

Land Institutions and „Land Markets“ in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

Leasing and sale of agricultural and forestry land has been fundamentally influenced by the privatisation and restructuring laws in the first decade of transition process in the CEE countries. In particular, the way and sequence how these new formal rules have been implemented at regional and local levels has had an impact of land allocation, land use and land ownership. After that, land market transactions emerged and increased gradually.

Accession to the European Union has additionally stimulated this process, particularly due to the introduction of direct payments to farmers that increased the value of land as a scarce factor, and the gains in economic security regarding the legal and administrative systems. EU membership may also give more access to foreign buyers of land. Another question is whether the increasing demand for land due to the “bio-energy boom” has also affected land markets in the CEECs.

Analysis of these issue areas should be based on selected and limited topics which can be done in several theses. These can focus on how land markets emerge during the post-socialist process of institutional change in the area of land transactions and may concentrate on selected regions. The theses may aim at a deep institutional analysis of the action situation of actors involved in transactions of land, investigate the Political Economy of national and regional land markets and conduct international comparisons of land-related institutions and land-market activities. The research should use approaches of institutional analysis, combined with empirical work based on combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods that provide a deep understanding of the development and functioning of the “new” land markets.

Qualitative Economics: its relevance for Institutional Resource Economics - an analysis of present literature

Economics and also parts of other disciplines are dominated by formal and quantitative empirical methods. This is in harmony with the widely accepted convention for distinguishing true from false statements based on formalised regularities, for example by econometric methods. These are often directly translated into causalities rather than being considered as more or less weak indications in an explorative process of search which must include a variety of knowledge improving methods. Some critics argue that quantitative approaches used in an isolated way are too technical in nature and do not actually produce a proper understanding of what they are supposed to explain.

In particular, there is a small emerging discipline of qualitative economics that has developed a different view. The master thesis proposed should explore the literature in this area and provide a systematic description of the theories and arguments found in the literature. As an additional source, publications from an interdisciplinary German network on qualitative analysis can be included. It would be desirable to show how the main characteristics of the debate on quantitative vs. qualitative economics relate to current insights from philosophy of science and the patterns of behaviour among economics identified in sociology of science. The study may give some results regarding the relevance of the methodological choice discussed for Institutional Resource Economics.

The topic area outlined may be split into two complementary master theses. Collaboration between two master students may be an appropriate way to put such an option into practice.