermann 1970 this position is attributed to the wheat growers), but have a very homogeneous farmstead structure. Meat producers tend to be highly modernised farms with few permanent labour force generally organised around a personal owner who draws his income exclusively from agriculture. These farmers are directly and personally concerned by any change in CAP. Good organisational coverage and direct personal relevance are ideal circumstances for an effective action of the DBV and thus a measurable impact of policy feedbacks in our field. In our fieldwork we conducted five formal interviews during spring 2013 (two farmers, two actors closely related to the DBV and one actor of a local service provider not officially affiliated with the DBV but headquartered in the same building) and several informal background conversations with farmers and institutional actors that were not recorded and helped to cross-check and substantiate some hesitant pieces of information on which the interviewees were unsure.

The formal and transcribed interviews were analysed along three lines. First, the image of and the role for the farmer: Is the (self-)image closer to the ancient CAP entrepreneur or to the greened steward and custodian? On this dimension we will be able to see if the change of paradigm in policy making has radiated out to the basic level on sender (associations close to DBV) and receiver (farmer) side. Second, the assessment of the CAP and its reform: Is it judged as an acceptable compromise (success in manufacturing assent) or even a good policy (success in transmitting positive attitudes) or rather as a bad compromise (normal failure) or even worse as an insult to agriculture (disruptive failure potentially menacing the corporatist representation model)? On this level the low-level officials play a crucial role as they themselves are the first ones the leadership has to convince so that they can convince or at least pacify the base. The third dimension will be the anticipated reaction to the CAP: Is there positive consent (adoption) or negative consent (coping) and thus in the end “loyalty”, to reuse Hirschman's (1970) terminology, that leads to stabilisation of the DBV's bargaining position as a corporatist leader? Or is there passive rejection (ranging from dissatisfaction with the DBV's work to quitting some forms of farming) that would lead to “exit” and a gradual erosion of DBV's power base? Or could there be rebellion (“voice”) that would lead to immediate loss of legitimacy for the DBV through the menace of either internal opposition or external opposition with the creation of new actors? While internal opposition would menace the corporatist position through lack of consensus enforcement capacities, external opposition would shatter the claim to corporatist representation altogether.

A positive result for the importance of policy feedbacks in CAP would be that real substantial change on the first axis could be measured on sender side and at least some modification in self-image on the receiver side, while at the same time the DBV could maintain itself as legitimate corporatist actor to continue working in the policy process and thus creating the so important throughput legitimacy of the political process. Not only would CAP be profoundly altered by the reforms, but also the major actor on German public side would have internalised the values and goals of the new CAP just as new groups emerged from milestone legislation in Social and Civil Rights Policy.

Findings

The interviews generally confirmed Bruckmeier & Ehlert's (2002) findings that farmers in Germany are quite sceptical of the CAP although the tone in our interviews was rather between resignation and mild approval than truly dismissive. Our detailed analysis will cling to the predefined dimensions: first, self-image as a measure of assimilation of general reform ideals, second, evaluation of policy content and third, further attitude towards CAP reform, as a proxy for the evaluation of politics and polity.

The farmer's own self-image is slightly conflicting. They self-position as entrepreneurs within a market environment and generally articulate their work in this vein (F1: "... The market has to deliver. If the market desires some products, that aren't normally possible, they will simply have to pay more. … The market will resolve that [issue]."). They express hopes that policy making will take account of their role as entrepreneurs, but do sound somewhat worried and doubtful (F2: "I hope that they see us as normal entrepreneurs and that we need to keep standing."). While this position clearly is dominant, some other aspects are mentioned. They acknowledge some external effects of their activity and the necessity to take care of these not only on an instrumental level (efficiency), but also on a cognitive (values) level. The most important issue was pollution through semi-liquid and liquid manure dissemination of which is very tightly regulated in Germany. This regulation is accepted and integrated into the value-system by the interviewees (F2: "..., it would be inadmissible, if we contaminated everything with manure...") and sheds light on some minor adjustments in the self-image that seems to incorporate some aspects of the new CAP and the role of farmers as guardians and stewards of the rural landscape, although not in any environmentalist vision (F2: "Fundamentally, farmers are also protectors of nature. If we weren't there, the whole nature couldn't be sprawling like that, could it?!"). These modifications are still minor, but not entirely negligible.

On the sender side, the image projected by lower tier association officials, the conflict between the two visions of the farmer is much more palpable and sometimes quite overt (A1: " He [the farmer] doesn't want to harm nature, but he has to earn his income, that's the constraint he is in..."). The entrepreneur is seen as "natural" role and when referring to policy and individual measures the key criteria are economic. The demands to the farmer are nonetheless quite clear (A1): "More ecological farming. That's what the general public expects from the farmer. That's what the CAP reflects... what it demands from the farmers... what is generally considered important... what grows more important in considering the situation. That's the ecological evolution, animal protection, diversity. That's the direction where we're headed." The environmentalist vocabulary remains alien and except when prompted by direct questions towards the CAP does not emerge in the interviews as shows this quote, where the distance between the demands formulated by the CAP and the interviewee's values are almost palpable. Both interviewees build a conceptual bridge that may connect the more entrepreneurial with the environmentalist position by different approaches to "sustainability". While the CAP is perceived to concentrate on justifying reforms in environmentalist language, the interviewees source their approach in the specifics of agricultural entrepreneurship: transmission between generations (A2: "And in the end he wants to create something for following generations, that he perhaps has inherited from his parents and he wants to hand it to his children."). This also reflects upon the manure discussion that was omnipresent, as overexposure to manure has been identified as a major long-term risk to field quality and thus of sustainable farming (as understood as transmission down the generations) as well as an environmental hazard. It deflects ideological demands directed at the farmers by the CAP along a traditional line (cf. Sonnleitner 2011) and introduces a possible field of compromise: general conformity in action with different approach to key concept. This strategy cannot solve all problems (as shown in the despair at the demand to set some surface aside for special crops or flowering) but prepare the playing field for future CAP negotiations with common points, red lines and some manoeuvring space.

The deflection strategy is no universal tool as we noted in some awkward passages when our interviewees got into a subject and went further than we anticipated. All interviewees articulated a

malaise when they got to their public image which at some times bordered on paranoia (F1: “And yes, one has the impression of being always spied upon by cyclists, for example, or anyone else, when one goes out with the herbicide or generally everywhere.”). They voice the impression of being only perceived as poisoners (F2: “... and highlighted in the media, just as if the farmers were poisoning the populace. That's how it's shown!”) or shadowy figures without regard for livestock and consumer alike (A1: “... the farmers that I work with, intensive farmers, are depicted as if their work, their food production, was done on the fringes of legality.”). We can see here the difficulties of adaptation on a much more tangible scale: The demands formulated towards the farmers by the general public directly hit their self-esteem without the gradual transition the CAP offers and the mediation through the whole apparatus of the DBV. Even low level officials get hit and are at the moment unable to formulate a response that would satisfy the general public and save the farmer's self-esteem. The public demands are generally seen as the major driving force behind current change in the CAP, so the DBV's work as corporatist actor becomes tangible: If it succeeds in presenting a coherent and at least somewhat prestigious vision for the farmers within CAP it may alleviate the malaise. Otherwise we may face a truly spoiled identity or an anomic situation in a few years time. The first step in this endeavour is to transmit an assessment of the new CAP that enables continuous working within the system which we have measured on the second dimension.

The general impression emerging from the interviews was a quite mixed perception of the CAP as Bruckmeier & Ehlert (2002) reported, but once deeper analysis started the image became relatively positive on the general lines of the CAP with most critical remarks relating to very precise measures. The low-level officials are keenly conscious of the big picture especially concerning the general public. They cite the need to justify the payments to farmers and demand for higher production standards in Europe when prompted to evaluate the Greening of the CAP, first as a label to certify the production standards and then as justification. They are also quite certain that the economic survival of the farmers is a key aim for CAP, which may sound a bit self-evident, but considering the scope of change and generally assumed dissatisfaction at the lower tiers, it is worth reporting. There is also a lot of consideration from farmers and officials alike for issues of distribution and especially fairness, acknowledging the necessity to equalize payments throughout the EU and targeted subsidies for those in particular need (F1: “[It's good] that the money is more targeted, say to farmers in the mountains, who have crappy farmland.”). The need to compromise is acknowledged and included into the overall evaluation of the CAP which earns some consideration as a compromise (F1: “That's a difficult subject. They have to do a difficult job, because they have to do it in a way that's good for all people in all countries with all that different cultures.”). That does not mean that they give their representatives a clean bill of health. There is doubt whether the higher levels did their work right (A1: “Perhaps our lobbyists weren't numerous enough to get the information to certain people.”) or took into account all components of the farming community (F2: “They [the wheat growers who run the DBV] say: ‘I don't care what's happening in Vechta and Cloppenburg. How the farmers get squeezed.’”). So there remains some necessity for internal sounding of grievances, but for the DBV there is not much need to worry, the opposition remains a minor aspect of CAP evaluation. There is some pronounced scepticism associated with two measures: First setting aside surface for alternative use (from flowering patches to specific crops), which remains associated with the set-aside policies to counter price slumps in the eighties and early nineties (similar tool but other aim), is criticized in the ancient vision that a profitable region does not need classic set-asides and secondly the premium system is quite explicitly dismissed (F2: “The premiums are to kick...”) because it appears to simply work to inflate lease prices for agricultural land. At best inactive former farmers receive the money and at worst external investors. With all this in consideration the interviewees do not expect major changes in their work due to CAP and the changes necessary seem to get generally positive feelings because there is room to work them into the current way of things (A1: “ We don't want to work against nature... If the general opinion is that “ok, we want more diversity here” we will try to do it.”).

This could be a foundation for the DBV to produce adoption (active consent) of the CAP, but the interviews showed us a much more passive base that is concentrating on coping with change and considering their (individual) influence on policy to be inexistent: A1 “We will try to get a hold of the situation through the economical impact. And if that means “I have to plant legumes”, then we will probably do it, there will be legumes.”/ F1 “I perceive it as so remote that I don't have any opportunity to somehow influence any decision whatsoever, except if I went myself into politics and that's out of the question.”. This passive position of negative consent by endurance is a general theme and does much to give an impression of dissatisfaction with the CAP which at close scrutiny reveals to be more a form of perceived helplessness than of substantial grievances. One official (A2) puts this into an exemplary phrase: “You just don't have any influence on it. We will have to take what is handed us in the end. I can't see that the farmers have to be very worried, that things will be much worse.”: It cannot be helped, but it will not be dangerous. This passivity is at first a good thing for the position of the DBV as corporatist actor, as future policy negotiations are not likely to suffer massive intrusion by the base, but on the long run of implementing the whole policy modification including the reorientation of goals it may become an issue, as adaptation is limited to practice and is not deliberately followed by a change of perception. The change of self-image we were able to measure in farmers and officials alike seems to be as much a product of external adaptation as of active change management by the DBV. The DBV does not seem to have transmitted to the lower tiers a new vision of agriculture in the new CAP. It mainly relies on few specific information and the sentiment that everything will sort out in a way that does not menace the farmers. There is some hint at a slow erosion of the DBV's base when one official stresses that some regulations have led farmers to abandon certain forms of agriculture and he reports that other regions have seen the same, which means that he is conscious that this is not a series of isolated cases but a pattern. The passive loyalty to the DBV may involve some forms of very quiet exit, the DBV is thus secure from activists staging a revolution but has to monitor the base's vitality.

Discussion

Where do we go from here?
There is a positive result: Farmers and officials are beginning to alter their vision of the farmer in accordance with the aims proclaimed by the new CAP. The CAP-reform is seen in relatively positive light, but institutional reaction appears relatively passive and trying to minimize change. The DBV chose the cautious way of action that usually works well for corporatist actors in limiting impact on the base to limit any risk of disruption in the corporatist bargaining system.
Put into perspective of the CAP reform as a third order change in policy that requires social and political adaptation, this strategy is not self-evident as it seems to freeze the base out of the necessary evolution.
To understand the logic of action we have to remind ourselves of past experiences that have shaped the policy field and especially an actor like the DBV: The key concepts are gradual change and long term perspective. Agricultural policy even before the CAP has known several major changes since its creation in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but generally in long term managed evolutions. Although the current reform hit the statute book abruptly it is very gradually installed and its implementation appears to have an even less disruptive impact. The most important goal for the DBV may thus be to remain at the table and shape policy in the very long term. To be sure of remaining at the table the DBV has to keep the policy working and the base calm. By providing services to minimize financial impact on the farmers and showing only minimal evolution in ideology, it can calm the base and implement policy to remain at the table. At the same time even minimal evolution in ideology means change but on a very long time scale, longer than we expected. The current ideological evolution has only begun to translate the aims of greening into a model of sustainability tailored to the multi-generational outlook most farmers still have. It has not yet gone into a complete role and status reversal for farmers. The potential success of these very gradual strategies shows in a few off-hand comments we gathered on the CAP, especially on

targeted aid to farmers in disadvantaged regions (especially mountains). This is a vestige of reforms begun in the seventies with the introduction of the regional funds and extended in the eighties and nineties by the decoupling of initially small parts of subsidies from production. These changes were early forms of redistribution between farmers and were quite problematic for the most favoured production regions (as the one we study), but slow incremental change has finally achieved that these policy goals of a farmer welfare system has been accepted. As our interviewees mentioned only DBV-affiliated sources of agricultural information and the framing of the measures closely matches DBV material we are confident in attributing this change to the DBV.

The strategy for this corporatist long term player in case of dramatic and potentially disruptive policy change is thus to buy time and stretch the adaptation period out from the experience that policy making is a very long series of cycles. The core components of this are to keep the base confident that everything will be manageable and that there will be someone (the corporatist actor) to manage it and at the same time disaffected enough to preclude any direct demands. Implementation will need to be stretched in policy making and in policy communication towards the base in order not to stir up uncertainty but to modify self-conceptions and behaviour without notice. In our case the farmers still saw themselves as entrepreneurs in a rough market environment but acknowledged redistribution between farmers, environmental protection and market regulation as a good and necessary policy. If the communication trends the low-level officials showed can be extrapolated the next major change will be sustainable entrepreneurs and a gradual strengthening of environmental protection by including it in asset protection. The strong corporatist actor will thus only try to stall development in the short term while its long term interest lies in managed change. The unexpected point in our research is the length of long term.

The larger time frame of most actors in our field may imply such findings as agriculture with its traditions and high investment barriers is not prone to short term changes, it may thus be interesting to investigate a sector with shorter horizons to see if corporatist actors still opt for consensual long term change management with almost no initial adaptation pain or choose a different path to adaptation.

The organisational strength of the DBV is another point to be taken into account. It is able to offer to take care of all paperwork and compliance management while at the same time doing the political representation. Our interviews showed a pronounced asymmetry between the DBV and the farmers. As they have become dependent on this assistance they feel completely helpless without the DBV and its affiliates.

Would an institution that could not credibly offer to take care of paperwork be able to inspire that much confidence? How would two or more competing organisations react to such policy change?

The DBV is one of the strongest corporatist actors across policy fields, the strategy of temporizing, confidence building and very gradual change is possibly only open to such strong actors while groups with less power may face disorganisation and disruptive change. This will need to be addressed at some point, but for the moment we can see that there is a way for corporatist actors to transmit major policy breaks to the base in a way that neither disrupts the policy making nor the public nor their dominant corporatist position nor the life of their base.

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