Session 6:
Why is farm land abandoned in some places but not others? Presentation of case study of South-East Serbia

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Outline

• What do we mean by abandoned land?
• Why is it such a problem in Europe?
• What drives the abandonment of farmland?
• How is it different at the local level; which are the factors that are most important in explaining different rates of abandonment?
• So what? What are the implications for policy and planning?
Definitional difficulties

• How long before land should be considered abandoned?
• How do you distinguish between land that is resting (fallow) and land that is abandoned?
• Does it have to lead to specific harms? If so, who can insist on remedial action, including compensation for non-performance?
• Should you differentiate between permanent crops, pasture and arable land?
• What is the minimal level of activities that would justify saying that the land is in use?

Some definitions

• ‘Farmland abandonment is a cessation of management which leads to undesirable changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services,’ Terres and Nisini 2013

• Agricultural land which is no longer farmed, for economic, social or other reasons, and which is not used in the crop rotation system which means that no agricultural use is intended. Pointereau et al 2008:20

• A plot of land that is not cultivated or subject to any farm work whatsoever or used as grazing land and where there is no upkeeping of a vegetal cover either that is adequate from an environmental point of view and where shrub and the remains of the same cover at least seventy five per cent of its area with an average size exceeding fifty centimetres as well as those planted stands in areas of agricultural interest when the vegetal cover of the undergrowth consisting in grass or shrub is of such nature that it poses a serious risk in the event of a forest fire. Section 30(1) Act 7/2007 Law on Land Banking in Galicia
Why is it a problem and who is most affected?

- Aging and shrinking farm population
- Aging and shrinking rural population

![Graph 1: Evolution of agricultural labour input in the EU by groups of Member States – Data from the EAA](chart1.png)

![Graph 2: Percentage rural population](chart2.png)

Source: Eurostat, EAA (online data code: agr_lndscr).

![Graph 3: Evolution of persons employed in agriculture in the EU (2010-2012) – data from the LFS](chart3.png)

Source: Eurostat, LFS (online data codes: LFS_employment).
Drivers of Land Abandonment (The big picture)

• Geographic – land is unsuitable for cultivation without extensive support
• Economic – farm incomes unstable and farms not viable
• Demographic – out migration means that there is not enough labour to cultivate the land plus there is smaller local markets
• Land Market – not enough demand for land, circulation blocked by ownership questions or high transaction costs
Some estimates
Getting down to the details with multi-variate factor and cluster analysis

Various Hypotheses:
- Size matters but not as much as remoteness?
- The main problem is tiny plots?
- Age is important but really only in small settlements?
- Public services are a strong stabilizing force for rural populations?
- Remoteness can be compensated by commuting?

- Data Sources
2011 Agricultural Census, 2011 Population Census, Survey of local authorities, official records from local municipalities, interviews, focus groups, workshops
Information that might explain rates of abandoned land

- **Demographic**: How many people lived in places, how old they were, whether they were resident full time or part time? How the population had changed over the last fifty years and how many babies were born in the past ten.

- **Employment**: What kinds of jobs they had, whether they commuted to work, whether they had finished school at 14, 16, 18 or more.

- **Settlement**: Local amenities, schools, clinics, pharmacies, shops, and garages, and just how far and how much it would cost to get a taxi into town.

- **Farms**: The size of farms, the numbers of people who worked on them, the number of separate plots and whether or not they leased any land. We asked if they employed seasonal labour, if they did anything else on their land that earned them income and whether or not they had taken out a mortgage on their property.

**Most Important Factors Related to Land Abandonment**
(according to the heads of the Mesna Zajednica)

- Distance: 52%
- Access: 57%
- Size: 15%
- Shape: 30%
- Degradation: 71%
- Unfavorable natural conditions: 18%
- Age Structure: 10%
- Unresolved ownership: 15%
- Utillated market: 94%
- No motivation or inheritor: 14%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour Force Potential</th>
<th>Socio-agrarian potential</th>
<th>Diverse rural economy</th>
<th>Unfavourable land structure</th>
<th>Uncultivated agrarian land (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>-0.908</td>
<td>-0.503</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
<td>1.263</td>
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<td>Highly</td>
<td>-0.760</td>
<td>-0.597</td>
<td>-0.191</td>
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<td>Moderately</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>2.084</td>
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<td>Less</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>-0.368</td>
<td>-0.271</td>
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<td>Least</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
<td>1.277</td>
<td>-0.220</td>
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<td>Direct payments to agricultural producers</td>
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<td>Young farmers</td>
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<td>Modernization of farms</td>
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<td>Processing and marketing</td>
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<td>Diversification of rural economy</td>
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<td>Strengthening producer groups</td>
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<td>Support for small farms</td>
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<td>Support for farming in areas with natural constrains</td>
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<td>Agri-environment measures</td>
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<td>Leader type measures</td>
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<td>Land consolidation</td>
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<td>Resolving ownership disputes</td>
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<td>Activating lease market</td>
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<td>Reducing cadastral costs</td>
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<td>Land for pensions</td>
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<td>Promote consolidation through subsidies</td>
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Conclusions

Farm land abandonment is complex process with many different causes and consequences. Information gaps means that accurate and comprehensive pictures are often missing, but spatial analysis can support effective intervention by identifying different causal combinations and therefore suggest different combination of policy measures.

Abandoned land tends to be higher the smaller the farm and the smaller the settlement, but where populations are mobile, then size matters less even in the context of shrinking populations.

Higher birth rates and better public services means less abandoned land.

A diverse rural economy is the most effective counter to land abandonment, but in places that are most hit by abandoned land, the unfavorable land structure is the biggest obstacle.

It is the subsistence, unsubsidized farmers who are abandoning their land.

The question of inter generational transfer is critical to success in countering land abandonment

References

- Act 7/2007, of 21 May on administrative and tax measures for the conservation of utilised agricultural areas and on the Land Bank of Galicia.
- P. Pointereau, F. Coulon, P. Girard, M. Lambotte, T. Stuczynski, V. Sánchez Ortega, A. Del Río, *Analysis of Farmland Abandonment and the Extent and Location of Agricultural Areas that are Actually Abandoned or are in Risk to be Abandoned*, Joint Research Center, European Commission and Institute for Environment and Sustainability, 2008

Thanks for your attention